

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."

Renewed focus at Amtrak: Quality service delivery and equipment in good repair

David Nogar, senior director for National Service Delivery, speaking at the NARP board of directors meeting in New Orleans Oct. 18, described how Amtrak is taking a more systematic approach to service delivery by its front line on-board employees. Taking this position two years ago, he led the development of Amtrak's new 600-page national Service Standards manual.

Nogar noted that the more localized management of trains that David Gunn has phased out had its good and bad points. While having local employees fully responsible for their train improved quality, there was no consistency in delivery of service. Things like having different food items on different trains meant a loss of economies of scale.

Then, as various reorganizations and downsizings were implemented and there was the possibility of a system-wide shutdown in June 2002, uncertainty set in and morale plummeted, taking service quality along with it.

Stability is critical to consistent, quality service delivery and Gunn has worked to institute that stability. Then, said Nogar, it must be clear to the employees what is expected of them. Thus the Services Standard manual, which is modeled after the safety and rules manuals used by the operating crews, was published. The continually updated book covers all aspects of on-board service delivery, including hours of food service, serving customers with special needs, grooming and uniforms.

But more must be done than providing the employees a copy of this hefty manual. Reinforcement of the standards must come from the front line supervisors every day. Employee testing procedures are being developed and are currently being tried out here in the Northwest. The testing is based on the rules and safety testing procedures.

Two major areas of concern were

expressed by board members: erratic and illogical food service hours and lack of supervision of on-board service personnel by the conductors. Nogar stated that both areas are being addressed. With few exceptions, dining and lounge car service hours are the same on all trains and the crews will be expected to abide by the rules. On the *Cascades*, there have been instances where food service ended on northbound runs at Olympia; the norm is usually Tacoma. However, on trains operating less than 500 miles, the lounge car must be open from departure at the originating terminal until arrival at the final destination. We are to see this when new point of sale cash registers are installed.

The conductors were once responsible for supervising all train employees. Then the national network trains gained chiefs of on-board service. When this program was eliminated, conductors again had this responsibility but it was not emphasized. New conductor training will add an emphasis on service delivery and supervision of all on-board employees.

David Hughes, Amtrak's chief engineer, was also a speaker at the meeting. He has been at Amtrak just 15 months and this is his first brush with the quasi-government world. Hughes said, "It has been a fascinating time." Amtrak has good employees but they have lacked proper governance and Congress' drive to force "self-sufficiency" on Amtrak caused deferment of hundreds of millions of

Sounder service to Everett!!

If Sound Transit and BNSF reach a final agreement by mid-December, one daily Sounder round-trip between Everett and Seattle will start before the end of this year possibly Dec. 22. A special Sounder from the north may also run for the Seahawks game on Dec. 21.

dollars in maintenance and repair work. Amtrak is emphasizing rebuilding the Northeast Corridor infrastructure, and rebuilding and overhauling locomotives and passenger equipment.

The 5-year \$1.6 billion mechanical plan will remanufacture 320 cars and overhaul 448 cars. Remanufacture means the cars will be taken down to their shells and all components will be overhauled or replaced. Included in this process are 134 Superliner I cars, which are now more than 20 years old, (See **Quality**, page 5)



WashARPer Rocky Shay at King St. Station on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. The station was packed with hundreds of holiday travelers waiting to board the 1:45 p.m. *Cascades* and the 2:00 p.m. extra train to Portland. In addition to the usual eight trains a day between Seattle and Portland, Amtrak operated two extra trips on this Wednesday and on Thanksgiving, and four extra trips on the Sunday after Thanksgiving. Virtually all space was sold out on Wednesday and Sunday as Amtrak carried over 13,000 passengers on the Seattle-Portland section of the Northwest Corridor between Tuesday Nov. 25 and Monday Dec. 1, the (See **Thanksgiving**, page 5) Photo by Jim Hamre

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

Our Trains Keep Moving; Why Sacramento and Houston?; A Tale of Three,

No, Four Northwest Corridor Cities; Thanks!

On Wednesday 26 Nov. a contract to purchase the previously-leased fifth Talgo trainset was signed by WSDOT and Talgo execs. Thus, coupled with the Oregon legislature's decision late this past summer to provide needed capital and operations funding for their share of our Northwest Rail Corridor, the foundation for continued, improved and increased intercity passenger rail service for western Washington and Oregon is in place.

The assurance that Amtrak nationally will have sufficient funding for full operation for at least another year can be credited in considerable part to two physically small, but tough and persistent US senators, our own Democratic Sen. Patty Murray and, across the aisle, Republican Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas. The stellar work of these two senators is particularly vital because they are not from the East Coast, and their support is conditioned on Amtrak being a national system, not just one serving the Northeast and maybe a couple other corridors. (This is said while both praising the consistent bipartisan support of Congressional delegations from the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states and acknowledging the essential role of Amtrak in the Northeast Corridor.)

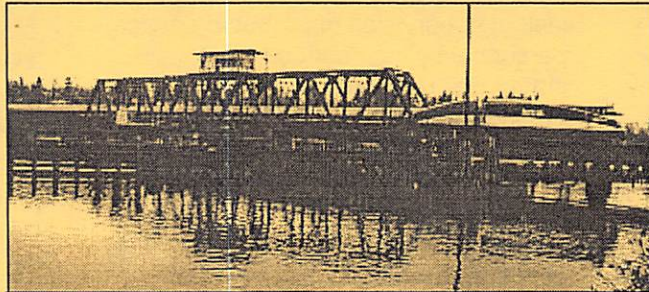
I have written and called Murray's office thanking her for her passenger rail work and have urged friends and relatives from Texas to do the same for Hutchison. I urge you to thank these and other elected officials at all levels of government who continue to work for rail being a larger part of our transportation future.



So why should we in the Pacific Northwest be concerned about what happens in Sacramento and Houston?

California's sheer magnitude plus its location means what happens there impacts us, for good or ill. The world watched as an ex-Mr. Universe-Terminator immigrant from Graz, Aus-

tria became leader of the world's sixth largest economy. Arnold Schwarzenegger's celebrity status only adds to the potential influence of what he does as governor. On one hand, his personal embrace of the macho extremes of American car culture (common among late 20th century immigrants to the US) gives balanced transportation advocates pause. However, the business-savvy Republican governor has referred to rail many times, both before and after his election, and has endorsed "smart growth," which explicitly complements both urban and intercity rail. Should Gov. Ahnold put his con-



The now-WSDOT owned fifth Talgo trainset usually holds down the daily Seattle-Vancouver, BC roundtrip. Here, northbound train 510 crosses the Snohomish River in Everett in March 2003. Photo by Jim Hamre

siderable muscle toward rail and rail-oriented development, the result will be affirmative for California, and will influence what transpires in neighboring states and beyond. While Schwarzenegger is now fully "Americanized," I would hope he will not forget Graz and its south Austrian state of Steiermark, with their superb urban and intercity rail systems and the exquisite well-husbanded landscapes, so different from what humankind has done the last half-century to much of the governor's adopted Kaleefornya.

The Good Guys won in Houston. I feel the 4 Nov. 52-48% victory for expanded light rail the voters of the sprawling east Texas metropolis brought has implications far beyond metro Houston. Why? Because of the nature of the losing opposition. Light rail foes refused to identify the donors to their multi-million-dollar war chest, but their leadership was no secret. US Rep. John Culbertson (R-Houston), a close ally of the very powerful House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Houston 'burbs), was the adamant anti-rail "CEO." While DeLay allowed Culbertson to head the negative side ("allowed" is the proper verb; woe be to a Texas House Republican who

would dare differ with The Hammer, as DeLay calls himself), DeLay's past opposition to federal rail money for even his own district makes his feelings obvious. Also joining the fray just before the election with public support for Culbertson and the anti-rail crowd was Rep. Ernest Istook (R-OK), another DeLay ally, who, in his role as chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, has unsuccessfully attempted to defund Amtrak out of existence and to sabotage Seattle's Link light rail project! But Houston-area voters, who will doubtless return

Culbertson and DeLay to office for years to come, nonetheless said, "No, Congressmen, on this one we disagree with you. We want and will pay for more light rail." While obviously unhappy with the result, both Culbertson and DeLay said they'll fight for federal rail money, abiding by the majority vote of their constituents. So the people of Houston who believe urban rail, not simply more road capacity, needs to be part of their city's transportation future will likely have partially tempered the

positions of at least two of the strongest anti-rail voices in the US Congress. This Houston pro-rail vote is certainly of concern to us in the Northwest and to balanced transportation advocates around the country. A positive concern.



A fascinating display of contrasts illustrating differing visions of future transportation and resultant land use for the three Northwest Corridor's big metro areas was evident at a panel presentation on "Financing Major Transportation Improvements" at the mid-October Cascadia transportation conference in Vancouver, BC. The spokesperson for the host city chronicled Greater Vancouver's very strong emphasis on transportation improvements other than general-purpose highway lanes. The representative for Portland-Vancouver (WA) gave a vision somewhat more car-oriented than that of the Canadian city, but still was based on a multi-modal future. Then the Central Puget Sound man gave the proposed Regional Transportation Improvement District (RTID) proposal, with increased general purpose (single-occupant vehicle, effectively) lanes and (See **Flem**, page 4)

The View Down the

Tracks =====

with Jim Cusick

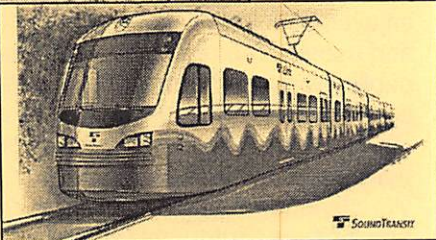
Is this for real?

On Saturday Nov. 8, Sound Transit's groundbreaking event signaled the start of construction of the Central Link light rail maintenance facility. This and construction of the first track segment are the most visible portions of the Sound Move plan that was passed by a majority of voters within the Sound Transit taxing district in 1996. These same voters confirmed their support in 2002 by voting against Initiative 776 by almost the same margin. Strangely enough, the groundbreaking event felt somewhat anticlimactic because of all the years of controversy and obstruction by those with short-term vision. I had trouble believing it was really happening. On Monday Nov. 25, the announcement by Sound Transit of a winning bidder for construction of the rail vehicles helped move my perception of progress slightly more towards reality.



Above, dignitaries dig for the first shovel of dirt at the Link maintenance base groundbreaking. Right, a Sound Transit graphic of the Link vehicles being purchased.

Top photo by Jim Hamre



ject can't dismiss.

Of course, what the groundbreaking really means is this is when the real work begins, because now there's no more discussion; it's no longer academic, it's time to build! This is the physical manifestation of the whole painful process, and I have just one thing to say to my friends down at Sound Transit...DON'T SCREW IT UP!!

Is the Seattle Monorail for real?

Well, now the lines on the maps are real. They are now in the position Sound Transit was with their scoping meetings at the very beginning of the process. You remember the Sound Transit scoping meetings, don't you? Yes you do, they were well publicized.

Even I was able to put in my 2 cents worth at most all of them. They occurred at the beginning of the

process. Despite whatever misinformation people pass along, this stuff wasn't done in secret.

The Seattle Monorail now has the same opportunity Sound Transit did to gauge public reaction. The Seattle Monorail open houses on Nov. 18 and 19 were definitely filled with enthusiastic crowds. The staff was just as enthusiastic as any other agency in their willingness to share their information, thoughts and ideas. They were also receptive to all comments, oral and written.

Wait, let me get out this box, and see...hmmm, yes, that point is sharp, and the feathers should steer it in the right direction. Okay, are you ready for some criticism?

Don't single track it. Saving money now by reducing capacity will undermine its future value. That's the benefit of mass transit, long term value. Key word - **VALUE**. Not just cost. It would be "penny wise and pound foolish" to

not build it with that future return on investment as the goal.

Wait, don't step in front yet, I still have one dart left!

King Street Station. Do not run it adjacent to the station. Follow Second Avenue all the way to King Street, and where it meets the north lot of Seahawks Stadium make the turn over to the location of the Weller Street Station. Give the Seahawks a dedicated entrance and make it a transportation concourse serving the monorail, the train platforms, and the International District tunnel station. After all, Safeco Field is going to get a station; the Seahawks should get one, too.

Are they for real?

Yeah, I know..."Here he goes again about Utah. If it was so great, why did he leave?" Well, aside from the personal reasons, I made a decision as a young man to leave that area for the Northwest. Had I known that a little "backwater" town like Salt Lake City would be YEARS AHEAD of the Puget Sound region in understanding growth and the effect RAIL transportation has on it, maybe I wouldn't have moved!

But here's what's twisting my little mind. It happened while reading how they supported the 2002 Winter Olympic events at the downtown Salt Lake City stadiums with only TRAX light rail and UTA's bus system, since there was no other way for anyone to get there. What they did was learn from Atlanta's experience and did not use transit inexperienced operators. This is the part that I find fascinating. They contacted the Amalgamated Transit Union and told them they wanted their best transit drivers. They ended up with 1,500 of the best bus drivers in the nation. Remember, the state of Utah is a right-to-work state.

I have to give them credit for looking at a problem and picking the option that gave them the best result, rather than blindly following a dogmatic approach. It's what helped make the Winter Olympics a success. To top it off, the public is crying for more rail and seems willing to pay for it, and the regional leaders are working together to figure out how to get it done. Working together. Hmmm, what a concept.

Drives me nuts.

Why? Because in this region it seems we can't give up our compulsive desire to be "rugged individualists." (See **Cusick**, page 4)



Photo by Jim Hamre

Marty Minkoff, above, director of Sound Transit's Sounder service, was guest speaker at the Oct. 11 WashARP meeting. He provided an update on all ST's services, emphasizing Sounder. He said Sounder now averages 3100 riders a day and set a ridership record the first week of Oct. Phase 1 of Seattle-Tacoma track improvements will be done in February 2004, allowing improved running times. Phase 2 will be done by April 2006, allowing for six additional weekday round-trips and weekend service. Minkoff noted that even with all the ongoing track and signal construction, Sounder has a 95% on time record.

Flem, from page 2

new roads the focus. Several attendees took the Puget Sound man politely to task for proposing a "recipe for continued sprawl," a position conspicuously unpopular with those attending the conference.

The Canadian Federal Government will fund significant transportation improvements to help the 2010 Winter Olympics the BC metropolis will host. It appears, however, all the money will be spent, including a percentage for local rail, within Greater Vancouver. When asked if any of these funds would be used to help connect Vancouver with the outside world, from where most Olympics visitors would come (the sorely needed investments on the BC portion of the Northwest Rail Corridor was explicitly mentioned), the answer was no, but that they would "welcome other parties" to so invest! We can only hope other Canadian monies can be found to at long last make our neighbors north of the 49th a real partner in our widely-praised and successful corridor's passenger train service. Frequent, dependable and faster rail service from the US Pacific Coast to Vancouver would be an economic boon to Vancouver as well as to the American portion of the Corridor. We have a few years for it to happen, but only a

few.

From the fourth city, the very rail-supportive southern anchor of our Corridor, The Eugene Register-Guard newspaper has recently reported a debate as to whether local public monies should be used to directly subsidize private airlines who might offer services at the Eugene airport. The article said increasingly both local and federal (USDOT) grants are being given, nationwide, directly to airlines to assist their operations, mostly in medium-to-smaller markets. In my view, there is nothing particularly wrong with these subsidies. If communities feel the advantages of the provided air service exceeds the public costs, so be it. But to rail advocates, this is exactly the point. Commercial air transportation is subsidized, as are virtually all forms of transportation! This is simply yet another example showing how utterly fallacious is the claim by some anti-rail demagogues that only passenger rail (and transit, particularly rail transit) is subsidized, while air and highway travel are totally paid for by user fees. (The anti-rail crowd tends to ignore, or be ignorant of, the very high public subsidies enjoyed by inland waterway providers and users.) The real case is whether public investments, including operations funding, direct or indirect, to any mode, yields long-term, comprehensive benefits which exceed the public costs. We obviously feel rail meets the test in many cases. But many feel the same about road, air, and waterway service subsidies. I feel that's acceptable; what is not acceptable is the absurd myth that only the rail and transit modes are on some kind of public dole.



Thanks to the many WashARPer and others of the rail community who sent get well wishes following my 5 Nov. lower back surgery. While quite painful and disabling, most spinal disc problems, including mine, are not critical to one's survival. I had a fine surgeon and am improving daily, but still lack the strength and stamina which will be worked on as soon as the medical OK is granted. Now, please let us aim our prayers and best thoughts to those of our friends, colleagues and families, and to all Americans and people of other nations involved in Iraq and Afghanistan, who suffer or are in danger of life-threatening problems. Finally, blessings for the Holidays and in 2004.

Cusick, from page 3

Does it really serve our purpose to be so anti-tax, so concerned that if compromise is reached it's equivalent to "caving in" to the "other side"?

Am I for real?

In an election pamphlet I received for Aaron Reardon, the newly elected Snohomish County Executive, it stated that his opponent, Dave Earling, a Sound Transit board member, didn't do anything about the "rot" at Sound Transit. What was the "rot"? It would have been nice to have had some specific information to help me understand what was behind that statement. However, I am willing to dismiss the comment as "electioneering hyperbole" and wish him luck as he takes on the job that Bob Drewel is leaving. As a Snohomish county resident I do have one expectation of Mr. Reardon. I expect that he will be a positive, integral part of solving regional mobility issues and, most importantly, I am expecting him to do whatever it takes...to BRING MORE PASSENGER RAIL service to the north end! I know Sound Transit is working on getting the eight daily Sounder trips running, but I'm talking about more!

I spend a lot of time explaining to friends and acquaintances all the intricacies associated with building roads and rail systems. I spend a lot of good party conversation time explaining where the ST taxing boundaries are, explaining sub-area equity, explaining that roads are really expensive, explaining that roads projects don't have sub-area equity rules...all in all, explaining quite a lot.

I do have trouble explaining why there aren't more rail options, though. However, what I find myself doing is one thing I wish wasn't my only option. I see state highways 9 and 522 receiving funding for capacity improvements, and the parallel rail line from Snohomish to Renton receives almost no consideration. I'm left with the feeling that I'm paying gas taxes for road improvements that I will never have the need to use. I start to resent the taxes I have to pay for roads when the transit taxes I voted for are under constant attack. I'm beginning to feel like I'm an anti-tax crusader. EGAD! I'm starting to sound like TIM EYMAN!!

I need help!!

Help in the form of more support for a **BALANCED** transportation infrastructure. **MORE RAIL!!!**

Amtrak funding remains unresolved

Though the 2004 federal fiscal year started Oct. 1, Amtrak funding, with all transportation and some other funding, remains unresolved. These agencies are operating under a continuing resolution. All remaining funding bills have been folded into a massive omnibus bill, but issues unrelated to transportation have tied it up. With the House stuck at the administration's shutdown \$900 mill. for Amtrak and Sen. Patty Murray (D-Shoreline) able to get the Senate to \$1.346 bill., the conference committee agreed to provide Amtrak \$1.225 bill. and defer repayment for another year on the \$100 mill. loan from FRA. Amtrak was able to carry over \$200 mill. in working capital from 2003 so, even though the final apparent figure is well below its \$1.812 bill. request, Amtrak should be all right for 2004. However, Pres. David Gunn stated that Amtrak has to evaluate the effect this appropriation will have on the company's capital program. Some important projects will have to be postponed or stretched over a longer time period. (We note that the administration requested \$303 mill. for the Iraqi railroad system.)

Quality, from page 1

and 58 Superliner II sleepers. Many of the Superliner I cars still have the original upholstery and seat cushions, which no longer provide much comfort. In the overhaul category are the 67 Talgo cars.

Hughes noted that someone recently stumbled across three overhaul kits for the single-level Heritage diners. They've been hauled out of storage and are now being installed.

Amtrak's back shops are also

working to return to service many wreck damaged cars, some of which have been sitting idle for years.

Once this improvement project is completed Amtrak will have 6% less equipment on the books than now but will have 12% more pieces in service at any given moment.

On the stations, Hughes stated that all stations will be fully ADA compliant by 2010.

When asked about why the new Seattle Amtrak maintenance base has been so slow to get built, after a groundbreaking in April 2000, Hughes said the original design was not well conceived. The maintenance base is currently being redesigned and should be built in about two years. He noted that parts of the new base have been finished, including the car wash and the wheel truing machine.

Thanksgiving, from page 1

most in the last five years and perhaps in Amtrak's history.

The *Cascades*, the Northwest Corridor and Amtrak as a whole have had a very good summer and fall. In July, *Cascades* ridership was 55,427, up 4.5% over 2002; total corridor ridership (including *Coast Starlight* passengers riding between Seattle and Eugene) was 64,429, up 3.3%. For August, the *Cascades* carried 63,047 passengers, up 4.4% and set an all time record of \$1.6 mill. in revenue. This was also the second highest month for ridership since the state DOT began its support in 1993. Total August corridor ridership was 72,977, also up 4.4%. September *Cascades* ridership was 45,379, plus 2.1% from the previous year, while corridor ridership totaled 53,179, up 3.2%. The *Cascades* carried 41,248 passengers in October, up 7.1%; corridor rid-

ership was 47,971, up 5.4%.

One area of disappointment continues to be on-time performance of the *Cascades* in 2003. To date, it has usually averaged between 65 and 75% each month, below the goal of 80%. Causes continue to be freight interference, particularly on Union Pacific south of Portland, and track work. Completion of track work between Seattle and Tacoma, and south of Portland will add capacity and reduce slow orders which should help improve reliability for *Cascades* customers.

Nationally, Amtrak set an all-time ridership record for fiscal year 2003 (ending Sept. 30): 24.028 mill., up 3% from last year.

Turning back to page 1, readers can see in the center background that work has begun on phase one of the King Street Station rehabilitation project. The historic neon "King Street Station" sign facing Jackson St. has been restored and reinstalled though it will not be re-illuminated until phase one repairs are completed. Other work that has begun includes a total rebuilding of the restrooms, which have been gutted. Temporary restrooms have been installed on the platform. The construction seen in the photo involves removal of walls to used to create offices in the 1960s. This additional space will allow an expanded waiting room. As the project moves into full gear early next year the ticket counter will be relocated to the former restaurant area; the heating, ventilation and electrical systems will be overhauled; the interior will be cleaned and brightened; the non-original addition that covers the steps to Jackson St. will be removed; the entire exterior will be cleaned and repaired; the clock will be repaired; and other work will be done.

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All are evening numbers, except Lloyd's, which is available 7:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily.

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U. S. Senate: Washington, DC 20510
Capitol Switchboard (all members): 202 224-3121
State Legislature: State Capitol, Olympia 98504
Hotline for leaving messages: 800 562-6000
Amtrak Reservations/Information: 800 872-7245
WashARP e-mail: washarp@scn.org
WashARP: www.trainweb.org/washarp
NARP: www.narprail.org
NARP Hotline: www.narprail.org/hot.htm
Amtrak: www.amtrak.com
Amtrak <i>Cascades</i> : www.amtrakcascades.com
Sound Transit: www.soundtransit.org

WashARP News

January 10: WashARP meeting at **12:45 p.m.** at **Andy's Diner**, 2963 4th Ave S, **Seattle** (just north of Spokane St).

January 15: Commuter Rail Group meeting at **6:30 p.m.** at **Andy's Diner**, 2963 4th Ave S, **Seattle**.

February 18 (Wednesday): WashARP evening meeting at **6:00 p.m.** at the **Panorama City** retirement community in **Lacey**. Cost is \$13 for a buffet, and includes room rental and other meeting costs. We are inviting key legislators to attend. Driving: from I-5, north or south, take exit 108 (Sleater-Kinney Rd. south). Travel about 1 mile to the Panorama City entrance, about 500 feet past 14th Ave. on the left. Follow the Information Center signs to parking adjacent to the Administration/Restaurant building. Proceed through the main entrance to the Garden Room on the second floor. The **March** meeting is also scheduled for the Olympia area. Date and location in the next newsletter.

WashARP welcomes the following new members in October and November: Ed Davis, Lacey; Lawrence Pulliam, Winlock; Mary & Gary Schmidt, Olympia; James Salisbury, Bellingham; John Haigh, Seattle; Craig Williams, Seattle; Dan Langdon, Seattle; Gary Chandler, Olympia; Randolph Peterson, Richland; and Doug Thorp, Everett.

Washington Association of
Rail Passengers
P. O. Box 70381
Seattle, WA 98127

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(always welcome and appreciated)

Note: if you move, let us know in advance and save WashARP 75¢ for address correction service.

WashARP meeting dates and cities for the rest of 2004 (subject to change):

April 10	Seattle	Sept. 11	Seattle
May 8	Seattle	Oct. 9	Mt. Vernon
June 12	Yakima	Nov. 13	Seattle
July 10	Seattle	Dec. 4	Seattle
Aug. 14	Puyallup		

Commuter Rail Group meeting dates in Seattle for the rest of 2004 (subject to change):

March 18	September 16
May 20	November 18
July 15	

Exact meeting locations will be in the newsletter as each date approaches.

WashARP members contributing to this newsletter include: John Carlin, Lloyd Flem, Gay Banks-Olson, Jim Cusick, Warren Yee, Tony Trifiletti, Rocky Shay and Kirk Fredrickson.

Letters...

Those of you who are NARP members have already seen the article about reopening of the Main St. Station in Richmond, VA. My wife and I were there in November and had occasion to ride the *Palmetto*, from there to Charleston, SC.

It was a rainy day in Richmond. There were four trains schedule through in a two hour period, the *Palmetto* between New York and Miami, and the *Carolinian* between New York and Charlotte, one of each north and southbound. There were various delays and all four came through in the space of an hour. We got to the station early. The local bus, obviously not set up for intermodal service, dropped us perhaps half a mile away. The rain started as we walked from the bus stop to the Staples Mill station.

We watched the other trains come through. There was a monitor showing the arrival times. It showed our train as "on time" until about 15 minutes before its

scheduled time, when I guess some real data started to come in. The train eventually came in about 20 minutes late. It lumbered through the station, about 8 passenger cars followed by an equal length of mail cars. All of these trundled through the station until the last car had cleared the walkway between the station and center platforms. If someone announced the latter was the place to board, I missed it and went chasing down the near platform half the length of the train until a fork lift operator told me I was in the wrong place. So I got to run **back** to the tail of the train and up the center platform. On the platform the conductor assigned us a pair of seats and we boarded.

The trip was quite pleasant. Although this is the only NY-Florida train without a full dining car, it had the usual Amtrak snack car so we did not lack for nourishment. We pulled into Charleston about 40 minutes late. Sad to say, I think that's about par for Amtrak.

I hope with the new Main St. station Amtrak can set up a better way to handle the mail cars without such an impact on the passenger service. I'm glad for the revenue, but if the effect is to drive away passengers, what's the gain? Amtrak was founded because the railroads did not want the passenger service interfering with their freight business. If Amtrak itself lets the freight "tail" wag the passenger "dog," what good is it?

If anyone in Richmond sees this, I'd like to suggest a volunteer activity. With four trains passing in mid-afternoon, station personnel are stretched thin. If some VaARP volunteers could help passengers get to the proper boarding places, it would be a fine public service and gain some visibility for your organization. Or maybe at Main St. station they'll have this covered.

John Carlin
Edmonds

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