



The Economic Impact of a Asheville-to-Salisbury Rail Corridor

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JANUARY 2026



Salisbury Train Station, Salisbury N.C.

Executive Summary

Reestablishing passenger rail service from Asheville to Salisbury, North Carolina presents a transformative opportunity for western North Carolina, offering significant benefits to communities along the corridor. This service would create a critical link between the Charlotte metropolitan area, the Piedmont Triad, the Research Triangle, and the Blue Ridge region, increasing accessibility for visitors, workers, and residents from across the state. Rail travel offers a convenient and sustainable alternative to driving, easing congestion on major highways while offering a comfortable and efficient mode of transportation. By removing cars from the road, especially along the heavily traveled I-40 corridor, the train would help reduce roadway wear, emissions, and traffic delays—all while improving overall travel safety.

The towns and cities along the Asheville-to-Salisbury route stand to gain substantially from increased tourism and economic activity. Asheville is already one of North Carolina's premier tourist destinations, drawing visitors from across the country for its vibrant arts scene, culinary offerings, and outdoor recreation. Study findings show that Asheville has been the most requested

location not currently on the NC By Train Amtrak service (Hofmann, 2023). Improved access by train will only bolster its visitor numbers, particularly among travelers who prefer to avoid driving. Similarly, communities both within Asheville and across Western North Carolina stand to benefit from increased exposure and foot traffic as travelers explore destinations along the rail corridor. Towns throughout the region, each offering a mix of historic charm, natural beauty, and cultural attractions, could become far more accessible and visible with a functioning passenger rail connection, strengthening not only Asheville's role as a hub but also the broader network of communities it links.



Southern Railway Station at 401 Depot Street. Circa 1914. Previously located in Asheville, N.C. Buncombe County Special Collections, Buncombe County Library

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Impact of Implementation

The economic impacts of passenger rail service would be far-reaching. Capital investment in rail infrastructure would generate jobs and business opportunities during construction. Over the duration of the project implementation, it is estimated that the Asheville-to-Salisbury corridor will generate a one-time impact of 5,280 job-years, \$360.5 million in employee earnings, \$1.05 billion in economic output, and \$33.6 million in local and state tax dollars (monetary estimates provided using 2025\$).

One-time Economic Impact of Implementing Asheville to Salisbury Corridor



\$1.05 billion
in economic output



\$360.5 million
in employee earnings



\$33.6 million
in local and state tax dollars
(monetary estimates provided using 2025 dollars)



5,280 job-years



Ongoing Economic Impact of Asheville to Salisbury Service

305 jobs

\$19.9 million
in annual employee earnings

\$59.8 million
in annual economic output

\$1.8 million
in local and state tax revenue
recurring on an annual basis

Impact of Operations

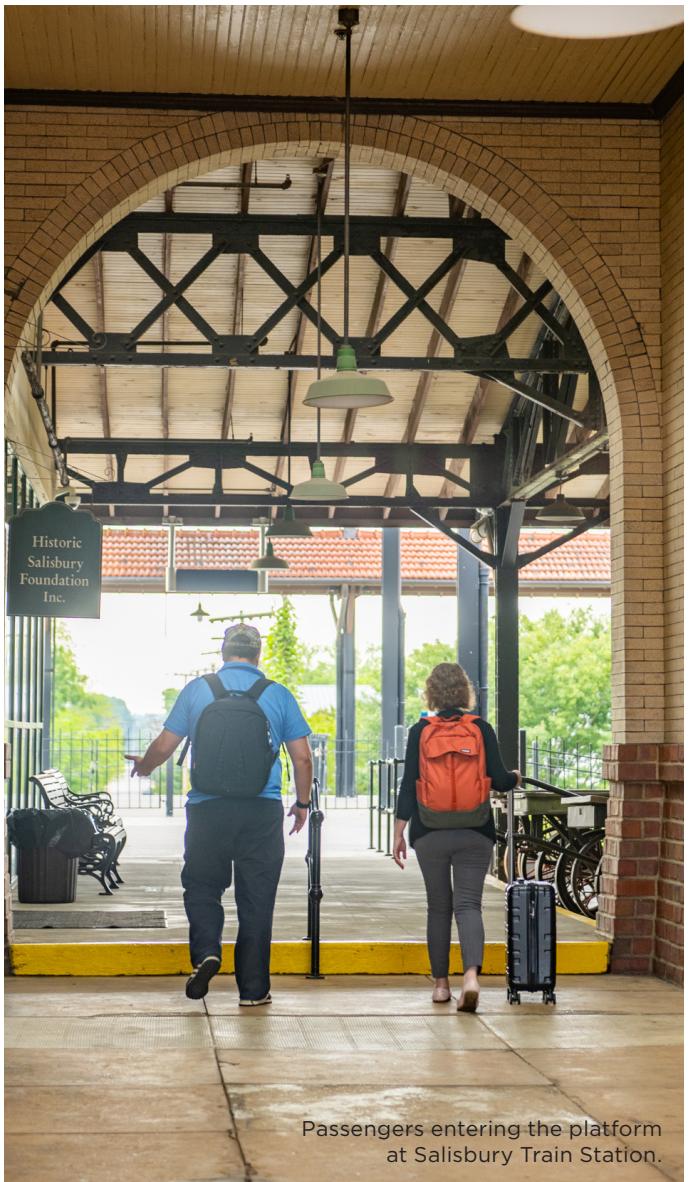
The corridor would also support sustained economic impacts in western North Carolina that radiate throughout the state. For example, long-term operations and maintenance would create stable employment across multiple sectors. Additionally, tourism-related spending by rail passengers would infuse local economies with new revenue, supporting restaurants, shops, hotels, and other service providers. Moreover, improved transportation options help expand market access by linking employers with a larger labor pool. Rail service enables more workers to travel efficiently across the region, which can help reduce labor shortages and support business growth. It is estimated that the Asheville-to-Salisbury corridor will generate sustained economic impacts, including 305 jobs, \$19.9 million in annual employee earnings, \$59.8 million in annual economic output, and result in \$1.8 million in local and state tax revenue recurring on an annual basis.

Conclusion

This Western North Carolina service would create a critical link between the Blue Ridge region and the regions of the Charlotte metropolitan area, the Piedmont Triad, and Research Triangle, increasing accessibility for visitors, workers, and residents from across the state. The towns and cities along the Asheville to Salisbury route stand to gain substantially from increased tourism and economic activity.

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Ultimately, the Asheville to Salisbury rail corridor offers a unique opportunity to create a more connected, resilient, and dynamic regional economy. It addresses transportation challenges, boosts tourism, enhances workforce mobility, and supports sustainable growth for communities both large and small. By investing in this rail line, North Carolina would be laying the groundwork for a future that balances economic opportunity with environmental stewardship and quality of life.

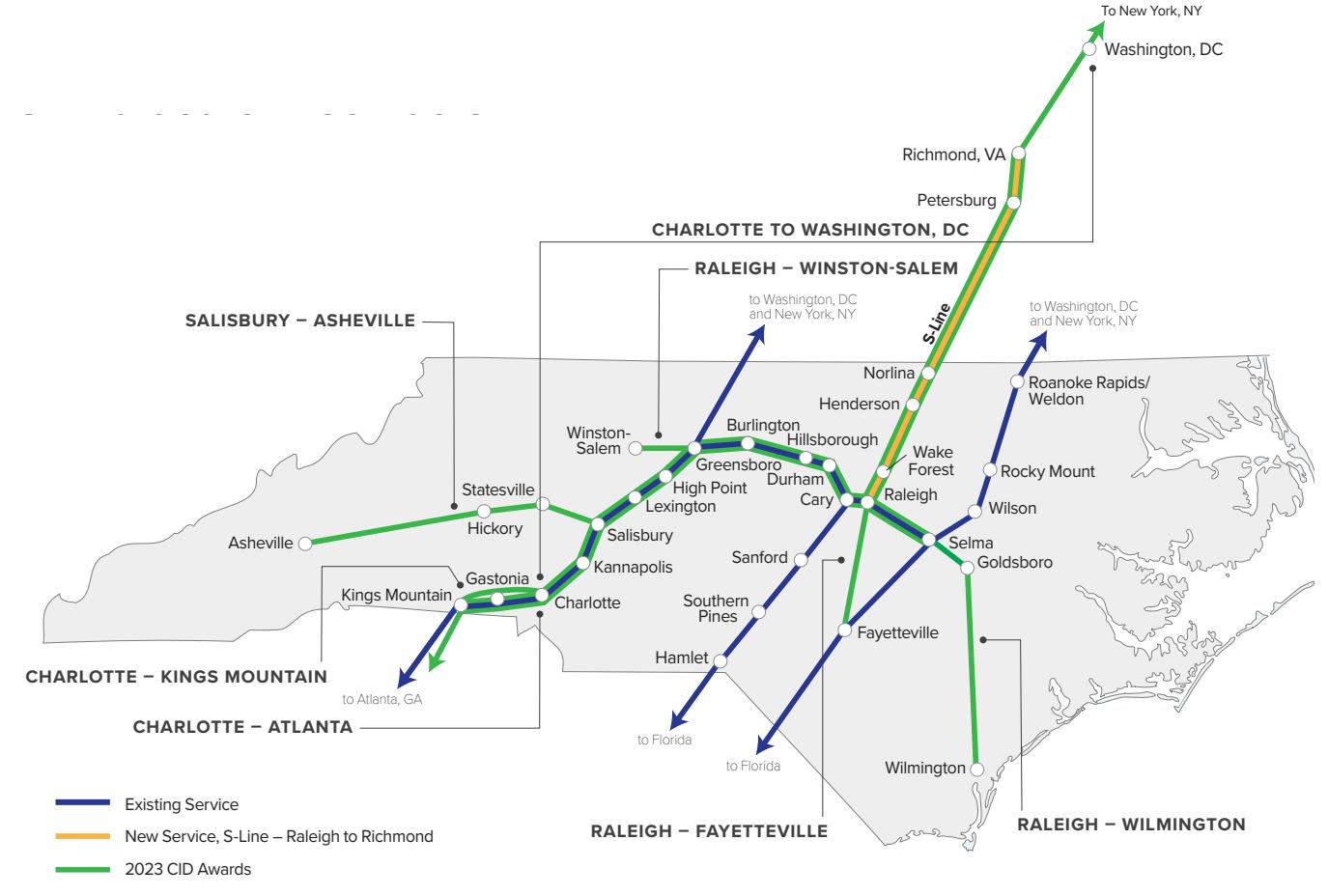


Passengers entering the platform at Salisbury Train Station.





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Asheville to Salisbury Corridor in Statewide Context

The map above shows existing and proposed passenger rail corridors in North Carolina. It is the vision for intercity passenger rail for the state. Asheville to Salisbury is one of seven corridors in North Carolina in the Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program to facilitate passenger rail expansion. This program funds planning and project development activities necessary to restore or expand passenger rail service. Another five corridors are a part of the state's vision but are not in the CID program. NCDOT is studying these corridors to determine the best paths for them to be realized.

All twelve corridors are built on the Charlotte to Washington, DC Southeast corridor and the existing NC By Train services of the Piedmont (between Raleigh and Charlotte) and Carolinian (between Charlotte and New York City). The Southeast Corridor includes the S-Line project that will better connect the entire state to Washington and the Northeast Corridor. NCDOT expects similar economic impacts for proposed services on other corridors.



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