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# Palouse River and Coulee City (PCC) Rail System Rehabilitation Plan



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The Palouse River and Coulee City (PCC) Rail System is the state's longest short-line freight rail system and was purchased by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) in 2007. WSDOT is developing and overseeing an ongoing rehabilitation plan for the PCC to preserve the rail infrastructure for continued use by shippers, manufacturers, and farmers in eastern Washington.

## Original Plan for Purchase and Rehabilitation

The 2003 Legislature appropriated funds to purchase the PCC Rail System and to rehabilitate one of its branches. During 2003, WSDOT studied rehabilitation needs for all of the branches. Based on that study, the 2004 Legislature appropriated funds to purchase the lines and begin rehabilitation. Bridge repairs were not included in the rehabilitation plan.

## Available Rehabilitation Funds

The PCC Rail System consists of three branches:

- PV Hooper Branch that runs from Thornton to Winona, and from Hooper through Winona to Colfax.
- CW Branch that runs from Coulee City to Cheney.
- P&L Branch that runs from Marshall through Pullman to the Idaho border near Moscow, and from Palouse directly east to the Idaho border where it meets a line owned by Watco Companies.

The PCC was purchased in two stages. The PV Hooper and P & L Branches were purchased in 2004, except for property in cities and railroad stations. In 2007, the entire CW Branch was purchased along with much of the property accepted from the 2004 purchase.

After use of funds for the purchase, the 2007 Legislature reallocated the rehabilitation funding as follows:

- \$3.6 million was appropriated for WSDOT to identify and perform rehabilitation needed as soon as reasonably possible to preserve the rail lines, and to perform an initial study on replacing the trestle that burned near Colfax in 2006.

- \$8.6 million was appropriated to rehabilitate the PCC rail lines after formation of a local intergovernmental agency to oversee business and economic development aspects of the operating leases. The PCC Rail Authority was formed by Grant, Lincoln, Spokane, and Whitman Counties in May 2008 to comply with this requirement. The funds were granted to the PCC Rail Authority, which asked WSDOT to administer the funds.



Rail replacement.

## Rehabilitation Project Identification Process

WSDOT performed an independent review of the lines, reviewed track repair documentation, and solicited the opinions of the operators. The information was used to select the most urgent and beneficial projects, and prioritize them based on available funding.

The following steps were taken to identify rehabilitation items for the 2008 construction season:

- Work items needed to prevent service disruption within two years.
- Work items needed to prevent possible service disruption within five years.
- Work items needed to avoid further deterioration for five years without further substantial capital investment.
- Documentation from each rail line was reviewed to determine justifications for imposing speed limits of less than 25 mph. The review provided an initial identification of potential areas for rehabilitation activities.
- Each rail line was inspected with the respective operators to verify the information from the document review and to collect first-hand, current line condition information.
- After cataloguing the information collected, each operator was provided the information for its line, and meetings were held to discuss the findings and the most important rehabilitation needs.
- A bridge evaluation report prepared by an engineering firm in 2005 for Watco Companies Inc. was reviewed for further rehabilitation opportunities.
- A final list of categories and rehabilitation work items was prepared and provided to the operators for comment.
- A final list of work items was then prepared.
- WSDOT performed a benefit analysis for each rail line to determine how to set priorities to perform all suggested repairs.

## 2008-09 Projects

Based on the foregoing analysis, three track rehabilitation projects were developed to correct the most urgent deficiencies. Those projects were completed in the spring of 2009.

Additional Projects:

- WSDOT worked with the city of Palouse on a street renovation project that also rehabilitated 600 feet of worn out rail. The city rehabilitated the rail and WSDOT provided engineering and construction management support to ensure proper rail work.
- Some road/rail crossings and signals with substantial regulatory defects were rehabilitated.
- A conceptual and cost analysis of rebuilding the burnt trestle and constructing an alternative alignment was performed. A business case study was also performed for the alternatives.

## PCC Rail Authority Rehabilitation Work

As mentioned, \$8.6 million was made available for further rehabilitation work through the PCC Rail Authority. WSDOT reviewed the work completed in 2008 and the remaining work items from the initial analysis in conjunction with a physical inspection of the lines to develop projects for the 2009 construction season:

- Inspections and a review of previous bridge reports revealed significant problems with a number of bridges as well as continuing track problems.
- Three projects focusing on the areas needing the most work began in the fall of 2009, and were completed in the summer of 2010.
- A fire destroyed a trestle in the summer of 2008, and was replaced by inserting a culvert and filling the gap.
- Burnt fencing was replaced as required by statute.

As work continued on the projects, additional needs were uncovered:

- A drainage rehabilitation project is underway to protect the track from the effects of standing or running water.
- Additional bridge work is needed.
- More fencing was required by the 2010 Legislature.

Final projects will be selected during fall 2010.

## Update of Total PCC Rail System Rehabilitation Needs

In 2003, WSDOT analyzed what was needed to bring the rail system to specified standards. The PCC Rail Authority is currently reviewing those needs in light of information learned during the rehabilitation process that is underway, and in light of current and prospective traffic patterns.

A report will soon be issued that:

- Lists the total needs for bringing the system up to specified conditions.
- Outlines an ongoing capital maintenance program that is needed whether or not the system is rehabilitated.
- Provides a prioritized blending of capital projects and programmed, capital maintenance that will bring the railroad to specified conditions in a 10- to 30-year time period and also keep the line in moderate condition indefinitely.

## What the FRA Bridge Rule Means for the PCC Rail System

The FRA recently adopted a rule that requires all short lines to adopt a bridge management program by September 2012. The program must include an inspection of all bridges to determine their load capacity. The inspection will also identify repair needs that will maintain the calculated capacity. Thereafter, bridges must be inspected yearly.