

# PORT OF BENTON

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## Prosser Airport Pavement & Electrical Upgrades Set for Summer 2026

The Port of Benton is moving forward with a major Pavement Rehabilitation and Electrical Replacement Project at Prosser Airport, with construction scheduled from May 4 through June 12, 2026.

After delays caused by a national shortage of FAA discretionary funding, the project received a significant boost in September 2025, when the FAA awarded a discretionary grant covering 95% of construction costs. The Port previously self funded critical crack repairs in May 2025 to maintain safe operations. The construction contract, valued at \$1.7 million, has been awarded to Western United Civil Group.


The project includes crack repair and slurry sealing across airport pavements, refreshed pavement markings, and full replacement of aging electrical systems. Electrical upgrades will include new LED runway edge lights,

guidance signs, PAPIs, REILs, wind cones and taxiway reflectors. Much of the new electrical cable will be installed in conduit using a plow method to reduce construction time and runway closures.

Due to FAA safety requirements, temporary closures of Runway 8 26, taxiways, and apron areas will occur during construction. The runway may be closed for up to 26 days, though it will remain open for Memorial Day weekend from 4 p.m. Friday, May 22, through 6 a.m. Tuesday, May 26. Construction has been carefully phased to minimize impacts to airport users, with safety as the top priority.

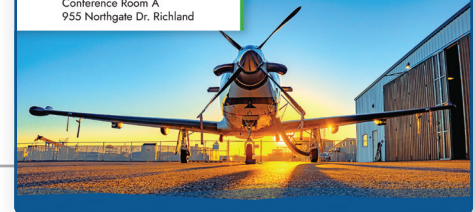
These upgrades will extend the life of airport infrastructure, improve reliability and support safe, efficient operations for years to come.

Richland Airport will begin an apron reconfiguration project later this summer. A public meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 20, at 5:30 p.m. at Richland Library to review the project details. Stay up to date on all projects at [portofbenton.com/projects](http://portofbenton.com/projects).



**PUBLIC MEETING**  
**Richland Airport Apron Reconfiguration Project**  
**Wednesday, May 20 at 5:30 p.m.**  
Details on the upcoming project will be shared.

**RICHLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY**  
Conference Room A  
955 Northgate Dr. Richland



## Port Projects at a Glance

### Rail Infrastructure Projects

Rail infrastructure improvements are moving forward, with grant contracting and obligations underway and construction anticipated to begin in early 2027. The project will rehabilitate the White Bluffs Southern Connection rail line, including rail and tie replacement, ballast installation, Wye track reconstruction, signal upgrades and systemwide improvements. The effort is funded through a combination of federal BUILD and CRISI grants, state capital funding, and Port match, with major construction phases planned between 2027 and 2030.

### Waterfront Development – Phase 1

Planning and engineering for Phase 1 of the Port's Waterfront Development project is approximately 95 percent complete. This phase includes cultural review, stakeholder outreach, utility analysis and evaluation of a potential kayak launch.

### 2579 Stevens Drive Modernization

Design and phased modernization are underway at 2579 Stevens Drive in partnership with Port tenant Barnhart to expand operations.

Construction is planned for 2026–2027, with work expected to begin in late 2026.

### Barge Complex Shore Power Improvements

Planning continues for shore power and dock improvements at the Barge Complex, with 90% design under review and permitting ongoing through 2026. Upland construction is currently targeted for 2027, pending approvals.



## President's Message

The Port of Benton is dedicated to its mission – manage public assets, make strategic investments and be a catalyst for regional economic growth and prosperity.

As we move further along into spring, the port is preparing for several district-wide projects. These projects will greatly enhance port assets, including road and building maintenance and improved leased space for our tenants.

We are looking forward to the upcoming airport projects in Prosser and Richland that will enhance the usability and safety for all airport users. There will also be opportunities in the coming weeks to attend community events held at each airport.

Work continues to improve our rail lines and we are grateful to receive an additional \$2.5 million for "Congressionally Directed Spending" (CDS) under the FY26 CRISI Grant Program, thanks to the advocacy and support of Senator Maria Cantwell.

These dollars will be devoted to the White Bluffs Rail Modernization and Intermodal Facility project, with contracting to take place this summer.

We look forward to recognizing late Commissioner Robert Larson at a dedication event at 10 a.m. on Thursday, June 4. Bob devoted nearly three decades to serving the Port of Benton and our community, leaving an extraordinary legacy of leadership, commitment and vision. He played a pivotal role in securing the USS Triton sail and conning tower and bringing it to North Richland. The Sail Park stands as a lasting reflection of Bob's determination, pride in service and belief in preserving meaningful history for future generations.

This gathering will be an opportunity to remember Bob, reflect on the impact he had on so many and to formally dedicate the Sail Park in his honor.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve on the Port of Benton Commission.



**Bill O'Neil**  
Commission President



Honoring Commissioner Robert D. Larson  
*You're Invited*

Please join the Port of Benton and the family of the late Commissioner Robert D. Larson for a special dedication ceremony honoring his leadership and vision, which helped make the USS Triton Sail Park possible.

*Join us as we honor his legacy and years of dedicated service.*

**JUNE 4, 2026**  
**10 A.M.**

*Reception to follow*

**USS TRITON SAIL PARK**  
3250 Port of Benton Blvd.  
Richland, WA 99354



## Port Welcomes New Staff

Brandin Lopez rejoined the Port as Engineering & Capital Development Senior Manager in March. Brandin formerly worked for the Port and brings an extensive amount of knowledge in planning, organizing and overseeing engineering and construction projects, including design, property acquisition, policies, codes, permitting and developing standards. Brandin, a licensed Professional Land Surveyor, possesses extensive experience overseeing Capital Improvement Projects from the design phase through project closeout.

Shaylee Nilsson and Mardie Romero also joined the Port in March, both as Administrative Assistants.

Shaylee's focus will include administrative support to the finance team and Mardie will provide overall support to the team.

Another familiar face rejoined the Port in April. Stuart Dezember, who served as Director of Finance and Auditor from 2003 to 2020, has returned to the Director of Finance position. Stuart brings extensive experience in government accounting and familiarity with Washington ports. In addition to being a Certified Public Accountant and Chartered Global Management Accountant, Stuart also received his Port Professional Manager certification while previously working for the port.



*Audrey Burney, Elizabeth Garcia, Tanner Martin, Brandin Lopez, Ron Branine*

## Regional Freight Plan Open House Held at the Port

The Port partnered with the Benton-Franklin Council of Governments and hosted an open house on April 14 to share the draft regional freight plan. The data-driven plan guides freight investments through 2050 by identifying key corridors, addressing safety and congestion, and prioritizing projects that support efficient, reliable, and competitive movement of goods. It also establishes the first Benton-Franklin Regional Freight Network. Public comment closed April 29, 2026. View the plan at [bfcog.us/215/Freight-Planning](https://bfcog.us/215/Freight-Planning).



**Brandin Lopez, PLS**  
Engineering & Capital  
Development Senior Manager



**Mardie Romero**  
Administrative Assistant



**Shaylee Nilsson**  
Administrative Assistant



**Stuart Dezember, CPA, PPM®, CGMA**  
Director of Finance

## Interim Executive Director's Message

It's hard to believe we are already nearing the halfway point of 2026. As with all things, change is inevitable. Two quotes come to mind: "By changing nothing, nothing changes," and "Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by some discomfort." As many are aware, the Port has experienced—and continues to experience—a period of change.

We are excited to welcome four new employees to our team and have taken steps to realign job duties, update position descriptions and are working toward implementing new policies and procedures. These changes are intended to strengthen our organization and better serve our tenants, partners and the community. The Port of Benton remains open, thriving, and committed to its mission, just as it always has been—even as we navigate change.

Numerous projects are underway across the district, including annual pavement maintenance at various properties and streets, a breakroom remodel at 3100 George Washington Way, the Steptoe Drive crossing project, renovations at 2579 Stevens

Drive, and the design of a new building at 2501 Stevens Drive. We are also excited about the opening of Crow Butte Park for the season and the launch of the Crow Butte Park Master Planning process. In addition, the \$9.5 million federal BUILD grant will, over time, restore Port rail speeds to nearly 25 mph, significantly reducing rail crossing times. This represents just a partial list of the important work underway at the Port.

This is an exciting time at the Port of Benton, and we are grateful for the opportunity to work alongside our outstanding tenants and valued local and regional partners. On a personal note, I am honored and humbled to work each day with such an amazing and talented team. The dedication and professionalism demonstrated throughout the organization—even during times of change and uncertainty—are truly remarkable.

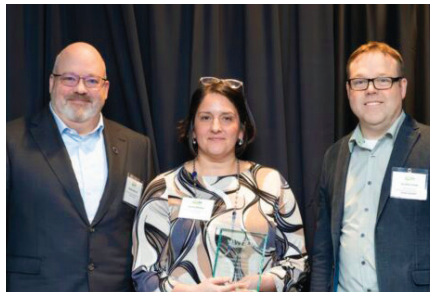
I wish everyone a safe, prosperous and enjoyable summer.

**Ron Branine, CPMM**  
Interim Executive Director  
Director of Facilities, Safety & Security

## Port of Benton Recognized for Fusion Energy Business Recruitment Award

The Port of Benton received the Washington Economic Development Association's (WEDA) Project of the Year – Business Recruitment Award, recognizing the recruitment and partnership with Avalanche FusionWERX, a clean energy company advancing fusion technology in the Pacific Northwest.

WEDA highlighted the Port's role in supporting infrastructure development, site readiness and project coordination, recognizing TRIDEC for their pivotal role in recruiting and supporting the project.



Hawkins DeFrance, Avalanche FusionWERX; Audrey Burney, Port of Benton; Jonathan Smith, WEDA



## Commissioners



**Commissioner Bill O'Neil**  
President



**Commissioner Scott D. Keller**  
Vice President



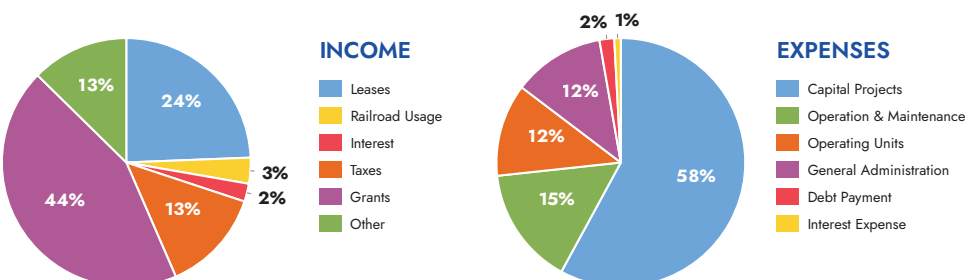
**Commissioner Lori Stevens**  
Secretary

## Executive Director



**Diahann Howard, PPM, PPX**

## 2026 Approved Budget of \$25.9 Million





## Aviation Career Day & Job Fair

Richland Airport (RLD)

Join us for a community celebration of aviation! Discover aircraft, meet pilots and aviation professionals, explore technology and learn how aviation impacts our region. Perfect for families, aviation fans, students, and anyone curious about flying or aerospace careers.

**Saturday, May 30 | 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.**  
**FREE | All Ages Welcome**

- Aircraft displays & demonstrations
- Meet local pilots & aviation experts
- Aviation technology (UAS, eVTOL, drones)
- Career & training information booths
- Military, academic & industry exhibits

Contact Jon Ray at 509-392-3370 or [restonhigh@gmail.com](mailto:restonhigh@gmail.com)

**THANK YOU, SPONSORS!**





### Aviation Career Day & Job Fair

Richland Airport tenant Rest on High is hosting an Aviation Career Day and Job Fair on Saturday, May 30, from 9:30 a.m. – 2 p.m. at the Airport located at 1903 Terminal Drive.

The public event will showcase the exciting aviation-related career paths for all skill and education levels and connect students with industry professionals.

For more information, contact Rest on High at 509-392-3370.



# Open House

Please join us:  
**Thursday, May 7, 2026**  
**Drop in anytime between 5:30-7:00 P.M.**  
**Paterson Community Center**  
**47808 W Prior Ave**





## Take our survey!



Help us improve Crow Butte Park by sharing your thoughts in our online survey. Your input will help us understand how to best improve park facilities, programming, and more!

The survey should take 5-10 minutes. Please submit your response by May 15.

Scan this QR Code or go to <https://engage.ahbl.com/CrowButte2026>

### CROW BUTTE PARK: MASTER PLAN UPDATE

The Port of Benton manages the park as a service to residents in the Port's district, and as a tourism destination, in support of the Port's Economic Development mission.

The Master Plan guides the Port's park improvements and operations for the next six years and beyond. We need your help to improve the park by sharing your thoughts at our Open House event.

### Crow Butte Master Plan: Survey and Open House

Work on the Crow Butte Master Plan is moving forward, with new opportunities for public input.

A public survey has been developed to gather feedback on recreation needs and future amenities at Crow Butte. The community is also invited to attend a public open house at 4 p.m. on Thursday, May 7, in Paterson.

The survey can be found at [CrowButte.com](https://CrowButte.com) and [PortofBenton.com](https://PortofBenton.com).

3250 Port of Benton Blvd.  
 Richland, WA 99354