



# AORTA Bulletin

A publication of the  
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

Issue 113

July 1997

Since 1976

## Legislature funds *Cascadia*, Thruway buses, in last minute bill

*Salem-* In the last minutes of the 1997 Legislative session, Oregon lawmakers provided funding that will keep the *Cascadia* and three round-trip Portland-Eugene Thruway buses on schedule. Governor John Kitzhaber's plan for transportation funding fell on deaf ears in the Senate, where legislators held the transportation funding package hostage in an attempt to pass unrelated legislation.

It was interesting to note that as the Governor's transportation bill evolved, the "high speed" rail program's share of alternative funding package grew from 10 to 20 to 30%. It is clear that, for some legislators, the relative importance of the rail project

(Continued on page 4. See "LEGISLATURE")

## Pioneer lost

The last *Pioneers* (east and west-bound) traveled through Portland on Saturday, May 10. AORTA's Portland Chapter President Ralph Gaskill and many others greeted and bid farewell to trains 25 and 26. AORTA has been critical of Amtrak's scheduling and management of the train for the last several years. Reduction from daily to three day a week service and lack of sufficient equipment to meet rider-ship demands hurt the trains revenue picture.

Sleeping car space was frequently sold out months

(Continued on page 2. See "Pioneer")

## Astoria rail line in new hands

On July 16 Portland & Western Railroad, Inc. (P&W), a shortline owned by Genesee & Wyoming, Inc. (G&W), announced purchase of the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line between Portland and Astoria. This is good news to businesses and potential patrons along the 92 mile line which reaches from Willbridge in NW Portland to Tongue Point, 3 miles east of Astoria. Earlier, BNSF donated to the City of Astoria 5 miles of track between Tongue Point and Astoria.

P&W now operates over 200 miles of track in Washington, Marion, and now Columbia and Clatsop Counties. The expansion increases the number of employees from 19 to 30, according to President and General Manager Tony Mogtych.

(Continued on page 7. See "ASTORIA RAIL LINE")

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Join AORTA at our  
**1997 Annual Family Picnic**  
in Brooks, Oregon on Aug 16  
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**Association of  
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A non-profit citizen advocate group working to educate the public about the need for safe, fiscally responsible, environmentally sound transportation. Also known as the Oregon Association of Railway Passengers (OreARP).

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Also serving on the Board of Directors: Jim Howell, Robert Lowry, Kenneth McFarling, Fred Nussbaum, Ray Polani, Ed Rynerson and Timothy Wilson.

AORTA works cooperatively with the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), but AORTA is an autonomous body. NARP Directors from Region 8 (AK, ID, MT, OR, WA), including Directors-at-Large, include James Hamre, Hans Mueller, Art Poole, Jeffrey Schultz and William Weeks.

**ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP**

Introductory/senior/student/low income	\$	10
Regular (family rate, add \$5/additional member)		20
Sponsor		100
Govt/corporate rate (budget under \$100,000/yr)		50
(budget over \$100,000/yr)		100

**Internet E-mail address:** [OregonRail@aol.com](mailto:OregonRail@aol.com)  
**WEB Page:** <http://home.aol.com/OregonRail>

Plan to attend the  
**1997 AORTA  
Annual Family Picnic**  
in Brooks, Oregon on  
**Saturday, August 16.**

See page 3.

*PIONEER* (Continued from page 1)

in advance. Television newscasts included an interview of a car attendant who said a second sleeping car would have been sold out had it been available!

Loss of the train leaves citizens in many rural communities without public transportation. It is not unusual for freeways along the route to be closed during winter months. A television story about ten years ago pointed out the train provided transportation for essential medical supplies and appointments when snow and ice blocked motor vehicle traffic in the Gorge.

Coverage of the *Pioneer's* last journey in Pendleton's *East Oregonian* included a picture of AORTA's Ralph Gaskill holding a sign, "Amtrak Pioneer: 1997-1997...Killed by Politics, Not Lack of Riders."

Hope continues that Amtrak will resume passenger service with a fast mail and express train within the next 6-12 months. Interested persons should contact Senators Ron Wyden ((202) 224-5244) and Gordon Smith ((202) 224-4209). Union Pacific, however, has been incredibly hostile toward resumption of passenger service. If freight railroads are hostile to passenger service, open access legislation will be needed to allow passengers to traverse their rails.

Thruway bus service is being provided on part of the route to help meet travel needs of local residents.

In August 1976 six OreARP members (at that time AORTA was only known as OreARP) and a representative of the Oregon Historical Society traveled along the prospective route visiting nine Oregon communities. The delegation met with local officials, business people and citizens to encourage support for passenger rail service along the route.

"The attitude in virtually every town we visited was strongly encouraging to our group," wrote John Sparrows in the Sept 1976 *OreARP Bulletin*. OreARP worked hard to bring the *Pioneer* to the Pacific Northwest. Now we need to work to bring it back!



## WDC needs to hear from you!

On July 27 House and Senate conferees agreed upon a dedicated source of capital funding of \$2.3B for Amtrak over two years. This is in lieu of the half cent gas tax previously proposed. The \$2.3B is linked to taxes paid by Amtrak's predecessor railroads. In essence, money paid by railroads and passengers prior to 1971 and which went to the US Treasury is coming back for rail passenger service!

But the \$2.3B is conditioned on passage of a bill containing necessary authorizing reforms for Amtrak. As we go to press, the situation is volatile. If you are not able to get up-to-date information from the internet, it is best to contact WDC and stress the need to provide adequate reforms and operations money to allow Amtrak to maintain, at a minimum, the current level of operations:

The White House	(202) 456-1111
FAX	(202) 456-6220
Sen Ron Wyden	(202) 224-5244
Sen Gordon Smith	(202) 224-4209
Rep Elizabeth Furse	(202) 225-0855
Rep Bob Smith	(202) 225-6730
Rep Earl Blumenauer	(202) 225-4811
Rep Peter DeFazio	(202) 225-6416
Rep Darlene Hooley	(202) 225-5711

**or toll-free: 1-800-962-3524**

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## Annual Family Picnic

AORTA's 1997 Annual Family Picnic is scheduled at Western Antique Powerland in Brooks on Aug 16 (11am - 4pm). We will join the Oregon Electric Railway Historical Society, the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society and other rail groups for a potluck picnic at the site of the new Oregon Electric Railway Museum.

Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. A \$2/person charge includes a piece of chicken and soft drink. Train rides will be provided by Willow Creek Live Steamers. Call Ralph Gaskill at (503) 636-4169 if you plan to attend.

## Commuter rail demo Aug 16

Oregon and Washington DOT's reached an agreement with Amtrak on Jul 24 to provide commuter rail service between Portland and Vancouver, WA, during the upcoming Interstate Bridge repair. The trains will be operated free of charge to commuters during the 21 day project.

The northbound structure of the bridge will be closed and commuter rail service begins Aug 16. The repair work includes replacement of a cracked axle-like steel structure, or trunion. The northbound span is 80 years old.

From Vancouver, three morning trains will be offered to commuters traveling from the Amtrak station on West 11th Street, at 5:30 am, 6:45 am and 8 am. Evening trains will leave Portland's Union Station at 4 pm, 5:15 pm and 6:30 pm.

Commuters traveling from Portland to Vancouver can catch the train at 6 am and 7:15 am, and return from Vancouver at 4:30 pm and 5:45 pm. These special trains will be offered Monday-Friday.

Amtrak will be using Amfleet cars, accommodating approximately 700 passengers per train. Estimated travel time is 20-30 minutes.

Official press releases say parking will be available near the Vancouver Amtrak station and on Fourth Plain Blvd, with shuttle service provided by C-Tran, and additional parking around the Union Station in Portland.

AORTA, however, encourages the public to use C-Tran and Tri-Met to access the rail stations. AORTA will be working with the local bus services to encourage better utilization of buses to feed the commuter rail operation.

Amtrak helps provide regular commuter rail service around the country, including Sacramento, Los Angeles, and in the Northeast.

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**Your dues and donations help us carry the message .  
Please make sure your dues are up-to-date.**



## IC3 Flexliner proves popular

The Danish IC3 visit to Oregon in May drew enthusiastic crowds. Demonstration runs departing from Hillsboro, Wilsonville, Newberg, McMinnville, Independence and Corvallis sold out days before the train reached the respective towns! Many who wished to ride were disappointed when they found the 141-passenger high-tech Danish train was sold out. The train provided service in the Willamette Valley until May 18, after which it traveled to the Chicago area.

An AORTA booth greeted the train in Hillsboro, Newberg, McMinnville and Eugene. Information on contacting legislators about the need for improved transportation was provided at the booths and on the train. Many visitors to the booth promised to contact state legislators regarding funding for Oregon's rail and bus program. Oregon helps to fund one train and three round-trip buses between Portland and Eugene.

Even before the IC3 Flexliner was placed into service between Portland and Eugene for two daily round-trips, nearly all seats were sold for the 9 day operation. *Special thanks* to ODOT's Grace Crunnican, Claudia Howells, Bob Krebs and Ed Immel, numerous local officials, and Amtrak, who helped make the visit possible.

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*LEGISLATURE (Continued from page 1)*  
increased as the session went on.

Another factor in the failure of Kitzhaber's plan was the trucking industry. Truckers fought the bill because it included increases in Oregon's weight-mile tax. The weight-mile tax helps ensure heavier trucks, which require roads and bridges to be constructed to higher standards and increase maintenance costs, come closer to paying their fair share.

Oregon's weight-mile tax draws national attention from the trucking lobby because most other states do not come close to recovering the costs heavy trucks impose on the roadways.

## LOCAL LINES: *News around the state*

### Coastal Tidings

#### Tillamook branch line improvements

*Tillamook-* Port of Tillamook Bay received a \$500,000 grant and loan in early July from the Special Public Works Fund to help replace over 12 miles of track and improve four bridges damaged by Feb 1996 floods. The Fund is backed by state lottery revenues.

Track improvements include replacement of 66,000 feet of track at three locations from Barview to Tillamook and to Rockaway Beach. The bridge across Heidel Creek and three Salmonberry River truss spans will be rehabilitated.

The 101-mile rail line connects Tillamook to Hillsboro and the Willamette Valley with grades as steep as 3.37%. Operations began in 1912 under the Pacific Railway & Navigation Company. The operation was sold to Southern Pacific in 1915. The line serves lumber and dairy industries on the coast and is critical to the economy of Tillamook County. *The Daily Astorian*, July 10.

#### SETD lowers bus fares

*Astoria-* Sunset Empire Transportation District reduced fares on bus service between Astoria and Seaside on April 28. The fare between the two cities was reduced from \$2.75 to \$2.25. Other intercity fares were also reduced. Service is provided seven days/week. SETD can be reached at (503) 325-0563 or (800) 776-6406.

#### Residents protest paving project

*Sunset Beach-* Neighbors in a Sunset Beach neighborhood (south of Warrenton) protested against a county project to pave their local street. While county officials claimed the pavement would make the streets safer, residents understood that wider, smoother roads will only make traffic go faster and result in a more dangerous situation.



## Southern Oregon Signals

### **RVTD adds service; struggles with gas pains**

On June 27 Rogue Valley Transit District (RVTD) board of directors voted to cut administrative costs and improve service. General Manager Sherrin Coleman stated that "The whole philosophy of the district is becoming more focused on service."

RVTD is cutting three administrative positions; and adding 2 full-time and 11 part-time drivers, 2 customer service agents and a maintenance worker. The hours current drivers work will be increased.

About 80% of the service cuts which occurred following failure of a tax levy has been restored. The District will restore bus service to Table Rock and hourly service to Central Point in August. A route serving Providence Hospital will also be restored.

The District will restore four Medford routes, one between Rogue Valley Mall and South Gateway Center every 15 minutes. The other three route will provide east-west service every 30 minutes during peak travel periods.

A \$1.5M, 2-yr federal grant from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality program is funding the service restoration.

While RVTD is pleased to be restoring service, the District is frustrated by frequent breakdowns with the ten natural gas buses put into service two years ago. Broken valves, weak fuel systems and cracked cylinders in the Hercules engines caused numerous service disruptions. The Hercules Engine Company product is expected to be replaced by 5.9 liter Cummins Northwest engines in late July. *See stories in Ashland Daily Tidings, 6/27 and 7/9.*

### **Medford reporter ordered: "take the bus!"**

Medford *Mail Tribune* Robert Hunter assigned reporter Bill Kettler to "take the bus" during National Transportation Week. Kettler had not previously ridden RVTD. He found the service to be punctual and the drivers to be friendly and helpful. Many

passengers were greeted by name.

Most of the passengers Kettler met were either students and older citizens. Kettler learned something most transit riders already appreciate: while riding on the bus took more time than driving, he was able to work on his story, meet people, and enjoy himself rather than get stressed by heavy traffic.

### **Ashland mayor points to solution**

Ashland Mayor Cathy Golden says paving over more land will not solve the city's downtown "parking problem." Golden already understands something many larger cities are only beginning to learn: efforts to accommodate more autos merely makes us more dependent on a mode that is inherently inefficient in term of use of terrestrial space.

"The best way to alleviate the parking problem is to provide alternatives (to driving)...," stated Golden. Some local business operators, however, continue to subscribe to the myth that providing a little more pavement will solve the problem. Ashland is probably the best example in the state of local government trying to avoid the addiction to fossil fuel fumes and pavement. *See story in Ashland Daily Tidings 6/28.*

### **Klamath Falls guides on the Coast Starlight**

The 7/13 Klamath Falls *Herald & News* gave extensive coverage to volunteers who act as tour guides on Amtrak's *Coast Starlight*. A full-page-plus article, including full-color pictures, described the efforts of local volunteers from Klamath County who help passengers "interpret" the scenery as Amtrak's premier train traverses the Cascade Mountains.

The US Forest Service provided guides between Eugene and Klamath Falls until two years ago, but the \$30,000 program fell victim to budget cuts.

*Thanks to the volunteers, the Klamath County Tourism and Museum, and Amtrak, for working together to make the trip a more valuable experience, and to the Herald & News for publicizing their efforts!*



## Columbia Gorge Gondolas

### Wasco County bus proves popular

*The Dalles-* Wasco County's new bus service is proving unmet transportation needs are much greater than anticipated. The demand response bus, acquired by the county two months ago, is struggling to meet current demands despite the fact the service is not yet well publicized. Mid-Columbia Council of Government's Transportation Program Manager Gail Sackmaster says "It's the beginning of public transportation again for Wasco County. An attempt to provide local public transportation services in the 1960's was short-lived.

Unfortunately, the County is having difficulty meeting the demand and is not able to purchase a needed second vehicle for the county-wide service because of the lack of funding for public transportation. Many transportation planners disregard the transportation needs of those who, because of physical, financial or legal issues, do not have access to an automobile. In rural parts of the state, where public transportation resources are particularly scarce, or totally absent, this problem is particularly acute. *The Chronicle*, The Dalles, Jul 21.

## Willamette Valley Whistles

### Tri-Met abandons bus riders

*Portland-* Tri-Met ran head-on into criticism when it reduced bus service in Portland's core in search of high-cost riders with mini-buses in low-density suburban areas. Mayor Vera Katz and City Commissioner Charlie Hales were two among many who recognized that General Manager Tom Walsh is driving the bus down the wrong street.

Concerns were expressed that Walsh is breaking earlier promises to provide more frequent service. "I recall Tom saying, 'Throw away your schedule. You won't need it because buses are coming every 10 minutes,'" stated Mayor Katz. It is particularly

disturbing to transit advocates because the transit agency is experiencing increases in revenues.

The *Willamette Week* article reported that Katz recently referred to Tri-Met officials as the "transportation mafia" and "castigated them for 'double talk.'"

The paper also quoted Sy Adler, a professor in urban studies at Portland State University and member of Tri-Met's Citizen Advisory Committee, former Tri-Met Board Chair Loren Wyss, Association for Portland Progress president Ruth Scott, and AORTA Board member Jim Howell. All were critical of the direction Walsh is headed.

The April 30 *Willamette Week* pointed out that since 1984 Tri-Met has added nearly 400 employees, but only 60 of them have been drivers. Its budget for lobbyists has grown from \$154,000 in 1993 to an average of \$765,000 in the last three years according to *Willamette Week*.

### Hooley helps Corvallis transit

*Washington, DC-* The US House Appropriations Committee approved funds on July 11 to provide \$700,000 in federal funds for construction of a downtown transit mall. US Rep Darlene Hooley (D-OR) was instrumental in securing the requested funds. The project has not yet received final approval from Congress..

Hooley testified that transit ridership had grown 58% since 1993-94 and that nearly 10% of the commuters bicycle to work in Corvallis.

Three different sites are being considered for the \$900,000 project. All three sites are within a block of City Hall.

The project will include shelters for bus patrons, bicycle lockers, improved lighting, pedestrian amenities and possibly a retail outlet according to city transit manager Bernadette Barrett.

The city budget provides for the remaining \$200,000. *Albany Democrat-Herald*, Jul 16



## Washington County releases Final Report on interurban rail

Washington County, Tri-Met, Metro, ODOT and several Washington County cities released a "Final Report" on the feasibility of interurban rail in May.

The report concludes "no design or engineering obstacles exist which would either prevent or require extraordinary capital expenditures to place into operation an interurban operation ..." between Beaverton and Wilsonville.

The report estimates that costs of implementing operations would be "towards the lower range of recent experience in implementing similar projects."

Travel time between Wilsonville and Beaverton (Merlo) is estimated at 31 minutes. The State Legislature approved \$500,000 for commuter rail study in Washington, Multnomah & Clackamas Counties.

### SHORTLINES AND QUOTES . . .

- "... though the new age is clearly coming, we are still moving down the old wrong road with tremendous momentum, and there is great profit to many people in our continuing to do so as long as possible. Only private citizens, motivated by concern for the national welfare, can be counted upon to lead the movement for better rail service soon." *The Way to Go: The Coming Revival of U.S. Rail Passenger Service*, Thomas C. Southerland, Jr and William McCleery, 1973.
- According to a study by the American Public Transportation Association, one-quarter of the population live in households without any automobiles. In addition, many households have automobiles that are inadequately maintained or insured, and cannot or should not be driven.
- According to a July 7, 1995, letter from Transportation Manager Ron Kilcoyne, City of Santa Clara, California, six separate studies "peg the net subsidy to the automobile between \$378 to \$935B. By contrast the total expenditure on transit by all levels of government, *including the fare box revenue* is \$24B."
- A study conducted by an atmospheric scientist at University of Wisconsin, Steven Ackerman, concludes that jet exhaust plumes, or contrails, influence regional climates. Contrails are human-created clouds which form warm, wet air from jet exhausts combine with the extremely cold air in the upper atmosphere. According to Ackerman, the jet-induced clouds set in motion a series of events that may change

#### ASTORIA RAIL LINE (Continued from page 1)

The acquisition nearly doubles the Albany-based shortline's mileage. P&W, a progressive rail operator, can be expected to breathe new life into a rail line which has seen declining traffic in recent years. P&W and Willamette & Pacific (W&P) have seen significant increases in traffic. During 1996 W&P and P&W handled more than 50,000 carloads. Both lines are owned by G&W.

Bob Melbo, Regional Vice President for G&W and President of W&P, told Astorians that the Port of Astoria could not have much a future without rail service. The Port has been struggling to survive.

"The Astoria line will be a welcome addition to our

growing network of regional railroads," stated Melbo. "It greatly enhances the number of origin and destination points we can offer to potential intrastate customers."

P&W faces some serious problems. A landslide in the February 1996 flood buried about 1,000 feet of track near Brownsmead. The slide isolated the westernmost 27 miles of the line. Restoration will cost an estimated \$2.5M.

Melbo hopes to secure long term commitments from local shippers to justify reopening the line to Astoria. A sawmill in Warrenton operated by Albany-based Willamette Industries could provide as many

(Continued on page 8)



**ASTORIA RAIL LINE** (Continued from page 7)

as 1,000 car loadings/year according to the mill manager. Diverting those 1,000+ heavy trucks from local roads and highways between Warrenton/Astoria and Albany would save taxpayers millions. It would also be good for local residents and tourists as the heavy truck burden is reduced.

While P&W works to obtain sufficient revenues from the private sector to re-open the rail line, the US Army Corps of Engineers is spending \$9.6 million to study deepening the Columbia River Channel from 40 to 43 feet. If the channel deepening is pursued, "construction" (or more appropriately, destruction) costs, and costs to the environment and the fisheries industry, will reach stratospheric heights.

Behind the effort to deepen the Columbia River channel is the Port of Portland. It is unlikely, however, that proprietors of ocean-going vessels will choose to spend a minimum of two days going up

## Washington rail projects on track

by Jerome F. Sheldon

Commuter rail service on existing track will provide two-way rush-hour service between Seattle and Tacoma starting in late 1999, according to the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority. Similar trains between Seattle and Everett will commence in early 2001.

The RTA's draft Implementation Guide has been released, giving the above start-up dates and other details of the long-range development plan.

Initial segment of the central light-rail system would begin carrying passengers in early 2005. The full line between the University of Washington and the City of SeaTac would be completed by 2006.

Meanwhile, regional express bus service will begin service in late 1999, with additional service and routes phased-in as facilities – including transit centers, park-and-ride expansion and direct high-occupancy vehicle access ramps – are completed.

and down the Columbia to reach port. These large, expensive ships make money by transporting goods across the ocean. When such vessels arrive in the Pacific Northwest, investors want to unload their cargo, take on another load, and set sail! That is how they show a profit.

It would minimize environmental and fisheries impact, and cost far less, if money is used to improve the Port of Astoria and Port of Longview, and improve rail service to the two ports.

The *Daily Astorian* stated the Corps study appears to be "less about the merits and cost of the project and more about selling the idea to political leaders."

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*Third Annual Two-Nation Conference*  
**Connecting Cascadia's Mainstreet**  
*An Action Plan to Enhance Passenger Rail*

**September 4-5**  
**Doubletree Hotel Kelso, Washington**

For more information contact Discovery Institute  
(206) 287-3404  
<http://www.discovery.org/cascadia.html>



## AORTA Timetable

Aug 16 Sat	AORTA Annual Family Picnic 11 am- 4 pm, Brooks, OR
Sep 4-5 Thu-Fri	High Speed Rail Conference Kelso, WA
Sep 18 Thu	AORTA Portland Chapter 6:30 pm, Rm 208, Union Station
Nov 8 Sat	Tentative date for AORTA Annual Banquet
Nov 9-11 Sun-Tue	"Making the Connection" Conference Eugene Hilton, Eugene, OR

The AORTA Board normally meets at 9 am, 4th Saturday of each month, in Room 208, Portland Union Station. Portland Chapter meets on the 3rd Thursday at 6:30pm.