Stampede Pass Rail Corridor: From 1984 Mothball to 1996–1997 Reopening Out of Auburn

Pillar: The Corridors | **Basis:** Historical Event + Carrier Record | **Primary Source:** WSDOT / BNSF | **As Of:** 2026-11-16

Originating out of Auburn Yard and climbing parallel to the Green River through the 1.86-mile Stampede Tunnel, BNSF's Stampede Subdivision was reopened in 1996–1997 to relieve Stevens Pass congestion.

Operational Continuity & Corridor Facts

• Built by the Northern Pacific in the 1880s and mothballed in 1984, Stampede Pass was rehabilitated and reopened by BNSF in 1996–1997 due to congestion on Stevens Pass.

• The line exits Auburn Yard/Palmer Junction, runs parallel to the upper Green River, crosses the 1.86-mile Stampede Tunnel, and continues to Yakima and the Tri-Cities.

• Because of steep Cascade grades, Stampede Pass primarily carries eastbound empty unit trains and manifest freight, freeing Stevens Pass for priority westbound traffic.

Washington Trans-Cascade Rail Corridors (BNSF)

Corridor	Valley Connection	Primary Role	Constraint
Stampede Pass (Subdivision)	Auburn Yard / Green River	Eastbound empties & manifest	Steep grades; 1.86-mi tunnel
Stevens Pass (Scenic)	Everett / North Sound	Priority westbound & intermodal	Single-track Cascade Tunnel
Columbia River Gorge	Vancouver, WA (South)	Heavy/high-volume flat grade	Requires north-south valley transit

Corridor Exposure, Triggers & Facility Actions

• Understanding BNSF's three-pass directional flow explains why Auburn Yard is vital even for shipments ultimately routed via Stevens Pass or the Gorge.

• Heavy-haul rail moves originating in the Midwest (like 737 fuselages) typically approach Puget Sound via northern/Gorge routes, while Stampede absorbs return capacity.

• Upper Green River mudslides or washouts near Palmer/Stampede directly affect Auburn Yard train staging.

Cross-Cluster Links & Primary Sources

• **WA Space Cluster Hub (#1382):** https://bcesg.org/washington-space-cluster-census/

• **Auburn WA Space Cluster Profile:** https://bcesg.org/auburn-wa-space-cluster-profile/

• **Kent WA Space Cluster Profile:** https://bcesg.org/kent-wa-space-cluster-profile/

• **Components & Materials Continuity Exposure:** https://bcesg.org/wa-space-components-materials-continuity-exposure/

• **Supply-Chain & Procurement Desk Brief:** https://bcesg.org/wa-space-role-procurement-lead-desk-brief/

• **BNSF Railway Network:** https://bnsf.com/

• **49 CFR DOT / FRA / PHMSA Regulations:** https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49

Provenance Note: Historical reopening dates (1984 mothball, 1996–1997 reopening) and tunnel length (1.86 mi) per WSDOT/rail records.