

Q4 2023 Report to Legislature

Amtrak Cascades

Summary

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) co-funds the Amtrak Cascades intercity passenger rail service with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) with ridership and passenger satisfaction much improved. Ridership in the fourth quarter surpassed 2019 pre-pandemic numbers by 35 percent and 2013 record ridership numbers by 20 percent. Additional Amtrak Cascades service was added between Portland and Seattle in December. These two new round trips will open more travel opportunities for passengers and will support ridership increases and customer satisfaction.

On-time performance for passengers traveling in Oregon improved during the fourth quarter as compared to the third quarter of 2023.

Both the Amtrak Cascades and Cascadia High Speed Rail applications were accepted into the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA's) Corridor Identification and Development Program as eligible corridors.

Key drivers of fourth quarter ridership numbers and on-time performance (OTP):

- Increased ridership due to holiday travel, the annular eclipse in Eugene, college sports games and lower ticket prices; and
- The host railroad focused on reducing delays attributed to the host railroad, which is reflected in reduction of total delay minutes charged to the host railroad.

Status

Ridership for October through December 2023

- Fourth quarter ridership was up 5 percent over the third quarter of 2023.
- The pre-pandemic baseline for comparison purposes is 2019. Ridership for the fourth quarter of 2023 on the Oregon portion of the Amtrak Cascades route was 35 percent higher than the fourth quarter of 2019, continuing the upward trend of ridership recovery since the pandemic.
- Ridership for the months of November and December exceeded all previous years' ridership for those same months.

On-Time Performance for October – December 2023

- OTP for northbound passengers was 76 percent and southbound passengers was 75 percent.
- OTP increased 8 percent from the third quarter to fourth quarter 2023.
- The longest delays this quarter were caused by:
 - freight and passenger train interference; and
 - slow order delays (speed reduction).
- Delays this quarter were caused by:
 - 65 percent - Host railroad;
 - 31 percent - Amtrak; and
 - 4 percent - Unassignable (i.e., trespasser strikes, weather-related delays, and drawbridge operation).

Current Progress and Next Quarter Look Ahead

Fifth and Sixth Round Trips between Seattle and Portland

The fifth and sixth round trips between Seattle and Portland began on December 11, 2023. ODOT, WSDOT, and Amtrak adjusted the train schedule to accommodate this new service. The morning train departure from Eugene was moved from 5:30 a.m. to 7:45 a.m. Early morning service between Eugene and Portland is now provided by the POINT bus that departs from the University of Oregon at 5:00 a.m. and Eugene Station at 5:15 a.m.

The new roundtrips between Portland and Seattle will add capacity between the two busiest stations on the Amtrak Cascades route. Trains on this segment of the corridor are frequently sold out, particularly on the weekends. Both leisure and business travelers are expected to take advantage of these new travel options and we expect more travelers between Portland and Eugene.

FRA Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study

The FRA is conducting an [Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study](#) to evaluate the restoration of previous intercity passenger rail service and new Amtrak long-distance routes. The FRA will report to Congress a list of prioritized long-distance routes and associated costs and funding opportunities. FRA expects to complete this work in the second half of 2024. ODOT and other western states, are participating in four regional workshops with the FRA that include examining the restoration of the Pioneer route that served eastern Oregon until 1997. Two workshops were held in 2023 and the third is scheduled for February 8, 2024, in Seattle. The fourth will be held later in 2024.

Cascadia High-Speed Rail Study

The [Cascadia High-Speed Rail study](#) (HSR Study) (formerly known as ultra-high-speed ground transportation) is being coordinated with WSDOT's I-5 Master Planning Study to address future transportation needs. WSDOT is leading this work with ODOT, Oregon Metro, and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (B.C. MOTI) as jurisdictional partners.

Governor Brown signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Washington, British Columbia, and Oregon to support the advancement of the project. The MOU expires in 2026. A new MOU is in negotiation between the jurisdictional partners.

FRA Funding

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) made \$66 billion available for rail projects. FRA's [Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant Program](#) (FSP Program) provides funding for capital projects that reduce the state of good repair backlog, improve performance, or expand or establish new intercity passenger rail service.

FRA's [Corridor Identification and Development Program](#) (CID Program) is a comprehensive intercity passenger rail planning and development program that will help guide intercity passenger rail development and create a pipeline of intercity passenger rail projects ready for implementation.

WSDOT applied for \$197 million from the FSP Program and \$500,000 from the CID Program to support the Cascadia HSR Study. ODOT and B.C.MOTI provided letters of commitment. The FSP application was not selected for this round of funding. All HSR projects awarded an FSP Program grant were considered shovel-ready. FRA announced that the Cascadia HSR Study was accepted into the CID Program.

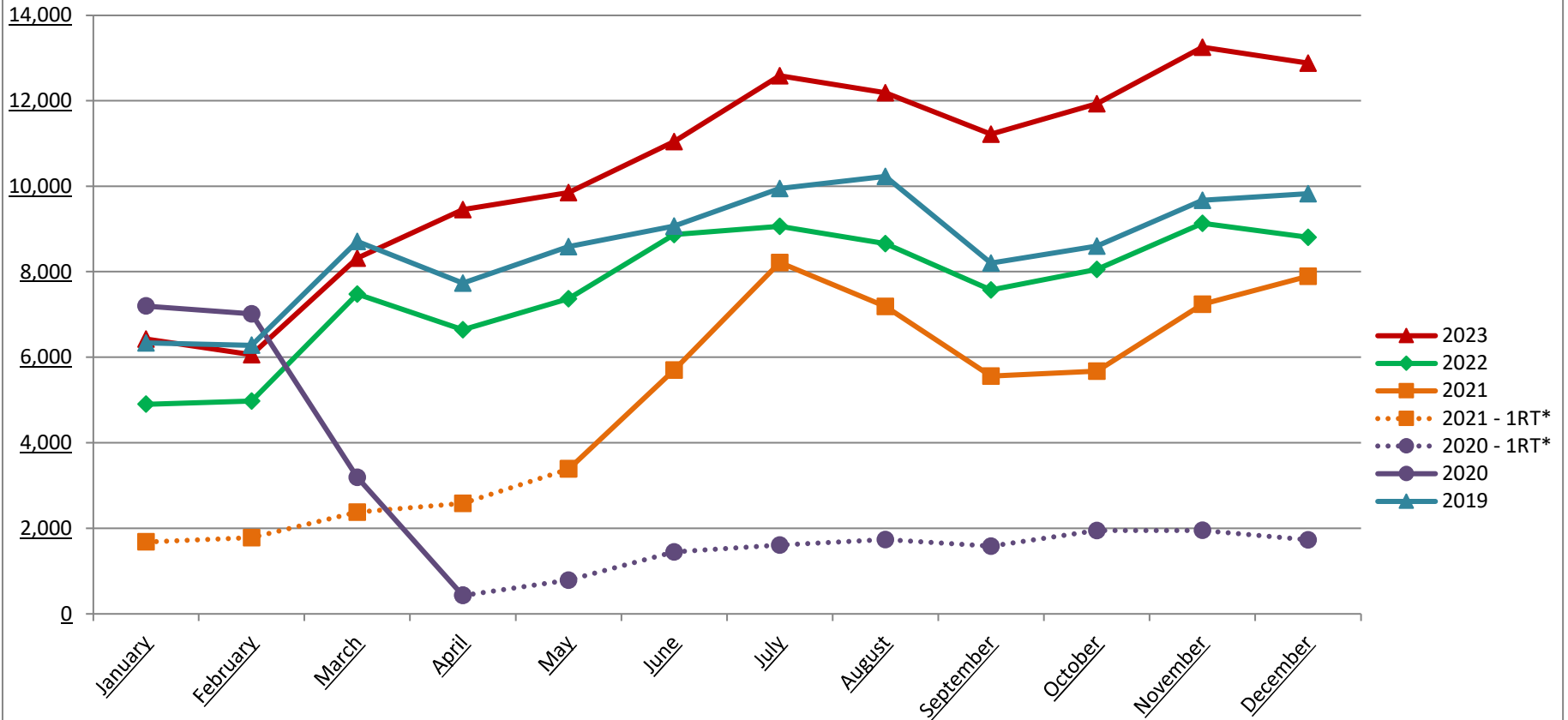
WSDOT and ODOT jointly applied for \$500,000 for the CID Program to support the preparation of an integrated Amtrak Cascades service development plan for both states. FRA announced that the Amtrak Cascades was accepted into the CID Program.

Acceptance into the CID Program means that each are corridor is part of the federal funding pipeline for future intercity passenger rail projects. The list of FRA awards can be found at [FRA 13-23.pdf \(dot.gov\)](#). WSDOT is the lead for HSR and WSDOT and ODOT are co-leads for the Amtrak Cascades.

2024 Oregon State Rail Plan

The FRA requires an update to all state rail plans every four years. The Oregon State Rail Plan (OSRP) was last revised in 2020; therefore, ODOT has started the process for an update in 2024. The information included in the newly adopted Oregon State Rail Plan-Implementation Plan will be considered when updating the OSRP in 2024. Work on the update is expected to begin in January 2024.

Amtrak Cascades Ridership in the Eugene – Portland Corridor Trains Operated Under Contract for the Oregon Department of Transportation

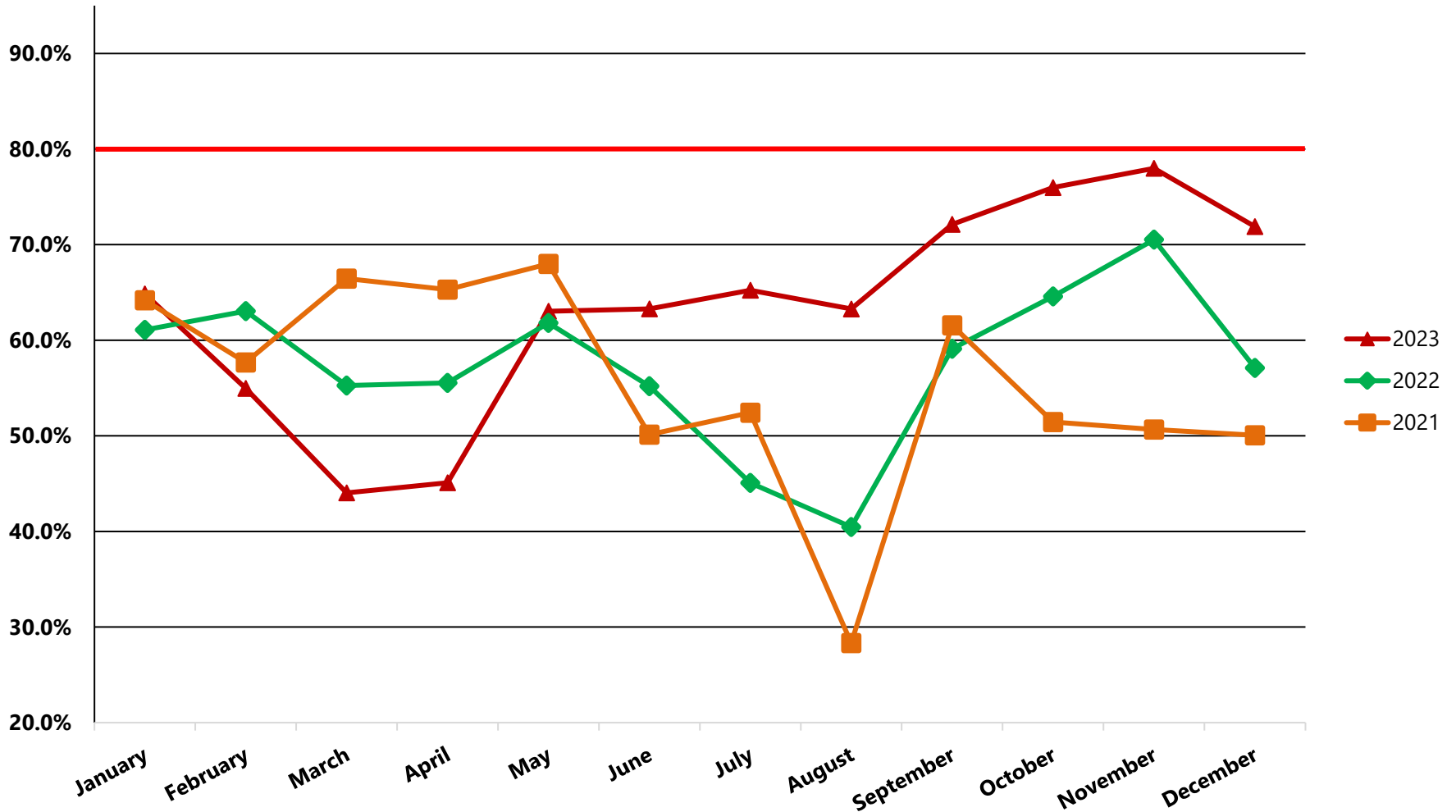


The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting decreases in demand led to the decision to reduce service to one round trip per day between Seattle and Eugene. Service was resumed to two daily round trips on May 24, 2021. The dotted lines above depict the timeframe when the service was reduced to one roundtrip daily.

*RT = Roundtrip PDX-EUG

Amtrak Cascades Customer On-Time Performance Eugene-Portland Corridor

Trains Operated Under Contract for the Oregon Department of Transportation



The data presented is based on the new federal standards for OTP. This new standard measures the timeliness of each individual passenger rather than the train and represents the percentage of customers who reached their stations in Oregon no later than 15 minutes after their published scheduled arrival time.