



Puget Sound Regional Council

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Jason Beloso

Freight and Rail Planning Program Manager

Paul Krueger, Systems Planning Engineer

Washington State Department of Transportation

310 Maple Park Avenue SE

P.O. Box 47300

Olympia, WA 98504-7300

Dear Mr. Beloso and Mr. Krueger:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a comment letter on the Amtrak Cascades Preliminary Service Development Plan.

Intercity rail is a critical component for the central Puget Sound region to meet growth, climate, economic development and quality of life goals. Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is forecasting King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties to grow in population from 4.3 million residents today, to 5.8 million in 2050. Over this same period, PSRC forecasts that air travel demand will double, putting enormous strain on the region's commercial airports.

Improved intercity rail service provides the opportunity to take pressure off a strained Interstate 5 corridor and focus air travel from the region's airports to destinations beyond Cascadia. Along with these massive mobility challenges, it is imperative that transportation support aggressive pursuit of climate goals. With these enormous stakes, the Preliminary Service Development Plan as presented does not do enough.

The 2006 Long-Range Plan for Amtrak Cascades set aggressive goals to improve intercity rail service in the Cascadia Region. This plan called for significantly improved travel times in the corridor. By 2023, travel between Seattle and Portland would have been reduced from nearly 4 hours to 2 hours 30 minutes. Trips between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. would have nearly identical improved travel times. Along with these highly improved travel times, frequency of service would be increased to meet demand. Unfortunately, the bold vision for 2023 intercity rail service was not realized.

Today, a trip on Amtrak Cascades takes 3 hours 25 minutes between Seattle and Portland and 4 hours to travel between Seattle and Vancouver. Disappointingly, the Preliminary Service Development Plan under the 90 mph scenarios (Alternatives C & E) decreased travel times by only 20 minutes.

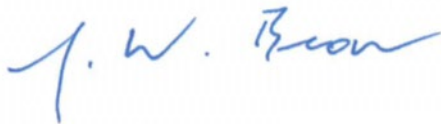
Put another way, the Preliminary Service Development Plan alternatives all have significantly worse travel times than the 2006 Long Range Plan for 2023. Instead of making improvements, the Preliminary Service Development Plan lowers expectations for intercity rail service at precisely the time we should be thinking more boldly about the future.

PSRC's recommendations to the service development plan are as follows:

- Following the example of the 2006 Long-Range Plan for Amtrak Cascades, develop alternatives that allow intercity rail service to connect Seattle with Portland and Vancouver in 2 hours 30 minutes— or better.
- Amtrak Cascades should outline policies to improve reliability that are actionable and realistic. The current on-time performance standard is 88%, but in 2022, Amtrak Cascades was only able to reach 47%. This is not acceptable. The Preliminary Service Development Plan should address this operational challenge with specific implementation recommendations.
- The Express route component should be pursued further as part of improvements to frequency and travel times in the corridor. Express trips between Seattle and Portland should include one intermediate stop in Tacoma and should occur at times in the morning, midday and evening to provide a realistic alternative to air travel for business and leisure passengers.
- WSDOT should act on the opportunity for transit system integration by coordinating with transit agencies and the Port of Seattle to provide a direct shuttle between Tukwila station and Sea-Tac International Airport. As Amtrak Cascades service frequencies and travel times improve, the system could be utilized much more by passengers connecting to flights.
- Over the last several years, WSDOT has pursued the development of a new Cascadia High Speed Rail corridor linking Portland, Seattle and Vancouver. The Preliminary Service Development Plan should closely coordinate with current and future high speed rail developments.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please contact me if you have questions or would like to discuss these recommendations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "J. W. Brown".

Josh Brown
Executive Director
Puget Sound Regional Council

cc: Mayor Rebecca Erickson, Poulsbo, Puget Sound Regional Council President
Executive Dave Somers, Snohomish County, Puget Sound Regional Council Vice President