

Washington State Rail Plan

Public Workshops Summary Report

Fall 2012



Washington State
Department of Transportation
State Rail & Marine Division

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For more information:

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Washington State Rail Plan Public Workshops Summary Report

WSDOT invited the public to participate in three workshops during Fall 2012. Over 150 participants shared their views about rail in public workshops held in Spokane and Seattle in October and November to help develop the next version of Washington's State Rail Plan. Participants included members of the public and representatives from industry, advocacy groups and public agencies who expressed interest in preserving and strengthening freight and passenger rail, funding sources and rail connectivity. Safety and maintenance and preservation issues were emphasized, and economic impacts discussed. The input will be used to develop the vision, goals, objectives and evaluation criteria for the state rail plan.

State rail plan overview

The Washington State Rail Plan will serve as a strategic blueprint for future public investment in the state's rail transportation system. It will provide an integrated plan for freight and passenger rail, including 5- and 20-year funding strategies, that meets federal and state requirements. The plan will inform the state Freight Mobility Plan; guide WSDOT as it develops strategic freight rail partnerships to support essential rail service; and establish priorities for determining which freight rail investments should receive public support. It will also guide Washington as it works with Oregon and British Columbia to implement intercity passenger rail service. WSDOT will release the final state rail plan by the end of 2013.

Collaborative planning process

Rail transportation is dependent on many partnerships between government agencies, private industry and other stakeholders. The plan cannot be successfully implemented without strong support which makes collaboration necessary for a successful outcome. The plan will be a product of broad participation. We are connecting with stakeholders and members of the public in a variety of ways:



- **Stakeholder interviews:** The purpose of these brief interviews is for information gathering and to solicit perspectives on the existing rail system and identify significant issues and opportunities for the near and long term.
- **Stakeholder Advisory Committee:** The committee, comprised of individuals selected from multiple rail constituencies, will act as a sounding board as we proceed through development of the plan.
- **Public meetings (workshops and open house):** Three meetings were held at the beginning of the process and more will follow with the release of the draft state rail plan to solicit public input.

In addition, the project team will provide briefings to groups, send email updates and post updates online throughout the project.

State rail plan timeline



Workshop format

The goal of the workshops was to introduce the state rail plan project; describe the timeline and highlight opportunities for public involvement; share information about the state's rail transportation system; and identify key issues and priorities to be addressed in the plan. We will incorporate factual information collected at the workshops into the technical reports that will serve as building blocks for the state rail plan. Feedback concerning priorities for the plan will be translated into a vision statement, and goals and objectives, for the rail system.

Workshops were held on October 30 in Spokane and October 31 in Seattle. Interest in the October 31 workshop exceeded capacity which required an additional meeting held in Seattle on November 29. Approximately 150 people attended the three meetings, including members of the public and representatives from industry (rail service providers and companies who ship via rail), advocacy groups and public agencies.



Each of the three workshops followed a similar format. Attendees were seated by interest area: freight, passenger, or freight and passenger. WSDOT opened with a welcome to participants and introduction to the state rail plan project. Project staff presented freight and passenger rail highlights from the system inventory. There were two small group discussion sessions during the workshop, to address the following questions:

- *What issues do you want to see addressed in the plan?*
- *Which vision statement themes are most important to you? Why?*

Each small group shared highlights from its discussion during a report-out session at the conclusion of each workshop.

What we heard (summary)

Workshop participants shared diverse opinions and points of view on a wide variety of topics. Themes that emerged as common priorities during the three workshop meetings are summarized below.

- **Economic development:** Address the importance of rail transportation in moving people and goods for a vital state economy. Recognize that Washington industries rely on a competitive freight rail system.
- **Preservation of existing facilities for freight and passenger rail:** Complete track maintenance and preservation activities on schedule; prevent loss of rail right-of-way; and pursue land use compatibility. It is important to use existing resources before investing in new, including existing right-of-way and infrastructure. Preservation of existing assets should be prioritized over expansion or new construction.
- **Rail capacity and system congestion:** Understand which bottlenecks and congested spots have the greatest impact on the operations of the state's passenger and freight rail services. Address key chokepoints along the rail line, accompanying infrastructure (rail yards, etc.) and terminals. Chokepoints may also include insufficient railcar supply to meet shipping needs. Recognize that the amount of volume that can be accommodated depends not only on infrastructure, but also on the railroad's scheduling strategy, use of technology and many other business decisions. Because capacity is dynamic, it should not be used as a sole measure for decision making.
- **Connectivity:** Facilitate farm to market movements (short-lines), connections to international markets via the Ports of Seattle, Tacoma, and others, and transitions between rail, marine and truck. Strengthen connections between intercity rail and public transit. Improve transitions between rail and non-motorized transportation to encourage biking and walking.



- **Community impacts:** Address the potential for increased rail traffic to affect traffic congestion and safety at at-grade crossings. Evaluate opportunities for freight and passenger rail service to contribute to local economic development.
- **Environment:** Understand the environmental benefits of rail transportation, such as greenhouse gas reduction and reduced need for highway expansion. Identify and address negative impacts, such as noise and delay at at-grade crossings.
- **Mode share:** Maximize use of freight and passenger rail to reduce demand on highways and air transportation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Identify and evaluate opportunities for the expansion of passenger rail service to population centers in eastern Washington. Continue and expand development of high-speed rail.
- **Financial resources:** Reduce costs, find more revenue or do both. Pursue sustainable funding for rail transportation.
- **Agency collaboration and public-private partnerships:** Facilitate cooperation and leverage resources between various levels of government and the private sector, in particular for freight rail or shortline expansion projects. Includes Pacific Northwest Region partners (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, British Columbia) and regional and local partners. These partnerships may involve sharing information, funding capital projects, or improving service.
- **Criteria for decision making** Recognize that the state's rail system can yield significant benefits to Washington State passengers and industries. These impacts can include environmental, safety, efficiency, and mobility benefits. These benefits should be recognized within any decision-making framework. Consider cost effectiveness and monitor success of any project using public money.
- **Coordination with other plans and current policies:** There needs to be coordination between the various freight plans, such as the Freight Mobility Plan, the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP), and other plans. These plans should reflect consistent information and, more importantly, their overall vision should be incorporated. Also should discuss connection to MAP-21 and other recent regulations.
- **State's role:** Stakeholders suggested the state's role includes providing funding; serving as an advocate for rail; and facilitating partnerships. Participants emphasized the need for a long-term vision (50 years) as well as practical plans for the near and mid-term.



How will we use this public input?

Workshop discussion revealed a number of priorities for the state’s rail transportation system. We will use the information to establish the vision and goals for the state rail plan. The **vision and goals** set the direction for **what** we want to achieve. They will help us identify and prioritize needs. The **objectives and implementation strategies** describe **how** we will achieve the vision and goals by identifying recommended future state investment in Washington’s passenger and freight rail system.

Draft vision statement:

As an integral part of Washington’s multimodal transportation network, the rail system provides for the safe, reliable and environmentally responsible movement of freight and passengers to ensure the state’s economic vitality and quality of life.

Draft goals:

Washington’s transportation system policy goals RCW 47.04.280	Freight and passenger rail focus areas for the state rail plan
<p>Economic vitality: To promote and develop transportation systems that stimulate, support, and enhance the movement of people and goods to ensure a prosperous economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the reliability of existing rail services • Scale rail services to meet future demands • Improve connections between rail and other modes • Strengthen rail as a competitive transportation option for freight and passengers
<p>Preservation: To maintain, preserve, and extend the life and utility of prior and future investments in transportation systems and services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain infrastructure in a state of good repair • Minimize loss of rail right-of-way • Encourage compatible land use development near rail infrastructure

Washington's transportation system policy goals
RCW 47.04.280

Freight and passenger rail focus areas
for the state rail plan

Safety: To provide for and improve the safety and security of transportation customers and the transportation system

- Enhance safety on the rail and at crossings
- Preserve rail transportation to contribute to transportation system redundancy

Mobility: To improve the predictable movement of goods and people throughout Washington State

- Improve efficiency
- Decrease travel times
- Preserve and expand facilities and services to accommodate future demands
- Improve competitiveness of rail with other modes for long-distance travel
- Address bottlenecks

Environment: To enhance Washington's quality of life through transportation investments that promote energy conservation, enhance healthy communities, and protect the environment

- Encourage the shift from highway travel to an environmentally sustainable and competitive rail system
- Minimize negative impacts through collaboration with communities

Stewardship: To continuously improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of the transportation system

- Develop inter-agency and public-private partnerships
- Consider cost effectiveness and return on investment of public investments and monitor success
- Achieve financial sustainability
- Employ new technologies to gain efficiencies

Draft plan development

Timing	Work products	How will WSDOT use the information?	Opportunities for public participation
Winter 2013	Vision, goals and objectives	These elements communicate values and priorities. We will translate the vision, goals and objectives into evaluation criteria that will help identify and prioritize plan recommendations.	Project information available on our website and via email updates.
	Baseline conditions and future forecasts	We will use this information to define rail transportation system strengths and challenges.	Written comments (letter, email) are always welcome. Feedback will be incorporated into technical reports, which will serve as the building blocks of the state rail plan.
Spring 2013	Needs and opportunities	We will define the set of problems and demands that will be the focus of plan recommendations.	There will be one advisory committee meeting in the winter and another in the spring.
	Improvement options	We will identify and evaluate capital projects, funding programs, operational improvements and policy changes to address system needs and opportunities.	Project briefings available by request.

Draft and final plan

Timing	Work products	How will WSDOT use the information?	Opportunities for public participation
Summer/ Fall 2013	Draft rail plan, including implementation plan	We will summarize the results of the planning process and identify recommended priorities to achieve vision, goals and objectives. Recommendations may include capital projects, funding programs, operational improvements or policy changes.	The draft plan will be revised in response to comments prior to final publication.
December 2013	Publish final Washington State Rail Plan	Plan recommendations will inform our work program. Findings will be incorporated into the Washington Freight Mobility Plan and Washington Transportation Plan.	There are lots of ways to stay in touch with the rail program after completion of the state plan, including website, email list serve, monthly newsletters and program briefings.

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Workshop participants

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Workshop project team

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Workshop locations:

October 30, Spokane:
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October 31, Seattle:
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999 Third Avenue, Suite 2424

November 29, Seattle:
City of Seattle
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