

OREGON PASSENGER RAIL EIS PROJECT NEPA OVERVIEW

The Oregon Passenger Rail Environmental Impact Statement Project will study potential improvements to passenger rail service on the Oregon segment of the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor. The project will be developed in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and Federal Railroad Administration policies and guidelines. The Oregon Passenger Rail Leadership Council will develop recommendations which will be documented by the Oregon Department of Transportation and forwarded to FRA for final approval.

The NEPA Process

The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to assess and consider the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. Two major purposes of the NEPA process are better informed decisions by the agency and citizen involvement. The Oregon Passenger Rail EIS will be developed under the authority of the Federal Railroad Administration and must comply with NEPA.

An EIS will be prepared because the project has the potential to significantly affecting the human environment. The EIS process has several steps, including:

- ◆ Developing a Purpose and Need Statement to identify project goals and the problems it is addressing.
- ◆ Conducting public scoping with all stakeholders to identify project issues and potential alternatives solutions.
- ◆ Developing a reasonable range of alternatives for study in the EIS. All suggested alternatives are screened to develop a reasonable range of alternatives – including the No Action Alternative - that are analyzed and reported on in the Draft EIS.
- ◆ Analyzing potential impacts of alternatives on the natural and built environment.
- ◆ Preparing and distributing a Draft EIS for public and agency review and comment and holding a public hearing.
- ◆ Identifying a preferred alternative after consideration of all stakeholder comments.
- ◆ Preparing and distributing a Final EIS documenting selection of the preferred alternative.
- ◆ Following publication of the Final EIS, the lead federal agency, in this case the FRA, will issue a Record of Decision which formally adopts the preferred alternative.

The FRA uses a tiered NEPA approach for projects of this size. We are conducting a Tier 1 EIS to make broad project decisions including selecting a general alignment, the cities where stations will be located, the motive power to be used (electric or diesel-electric) and service characteristics like the number of daily trips and travel time objectives.

The Tier I EIS will rely on high level conceptual design and existing information on the natural and built environment to make decisions. Most of the detailed information included in a typical EIS such as specific property impacts will not be available. The detailed design and environmental analysis will be done in the future after construction funding is secured.