

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5667

As of February 25, 2025

Title: An act relating to establishing intercity passenger rail improvement priorities.

Brief Description: Establishing intercity passenger rail improvement priorities.

Sponsors: Senators Valdez, Nobles, Chapman, Lovelett, Pedersen, Shewmake and Slatter.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/25/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes 2035 targets for the Department of Transportation's Amtrak Cascades service regarding travel time and reliability.
- Instructs the Department of Transportation to prioritize targets as it conducts project development work.
- Requires the Department of Transportation to annually report to the transportation committees of the Legislature and the Joint Transportation Committee with progress toward attaining goals and provide detailed explanations for constraints, whether or not they can be mitigated by the Legislature or another party.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Jenna Forty (786-7755)

Background: Amtrak Cascades service is a state sponsored service operated by Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Oregon Department of Transportation, and Amtrak. Service began in 1994. Currently, the corridor serves 18 cities with a northern terminus in Vancouver, British Columbia and a southern terminus in Eugene, Oregon and is served by:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

- six daily roundtrips between Portland and Seattle;
- two daily roundtrips between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia; and
- two daily roundtrips between Eugene and Portland.

Ridership for 2024 exceeded 980,000 passengers. The cost to operate the service varies, but service costs for 2023-25 are estimated to be approximately \$70 million.

WSDOT is responsible for passenger rail planning and program development; however, train tracks are owned by external parties, with BNSF and Union Pacific railways constituting the majority of the Amtrak Cascades corridor. Service goals in current statute were established in 1993, and establish targets for speed and reliability to be attained between the years of 2000 and 2030, which include achieving high speed ground transportation service offering top speeds over 150 miles per hour between Everett and Portland by 2020, achieving 2.5 hour travel times between Seattle and Portland by 2000, and implementing high speed ground transportation offering top speeds over 150 miles per hour between Seattle and Spokane by 2030.

Amtrak Cascades was accepted in 2023 into the federal Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program, a development program with a progressive federal funding stream based on attainment of negotiated milestones with the Federal Rail Administration. WSDOT produced a preliminary service development plan for the corridor in June, 2024.

Summary of Bill: Targets are established for Amtrak Cascades service, to be met by 2035, which include: (1) 2.5 hour travel times between Seattle and Portland, with a minimum of 14 round trips per day, (2) 2.75 hour travel times between Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia, with a minimum of five roundtrips per day, and (3) a minimum trip reliability of 88 percent on-time performance.

WSDOT is required to prioritize the targets as it conducts project development work, including work for the CID Program. Project development work done by WSDOT must include infrastructure investments and coordination with host railroads, as well as other service partners, to achieve the targets.

Annually by December 1st, WSDOT must report to the transportation committees of the Legislature and the Joint Transportation Committee on progress toward attaining the targets. If WSDOT finds one or more targets to be unattainable, they must include a full explanation and provide what is necessary to mitigate the constraint. In the event a constraint cannot be mitigated by the Legislature or another party, WSDOT must provide a detailed explanation for how and why targets should be modified temporarily or indefinitely.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The targets in this bill support mode shift, reduce emissions and improve health. Shorter travel times have been promised since the 2006 Cascades long range plan and other states have been successful in negotiating more trains and faster travel times with host railroads. Amtrak Cascades has been more reliable as recently as 2013, and these targets create an attainable vision for Cascades and holds WSDOT accountable. BNSF could not have expanded freight without the investments made for passenger rail. Additional passenger rail investments will create fluidity in freight movement.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Javier Valdez, Prime Sponsor; Breck Lebegue, WA Physicians for Social Responsibility; Meghan Anderson, Kittitas Climate Action; Brandon Bowersox-Johnson, 350 Seattle; Thomas White, Climate Rail Alliance and Rail Can't Wait Campaign; Alan Borning, Climate Rail Alliance and Rail Can't Wait Campaign; Mary Paterson; Bill Moyer, Solutionary Rail; Sasha Elenko, Solutionary Rail; Tim Gould, Sierra Club; Mike Elliott, Railroad Labor (Retired).

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.