

Washington Rail News

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Publication of the Washington Association of Rail Passengers

A Not-for-profit Consumer Organization

"...getting the Pacific Northwest on the right track."

Our Northwest Corridor rail boom continues

The good news for Amtrak's Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor continues.

August ridership on the trains running between Vancouver, BC, Seattle, Portland and Eugene hit the highest single month total in Amtrak's 26 year history. Just under 56,000 people rode our three Northwest Corridor trains or rode the *Coast Starlight* within the corridor. This is 9% more than August 1996 and 25% more than August 1995. DOT estimates 5 mill. passenger miles were eliminated from I-5 during August as a result of people riding our Northwest Corridor trains. January-August ridership is 13.7% ahead of 1996.

During the first part of August Amtrak, WSDOT, BNSF, Talgo Inc. and the Federal Railroad Administration conducted tests to determine safe parameters for operating the Talgo trainsets at higher speeds around curves, as the equipment is designed to do. The "high cant deficiency" tests determined how much additional forces the trains put on the rail while using the passive tilting system to keep the lateral (centrifugal) forces below levels that would cause passenger discomfort. DOT and Amtrak have asked FRA and BNSF for permission to run at 8 inches of cant deficiency (meaning the

outside rail on curves would need to be superelevated an additional 8 inches to equalize the lateral forces).

If the FRA grants and BNSF approves the waiver, Amtrak estimates that about 30 minutes can be removed from the Seattle-Portland schedules. By taking advantage of this reduction in running time and by using the *Mt. Baker's* Talgo equipment south of Seattle Amtrak will be able to add a mid-day train between Seattle and Portland. Each of the two sets of Talgo equipment would make 1½ round trips a day between Seattle and Portland/Eugene. The Legislature has funded DOT's share of this additional train. Amtrak and DOT want to have the additional train operating before Thanksgiving. The Seattle-Vancouver, BC run would be operated with Superliners until the new Talgo trains enter service in the Fall of 1998.

Preliminary design work for the King Street Station rehabilitation project continues. An open house will be held later this Fall to present the findings to the public. A decision on whether to continue the project will also be made this Fall. (WashARP certainly thinks the answer must be yes.) Final design of the (See **Rail Boom**, page 3)

Amtrak funding (and future) still undecided

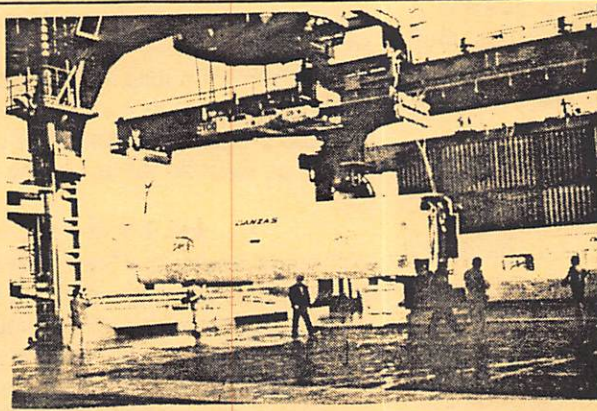
Though the federal fiscal year ended on Sept. 30 Congress still has not settled the Amtrak funding issue, leaving Amtrak's future up in the air.

Although the ½ cent for Amtrak capital was, in the end, deleted from the big balanced budget resolution, Sen. Bill Roth (R-DE) once again rode to Amtrak's rescue. He did this with a complex device called a "net operating loss carry-back" which is linked to income taxes paid in the 1960s by freight railroads that operated passenger trains. Amtrak would file for a "tax refund" of \$1.15 billion in January of each of the next two years.

Amtrak cannot tap into this source of capital, however, until Congress passes a reauthorization and reform bill and the president signs it. The main sticking point involves various labor reforms that would allow Amtrak and the unions to negotiate on things like severance packages and contracting out. These provisions that labor helped write two years ago are now inexplicably opposed by labor. This has made many Congressional Democrats oppose the bill and made President Clinton threaten a veto. The current House bill is virtually identical to the

one passed by the House on a 404-6 vote in 1995, a bill that never made it to the Senate floor.

As for the appropriations process for transportation, House and Senate negotiators have met but have not made much progress. Our main focus remains that the House numbers for Amtrak operations and mandatory railroad retire- (See **Funding**, p. 4)



Left, ground observations are conducted on August 5 just north of Burlington as part of the cant deficiency testing between Bellingham and Portland. Right, Talgo car shells are being loaded on a ship in Spain in early September for transporting to Long Beach, CA. The shells arrived October 2 and were then transported via truck to the Pacifica plant in Seattle for finishing work and final assembly.

Photos: Jeff Schultz (left) and Talgo (right)

From the
Executive
Director's Desk
by
Lloyd H. Flem

Amtrak Federal funding agonies; Passenger Rail Privati-

zation?; Rail bright spots!

The never ending Amtrak financial crisis painfully rolls on. Rail advocates must contact their U. S. Congress people and Senators on three issues. First, concerning "regular" Amtrak operations and "mandatory payments" (those *billed* to Amtrak but which have substantially nothing to do with operation of Amtrak trains, past or present!): the Senate numbers, though still inadequate are better than those of the House. Urge the Senate figures be adopted.

Second, we should ask support for Sen. John Chafee's (R-RI) ISTEA renewal bill, which provides states the *choice* to invest some federal surface transportation funds on intercity passenger rail, uniquely forbidden under otherwise-pretty-good existing ISTEA. Rep. Bud Shuster's (R-PA) "BESTEA" proposal would again prevent states from investing ISTEA monies in rail, while states' rights to spend transportation funds on such things as historic preservation, beautification, bike and hiking trail, etc. would remain. I do not quarrel with those choices being available, but find it incomprehensible that intercity rail, virtually alone, would continue to be a choice states could not make. Republicans in particular, who have run hard against the federal government imposing its will on states and localities, *should* accept that states might have the opportunity to invest in rail with some of their ISTEA funds, and not be prevented from doing so by an "all-powerful Washington, DC."

On the third funding issue, the Democrats need work. I don't usually take sides on labor-management issues. In Amtrak's case, I have friends among both contract and management people. But what is essential now is Amtrak's access to the \$2.3 billion for capital. Democrats, including the president, who obediently switched side on the Amtrak reauthorization bill for political advantage in 1998, at the real risk of killing America's only nationwide intercity rail system, must be reminded of the value of balanced, safe, environmentally sound rail transportation *and*

their historical support for Amtrak.



Editorialists have chastised those in rail labor and their Democratic allies for hindering passage of an Amtrak reauthorization and thus playing into the hands of ideologues who want Amtrak to fail, feeling either North Americans "don't need" passenger trains, or, if we insist, they be strictly private sector ventures. I certainly don't dogmatically oppose the idea of private participation in rail passenger service; recall we had the world's best in 1939, prior to government policies which gave nearly exclusive status to air and highway passenger travel. Perhaps a mix of public sector support for infrastructure with private-public partnership for operations might constitute a successful future.

What we don't need is the United Kingdom's privatization disaster as a model. Christian Wolmar of London's *Sunday Independent* has compiled a fascinating collection of rail passenger horror stories since January 1995, after British passenger rail privatization got under way. But I am as hesitant to endorse policy by anecdote, whether done by the *Independent* or by the same time-tested techniques (from a different ideological direction) as practiced by the *Reader's Digest*. It is Wolmar's introduction—not his anecdotes—which has policy value. He agrees private sector skills in marketing, industrial relations, and other operations would be valuable. It is that the British model has not accomplished improved services (they are much worse!) and has cost the British taxpayer more than ever, much of it for consultant and lawyer fees for "reorganization" and for the multiplicity of private owner "shareholders."

The current public Amtrak operating on (mostly) privately owned infrastructure has problems; British style privatization, as least so far, is not the solution.



Rail Bright Spots: the Sept. *Railway Age* contains some good news. Rail transit and commuter rail continue to grow and prosper in North America. Since regional rail systems in the U. S. are started or expanded only after voter approval, the growing movement of new starts, system improvements, and growing ridership prove that these forms of passenger transportation have strong public support.

I served as co-author for a feature article in September's *Railway Age* countering an LA-based "think tank's" position paper which said virtually all rail transit is bad and costly, and communities are "better off doing nothing" than investing in rail transit! These anti-rail authors were not entirely wrong; a few systems have been overbuilt, over sold, overpriced. But with reasonably prudent use of public monies and decent delivery of services, as is increasingly happening throughout North America, voters are saying, "It works; we like it; we vote for more." Portland and Vancouver, BC are my happy examples.

The most outrageous claim by the anti-rail writers was that the growing popular approval of regional rail and rail transit was because "... voters have been swayed by what amounts to misinformation." They conjure up a "conspiracy of interest groups working together to promote the construction of new rail transit lines, despite proven evidence that is very bad for the public at large." This image of a cabal of all-powerful rail advocates would a WashARP dream-come-true! Where is this "conspiracy of interest groups"? Love to have them join us, if they were ever to exist!

WashARPer's attending the recent Spokane Public Transportation and Rail Conference were very impressed by RTA management's commitment to getting the job done on time, within budget and "better than promised." WashARP Board member Stephanie Weber had been appointed to a special RTA oversight panel. Stephanie shares my perception about RTA's excellent early work.

Finally, *Railway Age* has continually chronicled the growing strength and success of short line and regional ("medium sized") freight railroads. With the "monsterification" of the big Class 1's, rail journalist Frank Wilner praises America's small roads as *the* examples for improving non-North American freight rail. We, who point to western Europe and Asia as centers of light because of their fine intercity passenger networks, often forget their freight rail systems have been allowed to decay and lose market share to trucks and barges. Wilner praises the entrepreneurship and dedication of these smaller railroads whether at home or in the foreign ventures.

Who knows, maybe some of their entrepreneurship, combined with some Amtrak experience and government investment in infrastructure and equipment can yield something better for intercity rail passengers than we've had in North America the past 40 years. It's worth considering.

President Mott addresses Amtrak board of directors

In late July, at the invitation of Amtrak President Tom Downs, WashARP President Chuck Mott and Executive Director Lloyd Flem traveled to Oakland via the *Coast Starlight* to attend an Amtrak Board meeting. Chuck was asked to speak to the board. Here are his July 25 remarks.

"Thank you for inviting us to come here from Washington State. It is a big highlight for us to exchange thoughts and ideas on how to make Amtrak passenger train service—something that we all care very much about—the best in the world. Also, we thank you for the marvelous experience coming here on the *Coast Starlight*. What a magnificent train it is! The crews, the service and all the many amenities were absolutely superb! Gil Mallery, Brian Rosenwald (*Starlight* product line manager), and the entire Amtrak West team have done a magnificent job with this train and we commend them for it.

"As a former Northern Pacific freight solicitor and later, as an incorporator, founder and officer of Burlington Air Express, I understand your efforts to develop mail and express services for handling on passenger trains. America desperately needs a scheduled, reliable and fast moving freight service that meets today's just-in-time low-inventory requirements in our highly competitive, cost driven economy! And, if Union Pacific can move intermodals and other freights off the Rio Grande/Missouri Pacific routes at the rate of two a week, up onto the North Platte Chicago-Oakland mainline, they surely can handle a pair of Amtrak mail and express passenger trains on it too. When I worked for the Atlantic Coast Line, we had the shiny fancy streamliners, like the *Champion*, *Florida Special* and *Miamian* to carry passengers in style. But it was trains like the *Havana Special* and *Everglades*, carrying dozens of mail and express cars on a daily basis, that made money for the railroad. We salute your efforts and support you in every way we can. Keep pushing. You will make it.

"My other remarks this morning are about something we care very much about in Washington State, which is the

redevelopment of King Street Station and Union Station into a comprehensive, effective intermodal transportation center. Two days ago, the waiting room at King Street Station was literally jammed with people waiting to board one train, the *Coast Starlight*. When commuter trains start in 2000 train boardings for both intercity and commuter rail are projects increase from about 1700 people today to 9100 passengers a day!

"In this connection, partnership with major private developers can build a truly world class intermodal facility along with commercial office space and other facilities, literally within walking distance of Amtrak, commuter rail, light rail, transit, intercity bus, the joint I-5 and I-90 main off ramp for Seattle, the waterfront trolleys, and just a few blocks away, the Seattle ferry terminal.

"The window of opportunity is small and it's shrinking fast. In less than five years, with two new sports stadiums built to handle up to 110,000 people—within two or three blocks of King Street Station—the problem will be here, unless something is done soon. We encourage you to look at this challenge as an opportunity to expand Amtrak service in the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor to the highest level possible, and to partner with private developers to build a world class intermodal transportation center befitting the Emerald City.

"Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today."

Rail Boom, from page 1

public. A decision on whether to continue the project will also be made this Fall. (WashARP certainly thinks the an-

swer must be yes.) Final design of the first floor and exterior rehabilitation are funded, but funding has not yet been secured for the actual construction.

South of the Columbia River, Oregon DOT has been awarded a \$5.2 mill. grant from the FRA for rail improvements between Eugene and Vancouver, WA. The money will fund track and signal improvements at Portland Union Station; make improvements in Eugene to facilitate simultaneous passenger and freight train movements, upgrade tracks in East Portland to increase a 20 mph zone to 40 and 79 mph; and install bi-directional signaling between Portland and Vancouver.

Seattle residents can attend the **Transportation Choices Candidate Forum** on Oct. 15 in the Tahoma Room at the Mountaineers, 300 3rd Ave W. from 6-9 p.m. Mayor and city council candidates will be there to address where they stand on transportation issues.

Fully renovated **Pacific Parlor cars** are starting to appear on the *Coast Starlight*. These cars are for first class passengers and are in addition to the Sightseer Lounge cars.

Amtrak and VIA Rail Canada have announced the launching in Jan. 1998 of a joint **North American rail pass**. For the first time passengers will be able to travel for up to 30 days with unlimited stops throughout the U. S. and Canada for one fare. There are 900 destinations available across a network of 27,000 miles of track. Upgrades to first class service will be allowed.

Mark Cain, president of Amtrak Inter-city, resigned effective Oct. 1. A search is on for his replacement.

Important Addresses and Phone Numbers

U. S. House of Representatives .. Washington, DC 20515
 U. S. Senate Washington, DC 20510
 Capitol Switchboard (for all members) .. 202 224-3121
 State Legislature..... State Capitol, Olympia, WA 98504
 Hotline for leaving messages 800 562-6000

WashARP Officers

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 James Neal, Ephrata...Vice Pres.-East..... 509 754-3114
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 All are evening numbers, except Lloyd's, which is available 24-hours a day (answering machine).



SOUNDTRANSIT

Pictured is the RTA's logo for our new region rail and bus system, which will operate under the Sound Transit name. The logo will make its debut on Oct. 25 at the dedication of Pierce Transit's new Tacoma Dome Station.

WashARP News

November 8: Meeting at noon at **University Plaza Hotel**, 400 NE 45th St (just west of I-5 at Exit 169), Seattle. Parking across 4th Ave from hotel entrance.

November 8: Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates annual meeting in Portland. Theme: commuter rail. Call Dan McFarling for more details, 503 642-4077.

December 6: Meeting at noon at **University Plaza Hotel**, 400 NE 45th St (just west of I-5 at Exit 169), Seattle. Parking across 4th Ave from hotel entrance. *Note: this is the first Saturday, not the usual second Saturday.*

Ellen Barton, WashARP secretary, attended an August town meeting held by Congressman Jack Metcalf (R-Langley). Representing both WashARP and the Bellingham Bicycle advisory committee, Ellen discussed transportation alternatives with Metcalf. She urged him to become more informed on transportation issues and to support balanced transportation.

WashARP contributors to this newsletter include Jerry Sheldon, Dennis Fait, Chuck Mott, Don Ohman, Ellen Barton, Jeff Schultz and Stan Suchan.

WashARP's Internet web page has moved. It's now hosted by Trainweb and can be found at:
<http://trainweb.com/washarp>

Washington Association of
 Rail Passengers
 P. O. Box 70381
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Address Correction Requested

Guides on the Coast Starlight

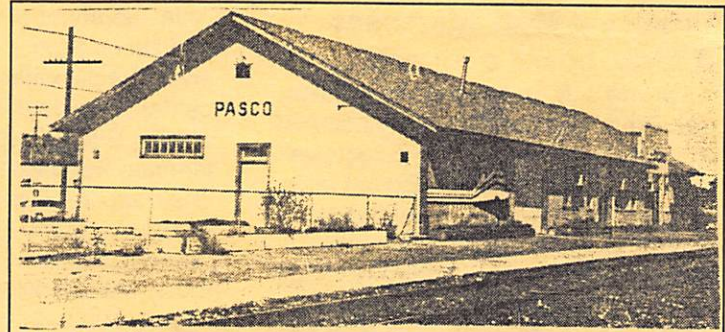
By Dennis Fait

Have you ever wondered when the Kelso-Longview train station was built, the height of Mt. Rainier, or why there is a large concrete egg by the tracks in Winlock, WA? The answers to these and many other questions can be learned aboard Amtrak's *Coast Starlight* between Seattle and Portland.

Volunteer on-board guides are presenting a running commentary about the sights and history of the region between Seattle and Portland. The guides will be working odd numbered days in October and even numbered days through most of November. Plans for the upcoming holiday seasons include a daily guide program on the *Starlight* and even a surprise for the kids.

Here are some of the things you'll learn: Vancouver, WA is the state's fourth largest city; the Tacoma Narrows bridge is as long as 20 football fields; Boeing has over 150,000 employees.

So...ride the *Coast Starlight* and enjoy yourselves; you might even learn something. Remember to say hello to your volunteer on-board interpretive (continued in right column ➡)



Pictured is the current Pasco Amtrak station. Station agent and WashARPer Don Ohman attended the September WashARP meeting in Pasco. Over the years he and his family and friends have worked to improve and clean up the once decrepit station. The City of Pasco has obtained funding to build a new intermodal station to serve both Amtrak and intercity buses. Construction could start early next year.

Photo by Jim Hamre

Funding, from page 1
 ment payments (\$104 mill. below Amtrak's needs) are rejected in favor of the Senate numbers which are "only" \$44 mill. below what Amtrak needs.

Like much of the government, Amtrak will be funded by a continuing resolution until the appropriations process is finished.

It's not too late to remind your legislators that you want a favorable outcome to the negotiations. See phone numbers on page 3.

guide in the Sightseer Lounge. Who knows, it might even be me.

(Answers to the questions in first paragraph: 1912; 14,411; to celebrate Winlock's egg production heritage.)

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