

# Regional Rail Futures Study Fact Sheet – December 2024

## 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. While the region’s long-term target is 36% of jobs accessible within 45 minutes by transit, our 2045 RTP constrained investments would only provide access to 8% of jobs. Reuse of existing freight rail lines is a potential solution to improve access already leveraged in the region (e.g., WES, Council Creek).

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. This effort will help identify additional rail opportunities for future travelers.

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, and undertaking an inventory of existing heavy rail and LRT assets, the Regional Rail Futures Study will assess potential future passenger rail service corridors that can fill transit system gaps. This study will begin to identify the potential for combining passenger service on existing heavy rail lines and potential improvements to LRT lines in our region.

The result will begin a high-level vision of passenger rail in the Portland metropolitan region including LRT connections, and a list of next steps to better understand the potential of moving forward with different improvements. The study may also look at potential connections (a case study) outside of the Portland region and operating and maintenance facility needs.

## ***Expertise and partner participation***

### Engagement

- Establish a Technical Advisory Group: Metro created a TAG of transit and freight experts and partners. *This group will meet up to 3 times to review materials and offer expertise.*
- Include ODOT rail and other key partners in conversations around opportunities/barriers.
- Identify other key groups for engagement and presentations.

Consultant team, led by Nelson\Nygaard, provides rail and transit expertise to assist with assessment of community needs and readiness of corridors for passenger rail considering barriers and opportunities to serve important connections.

### ***Major tasks***

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. They will develop a rail corridor inventory (including maps), a data gap summary, and review and map travel markets and how they line up with rail lines.

Identify opportunities and barriers for adding passenger rail and/or hybrid use and/or improving or extending LRT where markets may exist including:

- Existing infrastructure and right-of-way in key market corridors
- Ownership (state vs. private-owned corridors)
- Current use and operating plans
- Track and signal needs to support increased travel speeds and/or freight and passenger service
- Governance needs/opportunities of an expanded passenger system
- Operating and maintenance needs
- Order of magnitude costs associated with passenger service

The project may identify one case study for adding passenger rail to a freight rail line that connects to areas outside of the Portland region for analysis.

The Regional Rail Futures memo will document findings, assess corridor readiness, and make recommendations to inform the region’s vision for passenger rail priorities. It will recommend next steps (near and longer term), and identify areas that need more analysis, which corridors are likely to serve the most riders, 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
	December 2024	Consultant selected and onboard
2025	January 2025	Technical Advisory Group (TAG) established
	Ongoing	Engagement (3 TAG meetings & other engagement TBD)
	Winter 2025	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
	October 2025	Regional Rail Futures Draft Memo - Recommendations for passenger rail ○ Focus of future study ○ Promising corridors and next steps -Potential case study summary/evaluation
	October 2025	Share memo and receive comments from TAG and partners
	December 2025	Final Regional Rail Futures Memo

Technical Advisory Group members confirmed: ODOT Rail, TriMet, City of Portland, Clackamas County, Multnomah County, Washington County, Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments, BNSF, UPRR, 1000 Friends of Oregon, AORTA