



AORTA Bulletin

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Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

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Since 1976

ConnectOregon fails passenger rail, good for freight

by Jon Nuxoll and Fred Nussbaum

The 2005 Oregon Legislature set aside \$100 million (M) in lottery-backed bonds for "ConnectOregon," a program to fund non-highway capital projects -- air, marine, rail, transit -- as proposed by Gov. Kulongoski. However, in the final recommendations, adopted on June 29th by the Oregon Transportation Commission, only \$125,000 of that will benefit Amtrak passengers in the form of a new depot and "Welcome Center" at Chemult. The only other funding for passenger rail was \$533,000 for replacement of tourist rail equipment on the Eagle Cap Excursion train.

AORTA had hopes that ConnectOregon would remove a bottleneck near Eugene, by adding a second track north of the depot and a siding at the station. This \$5.6 M improvement has been a high priority for increasing the level and reliability of passenger service in the Valley and had been funded by the 2003 Legislature. (Other rail projects ate up most of that money). Also of interest was a \$4.6 M project to add Centralized Traffic Control between Salem and Albany on the Union Pacific mainline, which would ease congestion. UP has cited more track capacity as a prerequisite for added Portland-Eugene Cascades service on its tracks and has stated clearly that both projects are key.

The projects had rated high in the Rail Advisory Committee, the Freight Advisory Committee and the Region 2 committee recommendations for ConnectOregon projects of statewide significance. However, the final Consensus Committee pared the statewide allocation down to \$1.6 M and dropped these projects.

Amtrak is regularly delayed north of Eugene when freights park on the single-track mainline for mandatory safety checks or wait to enter yards. AORTA strategic planner Fred Nussbaum testified for AORTA at a June 29 ConnectOregon hearing in Boardman before the OTC. Nussbaum expressed disappointment that this top-priority passenger rail project was not included and asked the OTC to make it the first waiting list project. Jonathan Hutchison, Amtrak western governmental affairs representative and former Oregon Passenger Rail Coordinator, also testified in support of the Eugene project. OTC Chairman Foster did not address the waiting list proposal, but promised that the OTC would aggressively seek funding for the project.

Freight rail improvements will receive over \$52 M, plus a share of \$13 M for intermodal rail projects. Nearly \$14 M was also approved for transit projects, including \$5.4 M for bus rapid-transit in Springfield, \$4.0 M for a transit operation center in Bend, \$2.1 M to expand the Portland Streetcar, \$0.8 M for a Sandy transit operations center, and \$0.6 M for a Tillamook transit/visitor center.

The only ConnectOregon proposal opposed at the Boardman hearing was UP's request for \$7.5 M to expand its Hinkle yards in Umatilla County. The Oregon Wheat Growers' League asked the OTC to help short line railroads rather than the UP because of frustration with poor UP service in Oregon, coupled with skepticism that the project would improve rail service within the state, as ConnectOregon legislation intends.

Over \$200 M in requests competed for the ConnectOregon funds, leading several speakers to hope that the 2007 Legislature will enact a "ConnectOregon II."

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THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

On-time performance a policy issue

By Bob Krebs

"Rail Freight Congestion: Growing Problem" reads the headline on the May 2006 issue of the NARP News. Increased rail freight traffic is the leading contributor to the declining on time performance (OTP) of passenger trains. Amtrak's Coast Starlight and Sunset Limited trains are notorious for being many hours and sometimes days late in reaching their terminals.

Some blame for train tardiness goes to Amtrak equipment failures and trains delayed by careless operating activities. Union Pacific dispatchers receive much criticism for mishandling of passenger trains. It is difficult to sympathize

with the UP dispatchers while sitting on a siding for hours as a platoon of freights go past. We can discuss these issues and still not really address the problem. Government policy (or lack of one) and public misconceptions about rail transportation are the real contributors to the situation. All modes except intercity rail operate using infrastructure financed by government. Even air traffic controllers, the "dispatchers" for air service, are paid from government funds.

Track, on the other hand, was constructed and is maintained by private finances. The UP line through the Willamette Valley was built in 1869-70. Although the track has been upgraded for higher speeds and heavier freight cars, it follows the same alignment laid out in the 1870s. There is a pressing need for infrastructure improvements, but UP has no plans to modernize this route in the foreseeable future without government investment.

The 2003 "Connect Oregon" Act (CO) funds transportation projects for non-highway modes. It was designed to address significant projects in the rail, transit, air and water transportation fields. Unfortunately, passenger rail received no significant funding. Last minute political pressure shifted money from the Eugene lay over and double track to LTD's Springfield Busway.

Loss of this priority project means passenger trains will continue to experience delays in the Eugene area. This has a negative effect on ridership and reduces the economic value of the service. The infrastructure and service implementation plan for Willamette Valley passenger rail service is almost a decade behind schedule. No wonder the system is not meeting goals set for this time period.

The Eugene project is just a small example of the cavalier attitude of transportation decision makers toward rail as the "poor stepchild" of the other modes. The 2007 Oregon Legislature must be encouraged to fund two Willamette Valley trains and the Thruway Bus network as well as revisit CO or some other process to assure that there will be infrastructure money for intercity passenger rail. State investment is essential to address the OTP problems that currently plague the rail corridor.

Amtrak Cascades expands service

On July 1, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) launched an additional round trip between Portland and Seattle, bringing the service level to four trains per day over the central portion of the Cascades corridor. To accommodate the additional round trip, some Amtrak Cascades schedules have changed. Train 513 originates earlier in Bellingham, and travels through Seattle to Portland. Train 516 now originates in Portland, and travels through Seattle to Bellingham. Passengers traveling between some communities north and south of Seattle, such as from Bellingham to Portland, will have a shorter layover at Seattle's King Street Station. However, passengers traveling from north of Seattle to south of Portland, such as Everett to Eugene, will have a longer layover than before the change.

To introduce the new service, inaugural celebrations were held on July 1 along the route in Bellingham, Seattle, Centralia, and Portland. Special activities were also held onboard the inaugural trains 513 and 516.

The new Seattle-Portland round trip is funded entirely by WSDOT, with no funding from the State of Oregon. Since service began in 1994, Amtrak Cascades has experienced 11 consecutive years of record ridership.

Albany station re-dedicated

Local dignitaries joined passenger rail supporters and the traveling public in dedicating the newly-refurbished Albany train station on April 18, 2006. Among those on hand were Albany Mayor Chuck McLaran, and Congressman Peter DeFazio whose efforts were instrumental in making the project possible. City of Albany Project manager Guy Mayes called it a truly multi-modal facility, with one facility offering intercity and local transit service. The Albany station is served by Amtrak, Albany Transit System, the Linn-Benton Loop, which connects the Albany and Corvallis transit networks, and the Valley Retriever, an intercity service which connects Newport and intermediate communities to Portland, Salem, and Bend.

Interim head of Public Transit Division appointed

On July 17, ODOT Director Matthew Garrett announced that, effective immediately, Troy Costales will be serving as interim Public Transit Division Administrator, replacing Martin Loring. Costales has been serving as Administrator of ODOT's Safety Division.

In an e-mail, Garrett stated that "My goal for this change is to ensure that ODOT's Public Transit Division continues to offer very successful community transit programs, and also that the division sets a course to meet the significant challenges ahead for providing public transportation and mobility alternatives."

Shortlines and Quotes...

- The next time you ride Amtrak Cascades, look around you... If it weren't for the train, 61% of your fellow riders would be driving, adding to the congestion on our highways and freeways.
- Since the August 2005 upgrades to the Empire Builder service, travel agent bookings are up 23% for the first quarter of 2006. Upgrade the service, and it becomes more marketable.
- More than 2 out of 5 adults in the Portland metro area use TriMet at least twice a month.
- In the City of Vancouver, B.C., over the last 20 years, scarcely 20 miles of new roadway was built. There are no freeways in the city. Instead, they chose to build parks, residential real estate developments and bike/pedestrian facilities. With 30 years of policy to constrain the car and give priority to pedestrians, cyclists and transit users, Vancouver is rated one of the most livable cities in the world.

Train of Thought Editorials

by Fred Nussbaum, AORTA Strategic Planner

Ballot Measures 41 and 48 bad for Rail, Transit, Public Services

The election is only weeks away and we hope AORTA members are getting the facts about two irresponsible measures, which have qualified for the November 7 ballot: Measures 41 and 48, both of which affect state government spending immediately.

Measure 41 pretends to fix an alleged state income tax problem, but is really about cutting the budgets of services that depend on the state General Fund. Total cuts in the General Fund are estimated to be \$151 million for the current fiscal year (ending June 30) and almost \$800 million in the 2007-2009 biennium. AORTA members should be aware that the \$9 million Passenger Rail Program is supported by the General Fund.

Measure 48 (also known as TABOR) is a scheme imported from Colorado, heavily backed by out-of-state interests. It limits the growth in state spending based on a simplistic formula, which only looks at population increases and inflation. Readers should be aware that Colorado's version recently was suspended by their Legislature and voters, because the state has fallen so far behind other states in supporting transportation, education and public health services, that it people and businesses are leaving the state. This measure also would go into effect immediately, having direct financial impact for the remainder of the current fiscal year that ends June 30. For AORTA, this measure does not only threaten current and future operating support for the Passenger Rail Program and other public transportation services, it would also affect the hard-won funds authorized for rail infrastructure improvements under the ConnectOregon program (see related article on p. 1). The spending limitations also affect the bond sales and proceeds that fund ConnectOregon, so that the program is subject

to the recent bond sales moratorium imposed by the State Treasurer. Only \$25 million of the \$100 million in bonds authorized for ConnectOregon were sold before the moratorium went into effect and this money was earmarked for projects being undertaken by public agencies. All the approved projects being initiated by private entities, such as the Portland & Western railroad improvements which would help Beaverton - Wilsonville interurban ("commuter") rail project, are thus on hold.

AORTA's Board urges all members to not only oppose these two damaging measures, but also to make sure they get the word out to friends, co-workers and neighbors about the devastation the measures will cause.

Further information is available from Defend Oregon Coalition at www.defendoregon.org or 503-231-3672 (Portland). Note: AORTA has not officially endorsed or joined this coalition and only provides their contact information as a resource.

ConnectOregon II needed in 2007, better process required

While the ConnectOregon program was a success for freight rail, transit, aeronautics and marine projects, passenger rail fared poorly, garnering only 0.6% of the \$100 million appropriated by the Legislature. Non-highway interests agree that the basic concept of ConnectOregon is sound and a second installment should be sought from the 2007 Legislature. Requests were about double the budget available. Most of the projects that did not make it had merit. Certainly, lack of funds had a major role.

However, AORTA is not alone in feeling that the Eugene passing track and Salem-to-Albany CTC projects, among others that were dropped, had higher merit than several other projects that were funded (See related article on p. 1).

AORTA and several others involved believe the ConnectOregon project selection process can be

significantly improved; that regional concerns, rather than assessment of statewide significance, governed the final selections. Critics (AORTA included) decided not to challenge the process in the interest of getting projects implemented in time to show the Legislature the effectiveness of ConnectOregon and build momentum for ConnectOregon II.

The legislation behind ConnectOregon required a balance between projects of mainly regional benefit and those with statewide impacts. Each of the five ODOT regions were to get a minimum of 15% of the funds, leaving up to 25% for statewide endeavors. Projects competing for ConnectOregon funds were first reviewed and ranked by the relevant modal advisory committees, then the regional advisory committee(s) wherein the project was located and finally a Consensus Committee, which was supposed to reconcile any differences and make final recommendations to the Oregon Transportation Commission.

The Rail Advisory Committee, the Freight Advisory Committee and even the ODOT Region 2 group ranked the Eugene and CTC projects high on their lists of projects of statewide significance. However, the Consensus Committee, which was dominated by regional interests, decided on taking a "peanut butter" approach, spreading available funds geographically, with little regard to statewide concerns. It was this committee's list that went to the OTC and was approved. While AORTA has not taken a formal position on individual projects other than the Eugene and Salem-Albany CTC, I believe that the approved Portland streetcar extension project (\$800,000) and the Bend transit operation center (\$2.1 million) are examples of two projects that had other funding sources available. The streetcar extension into South Riverfront will serve an area that will see a vast rise in property values and could be funded by development fees or tax increments. Bend is a city that finally decided, after five decades without, to invest in public transit, despite decades of phenomenal economic growth. While Bend's belated embrace of transit is extremely laud-

able, it has the economic base to fund the operations center on its own.

Most of the passenger rail related projects are of statewide significance and have no other source of local funding. AORTA should work with allied interests to make sure that ConnectOregon II gives priority to projects demonstrating statewide benefits over mainly local ones. Any regional allocations (probably politically inevitable) should be based on population (which the ODOT Regions are not) and the distribution percentages should be maximums, not minimums. This would guarantee a minimum allocation to statewide projects instead of the other way around. If the Consensus Committee approach is used again, that committee should be balanced between modal, statewide and regional representatives to reflect a true consensus.

ODOT Rail Asleep at the Switch

Where was the ODOT Rail Division when recent scheduling changes were made to add the fifth train between Portland and Seattle (see Amtrak Cascades Expands Service, p. 3). The new schedule makes some connections worse for those traveling between Willamette Valley stations and communities north of Seattle. And Salem, Albany and Eugene passengers derive no benefit from the added midday train service, because no adjustments were made in the Willamette Valley Thruway bus schedules to connect with those trains. WSDOT and Amtrak are usually good at including ODOT. We suspect that this oversight is just one of the many details that are being missed, due to ODOT Rail Division Administrator Kelly Taylor's not refilling the Passenger Rail Coordinator position vacated by Jonathan Hutchison early this year.

One of the duties of the Passenger Rail Coordinator was to oversee the scheduling and operations of connecting Thruway buses. Since Ms. Taylor became Administrator, both of the passenger related positions in her division have been eliminated. One has to wonder how the Passenger Rail Program can survive without any planning and administrative support.

Mineta resigns; NARP's Chilson critiques USDOT white paper

Washington, DC — On June 23, the Bush Administration announced Transportation Secretary Mineta's resignation, effective July 7. Separately, United States Department of Transportation General Counsel Jeffrey Rosen, who has represented Mineta on the Amtrak Board, leaves DOT July 3, to join the Office of Management and Budget.

NARP President George Chilson wrote to U.S. Transportation Sec. Norman Mineta on June 13, asking why the Department's recently released white paper on reducing transportation congestion did not cite either freight or passenger rail as possible solutions. The letter, which was sent to reporters on the 13th, is available on NARP's website

In the letter, Chilson wrote, "While you are right to target congestion as a serious and growing national problem, we are dumbfounded that you failed even to mention rail in National Strategy to Reduce Congestion on America's Transportation Network...Neglect of rail—both by federal policy and the state policies that it encourages—is the primary reason that our nation continues to spend enormous amounts on transportation infrastructure without satisfactory results..."

Chilson's letter opened an issue that has troubled many transportation experts: the continuing reluctance of the federal government to include railroad infrastructure development in its transportation plans or budgets. Although rail is the most economically efficient form of transportation to operate and build, and the nation's key rail rights-of-way hold much undeveloped capacity, too few of the nation's travelers and too little of its freight are using rail because, without federal infrastructure assistance, private capital cannot afford the heavy bill for creation of the needed rail capacity.

Highways, airports, the FAA's Air Traffic Control System, and the Inland Waterway System are publicly owned and funded, but the private rail-

roads have been considered off-limits to federal policy except for safety regulation.

Chilson said NARP believes the time has come for that policy to change. "Private ownership of the nation's rail infrastructure does not render it less valuable to the American people, place it beyond the purview of federal transportation policy or make it ineligible for public funding," he wrote to Mineta.

Chilson cited the successful rail program in Mineta's home state of California, where state investments in track, signals, bridges, stations and passenger rolling stock have led to a popular and fast-growing network of 60 daily passenger trains that carry more than 4 million passengers a year on a three-route, 800-mile network. Besides making passenger trains useful and appealing, state funding for double-tracking, signaling and grade-separation projects also has benefited freight operations.

"California has proven that a dollar spent developing a railroad will buy us four or five times as much freight- and passenger-hauling capacity as a dollar spent on airports or highways," Chilson said.

"California also has proven that government can use its funds to develop a railroad's property without interfering with the shareholder's rights to use their property for profitable freight hauling," he said. "Government development of railroad infrastructure clearly is a win/win/win situation, and there's no reason why a federal government that claims to be concerned about air and highway congestion should not adopt it."

Chilson's letter to Mineta noted a "growing consensus" for rail development. He cited two reports issued in 2003 by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). The reports, Intercity Passenger Rail Transportation and Freight-Rail Bottom Line Report, said failure to develop rail capacity would confront even the best-developed highway system with enough excess

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Bus Rapid-Transit coming to Eugene-Springfield

by Jon Nuxoll

Bus Rapid-Transit or BRT – think of it as light rail on rubber tires – should be up and running in Oregon by the end of the year. December 17 is the start-up date for Lane Transit District's bus rapid-transit line between Eugene and Springfield. The four-mile corridor will consist of dedicated bus lanes along nearly two-thirds of the route, which LTD projects will cut transit travel time to 16 minutes from the 22 minutes now needed for a conventional bus to make the same trip. LTD calls for at least four buses to provide service at ten-minute intervals, with high-level platforms, wide doors, limited stops and – at least for the first two years – fareless service, according to published reports.

Fareless service is proposed on the assumption that most projected riders already use passes, either through the University of Oregon or nearby Sacred Heart Medical Center. LTD expects delivery this fall of six articulated, hybrid-electric propulsion New Flyer buses under construction in Canada.

The EmX route will serve the northern edge of the UO campus along Eugene's Franklin Boulevard, running in a single dedicated lane with turnouts in the median in the center of the street. Eight new stations were reportedly finished ahead of schedule last summer. Four new traffic lights have been added along the route, and stations where there is a single lane will be signaled for safety.

A second EmX line from downtown Springfield to the Gateway area in northwest Springfield is projected to open in 2009 or 2010, thanks in part to state ConnectOregon funding (see story p. 1). The line would serve the new northwest Springfield RiverBend Hospital, now under construction to replace the downtown Eugene Sacred Heart Medical Center. LTD projects an EmX route from downtown Springfield, north via Pioneer Parkway to Harlow Road, then forming a loop to serve the new hospital and returning via Gateway Mall. The Pioneer Parkway-River-

Bend line would connect with the Springfield-UO-Eugene EmX line projected to open later this year.

LTD and the City of Springfield were awarded \$5.4 million through ConnectOregon. LTD says further federal funding is still needed to complete the project. Pioneer Parkway-RiverBend line construction is projected to begin in 2008.

Bend transit takes off

by Jim Long

After years of hard work by Central Oregon transit supporters, a ribbon-cutting ceremony held on September 26 officially inaugurated the first fixed-route transit service serving Bend, Oregon. Previously, Bend had been the largest metropolitan area without public transit service.

Credit is due in no small measure to the efforts of "Commute Options for Central Oregon" (www.commuteoptions.org), and their ability to achieve a 62% increase for 2006 in the number of local businesses and other employers who expressed support for increased commuting alternatives for the Bend area. This critical mass of support helped bring about \$4 million in recent funding from the "ConnectOregon" legislation (story p. 1, editorial p. 4). Transit information is available at:

www.bend.or.us/bend_area_transit

AORTA Annual Meeting slated

by Dan McFarling

The AORTA Annual meeting will be Saturday, December 2 at St Michael the Archangel Catholic Church, 424 SW Mill Street in Portland. Informal coffee "hour" and registration at 11:30 am, luncheon will begin at noon.

The church is conveniently located near the Portland Streetcar line.

Two speakers are scheduled. John Schumann of LTK Engineering will present "Passenger Trains on Freight Rails: Problems and Potential." Claudia Howells, former Oregon Rail Division Administrator, will offer her perspective on the prospects of passenger rail.

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traffic to throw key segments into permanent gridlock. The freight report cited a \$53 billion gap between investment needed to maintain rail's existing market share and what the railroads are likely to invest without government help.

Chilson also noted that Joseph Boardman, who chaired AASHTO's Standing Committee on Rail Transportation when the reports were issued, is now Federal Railroad Administrator.

"The availability of so much experience and judgment at USDOT makes it all the more puzzling and disappointing that the Department has failed to acknowledge rail development as a key element in any strategy intended to solve the nation's congestion problems," Chilson said. "At NARP we are looking forward to answers and seeking a fruitful dialogue."

British conservatives concede separating track and operations increased rail costs

According to a July 17 British Broadcasting Company news report, "The Conservatives have admitted their decision to divide the track and train components of the rail network in 1996 was a mistake which increased costs" and ticket prices.

The separation of track ownership from operations was said to also be making it more difficult to plan for the future. The news agency reported that transport secretary Chris Grayling projects a 40% increase in ridership over the next seven years, but expressed concern that the rail network is not preparing to meet increasing demands.

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

CalTrans provides options for Southern Oregon

The California Department of Transportation has extended Amtrak California feeder bus service from Sacramento to serve the Medford-Ashland area of Southern Oregon. The new service will allow Southern Oregon residents to make connections in Sacramento to San Joaquin trains to Bakersfield, and Capitol Corridor trains to Oakland and San Jose. Connections to Los Angeles, San Diego, and other points in Southern California can be made in Bakersfield.

The southbound schedule for the new intercity motorcoach service is: Medford 8:10 am; Ashland 8:35 am; Yreka 9:40 am; Weed 10:20 am; Mt. Shasta 10:35 am; Dunsmuir 10:50 am, arriving Sacramento 3:55 pm for a 4:25 pm train 704 departure. Northbound train 701 arrives Sacramento at 12:30 pm, the new service departs at 1:00 pm, arriving: Dunsmuir 5:40 pm; Mt. Shasta 6:00 pm; Weed 6:15 pm; Yreka 6:55 pm; Ashland 7:45 pm; and Medford 8:05 pm.

Although the southbound service is designed to connect at Sacramento with San Joaquin train 704 to Bakersfield, it also facilitates connections to Capitol Corridor train 545 to Oakland and 547/747 to San Jose. The northbound schedule offers a fifteen-minute connection window with train 528 from Oakland to Sacramento. Sacramento also offers motorcoach connections at 4:00 pm and 9:05 pm for Reno, via Roseville and Truckee.

Passengers may make reservations and purchase a ticket for the train and Thruway Motorcoach from their local travel agent, by calling Amtrak at 1-800-USA-RAIL, or by visiting Amtrak.com.

AORTA Timetable

October 28 ... AORTA Board of Directors meeting, Eugene*

December 2 ... AORTA Annual Membership Meeting, 11:30 AM, 424 SW Mill Street in Portland

* Phone 541-684-8883 or 503-642-4077 to confirm details.