

Metro Regional Rail Futures Study Fact Sheet – October 2025

Issue Statement

The Metro Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) establishes a strong vision for transit to help the Portland metropolitan region meet its transportation goals and provide communities with equitable, economic, safety and climate benefits. However, gaps remain in the transit system. Reuse of existing freight rail lines/corridors is a potential solution to improve access already leveraged in the region (e.g., WES).

The Oregon State Legislature passed Senate Bill 5701 in April 2024, calling on Metro to study the use of existing heavy freight rail assets in the Portland metropolitan area for passenger rail alternatives to augment existing transportation modes.

Providing better connections for current and future passenger travel markets in our region could be accomplished using heavy rail corridors and through improvements and/or expansion of LRT corridors. Building on the recently adopted High Capacity Transit Strategy, undertaking a high-level inventory of existing heavy rail and LRT assets, the Regional Rail Futures Study is looking at potential future passenger rail service corridors that can fill transit system gaps.

This short-term, high-level study is a beginning step to develop a high-level vision of regional passenger rail in the Portland metropolitan region.

What is regional rail?

Regional rail is passenger service using heavy rail corridors to connect centers with high travel demand with longer distance stations (2+ miles) for all types of trips throughout the day. As it often shares a corridor with freight rail, it requires extensive coordination with railroad owners, freight operators, as well as the Federal Railroad Administration to meet safety and regulatory requirements.

Examples of regional rail in the US include Sounder (Seattle/Tacoma, Washington), Trinity Railway Express (Fort Worth/Dallas, Texas), and SMART (Sonoma-Marin County, California). TriMet's WES service, between Beaverton and Wilsonville, has many regional rail characteristics, but does not include midday service.

Metro Regional Rail Study

Metro is working with a consultant team led by Nelson\Nygaard to assess regional rail potential by researching best practices and peer lessons, inventorying corridors and travel demand, engaging interested parties, and developing a memo to summarize findings and recommendations.

High-level Engagement

Metro created a Technical Advisory Group of transit and freight experts and partners to review materials and provide feedback. This group has met twice and will meet again in November.

Metro staff are also engaging with TPAC and JPACT, ODOT Rail, county coordinating committees, the Oregon Freight Committee, the Portland Freight Committee, and other groups to share our

findings over the next few months. If desired, staff will meet with Oregon legislators and Metro councilors.

Research and summarize existing information from previous transit and rail studies such as the High Capacity Transit Strategy, Regional Transit Strategy, Oregon State Rail Plan and updated Rail Inventory, 2018 Freight Strategy, and TriMet’s LRT bottleneck analyses. The team also reviewed travel demand data and check for patterns and obstacles for connections.

Identify opportunities and barriers for adding passenger rail and/or hybrid use and/or improving or extending other forms of rail where opportunities exist. This included assessing potential travel demand and gathering best practices and lessons learned from experts and peers.

The Regional Rail Futures memo will document findings and identify potential opportunities to inform the region’s vision for passenger rail priorities. It will recommend next steps (near and longer term), identify areas that need more analysis, and opportunities and barriers to implementation.

Regional Rail Futures Study Schedule		
2024	April 2024	Senate Bill 5701 adopted by Oregon Legislature
	July 2024	Metro received funding to conduct the study
	Summer/Fall 2024	Metro receives funding, selects and onboards consultant
2025	January 2025	Technical Advisory Group (TAG) established
	Ongoing	Engagement (3 TAG meetings & other engagement)
	Winter 24/25	Existing conditions inventory, data gap analysis – maps and memo
	Spring/Summer 25	Opportunities and barriers analysis for adding traveler rail connections
	Summer 2025	Identify potential case study for key connection
	November 2025	Regional Rail Futures Draft Memo - Recommendations for passenger rail ○ Focus of future study ○ Promising corridors and next steps
	November 2025	Share memo and receive comments from TAG and partners
	December 2025	Final Regional Rail Futures Memo

Technical Advisory Group members: ODOT Rail, TriMet, City of Portland, Clackamas County, Multnomah County, Washington County, Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments, C-Tran, Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC), BNSF, UPRR, 1000 Friends of Oregon, AORTA