

JPACT Worksheet

Agenda Item Title: Cascadia High Speed Rail: Service Development Plan Update

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Purpose/Objective

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is studying how high-speed rail (segments operating at speeds of at least 160 mph, per Federal Railroad Administration [FRA] guidelines) could serve as a catalyst to transform the Pacific Northwest – connecting the metropolitan areas of Vancouver, British Columbia, Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon – with a fast, frequent, reliable and environmentally responsible transportation option. WSDOT established the [Cascadia High-Speed Rail and I-5 Program](#) to integrate planning for I-5 and high-speed rail planning within this important transportation corridor.

This update provides a progress report on the work done to date on initial market study, preliminary draft purpose and need, and coordination plans that will support development of the Service Development Plan (SDP) for the [Cascadia High Speed Rail \(HSR\) project](#), as well as what next steps that will entail over the next three years. The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is the grant recipient for the federal grant funding this work and Washington State provided the required 10% match for federal funding. Metro and ODOT are co-leads in project implementation for Oregon. Agency leadership and staff have been participating on the Executive and Leadership Committees guiding the project which also includes representatives from the Washington State Department of Transportation, the B.C. Ministry of Transportation and Transit, Puget Sound Regional Council, and Cascadia Innovation Corridor.

Action Requested/Outcome

Metro staff is seeking JPACT's feedback to guide how the coordination plans are implemented and how the region's values and desired outcomes are reflected in the route and service options assessed as part of the first steps in developing the SDP, in alignment with FRA requirements and direction. WSDOT staff will begin engaging agency, railroad, tribal, business and community partners this year.

What has changed since JPACT last considered this issue/item?

JPACT last received a staff update on the Cascadia HSR project in late 2022. At that time, Metro was supporting ODOT and WSDOT joint Expressions of Interest for both the HSR project and coordinated improvements for Amtrak Cascades service. Both Cascadia HSR and Amtrak Cascades were accepted into the [Corridor Identification and Development \(CID\) Program](#) in December 2023.

FRA established this grant program to create a pipeline for funding-ready new or improved intercity passenger rail projects for investment through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. It consists of three steps (detailed in Attachment 1). All accepted projects received \$500,000 to support work in Step 1. That work included development of a scope, schedule, and budget for completion of the SDP required in Step 2.

The Cascadia HSR project completed Step 1 and entered Step 2 in late 2024, with \$49.7 million obligated in federal funds supported by \$5.5 million in match funds from the Washington

Legislature. This funding award supports the technical planning effort and engagement and coordination with communities and partners along the corridor to understand their priorities for the future transportation system and to answer the following questions:

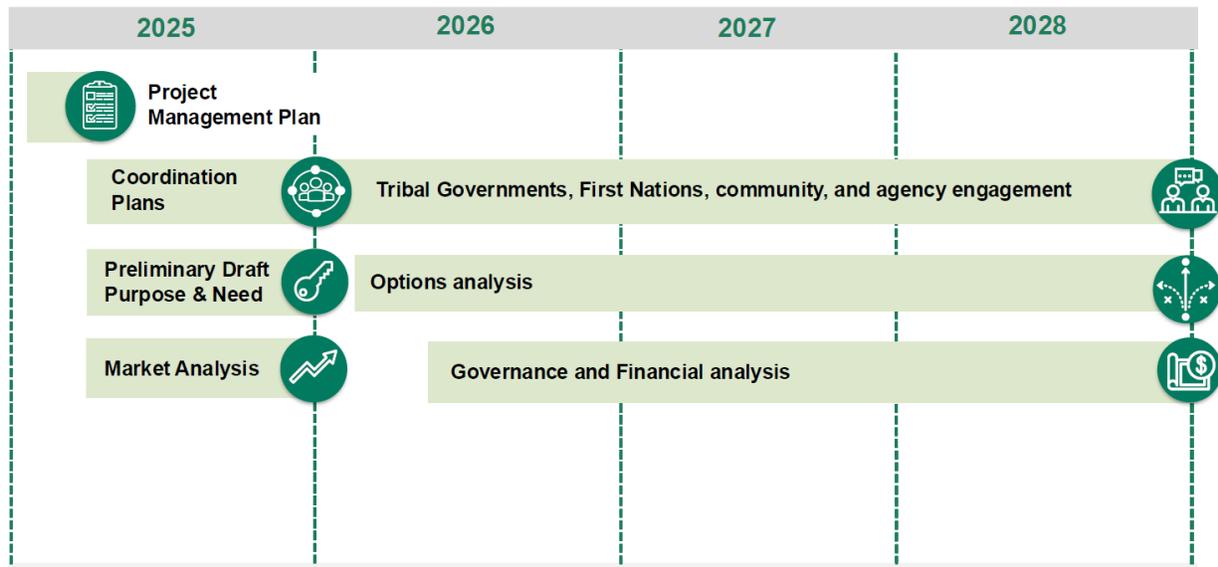
- What is the vision for a high-speed corridor given projected regional growth?
- What is the market and ridership potential?
- What environmental opportunities and concerns need to be considered?
- What are the potential route options?
- At a high level, what are the economic and governance considerations for future phases?

Step 2 work to date has included the following:

- Creating a Project Management Plan how the team will complete Step 2 activities by 2028
- Conducting a Market Analysis to understand the level and nature of demand for HSR (see Attachment 2 below for more information)
- Drafting a Preliminary Draft Purpose and Need statement that builds on the project’s north star and is aligned with FRA’s statutory authority
- Developing agency, railroad, tribal and public engagement plans

This initial effort has laid the groundwork for the route options analysis, which will begin in 2026 with identifying highly sensitive areas, establishing comparative criteria, and identifying technically viable route areas. Implementation of the engagement plans will also begin this year to support this work. Future phases of the SDP will continue to refine those identified options. Additional work as part of developing the SDP includes conducting financial and governance analysis and economic evaluation to document the anticipated overall impact of the project. However, identification of station locations will occur after the completion of the SDP in a future phase.

Figure 1: Cascadia HSR Service Development Plan Timeline



Federal funding remains essential to continue to fund future phases of work. Development of the SDP may indicate the need for further environmental review of potential route options, which could require additional funding under CID Step 2, as well as additional match funding. Oregon has not yet financially contributed to the project in this phase.

What packet material do you plan to include?

1. Metro Cascadia HSR Briefing Fact Sheet
2. Market Analysis Executive Summary