



AORTA Bulletin

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Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

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Since 1976

AORTA's Legislative Activity

By Fred Nussbaum

AORTA is actively promoting passenger rail this legislative session. With the flip in control and a vastly improved economic outlook, we are cautiously optimistic that we will achieve more than simply keeping our head above water. The last four sessions have been cliffhangers to the eleventh hour to see if the Amtrak Cascades and Thruway Bus service would get funded.

AORTA's priorities are:

1. Secure adequate, stable operating funds for the Passenger Rail Program, including two additional Thruway bus round trips in the Portland - Eugene corridor, to fill current service gaps.
2. Support an improved ConnectOregon II funding program for Rail, Public Transit and other non-highway capital projects.
3. Pass AORTA's separate funding bill for Passenger Rail infrastructure and equipment.
4. Spur reorganization of ODOT to focus more attention and resources on intercity passenger rail and bus service needs.

Stable operating funds have been elusive since the Passenger Rail Program started in 1994. Drawing from the General Fund always pits the trains against education, human services and other needs with strong constituencies. This session the Governor proposes "dedicating" to the Rail Program the "Vanity Plate Fund" -- extra charges for personalized auto plates, exempt from Constitutional restrictions. This would raise about \$2.3 M/year - enough to operate one of the Cascades trains. A statutory change, this would be much easier to tinker with than the highway fund's constitutional protection. AORTA is supportive, although there is a risk: gaining "dedicated" funds for only half of cur-

rent needs may make it more difficult to obtain the additional funds for the remainder of the program, since some may feel that the Passenger Rail Program already "got its fund." AORTA is also seeking \$160,000 more than the Governor's budget for additional corridor Thruway service. Currently you can't go south in the morning or mid-afternoon (to connect with #513) or north in the late morning (to meet #516) or in the evening. Adding Thruway buses serves current needs, while building a market for future train service, which will require major track improvements and new equipment purchases.

AORTA supports renewal of ConnectOregon, even though rail passengers did not really benefit from the last cycle (see October 2006 AORTA Bulletin). By funding rail and public transit projects, ConnectOregon is consistent with AORTA's mission. At a recent hearing on HB 2278-ConnectOregon II AORTA suggested greater emphasis be placed on projects of statewide benefit and priority be given to projects with no other non-local funding. Most passenger rail projects have those characteristics, in contrast to some of the projects that were funded under ConnectOregon I. AORTA also suggested that ConnectOregon may never be able to address passenger rail's capital needs adequately. ODOT Rail Division, the most logical applicant for funds, feels it cannot take that role, because it is also involved in assisting in the evaluation process. That leaves the host railroads and Amtrak, who have totally different visions and priorities.

For this reason, stalwart supporter Rep. Mitch Greenlick is introducing our Passenger Rail Capital Funding bill to cover both the priority infrastructure projects, like the Eugene bypass and

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railroad. The house proceeded onto the tracks because one of the moving supervisors had checked the train timetable and nothing was scheduled at that time. The crossing where the incident occurred has over sixty trains a day passing through it. Freight and commuter trains are not in the Amtrak timetable. The mover should have contacted the railroad to negotiate a safe period for crossing the tracks. Trains could then be held until the house was clear of the crossing. Ironically, signs on signal boxes at each crossing have a toll free number for contacting the railroad about crossing issues. In Salem, Operation Lifesaver people had to have a safety conversation with high school track coaches for both the men's and women's teams. Coaches instructed their kids to run down the Union Pacific main line during practice drills. A part of this route took them over a railroad trestle. This concern has been resolved and a new footbridge now directs pedestrians away from the tracks.

Many stories could be told about hazardous personal activities on or near railroad lines. The point is that these situations occur because of how the public and many of our legislators view rail operations. There are many myths out there. Most people are familiar with the road system with its almost constant flow of traffic and congestion. They relegate the same values to the rail network, which affects how government responds to it. The track is empty a lot of the time. They believe that must mean there is not much demand for railroad service. The rail mode functions differently than highways. When a freight train goes by it often carries more than 300 truckloads of cargo. In reality the volume for a main line railroad averages several truckloads per minute over a 24-hour period. Considering most rail lines in Oregon are single-track, usage is very efficient and cost effective when compared to the highway mode. The big struggle is educating the public and legislators to understand the unique transportation benefits rail can provide for Oregon and the U.S. Not seeing rail's value has resulted in rail projects being denied federal and state funds. The Oregon Passenger Rail Program is over ten years behind the 1992 plan that launched it. Making a new plan would just be a cop-out. Plans are meaningless unless we back them with adequate funding.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Oops, There's a House on the Tracks!

By Bob Krebs

A late evening Amtrak special train loaded with sports fans is traveling south from Seattle at 79 MPH. Suddenly, the headlight illuminates a house on the tracks. Emergency breaking fails to avoid a collision. By some miracle two men working on the roof of the house, lifting utility wires, are not hurt and passengers on the train are unscathed. Unfortunately, lumber from the demolished house fills the locomotive cab and seriously injures the engineer.

The firm moving the house had secured all the required road permits but had not contacted the

AORTA Protest Leads to Improved Union Station Bus Service during Mall Construction

By Fred Nussbaum

Light rail will be operating on the Portland Transit Mall by 2009, despite a valiant fight by AORTA to stop the project. Last May, TriMet released a draft bus rerouting plan, which would have drastically reduced bus service to and from Union Station, the Greyhound terminal and adjacent residential areas for the entire two-year duration of Mall reconstruction beginning January 2007. Under the proposed reroutes, service would have dropped to every 30 to 60 minutes on evenings and weekends, when many trains stop at the station.

AORTA, led by director Jim Long, developed and distributed a mail-in card at and near the station to alert passengers and residents about the service cuts proposed for the area and to encourage them to let TriMet know how this would impact them. In addition, many AORTA members let TriMet know their concerns via phone calls, letters and email. The AORTA Board also sent a formal letter explaining why the proposed service was unacceptable.

TriMet responded quickly to let AORTA know that we had correctly identified a significant problem and that they would work on improving frequency of service and stop locations in the area. The revised rerouting, which started in January, provides service at least every 15 minutes to/from downtown 7 AM to 10 PM every day on Line 9-Broadway/Powell. Riders heading downtown can board on NW Broadway at Hoyt 3 blocks from the station, avoiding the dark alley and stairs. Those going to the station from downtown can get out either on Hoyt at Broadway or on the Broadway Bridge ramp (closer to the station, but requiring stairs). The above changes are expected to last until early 2009. A permanent improvement is the routing of Line 77-Northwest Portland/Troutdale directly in front of the station in both directions.

Congratulations all around for making your voices heard and kudos to TriMet for listening and responding. We may not win all our battles, but we must at least speak up to the powers that be, to have a chance of getting what we need from them.



In memoriam: Ken McFarling

Kenneth McFarling, a founding member of AORTA, passed away January 26 at his home in Aloha, Oregon, at the age of 92.

Ken was born August 21, 1914 in Portland, and graduated from Jefferson High School in 1931. He obtained a degree in civil engineering from Oregon State College in 1940. On February 10, 1940, he married Phronsie Ruth Kellmer, a 1938 graduate of Reed College.

During World War II, Ken and Phronsie moved to Takoma Park, Maryland, and then to San Francisco, where in 1944 he began employment with the Engineering Department of Southern Pacific Railroad Company in San Francisco. In 1947 Ken took a position with SP in Portland. He retired from Southern Pacific in 1977.

In the 1950's Ken helped organize the Pacific Northwest Electric Railway Association, and was an early member of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. In 1976, he helped found the Oregon Association of Railway Passengers, Inc., known today as the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA).

NARP Vice President Art Poole commented, "Ken made many contributions to rail passenger advocacy. He helped to recruit members for both OreARP and NARP. He also edited the OreARP Bulletin for many years. Ken was a mentor to many OreARP leaders, including myself. His professional experience concerning railways added to our credibility as rail advocates when we communicated with politicians and the news media."

The family has requested that remembrances be directed toward the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates.

NARP Region 8 to meet March 17 in Tacoma, Washington

All Aboard Washington (formerly the Washington Association of Railroad Passengers) will host a joint meeting of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, All Aboard Washington, the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, and the Montana/Wyoming Association of Railroad Passengers, on March 17th at the Best Western Tacoma Dome Hotel in Tacoma, Washington. Featured speakers invited to appear include: United States Senator Patty Murray; Jonathan Hutchison, Amtrak Director of Government Affairs; Scott Witt, WSDOT Freight Multimodal Manager; and David Johnson, NARP Assistant Director.

Registration and social hour begins at 11:15 AM, followed by a buffet luncheon and presentations. The meeting is scheduled to adjourn by 4:45 PM.

Early registration is available for entries postmarked by March 7 at a cost of \$39. After March 7, the cost is \$49. A PDF registration form is available from www.allaboardwashington.org in the "Event Calendar" section, or by emailing washarp@olywa.net, or by telephone at 360-943-8333 or 206-784-9232.

Rail Passengers Support Reintroduction of Rail Passenger Bill

Washington, D.C.—Senators Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Trent Lott (R-MS), appearing at a joint news conference on January 16 at Washington Union Station, announced that they were introducing their Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act. The new bill, S. 294, is similar to S. 1516 in the last Congress, except for changes in the dates and technical amendments. S. 294 also includes the rail security package that the Senate has passed unanimously three times, most recently as H.R.4954, the SAFE Port Act (109th Congress).

Both senators alluded with humor to the change in control on Capitol Hill. Lott said the bill "used to be Lott-Lautenberg. Now, it's Lautenberg-Lott. We never miss a step... There are some things in Washington that are truly bipartisan, including transportation... There are limits to how many lanes we can build, how many planes we can fly."

Lautenberg said, "We have a chance to get Amtrak back on track... The future of Amtrak is looking bright... Congress is ready to pass a bill to revitalize Amtrak... I chair the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine. This bill is my top priority."

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon said, "We applaud the continued, strong, bipartisan work of Senators Lautenberg and Lott to get this reauthorization passed. This lays the foundation for meaningful federal support for state corridor development. It also should encourage the appropriations committees to focus on funding and not on micromanaging legislative provisions."

AORTA's Legislative Activity

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layover tracks, and rolling stock. Washington DOT (WSDOT) co-owns the Cascades Talgo train sets with Amtrak. ODOT Rail Division has so far not addressed the fact that WSDOT will reclaim one of the two train sets operating in Oregon when they add the fifth round trip between Portland, Seattle and beyond in the next 2-3 years. Oregon does not own any passenger rail equipment that could fill this impending gap and it takes about 2 years lead-time for ordering new equipment. The time to address this issue is now during this session.

Strategic Planner Fred Nussbaum chairs AORTA's Legislative Action Committee and is AORTA's main point man in Salem.

Join AORTA today! as low as \$12/year

Help AORTA continue to improve public transportation and rail services throughout Oregon. See page 2 for membership and contact information.

AORTA Timetable

March 17 ... NARP Region 8 Meeting, Tacoma, WA.
See story on p. 4.