

*Northern Pacific Railroad*



# WHERE TO BUILD A RAILROAD

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## Railroads Come to Washington

**Purpose of This Activity:** To understand how western railroad expansion influenced the ways land was used.

Imagine you live in Washington's past. The railroads had not yet been built this far west, but they were about to be. Your group has been given the task of deciding the location of rail lines for this state. Different members of your group will represent railroad company owners, timberland owners, and officials of port cities. In deciding where to place the rail lines, consider the following:

1. The topography (lay of the land) of Washington state. Your lines can only go through passes in the mountains and it costs tremendous amounts of money to cross rivers.
2. In addition to moving people, trains need to transport trees to Midwest and East Coast lumber markets. Trees also must travel by rail to ships headed down the coast and across the sea.
3. Many cities compete for the privilege of being the rail line terminus or end point. (See **Information to Help You** below.) Which city or cities would be most appropriate, considering topography and nearness to forests? (Refer to the activity you did in **Forest Regions of Washington** for more information on this.)

Make a copy of the provided Washington topography map for each team member. Representing one of the interest groups (railroad, timberland, cities), each team member will draw where on the map he/she thinks the rail line should go.

When finished, compare your maps. What are the similarities? What are the differences? Still representing the same interest group, work together to create one final rail line map. In making your final map, consider the following:

1. The timberland owners will be in direct competition with the railroad company for forested land.
2. The cities will be in competition with each other for the opportunity to be the rail terminus.
3. What compromises have to be made by each group? Who would be interested in selling or trading land? What trades can each group offer?

When your group has made a common plan, draw it on the Washington topography map. For the final display, show all your maps. Include a written paragraph for each of the interest groups, explaining their concerns during mapping. Add a paragraph explaining any compromises made during the final agreement. (A videotaped re-enactment of the planning and decision-making process could be used in place of the written explanations.)

## Information to Help You

Congress offered land grants to rail companies to help pay for building a transcontinental (across the country) railway to Puget Sound. Whatever town got the terminus would get rich because of the railroad's activity, and every Puget Sounder knew why their town should become the site. Olympia was the largest town and territorial capital. Steilacoom was twenty miles closer to the ocean and boasted an army post. Port Townsend was located at the Strait of Juan de Fuca. But why build a railroad all the way around the Sound when Bellingham had a fine port, as did Tacoma? Behind Seattle lay Snoqualmie Pass, where the Cascades dipped to three thousand feet. It was logical that a railroad should cross the mountains to receive grain shipments from eastern Washington.

The Northern Pacific Railroad arrived in Tacoma in 1883. Its route was through Portland, by ferry across the Columbia River and by rail again up the Cowlitz River Valley. Five years later the Northern Pacific completed another line across Stampede Pass connecting Seattle with the East. In 1893, James Hill's Great Northern Railroad reached Seattle. It was one hundred miles shorter and with milder grades than the Northern Pacific route through Stampede Pass.

By 1900, James Hill had gained a financial interest in the competing Northern Pacific Railroad. Hill sold 900,000 acres of Northern Pacific land to his Minnesota neighbor, Frederick Weyerhaeuser. Much of the timber soon was burned in the Yacolt fire of 1902. He organized the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company and built a new mill in Everett in 1914. It was the largest lumber mill in the world.

The railroads triggered decades of unmatched growth. By 1910, Washington's population reached 1,141,990, fifteen times what it had been in 1880!

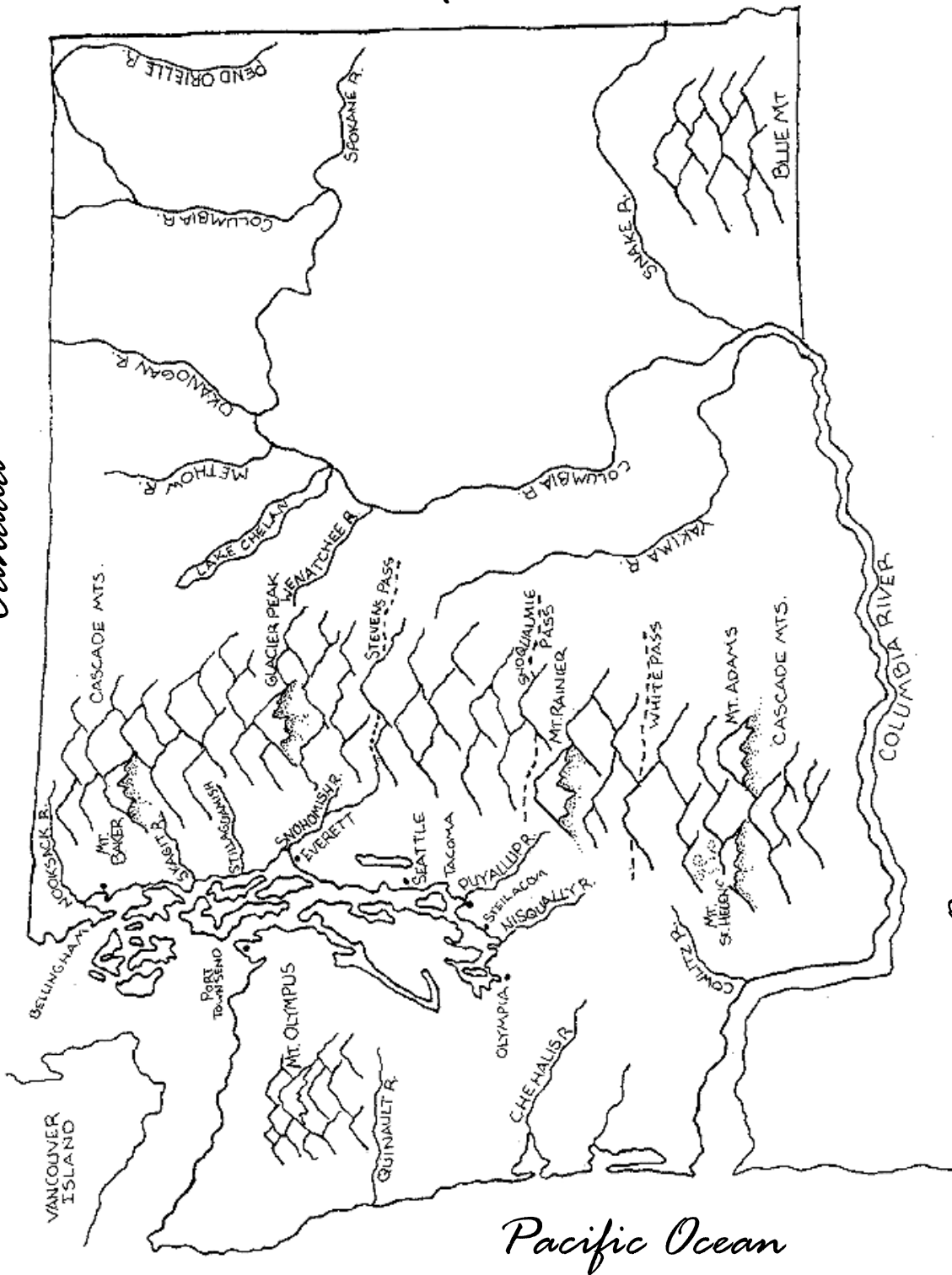
## What Do You Think?

After completion of your display, think about and research the following questions:

1. What city or cities do you think actually became the railroad terminus?
2. Based on what you have learned, how do you think the land given and sold to railroad companies and timber companies influenced current forestland management and ownership?

Idaho

Canada



Oregon

Pacific Ocean