



2026 IDAHO STATEWIDE RAIL PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) is pleased to present the latest Idaho Statewide Rail Plan that has been in the works for the past 12 months. Aligning with the Federal Railroad Administration guidelines and the Idaho Department of Agriculture's requirements, ITD has collaborated across the state with Class 1, Class 3, and rail industry leaders in the private and public sectors.

Along with these representatives, the ITD Freight Advisory Committee played a key role in scoping, reviewing, and providing feedback to make this latest rail plan a reflection of what makes Idaho unique. This plan touches every corner of the state to show our commitment to boosting the quality of life for communities, both freight and passenger rail advocates, and freight rail carriers.

Idaho's rail system is an essential component of the State's multimodal transportation network, supporting economic vitality and the movement of people and goods across Idaho. Rail connects people and goods to Idaho's abundant natural resources, allowing more of them to be preserved and sustainably harvested and ensuring that the State's natural beauty, outdoor recreation opportunities, and historical sites are preserved for residents and visitors alike.¹

¹ <https://www.aar.org/idaho/>.



7.8 MILLION tons of commodities

originated in Idaho in 2022,

including many bulky goods such as:

FOOD, NONMETALLIC MATERIALS, CHEMICALS, LUMBER/WOOD PRODUCTS, and FARM PRODUCTS

resulting in 85.7k carloads of products.



Without railroads, Idaho would see an

additional **18,000 TRUCKS**

on the road each day, more than doubling truck traffic on some roads.



In 2023 Freight railroad companies

employed **1,197 PEOPLE** in

Idaho.¹



IDAHO'S RAIL SYSTEM OVERVIEW

Idaho's 2026 Statewide Rail Plan

The Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) developed this 2026 Statewide Rail Plan in line with Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) guidance. It includes information about rail infrastructure and operational conditions, rail system needs, investments, and strategies. **The Statewide Rail Plan allows ITD to better understand Idaho's rail system and its role in serving Idaho's residents, businesses, and visitors.**

Since the most recent Statewide Rail Plan in Idaho in 2013 there has been significant demographic and economic growth in Idaho, changes in consumer behavior, and changes in transportation supply and demand. Key rail-related trends impacting Idaho's rail system since 2013 include:

ECONOMIC TRENDS, including changing logistics patterns and the growth of e-commerce, and fluctuations in national and international trade policy and tariffs.

- » **RAIL TECHNOLOGY TRENDS**, including Positive Train Control (PTC) regulation and implementation, crew size regulations, autonomous and zero-emission technology, and real-time shipment visibility.
- » **RAIL INDUSTRY TRENDS**, including precision scheduled railroading (PSR), increase in train lengths, increased containerization, and changing rail markets.

The vision and goals for Idaho's rail system were shaped through a collaborative process that included Freight Advisory Committee (FAC) discussions, internal coordination with ITD staff, and feedback gathered throughout broader engagement with railroads, shippers, local and regional agencies, economic development partners, and passenger-rail interests within the state. This input helped refine and validate the Plan's vision and goals and provided ITD with direction to further its mission of safety, mobility, and economic opportunity as it applies to the rail system.

The vision for the 2026 Idaho Statewide Rail Plan is:

Idaho will work with its rail providers and rail customers to deliver a **safe and innovative rail system** that **drives economic opportunity** and **meets the State's evolving freight and passenger transportation needs.**

The two goals for the 2025 Idaho State Rail Plan are:



GOAL 1

Invest limited available funding strategically in the rail system to improve safety, maximize existing capacity, preserve infrastructure, and drive innovation.



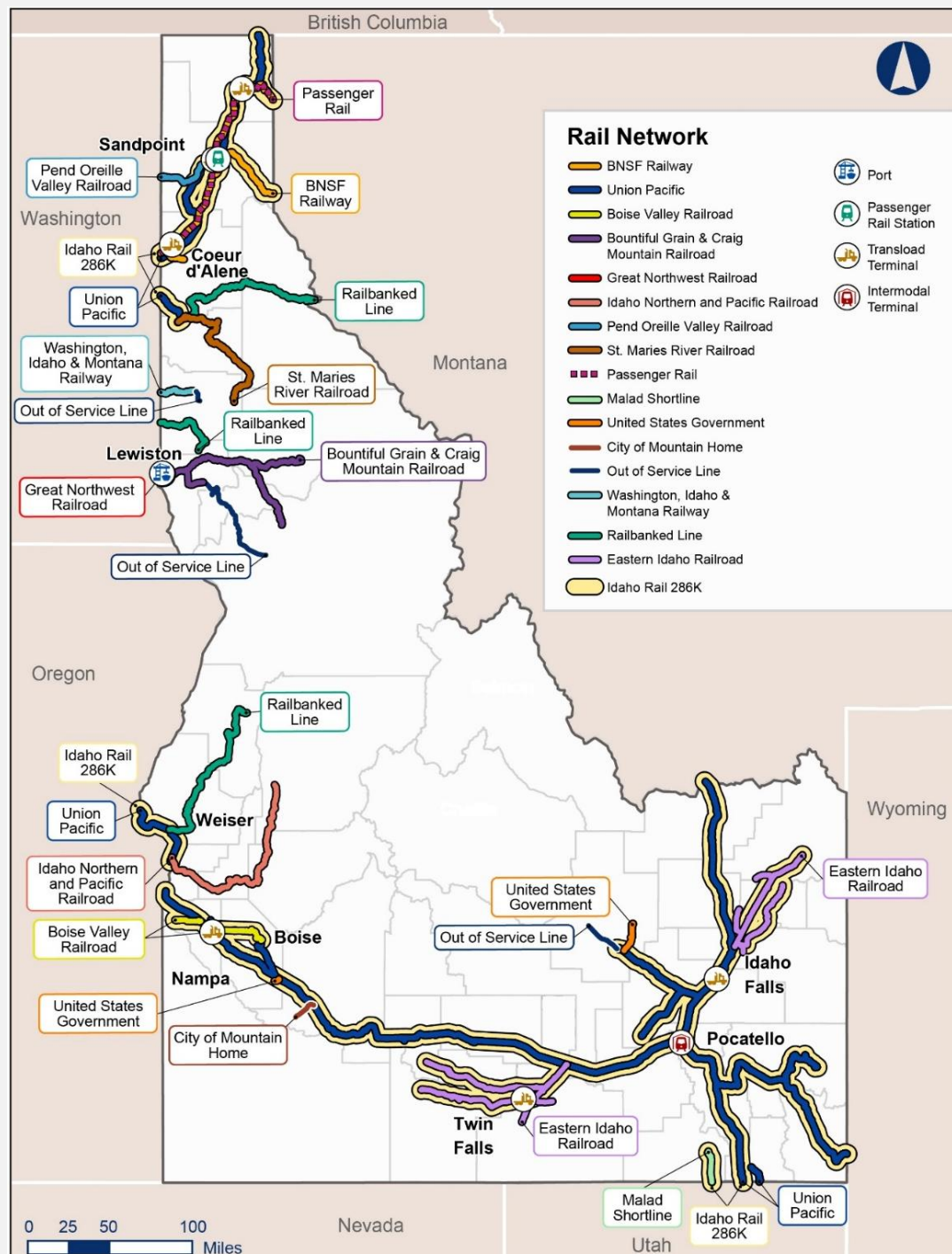
GOAL 2

Participate in effective partnerships that leverage resources and opportunities for the rail system.

Idaho's Rail System

Idaho's rail system is comprised of 1,828 miles of railroad, including two Class I railroads and nine Class III railroads; one passenger rail station in Sandpoint, ID served by Amtrak; several government owned rail lines; and several inactive or railbanked rail lines. There are also several dozen rail yards and transload facilities in the State, including at the Port of Lewiston, and an intermodal terminal in Pocatello, ID, shown in Figure 1.

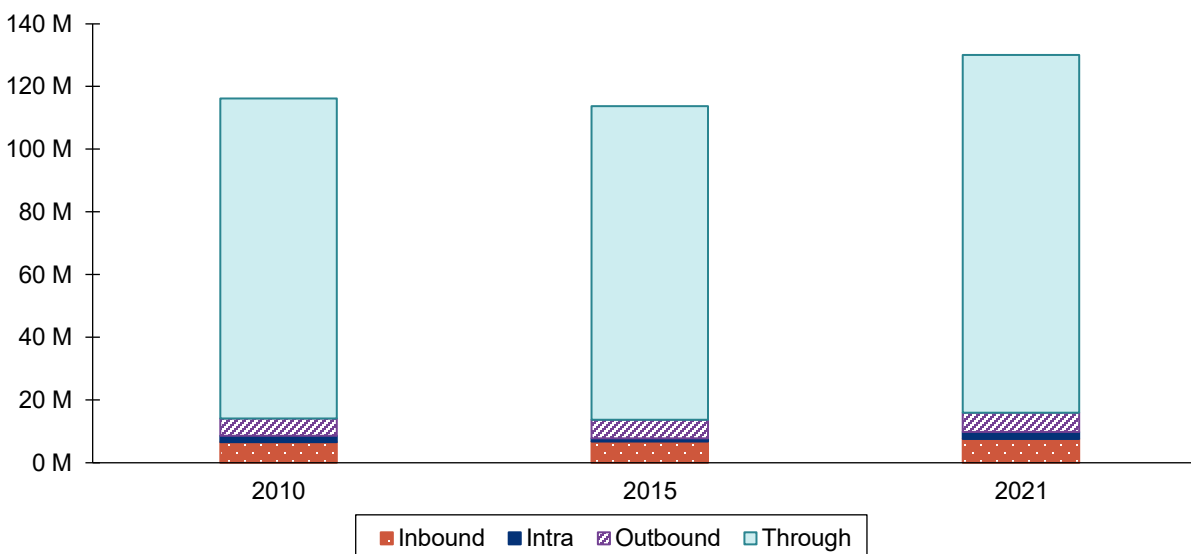
Figure 1 Idaho's Rail Network



Freight Rail

Idaho's freight rail traffic is primarily composed of freight moving through Idaho, which accounts for 88 percent of all freight rail traffic in 2021.

Figure 2 Freight Rail Tonnage by Traffic Type in Idaho, 2010–2021



Source: Surface Transportation Board Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

Freight originating or terminating in Idaho accounts for about 11 percent of total tonnage, and includes top commodities closely tied to the State's agricultural and natural resource sectors.

Table 1 Top Ten Rail Commodity Flows by Tonnage in Idaho (2021)

Commodity	Inbound/Outbound/Intra Idaho Rail Volumes	% Traffic ¹	Total Idaho Rail Volumes	% Total Traffic ²
Farm Products	3,003,881	19%	45,234,637	35%
Chemicals or Allied Products	3,497,288	22%	16,515,084	13%
Coal	64,287	0%	14,786,200	11%
Food or Kindred Products	3,576,984	22%	12,533,750	10%
Miscellaneous Mixed Shipments	23,760	0%	8,285,840	6%
Lumber or Wood Products; except Furniture	1,349,275	8%	7,255,855	6%
Crude Petroleum, Natural Gas or Gasoline	0	0%	6,673,661	5%
Petroleum or Coal Products	622,620	4%	4,113,035	3%
Nonmetallic Minerals; except Fuels	2,455,712	15%	2,916,590	2%
Pulp, Paper or Allied Products	580,010	4%	2,397,620	2%
Other		6%		7%

Source: Surface Transportation Board Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021).

¹ Percent of inbound/outbound/intra Idaho rail volumes.

² Percent of total Idaho rail volumes.

Key trade lanes for Idaho's rail traffic include farm products from Nebraska and Iowa, minerals and fertilizers from British Columbia, grain and fertilizers to California, Illinois, and Texas.

Passenger Rail

Idaho has a rich history of passenger rail tied to Idaho's tourist destinations such as Sun Valley, America's first destination ski resort. However, these rails were ultimately converted to other uses, and today Amtrak's *Empire Builder* service is the only passenger train serving Idaho, with one train in each direction daily. Amtrak makes one stop in Sandpoint, Idaho, from which passengers may travel to 46 other stations by heading either east toward Chicago or west toward Seattle or Portland. While ridership on the *Empire Builder* has declined since 2015, partially due to the Covid-19 pandemic, ridership is projected to return to 2015 levels by the end of the decade.

Figure 3 Amtrak Empire Builder Line



Source: Amtrak.

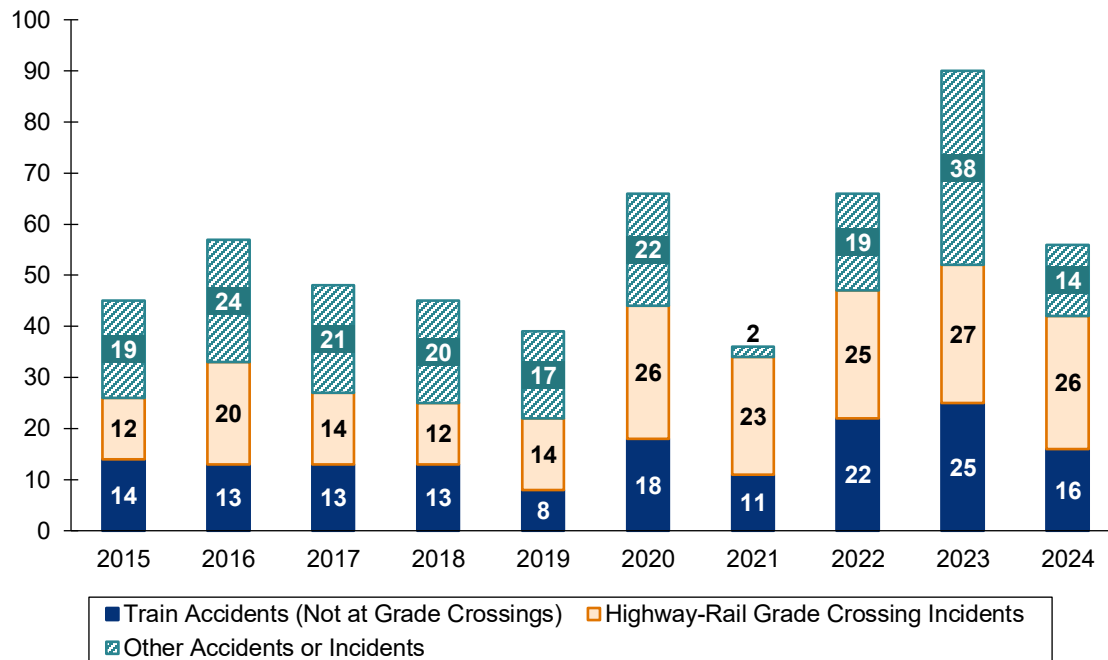
Rail and At-Grade Crossing Safety

Idaho's rail network has 2,373 highway/rail at-grade crossings, of which 56 percent (1,334) are on public rights-of-way (ROWs). Only 30 percent of Idaho's public at-grade crossings have active warning devices (gates or lights).² While national rail accident/incident levels have been stable or declining in recent years, Idaho's accidents/incidents have increased since the

² <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b94318eb3bcc4f2d968d85156379a949>.

last Statewide Rail Plan, particularly at at-grade crossings (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Idaho Rail Accidents / Incidents by Category, 2015–2024



Source: FRA 2025 Accident/Incident Overview Dashboard.



Between 2011 and 2020,
there were

171 COLLISIONS

at at-grade crossings in
Idaho,

of which

119 resulted in

NO INJURY, while

55 resulted in **INJURY** or

FATALITY for the motor vehicle
driver.



IDAHO'S RAIL SYSTEM NEEDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

ITD worked with public and private sector stakeholders in Idaho to understand the needs of Idaho's rail network, organized in the form of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Assessment. The needs and opportunities emphasize the link between freight and passenger rail and Idaho's overall economy and transportation system. The SWOT analysis was used to develop strategies, actions, and investments included in this plan.

Figure 5 SWOT Assessment



Strategies and Actions

The strategies that follow were developed through close collaboration with the Idaho FAC, including focused discussions with short lines, Class I railroads, economic development partners, MPOs, and state agencies. These strategies reflect the FAC's consensus on Idaho's most important statewide rail priorities and were further affirmed through broad public input gathered as part of the Idaho State Rail Plan survey. These strategies fulfill objectives for both goals, effectively carrying out the SRP vision.



STRATEGY 1 | Explore sustainable and diversified revenue mechanisms for Idaho's rail system.

- » **Action 1.1 |** Examine potential state-level rail revenue mechanisms and innovative financing tools.
- » **Action 1.2 |** Develop a coordinated funding strategy and pipeline of grant-ready rail projects aligned with Federal programs and Idaho's high-growth sectors.



STRATEGY 2 | Strengthen Idaho's rail network by aligning future needs and investments with emerging industries and enhancing first-mile/last-mile and transload connections to expand statewide market access.

- » **Action 2.1 |** Develop and maintain a statewide database and inventory of existing and potential first-mile/last-mile connections and transload sites.
- » **Action 2.2 |** Identify and prioritize industries and locations suitable for new or expanded transload facilities, determine site requirements, and develop coordinated funding packages for implementation.
- » **Action 2.3 |** Integrate rail investment priorities, including first-mile/last-mile and transload improvements, into statewide and regional economic development and freight strategies.



STRATEGY 3 | Improve rail safety, reliability, and project delivery efficiency through coordinated corridor-based initiatives and streamlined review processes.

- » **Action 3.1 |** Coordinate with Class I and short line carriers to identify, package, and prioritize safety and efficiency improvements along key rail corridors in alignment with Idaho's Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan.
- » **Action 3.2 |** Streamline ITD and local permitting, coordination, and contracting processes by developing standard contract templates to expedite rail safety improvements.
- » **Action 3.3 |** Integrate rail corridor safety planning with local land use and industrial development decisions.



STRATEGY 4 | Protect and preserve current and potential rail-served industrial lands to support long-term economic growth.

- » **Action 4.1 |** Inventory and evaluate current and potential rail-served industrial sites and develop a public-facing GIS map to support business recruitment and investment.
- » **Action 4.2 |** Work with public agencies to integrate site preservation into local and regional plans.



STRATEGY 5 | Strengthen coordination between railroads, shippers, and public agencies to plan collaboratively, share best practices, and develop tools and strategies that improve service, safety, and investment outcomes.

- » **Action 5.1 |** Coordinate with stakeholders to convene an annual rail-focused forum to advance coordination, innovation, and performance discussion.



STRATEGY 6 | Support deployment of innovative rail technologies to enhance safety, improve operations, and strengthen Idaho's market position.

- » **Action 6.1 |** Develop a statewide framework to identify priority corridors for advanced rail technologies and pilot innovative solutions to evaluate safety and operational benefits.
- » **Action 6.2 |** Host a round table/peer exchange to learn and share best practices and provide technical assistance for integrating rail technology.



STRATEGY 7 | Maintain alignment with Federal passenger rail policy and coordinate with partner-led efforts to ensure Idaho is positioned for future opportunities.

- » **Action 7.1 |** Monitor Federal passenger rail programs and maintain Idaho's eligibility.
- » **Action 7.2 |** Participate in multi-state or federally led passenger rail planning efforts.
- » **Action 7.3 |** Coordinate with MPOs and local partners to support locally led passenger rail initiatives where appropriate.



Rail Studies and Capital Program Investments

ITD does not build rail infrastructure or operate train services, but ITD does invest into some rail network improvements (especially at-grade crossings) and coordinates with residents, local businesses, railroad companies, and local, state-level, and Federal government agencies to ensure that funding and projects benefit Idahoans. Thus, this Statewide Rail Plan better positions ITD to build those partnerships with rail providers and users and support economic opportunities and investments throughout the state.

Table 2 reflects a partial list of ongoing plans related to and investments in Idaho's rail system that are being advanced through collaborative planning, grant opportunities, or public-private partnerships. A full list is included in Chapter 5 of the Statewide Rail Plan.

Table 2 Ongoing Rail Related Plans and Investments

Title	Location	Lead Agency
Southern Idaho Short Line Modernization Project: Growth in Agriculture Commodity Transport	Rupert ID to Jerome ID	Watco
Treasure Valley Freight Multi-modal Transload Center	City of Boise	COMPASS
Bridging the Valley: Grade Crossing Improvement (BNSF route) and realignment of UPRR mainline.	Spokane Valley/Rathdrum Prairie	Union Pacific
Various Railroad Crossing Improvements and Separation	Statewide	ITD or Local Agencies
Treasure Valley Freight Multi-modal Transload Center	Treasure Valley	COMPASS
Pioneer Corridor Restoration Project: Updated Corridor ID Program	Salt Lake City, UT to Boise, ID	Boise
Let's Ride Treasure Valley Study. A Planning and Environmental Linkages Study	Treasure Valley, ID. Includes Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Caldwell	COMPASS



ITD will also continue its ongoing programs and plans to support rail planning and investment in Idaho, including the [Idaho Railroad Crossing Safety Program](#), [Operation Lifesaver](#), [Idaho Rail Preservation Program](#), and regular updates to the [Idaho Long-Range Transportation Plan](#), [Idaho Statewide Freight Plan](#), and [Idaho Statewide Rail Plan](#).

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Idaho Statewide Rail Plan was developed through a comprehensive engagement and coordination process involving public agencies, private railroads, shippers, industry groups, economic development partners, regional planning organizations, and community members. This process ensured that the information in this plan reflects real-world operational needs, economic trends, and community priorities. Table 3 identifies how each of these methods of engagement, explained in further detail in the following subsections, were used to solicit feedback from key stakeholder groups.

Table 3 Methods of Engagement by Stakeholder Category

Stakeholder Group	FAC Workshops	Focused Stakeholder Interviews	Virtual Stakeholder Meeting	Statewide Public Survey and Public Comment
Idaho Public-Sector Representatives	✓	✓	✓	✓
Freight Industry Representatives	✓	✓	✓	✓
General Public	–	–	–	✓
Passenger Rail	–	✓	✓	✓
Rail Carriers	–	✓	✓	✓
Rail Shippers	✓	✓	✓	✓

ITD distributed a survey to gather input from a broad cross-section of rail users and community members, seeking to understand how people interact with the rail system today and what is needed to ensure the rail system's future viability.

3,495 PEOPLE
responded to the
survey from across Idaho.



SAFETY and **DELAYS** at
highway/rail at-grade crossings
were seen as a **CRITICAL
CONCERN** in many communities.



About **83%** said that **rail is**
'EXTREMELY IMPORTANT'
or **'VERY IMPORTANT'**
to their communities



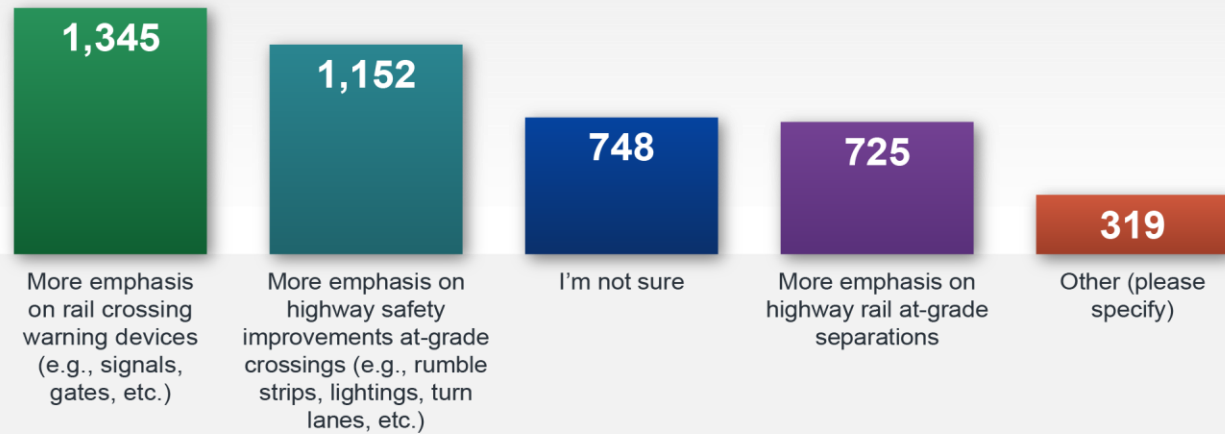
When asked about ITD's role, respondents
wanted to see **MORE SAFETY
IMPROVEMENTS** at these
crossings throughout the State.



Figure 6 Survey Question About ITD and Future Investments at Highway Rail at-Grade Crossings

ITD's primary role in investing in the state rail system is safety improvements at highway rail-at grade crossings. Are there types of improvements that you would like to see ITD focus on? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 3,290 Skipped: 199



Other highlights include:

- » Respondents were **most concerned about the delays and congestion caused by blocked crossings from stopped/slow trains, safety infrastructure at crossings** (e.g. signs, signals, and crossing gates), and **driver or pedestrian behavior near rail crossings at highway rail at-grade crossings** in their communities.
- » **Exploring sustainable and diversified revenue mechanisms for rail** was rated as the most important strategy for Idaho to undertake.
- » While 90 percent of respondents have not used the Amtrak Empire Builder in Sandpoint, ID, **86 percent said they would use passenger rail if available in their community**, and many respondents **wanted “more connections within the State”** and “increased access” to the passenger rail system.



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For mor information on the plan:
www.itd.idaho.gov