



Memorandum

Role of Leadership Council in Long Range High Speed Rail Planning

To: Oregon Passenger Rail Leadership Council
From: Jim Cox and David Knowles
Date: December 12, 2013

Background

The purpose of the Oregon Passenger Rail project is to improve the frequency, convenience, speed, and reliability of passenger rail service between the Eugene-Springfield area and the Columbia River in the Portland metropolitan area. The project has established that the vehicle technology must be compatible with the vehicle technology in Washington State. In general, this means vehicles that do not exceed 125 miles per hour. The first step in project development—completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act—is the focus of the work that is underway now. The Leadership Council is an important part of the decision making for the EIS effort. At each milestone in the EIS process, the Leadership Council is providing recommendations to ODOT which in turn is seeking approval by the Federal Railroad Administration.

Since the beginning of the Oregon Passenger Rail project, members of the Leadership Council have expressed an interest in preserving opportunities for true high speed rail—vehicles which travel in excess of 125 miles per hour—in the future. However, the EIS process focuses on near term improvements. The EIS process does not provide much flexibility for considering a long range vision for true high speed rail.

In response to the interest expressed at the October 29 Leadership Council meeting, ODOT developed a proposed approach for the Leadership Council to participate in a conceptual vision for high speed rail. In developing this approach, ODOT consulted with the Steering Committee for the Oregon State Rail Plan update. The Steering Committee was appointed by the ODOT Director. Leadership Council Co-Chair Mayor Kitty Piercy is a member of the Steering Committee. The Rail Plan update is in the final phase of a planning process that will result in a comprehensive, long range, state-wide strategic Rail Plan for improvements that benefit both freight and passenger rail service within the state. However, the plan will not directly address the future of high speed rail in the state.

Proposed Approach for Preparation of the Plan

ODOT and the consultant team will support the Leadership Council for development of a Long Range Concept Plan for high speed rail. The planning effort will have four primary objectives:

1. Develop an agreed upon definition of high speed rail (in excess of 125 miles per hour), including characteristics that differentiate it from passenger rail that travels at lower speeds.
2. Recommend a list of improvements needed to achieve high speed rail service in the Willamette Valley between the Eugene-Springfield area and Vancouver, Washington for implementation beyond 2035.
3. Determine population levels and associated ridership needed to support a portion of operations and maintenance costs.
4. Identify actions needed by local, state, and federal governments to advance development and funding of the concept.

This will be a high level study. The improvements needed will be studied at a conceptual level. No specific alignments will be identified. Cities to be served will be identified, but not specific station locations. Costs will be developed based upon best available data on unit prices for similar projects.

The study will be overseen by a committee consisting of members of the Oregon Rail Plan Steering Committee and members of the Leadership Council. The major study topics and recommendations will be reviewed by the oversight committee and then forwarded to the Leadership Council and Rail Plan Steering Committee.

Schedule and Process

The proposed schedule is to complete the first phase of activities by April 15, 2014 with follow up action at the conclusion of the EIS process. These are the proposed study steps:

1. Leadership Council sub-group approved work program and outcomes (December 4).
2. Rail Plan Steering Committee approves work program and outcomes (December 12).
3. Leadership Council approves work program and outcomes. Appoints sub-committee (December 17).
4. Project Team consults with key stakeholders seeking input on key issues and concept corridors (mid December to early February). Stakeholders include local and regional governments, ODOT, individuals and interest groups.
5. Project Team drafts the plan and develops cost estimates (January and February).
6. Joint oversight committee reviews and provides comments on draft plan (February and March).
7. Project team revises plan (March and April) and publishes an interim report by April 15th.

8. At the conclusion of the EIS process, the Leadership Council will determine if there are elements of the Locally Preferred Alternative that should be included in the Final Vision Report.
9. Leadership Council adopts statement endorsing Concept Plan and submits to Oregon Rail Plan and Oregon Transportation Commission.

An outline of the proposed study is attached.

Long Range Concept Plan Report Outline

I. Introduction

- A. Description of the Oregon Passenger Rail Project
- B. Role of the Leadership Council
- C. National Environmental Policy Act Scope and Process

II. Purpose of the Report

- A. Document Leadership Council Support for High Speed Rail
- B. Provide Basic Information on High Speed Rail components

III. Summary of Stakeholder Comments on High Speed Rail from outreach during the Tier One study

- A. Project Purpose
- B. Project Need
- C. Alignment
- D. Communities with Stations

IV. Corridor Demographics

- A. Population
- B. Employment

V. High Speed Rail Potential Improvements

- A. High Speed Rail Case Studies
 - 1. Threshold Characteristics
 - 2. "Tool Box" of HSR Improvements
- B. Oregon Corridor Characteristics and Application of High Speed Rail Improvements
- C. Order of Magnitude Costs for Potential Improvements
- D. Recommended Improvements

VI. Action Plan for Funding and Implementation

- A. Potential Funding Sources
- B. Local Actions
- C. State Actions
- D. Federal Actions