The purpose of the Washington State Rail Plan is to outline strategies for addressing system needs and provide a blueprint for ensuring the continued movement of people and goods on the rail system in support of a healthy economy. Consistent with federal and state requirements, this is Washington’s first state rail plan to incorporate freight rail and passenger rail into a unified planning document. The plan describes what is working well, identifies the strengths and challenges, and highlights policy priorities. It sets a course for state action and investment to ensure that these vital services continue to meet transportation needs now and through 2035.

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www.wsdot.wa.gov/Rail/staterailplan.htm

Action Items
• Deliver Amtrak Cascades capital program and implement service improvements. The present capital program entails an investment of nearly $800 million in federal funding (ARRA and HSIPR) for rail improvements. These will result in travel time savings, improved on-time performance, and two additional round trips between Seattle and Portland, starting in 2017.
• Incorporate findings and recommendations in the Freight Mobility Plan, Washington Transportation Plan and other relevant planning efforts.
• Complete Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan and Fleet Management Plan to identify priority efficiency improvements, determine capital needs, and quantify funding requirements for capital projects and operations. Continue coordination with Oregon and British Columbia.
• Finalize corridor policy for adding, changing and removing station stops on Amtrak Cascades.
• Collect data to support inventory of short-line railroad needs, address maintenance needs in grant and loan programs, and identify funding needs to meet state interests.
• Facilitate discussions between communities and railroads to address at-grade crossing concerns.
• Continue to incorporate performance measurement into the state’s rail programs. Funding priorities will be assessed as these are developed.
• Continue grant and loan programs as the state’s proactive approach to preserving short-line rail infrastructure that may be vulnerable to abandonment.
• Continue incremental implementation of the long-term vision established by previous rail plans for Amtrak Cascades: Seattle to Portland, 13 round trips per day; Seattle to Vancouver, British Columbia, four round trips per day.

“In order to address rail system challenges and identify opportunities for improvement, the Washington State Rail Plan describes the rail system and state’s interest in it, identifies potential public actions to improve the rail system and recommends policies for state action consistent with Washington’s transportation policy goals of economic vitality, preservation, safety, mobility, environment and stewardship.”
- Lynn Peterson, Secretary of Transportation

Rail is an integral part of the multimodal transportation system that keeps people and businesses moving in Washington state. Serving freight and passengers, the state’s rail system provides efficient transportation critical to maintaining our economy, environment and quality of life.

The purpose of the Washington State Rail Plan is to outline strategies for addressing system needs and provide a blueprint for ensuring the continued movement of people and goods on the rail system in support of a healthy economy. Consistent with federal and state requirements, this is Washington’s first state rail plan to incorporate freight rail and passenger rail into a unified planning document. The plan describes what is working well, identifies the strengths and challenges, and highlights policy priorities. It sets a course for state action and investment to ensure that these vital services continue to meet transportation needs now and through 2035.
Existing and Future Conditions

The Washington State Rail Plan comes during a time of change for rail transportation in the state, with the rail transportation system facing significant near-and long-term challenges. Freight train volumes are expected to double by 2035. Successfully accommodating growing demand will require improvements to operations and infrastructure.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 makes significant changes to intercity passenger rail service and the role of states in providing that service. Effective October 1, 2013, states of Washington and Oregon took on 100 percent of direct route costs for Amtrak Cascades trains. Early estimates indicate operating costs will rise over time. By working to reduce costs and increase revenues, WSDOT will reduce the financial impacts to the service.

Rail Infrastructure and Service

Though addressing many of those challenges will be the responsibility of private-sector rail stakeholders who own or operate over rail infrastructure, the state also has an interest in ensuring that there is a viable system to support movement of people and goods.

Rail System Needs and Recommended Actions

The Washington State Department of Transportation followed a deliberate process designed to identify and describe the rail system and the state’s interest in it, based on Washington’s transportation planning policy goals: economic vitality, preservation, safety, mobility, environment, and stewardship. This plan melds the state level policy direction with feedback from stakeholders, tribes and the public to guide identification of needs and development of recommendations. Public actions to improve the rail system are identified, and policies for state action are recommended.

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<th>Needs</th>
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<td>Address capacity constraints in order to meet future passenger and freight rail demands.</td>
<td>The state’s involvement in the rail system should be focused on actions that improve the state’s interests, including a thriving and diverse economy, environmental efficiency, resiliency and safety. The state should take an active leadership role to build on existing multistate coalitions to address rail system and corridor needs across the Pacific Northwest. The Washington State Department of Transportation should continue to pursue the incremental implementation of passenger rail service. Statewide rail stakeholders should work through regional and state transportation planning organizations on a regular basis to ensure that their needs and opportunities are understood, and are used to inform any state rail investments or planning efforts. WSDOT should improve recognition of rail-related needs in its highway engineering activities.</td>
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<td>Preserve existing rail capacity and infrastructure.</td>
<td>Work with short-line railroads and short-line rail stakeholders to assess short-line rail needs, and create a statewide short-line rail needs inventory. WSDOT should consider the stewardship and upkeep history of any potential rail improvement project. WSDOT should seek to address rail needs in the most cost-effective manner possible. WSDOT should consider strategic state interest when examining the impacts of the loss of rail infrastructure.</td>
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<td>Enhance the efficiency and reliability of existing rail services.</td>
<td>WSDOT should periodically re-evaluate its passenger system plans and adjust them as necessary to achieve operational improvements in pursuit of transportation system goals. WSDOT should adopt a formal policy on adding or consolidating stops on Amtrak Cascades. The state should ensure that passenger and freight rail metrics are in place that can appropriately evaluate the performance of mobility, efficiency, safety, reliability and environmental compatibility of proposed new projects.</td>
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Rail’s Role in Economic Development

Support economic development by providing access to people and industry.

Preserve access to global markets by ensuring access to Washington’s ports.

The Washington State Freight Mobility Plan should include projects that enhance or support connectivity to Washington’s deep-water, river and inland ports.

Rail System Priorities and Goals

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<td>Employ cost-effective strategies when investing public funds in the state’s rail system.</td>
<td>WSDOT should use performance metrics to evaluate its passenger and freight rail programs, and ensure that the program funding is aligned with demonstrated need. The state should seek innovative funding and financing sources to leverage public funds and provide more value with limited resources. WSDOT will focus on the specific requirements of Amtrak Cascades service to maximize utility to the state’s benefit while minimizing public costs by operating the system in the most efficient manner possible.</td>
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<td>Strengthen rail to maximize the positive benefits, while minimizing the potential negative impacts to communities and the environment.</td>
<td>The state should facilitate discussions about community concerns or questions about rail benefits and impacts, and help coordinate with communities, the railroads and other rail stakeholders. Railroads and public agencies should continue to use WSDOT reports, studies and other materials to clearly communicate the benefits of the rail system to Washington residents.</td>
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<td>Continue to support passenger and freight rail safety and security.</td>
<td>The state should continue to support rail safety and security. WSDOT should continue to coordinate pedestrian access in and around Amtrak Cascades stations in order to meet safety performance goals.</td>
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Implementation and Next Steps

Funding and implementation of this plan will rely on a mix of private and public action, including public-private partnerships. The plan identified fully funded projects in the near term, and highlights policy and planning efforts needed to focus investments in the long term.

This plan focuses on actions that can be completed within existing resources, or with minimal near-term investment. It provides a flexible framework to consider solutions in a multimodal context, and recommends prioritization based on performance measures.