

# AORTA Bulletin

A publication of the  
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

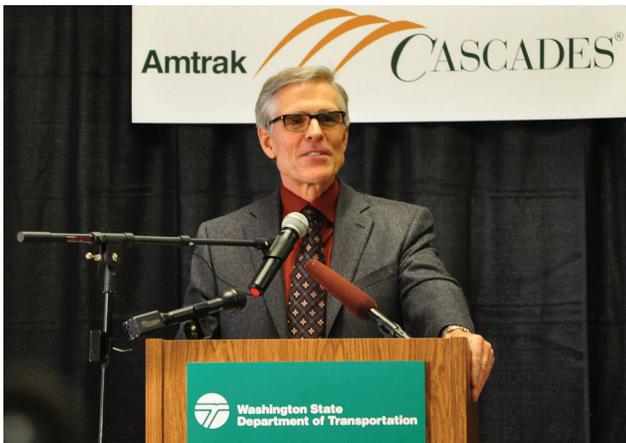
Issue 153

April 2012

Since 1976

## Oregon, Washington to Integrate Passenger Rail Service Oversight

John Sibold named Cascade Corridor Director



*Olympia, WA* – Washington and Oregon announced creation of a new partnership to manage passenger-rail service between Eugene, Oregon, and Vancouver, B.C., as one continuous rail corridor rather than two separate state operations. Transportation officials for each state signed an agreement on April 4 as another step toward offering faster, more frequent Amtrak Cascades service.

Oregon Director of Transportation Matt Garrett and Washington Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond said they will create a corridor management plan to include governance, centralizing fleet management, scheduling, budgeting and capital planning, with a goal of improving passenger-rail performance that benefits riders and economies in both states.

Garrett and Hammond also announced the selection of John Sibold to fill a new position of Cascade Corridor Director. Sibold has been the rail and marine director at the Washington State Department

*continued on pg 2, see "OR-WA Partnership."*

## Union Pacific Seeks Harrisburg Bridge Replacement

by Jon Nuxoll

Union Pacific Railroad is applying for state ConnectOregon IV funds to replace its Willamette River bridge at Harrisburg, between Eugene and Albany on UP's Brooklyn Subdivision mainline. Trains now must slow from 70 to 30 miles per hour when crossing the bridge, built in 1906. UP estimates that a new bridge would increase unobstructed run times for Cascades trains between Salem and Eugene by 4 percent, improving optimal running time to 1:20 from the current 1:23.

UP estimates cost of the new bridge at \$10.2 million and is applying for \$8.2 million in ConnectOregon funding, with the remainder to be matched by UP. **AORTA** submitted a letter in support of UP's application, as did Amtrak. In late spring a final review committee will recommend awards to the Oregon Transportation Commission, based on criteria factoring in modes of transportation, economic impact and statewide geography.

*continued on pg 2, see "Bridge."*

## New Talgo Trains May Mean New Valley Schedules

by Jon Nuxoll

An all-rail daytrip from Portland and possibly Seattle to the Willamette Valley and back may be possible this fall, under Cascades schedule changes now under consideration by the Oregon Department of Transportation, Amtrak and Union Pacific. A morning southbound Cascades from Portland and its return from Eugene in the late afternoon may be possible thanks to two new Talgo sets ODOT will receive later this year.

Oregon's Talgo equipment will bring to seven the number of sets in use on the Cascades between Eugene and Vancouver, B.C.. They will not, however, result in any net increase in Willamette Valley service because state support for operating the trains remains unchanged. The additional equipment will allow for more flexible schedules.

Since the Cascades corridor was established in the 1990s, equipment availability has limited scheduling flexibility to maximize use of the current five Talgo sets. That has meant that same-day Cascades trips from Portland

to the Willamette Valley are not possible, as the day's first southbound train from Portland (the Coast Starlight) does not leave until mid-afternoon, and the day's third and last northbound train from Eugene (also the Starlight) leaves in the early afternoon.

A scheduling change would likely mean replacing one of the two morning northbound departures from Eugene with Thruway bus service. Train 500's 5:30 a.m. departure is popular with travelers commuting up the Willamette Valley as well as Washington-bound passengers, while Train 504's 9:00 a.m. departure is especially popular with Willamette Valley residents making a day trip to Portland.

Southbound, the 9:00 p.m. Portland departure of Train 509 has the lowest ridership of the four Oregon-sponsored trains, making that likely for replacement with a



*continued on pg 3, see "New Schedule."*

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**OR-WA Partnership ...** contd from pg 1 of Transportation since August and will continue to focus on improving the reliability of passenger-rail service and managing the state's freight lines.

"John will help improve customer service along the corridor and maximize the economic benefits of reliable rail travel that is on-time, fast, safe and affordable," Hammond said. "More and more people realize that passenger rail is convenient, affordable and a good alternative to automobiles."

Ridership continues to increase. During the past 10 years, Amtrak Cascades ridership has risen 51 percent to nearly 850,000 passengers in 2011.

"One of John's immediate tasks over the next six months will be to develop a new plan for managing the rail corridor in full partnership with Oregon and in consultation with British Columbia," Garrett said. "We anticipate a plan that leads to cost savings, greater efficiency between our states, improved contract management with equipment and service providers, innovative service improvements and coordinated delivery of federal projects."

Sibold will also be working with U.S. and Canadian border services on the implementation of a new customs pre-clearance program to reduce the delays to passenger trains crossing the border. He will also continue to build partnerships and a shared vision with British Columbia on the rail corridor.

This summer, Oregon will introduce two new 13-car Talgo trains into the fleet, providing the opportunity for improving schedules during peak demand. WSDOT recently secured

nearly \$800 million in federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grants to make



improvements on the BNSF rail lines that will result in higher passenger-train speeds and more reliable performance. WSDOT will be purchasing eight high-speed locomotives that will substantially improve overall corridor service by 2017.

With the ARRA funds, the goal is to add two daily Amtrak Cascades roundtrips between Seattle and Portland, for a total of six each day. The improvements are also intended to reduce travel times, as well as improve average on-time performance (pdf 204 kb) from the current 70 percent to 88 percent.

"It's an exciting time to be in the passenger-rail business, given that rail ridership is going up and we have federal dollars to make system improvements," Sibold said. "Our goal in all that we do as partner states, and as we work with Amtrak, BNSF and Talgo, is to meet customer expectations for service."

Sibold worked for the Port of Bellingham as the director of aviation and marine service, for WSDOT as the director of aviation, and for Alaska Airlines as a customer service manager.

**Note:** Sibold spoke at an All Aboard Washington event in Tukwila April 14. Sibold correctly stressed that reliability and frequency of service are the keys to progress in the corridor. **AORTA welcomes John Sibold!!**

**Bridge ...** contd from pg 1

UP proposes a single-track bridge. Over the last five years, UP has replaced north and south approaches to the bridge.

The UP application is one of 65 statewide applications for \$40 million authorized by the 2011 Legislature in lottery-funded ConnectOregon infrastructure projects. The current round, "ConnectOregon IV," is the fourth such infrastructure appropriation approved over the past decade; UP also applied in ConnectOregon III to replace the Harrisburg bridge but its application failed to receive funding.

**President Obama appoints Californian to Amtrak Board**

WASHINGTON, DC – On March 29 President Barack Obama announced his intent to nominate Yvonne B. Burke to the Amtrak Board of Directors. Burke is currently a member of the Committee on Congressional Ethics as well as the California Transportation Commission.

From 1992 to 2008, Ms. Burke served on the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, which she previously served on from 1979 to 1980 as the first African-American representative on the Board. During this time, she was

also a partner at Jones Day, a position she held from 1987 to 1993. She was appointed to serve on the Board of Regents of the University of California in 1979 and again in 1982. In 1972, Ms. Burke was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, serving until 1978. Prior to that, she served as a California State Assemblywoman from 1966 to 1972.

Ms. Burke received a B.A. from the University of California, Los Angeles and a J.D. from the University of Southern California School of Law.

# No boost for ConnectOregon at Legislature

By Floyd Smith, Government Affairs Director

The measure to enhance Connect Oregon IV by \$10 million above its \$40 million bonding limit died in Ways and Means toward the end of the 2012 session. The Legislature completed its work in early March. Debt limit issues scuppered the increase to the popular Connect program.

Earlier, the House Transportation and Economic Development Committee passed the bill. Freight rail supporters, including **AORTA**, worked successfully to get the measure moved to Ways and Means.

The 2011 Legislature set the \$40 million limit on lottery-backed bonds for ConnectOregon IV. Before that, ConnectOregon measures to support funding were each pegged at \$100 million. The public-private partnership program supports multi-modal, non-highway-system development throughout the state.

**Columbia River Crossing.** **AORTA** has actively joined the Smarter Bridge Committee opposing the Columbia River Crossing.

The controversial CRC is estimated to cost a whopping \$3.6 billion before interest charges, which could raise the bill to \$10 billion. It would replace the existing Interstate bridges between Portland and Vancouver with a 10-story, 10-lane freeway including multiple interchanges and light rail, all of which would displace about a thousand jobs.

Smarter Bridge Committee members hammered away at the CRC staff's unsound data and conclusions in testimony

March 16 to Oregon's joint legislative oversight committee studying the subject. The committee is expected to make recommendations to the 2013 Legislature.

While members of the Smarter Bridge coalition are bound together in opposition to the CRC, they have river crossing plans of their own to improve or eliminate vehicular traffic congestion. Among those plans, the Common Sense Alternative (Google it) is supported by **AORTA** and is co-authored by policy director Jim Howell.

He estimates the alternative, which allows for phased construction, would cost about half as much as the proposed CRC. The alternative would eliminate vastly fewer businesses and jobs by keeping the existing bridges. And it would provide a new bridge for trucks and passenger trains.

**Rail funding.** The quest for measures to better fund rail and other non-highway modes continues. The 50-plus-member Non-Roadway Funding Working Group, made up largely of elected officials and industry representatives, has been meeting to decide on a list of financing options that can get traction at the upcoming 2013 Legislature and beyond.

The Oregon Consensus gurus at Portland State University are managing the process. Their pared down list of recommendations is scheduled for delivery by mid-May. Decisions will not come easy as powerful interests are at play.

This non-roadway funding drama comes on the heels of work late last year by the Oregon Rail Funding Task Force that recommended five sources of capital to capture some \$80 million each year

specifically for train-related costs. The task force's transmittal letter to the chairman of the Oregon Transportation Commission is pretty clear about the need: "Oregon's lack of dedicated, sustainable funding for rail investments is the number one challenge facing a viable rail system for both passenger and freight in Oregon."

The five recommended sources, which include tax shifts in local jurisdictions, are controversial, to say the least. Don't expect easy approval by the Legislature.

**Cascades Corridor.** Perhaps you thought the corridor between Eugene and Vancouver, B.C., was fixed. Yes, the Washington section has been established. But Oregon must go through an environmental impact study to determine the route, motive power and top speed.

**AORTA** supports the Union Pacific alignment through the Willamette Valley, diesel-electric power and speeds up to 110 mph. This allows for cost-effective, incremental development of Oregon's principal passenger rail corridor in keeping with and connecting to Washington's.

The framework for the EIS will be established by the Oregon Passenger Rail Leadership Council. Gov. John Kitzhaber appointed this council to provide direction. It is comprised principally of elected officials from the Eugene to Portland.

**AORTA** will maintain vigilance as the council does its work. Given that \$10 million in combined state and federal money has been dedicated for consultants to study corridor alignment and other options, it is important that the analysis be done expeditiously with fiscal prudence.

**New Schedule** ... continued from page 1

Portland-Eugene Thruway bus.

Use of Oregon's equipment to expand capacity of frequently sold-out Portland-Seattle trains was also rumored in earlier months.

Bob Melbo, ODOT rail planner, outlined possible schedule changes in a March article in the Eugene Register-Guard, and ODOT has asked the **AORTA** board for its comments on any schedule changes.

Amtrak and the Washington Department of Transportation own the five Talgo sets now in use in the Cascades corridor. Together, the five sets travel 2,606 miles daily, Melbo said. Current scheduling is necessary to also allow each set to be overnight in Seattle for maintenance every fourth night.

## Amtrak less expensive than I-5

Cost for a one-way trip Eugene-Portland on Amtrak Cascades and by car:

Amtrak fare: \$26

10-ride punch card: \$13.80 per ride

Driving Scenario 1\*: \$25.55

Driving Scenario 2\*\*: \$62.72

\*Based on gasoline costs alone, 17.6 mpg and gas price of \$3.98/gal.

\*\* using IRS standard mileage rate (55.5 cents/mi.)

Eugene Register-Guard, March 15, 2012



## Pictures from NARP Meeting in Whitefish, Montana

More than 75 persons attended a well-organized NARP NW Regional meeting in Whitefish, Montana on March 17. Check **AORTA**rail.org for report on the meeting. Excellent speakers included Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph C. Szabo, Amtrak VP Government Affairs & Corporate Communications Joe McHugh, Antonio Perez, Talgo and others.

Live music during the meal provided by a local high school jazz band.

Special thanks to Barry Green, Jim Hamre and others who helped host this successful event!



BE IT REMEMBERED, that at a regular term of the Board of Commissioners of the State of Oregon, for the County of Union, sitting for the transaction of County business, begun and held at the Joseph Building Annex in the City of La Grande, in said County and State, when were present:

The Honorable William D. Rosholt, Chairman

Steve McClure, Commissioner

Mark D. Davidson, Commissioner

WHEN, on Wednesday, the 18<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2012, among others the following proceedings were had to wit:

IN THE MATTER OF A RESOLUTION IN ) RESOLUTION  
SUPPORT OF AMTRAK RAIL SYSTEM ) 2012-06

WHEREAS, intercity trains have helped shape Union County and its neighborhoods into places more desirable for a wider range of ages, families, and living situations; and

WHEREAS, rail is an engine for economic growth, creating well-paying construction, manufacturing, and operating jobs that can't be outsourced; and

WHEREAS, Amtrak makes our country less dependent on oil; and

WHEREAS, Amtrak rejuvenates neighborhoods, increases property values, and keeps the air we breathe cleaner, raising the overall quality of life; and

WHEREAS, the United States will add 130 million additional Americans by the year 2050, necessitating an increase in the capacity and efficiency of our transportation network.

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS RESOLVED that Union County Board of Commissioners HEREBY requests Congress to:

1. Fully fund Amtrak's request for Fiscal Year 2013; and
2. Include a strong High Speed & Intercity Passenger Rail Program in the FY 2013 budget, to strengthen conventional train service and speed the introduction of high speed rail to America; and
3. Fully restore long-distance, customer focused, and regular passenger rail service to and through La Grande, Oregon (Union County) and the eastern Oregon region as an essential part of the developing regional and intercity transportation network now serving Oregon and the northwest. In view of the current economic challenges, the high and continuing cost of gasoline/diesel and the limited public transportation options to and from La Grande and the major metropolitan centers of Oregon (Portland) and Idaho (Boise) along with the current record levels of ridership for both intercity and long-distance Amtrak trains it is clear now that Americans are beginning to regard rail travel as not simply an "alternative" transportation option, but an essential and much needed one.
4. Continue the Code 45G Tax Credit for Short Line Railroads.

DATED this 18<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2012.

  
William D. Rosholt, CHAIRMAN

  
Steve McClure, COMMISSIONER

  
Mark D. Davidson, COMMISSIONER

Thank You to **AORTA** Director David Arnold, LaGrande, Oregon, for helping push a resolution by the Union County Board of Commissioners in support of Amtrak and the return of passenger trains to Eastern Oregon!! This resolution is being carried to Washington, D.C. by Donald Leap and Mike Morrison as the **AORTA Bulletin** goes to press.

# LTD Survey Shows Support for Transit

by Jon Nuxoll

Expanded transit service is the leading transportation concern among Lane County voters, and Lane Transit District's plans to add a third bus-rapid transit (BRT) corridor in West Eugene have slightly more supporters than opponents, according to a survey commissioned by LTD.

When asked an open-ended question about transportation issues in the Eugene-Springfield area, 20 percent of respondents indicated better public transit is their main transportation concern. Ten percent consider better road maintenance as the area's principal transportation need, and another 10 percent said they consider themselves "satisfied" with transportation options in Eugene-Springfield. As for immediate priorities local officials should address, 41 percent see public-transit improvements as an "urgent" or "high" priority, and 66 percent see street maintenance as an "urgent" or "high" priority.

LTD's proposed expansion of its EmX ("Emerald Express") BRT route to west Eugene was "strongly" or "somewhat" supported by 50 percent, while 45 percent "strongly" or "somewhat" oppose it. The extension would go from downtown Eugene to West 11th Avenue, a heavily congested area which doubles as Route 126 to Veneta and Florence.

EmX expansion, which the **AORTA** board has endorsed, has been vocally opposed by some citing loss of a lane of traffic and reduced parking; supporters, including other business owners in the corridor, counter that more transit means less congestion. It would also create a one-seat ride from West Eugene to downtown Eugene, the University of Oregon and Springfield.

Public hearings on the proposal are expected in coming months after release of an environmental assessment. Both the LTD board and Eugene City Council would need to approve final route for the expansion. If approved, EmX would go into service in 2017.

LTD's first EmX corridor opened in 2007, connecting downtown Eugene with downtown Springfield, via Franklin Boulevard along the northern edge of the UO campus, past the new Matthew Knight Arena and through the Glenwood district. A second route opened in 2011, from downtown Springfield north to the new Sacred Heart Medical Center at Riverbend and the Gateway area of northeast Springfield.

BRT features high-level platforms, fewer stops and ticket machines at stops to facilitate quicker boarding. About 60 percent of LTD's EmX travels in exclusive lanes to provide faster service than

conventional buses. Service runs every 10 minutes on weekdays, and every 15 to 30 minutes on evenings and weekends.

Four hundred Lane County voters were surveyed in February, and results were made public in late March. Full results may be viewed on LTD's website, [www.ltd.org](http://www.ltd.org). Additionally, EmX supporters have a Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/WestEmXYes](http://www.facebook.com/WestEmXYes).

## LTD Considers 25-Cent Fare Increase

by Jon Nuxoll

Bus fares in Eugene-Springfield may go up by a quarter, in a proposal now under review by the Lane Transit District.

One-way cash fares would increase to \$1.75 and a day pass would cost \$3.50, up from \$1.50 and \$3.00, respectively. Monthly and youth passes would also increase. LTD replaced transfers with day passes several years ago.

The LTD board held a hearing in April on the proposal, and another public hearing is scheduled for May 14.

# Train of Thought Editorial: Columbia River Crossing planners exaggerate traffic growth

Jim Edelson

Every work day, bureaucrats fill up the entire floor of an office building in downtown Vancouver to plan for the ill-fated Columbia River Crossing. Let's hope they read David Sirota's column ("America doesn't need more roads," April 7). He reports data that show Americans are putting fewer miles on their cars at any time since 1999. Most importantly, he notes the rapid shifts in young people away from driving and toward the Internet.

Despite the evidence, the CRC planning schemes consistently overestimate the growth of traffic demand on the Interstate Bridge. The number of crossings per day in 2010 was close to

127,000 per day. In the few short years since the original Environmental Impact Statement was published in 2008, CRC projections have proven staggeringly inaccurate, and traffic demand has never reached the levels once reached. For more than 5 years, the CRC planners stuck with their estimated gas price of \$1.10 per gallon as a basis for traffic projections, but they have since updated it.

Yet the CRC planners still continue to project consistent future traffic growth through 2030, even with tolls and \$4 a gallon gas. Fortunately, the treasurers of both Oregon and Washington have told the CRC planners that toll revenues may be

so insufficient from falling traffic levels as to create large shortfalls in state funding accounts.

For years, many have argued that the CRC process itself has been the main obstacle to letting the region arrive at a right-sized and right-priced solution to the real shortcomings of the Interstate Bridge. Professional groups and advocates have made public presentations and put realistic alternatives on the table. Let's hope the workers in the CRC office put their fantasies away and pick up a solution that the region can implement.

*Reprinted with the author's permission. Originally appeared in **The Oregonian**.*

## Interim Rail Division Administrator, ODOT Hal Gard



*Salem-* As interim Rail Division Administrator, Hal Gard oversees a division responsible for rail safety, crossing safety, and operations of passenger and freight rail service in Oregon.

Gard most recently managed the Geo-Environmental Section within ODOT's Technical Services Branch and served as the agency's tribal liaison for regulatory issues. Gard began his ODOT career in 1994 when he was hired as the department's first archaeologist. After developing and managing that program for eight years, he joined the newly-formed Bridge Delivery Unit to work on new environmental streamlining opportunities presented by the Oregon Transportation Investment Act III.

Gard received the 2011 Hewes Award, recognizing outstanding contributions to highway development, from the Western Association of State Highway Transportation Officials. In presenting the award, WASHTO noted his considerable individual efforts in improving environmental performance in Oregon's transportation projects and programs.

A Registered Professional Archaeologist, Gard holds a Bachelor's Degree from the University of California in Anthropology and a Master's Degree in the co-fields of Archaeology, Fish and Wildlife, and Geo-science from Oregon State University.

*-Floyd Smith*

## Amtrak Operating 110 mph Service in Michigan

*Michigan-* A special train operating at a maximum speed of 110 mph on Feb 15, celebrated the inauguration of the first expansion of regional high speed rail outside the Amtrak-owned Northeast Corridor. Aboard were federal, state and local leaders welcomed by Amtrak and the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

"This improvement is one of many we are making in the Midwest and throughout our system," said Tom Carper, Chairman of the Amtrak Board of Directors. "By operating at higher speeds, our passengers can reach their destinations sooner, our trains and our crews can be more productive by covering more ground in less time and we are showing how incremental improvements to Amtrak service can be achieved with new technology."

Amtrak began raising speeds on this corridor from 79 mph in 2001 to 90 mph in 2002 and to 95 mph in 2005. Sustained operations at 110 mph will shave 10 minutes from the 95 mph schedules and about 20 minutes from the 2001 schedules on the Amtrak-owned segment of the corridor.

"This sets the stage for expansion of accelerated service from Kalamazoo to Dearborn by 2015, helping us meet the demands of the next generation of travelers," said MDOT State Transportation Director Kirk T. Steudle, who pointed out Michigan is in the late stages of completing the purchase of that track segment from Norfolk Southern Railway, with the support of a federal grant and technical assistance from Amtrak.

"The State of Michigan and Amtrak have been partners for more than 35 years and we believe passenger rail service has a bright future in our state," Steudle added.

Carper, Steudle and others were joined on the special train by Joseph Szabo, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Administrator, and they spoke at events in New Buffalo and Kalamazoo.

"This is just the beginning," said Szabo. "With projects coming to fruition this year and new ones breaking ground,

2012 promises to be the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program's best year yet."

The Incremental Train Control System (ITCS) installed on the Amtrak-owned Michigan District between Kalamazoo and Porter has been developed by General Electric Transportation with assistance from Amtrak, MDOT and FRA. ITCS continually monitors the condition of signals, switches and crossings, is full-featured, vital positive train control system with a display in the locomotive control cab (image above).

Amtrak extended ITCS coverage to the western and eastern ends of the line between Porter and Kalamazoo last year, completing the system across 97 miles of track and permitting the higher speeds on about 80 miles of the route, 64 miles in Michigan and 16 in Indiana. The FRA granted approval for regular service at 110 mph (177 kph) on Jan. 27, 2012.

*Amtrak News release*

## New Books Available in **AORTA** Library

Several new books are now available in the **AORTA** office. Three are considered "must read" for persons involved with improving public transportation.

***Transport for Suburbia: Beyond the Automobile Age*** by Paul Mees explains that effective transit systems need good connectivity, but not necessarily high density.

***Human Transit: How Clearer Thinking about Public Transit Can Enrich Our Communities and Our Lives***, by Jarrett Walker describes how effective transit system design leads to high ridership and healthy communities.

***The High Cost of Free Parking*** by Donald Shoup explains how the provision of "free" parking leads to automobile dependency, energy waste, urban sprawl and many other problems. Shoup maps out a course to properly manage parking by employing fair market prices, and improving economic viability and safer, healthier neighborhoods.