

Washington Rail News

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A Not-for-profit Consumer Organization
"...getting the Pacific Northwest on the right track."

Administration: "Reform" Amtrak by axing all its funding

The Bush Administration's 2006 budget was released on Feb. 7. It contained zero funding for intercity passenger rail service for the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1, 2005. The theory is that forcing Amtrak into bankruptcy will bring about "reform" that the administration thinks is needed to cure the problems it perceives with Amtrak. The chorus of protests was loud and bipartisan, and came from nearly every corner of the country: Congress, state legislatures, mayors, newspaper editors, balanced transportation advocates and just plain citizens.

On Feb. 14, Sens. Conrad Burns (R-MT) and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) sent a letter signed by 35 senators to the Senate Budget Committee urging full funding of the \$1.8 bill. in Amtrak's

ern representative to sign this letter was Denny Rehberg (MT).

Amtrak Board Chairman David Laney sent Congress the company's "annual report," a four page letter with an attachment from President David Gunn. The attachment outlined Amtrak's progress over the last four years, but there was no grant request for 2006 as required by law. The letter says a grant request will be sent "as soon as a planning process permits." Laney ominously writes that the Amtrak Board "agrees that the President's proposed operating budget of 'zero' is the right message (but) 'zero' is not the right number at this juncture...to effect needed reforms." As of March 26, Amtrak had not yet submitted its grant request for 2006.

Sen. Patty Murray (D-Shoreline) quickly issued two letters demanding answers to the administration's bankruptcy plan and to why the Amtrak Board had not provided the required grant request. Sen. Murray's first letter, to DOT Secretary Norm Mineta, stated "This is an extraordinary and, in my view, dangerous turnaround in the Administration's position regarding Amtrak. Ceding control of the national railroad to a bankruptcy trustee is both reckless and irresponsible. This plan will put at grave risk the travel options of every Amtrak rider." Murray demanded answers to her concerns about all the ramifications of an Amtrak bankruptcy. For the full

letter: murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=232226.

Murray's second letter, to Amtrak Board Chairman David Laney and co-signed by Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI), called on the board to fulfill its legal requirement to provide Congress a fund- (See **Amtrak**, page 4)

Remembering a great citizen-legislator

By Lloyd Flem



Former state Representative Ruth Fisher (D-Tacoma, until she retired following the 2002 session) passed away Feb. 21, 2005 at age

79. She was the single most important legislator in ensuring the true development of a Department of Transportation as opposed to just a Department of Highways. Ruth is widely seen as the mother of Sound Transit. It is less publicized that she was also the most vital legislator in supporting the development and funding of our state's nationally-respected, successful and rightly popular intercity rail program.

At the public memorial service held at Tacoma's magnificently-restored Pantages Theater on the afternoon of Saturday 12 March, public figures, including Gov. Christine Gregoire, former Gov. Mike Lowry, and Congressman Norm Dicks, delivered touching and oft times amusing eulogies celebrating the life of this most unforgettable Tacoma Democrat.

Representing WashARP "officially" were Board members Jim Hamre and Loren Herrigstad and myself. In handing a card from WashARP to Ruth's family, I told her daughter Joan that WashARP treasures the memory of Ruth and the wonderful work she had done for rail in our state.

In respect for Ruth AND because it is the superior way civilized grown-ups travel, Loren and I rode the Amtrak Cascades to and from Tacoma and were joined by Jim Hamre and Rep. Deb Wallace (D-Vancouver) on Tacoma's well-patronized Link light rail line from Tacoma Dome Station to the Theater district stop, just downhill from the Pantages.

Ruth was rightly pleased with the renaissance her home city's downtown (See **Ruth Fisher**, page 5)



Amtrak Cascades train 500 traveling along Tacoma's waterfront on a foggy February morning. Train 500 is one of four runs each day between Seattle and Portland that is fully funded by Amtrak. (The other three are trains 11, 14 and 509.) The state of Washington funds direct operating costs for the other four daily runs.

Photo by Jim Hamre

five-year plan. Other Northwest senators signing the letter were Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Max Baucus (D-MT).

A Mar. 3 letter signed by 21 House Republicans went to the House Budget Committee urging "sufficient funding in the fiscal year 2006 Budget Resolution to sustain Amtrak's national network of passenger rail service." The only west-



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

On Amtrak And Passenger Rail's Future; Portland

Except for the Wall Street Journal and the tiny cadre of what pro-rail conservative Paul Weyrich calls "libertarians," few have applauded the Federal Administration's statements to date on the future of intercity passenger rail. Given the multiplicity of problems facing Amtrak with its current financial situation (which is in part a result of bad decisions by past Amtrak management), the Administration's suggestion of an Amtrak bankruptcy, where assets, which include stations and equipment, would be sold to creditors, many of whom are non-North American entities, would effectively end intercity passenger rail service.

Remarks made by Secretary of Transportation Norm Mineta as late as today (24 March) repeated what are errors in fact about the *Empire Builder* in his apparent campaign to end support for the *Builder* and other National Network trains. And while one may be able to take a discount airline flight from Chicago to Seattle cheaper than on Amtrak, critics of these "long-distance" trains either ignore or simply don't know that the overwhelming majority of ridership on the *Builder* is not between the two metropolitan endpoints, but to and from dozens of destinations along the line, where intercity bus service is gone and air service, if available, is dramatically more costly than the equivalent Amtrak trip. "Red State" Montana, which is dependent on the *Builder*, is near-universally opposed to the Administration's Amtrak "reforms," at least as they have been publicly and repeatedly announced.

Another Administration proposal is to allow competitive bidding for passenger rail service by non-Amtrak providers. I have no ideological opposition to this idea. While in Germany in 1998, executives from Talgo-Berlin told me the opening of potential competition to previously monopolistic Deutschebahn forced that government rail company to provide better service. While we here

are blessed with among the highest quality service with our Amtrak *Cascades*, potential competition could well urge the company nationwide into a "let's hustle for more business and better service" mode.

But at present the Class I freight rail companies, upon whose tracks nearly all Amtrak trains outside the Northeast Corridor travel, have stated they wish not to have any intercity passenger provider other than Amtrak on their properties. Could that change someday? Maybe, but for the present, Amtrak alone is it. If the government were to force the Class I's to accept other passenger providers, the current access and liability insurance costs would increase dramatically for the non-Amtrak provider, effectively discouraging their entrance into the market.

Are there aspects of the Administration plan which have merit? Perhaps. I understand some private discussions

Critics of these "long-distance" trains either ignore or simply don't know that the overwhelming majority of ridership on the Builder is not between the two metropolitan endpoints, but to and from dozens of destinations along the line.

with Mineta and Amtrak Board members have shown a more reasonable posture by the Administration. As I said in my Portland presentation on 12 March, the Administration's "reform plan," to be put forth in detail in early April, may not be as bad as their public rhetoric now suggests. We'll see. I, for example, do not categorically oppose the Northeast Corridor infrastructure being a separate (federally, not state and locally, funded) institution. Capital needs of the NEC are of the multi-billion-dollar magnitude and might better be obligations of an institution other than Amtrak. (This, and some other issues should be at least open to reasonable policy debate. While I obviously do not agree with what we know of the Administration's position, neither do I feel rail advocates need to doggedly support the Amtrak status quo in its entirety.)

We can be somewhat pleased that our Amtrak *Cascades* are touted as a national model in Mineta's speeches. But again, some of the facts in the touting are a bit suspect! While our state, the private sector, and individual communities have been more involved in the growing development of our corri-

dor than is the case in much of the rest of the country, Amtrak (particularly Amtrak West, when it was a semi-independent organization) was part of the team and Amtrak today retains a significant responsibility for the operation of the *Cascades*. ("Thanks for the kudos, Mr. Secretary, but we in the Northwest Corridor do **NOT** endorse what we know of your plan to date!")

We must continue to inform our Congressional delegation of the need to not only preserve our passenger rail system (while not precluding some "reform"), but also of the obvious need for a serious look at much more significant investments in passenger and freight rail for our country in the future. Road, air, and waterway infrastructure are near-universally accepted as reasonable obligations of federal and state governments. While we may have differences as to what is the best form and shape of public funding of passenger rail in the future, there should be no disagreement, if we

are truly passenger rail advocates, that a growing public-sector investment role is essential.



Congratulations to rail advocates from Oregon for the superb meeting they hosted at Portland's classic Hotel Multnomah on 19 March. (Ok, so the hotel now has another McName as it was evidently gobbled up by a large lodging chain. But to this curmudgeon, it will always be the Multnomah; also Seahawks Stadium, Hec Ed Pavilion and I will remember the Bon Marche.)

Most WashARP members traveled to Portland on the Amtrak *Cascades*, an incomparably better way than enduring the agonies of I-5 or taking a costly, hassle-filled and end-point to end-point not-even-time-efficient flight. Striking were the large crowds of train travelers at Portland's beautifully-restored Union Station. One is reminded of pictures from World War II, when gasoline rationing and few civilian air flights meant that train and bus were about the only intercity travel choices for most people.

Yet today, when "nobody rides the train," our Amtrak *Cascades* were at capacity and finding a seat in Union Station's ample waiting rooms was difficult.

Motor fuel costs continue to rise, petroleum supplies are finite and countries such as India and China will continue to drive prices upward as their potentially-huge economies grow. Highways are congested, air travel is increasingly less-enjoyable. To not reasonably fund passenger rail, as every other industrialized country is doing, is simply absurd. Let's keep the pressure on our public decision makers.



The View Down the Tracks

=====

with Jim Cusick

I'm In Love With My Car

I know I said I was going to talk positive, but there are a few nits to pick, just to get it out of my system.

Cars, cars, cars. Why do I keep getting the message from the media that I'm in LOVE with my car. If there were to be a song written about me and my cars, in the flavor of the rock group Queen's song "I'm in love with my car," it would most assuredly have to be re-titled to include the dark side of my love-hate relationship with them. Hey, guess what? Spring is here, driving will increase as summer gets closer, and...the PRICE of GAS is going up?

Gee, isn't that a surprise. We'll get endless news reports at the gas pumps, with interviews of lots of whiney drivers. If we only had other options. Well, you know, they're only raising gas prices because, well...you do remember what I said about the market.

Now, charging what the market will bear is not always restricted to the oil companies. With that in mind, while I applauded the agreement that Sound Transit, the City of Sea-Tac and the Port of Seattle came to in order to get light rail to the airport, I also found out something quite interesting.

I (the auto owner) am just a cash cow.

How depressing.

Is there no love involved?

While I was at a recent Central Link open house, I spoke with some of the engineers and architects involved with station design. I mentioned that the walkway between the station and the airport would be a perfect place for one of those high-speed automated walkways prevalent in major airports. I was told that that particular enhancement was not included because the Port didn't want to make things too convenient for those arriving by rail. That might discourage them from using their car to come to the airport and, well, the Port does make money on the parking fees from the garage. I'll be honest, while the walkway decision was new to me, the money making aspect of parking fees was something the Port had freely,

and proudly, admitted a number of years ago at a public meeting.

[Light] Rail will come to Bothell

Years ago, when I was involved with the City of Bothell's 20-year growth plan 'Imagine Bothell,' I had told then-Mayor Debbie Treen, that some day "light rail will come to Bothell." Well, as things have progressed, according to the article in the local paper for both Bothell and Kenmore, the Bothell Reporter, the SR 522 corridor is considered a major transit corridor by Sound Transit. Along with the efforts of the King County Monorail folks, using this corridor for High Capacity RAIL transit is certainly on the books.

While the article highlighted the differences between the choice of mono-

All of us in WashARP know that while we might have opinions about the various rail choices, we don't dismiss any rail choice.

rail vs. light rail, and quoted the usual parties on both sides of the debate, I was able to offer my informed and unbiased opinion to the reporter in an hour long conversation. All of us in WashARP know that while we might have opinions about the various rail choices, we don't dismiss any rail choice. We support ALL rail choices. While there was only one quote attributed to me, I could tell from her writing that she was able to absorb, understand and clearly explain the positives and negatives of both choices, and what technical issues are involved. However, I will say I was misquoted.

Misquoted Again!

However, it wasn't concerning a rail issue. When I made the comparison about those who support monorail versus those who support light rail, I used the analogy that it was like the difference between sports fans who enjoy high scoring offensive style games, versus those who enjoy low scoring defensive style games. What I said was: "It's like the difference between basketball, and **HOCKEY!**"

The quote had me saying was it was like the difference between basketball and **BASEBALL!** Sheesh! Baseball? What the heck is that? Hockey is the real sport!! Well, ignore the silly lock-out for now. I suppose that more of the general public in the hockey desert of Seattle would understand the baseball reference better. However, hockey is the one sport that hasn't come asking

for public funding, yet.

Does anyone know what's going on?

Well, as far as building light rail goes, apparently not! This is another chance for you to take your friends on a fun filled rail tour. One of my former coworkers needed to visit a business in the SODO area, and since we had extra time, I took them on a tour of the Central Link construction. They said "Wow! I didn't know there was this much work being done. I never read or see anything about it." They were quite impressed by the work at the maintenance base, and were impressed with all the utility and other preparatory work being done in the Rainier Valley.

Just wait until construction of the elevated portion through Tukwila begins. The method they are using will be the same as what was used to build Skytrain in Vancouver, BC. This process uses precast sections cast offsite, then brought to the location

where they will be erected with a 'walking crane' that uses the already constructed portions of the span as the attachment point. The precast sections are hoisted into place, where they are connected into one span between the vertical supports. The process is very fast, and I was told that if you leave the area for a few weeks, when you come back there will be a markedly different appearance to the area.

Sort of like the way the monorail proponents say are the benefits of monorail construction. Do you want to know what it will look like? Just go up to Vancouver and take a look at Skytrain. You know Skytrain, it's a steel wheel on steel rail system. Two of them. Two rails, that is. Picture a structure which is about as intrusive as the width of an elevated freeway off ramp.

Why don't you take a friend on a drive? Better yet, take them on a trip on Sounder to a Mariners game. Heck you don't even have to go to the game, you can just spend the day doing a walking touring of Central Link. Just be done by the time the game ends! Well, okay, maybe walking the route is a bit much. Of course, there's another idea to make use of all those Sound Transit shuttle buses...Hmmm, I suppose the fact that they haven't been purchased would be a problem. However, I think combining Central Link tours with the Mariners Sounder specials is a grand idea. (I can hear the groaning from the ST employees now.) Now, what else can I think up for a fun filled weekend?

Amtrak, from page 1
ing request. The senators wrote "This year's report as submitted by a largely new Board deliberately evades the question of the railroad's subsidy needs and instead praises the President's irresponsible proposal to bankrupt Amtrak as 'the right message.' Such an approach undermines Congress's ability to assess Amtrak's needs and is a disservice to the Corporation that you are charged with governing....By not submitting a grant request prior to our budget considerations, you deliberately leave uncontested the Administration's request to eliminate all funding for Amtrak and push the railroad into bankruptcy....

These actions on the part of the Board are irresponsible." The letter can be viewed at murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=232346.

WashARP member Carl Fowler, vice president of Rail Travel Center Tours (www.railtravelcenter.com), sent an op-ed to newspapers around the country. It was published in at least the Billings (MT) Gazette and Toledo (OH) Blade. Carl was also quoted in the Sydney (MT) Herald. For his editorial go to www.billingsgazette.com and type Carl Fowler in the search box.

The Senate, on Mar. 16, rejected on a vote of 46-52 an amendment by Sen. Robert Byrd (D-WV) to its budget resolution to fund Amtrak for 2006. Only four Republicans voted for the amendment. Some senators claimed funding it required new revenue.

Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS), again chairman of the authorizing subcommittee said, "I am committed to find a way to get a reauthorization and get a reliable stream of funds for Amtrak so its future can be certain and so (Amtrak) does not have to depend on annual appropriations."

portant Amtrak is to Montana's transportation infrastructure. We have the flexibility...to make sure the funds are there to keep the *Empire Builder* rolling."

The House adopted a budget resolution on Mar. 17 that does support \$1.2 bill. for Amtrak (the amount it received for 2005). The resolution states "the President's recommended level, as re-estimated by the Congressional Budget Office, with the following adjustment: the starting level was increased to accommodate for continued funding of passenger rail services."

DOT Secretary Norm Mineta has been compelled to take to the road to defend the administration's "save Amtrak by killing it" proposal. He has made a series of appearances in the Midwest and east but has

not yet ventured to the west coast. The amount of misinformation he is presenting to the media and public is overwhelming. NARP has set up a fact check section on its web site to rebut the inaccurate information being spread by Mineta and some in Congress: www.narprail.org/factcheck.pdf.

Two Amtrak services that Mineta continues to spread misinformation about are our *Cascades* and the *Empire Builder*. In a Feb. 23 New York Times op-ed piece he said, "The State of Washington has upgraded stations and tracks, and purchased new, higher-speed trains. It subsidizes the operating costs, while Amtrak's role is reduced to running the trains under contract."

NARP fact check: Washington state funds direct operating costs for only four of eight runs each day between Seattle and Portland. Amtrak funds the other four as well as some overhead costs for the state supported trains. Also, two of the five Talgo trainsets were purchased by Amtrak, with Washington state owning the other three. Mineta is right about one thing: Washington has invested many millions in rail capital projects without much support from the federal government. How eliminating Amtrak and the *Cascades* would bring new federal money to our state for rail investments remains unanswered.

Mineta's Mar. 24 event in Detroit provided him the opportunity to bash the *Empire Builder*, one of Amtrak's strongest and most used national network trains. Building on his Feb. 14 statement in Chicago that "Amtrak...is...running trains that nobody rides between cities that nobody wants to travel between" he said, "The problem is if the *Empire Builder* is

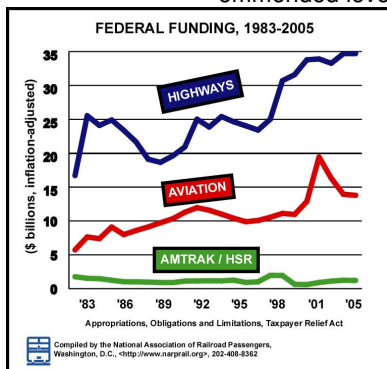
going from Seattle to Chicago and it's going through let's say Montana, but there are only 53 people a day using that train service, can I really justify pouring that kind of subsidy into the *Empire Builder* for a segment of that service?"

NARP fact check: In fiscal 2004, the *Empire Builder* handled 437,200 passengers, an average 1,195 per day (597 per trip, with one eastbound and one westbound train per day). This was 5% above the 2003 level, and 19% above 2002. In 2004, boardings and alightings within the state of Montana totaled 129,044 or an average of 353 per day. At the same time, about 100,000 passengers (average 275 per day) traveled all the way across Montana en route between Idaho-west and North Dakota-east points.

Mineta wants "coalitions of states" to step up and fully support the national network trains. Even where there are only two states involved in a partnership it is difficult to keep service running. The states of Illinois and Wisconsin have argued over funding for the *Hiawatha* service in the past. Washington and Oregon's partnership is strong but either legislature could reduce or eliminate funding at anytime. *Cascades* trains could still operate only north of Portland or only south of Portland but would be considerably weaker without the other leg.

Yet Mineta wants **eight** states to join together to operate and support the *Builder*. Mineta's solution if a state refuses to partner with the other states: lock the doors and make no stops in that state. Just how eliminating nearly 30% of the *Builder's* ridership if Montana wouldn't pay to play improves the financial performance of the train has yet to be explained by Mineta. Ridership on this train would be even higher if Amtrak had the equipment to meet the demand during busy holiday and summer periods. Joe Szabo, a United Transportation Union official, on states joining together to fund trains: "We already have a consortium of states. It's called the federal government."

Writing in the March 2005 Railway Age, editor William Vantuono sums up the federal government's current transportation policy perfectly: "The U.S. DOT logo is a stylized triskelion, which is Greek for 'three-leg.' This symbol, which originated in ancient Greece, is associated with progress and competition. Presumably, the three legs of the stool are planes (Federal Aviation Administration), trains (Federal Railroad Administration), and automobiles (Federal Highway Administration). Progress and competition—on a two-legged stool?" (www.railwayage.com/A/xfromtheeditor.html)



NARP graphic



Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D) was the keynote speaker at the joint NARP Region 8/ WashARP/AORTA/MTWYarp meeting March 19 in Portland. Blumenauer is a strong passenger rail advocate. More meeting details will be in the next newsletter.

Photo by Jim Hamre

Sen. Burns said on his web site, "I agree that Amtrak must be adequately funded. Raising taxes is not the way to accomplish it, and anyone who says this was a vote against Amtrak is pandering. I sent a letter to Sen. Gregg, the Budget Committee Chairman, and made sure he knew how im-



Mayor Vigil Clarkson, right, welcomed WashARP to Lacey at its Feb. 12 meeting. Rep. Deb Wallace (D-Vancouver), middle, was our featured speaker. Photo by Jim Hamre

Ruth Fisher, from page 1 is undergoing, in large part thanks to the wise investments in the several museums, UW-Tacoma campus and Tacoma Link.

For many years, early during each legislative session I held a scheduled meeting with Ruth. As the session continued, I was able to drop into her office several times without prior notice, usually just for a few minutes. As Ruth was always on "our side" on rail issues, my purpose in these short meetings was to find out her views of the status of important pro-rail legislation and what we, as independent rail advocates, should do to further the cause with other members of the Legislature. While our meetings were always totally cordial, Rep. Fisher and I wasted little time with small talk. I always left her office energized about what our message was and to whom it should be carried.

Ruth was a deeply committed Democrat, but was never blindly partisan. She was quite capable of overt grumping at Democrats with whom she disagreed. Likewise, there were Republicans she respected and with whom she worked closely. On transportation issues, I recall Ruth particularly allied with former Sen. Jeannette Wood and former Rep. Karen Schmidt, the latter Ruth's co-chair of the House Transportation Committee a few years back. Fortunately for rail advocates, Fisher and Schmidt were pro-rail and led their caucuses into voting our way. (Woe be to the person or issue those two powerful personalities agreed to oppose! Ruth was never a rail or transit

"buff." She supported multi-modal transportation as being needed for our state, leaving technical and operational details to others. On transportation issues, she supported needed state funding and was rightly contemptuous of those who wanted transportation investments – especially in their own districts – yet voted "no" on any funding for these investments. (Oh yeah, such folks are still found in Olympia, opposing all funding, yet front and center in the ribbon cutting photo-op for hometown projects!)



Ruth Fisher received WashARP's Tom Martin award in Dec. 2002 for her extraordinary service on behalf of passenger rail service.

Photo by Warren Yee

Among my most memorable experiences concerning Ruth occurred about 15 years ago when WashARP Chairman Chuck Mott and I "walked across the bridge" – the footbridge over Capitol Way which separates the DOT building from the Capitol and legislative offices.

WashARP had worked hard with legislators, particularly Ruth and Jeannette Wood, to get a start on an intercity rail program. (I hasten to add others, in and out of government, were also affirmatively active.) Following some close calls in the Legislature (the dramatics involved might make a decent TV mini-series!), a respectable start for a rail program was funded.

Months passed and I perceived little tangible progress in administering the program. Let me emphasize the DOT employees then involved favored adding intercity rail to the DOT mission. They were/are "good guys" and several I consider friends. (All have since moved on or are retired; in my 19 years as WashARP's executive director I have experienced multiple generations of legislators, public employees and

appointees who have come, served and gone.)

The problem was that intercity rail was a New Thing and perhaps the folks were uncertain as how to dive into that cold water! In retrospect, I should have directly approached these people charged with the program. Instead, Chuck and I walked across the bridge to speak with Jeannette and Ruth, as tactfully as possible stating our concern that "our rail program" didn't appear to be moving very fast. Senator Wood listened carefully and said she would carefully address the issue. Then we went to Ruth's office. We got out maybe two sentences. Then, "That's it! I've heard enough!" she barked.

Upshot was some DOT mid-management got a legendary tail-chewing from a Tacoma lady that could strike fear in the heart of the biggest and strongest state employee, lobbyist or fellow legislator. WashARP then became more closely involved, in a citizen advisory capacity, and the rail program began its steady climb into being one of the nation's best under Gil Mallory's full-steam-ahead activism and Ken Uznanski's nationally-lauded administrative skills.

Ruth is physically gone from Olympia, but there are others in the Legislature that are – but not, they would concede – replacements for Ruth who share her beliefs that Washington must have a variety of decently-funded transportation modes. We will work with them to continue needed progress for rail, intercity and urban, passenger and freight.

Without Ruth Fisher's integrity and determined hard work, would Sound Transit and the state rail program have come into existence? Quite possibly not. Thank you Representative Fisher! Your legacy and example gives us energy to continue our efforts to make Washington a better place.

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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. House of Representatives:
Washington, DC 20515
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: www.washarp.org
NARP: www.narprail.org
NARP Hotline: www.narprail.org/hot.htm
Amtrak: www.amtrak.com
Amtrak Cascades: www.amtrakcascades.com
Sound Transit: www.soundtransit.org

WashARP News

April 9: WashARP meeting at **12:45 p.m.** at **Andy's Diner**, 2963 4th Ave. S., **Seattle** (just north of Spokane St. and on Metro routes 23 and 174).

May 14: WashARP meeting with Discovery Institute planned for **Tacoma**. Location and other meeting details are not finalized. Members will be informed by postcard in April.

May 19: Commuter Rail Group meeting at **6:30 p.m.** at **Andy's Diner**, 2963 4th Ave. S., **Seattle** (transit information above).

June 11: WashARP meeting in **Leavenworth**. Location and other meeting details are not finalized. Members will be informed by postcard in April.

WashARP welcomed the following new members in January and February: Commissioner Mike Leita, Yakima; Fred Renspies, Yakima; Ernie Frank, Yakima; Bev Luby Bartz, Yakima; Dirk Sampson, Vancouver; Maryanne Sood, Seattle; Larry Drawdy, Des Moines; Mayor Paul George, Yakima; and Janet Gryczan and Phil Secor, Seattle.

WashARP members contributing to this newsletter include: Tony Trifiletti, Lloyd Flem, Jim Cusick, Louis Musso, Zack Willhoite, Warren Yee, Carl Fowler, Mike Lustig and Mark Meyer.

Amtrak *Cascades* ridership was up 0.9% in January and down 2.6% in February over 2004. Total Northwest Corridor ridership was down 3.0% and 4.8%, respectively. (February 2004 was a leap month.)

Seattle's Waterfront Streetcar threatened with shutdown

As the Seattle Art Museum developed plans for its waterfront sculpture part over the last several years the fact that the project could doom the George Benson Waterfront Streetcar remained a secret. Only recently has the general public become aware of the situation and the reaction has been swift, strong and negative. City and county politicians and SAM directors are scrambling to be sure they aren't blamed and are now trying to figure out what can be done to preserve the system former city Councilman George Benson, who died last year, pushed to bring to Seattle in 1982.

The problem stems from the need for SAM to remove the car barn at Broad St. and Alaskan Way to build its sculpture park. Officials have yet to offer an explanation of how the park project could get to this point with no thought given to the needs of the streetcar.

As government officials scrambled to keep the line in operation, the Port of Seattle has offered space next to its grain terminal, about a mile north of the current end of the line for a new car barn. The port has also offered to construct the track extension along the edge of Myrtle Edwards Park. Two major issues remain: how to fund a new car barn (maybe SAM should pay for it as its project is displacing the building), and how to not have the streetcar shut down in September until the new facility is built.

The Waterfront Streetcar is not only itself a tourist attraction but is also a real mode of transportation for both commuters and tourists along the waterfront and in Pioneer Square and the International District. To protest the possible end of the waterfront streetcar visit www.historylink.org/feedback/streetcar.cfm.

Ellensburg continues effort to save its rail station

On Feb. 7, the Ellensburg city council took an important step toward acquiring the city's historic 1910 railroad station by voting to make a final offer for the building and possibly moving to condemn it. The city has been working for 10 years to purchase the station and save it from further deterioration.

In 1999, the city obtained a \$221,000 Transportation Enhancement grant from WSDOT. Historic Ellensburg raised the \$39,000 match for the grant but DOT wouldn't release the funds unless the city obtained a 20-year lease of the land under the building from BNSF. The railroad initially refused to give more than a 5-year lease, but changed its mind in March 2002, and is willing to issue a 20-year lease.

A Nov. 2002 appraisal of the station set the value at \$120,000, which the city offered to the owners. But the owners wanted \$240,000 and the city can't pay more than 10% above appraised value. To complicate matters, the building owners are fighting with each other.

And now DOT says a new appraisal is needed. That is to be done soon. If the new appraisal is still well below what the owners will accept the city council could resume its discussion of condemnation, a risky process that could cost \$50,000 or more. Citizens that packed the council chambers at the Feb. 7 meeting demanded the city move forward with acquisition by whatever means necessary as the building is threatened with "demolition by neglect."

The Ellensburg station would be an integral part of restored passenger train service from Seattle to the Yakima valley, a proposal that gathers momentum daily.

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

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