



WASHINGTON RAIL NEWS

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2012

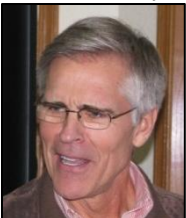
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"Moving forward... On Rail."

Northwest Rail Corridor update: Service and Infrastructure Improvements

(This article is based on a presentation by Washington State Department of Transportation's Rail Director John Sibold at the AAWA December 10 meeting and an interview with David Smelser, WSDOT's Cascades HSR Program Manager, on January 13.)

John Sibold, at our December 10 meeting at Centennial Station in Lacey, began his presentation by asking what people want from transportation. People want alternatives and choices in travel mode. He named several of the advantages of passenger rail – avoiding congestion and stress, making better use of your time, greener and more fuel efficient, scenery.



John Sibold

He said we need better on time performance and reliability to bring more travelers to rail. Increased ridership means less state support is needed for operation of the Amtrak Cascades. Meeting

passenger expectations is critical to getting a person to ride the first time and then to continue riding. Trains running on time is at the top of passenger expectations and high on the his priority list.

Sibold noted that he meets with Ron Pate, Cascades Operations Manager, and Rail Office staff each morning to review the Cascades operations and delay report from the previous day. When there are problems, the Rail Office goes to its service providers Amtrak and BNSF for explanations.

Also high on Sibold's list is great customer service and clean, well maintained trains. Amtrak crews are expected to be pleasant and accommodating to passengers and provide passengers complete information on events affecting their trip, such as delays. He is considering putting WSDOT staff on trains to help evaluate operations and service standards.

Amtrak and BNSF are great partners in the operation of the Cascades. But that doesn't mean WSDOT doesn't encour-

age the two companies to perform better. For example, on the mudslide issue, WSDOT has engaged BNSF to explain the science behind its 48 hour moratorium on passenger train operations every time even a small amount of mud comes down on or near the tracks. Sibold noted it was huge on BNSF's part to even start talking about the mudslide moratorium issue. The two are exploring options to reduce the amount of time passenger trains are restricted after a mudslide, which minimizes the need to bus passengers.

WSDOT received a \$16 million federal grant to begin environmental and preliminary engineering work to mitigate the mudslides. Secretary Paula Hammond has directed Sibold to expedite this work where possible. And she has discussed the issue directly with BNSF CEO Matt Rose. WSDOT will look at using state funding to provide at least temporary fixes at some of the most problematic areas while awaiting construction of permanent solutions.

WSDOT will consider working with Amtrak to minimize the distance passengers are bused when there is a service disruption. For example, if there is a slide near Mukilteo, once it's cleared and the train equipment can deadhead through the area, passengers could be bused only between Seattle and Everett instead of all the way to Vancouver, BC.

Sibold reports that the Rail Office is now working closer than ever with its counterparts at Oregon DOT to develop a unified approach in operation of the Northwest Rail Corridor. WSDOT has also approached the British Columbia government on this issue, exploring a more unified perspective on things such as pricing and schedules.

He closed with two thoughts:

- Passenger Rail is ready to reemerge in the Northwest.
- The Rail Office wants a solid relationship with AAWA.

David Smelser, Cascades HSR Pro-

gram Manager, started off his interview with AAWA by pulling out a large three-ring binder. WSDOT has already executed nearly 25 agreements concerning the Northwest Corridor infrastructure projects between the Canadian border and the Columbia River funded by \$791.6 million in federal high speed rail grants. Smelser figures he will eventually have two more like binders with agreements. Parties involved in the agreements to get these projects built include the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), WSDOT, BNSF, Amtrak, Sound Transit and Tacoma Rail. He noted we are the first state to complete all its agreements with FRA, allowing work to start.



Amtrak Cascades train 516 crosses the Coweeman River near Longview Jct. in Feb. 2011. The Kelso to Martins Bluff project will build another bridge over the river as part of the construction of a third main track in this area.

Photo by Zack Willhoite

Below is an update on many of the infrastructure projects that will lead to improved operations, better on time performance and reducing running times on the Northwest Corridor.

Advanced Wayside Signal System – This is part of the Positive Train Control (PTC) system Congress has mandated be installed by 2015 for most rail lines that have passenger service or carry toxic inhalants. The state's investment pays for the backbone of the system on the ground. This includes wayside signal components at control points, sidings and turnouts, and installation of an integrated command, control, communications and information system for managing train movements. The design is mostly complete but BNSF and WSDOT (See **Rail**, page 4)



*From the desk of
the Executive
Director
by
Lloyd H. Flem*

Our Rail Corridor Progresses as HSR Support Fades Nationally; Yes, Rail for Dryside, Too; Blaine, Eastside Line and Kelso

High Speed Rail (HSR), which had been a feature of President Obama's past State of the Union and other major policy addresses, was not present in his Tuesday evening speech. Even though the ubiquitous "roads and bridges" were mentioned, as well as other infrastructure investments, HSR did not make the cut. This may reflect an apparent decline in vocal interest among some traditional supporters (mostly urban-based Democrats and big-city media), coupled with relentless criticism from the usual "think tank" suspects and the (substantially freshmen) Congressional Republicans who seem to get their ideological basis from them. In addition, the highly-publicized California HSR project has undergone a barrage of bad attention, some of it justified.

My personal view is in agreement with those fellow rail advocates who were a bit uncomfortable with the "high speed" emphasis in reference to this first-time strong Federal financial support for the rail mode since the 19th century land grants! With the connotation of Mag-Lev shown on the cover of the venerable Popular Science magazine, or tales of the super-quick trains of western Europe, Japan and China, much of the general public seemed to conclude, with a national investment of \$8 billion, the US would have our own "bullet trains" next year!

While there are differences of opinion among even the members of AAWA, I take the view that "high-speed," anything over 150 mph, even 125 mph, is NOT essential for dramatic increases in the role of intercity passenger trains in our already modestly successful Northwest Corridor. Questionnaires given to attendees at the 2010 Train Day at Amtrak stations in Olympia, Centralia and Bellingham reinforced my opinion. "Top speed" of future trains was seen as least important among several choices. However, decreased overall travel time was seen as important, as were increased

frequencies and reliable on-time performance.

While California's HSR is currently the national model for negative public pronouncements, Illinois has proceeded with Federal HSR funding for high speed 110 mph trains between Chicago and St Louis. (OK, the cynics can say, "Naturally, both the President and Transportation Secretary LaHood are from Illinois," but that state, like Washington, had good passenger rail investment programs in place **before** the Obama Administration funding.)

Would I like to see top speeds of 90, even 110, between Seattle and Portland? Sure, but the costs and hassles associated with the new rights-of-way required make it politically near-impossible to con-

My personal view is in agreement with those fellow rail advocates who were a bit uncomfortable with the "high speed" emphasis in reference to this first-time strong Federal financial support for the rail mode since the 19th century land grants!

sider any "true" HSR for our corridor in the reasonable future. But decreasing total travel time, being 95% on time, and adding daily frequencies, even at the current FRA-mandated 79 MPH, will surely get more people on the trains and some off I-5 and out of short-hop commercial planes.

And the above is just what is being done with our state's very significant share of the original Federal \$8 billion: decreased total travel time, increased on-time reliability, and more frequencies. I remain very impressed with the leadership and staff of our WSDOT Rail Office and am reporting that impression to legislators with whom I am meeting during this 2012 Legislative session.

We in Washington have not had to endure the level of anti-passenger-rail noise heard elsewhere. Rail advocates here can be pleased our state passenger rail program, past and present, has a justified reputation as an efficient and productive public enterprise which is part of an affirmative partnership with BNSF, Amtrak, Sound Transit, Talgo, rail labor, businesses, the communities, the growing numbers of passengers, and the rail advocate community. (Oops, that last mention is substantially AAWA!)

This is now my 27th year working in behalf of passenger train service in our Washington. What I have found is good bi-partisan support for our rail programs,

including from Eastern Washington legislators who understand the improvements in the Northwest Corridor aid movement of freight to and from their areas as well as Western Washington passengers. These Dryside legislators have been very patient, in my view, but are fully justified in asking that someday they will have passenger trains beyond the daily *Empire Builder*, good as it is, which serves Spokane only in the middle of night and the Yakima Valley not at all.

So, the excitement over high speed rail has decreased nationally among both the general public and the political class. But we in the Northwest corner are doing quite well, both in support and in passenger rail's moving forward. But we don't have, and with the current funding, are not going to soon have high speed rail, as defined by the Popular Science covers! And I'm not that concerned. More and better rail service has always been our mission and **THAT** is happening.

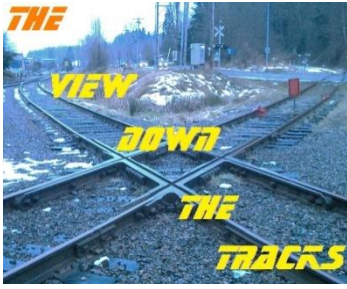
The Amtrak *Cascades* ridership data are out: Despite the many train cancellations, mostly due to the BNSF-mandated 48-hour suspension of passenger train service (including Sounder) following mudslides, total 2011 ridership exceeded that of 2010, another new record.



While advocacy for more and better intercity passenger trains in the Northwest Corridor remains our top priority, AAWA surely has other interests as well. Here are three:

People in Blaine have two related local concerns. One is to physically preserve their near-century old Great Northern passenger train station. The second is to have passenger rail service to their city. AAWA members support both causes. In the latter case, rail passenger service could be regional rail, Sounder-type trains (or DMUs) connecting south to Everett. A future Blaine Amtrak stop might come from a "two-tier" service, with the "locals" serving existing and maybe additional small communities like Blaine as well as large cities, as well as "expresses" which have faster total trip times as they serve only the major metropolitan stops. A potential market for a Blaine station is the very large underserved population just north of the 49th parallel in British Columbia but south of the City of Vancouver.

For years AAWA has supported physical preservation of the "Eastside Line," the now mostly unused and cut-in- (See **Flem**, page 4)



WITH
JIM
CUSICK

Snow-pocalypse

Boy, did winter hit with a vengeance this year, and I don't think this time it was an issue of us here in the Pacific Northwest being the perennial snow wimps.

The kicker this time was the ice storm on top of the double-digit snow accumulations.

Nobody was out on the roads, believe me. How do I know? I was out on the roads, of course! However, mine is a short, five minute commute in my All Wheel Drive Imperium Condescender.

No Problemo!

Others I saw were in four wheel drive vehicles too, braving the elements to connect with those conveyances that were still running. Trains, in my neck of the woods.

In this case, the areas north of Seattle weren't hit quite as hard, so there were delays, but not the cancellations of service that the south end suffered. With the ice storm bringing trees down onto the mainline tracks between Tacoma and Olympia, and other points south, there came the time to say "wait until things are safer."

Along with trees down on the tracks, the biggest struggle for rail transit in the area was staying ahead of the ice.

For Central Link, keeping the ice off the overhead wire was a challenge. Sound Transit kept things running as long as they could.

Tacoma Link shut down simply because they just don't have the equipment to run as frequently as Central Link.

Sounder and Amtrak were plagued by frozen switches that had to be manually cleared.

Is there anything we can do?

What about switch heaters, anyway? Well, they certainly would have helped, but with the normally above-freezing temperatures on the wet-side, it probably isn't worth the investment.

We know they run trains in the cold wintery climates of the upper Midwest, but that's for a winter season that lasts months, instead of days.

I'd be happier with a healthy investment in mudslide control.

But if we could, we would need something like a temporary heater.

Found, of course, on eBay at Scary Larry's Pawn and Junk.

Okay, so it's a vintage oil burning one, but it shows that anything is possible (for \$39.99 or best offer).

What will run on I-5?

Well, if cars weren't using I-5 north of Seattle, I'm sure trains will be.

Why? Good question. One I've been asking myself after Sound Transit re-leased their preferred alternative for the Link North Corridor. The alignment they chose is the one along I-5.

Don't they take me seriously? I thought they treated my column as gospel...I'm shocked.

We know it isn't really a good long term solution because it doesn't adequately answer the issue of Transit Oriented Development. After all, that was the argument against the "Freeway Monorail," wasn't it? The problem is no one wants to live next to the freeway.

Did they pick it for expediency's sake, just to get it up and running?

The only way to save that decision, besides deleting the station stops between Northgate and the Mountlake Terrace Park & Ride to save even more money, is to figure out how to get the track far enough off the freeway right-of-way to where a suitable type of development can occur.

Now hold that snout still, so I can get this lipstick on just right...

Who should pay their fair share?

I once heard Seattle derisively referred to by someone as "Wet LA." Well, in the realm of transportation choices, we are.

We seem to make decisions that attempt to convince me that the car-centric nature of the LA area is what we want here.

Our wet, windy weather that scours out the air pollution is what keeps us from looking exactly like LA.

Who needs to see Mount Rainier anyway? Besides, most people who haven't been here think it's just airbrushed onto the postcards.

So how do we rate? Are we the LA Wannabes, doing everything we can to keep ourselves on the road?

I do have a theory, though. What we are is Rain Wimps, not Snow Wimps.

Really, we might act all outdoorsy, but really we don't want our REI North Face Limited Edition clothing to get all wet, do we?

I am convinced that without an honest public vote on a comprehensive roads package, that the public is announcing that congestion really isn't a problem.

How do I come to this conclusion?

The start of tolling on SR 520 is showing that up to 40% of drivers are avoiding the toll. SR 520 is regularly reported as being wide open.

I-90 and the local arterials are seeing a higher level of congestion.

Drivers are choosing a congested commute over one that has at least some semblance of "farebox recovery" to it. Transit riders are expected to pay; why not single occupant vehicles? In fact, on the bus routes over 520, transit ridership is up. That's a good thing.

We pay taxes for transit and the riders pay a fare when they use it. Depending on its popularity, the fare box recovery percentage can vary.

Spread thin, transit (mainly buses) can have a low 20% ratio, or up to a high 60% ratio for mature rail systems.

The toll on SR 520 is only covering one-quarter of the project cost. The state DOT has one-quarter of the money in hand and is still determining where the other half will come from to finish this project.

Just think, Florida's governor turned down high speed rail money because he didn't want to be "burdened" with the operating costs afterwards. We seem to have no problem constructing roads that don't even have a funding stream in place to complete them.

I'm glad we have an enlightened group of people at WSDOT and in the Legislature who support rail. They have smartly taken the monies turned away by other states for high speed rail and saw fit to invest it properly in our state's rail infrastructure.

But I do wonder if we are still in denial about how we view our road system. The message is clear by how the public is behaving.

If there was another "Roads" portion of a Roads and Transit ballot proposal, then we would know exactly what the public thinks.

What do they want to see?

Rail and the Eastside

This means I have to ask the next obvious question: is this what they want to see?

Are we serious about building a rail infrastructure?

Why is this End-of-Track Red Flag here, along with the derails?

(See **Cusick**, page 4)



Flem, from page 2

two north-south ex-BNSF line running east of Lake Washington. While keeping the line "in public use" and intact is better than having it revert to the adjacent property owners, ripping up the tracks for trails-only is but marginally better. Trails virtually NEVER return to rail use, even when economic, social and environmental justifications are many, once that trail is in place. AAWA has advocated rail **AND** trail, an idea that has found success elsewhere in the US and in Western Europe.

Finally, and without any potential controversy, I urge your attendance at the Kelso Depot Centennial celebration on Saturday February 11 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Many of the fine old Northern Pacific stations were built around 1912. Join us in Kelso. Amtrak trains from the north work fine for transportation to Kelso.

Cusick, from page 3

I know how they got there. BNSF put them there when they sold the line to the Port of Seattle, and the Port said not to bother removing them.

What I want to know is why are they still there?

I understand GNP Railway has sought potential customers south of this junction in Woodinville (next to McRory's On The Slough).

Why they can't entertain them and have this removed is a question that needs to be asked.

Quite publicly, in my opinion.

Then there are other questions, such as what is Kirkland proposing to do with their plan to purchase five miles of the right-of-way in their town.

If you look at the picture the Kirkland Reporter ran with the story "Kirkland City Council unanimously approves purchase of Eastside Rail Corridor for \$5 million" – tinyurl.com/kirklandrail – showing citizens swarming over the railroad right of way, one wonders.



Do their plans resemble what Redmond has decided to do, as demonstrated by this picture?

This is only part of the story, if you look at the documentation for Redmond's Downtown Vision Implementation, it shows a curious feature called "BNSF ROW Trail." The document talks about Transit Oriented Development, and even claims to "encourage light rail transit."

This is the part I don't understand. Why rip up the tracks and remove the railroad crossing hardware if you are planning this type of development? The hardware is still on display in the "future trail" area. What are their intentions? To keep it in storage?

Is that what the region has to look forward to: elected officials who totally ignore the public's wishes?

I'm not exercising any "raifan hyperbole" here; I'm stating what the I-405 Corridor Program found out from their survey in 2000. As many people showed strong (75%) support of rail in the corridor as those who thought more lanes were part of the solution. In fact, analyzing the results reveals that at least 40% think both should have been part of the solution. This not a Road vs. Rail issue.

Using the Woodinville Subdivision as part of a regional rail solution has not been through a full vetting.

The life of this rail line will suffer a "death of a thousand cuts" by the parochial practices of the municipalities in the corridor.

I also don't think WSDOT should be let off the hook on this one either. After all, I haven't heard of their plan to reconnect the Woodinville Sub at the Wilburton Tunnel location.

I fully understand the issues neighbors of the rail line have. I've lived 50 feet away from an active commuter line, and currently live only five minutes away from a very active mainline railroad.

Many of their issues can be addressed and mitigated, and some are just part of living next to an active rail line.

But to allow a few landowners, who are willing to sacrifice a perfectly good rail corridor because they are offended by the sound of trains in their backyard, to control the regional planning process is quite frankly extremely embarrassing.

Who are we kidding?

At one of the Puget Sound Regional Council meetings analyzing this corridor, where members of All Aboard, myself included, testified, I did ask them one thing: "Would you be willing to have your names on a billboard next to I-405, that states 'This rail line, as a commute option, is no longer in service, courtesy of...'" and have each one of your names, as elected officials, on that sign?"

If you vote for a particular solution, you should be proud of that solution.

I'll be around to make sure the facts are presented accurately.

Rail, from page 1

must satisfy FRA that no construction will need to be rebuilt as other corridor projects are built. A discussion on raising maximum train speeds above the current 79 mph, which PTC will allow, is down road. Federal funds: \$60.1 million.

Corridor Reliability Upgrades –

There are two projects: the Canadian border to Everett and Nisqually to the Columbia River. The projects are currently in design. Upgrades will include drainage improvements; remediation of soft spots in the roadbed; replacement of thousands of ties, rail and ballast; and resurfacing of the tracks. These projects will eliminate many permanent slow orders and reduce instances of temporary slow orders allowing faster speeds, more reliable on time performance and improved passenger ride comfort. Federal funds: \$149 million.

Everett Storage Tracks – This project constructs two new departure/receiving tracks at Delta Yard, eliminating a major source of conflict between freight and passenger trains and improving reliability. Project design is complete and construction is imminent. WSDOT and BNSF are waiting for an FRA Buy America waiver on a concrete tie component. Federal funds: \$3.5 million.

King Street Station restoration –

This project is managed by the City of Seattle. The new Amtrak ticketing and baggage facilities on the north side of the building will soon be open. This area will also have a temporary waiting room while the main waiting room is restored. Bids for the next phase of the restoration will be opened in early February. In addition to returning the waiting room to its original grandeur, this phase will complete seismic upgrades, electrical and mechanical upgrades, and restoration of historic architectural details, inside and out. Project completion is anticipated in spring 2013. Total funding from local, state and federal sources: \$47.3 million.

King Street Station Track Improvements – This project will complete the upgrade and reconfiguration of the westerly tracks used by Amtrak. Design and a maintenance agreement have been completed. Ownership issues are still being resolved. Federal funds: \$50.4 million.

Point Defiance Bypass – This project, the most controversial of the Northwest Corridor improvements, proposes to move Amtrak service from the BNSF Point Defiance line to a dedicated passenger line through South Tacoma and Lakewood that is now owned by Sound Transit. It ties back into the mainline at Nisqually. It includes upgraded tracks, signal systems and grade crossings. A new Amtrak station being considered at Freighthouse Square where Souther service ends (until the Lakewood extension opens late this year). The project complements Sound Transit's D St. to M St. project and will allow additional Cascades frequencies, improve on time performance and shorten running times. Federal funds: \$89.1 million.

Kelso to Martins Bluff – Several

All Aboard Washington Officers

Loren Herrigstad, Centralia - President360 736-5783 ..lbhrgstd@isomedia.com
 Jim Hamre, Puyallup - Vice President253 848-2473 ..jimhamre@mindspring.com
 Rocky Shay, Federal Way - Secretary.....253 925-2085 ..HarmonShay@aol.com
 Harvey Bowen, Seattle - Treasurer.....206 322-2729 ..harveyb@allaboardwashington.org
 Lloyd Flem, Olympia..
 Executive Director.....360 943-8333 ..washarp@q.com
 Address.....620 Boundary St SE, Olympia 98501

Jim Hamre, Puyallup - Newsletter Editor.....253 848-2473 ..jimhamre@mindspring.com
 Warren Yee, Seattle - E-newsletter206 723-0259 ..washarp@earthlink.net
 Zack Willhoite, Puyallup - Membership Directorzackw@allaboardwashington.org

All are evening numbers, except Lloyd's, which is available 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily.

Important Addresses and Phone Numbers

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
 All Aboard Washington: AllAboardWashington.org
 NARP: www.narprail.org
 NARP Hotline: www.narprail.org/cms/index.php/hotline/
 Amtrak: www.amtrak.com
 Amtrak Cascades: www.amtrakcascades.com
 Sound Transit: www.soundtransit.org

projects will be built between Kelso and Kalama. Included are a new third main track from Kelso to Longview Junction (including a new bridge over the Coweeman River), additional sidings in the Port of Kalama area and a grade separation at Toteff Road. The projects will help separate through passenger and freight trains from train entering and leaving the Ports of Longview and Kalama. The final scope of this project is still being developed by BNSF and WSDOT. Federal funds: \$194 million.

Vancouver Rail Yard Bypass –

This project adds a new 2.5 mile bypass track east of the rail yard for trains to and from the BNSF Columbia Gorge line. It, along with other rail yard improvements and the closing of two grade crossings and upgrade of two other crossings, will eliminate a major choke point. This will increase on time performance and reliability. The project complements a large array of rail improvements being done by the Port of Vancouver. Federal funds: \$28.5 million.

WSDOT will have five of these projects under construction in 2012, worth \$200 million:

- Advanced Wayside Signal System
- Everett Storage Tracks
- Sound Transit's Tacoma D St. to M St.
- King Street Station
- Corridor Reliability South

For more information on these projects:

tinyurl.com/nwrailcorridor

For additional King St. Station information:

seattle.gov/transportation/kingstreet.htm

Amtrak sets 2011 ridership record

Amtrak carried nearly 30.2 million passengers in FY 2011, ending September 30, 2011, the highest ridership in the company's 40-year history. Ridership was up 5.1% over FY 2010 and revenue was up 8.5%. These impressive gains came amid a spring and early summer that saw major service disruptions on numerous routes in (See **Record**, page 6)

Amtrak Station Data

Six-Year Washington State On & Off Totals (calendar year)

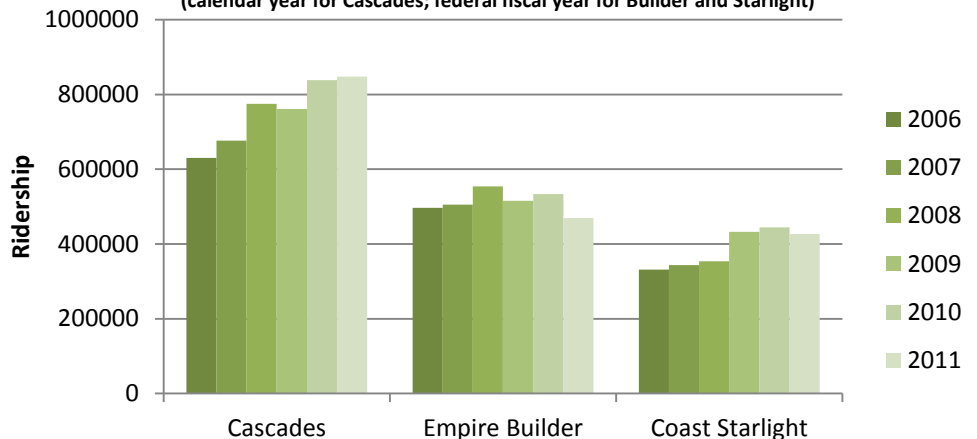
Station	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	'10-'11 % Change
Bellingham	52,356	51,315	70,990	72,033	62,562	58,283	-6.8
Bingen-White Salmon	1,924	2,307	2,959	2,835	3,253	2,505	-23.0
Centralia	18,816	21,060	23,663	24,279	23,270	22,122	-4.9
Edmonds	27,320	27,543	31,204	30,770	31,845	30,670	-3.7
Ephrata	3,469	3,923	4,365	4,020	3,574	2,981	-19.1
Everett	40,047	41,567	48,420	46,785	44,103	41,594	-5.7
Kelso-Longview	21,411	23,519	28,330	27,406	28,603	26,553	-7.2
Leavenworth				3,370	9,149	7,898	-13.7
Mt. Vernon	20,206	19,328	24,280	24,935	18,662	18,805	+0.8
Olympia-Lacey	44,205	49,659	58,133	59,884	60,415	57,530	-4.8
Pasco	27,147	28,072	29,202	24,765	24,992	21,647	-13.4
Seattle	609,104	634,193	668,037	648,774	655,036	648,908	-0.9
Spokane	46,096	48,484	59,001	47,670	49,058	47,680	-2.8
Stanwood				818	4,639	4,018	-13.4
Tacoma	102,703	110,869	124,351	122,763	124,451	119,383	-4.1
Tukwila	16,082	18,887	22,292	22,265	24,892	26,239	+5.4
Vancouver	74,907	84,766	97,554	97,889	98,395	97,284	-1.1
Wenatchee	19,992	19,085	20,945	19,301	16,062	13,076	-18.6
Wishram	1,403	1,683	1,814	1,330	1,570	1,275	-18.8
TOTALS	1,089,235	1,186,260	1,315,540	1,281,892	1,284,531	1,248,451	-2.8

Station totals include Thruway bus ridership 2006-2009, but not 2010-2011.
 Leavenworth service started Sept. 26, 2009; Stanwood service started Nov. 21, 2009.

Trains Serving Washington State

Six Year Totals

(calendar year for Cascades; federal fiscal year for Builder and Starlight)



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All Aboard News

February 11: Join AAWA at the **Kelso Station** Centennial Celebration from **10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.** at the station.

March 17: Joint Northwest passenger rail advocates membership meeting in **Whitefish, MT** at **The Lodge at Whitefish Lake**. Meeting is timed between the morning arrival of the eastbound *Empire Builder* and the departure of the westbound *Empire Builder*. For information and registration see the flyer mailed separately or available on our website. Online registration is also available via our website.

April 14: All Aboard Washington business meeting from **noon-4 p.m.** at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, 15920 W. Valley Hwy, **Tukwila**, adjacent to the Amtrak Station. Please RSVP to Harvey Bowen, if you can (contact info p. 5). Put "April 14 RSVP" in Subject or Body of your email.

All Aboard Washington welcomed the following new members in December and January: Jon Cox, Lacey; Gretchen Garth, Kenmore; Benjamin Hart, Seattle; George Werkema, Lynden; Maribeth Chadwell, Se-

attle; Quentin King, Seattle; William Bruzas, Seattle; Stephen Grande, Vancouver, WA; and Andrew Sherry, Seattle.

All Aboard Washington members contributing to this newsletter include Mark Meyer, Zack Willhoite, Lloyd Flem and Jim Cusick.

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the Midwest because of months-long flooding of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers and their tributaries.

The *Empire Builder* had off and on service disruptions from late December 2010 through mid July 2011 because of freight derailments, blizzards, avalanches, wind and flooding. The train was suspended or only operating Seattle-Havre and St. Paul-Chicago for nearly a month in June and July because of the North Dakota flooding. Service to Minot, the 8th busiest stop for the *Builder*, was suspended from late June to just before Thanksgiving due to severe flood damage to the recently renovated station and platform. Despite all this, the *Builder's* 2011 ridership dipped just 12.1% to 469,167 passengers from 2010. The train still remained Amtrak's most popular long distance train, staying ahead of number two, the *Coast Starlight*.

The *Cascades* set another all time ridership record in 2011 despite suffering one of the worse mudslide seasons on record

during last winter's La Niña weather event. Nearly 200 runs were cancelled because of the hillsides falling onto BNSF tracks. (See the April/May 2011 **WASHINGTON RAIL NEWS** for more details.)

This had a dramatic impact on *Cascades* ridership. After years of healthy gains (except for the recession year of 2009) ridership was up only 1.1% in calendar year 2011 from 2010. The total passenger count was 847,709. All of the gain is attributable to stronger ridership between Portland and Eugene. Passenger counts north of Portland were essentially flat.

Coast Starlight ridership also dipped in 2011, being down 4.0% from 2010. A total of 429,584 passenger boarded the *Starlight* last year. In addition to the train seeing service disruptions in the Northwest Corridor there were also disruptions and a track work reroute in California.

For more ridership details go to the News and Media link on Amtrak's website, select 2011 Press Releases and find the October 13 release.

To read about Amtrak's plans for 2012, see its January 11, 2011 press release at the above News and Media link.

