



**WASHINGTON COUNTY**  
COMMUTER RAIL PROJECT

## Partnership brings Oregon's first commuter rail line closer to reality

A century old railroad corridor in Washington County soon will be transformed into an innovative transportation connection.

Construction is underway on a new regional transportation project, the Washington County Commuter Rail, the future Westside Express Service (WES), is the first commuter rail in Oregon and one of the few suburb-to-suburb commuter rail lines in the nation.

Commuter Rail will use self-propelled railcars to serve the 14.7-mile stretch between Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville. The \$117.3 million project will include five stations along the Interstate 5/Highway 217 corridor and have weekday service every 30 minutes during the morning and afternoon rush hours.

This transportation project is 10 years in the making. In October the Federal Transit Administration approved the project's Full Funding Grant Agreement to allow construction to begin.

### Vision for success

Driven by the desire to improve transit options for residents and employees in the heavily traveled I-5/217 corridor, local officials began to explore various alternatives in 1996.

Washington County and its eastern cities identified a unique opportunity in the 100-year-old rail corridor, which was used primarily for freight transport.

They saw the potential to use this resource for adding a commuter rail line to serve eastern Washington County.

The mayors of Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin, Wilsonville and Sherwood and the County championed Commuter Rail. Working with Metro, TriMet and the Oregon Department of Transportation, the team launched a feasibility study to consider commuter rail as a viable alternative. Then Oregon House member Tom Brian took a leadership role to secure funding for follow-up studies.

Brian continues to lead the project as chair of the Washington County Commission.

Obtaining or building a right-of-way in a high growth area is challenging and expensive. This concept took advantage of the existing railroad right-of-way to limit construction impacts.

Despite the array of challenges they encountered during the last 10 years, local leaders persevered by teaming with Oregon Governors John Kitzhaber and Ted Kulongoski, the Oregon State legislature and Oregon's Congressional delegation, including Senator Gordon Smith and Rep. David Wu, to obtain funding for the project.



*In 2001, the project received key federal funding for feasibility studies. Celebrating were (from left) Mike Burton, then Metro executive officer, Senator Gordon Smith, Representative David Wu, Senator Ron Wyden, Washington County Board Chair Tom Brian and County Commissioner Roy Rogers.*

## More changing travel patterns

Traditional travel patterns are shifting in Washington County. Rather than living in the suburbs and commuting to work in Portland's downtown core, a significant number of people live and work *within* the I-5/Hwy 217 corridor.

From 1994 to 2000:

- The number of households in the corridor grew 34 percent faster than the rest of the Portland region
- The number of jobs rose at a rate 55 percent faster than anywhere else in the region
- Corridor employment is expected to increase by more than 40 percent in the next 20 years.

Washington County also is bound by geographic constraints that restrict transportation options. Low mountains define the east and west sides of the corridor, and the Tualatin River and Fanno Creek run through the area. Funding limits make it extremely difficult to expand the highway system. After thorough analysis, Commuter Rail was deemed a good solution for the corridor.

## Revitalizing and reflecting communities

Commuter Rail will serve four cities: Beaverton, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville along the I-5/Hwy 217 corridor.

The cities of Tigard and Tualatin are creating unique station designs to highlight their individual identities. Wilsonville is expanding the Commuter Rail terminal to serve as a hub for their SMART bus service.

Ridership forecasts show that 75 percent of the total trips will be within the corridor. Commuter Rail also is being designed to facilitate transfers to other destinations. At the Beaverton Transit Center, Commuter Rail will connect to the MAX Red and Blue lines, providing direct connections to Hillsboro, downtown Portland and the Portland International Airport, along with 11 bus lines. Riders also can connect with bus service and park & ride spaces at the Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville stations.

## Weekday trips

Commuter Rail will run every 30 minutes on weekdays during the morning and afternoon rush hours. Each



railcar will seat 80 passengers. The train's top speed is 60 mph; its average speed will be 37 mph.

## A unique, historic travel corridor

Characterized by parklands, wetlands and flood plains, the route will take riders through areas seldom seen by commuters. The Tualatin River and Fanno Creek crisscross the route, and a steel truss bridge built in the 1920s will be preserved. TriMet, the City of Tigard and Clean Water Services are partnering on an 11-acre wetland mitigation project at Tigard's Fanno Creek Park, adjacent to the line.



Over the past 70 years, the route has been used for freight service, but it was once home to two passenger

lines. Oregon Electric Railway ran one set of tracks along the alignment from Portland to Salem in 1908 and later expanded to Eugene. By 1914, Oregon Electric had 26 trains entering and departing Portland daily. The rise of the automobile, however, diminished service and the railway discontinued passenger service by 1933.

In 1918, Southern Pacific Railway also operated "The Red Electric" on the route. The steel trains were painted bright red and had three round porthole-like windows across the front. At the height of operations, "The Red Electric" ran 32 trains entering and departing Portland everyday, but service ended in 1929.

Today, Portland & Western Railroad owns the freight line. In a groundbreaking agreement, Portland & Western Railroad will provide contract services to Washington County Commuter Rail.



*This rendering illustrates design for the diesel multiple unit (DMUs) vehicles planned for Commuter Rail.*

## A new kind of rail car

Existing track will be replaced along the Commuter Rail alignment to accommodate the new railcar speeds of up to 60 mph. Commuter Rail vehicles will share the track with freight trains and additional double track will be constructed to allow freight and commuter trains to pass each other along the route. In addition, the project team will install a state-of-the-art signal system with computerized dispatch for vehicle coordination and safety.

Colorado Railcar is producing the diesel multiple unit (DMU) cars for the project, and TriMet will maintain the vehicles. The railcars are self-propelled units, which won't require a locomotive engine or electrical wiring. They also can pull a second car. Four cars (three single-powered cars and one trailer car) will be purchased to serve the corridor.

## Project chronology

1996-1999	Team conducted preliminary studies
1999-2002	Commuter Rail accepted as locally preferred alternative; completed environmental assessment and preliminary engineering plan
2002-2004	Project worked to obtain federal approval
2003	Washington County negotiated a shared-use agreement with Portland & Western Railroad and a purchase and sale agreement with Union Pacific
2004	Federal Transit Administration approved start of final design
2005	Colorado Railcar selected to manufacture DMU passenger cars
2006	Final design 95 percent complete; Stacy and Witbeck, Inc., selected for track construction and civil engineering
Oct. 2006	Receipt of Full Funding Grant Agreement
Oct. 2006	Construction began
Nov. 2007	TriMet selected WES as the new name of the Washington County Commuter Rail line. WES stands for Westside Express Service.
Feb. 2009	Commuter Rail service begins

## Metro's Region 2040 Plan

Metro's Region 2040 Plan set the stage for the new Washington County Commuter Rail. The 2040 Plan guides public and private investment in land uses and transportation within the Urban Growth Boundary. To successfully manage growth and maintain the region's livability, the 2040 Plan identifies high-density mixed-use areas called Regional Centers and Town Centers. The Westside corridor has two Regional Centers (the areas surrounding downtown Beaverton and Washington Square) and three Town Centers (Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville). Commuter Rail will play an integral part of the plan by connecting the Regional and Town Centers through high-capacity transit.

Several key strategies of Metro's Regional Transportation Plan include expanding alternatives to driving, sustaining economic health through access to jobs and industry, and maintaining access to the natural areas in the region. The new Commuter Rail achieves these strategies by providing an efficient transit option on existing freight tracks in a heavily traveled corridor while maintaining natural surroundings.

### For alternative formats contact us:

503-238-RIDE (7433)  
 customerservice@trimet.org  
 TTY 503-238-5811

