



AORTA Bulletin

A publication of the
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

Issue 120

September 1999

Since 1976

Oregon Legislature funds HSR project

Salem- The Oregon Legislature provided \$10 million to fund the state's high-speed rail and bus project for 1999-2000. "This is \$4 million less than the Governor Kitzhaber requested," stated **AORTA** President Aloha Wyse. "But it will help to keep Oregon moving in the right direction, albeit very slowly." Kitzhaber signed the bill September 2.

The Oregon Department of Transportation expects to purchase additional rail equipment within the next year to increase rail service between Portland and Eugene. According to ODOT's Bob Krebs, "ODOT Rail Division is moving forward with implementation of the proposed rail corridor service expansion program. We are engaged in the preliminary activities needed to take us to service start up on July 1, 2000 or sooner."

Krebs says there has been some "misinformation about the type of equipment that will be used for the second Eugene-Portland train. The four **Amtrak Cascades** Talgos will be fully committed by the time we start the new Oregon service." This means Oregon must find other equipment, says Krebs. "An eastern reporter for the Wall Street Journal decided to use the term 'Metroliner' instead of 'used equipment.'" According to Krebs, this erroneous information has been repeated in other publications.

"There are eight or more potential suppliers of rolling stock for the new train service. We feel that "push-pull" equipment will be the most economical to use in providing the service. We are therefore looking at diesel multiple unit (DMU) trains as possible first choice. ODOT is seeking a supplier that can provide a new FRA acceptable train on a lease/purchase contract. Failing to achieve this goal, used equipment will be used for the interim period."

The funding mechanism calls for money to be borrowed from the State Department of

Veterans Affairs. This source of funding was chosen because the fund has a "very good cash balance," stated a legislative financial analyst.

Krebs also reported that "WS-DOT will start a Bellingham-Seattle-Bellingham train on September 2nd. The train will depart Bellingham at 10:40 am and arrive in Seattle at 12:45 pm to connect with Train #753 to Portland. The northbound offers a connection from Train #752 departing Seattle at 5:30 pm to arrive Bellingham at 8:00 pm. The new train will make intermediate stops at Mt. Vernon/Burlington, Everett and Edmonds. Any comments on this new service should be directed to WS-DOT and not ODOT."

Bellingham is 22 miles south of the Canada-
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GET OREGON ON BOARD!



Amtrak  CASCADIES

Connecting Oregon . . . Connecting the Northwest

Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

PO Box 2772, Portland, Oregon 97208-2772

A nonprofit citizen advocate group working to educate the public about the need for safe, fiscally responsible, environmentally sound transportation. Incorporated as the Oregon Association of Railway Passengers (OreARP).

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House Subcommittee and Amtrak Reform Council meet in Seattle

The House Subcommittee on Ground Transportation of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing on morning of August 31 in Seattle, WA. The House Subcommittee heard testimony on transportation issues in the Northwest region, including inter-city passenger rail service, border crossing concerns, and water channel deepening. Gilbert E. Carmichael, Chair of the Amtrak Reform Council, was among those who testified. Only three members of the Subcommittee, Chair Thomas E. Petri (R-WI), Rep Peter DeFazio (D-OR) and Rep Jack Metcalf (R-WA) were present.

The Amtrak Reform Council held a public meeting on the afternoon of the same day. The Council discussed the FY2001 Budget Request, reviewed recent OIG and GAO financial reports on Amtrak, and received a briefing on Amtrak's Mail and Express Business Plan. Members attending included Chair Gilbert Carmichael, Vice Chair Paul M. Weyrich, Clarence V. Monin, Bruce Chapman, Wendell Cox and S. Lee Kling.

Ken Uznanski (WashDOT Rail Office Manager), Ed Immel (ODOT Rail Division), and Lloyd Flem were invited guest speakers. Much praise was voiced about the partnership between Burlington Northern-Santa Fe, Amtrak West, cities along the corridor and the Washington Legislature. Grace Crunnican, Administrator of the ODOT acknowledged Oregon is not yet a full-partner, but the state is participating.

Uznanski expressed concern that it appears Amtrak charges to the states are increasing while the program continues to be more successful. Council members agreed that increased success should result in reduced charges. A desire to reconvene regular meetings between Amtrak Corporate and the states was voiced.

Support to continue Amtrak's three regions and not return to a centralized structure was also expressed.

Lloyd Flem testified there is a need to "level the playing field! The small market

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dian border, 60 miles from Vancouver, B.C.

"**New Thruway Bus service** operated by Pacific Trails will be offered between Portland and Roseburg starting September 1st. Buses will depart Union Station daily at 7:45 am Arriving Salem 9:00 am, Albany 10:05 am, Eugene 11:00 a.m. and Roseburg 12:40 pm. The return departs Roseburg at 1:55 pm, Eugene 3:35 pm, Albany 4:40 pm, Salem 5:35 pm arriving Portland 7:00 pm. These buses also stop at Tualatin, Wilsonville, Woodburn and Cottage Grove. This new service is a private business endeavor receiving no state funds. It will supplement the existing Eugene-Portland Thruway Motorcoach service operated by Oregon Coachways.

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“The Forgotten Bridge” on the Map

Ken Skach-Mills

After being ignored for decades by the Metro region, “the Forgotten Bridge” (the existing railroad bridge connecting Lake Oswego to Milwaukie) is gaining the attention of Metro’s public officials and the region’s public.

Since Metro’s “South Willamette River Study” failed to find a suitable location for a new highway bridge across the Willamette River in Clackamas County (June, 1999 Bulletin), two public groups have included this rail bridge in their continuing transportation studies. At their June meeting, the region’s Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation funded the \$1.5 million “South Corridor Transportation Alternatives Study,” which will include this rail bridge in its study of transportation modes other than light rail in the “South Corridor.”

Two months later, the Metro Council voted to include this rail bridge in a study of the Region’s needs for crossing the “South Willamette.” AORTA board members attending the August 5, Metro Council meeting report that the rail bridge idea was strongly supported by Council members Bill Atherton (district 2) and Dave Bragdon (district 7). The strongest opposition was from Council member Jon Kvistad (district 3), who seemed to be concerned only about highway transportation. In fact, Kvistad stated that this rail bridge crossing provides “no increase in capacity.” He clearly fails to see that the goal is to move people across the river, not cars.

It is significant that the rail bridge is no longer being ignored. AORTA has been working hard toward this goal for some time. AORTA Board members have been testifying whenever possible at public meetings, pointing out the benefits of this existing rail bridge. AORTA also staffed a booth at the April 24, 1999, “Grand Re-Opening” of Portland’s Hawthorne Bridge, to raise public awareness of “the Forgotten Bridge,” where hundreds of interested citizens learned about “the Forgotten Bridge” and the idea of a cost-effective Rail Shuttle between the Lake Oswego and Milwaukie Transit Centers. Many citizens liked the idea, and many promised to call

officials at Tri-Met, Metro, Milwaukie, Lake Oswego, and Clackamas County. Their calls (and yours) seem to be making a difference. To continue showing support for this rail bridge crossing, you may call:

Fred Hansen, Tri-Met Gen Mgr (503) 238-4831
Mike Burton, Metro Exec Dir (503) 797-1502
Milwaukie Mayor’s Office (503) 786-7555
Lake Oswego Mayor’s Office (503) 635-0213
Clackamas Co Commissioners (503) 655-8581

Seattle meeting. continued from Pg 2

share for intercity rail in North America compared to Europe and Japan is overwhelmingly a result of 80 years of public policy at all government levels which have supported and subsidized the highway and air modes, while taxing and regulating rail to near extinction. While this Council is properly charged with seeking reform and improvement in Amtrak, rail advocates wish equally-rigorous analyses were done concerning the costs and subsidies ... to rubber-tire, air, and inland waterway transportation modes ... Intermodal policy “fairness” should at least be considered.”

On Sept 1, members of the Subcommittee and Council rode the new *Amtrak Cascades*, featuring Talgo trainsets built in Washington State, on a trip to Vancouver, B.C. According to Flem, the trip was excellent and enjoyed by all. The Northwest Corridor is being viewed as a model for others to copy.

The British Columbia Provincial Government provided a nice luncheon, and said good words. But many, including residents of the province, expressed concern about B.C.’s lack of financial support.

On Sept 2, Amtrak and WashDOT initiated another train between Seattle and Bellingham, WA (This new service is in addition to the Seattle - Vancouver, B.C. train). WashARP’s Chuck Mott was the honorary “first” passenger. Amtrak and WashDOT are working on connecting bus to Vancouver, B.C. Another possibility is extending the train in to Westminster where it would connect with the SkyTrain.

Coastal Tidings**Trolley, SETD on track**

Astoria- The Astoria Trolley grossed over \$7,000 in its first two and one-half months operation, according to Jim Santee, Sunset Empire Transportation District (SETD) Chair. Much of the success can be attributed to the City of Astoria and their volunteer group.

Astoria's intermodal center project continues to make progress, according to Santee. "Both the US Senate and House passed the appropriation, and final details are being worked out in conference committee ... The design will incorporate a multiuse public square."

"August 19th, a meeting was held in Astoria, with representatives of ODOT Public Transit, and transportation officials from Columbia, Clatsop, Tillamook, and Lincoln counties. The effort was to combine forces and pool resources. The meeting was an unqualified success thanks to the assistance of the ODOT's Public Transit Division and Cindy Howe, SETD's CEO.

"On August 20th, a 'board member' training was conducted by Andrew Jordan. This group included the SETD Commissioners, the Council of Seniors from Columbia County, and transportation managers from Columbia and Lincoln counties.

"We are 'ramping' up for the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial ... Various sources indicate we might have in excess of 800,000 visitors. Keep in mind Clatsop County has a population of about 32,000. *[Lewis & Clark arrived at the mouth of the Columbia River November 19, 1805, and built their winter stockade, Fort Clatsop, nearby.]*

"The Sunset Empire Transportation District has submitted a grant request for a transportation growth management plan. We expect to hear more on this shortly.

"Cindy Howe, the SET CEO meet with partners, the City of Astoria, ODOT and the National Parks Service to firm up details on a public discretionary grant to provide a shuttling system for Ft. Clatsop National Memorial Park during the Lewis and Clark bicentennial years." Santee is optimistic about the grant.

[Special thanks to AORTA member Jim Santee for this report.]

Trolley, truck collide in Astoria

Astoria- On June 15, Astoria's "new Waterfront Trolley" had a close encounter of the truck kind. City Councilor Don Morden was at the controls when a semitrailer truck started to back across the railway just as the "trolley" approached. Although he rang the bell and applied the emergency brake, there was a collision. Damage was limited to the diesel generator car and the truck trailer. The truck driver claimed to have not heard the car's bell. None of the passengers (approximately 15) were injured. According to **The Daily Astorian**, the grade crossing was not marked.

Willamette Valley Whistles**SMART celebrates 10 yrs**

Wilsonville- South Metro Area Rapid Transit (SMART) will be celebrating ten years of service in conjunction with National Try Transit Week, Sept 13-17. Riders and visitors will receive special treats, prize drawings, and receive souvenirs throughout the week. On Thursday, Sept 16, a SMART birthday party will be held at Town Center Park, from 11 am until 2:30 pm. Town Center Park is the site of a beautiful new bus shelter.

On Friday at noon there will be a VIP reception at the Clackamas Regional Tourism Center to recognize local businesses which support the bus service.

For more complete information, visit SMART's website at www.ridesmart.com or call (503) 682-7790.

East Oregon Extras

The Oregon Department of Transportation will be holding meetings in Ontario (Sept 9), Burns (Sept 9) and Bend (Sept 10) to discuss and receive input on new Thruway bus service which will connect Eastern and Central Oregon with the rail corridor. The new service is expected to operating by July 1, 2000. For more information, see article on page 8.

Salem Amtrak station restoration work nears completion

Salem- Restoration of the historic railway passenger station in Salem is nearing completion. Remaining tasks include electrical work and cleanup. Work on repaving the passenger platforms is expected to begin about Sept 10. The platform will be raised to make it easier for passengers boarding and departing the *Amtrak Cascades* and *Coast Starlight*.

Plans call for the south half of the platform to be repaved first. After work is finished on the south end, the Amtrak ticket counter, waiting room and offices will be reopened in the remodeled station. That should occur in late September or early October. A temporary building now serves that function.

Union Pacific is replacing older ties between the bridge over Sheldon's Ditch (south of station) and the grade crossing (north of the station) during the same period.

Work on the north end of the platform will begin after the station is reoccupied. Work on the platform may make it necessary for some trains to stop twice in order to load and unload passengers, according to Amtrak Ticket Clerk Randy Johnson.



USPS claims pollution reduction

The September 1999 issue of *Memo to Mailers*, published by the United States Postal Service, claimed "the direct mail industry can be credited with reductions of 66,000 tons of air pollutants and 97 million gallons of gasoline..."

The article goes on to give credit to an annual savings of 38 lives, 3,159 fewer injuries, and \$47 million in property damage. The savings are allegedly the result of reduced automobile traffic by allowing people to "shop at home."

That is significant progress. But, according to *AORTA* Director Ken McFarling, the US Postal Service could realize significantly more savings by removing thousands of heavy, long-distance trucks from the highway system and shipping more mail by Amtrak.

SkyTrain, commuter rail expand

Vancouver, B.C.- TransLink, the regional transit authority in Vancouver, B.C., is planning an extension of the SkyTrain to Coquitlam Town Centre. The \$1.9 billion project awaits final approval from the provincial government.

In related news, TransLink announced it will spend \$15 million to buy an additional six new bi-level commuter rail cars for the West Coast Express. The train is operating at or above seated capacity 33% of the time. The new cars will be delivered in late 2000 and early 2001. West Coast Express already has three new bi-level cars on order.

In a recent issue of *The Oregon Motorist* AAA Oregon/Idaho President and CEO Roger L. Graybeal stated "Oregonians have long held that all highway users should pay their fair share of the cost for Oregon's roads and bridges." Wouldn't it be nice if AAA Oregon/Idaho and trucking interests both actually worked for that principle?!

"Train Time" in the Oregon Quarterly

Ken Skach-Mills

Susan Rich has "fallen in love with trains." The Eugene writer and poet writes about this love in the Summer, 1999, issue of *The Oregon Quarterly* magazine, published by the University of Oregon. In "Train Time," Ms. Rich embellishes the story of her pleasant *Amtrak Cascades* trip from Eugene to Seattle with lots of rail lore and history. Her article is positive, interesting, and well-written.

Ms. Rich also weaves into her story pertinent transportation details such as the impressive ridership gains since 1993 in the Pacific Northwest corridor, the Talgo tilt technology and shortened running times, and the energy-efficient environmentally appropriate aspects of today's trains. She even mentions *AORTA*, and quotes *AORTA*'s Ken Skach-Mills (whom she incorrectly identifies as *AORTA*'s president) as saying,

"Highways won't be able to meet our needs indefinitely. The need for trains will only increase in the future."

Susan Rich succeeds in casting train travel, and particularly the *Amtrak Cascades* service, as a quality experience, a good value, and a relevant part of modern life in the Pacific Northwest. She packs her story with historical information, yet she lives her trip vividly in the present moment. She also keeps her vision open to the future, saying, "... trains are more than a page torn from history or folklore. Though they still have delays and occasional accidents, they have outlasted the stagecoach, made canal transport extinct, and may someday outlive the automobile as we know it."

Thank you, Susan Rich, for riding the train. And thank you for sharing your love with others. *The Oregon Quarterly* is published four times per year and distributed free to alumni of the University of Oregon.

Shortlines and Quotes . . .

- **"Dollars and Sense: The Economic Case for Public Transportation in America,** gathers a wide range of information on the benefits of transit as an essential part of a balanced national transportation system. The report demonstrates that the benefits of public transit investments have often been understated or unrecognized both for large metropolitan areas and rural communities. The report finds that American taxpayers receive some \$62 billion per year in quantifiable benefits from their \$15 billion investment in public transportation, a 4-to-1 return on the money. Paul Weyrich, President of the Free Congress Foundation, notes that, 'this study supports an important conservative argument for transit: transit doesn't just cost money, it saves money and it makes money.'" Warren Miller, American Public Transit Association, speaking before the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee.
- On June 10 the California Air Resources Board (ARB) and the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) announced that exposure to some air pollutants and toxins may be ten times higher inside vehicles than in ambient air. Researchers found that as much as one-half of the pollutants detected in test cars were emitted by the vehicles ahead. They also learned that people who use carpool lanes were exposed to pollutant levels below those measured in other traffic lanes, possibly because carpool lanes are less congested and further removed from truck lanes. For more information, visit www.arb.ca.gov.

Will a Portland-Boise train work?

Robert W. Rynereson

While working with Oregon DOT in 1971-76, I concluded with the information available that the *Pioneer* had to at least have a connection to and from the East, and that the State of Oregon should not directly subsidize it.

In that era, Art Lloyd and I found that we were on the same wave length, and headed off an effort by Amtrak's Marketing Department at that time to emphasize the Portland-Boise link at the expense of all other markets. We came up with a schedule instead which served that market, but carried other traffic.

I cannot emphasize enough how important Art Lloyd's contributions were. He was one of the few top Amtrak officials who knew our area. The way we found out that we agreed on how to set up the *Pioneer* is noteworthy. We both wrote up draft schedules and mailed them to each other, after some brief phone conversations. The drafts passed in the mail, and we found out they were almost the same.

The original Seattle-Portland-Ogden-Salt Lake City train was soon chronically listed as sold out. It survived various cutback attempts because it was so efficient, with few intermediate station costs, and a due to its overhead traffic connecting east.

The 1977 service start-up came about through pressure from Senators Mark Hatfield and Frank Church. Amtrak and the US DOT were opposed to this route from the beginning. The USDOT selected an unworkable route from Denver to Washington, DC via the congested Joint Line (the multi-ownership rail link between Denver and Pueblo, Colorado), instead, and, of course, that was never operated. When the service was launched, it consisted of Amfleet coaches, with no baggage and no sleeper. When I first saw the train, at Christmas, 1977, it arrived in Portland crammed full of passengers and baggage. The U.P. conductor's comment to me was "it looks like a god-damned freight train in there."

Throughout its history, there was a struggle between employees like Art Lloyd who wanted to do a respectable job with the train, whether or not they were running it because they had to, versus those who wanted to show that they could

not be pushed around. The latter faction was responsible, I assume, for things like the original non-connecting schedule proposal and the lack of checked baggage service, etc.

The decision to operate the *Pioneer* through Wyoming was originally stated to be in order to reduce the train lengths and weight to allow more mail and express on the *California Zephyr* west of Denver. Therefore, we were not supposed to be alarmed by the large increase in train miles, versus the minimal new markets tapped.

There was no major movement of mail and express gained on the *Pioneer* itself when it was daily, even though the Portland-East UP route was a major "head-end" traffic corridor. The Post Office continued trucking mail between Denver, Salt Lake City and Portland. In both Denver and Portland, there are still postal facilities adjacent to the stations.

Mail was finally handled on a regular basis after the cutback in the *Empire Builder*, but only after Amtrak first tried trucking it across the Northern Tier. In other words, they would do anything to avoid putting revenue onto the *Pioneer*.

Severe schedule adherence problems, which began with the inaugural run, trashed efforts by the Visitors Bureau in Denver to provide welcoming services during the Denver layover for through *Pioneer*-East passengers. The volunteers, who were not railfans, quit because of wasting their time night after night. While joining them for instruction purposes, I discovered that one hazard of volunteering was having rail passengers complaining to the Visitors Bureau volunteers about Amtrak issues. In particular, I kept hearing about sold out space, most commonly in sleepers, that had forced people to change travel dates.

Although the Wyoming service was supposed to be considered in light of how it would help handle mail and express in the overall Central Corridor, when the service cuts were made, the *Pioneer* was considered on its own. The Wyoming costs were held against the service for the Pacific Northwest, even though it was not part of the original concept.

I am most concerned now about the Portland-Boise idea because of the threat of abandonment on the line east from Boise to Orchard,

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Eastern Oregon meetings to discuss Thruway bus service

Transportation officials are holding meetings in September to discuss proposed intercity bus service in Central and Eastern Oregon.

The meeting schedule:

- **Ontario:** Thurs, Sept 9, 9 a.m., Council Chamber, Ontario City Hall, 444 SW 4th St.
- **Burns:** Thurs, Sept 9, 3 p.m., Judge's Chamber, Harney Co. Court House, 450 N. Buena Vista.
- **Bend:** Friday, Sept 10, 10 a.m., Bend Chamber of Commerce, 63085 N. Hwy. 97.

The purpose of the meetings is to obtain input on proposed schedules and types of service, according to Robert Krebs of the ODOT's Rail Division. DOT will contract with private carriers to serve the Amtrak Thruway Motorcoach routes. The new services are expected to be operating by July 1, 2000, Krebs added.

The routes are designed to allow travelers to connect with trains as well as travel between cities along the route. Proposals include:

- Restoration of bus service along U.S. Highway 20 between Boise, Ontario, Vale, Burns, Bend, Sisters and the Willamette Valley. The service will operate three times a week and connect to Amtrak trains traveling between Portland and Seattle.
- New service for the Bend area to connect to Amtrak trains at Chemult with stops at Sunriver and LaPine. The new service will operate three times a week.. The proposed schedule would connect to the Amtrak **Coast Starlight** train that travels between Los Angeles and Seattle.

"These new services will extend the economic benefits of the rail corridor to other areas of the state and fill missing links in Oregon's intercity bus network," Krebs said.

The proposed routes are part of a \$10 million state General Fund appropriation to the Rail Division to increase public transportation (see page 1). The funding package continues one **Amtrak Cascades** train and three Amtrak Thruway Motorcoaches daily between Portland and Eugene (RT). The Seattle - Los Angeles **Coast Starlight** train provides an additional daily round-trip in the corridor.



AORTA TimeTable

Thursday, Sept 16, 6:30 PM

AORTA Portland Chapter meeting
Union Station, Room 208

October 14-15

Cascadia Conference, Eugene, OR

October 21, 6:30 PM

AORTA Portland Chapter meeting
Union Station, Room 208

October 23

AORTA Board Mtg (location tba)

AORTA's Portland Chapter normally meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month in Room 208, Union Station. The Board normally meets on the 4th Saturday of the month in Portland, Salem or Eugene. Please call (503) 642-4077 to confirm dates/locations.

Expanded service will include an additional train between Eugene and Portland with Thruway Motorcoach links to Southern Oregon.

Since 1992 when Congress designated the rail corridor between Eugene and Vancouver, B.C., as the Pacific Northwest High Speed Rail Corridor, Oregon has received \$25 million in federal rail dollars to improve safety and increase speed. Freight railroads also have funded track and signal improvements.

For current schedule and fare information:

Amtrak: 1-800-USA-RAIL or

Visit the web site: www.amtrak.com

Portland-Boise train- continued from pg 7

Idaho. As the Portland-Boise idea has the only "official" cachet, that will become grounds for abandoning the track needed to run a through service which includes Boise. I field-surveyed all the alternatives for Oregon DOT in 1976 (Idaho had no staff then), and believe that without Boise, stops in Nampa and Kuna would be needed, but that this would become yet another burden for the route to overcome.