



DATE: March 20, 2013

TO: House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

FROM: Hal Gard, Administrator
ODOT Rail and Public Transit

SUBJECT: House Bill 2918-1—Cascades Rail Corridor

INTRODUCTION

HB 2918 with the -1 amendment permits ODOT to enter into agreements with transportation departments in Washington state and British Columbia regarding the Cascades Rail Corridor, and directs ODOT to biennially report to the legislature on the status of agreements and other subjects pertinent to the corridor.

BACKGROUND

In October 1992, the U.S. Department of Transportation designated the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor (also known as the Cascades Rail Corridor) between Eugene, Oregon and Vancouver, British Columbia as a high-speed rail corridor. In October 1994, ODOT began contracting with Amtrak, to provide a daily round-trip passenger train between Portland and Eugene with intermediate stops at Salem and Albany; a second Portland to Eugene roundtrip train was added in October 2000. Amtrak's Thruway bus runs now number four per day each way with a fifth schedule on Fridays and Sundays, supplementing the rail service.

Last year, ODOT-sponsored rail and bus operation ridership totaled 211,136, an increase of 249 percent since 1995. Amtrak's long-distance daily northbound and southbound *Coast Starlight*¹ accommodated an additional 38,906 local travelers between Eugene and Portland. To insure the ability to continue offering rail service as an alternative method of transportation, ODOT will take delivery later this year of two passenger trainsets for use in the Cascades Rail Corridor.

Effective October 2013, the federal Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) ends Amtrak's contribution to passenger rail service within the Cascades Rail Corridor. The federal legislation requires that the states of Oregon and Washington cover all costs associated with operating the service and its capital costs. The result is a significant increase in Oregon's passenger rail operating costs for the same service level for the 13-15 biennium and beyond.

DISCUSSION

HB 2918-1 establishes legislative policy and lends support to ODOT's efforts to partner with Washington on rail service for the Cascades Corridor. The bill also encourages cooperation and partnership with British Columbia. The partnerships encouraged by HB 2918-1 are increasingly important given that resources to provide rail service are limited.

¹ While the *Coast Starlight* does not receive any financial support from the state it does provide Oregonians an attractive mid-day Willamette Valley schedule.

Oregon and Washington signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on March 7, 2012 that committed the agencies to operate the passenger rail service as a single corridor. The two states signed a corridor management work plan on January 31, 2013 which provides the framework for the initial steps to develop a single corridor, defines how the states will work together, and establishes milestones to formalize the relationship prior to implementation of Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA).

The states are working together to contract services for operations and maintenance of the fleet of trains. Oregon and Washington are also coordinating the update of their respective State Rail Plans, taking advantage of efficiencies such as data collection and planning, and stakeholder outreach.

The bill requires ODOT to report to the legislature biennially on the efforts of coordination with the state of Washington and British Columbia. ODOT must also report on the performance of rail service and the financial status and needs of the Cascades Rail Corridor.

SUMMARY

HB 2918-1 creates a more direct link between the bi-state efforts on the Cascades Rail Corridor and the legislature. The bill provides for a reporting mechanism so that the legislature can be better informed of the financial status and needs of the Cascades Rail Corridor and how the service is performing. Oregon and Washington are proceeding on the path to jointly manage the Amtrak Cascades Passenger Service as a single entity, and the legislature is providing policy direction to the agency to continue with the partnership.