



IDAHO STATEWIDE RAIL PLAN



May 2026

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1.0 The Role of Rail in Statewide Transportation

Since Idaho achieved statehood in 1890—and even in the decades before—the railroad has been a cornerstone of the State’s development and cultural heritage. The first tracks were laid in 1874 when the Utah & Northern Railway was chartered to connect the Union Pacific main line at Ogden, Utah, north through present-day Idaho into Montana. This new transportation link arrived during the height of westward expansion, when settlers were drawn to the region by the Gold Rush and other economic opportunities.

As new settlers came to Idaho and the Northwest in search of economic opportunity, Idaho’s rail network continued to grow. The Oregon Short Line Railway, established in 1881 as a subsidiary of Union Pacific, further helped to create an expansive rail network linking cities like Boise, Idaho Falls, and Pocatello with key trading hubs and settlements in Wyoming, Utah, and Oregon. This helped to significantly boost trading and production of some of Idaho’s key commodities, including wheat, timber, and livestock, especially along the Snake River Plain. In the northern portion of the State, the Northern Pacific Railway (NP) helped connect key mining settlements and timber hubs such as Coeur d’Alene with Washington, Montana, as well as points east and even into Canada.¹ As the western United States was growing, so was the region’s rail network, which saw continued growth well into the 20th century. Increased economic activity was financially beneficial to the State’s railroads, which included both freight and passenger rail.

Like much of the nation, however, Idaho’s rail network faced challenges in the latter half of the century. The rise of automobiles and trucking, combined with strict economic regulations, eroded rail market share. Industry mergers and service reductions followed. The 1980 Staggers Rail Act helped revitalize freight rail by allowing more competitive service agreements, but rail volumes never fully returned to early-20th-century peaks.

Today, Idaho’s rail system remains essential to the State’s economy and freight mobility. Since 2000, Idaho’s gross domestic product has more than tripled, and its population has grown nearly three times the national rate. The Treasure Valley has transformed from a frontier outpost into a vibrant metropolitan hub with globally recognized technology and advanced manufacturing industries. Outside urban areas, Idaho remains a leading United States producer of potatoes, hay, wheat, dairy products, phosphate, and silver, along with many other agricultural and mineral commodities.² Railroads play a critical role in supporting these industries by moving large volumes of bulk goods efficiently and cost-effectively over long distances. Idaho’s rail network connects producers to markets across North America, including major population centers and coastal seaports. In the north, Amtrak’s Empire Builder links Sandpoint to cities across the Pacific Northwest and the Midwest.

Although the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) does not directly operate or manage railroads—aside from administering Section 130 grade crossing safety programs—the Department recognizes that a healthy rail network benefits the State’s entire multimodal system. Strong freight and passenger rail service provides competitive transportation options to shippers and customers, reduces highway congestion, improves safety, and supports economic growth. The 2026 Idaho Statewide Rail Plan provides a strategic framework for understanding the condition, needs, and opportunities of Idaho’s rail

¹ Idaho Railroads: State Map, History, Abandoned Lines, <https://www.american-rails.com/id.html>.

² Idaho Mining and Exploration, <https://idahobusinessreview.com/2008/11/17/union-pacific-senior-vp-talks-about-challenges-facing-railroad-firm/>.

system. It outlines investment opportunities and policies to ensure that rail continues to serve as a reliable, efficient, and integrated component of Idaho's transportation network for decades to come.

1.1 Plan Organization and Requirements

In keeping with Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Guidance, this plan includes an inventory and assessment of existing and future conditions for Idaho's freight rail and passenger rail systems, establishes a vision for freight and passenger rail in Idaho, and provides an investment program for existing and proposed freight and passenger rail infrastructure and services in the State. The state's railroads, rail users, industry, and public and private stakeholders were involved in developing this plan. The 2025 Idaho Statewide Rail Plan is organized as follows:

- » **Chapter 1: The Role of Rail in Statewide Transportation**—Describes the current and anticipated role of rail in Idaho's multimodal transportation system and the State's ability to provide political, legal, and financial support to freight and passenger rail service development.
- » **Chapter 2: Idaho's Existing Rail Infrastructure**—Provides an overview of Idaho's existing rail system. It describes the geographic and physical characteristics of the State's freight and passenger rail systems, including supporting facilities and infrastructure.
- » **Chapter 3: Trends & Forecasts**—Presents key trends and forecasts related to rail performance in Idaho. Topics include population and economic trends; freight and passenger rail demand and growth; fuel costs trends; rail congestion trends, highway and airport congestion trends; and land use trends.
- » **Chapter 4: Rail System Needs & Opportunities**—Summarizes overarching rail system needs & opportunities, identified through the assessment of existing infrastructure, trends and forecasts, as well as through the stakeholder engagement process.
- » **Chapter 5: Idaho's Rail Service Investment Program**—Highlights upcoming and potential investments and strategies to address identified rail investments and improvements.
- » **Chapter 6: Coordination & Review**—Details Idaho's approach towards public and private-sector stakeholder engagement and highlights findings from these outreach efforts.

The Idaho Statewide Rail Plan is fully compliant with Title 49 USC Section 22102 and the FRA's requirements under the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA), as shown in Table 1.1. The State is also in compliance with Idaho Code 49-2905, as shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.1 FRA Statewide Rail Plan Requirements

FRA Statewide Rail Plan Requirement	Idaho Statewide Rail Plan Reference(s)
An executive summary that highlights key facts and findings of the Statewide Rail Plan.	Executive Summary (separate document)
An inventory of the existing overall rail transportation system and rail services and facilities within the State and an analysis of the role of rail transportation within the State's surface transportation system.	Chapter 2
A review of all rail lines within the State, including all freight rail lines, intercity passenger rail lines, commuter rail lines, and proposed high-speed rail corridors and significant rail line segments not currently in service.	Chapter 2
A statement of the State's passenger rail service objectives, including minimum service levels, for rail transportation routes.	Chapter 2
A general analysis of rail transportation, economic, and environmental impacts in the State.	Chapter 3
A long-range rail investment program for current and future freight and passenger infrastructure in the State that includes a list of rail capital projects, a funding plan, public and private benefits for projects, and a statement of correlation between public funding and public benefits.	Chapter 5
A statement of public financing issues for rail projects and service in the State, including a list of current and prospective public capital and operating funding resources, public subsidies, state taxation, and other financial policies relating to rail infrastructure development.	Chapter 1 & 5
An identification of rail infrastructure issues within the State that reflects consultation with all relevant stakeholders.	Chapter 4 & 5
A review of the major passenger and freight intermodal connections and facilities within the State.	Chapter 2
A review of publicly funded projects within the State to improve rail transportation safety and security, including all major projects funded under Section 130 of Title 23.	Chapter 5
A performance evaluation of passenger rail services operating in the State, including possible improvements in those services and a description of strategies to achieve those improvements.	Chapter 2
A compilation of studies and reports on high-speed rail corridor development within the State not included in a previous plan under this subchapter and a plan for funding any recommended development of such corridors in the State.	Chapter 2
A statement that the State is in compliance with Title 49 USC Section 22102.	Chapter 1

Source: FRA Statewide Rail Plan Guidance.

Table 1.2 Idaho Code 49-2905—State Rail and Intermodal Facility System Plan Requirements

Idaho Statewide Rail Plan Requirement	Idaho Statewide Rail Plan Reference(s)
(a) Identify and describe the State's rail system	Chapter 2
(b) Prepare state rail system maps;	Chapter 2
(c) Identify and evaluate mainline capacity issues in cooperation with the railroads;	Chapter 3
(d) Identify and evaluate rail access and congestion issues;	Chapter 3
(e) Identify and evaluate rail commodity flows and traffic types;	Chapter 3
(f) Identify lines and corridors that have been rail banked or preserved;	Chapter 2
(g) Identify and evaluate other rail and intermodal issues affecting the State's freight transportation system and regional and local economies;	Chapter 4
(h) Identify and evaluate those rail freight lines that are potentially subject to abandonment in the future because of unmet capital needs or other reasons, or have recently been approved for abandonment but the track improvements are still in place;	Chapter 2
(i) Whenever possible provide priorities for determining which rail lines or intermodal commerce authorities should receive state support and provide to the interagency working group supporting information used in establishing such priorities for use by the interagency working group. The priorities should include: • The anticipated benefits to the State and local economy; • Coordinated freight transportation system including the anticipated cost of road and highway improvements necessitated by the proposed project; • Establishment of an intermodal facility, if indicated; • The likelihood the qualified line receiving funding can meet operating costs from freight charges, surcharges on rail traffic and other funds; and • The impact of abandonment or capacity constraints if the project does not obtain state support; and	Chapter 5
(j) Identify and describe the State's intermodal rural rail and truck freight system by: • Preparing state intermodal and regional freight transfer station system maps; • Identifying and evaluating intermodal and truck and rail freight transfer capacity and coordination issues in cooperation with local government and the railroad and truck interests; • Identifying and evaluating intermodal and freight transfer access and highway capacity issues; and • Identifying and evaluating major freight commodity origins, destinations and traffic flows by mode and corridor.	Chapter 2

Source: Idaho Code 49-2905.

1.2 Multimodal System Vision, Goals, and Objectives

To conduct a comprehensive update of the Statewide Rail Plan, ITD thoroughly examined relevant documents and planning processes to help guide vision, goal, and objective development. The purpose of this process is to ensure consistency amongst other related planning efforts at ITD and across the State. These efforts, and corresponding proposed vision, goals, and objectives are summarized as follows:

1.2.1 Statewide Rail Plan Vision

Across the visions and goals established by ITD and other state agencies, four common themes emerge: **safety, economic opportunity, innovation, and engagement and partnerships**.³ These themes appear in multiple reports and plans with statewide breadth, both with a transportation and economic development focus. How each statewide document touches on one or more of these themes is shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Statewide Vision Planning Themes

Theme	ITD Annual Report	ITD Strategic Plan	Strategic Freight Plan	Grade Crossing Plan	ITD Previous Rail Plans	Idaho Commerce Strategic Plan	2013 Statewide Rail Plan
Safety	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓
Economic opportunity	–	✓	✓	–	✓	✓	✓
Innovation	✓	✓	✓	✓	–	✓	✓
Engagement & partnerships	✓	–	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: ITD, Idaho Commerce, Economic Development Districts of Idaho.

Overall, there is broad agreement that safety, economic opportunity, innovation, and engagement are key aspects of ITD's vision and the State as a whole. Therefore, each of them is woven into this plan's vision, goals, and objectives.

Vision for Idaho's 2025 Statewide Rail Plan

The vision for Idaho's rail network follows four guiding principles aligned with the statewide vision and planning themes: Idaho's rail system should be safe, innovative, drive economic growth, and responsive to the changing needs of rail providers and customers. Although ITD does not directly maintain or manage the State's rail system, as it does for highways, the vision for Idaho's rail network should further ITD's mission of safety, mobility, and economic opportunity. Rail should serve as a key driver of economic opportunity, as it has since Idaho first became a state in 1890. At that time, timber and mining were major

³ Idaho Commerce's planning themes are identified in its RURAL IMPACT: A Community and Economic Development Resiliency Strategy for the State of Idaho document, which is based on four goals: targeted business development, creating quality and resilient places, developing a talent and people-driven economy, and prioritizing infrastructure investments.

statewide industries that were reliant on rail and still are today. In current times, many more of Idaho's most prominent industries, including manufacturing and agriculture, rely on rail as well.

The vision for the 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.

1.2.2 Statewide Rail Plan Goals and Objectives

The purpose of establishing goals & objectives is to help ITD carry out its vision for the 2025 Idaho Statewide Rail Plan and the State's rail system. These goals and objectives provide an initial step in long-term rail planning, and for establishing strategies and actions as discussed in Chapter 5 of this plan.

As identified in Table 1.3, ITD's previous rail plan established three goals, which are centered on connectivity, partnerships, and investment. These concepts remain the core of the two goals identified to support this plan's updated vision, with minimal revisions to align with goals from more recent statewide plans.

The two goals for the 2025 Idaho Statewide 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.

Objectives are shorter term, measurable actions for ITD and its' partners to undertake to achieve the goals and vision of the Statewide Rail Plan. The objectives below both reflect key themes from Idaho's previous rail plan and consider new themes such as resiliency and coordination with ongoing ITD planning initiatives. The objectives for each goal in the 2025 Statewide 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.**
 - **Objective 1.1**—Reduce the number of and potential for at-grade rail-highway accidents;
 - **Objective 1.2**—Identify and improve existing infrastructure shortcomings;
 - **Objective 1.3**—Coordinate safety investments with other planning processes and initiatives such as the State Freight Plan (SFP), Safety Action Plan (SAP), and Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

- **Objective 1.4**—Identify all potential sources of Federal funds for application in addressing identified rail needs;
 - **Objective 1.5**—Administer funding, as available, for rail service preservation and encourage the use of local funds for capital investments.
- » **Goal 2—Participate in effective partnerships that leverage resources and opportunities for the rail system.**
- **Objective 2.1**—Engage with public and private-sector rail stakeholders to identify key opportunities to strengthen the rail network.
 - **Objective 2.2**—Maintain communication regarding Federal funding opportunities, including capital and other requirements.

1.3 Importance of Rail in Idaho's Transportation System

With its historic roots in mining and agriculture, Idaho has long depended on the efficient movement of goods to market. Over time, the State's economy has diversified, and new industries that are freight-reliant or freight-intensive have grown alongside traditional sectors. Today, key industries that depend on Idaho's multimodal transportation system include agriculture and forestry mining, utilities, construction, manufacturing, wholesale and retail trade, and transportation and warehousing. These sectors use a variety of modes to move goods—including truck, rail, water, air, multimodal services, and pipelines.

Rail is a critical part of this multimodal system. Alongside trucking, it is the only freight mode utilized by every one of Idaho's major industries. Without railroads, the United States would require an estimated 80 million additional trucks on the nation's highways and would consume four times more fuel to move the same volume of goods.⁴

Freight rail, which makes up the majority of Idaho's rail activity, is especially valuable for transporting heavy, bulk goods and containers efficiently over long distances. Although rail carries just 5 percent of Idaho's total freight by value, it accounts for 9 percent of freight by weight, according to the Idaho SFP. This higher share of weight underscores rail's central role in moving lower-value, bulk commodities, as well as a variety of goods moving to and from markets both within and outside the State. Top commodities shipped by rail include fertilizers, wood products, cereal grains, other foodstuffs, paper, crude petroleum, motor vehicles, plastics and rubber, animal feed, and fuel oils. These commodities form the foundation of Idaho's economy as well as supply chains across the United States.

As further discussed in Chapter 3, much of Idaho's rail traffic is through-traffic, reflecting the State's strategic location in the national freight network. Rail corridors in Idaho serve as critical connectors between West Coast ports and major inland markets to the east. While much of this traffic does not originate or terminate in Idaho, it underscores the importance of maintaining a strong and reliable rail infrastructure in the State. In addition to this freight role, passenger rail also serves Idaho, though on a much smaller scale. Amtrak's Empire Builder provides residents and visitors with connections to the

⁴ AAR Freight Rail Facts & Figures, <https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/AAR-Facts-Figures-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

West Coast and to the Midwest via Chicago, offering mobility and tourism benefits that supplement the State's largely freight-oriented rail system.

With targeted investment, Idaho has the opportunity to enhance the capacity and reliability of its rail system. Doing so would not only support rail-served industries within the State but also strengthen the resilience of the broader multimodal transportation system, relieve highway congestion, and reinforce Idaho's role as a key freight corridor in the national network.

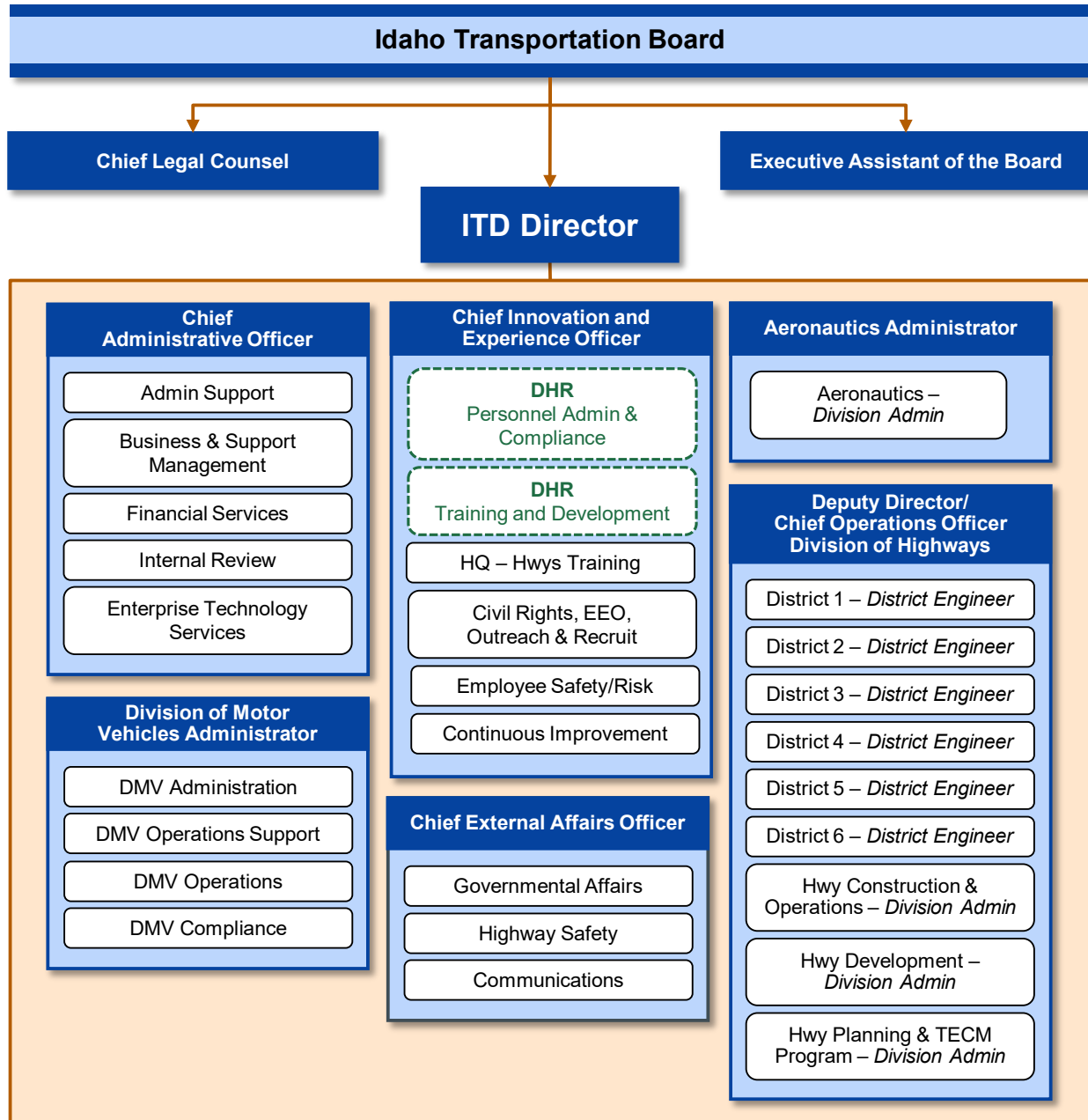
1.4 Rail Governance

Freight rail service is primarily provided by private sector carriers, while passenger rail services are operated by Amtrak, a federally chartered private corporation fully owned by the Federal government. Key public sector stakeholders involved in decision-making around rail planning in Idaho are identified below.

1.4.1 Idaho Transportation Department

Rail planning and coordination in Idaho is performed by the Division of Planning Services. The Railroad Crossing Program is also a function of the Division of Planning Services. The organization of ITD and where the Division of Transportation Performance is situated within the overall organization of the agency is shown in Figure 1.1. ITD's role includes assisting in the preservation of essential rail lines through planning and coordination with private railroad owners and addressing potential safety hazards of at-grade railroad crossings. ITD also helps to select and coordinate projects with rail operators when an at-grade crossing is part of the scope of work.

Figure 1.1 ITD Organizational Chart



Source: ITD.

1.4.2 Federal Agencies

Multiple Federal departments, agencies, and boards are involved in rail related matters. The United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) has the most extensive involvement, both directly with the carriers and indirectly in conjunction with the State departments of transportation and regional jurisdictions. The purpose and relationship of the agencies that are most heavily involved with the railroad industry are summarized below:

Federal Railroad Administration

The FRA is responsible for developing and enforcing railroad safety rules, managing the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) program, and providing oversight of Amtrak for U.S. DOT. The FRA also manages a small research program. With the passage of the PRIIA in 2008, and the subsequent provision of capital funding for intercity passenger rail in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), the FRA was tasked with managing these programs. Traditionally, the vast majority of FRA personnel and financial resources have been devoted to safety enforcement activities.

Federal Highway Administration

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is responsible for public highway-rail grade crossing issues that affect highway safety. FHWA provides guidelines and standards for the correct design of grade crossings, the assessment of safety at highway-rail grade crossings, and appropriate placement of traffic control devices at and on the approach to highway-rail grade crossings. These traffic control devices include circular advance warning signs, crossbucks, pavement markings, and, in some locations, bells, gates, and flashing lights as described in the FHWA's Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). States determine which public crossings need improvements, and rely heavily on federally supplied funds, supplied through the Section 130-Railway-Highway Crossing Program.

Federal Transit Administration

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) administers formula and discretionary funding for the development of public transportation in urban and rural areas, supports existing funding and recommends funding for new services, and coordinates research and training. Through the New Starts, Small Starts, and Core Starts processes, the FTA establishes criteria and evaluates applicants seeking Federal funding for new transit lines, including light rail, heavy rail, commuter rail, streetcar, and bus rapid transit projects.

Surface Transportation Board

Established in 1996 as a successor to the long-lived Interstate Commerce Commission, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) adjudicates disputes over rates and services between shippers and carriers and has administrative authority over railroad mergers and line abandonments. In 2008, PRIIA expanded its role to mediate conflicts between passenger rail operators with freight rail owners. This new provision was intended to address long-standing concerns about enforcement of Amtrak's statutory rights to operate passenger trains over the freight network.

Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) is responsible for developing and enforcing regulations for the safe, reliable, and environmentally sound transportation of energy and other hazardous materials. PHMSA works alongside other agencies like the FRA to establish safety standards for rail cars that carry hazardous materials, including the design and maintenance of tank cars, especially for hazardous substances including crude oil and chemicals. PHMSA also provides guidance and regulations related to emergency responses for hazardous materials incidents. This includes ensuring that first responders have the resources and training needed in case of a hazardous materials release from a rail car, and that rail companies have contingency plans for accidents.

1.4.3 Other Organizations and Public-Sector Rail Planning in Idaho

Additional public-sector agencies involved in rail planning in Idaho include the following:

Idaho Public Utilities Commission

The Idaho Public Utilities Commission (PUC) was established in May of 1913 by the Idaho Legislature, with statutory authorities detailed in Title 61 and 62 of Idaho code. The PUC oversees the intrastate operation of investor-owned electric, gas, water, and telecommunications utilities, as well as rail and pipeline safety programs. The PUC has responsibility for ensuring all rail services operating within Idaho do so in a safe and efficient manner. The PUC has rail inspectors that investigate highway-rail grade crossing issues and safety projects throughout the State. State safety inspectors are also responsible for inspection of rail cars carrying hazardous materials in and through Idaho, and enforcing Federal hazardous materials regulations, which the State has adopted.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

The Idaho Legislature created the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) in 1919 to assist and regulate the State's fast-growing agricultural industry. The primary purposes for establishment were to protect Idaho's crops and livestock from the introduction and spread of pests and transmittable diseases, to help provide the industry with a system for the orderly marketing of agricultural commodities, and to protect consumers from contaminated products or fraudulent marketing practices.

The ISDA is responsible for administering the Idaho Rural Economic Development and Integrated Freight Transportation (REDIFIT) loan program. The mission of the REDIFIT Program is to assist businesses and industries to develop and expand options for shipping freight and products to market. The state's interest is served by maintaining competitive transportation services for Idaho's freight shippers, reducing public roadway maintenance and repair costs, increasing economic development opportunities, increasing domestic and international trade, creating and preserving jobs, and enhancing safety. State funding for projects is contingent upon appropriate private sector partnerships with the participation and cooperation of state and local governments.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) are associations of local agencies that coordinate transportation planning and development activities within a metropolitan area. Establishment of an MPO is required by law in urban areas with populations of more than 50,000 in order for the area to use Federal transportation funding. MPOs are designed to ensure coordination and cooperation among the various jurisdictions that oversee transportation within the urban area. MPO decision-making is guided by:

- » A policy board, generally comprised of local elected officials and public agency officials who administer or operate major modes of transportation, and
- » A technical advisory group of professional planners and engineers who are often employees of the same agencies.

An MPO has effective control over transportation improvement funding within the metropolitan planning area, since a project must be a part of the MPO's adopted long-range plan and be placed in their Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program (MTIP) to receive Federal funding.

Current MPOs in Idaho include the following:

- » **Bannock Transportation Planning Organization**—As the MPO for Pocatello, the Bannock Transportation Planning Organization (BTPO) also includes the City of Chubbuck and adjacent urbanized portions of Bannock County.
- » **Bonneville Metropolitan Planning Organization (BMPO)**—As the MPO for Idaho Falls, the BMPO also includes the Cities of Ammon, Iona, Ucon, and adjacent urbanized portions of Bonneville County.
- » **Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS)**—As the MPO for the Treasure Valley, the COMPASS includes the Cities of Boise, Meridian, and Nampa, as well as the Cities of Eagle, Garden City, Kuna, Star, Caldwell, Greenleaf, Middleton, Notus, Parma, and Wilder, in addition to other adjacent urbanized portions of Ada and Canyon Counties.
- » **Kootenai Metropolitan Planning Organization (KMPO)**—As the MPO for Couer d'Alene, the KMPO includes the Cities of Post Falls, Hayden, Dalton Gardens, Hayden Lake, Huetter, Hauser, and Stateline, and adjacent urbanized portions of Kootenai County.
- » **Lewis-Clark Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (LCVMPO)**—As the MPO for Lewiston, the LCVMPO includes the Cities of Asotin and Clarkston in Washington, and adjacent urbanized portions of Nez Perce County, ID, and Asotin County, WA.
- » **Magic Valley Metropolitan Planning Organization (MVMPO)**—As the MPO for the Magic Valley, the MVMPO includes the Cities of Twin Falls and Kimberly, and adjacent urbanized portions of Twin Falls County and Jerome County.

County and Local Agencies

County and local government projects throughout the State range from preparing transit supportive land use plans and adopting appropriate zoning and development regulations to crossing improvement projects. On the State level, local projects are selected by ITD on a statewide basis and scheduled into the ITD Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). Rail-Highway Crossing Projects are selected and scheduled in the STIP based upon the crossing's location and priority rating as determined by ITD's Rail Operations and Safety Team.

In the Treasure Valley, Valley Regional Transit has undertaken rail planning to evaluate future high-capacity transit options. In 2020, the agency partnered with COMPASS, the region's metropolitan planning organization, to complete the 2020 Update to the Treasure Valley High-Capacity Transit Study. The study assessed bus rapid transit, light rail, and commuter rail along corridors such as I-84, Franklin Road, Fairview/Cherry, and the Boise Cutoff rail line. With strong regional growth projected, it found that dedicated right-of-way options—particularly the Boise Cutoff and I-84—offered the best

performance for travel time, reliability, and ridership.⁵ This was followed by the Let's Ride Treasure Valley Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Report completed in January 2026 which recommended the Boise Cutoff Commuter Rail Alternative as the preliminary locally preferred alternative to connect Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Caldwell with commuter rail service in existing freight rail corridors.⁶

Idaho Operation Lifesaver

Idaho Operation Lifesaver is the state chapter of the national nonprofit rail safety education organization, Operation Lifesaver, Inc. It works to reduce collisions, injuries, and fatalities at highway-rail grade crossings and along railroad rights-of-way through public education and community outreach. The Idaho program partners with railroads, law enforcement, schools, and community groups to deliver free rail safety presentations, host events, and share resources that promote safe behavior around trains and tracks.

Idaho Operation Lifesaver is currently governed by its Board of Directors, consisting of members of our various safety partners, including WATCO Inc., Burlington Northern and Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway, Idaho Northern and Pacific Railroad (INPR), Railroad Labor Unions, Idaho State Police, Idaho Sheriff's Association, Idaho Chiefs of Police Association, ITD, and the Idaho Department of Education. Daily operations are handled by the State coordinator.

1.5 State Funding Authority for Rail

Rail operations and infrastructure are, broadly, privately funded. Class I railroads largely finance their expenses, including infrastructure and track improvements and maintenance, through operating revenues. Class III short line railroads similarly fund much of their expenses through operating revenues, but with lower operating revenues; they also rely on public sector funding, especially for capital projects. This subsection discusses the different sources of public funding for rail in Idaho.

1.5.1 State Revenue

There is a small amount of Idaho state revenue that funds rail infrastructure safety improvements. State revenue for rail in Idaho generally goes towards safety improvements for railroad crossings. State revenue sources for transportation funding in Idaho are approximately 40 percent from state sources and 55 percent from Federal sources. Most of the Idaho state revenue is from the Highway Distribution Account (HDA), which is comprised of:

- » Gasoline tax, 32 cents per gallon, accounts for approximately 40 percent of state revenue.
- » Diesel tax, 32 cents per gallon, accounts for approximately 18 percent of state revenue.
- » Passenger car and truck registrations account for approximately 30 percent of state revenue.

⁵ Treasure Valley High Capacity Transit Study, https://compassidaho.org/wp-content/uploads/Treasure_Valley_High_Capacity_Transit_Study_2020_Update_Final0907.pdf.

⁶ Let's Ride Treasure Valley Planning and Environmental Linkages Study Report, <https://compassidaho.org/public-transportation-high-capacity-transit/>.

HDA revenue is added to the remaining 12 percent of state revenue from Department of Motor Vehicles fees (such as operators' licenses, titles, driver records, etc.) and miscellaneous sources of revenue from Federal and local funding to comprise the State Highway Account.

The Idaho Transportation Board, as required in Idaho Code 63-2412(1)(c), allocates \$250,000 dollars annually from the State HDA for rail safety projects, in addition to the Federal funds dedicated under the Railway-Highway Crossing Program component of the Highway Safety Improvement Program. A crossing over any public road is eligible for this program. Projects are identified by the Districts, the Office of Highway Safety, or local officials and prioritized by the Rail Operations and Safety Team, which is made up of representatives of each District Office within ITD, Highway Operations, and the Rail Program Manager, along with representatives from Idaho Operation Lifesaver and FHWA Safety Division. Projects are prioritized based on safety data, with priority given to low-cost, near-term projects, and railroad/road corridors and crossings. Requests for projects are sent through the districts and reviewed for eligibility by the Rail-Highway Crossing Program Manager, then submitted to the Idaho Transportation Board for final approval and allocation. The projects are included in the STIP, as well as Idaho's Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan.

1.5.2 REDIFiT

Idaho's REDIFiT is a low interest transportation state loan program designed to assist businesses and industries, including qualified short line or intermodal freight shippers, to upgrade, expand, rehabilitate, purchase or modernize equipment and facilities for Idaho's freight shipping infrastructure. The mission of the REDIFiT Program is to assist businesses and industries to develop and expand options for shipping freight and products to market. Eligible potential projects include:

- » Rehabilitating or improving rail lines to preserve essential local rail service;
- » Purchasing or rehabilitating railroad equipment necessary to maintain essential rail service;
- » Construction of loading or reloading facilities or other capital improvements; and
- » Coordinating intermodal traffic for integrated rural freight transportation.
- » Funds are also available for planning activities.

1.5.3 Federal Revenue

Federal funding for rail is available through both formula-based programs and competitive discretionary grants. Formula programs distribute funds to states according to established allocation formulas, providing predictable and recurring support that can be programmed in advance. Discretionary programs, by contrast, award funding on a competitive basis, often prioritizing projects that improve safety, efficiency, and resiliency within the national transportation system, including rail. This subsection provides an overview of available Federal programs at the time of this plan, including those designed specifically for rail as well as broader multimodal programs that can be applied to rail infrastructure improvements.

Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement Program

The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement Program (CRISI) program is a discretionary grant administered by the FRA to improve the safety, efficiency, and reliability of intercity passenger and freight rail. Eligible projects include those that address railroad safety hazards, reduce congestion, and enhance grade crossing safety. In 2020, the Eastern Idaho Railroad (EIRR) received a \$7.5 million CRISI award to extend its yard track, construct new passing sidings, and replace or remove sections of track in Rupert, ID to improve operations and reduce conflicts at street crossings.

Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program

The Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE) program is an FRA discretionary grant program focused on improving safety at highway-rail grade crossings. Eligible projects include grade separations, track relocations, installation of signals and safety devices, and other infrastructure upgrades that reduce conflicts between trains and roadway users.

Idaho has benefited from several RCE awards in recent years. In 2022, ITD was awarded up to \$36 million for a grade separation project at SH 53 and Pleasant Valley Road in Hauser. In the 2023/2024 award cycle, the City of Nampa received up to \$1.2 million to advance an overpass project at the Robinson Rd and Greenhurst Road crossings, while the Lakes Highway District was awarded \$14 million for a grade separation at Brunner Road on BNSF Railway's Kootenai Subdivision.

Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development

The Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant program provides competitive, discretionary funding for surface transportation infrastructure projects that have significant local or regional impacts. Eligible projects can include road, rail, transit, and port improvements that enhance safety, mobility, and economic competitiveness. In the fiscal year 2022 funding cycle—when the program operated under its previous name—Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE)—Idaho communities received awards including a \$5 million rail-related grant to the City of Nampa to modernize two aging railroad underpasses.

Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highway Projects (INFRA)

The Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) program is a competitive, discretionary grant program administered by U.S. DOT that funds large-scale multimodal freight and highway projects. Eligible projects include freight rail, highway freight, and intermodal freight improvements, as well as highway-rail grade crossings and grade separations. The program prioritizes investments that enhance the safety, reliability, and efficiency of both freight and passenger transportation.

Railway-Highway Crossings Program—Section 130

This FHWA grant program, also known as Section 130, is a formula grant program that allocates funding to states to be used to eliminate hazards at public highway-railway crossings. The Section 130 Program funds can be used for projects for public railroad crossings including roadways, bike trails, and pedestrian paths. Idaho receives approximately \$7 million annually through this program that can be used for projects implementing strategies to improve safety at railroad crossings.

Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing

The U.S. DOT offers a low-interest loan program dedicated to funding railroad infrastructure projects. Eligible uses include acquiring, improving, or rehabilitating rail equipment and facilities, developing new railroad or intermodal facilities, and refinancing debt from previous rail infrastructure investments. Of the program's \$35 billion in available financing, \$7 billion is reserved specifically for rail operators that are not Class I railroads.

1.6 Rail Services, Initiatives, and Plans

Idaho's 2040 LRTP and 2023 Strategic Freight Plan do not identify rail-specific projects or initiatives. For the purposes of this Statewide Rail Plan, recent and planned rail infrastructure initiatives have been compiled from information provided by the State's freight rail carriers and Amtrak. These initiatives represent private-sector investment in Idaho's freight rail network and planned enhancements to intercity passenger rail services affecting the State. Additional capital projects, identified by Idaho's railroads are identified in Chapter 5, while additional information on how the Statewide Rail Plan aligns with ITD plans and initiatives, including Idaho's Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan can be found in Chapter 6.

Since the development of the 2013 Statewide Rail Plan, multiple updates have been made, and multiple investments have been made on Idaho's rail network. This includes the following updates, improvements, and investments:

- » The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 mandated that Class I railroads install Positive Train Control (PTC) technology on any tracks that carry passengers or toxic by inhalation (TIH) materials. This includes most of Idaho's Class I rail network, and a large portion of the State's rail mileage. On December 29, 2020, FRA announced that Positive Train Control (PTC) technology is in operation on all 57,536 required freight and passenger railroad route miles, prior to the December 31, 2020 statutory deadline set forth by Congress.⁷ PTC technology includes a communication system linking locomotives and rail operations centers to communicate information on train speed in relation to speed limits along rail lines. It also provides the ability to send a warning alert to a locomotive in advance of a violation or potential derailment, and can also take control of, and stop the locomotive.
- » In 2020, the EIRR was awarded a \$7.5 million CRISI grant to extend its yard track and add new passing track to relocate switching operations that currently block SH-24 at 8th Street crossing in Rupert. It also includes rail replacement on the main line track through the yard, removal of two of the four tracks at the 8th Street crossing, and upgrades at the 100 North crossing.⁸
- » In 2021, ITD developed the Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan. The Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan summarizes Federal and State statutes and guidance on grade crossings, identifies key metrics and existing conditions, as well as strategies for implementing proposed strategies.⁹

⁷ PTC, <https://railroads.dot.gov/research-development/program-areas/train-control/ptc/positive-train-control-ptc>.

⁸ FRA's Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program, [https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2020-10/FY20 CRISI Project Listing for Press Release FINAL2.pdf](https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2020-10/FY20%20CRISI%20Project%20Listing%20for%20Press%20Release%20FINAL2.pdf).

⁹ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b94318eb3bcc4f2d968d85156379a949>.

- » In 2021, Savage, a large rail operator and logistics servicer, entered into agreement with Union Pacific to construct the State's first intermodal rail terminal in Pocatello. The terminal, currently in operation, provides local shippers, especially agricultural producers prevalent in the area, with increased access to West Coast ports including Tacoma and Seattle.¹⁰ In 2024, Savage announced that expanded operations at the intermodal terminal, including plans for a new transload terminal, and railcar repair services.¹¹
- » In relation to passenger rail service, Amtrak debuted new locomotives in 2022 to replace its aging stock which have been in service since the 1990s. The locomotives, which are being implemented through 2024, are able to reach speeds of 125 miles per hour, with nearly 95 percent less emissions compared to their predecessors. Known as Amtrak Long Distance Charger (ALC)-42 locomotives, the new engines are set to be deployed along the Empire Builder passenger service which passes through Idaho.¹²
- » In 2024, BNSF Railway assumed operation of the Montana Rail Link. The Montana Rail Link operated for 36 years through a deal with Burlington Northern, the predecessor to BNSF (through the merging of Burlington Northern Railway and the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway). The original deal was made with Dennis Washington, an industrialist who would establish the Montana Rail Link to operate the railroad along Burlington Northern's trackage through a lease of 60 years. The lease ended 24 years early following an approximately \$2 billion buyout offer from BNSF. The buyout of Montana Rail Link operations gives BNSF additional access to customers in Idaho's panhandle and across much of western Montana.¹³
- » In July 2025, Union Pacific agreed to acquire Norfolk Southern in an \$85 billion deal. If approved, the merger would be the largest buyout ever recorded in the freight rail sector and would create the first coast-to-coast railroad in the United States. The deal is required to be approved by the STB subject to Major Rail Consolidation Procedures which detail key criteria that would have to be met.¹⁴

¹⁰ Savage and Union Pacific Collaborating to Build and Operate Idaho's First Intermodal Rail Terminal in Pocatello, <https://savageco.com/press-release/savage-union-pacific-intermodal-rail-terminal-pocatello-idaho/>.

¹¹ Savage Adds Transload And Railcar Repair Services In Pocatello With Acquisition Of Idaho Rail Shop, <https://www.potatogrower.com/2024/03/savage-adds-transload-and-railcar>.

¹² ALC-42s Taking Charge, <https://railfan.com/alc-42s-taking-charge/>.

¹³ BNSF Railway Takes Control of Montana Rail Link, <https://railfan.com/bnsf-railway-takes-control-of-montana-rail-link/>.

¹⁴ Major Rail Consolidation Procedures, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2001/06/15/01-14984/major-rail-consolidation-procedures>.

2.0 Idaho's Existing Rail Infrastructure

This Chapter provides an extensive overview of Idaho's existing rail system. This includes a geographic and physical overview of the State's freight and passenger rail systems, including supporting facilities, as well as tourism rail services and inactive lines.

2.1 Idaho's Freight Rail System

This section introduces the eleven freight railroads and intermodal facilities that comprise the freight rail system in Idaho. This includes two Class I railroads, and nine Class III railroads. The freight railroad inventory also includes trackage owned by the United States Government and the City of Mountain Home. These railroads are visualized in Figure 2.1 and summarized in Table 2.1. In total, the Idaho freight rail network consists of 1,828 miles.

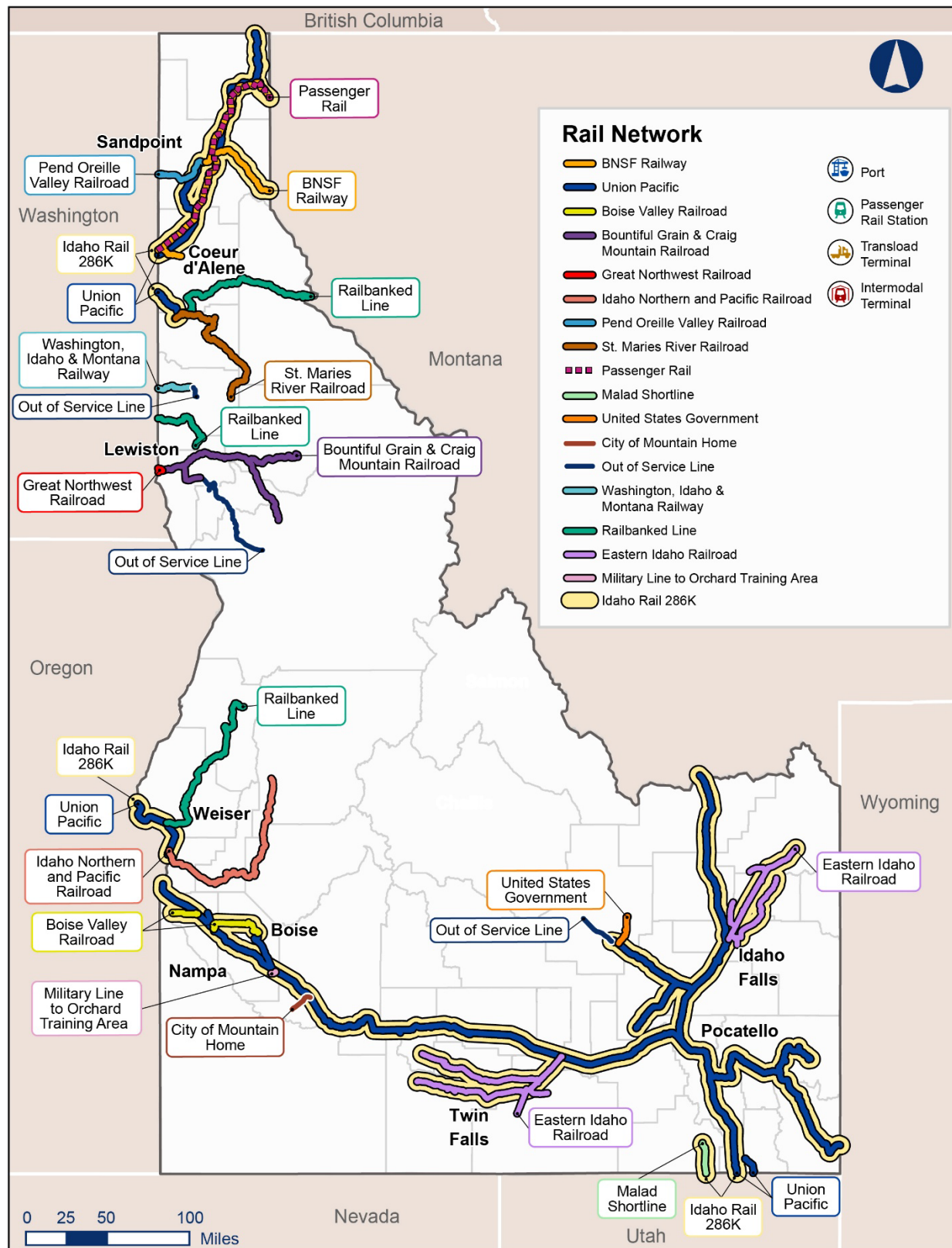
The majority of the active railroad tracks in Idaho are owned by major US railroad operators, or Class I Railroads.¹⁵ In the U.S. there are six Class I railroads, two of which primarily operate east of the Mississippi River and two west of the Mississippi, along with two that operate primarily on a north-south axis between the Great Lakes and the Gulf Coast. In Idaho, there are two Class I railroads that operate in Idaho: Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF Railway.

Class III railroads, often referred to as short lines, are railroads with annual operating revenues of less than \$48.2 million, as designated by the STB.¹⁶ These railroads primarily offer line-haul services and serve as crucial links between smaller communities and the larger Class I network, providing essential connectivity to freight-generating facilities, especially in rural areas. In Idaho, there are nine Class III railroads.

¹⁵ The STB defines Class I railroads as carriers with an operating revenue over \$1.07 billion Revenue Deflators for Railroads, <https://www.stb.gov/reports-data/economic-data/>.

¹⁶ STB, Revenue Deflators for Railroads, <https://www.stb.gov/reports-data/economic-data/>.

Figure 2.1 Idaho's Rail Network



Source: ITD, Idaho Freight Railroads, Amtrak.

Table 2.1 Idaho Freight Railroads

Class #	Railroad Name	Alpha Code	Parent Company	Mileage	% of Total
Class I	BNSF Railway	BNSF	Berkshire Hathaway, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, LLC	148	8%
	Union Pacific Railroad	UPRR	Union Pacific Corporation	873	48%
Class III	Boise Valley Railroad	BVRR	Watco Companies LLC	71	4%
	Bountiful Grain & Craig Mountain Railroad	BGCM	Midwest Pacific Rail Net & Logistics of Kansas City	126	7%
	City of Mountain Home	–	City of Mountain Home	7	< 1%
	Eastern Idaho Railroad	EIRR	Watco Companies LLC	365	20%
	Great Northwest Railroad	GRNW	Watco Companies LLC	4	< 1%
	Idaho Northern and Pacific Railroad	INPR	Rio Grande Pacific Corporation (RGPC)	101	6%
	Malad Shortline	–	Hess Pumice Products, Inc.	2	< 1%
	Pend Oreille Valley Railroad	POVA	Port of Pend Orielle	25	1%
	St. Maries River Railroad	STMA	Potlatch Corp	71	4%
	United States Government	–	United States Government	14	1%
	Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway	–	Bennett Lumber Products Inc.	21	1%
Total	–	–	–	1,828	100%

Source: ITD, Idaho Freight Railroads, Amtrak.

2.1.1 Rail Ownership and Operations

The following subsections provide an inventory of Idaho's freight rail ownership and operations, including:

- » Geographic extent of each railroad's area of operations or operating rights.
- » Maximum Gross Weight on Rail (GWR) of a railcar allowed along the railroad. Along the North American rail network, 286,000 pounds is the generally accepted standard (referred to as the 286k standard in this plan) for GWR. The purpose of this standard is to maintain a consistent level of track quality and allow for ease of interchanging traffic across main lines and high-traffic railroads.¹⁷
- » Brief history of the railroad.
- » Primary types of commodities hauled.

¹⁷ Transportation Research Forum, Introduction of Heavy Axle Loads by the North American Rail Industry, https://trforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2013v52n2_06_HeavyAxleLoads.pdf.

- » Interchanges with other railroads.
- » Double stack clearance—referring to the ability of a railroad to accommodate two layers of intermodal containers.
- » Mileage of the railroad by ownership, operation, and FRA track class, when available. The track class of a railroad or rail segment is an additional indicator of track quality and refers to the maximum speed limits allowed for freight and passenger trains.¹⁸ Track class speed standards are shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 FRA Track Class Corresponding Maximum Speed Limits in Miles Per Hour (mph)

Track Class	Freight	Passenger
Excepted	10 mph	Not Allowed
1	10 mph	15 mph
2	25 mph	30 mph
3	40 mph	60 mph
4	60 mph	80 mph
5	80 mph	90 mph
6	110 mph	110 mph
7	125 mph	125 mph
8	160 mph	160 mph
9	200 mph	200 mph

Source: FRA.

Union Pacific Railroad

Union Pacific Railroad (UP) ranks as the largest railroad in Idaho and the second-largest Class I railroad in the U.S., operating a vast network that stretches 32,000 miles across 23 states in the western two-thirds of the country.¹⁹ Established in 1862 through the Pacific Railway Act, Union Pacific has evolved significantly over the years through a series of mergers, including with the Missouri Pacific, Chicago and Northwestern, Western Pacific, Missouri-Kansas-Texas, and Southern Pacific railroads.²⁰ Union Pacific-related rail traffic first arrived in Idaho in 1874 from Utah to serve farming activities in the Cache Valley. In 1878, the Utah & Northern Railway Company was established and taken over by Union Pacific. The line was extended twice, initially to Blackfoot, Idaho and then to Butte, Montana by 1881.

In Idaho, Union Pacific is the largest railroad operator, with 873 miles of track under its control. Union Pacific also holds trackage rights over multiple additional rail lines in the State, giving it an expansive operating presence. The network is divided into two major sections—one in northern Idaho and one in the south—separated by the rugged central geography between the Salmon River and the Wood

¹⁸ 49 CFR § 213.9, 49 CFR § 213.307.

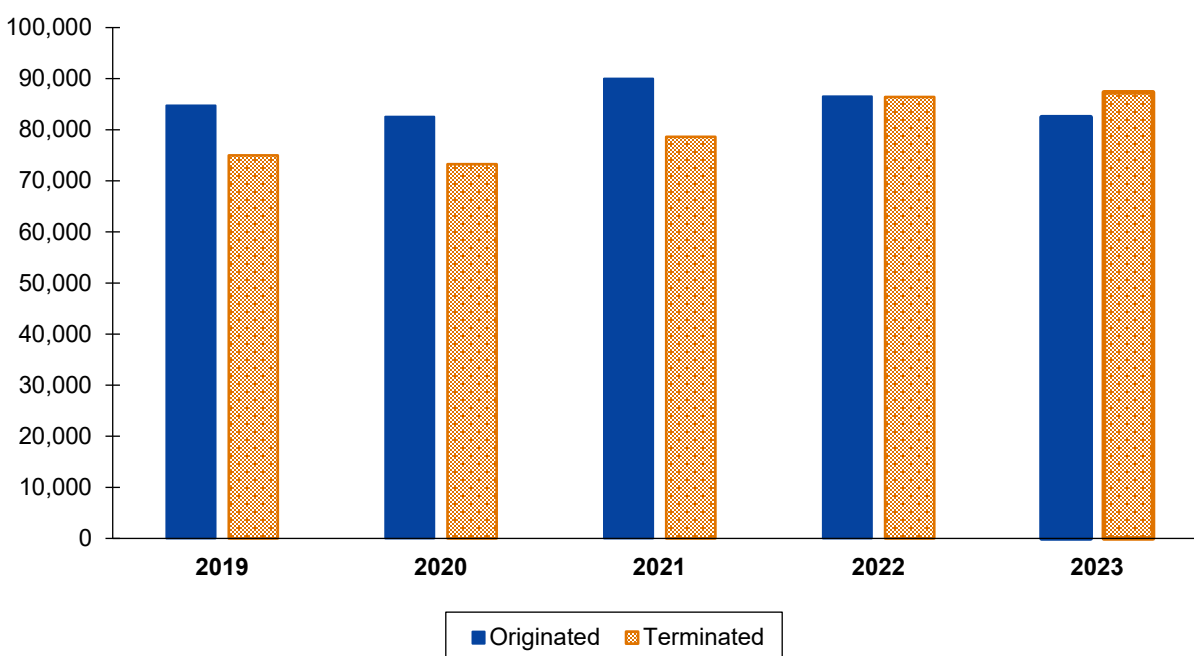
¹⁹ https://www.up.com/cs/groups/public/@uprr/@corprel/documents/up_pdf_natedocs/pdf_idaho_usguide.pdf.

²⁰ Union Pacific, Company Overview, https://www.up.com/aboutup/corporate_info/uprover/index.htm.

River Valley, where no railroad has historically operated. In 2023, Union Pacific reported approximately 82,000 originating carloads and 87,000 terminating carloads in Idaho. The combined total represents an increase from 2019, as shown in Figure 2.2.²¹ Rail mileage metrics for Union Pacific are shown in Figure 2.2.

In 2023, the top commodity by volume shipped and received on Union Pacific trains in Idaho was fertilizer. Other high-volume commodities included food products (dry goods, perishables, and beverages) and industrial goods such as lumber and building materials. Additional top commodities transported via Union Pacific include agricultural inputs and sulfur.²² More information on commodities shipped on Idaho's rail system can be found in Chapter 3.

Figure 2.2 Union Pacific Railcars Originated and Terminated in Idaho (2019–2023)



Source: Union Pacific.

Table 2.3 UP Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
873	873	N/A	1,520	Generally Class 3 or 4 for major larger subdivisions Class 1 or 2 for smaller subdivisions

Source: Union Pacific supplemented with information from 2013 Idaho Statewide Rail Plan.

²¹ Union Pacific, Idaho Profile, https://www.up.com/cs/groups/public/@uprr/@corprel/documents/up_pdf_natedocs/pdf_idaho_usguide.pdf.

²² Union Pacific, Idaho Profile, supplemented with insight from Union Pacific interviews. https://www.up.com/cs/groups/public/@uprr/@corprel/documents/up_pdf_natedocs/pdf_idaho_usguide.pdf.

In July 2025, Union Pacific agreed to acquire Norfolk Southern in an \$85 billion deal. If approved, the merger would be the largest buyout ever recorded in the freight rail sector and would create the first coast-to-coast railroad in the United States. The deal would still have to be approved by the STB subject to Major Rail Consolidation Procedures which detail key criteria that would have to be met.²³ This and other potential rail mergers are discussed further in Chapter 3.

Union Pacific's Network in Southern Idaho

In southern Idaho, two primary through routes cross the State. The first, known as the Northwest Corridor, is a key artery to the Pacific Northwest that carries significant volumes of transcontinental traffic along the Snake River. This corridor provides direct connections to the Port of Portland and major ports in western Washington via the Columbia River Gorge. To the east, it links with Union Pacific's Overland Route in Wyoming, offering direct access to major inland markets including Omaha, Kansas City, and Chicago.

Within Idaho, the Northwest Corridor consists of the Huntington, Nampa, and Pocatello Subdivisions, all of which are equipped with automated train stop (ATS) signal control systems. The Huntington Subdivision features a double-track main line running through a busy industrial and agricultural corridor between junctions with the Boise Valley Railroad (BVRP) at Caldwell and Nampa. The Nampa Subdivision includes a second segment of double track between the Treasure Valley and Magic Valley, while the Pocatello Subdivision has a third double-track stretch in the Portneuf River Valley at a busy junction with the Ogden and Montana Subdivisions. While passing sidings are located along the corridor, many are not long enough to accommodate today's longer single-unit trains. In addition, rail operations face challenges navigating the grade changes and narrow canyon terrain of southeastern Idaho, including a tight switchback at Lava Hot Springs.

At 438 miles, the Northwest Corridor is Idaho's busiest rail line. It carries double-stack container traffic, much of it bound for West Coast ports and foreign markets or eastward toward Chicago and major domestic distribution hubs. Historically, containers have not been loaded or unloaded on Union Pacific's system within Idaho. However, the completion of the Savage Railport in Pocatello—located at the junction of Union Pacific's busiest statewide subdivisions—positions the State to potentially capture growth in containerized traffic and begin handling intermodal loads locally. According to Union Pacific, the three subdivisions together host an average of seven intermodal trains per day out of roughly 20 total daily trains, meaning intermodal traffic accounts for about 35 percent of corridor movements. Manifest trains remain more frequent than intermodal service.

The Northwest Corridor is also supported by a network of feeder lines that serve Idaho's agricultural economy. These lines carry key commodities such as potatoes, sugar beets, onions, beans, grain, fertilizer, phosphate, and forest products. Pocatello and Nampa function as major Union Pacific hubs, supporting branch line operations and crew changes. While each subdivision typically sees one local train per day, the Huntington Subdivision and its BVRP connections in the Treasure Valley generate somewhat higher volumes of local activity. On average, the Huntington and Nampa Subdivisions each carry 20 trains per day, while the Pocatello Subdivision carries 19 trains per day.

²³ Federal Register, Major Rail Consolidation Procedures, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2001/06/15/01-14984/major-rail-consolidation-procedures>.

The second through route in southern Idaho is formed by the Montana and Ogden Subdivisions, creating a north-south corridor that runs between the Montana and Utah state lines. The Montana Subdivision extends north to Silver Bow, near Butte, Montana, while the Ogden Subdivision continues south to Ogden and Salt Lake City, providing access to California ports and markets as well as Union Pacific's major east-west corridors. These subdivisions intersect with the Northwest Corridor at Pocatello, linking north-south and east-west operations. Both subdivisions operate with older signal systems, using automated block signaling (ABS) south of Idaho Falls and track warrant control (TWC) north of Idaho Falls. Daily traffic is relatively light compared to the Northwest Corridor, with three to four trains on average. Most traffic on the Montana Subdivision north of Pocatello is local, with two daily trains connecting to the EIRR at Idaho Falls. The EIRR's 110-mile network serves the agribusiness industry north and east of Idaho Falls, funneling all locally generated traffic onto the Union Pacific Montana Subdivision. South of Pocatello, the Ogden Subdivision primarily carries manifest mixed-order trains between the Salt Lake Valley in Utah and Idaho. A summary of Union Pacific's subdivisions in southern Idaho is provided in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4 Union Pacific Subdivisions in Southern Idaho

Subdivision	Idaho Mileage	Terminus	Terminus	Key Commodities
Aberdeen	28.3	Rockford–Scoville Subdivision	Aberdeen	Agricultural Products
Boise Cut-Off	11.3	Orchard	Boise–BVRR	Potatoes, Lumber, Fertilizer, and Fuels
Cache Valley	8.3	Preston	ID-UT State Line	Agricultural Products
Dry Valley	26.5	Soda Springs–Montana Subdivision	Dry Valley	Phosphate
Northwest Corridor–Huntington	71.7	ID-OR State Line	Nampa	Treasure Valley Industries, Agribusinesses
Idaho Northern Industrial Lead	5.8	Nampa–Northwest Corridor	Middleton	Services Sunroc Ready Mix concrete facility
Malad	11.7	Malad City	ID-UT State Line	Agricultural Products, Metal Products
Montana	131.6	Pocatello–Northwest Corridor	ID-MT State Line	Agricultural Products
Northwest Corridor–Nampa	238.6	Nampa	Pocatello	Snake River Plains Industries, Agribusinesses
Ogden	48.9	McCammon–Northwest Corridor	ID-UT State Line	Mixed Products, Agricultural Products
Northwest Corridor–Pocatello	124.3	Pocatello	ID-WY State Line	Agribusinesses, Phosphate
Scoville	31.3	Blackfoot–Montana Subdivision	Idaho National Laboratory–Radioactive Waste Management Complex	Nuclear Products

Source: Union Pacific.

In addition to those subdivisions comprising the Northwest Corridor, there are eight smaller subdivisions operated by Union Pacific in southern Idaho. None of these lines, with the exception of the Dry Valley

Subdivision in southeast Idaho, carry more than one train per day, and all are single-tracked and operating under non-signalized traffic control. The Dry Valley Subdivision travels into the mountains northeast of Soda Springs to service phosphate mining sites and mills. Other lines include the Cache Valley Subdivision, which terminates in Preston. The line proceeds south into Utah, through the city of Logan, and connects to the Union Pacific Ogden Subdivision at Cache, following the Bear River around the northern promontory of the Wasatch Mountains. A parallel line on the west side of the Ogden Subdivision—the Malad Subdivision—links the farming and metals manufacturing community of Malad City to the Union Pacific main line farther south at Brigham City via the Malad Shortline. The Boise Cut-Off, part of the former Boise Subdivision, connects the Northwest Corridor to the BVRR to the southeast of Boise.

The Union Pacific Scoville Subdivision serves the Idaho National Laboratory (INL) Radioactive Waste Management Complex, a government research center and nuclear waste storage site northwest of Idaho Falls. The tracks entering the INL facility are owned by the Federal government, but Union Pacific has trackage rights. A feeder line for the Scoville Subdivision is the Aberdeen Subdivision, which serves agribusinesses on the northeastern shore of the American Falls Reservoir. The Idaho Northern Industrial Lead Subdivision provides freight rail service and primarily aggregate to the Sunroc Ready Mix concrete facility in Caldwell along with other industries. The line connects the plant with Union Pacific's major rail yard in Nampa.

Union Pacific's Network in Northern Idaho

In northern Idaho, Union Pacific's Spokane Subdivision enters the State at Post Falls after running east from Spokane, Washington. The line parallels the BNSF Great Northern Corridor, crossing beneath it at Athol and again at-grade in Sandpoint, with an additional at-grade crossing north of Naples. Southwest of Sandpoint, the BNSF corridor follows the former NP transcontinental alignment, while northeast of the city it generally follows the Great Northern Railway's historical line.

The Spokane Subdivision connects with both the BNSF Great Northern line and BNSF's Montana Rail Link at Sandpoint, where geography and operational factors create challenges for train operators. A second connection between the Union Pacific and BNSF routes occurs northeast of Sandpoint at Bonners Ferry. Less than 10 miles from the Montana border, the Union Pacific line diverges from BNSF and continues north for 20 miles to the international port of entry at Eastport, Idaho, and Kingsgate, British Columbia. Sidings on both sides of the border facilitate interchanges with the Canadian Pacific Kansas City Limited's (CPKC) Kingsgate Subdivision, which links to Canada's original transcontinental line at Cranbrook and provides connections to Vancouver, British Columbia, and the St. Lawrence Seaway.

The Spokane Subdivision averages eight trains per day, making it the fourth busiest Union Pacific line in Idaho. Approximately half of these are manifest trains; three carry bulk materials, and one handles local traffic. Portions of the line are single-tracked with a non-signal-based traffic control system, factors that limit operational capacity.

In addition to the Spokane Subdivision, Union Pacific operates the Wallace Subdivision which connects the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation and the St. Maries River Railroad (STMA). The STMA and, by extension, the Union Pacific Wallace line mostly handle finished and raw timber products. Previously, Union Pacific operated the Coeur d'Alene Subdivision which connected the northern Idaho city to the Spokane Subdivision. Most of the trackage comprising this subdivision was abandoned in the 2000s. As

of 2025, approximately two miles of trackage remains, with Union Pacific primarily using this trackage for railcar storage. A summary of Union Pacific's northern Idaho subdivisions is provided in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5 Union Pacific Subdivisions in Northern Idaho

Subdivision	Idaho Mileage	Terminus	Terminus	Key Commodities
Spokane	121.2	ID-WA State Line	USA–Canada Border	Timber, Bulk Materials
Wallace	15.1	ID-WA State Line	Plummer	Timber

Source: Union Pacific.

Except for the Cache Valley Subdivision, Boise Cut-Off, and trackage along the former Coeur d'Alene Subdivision, Union Pacific's rail network in Idaho is rated to handle a minimum weight of 286,000 pounds per railcar. The Northwest Corridor and its associated subdivisions are rated for 315,000 pounds, accommodating heavier freight and higher-capacity trains.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad

With a rail network spanning 32,500 miles across 28 states, BNSF Railway is the largest Class I railroad in the United States.²⁴ The railroad was formed in 1996 through the merger of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway and the Burlington Northern Railroad, and is currently owned by Berkshire Hathaway. In Idaho, BNSF's operations are concentrated in the panhandle. In 2023, the railroad reported 10,887 originating carloads and 6,650 terminating carloads within the State. Key facilities in Idaho include a refueling station at Hauser, which services 32 trains daily with fuel, traction sand, and lube oil, and a major classification yard at Sandpoint that supports operational and freight handling needs.²⁵

The BNSF Great Northern Corridor, following the alignment of the former Northern Pacific Railroad transcontinental line, is BNSF's primary route through Idaho. This corridor is a critical freight artery, connecting major Pacific Northwest ports with nearly all major markets in the Midwest and points south. Within Idaho, the Great Northern Corridor spans 101.1 miles between the State line and Bonners Ferry, roughly parallel to Union Pacific's Spokane Subdivision. About half of the line is double-tracked and includes seven passing sidings. Much of the corridor is rated Class 4, allowing freight trains to operate at up to 60 mph and Amtrak passenger trains at up to 79 mph. Several grade-separated crossings exist, including two with the UP Spokane Subdivision, and the corridor is equipped with centralized traffic control (CTC) signaling.

The line's infrastructure and geography support an average of 48 trains per day southwest of Sandpoint, making it the busiest rail corridor in Idaho. Northeast of Sandpoint, the corridor is not certified for large dimensional shipments due to clearance limitations in Montana. While BNSF allows double-stacked trains along the entire corridor, some oversized shipments between Sandpoint and Whitefish, MT, are restricted.

BNSF's network in Idaho has expanded since the previous Statewide Rail Plan in 2013. In 2024, BNSF assumed ownership and operations of the Montana Rail Link, adding approximately 937 miles of trackage between Spokane, Washington, and Huntley, Montana, near Billings. Within Idaho, this expansion

²⁴ <https://bnsfnorthwest.com/idaho/>.

²⁵ BNSF Railway, BNSF in Idaho supplemented with insight from BNSF interviews. <https://bnsfnorthwest.com/idaho/>.

includes 34 miles of additional track from Sandpoint east to Colby, while also providing BNSF with enhanced access to key Montana markets. According to BNSF, the integration improves operational efficiency, increases capacity, and supports regional freight growth, particularly for petroleum, mining, and other key industries. A summary of BNSF's subdivisions in northern Idaho is provided in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6 BNSF Subdivisions in Idaho

Subdivision	Idaho Mileage	Terminus	Terminus	Key Commodities
Coeur d'Alene Subdivision	8.4	Hauser–Great Northern Corridor	Coeur d'Alene	Timber, Agricultural Products, Petroleum Products, Fertilizer
Great Northern Corridor	101.1	ID-WA State Line	ID-MT State Line	Fertilizer, Lumber, Wheat & Flour, Grain, Dry Goods, Coal
Montana Rail Link Subdivision	34	Sandpoint	ID-MT State Line	Grain, Mixed Freight, Coal, Oil
Newport Subdivision	4.5	Sandpoint	Dover	Lumber

Source: BNSF.

With the exception of the Newport Subdivision, BNSF's Idaho network is rated for a minimum weight of 286,000 pounds per railcar. The primary commodities transported through Idaho include fertilizer, wheat and flour, grain, dry goods, and coal. Rail mileage metrics for BNSF are shown in Table 2.7.

Table 2.7 BNSF Railroad Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
148	148	N/A	458	Class 3 / 4

Source: BNSF Railway supplemented with information from 2013 Idaho Statewide Rail Plan.

BNSF operates two additional rail lines in Idaho that support its transcontinental service. The Newport Subdivision, 4.5 miles long, connects to the Great Northern Corridor, the Montana Rail Link Subdivision, and the Pend Oreille Valley Railroad (POVA), a short line serving Sandpoint to Meteline Falls, Washington. The Coeur d'Alene Subdivision links Coeur d'Alene to the Spokane area via the Kootenai River line. Both of these subdivisions see relatively low traffic, averaging fewer than one train per day.

Boise Valley Railroad

The BVRR is a 71-mile Class III railroad operating within the Caldwell–Nampa–Meridian–Boise corridor of the Treasure Valley.²⁶ Watco began operations on two main lines—the Wilder Branch and the Boise Cut-off—in November 2009, following their purchase from Union Pacific. The Wilder Branch is an 11-mile route linking Wilder and Caldwell, while the 25-mile Boise Cut-off runs between Nampa and Boise, including additional trackage serving industrial areas near Boise Airport and paralleling I-84. The BVRR connects these lines through trackage rights on Union Pacific's Huntington and Nampa Subdivisions, part of the Northwest Corridor. As of 2015, BVRR served approximately 60 customers, and it primarily

²⁶ <https://www.watco.com/service/rail/boise-valley-railroad-bvrr/>.

transports commodities such as potatoes, lumber, fertilizer, and fuels.^{27,28} Rail mileage metrics for the BVRR are shown in Table 2.8.

Table 2.8 BVRR Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
71	80	N/A	9	Class 2

Source: BVRR.

Bountiful Grain and Craig Mountain Railroad

The Bountiful Grain and Craig Mountain Railroad (BGCM) is a Class III short-line railroad in north-central Idaho, owned by Midwest Rail Net & Logistics.²⁹ It operates on portions of the former Camas Prairie Railroad's Second Subdivision east of the Great Northwest Railroad (GRNW) connection at Spalding, near Lewiston. The BGCM began service in December 2002 after acquiring track from Camas Prairie RailNet. The railroad extended its operations in 2005 via a leased line from GRNW, giving it access from Spalding eastward through Kooskia and toward Orofino. The line originally extended to Cottonwood, with the northern segment toward Grangeville abandoned and removed by the early 2000s.³⁰

BGCM's role is closely tied to its operations with the Port of Lewiston, although the GRNW operates service directly in the port. The BGCM also operates 126.6 miles of track across two lines—a 51-mile line from Spalding to Cottonwood, partially following Lapwai Creek, and a 75.5-mile line along the Clearwater River from Kooskia to Lewiston. The Clearwater River line collects cargo from the Cottonwood line and interchanges with the GNRR. Service on the Cottonwood line is minimal, with no service beyond Culdesac. The BGCM primarily transports agricultural and timber commodities.³¹ Rail mileage metrics for the BGCM are shown in Table 2.9.

Table 2.9 BCGM Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
126	126	N/A	N/A	Class 2

Source: BCGM.

²⁷ Idaho Business Review, Freight rail could become a big player in Boise, <https://idahobusinessreview.com/2015/08/25/freight-rail-could-become-a-big-player-in-boise/>.

²⁸ Watco, Boise Valley Railroad, <https://www.watco.com/service/rail/boise-valley-railroad-bvrr/>.

²⁹ <https://midwestpacificrr.com/bountiful-grain-craig-mountain.html>.

³⁰ Railroadfan Wiki, BGCM, https://railroadfan.com/wiki/index.php/Bountiful_Grain_%26_Craig_Mountain_Railroad.

³¹ Midwest Pacific Rail Net & Logistics, Bountiful Grain and Craig Mountain, <https://midwestpacificrr.com/bountiful-grain-craig-mountain.html>.

City of Mountain Home

The City of Mountain Home acquired 6.39 miles of railroad main and 0.55 miles of siding from the United States Air Force to develop an approximately 400-acre industrial park along with a private investor.³² As of 2025, the project remains in the conceptual phase, with long-term plans to invest in infrastructure upgrades at this site to ensure the railway meets Union Pacific standards.³³ Rail mileage metrics for the City of Mountain Home are shown in Table 2.10.

Table 2.10 City of Mountain Home Railroad Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
7	N/A	N/A	N/A	Unknown

Source: City of Mountain Home, Idaho Commerce.

Eastern Idaho Railroad

The EIRR is a 365-mile Class III railroad and a subsidiary of Watco Companies Incorporated.³⁴ Its system is organized into two major track clusters in southeastern and south-central Idaho, with interchanges to Union Pacific's Northwest Corridor at Minidoka and Idaho Falls. The southeastern cluster spans 116 miles, running from Idaho Falls to Ashton and including branch lines to Lincoln, Newdale, Ammon, Menan, and Edmonds. These lines were originally built by the St. Anthony Railroad and later extended by the Yellowstone Park Railway before being acquired by the Oregon Short Line Railroad in 1910. The south-central cluster covers 154 miles, extending from Minidoka to Buhl with branches to Wendell, Burley, and Delco. This portion of the network originated with the Minidoka & Southwestern Railroad, was later expanded by the Oregon Short Line Railroad, and was eventually sold to Watco by Union Pacific in 1993. EIRR's traffic is dominated by agricultural commodities, particularly potatoes and grains. Portions of the network support the 286,000-pound weight standard.³⁵ Rail mileage metrics for the EIRR are shown in Table 2.11.

Table 2.11 EIRR Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
365	365	N/A	N/A	Class 1 / 2

Source: EIRR.

³² <https://mountain-home.us/departments/community-development/industrial-park-rail/>.

³³ Idaho Commerce, Mountain Home, Idaho Opportunity Zone, https://commerce.idaho.gov/content/uploads/2019/03/OZ_Mtn-Home.pdf.

³⁴ <https://www.watco.com/service/rail/eastern-idaho-railroad-eirr/>.

³⁵ Watco, Eastern Idaho Railroad, <https://www.watco.com/service/rail/eastern-idaho-railroad-eirr/>.

Great Northwest Railroad

The GRNW is a 103-mile Class III short line serving Lewiston, Idaho, and southeast Washington.³⁶ Approximately 4 miles of its track are located in Idaho, primarily yard trackage at the Port of Lewiston, with the balance extending west into Washington. The line operated as the Camas Prairie Railroad until 1998, and then as Camas Prairie Railnet, before being acquired by Watco in 2004 and renamed the GRNW. Today, the railroad runs from Lewiston to Riparia, Washington, where it interchanges with both BNSF Railway and Union Pacific at Ayer. GRNW previously controlled the BGCM lines east of Lewiston, but in 2005 sold the 75-mile Kooskia Branch to BGCM. In addition to providing terminal and switching services at the Port of Lewiston, the railroad offers essential connectivity to the national rail network for both the port and BGCM. GRNW operates at the 286,000-pound weight standard, and its traffic base consists largely of forest products, agricultural commodities, industrial and paper-industry chemicals, fertilizer, scrap iron, and frozen vegetables.³⁷ Rail mileage metrics for the GRNW are shown in Table 2.12.

Table 2.12 GRNW Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
4.3	4.3	0	0	Excepted: 3.5 Class 1: 0.8

Source: GRNW.

Idaho Northern and Pacific Railroad

The INPR is a 120-mile Class III short line operating on former Union Pacific branch lines in southwestern Idaho and eastern Oregon.³⁸ A subsidiary of Rio Grande Pacific Corporation, the railroad was established in 1993 when Rio Grande Pacific acquired the lines from Union Pacific. The routes had originally been constructed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company and the Idaho Northern Railway. Union Pacific later consolidated and abandoned portions of the network before selling the remaining lines to the INPR. From 1999 to 2009, the INPR also leased and operated Union Pacific's Boise Branch and Wilder Branch, until those operations were transferred to the BVRR.

The INPR interchanges with Union Pacific at La Grande, OR, via the Elgin Subdivision, and at Payette, ID, via the Payette Subdivision. The system consists of two main subdivisions—the 21.5-mile Elgin Subdivision between La Grande and Elgin, OR, and the 101-mile Payette Subdivision, which runs from Payette through Emmett to Cascade, ID. Freight service north of Emmett ended in 2001, though the line continues to serve customers farther south. INPR's traffic base includes forest products, agricultural commodities, and chemicals.³⁹ Rail mileage metrics for the INPR are shown in Table 2.13.

³⁶ <https://www.watco.com/service/rail/great-northwest-railroad-grnw/>.

³⁷ Watco, GRNW, <https://www.watco.com/service/rail/great-northwest-railroad-grnw/>.

³⁸ <https://rgpc.com/railroads/idaho-northern-pacific>.

³⁹ Rio Grande Pacific, INPR, <https://rgpc.com/railroads/idaho-northern-pacific>.

Table 2.13 INPR Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
120	120	N/A	N/A	Class 1 / 2

Source: INPR.

Malad Shortline

The Malad Shortline is a 1.68-mile Class III railroad operated and maintained by Hess Pumice in Malad City on track leased from Union Pacific.⁴⁰ Built to the 286,000-pound weight standard, the short line was formed in the early 2000s after Union Pacific discontinued direct service to Malad City. At the time operations began, track conditions were poor, and the new operator-initiated rehabilitation efforts to restore service.

Today, the Malad Shortline primarily handles refined pumice products for Hess Pumice, while also serving approximately seven year-round customers and several additional seasonal shippers. The railroad interchanges with Union Pacific south of Malad City, with Union Pacific providing service to the interchange three days per week. To maintain safe and reliable operations, the Malad Shortline undertakes ongoing track maintenance and looks to replace at least 300 ties annually as part of its upkeep program.⁴¹ Rail mileage metrics for the Malad Shortline are shown in Table 2.14.

Table 2.14 Malad Shortline Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
0	1.68	1.68	N/A	Unknown

Source: Hess Pumice.

⁴⁰ <https://hesspumice.com/about-hessPumice.html>.

⁴¹ Hess Pumice Interview.

Pend Oreille Valley Railroad

The POVA is a 41-mile Class III railroad serving northern Idaho and eastern Washington.⁴² In Idaho, the POVA operates 25 miles of track between Dover and the Idaho–Washington state line before continuing west to the Port of Pend Oreille in Usk, Wa. The line was originally constructed by the Idaho and Washington Northern Railroad between 1909 and 1911 to transport timber and other raw materials. In 1916, it was purchased by the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad (Milwaukee Road), which operated it until ceasing service in 1979. To preserve rail access for local mills, Pend Oreille County residents voted to create the Port of Pend Oreille, which leased the line to Kyle Railways before assuming operations directly in October 1984. In 1998, the Port expanded into Idaho by leasing 24 miles of track from BNSF, extending service to Dover and establishing a direct connection with BNSF at Sandpoint.

As of 2025, POVA operates three days per week, serving customers such as Bell Pole (Oldtown), Tri-Pro Cedar Products, Dyno Nobel, Mountain West Bark (Albeni Falls), Stimson Lumber (Priest River), and Idaho Forest Products (Laclede). The POVA also has trackage rights on 4 miles of Union Pacific track and uses BNSF's yard in Sandpoint to interchange freight. Outbound cars are delivered to BNSF for long-haul transport, while inbound traffic is returned to POVA for local delivery. Although POVA directly interchanges only with BNSF, it can handle Union Pacific cars when required to meet customer needs.⁴³ Rail mileage metrics for the POVA are shown in Table 2.15.

Table 2.15 POVA Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
1	25	24	4	Class 2: 25

Source: POVA.

St. Maries River Railroad

The STMA is a 71-mile Class III short line in northern Idaho that began operations on May 23, 1980, over former Milwaukee Road trackage.⁴⁴ The railroad operates between Plummer and St. Maries on the Milwaukee's former Pacific Northwest main line, as well as on the Elk River Branch extending to Bovill, Idaho. The STMA interchanges with Union Pacific at Plummer.

From its inception until 2010, STMA was owned by Potlatch Corporation. In its early years, Potlatch also operated 45 miles of adjacent Milwaukee Road trackage between St. Maries and Avery as a logging railroad, though that line was condemned by the FRA and shut down in the mid-1980s. In its place today is portions of the St. Joe River Road Scenic Byway and the Old Milwaukee Road Rail Trail.⁴⁵ In 2010, Potlatch sold the STMA to Midwest Pacific Rail Net & Logistics (a Williams Group holding company that also owns the BGCM and other short lines). The Bovill segment is no longer in service, as the connecting Washington and Idaho Railway line between Bovill and Harvard has been abandoned. The STMA primary

⁴² <https://povarr.com/about/>.

⁴³ POVA, [Freight Services](#), supplemented with information from POVA interviews.

⁴⁴ <https://midwestpacificrr.com/st-maries.html>.

⁴⁵ <https://freestateamerica.blog/biking-the-milwaukee-road-along-the-st-joe-river/>.

hauls lumber shipments and also provides railcar storage services.⁴⁶ Rail mileage metrics for the STMA are shown in Table 2.16.

Table 2.16 STMA Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
71	71	0	0	Unknown

Source: STMA.

United States Government

The U.S. Federal Government owns roughly 14 miles of rail track within the high-security boundaries of the INL. These tracks are part of Union Pacific's Scoville Subdivision, over which the Class I railroad has trackage rights. INL is the nation's leading center for nuclear energy research and development, supporting a wide range of energy innovation and national security programs.⁴⁷ Rail mileage metrics for the U.S. Federal government in Idaho are shown in Table 2.17.

Table 2.17 United States Government Rail in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
14	14	0	0	Unknown

Source: United States Government.

Washington, Idaho, and Montana Railway

The Washington, Idaho, and Montana Railway (WI&M) is a newly formed 21-mile Class III railroad operating between Princeton and the Idaho—Washington border.⁴⁸ The original WI&M began operations in 1905 operating Northern Pacific in Palouse, WA to Bovill where it met the larger Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific Railroad (Milwaukee Road). In 1962, the WI&M became a subsidiary of the Milwaukee Rail, and subsequently part of the Burlington Northern before being spun off as a short line in the 1990s. The previous operator, the Washington & Idaho, last ran on the route in 2018.

The current WI&M was established in 2021 and operates as a limited liability company (LLC) over tracks owned by Bennett Lumber Products Inc. To the west, the WI&M interchanges at the Idaho—Washington border with the Spokane, Spangle & Palouse Railway which provides the sole rail connection to BNSF and the national Class I rail network. Since 2023, WI&M has been making a number of improvements to the line, including the installation of over 10,000 rail ties, in order to restore service.⁴⁹ In September 2025, the WI&M made its first revenue run consisting of finished lumber products for Bennett Lumber. In the

⁴⁶ Midwest Pacific Rail Net & Logistics, St. Maries, <https://midwestpacificrr.com/st-maries.html>.

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of Energy, Nuclear Facility Operations, <https://www.energy.gov/ne/nuclear-facility-operations>.

⁴⁸ <https://wimry.com/>.

⁴⁹ Rail Fan Dan YouTube Channel, The First Train on a Brand New Railroad! Washington, Idaho & Montana Railway (4K), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GY6msU_OXF4&t=2184s.

upcoming years, WI&M hopes to attract additional customers, and eventually offer railcar storage and transload services.⁵⁰ Rail mileage metrics for the WI&N in Idaho are shown in Table 2.18.

Table 2.18 WI&M Mileage in Idaho

Miles Owned	Miles Operated	Miles Leased	Trackage Rights Mileage	Mileage by FRA Track Class
0	21	21	0	Excepted: 21

Source: WI&M.

2.1.2 Freight Rail Facilities

Intermodal Terminals

Intermodal terminals allow for transfer of intermodal containers and highway trailers between highway, rail, and/or water modes. In the United States major intermodal terminals are typically operated by or near Class I railroads located next to major urban and freight centers. The Savage Railport, Idaho's only intermodal facility, opened in 2021. Otherwise, the nearest intermodal terminals are in Spokane for northern Idaho and Salt Lake City for southern Idaho.

Savage Railport is the State's first and only intermodal rail facility located in Union Pacific's Pocatello rail yard.⁵¹ Operated by Savage, a supply-chain logistics company, the 27-acre facility enhances rail access for agricultural producers in southern Idaho and northern Utah—particularly hay and produce shippers—and provides improved connectivity for containerized exports through the Northwest Seaport Alliance ports of Tacoma and Seattle. The facility includes 210 railcar spots and three loading tracks, each 4,200 feet in length.

In 2024, Savage announced plans to expand operations with the acquisition of the nearby Idaho Rail Shop, historically used for freight car repairs.⁵² The expansion will add railcar repair services and establish a multi-commodity transload terminal capable of handling dry bulk products, liquids, dimensional freight, and other specialized cargo, ensuring efficient transfer between rail and other modes of transportation.⁵³

Other Railyards and Transload Facilities

Idaho is home to several rail yards and transload facilities, operated by the State's Class I and Class III railroads. Railyards serve multiple functions, including railcar sorting, storage, and crew changes, for the railroad industry. Like intermodal terminals, transload facilities allow for the transfer of non-containerized freight between one or more modes, including loose freight transported by boxcars, hoppers, flat cars,

⁵⁰ Railfan Railroad Magazine, Idaho Short Line Reopens Route, <https://railfan.com/idaho-short-line-reopens-route/>.

⁵¹ <https://www.railwayage.com/freight/switching-terminal/savage-expands-idaho-operations/>.

⁵² <https://savageco.com/press-release/savage-adds-transload-and-railcar-repair-services-in-pocatello-with-acquisition-of-idaho-rail-shop/>.

⁵³ Idaho State Journal, [New transload services offered in Pocatello after Idaho Rail Shop falls under new ownership](#)

tank cars, gondolas, and coil cars, and may also include additional railyard services. Idaho's railyards are shown in Table 2.19 and Idaho's transload facilities, along with modes served, are shown in Table 2.20.

Table 2.19 Major Rail Yards in Idaho

Facility Name	Facility Location	Freight Railroad Company/ies	Commodities Handled
Eastport Rail Yard	Eastport/Bonnars Ferry	UP, CPKC	Lumber, grain
Hauser Refueling Facility	Hauser	BNSF (including MRL Subdivision)	Any (refueling only)
Idaho Falls Yard	Idaho Falls	UP, EIRR	Wood products, agricultural products, fertilizers, manufactured goods
Nampa Yard	Nampa	UP, BVRR	Wood products, agricultural products, manufactured goods
Plummer Junction	Plummer	UP, STMA	Lumber
Sandpoint Yard/Sandpoint Rail Terminal/Boyer Yard	Sandpoint	BNSF, UP, POVA	Wood products, agricultural products, manufactured goods
St. Maries River Railroad Terminal	St. Maries	STMA	Lumber, wood products
Twin Falls Yard	Twin Falls	EIRR	Agricultural products

Source: Idaho Freight Railroads.

Table 2.20 Transload Facilities in Idaho

Facility Name	Facility Location	Access Railroad	Modes Involved	Capacity (if available)	Commodities Handled
Burley Transload Terminal	Burley	Eastern Idaho Railroad	Rail/Truck	13 railcars	Breakbulk, Bulk Commodities, Food Products, Lumber, Steel, Timber, Plastics
Port of Lewiston	Lewiston	Port District of Nez Perce County	Water/Truck/Rail	TBD	Pulses, Grain, Oversize Cargo
Gavilon Grain	Burley	Eastern Idaho Railroad	Rail/Truck	110 railcars	Grain
Land O Lakes Farmland Feed	Gooding	Union Pacific	Rail/Truck	100 railcars	Grain
Lansing Grain	Bliss	Union Pacific	Rail/Truck	100 railcars	Grain
Simplot Land and Livestock	Mountain Home	Union Pacific	Rail/Truck	110 railcars	Grain
Savage Services—Pocatello	Pocatello	Union Pacific	Rail/Truck	75 railcars/200 TEU Per Week	Agricultural Products
Conrad & Bishoff Terminal	Idaho Falls, Nampa	BVRR	Truck/Rail	Unknown	Petroleum

Source: Idaho Freight Railroads, Idaho's 2023 Strategic Freight Plan.

2.2 Idaho's Passenger Rail System

Due to its location and vast natural amenities, Idaho has had historically rich connections to passenger rail, though most services have disappeared over time. Union Pacific, led by Averell Harriman, played a key role in the rise of skiing in the United States by developing Sun Valley in the 1930s as America's first destination ski resort. The popular recreational destination was served by Union Pacific passenger rail, leading to a boom in passenger rail travel in Idaho, bringing tourists, ski instructors, and even Hollywood celebrities to Idaho's slopes. For decades, Union Pacific played a pivotal role in making Sun Valley accessible to travelers, attracting ski enthusiasts, and promoting the sport in the United States.⁵⁴ Although these railroad tracks were removed in 1997 and later converted to a shared-use trail, the legacy of passenger rail in the Wood River Valley and the Sawtooth Mountains remains strong.

In the past, Idaho also had multiple long-distance passenger rail connections. Amtrak served Pocatello, Shoshone, Boise, and Nampa between 1979 and 1997, as part of a route linking Chicago, Denver, Salt Lake City, Portland, and Seattle. Today, Idaho's only passenger rail stop is Amtrak's Sandpoint station on the *Empire Builder* line, which runs from Chicago to Seattle and Portland (Figure 2.3). There is a total of 46 train stations served by the *Empire Builder*, which operates in Idaho on BNSF's Great Northern Corridor, entering the State from the east near Moyie Springs and traveling southwest to Sandpoint before continuing into Washington.

Figure 2.3 Amtrak Empire Builder Line

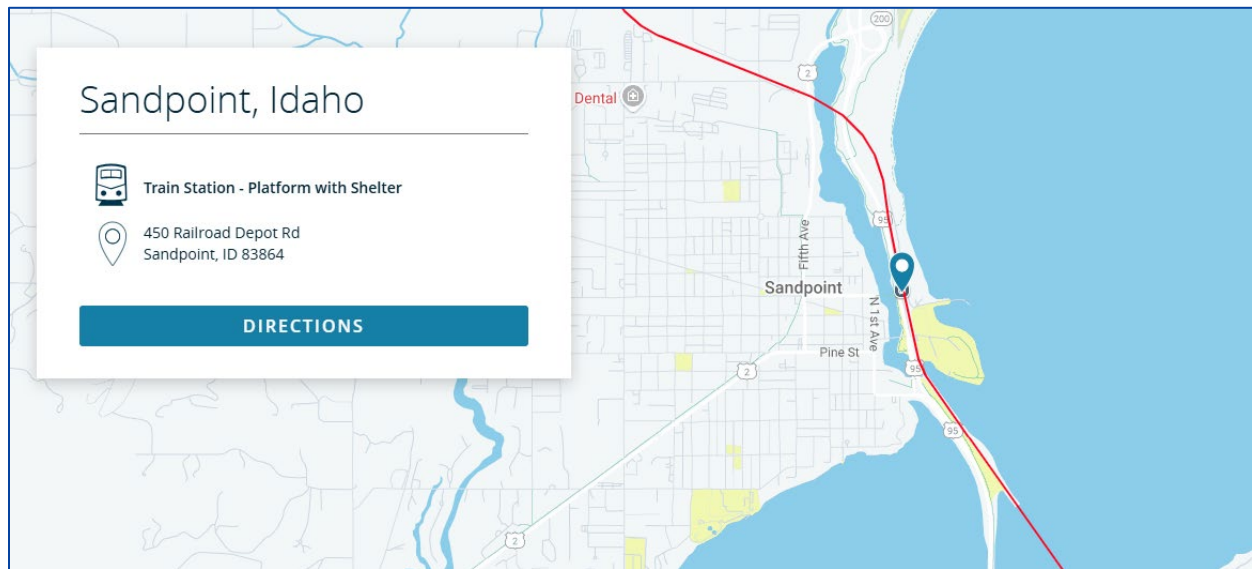


Source: Amtrak.

2.2.1 Sandpoint, ID (SPT) Amtrak Station

Sandpoint is the only Idaho community currently with Amtrak service, as shown in Figure 2.4. The station is located at one of the oldest former NP depots and one of the only few in the nation remaining active in operation. It was built in 1916, offering visitors views of Lake Pend Oreille. The site that the station sits on is currently owned by BNSF.

⁵⁴ Union Pacific Railroad Museum, The Railroad and Sun Valley, <https://www.uprrmuseum.org/uprrm/exhibits/Travel/SunValley/index.htm>.

Figure 2.4 SPT Amtrak Stop

Source: Amtrak.

In 2009, Amtrak considered relocating its Sandpoint stop due to concerns about the new Sand Creek Byway. The plan was to move the roadway out of downtown, towards the peninsula where plans had it passing within 40 feet of the depot. To construct the Sand Creek Byway, ITD needed to negotiate with BNSF which retained the right-of-way. However, due to community interest, city officials and ITD committed additional funds to retain service at the original depot and site in 2011. By winter 2013, Amtrak and BNSF were working on lease modifications to allow rehabilitation of the building and platform. In 2015, the station was restored with a new roof that matched the original green tiles, a refurbished waiting room, as well as plans for an accessible concrete platform.⁵⁵

The Great American Stations website, maintained by Amtrak, reports that this is an unstaffed station with no amenities aside from restrooms. In partnership with BNSF, Amtrak announced in 2024 that it will upgrade the station to meet Americans with Disabilities (ADA) compliance standards. The project will include a new platform, walkways, parking spaces, improved lighting, signage, and interior station improvements. A temporary platform has also been built to allow BNSF to construct a third main line through the station. Completion of the project is expected by 2029.⁵⁶

2.2.2 Service Frequency and Ridership

The long-distance *Empire Builder* train offers one daily service frequency in each direction at Sandpoint. Between Chicago and Spokane, the *Empire Builder* functions as one train. West of Spokane, the train splits, with a portion of the cars continuing to Seattle, and the other portion continuing to Portland. As per Amtrak's online schedules and timetables, traveling to the east, the train arrives at 2:20 a.m. mountain

⁵⁵ The Great American Stations, SPT, <https://www.greatamericanstations.com/stations/sandpoint-id-spt/>.

⁵⁶ Amtrak, Amtrak in Idaho: Fiscal Year 2024, <https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/IDAHO24.pdf>.

time (MT). Traveling to the west, the train arrives at 12:55 a.m. MT. Table 2.21 below summarizes these times for Sandpoint and major stops along the Empire Builder line.⁵⁷

Table 2.21 Empire Builder Daily Timetable with Select Stations

Eastbound Departure	Station	Westbound Departure
4:55 PM	Seattle, WA—King Street Station (SEA)	11:29 AM
4:45 PM	Portland, OR—Union Station (PDX)	11:17 AM
1:15 AM	Spokane, WA (SPK)	2:44 AM
2:20 AM	Sandpoint, ID (SPT)	12:55 AM
1:05 PM	Havre, MT (HAV)	4:15 PM
8:50 AM	St. Paul-Minneapolis, MN—Union Depot (MSP)	11:13 PM
4:45 PM	Chicago, IL—Union Station (CHI)	3:05 PM

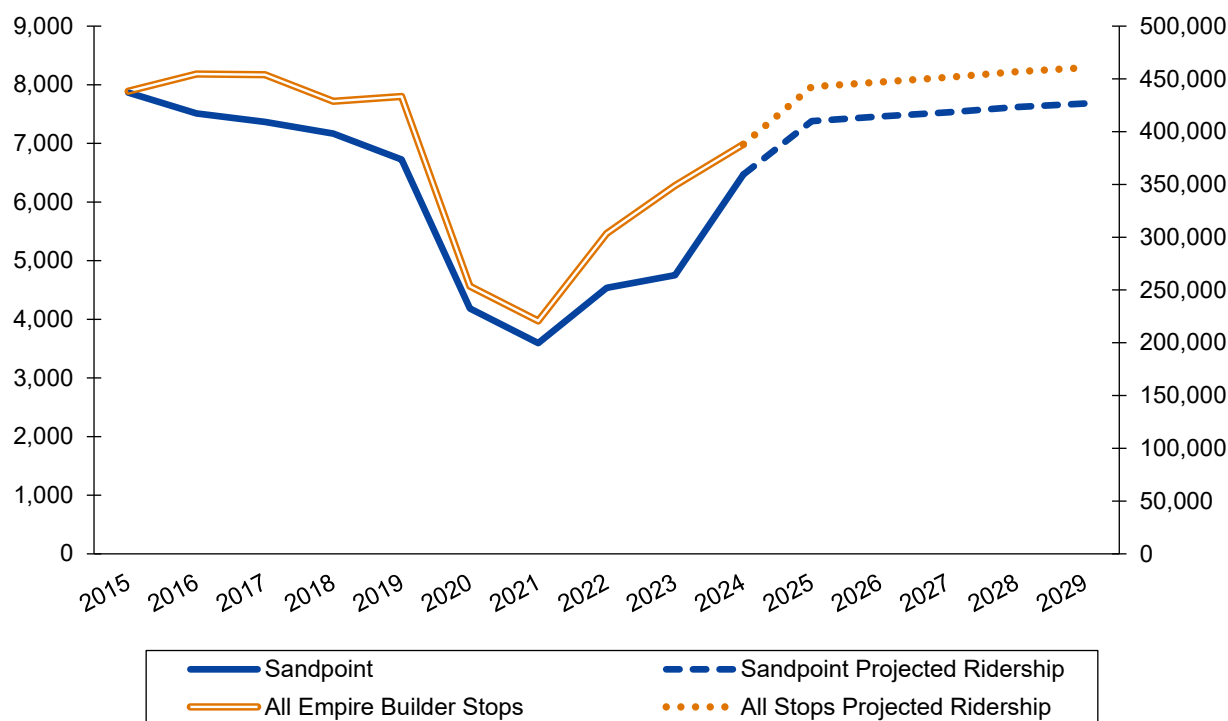
Source: Amtrak.

Overall, Sandpoint station comprises just under 2 percent of all *Empire Builder* boardings and alightings and generally averages approximately 20 riders per day. However, many riders pass Sandpoint as a through stop on their journey.

Figure 2.5 below shows the total ridership, including boardings and alightings for the *Empire Builder*. Between 2015 and 2021, *Empire Builder* ridership generally followed a downward trend, dropping from nearly 7,900 riders to approximately 3,600, for a drop of 54 percent. This decline in ridership can be attributed to service delays along the *Empire Builder* coupled with late-night hours only service in the Western states, as well as the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the pandemic, however, ridership along the line has rebounded and is projected to reach pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2025 based on ridership projections from Amtrak's FY24–29 Five-Year Plan. In the longer term, the 2019 Washington Statewide Rail Plan forecasts 25 percent growth in ridership on the *Empire Builder* service between 2018 and 2040.⁵⁸ This forecast expects ridership to increase along the corridor to approximately 536,000 annual riders.

⁵⁷ Amtrak, Empire Builder Timetable, [https://content.amtrak.com/content/timetable/Empire Builder.pdf](https://content.amtrak.com/content/timetable/Empire%20Builder.pdf).

⁵⁸ Washington Statewide Rail Plan 2019–2040, <https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/2019-2040-State-Rail-Plan.pdf>.

Figure 2.5 Sandpoint and Empire Builder Rider Ridership and Projections (2015–2029)

Source: Amtrak ridership reports and FY24–29 Five-Year Plan ridership projections, analysis by Cambridge Systematics.

2.2.3 On-Time Performance and Delays

On-time performance (OTP) is measured by Amtrak as the percentage of scheduled stops at which the train arrives within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time and is identified at the entire corridor level. In FY2024, the customers that boarded and alighted along the *Empire Builder* service experienced an OTP of 55 percent. By comparison, OTP for the entire Amtrak system was approximately 75 percent in FY2024. The low OTP experienced by customers on the *Empire Builder* is characteristic of many of Amtrak's long-distance services. The length of these delays tends to vary widely by station but have generally averaged up to two hours. As Sandpoint station does not have any amenities and trains are scheduled for nighttime hours, delays can be a significant burden to Idaho Amtrak customers.⁵⁹

As per Amtrak's *Host Railroad Report*, the most common causes of delay are freight train interference and slow orders.⁶⁰ Both of these delay reasons are labeled by Amtrak as 'host railroad responsible delays'. The portion of the *Empire Builder* passing through Idaho is operated along trackage owned by BNSF. With only a small portion of the *Empire Builder* passing through Idaho, these causes of delay largely occur outside of the State. Host railroads not giving preference to passenger rail trains is a known challenge across the nation. Non-compliance with 49 U.S.C. § 24308(c) continues to negatively impact operating and financial

⁵⁹ Amtrak Long-Distance Train Performance Reports, <https://www.bullshead.com/bullshead.com/zatklid.html>.

⁶⁰ Amtrak Host Railroad Report, <https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/HostRailroadReports/November-2024-Amtrak-Host-Railroad-Report.pdf>.

passenger rail performance across many Amtrak services.⁶¹ Amtrak states that it continues to fine-tune operating schedules with host railroads via a schedule certification system in place since FY2021, but maintains that Congressional action would be the ultimate resolution to the reliability issue.

2.2.4 *Employment and Wages*

At the end of FY2023, the most recent year with employment data available, Amtrak employed 22,642 people, including three Idaho residents. Total FY2023 wages were \$2.21 billion, of which Idaho residents earned \$309,018.⁶²

2.2.5 *Passenger Rail Planning and Funding Programs*

Idaho does not fund passenger rail services. Without a state directive, ITD is not in a position to support passenger rail initiatives, even with potential FRA or Federal support. The following initiatives and programs, however, may be monitored for informational purposes, as they could inform future discussions should state leadership pursue passenger rail service.

Daily Long-Distance Service Study

FRA's Daily Long-Distance Service Study, which concluded in January 2025, examines the possibility of restoring daily train service on certain long-distance Amtrak routes using modernized existing infrastructure.⁶³ Moreover, Amtrak was instructed to consider new long-distance routes that would meet specific criteria, such as linking and serving large and small communities, and which reflect public engagement and local and regional support for restored passenger rail service.

Through this planning process, the FRA identified 15 preferred routes for prioritization of future service investments. Two of these preferred routes include service through Idaho:

- » **Seattle–Denver:** Intercity rail service along this corridor would include stops in Nampa, Boise, Mountain Home, Shoshone, and Pocatello, before continuing west to Portland / Seattle or east to Salt Lake City/Denver, along the former *Pioneer* service. This corridor through Idaho has not been served by intercity passenger rail services since 1997.
- » **Seattle–Chicago:** Intercity rail service along this corridor would include a stop at Sandpoint. Outside of Idaho, the service would connect multiple population centers currently unserved by intercity passenger rail services in Washington, Montana, and North Dakota.

The preferred routes are provided as conceptual schedules, designed to maximize daytime service at the largest population centers. Although the study does identify potential existing funding sources and opportunities, it does not establish a dedicated funding source to realize needed investments. It is likely

⁶¹ 49 U.S. Code § 24308 governs the Use of facilities and providing services to Amtrak.

⁶² Amtrak, Fiscal Year 2023: State of Idaho, <https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/IDAHO23.pdf>.

⁶³ FRA, Daily Long Distance Rail Study, <https://fralongdistancerailstudy.org/>.

that full realization of the required infrastructure and service upgrades could take up to 15 years per corridor, and such investments would likely be achieved incrementally.

Corridor Identification and Development Program

The Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program is an extensive plan to analyze and improve train services between different cities across the country. The program helps locate and prepare potential passenger rail projects to be ready for implementation. The FRA supports this initiative and provides funding to the grantee, awarding \$500,000 for each selected corridor to support development efforts, including the development of a scope, schedule, and cost estimate. Eligible applicants to submit their projects include Amtrak, states, groups of states, regional passenger rail and planning organizations, political subdivisions of a state, and federally recognized Indian Tribes. Each corridor is prioritized and may eventually receive Federal funding.⁶⁴

2.3 Idaho's Former Tourism Rail Services

The Thunder Mountain Line, established in 1998, operated as a tourist-oriented rail service north of Boise. Marketed for many years as “Idaho’s only scenic train ride,” the service originated in Horseshoe Bend and offered two excursion routes: one westward to Montour and another northward to Banks. Both routes provided passengers with scenic views along the Payette River. Declining ridership led to the suspension of operations in 2016, and there are no indications that service will be reinstated. As of late 2025, Idaho no longer has any active tourist rail operations.⁶⁵

2.4 Inactive Rail Lines

Railroad abandonment occurs when a rail line is no longer used for rail service, and the right-of-way reverts to the underlying property owners. Abandonment and discontinuance of common carrier rail service on a given rail line is allowed by Federal law subject to review by STB. 49 U.S.C. 10903 governs the abandonment and discontinuance process as detailed in 49 CFR Part 1152.⁶⁶ Table 2.22 details rail abandonments in Idaho since the previous Statewide Rail Plan was developed in 2013. The list of abandonments does not include instances where the right-of-way has been railbanked—a practice where railroad activity has been discontinued and track infrastructure removed, but the rail operator maintains the option to resume activity on the corridor in the future.

⁶⁴ FRA, Corridor Identification and Development Program, <https://railroads.dot.gov/corridor-ID-program>.

⁶⁵ Boise Public Radio, Boise State Public Radio, <https://www.boisestatepublicradio.org/economy/2016-01-20/operators-of-thunder-mountain-train-line-blame-decision-to-close-on-recession>.

⁶⁶ Code of Federal Regulation, Abandonment and Discontinuance of Rail Lines and Rail Transportation Under 49 U.S.C. 10903, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-X/subchapter-B/part-1152>.

Table 2.22 Rail Abandonment in Idaho (2013–2025)

Railroad	Counties	Length (Miles)	Approved	Completed	Docket No.
Union Pacific	Washington	0.28	2013	2013	AB-33-306X
Eastern Idaho Railroad	Fremont	5	2019	2019	AB-1252X
Eastern Idaho Railroad	Bonneville	0.76	2020	2021	AB-1254X
Union Pacific	Kootenai	1.16	2020	2020	AB-33-346X
Union Pacific	Bannock, Bingham	21.49	2025	Pending	AB-33-93X

Source: STB.

The trend of rail line abandonment in Idaho has largely stabilized since the passage of the Staggers Rail Act in 1980. This legislation deregulated much of the railroad industry, allowing railroads to more efficiently respond to market conditions by selling or abandoning lines that were economically unprofitable. In the decades immediately following the act, Idaho experienced a noticeable decline in active rail mileage as carriers sought to shed low-density or lightly used lines. Since that period of significant contraction, however, abandonments have become less frequent, reflecting both the consolidation of rail operations on core routes and the increased focus on maintaining economically viable corridors that continue to serve Idaho's freight and industrial needs.

Through the abandonment process, railroad rights-of-way may be preserved through a mechanism known as railbanking, established under the 1983 amendments to the National Trails System Act.⁶⁷ Railbanking allows corridors proposed for abandonment to be maintained for potential future rail service while being converted to interim trail use. To initiate this process, a public agency or qualified private organization must submit both a *Statement of Willingness to Assume Financial Responsibility* and a *Public Use Condition* request to the STB during the abandonment proceeding. Under a railbanking agreement, the tracks and ties may be removed; however, essential infrastructure such as bridges and trestles must remain intact. This arrangement has been implemented in Idaho to establish the Route of the Hiawatha and Trail of the Coeur d'Alene in northern Idaho, as well as the Presley Trailhead between Weiser and McCall.

⁶⁷ National Park Service, National Trails System Act, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationaltrailssystem/upload/National-Trails-System-Act-Amended-2019.pdf>.

3.0 Trends and Forecasts

Idaho's rail system exists to serve the needs of the people—both State residents and workers as well as those traveling through—as well as the State and national economy. This Chapter provides a broad overview of trends and forecasts that influence Idaho's rail system, and includes the following components:

- » **Section 3.1: Population, Industries, and the Economy**—Provides an assessment of key population and economic metrics which impacts rail traffic originating and/or terminating in Idaho.
- » **Section 3.2: Freight-Reliant Industries**—Identifies freight-intensive industries that utilize freight rail service and highlights key supply chains in the State.
- » **Section 3.3: Rail System and Highway/Rail At-Grade Crossing Safety and Security**—Overviews safety and security trends for Idaho's rail network and describes ongoing rail safety plans and initiatives.
- » **Section 3.4: Freight and Passenger Rail Traffic**—Analyzes Idaho's freight rail traffic, including overviews of rail traffic and congestion in the State, then discussing rail freight flows, as well as summarizing Idaho's passenger rail service and demand.
- » **Section 3.6: Traffic, Congestion, and Land Use Trends**—Describes multimodal freight and passenger transportation volumes, congestion, bottlenecks, and land use development trends.
- » **Section 3.7: Freight Rail Regulatory Trends**—Discusses recent and ongoing regulatory and economic trends impacting rail in Idaho and nationwide.
- » **Section 3.8: Regulatory Rail Safety Trends**—Describes potential and ongoing safety-related regulatory changes.
- » **Section 3.9: Other Rail Industry Trends**—Identifies industry trends that may impact rail competitiveness, labor, and investment.
- » **Section 3.10: Other Economic Trends**—Describes global economic trade and cost trends that impact Idaho's railroads, including rail fuel cost and efficiency.
- » **Section 3.11: Rail Technology Trends**—Discusses technological developments and their potential impact on railroads and freight transportation in general.

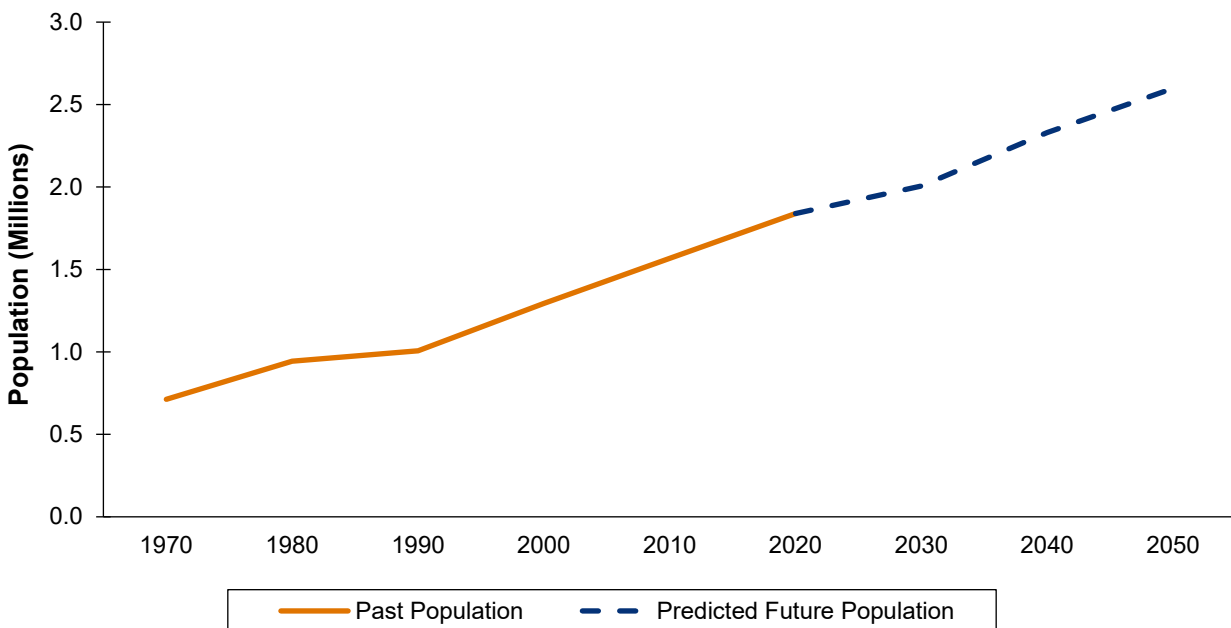
3.1 Population, Industries, and the Economy

Demand for rail service in Idaho is largely driven by population growth and economic development. The strength of the State's rail transportation system, and its ability to provide efficient rail service, influence the overall competitiveness of the State and contributes to Idaho's economic health and vitality.

3.1.1 Population

Idaho's population has grown since 1970, despite a period of relatively flat growth between 1980 and 1990. The State's population growth accelerated after that, growing by nearly 30 percent between 2000 and 2010 and by over 20 percent between 2010 and 2020, as shown in Figure 3.1. This growth resulted in a population of about 1.8 million residents, according to the 2020 U.S. Census. Looking forward, the State population is projected to grow by over 40 percent through 2050, making it one of the most rapidly growing States in the Nation.

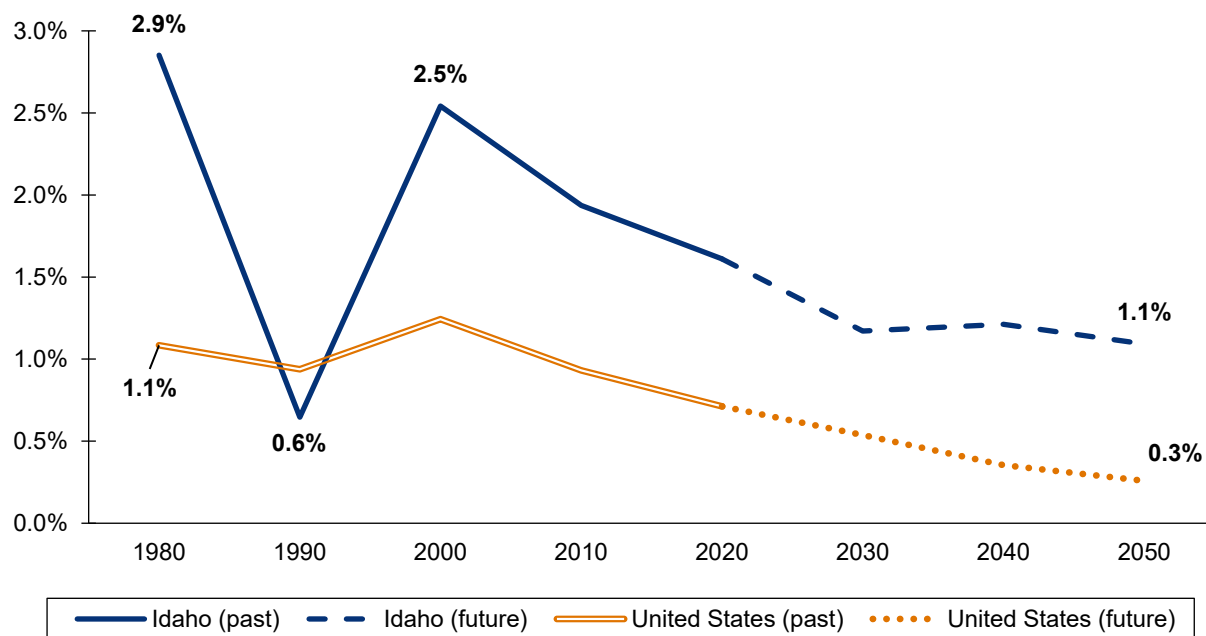
Figure 3.1 Idaho Population Growth (1970–2050)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau (past population, through 2020), University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (projected population, 2030–2050).

Figure 3.2 shows the average population growth rate per year by decade for Idaho and the United States.⁶⁸ With the exception of 1990 relative to 1980, Idaho's population has grown faster than that of the Nation in every decade. While the State's population is forecast to continue to grow faster than that of the entire Nation, both rates are anticipated to moderate over time.⁶⁹ These trends indicate continued population growth for Idaho, with the State comprising a larger proportion of the country's population in the upcoming decades.

Figure 3.2 Annual Population Growth Rate by Decade, Idaho and the United States (1980–2050)



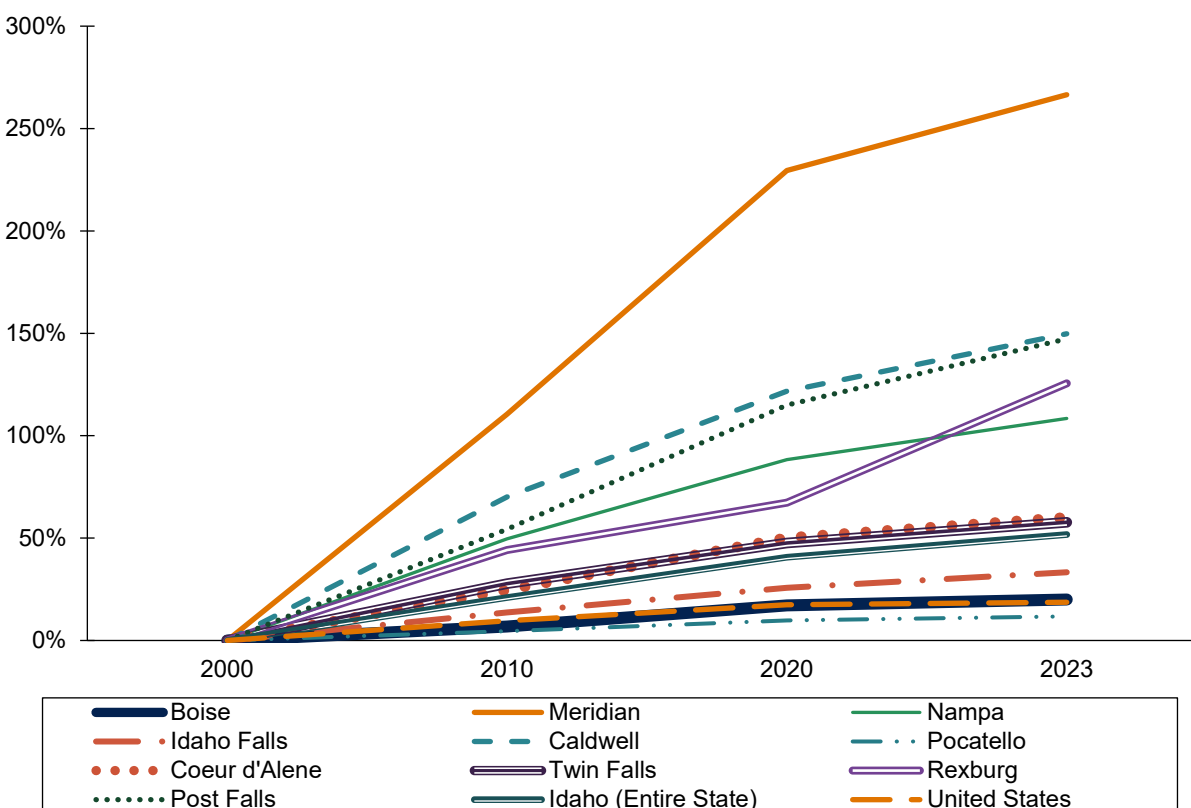
Source: U.S. Census Bureau (past population, through 2020), University of Virginia Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service (projected population, 2030–2050).

⁶⁸ Defined as the ratio of the population in a given decade to the population one decade earlier, converted into a compound annual percentage rate of growth.

⁶⁹ U.S. Census, Population Projection, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/population-projections.html>.

Idaho's strong population growth is especially reflected across the State's population centers. As shown in Figure 3.3, Idaho's top 10 cities by population have grown substantially since 2000. Meridian, located in the heart of the Treasure Valley between Boise and Nampa, more than tripled in size between 2000 and 2023, and has about 120,000 residents today, making it the second largest municipality in Idaho. Four additional cities more than doubled in population across this same period—Caldwell, Post Falls, Rexburg, and Nampa.

Figure 3.3 Population Growth Rates of Idaho's Largest Cities (2000–2023)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

Idaho experienced particularly sharp increases in population during the COVID-19 pandemic as households and workers relocated to the State.⁷⁰ In particular, Idaho's population grew at an average rate of 3.25 percent per year between 2019 and 2021. Since then, growth has moderated to less than 2 percent per year, still remaining higher than the national average. The fastest-growing counties, Ada (including Boise and Meridian) and Canyon County (including Nampa and Caldwell), have added approximately 80,000 new residents since 2019.

⁷⁰ Idaho Press, Idaho's Growth, Still Strong but Slower, Led by Canyon County for 2nd Year in a Row, https://www.idahopress.com/news/local/idahos-growth-still-strong-but-slower-led-by-canyon-county-for-2nd-year-in-a/article_fa13c440-ed28-11ee-8cad-936d4d3c2523.html.

3.1.2 Economy

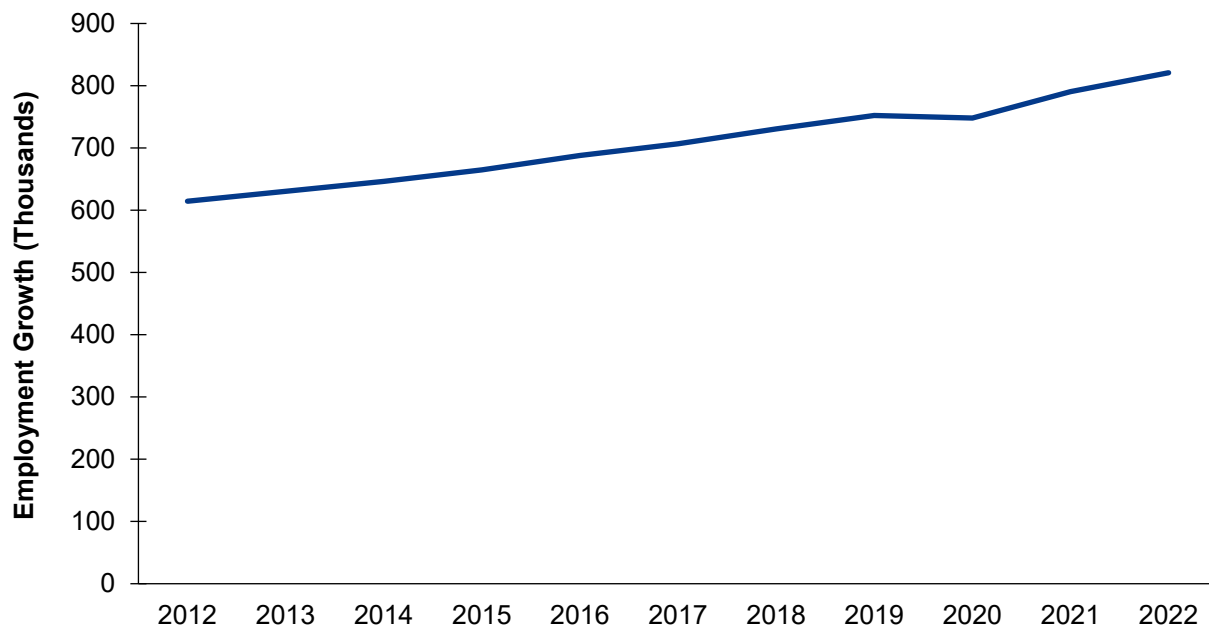
Idaho is located in the center of three major economic markets—Rocky Mountains, Pacific Northwest and Canadian West. It is the only State bordered by six other states and one foreign country. Idaho’s freight facilities transport and process goods traveling between these markets and beyond. The pace of growth for these economic regions, as well as Canada and other regions in the United States, will drive the future demand for freight rail service. This section profiles Idaho’s economy, highlighting key economic, demographic, and employment trends.

Employment

While this section focuses on broad State-level employment trends, it is important to acknowledge that freight railroads employ over 1,100 Idaho residents, and rail employees earn an average range of \$135,000–\$190,000 annually.⁷¹ Additionally, there are over 5,200 railroad retirement beneficiaries in Idaho.

Overall, between 2012 and 2022, Idaho’s employment grew from 614,000 to 821,000, as shown in Figure 3.4, and outpacing the State’s population growth. Even though employment declined in 2020, it quickly regained a growth trend.

Figure 3.4 Idaho Employment Growth (2012–2022)

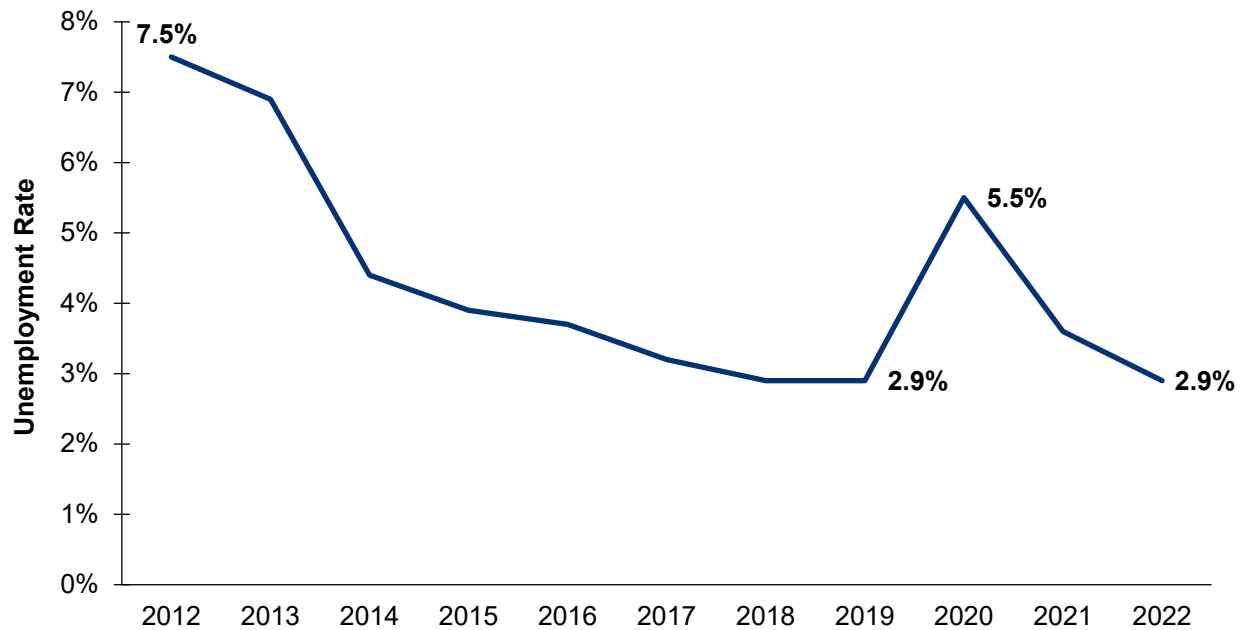


Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW).

⁷¹ Association of American Railroads, Idaho Rail Fact Sheet, <https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AAR-Idaho-State-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

The unemployment rate in Idaho declined from a high of 7.5 percent in 2012 to 2.9 percent in 2022, as shown in Figure 3.5. While the unemployment rate spiked in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic, it returned to its pre-pandemic low of 2.9 percent by 2022.⁷²

Figure 3.5 Idaho Unemployment Rate (2012–2022)

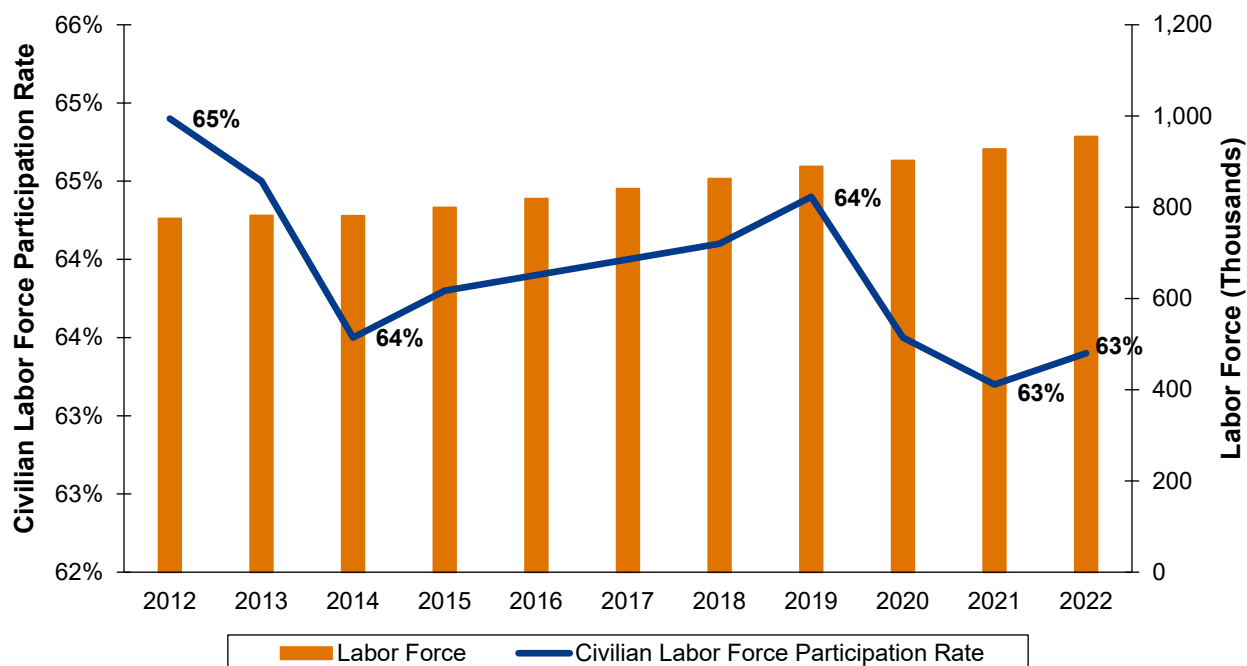


Source: BLS, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS).

⁷² Unemployment rate is defined as the percentage of the civilian labor force (i.e., excluding discouraged workers who have given up looking for work as well as those otherwise not looking for work) who are unemployed.

Between 2012 and 2022, Idaho's civilian labor force participation rate varied between 63 and 65 percent, as shown in Figure 3.6. The highest rates of participation were observed in 2012 with another spike in 2019. The decline in the labor force participation rate post Covid-19 pandemic corresponds with an increase in Idaho's population which grew faster than employment.

Figure 3.6 Idaho Civilian Labor Force Participation Rate (2012–2022)



Source: BLS, LAUS.

Employment by Industry

In 2022, overall Idaho employment averaged over 800,000 annually. Among this pool, 65 percent worked in service industries, 20 percent worked in manufacturing industries, and 15 percent worked in government, as shown in Figure 3.7. Manufacturing jobs are the most common within Goods-Producing industries, while Trade, Transportation, and Utilities jobs are most common within Service-Providing industries. Overall, Construction jobs have grown at the greatest rate since 2012, corresponding with demands from an increased population, which has necessitated building more homes and commercial facilities to support a population influx from other states.

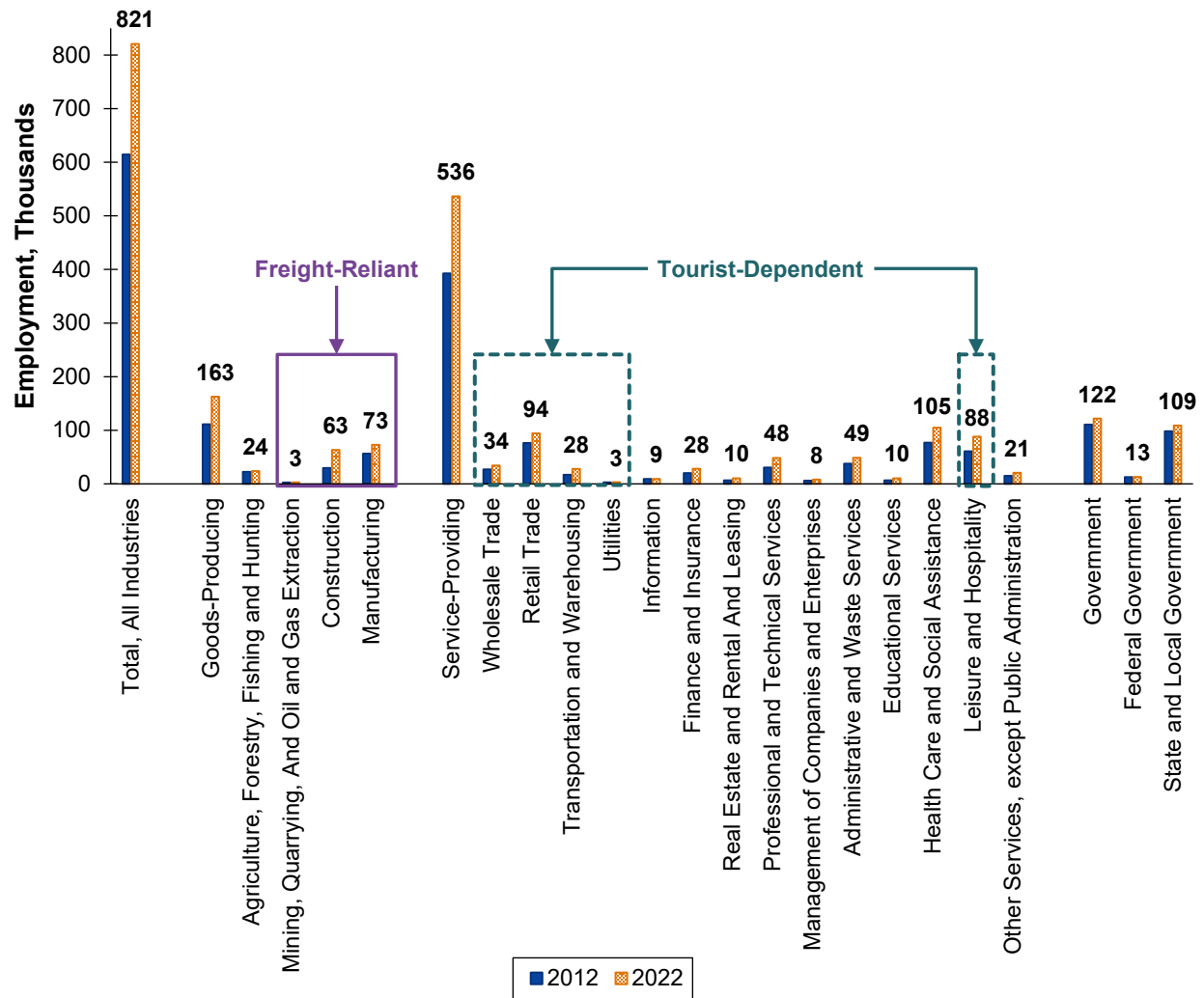
In its 2023 Strategic Freight Plan, Idaho identified industries that are considered freight-reliant—those that depend on the State's multimodal transportation infrastructure for basic operations and produce, ship/receive, or transport significant amounts of goods, many of which move by rail. These industries include Agriculture, Forestry, Mining, Utilities, Construction, Manufacturing, Wholesale Trade, Retail Trade, Transportation, and Warehousing. Similarly, tourist-dependent industries, such as Leisure and Hospitality, rely upon the multimodal transportation system, including passenger rail, to bring visitors to Idaho.

Throughout the remainder of this section, freight-reliant industries are highlighted in yellow, and tourist-dependent industries are highlighted in green. Nearly 50 percent of Idaho employees work in these industries, which are the most heavily impacted by investments in Idaho's rail system.

The Idaho Department of Labor projected employment growth by industry between 2022 and 2032 as shown in Figure 3.8.⁷³ Top industries by employment are expected to be essentially unchanged from 2022 levels, with some higher relative growth in the Health Care and Social Assistance, Construction, and Transportation and Warehousing industries. No industry in Idaho is expected to shrink through 2032 by measure of employment.

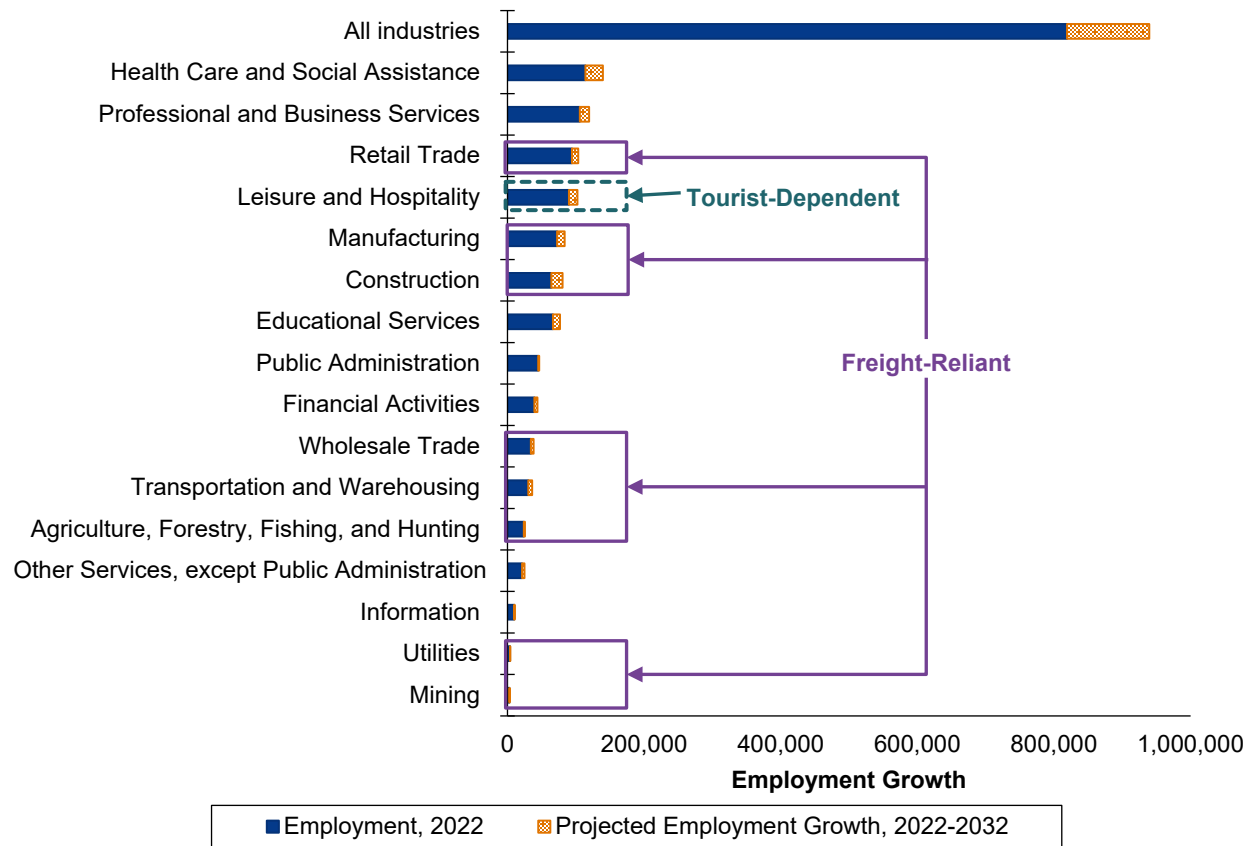
⁷³ Numbers for 2022 shown in Figure 3.7 differ from those provided in Figure 3.8. The Idaho Department of Labor's projections includes certain workers that are outside of the BLS Quarterly Census for Employment and Wages which is limited to jobs covered by underemployment insurance and covers more than 95 percent of United States jobs.

Figure 3.7 Idaho Employment by Industry Including Freight-Reliant and Tourist-Dependent Industries (2012–2022)



Source: BLS, QCEW.

Figure 3.8 Idaho Projected Employment Growth by Industry Including Freight-Reliant and Tourist-Dependent Industries (2022–2032)

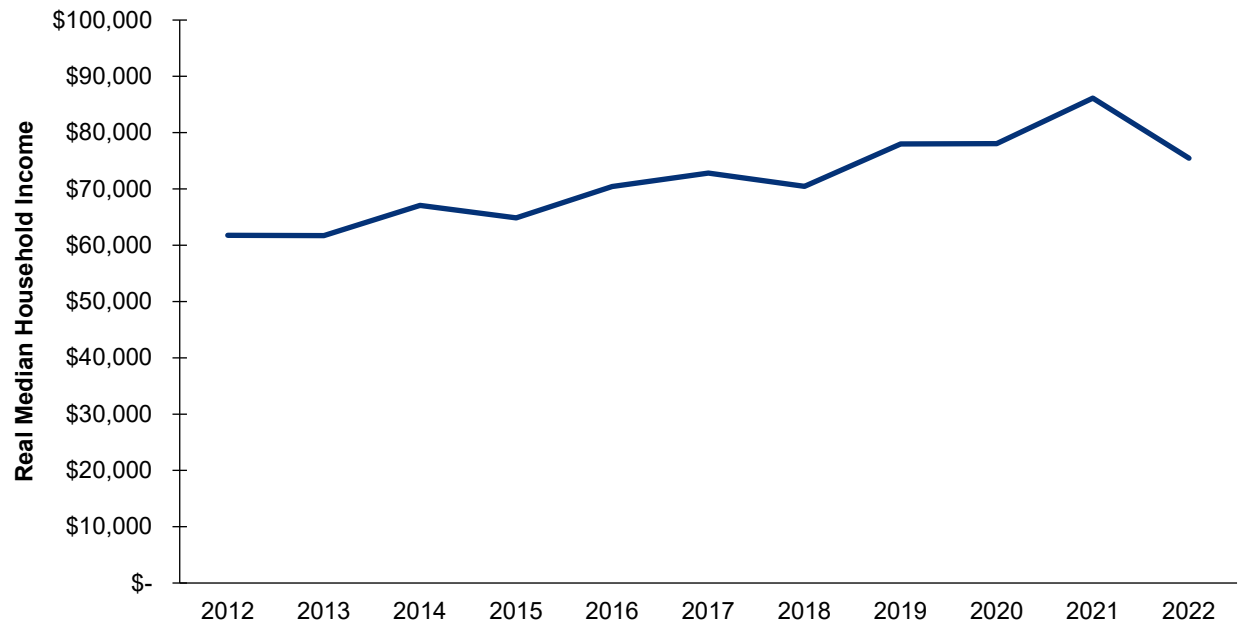


Source: Idaho Department of Labor, Occupational and Industry Projections.

Income

Figure 3.9 shows real median household income (in 2023 Chained Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (C-CPI-U) dollars) in Idaho from 2012 through 2022 (without seasonal adjustments). Due to higher inflation in 2021 and 2022, real incomes decreased 13 percent from 2021 through 2022, returning to levels seen in 2018.⁷⁴

Figure 3.9 Idaho Real Median Household Income (2012–2022)



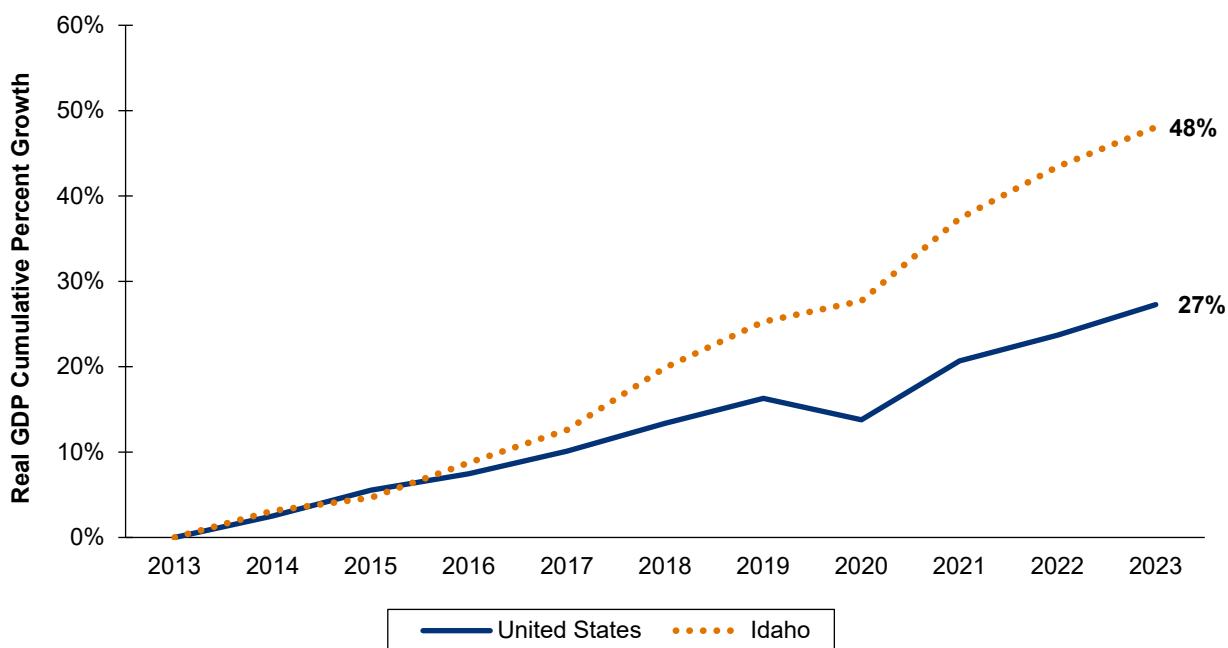
Source: U.S. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Federal Reserve Economic Data, 2023 C-CPI-U dollars.

⁷⁴ Real income is income after adjusting for inflation. To represent the value of a dollar over time, these estimates are adjusted by the 2023 C-CPI-U. The C-CPI-U is a measure of the average change over time in prices for all goods and services purchased for consumption by urban households.

Gross Domestic Product

Idaho's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) stood at \$121 billion as of 2023.⁷⁵ Over the past decade, the State's GDP grew faster than the Nation, increasing by 48 percent while the United States GDP increased by 27 percent, as shown in Figure 3.10.

Figure 3.10 Idaho and United States Real GDP Cumulative Percent Growth in Millions of Chained 2017 Dollars (2013–2023)



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

Idaho's real GDP growth tracked closely with the Nation from 2013 to 2016. After 2017, its growth accelerated and grew 2 to 4 percent faster than the United States did through 2022. In addition, while the Nation's economy contracted in 2020, the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, Idaho's economy grew by 2 percent. This economic growth coincided with an increase in population as remote work surged and remote workers moved to Idaho attracted by cost-of-living and amenities.⁷⁶ In 2023, Idaho's annual growth in real GDP returned to the same rate as the Nation (3 percent).

3.1.3 Industries

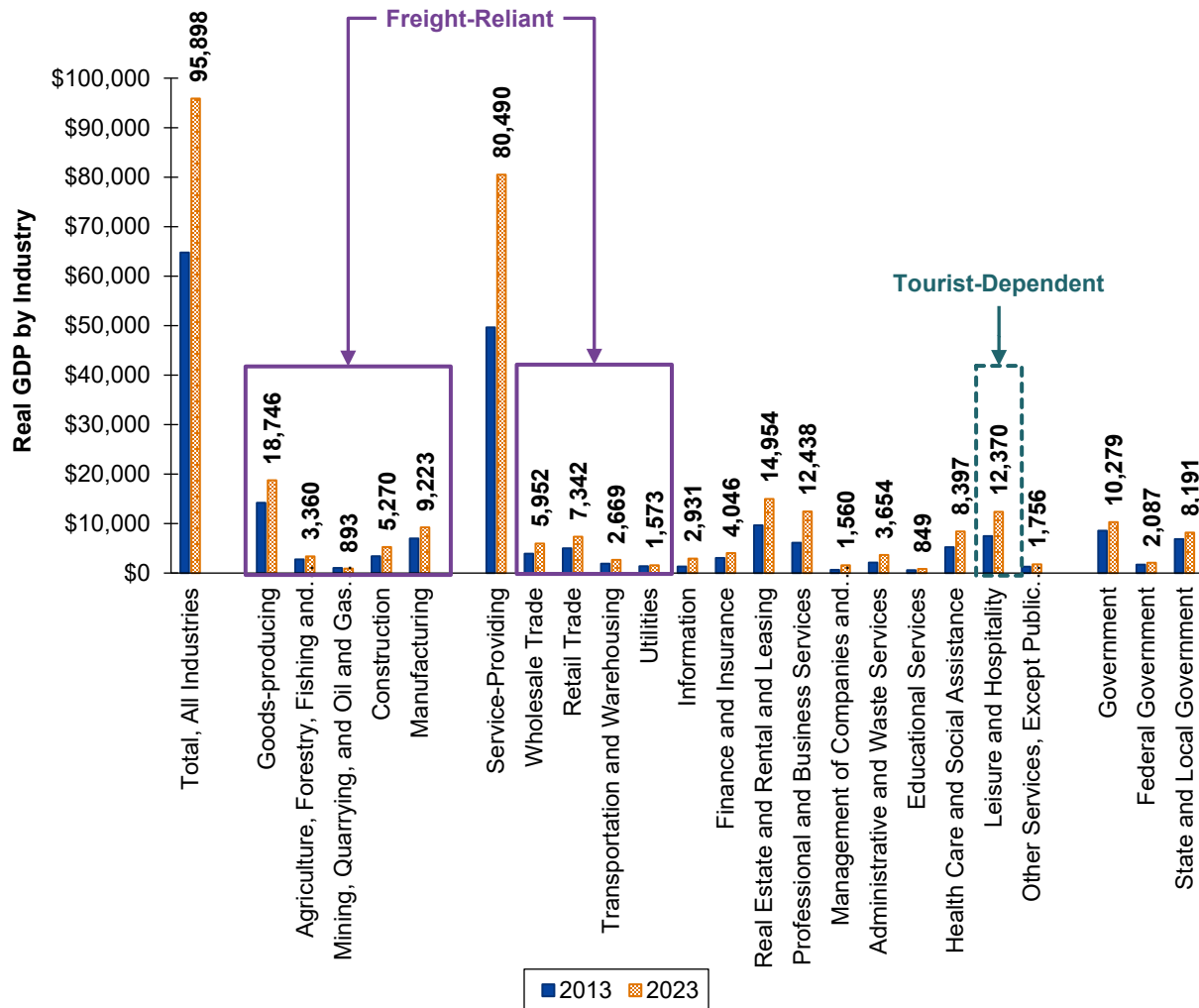
In 2023, the three economic sectors that contributed the greatest amount to Idaho's real GDP included Real Estate, Rental, and Leasing; Professional and Business Services, and Leisure and Hospitality; these three sectors also grew by the greatest amount between 2013 and 2023. The largest freight-reliant

⁷⁵ GDP represents the total value of goods produced and services performed, taking into account consumer spending, private investment in fixed assets (such as land and buildings), government spending (including infrastructure), and net exports. Real dollars have been adjusted to remove the effects of inflation over time and allow different periods to be compared.

⁷⁶ German Marshall Fund, [From the Bay to Boise: Remote Work and the Rise of the Mid-size American City](https://www.gmfus.org/news/bay-boise-remote-work-and-rise-mid-size-american-city)
<https://www.gmfus.org/news/bay-boise-remote-work-and-rise-mid-size-american-city>.

industry, Retail Trade, is driven by population growth. As Idaho has attracted new residents, the demand for goods, such as motor vehicles, fuel, and food, has risen. In the last decade, real GDP contributions in Idaho from freight-reliant industries increased by 37 percent, while tourist-dependent industries increased by 66 percent. Idaho's real GDP by industry is presented in Figure 3.11.

Figure 3.11 Idaho Real GDP By Industry in Millions of Chained 2017 Dollars, Including Freight-Reliant and Tourist-Dependent Industries (2013, 2023)

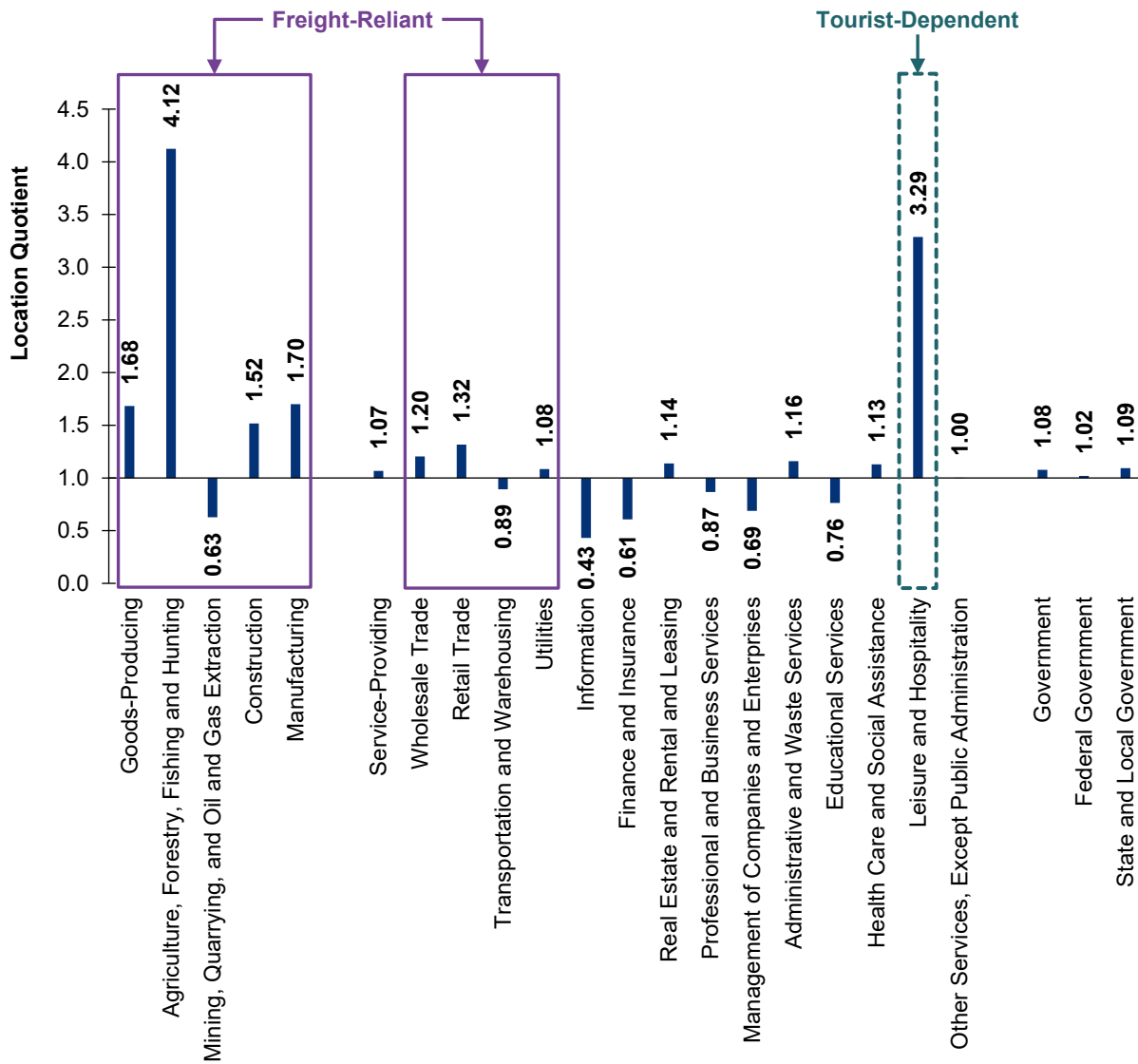


Source: BEA.

A useful measure for considering economic density is the “location quotient”, which is a measure of a concentration of an industry in a State compared to the United States as a whole. Location quotients higher than one indicate that an industry is more concentrated in Idaho than in the United States as a whole, whereas location quotients below one indicates that an industry is less concentrated in Idaho. Location quotients for Idaho industries, as measured by contribution to State GDP, are presented in Figure 3.12. Industries with the highest concentration in Idaho include Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting (location quotient of 4.12) and Leisure and Hospitality (location quotient of 3.29).

While employment in Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and hunting has increased at a slower rate (21 percent) than all industries combined (48 percent) it has the highest location quotient among all industries as shown in Figure 3.12. Other industries that are more concentrated than the Nation include Leisure and Hospitality, Manufacturing, Construction, Retail Trade, and Wholesale Trade.

Figure 3.12 Location Quotient for Real GDP by Industry Sector in Millions of Chained 2017 Dollars, Including Freight-Reliant and Tourist-Dependent Industries (2013, 2023)



Source: BEA; Analysis by Cambridge Systematics.

3.2 Freight-Reliant Industries and Supply Chains

As noted in the previous section, multiple freight-dependent industries are central to Idaho's growing economy. Each of these industries is supported by complex supply chains that rely on the efficient movement of goods. Within the statewide rail planning process, it is important to understand how rail contributes to these supply chains to guide future rail investments and strengthen Idaho's multimodal freight system.

This section examines Idaho's major freight-reliant industries, presenting key economic statistics and, where relevant, case studies of industry supply chains in which rail plays a critical role. These case studies highlight material inputs and outputs, key facilities for production, processing, and distribution, and the transportation modes used for logistics. Emphasis is placed on supply chains where rail within Idaho is essential to overall efficiency and competitiveness.

The following freight-reliant industry sectors are highlighted in this section:

- » **Agriculture**—As a predominantly rural State, agriculture has long been central to Idaho's economy, supported by abundant natural resources and fertile soils. Idaho's potato and hay supply chains are examined in detail within this sub-section.
- » **Manufacturing**—By contribution to total GDP, manufacturing is Idaho's leading freight-intensive industry. It encompasses a diverse range of sectors, including electronics, food processing, aerospace and defense, and packaging.
- » **Mining**—Known as the "Gem State," Idaho has a long mining tradition. The extraction process is highly resource- and logistics-intensive, making rail especially important for the industry's continued viability.

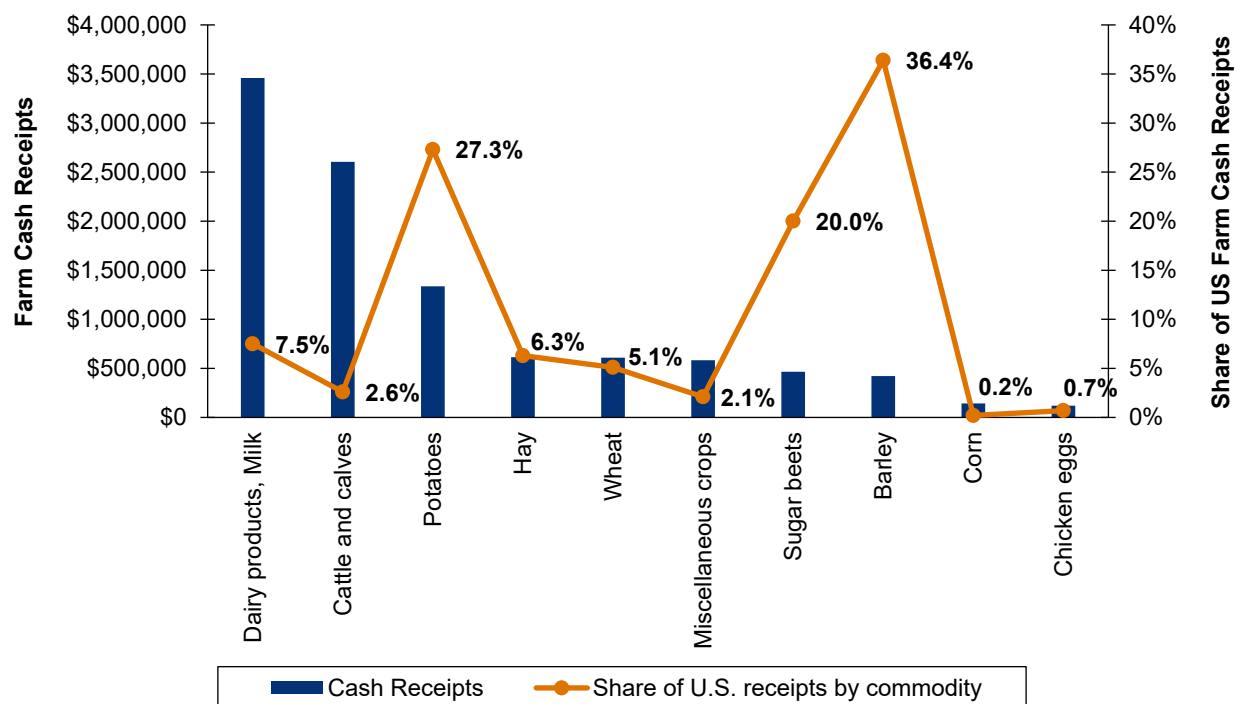
3.2.1 Idaho's Agriculture Industry

According to BEA data, Idaho's Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting sector represents more than four times the share of GDP compared to the national average. Between 2013 and 2023, the sector grew steadily: farm contributions to Idaho's GDP increased by 16 percent, while forestry, fishing, and related industries grew by nearly 40 percent. Farms continue to account for the vast majority of the sector's total share.

In 2023, Idaho generated an estimated \$10.9 billion in farm cash receipts—representing 2.1 percent of all United States agricultural receipts.⁷⁷ While Idaho produces a wide variety of crops, potatoes remain its signature product. Potatoes rank third in the state by value but command more than 27 percent of the national market. Idaho is also a leading producer of sugar beets (20 percent) and barley (36 percent). Figure 3.13 highlights the top 10 agricultural commodities in Idaho, which together account for 95 percent of the State's total farm cash receipts.

⁷⁷ Idaho State Department of Agriculture, Idaho Agriculture Facts, https://agri.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/marketing/Publications&Resources/2025-Idaho-Ag-Statistics_Final.pdf.

Figure 3.13 Idaho Farm Cash Receipts and Share of United States Farm Cash Receipts, Top 10 Commodities (2023)



Source: USDA Economic Research Service.

Agriculture Case Study and Supply Chain Analysis: Potatoes

The potato supply chain in Idaho is centered around the State's numerous farms. Especially concentrated in southeast Idaho and the Snake River Valley, farm sizes can vary significantly, ranging from a few acres to thousands of acres.⁷⁸ Wada Farms, one of the State's largest grower-shippers of potatoes, farms over 11,000 acres of potatoes across the region.⁷⁹ Key inputs to farming activities are fertilizer, pesticides & herbicides, and machinery & farm equipment, and water.

Approximately 10 percent of Idaho's potato crop is exported, primarily in the form of frozen and processed products.⁸⁰ Top countries that import potatoes from the United States, including Idaho, are Japan and South Korea. This makes access to key West Coast ports, including by rail, particularly critical. Mexico and Canada are additional major importers, relying on both truck and rail. The remaining 90 percent of Idaho's potato crop is bound for domestic markets, including retail and foodservice industries, as well as institutions such as schools and prisons.

⁷⁸ International Food and Agribusiness Management Review, The Impact and Coordination of Production and Marketing Strategies on Price Behavior: Evidence from the Idaho Potato Industry, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/ags/ifaamr/53648.html>.

⁷⁹ Spudman, Second Generation Stepping into Leadership at one of Idaho's Largest Fresh Grower-Shippers, <https://spudman.com/article/second-generation-stepping-into-leadership-at-one-of-idahos-largest-fresh-g/>.

⁸⁰ Idaho Business Review, Idaho Potato Farmers Eye Drop as Exports Get Pummeled, <https://idahobusinessreview.com/2020/06/25/idaho-potato-farmers-eye-drop-as-exports-get-pummeled/>.

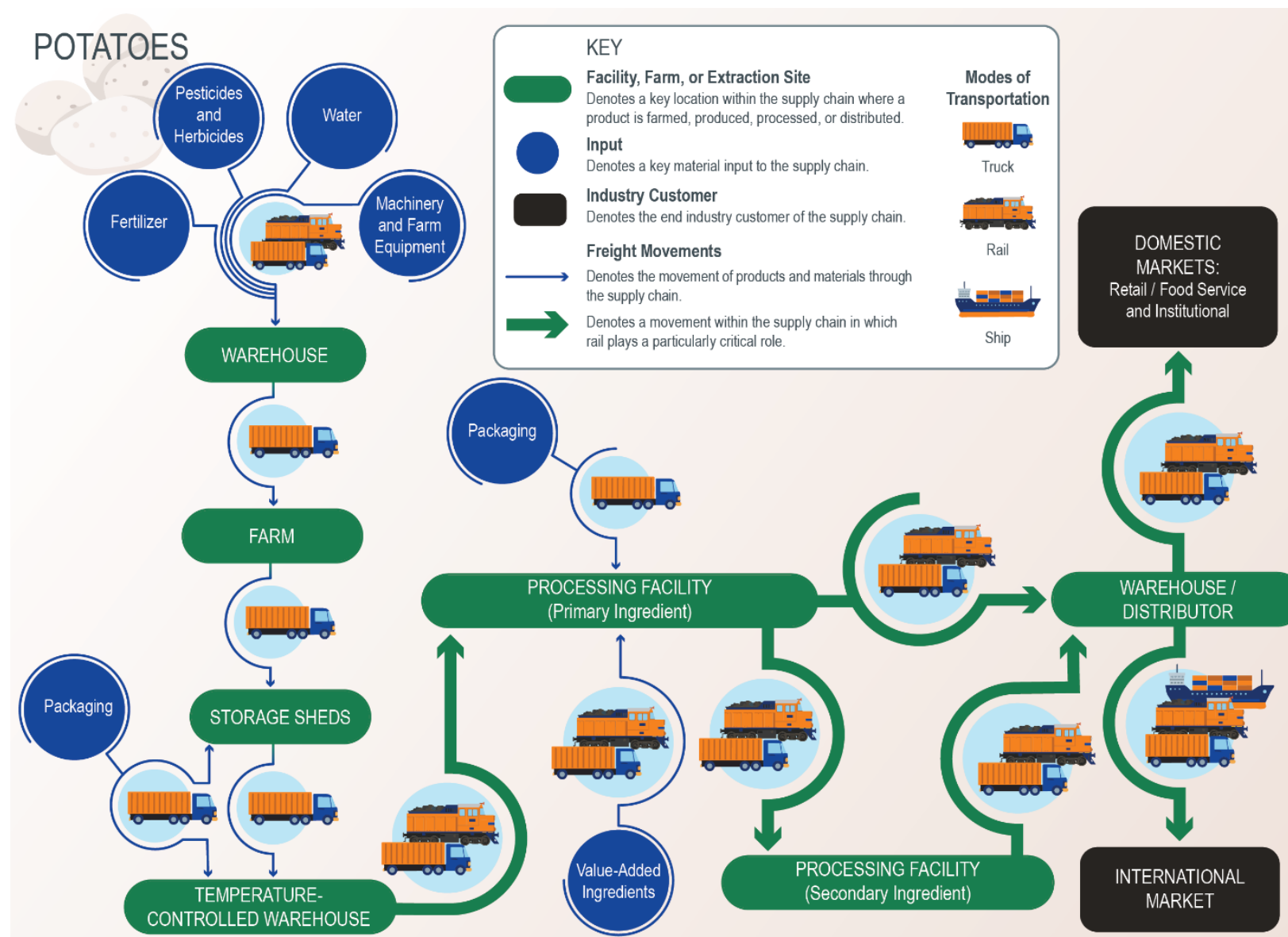
Figure 3.14 illustrates Idaho's potato supply chain. While most transportation from farm inputs to final outputs are handled by truck, some steps also utilize the State's rail system. Potatoes are typically hauled by trucks from farms to storage sheds, then onto packaging facilities, and finally to temperature-controlled warehouses or processing plants—these intra-state movements are almost entirely truck-based. Rail plays a more targeted, yet vital, role in the potato supply chain for two primary purposes:

1. **Inbound Bulk Shipments**—Large-volume inputs like fertilizer, chemicals, or specialized farm equipment—particularly when sourced from distant suppliers—may arrive by rail before being transferred to trucks for final delivery. Almost 3 million tons of fertilizers and other chemicals are brought in to Idaho via rail each year.⁸¹
2. **Outbound Processed Potato Shipments**—Rail becomes essential when moving significant volumes of processed products—such as frozen fries or dehydrated potatoes—to national markets and export ports. In fact, an industry source notes that Idaho growers rely on rail to move about 30 percent of their products.⁸²

⁸¹ STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

⁸² Spudman, [Potato Transportation](https://spudman.com/article/potato-transportation/) <https://spudman.com/article/potato-transportation/>.

Figure 3.14 Illustrative Idaho Potato Supply Chain



Agriculture Case Study and Supply Chain Analysis: Hay

Hay—produced from grasses such as ryegrass or legumes such as alfalfa—is primarily used as livestock feed. Idaho is one of the top hay-producing states in the United States, with significant acreage concentrated in the Magic Valley, the Upper Snake River Plain, and other irrigated agricultural regions, as well as in Latah County in the Palouse region (without irrigation). Hay is a cornerstone of Idaho's dairy industry, which consumes the majority of in-state production.⁸³ Figure 3.15 illustrates Idaho's hay supply chain.

In 2024, the largest United States hay export markets by value were Japan (\$352 million), China (\$330 million), and South Korea (\$153 million). As of 2023, roughly 40 percent of United States alfalfa hay exports still go to China, with Japan and Saudi Arabia following as other major buyers.⁸⁴ Although Idaho-specific data isn't available, these national-level export dynamics are reflected in the Western United States export flow—where Idaho plays a significant part—due to shared logistics routes and regional compression facilities.

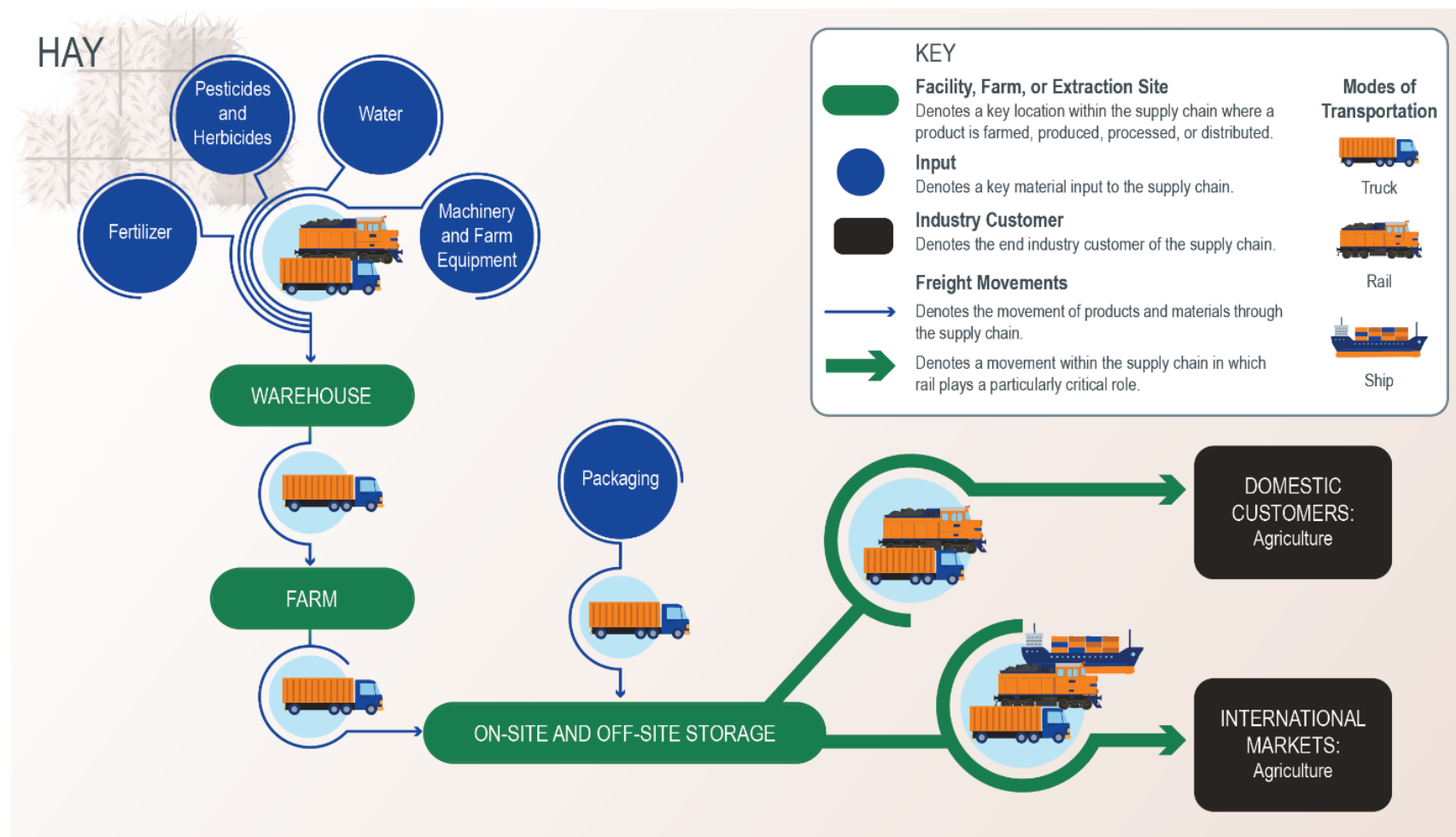
Most transportation in Idaho's hay supply chain is handled by trucks. Bales are typically hauled from farms to local dairies, feedlots, or regional buyers. Trucking dominates because hay is bulky, has a relatively low value per ton compared to specialty crops like potatoes, and is most often consumed close to where it is produced.

Rail plays a more limited but strategic role. Inbound, crucial farm inputs—such as seed, fertilizer, chemicals, and machinery—often arrive by rail from distant suppliers. Outbound, rail becomes important particularly for hay destined for export markets: high-value alfalfa bales are compressed in southern Idaho and Lewiston(?) at intermodal facilities and then shipped to West Coast ports via rail. From there, they travel overseas—most notably to Asia—which remains the dominant export destination for United States hay.

⁸³ Boise State University College of Business and Economics, Idaho's Crops: Production and Economic Impact, <https://www.boisestate.edu/cobe/blog/2025/01/idahos-crops-production-and-economic-impact/>.

⁸⁴ Hay & Forage Grower, Hay Exports in Tumbled in 2023, <https://hayandforage.com/article-4700-Hay-exports-tumbled-in-2023.html>.

Figure 3.15 Idaho Hay Supply Chain

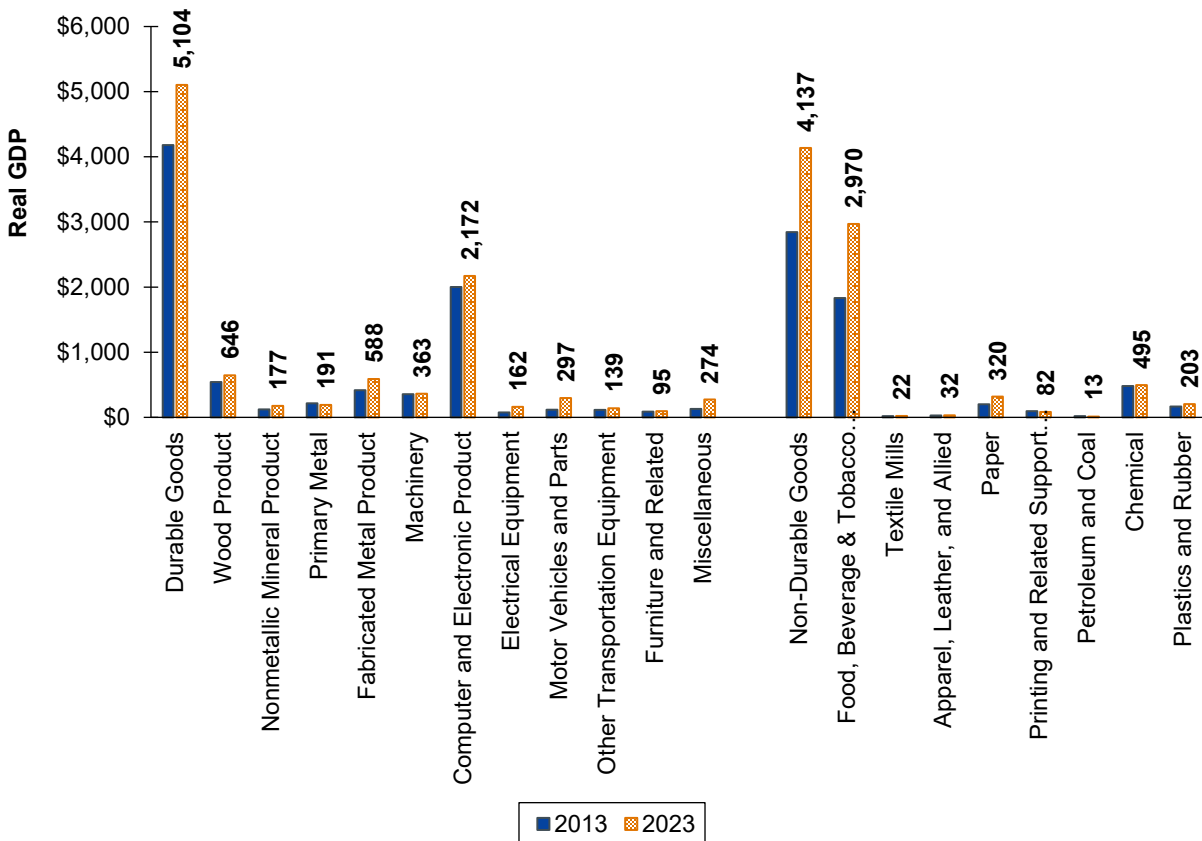


3.2.2 Idaho's Manufacturing Industry

Manufacturing is the State's largest freight-reliant industry, contributing 10 percent to Idaho's economy in 2023, as depicted in Figure 3.16. Manufacturing makes up a significantly larger share of total employment in Idaho than it does nationwide—about 70 percent higher—highlighting its disproportionate importance to the State's economy.

The manufacturing sector is typically divided into durable and non-durable goods. Durable goods are items that consumers buy with the expectation of long-term use such as cars, appliances, furniture, and electronics. Nondurable goods are products that are consumed quickly; examples include food, clothing, and household cleaning supplies. While a greater share of Idaho's GDP is generated by durable goods, there was a large increase in nondurable goods between 2013 and 2023. Computer and Electronic Products contribute 72 percent of the GDP produced by Durable Goods Manufacturing while Food and Beverage and Tobacco Product Manufacturing contribute to 43 percent of the GDP produced by Nondurable Goods Manufacturing. These are both highlighted as Idaho commerce key industries.

Figure 3.16 Goods, Real GDP (Millions of Chained 2017 Dollars), 2013–2023



Source: BEA.

Manufacturing Case Study and Supply Chain Analysis: Paper

Idaho's paper supply chain, shown in Figure 3.17, is rooted in the State's abundant forest resources, particularly in northern and north-central Idaho. Timber harvested from nearby forests, along with wood from eastern Washington, feeds into a network of sawmills and pulp mills. Sawmills produce both lumber and wood chips, the latter serving as a key input for pulp production. Pulp mills, in turn, process these wood chips into pulp that is either used on site or supplied to paper mills, where it is transformed into products such as bleached paperboard, packaging, and tissue.

Inputs to this system extend beyond timber. Pulping and papermaking require chemicals such as bleaching agents, coatings, and additives, which are typically delivered by truck from regional suppliers but may also move by rail or ship when sourced from farther away. Water is another critical input, drawn from the Clearwater and Snake Rivers to support the energy- and water-intensive pulping process. Together, these inputs sustain one of Idaho's most significant forest-product and manufacturing industries. Internationally, in 2023, Idaho exported \$202 million and imported \$307 million worth of wood, pulp, paper, and printing products.⁸⁵

While most transportation within Idaho's paper supply chain involves truck movements—logs are trucked from forests to sawmills and pulp mills—the industry is notable for its comparatively high reliance on freight rail, especially for outbound distribution. Because paper is non-perishable, shippers can optimize for cost and volume rather than speed, making rail the preferred mode for reaching distant domestic markets and ports for international exports. Distribution centers serving the paper industry are often also located on or near short-line rail connections, ensuring efficient access to the national freight network.⁸⁶ The Clearwater Paper mill complex in Lewiston, which processes wood into pulp, bleached paperboard, and tissue products, reports that about one-third of its products move by rail.⁸⁷ The mill is also equipped with multiple rail docks and serves as a major supplier of private-label tissue products for national grocery chains.⁸⁸

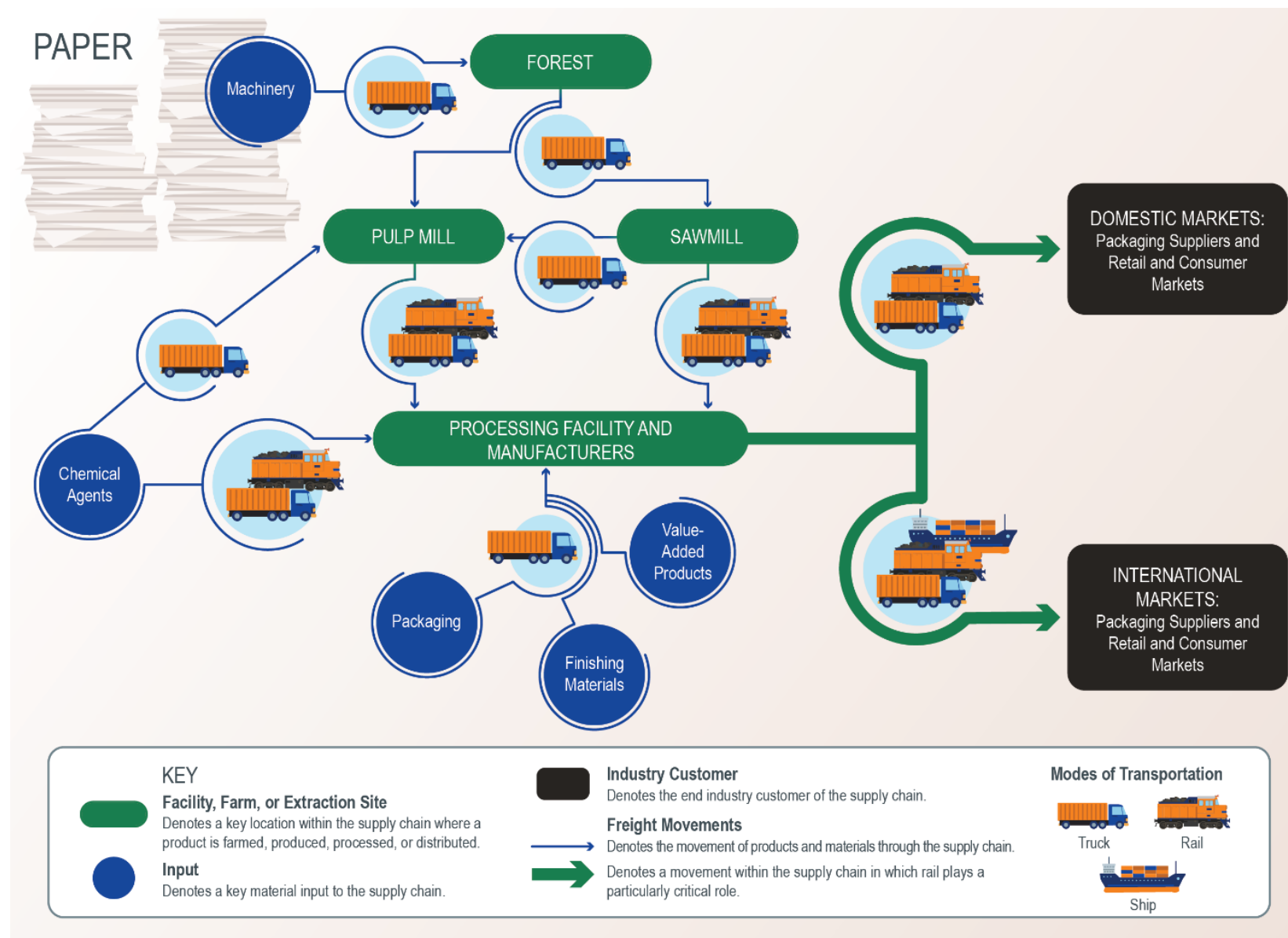
⁸⁵ <https://commerce.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/International-One-SheetsWORLD.pdf>.

⁸⁶ Transportation & Logistics International, Boise Paper, <https://tlimagazine.com/news/boise-paper/>.

⁸⁷ Clearwater Paper, Get to Know Lewiston, https://s24.q4cdn.com/913789668/files/doc_downloads/our-locations/2024/Lewiston-Fact-Sheet_December-2024.pdf.

⁸⁸ Toilet Paper Shortage in 2024 Due to Port Strike Unlikely, Experts Say, <https://www.news-leader.com/story/news/local/ozarks/2024/10/03/toilet-paper-shortage-2024-port-strike-unlikely/75497514007/>.

Figure 3.17 Idaho Paper Supply Chain

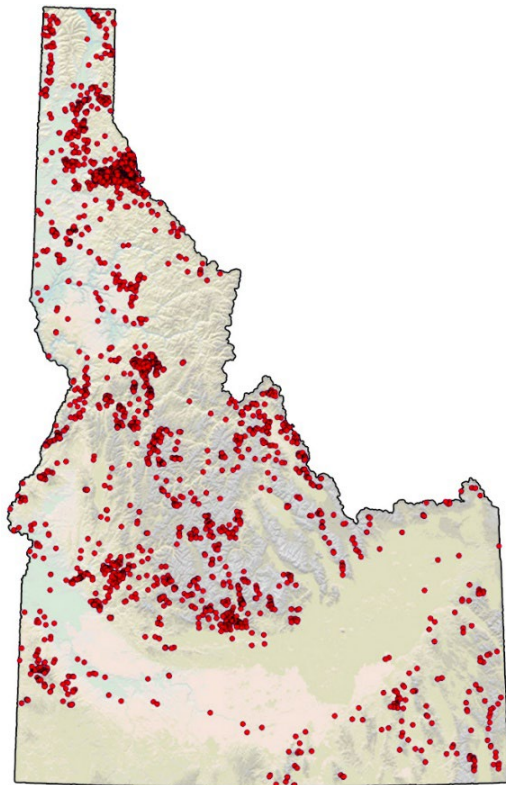


3.2.3 Idaho's Mining Industry

While mining comprises a comparatively smaller proportion of Idaho's GDP and employment, due to the size, scale, and bulk outputs of corresponding operations, mining and extraction can produce significant amounts of goods moving on the transportation system. Mining operations are often heavily dependent on freight rail throughout multiple components of the supply chain.

As explained in Chapter 1, Idaho has a rich mining history. According to the Idaho Department of Lands, there are 1,595 active mines across the State, including 28 active dredge and placer mines consisting of gold and valuable mineral extraction.⁸⁹ The extent of these mines is shown in Figure 3.18, while Figure 3.19 identifies the largest operating mines and mining districts in the State. Idaho leads in the production of pumice/pumicite; is a major producer of garnet, feldspar, lead, molybdenum, perlite, phosphate, silver, zeolites, and zinc; and also produces aggregates, cement, copper, dimension stone, lime, and gemstones.⁹⁰ These commodities play an integral role in everyday life, and have uses ranging from construction and glassmaking to fertilizer and manufacturing.

Figure 3.18 Mining Properties in Idaho in 2024

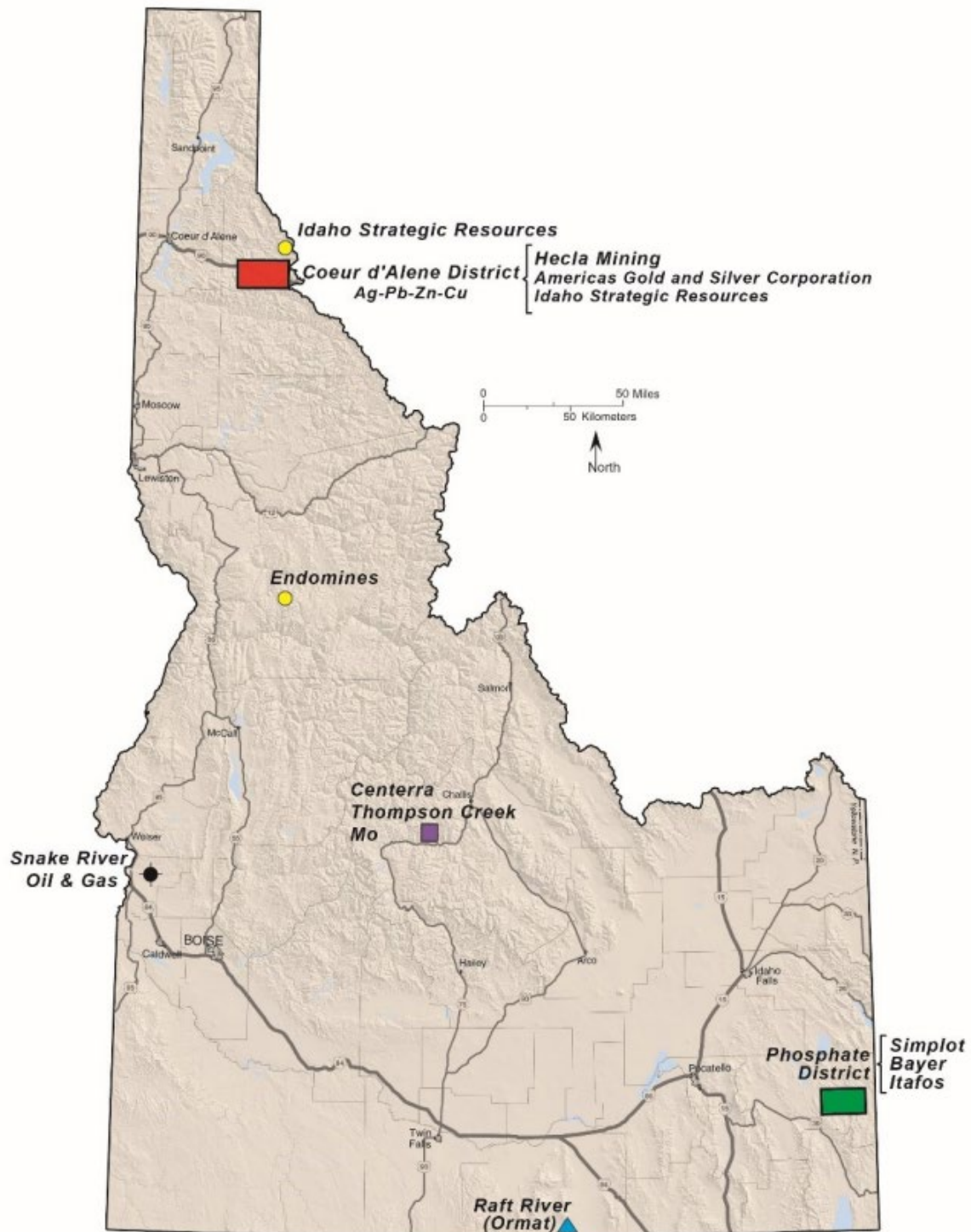


Source: Idaho Geological Survey.

⁸⁹ Idaho Department of Lands, Mining Website home, <https://www.idl.idaho.gov/mining-minerals/>.

⁹⁰ U.S. Geological Survey, The Mineral Industry of Idaho, <https://www.usgs.gov/centers/national-minerals-information-center/mineral-industry-idaho#:~:text=Idaho%20leads%20in%20the%20production,stone%2C%20lime%2C%20and%20gemstones.>

Figure 3.19 Operating Large Mines in Idaho in 2024



ACTIVE MINES AND PLANTS 2024

Source: Idaho Geological Survey.

Mining Case Study and Supply Chain Analysis: Phosphate Mining and Fertilizer Production

Phosphate mining is one of the most important components of Idaho's mining sector. Nationally, phosphate is the fifth-largest mining industry, and within Idaho it ranks as the State's second most valuable non-fuel mineral commodity, behind molybdenum. Phosphate is indispensable to fertilizer production, which supports agriculture locally, across the United States, and in overseas markets.

Idaho's phosphate resources are concentrated in the southeast corner of the State, with extraction occurring in the Caribou Mountains and processing centered around Soda Springs and Pocatello. The region contains about 22 percent of U.S. phosphate reserves and 4 percent of the world's supply, underscoring its national and global significance.⁹¹

The phosphate supply chain begins at the mine site. Vegetation is cleared and overburden removed—typically 15 to 20 feet of soil—to expose the ore body. Mining requires a steady flow of inputs such as heavy equipment, fuel, lubricants, water, and explosives. These are typically trucked in, though in some cases rail is also used. At certain sites, phosphate ore can be loaded directly onto railcars for shipment.

Once extracted, ore must be moved to a processing plant. Mode choice is distance-dependent: trucks often serve short hauls, but for movements over roughly 20 miles, rail is the preferred mode due to the bulk nature of the material.⁹² This makes rail the backbone of the phosphate supply chain in southeastern Idaho, connecting remote mines to major processing facilities in Soda Springs and Pocatello, as well as plants in neighboring states. Notable facilities include Soda Springs Phosphate II LLC and Itafos Conda in Soda Springs, and J.R. Simplot's Don Plant in Pocatello. Simplot also operates a fertilizer factory in Rock Springs, WY, which relies heavily on phosphate railed in from Idaho.

Processing phosphate is resource intensive. Most phosphate ore is converted into fertilizer, a process that requires additional chemical inputs such as anhydrous ammonia, sulfuric acid, and potassium compounds. As shown in Table 3.1, many of these materials arrive by rail, particularly bulk imports like potash, about 90 percent of which is imported into the United States from Canada. Rail connections are therefore critical not only for moving Idaho's phosphate outward, but also for bringing in the raw materials needed to process it.⁹³

⁹¹ Bureau of Land Management, Idaho Mining and Minerals, <https://www.blm.gov/programs/energy-and-minerals/mining-and-minerals/about/idaho#:~:text=Phosphate%20mining%20and%20processing%20contribute,people%20in%20high%2Dpaying%20jobs>.

⁹² Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, Trends in the Phosphate Industry of Idaho and the Western Phosphate Field, <https://idahogeology.org/pub/Pamphlets/P-155.pdf>.

⁹³ University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Farm Doc Daily, Tariff Threats and U.S. Fertilizer Imports, <https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2025/02/tariff-threats-and-us-fertilizer-imports.html>.

Table 3.1 Fertilizer Compound Imports

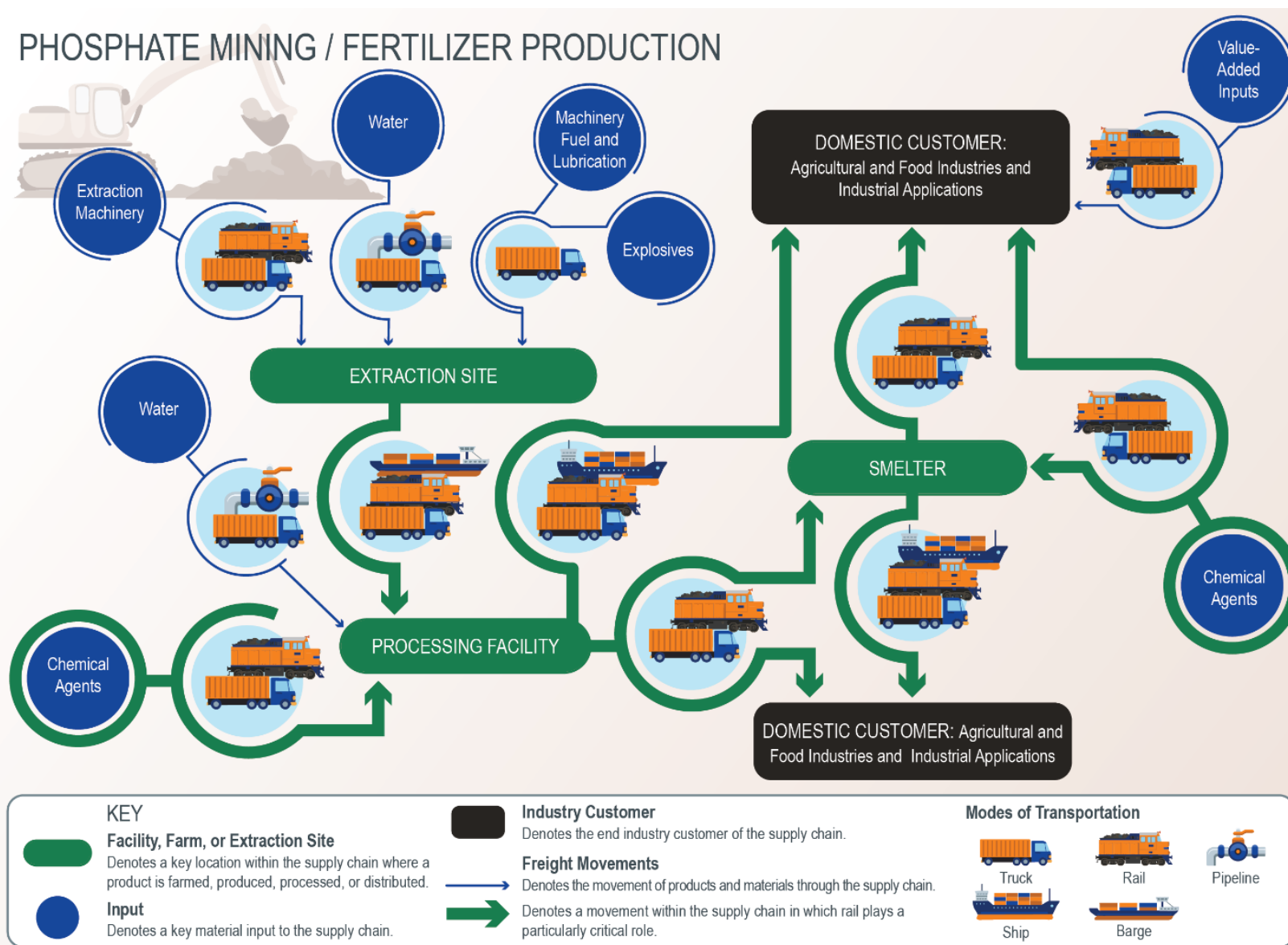
Commodity/Compound	Percent Imported	Primary Origin Countries
Nitrogen (Anhydrous Ammonia)	10%	Canada
Phosphorous (Phosphates)	11%	Peru, Morocco
Potassium (Potassium Chloride)	90%	Canada, Russia, Belarus
Sulfur (Sulfuric Acid)	12%	Canada, Mexico, Spain

Source: <https://farmdocdaily.illinois.edu/2025/02/tariff-threats-and-us-fertilizer-imports.html>.

Some phosphate undergoes further refining into higher-purity phosphorus products. These are essential for specialized applications such as flame retardants, detergents, lubricants, pesticides, electronics, and food-grade additives. Production involves complex chemical reactions carried out at high temperatures and pressures, requiring precise logistics and steady input supply.

Finished products are then distributed to markets across the country and exported abroad, with rail again serving as the primary long-haul mode. Key export destinations include South America, Europe, and Asia, though the majority of output supports the U.S. agriculture and food industries. While trucks remain essential for local and final delivery, rail provides the crucial long-distance link that enables Idaho's phosphate industry to function as part of both the national and global economy. An example supply chain for phosphate is shown in Figure 3.20.

Figure 3.20 Phosphate Mining Supply Chain



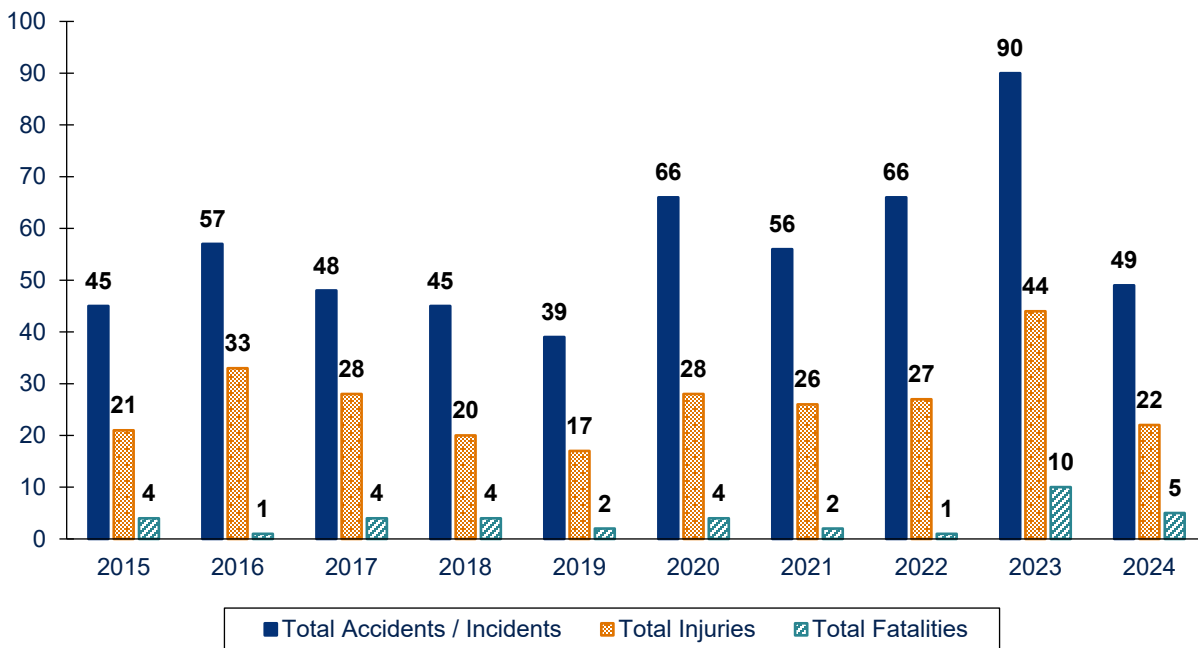
3.3 Rail System and Highway/Rail At-Grade Crossing Safety and Security

Safety issues and initiatives can have a large impact on the rail system and across Idaho's entire multimodal transportation network. This section examines rail system safety and security as well as the safety of highway/rail at-grade crossings in Idaho.

3.3.1 Rail Safety Metrics

The FRA Office of Safety Analysis collects safety information and aggregates it at the State level to gauge overall performance and assess the effectiveness of rail safety programs. Rail accidents/incident trends for Idaho are shown in Figure 3.21 and broken out by total accidents/incidents, injuries, and fatalities between 2015 and 2024.⁹⁴ While national incident levels have been stable or declining in recent years, Idaho's accidents/incidents have fluctuated, but have generally increased until 2023, reaching a high of 90, then dropping back down to 49 total accidents/incidents in 2024. However, at the same time, fatalities have trended upwards nationally, but with the exception of 2023, have remained flat in Idaho, with an outsized peak in 2023 of 10 total fatalities in the State before dropping to pre-2019 levels in 2024.

Figure 3.21 Idaho Rail Accidents/Incidents and Safety Metrics, 2015–2024



Source: FRA 2025 Accident/Incident Overview Dashboard.

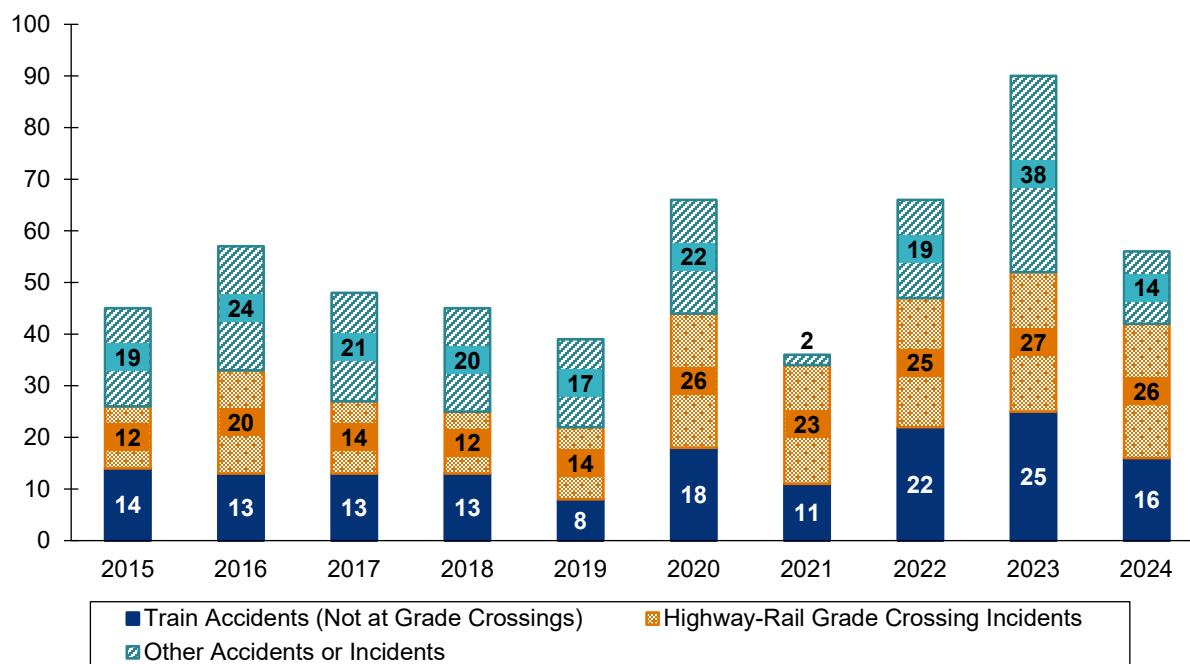
⁹⁴ The FRA does not differentiate between an "accident and an "incident." Rather, the FRA explains, "Accident/Incident is the term used to describe the entire list of reportable events. These include collisions, derailments, and other events involving the operation of on-track equipment and causing reportable damage above an established threshold; impacts between railroad on-track equipment and highway users at crossings; and all other incidents or exposures that cause a fatality or injury to any person, or an occupational illness to a railroad employee."

The FRA further categorizes reportable accidents/incidents into three categories:

1. **Train Accidents (Not at At-Grade Crossings)**—An event involving on-track rail equipment that results in monetary damage to the equipment and track.
2. **Highway/Rail At-Grade Crossing Incidents**—Highway/rail at-grade crossings (referred to as grade crossings from this point onwards) are intersections where a roadway crosses railroad tracks at the same level. Any impact between a rail and highway user at a grade crossing site, regardless of severity, is included here. This category includes motor vehicles and other highway/roadway/sidewalk users at both public and private crossings. Grade crossing safety is discussed in further detail in the following section.
3. **Other Accidents or Incidents**—Events other than train accidents or crossing incidents that caused death or nonfatal condition to any person. Most fatalities in this category are due to trespassing.

As shown in Figure 3.22, the composition of rail incidents in Idaho has varied. For most years, “Other Accidents or Incidents” have comprised approximately half of all reportable incidents, though 2021 and 2024 saw smaller numbers in this category. Train accidents not at-grade crossings have elevated in recent years, reaching a high of 25 incidents in 2023, but have comprised generally less than one-third of all incidents. The number of grade crossing incidents have also generally increased since 2020, an uptick likely in-part attributable to increased vehicular traffic due to post-COVID era growth.

Figure 3.22 Idaho Rail Accidents / Incidents by Category, 2015–2024



Source: FRA 2025 Accident/Incident Overview Dashboard.

Hazardous Materials Transport

The Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) captures information on hazardous material transport nationwide. Rail is generally safer than other modes, especially for hazardous materials transport. In 2022, trucks carried 5.7 times as much tonnage as freight rail across the United States (though this increases to a factor of 30 in Idaho).⁹⁵ Between 2013–2023 across the United States, hazmat trucks experienced 40 times as many incidents as hazmat trains, with incidents increasing over that time period for hazmat trucks and decreasing for hazmat trains. Furthermore, during that time, there were 85 fatalities in hazmat truck incidents but none in hazmat train incidents.⁹⁶

However, during that time period, there were only 3.9 times as many fatalities and injuries put together in hazmat truck incidents compared to hazmat train incidents. This means that injuries per ton per year have been higher for hazmat trains than for hazmat trucks. This is because individual incidents involving hazmat trains, though much rarer than individual incidents involving hazmat trucks, have a somewhat higher likelihood of injuring more people when they do happen. In particular, across the United States between 2013–2020, there were at least 100 hazmat truck injuries every year and fewer than 20 hazmat train injuries in every year except one. The single exceptional year for hazmat trains was in 2015, when there were 213 hazmat train injuries, of which 197 were in a single incident (the Marysville, TN hazmat train derailment); this means that there were only 16 injuries across all other hazmat train incidents in 2015, which is comparable to statistics from other years between 2013–2023.

3.3.2 Highway-Rail At-Grade Crossing Safety

Because a grade crossing is a point at which more than one mode of transportation meets, both public and private entities have jurisdiction over various aspects of the intersections. Railroad companies own and maintain the tracks and generally own the property (right-of-way) to either side. However, the roadway at a crossing is either on a railroad easement or owned by a public entity. Public crossings are those at which the highway or roadway is under the jurisdiction of a public authority such as a municipality, and private crossings are those in which the roadway is privately owned and are not under the jurisdiction of the public entities. Because of these dual responsibilities at crossings, it is imperative that the public and private sectors coordinate to ensure the intersections are safe.

As discussed in the previous section, information about safety incidents at grade crossings is collected by the FRA. Additionally, effective January 13, 2021, the FRA amended 49 CFR 234.11 to require each State to have an FRA-approved highway-rail at-grade crossing action plan no later than February 14, 2022. Idaho's first Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan was adopted in January 2022. The plan summarizes Federal and State statutes and guidance on grade crossings, identifies key metrics and existing conditions, as well as strategies for implementing proposed strategies.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ CF2200A12: Geographic Area Series: Census Bureau Table, https://data.census.gov/table/CFSAREA2022.CF2200A12?q=010XX00US_040XX00US16&d=ECNSVY+Commodity+Flow+Survey+Geographic+Area+Series.

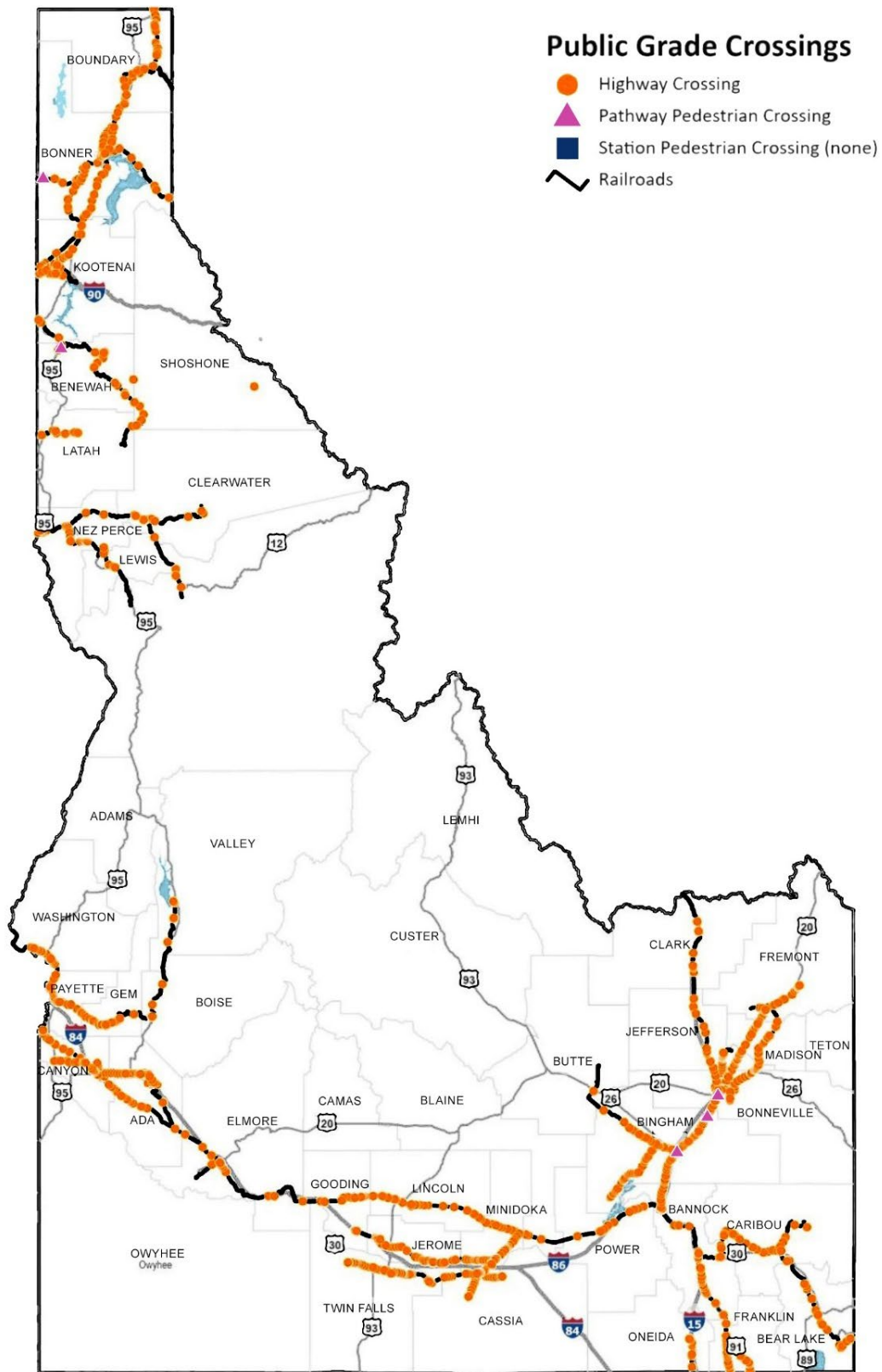
⁹⁶ Hazardous Materials Fatalities, Injuries, Accidents, and Property Damage Data | BTS, <https://www.bts.gov/content/hazardous-materials-fatalities-injuries-accidents-and-property-damage-data>.

⁹⁷ <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b94318eb3bcc4f2d968d85156379a949>.

As per the 2021 Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan, there are 1,334 grade crossings located on public rights-of-way (ROW). This represents 56 percent of all grade crossings in the State. These are visualized across Idaho's rail network in Figure 3.23. At-grade crossings comprise 93 percent of all crossings in the State, with the rest being grade separated. Of these grade crossings, 69 percent have only passive signage warning of the crossings. Of the remaining grade crossings, there is an approximately even split between active crossing gates and solely flashing lights/bells. Those crossings with active warning features can be found primarily in urbanized and high-traffic locations in Idaho, in addition to along crossings with challenging designs / geometries or other safety concerns. Almost all private crossings have only passive signage warning of the crossing.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ ITD must document crossings on private property and collisions at those crossings but cannot spend public funds on improving crossings on private property (except to buy such property and transfer it to the public ROW).

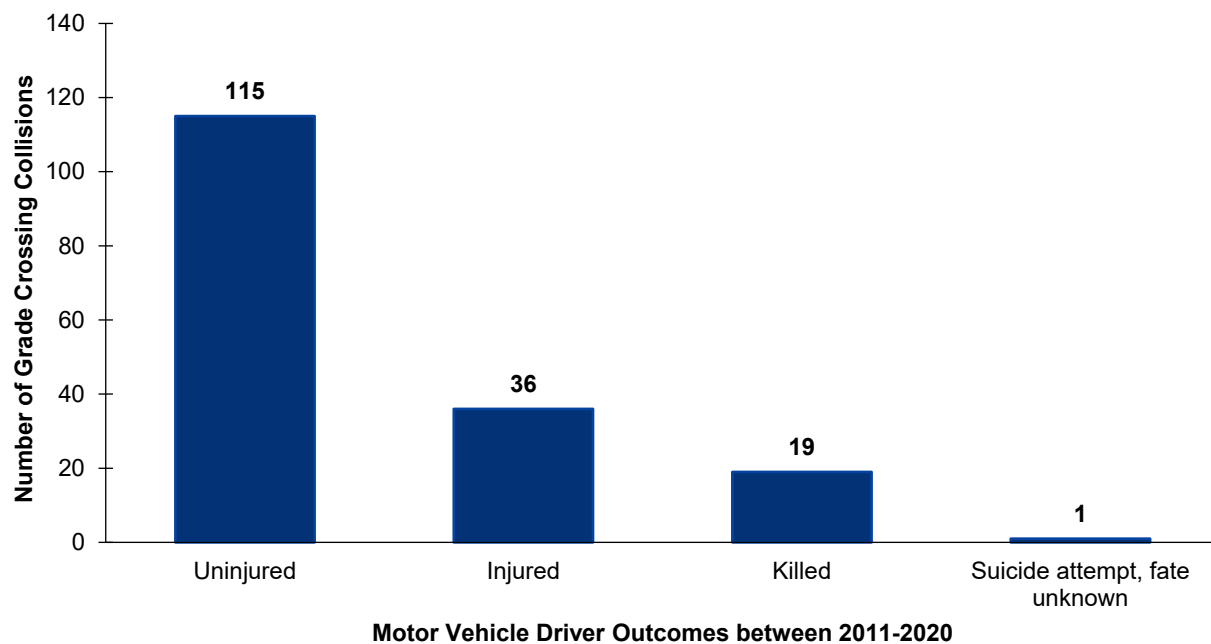
Figure 3.23 Idaho Public Grade Crossings



Source: 2021 Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan.

The 2021 Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan reported 171 grade crossing collisions between 2011 and 2020.^{99,100} As shown in Figure 3.24, although most collisions did not result in injuries to the driver, 19 fatalities did occur. Geographically, this included concentrations of crashes on Union Pacific's Nampa subdivision in Minidoka County, Union Pacific's Huntington subdivision in Canyon County, and Union Pacific's Spokane subdivision in Kootenai County (Figure 3.25).

Figure 3.24 Distribution of Grade Crossing Collisions in Idaho by Motor Vehicle Driver Outcome (2011–2020)



Source: 2021 Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan.

⁹⁹ ITD, Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b94318eb3bcc4f2d968d85156379a949>.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. DOT, Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Incidents Landing Page, <https://data.transportation.gov/stories/s/Highway-Rail-Crossing-Incidents-Landing-Page/9hnw-nt86/>.

Table 3.2 Idaho Action Plan for Accomplishing Grade Crossing Safety Goals and Objectives

Theme	Action Plan
Education	1. Continue to support educational outreach and public service announcements about crossings safety and provide ITD personnel as volunteers and support to Idaho Operation Lifesaver. 2. Hold training workshops with railroads and local and State agencies that maintain highway infrastructure at and near grade crossings. 3. Attend local government and affiliated organization meetings to present ITD's grade crossing program. 4. Cultivate and encourage participation in Rail Operation and Safety Team (ROAST).¹ 5. Participate in peer exchange and other training to learn about best practices.
Enforcement	1. Continue to encourage the enforcement of traffic laws at grade crossings as law enforcement agencies conduct regular patrol and specialized mobilization efforts such as Idaho Operation Lifesaver's Officer on a Train and Union Pacific's Crossing Accident Reduction Education and Safety (CARES) events. 2. Continue to support legislation that promotes responsible driver behavior at grade crossings. 3. Continue to provide educational information about legislation that would promote unsafe driver behavior at grade crossings. 4. Provide location information to law enforcement where the Diagnostic Review Team identifies enforcement as a countermeasure to improve safety.
Engineering	1. Efficiently utilize Federal Section 130 funds within the Rail-Highway Crossing Program. 2. Continue to perform regular inventory and inspections of grade crossings and send letters to road authorities and railroads for identified deficiencies. 3. Identify grade crossings that require additional diagnostic review such as grade crossings with low ground clearance, frequently blocked by train, multiple crash locations, grade crossings located near traffic signals, etc. 4. Modify ITD railroad standard drawings as innovations are made, and national standards are revised. 5. Develop grade separation warrant criteria. 6. Develop a pedestrian/bicycle grade crossing best practice manual. 7. Improve project prioritization and selection process to use Section 130 funds and other local and national resources at locations that provide the most benefit. 8. Support and encourage grade crossing closures and consolidations. 9. Perform an annual analysis of the highest ranked crossings/corridors using FRA's WBAPS as a tool for evaluating and prioritizing crossing projects.
Evaluation	1. Utilize FRA data to analyze grade crossing statistics throughout Idaho to evaluate the effectiveness of the goals and objectives of this plan. 2. Utilize ITD's Office of Highway Safety's detailed database of crash statistics for additional analysis of grade crossing data. 3. Review the goals and objectives of this plan on an annual basis to determine the status of each goal and objective. Update the plan as needed. 4. Develop performance measures to evaluate the effectiveness of ITD's Rail-Highway Crossing Program.

¹ ITD's ROAST proposes, reviews, evaluates and recommends grade crossing projects. The voting members of ROAST are comprised of a representative from each of ITD's six districts and the Idaho Operation Lifesaver State Coordinator. Ex officio members include Federal Highway Administration, Local Highway Technical Assistance Council, ITD's Highway Design, Traffic Services, Freight Manager, Highway Safety Manager and Rail-Highway Crossing Program Manager. All proposed projects are vetted through the applicable district ROAST members.

Source: 2021 Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan.

Implementation of Grade Crossing Improvements in Idaho

Responsibility for highway/rail at-grade crossings is shared between FRA and FHWA, along with State and local transportation agencies. In particular, FHWA is responsible for public grade crossing issues that affect highway safety, providing guidelines and standards for the correct design of grade crossings, the assessment of safety at a grade crossing, and appropriate placement of traffic control devices at and on the approach to a grade crossing. However, states determine which public crossings need improvements and rely heavily on federally supplied funds, known as Section 130 funds, to make improvements. This program allocates money to the states specifically for eliminating hazards at public highway-rail grade crossings.

In Idaho, ITD's Division of Planning Services administers Section 130 funds, with the State receiving approximately \$2 million in such funding annually. To match Federal funding, Idaho also allocates a maximum of \$250,000 annually for at-grade crossing improvements and safety programs. Some recent project highlights funded with discretionary grants(?) include the following:

- » **Grade Crossing Elimination in Hauser**—In 2023, ITD received a \$36 million grant to build a new interchange between SH 53 and Pleasant View Road. The project will result in the elimination of three grade crossings over BNSF trackage which sees on average, over 40 trains per day. As a result of the grant, construction, which was originally programmed to commence in 2028, already began in 2024.¹⁰¹
- » **Grade Crossing Safety Improvements in Fremont and Madison Counties**—ITD is currently finalizing a funding program for safety improvements at multiple grade crossings along US-20 in Fremont and Madison Counties in Eastern Idaho. The project will include new frontage roads to better circulate traffic, and at least one grade separation to the south of St. Anthony.¹⁰²
- » **Grade Crossing Elimination Project Development in Nampa**—In 2024, the City of Nampa was awarded a \$1.2 million grant for project development and planning activities to advance a grade separation project along Robinson Road near the intersection with Greenhurst Road, over Union Pacific trackage.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ ITD, Project to Improve Safety on SH 53 Near Hauser Receives \$36 Million Grant, <https://itd.idaho.gov/news/project-to-improve-safety-on-sh-53-near-hauser-receives-36-million-grant/>.

¹⁰² ITD, U.S. 20 At-Grade Safety Improvement Evaluation, <https://itd.idaho.gov/projects/?keyword=grade%20crossing>.

¹⁰³ FRA, Railroad Crossing Elimination (RCE Grant Program FY 2023–2024 Selections, https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2025-01/FY23-24_RCE_Project_Selections.pdf.

3.3.3 Rail System Security

An additional aspect within the topic of rail safety is rail system security. Rail system security in the United States is a shared Federal agency responsibility with various measures aimed at protecting the Nation's railway infrastructure, passengers, and freight from security threats. In 2024, it is estimated that cargo theft resulted in \$100 million losses for Class I railroads, an increase of 40 percent from previous years.¹⁰⁴

While the FRA plays a significant role in regulating and enforcing safety and security standards for the Nation's railroads, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), under the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, has primary Federal jurisdiction over rail security. This includes oversight of key programs related to incident reporting, cybersecurity, cargo theft, and other urgent security needs. The TSA published rules aimed at protecting the Nation's freight and passenger rail systems on November 26, 2008. These include a requirement by railroads shipping TIH materials, certain explosive materials, and certain radioactive materials (collectively referred to as "security-sensitive material") shipments to follow prescribed chain of custody procedures.¹⁰⁵

The TSA's Surface Transportation Security Inspection Program deploys inspectors across the United States to verify implementation of voluntary freight rail security measures, conduct vulnerability assessments, and conduct regulatory compliance inspections. Locally, Idaho State Police and the Idaho Office of Emergency Management are tasked with coordinating emergency responses to vulnerabilities within the State. Rail carriers, rail transit systems, and certain rail facilities are also required to designate rail security coordinators to act as liaisons with the TSA. Railroads are required to report security concerns to the TSA. Upon request by TSA, railroads must be able to report the location of a single car with security-sensitive materials within five minutes, and within 30 minutes the location of multiple security-sensitive material cars in multiple locations.

Strategic Rail Corridor Network

The United States Transportation Command developed the Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET), which is a system of commercial railroads that serves U.S. Department of Defense's domestic operations, connecting bases, military installations, and maritime ports where rail service is needed. In Idaho, this includes access to the Orchard Combat Training Center in Boise and the Naval Nuclear Laboratory Scoville (Naval Reactors Facility), located 52 miles northwest of Idaho Falls.

STRACNET is designated along with the Strategic Highway Network (STRAHNET), strategic seaports, military airports, and other infrastructure facilities to support essential freight activity and goods movement for the U.S. military. Figure 3.26 shows the STRACNET routes within Idaho. STRACNET routes in Idaho include Union Pacific's Northwest Corridor and BNSF's Great Northern and Montana Rail Link Corridors. STRACNET also includes a series of connector rail routes which carry less than three million gross ton-miles (MGT) per year to sites of military importance. In Idaho, this includes Union Pacific's Montana and Scoville Subdivisions which carry traffic between the Naval Nuclear Laboratory in Scoville and Union Pacific's Northwest Corridor.

¹⁰⁴ Trains Magazine, AAR Says Cargo Theft Cost Class I Railroads More Than \$100 Million in 2024, <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/aar-says-cargo-theft-cost-class-i-railroads-more-than-100-million-in-2024/>.

¹⁰⁵ Federal Register, Rail Transportation Security, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2008/11/26/E8-27287/rail-transportation-security>.

Figure 3.26 Idaho STRACNET Locations



Source: U.S. Army Transportation Engineering Agency.

3.4 Freight and Passenger Rail Traffic

Idaho's rail network is critical for moving goods to, from, within, and through the State. According to Idaho's 2023 Strategic Freight Plan, rail transports the second highest quantity of goods in Idaho, yet is far behind trucks in terms of total volumes.¹⁰⁶ Freight trains moving through Idaho include long-distance intermodal service moving from coastal ports, unit trains carrying coal or other bulk commodities, and local feeder traffic moving Idaho's agricultural products and raw materials to and from markets within the State and beyond. This section describes overall rail traffic and congestion in Idaho, overviews freight rail flows, and discusses passenger rail traffic.

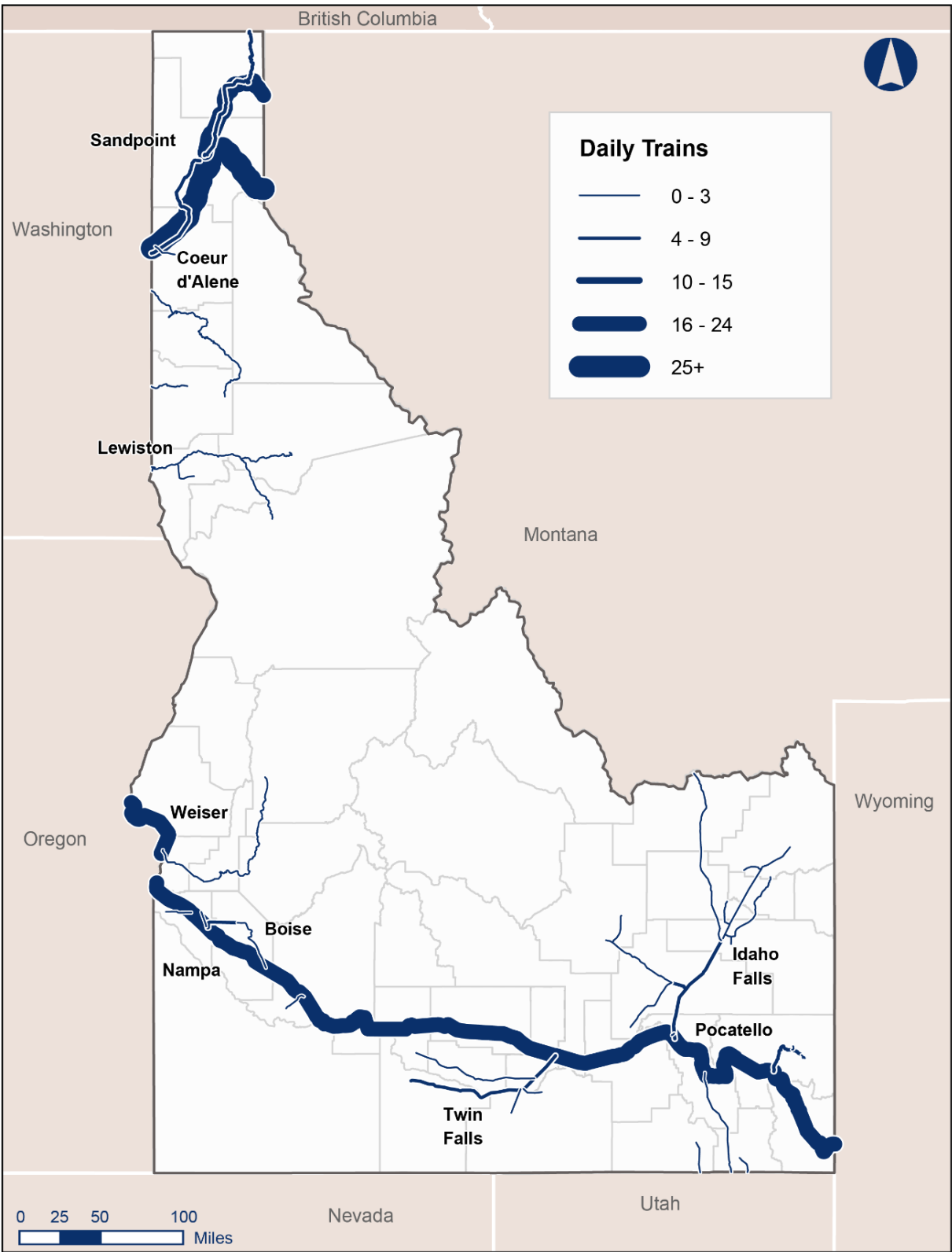
3.4.1 Rail Traffic and Congestion

Rail traffic across the Idaho network is shown in Figure 3.27, by measure of daily trains. Most of Idaho's rail traffic is concentrated along BNSF's Great Northern Corridor in the Idaho panhandle, and Union Pacific's Northwest Corridor across the southern part of the State. At the national scale, the Great Northern corridor provides a critical link between the Pacific Northwest and Chicago and eastern United States markets. This corridor through Idaho sees upwards of 35 daily trains, consisting almost entirely of through traffic. Union Pacific's Spokane Subdivision, which roughly parallels BNSF's Great Northern Corridor, sees approximately 8 daily trains. Most of this traffic is bound for Canada via the Eastport border crossing.

In southern Idaho and across the Snake River Valley, Union Pacific's Northwest Corridor sees the highest traffic volumes, carrying between 16 and 20 daily trains between the Oregon and Wyoming State lines. This corridor provides the major link between the Pacific Northwest and eastern United States markets for Union Pacific. North of Idaho Falls, Union Pacific's Montana Subdivision sees approximately one daily train north towards Butte, Montana. To the south of Pocatello, the Ogden Subdivision sees approximately three daily trains in the direction of Ogden and Salt Lake City in Utah.

¹⁰⁶ ITD, 2023 Strategic Freight Plan, https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2023-12/ID_FreightPlan.pdf.

Figure 3.27 Idaho Rail Traffic



Source: Daily traffic data aggregated by rail line and derived from FRA Grade Crossing Inventory.

Idaho's terminal Class I subdivisions and short line railroads see comparatively less traffic by measure of daily trains, in comparison to its through routes. In southeast Idaho, Union Pacific's Dry Valley subdivision sees up to eight daily trains, consisting almost entirely of mining traffic. The Minidoka division of the Eastern Idaho Railroad sees up to six daily trains, consisting primarily of agricultural traffic. Most of Idaho's remaining lines, which typically interchange with the busier Class I through corridor, see one daily train or less. The composition of this traffic varies by geography, and includes forest products, grains, and chemicals.

As previously noted, rail tonnage in Idaho is expected to grow significantly in the coming decades. While Idaho's rail network is not currently congested, increased growth may change this trend in the coming years. Additionally, as infrastructure ages, the need for maintenance increases and the likelihood of slowdowns or route closures increases.

As part of the stakeholder engagement process for this plan, railroads and shippers were asked about congestion trends across the statewide network, and corresponding needs. Overall, Idaho's railroads and stakeholders did not identify any specific bottleneck or congested locations across the statewide network. However, one capacity expansion need and two state-of-good-repair needs were identified:

- » The Rio Grande Pacific Corporation, which operates the INPR, noted that their interchange with Union Pacific in Payette could handle up to double current volumes. However, INPR does need to install another siding track to handle capacity at their yard in Emmett. To the north, between Banks and Cascade, INPR's tracks are currently out-of-service due to frequent rockslides, especially when snow thaws in the higher elevations. With the tracks being located across the Payette River from SH 55, getting equipment to the corridor to upgrade existing infrastructure is a challenge.

This infrastructure investment would also support expansion of INPR's business, especially in the movement of chemicals, particularly with shippers involved in water treatment chemical production, as well as diesel exhaust fluid producers. INPR also sees potential for new and planned mining ventures. However, infrastructure upgrades will be required to mitigate further congestion chokepoints, and to advance the viability of these opportunities.

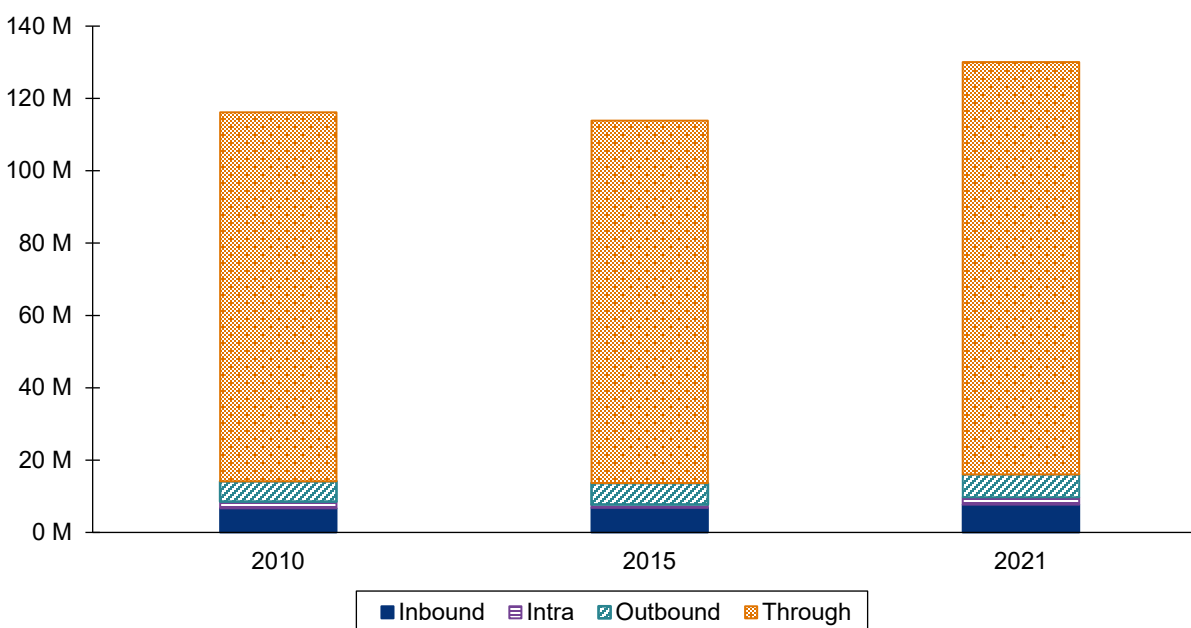
- » Hess Pumice, which operates the Malad Shortline, indicated the need for tie replacement and other infrastructure needs along the line. These upgrades are likely needed to prevent future chokepoints across the line.
- » Port of Pend Oreille, which operates the POVA, identified bridges and grade crossings along BNSF's trackage that could be replaced or upgraded, and which impact local operations.

3.4.2 Freight Rail Flows

Overview

As shown in Figure 3.28, Idaho's freight rail traffic is primarily composed of through movements, which account for 88 percent of all freight rail traffic in 2021, according to the STB's Confidential Carload Waybill Sample data.¹⁰⁷ Freight originating or terminating in Idaho accounts for about 11 percent of total tonnage, with intrastate traffic comprising less than 2 percent.

Figure 3.28 Freight Rail Tonnage by Traffic Type in Idaho (2010–2021)



Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

Between 2010 and 2021, the total freight tonnage moved in Idaho declined slightly and later recovered. The decline between 2010 and 2015 was due to a decrease in both intrastate traffic and through traffic of grains, the largest commodity by tonnage. Between 2015 and 2021, rail traffic increased due to several factors such as an increase in shipments of food products like sugar, malt, and distilled liquor, along with growth in chemical shipments driven by higher demand for fertilizers and industrial chemicals. This recovery contrasts with national trends, where total freight tonnage continued to decline between 2015 and 2021, largely due to reductions in coal shipments and broader shifts in freight patterns.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.stb.gov/reports-data/waybill/>.

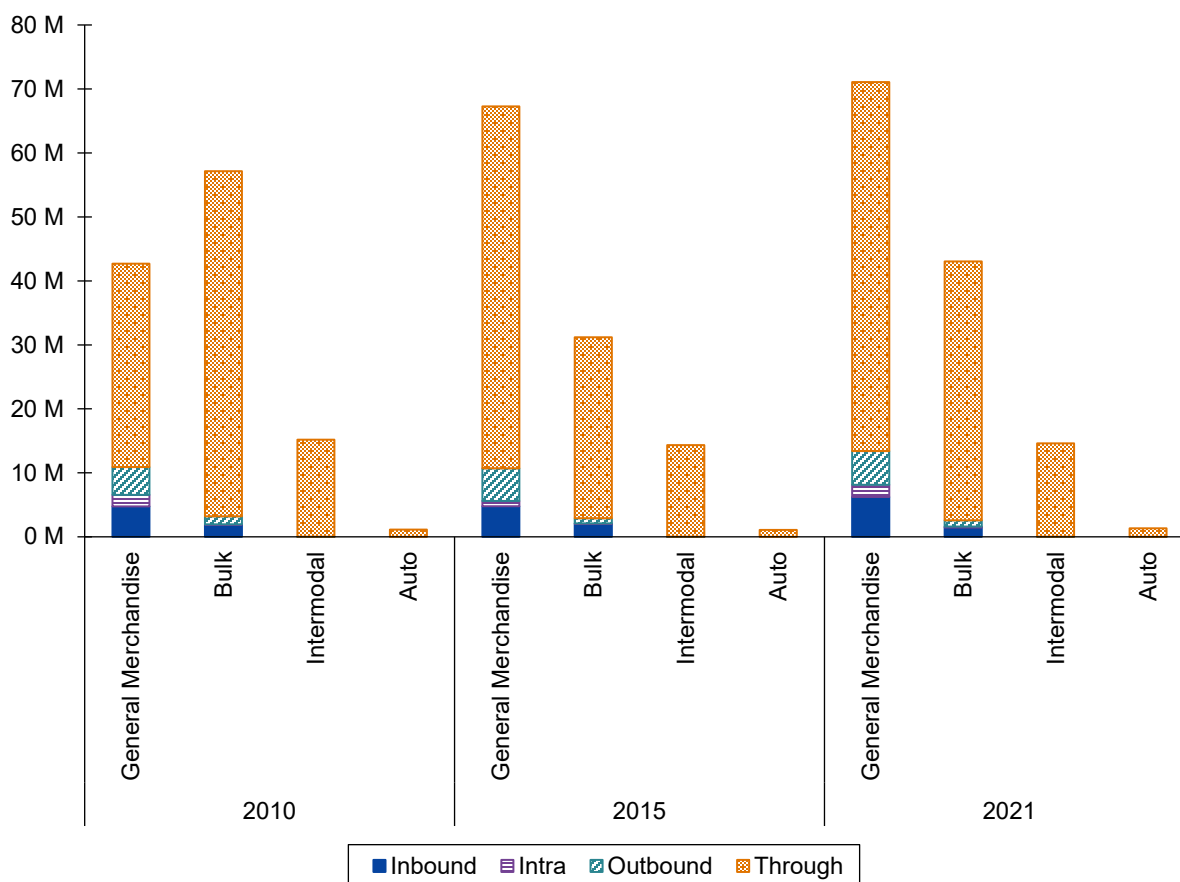
3.4.3 Types of Freight Rail Flows

The STB Waybill data provides insight into the types of freight service offered by railroads, which is essential for understanding how the rail network operates and what infrastructure it requires. The four service type categories are:

- » **General Merchandise Service**—Miscellaneous goods transported in boxcars or other non-intermodal or bulk commodity cars.
- » **Bulk Service**—The transportation of heavy aggregates, ores, or other mass commodities, often delivered uncovered.
- » **Intermodal Service**—The movement of containerized cargo in standard-sized containers which can move via multiple modes.
- » **Auto Service**—The delivery of automobiles via specialized intermodal auto rail cars (auto racks) and the transportation of auto parts.

Distinguishing among rail service types is important because each represents different operational patterns, infrastructure needs, and planning considerations. For example, intermodal traffic often requires access to intermodal terminals and connections to highway networks, while bulk services typically involve high-volume, predictable shipments using unit trains. General merchandise and auto services may involve more frequent switching, specialized equipment, or dedicated facilities.

As shown in Figure 3.28, Idaho is a critical national corridor for trans-regional rail traffic. Figure 3.29 breaks down the service types moving through the State. The primary types of traffic moving through the State are general merchandise and bulk service, though there is also a significant amount of intermodal traffic. Bulk traffic also includes a mix of through, inbound, and outbound shipments, and general merchandise is the only category that also includes in-State movements. Nearly all intermodal and auto shipments pass through Idaho without being loaded or unloaded.

Figure 3.29 Freight Rail Tonnage by Service Type in Idaho (2010–2021)

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

3.4.4 Freight Rail Flows by Railroad Class

The majority of tonnage transported by rail occurs via the State's Class I railroads, as illustrated in Figure 3.30 (tonnage by origin) and Figure 3.31 (tonnage by destination). Through 2021, approximately 93 percent of tonnage moved across BNSF or Union Pacific's trackage; most of it comprised of through movements (passing through the State without necessarily originating or ending in it). As indicated in the previous section, these movements are especially comprised of general merchandise, bulk, and intermodal shipments.

BNSF service operates in northern Idaho. More than 98 percent of its operations involve through traffic, with little service in the State. Its mainline through the State is part of the Great Northern Corridor, a key freight route connecting the Pacific Northwest to the Midwest. Only 2 percent of its freight tonnage either originates or terminates in Idaho. The majority of traffic includes agricultural commodities, consumer products, and mixed merchandise.¹⁰⁸ In 2022, BNSF launched a two-way freight service on its new Sandpoint Junction Connector rail bridge over Lake Pend Oreille, completing a major infrastructure

¹⁰⁸ Idaho Governor's Office, Letter of Support for Sandpoint Junction Connector Project, <https://www.dco.uscg.mil/Portals/9/DCO Documents/5pw/Office of Bridge Programs/BNSF Sandpoint/File - Gov. Otter 4-9-2018.pdf>.

project with goals of enhancing capacity, reducing congestion, and supporting long-term freight and passenger rail efficiency.¹⁰⁹ BNSF also operates a major refueling facility in Hauser that serves approximately 32 trains per day.¹¹⁰

Union Pacific in southern Idaho accounts for the majority of rail activity in Idaho when through traffic is excluded. Union Pacific transports a wide range of products, including potatoes, sugar beets, beans, grain, fertilizer, phosphate, and forest products.¹¹¹ Unlike BNSF, Union Pacific offers a more balanced service, benefiting from strong local feeder lines and connections with the Eastern Idaho Railroad (EIRR) and the Boise Valley Railroad (BVRR), two short lines with frequent local service. About 60 percent of Union Pacific's operations are through traffic, while about a third consists of inbound and outbound shipments. Idaho's first and only intermodal rail terminal is located at Union Pacific's rail yard in Pocatello and provides agricultural producers in southern Idaho and northern Utah with improved access to containerized rail service and export markets.¹¹²

Idaho's Class III railroads have consistently carried approximately 15 million tons, with over 90 percent of this identified as through traffic, which is often due to shared trackage rights or other switching between Class III and Class I carriers. Through Class III railroads account for around 10 percent of traffic by origin railroad, as shown in Figure 3.30, but a much smaller percentage of traffic by destination railroad, as shown in Figure 3.31.¹¹³ These short line railroads primarily transport agricultural products, forest products, fertilizers, industrial chemicals, and food-grade commodities, reflecting their role in connecting rural regions to the national rail network and beyond.

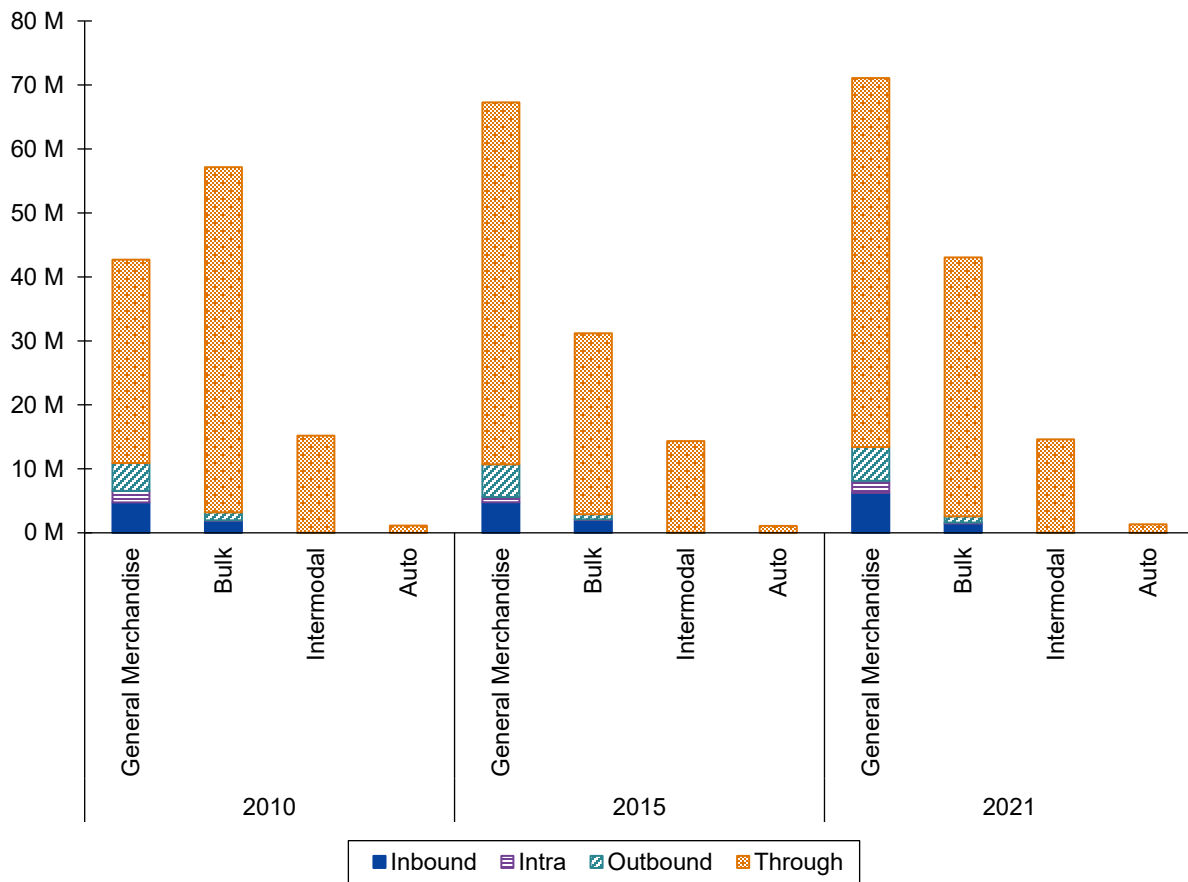
¹⁰⁹ BNSF News, BNSF Railway's Sandpoint Junction Connector Bridge Now Open, <https://www.bnsf.com/news-media/news-releases/newsrelease.page?relId=bnsf-railways-sandpoint-junction-connector-bridge-now-open>.

¹¹⁰ BNSF, BNSF Railway in Idaho, <https://bnsfnorthwest.com/idaho/>.

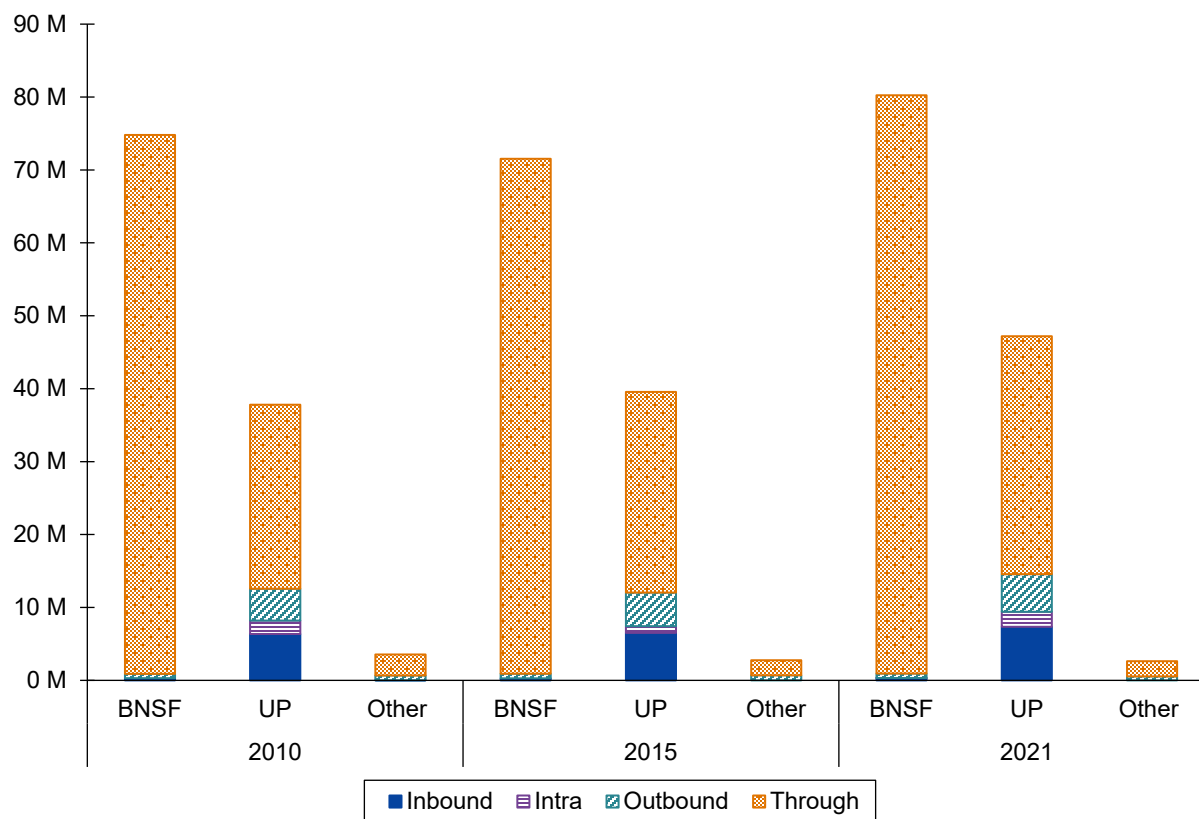
¹¹¹ Union Pacific, Union Pacific in Idaho, https://www.up.com/cs/groups/public/@uprr/@corprr/documents/up_pdf_natedocs/pdf_idaho_usguide.pdf.

¹¹² Railway Age, Savage Expands Idaho Operations, <https://www.railwayage.com/freight/switching-terminal/savage-expands-idaho-operations/>.

¹¹³ STB, Carload Waybill Sample, <https://www.stb.gov/reports-data/waybill/>. Note that STB Waybill data may not fully capture the activity of Class III operators. The data may understate short line and regional activity because Class I railroads often handle billing for short line movements, causing these movements to appear as Class I traffic in the data. Conversely, some traffic that interchanges between a Class I / Class III railroad is marked as "Class III (Other) through traffic (see Figure 3.31 and 3.32). Additionally, the waybill data is collected from railroads that handle at least 4,500 carloads annually, excluding short lines with low volumes.

Figure 3.30 Freight Rail Tonnage by Origin Railroad in Idaho (2010–2021)

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

Figure 3.31 Freight Rail Tonnage by Destination Railroad in Idaho (2010–2021)

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

3.4.5 Freight Rail Commodity Flows

In 2021, the top three commodities by tonnage moved by rail in Idaho were farm products, chemicals, and coal, as shown in Table 3.3. The top commodities are closely tied to the State's agricultural industry, including both harvested goods and inputs for agricultural processes. Farm products represented the largest share, with grain and oil kernels making up 34 percent of total rail traffic. Chemicals, the top inbound commodity, contribute another 13 percent. Coal was the third-largest commodity, accounting for 11 percent of rail traffic, almost all of it through traffic. Food and kindred products, the top outbound commodity, including soybean and vegetable oils, made up 10 percent of total rail traffic.

As depicted in Figure 3.32, between 2010 and 2015, Idaho saw a decline in through traffic, largely driven by a reduction in grain shipments but also impacted by national trends such as a drop in overseas agricultural exports due to a stronger U.S. dollar, labor disruptions at the West Coast ports, slower domestic sales, and falling commodity prices.^{114,115} This decline also impacted the movement of nonmetallic minerals, and

¹¹⁴ Boise State Public Radio, Idaho Agricultural Exports Fell 22 Percent Last Year, <https://www.boisestatepublicradio.org/economy/2016-05-16/idaho-agricultural-exports-fell-22-percent-last-year>.

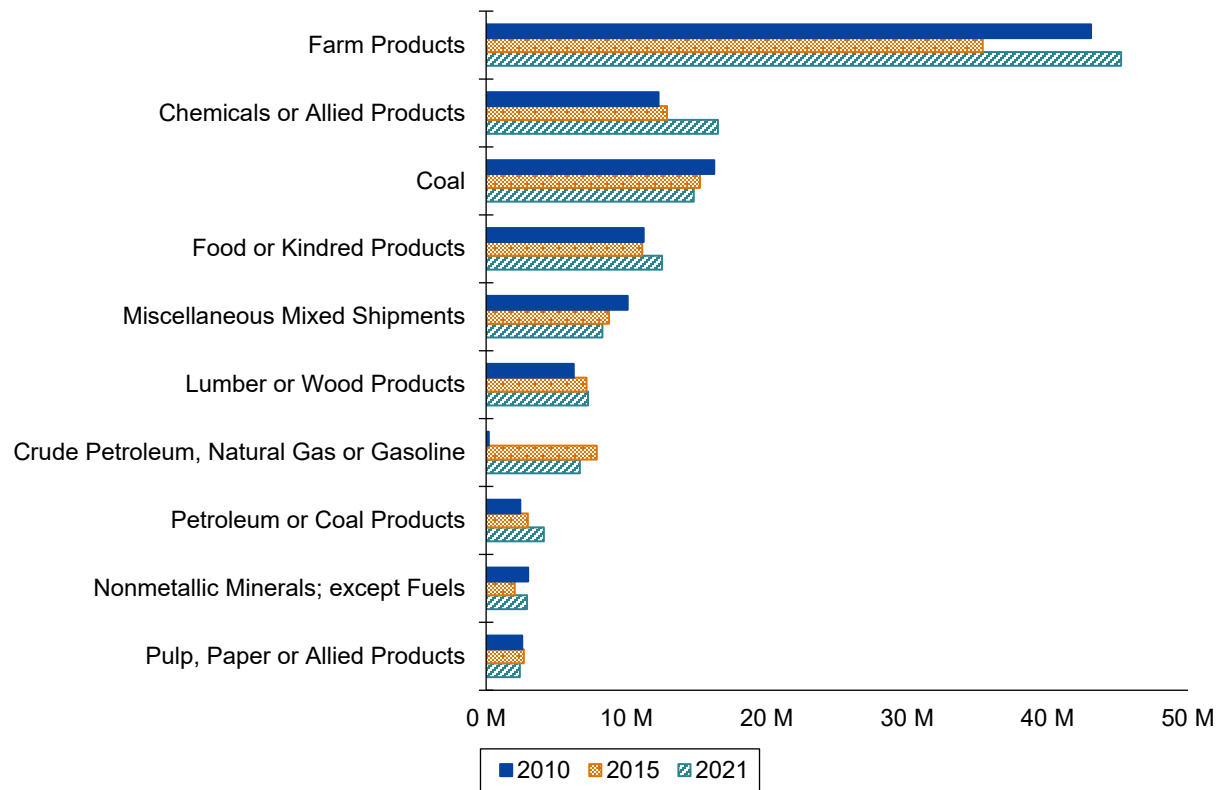
¹¹⁵ University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture 2015, Idaho House and Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee, https://legislature.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/sessioninfo/2016/standingcommittees/160202_saga_0800AM_Attachment_2.pdf.

chemical or fertilizer minerals. However, from 2015 to 2021, shipments of food products rebounded and saw a notable increase, driven by commodities like sugar, malt, and distilled liquor. Chemicals also experienced growth, primarily due to an increased demand for fertilizers and industrial chemicals. On the other hand, farm product shipments continued to decline, mainly due to decreases in oil kernels, grain, and miscellaneous field products. When excluding through traffic, as depicted in Figure 3.33, food products, chemicals, and farm products emerge as the top commodities transported by rail within Idaho. This shift highlights the significance of the State's two transcontinental rail services, which handle the bulk of through traffic. However, local rail lines feeding into these larger services also play a critical role, particularly in transporting Idaho's agricultural products and raw materials onto the broader network.

Table 3.3 Top 10 Rail Commodity Flows by Tonnage in Idaho (2021)

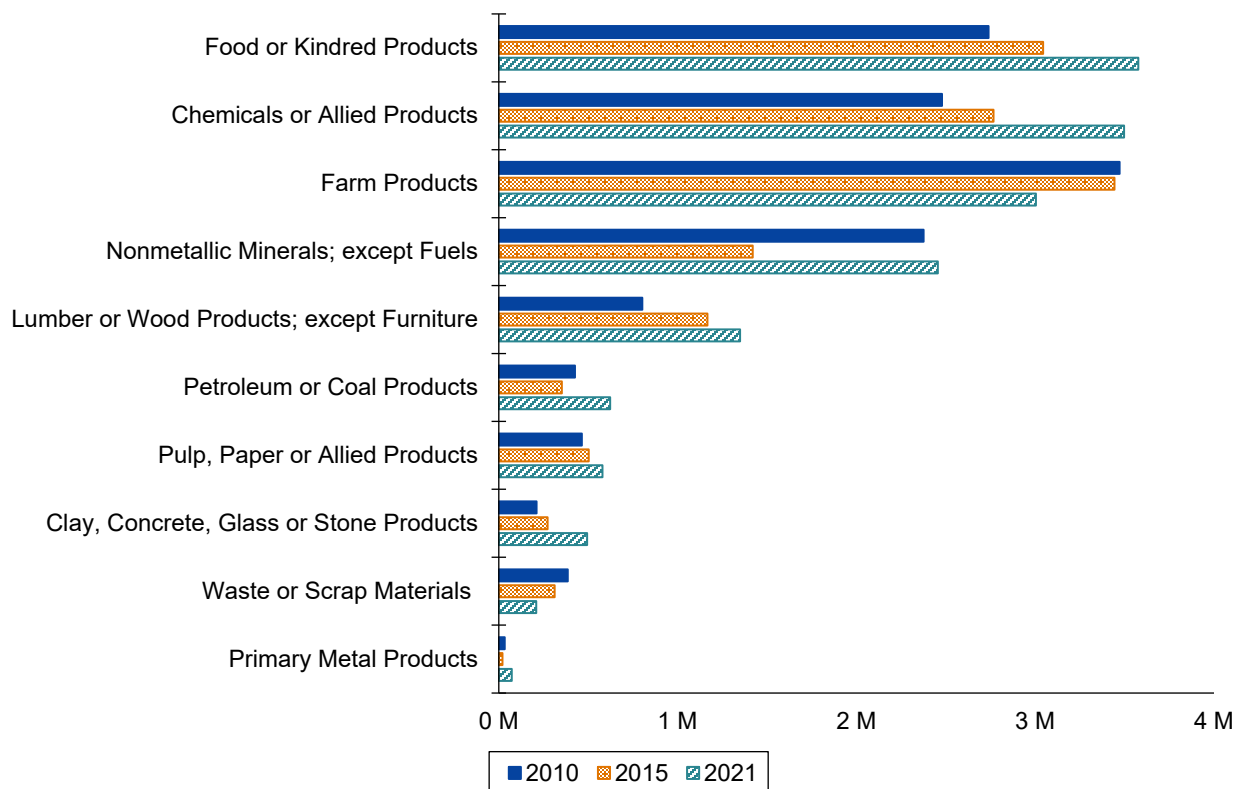
Commodity	Inbound	Intra	Outbound	Through	Total	% Total	% Total w/o Thru
Farm Products	1,607,613	135,014	1,261,254	42,230,756	45,234,637	35%	19%
Chemicals or Allied Products	2,250,913	27,380	1,218,995	13,017,796	16,515,084	13%	22%
Coal	61,352	2,935	–	14,721,913	14,786,200	11%	0%
Food or Kindred Products	1,346,674	11,780	2,218,530	8,956,766	12,533,750	10%	22%
Miscellaneous Mixed Shipments	–	–	23,760	8,262,080	8,285,840	6%	0%
Lumber or Wood Products; except Furniture	267,885	18,805	1,062,585	5,906,580	7,255,855	6%	8%
Crude Petroleum, Natural Gas or Gasoline	–	–	–	6,673,661	6,673,661	5%	0%
Petroleum or Coal Products	599,645	2,800	20,175	3,490,415	4,113,035	3%	4%
Nonmetallic Minerals; except Fuels	524,063	1,846,374	85,275	460,878	2,916,590	2%	15%
Pulp, Paper or Allied Products	324,510	325	255,175	1,817,610	2,397,620	2%	4%

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021).

Figure 3.32 Top 10 Rail Commodities by Tonnage in Idaho (2010–2021)

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

Figure 3.33 Top 10 Rail Commodities by Tonnage in Idaho—Excluding Through Traffic (2010–2021)



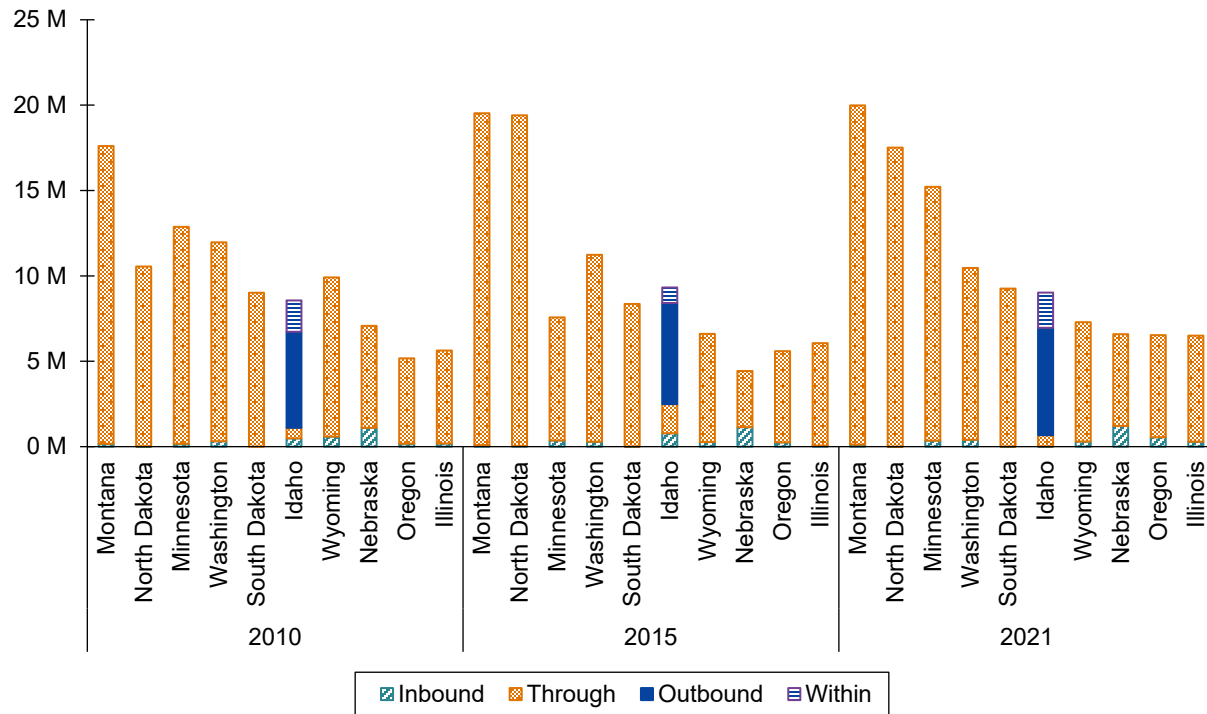
Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

3.4.6 Freight Rail Trading Partners

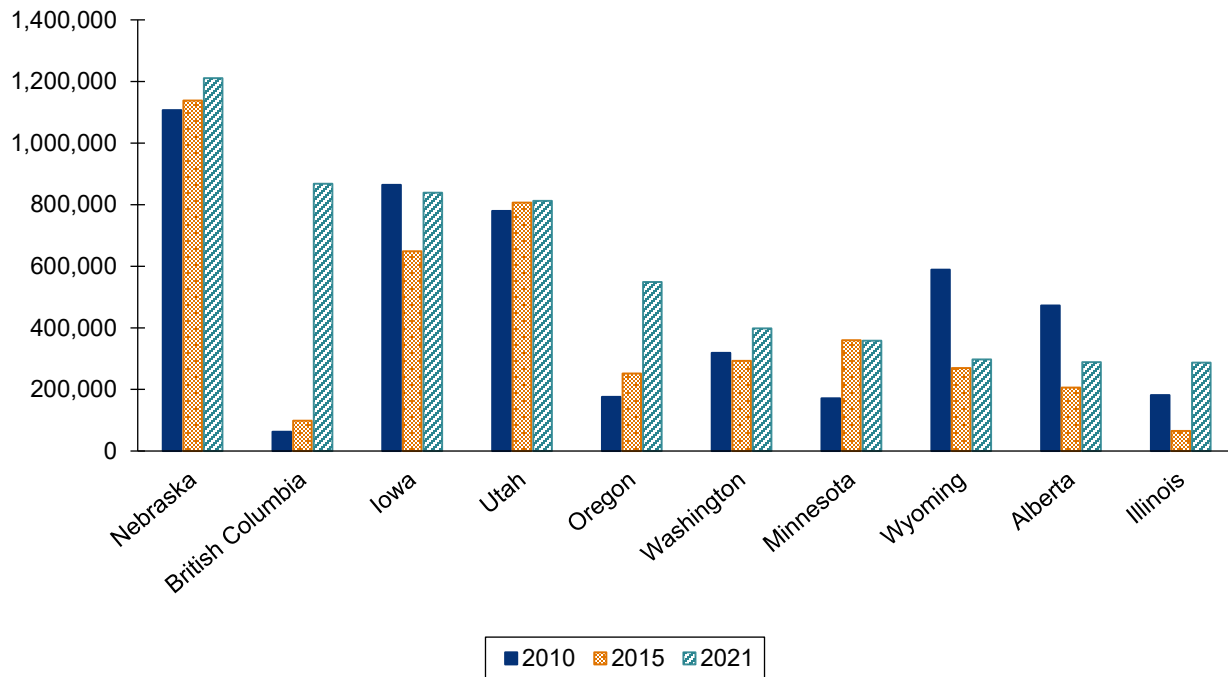
By tonnage, Idaho's top trading partners for originating traffic are Montana, North Dakota, and Minnesota. However, as shown in Figure 3.34, more than 97 percent of this freight is through traffic. These shipments primarily consist of farm and food products, as well as coal, and are typically destined for Washington, California, Oregon, and British Columbia.

When excluding through traffic, Idaho's inbound trading partners shift significantly. As shown in Figure 3.35, Nebraska, British Columbia, and Iowa emerge as the top sources of freight that terminates within the State. These inbound shipments consist of a diverse mix of agricultural and industrial commodities: Nebraska supplies farm products and chemicals, British Columbia supplies nonmetallic minerals and fertilizers, and Iowa ships grain and distilled liquor.

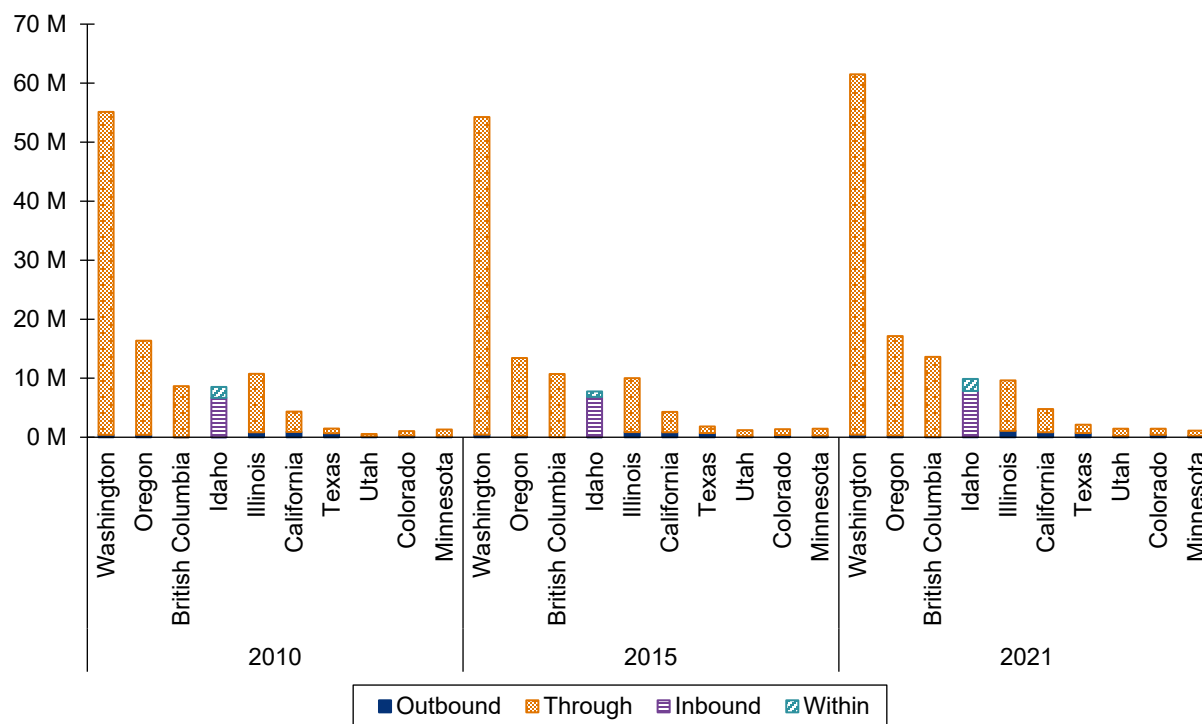
Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia are top trading partners by destination State, as shown in Figure 3.36. However, similar to trading partners by origin State, at least 98 percent of the rail traffic is through traffic. Without through traffic, the profile of outbound destinations changes. As shown in Figure 3.37, Illinois, California, and Texas are the top destination states. Idaho ships grain and field dry ripe vegetable food seeds to Illinois, grains and fertilizers to California, and grains and malt to Texas.

Figure 3.34 Top 10 Rail Tonnage Trading Partners by Origin State in Idaho (2010–2021)

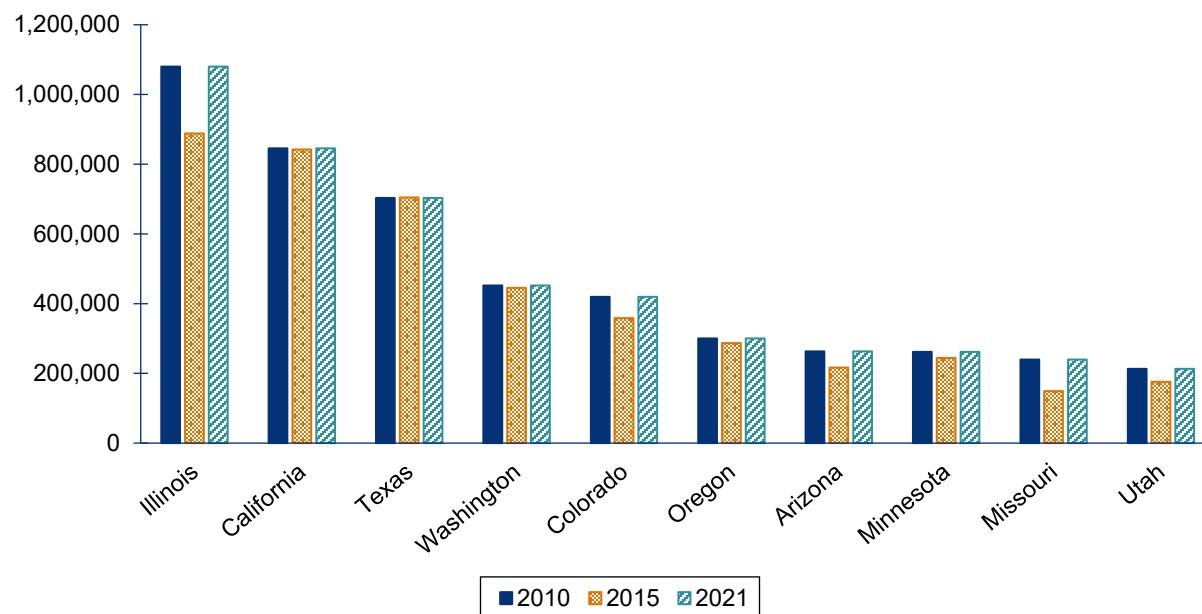
Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

Figure 3.35 Top 10 Rail Tonnage Inbound Trading Partners by Origin State in Idaho (2010–2021)

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

Figure 3.36 Top 10 Rail Tonnage Trading Partners by Destination State in Idaho (2010–2021)

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

Figure 3.37 Top 10 Rail Tonnage Outbound Trading Partners by Destination State in Idaho (2010–2021)

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2010, 2015, and 2021).

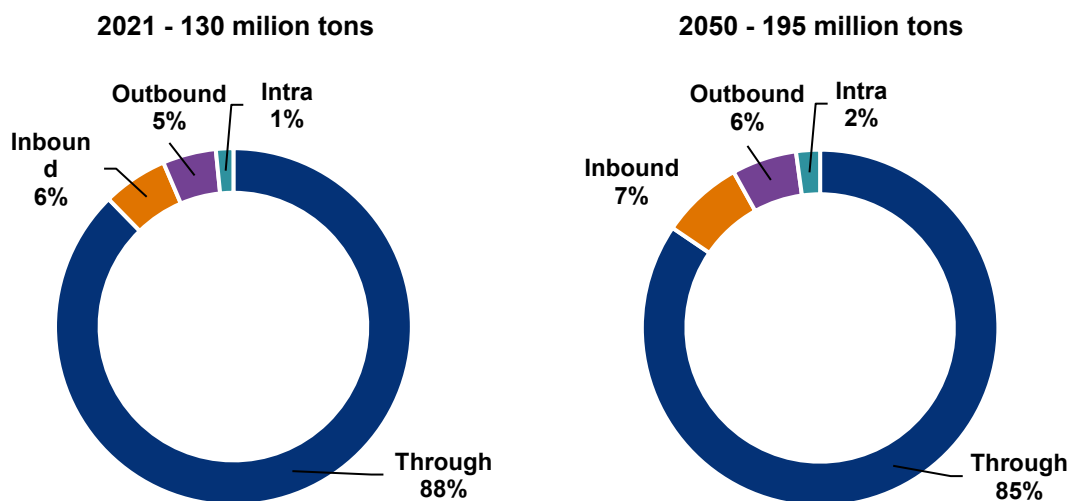
3.4.7 Freight Rail Growth

Idaho's rail freight system has historically been dominated by agricultural products and primary materials, a reflection of its role as a major agricultural producer in the West. In 2021, farm products, chemicals, and coal made up the top three commodities moved by rail, with farm products alone accounting for over a third of all traffic. However, ongoing trends point to a shifting landscape, including a decline in grain exports, fluctuating commodity prices, and growing demand for processed food and industrial inputs.

This subsection presents an overview of projected changes in Idaho's rail freight flows through 2050. Using the same 2021 STB Waybill data used in the previous subsections as a baseline, total rail freight volumes are forecasted to increase from approximately 130 million tons in 2021 to 195 million tons in 2050.¹¹⁶ Note too that all annual percentage changes are compound annual growth (or decline) rates.

Figure 3.38 summarizes rail flows by tonnage for both 2021 and 2050. Through traffic is expected to remain the dominant movement type although its share is projected to decrease slightly from 88 percent to 85 percent. This reduction is expected to be balanced by small increases in the shares of inbound, outbound, and intrastate flows.

Figure 3.38 Rail Commodity Flow by Direction, 2021 and 2050



Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021), BTS Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 (2050).

Table 3.4 provides a comprehensive view of projected changes in Idaho's rail freight mix through 2050. While the top 10 commodities by tonnage remain largely consistent with 2021, their rankings and growth trajectories reflect significant shifts in the State's economic and freight landscape. Farm products continue to lead by tonnage but are projected to grow at less than 1 percent annually. In contrast, chemicals and allied products,

¹¹⁶ Forecasted 2050 tonnage values were developed by applying growth rates derived from BTS Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 data, based on the period between the baseline years of 2017 and 2050. These growth rates were applied to 2021 STB Waybill data at the 2-digit STCC level to estimate future rail freight volumes by commodity.

driven by growing industrial and agricultural demand, are forecasted to grow the fastest at 3.5 percent per year. Miscellaneous mixed shipments follow with a 2.7 percent compound annual growth rate.

Coal (which is separate from “Petroleum or Coal Products”) is expected to see the steepest decline, dropping from 14.8 million tons in 2021 to just 2.6 million in 2050, an annual decline of nearly 6 percent. This mirrors national shifts away from coal as an energy source. Meanwhile, nonmetallic minerals move up the rankings, replacing petroleum and coal products in seventh place, with both categories still growing, though at different rates (2.6 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively). Clay, concrete, and stone products are expected to drop out of the top 10 due to slower growth (1.7 percent annually), despite still increasing volume.

Table 3.5 presents the top 10 inbound commodities to Idaho based on total tonnage. Chemicals and allied products, projected to grow by 4 percent annually, remain the top inbound commodity through 2050, supported by continued demand for fertilizers and inputs tied to Idaho’s agricultural sector. Food or kindred products are expected to surpass farm products, growing by 2 percent annually. Nonmetallic minerals are also anticipated to move ahead of petroleum and coal products, with an estimated growth rate of 3 percent compared to 1 percent for petroleum-related commodities.

Table 3.4 Top 10 Total Rail Freight Commodities by Tonnage, 2021 and 2050

Rank	Commodity	2021 Thousand Tons	2050 Thousand Tons	CAGR
1	Farm Products	45,234,637	54,789,824	0.7%
2	Chemicals or Allied Products	16,515,084	44,927,763	3.5%
3	Food or Kindred Products	12,533,750	23,278,813	2.2%
4	Miscellaneous Mixed Shipments	8,285,840	17,905,774	2.7%
5	Lumber or Wood Products	7,255,855	11,238,385	1.5%
6	Crude Petroleum, Natural Gas or Gasoline	6,673,661	7,595,567	0.4%
7	Nonmetallic Minerals	2,916,590	6,168,012	2.6%
8	Petroleum or Coal Products	4,113,035	5,838,476	1.2%
9	Pulp, Paper or Allied Products	2,397,620	3,980,618	1.8%
10	Transportation Equipment	1,915,088	3,893,449	2.5%

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021), BTS Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 (2050).

Table 3.5 Top 10 Inbound Rail Freight Commodities by Tonnage, 2021 and 2050

Rank	Commodity	2021 Thousand Tons	2050 Thousand Tons	CAGR
1	Chemicals or Allied Products	2,250,913	6,194,203	4%
2	Food or Kindred Products	1,346,674	2,489,041	2%
3	Farm Products	1,607,613	1,903,252	1%
4	Nonmetallic Minerals	524,063	1,115,219	3%
5	Petroleum or Coal Products	599,645	852,641	1%
6	Clay, Concrete, Glass or Stone Products	467,365	738,821	2%
7	Pulp, Paper or Allied Products	324,510	531,133	2%
8	Lumber or Wood Products	267,885	416,637	2%
9	Waste or Scrap Materials	115,890	163,667	1%
10	Primary Metal Products	70,415	90,021	1%

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021), BTS Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 (2050).

For commodities headed out of Idaho, the top 10 remain unchanged, though their rankings have shifted, as shown in Table 3.6. Food or kindred products retain the top position, with a projected growth rate of 2 percent annually between 2021 and 2050. Chemicals and allied products move up to second place from third, with a growth rate of 4 percent annually. Farm products drop from second to fourth, reflecting a slower growth rate of 1 percent annually. Waste and scrap minerals also see a decline in ranking, with a modest growth of 1 percent. Miscellaneous mixed shipments, on the other hand, rise in the rankings, showing a growth rate of 3 percent annually.

Table 3.6 Top 10 Outbound Rail Freight Commodities by Tonnage, 2021 and 2050

Rank	Commodity	2021 Thousand Tons	2050 Thousand Tons	CAGR
1	Food or Kindred Products	2,218,530	3,808,524	2%
2	Chemicals or Allied Products	1,218,995	3,664,620	4%
3	Lumber or Wood Products	1,062,585	1,645,150	2%
4	Farm Products	1,261,254	1,502,637	1%
5	Pulp, Paper or Allied Products	255,175	417,809	2%
6	Nonmetallic Minerals	85,275	169,593	2%
7	Waste or Scrap Materials	93,190	131,609	1%
8	Miscellaneous Mixed Shipments	23,760	51,346	3%
9	Clay, Concrete, Glass or Stone Products	26,960	41,051	1%
10	Petroleum or Coal Products	20,175	28,580	1%

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021), BTS Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 (2050).

Through traffic continues to dominate Idaho's rail system, though its overall share of tonnage is projected to decline slightly. Table 3.7 shows that among through traffic, farm products remain the top commodity and are projected to grow by 1 percent annually between 2021 and 2050. Chemicals and allied products

follow, moving up in the rankings with a projected annual growth rate of 3 percent. Coal, which previously ranked second, drops to tenth place due to a significant projected decline of 6 percent annually.

Food and kindred products fall from third to fourth in the ranking, although they are still expected to grow by 2 percent annually. Crude petroleum also drops in the rankings, with minimal growth of less than 1 percent annually over the forecast period.

Table 3.7 Top 10 Through Rail Freight Commodities by Tonnage, 2021 and 2050

Rank	Commodity	2021 Thousand Tons	2050 Thousand Tons	CAGR
1	Farm Products	42,230,756	51,226,432	1%
2	Chemicals or Allied Products	13,017,796	34,989,271	3%
3	Miscellaneous Mixed Shipments	8,262,080	17,854,428	3%
4	Food or Kindred Products	8,956,766	16,961,505	2%
5	Lumber or Wood Products	5,906,580	9,147,351	2%
6	Crude Petroleum, Natural Gas or Gasoline	6,673,661	7,595,567	0%
7	Petroleum or Coal Products	3,490,415	4,953,289	1%
8	Transportation Equipment	1,859,573	3,812,028	3%
9	Pulp, Paper or Allied Products	1,817,610	3,031,144	2%
10	Coal	14,721,913	2,600,730	-6%

Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021), BTS Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 (2050).

Intrastate traffic remains a smaller but important component of Idaho's rail system. As shown in Table 3.8, nonmetallic minerals are projected to remain the top intrastate commodity through 2050, reflecting ongoing demand from construction and agricultural support industries. Farm products follow in second place, expected to grow by 1 percent annually over the same period. Coal has the most significant decline, dropping to ninth in the rankings with a projected decrease of 6 percent annually.

Table 3.8 Top 10 Intra Rail Freight Commodities by Tonnage, 2021 and 2050

Rank	Commodity	2021 Thousand Tons	2050 Thousand Tons	CAGR
1	Nonmetallic Minerals	1,846,374	3,931,082	3%
2	Farm Products	135,014	157,503	1%
3	Chemicals or Allied Products	27,380	79,668	4%
4	Lumber or Wood Products	18,805	29,247	2%
5	Food or Kindred Products	11,780	19,743	2%
6	Transportation Equipment	11,640	17,072	1%
7	Petroleum or Coal Products	2,800	3,966	1%
8	Pulp, Paper or Allied Products	325	532	2%
9	Coal	2,935	518	-6%
10	Waste or Scrap Materials	300	424	1%

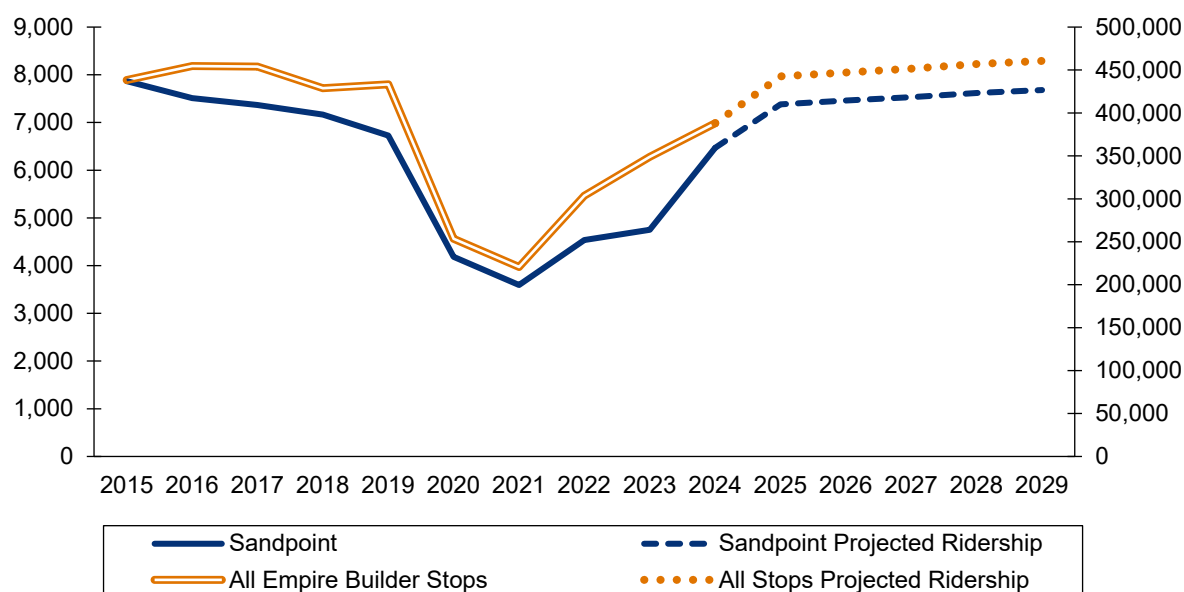
Source: STB Confidential Carload Waybill Sample (2021), BTS Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 (2050).

3.4.8 Passenger Rail Frequency, Demand, and Growth

Amtrak is the sole provider of passenger rail services in Idaho. Nationwide, Amtrak ridership declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic but returned to pre-pandemic levels in FY24. Ridership on the Empire Builder—the only Amtrak route serving Idaho—remains 8 percent below FY19 levels but has increased compared with FY23. As discussed in Chapter 2, boardings and alighting's at Sandpoint, Idaho's only Amtrak station, trended downward between FY15 and FY19, dropped steeply in FY20 and FY21 due to the pandemic, and have shown modest recovery over the past three years. The Empire Builder continues to provide one daily round-trip through Idaho, with a train operating in each direction.

There are no known plans currently to increase or decrease Empire Builder route frequency or add additional routes serving Idaho. Amtrak's FY24–29 Five-Year Plan includes ridership projections through FY2029 which are also shown in Figure 3.39. The growth rates for each year for the *Empire Builder* are accordingly applied to Sandpoint ridership. Based on these projections, Sandpoint ridership would continue to increase to those levels recorded in 2015. Longer term, the 2019 Washington Statewide Rail Plan forecasts 25 percent growth in ridership on the *Empire Builder* service between 2018 and 2040.¹¹⁷ This forecast expects ridership to increase along the corridor to approximately 536,000. Applied to Sandpoint, ridership could grow to approximately 9,000.

Figure 3.39 Sandpoint and Empire Builder Rider Ridership Short-Term Projections



Source: Idaho Amtrak Routes provided by the Amtrak Fact Sheet, Fiscal Years 2015–2014, Amtrak Media Center Ridership Reports, Amtrak FY24–29 Five-Year Plan ridership projections applied to Sandpoint ridership figures.

¹¹⁷ Washington Department of Transportation, Washington Statewide Rail Plan 2019–2040, <https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/2019-2040-State-Rail-Plan.pdf>.

3.5 Traffic, Congestion, and Land Use Trends

Traffic patterns and congestion have a large impact on the State's transportation system. Congestion on other modes, particularly highways and air systems, can make rail a more or less attractive mode for both freight and passenger travel. Trends in traffic and congestion for highway and air, as well as land use/development trends for the State of Idaho are discussed in this section.

3.5.1 Highway Congestion Trends

Idaho's 2023 Strategic Freight Plan identified major truck bottlenecks within Idaho.¹¹⁸ The causes of many of these bottlenecks stem from location specific challenges, including urban congestion, environmental and topographical challenges, and high traffic volumes. Some of these causes also include freight industry specific challenges such as peak harvest times for wheat. The bottlenecks identified in the Freight Plan as of 2023 include:

- » **I-15 from Sage Junction to Hamer**—This segment of I-15 is experiencing a bottleneck due to environmental conditions. Specifically, decreased visibility caused by blowing dust from agricultural activity and sand blowing from the St. Anthony Sand Dunes in spring, summer and fall as well as snow blowing over the Interstate in winter.
- » **I-84 from Boise to Caldwell**—ITD identified I-84 between US-20 (Caldwell, ID) and SH 55 (Boise, ID) as Idaho's most congested interstate segment for all types of vehicles. This section of interstate has a "Poor" TTTR rating and is the route with the highest daily truck traffic at over 8,000 trucks a day with an afternoon peak travel speed below 35MPH. It is noted that ITD is addressing congestion through this urbanized region of the State, including multiple widening and bridge upgrade projects along I-84, U.S. 20/26, SH 16, and SH 55.
- » **I-90 at the Idaho/Montana Border**—I-90 is identified as having peak hour truck travel speed below 35 MPH due to geography. This segment of I-90 passes through high mountain passes (specifically Lookout Mountain Pass), extreme curves, and steep ascending and descending segments.
- » **US-20/I-84 Interchange**—High truck volume with low truck speed as freight trucking transits between the Boise metropolitan area and I-84 in Southwest Idaho. Projects intended to address this congestion began in 2022.
- » **US-20/26 in Ada and Canyon Counties**—High traffic volumes create truck speeds below 25MPH during peak hours. Projects intended to address congestion on US-20/26 through Treasure Valley began in 2022.

¹¹⁸ Truck bottlenecks on Interstate highways were defined by the afternoon peak hour average truck travel speed below 35 miles per hour or a truck travel time reliability (the ratio of congested travel time to free-flow travel time) of at least 1.5. Truck bottlenecks on U.S. or State highways were defined by an afternoon peak hour average truck travel speed below 25 miles per hour.

- » **US-95 in Coeur d'Alene**—This US-95 corridor routes through a densely populated urban community heavily dependent on tourists, forest products and agricultural industries. High traffic volumes for both trucked freight and the traveling public results in 'stop and go' traffic, slowing truck speeds during much of the day and more significantly during peak traffic periods.
- » **US-20 in Rexburg**—US-20 north of Idaho Falls has the highest truck volume for a non-Interstate route in Idaho as freight transits between Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. In this area of Idaho, US-20 and SH-33 intersect, and both routes become agricultural freight arteries moving agricultural products to and from producers and processing facilities along with agricultural equipment. Also, US-20 is a major tourist route into Yellowstone National Park.
- » **US-12/95 in Lewiston**—Both US-95 and US-12 serve as the primary freight routes in north central and middle-north Idaho supporting the Nez Pierce Tribe and Idaho's forestry and agricultural industries. Reduced truck speeds in the City of Lewiston are caused by three factors:
 - The unique geographic restrictions caused by the confluences of the Clearwater River and Snake River valley cause both truck and public traffic to reduce speed for safety purposes while navigating ascending and descending grades.
 - Palouse and Camas Prairies account for $\frac{2}{3}$ of Idaho wheat production, and from June through November trucks haul wheat from numerous farms to the Port of Lewiston for distribution to consumers and processing plants. This creates congestion along the main thoroughfares in the area.
 - Truck traffic from numerous logging areas use US-95 and US-12 to deliver wood chips to the Clearwater Paper mill and raw lumber to numerous lumber mills in Idaho and Washington.

3.5.2 Airport Congestion Trends

Idaho's network of airports comprises six commercial airports and eleven general aviation airports. Primary airports in Idaho—those defined as commercial airports with over 10,000 passenger boardings, are shown in Table 3.9. Boise Airport is the largest airport in the State with nearly 2.4 million passenger boardings in 2023. It is classified as a 'Medium Hub' airport, accounting for at least 0.25 percent of all United States passenger boardings. Boise Airport has seen significant growth in recent years and is currently in the midst of a major expansion which will add new parking garages, expand the existing rental car facility, and expand existing passenger terminal capacity.¹¹⁹ To the north, Spokane International Airport, 25 miles west of Idaho's border with Washington, also serves users in Coeur d'Alene, Sandpoint, and neighboring areas. Spokane's airport has also grown in recent years and is also in the midst of a multi-terminal expansion.¹²⁰ The remaining six primary airports serving Idaho are smaller in size and scale of operations. These airports primarily rely on service to nearby larger hubs, such as Seattle, Salt Lake City, and/or Denver, or provide increased services during certain seasons.

¹¹⁹ [BOI Upgrade | City of Boise](#).

¹²⁰ [TREX Spokane International Airport](#).

Table 3.9 Primary Airports Serving Idaho

Airport (IATA code)	Location	Idaho Region Served	Number of Passenger Boardings in 2023
Boise Airport (BOI)	Boise, ID	Southwest	2,369,164
Spokane International Airport (GEG)	Spokane, WA	Northern	2,002,286
Idaho Falls (IDA)	Idaho Falls, ID	Eastern	270,140
Friedman Memorial Airport (SUN)	Hailey, ID	Central	109,368
Pullman-Moscow Regional Airport (PUW)	Pullman, WA	North Central	63,835
Lewiston-Nez Perce County Airport (LWS)	Lewiston, ID	North Central	36,761
Magic Valley Regional Airport (TWF)	Twin Falls, ID	South Central	19,871
Pocatello Regional Airport (PIH)	Pocatello, ID	Southeast	17,504

Source: U.S. Federal Aviation Administration.

Both Boise Airport and Spokane International Airport are United States Customs and Border Patrol Ports of Entry. They are staffed by U.S. Customs Agents, allowing for the processing of passengers and cargo from outside the United States. Both airports play the largest role in moving air cargo into and across the State. In 2023, Spokane International Airport handled 282,128 metric tons of landed cargo weight, and Boise Airport handled 208,217 metric tons of landed cargo weight.¹²¹ Ultimately, air cargo accounts for less than 1 percent of cargo transportation by weight in Idaho, with such shipments primarily consisting of lighter-weight, higher-value, and more time-sensitive goods.

3.5.3 Land Use Trends

Land use trends and development patterns have a significant impact on transportation needs. Correspondingly, rail traffic can arise in both urbanized and rural geographies. In urban areas, this includes demand generated from construction, manufacturing facilities, warehouses, and consumers. The most common sources of rural rail traffic are farming and resource extraction, e.g., mining.

Across Idaho, recent residential and commercial development has primarily occurred along highway corridors, and with the expansion of road infrastructure, especially within, and in proximity to the State's urban centers. In the Boise region, for example, residential, commercial, and industrial development is heavily occurring to the southeast of the city center along I-84. This area of Boise is home to the recently expanded nearly 900,000 square foot WinCo Foods Distribution Center, as well as Micron's \$15 billion, 1.2 million square foot research and development/chip manufacturing site. Operations at the newly expanded facility are expected to commence in 2026.

Development also continues to occur west of Boise around Meridian, Nampa, Kuna, and even to the northwest in Emmet. For example, in 2021, Amazon opened a nearly 700,000 square foot fulfillment center with 1.1 million square feet of floor space in the rapidly developing area of Nampa north of I-84. Across this region, single and multi-family residential and commercial development continues to infill across former agricultural areas of the Treasure Valley between Boise, Nampa, and Caldwell. Similar

¹²¹ [CY 2023 All-Cargo Landed Weight Percentage Change from CY22 \(8/27/2024\)](#).

development patterns are also evident across Idaho's other large population centers, including Twin Falls, Pocatello, Idaho Falls, and Coeur d'Alene.

Outside of the State's urban centers, Idaho's land use is characterized almost exclusively by agriculture, as well as large swaths of undeveloped land, including deserts, grasslands, forests, and mountains. This also includes some mining operations throughout the State. Throughout these vast regions, Idaho is home to many smaller population centers which also provide access to grocery stores, shopping, and other essential needs and services for surrounding rural regions. Historically, these towns grew because of their position along early transportation corridors such as the Oregon Trail, rail lines such as the Oregon Short Line Railroad, and navigable waterways like the Snake, Salmon, and Kootenai Rivers. In recent decades, growth throughout these regions has primarily occurred along the State's Interstate and U.S. Highway corridors, especially in the southern half of the State across the Snake River Valley. This includes farming equipment, hardware / supply stores, light manufacturing, grain silos and elevators, as well as fuel and traveler services. Some of these facilities require and benefit from rail service, including fuel and animal feed suppliers.

From the perspective of passenger rail and land use, Sandpoint has also seen significant growth in recent decades. Under existing conditions of one nightly *Empire Builder* train per direction, the presence of intercity rail alone won't have a significant impact on neighboring land use. However, future service improvements, guided by Federal legislation and investments, do have the potential to generate additional demand for residential and commercial growth in Sandpoint, and at any additional future stations within the State.

3.6 Freight Rail Regulatory Trends

Because of its place in interstate commerce, freight rail service is subject to economic rules and regulations overseen by the STB. Key actions and their implications for Idaho's rail operations are reviewed in this section.

3.6.1 Reciprocal Switching

In 2011, the National Industrial Traffic League (NITL) submitted a petition to the STB to initiate a rulemaking for new rules that would facilitate competitive access to switching for shippers that are exclusively served by a single Class I carrier. On April 30, 2024, a final rule was published that allowed shippers who are served by just one Class I railroad and who receive substandard service to seek service from a second railroad.^{122, 123} The rule sets the following minimum standards for rail service:

- » **Service Reliability**—Service is considered unreliable if the rail carrier delivers shipments over a given lane to the destination by the original estimated time of arrival less than 70 percent of the time, as measured over a 12-week period.

¹²² Surface Transportation Board, STB Adopts Final Rule For Reciprocal Switching, <https://www.stb.gov/news-communications/latest-news/pr-24-20/>.

¹²³ Trains Magazine, STB adopts final reciprocal switching rule for inadequate rail service, <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/stb-adopts-final-reciprocal-switching-rule-for-inadequate-rail-service/>.

- » **Service Consistency**—Service is considered inconsistent if a rail carrier’s average transit time for shipments increases by more than 20 percent compared to average transit time for the same 12-week period of the previous year.
- » **Inadequate Local Service**—Service is considered inadequate if the rail carrier had a ‘spot and pull’ success rate of less than 85 percent over a period of 12 weeks. ‘Spot and pull’ is the local delivery and pick-up of loaded and unloaded rail cars. A successful ‘spot and pull’ is one that occurs within the applicable service window.

Since this is a recent decision, the impacts of this rule have yet to be determined. This is especially the case in the potential scenario where a large number of shippers invoke the rule to gain access to a second railroad. Over time, however, this rule will require Class I carriers to provide historical data on the service metrics outlined above. In May of 2024, three railroads, including Union Pacific, filed a suit asking for the rule to be blocked. This suit is still active as of mid-2025, although the rule still remains in effect. Given the geographic composition of Idaho’s freight railroads, most of the State’s shippers are served by a single Class I railroad. On the other hand, it remains to be seen how this ruling would be actively enforced. As a result, Idaho should continue to monitor the overall conditions of rail service provided to shippers in the State and performance of railroads in serving Idaho’s businesses.

3.6.2 Revenue Adequacy

Federal statute enables the STB to annually determine if railroads are revenue adequate. A railroad is deemed revenue adequate when the railroad is determined to have earned enough in revenue to cover the cost of capital, or the cost of efficient operation.¹²⁴ The purpose of determining revenue adequacy is to garner a sense of whether there is effective competition within the rail industry. When railroads are performing well financially, they are better able to keep rail infrastructure in good condition, improve service, add capacity, and respond adequately to changing markets.

Per the STB, railroads’ financial performance has improved in recent years, and revenue adequacy has largely been achieved. In September 2024, the STB determined three American Class I railroads to be revenue adequate for the year 2023: BNSF, CSX, and Union Pacific.¹²⁵ Idaho’s Class I railroads—BNSF and Union Pacific—were also considered revenue adequate in 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. This strong history of revenue adequacy in recent years bodes well for these railroads to continue to maintain their respective Idaho rail networks in a state of good repair and potential for investments in rail and intermodal facilities. On the other hand, revenue adequacy could also open up railroads to further scrutiny in rate cases—the primary rationale being that if a railroad is earning more than it needs to be financially sustainable, it could be exerting excessive market power, especially in markets where competition is limited.

3.6.3 Commodity Exemptions

The Staggers Rail Act of 1980 grants the rail industry wide flexibility in setting prices and service for commodities and markets that are inter- and intra-modally competitive. Through this act, regulators have exempted some commodities from regulatory review. In the intervening time, various industry interests have

¹²⁴ Association of American Railroads, Freight Rail & Revenue Adequacy, <https://www.aar.org/issue/revenue-adequacy/>.

¹²⁵ Railway Age, For 2023, Three Class I’s Deemed Revenue Adequate, <https://www.railwayage.com/regulatory/for-2023-three-class-is-deemed-revenue-adequate/>.

advocated for specific commodities to be subject to regulatory review. Shippers argue that markets have become less inter and intra-modally competitive over time, and the result is excessive costs and inadequate service. Railroads generally counter that few commodities are not actually modally competitive, and that geographic competition limits the railroad's power as well in terms of setting rates and service.

In 2016, the STB initiated a re-examination of exemptions for select commodities.¹²⁶ Through this proceeding, the STB considered re-imposing regulatory oversight on commodities including scrap metal, aggregates, coke, and Portland cement. As of mid-2025, a decision had not yet been made by the STB on Ex-Parte 704. In relation to Idaho's rail operations, aggregates are one of the top 10 commodities transported in the State. Additional impacts on rail operations in other states, because of potential modal shifts, could also impact operations in Idaho. This may also include potential further downstream impacts on local supply chains.

3.6.4 Common Carrier Obligation

Railroads in the United States are considered 'common carriers', meaning they are required to carry people and goods for the benefit of the public without discrimination. This designation holds railroads to a 'common carrier obligation', which is the railroads' statutory duty to provide 'transportation or service on reasonable request'. The rules around this duty, and how to determine whether a railroad is not fulfilling it, have not been subject to a substantive examination by the STB. However, in recent years there have been several STB proceedings that touched on this topic, but thus far have not resulted in any decisions.

In the mid-2010's, the STB investigated how railroads are complying with the common carrier obligation and held a hearing to examine related issues.¹²⁷ However, the STB undertook no further action following the hearing. In 2020, a Minnesota shipper Sanimax brought a case to the STB against Union Pacific asking the railroad to restore service to five days per week from three days per week at their rendering facility in South St. Paul, MN.¹²⁸ Union Pacific sought an exemption and asked the STB to toss the case out, claiming animal byproducts—which are produced by the facility—are exempt from regulation. In 2021, the STB allowed the case to proceed. In early 2024, Sanimax and Union Pacific reached a confidential settlement and the case was dropped. If the case had proceeded and the STB had issued a ruling, this may have offered some insight and guidance into what constitutes the common carrier obligation in the 21st century modal environment, and what the appropriate remedies would be when carriers fail to meet their obligations. With service directly impacting the utility of rail transportation as a modal option for freight shippers, future proposed changes to the regulation and enforcement of the common carrier obligation should be monitored in Idaho.

¹²⁶ Federal Register, Review of Commodity, Boxcar, and TOFC/COFC Exemptions, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/10/05/2020-21925/review-of-commodity-boxcar-and-tofccofc-exemptions>.

¹²⁷ Federal Register, Common Carrier Obligation of Railroads, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2008/02/27/E8-3712/common-carrier-obligation-of-railroads>.

¹²⁸ Trains Magazine, Sanimax and Union Pacific Settle Common Carrier Case Over Reduced Local Service <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/sanimax-and-union-pacific-settle-common-carrier-case-over-reduced-local-service/>.

3.6.5 Truck Size & Weight

In 1975, the Federal government set the maximum weight for standard highway tractor combinations at 80,000 pounds. Long combination vehicles were later restricted to specific highways in the Western United States beginning in 1991. Idaho gradually increased its own limits in the decades that followed, ultimately raising the State maximum to 105,500 pounds. When Congress froze truck weight limits in 1991, Idaho's Interstate limit remained at 105,500 pounds—lower than several neighboring states that permitted up to 129,000 pounds.¹²⁹ To address this disparity, the Idaho Legislature enacted House Bill 395 in 2003, establishing a pilot program to allow 129,000-pound trucks on designated routes. Based on the program's results, lawmakers in 2013 authorized the 129,000-pound limit on additional State highways, and in 2016, the Federal government extended the same allowance to Idaho's Interstate system.¹³⁰

In recent years there has been increasing pressure to increase weight limits across the United States. Many states, including Idaho, have given exemptions for specific industries, and there is lobbying to increase the weight limit at the Federal level as well. In early 2025, a bill was introduced in the House of Representatives to raise the weight limit to 90,000 from 80,000, an increase of over 12 percent. As of early 2025, the bill was in committee and its prospects for passage are unclear.

Potential changes to Federal maximum truck size and weight standards may also have direct impacts for Idaho's railroads. These increases could impact the ability of railroads to compete with trucks, if the efficiency benefits of rail are reduced. A decrease in the efficiency benefit of rail would particularly be felt by short line railroads, including those in Idaho, and are worth monitoring.

3.6.6 Class I Rail Mergers

In 2021, Canadian Pacific (CP) and Kansas City Southern (KCS) agreed to the first major railroad merger in more than two decades, forming CPKC. The new CPKC became the first Mexico-United States-Canada rail network and brought the number of Class I freight railroads from seven to six. When the merger was announced, four of the other Class I railroads announced opposition—including BNSF and Union Pacific and demanded the STB place conditions on CP to ensure competition. However, the merger was approved with limited conditions in 2023.¹³¹

This action was undertaken under a relatively strict (since the early 2000s) set of regulations governing railroad mergers.¹³² This environment came as a result of a series of mergers in the 1990's that caused extensive service disruptions, along with a recognition that combinations involving any of the remaining seven Class I carriers would cause substantial concentration and reduce intra-modal competition. The STB

¹²⁹ The Spokesman-Review, Senate Passes Interstate Heavy-Trucks Bill, Praises Congress, <https://www.spokesman.com/stories/2016/feb/05/senate-passes-interstate-heavy-trucks-bill-praises/>.

¹³⁰ IDT, 129,000 Pound Pilot Project Report, https://apps.itd.idaho.gov/Apps/freight/129K_Pilot_Proj_Report.pdf.

¹³¹ Idaho State Journal, First Major U.S. Railroad Merger in Two Decades Will Go Forward, https://www.idahostatejournal.com/first-major-u-s-railroad-merger-in-two-decades-will-go-forward/article_595233c0-3822-5e08-9a4d-f3e688b94634.html.

¹³² Ibid.

exempted KCS from these new rules due to its far smaller revenue and geographic reach than the other six Class I railroads, and thus the CP-KCS merger was conducted according to the pre-2001 STB rules.¹³³

As of mid-2025, direct overall impacts to Idaho's rail operations because of the recent CPKC merger have been minor as the new railroad network does not pass through Idaho. However, the Eastport–Kingsgate Idaho–British Columbia border crossing provides a direct connection between Union Pacific and CPKC. This could open additional opportunities for increased grain, timber, and intermodal shipments to and from Idaho in the coming years.

In 2025, the Federal regulatory environment has potentially changed in a way which may relax some of the regulatory standards that the STB has been operating under for the past 20 years. Subsequently, there has been some renewed interest in Class I mergers, including direct implications for Idaho. In July 2025, Union Pacific agreed to acquire Norfolk Southern in an \$85 billion deal. If approved, the merger would be the largest buyout ever recorded in the freight rail sector and would create the first coast-to-coast railroad in the United States. The deal would still have to be approved by the STB subject to Major Rail Consolidation Procedures which detail key criteria that would have to be met.¹³⁴ Even under current favorable conditions, any potential mergers would likely face significant scrutiny and would require a multi-year process for approval.¹³⁵ As of this time, BNSF has not indicated plans to pursue a merger, citing a lack of desire from its customers for further Class I consolidation, however, has announced partnerships with CSX to provide coast-to-coast intermodal transportation.¹³⁶

3.7 Regulatory Rail Safety Trends

Rail safety is also subject to Federal regulation. This section discusses recent or potential changes to safety regulations that could impact rail in Idaho.

3.7.1 Positive Train Control

PTC systems are designed to prevent train-to-train collisions, over-speed derailments, incursions into established work zones, and movements of trains through switches left in the wrong position. PTC consists of a system of communication between operating locomotives and a rail track operations center, as illustrated in Figure 3.40. This system, which communicates train speeds, can identify any operational issues within the track network or locomotive, including speeding. If needed, the PTC system can remotely stop the locomotive from moving. The term *positive* refers to the requirement that the track operations center provides positive movement allowance for a locomotive to proceed on PTC-implemented trackage.

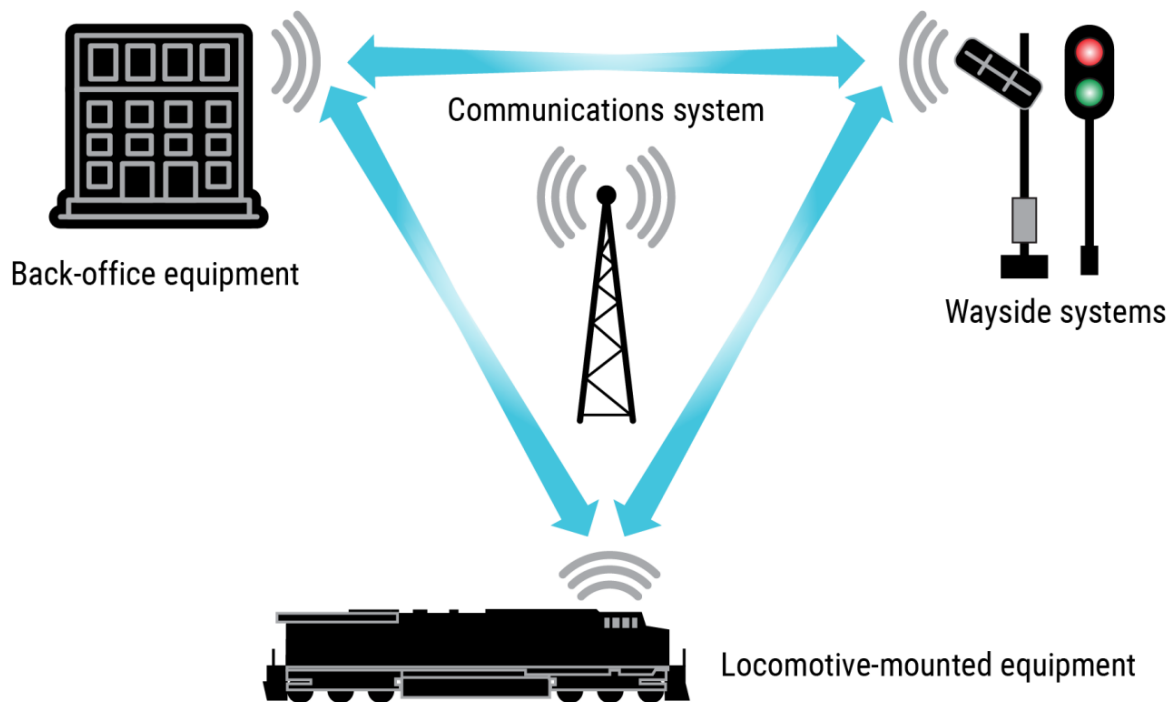
¹³³ STB, Surface Transportation Board Determines Regulatory Waiver for Merger Between CP and KCS Applies, <https://www.stb.gov/news-communications/latest-news/pr-21-20/>.

¹³⁴ Major Rail Consolidation Procedures, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2001/06/15/01-14984/major-rail-consolidation-procedures>.

¹³⁵ Trains Magazine, Some Class I Railroads Take a Fresh Look at Mergers, <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/some-class-i-railroads-take-a-fresh-look-at-mergers/>.

¹³⁶ <https://www.bnsf.com/news-media/customer-notifications/notification.page?notId=coast-to-coast-solutions-bnsf-and-csx-launch-new-intermodal-services>.

Figure 3.40 PTC System



Source: Association of American Railroads.

Through the Rail Safety Act of 2008, PTC implementation was mandated for the Class I rail network for any track sections with 5 million or more gross tons of annual rail traffic, trackage where certain hazardous materials are transported, and on any main lines over which intercity or commuter rail passenger service is regularly provided. In Idaho, this includes BNSF's Great Northern Corridor and Union Pacific's Northwest Corridor. On December 29, 2020, the FRA announced that PTC had been successfully implemented across all 57,536 miles of United States trackage where it was required.

With the full rollout of PTC across the United States, opportunities have emerged for further safety and efficiency improvements. A recent report by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has highlighted shortcomings of the current PTC system, and opportunities for future improvements.¹³⁷ These shortcomings include the following:

- » **Signal Enforcement**—The current PTC system functions based on the enforcement of signals. These signals are manually set by dispatchers. For example, if a dispatcher prematurely removes signal protection from established working limits, PTC will no longer prevent a train from transiting the work zone. As an additional example, PTC does not detect or respond to a close approach or collision between trains if both trains within the same signaling block are traveling within the required speed limit.

¹³⁷ National Transportation Safety Board, Beyond Full Implementation: Next Steps in Positive Train Control, <https://www.nts.gov/safety/safety-studies/Documents/RIR2312.pdf>.

- » **GPS Accuracy and Limitations**—PTC systems rely on Global Positioning System (GPS) units mounted on locomotives, track-mounted transponders, and track circuits to disseminate information. However, the technology does not consider the full length of the train. Additionally, even with strong reception, conventional GPS accuracy can still include errors of up to 50 feet. GPS reception can also be degraded in tunnels, underground, in sheds, or in topographical or urban canyons.
- » **Trackage System Limitations**—PTC systems provide protection on main tracks and are not intended for yard tracks or switching operations.

Additionally, some railroads have reported additional delays due to communication failures and outages, during which trains are compelled to move at slower speeds while operating in non-PTC fallback mode.¹³⁸ To address these shortcomings, the NTSB has recommended the following direction for Federal legislation:

- » Develop a plan to implement any promising PTC technologies for train-to-train collision avoidance,
- » Work with railroads to remove terminal exceptions currently granted under Title 49 Code of Federal Regulations 236.1019 using available improved PTC-related technologies,
- » Require that railroads adopt engineering controls that automatically return PTC to the active mode following switching operations; and
- » Require railroads to implement technologies that eliminate the risk of miscommunication between dispatchers and roadway workers in charge regarding established working limits and PTC protection.

Through 2025, enhancements to PTC systems are largely in the conceptual and early phases of design, although the NTSB did reiterate the need for the FRA to address current shortcomings of PTC following a derailment in Pennsylvania in 2024.¹³⁹ In late 2024, the FRA published a notice of proposed rulemaking which seeks to implement stricter parameters and operating restrictions for scenarios where PTC is temporarily non-functional. The proposed legislation would also emphasize that PTC systems must be reliable and robust, with fewer failures and outages over time. As of mid-2025, the proposed legislation has not yet been formalized. Idaho will continue to look to FRA and Federal sources for guidance on PTC.

3.7.2 Train Crew Size

In 2014, the FRA began to explore creating regulations to require two-person train crews for most operations (as opposed to a one-person crew). In 2024, the FRA's final rule went into effect, requiring two crew members for railroad operations except for specific one-person train operations that do not pose a significant safety risk to railroad employees, the public, or the environment.¹⁴⁰ Short line railroads already running one person crews are exempt from this new regulation.

¹³⁸ Positive Train Control Communication Failures and Their Impacts, https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2024-09/GTMS_Case_Study.pdf.

¹³⁹ FRA, Positive Train Control Communication Failures and Their Impacts: Case Study Using Generalized Train Movement Simulator, https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2024-09/GTMS_Case_Study.pdf.

¹⁴⁰ Federal Register, Train Crew Size Safety Requirements, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/09/2024-06625/train-crew-size-safety-requirements#:~:text=In%20%C2%A7%20218.123%2C%20the%20final,crewmembers%20is%20not%20in%20the>.

After the rule was announced by the FRA, four railroads, including BNSF and Union Pacific asked the Federal appeals court to vacate the new rule, claiming there was no data or evidence to back the claim that two-person crews were safer, and framing it as a labor issue. Conversely, organized labor has advocated for the practice of two-person crews to be preserved, citing numerous safety benefits.¹⁴¹ In response to the East Palestine, Ohio train derailment, states have also pursued more stringent rules around freight rail crew size and composition.¹⁴² At this time Idaho does not have plans to enact additional regulations on train crew sizes, and will continue to look to FRA and Federal sources for guidance.

3.7.3 Train Length

In recent years, train length averages have gone up, and “long trains” are becoming more common. Longer trains can be advantageous because they can increase fuel efficiency and lower the emissions per ton of a shipment. The American Association of Railroads reports that in 2023, the median Class I freight train length was 5,300 feet (or about 85 cars, assuming an average car length of 62 feet), that 10 percent of trains were longer than 10,000 feet (or about 160 cars), and that 1 percent of trains were over 14,000 feet (or about 225 cars).¹⁴³ In recent years, potential risks of long trains have been discussed more frequently. In 2024, the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine released a report which concluded that the FRA and Congress should take action to ensure rail safety as train lengths increase and safety risks rise.¹⁴⁴ Recent research has analyzed rail equipment data from the FRA and found that 100-car trains have an 11 percent higher risk of derailing than 50-car trains.¹⁴⁵ The trend of train length increase also impacts rail hubs and surrounding transportation infrastructure. Longer trains take longer to build and break down and can slow down operations in terminals. They also cause longer stops and wait times for vehicle drivers, pedestrians, and other travelers waiting at grade crossings, which is noted as a growing issue in the Treasure Valley and the Rathdrum Prairie. On the other hand, freight railroads have noted that increased train lengths have allowed increased operational efficiencies across the network, helping reduce the need for trucks on the highway network. As recently as 2025, some states have introduced legislation that would cap train lengths anywhere between 7,500 feet and 8,500 feet. Idaho will continue to look to FRA and Federal sources for guidance on train lengths and the regulation of interstate commerce.

¹⁴¹ AP News, Freight Railroads Ask Courts to Throw Out New Rule Requiring Two-Person Crews on Trains, <https://apnews.com/article/two-man-train-crew-railroad-rule-lawsuit-119dd28129843d3c4b12a1d76f015c9a>.

¹⁴² AP News, States Clamp Down on Freight Trains, Fearing Derailments and Federal Gridlock, <https://apnews.com/article/railroads-freight-safety-derailment-state-laws-42fa5ddae7486e44c7383def082d31a3>.

¹⁴³ Trains Magazine, Study: Derailment Risk Rises with the Number of Cars in a Freight Train, <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/study-derailment-risk-rises-with-the-number-of-cars-in-a-freight-train/>.

¹⁴⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, Long Freight Trains, <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/27807/long-freight-trains-ensuring-safe-operations-mitigating-adverse-impacts>.

¹⁴⁵ Trains Magazine, Study: Derailment Risk Rises with the Number of Cars in a Freight Train, <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/study-derailment-risk-rises-with-the-number-of-cars-in-a-freight-train/>.

3.7.4 Hazardous Materials

Railroads have a legal obligation to transport hazardous materials (hazmat), and rail has long been considered the safest way to transport these materials.¹⁴⁶ This includes many of the chemicals used to support Idaho's fertilizer and agriculture industries.

Scrutiny on railroad safety has recently increased due to incidents such as the East Palestine, OH train derailment. In early 2023, equipment failure on a Norfolk Southern train near East Palestine, OH caused 38 cars to jump the tracks, resulting in a fire that burned for several days and caused hazardous chemicals to be spilled and released into the air. Notably, first responders were instructed to intentionally burn some of the hazmat chemicals as an emergency response safety strategy, but later it was determined that this action was unnecessary and had environmental and public health ramifications.¹⁴⁷ The incident drew nationwide press attention and brought new interest to increasing rail safety regulations. In May 2023, a bill was introduced in the United States Senate to create more stringent rail safety regulations, including rules around informing State emergency response commissioners about hazmat as they are transported, however this bill failed to become law.¹⁴⁸ As of late 2025, lawmakers continue discussing new versions of the bill, but it remains unclear what if anything will be passed.

In fall of 2024, the U.S. DOT PHMSA implemented a new rule aiming to modernize hazmat transportation regulations.¹⁴⁹ This rule mandates that railroads provide first responders with immediate electronic details about rail hazmat shipments after incidents. Railroads will be required to generate real-time data on hazmat, including quantities and locations, and emergency contact details for individual trains. This new regulation is a response to the emergency response errors that occurred during the East Palestine, Ohio derailment and is intended to help first responders act more effectively to any future incidents.

In Idaho, incidents involving hazardous materials transported by rail have been both rare and minor. Between 2015 and 2024, there were 27 incidents involving rail-transported hazardous materials, including six incidents each in 2018 and 2023 (Table 3.10). Multiple years, including 2015, 2016, and 2024, did not record a single incident. Additionally, none of these incidents resulted in injuries or fatalities. When considering the overall annual tonnage and traffic transported by rail during this period, Idaho has met the approximately 99.9 percent success rate of hazardous material transport. Idaho will continue to look to FRA, PHMSA, and Federal sources for guidance on the transportation of hazardous materials through the State.

¹⁴⁶ AAR, Freight Rail: Hazmat Safety, <https://www.aar.org/issue/freight-rail-hazmat-safety/#:~:text=Freight%20rail%20remains%20the%20safest,by%20shippers%2C%20not%20the%20railroads>.

¹⁴⁷ Ohio Capital Journal, NTSB: Norfolk Southern Controlled Burn of Toxic Chemicals in E. Palestine Derailment Unnecessary, <https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/06/26/ntsb-norfolk-southern-controlled-burn-of-toxic-chemicals-in-e-palestine-derailment-unnecessary/>.

¹⁴⁸ Library of Congress, S.576—118th Congress (2023-2024): Railway Safety Act of 2023, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/576>.

¹⁴⁹ Franklin County Free Press, New U.S. Rule Requires Real-Time Hazmat Info for First Responders, <https://fcfreepresspa.com/new-u-s-rule-requires-real-time-hazmat-info-for-first-responders/>.

Table 3.10 Idaho Hazardous Material Incidents Occurring Along Railways by Year, 2015–2024

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
0	0	5	6	4	4	1	1	6	0

Source: U.S. DOT PHMSA Office of Hazardous Material Safety 2015 FRA-RAILWAY Hazmat Summary by Incident State.

3.8 Other Rail Industry Trends

This section discusses general rail industry developments and trends that are impacting, or could impact, the rail system.

3.8.1 Precision Scheduled Railroading

Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR) is a set of strategies intended to improve financial performance by maximizing revenues and generating cost savings through improved operational efficiency and asset utilization. Central elements include the following:¹⁵⁰

- » Shifting traffic from hub-and-spoke operations (which rely on freight yards) to direct origin-destination movements (which eliminate the need for intermediate yarding) with the goal of speeding deliveries, reducing car handling, and reducing terminal dwell times.
- » Regular train departures and balancing of traffic flows to improve asset utilization and operational consistency.
- » Operating “general purpose” trains instead of dedicated services where possible.
- » Maximizing train lengths and minimizing locomotive requirements.
- » Maximizing revenue yields by incentivizing shippers to adapt their operations to minimize railroad costs, along with abandoning less efficient services and routes.

Following demonstrated financial success at Canadian railroads CN and Canadian Pacific (now CPKC) in the early 2010’s, Wall Street investors pressured all the publicly held Class I railroads to adopt PSR. With an objective of streamlining operations, railroads cut employment and idled infrastructure and rolling stock assets that were no longer needed because of improved efficiencies and reduced volumes. This resulted in substantial impacts on the Class I railroad workforce. Between 2015 and 2021, these railroads cut as much as 35 percent of their labor force, while continuing to move steady amounts of tonnage.¹⁵¹ In turn, these railroads also reduced the number of trains operated throughout their networks. For example, prior to the implementation of PSR, Union Pacific ran between 20 and 25 daily trains along the Northwest

¹⁵⁰ International Railway Journal, Precision Scheduled Railroading—Evolution or Revolution?, https://www.railjournal.com/in_depth/precision-scheduled-railroading-evolution-revolution/.

¹⁵¹ FracTracker Alliance, Exploring the Fallout of Precision Scheduled Rail: A Rail Worker’s Perspective on Precision Scheduled Rail, <https://www.fractracker.org/2024/06/exploring-the-fallout-of-precision-scheduled-rail-a-rail-workers-perspective/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20US%20Government,recent%20potential%20rail%20strike%2C%20his.>

Corridor through Idaho. Through 2025, this figure has dropped to between approximately 16 and 20 daily trains, although of longer lengths.¹⁵²

Overall, the PSR implementation has been a controversial topic. Proponents argue that PSR-managed railroads are more resilient in responding to service interruptions. As a result, this operational performance has produced measurable service benefits for shippers. Additionally, the cost savings because of PSR allow railroads to pursue business that would otherwise not be financially viable.¹⁵³ Critics argue that evidence of these benefits for shippers has been scant. The labor and service cuts enacted through the implementation of PSR have resulted in tangible reductions to service and lengthy periods of poor performance due to the loss of reserve capacity. Through 2025, the concepts of PSR are being broadly applied across every Class I railroad which implemented these strategies in the previous decade. BNSF remains the sole North American Class I railroad to resist implementing PSR, although very recently the railroad has adopted components of the PSR approach in response to BNSF's corporate owners' dissatisfaction with profits.¹⁵⁴

State governments across the United States have expressed concern about the potential for PSR to increase the likelihood or severity of freight rail safety lapses. In 2023, many of them supported Federal efforts to mandate minimum train crew sizes, new trackside systems that can detect rail failures, and inspection procedures for trains handling hazardous materials.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, dozens of State legislatures have introduced legislation, some of which has passed and been signed into law, instituting at the State level the aforementioned mandates that have been proposed at the Federal level. This has also included mandates for maximum train lengths and for freight rail operators to train local fire departments about how to safely put out fires involving freight trains (especially those carrying hazardous materials).¹⁵⁶

Some freight rail operators have expressed concerns that these regulations may harm the financial viability of their operations and thereby impede flows of commodities and goods, and they have claimed that smaller train crews have been successfully used in the United States and in other countries without compromising safety. Additionally, the industry has questioned whether states have the legal authority to regulate interstate freight railroads and suggested that even if states have such legal authority, a patchwork of State-level regulations and laws would significantly complicate conducting business as a railroad in the United States.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Railfan & Railroad Magazine, A Tale of Two Idahos, <https://railfan.com/a-tale-of-two-idahos/>.

¹⁵³ Union Pacific, What Is Precision Scheduled Railroad?, <https://www.up.com/customers/track-record/tr091019-precision-scheduled-railroading.htm>.

¹⁵⁴ Wall Street Journal, Can a 'Precision Scheduling' Expert Fix Berkshire Hathaway's Railroad?, https://www.wsj.com/business/logistics/can-a-precision-scheduling-expert-fix-berkshire-hathaways-railroad-f33811e4?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=ASWzDAjMsUwHzUhSoB-FlaYGvSpyf-0RJkvvc7srtv5zVeHnrWjG7stkUboWiejLx4%3D&gaa_ts=6849b2d3&gaa_sig=iQ3z1UhUQ5zOAP4IMIH5o8kZf5dUIK4luydZc_uW_13dOrQqHzH4Q1SR2KmXDvrnhblAPRm2Miqao8_79oCdsg%3D%3D.

¹⁵⁵ National Conference of State Legislatures, Full Steam Ahead as States Back Federal Efforts to Boost Rail Safety, <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/full-steam-ahead-as-states-back-federal-efforts-to-boost-rail-safety>.

¹⁵⁶ AP News, States Clamp Down on Freight Trains, Fearing Derailments and Federal Gridlock, <https://apnews.com/article/railroads-freight-safety-derailment-state-laws-42fa5ddae7486e44c7383def082d31a3>.

¹⁵⁷ Freight Waves, Railroads Want Feds to Scrap 2-Person Train Crew Rule, <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/railroads-want-feds-to-scrap-2-person-train-crew-rule>.

Idaho has deferred to Federal regulators to conduct oversight and ensure the safety of Idaho's rail system. However, the neighboring states of Washington and Oregon have respectively passed and proposed legislation requiring minimum train crew sizes of two employees.^{158,159} Rail shipper representatives interviewed for this plan have raised concerns that such regulations would impact freight train traffic in Washington and Oregon and therefore in Idaho as well. Idaho will continue to monitor impacts from PSR implementation, as well as the impacts from other states imposing additional regulations on freight rail operations.

3.8.2 Labor Market

As indicated above, the implementation of PSR across most Class I railroad operations has led to notable reductions in the labor force.¹⁶⁰ As a means of improving operational efficiencies and profitability, these cuts in employment have impacted most aspects of railroad operations. In the case of train engineers, this has been made possible in part by significantly increasing train lengths (in order to decrease the number of separate trains in operation).¹⁶¹

Rail labor leaders have argued that these changes have stretched remaining freight rail workers thinner. Workers are expected to work longer hours, cover more areas, and undertake more tasks as individuals that used to be dealt with by multiple workers. As a result, labor leaders claim these changes have led to compromises in worker health and safety as well as to the safety of the freight rail infrastructure. These concerns have coincided with rail labor leaders' broader concerns about pay and benefits which nearly led to an industry-wide strike in 2022, which was subsequently blocked by President Biden.¹⁶²

In Idaho, there is evidence of decreased rail industry employment. While Class I rail operations in Idaho are more limited than in other states, crew changes do occur at Union Pacific's facilities in Pocatello, and Nampa, and at BNSF's facilities in Hauser and Sandpoint. Union Pacific's Pocatello facility includes intermodal operations operated by Savage, and BNSF's Hauser yard also includes a major refueling facility along the busy Great Northern Corridor. Since the late 2000s, Union Pacific's employment in the State has dropped from over 1,000 to just under 700 in 2023.^{163,164} Although less data was available for BNSF dating back to the late 2000s, employment across the railroad has remained steady in recent years at just over 300.¹⁶⁵ While data is more limited, Idaho's Class III railroads likely operate under much leaner

¹⁵⁸ Freight Waves, Washington State Will Require a Minimum Train Crew Size, <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/washington-state-will-require-a-minimum-train-crew-size>.

¹⁵⁹ Oregon State Legislative Information System, SB723 2025 Regular Session, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Measures/Overview/SB723>.

¹⁶⁰ BLS, Tracking Productivity in Line-Haul Railroads, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-13/tracking-productivity-in-line-haul-railroads.htm>.

¹⁶¹ AP News, Latest Freight Railroad Layoffs and Wall Street Pressure Renew Concerns About Safety and Service, <https://apnews.com/article/railroads-cost-cutting-wall-street-regulators-investors-c7f017fefbeb8444822269b0df801de4>.

¹⁶² Reuters, Biden Signs Bill to Block U.S. Railroad Strike, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-signs-bill-block-us-railroad-strike-2022-12-02/>.

¹⁶³ Idaho Business Review, Union Pacific Senior VP Talks About Challenges Facing Railroad Firm, <https://idahobusinessreview.com/2008/11/17/union-pacific-senior-vp-talks-about-challenges-facing-railroad-firm/>.

¹⁶⁴ Union Pacific, Union Pacific in Idaho, <https://bnsfnorthwest.com/idaho/>.

¹⁶⁵ BNSF, BNSF Railway in Idaho, <https://bnsfnorthwest.com/idaho/>.

conditions, and are likely less prone to significant fluctuations in labor levels beyond those from largescale changes in local freight traffic. In the upcoming years, changes to the rail labor market will likely be determined as a result of freight traffic totals and operational needs.

The interconnected nature of freight transportation networks across the United States means that labor concerns across other modes can affect freight rail traffic patterns and corresponding labor needs in Idaho as well. Strikes at West and East Coast ports in 2024 and 2025 led to deals in relation to the preservation of some jobs, wage increases, and a framework for implementing future automation and technology improvements.¹⁶⁶ As previously discussed, impacts to port operations can have upstream impacts in Idaho, as shippers adjust their modal preferences based on overall system reliability. As a result, the overall labor market across all modes bears watching for impacts locally in Idaho.

3.8.3 Short Line Tax Credits

In 2005, the U.S. Railroad Track Maintenance Tax Credit (45G) went into effect. This Federal credit grants an amount equal to 40 cents for each dollar of qualified track maintenance expenses, and other infrastructure projects, to short-line railroads.¹⁶⁷ This program assists short line railroads with maintaining track infrastructure and was made permanent in 2020.

Several states have adopted tax credits similar to 45G at the State level. Oregon, Kansas, Minnesota, Iowa, Pennsylvania and other states also provide State funding for rail in addition to Federal surface transportation allocations.¹⁶⁸ In 2019, Idaho legislators introduced a bill that would provide a 40 percent income tax credit for small railroads for costs incurred maintaining or expanding their infrastructure.¹⁶⁹ This bill was not passed by the Idaho legislature and the issue has not been taken up again at the State level in Idaho in recent years. In addition to 45G-style tax credits, many states also offer direct grants and loans to short lines to pursue capital upgrades, including Minnesota, Tennessee, North Carolina, California, and Iowa, and others.¹⁷⁰

Short line rail company advocates argue the existing Section 45G Tax Credit is not sufficient to fund necessary maintenance to the Nation's short line rail infrastructure and point out that the cost of upgrading rail has increased since Section 45G went into law.¹⁷¹ In early 2025, the Idaho House introduced a bill to update the tax credit by increasing the credit cap from \$3,500 per mile to \$6,100 per

¹⁶⁶ Reuters, Second U.S. Port Strike Averted as Union, Employers Reach Deal, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-dockworkers-port-employers-reach-tentative-agreement-2025-01-09/>.

¹⁶⁷ Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute, 26 U.S. Code § 45G—Railroad track maintenance credit, <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/26/45G>.

¹⁶⁸ Colorado DOT, Colorado Freight and Passenger Rail Plan, https://www.codot.gov/programs/transitandrail/assets/state-freight-and-passenger-rail-plan_final_5-1--2024.pdf.

¹⁶⁹ Progressive Railroading, Idaho Legislator Proposes Short-Line Tax Credit. For Railroad Career Professionals, https://www.progressiverailroading.com/short_lines_regionals/news/Idaho-legislator-proposes-short-line-tax-credit--56685.

¹⁷⁰ Idaho State Legislature, House Bill 61, <https://legislature.idaho.gov/sessioninfo/2019/legislation/h0061/>.

¹⁷¹ American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association, 45G Short Line Tax Credit Modernization, <https://www.aslrra.org/advocacy/45g-short-line-tax-credit-modernization/>.

mile.^{172,173} This update also proposes a mechanism to automatically increase the cap with inflation. This change would make infrastructure maintenance more financially attractive for short-line railroads nationwide. Additional information on funding and assistance for Idaho short-lines can be found in Chapter 1.

3.9 Other Economic Trends

National or global economic trends impact Idaho rail. Although rail is a more fuel-efficient mode than truck or car transportation, trends towards increased fuel cost will affect all transportation industries. Two additional trends discussed in this section that will likely impact rail over time are freight transportation pricing and international trade policy.

3.9.1 Rail Fuel Efficiency

Rail is a more fuel-efficient mode of transportation than trucks. One railcar can move the tonnage of three to four trucks, while trains can move a ton of goods three to four times as far with one ton of fuel compared with trucks.^{174,175} This greater fuel efficiency reduces the emissions and fuel cost associated with rail versus trucks, ultimately contributing to public health and safety as well as lower transportation costs.

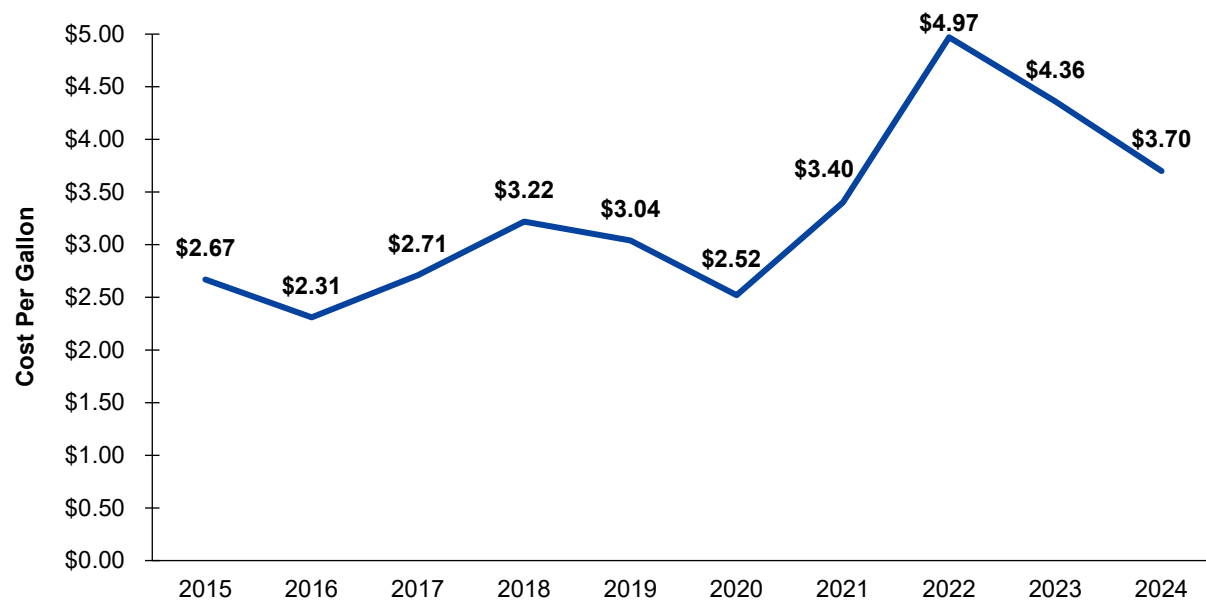
Retail diesel fuel prices in the Rocky Mountain Petroleum Administration for Defense District IV (PADD IV), which includes Idaho, have fluctuated over the past decade, as shown in Figure 3.41. Through 2020, diesel fuel costs ranged between approximately \$2.30 and \$3.30 per gallon. From 2020 to 2022, diesel fuel costs spiked significantly to a high of nearly \$5.00 per gallon, before dropping back down to \$3.70 per gallon in 2024, including taxes. While fuel costs have come down since 2022, the figures still remain elevated in comparison to pre-2022 levels. In the longer term, fuel costs will be impacted by overall demand, as well as production levels. Through the rest of 2025, and in the upcoming years, fuel costs could be impacted in large part by the impacts from tariffs on imported fuel products.

¹⁷² Trains Magazine, House Bill Would Update Tax Credit for Short Lines, <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/house-bill-would-update-tax-credit-for-short-lines/>.

¹⁷³ Idaho Legislature, HOUSE BILL 61, <https://legislature.idaho.gov/sessioninfo/2019/legislation/h0061/>.

¹⁷⁴ Union Pacific, 12 Train Facts you Might Not Know, <https://www.up.com/news/service/tr030822-12-train-facts-you-might-not-know>.

¹⁷⁵ RSI Logistics, Green Rail: Is Rail Better for the Environment than Trucks, <https://www.rsilogistics.com/blog/is-rail-better-for-the-environment-than-trucks/>.

Figure 3.41 Cost of Diesel Gallon in the Rocky Mountain Region, 2015–2024

Source: Energy Information Administration; U.S. BLS CPI-U.

3.9.2 Freight Transportation Pricing and Rate Trends

The price of different freight modes has risen over time and has had some significant changes in recent years, starting in 2020. The price index produced by the U.S. BTS tracks changes in pricing.¹⁷⁶ “This index indicates that rail costs rose steadily from 2020 to 2023: increasing by about 5 percent from 2020 to 2021, 9 percent from 2021 to 2022, and another 2 percent from 2022 to 2023, for a cumulative increase of roughly 17 percent over the three-year period. Trucking costs, by contrast, spiked more sharply—rising by about 13 percent in 2021 and 20 percent in 2022—before declining by approximately 5 percent in 2023. While both modes experienced substantial cost increases in 2021 and 2022, the trucking price index fell in 2023, whereas rail continued to trend upward. These fluctuations reflect a range of drivers, including fuel prices, labor and wage pressures, supply chain disruptions, and regulatory changes. It is also important to note that, despite these cost shifts, rail generally remains less expensive than trucking on a per-ton-mile basis, particularly for long-haul and bulk shipments. This enduring structural advantage underscores rail’s continued role as the most cost-efficient mode for many freight movements in Idaho.

Comparative rates of different modes will always impact shipper behavior through the modes that they select for shipping goods. If the rates of truck shipping continue to fall while rates for rail shipping remain static or continue to rise, this could make trucking a more competitive freight mode for some shippers and could impact the rail industry. In Idaho, this could have implications for freight volumes and congestion on both highways and rail networks.

¹⁷⁶ U.S. DOT BTS, Transportation Economic Trends: Transportation Costs—Businesses, <https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/2yqq-baqq/>.

3.9.3 International Trade Policy

Roughly 38 percent of all American rail traffic was directly tied to international shipments in 2023.¹⁷⁷ In the same year, Idaho exported over \$4 billion of products and services to over 180 global partners.¹⁷⁸ Canada was the top export partner, and was the recipient of about a third of Idaho's international exports (\$1.5 billion) in 2023. Taiwan (\$505 million) and Mexico (\$284 million) are the nations with the second and third highest dollar volume of exports from 2023. Food and agricultural products were the top international export commodity category, representing nearly \$1.2 billion in 2023. Commodities that exhibit significant rail freight flows in Idaho (such that the mode share of rail in Idaho is more than 1 percent for that commodity) are raw nonmetallic minerals, cereal grains, other foodstuffs, animal feed, gravel, and waste.¹⁷⁹

American tariff policy has changed significantly in 2025, including tariffs on Canadian and Mexican goods imported to the United States. Goods that are transported by rail, such as the 10 percent of Idaho potatoes that are exported, are likely to be impacted by tariff policy.¹⁸⁰ If export demand changes due to shifting global trade patterns, this will also have downflow impacts on freight-intensive industries like manufacturing and mining, which will in turn impact traffic volumes and flows on Idaho's railroads.

Predictions and forecasts regarding the effects of tariff policy vary, limiting the conclusions that can be made around this topic. Further, adding to the current uncertainties, the Trump administration's approach has been to negotiate individual deals with each trading partner, a highly complex and lengthy undertaking, leading to a highly fluid situation regarding the levels of tariffs applied to goods from multiple countries, retaliatory tariffs, and other as of yet unknown impacts.

In Idaho, rail stakeholders noted a variety of reactions and concerns as to the impacts of tariffs on rail traffic. Some rail shippers have not yet noticed any impacts from proposed and enacted tariffs. Other stakeholders stressed that it is still too early to know the full impacts—positive or negative, associated with the new American tariff policy. For example, the Port of Lewiston is a major exporter of wheat, which is grown in the Palouse region of Idaho and Washington. The wheat is then barged to West Coast ports and exported in significant quantities to Asian markets such as Japan and Taiwan. The impacts of tariffs and retaliatory tariffs on wheat exports won't be evident until late 2025 as the wheat harvesting season progresses. However, wheat producers are currently struggling with low prices and could face additional problems if demand further softens from Asian markets.

¹⁷⁷ Association of American Railroads, AAR: Rail Transportation and the U.S. Economy: Fueling Growth, Trade, and Opportunity, <https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/AAR-PE-Economic-Impact-Report-2025-FINAL.pdf>.

¹⁷⁸ Idaho Commerce, 2023 Global Trade, <https://commerce.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/International-One-SheetsWORLD.pdf>.

¹⁷⁹ ITD, 2023 Idaho Strategic Freight Plan, <https://apps.itd.idaho.gov/apps/freight/FreightPlan.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ University of Idaho, Idaho Agriculture Global Exports, 2018, <https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/publications/res-0199>.

3.10 Rail Technology Trends

Technological advancements have the potential to change rail operations, efficiency, and labor. Some technology trends that may have ramifications for rail in Idaho are discussed in this section.

3.10.1 Shipment Visibility

Rail lags other freight modes in providing shipment visibility, which has increased in importance as customers increasingly require the ability to track shipment progress in real-time from the point that the goods are tendered for shipment to their delivery. When asked, rail shippers in Idaho expressed a desire for improved shipment tracking capabilities and communication on the part of the freight railroads, indicating potentially significant value in the continued integration of shipping visibility tools.

While technology for intermittent tracking of rail shipments has been widespread since the 1980s, for railroads to remain competitive, access to real-time shipment status and schedules is becoming increasingly necessary. Several private companies have developed technological solutions to improve access to real-time rail data, including:

- » **RailPulse**, a coalition originally founded by Norfolk Southern, GATX Corporation, Genesee & Wyoming, TrinityRail, and Watco has sought to respond to these needs through the development of a collaborative telematics platform. The RailPulse platform, launched in 2024, provides real-time information from GPS sensors installed on individual rail cars. Sensors can provide information on location, handbrake engagement, impact events, and door status.¹⁸¹
- » **Telegraph**, a Chicago-based startup, uses telematics to help railroads and shippers manage pipeline activity and optimize pricing systems.¹⁸²
- » **RailState**, launched in 2019 is an AI-powered rail network intelligence platform that provides real-time, independent tracking and analytics on freight train movements across North America. Through its network of trackside cameras across North America, RailState provides images and geolocation of rail cars enroute. RailState is currently expanding its network, which is forecast to include all Class I lines in northern Idaho by the end of 2025.¹⁸³

The impact of this very recent new technology on the industry is not yet clear. In addition to the focus on better data and visibility on rail equipment and shipments, future technological improvements are predicted to include real time monitoring of railcar performance and lading conditions, further integration with railroad and shipper systems, and increased systemwide analytics.

¹⁸¹ RailPulse Website, <https://railpulse.com/>.

¹⁸² Telegraph Software Website, <https://telegraph.io/rail-freight-management-software/>.

¹⁸³ RailState Website, <https://www.railstate.com/>.

3.10.2 Autonomous Trucks and Automated Train Operations

Advanced levels of automation present opportunities and challenges for the rail industry. Automatic train operations and autonomous trucks offer the prospect of reducing labor needs in moving freight. Because rail is already more labor-efficient than highway transportation, future gains from automation are likely to accrue more significantly to the highway sector. This dynamic could erode rail's relative cost competitiveness, potentially prompting modal shifts that would have substantial implications for congestion and infrastructure investment across Idaho's multimodal network. At the same time, the technological and institutional barriers to widespread adoption of autonomous trucks are considerably greater than those for rail, where automation has been commercially deployed since the 1960s. Driverless highway vehicles also present notable safety challenges. In Idaho—where rural settings, mountainous terrain, and severe winter conditions are common—these risks may be further magnified.

A variety of technologies to automate rail operations are currently in development. The Class I railroads, working together with rail industry suppliers, are utilizing the technology platform that underlies PTC to automate train operations. While the initial goal of this technology is to reduce the workload of train crews, this same technology could be utilized to fully automate operations in the future. Other, more transformative technologies are also in development. A noteworthy example is Parallel Systems, which develops autonomous battery-electric rail cars.¹⁸⁴ Fully driverless, the railcars have platooning abilities, meaning that the cars can move in coordination together along a track with bumper-to-bumper contact, mimicking conventional trains. In 2025, Parallel Systems received approval from the FRA to begin testing of their technology on a Georgia short line.

In the trucking industry, driverless vehicle technology is also being developed. In early 2025, Aurora Innovations, a driverless technology company, announced that a handful of driverless trucks would be deployed hauling freight in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona starting in April 2025.¹⁸⁵ These technologies are in very early stages and it is too early at this point to ascertain whether they will have a significant impact on the freight rail industry, or what that impact might be in Idaho.

It is noted that in 2018, Idaho formed a Connected Vehicle Testing and Deployment Committee to study and develop recommendations around autonomous vehicle technology.¹⁸⁶ This committee recommended Idaho allow testing and deployment of autonomous vehicles in the State, but no significant legislative activity on this topic has occurred in Idaho since then.

¹⁸⁴ Trains Magazine, Parallel Systems Shows Off Autonomous Cars' Ability to Move Together in Platoons, <https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/parallel-systems-shows-off-autonomous-cars-ability-to-move-together-in-platoons/>.

¹⁸⁵ Reuters, Aurora Plans for Self-Driving Trucks in Harsh Weather After Commercial Launch, <https://www.reuters.com/business/autos-transportation/aurora-plans-self-driving-trucks-harsh-weather-ahead-commercial-launch-2025-03-25/>.

¹⁸⁶ Idaho News, Future of Autonomous Vehicle Testing in Idaho, <https://idahonews.com/news/local/future-of-autonomous-vehicle-testing-in-idaho>.

3.10.3 Zero Emission Technology

Both Union Pacific and BNSF are undertaking greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction plans, which could lead to significant benefits in terms of reducing fuel consumption and operational costs. Union Pacific has proposed a plan to reduce GHG by 26 percent by 2030 from a 2018 baseline.¹⁸⁷ BNSF has proposed a plan to reduce GHG by 30 percent on the same timeline.¹⁸⁸ In terms of implementation, BNSF has been testing battery-electric locomotives, and in 2022, Union Pacific announced plans to purchase North America's largest carrier-owned fleet of battery-electric locomotives.^{189,190} Implementation of this technology is still in its early stages in the United States and globally, and the speed and degree to which this technology will be adopted remains to be seen. In Idaho, the degree to which this technology is adopted will depend in part on changing Federal and local priorities.

The implementation of this technology provides increased operational efficiencies and leads to economic investment in supporting infrastructure. BNSF currently operates a major refueling and servicing facility in Hauser. Further implementation of these projects could lead to increased facility expansions and investments to accommodate the needs of such locomotives at Hauser and other locations in Idaho.

¹⁸⁷ Union Pacific, What Are Railroads Doing About Emissions?, <https://bnsf.com/in-the-community/environment/sustainability-overview-2023/protecting-our-planet.html>.

¹⁸⁸ BNSF, Protecting Our Planet, <https://bnsf.com/in-the-community/environment/sustainability-overview-2023/protecting-our-planet.html>.

¹⁸⁹ BNSF, BNSF and Wabtec Commence Battery-Electric Locomotive Pilot Test in California, <https://www.bnsf.com/news-media/news-releases/newsrelease.page?relId=bnsf-and-wabtec-commence-battery-electric-locomotive-pilot-test-in-california>.

¹⁹⁰ Union Pacific, Union Pacific Railroad to Assemble World's Largest Carrier-Owned Battery-Electric Locomotive Fleet, <https://www.up.com/press-releases/service/battery-electric-locomotive-nr-220128>.

4.0 Idaho's Rail System Needs and Opportunities

This chapter presents the needs and opportunities for the rail system in Idaho. The assessment of needs and opportunities draws upon the data analysis and stakeholder input received throughout this plan, as well as a based on a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis which was developed in consultation with ITD and vetted and prioritized by ITD staff and key stakeholders. The needs and opportunities presented in this chapter emphasize the link between Idaho's freight and passenger rail system and the State's overall economy and transportation system. Identifying these needs and issues is critical for developing the strategies, actions, and investments that will be presented in Chapter 5.

4.1 SWOT Analysis Overview

The SWOT analysis of Idaho's rail system uses data and information developed throughout this Plan to identify the internal and external factors with the biggest effects on Idaho's rail system. The analysis is comprised of the following elements:

- » **Strengths**—Advantages of Idaho's rail system. Strengths provide a solid foundation for current operations and future growth.
- » **Weaknesses**—Challenges or deficiencies on Idaho's rail system. Weaknesses limit the performance, reliability, or competitiveness of Idaho's rail system.
- » **Opportunities**—Trends and future developments. Opportunities can be leveraged by ITD and its partners to strengthen its rail system.
- » **Threats**—Risks or pressures. Threats may weaken Idaho's rail system if not addressed.

The analysis draws upon multiple sources of information to ensure a comprehensive and balanced evaluation:

- » **Chapter 2: Existing Physical Conditions**—The infrastructure and operating conditions of Idaho's rail network provide a foundation for identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- » **Chapter 3: Trends & Forecasts**—Statewide and regional demographic, economic, and freight demand projections, as well as industry trends, inform the opportunities and challenges that Idaho's rail system is expected to face in the future.
- » **Chapter 6: Stakeholder Outreach**—Input from Idaho's railroads, rail stakeholders, and Idaho's Freight Advisory Committee provides further insight into rail system needs and trends that inform the SWOT analysis.

Together, these sources provide both a technical and stakeholder-driven basis for the SWOT analysis, ensuring that the identified needs and opportunities reflect not only current system conditions but also future demands and the perspectives of those directly engaged with Idaho's rail system.

To help guide the development of actionable strategies for the Idaho Rail Plan, the SWOT analysis elements were prioritized through a collaborative effort with Idaho's Freight Advisory Committee. Each element of the SWOT analysis, shown in Figure 4.1 is described in the subsections below.

Figure 4.1 SWOT on Idaho's Rail System



4.2 Strengths Associated with Idaho's Rail System

Strengths of Idaho's rail system are providing a solid foundation for current operations and future growth. Three strengths emerged from the Idaho Rail Plan SWOT exercise and are prioritized as follows:

1. Strong Market Connections.
2. Well-Maintained Class I Rail Network.
3. Sufficient Rail Network Capacity.

Strong market connections to West Coast ports and major population centers to the east were prioritized highest by the Idaho Freight Advisory Committee, reflecting stakeholders' view that this strength is a key foundation for strategies to enhance Idaho's economic competitiveness. When paired with the second-ranked strength—a well-maintained Class I network—these market connections provide Idaho with reliable long-haul rail access. Stakeholders emphasized, however, that realizing the full benefit of these conditions requires stronger first- and last-mile connectivity, particularly for agricultural and natural resource shippers that depend on seamless access to Class I lines. Rail network capacity was also seen as a strength allowing for future growth; however, less need for direct action in the Statewide Rail Plan

was identified as it is largely the result of ongoing Class I investment and maintenance. This provides the State with a strong baseline of rail infrastructure that can enable Idaho to focus attention on areas where its policies and investments can make the greatest difference.

4.2.1 Strong Market Connections

Idaho's Class I rail network provides robust connectivity to key U.S. markets, positioning the State as a strategic node in national and international supply chains. Union Pacific and BNSF Railway offer direct access to major Pacific Northwest ports, including Seattle, Tacoma, and Portland, supporting Idaho exporters in reaching global markets. To the east, these networks connect Idaho to major population and industrial centers such as Salt Lake City, Denver, and Chicago, enabling efficient long-haul movements of agricultural products, forest products, and manufactured goods.

Infrastructure improvements such as BNSF's Sandpoint Junction Connector enhance Idaho's role in these national freight flows. By adding a second rail bridge over Lake Pend Oreille and upgrading key rail crossings, the project allows more frequent and reliable train movements through northern Idaho.¹⁹¹ This reduces congestion on a critical segment of BNSF's Northern Transcon, ensuring that Idaho-origin and Idaho-passing shipments can move efficiently to both West Coast ports and eastern United States markets, strengthening the State's position as a reliable corridor in transcontinental supply chains.

Together, Union Pacific and BNSF lines give Idaho shippers competitive access to coastal gateways and inland hubs, supporting efficient intermodal, bulk commodity, and time-sensitive freight movement. Strategic infrastructure upgrades, like the Sandpoint Junction Connector, help maintain this connectivity and improve overall network reliability for freight moving through the State.

4.2.2 Reliable and Well-Maintained Class I Rail Network

Class I trackage accounts for most of Idaho's rail network and carries most of the State's rail traffic by both tonnage and daily train volumes. BNSF's rail network allows double-stacked railcars and meets the 286,000 pound (286K) rail weight standard throughout Idaho. The same holds for Union Pacific's rail network in almost all of Idaho, with exceptions only in a few spur lines. Additionally, in stakeholder interviews, both Union Pacific and BNSF indicated that their Idaho lines are maintained to a high standard, a view that was corroborated by Idaho's Freight Advisory Committee. The 2023 Strategic Freight Plan indicates that the State's freight network is generally in good condition with few capacity constraints, and that non-highway freight assets, including rail, have the capacity to expand operations.¹⁹²

Well-maintained Class I lines ensure that Idaho shippers have reliable connections to major western markets and ports, and that the rail system can support industry-standard 286K railcar loadings. Stakeholders also noted that compared to other parts of the country, congestion and delays are not a significant issue on Idaho's Class I network. This reliability, paired with ongoing investment and maintenance by the Class I carriers, makes the network a dependable asset for moving bulk commodities and supporting economic activity in the State.

¹⁹¹ BNSF Railway, BNSF Railway's Sandpoint Junction Connector bridge now open, <https://www.bnsf.com/news-media/news-releases/newsrelease.page?relId=bnsf-railways-sandpoint-junction-connector-bridge-now-open>.

¹⁹² ITD, 2023 Strategic Freight Plan, <https://apps.itd.idaho.gov/apps/freight/FreightPlan.pdf>.

Stakeholders also highlighted that the State's rail system is largely free of major chokepoints or constrained infrastructure that can cause freight slowdowns or bottlenecks. Union Pacific and BNSF lines in Idaho generally allow trains to move without delay, contrasted to congested corridors seen elsewhere in the United States, such as the Chicago rail hub or nearer to West Coast ports. While operational reliability is ultimately still affected by congestion throughout the network, the absence of major chokepoints in Idaho itself provides a structural advantage to rail traffic moving in, out, and through the State.

4.2.3 Sufficient Rail Network Capacity

Idaho's Class I rail network offers the capacity to accommodate current and projected freight volumes on both UP and BNSF routes. Both Union Pacific and BNSF have recently invested in infrastructure and equipment in Idaho to maintain and manage capacity. For example, Union Pacific invested \$34.1 million in the State in 2017 to improve track, bridges, and other assets.¹⁹³ BNSF maintains sufficient locomotives, crews, and track capacity to handle current traffic levels, indicating that Idaho's Class I network can continue to support the State's freight demand.¹⁹⁴ This combination of infrastructure investment and operational readiness provides a stable foundation for efficient freight movement across Idaho.

4.3 Weaknesses of Idaho's Rail System

Weaknesses of Idaho's rail system are challenges or deficiencies with Idaho's rail system which may limit its performance, reliability, or competitiveness. Six weaknesses emerged from the Idaho Rail Plan SWOT exercise, and are prioritized as follows:

1. Limited Transload and Intermodal Capacity.
2. Fragmented Rail System.
3. Low Freight Rail Market Share.
4. Lack of Dedicated Funding.
5. High Numbers of Highway/Rail At-Grade Crossings.
6. Increasing Rail Safety Incidents.

The Idaho Freight Advisory Committee placed the highest priority on limited transload and intermodal capacity, reflecting the significant barriers that small shippers and rural producers face in accessing rail access within the State. Without publicly available transload facilities or aggregation points, it is difficult for smaller-scale agricultural and industrial producers to consolidate shipments efficiently. This forces many businesses to rely on either long-haul trucking or truck transport to a transload or intermodal yard in Utah or Washington. Idaho's fragmented rail system also limits access to markets, as shippers and customers are constrained by desperate rail networks in the northern and southern parts of the State.

¹⁹³ Railway Age, BNSF, UP expanding, upgrading in northern Idaho, <https://www.rlands.com/freight/class-1/bnsf-up-expanding-upgrading-in-northern-idaho/>.

¹⁹⁴ STB, BNSF 2021 Rail Metrics, <https://www.stb.gov/wp-content/uploads/NGCC-RailroadMetrics-2021.pdf>.

Together, these factors constrain opportunities for Idaho's producers to leverage rail and reduce competitive pressures in markets that demand efficient transportation.

Rail's relatively low modal share compared to other western states was also viewed as a weakness of Idaho's system. While Idaho benefits from Class I mainlines, the system is underutilized, particularly for commodities well-suited to rail such as grains, minerals, and forest products. Stakeholders emphasized that without better access and infrastructure support, opportunities to shift freight from truck to rail will remain limited. The absence of dedicated state funding programs, such as those that exist in neighboring states to support short line railroads, was ranked next. Idaho's Class III carriers in particular face high capital costs—sometimes exceeding \$300,000 for reactivating a spur or siding—which can be prohibitive without financial assistance. This lack of funding mechanisms creates a structural disadvantage for Idaho's short lines and their shippers.

With over 2,200 highway/rail at-grade crossings and 1,334 public crossings statewide, trends towards modestly increasing incidents at rail crossings present ongoing safety and efficiency challenges in Idaho.¹⁹⁵ However, Federal regulations and existing state-level programs were viewed by stakeholders as generally sufficient to address the most pressing risks.

4.3.1 *Limited Transload and Intermodal Capacity*

Idaho has relatively few transload facilities, with Table 2.19 identifying only seven transload facilities and one intermodal facility in the State. This paucity of facilities limits opportunities for shippers not directly served by rail to access the rail network. Existing facilities in Lewiston, Nampa, and eastern Idaho have sufficient capacity to handle current demand of key commodities, but interest in using these facilities may be underestimated due to difficulty for smaller businesses and rural producers to reach or use transload and intermodal facilities cost-efficiently. Limited access to multimodal facilities can force reliance on trucking (including for relatively shorter-distance freight transportation between Idaho and neighboring states), reduce flexibility in responding to market changes, and constrain opportunities for economic growth by discouraging new industries from utilizing rail.

4.3.2 *Fragmented Rail System*

Idaho's rail network is geographically fragmented, with northern and southern systems historically never directly connected due to the rugged Bitterroot and Salmon River mountain ranges. Most of Idaho's trackage is found in the southern half of the State, along the Snake River Plain. This separation limits the ability to move freight seamlessly across the State, requiring reliance on longer routes through other states and/or trucking to bridge gaps between rail networks. The fragmented system can increase transportation costs, reduce operational efficiency, and constrain the growth of industries that could benefit from more integrated rail service.

4.3.3 *Low Freight Rail Market Share and Stagnant Rail Volumes*

Although Idaho is served by two Class I railroads, rail's share of the State's overall freight market remains lower than average, and volumes have remained stagnant in recent years. This disconnect highlights a

¹⁹⁵ ITD, Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/b94318eb3bcc4f2d968d85156379a949>.

potential challenge to Idaho's long-term freight balance—even as demand for goods and commodities increases, much of that growth has been absorbed by trucking rather than rail. While freight rail offers clear advantages in terms of efficiency, safety, and emissions, those benefits have not translated into a measurable increase in rail's modal share in Idaho.

Most freight movements within Idaho rely on highways, reflecting the dispersed nature of agricultural production, the prevalence of short-haul shipments, and the flexibility of trucks serving rural areas. According to Idaho's SFP, in 2020, trucks carried 57 percent of freight by tonnage, compared to just 8 percent for rail. This means that in 2020, trucks carried seven times as much tonnage as rail in Idaho, though this is less skewed than nationwide, where in 2020, trucks carried over 8.6 times as much tonnage as rail.¹⁹⁶ As a result, in Idaho, even industries that traditionally depend on bulk rail movements, such as agriculture and forest products, often also rely heavily on trucking for both local and regional distribution.

The limited market share of rail in Idaho's freight system has several implications. Heavy dependence on trucks increases demands on the State's highway network, contributing to congestion, roadway wear, and higher maintenance costs. It also constrains the ability of shippers to use rail as a cost-effective and reliable option for long-haul freight, particularly for smaller producers or those located far from rail access points. This can reduce competitiveness for some industries, as trucking may carry higher costs over long distances and offer fewer opportunities to capture the efficiency and environmental benefits of rail. Rail's low modal share also means that investment and service levels in the State are more difficult to sustain, since carriers tend to concentrate resources in regions where rail volumes are higher. This creates a feedback loop in which limited rail use leads to fewer options for shippers, reinforcing dependence on trucks.

The risk of stagnant rail volumes is twofold. First, if rail traffic fails to grow in proportion to Idaho's economy, the State may miss opportunities to strengthen its competitive advantage in bulk commodity markets and to shift more freight to lower-cost, lower-emission modes. Second, stagnant or declining volumes may limit Class I railroads' incentive to make new capital investments in Idaho, particularly beyond the baseline maintenance of their mainline routes. Without stronger rail utilization, the system risks falling into a cycle where limited growth leads to limited investment, which in turn constrains Idaho's ability to leverage rail as a tool for supporting its expanding economy. Addressing this challenge will require identifying opportunities where Idaho's growing industries—particularly agriculture, mining, timber, and manufacturing—can make greater use of rail, supported by improved first- and last-mile connections and strategic investments in short line infrastructure.

4.3.4 *Lack of Dedicated Funding*

Idaho contributes up to \$250,000 per year to match Federal Section 130 funds to support at-grade crossings improvements in the State. Beyond this amount, Idaho does not currently maintain a dedicated funding source or tax credit program to support freight or passenger railroads. This poses significant challenges, especially for the State's Class III short line railroads, which often lack the capital needed for infrastructure rehabilitation or upgrades. While the ISDA administers the REDIFit program, it operates as a loan-only initiative. This structure provides limited relief for railroads facing high capital needs—such as bridge replacement, track modernization, or safety improvements.

¹⁹⁶ Moving Goods in the United States | BTS Data Inventory, <https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/Moving-Goods-in-the-United-States/bcyt-rqmu>.

By contrast, several peer states have implemented grant or tax credit programs that offer more direct assistance to short line railroads. For example, Oregon's Connect Oregon program provides competitive grants for rail infrastructure upgrades, and Washington's Freight Rail Assistance Program (FRAP) offers grants aimed at preserving essential rural rail service.^{197,198} Additionally, Kansas has enacted a short-line tax credit program, allowing Class II and III railroads to claim a credit equal to 50 percent of eligible track maintenance expenditures—capped at \$5,000 per mile—which is expected to deliver approximately \$8.7 million in tax credits over its 10-year span.^{199,200} These programs help keep rural short lines competitive, enhance first- and last-mile connectivity, and safeguard vital links between local industries and the national rail network.

For the Idaho Rail Plan, the absence of a dedicated state program represents a weakness that may limit the State's ability to attract Federal dollars or unlock new freight opportunities. Without state matching funds or tax credit incentives, Idaho risks falling behind neighboring states in supporting short line resiliency and expanding multimodal freight access. This limits the ability of rural producers and small-volume shippers to connect efficiently with national and global markets, which in turn reduces the competitive advantage of Idaho's agricultural and resource-based industries.

4.3.5 High Numbers of Highway/Rail At-Grade Crossings

Idaho's rail network includes roughly 2,200 highway/rail at-grade crossings and 1,334 public crossings. Each of these crossings is a potential safety concern as it exposes pedestrians and vehicles on the roadway and sidewalks and trains traveling on the rail tracks. Figure 3.25 shows 55 fatalities or injuries for motor vehicle drivers at grade crossings in Idaho between 2011–2020. For freight operations, these crossings can also create bottlenecks that reduce network efficiency, particularly in areas experiencing population growth or higher traffic volumes.

4.3.6 Increasing Rail Safety Incidents

In the last 10 years, the national number of annual rail safety incidents, including derailments and collisions, has remained essentially flat. By contrast, Idaho's safety incidents have increased over that same time period. FRA data used in Figure 3.22 shows that the average number of incidents per year increased from 47 between 2015–2019 to 65 between 2020–2024. Figure 3.22 shows that the average number of injuries and fatalities per year increased from 27 between 2015–2019 to 34 between 2020–2024.

While the absolute number of rail incidents in Idaho remains modest compared to states with more rail activity, the divergence from national trends is notable and suggests a systemic, not random, worsening of rail safety in Idaho over the 10-year period using this metric. Idaho maintains strong compliance with

¹⁹⁷ Oregon Department of Transportation (DOT), Connect Oregon, <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/programs/pages/connectoregon.aspx>.

¹⁹⁸ Washington State DOT, State Rail Grant and Loan Programs, <https://wsdot.wa.gov/business-wsdot/grants/state-rail-grant-and-loan-programs>.

¹⁹⁹ Kansas Department of Revenue, Kansas Short Line Railroad Tax Credit, <https://www.ksrevenue.gov/prtaxcredits-shortline.html>.

²⁰⁰ Progressive Railroading, Kansas creates short line tax credit program, <https://www.progressiverailroading.com/railPrime/details/Kansas-creates-short-line-tax-credit-program--66419>.

Federal safety requirements and partners with programs such as Operation Lifesaver, but further analysis may be warranted to understand underlying causes and what can be done to address them.

4.4 Opportunities for Idaho's Rail System

Opportunities facing Idaho's rail system include trends and future developments which Idaho can leverage to strengthen its rail system. Four opportunities emerged from the Idaho Rail Plan SWOT exercise, and are prioritized as follows:

1. Strong Global Demand for Idaho Commodities.
2. Alignment of Federal Priorities with Idaho's Industries.
3. Strong Population and Economic Growth.
4. New Technologies.

Idaho's Freight Advisory Committee ranked strong global demand for Idaho commodities as the top opportunity for Idaho's rail system. Agricultural, mining, timber, and energy products continue to experience robust domestic and international demand, creating potential for increased rail volumes. Capturing this opportunity depends on improvements to first- and last-mile connections and multimodal access, particularly for smaller or rural producers. Targeted investments in short line infrastructure could unlock new shipping options and allow Idaho producers to take greater advantage of existing and emerging markets.

Federal priorities aligned with Idaho's rail-served industries were identified as the next-highest opportunity. Current Federal economic policy focuses on domestic mining, energy, and other resource-based industries could align with or support investments in rail infrastructure if Idaho is prepared with actionable project proposals and partnerships.^{201,202} New or expanding industrial activities may generate additional demand for rail, particularly on short lines or connecting sidings, but realizing these opportunities will require proactive planning and coordination at the State level.

Continued population and economic growth, along with new technologies to track shipments and improve operations, were ranked slightly lower. Population and industrial growth suggest that freight volumes could increase over time, but only if rail infrastructure and coordination keep pace with demand with investments like more truck-to-rail transfer facilities, short line upgrades, or expanded transload services. Real-time tracking, sensors, and analytics can enhance shipment visibility and operational efficiency, but stakeholders emphasized that these tools provide limited value if reliability issues persist. Tracking shipments that are frequently delayed does not meaningfully improve service; improvements that reduce delays and enhance first- and last-mile access are a prerequisite for technologies to deliver tangible benefits, particularly for higher-value or time-sensitive goods. Together, these complementary

²⁰¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/unleashing-american-energy/>.

²⁰² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/immediate-measures-to-increase-american-mineral-production/>.

improvements provide a foundation for Idaho's rail system to better serve existing shippers and capture new freight opportunities.

4.4.1 *Strong Global Demand for Idaho Commodities*

Idaho's agricultural, mining, timber, and energy sectors continue to benefit from steady domestic and international demand, creating opportunities to grow rail shipments. Many of these commodities are bulk-oriented and long-haul in nature, making them well-suited for rail transportation. Importantly, Idaho products are often valued for their quality and reliability—for instance, Idaho-grown wheat is prized in Japan for ramen production, while Idaho's timber and mineral products are recognized in global markets for their consistency and strength.²⁰³ This reputation enhances Idaho's competitive position, helping maintain demand even in a highly competitive global marketplace.

Sustained demand for Idaho's commodities provides a strong case for maintaining and expanding rail capacity across the State. By ensuring that rail networks can efficiently move high-volume shipments, Idaho producers can continue to compete effectively in both national and international markets. Doing so will require strategic investments in short line connections, transload and intermodal facilities, and Class I corridors. Those investments will also improve the network resilience of Idaho's rail system, allowing it to remain adaptable and competitive even in the face of external disruptions like changing international trade policies and conflicts abroad.

4.4.2 *Alignment of Federal Priorities with Idaho's Industries*

The current Federal administration has identified sectors such as critical minerals, timber, and energy as strategic priorities for national security and economic competitiveness. Idaho is well-positioned within this policy landscape. The planned reopening of the Stibnite Mine—containing antimony and gold—illustrates how Idaho could play a role in meeting the nation's demand for critical minerals used in defense, batteries, and clean energy technologies. Similarly, Idaho's timber and agricultural industries align closely with Federal goals to strengthen domestic supply chains and support rural economies. These alignments create opportunities to leverage Federal attention and funding in ways that could benefit Idaho's rail system.

Many of Idaho's mines, timber operations, and agricultural producers could expand their use of rail, but infrastructure upgrades are often needed to make this more viable. The INPR in southwestern Idaho, for example, has noted that track and bridge improvements would be required to handle heavier railcars and higher volumes associated with potential new mining and timber shipments. Without these upgrades, shippers may remain reliant on trucking, which can limit efficiency, increase costs, and diminish the potential benefits of Federal initiatives in these industries.

Targeted investment in Idaho's short line infrastructure offers a way to unlock these opportunities. Federal funding programs that prioritize critical minerals, timber, and agricultural exports could help short lines modernize their networks, expand transload facilities, and enhance connectivity to the Class I railroads. In doing so, Idaho's rail system would be better positioned to support growth in key industries, strengthen

²⁰³ USDA Forest Service, Timber Basket of the Interior West: Idaho's Forest Products Industry and Timber Harvest, https://www.fs.usda.gov/rm/pubs_series/rmrs/rb/rmrs_rb038.pdf.

multimodal options for shippers, and ensure the State fully benefits from Federal priorities aligned with its economic strengths.

4.4.3 Strong Population & Economic Growth

A key theme impacting multimodal transportation planning in Idaho is the State's significant population and economic growth. Since 2000, Idaho's population has increased by more than 50 percent, with several cities more than doubling in size during that period. Over the same timeframe, Idaho's GDP has doubled to approximately \$100 billion.²⁰⁴

The continuation of Idaho's strong population and economic growth represents a significant opportunity for the State's rail system. As demand for freight and passenger movement increases, rail has the potential to play a larger role in meeting transportation needs—if infrastructure and service levels keep pace.

This growth creates opportunities for increased freight demand from industries such as agriculture, timber, food processing, and manufacturing, as well as renewed interest in passenger rail options. However, realizing these opportunities depends on ensuring that rail infrastructure and services keep pace with demand. If bottlenecks or capacity limitations emerge, rail may not be able to capture its share of future growth, forcing shippers and travelers to rely even more heavily on highways.

Finally, stakeholders emphasized the sustainability of Idaho's population and economic growth. Unlike the cyclical boom-and-bust trends experienced in some states, Idaho's growth is supported by a relatively low cost of living and diversification across many industries, ranging from agriculture and food processing to manufacturing, technology, and services. This stability strengthens the foundation for continued rail demand and provides opportunities for shippers to expand or locate in the State.

4.4.4 New Rail Technologies

Recent advances in shipment visibility and automation technologies are creating opportunities for the rail industry to improve efficiency and strengthen competitiveness with trucking. Historically, rail has lagged behind other freight modes in providing real-time shipment tracking, but emerging platforms are addressing this gap. RailPulse, launched in 2024, equips railcars with GPS-enabled sensors that provide continuous data on location, equipment condition, and handling events.²⁰⁵ Similarly, RailState is expanding its AI-powered network of trackside cameras across North America—including northern Idaho by 2025—to give shippers near real-time visibility into railcar movements.²⁰⁶ These innovations respond directly to Idaho shippers' expressed desire for better shipment tracking and communication, offering the potential for more efficient fleet management and improved supply chain reliability.

Beyond visibility, automation technologies also hold long-term potential to reshape rail operations. The rail industry is already building on PTC systems to support semi-automated and eventually fully automated train operations, which could reduce crew workload and improve safety. Startups such as Parallel Systems are testing autonomous battery-electric railcars capable of platooning, a technology that

²⁰⁴ Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Gross Domestic Product: All Industry Total in Idaho, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/IDNGSP>.

²⁰⁵ Home—RailPulse, <https://railpulse.com/>.

²⁰⁶ Home—RailState | Rail Network Intelligence, <https://www.railstate.com/>.

could lower costs and increase operational flexibility in the future. While trucking is also moving toward automation, rail may be better positioned for near-term deployment due to its controlled operating environment and established safety technologies.²⁰⁷ If successful, these innovations could help railroads offset some of the competitive pressures posed by autonomous trucks, enhance labor efficiency, and maintain rail's role in Idaho's multimodal freight system.

4.5 Threats to Idaho's Rail System

Threats facing Idaho's rail system include risks or pressures which could undermine Idaho's rail system if not addressed. Six threats emerged from the Idaho Rail Plan SWOT exercise, and are prioritized as follows:

1. Predominance of Through Freight Traffic.
2. Short Line Railroad Infrastructure Needs.
3. Freight & Rail Industry Labor Shortages.
4. Increased Rail Activity in Urbanized Areas.
5. Trade Policy and Impacts to Idaho's Rail Shippers.
6. Increased Train Lengths.

Stakeholders identified the predominance of through freight traffic as the top threat for the Rail Plan to address. As a largely rural, inland state, Idaho often functions as a corridor for Class I railroads moving freight to other states. This can limit the State's influence over service levels, investment priorities, and operational decisions, which in turn may constrain local shippers' ability to rely on rail. Closely related is the need to address infrastructure constraints on short line and Class III railroads. Aging or capacity-limited short lines could hinder the development of new rail services, especially for rural or smaller-volume shippers. Stakeholders highlighted that proactive capital investments in these networks are essential to unlock new freight opportunities and ensure multimodal connectivity across the State.

Freight and rail industry labor shortages were ranked next, reflecting concerns about the availability of skilled workers in both rail operations and associated industries, such as agriculture and logistics. Labor constraints could limit the efficiency, reliability, and responsiveness of rail services over time. Increased rail activity in urbanized areas was also prioritized, as population growth and land development along rail corridors can create conflicts with freight mobility, raise safety risks, and increase pressure on grade crossings.

Trade policy and its impacts on Idaho rail shippers were identified as a mid-priority threat. Shifts in international tariffs or trade agreements can affect the volume and predictability of key commodity exports, including agricultural products, minerals, and forest goods. Finally, stakeholders noted that longer trains, while improving operational efficiency for railroads, can exacerbate congestion at crossings, create safety challenges, and increase the risk of delays—particularly for smaller shippers with limited storage flexibility. Recognizing these threats to Idaho's rail system is a step in identifying areas where

²⁰⁷ For example, automatic train operation has been used in open railway systems (not just closed rail rapid transit systems) since 1991. [596fb62d1839d1c7c1c9649971336207d17f.pdf](https://www.fra.dot.gov/fra/2018/01/201801271336207d17f.pdf).

action, planning, and coordination are warranted to most effectively support Idaho's reliability, accessibility, and economic growth.

4.5.1 Predominance of Through Freight Traffic

Nearly 90 percent Idaho's rail traffic consists of 'through' movements that neither originate nor terminate in the State. Both Union Pacific and BNSF operate transcontinental mainlines through Idaho that primarily serve long-haul corridors between the Pacific Northwest, Midwest, and Gulf Coast markets. While this positioning underscores Idaho's importance as a rail corridor, it also means that most rail activity in the State is driven by interstate commerce rather than Idaho-based shippers.

Because of this dynamic, there may be limited incentive for Class I railroads to expand service offerings, add capacity, or develop new facilities that directly benefit Idaho shippers unless those investments also support broader system-wide freight flows. This reliance on through traffic can therefore limit Idaho's leverage in shaping future rail service improvements, potentially constraining opportunities for economic development tied to rail access.

4.5.2 Short Line Railroad Infrastructure Needs

Idaho's Class III short line railroads are essential for connecting rural producers and industries to the national rail system, but they face significant infrastructure and capital challenges. Unlike Class I railroads, which have greater access to private capital and revenue, short lines often operate with limited financial capacity and rely heavily on external support to complete major rehabilitation or expansion projects. Idaho does not have a dedicated funding or tax credit program for short lines, which further constrains their ability to address long-term infrastructure needs.

The INPR, operated by Rio Grande Pacific Corporation, illustrates both the opportunities and the challenges faced by short lines in the State. INPR has identified projects such as adding yard and siding capacity in Emmett to reduce congestion, reopening the out-of-service Banks-to-Cascade corridor, and serving new traffic from water treatment chemical producers, diesel exhaust fluid shippers, and emerging mining ventures. The Payette interchange with Union Pacific could handle up to double current volumes if improvements were made. However, these projects involve high costs and engineering challenges, such as stabilizing track prone to rockslides and working in difficult terrain along the Payette River corridor.

Without additional investment, Idaho's short lines risk being unable to capture new business opportunities or keep pace with demand, which could lead to service constraints, bottlenecks, or a shift of freight to highways. This not only limits economic growth potential for freight-intensive industries but also places greater strain on Idaho's highway system. Ensuring that short lines remain viable connectors to the Class I network is critical for maintaining competitive market access and supporting the State's long-term economic vitality.

4.5.3 Freight & Rail Industry Labor Shortages

Idaho's railroads and freight-dependent industries face growing challenges in attracting and retaining skilled labor. Rail operations require specialized training and experience, and the pool of qualified workers is tightening across the State. This trend mirrors national workforce shortages but is compounded in Idaho by competition with other sectors such as construction, warehousing, and technology. The result is

a constrained labor market that threatens the long-term reliability of rail service, particularly for smaller operators who lack the resources to match the wages and benefits offered by larger employers.

Rising costs of living, particularly in the Treasure Valley where growth and housing pressures are most pronounced, further complicate recruitment and retention. Workers are increasingly priced out of the regions where rail and freight jobs are concentrated, creating a disconnect between labor supply and demand. Persistent shortages may translate into higher operating costs, service constraints, or even reductions in rail activity if left unaddressed. For Idaho's freight system, these pressures underscore the importance of considering workforce dynamics as part of long-term planning to ensure that rail can continue to serve the State's growing economy.

4.5.4 Increased Rail Activity in Urbanized Areas

Idaho's rapid population and economic growth is driving the expansion of urbanized areas, where formerly rural and agricultural lands are being rezoned to accommodate housing and commercial development. Areas around Meridian, Idaho's fastest-growing city since 2000, illustrate how communities are expanding into areas historically adjacent to freight rail corridors, as shown in Figure 4.2. As this growth continues, interactions between rail operations and vehicles, pedestrians, and residential neighborhoods will increase.

Higher levels of rail activity in urbanized areas present challenges for safety, mobility, and quality of life. Long trains can block at-grade crossings for extended periods, delaying emergency response times, creating traffic congestion, and increasing the risk of motorists and pedestrians attempting to bypass lowered crossing gates. In dense areas, a single long train can block multiple crossings at once. Noise, vibration, and diesel emissions associated with rail operations are also points of concern in neighborhoods close to rail lines.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ Train noise hot PF topic | Coeur d'Alene Press, <https://cdapress.com/news/2019/nov/19/train-noise-hot-pf-topic-5/>.

Figure 4.2 Residential and Commercial Development in Meridian, Separated by BVRR Tracks

Source: Google Maps.

For rapidly growing regions, these dynamics can lead to friction between community development goals and the operational needs of the freight rail network. Proactive planning and mitigation at the State and local levels in coordination with the private sector—such as grade separation projects, quiet zones, and coordinated land use policies—are options to decrease the threats to mobility, public safety, and community well-being in urbanized areas were increased rail activity.

4.5.5 Volatile International Trade Policy

Rail traffic volumes in Idaho are closely linked to international trade flows. Nationally, nearly 40 percent of all United States rail traffic is tied to imports and exports, and Idaho alone exported over \$4 billion in goods to more than 180 global partners in 2023. Much of this activity involves agricultural commodities, minerals, and foodstuffs—products that rely heavily on rail for efficient, long-haul movement. Canada, Taiwan, and Mexico are among Idaho's largest trading partners, with Canada alone accounting for roughly one-third of Idaho's exports.

Changes in trade policy, including the imposition of tariffs or retaliatory measures, pose risks to these freight flows. Shifts in export demand for key Idaho commodities—such as potatoes, wheat, cereal grains,

and other agricultural products—may reduce rail traffic volumes, raising costs for producers and diminishing the stability of rail-dependent supply chains. For example, the Port of Lewiston serves as a major outlet for Palouse wheat exports to Asian markets, and tariff-related disruptions are directly impacting shipments to these customers, with volumes in July 2025 down 49 percent year over year.²⁰⁹

Continued uncertainty around United States tariff policy compounds this threat to Idaho’s economy. Ongoing negotiations and fluctuating trade rules make it difficult for Idaho producers and railroads to plan for long-term stability. Even where impacts are not yet visible, the risk of reduced export competitiveness remains significant. This fluid situation could undermine rail demand in Idaho and constrain opportunities for growth in freight-intensive industries.

4.5.6 Increasing Train Lengths

A growing trend across the freight rail industry is the operation of longer trains, in some cases exceeding 12,000 to 14,000 feet.²¹⁰ While longer trains offer efficiencies for railroads by reducing crew and equipment needs, they can pose challenges in states like Idaho, where rail lines intersect with expanding urban areas. Extended trains can block multiple grade crossings at once, creating significant delays for motorists, emergency responders, and freight movement on local road networks. These disruptions are particularly concerning in rapidly growing communities such as Meridian, Nampa, and other parts of the Treasure Valley, where population growth has intensified pressure on already-busy corridors.

Longer trains also raise safety concerns. Prolonged blockages can encourage risky behavior by pedestrians or drivers attempting to circumvent crossings, and stalled emergency response times can put public safety at risk. Additionally, the handling of longer trains requires greater precision in braking and operations, raising the potential for mechanical stress and operational incidents. For Idaho, where rail corridors run directly through both rural towns and urbanized centers, increased train lengths highlight the importance of considering grade separation, crossing safety, and local coordination in statewide rail planning.

²⁰⁹ <https://portoflewiston.com/dock-operations-tariff/>.

²¹⁰ Associated Press, Railroads and regulators must address the dangers of long trains, report says, <https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2024/railroads-and-regulators-must-address-the-dangers-of-long-trains-report-says/>.

5.0 Idaho's Rail Service Investment Program

This chapter describes the freight and passenger rail investment programs, including how these components fit into and further the vision for rail service in Idaho. Program coordination and related studies are also discussed. Finally, the individual projects, many of which are led by railroad owners/operators or local agencies within the state, that comprise the rail capital program are identified in Section 5.7.

5.1 Vision, Goal, Strategies, and Actions

As initially presented in Chapter 2, the vision and goals for Idaho's rail system were shaped through a collaborative process that included discussions with ITD's Freight Advisory Committee (FAC), internal coordination with ITD staff, and feedback gathered throughout the broader engagement effort described in Chapter 6. Input from railroads, shippers, local and regional agencies, economic development partners, and passenger-rail interests helped refine and validate the framework.

The vision for the 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 Statewide 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.

5.1.1 Strategies and Actions

The strategies and actions that follow were developed through close collaboration with the FAC, including focused discussions with short line railroads, Class I railroads, economic development partners, metropolitan planning organizations, and state agencies. These strategies reflect the FAC's consensus on Idaho's most important statewide rail priorities and were further affirmed through public input gathered as part of the Idaho Statewide Rail Plan survey. Collectively, the strategies and actions support the achievement of both Goal 1 and Goal 2 and provide a coordinated framework to carry out the Statewide Rail Plan vision.

It is important to note that ITD will not serve as the lead agency for every action. Instead, the strategies and actions are intended to facilitate coordinated decision-making among ITD and its partners as programs, policies, and investments are advanced across Idaho's rail system.

5.2 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:
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Idaho Legislature, rail carriers
 - **Support Roles:** ITD, carriers, shippers, Idaho Legislature
- » **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:
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** rail carriers
 - **Support Roles:** Idaho Department of Commerce, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Economic Development Organizations, rail carriers, local jurisdictions

5.3 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.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** ITD with input from rail carriers and industry
 - **Support Roles:** ITD (data support), local jurisdictions, rail carriers, shippers, ports
- » **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.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Idaho Department of Commerce or Regional Economic Development Organizations
 - **Support Roles:** ITD (data support), local jurisdictions, rail carriers, shippers, ports
- » **Action 2.3**—Integrate rail investment priorities, including first-mile/last-mile and transload improvements, into statewide and regional economic development and freight strategies.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Local jurisdictions, ITD, and Department of Commerce
 - **Support Roles:** Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Economic Development Organizations, rail carriers, local jurisdictions, ports

5.4 Strategy 3—Improve Rail Safety, Reliability, and Project Delivery Efficiency Through Coordinated Corridor-Based Initiatives and Stream-Lined 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.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Local jurisdictions, ITD (coordination role), rail carriers and partner agencies
 - **Support Roles:** Class I and short line railroads, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, local jurisdictions, FRA
- » **Action 3.2**—Streamline ITD and local permitting, coordination, and contracting processes by developing standard contract templates to expedite rail safety improvements.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Local jurisdictions, Class I, and ITD
 - **Support Roles:** rail carriers, ITD, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, FRA, local jurisdictions
- » **Action 3.3**—Integrate rail corridor safety planning with local land use and industrial development decisions.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Local jurisdictions and Metropolitan Planning Organizations
 - **Support Roles:** ITD, Department. of Commerce, rail carriers

5.5 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.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Local jurisdictions, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, ITD, and Department. of Commerce
 - **Support Roles:** ITD (data support), Economic Development Organizations, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, rail carriers, local jurisdictions
- » **Action 4.2**—Work with public agencies to integrate site preservation into local and regional plans.
 - **Potential Lead Roles:** Local jurisdictions
 - **Support Roles:** Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Commerce, ITD, rail carriers

5.6 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.

▪ **Potential Lead Roles:** Economic Development Organizations and Idaho Rail Associations

▪ **Support Roles:** ITD, Economic Development Organizations, Commerce

5.7 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.

▪ **Potential Lead Roles:** Local jurisdictions, Economic Development Administration, or rail carriers

▪ **Support Roles:** rail carriers, FRA, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, technology providers, research institutions

» **Action 6.2**—Host a round table/peer exchange to learn and share best practices and provide technical assistance for integrating rail technology.

▪ **Potential Lead Roles:** Class I and short line carriers

▪ **Support Roles:** FAC, ITD (advisory), carriers, FRA

5.8 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.

▪ **Potential Lead Role:** ITD

▪ **Support Roles:** FRA, Amtrak, Metropolitan Planning Organizations

» **Action 7.2**—Participate in multi-state or federally led passenger rail planning efforts.

▪ **Potential Lead Role:** FRA

▪ **Support Roles:** ITD, local jurisdictions, rail carriers

» **Action 7.3**—Coordinate with MPOs and local partners to support locally led passenger rail initiatives where appropriate.

- **Potential Lead Roles:** Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Valley Regional Transit
- **Support Roles:** ITD, local jurisdictions

5.9 Program Coordination

Effective coordination among Idaho’s local, regional, state, and Federal partners is essential to advancing rail investments and maximizing the benefits of Idaho’s freight and passenger rail network. The Rail Plan builds on the guidance, requirements, and collaborative opportunities embedded in Federal legislation including the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), FRA’s national rail programs, and FHWA multimodal planning requirements, alongside statewide planning processes such as Idaho’s Strategic Freight Plan, Highway Safety Programs, and MPO regional transportation plans. Similarly, the information in this Rail Plan should be used to inform and guide future plans and programs.

The elements below summarize the key programs, plans, and regulatory frameworks that inform and support implementation of Idaho’s rail priorities.

5.9.1 *Statewide and Federal Planning Frameworks*

Table 5.1 outlines Idaho’s available rail plans and programs, including Federal, local, and private sector partnership opportunities. These programs provide funding opportunities for projects outlined in Section 5.4.

Table 5.1 Idaho's Available Statewide Rail Plans and Programs

Plan/Program	Topic Area	Lead Agency	Funding	SRP Planning Coordination Elements
2023 Strategic Freight Plan	Freight Planning	ITD	National Highway Freight Program	The Idaho Strategic Freight Plan (SFP) provides multimodal freight policy foundation and identifies performance needs. Coordination with the SFP ensures statewide priorities remain aligned.
Idaho Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan	Safety Action Plan	ITD	National Highway Administration Section 130	This plan identifies high-risk public grade crossings and outlines recommended safety improvements, consistent with FRA requirements under 49 CFR Part 234. Continued coordination between ITD, railroads, and local agencies supports data sharing, prioritization, and advancement of grade crossing safety upgrades.
Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI)	Infrastructure and Safety Improvements	FRA	IIJA	FRA's most flexible and widely used freight rail funding program, supporting track rehabilitation, grade crossing improvements, bridge repairs or replacements, equipment modernization, planning and environmental work, and safety deployment. Short lines, Class I railroads, ports, states, MPOs, and local jurisdictions are eligible
Railroad Crossing Elimination Program	Crossing Improvements	FRA	IIJA	This program funds projects that improve safety and mobility at highway-rail grade crossings, including closures, grade separations, and upgrades. Idaho jurisdictions regularly pursue these funds for high-priority crossings identified through statewide safety assessments.
Fed-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail	Interstate Rail Partnership	USDOT	IIJA	This program supports improvements to long-distance, regional, and emerging passenger rail corridors. Activities may include state-of-good repair upgrades, new service deployment, and station improvements. It is relevant to Idaho's multi-state passenger rail discussions and long-distance corridor restoration efforts.
Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program	Passenger Rail Development	FRA	IIJA	This program funds concept development, planning, and pre-NEPA activities for intercity passenger rail. While Idaho is not yet a lead applicant, adjacent states' participation creates opportunities for Idaho to coordinate and align future efforts.
Adjacent Statewide Rail Plans and Regional Coordination	Regional Coordination	N/A	N/A	Coordination with nearby states is a crucial component of program development. Review of rail plans from Washington, Oregon, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, and Nevada highlights opportunities to align corridor-level safety initiatives, intermodal and transload development strategies, industrial land preservation efforts, and multi-state passenger rail feasibility activities.
Public-Private coordination with Rail Operators	Public-Private Partnership	N/A	N/A	Both Class 1 railroads (BNSF and Union Pacific) and Idaho's short line railroads play critical roles in identifying infrastructure needs, operational, constraints, and long-term capital priorities.
Alignment with Economic Development Partners	Economic Development	N/A	N/A	Economic development organizations (EDOs), regional partnerships, and port influence industrial recruitment, freight forecasting, and the expansion of rail-served markets. Coordination in the area ensures that Idaho's rail planning reflects industry growth trends, workforce and supply chain shifts, infrastructure needed to support expanding or emerging markets, and opportunities to advance job creation and private-sector investment.

5.10 Funding and Financing Framework

Idaho's rail system relies on a combination of Federal, state, local, and private funding sources to support rail improvements. Public financing for rail projects in Idaho is shaped by several key constraints, including the absence of a dedicated state rail funding program, no state operating assistance for rail service, and the predominance of privately owned rail infrastructure. As a result, ITD's direct public investment in rail is primarily limited to highway–rail grade crossing safety improvements where rail intersects with the state highway system. Broader rail capital improvements are typically advanced through competitive Federal grants, project-specific state or local contributions, public subsidies, and cost-sharing or partnership arrangements with railroads. Funding mechanisms may include capital grants, loans, credit assistance, and public-private partnerships, reflecting the varied roles of public agencies and private rail operators in advancing rail infrastructure development statewide.

5.11 Passenger Rail Program Element

ITD continues to monitor national and regional efforts related to long-distance route restoration and emerging intercity passenger rail corridors. As feasibility analyses and multi-state coordination efforts progress, ITD will refine its understanding of potential passenger rail roles within Idaho's multimodal transportation system.

Advancing passenger rail in Idaho will require targeted planning efforts that build on existing research and addresses remaining gaps in corridor analysis, feasibility assessment, regional coordination, and market evaluation. While several multi-state and Federal initiatives are underway, Idaho-specific research is needed to clarify service opportunities, understand system requirements, and position the state for future Federal funding programs such as the Federal-State Partnership and Corridor Identification and Development Program. The following research needs highlight priority topics where further analysis will help Idaho refine passenger rail concepts, assess demand and feasibility, and coordinate effectively with regional partners. The research will represent foundational steps toward developing a clear vision for future passenger rail service in Idaho.

5.12 Freight Rail Program Element

The freight rail network plays a central role in Idaho's economy by supporting agricultural production, manufacturing, natural resource industries, and regional supply chains. ITD works closely with railroads, shippers, and local jurisdictions to monitor system needs, identify investment priorities, and advance freight rail programs that enhance safety, efficiency, and market access. The following subsections outline the near-term and long-term capital financing framework, operating considerations, and the economic basis for advancing freight rail improvements across the state.

ITD's capital financing strategy is organized around near-term priorities and long-term system needs that support Idaho's freight-dependent industries and economic growth. Over the four-year period, ITD focuses on advancing projects that are ready for implementation and that provide clear public benefits such as safety, rail line preservation, and improved freight mobility. These near-term investments include grade crossing safety improvements funded through the appropriate programs noted in section 5.

Because freight rail services in Idaho are owned and operated by private railroads, ITD's role in operating financing is limited and applies only when public agencies own freight rail infrastructure or participate in rail

preservation efforts. In these situations, ITD supports an operating approach that clearly defines responsibilities between public owners and private operators, encourages efficient and cost-effective maintenance practices, and promotes cost-sharing among local governments, industry partners, and rail operators. Operating needs associated with publicly supported freight infrastructure may be partially offset through programs such as the Idaho Rail Preservation Program or the Rural Economic Development and Integrated Freight Transportation Program (REDiFIT), along with local or industry match, or through revenue agreements with operators when appropriate. This operating financing approach ensures that public involvement is reserved for projects that provide substantial public benefits, including improved safety, support for rural access, or enhanced economic development, and that all public support remains transparent, justified, and aligned with statewide multimodal and economic objectives.

5.13 Rail Studies and Reports

Table 5.2 Outlines freight and passenger rail programs and studies that are planned or in progress during the 20-year planning horizon ending in 2045.

Table 5.2 Idaho Freight and Passenger Rail Programs and Studies

Title	Lead Agency	Location	Project Description	Status	Cost	Funding Source
Treasure Valley Freight Multi-modal Transload Center	COMPASS MPO	Treasure Valley	Phase 1: Work with key stakeholders to identify local, state, Federal and private funding opportunities, and develop business plan.	Concept	\$150,000	EDA Grant
Railroad Crossing Safety Program	ITD	Statewide	1) Continue working with rail line owners and local jurisdictions to identify high risk grade crossings that meet the Railroad Crossing Safety Program requirements. 2) Increase awareness of program	In progress	N/A	FHWA Railway Highway Crossing Program and FRA RCE Grant Programs
Operation Lifesaver	Operation Lifesaver	Statewide	To promote safety at highway/rail grade crossings and on railroad property through awareness, education, engineering and enforcement	Ongoing investment	\$2 million nationally	FRA and FTA Grants
Idaho Rail Preservation Program	ITD	Statewide	1) Annually assess rail volume reports (from IPUC) for trends 2) Conduct cost/benefit analysis on individual lines showing decreasing volume over time, including potential for new industries. 3) Identify economic development partnerships/investments 4) Develop partnerships between state/local jurisdictions and rail line owners/operators to apply for REDiFIT funding for rail line preservation and/or to apply for other funding for corridor preservation.	Ongoing	N/A	A combination of Federal, state, and local funding.

Table 5.2 Idaho Freight and Passenger Rail Programs and Studies (continued)

Title	Lead Agency	Location	Project Description	Status	Cost	Funding Source
Big Sky North Coast Corridor ID	Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority	Chicago, IL to Seattle, WA	Establishment of a passenger rail corridor from Chicago to Seattle that runs through southern Montana, northern Idaho, and Central Washington	In progress	\$500,000	FRA Corridor ID Program
Pioneer Corridor Restoration Project: Updated Corridor ID Program	City of Boise	Salt Lake City, UT to Boise, ID	Restoration of passenger service along a 435-mile route between Salt Lake City and Boise	In progress	N/A	FRA Corridor ID Program
Lets Ride Treasure Valley Study. A Planning and Environmental Linkages Study	COMPASS	Treasure Valley, ID. Includes Boise, Meridian, Nampa, and Caldwell	Study to examine future high-capacity transit connections across the Treasure Valley.	In progress, scheduled adoption in 2026.	\$400,000	FTA
Statewide Rail Plan	ITD	Statewide	Provides a statewide framework to assess existing rail conditions, identify needs and opportunities, and guide strategic investment, coordination, and policy decisions related to freight and passenger rail.	Completed in 2026 ; no update cycle	N/A	ITD
Statewide Freight Plan	ITD	Statewide	The Idaho Statewide Freight Plan establishes a strategy to improve the safe, efficient movement of goods by identifying freight system priorities, investment needs, and policies that support economic competitiveness and system reliability.	Completed in 2023 ; 4 year update cycle	N/A	ITD

5.14 Rail Capital Program

5.14.1 Freight Rail Capital and Crossing Projects List

This section summarizes freight rail capital projects identified for near-term and long-term consideration. Projects are drawn from statewide needs assessments, stakeholder input, rail operator priorities, and regional planning processes.

Table 5.3 reflects conceptual and ongoing projects that may be advanced through collaborative planning, grant opportunities, or public-private partnerships. Project descriptions, status information, and potential funding sources will be refined by the lead agency as feasibility, engineering, and coordination activities progress. Table 5.4 also describes the rail crossing projects identified in Idaho's MPO TIPs. These projects are identified by project name, city location, project type, and project purpose and scope.

5.14.2 Anticipated Economic Benefits and Public Funding Correlation

Rail investments have the potential to generate significant public and private economic benefits for Idaho if future feasibility studies identify a viable service concept. Potential public benefits may include improved mobility, reduced highway congestion and emissions, enhanced safety outcomes, and expanded access to employment, education, and essential services. Private benefits could accrue households, businesses, and industries through reduced travel times, improved regional connectivity, and expanded labor market access.

If a passenger rail concept were to advance beyond feasibility assessment, ITD would support an evaluation of anticipated benefits using cost-benefit analysis and other economic assessment tools consistent with Federal Railroad Administration guidance. These analyses would help quantify the relationship between potential public support from Federal, local, or regional partners and the public benefits associated with a proposed corridor.

Table 5.3 Freight Rail Capital Project List

Title	Location	Lead Agency	Project Description	Cost	Funding Source	Project Timeline
Southern Idaho Short Line Modernization Project: Growth in Agriculture Commodity Transport	Rupert ID to Jerome ID	Watco	Tie and Rail replacement project to meet the 136# rail / 286,000 lb. Railcar capacity on the Northside Subdivision of the Eastern Idaho Railroad	\$43 million	FRA	Short (< 4 years)
Treasure Valley Freight Multi-modal Transload Center	City of Boise, ID	COMPASS	Phase 2: Develop 50-acre transload facility with 50,000 square foot warehouse facility	\$15.5 million	EDA Grant	Long (> 4 years)
Bridging the Valley: Grade Crossing Improvement (BNSF route) and realignment of UPRR mainline.	Spokane Valley/Rathdrum Prairie, WA and ID	UPRR	1) Work with KMPO to identify funding for benefit cost analysis and prioritization.2) Engineering and construction	N/A	Federal, State and local match	Short (< 4 years)
Railroad crossing, Benjamin Lane	Boise, ID	Ada County Highway District	Install "type 1" crossing signal, including constant warning detection, planking, and electronics cabinet at the Boise Valley railroad crossing	\$445,000	Federal and state	Long (> 4 years) 2030
Railroad crossing, Cherry Lane	Boise, ID	City of Nampa	Install signals and gates and resurface the Union Pacific railroad crossing at Cherry Lane in the City of Nampa	\$900 ,000	Federal and State	Long (> 4 years) 2030
Railroad crossing, Lemp Lane	Canyon County	Notus-Parma Highway District	Install signals and gates and improve the crossing surface at the Union Pacific railroad crossing at Lemp Lane between the Cities of Parma and Notus	\$330,000	Federal and State	Long (> 4 years) 2030
Railroad Crossing, Look Lane	Caldwell, ID	Notus-Parma Highway District	Relocate and realign the Union Pacific railroad crossing at Look Lane near the City of Caldwell. Work includes adding signals, gates, planking, and a cabinet for electronics.	\$964,000	Federal and State	Short (<4 years) 2028
Railroad crossing, North Black Cat Road	Meridian, ID	Ada County Highway District	Resurface the railroad crossing at North Black Cat Road in the City of Meridian. Work also includes adding safety lights, railroad signals, and gates.	\$655,000	Federal and State	Short (< 4 years) 2029
Railroad crossing, South Cole Road	Ada County, ID	ITD	Install safety features and improve the southerly roadway approach on a railroad crossing on South Cole Road in Ada County	\$795,000	Federal and State	Long (> 4 years) 2031

Table 5.3 Freight Rail Capital Project List (continued)

Title	Location	Lead Agency	Project Description	Cost	Funding Source	Project Timeline
Brunner Road BNSF Grade Separation Project	Kootenai County, ID	Lakes Highway District (LHD)	Construction of a structure to grade separate Brunner Road and the construction of a roundabout	\$17,966,410	FRA, LHD, and BNSF	Short (< 4 years) 2028
Railroad signal improvements, Chase Road	Post Falls, ID	City of Post Falls	This project will reconstruct the approaches to the crossing at Chase Rd. And the Burlington Northern and Santa Fe railway (BNSF) branch line serving Post Falls	\$1,204,000	Federal (STBG)	Short (< 4 years) 2025
Railroad crossing improvements, Huetter Road	Post Falls, ID	City of Post Falls	The project will add gates and signals at Huetter Rd	\$400,000	Federal (RCE)	Short (< 4 years) 2025
Center Street Pedestrian Bridge	Pocatello, ID	City of Pocatello	Installation of a bicycle/pedestrian bridge over West Center Street at railroad tracks	\$536,000	Federal and local	Short (< 4 years) 2026
Kootenai Cutoff Railroad crossing	Ponderay, ID	City of Ponderay	This project proposes improvements to solve the traffic and capacity issues	N/A	Federal and Local	Long (> 4 years)
US-20B, E Anderson and Holmes Railroad Crossing	Idaho Falls, ID	ITD	Crossing Improvements at this intersection	\$400,000	State	Short (< 4 years) 2026
25 th East Railroad Crossing	Bonneville County, ID	Bonneville County	Crossing improvements at this intersection	\$100,000	Federal	Long (> 4 years) 2028
Port of Lewiston Safety Improvements	Nez Perce County, ID	Port of Lewiston	Safety improvements	N/A	N/A	Long (> 4 years) 2028
Amtrak – Empire Builder	Bonner County, ID	Amtrak	Station platform upgrades	N/A	N/A	N/A
Safety Improvements	Statewide	ITD	Section 130 – Highway at-grade crossing improvements	N/A	Federal	Short (< 4 years) 2026
Various Maintenance Improvements	Various	BNSF	Tie replacement, rail replacement, high speed surfacing, rock scaling mitigation, equipment upgrades, surface replacement	N/A	Private	Short (<4 years) 2026
City Service Valcon	Hauser, ID	BNSF	Land and track leasing to receive fuel and propane products; initial volume projections are 250 cars annually	N/A	Private	Short (<4 years) 2026

Table 5.4 Idaho Transportation Department Section 130 Rail Grade Crossing Improvement Projects

District	KeyNo	Location	Railroad	FRA Crossing ID	Prog Year
1	20378	STC-7219, N HUETTER RD, POST FALLS	UPRR	662627N	2025
1	20504	STC-5908, SCHOOL HOUSE RD, BOUNDARY CO	UPRR	662665X	2025
1	23018	OFFSYS, DEEP CR LOOP, S OF BONNERS FERRY	BNSF	058700V	2025
4	23016	OFFSYS, N 800 E, MINIDOKA HD	UPRR	812404N	2025
1	23376	OFFSYS, RIVER LAKE DR, NEAR CLARK FORK	BNSF	091167K	2026
1	23377	OFFSYS, FISH HATCHERY RD, NEAR CLARK FORK	BNSF	091166D	2026
3	20537	STC-3083, BENJAMIN LN, BOISE	BVRR	819604W	2026
1	23787	OFFSYS, SELLE RD, PONDERAY	BNSF	058721N	2026
4	23383	SH 46, WENDELL	EIRR	818893W	2026
1	23372	SH 200, S PONDERAY	UPRR	662551K	2027
3	24294	SMA-3051, N BLACK CAT RD, MERIDIAN	UPRR/BVRR	819582Y	2027
3	20355	OFFSYS, LOOK LN, CALDWELL	UPRR	819387Y	2028
4	23375	OFFSYS, 400 E, WEST OF MINIDOKA	UPRR	812796S	2028
4	23374	OFFSYS, 400 W, MINIDOKA CO	UPRR	812803A	2028
6	23385	OFFSYS, CEMETARY RD (5TH ST), DUBOIS	UPRR	812386T	2028
1	23380	OFFSYS, BLUME HILL RD, BONNERS FERRY	UPRR	662674W	2029
1	23381	OFFSYS, COLBURN CULVER, N OF SANDPOINT	UPRR	662557B	2029
3	24295	STC-8716, N 7TH AVE, PAYETTE	UPRR	819455X	2029
5	19930	STC-1764, PARK ST, INKOM	UPRR	811315T	2029
3	20358	OFFSYS, LEMP LN, NOTUS-PARMA HD	UPRR	819302U	2030
3	23378	CHERRY LANE, NAMPA	UPRR	818670F	2030
1	23788	STC-5804, LIONS DEN RD RRX, BONNERS FERRY	UPRR	662646T	2031
3	20723	STC-3877, RIVER DOCK RD, WASHINGTON CO	UPRR	819406B	2031
3	23971	OFFSYS, S. COLE RD RRX, ADA COUNTY	UPRR	819327P	2031
6	23373	SH 43, UCON CONNECTOR	UPRR	906443S	2031
6	23384	STP-7056, 25th E, BONNEVILLE CO	EIRR	812105G	2031

Source: ITD.

Note: Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR); BNSF Railway (BNSF); Eastern Idaho Railroad (EIRR).

6.0 Coordination & Review

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 Plan reflects real-world operational needs, economic trends, and community priorities. Engagement was designed to gather meaningful insights, validate data, identify issues early, and support alignment with both statewide and regional transportation objectives. This chapter summarizes:

- » The methods used to involve stakeholders and the public.
- » Key themes from those engagement activities.
- » Coordination efforts with neighboring states.
- » Recommendations brought forward by stakeholders and the public.

6.1 Public Outreach and Stakeholder Participation Approach

ITD conducted targeted outreach to gather input from public agencies, industry representatives, and the general public on Idaho's rail system. Engagement activities included consultation with the Idaho Freight Advisory Committee, a statewide public survey, a virtual stakeholder meeting, and individual stakeholder interviews. These efforts bring together diverse perspectives and address key operational, economic, and community issues. Table 6.1 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 6.1 Methods of Engagement by Stakeholder Category

Stakeholder Group	Freight Advisory Committee 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	✓	✓	✓	✓

6.1.1 Freight Advisory Committee

The Idaho Freight Advisory Committee (FAC) served as a primary advisory body throughout the development of the Statewide Rail Plan. The FAC includes representatives from freight-dependent industries, logistics providers, rail carriers, economic development organizations, and public agencies.

The committee provides ongoing guidance to ITD on freight system needs, policy considerations, funding priorities, and operational trends that influence Idaho's multimodal network.

The role of the FAC in Idaho's freight and rail planning framework includes:

- » Providing a forum for discussion on freight movement, system efficiency, and multimodal connections across Idaho.
- » Advising ITD on freight-related issues, including system needs, operational challenges, funding considerations, and emerging priorities.
- » Educating freight stakeholders, the public, and decision-makers on the importance of freight transportation to Idaho's economy and the role of rail within the statewide system.
- » Collaborating with agencies and industry partners to support data and information sharing that enhances statewide decision-making.
- » Ensuring freight interests are integrated into transportation planning processes, including identification of critical infrastructure and strategic investments.
- » Supporting coordination across local, regional, state, and Federal entities, particularly where freight flows cross jurisdictional boundaries.
- » Promoting cross-sector communication between public and private partners to address shared freight challenges and opportunities.

Through three key meetings during the planning process, the FAC contributed to the following:

Introductory Meeting—May 2025

- » Reviewed FRA requirements and the purpose of the Rail Plan.
- » Helped identify initial data sources for freight flows, industrial activity, and system performance.
- » Highlighted early priority issues such as grain movements, lumber products, food processing needs, and market shifts affecting Class I interchange points.

FAC Workshop #1—July 2025

- » Reviewed the rail system inventory and condition assessment.
- » Identified bottlenecks and critical segments where maintenance and rehabilitation needs are growing.
- » Provided feedback on short line railroad challenges, including limited capital for tie replacement, ballast renewal, and siding extensions through a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

- » Discussed growing demand for transload facilities, particularly to support agriculture and diversified manufacturing.

FAC Workshop #2—October 2025

- » Reviewed the draft statewide strategies and actions and discussed options for improving rail service reliability, equipment availability, and freight visibility.
- » Discussed passenger rail interest statewide and implications for shared corridors.
- » Highlighted opportunities to support emerging industries, including food processing, specialty manufacturing, and chemical production, that rely heavily on rail access.

Feedback from the FAC meetings in May, July, and October 2025 were central to the development of this Plan. As ITD moves from planning to implementation, the FAC will continue to be instrumental in the Plan implementation.

6.1.2. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement for the Idaho Statewide Rail Plan began with targeted outreach to key industry and agency partners, who participated through interviews or by responding to written questions at the outset of the study. Input from these early participants, including Idaho Northern and Pacific Railroad, Union Pacific, Hess Pumice, Idaho Milk, Pend Oreille Valley Railroad, the Port of Lewiston, and others, provided detailed insights into system conditions, operational challenges, market trends, and infrastructure needs. Their feedback informed the development of the SWOT analysis in Chapter 4, which in turn shaped the statewide strategies and actions presented in Chapter 5. These participants were invited to review the emerging findings, provide feedback, and help disseminate the statewide survey to their constituents where applicable.

Stakeholder interviews

To support outreach, ITD conducted structured one-on-one and small group interviews with rail carriers, shippers, agricultural representatives, ports, transit agencies, and other key partners to gather detailed information on system performance and operational needs. Rail carriers were asked about infrastructure conditions, current and projected traffic volumes, interchange relationships, regulatory considerations, and long-term investment needs. Rail customers and commodity representatives were asked to describe shipping patterns, service challenges, equipment needs, pricing considerations, and broader economic or logistical constraints affecting their use of rail.

Input from these interviews was synthesized to identify a set of recurring, cross-cutting themes that reflect shared challenges, priorities, and opportunities across Idaho's rail system. These themes capture both near-term operational issues and longer-term considerations related to infrastructure investment, market access, funding, and coordination.

Key Takeaways

- » **Aging Infrastructure and Maintenance Needs:** While the majority of the Statewide Rail system has been reported to be in good condition - stakeholders consistently cited aging infrastructure including deteriorating ties, outdated signals, and issues at highway-rail grade crossings. Short line railroads emphasized the need for targeted maintenance investments, while shippers noted operational impacts such as reduced speeds and rough crossings.
- » **Capacity Constraints and Equipment Availability:** Multiple stakeholders identified capacity limitations related to railcar availability, terminal inefficiencies, and constrained rail-served facilities. While some locations have latent capacity, limited redundancy and outdated infrastructure restrict the ability to scale operations or attract new customers.
- » **Reliability, Service Quality, and Operational Efficiency:** Concerns about slow train speeds, inconsistent service, and railcar quality were common among shippers and commodity representatives. These reliability issues affect competitiveness with trucking and influence decisions about where products are processed, transloaded, or shipped.
- » **Market Access and Economic Competitiveness:** Stakeholders highlighted the importance of improving market access for Idaho-produced goods, particularly agricultural and resource-based products. Geographic barriers, chokepoints, and inter-jurisdictional constraints in the broader regional rail network were cited as factors that limit Idaho's ability to compete in domestic and export markets.
- » **Regulatory and Funding Uncertainty:** Short line railroads expressed concern about the cumulative cost of regulatory requirements and limited revenue capacity to absorb additional compliance costs. Several stakeholders noted a lack of clarity around available state rail funding programs and eligibility criteria, particularly for maintenance, safety, and capacity-enhancing improvements.

Virtual Stakeholder Meeting: October 22, 2025

The meeting brought together more than 30 participants representing adjacent state DOTs, ITD district staff, Idaho Freight Advisory Committee members, Class I and short line railroads, regional and metropolitan planning organizations including Compass, the Boise-area MPO, local and regional jurisdictions, agricultural and industry associations, industry associations and advocacy groups, shipping and logistics companies, public utilities and railroad safety officials, and Federal and military partners. Most attendees participated to hear an update on the Plan, review the existing conditions analysis, SWOT findings, and preliminary project concepts. Several offered targeted feedback, while others used the session to learn more about the SRP and were encouraged to complete the public survey and share it with their respective constituents where applicable.

Key Takeaways

Stakeholder comments toward the end of the meeting highlighted several important themes:

- » **Intermodal and transload opportunities:** Participants, including the City of Pocatello, emphasized the value of additional intermodal and transload facilities, noting that shifting freight from trucks to rail can reduce wear on local roadways, lower emissions, and improve long-term roadway performance.

- » **Need for direct dialogue with Class I railroads:** Short line representatives stressed that meaningful, live conversations with Class I partners are essential. They want Class I railroads to understand Idaho's goals and SWOT findings and to see their participation as critical to the success of the Rail Plan.
- » **Better alignment with highway planning and congestion hotspots:** Stakeholders asked ITD and rail partners to identify where truck-related congestion is most acute and how long-range highway projects and freight rail business development can be planned together over a 5 to 20 year horizon.
- » **State-level tax incentives for short line investment:** Participants noted that many states use a state-level short line tax credit to attract private reinvestment and suggested that a similar tool in Idaho could significantly influence where railroads direct their capital.
- » **Equipment and car supply challenges:** Stakeholders raised concerns about aging refrigerated cars, limited refrigerated capacity, and ongoing difficulties obtaining and repositioning rail cars in Idaho, describing these as part of a broader national issue with local impacts.
- » **Shipment visibility and reliability:** Shippers reported that knowing when rail cars will actually arrive is a major barrier to greater rail use and compared current limitations unfavorably to the tracking reliability offered in the trucking and parcel sectors.
- » **Monitoring industry changes and grant positioning:** Participants asked how emerging developments such as potential Class I mergers and FRA expectations will be reflected in the Plan. ITD confirmed that the Rail Plan will be FRA approved and that draft chapters will be posted online so stakeholders can review and comment before finalization.

6.1.3. Public Survey

A statewide public survey was conducted to gather input on how Idaho residents and businesses experience the rail system and what improvements they would like to see prioritized in the Statewide Rail Plan. The survey included questions about respondents' current use of passenger rail and their likelihood of using expanded services, as well as their perceptions of highway–rail crossing safety and related concerns. Participants were asked to identify the types of system improvements they believe ITD should focus on, including crossing upgrades, grade separations, and expanded freight or passenger rail options. Additional questions explored interest in new or restored passenger rail corridors, the ways freight rail affects local businesses and supply chains, and any upcoming rail-related projects or community needs that should be considered in the Plan. Multiple open-ended prompts allowed respondents to provide broader comments on rail service, infrastructure, safety, and future opportunities. The survey concluded with standard demographic questions to help contextualize the feedback. Together, these questions offered a comprehensive picture of rail-related priorities across Idaho and informed the needs, strategies, and investment considerations in the SRP.

Survey Distribution

To reach a wide audience and capture perspectives from both industry partners and Idaho residents, ITD designed the survey to gather input from a broad cross-section of users and community members. The

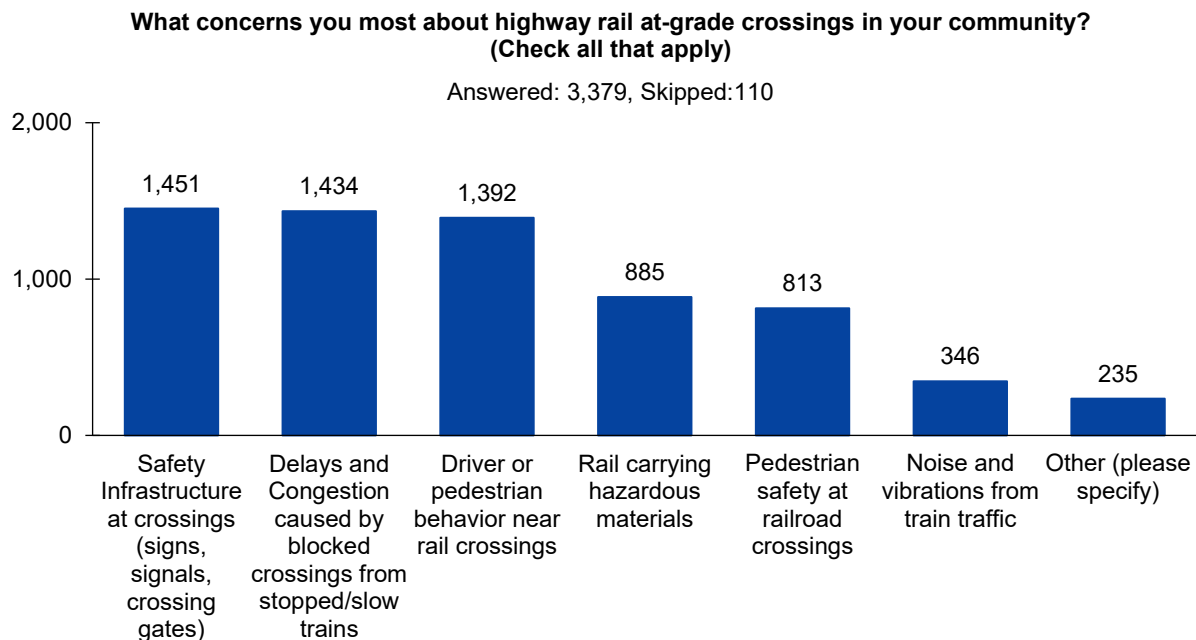
survey sought to understand how people interact with the rail system today while also identifying long-term needs and investment priorities that could guide the strategies presented later in this Plan.

The survey was open for three weeks beginning Oct 22, 2025 and closed November 12, 2025, with the first week open to stakeholders, and the following two weeks open to the public. The survey was promoted through multiple channels including a formal ITD press release, social media pushes, email blasts, and the project website update. A couple of notable general highlights include:

- » There were 3,495 total respondents.
- » Zip code data shows representation from respondents across the state of Idaho.
- » About 83% of respondents said rail is either “extremely important” or “very important” to their community. People believe rail is an important transportation mode in their community.

Survey respondents identified safety-related issues as their primary concern at highway-rail at-grade crossings as seen in **Figure 6.1**. The most frequently cited issues included the condition and visibility of crossing infrastructure such as signs, signals, and gates, followed closely by delays and congestion caused by stopped or slow-moving trains and unsafe driver or pedestrian behavior near crossings. Concerns about hazardous materials, pedestrian safety, and noise or vibration were raised less frequently but still reflect the broad range of community impacts associated with at-grade crossing.

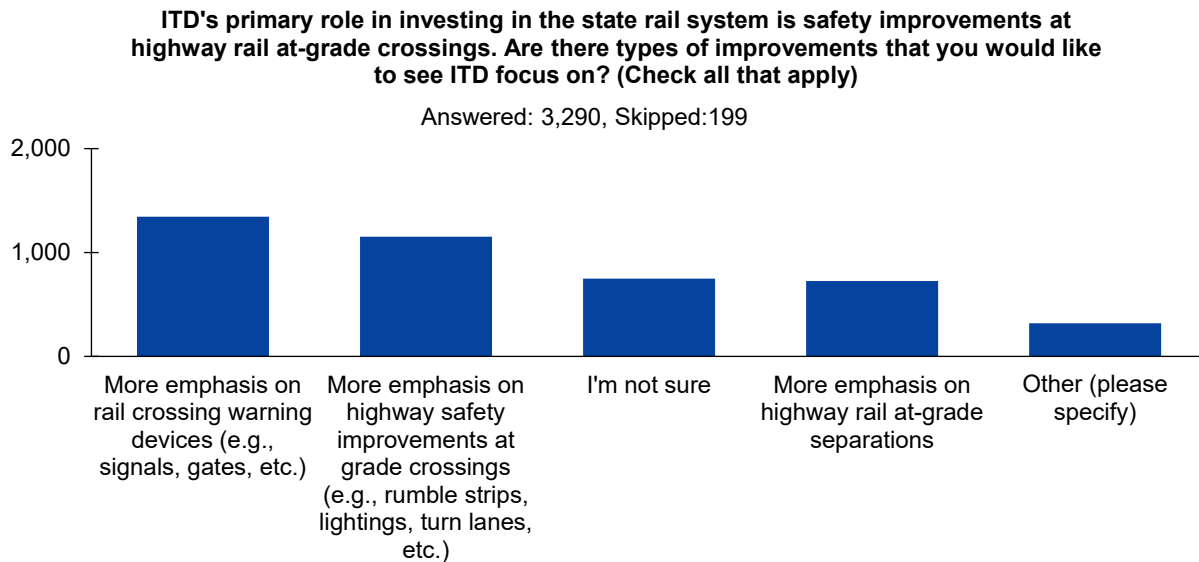
Figure 6.1 Survey Question Related to Concerns and Highway Rail At-Grade Crossings



In another question, survey respondents indicated strong support for continued investment in highway-rail at-grade crossing safety improvements, seen in Figure 6.2. The most frequently selected priorities were enhanced rail crossing warning devices, such as signals and gates, followed by roadway-focused safety improvements at crossings, including lighting, rumble strips, and turn lane treatments. A smaller but

notable share of respondents expressed interest in grade-separated crossings, while some indicated uncertainty or identified other safety needs, reflecting a range of perspectives on how ITD can best improve crossing safety statewide.

Figure 6.2 Survey Question About ITD and Future Investments at Highway Rail At-Grade Crossings



Freight Rail Survey Highlights

- » Participants were most concerned about the delays and congestion caused by blocked crossings from stopped/slow trains, safety infrastructure at crossing (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.
- » “More emphasis on rail crossing warning devices (e.g. signals, gates, etc.)” was rated as the top safety improvement for ITD to focus on.
- » 72% of businesses that responded do not ship or receive goods on the Idaho freight rail system.

Passenger Rail Survey Highlights

- » 86% said they would use passenger rail if available in their community.
- » “More connections within the state” and “increased access” were the top factors to increase usage of the passenger rail system.
- » 90% of respondents have not used the Amtrak Empire Builder in Sandpoint, ID.

Emerging Themes

While the closed-ended questions provided clear quantitative insight into travel behavior, safety concerns, and system priorities, the open-ended responses offered a deeper look at how respondents think about the future of rail in the state. These comments revealed recurring themes related to investment needs, desired freight and passenger improvements, and broader transportation challenges. The themes summarized below reflect the ideas most frequently raised by respondents and provide important context for the strategies identified in Chapter 5. These themes are broken down into two categories: future investment suggestions and project ideas.

Future Investment Suggestions

Survey respondents expressed strong support for passenger rail expansion, especially along key corridors connecting major population centers. Several business owners mentioned the potential benefits of commuter rail, especially in the Treasure Valley. Others mentioned the lack of transportation options in Idaho as a reason to invest in passenger rail.

Business owners, that responded to the survey, stressed rail's pivotal role in the shipment of goods in Idaho, with several saying they could not survive without it. Others expressed interest in using the freight rail, but questioned its viability given higher prices compared with truck transport. Current users of the freight rail system expressed concerns over high prices, speed of delivery, accessibility, track conditions, reliability, and tracking; however, many businesses prefer rail to other modes of transportation and would increase their usage if conditions improve.

Future Projects

The survey asked respondents if they were aware of any upcoming infrastructure projects related to rail so they could be incorporated into the project lists. Some rail carriers provided project details, but other survey respondents expressed support for passenger rail projects, especially in the Treasure Valley and between Boise and Salt Lake City/Seattle/Portland. Others proposed additional grade separated crossings and improved safety at existing at-grade crossings.

Freight rail users emphasized the importance of investing in transload facilities and increasing the quality and availability of refrigerated cars. Track and siding improvements along key rail segments were also mentioned, as well as better tracking for shippers. The importance of preserving land along industrial corridors was mentioned by rail carriers and municipalities, especially as Idaho's population continues to grow. Overall, there were themes within the responses to this question primarily related to advancing safety and reliability of freight rail, expansion or restoration of passenger rail, and improved statewide rail connectivity.

6.2 Coordination with Neighboring States

Since Idaho's freight and passenger rail movements are inherently regional, ITD reviewed the most recent rail plans and relevant planning documents from adjacent states to understand trends, policies, and investment priorities that may influence Idaho's system. Plans reviewed include those from Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and Montana. Each of these states plays a role in Idaho's

broader rail network through shared Class I corridors, interconnected short line systems, regional commodity flows, and multistate highway and freight corridors.

This review helped identify cross-border considerations such as:

- » **Shared freight corridors** where agricultural, manufacturing, and energy-related commodities regularly move between states.
- » **Connectivity to national rail hubs**, including West Coast ports, the Wasatch Front, and northern-tier rail gateways.
- » **Potential passenger rail opportunities** related to intercity services, long-distance Amtrak routes, and ongoing corridor planning in Utah, Washington, and Montana.
- » **Safety and grade-crossing issues** that span jurisdictions along continuous rail corridors.
- » **Industrial land and transload facilities** where regional supply chains depend on coordinated planning across state borders.

In addition to reviewing statewide plans, rail coordinators in neighboring states received draft Plan materials and were invited to provide comments as part of the review process. This step supports consistency where multistate freight patterns intersect and helps Idaho align its long-term planning efforts with regional initiatives that may affect future operations, funding pursuits, or corridor-level improvements.

6.3 Suggestions from Stakeholders and Public

Across all outreach activities, participants offered a variety of ideas for improving Idaho's rail system, reflecting both community priorities and opportunities identified by rail users. These suggestions ranged from systemwide policy needs to specific corridor and project concepts that could enhance mobility, safety, and economic connectivity. Through the public survey a large amount of feedback focused on the future of passenger rail in Idaho, with residents expressing interest in restoring past services, creating new connections between growing population centers, and improving conditions in communities with frequent rail activity.

The passenger rail concepts mentioned most often include potential corridors within the Treasure Valley, new or reinstated intercity connections to neighboring states, additional station locations, and local improvements such as quiet zones and upgraded crossing infrastructure. Together, these suggestions illustrate the breadth of public interest in exploring passenger rail opportunities as Idaho continues to grow. Additionally, survey respondents often mentioned the need for improvements of the infrastructure at highway rail at-grade crossings within their communities.

6.4 Coordination with Other Transportation Planning Programs

This SRP has been coordinated with and is structured to provide input to other statewide and metropolitan planning efforts, including 23 U.S. Code § 134, 23 U.S. Code § 135, 49 U.S. Code § 5303, and 49 U.S. Code § 5303 in relation to statewide, metropolitan, and nonmetropolitan planning. The SRP was also developed in close coordination with the Idaho Statewide Freight Plan.