

Cascadia High-Speed Rail and I-5 Program

Puget Sound Regional Council Transportation Policy Board Update

September 10, 2026

Ben Tripousis, Cascadia High-Speed Rail & I-5 Program Administrator
Jason Beloso, Rail, Freight & Ports Strategic Planning Manager

What we will cover today

- Cascadia High-Speed Rail & I-5 Program Overview
- Projects Overview
 - Washington's I-5 Master Plan
 - Cascadia High-Speed Rail
 - Amtrak Cascades
- Fall engagement opportunities
- Q&A



The Cascadia Program

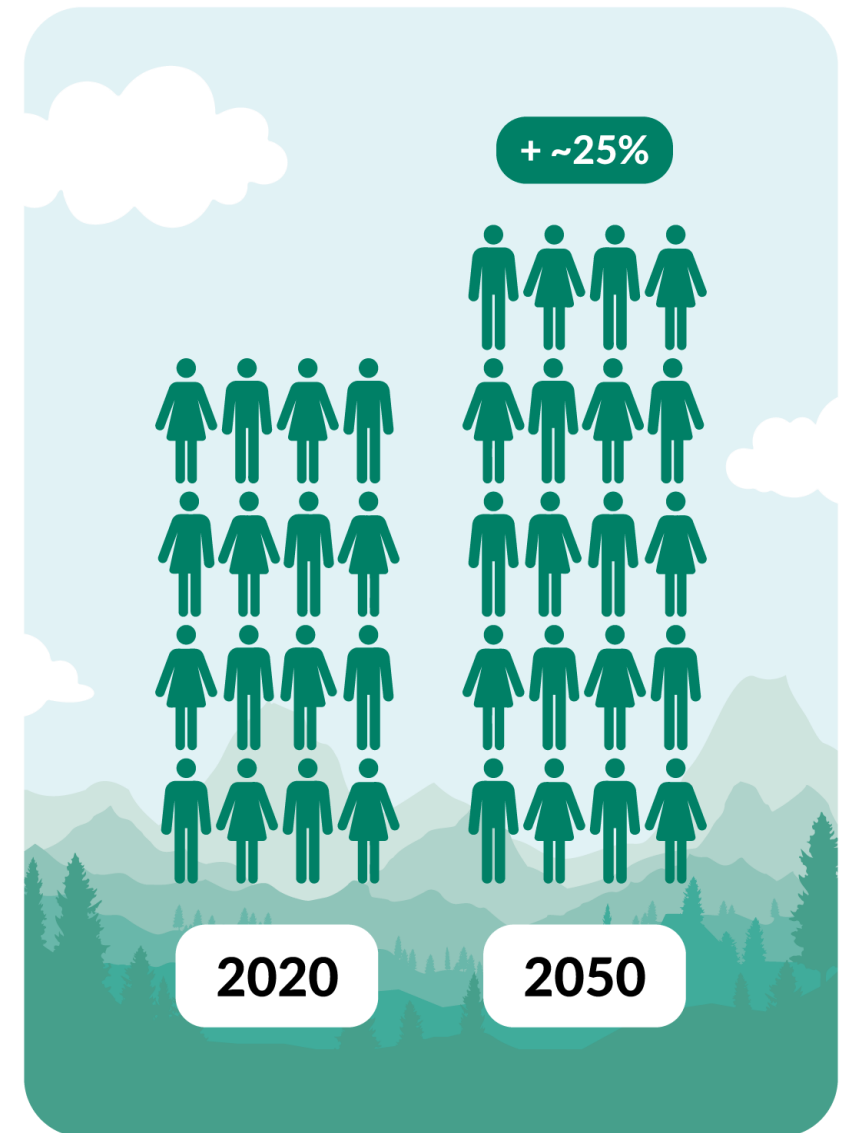
Cascadia Program is shaping the future of our transportation system across the Cascadia Megaregion. The program aims to address our region's growing population and infrastructure demands to support the safe, reliable and efficient movement of people and goods.



Expected population and job growth

By 2050:

- **3.4 million more people** expected in the Cascadia Megaregion.
- Continued economic growth is expected with **1.8 million additional jobs** projected.



Expected transportation growth

- In Washington, truck trips are expected to grow by **50-67% statewide by 2050**.
Currently, trucks trips on I-5 make up to 20% of the total traffic.
- In Washington, **80%** of I-5 will operate at medium/high congestion in 2050, compared to 59% today.
- In Oregon, **78%** of I-5 in Portland will operate with severe congestion by 2045, compared to 33% in 2019.



Understanding system constraints

Findings from the 2025 Cascadia High-Speed Rail Market Analysis



Highway congestion means that travel times are unreliable, which affects vehicles, intercity buses, and freight



Intercity passenger rail shares tracks with freight, which makes it susceptible to **on time performance** and **reliability challenges**



Air travel trips experience delays and existing airport growth is limited



Limited housing in the metropolitan areas, with 1.4 jobs for every available housing unit today, **indicating a lack of housing where jobs are located.**

Implementing a system-wide approach

Findings from the 2026 I-5 Master Plan existing conditions analysis



I-5 is an essential but increasingly fragile statewide backbone.



Safety challenges are widespread and systemic.



Seismic and climate resilience are not future concerns—they are current risks.



Trips using I-5 will become longer and less reliable without a systemic approach to congestion management.



No single solution will fix I-5.

The analysis confirms the need for a phased, integrated strategy

The opportunity

Planning for a better-connected Cascadia Megaregion gives us the opportunity to:

- Transform the way people connect to where they live, work, and play
- Strengthen economic competitiveness
- Drive progress and shape job growth
- Create transportation options and a more reliable transportation network



Coordinating planning efforts



I-5



High-Speed
Rail



Amtrak
Cascades



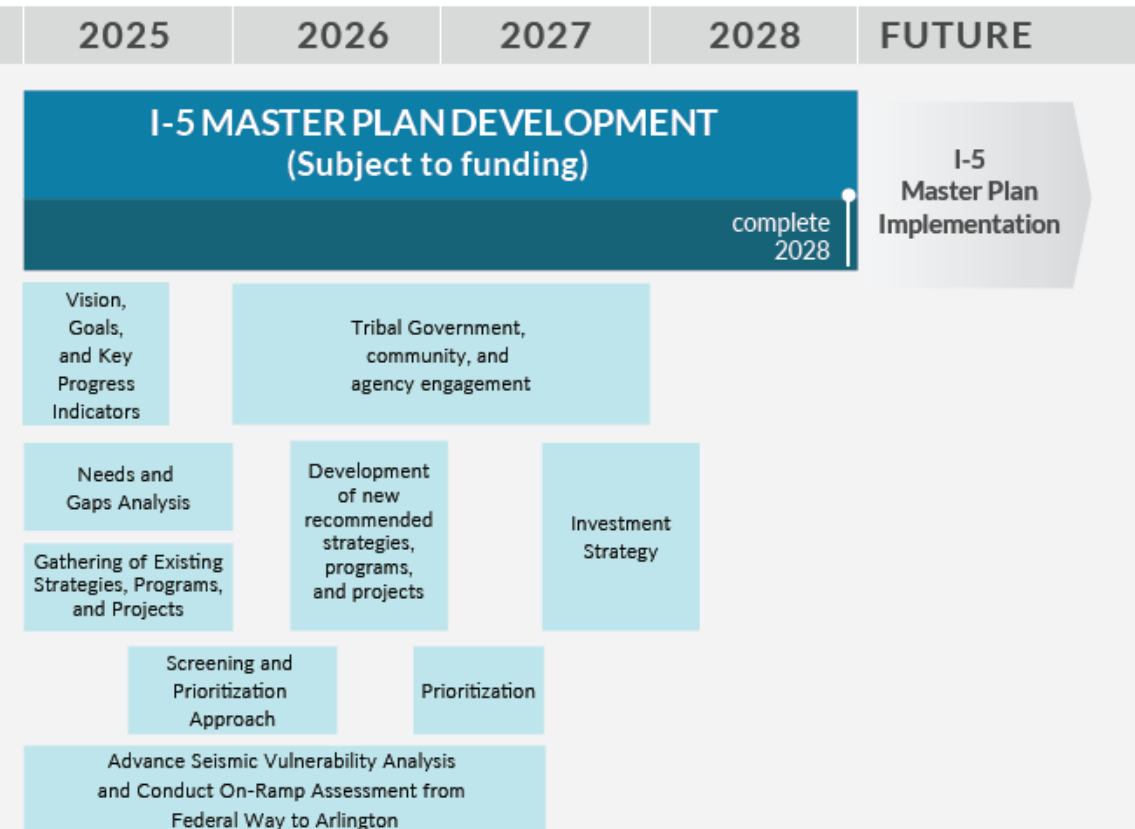
Air travel

Program schedule

Cascadia High-Speed Rail



I-5 Corridor Planning





I-5 Master Plan

Master Plan overview



SCOPE

- 277 miles of I-5 in Washington
- Planning horizon: 2050



WHAT IT DOES

- Identifies programs, strategies, studies and projects
- Prioritized with funding pathways



WHY IT MATTERS

- Improves safety, mobility, preservation, climate resiliency, and system performance

Vision statement

I-5 Master Plan



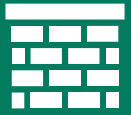
Vision

I-5 is a safe, reliable, and resilient system that provides accessibility and multimodal travel options for all and supports regional and statewide economic vitality.



Master Plan goal categories

I-5 Master Plan



**System Resiliency,
Preservation, &
Environmental**



Safety



**Mobility and
Accessibility**



**Equity and
Community**



**Economic Vitality
and Movement
of Goods**



**Innovation and
Future Readiness**

Needs and gaps analysis

I-5 Master Plan

I-5 System Needs

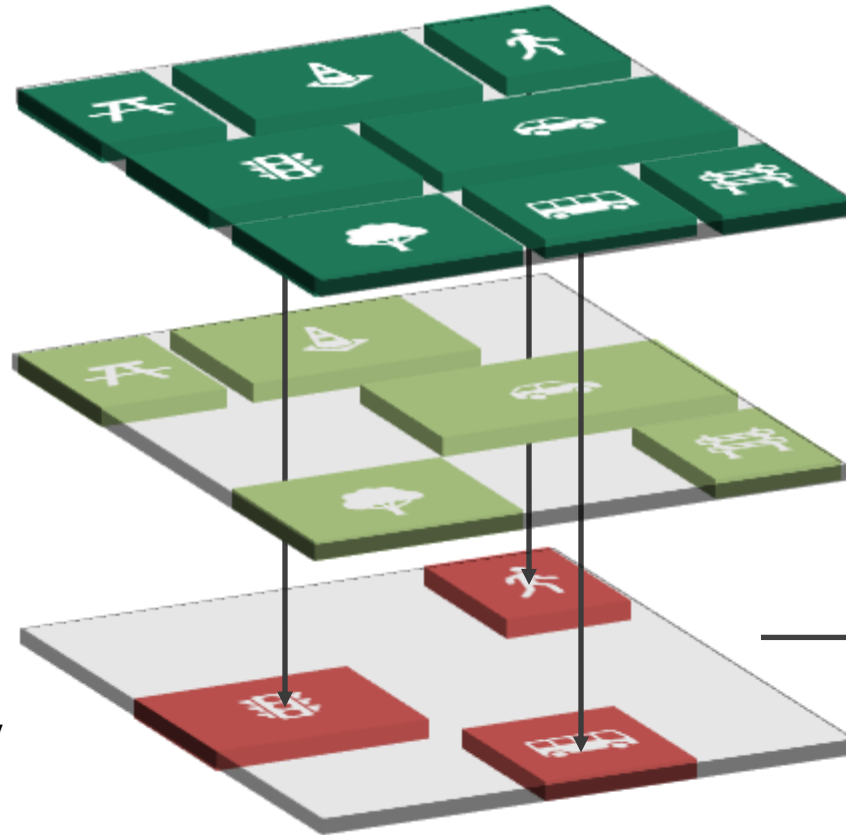
I-5's issues and opportunities

Planned Work

Strategies, programs, studies, and projects already identified to address I-5's needs

Gaps

Needs not addressed by existing planned work



New Proposed Work

Other strategies, programs, studies, and projects needed to address I-5's remaining needs



Prioritization process steps

I-5 Master Plan

1

Full List

Develop a broad list of projects and recommendations



2

Screen

Identify projects and recommendations most relevant to the I-5 corridor



3

Prioritize

Rank projects based on the Master Plan goals, corridor needs and interested party input



4

Recommendations

Prepare Master Plan recommendations



Prioritization Approach

DRAFT Category Weights & Rationale





High-Speed Rail

Project overview

Cascadia High-Speed Rail

- Federal Rail Administration awarded a \$49.7 million Corridor Identification and Development grant to study high-speed rail. Washington state provided \$5.5 million in state match funds.
- Early planning will assess the technical and economic feasibility of high-speed rail service to connect the metropolitan areas of Vancouver, B.C.; Seattle, WA; and Portland, OR.
- This process will result in a Service Development Plan in 2028.

PROJECT PARTNERS:



Puget Sound Regional Council



Service Development Plan

Objectives



The Service Development Plan is part of early planning for high-speed rail and will:

- Identify potential route and conceptual service options for analysis in future stages.
- Identify potential governance options.
- Identify potential finance options.



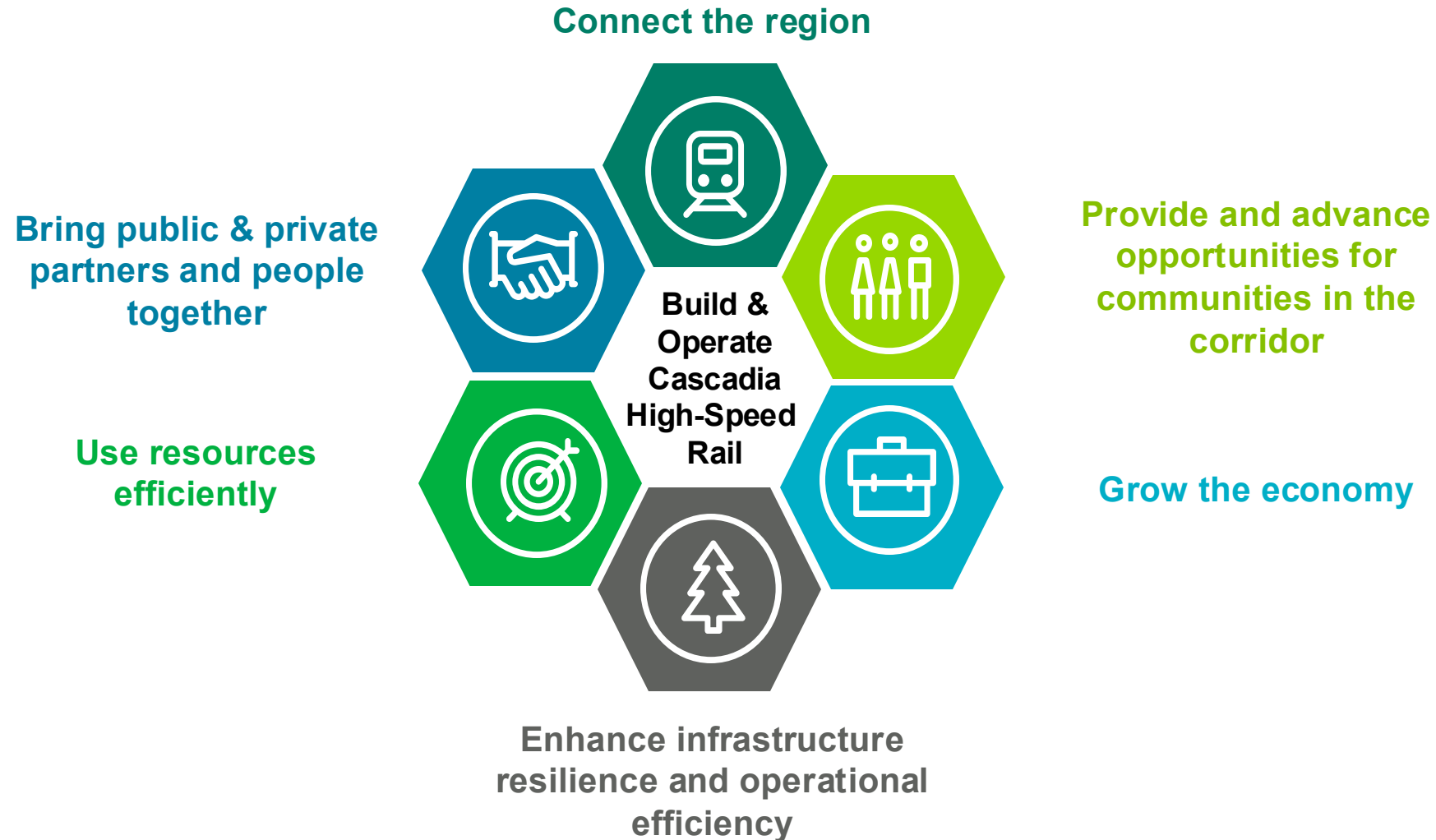
The Service Development Plan will not:

- Select a preferred route.
- Identify station locations.



Cascadia High-Speed Rail North Star

Guiding principles



SDP Preliminary Draft Purpose and Need

Phase I Results

Purpose: The purpose of the Cascadia High-Speed Rail Project is to provide reliable high-speed rail service at speeds greater than 160 mph* that is competitive with other transportation modes and improves mobility between the Cascadia Megaregion metropolitan areas. The project purpose includes optimizing the safe and efficient movement of people in the growing Cascadia Megaregion and facilitating economic development.

Needs:

- Population and employment growth
- Travel demand
- Existing transportation system capacity constraints and congestion
- Travel time and reliability
- Transportation choice and connectivity
- Transportation network resilience to hazards
- Economic development

*FRA guidelines define high-speed rail as service that operates at speeds greater than 160 mph. That definition is reflected in this SDP Preliminary Draft Purpose and Need Statement.

Cascadia High-Speed Rail: Conceptual options analysis

WE ARE
HERE

Phase 1 Q2-Q4 2025

High-Speed Rail Corridor



Phase 2 Q1-Q3 2026

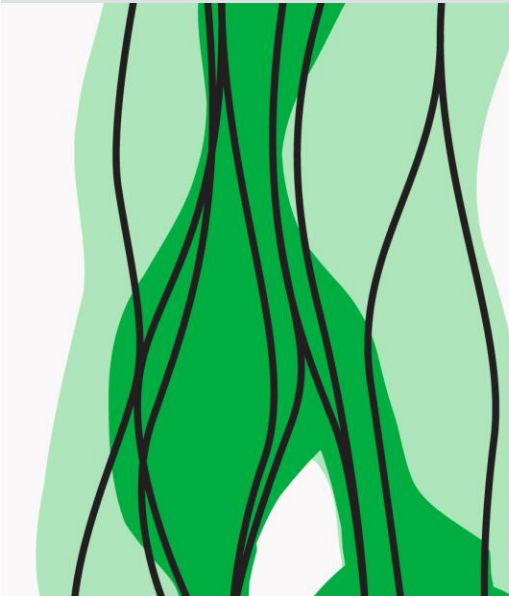
Refined High-Speed Rail Corridor



Phase 3 Q3 2026-Q3 2027

Identify **potentially feasible route options** within route areas.

Conceptual illustrations

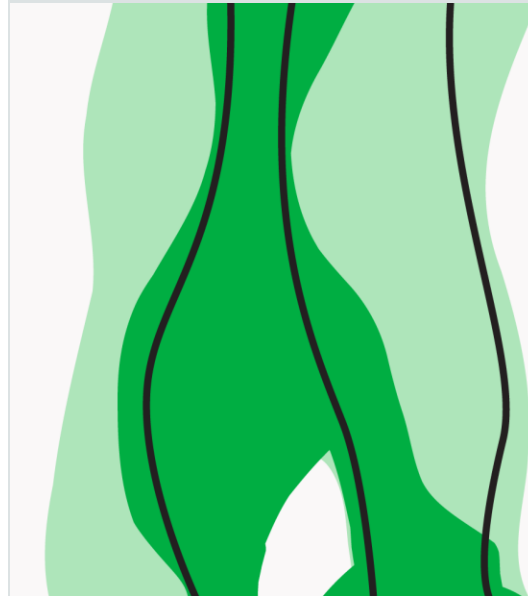


Route options

Phase 4 Q4 2027-Q4 2028

Refine **feasible route options**, if possible.
Assess governance and financing options.

Conceptual illustrations



Most feasible route options

- High-Speed Rail potential route areas
- Areas for focused study
- Potential routes



Amtrak Cascades

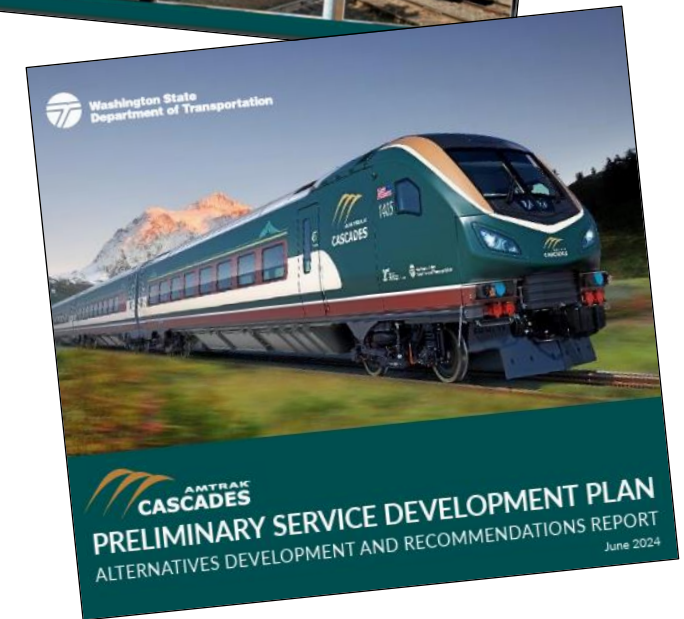
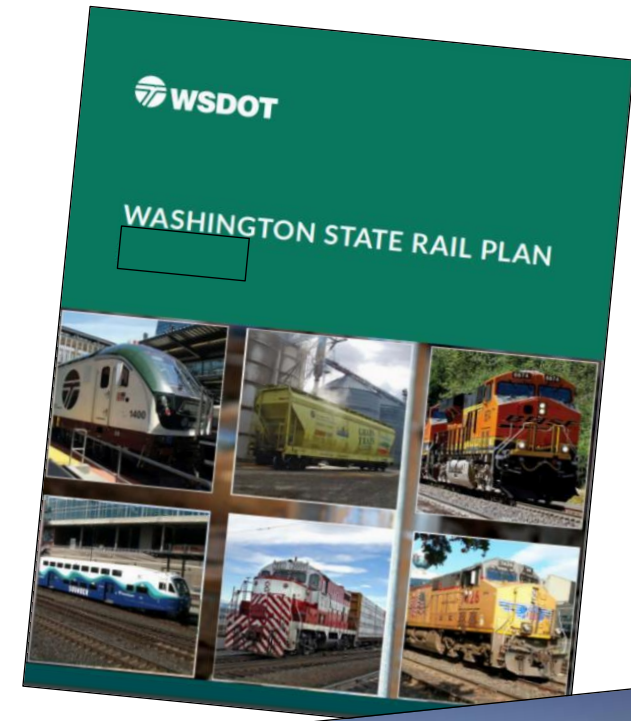
Amtrak Cascades update

Washington State Rail Plan

- Focused on modal integration and preparing for growth
- Includes historical data, current condition reports and future projections to analyze performance and future capacity of Washington's passenger and freight rail network
- Draft plan ready for review and comments by end of September

Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan

- Blueprint for future capital improvements and service changes over the next 20 years
- Published preliminary plan in December 2024
- Awaiting federal approval and funding to move forward with a complete plan
- Critical to identifying improvements and investments necessary to expand the service in the future



Recent developments



Next generation equipment

- Eight new Airo trainsets, two new locomotives, and extra cab car
- \$200 million investment
- Improved seating capacity and passenger experience
- Revenue service starting September 30

Customs preclearance between Canada and USA

- Started June 8, 2026
- First rail facility in North America to be designated – all others at airports
- Saving at least 10 minutes in travel time between Vancouver, BC and Seattle



Recent developments



Program delivery

- \$300M Seattle maintenance facility
- \$110M Salmon Bay Bridge balance span rehabilitation
- \$12M landslide mitigation projects
- \$12.9M trackside equipment improvements

Federal funding announcements

- Two additional Airo trainsets
- Locomotive lifecycle enhancement project

Pending federal applications

- Amtrak Cascades Corridor Improvement Project
- Vancouver Rail Yard Congestion Relief Project
- Landslide Mitigation Phase V





Engagement opportunities

Stay informed and involved!

September 21 Washington Local Agency Program Webinars

- Learn more about this program and projects

October Public Online Open House & Survey

- Learn more about this program and projects
- Help shape the future of the Cascadia Megaregion by sharing your input via a survey

Sign-up for email updates

- www.wsdot.wa.gov/CascadiaProgram

Visit the Cascadia Program website

- www.wsdot.wa.gov/CascadiaProgram

Contact us: CascadiaProgram@wsdot.wa.gov



Questions?