



August/September 2015 – in review

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Progress continues on Amtrak Cascades high-speed rail projects

The high-speed rail program reached a halfway point, with 10 of its 20 projects now complete. This milestone was reached with the completion of three more projects in August and September – Advanced Wayside Signal System, Mount Vernon Siding Extension, and Blaine-Swift Customs Facility. Nine more projects are in construction and the final project, King Street Station Track Upgrades, begins construction in early 2016.

All projects must be completed by spring 2017, when new service will begin for two additional daily roundtrips between Seattle and Portland, as well as improved on-time performance and reduced travel times. WSDOT will assume additional ongoing financial responsibilities with the start of this new service.

Recent updates on construction projects include:

- **Advanced Wayside Signal System** – Work at the last of 15 sites between Seattle to Vancouver was completed in August, making this project operationally complete. Additional punch list items and some electrical work will continue throughout the remainder of the year. The project upgrades signal system components at all control points, sidings and turnouts between the Canadian border and Vancouver, Washington.
- **Mount Vernon Siding Extension** – Work has been completed on a new turnout that allows slower freight trains to move off the main line, thus allowing faster passenger trains to pass. The siding extension provides sufficient capacity for 8,000-foot freight trains that are now commonly operating on the main line.
- **Blaine-Swift Customs Facility** – Inspections of freight trains at the U.S. Customs facility near Blaine frequently cause delays to Amtrak Cascades service. With the September completion of a new 9,000 foot main track and conversion of the existing main track into a second siding, freight trains now will be inspected on the sidings, off the main line. Therefore, Amtrak Cascades trains will no longer be impeded, allowing them to move past the customs facility with less interference.
- **Landslide Mitigation** – Work began in mid-August on four landslide mitigation projects near Everett and Mukilteo that are part of the second phase of the Corridor Reliability Supplemental Work project. All work is scheduled for completion by the end of October 2015. Two other sites in the same area were completed in 2014, with no subsequent landslides last winter. Types of work include retaining walls to catch debris before it hits tracks, slide detection fences for early landslide warning, improved drainage systems and

slope stabilization/erosion control. A September open house in Mukilteo provided an opportunity to educate property owners along the coastal bluffs on ways they could help prevent landslides on their properties.

- **Kelso Martin's Bluff – New Siding** – Crews began work to build a retaining wall along southbound Interstate 5 near Kalama in mid-August. The wall is needed for the construction of a four-mile third main rail line along the interstate. The retaining wall work will continue into the fall. The project, one of three in the Kelso area, is scheduled to be complete in late 2016.
- **Point Defiance Bypass/Freighthouse Square** – A new inland bypass route is being constructed between Tacoma and Nisqually. As part of this project, the 75 percent design of a new Amtrak station at Tacoma's Freighthouse Square was submitted to Federal Railroad Administration and other partners for review. This is a key step in the move towards station construction, which begins in early 2016. The final meeting of the Citizens Advisory Committee helping to design the new station was held in September. Track and signal work through DuPont, Lakewood, and south Tacoma will begin next month and continue into 2017.

2015-2017 state rail projects

The State Legislature approved several rail projects that benefit both passenger and freight service as part of the new transportation package. The Rail Division will be delivering projects associated with the Freight Rail Assistance Program (FRAP), Freight Rail Investment Bank (FRIB), and Connecting Washington programs. Projects under the FRAP and FRIB programs were identified through a previously well-developed process and were solicited through a call for projects. In contrast, those funded through Connecting Washington are much less well-defined and we are in the process of determining the legislative intent and scopes so that we can proceed quickly to deliver projects within the biennium. A delivery model for each project will be identified to meet its specific goals. Projects in this group include safety enhancements in Lakewood associated with the Point Defiance Bypass project, additional landslide mitigation activities, and work with some specific ports and short line railroads. We will keep you informed as these projects move forward.

Locomotive acquisition

Task 16 of the ARRA-funded projects is the purchase of eight new locomotives, which will begin arriving in Washington in late 2016. During an interactive planning session in August, WSDOT's capital and operations teams met with Amtrak representatives to document the steps needed to meet our goals to have all the new locomotives delivered, equipped, serviced, tested, and in operation when we start our new service in 2017.

Amtrak Cascades video now online

The [video](#) created to promote our passenger train service is now posted on the Amtrak Cascades website and on the WSDOT YouTube channel. You can view the video here:

<http://www.amtrakcascades.com/Videos.htm>.