

11 - Regional Rail System

Introduction

The Regional Rail System chapter of the SKATS Regional Transportation Systems Plan (RTSP) includes:

- a list of the regional goals, objectives, and policies established for the Regional Rail System;
- a general inventory of the regionally significant rail service and facilities in the SKATS area;
- an estimation of the major freight and passenger movements associated with the rail system;
- an analysis of problems and issues identified on the regional rail system;
- recommended service and infrastructure improvements needed on the rail system in the area; and
- a general picture of costs and revenues associated with the recommended improvements.

The infrastructure of the region's rail system, unlike most of the highway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities in the region, is generally privately owned and operated. As a result, capital investment by the rail industry is much more directly driven by market forces than by policy initiatives at the state, regional, and/or local levels. Coordination and cooperative efforts between the public and private sectors, however, can be mutually beneficial and serve to increase the efficiency of both the rail and nonrail elements of the region's transportation system.

The Regional Rail System

Rail Infrastructure and Service Levels

Overview

Although subsequent mergers may affect service levels, at the present time the Salem-Keizer area is served by one major (Class I) railroad company, the Union Pacific (UP), and two

shortline (Class III) carriers, the Willamette Valley Railway (WVRY) and Portland & Western Railroad (P&W).

Both the UP and P&W operate in primarily north-south rail corridors that traverse the length of the region (**Map 8-1**). The WVRY operates the former SP Geer Branch in an east-west corridor running from Cordon Road in Salem to Geer where it connects to the WVRY West Stayton Branch. The line is currently used for the storage of railroad cars. P&W acquired the track structure of the BNSF line north of Perkins Road outside of Keizer to Beaverton in 1998, and have permanent and exclusive operational easement over this right-of-way, which is owned by ODOT. They acquired the rest of the BNSF line to Eugene in 2002. There are approximately 35.6 rail route miles (not counting spurs and/or sidings) in the SKATS region associated with the two principal rail corridors. Approximately 25 rail route miles (70% of the total) of this infrastructure are located inside the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB); 10.6 miles (30%) are located outside the UGB.

Significant rail spurs in the region include the P&W/UP connecting track running just north of Johnson Street NE in the Cherry Avenue Industrial Area.

Union Pacific (UP) Lines

The Union Pacific (UP) "Valley Mainline" route through the SKATS area consists of 14.4 rail route miles and runs in a corridor roughly parallel to I-5. In northern Marion County, the UP mainline is located east of I-5. At a point just north of the Portland Road/I-5 Interchange, the line crosses below the freeway and traverses the eastern edge of the Downtown/Capitol Mall area. Just north of the Kuebler Boulevard/I-5 Interchange, the line re-crosses to the east of the freeway and continues into the community of Turner. The UP also operates a rail yard bounded by Hines Street to the north, Vista Avenue to the south, 14th and 16th Streets to the east, and 13th Street and Pringle Road to the west.

This "Valley Mainline" is a part of the UP north-south mainline extending from Portland to Eugene. From Eugene, the "Cascade Line" continues south, providing service to California via Chemult and Klamath Falls. The UP line represents the main west coast rail line providing a link to Canada and Mexico. Through its connection with UP's east-west mainline in Portland, it offers shippers in the Salem-Keizer area access to markets throughout the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.

The UP Mainline also provides the route for rail passenger service, providing station access in Salem and direct southbound service to Albany/Corvallis; Eugene; Klamath Falls; and Los Angeles, California; as well as direct northbound service to Portland and Seattle, Washington.

An east-west connecting track through the Cherry Avenue industrial area connects the UP "Valley Mainline" to the P&W line in the region (see below).

Portland & Western Railroad (P&W) Lines

In 1998, P&W acquired from BNSF the Oregon Electric Branch line's track structure running from north of Keizer at Perkins Road to the Portland metropolitan area, parallel and to the west

of the I-5 corridor. The right-of-way for this line is owned by ODOT, and P&W has a permanent and exclusive operating easement on this line. This route is mainly outside the SKATS area. In 2002, the parent company of the P&W, the Genesee & Wyoming Inc., located in Connecticut with operations worldwide, acquired the remainder of this line, from just north of Keizer to Eugene, running along the east side of the Willamette River.

Willamette Valley Railway (WVRY) Lines

The rail lines in the SKATS area associated with the Willamette Valley Railway have either been abandoned (from 14th Street SE to Lancaster Drive), are currently embargoed (east of Lancaster Drive to Cordon Road), or are being used for storing railroad cars (east of Cordon Road).

Amtrak

Although Amtrak does not own any right-of-way, they provide passenger rail service through the Willamette Valley, connecting Salem with Portland and Seattle to the north, and Eugene, Medford, San Francisco, and Los Angeles to the south. In addition, Portland, Seattle, and Los Angeles provide links with Amtrak's transcontinental trains, providing service to cities in the Midwest and East. Service is run over UP's Valley Mainline in the Willamette Valley, with the Salem Railroad Station as the passenger station for Salem.

Intermodal Rail Facilities

Intermodal Freight Rail Facilities

Currently, the SKATS area's largest intermodal freight rail facility is a private lumber reload (break-bulk) operation. The firm, Cascade Warehouse, operates three facilities within the city of Salem: one located on Industrial Way NE, one located on Cherry Avenue, and one located on Front Street. This firm has access to both of the railways serving the Salem-Keizer area. Additional information on this system is presented in Chapter 8, Regional Goods Movement System.

Intermodal Passenger Rail Facilities

The SKATS area has one intermodal passenger rail facility. It is the Salem Railroad Station, located at the corner of Mill Street SE and 12th Street SE. The Salem Railroad Station offers travelers both intercity train and bus service. The facility's principal assets include a terminal building that was remodeled in 1999, a historic "freight shed" that is in need of structural and cosmetic repair, a concrete passenger platform that is in very good condition, and a paved parking lot that is in new condition.

The existing Salem passenger rail station site is roughly rectangular in shape, being approximately 1,220 feet in length from north to south, and ranging from approximately 85 feet to 138 feet in width from east to west. This site also has an uninterrupted platform length of more than 1,100 feet, well in excess of the 800-foot minimum required for a facility of this type.

The northern half of the site contains a paved parking lot and half of the depot's passenger platform. The parking lot currently has a capacity of up to 150 cars. At the present time, parking spaces in the lot are not clearly marked, nor are there any clearly defined areas set aside for vehicle movements, taxi queuing areas, or intercity bus staging.

The southern half of the site contains the Salem Railroad Station structure that dates from 1918, an 1880's "freight shed" that is no longer in use, the southern half of the passenger platform, a Union Pacific microwave communications tower, and a small wooded area that slopes down toward the Shelton Ditch. There is no vehicular circulation on the southern portion of the site.

The 1918 station structure is approximately 150 feet by 40 feet in size. The station has a current passenger capacity of approximately 160 people.

This facility is adjacent to State Highway 22, which offers connections to Interstate 5, Oregon Highway 221, Oregon Highway 219, Oregon Highway 213, and Pacific Highway 99E. The station is within a half-mile distance of Willamette University, Tokyo International University, and the Capitol Mall. Most of the sidewalk and bicycle lanes surrounding the existing station site were installed as part of the Oregon Highway 22 overpass project and connect to existing bicycle facilities on the Pringle Parkway. The 12th Street Pedestrian Promenade, which is described in the Pedestrian chapter of this document, will provide a safe, convenient, and attractive walking path from the station to the Capitol Mall and downtown areas.

The Salem-Keizer Transit District serves the Amtrak Station with route number 7, "State and Fairview." This route stops on Mill Street along the north side of Amtrak's north end parking lot on both the inbound and outbound trips. Route number 15, "Laurel Spring," goes through the area, stopping at the corner of 12th Street and Pringle Parkway as it leaves downtown. This bus stop requires potential passengers traveling from downtown to cross the intersection of 12th and 13th streets, and Oregon Highway 22, to reach the Amtrak terminal. Route number 6, the "12th & Sunnyside," and number 15, the "Laurel Spring," both pass directly in front of the Amtrak station on 13th Street when traveling towards the downtown Transit Center, but due to a very difficult street network and traffic pattern, does not have a designated stop at or near the station. Additionally, the CARTS "Canyon Connector" route travels on 12th Street near the station and will stop at the station as requested by passengers onboard, providing service from communities in the Santiam Canyon.

With the financial backing of ODOT's High Speed Rail Project, Amtrak Thruway motor coach service stops at this facility, providing connections with Portland, Eugene, Central Oregon, and the coast.

Rail System Support Facilities

Freight Rail Support Facilities

Freight rail support facilities within the SKATS area are privately owned and operated. Cascade Warehouse operates three break-bulk (lumber) reload facilities within the boundary of SKATS that also offer a warehousing function. Currently, no Trailer on Flatcar (TOFC) or Container on Flatcar (COFC) reloading facility exists within the SKATS boundary.

Approximately 45 separate addresses within the SKATS area are equipped with railroad sidings and most are associated with various industrial uses.

Passenger Rail Support Facilities

Passenger rail service support facilities within the SKATS area consist of Salem's Railroad Station, which is served by Amtrak. This facility is described in detail in the previous section.

Transportation Demand on the Regional Rail System

Freight Movements

Regional Rail Corridor Commodity Flows

There are two principal rail corridors located in the SKATS region. According to the data contained in the *2001 Oregon Rail Plan*, the total freight commodity flow associated with these corridors amounts to approximately 31 million tons per year.

The portion of the UP mainline between Eugene and Portland is the most heavily used rail line for freight in the Willamette Valley, with more than 30 million gross tons being shipped over it on an annual basis. According to 2000 data obtained from the state, about 26 through freight trains are routed over this line per day between Eugene and Portland. Three switching locomotives also use this segment of the UP mainline daily to shuttle cars and make up trains.

A survey of six SKATS area firms conducted in the mid-1990s indicated combined annual rail shipments of over 300,000 gross tons. Several firms are choosing instead to ship their products in containers via truck to Portland area rail or marine terminals for reloading.

Amtrak also offers freight delivery service to the SKATS area via its Amtrak Express service, which is accessed at the Salem Railroad Station. This service can ship packages from 1 to 2,000 pounds from the SKATS area to anywhere in the nation that Amtrak serves.

Intermodal Freight Transfers

Intermodal freight movements involve the transportation of container encapsulated or trailer encapsulated cargo, while using two or more modes of transportation to ship the cargo from its origin to its destination. The movement of bulk and break-bulk cargos, both into and out of the SKATS area, is also frequently intermodal in nature. Advantages inherent to intermodal shipment of goods include increased modal options for those shipping goods, the potential for reduced costs, and a potential increase in the size of the market the shipper can reach cost effectively. According to the *2001 Oregon Rail Freight Plan*, intermodal freight movements involving rail account for a large percentage of the total freight transported within the United States and account for nearly 17% of all rail revenue, second only to coal shipments.

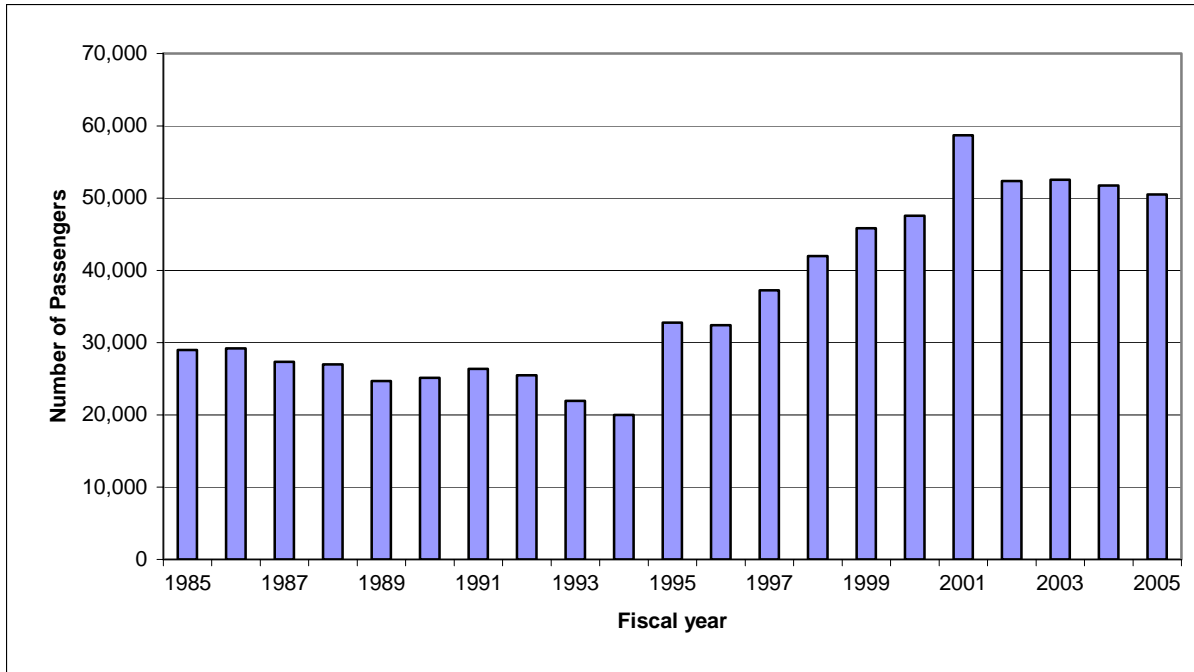
Currently, the SKATS area's largest intermodal rail activity within the city of Salem is a lumber reload (break-bulk) operation. The firm operates three facilities, one located on Industrial Way NE, one located on Cherry Avenue, and the other located on Front Street. These facilities reload approximately 200,000 tons of wood products annually. While other opportunities for increased intermodal activities appear to exist within the SKATS area, potential users would have to be identified and their needs assessed before any additional actions could be taken.

Passenger Movements

Regional Rail Corridor Passenger Demand

Amtrak provides the SKATS area with two service options for passenger rail service, the *Coast Starlight* and *Cascades* trains, with station access at the Salem Railroad Station. For fiscal year 2005, just over 50,500 passengers used the Salem station. The growth in passenger use of the Salem Railroad Station can be seen in **Figure 11-1**, where the number of passengers boarding and detraining in Salem has increased significantly since 1996. This increase can be traced to improvements that have been made in the service and equipment used in the Pacific Northwest High Speed Corridor, which is currently one of the eleven federally designated High Speed Rail (HSR) corridors. The corridor extends from Eugene through Salem to Portland, and then to Seattle and finally to Vancouver, British Columbia. Trains operating in this corridor are marketed as the *Cascades*, thus lending the corridor a second name, the Cascade Corridor. In 1994, Amtrak expanded service by extending a Cascade Corridor train to Eugene from Seattle, via Portland. The introduction of Talgo trainsets in 1995, bringing a definite European flavor to the corridor trains, provided a higher level of comfort for passenger travel. These trainsets tilt when entering curves, allowing the train to maintain a higher speed, and thus reduce the running time between stations. In 2000, Amtrak introduced a second train running between Eugene and Seattle.

Figure 11-1
Salem Railroad Station Boardings and Detraining, 1985 to 2005



The *Coast Starlight* service (serving the entire west coast corridor) provides direct southbound service to Albany, Eugene, Klamath Falls, and Los Angeles, California, and direct northbound service to Portland and Seattle, Washington. This service consists of one train per day in each direction. According to information developed for the ODOT 1994 *Oregon Rail Freight Plan*, total Oregon ridership on the *Coast Starlight* route reached a peak of over 591,000 passengers in 1981. From 1985 till 1992, passenger activity through the Salem Railroad Station remained basically flat on an annual basis, with a cumulative total for the eight-year period of 1985-1992 amounting to 182,871 boarding and deboarding passengers, an average of 26,785 passengers per year.

Enhanced Passenger Rail Service (EPRS)

In 1992, ODOT completed the *Oregon Transportation Plan* and a *Rail Passenger Policy and Plan*, which called for the eventual development of High Speed Rail (HSR) services from Eugene, Oregon to Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. That same year, the states of Oregon and Washington applied for and received "corridor status" from the U.S. Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to be part of the Federal High Speed Rail Program, one of only five such corridor designations nationwide at that time. Trains running over this corridor are marketed as the *Cascades*.

The long-range Enhanced Passenger Rail Service (EPRS) goal is to reduce the running time between Portland and Eugene to two hours, and the travel time between Salem and Portland to 45 minutes in the corridor for intercity passenger service. This service would be provided by up to six round trips daily between Portland and Eugene, via Salem and Albany, nine round trips daily between Portland and Seattle, and four round trips per day between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.

Interim, short-term goals for corridor rail passenger service include more frequent service between Eugene and Seattle and track improvements to allow maximum train speeds of 79 mph over longer portions of the line, which would aid in increasing train speeds in the corridor from the current average speed of 47 mph.

Feeder bus service to several communities east and west of the UP mainline, as well as Amtrak Thruway bus service along the length of the EPRS corridor, are already being offered in an effort to increase ridership on Amtrak's existing passenger rail service.

In addition to the High Speed Rail Task Force, the Mid-Willamette Area Commission on Transportation (MWACT) has been established by ODOT to oversee the coordinated efforts of valley and state jurisdictions to study, design, and recommend implementation of EPRS, as well as a comprehensive system of both passenger and freight transportation improvements (such as intercity bus service and intermodal facilities) in the corridor.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies

The Regional Rail System Element of the Regional Transportation Systems Plan (RTSP) provides a blueprint for development of an adequate, efficient, and safe system of rail facilities into and through the SKATS area. Since SKATS does not actually build, maintain, or operate any portion of the facilities comprising this system, the Regional Rail System Element is implemented through the cooperative adoption of regional goals, objectives, and policies contained in the regional Plan. In turn, the regional Plan must be consistent with the state and federal plans, policies, and mandates.

Goal 1: A regional rail system that provides an adequate level of service to passenger and freight rail consumers within the SKATS area.

Objective: Support the provision of rail service within the SKATS area that adequately addresses service demands of both passengers and freight.

Policy: Encourage continued and improved rail service to and from the SKATS area.

Policy: Promote the enhancement of intercity passenger rail service to provide an option to workers commuting along the I-5 corridor.

Objective: Promote the development and maintenance of an adequate infrastructure and facility system to support continued and improved rail service in the SKATS area.

Policy 1: Encourage the continued improvement of the region's existing rail infrastructure and facilities.

Policy 2: Encourage the development and implementation of adequate infrastructure and facilities to address the needs of both passenger and freight movements in the region.

Goal 2: A safe system of regional rail transport serving the SKATS area.

Objective: Support efforts to maintain and improve regional rail transportation safety by complying with federal and state rail safety standards.

Policy: Encourage improvements to the regional transportation system that enhance rail safety as well as safety between railroads and other transportation modes.

Goal 3: Efficient use of existing regional rail transportation infrastructure.

Objective: Promote the maximization of efficient use of existing regional rail transportation infrastructure.

Policy: Encourage actions that maximize efficient use of existing rail infrastructure and improved service levels to address SKATS area rail transportation needs.

Goal 4: Staged infrastructure upgrades as part of the High Speed Rail Corridor Project.

Objective: Support provision of rail-related infrastructure upgrades as part of the High Speed Rail Corridor Project.

Policy: Encourage infrastructure upgrades needed for the successful implementation of the High Speed Rail Project.

Goal 5: Preserve rail rights-of-way that may be abandoned for future transportation-related uses.

Objective: Reserve all regional rail corridor rights-of-way for transportation-related uses where viable.

Policy: Designate all regional rail corridor rights-of-way as "Transportation Corridor Preserves" pending results of alignment specific suitability studies.

Goal 6: Multimodal connectivity to regional passenger rail terminal.

Objective: Support improved multimodal access to regional passenger rail terminal.

Policy 1: Promote infrastructure upgrades to the regional passenger rail terminal.

Policy 2: Develop and promote intercity and intracity public transportation system connections to the regional passenger rail terminal.

Recommended Improvements

Rail Infrastructure Improvements

It should be noted that the rail infrastructure within the SKATS area is privately owned and maintained by the railroads. Improvements are often made at the discretion of the railroads, with Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) involvement occurring whenever there are safety or capacity concerns or potential conflicts with other modes of transportation.

According to the 2000 *Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor, Oregon Segment Operating / Capital Facilities Plan*, the Oregon Department of Transportation has identified \$1.1 million in needed improvements along an approximately four-mile stretch within the Salem-Keizer urban area. These improvements include upgrading the track and crossing signals along the Union Pacific mainline to allow the passenger trains to operate at a faster speed.

Service Improvements

Freight Rail Service Improvements

Due to mergers and a change in marketing strategies, many of the nation's largest railroads, UP and BNSF included, are choosing to reduce localized service and focus more heavily on the enhancement of their long haul and transcontinental service. The ability of a major railroad to concentrate on providing regularly scheduled long haul services has become a key to their profitability. Due to this change in emphasis, rail equipment is at a premium, as it is being increasingly deployed on longer nonstop routes between major cities. Allocating equipment to address the switching needs of local sidings users, and to make up local trains, has become less of a priority. Several SKATS area corporations who ship by rail and operate sidings have experienced this difficulty.

Passenger Rail Service Improvements

The *Cascades* service (serving the Pacific Northwest corridor) was expanded in October of 1994 to include the Willamette Valley corridor. It provides direct southbound service to Albany and Eugene and direct northbound service to Portland and Seattle, Washington. It was further expanded in 2000, adding a second daily train between Portland and Eugene in each direction. The utility of this service for local commuters is problematic because the arrival and departure hours do not coincide with normal work schedules. Amtrak, with ODOT funding and support, is operating Amtrak Thruway motor coach services north to Portland and south to Eugene in an effort to build the passenger base for future expansions of rail service, and to provide mobility options in the time periods when a train is not available for travel in the corridor.

Ultimately, with a fully upgraded trackage, the running time between Portland and Eugene would be 120 minutes, with trains expected to reach speeds of up to 110 miles per hour. This would represent reducing the current Amtrak running time between the two cities of 155 minutes by 23 percent. Up to six round trips daily would be provided between Portland and Eugene, via Salem and Albany. There would also be nine round trips daily between Portland and Seattle and four round trips per day between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. The estimated cost for the EPRS improvements required for full system build-out in Oregon has been estimated at roughly \$450 million in 1994 dollars.

Along with the High Speed Rail Task Force, the Mid-Willamette Area Commission on Transportation (MWACT) has been attempting to coordinate the efforts of valley and state jurisdictions to study, design, and recommend implementation of EPRS.

Support Facilities

Freight Rail Support Facilities

Additional improvements needed to these facilities will be identified as they arise by the owners and users of the facilities.

Passenger Rail Support Facilities

With the recent renovation of the Salem Railroad Station, and the funding for the 12th Street Pedestrian Promenade to connect it with the downtown Capitol area, the major need is to provide adequate transit service to the station to ensure that users of the station and rail service are afforded the widest possible range of modes.

Outstanding Issues

The principal outstanding issues for the Regional Rail System involve the uncertainty of available funding for the recommended trackage improvements and the lack of identified funding for expanding the service as envisioned in the *Oregon Rail Plan* (2001).

Long-term operations and maintenance of the Salem Railroad Station is another outstanding issue, as the Salem station is the only one in the valley to be owned by ODOT and not local jurisdiction(s).

Intercity rail service can provide a viable alternative to long-haul automobile travel, be it for commuting or for shopping/recreation trips. The potential and feasibility of additional intercity rail service along the I-5 corridor between the Salem-Keizer area and the Portland Metropolitan area to the north, and Corvallis/Albany to the south, is an issue that needs further study. Two routes are available to the north. One follows the route of Amtrak's passenger trains by using the UP line to the east of I-5 to Oregon City and then to Union Station in Portland. The second option is to use the P&W line that runs to the west of I-5 from Keizer to Wilsonville, where it would connect with commuter rail service linking Wilsonville and Beaverton, which begins service in 2008.

Another continuing issue is the safety of railroad crossings. In the 1996 RTSP, a number of crossings were identified as needing improvement to reduce the possibility of serious collisions between trains and autos. These improvements have been completed and the 12th Street Pedestrian Promenade was constructed to address the safety concerns facing pedestrians in the 12th Street corridor. However, increases in the number and/or speed of trains along either of the rail corridors in the SKATS area should be tied with a reexamination of the safety of the crossings.

Other outstanding issues that cannot be fully addressed by this document include the preservation of land that is currently capable of being served by rail, and the reduction of land-use conflicts near existing rail lines.

