

Request for Proposals (RFP) Tourism Train Feasibility Study

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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview. The Port seeks Proposals from qualified firms to determine the feasibility, economic impacts and next steps for initiating a heritage tourist train service between Dayton and Waitsburg with subsequent service extending to Walla Walla, Washington. Opportunities, challenges, and a range of operational scenarios should be considered. If adequate existing or potential demand is proven, and economic and financial impacts are positive, this project will result in a completed Feasibility Study that will a) guide heritage tourist train-focused development between Dayton and Waitsburg and later extending to Walla Walla; b) inform the Port what public infrastructure improvements are required to initiate heritage tourist rail service and enable related private investment, and c) help the Port advance its mission.

1.2 Procuring Agency: Port of Columbia
1 Port Way
Dayton, WA 99328

1.3 Solicitation Schedule (All times presented are in the Pacific Time Zone):

Event	Date / Time
RFP Issued:	October 1, 2026
Respondent questions, if any, are due no later than:	October 19, 2026
Proposal due date	October 30, 2026 by 12:00 pm PST
Award announced	November 12, 2026

The Port of Columbia's mission is to maximize public resources and private investment to create jobs, provide infrastructure, and maintain and improve the economic vitality of Columbia County and its communities.

1.4 Submittal of Proposals. Respondents are invited to submit a proposed fixed fee and timeline for completing the Scope of Work described in **Section 2**, below. Said Scope of Work and the Deliverables described in **Section 3**, below are collectively referred to as “Proposal”. Proposals are to be addressed and delivered via electronic mail to:

Submit Proposals via email to Jennie Dickinson, Executive Director
at jennie@portofcolumbia.org

Please use subject line: “Tourism Train RFP Response”

Respondents will not be reimbursed for costs associated with preparing responses to the RFP. Proposals and documents pertaining to this solicitation become the property of the Port and will not be returned.

The Port reserves the right to accept or reject any Proposal received in response to the RFP, to negotiate with qualified Respondents, to award a contract without discussions or interviews or to cancel the RFP in part or in whole. The Port reserves the right to award to other than the lowest priced Proposal, and reserves the right to waive minor defects, informalities or irregularities in any Proposal.

Submitted Proposals must be valid for at least sixty (60) days after the Proposal due date.

1.5 Communication. Questions and all other communication must be submitted by email and directed to the Port, attention Jennie Dickinson: jennie@portofcolumbia.org.

Please use subject line: “Tourism Train RFP Question”

Questions and answers will be posted on The Port’s website: <https://portofcolumbia.org> under the tab “Doing Work For The Port”.

Questions about the RFP, if any, must be received by the date indicated in **Section 1.3**, above. Only written interpretations, corrections or addenda issued by the Port will be binding.

1.6 Location of Documents. Prospective Respondents and interested parties may obtain the RFP, addenda, and any RFP updates on the Port’s website: <https://portofcolumbia.org> under the tab “Doing Work For The Port”.

1.7 Project Funding. Lead funding for this project is provided by the Port. The successful Respondent must comply with all applicable laws and enter a fixed price contract with the Port. A notice to proceed will be issued by the Port upon contract award.

SECTION 2 – SCOPE OF WORK

2.1 Background. The Port’s mission is to maximize public resources and private investment to create jobs, provide infrastructure, and maintain and improve the economic vitality of Columbia County and its communities. The Dayton-Walla Walla Rail Line represents one of Columbia County's most significant and under-utilized transportation and historical assets and offers a unique opportunity to diversify the local economy through heritage rail tourism. Originally

constructed to transport agricultural and timber products, the rail corridor remains an active asset with exceptional potential for recreational and tourism-based use.

In 1881, the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company extended rail service from Walla Walla to Waitsburg and Dayton to transport wheat to regional and global markets, and to access Blue Mountain timber for further railroad expansion. Passenger rail service began at the same time, triggering rapid civic and commercial growth.

As road infrastructure and automobile technology improved, freight and passenger rail service declined, as did investment in maintaining the rail infrastructure. Passenger service ceased in the mid 20th century; however, modest freight rail service has survived, so the core infrastructure for a heritage tourist railroad service still exists.

The Port owns 37 miles of railroad track and right-of-way, extending from Dayton, Columbia County, Washington, to the Veterans Memorial Golf Course in Walla Walla County, Washington. The track is currently leased to CWW LLC, dba Columbia Rail (CWW)¹, an experienced freight operator that continues to provide freight service along the corridor. The track between Dayton and Waitsburg is Class I Track.

To advance its mission, the Port's goal is to initiate heritage tourist train service between Dayton and Waitsburg with subsequent service extending to Walla Walla, Washington, provided that doing so is feasible and that the financial and economic impacts are positive.

Subject to development of exact details (operator, legal agreements, insurance), CWW is generally supportive and is advising in achieving this goal. The Cities of Dayton and Waitsburg, the Port of Columbia and Walla Walla County support this goal as well.

Note: The Port's track ownership ends at Veteran's Golf Course, about a mile or two north of downtown Walla Walla. Sections of track south of the golf course into the city of Walla Walla are owned by UP and/or by BNSF. CWW leases and operates freight service throughout the corridor from Dayton to Walla Walla.

2.2 Feasibility Study Components. If a Respondent's Proposal is accepted, the Respondent shall perform a Feasibility Study that includes the following elements (collectively, the "Feasibility Study"):

a. Demographic & Regional Overview. For Columbia and Walla Walla Counties as well as surrounding areas, review relevant economic and demographic characteristics and trends over past five years as well as land use trends and tourist origin/destination travel patterns to help determine 1) the market for sustaining the proposed tourist train service; 2) the available labor force for staffing of tourist train and hospitality operations; 3) what type of products to offer such as historical, event style (entertainers, themed experiences, wine tasting, dinner trains, murder mystery, jazz/blues, or scenic trips, film-making; and 4) help set pricing and minimum ridership

¹ A business unit of the greater Columbia Rail "brand" of companies, owned by Paul Didelius (Lewiston, ID).

needs to cover operating costs. Data provided by the Port and/or by Visit Walla Walla may be relied upon in addition to performing independent research.

b. Market Analysis. Identify existing and developable market demand for heritage tourist rail service between Dayton and Waitsburg, with later service extending to Walla Walla, Washington.

c. Technical and Operational Feasibility. Determine whether a heritage tourist train service between Dayton and Waitsburg, with later service into Walla Walla, Washington, is technically and operationally feasible.

1. Determine the availability and costs of necessary land, buildings and other improvements that may be needed for a tourist train service, including railroad stations, depots, passenger platforms, ticket booths, run around tracks, restrooms, parking, storage, staging areas, water, electric, fuel supply stations;
2. Determine the site's appropriateness for tourism train service, including zoning, environmental and scenic considerations, bus, taxi, bike trails, car share, bike share, and nearby walkable commercial, recreational, historic and cultural amenities including overall adequacy to support the anticipated development;
3. Identify key local support services within reasonable distance from main train station that may be required to start up and operate a tourism railroad service including airport, freight access, machining, tools, parts, other operational supplies; hospital, fire and other emergency services, food, beverage and catering supplies.
4. Identify local ground transportation infrastructure needed or impacted by the tourism train service, including roads, parking, traffic flow, impact on surrounding community and local transportation system, security and utility systems;
5. Identify what management structure is assumed or recommended for the proposed service and why.

d. Financial Feasibility. Determine whether a heritage tourist train service between Dayton and Waitsburg, with later service into Walla Walla, Washington, is financially feasible.

1. Determine whether and when said train service will likely be profitable or the degree to which subsidies may be required;
2. Estimate return on investments; and
3. As an appendix to the Feasibility Study, include detailed pro-forma capital and operating budgets (with visible and functional formulas) for start-up and five years of operations. Include monthly capital, income and expense data to illustrate assumed seasonal fluctuations. Include detailed assumptions on which financial data are based, including 1) estimated ridership demand during each of the first five years; 2) operating access and structure with the Port and CWW; 3) assumed equipment strategy and initial capital needs; 4) insurance, liability, and risk allocation; 5) revenue generating sources and opportunities; and 6) project grant and other funding pathways.

Determine financial models that would support and justify a startup operation. Operation considerations include a) wages (train crew, car attendants, entertainment, retail, ticketing, mechanical, etc.), b) fuel, c) equipment and track maintenance, d) retail and F&B COGS, e) insurance, f) administrative overhead (HR, accounting, marketing, business manager), g) ticketing system and marketing costs, h) utilities.

For capital improvement budgeting, consider a) passenger cars, head end power (for lights/AC) & locomotives (as needed), b) building infrastructure (depot, parking, remote boarding stations, office space, etc.), c) track modifications to accommodate passenger service, d) lease/operating agreement costs for use of track to operate, versus incorporated service into the existing freight line operations, e) availability of grant funding or state or federal funding opportunities.

e. Economic Impacts. Determine the direct and indirect economic impacts of a tourist train service between Dayton and Waitsburg with later service into Walla Walla, Washington, including start-up and five years of operation. Determine how the project will assist local economic diversification, private investment, job creation, and tax revenue.

f. Recommendations. State all pertinent conclusions drawn by the Feasibility Study and provide the Port with recommendations whether to proceed, and if so, identify appropriate next steps.

SECTION 3 – DELIVERABLES. On or before the Proposal Due Date listed in **Section 1.3**, above, Respondents shall provide the Port with:

3.1 A responsive Proposal to perform the Scope of Work outlined in **Section 2**, above, signed by a person legally authorized to bind the Responding firm to the terms of the Proposal and to a contract for the execution of the Scope of Work. Proposals must include:

1. Identification of the Respondent firm's name, address telephone number and Federal Employer Identification Number.
2. Acknowledgment of receipt of RFP addenda, if any.
3. Name, title, address, telephone number, and email address of Respondent firm's contact person during the period of Proposal evaluation.
4. Confirm the Proposal will remain valid for 60 days from the Proposal due date.
5. The proposed fixed fee Respondent will charge for completing the Scope of Work a) if the analysis is limited to Dayton to Waitsburg; b) if Waitsburg to Veteran's Memorial Golf Course is also included; and c) if Veterans Memorial Golf Course to the City of Walla Walla is also included.
6. Date by which the Scope of Work will be completed.
7. A brief history of the firm, its age, number of employees, and subsidiaries. Please include a) a statement of qualifications of proposing firm with details on its relevant experience; b)

current references; and c) a resume for each proposed project team member, including education, experience and unique qualifications.

8. A narrative of the Respondent's methodology and approach for executing the Scope of Work.

9. Include proposed conditions, exceptions and/or deviations to the RFP or addenda, if any. Proposals containing conditions, exceptions and/or deviations may be rejected as non-responsive unless agreed to by the Port in writing.

4. EVALUATION CRITERIA. All Proposals received will be scored by an evaluation committee according to the evaluation criteria below. After the initial scoring, the committee may choose to interview the top Respondents in a competitive range to clarify any information or questions the evaluation team may have concerning the Proposal. Original scoring may be modified based on interview results. Evaluation criteria are equally weighted and include:

4.1 Qualifications, Related Experience, and References: Respondent qualifications will be evaluated in terms of relevant experience in performing work of a similar nature, strength and stability of the firm; capacity to perform the required services and by client references.

4.2 Proposed Project Team and Organization: The organizational structure of the Respondent will be evaluated in terms of its effective use of personnel, relevant experience and time commitment of key personnel, especially the designated Project Manager; adequacy of labor commitment and resources.

4.3 Methodology and Approach. The narrative of the Respondent's methodology and approach will be evaluated to determine the Respondent's understanding of project scope and ability to execute and complete this project.

4.4 Project Schedule and Deliverables. The project schedule will be evaluated to determine the Respondent's understanding of Scope of Work; clarity, specificity, and overall quality.

4.5 Project Costs. All costs the Respondent asks the Port to incur if a responsive Proposal is accepted.

SECTION 5. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

5.1 Modification or Withdrawal of Proposals. A modification of any part of a Proposal already received will be considered by the Port only if the modification is received prior to the Proposal Due Date. A Respondent may withdraw the entire Proposal already received prior to the Proposal Due Date by submitting a written request for withdrawal executed by the Respondent's authorized representative. Oral change orders are not permitted.

5.2 Conflicts of Interest.

- a. No member, officer, or employee of the Port or of a local public body during their tenure or one year thereafter shall have any interest, direct or indirect, in a contract issued related to the RFP or to the proceeds thereof.
- b. By entering into a contract with the Port related to this RFP, Respondent will thereby covenant that no person or selling agency except bona fide employees or designated agents or representatives of the Respondent has been employed or retained to solicit or secure said contract with an agreement or understanding that a commission, percentage, brokerage, or contingent fee would be paid; and that no gratuities were offered or given by the Respondent or any of its agents, employees or representatives, to any official, member, or employee of the Port or other governmental agency with a view toward securing said contract or securing favorable treatment with respect to the awarding or amending, or the making of any determination with respect to the performance of services related to the RFP.
- c. The Respondent certifies that to the best of its knowledge, no Port Commissioner, employee, or officer, and no employee of officer of any agency interested in a contract that may be entered into related to the RFP has a pecuniary interest in the business of the Respondent or with said contract and that no person associated with the Respondent has any interest that would conflict in any manner with the performance of such contract.
- d. Respondents may compete for an operating role in the work the Feasibility Study produced pursuant to the RFP recommends provided that the Respondent discloses such potential intent in its proposal, and provided the scope, assumptions, and financial model it delivers in response to the RFP are in a form another firm can independently verify. Proposals may be submitted as a stand-alone study, or as a Phase 1 study with an option, exercisable at the Port's sole discretion, to negotiate a Phase 2 start-up and operating agreement.

5.3 The Port of Columbia is an equal opportunity employer and encourages women-, disadvantaged-, minority-, and veteran-owned consultant firms to apply.