

Number of state-supported passenger rail and bus riders in the Willamette Valley

Our strategy

ODOT's Public Transportation Division (PTD) and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) co-fund and contract with Amtrak to provide passenger rail services in the Pacific Northwest from Eugene, OR to Vancouver, B.C. This coordination supports passenger rail as a part of the statewide multimodal transportation network in Oregon and provides connections for regional travel on passenger rail.

PTD also funds an intercity bus route along the north I-5 corridor as part of its POINT service. This POINT route is operated by a private transit company under contract with ODOT. Both Amtrak Cascades and POINT are

an integral part of the statewide transit network and supplement the national passenger rail network.

ODOT's goal is to provide transportation options along this corridor that are reliable and safe. One indicator is the number of passenger rail and bus rides provided.

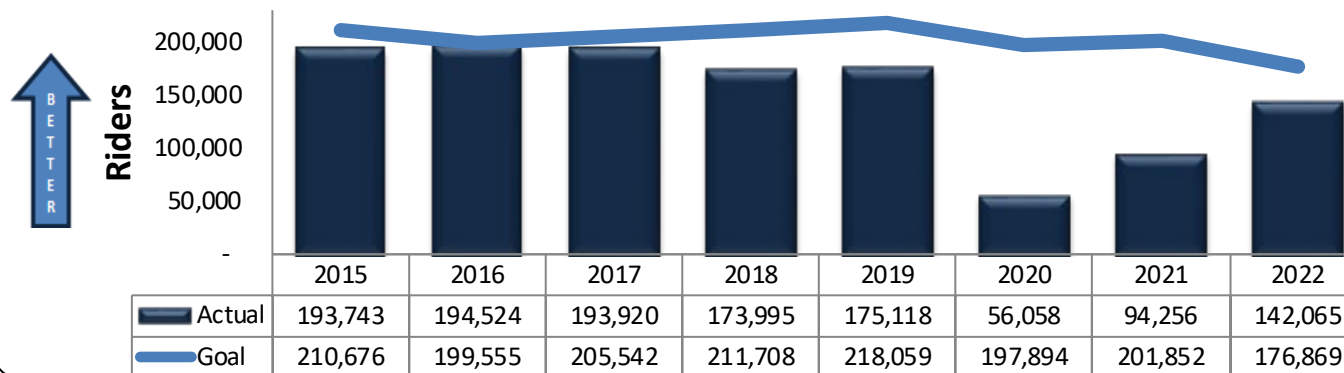
ODOT recently completed a Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan (CIP), identifying needed infrastructure improvements and equipment to improve on-time performance, increase service reliability, and to provide more frequent passenger rail services. The CIP is the foundation for future project development and intended to support future Federal Railroad

Administration, State of Oregon, local government, and private sector decisions on investments in passenger rail along the I-5 corridor. The completion of the CIP positions ODOT to be competitive for federal funds for infrastructure improvements.

About the target

The target was established pre-pandemic, presuming a steady annual increase in passengers riding both Amtrak Cascades and POINT in the north I-5 corridor. Increasing ridership and the passenger experience is an ODOT priority. The 2021 legislatively adopted budget revised the goal downward to set a more realistic goal as a result of pandemic ridership losses. Starting in 2022 the new target is based on 2019 actual

Willamette Valley Passenger Train and POINT Bus Ridership



Fact

The pre-pandemic baseline for comparison purposes is 2019. Oregon Cascades train ridership for 2022 is only 13 percent below 2019 ridership.

Passenger Rail Ridership, cont.

ridership with an expected annual increase of one percent.

How we are doing

Train ridership was expected to increase in 2017 with the addition of two roundtrips between Portland and Seattle. A derailment on the first day of the new service in Washington has delayed increasing service levels and hampered ridership growth. This was exacerbated by ridership losses due to the pandemic that led to reduction in service levels and fewer people traveling.

Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, Amtrak Cascades ridership grew throughout 2022. In 2020, Oregon's ridership dropped 70 percent from pre-pandemic levels and remained down 43 percent in 2021. From January to August 2022, Amtrak and ODOT enacted an educational campaign and enhanced safety measures to promote passenger rail services. During the campaign period, ridership increased 176 percent despite reduced service levels.

Factors affecting results and what needs to be done

ODOT evaluates ridership on every Amtrak Cascades train to determine which trains attract the most passengers. ODOT and WSDOT coordinate on the use of these data to adjust train schedules to achieve

maximum ridership. The POINT schedule connects with the Amtrak Cascades trains and provides service along I-5 during high travel demand times.

The pandemic and the resulting decreases in demand led to the decision to reduce service to one round trip per day between Seattle and Eugene. In May 2021, the states returned to the 2019 service frequencies between Eugene and Seattle. One round trip between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C., resumed in September 2022. The second roundtrip to Vancouver, B.C. will resume on March 6, 2023 and the new, additional roundtrips between Seattle and Portland are scheduled to begin fall 2023. The increased service levels should increase ridership by providing more travel options.

Since service in Oregon has resumed, Amtrak and ODOT have initiated marketing and communication efforts to increase awareness of the changes. Lower fares for travel between Eugene and Portland were introduced in January 2023 and Amtrak is changing their child discount policy allowing all children to travel for 50% off.

ODOT, Amtrak and Union Pacific are coordinating to identify and prioritize infrastructure investments that will increase reliability. These projects include adding or

extending sidings to reduce freight and passenger train interference.

ODOT will leverage state and federal funds to apply for grants through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to fund infrastructure projects to improve on-time performance and support increased service frequency, improving the passenger's travel experience.

PTD will continue to analyze the impact of the pandemic and timing for recovery and determine if the target remains reasonable.

About the data

PTD analyzes monthly ridership and on-time performance data provided by Amtrak and by MTR Western for Cascades POINT ridership.

Contact information

Kathy Holmes
ODOT Public Transportation Division
503-400-4944

Data sources

Amtrak
MTRWestern