



Washington Rail News

December 1993/January 1994

Publication of the Washington Association of Railroad Passengers
A Not-for-profit Consumer Organization
"...getting the Pacific Northwest on the right track."

Pioneer, Eagle service cut; 15 station agents eliminated; small stations threatened with closure

Faced with a projected \$30 mill. budget deficit for FY 1994, Amtrak, on Nov. 4, cut the *Pioneer* to triweekly operation. Trips originate in both Seattle and Denver on M/W/Sa. *Pioneer* equipment operates daily on the *California Zephyr* between Denver and Chicago. Amtrak is attempting to accommodate passengers already booked on days the *Pioneer* doesn't operate by adding a third coach and second sleeper through early January.

Amtrak employs 337 people in Washington, with an annual payroll of \$10 mill. In 1992 the com-

pany purchased \$300,000 in goods and services here. Since the *Pioneer* is based in Seattle a number of these employees will be laid off or have to move and Amtrak will make fewer purchases here.

"This is perhaps the most depressing document ever in terms of what it says about the author's awareness of why Amtrak exists."

NARP's Ross Capon in letter to Amtrak's Tim Gillespie concerning an internal Amtrak memo proposing closure of 64 small stations

pany purchased \$300,000 in goods and services here. Since the *Pioneer* is based in Seattle a number of these employees will be laid off or have to move and Amtrak will make fewer purchases here.

The *Texas Eagle* was also cut to triweekly south of St. Louis. The *River Cities*, which was but a single coach between St. Louis and Carbondale, IL where it became part of the *City of New Orleans*, was eliminated. Instead a change to a middle-of-the-night-bus is now necessary.

Amtrak also eliminated station staffing at fifteen stations. The stations will be opened by caretakers but have lost ticketing, checked baggage and express service. Cheyenne, WY and Pocatello, ID on the *Pioneer* route and Malta,

MT and Devils Lake, ND on the *Empire Builder* route were among the stations unstaffed.

Amtrak claims savings of \$10 mill. with the above service cuts, \$2 mill. of which is attributable to the *Pioneer* reduction. After the last *Pioneer* triweekly venture, Amtrak admitted savings were minimal. Rail passenger advocates are again skeptical of the claimed savings.

The most bizarre document to filter out of Amtrak Headquarters in recent times is an internal memo concerned employees passed on to a rail passenger ad-

vocate. The document, written by an unnamed person in corporate planning, proposes complete elimination of 64 lightly used stations. The rationale behind this: 135 of Amtrak's 530 stations account for 90 percent of the revenue and

Amtrak announced its new president on Nov. 30: Thomas M. Downs. He is currently head of New Jersey DOT (and New Jersey Transit). Previously, he was Urban Mass Transit Administrator for Jimmy Carter and, when working for the D.C. government, the city's liaison for the Union Station restoration. Downs, age 50, became president on Dec. 7.

these lightly used stations cost Amtrak money in time and fuel spent stopping.

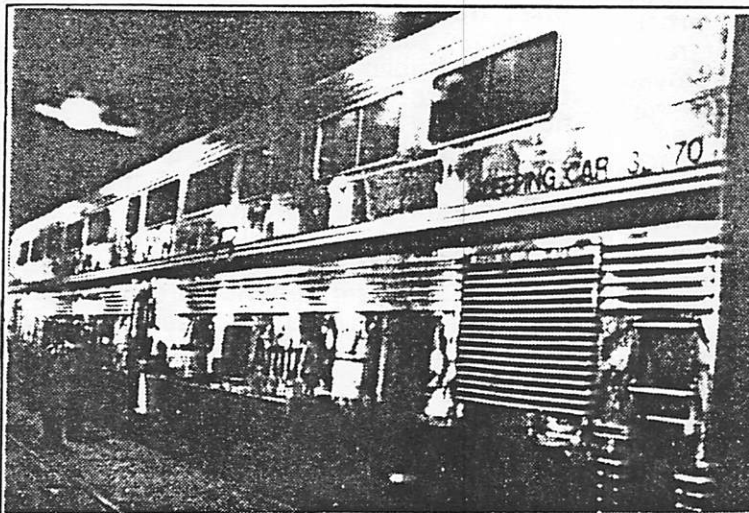
Amtrak's Tim Gillespie and Art McMahon have assured NARP that no stations would be eliminated without advance notice and the right people at Amtrak are appropriately skeptical of any claims of reduced costs associated with elimination of stations.

Seven stops on the *Empire Builder* are listed: Ephrata, Bingen-White Salmon and Wishram; Cut Bank and Browning, MT; Stanley, ND and Detroit Lakes, MN.

Four stops on the *Pioneer* are listed: Baker City and Hood River, OR and Green River and Evanston, WY.

One stop on the *Coast Starlight* is listed: Dunsmuir, CA.

The author's knowledge of geography is appalling. This person thinks Columbia Gorge service on the *Pioneer* and *Empire Builder* can be consolidated at The Dalles, even though the *Builder* runs in Washington, not Oregon. It would be 222 miles without a stop between Vancouver and Pasco. Utah and Nevada would be blessed with gaps without stops of 567 miles between Salt Lake City and Sparks, and 448 miles between Salt (See Cuts, page 3)



Just delivered Superliner II sleeping car "Alabama" on display at Chicago Union Station for the NARP meeting.

Photo: Jim Hamre

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

**Looking
for Silver
Linings**
Rail advocates nationwide greeted

the news of Thomas M. Downs' appointment to the Amtrak presidency with relief and hope. Relief that the wait and partial corporate paralysis following Graham Claytor's "anydaynow" retirement announcement over a year ago were over and hope that Downs will bring a new "corporate culture" to the National Railroad Passenger Corp. Mr. Claytor is thanked for the saving and building of Amtrak during the '80s, using his considerable clout with old D.C. hands to support a corporation under assault from hostile federal administrations. But the '90s require leadership with a more open vision; a less authoritarian style; a confidence in railroads of the future, not the past. WashARP will redouble our work with our Congressional delegation to urge Downs and company toward new positive directions.

☆☆☆☆☆☆

WashARP opened its November meeting with silence and a prayer for the five good railroad men lost in the Kelso tragedy. The only good coming from the Kelso freight train collision will be the probable hastened implementation of "fail-safe" technology on mainlines, where existing and future passenger trains, as well as a full complement of freight, will travel.

☆☆☆☆☆☆

Other dark clouds are Amtrak service cuts (see lead article), meager federal funding of rail at all levels (despite an "improved" Administration rhetoric on rail), continued regional increases in single occupant vehicle (SOV) mileage and percentage of trips.

The Puget Sound area dawdles and dithers over regional rail and may lose federal assistance, unless they soon get coherent in their planning. Silver lining: Vancouver/Clark County, tying into the progressive, aggressive Portland light rail program, may get funds authorized for Puget Sound.

A few scattered groups of NIMBYs* are fighting faster trains

on the Corridor and, in one extreme case, want Jim Hill's mainline, present for over a century and a vital economic linkage to the Puget Sound region, moved "somewhere else"!

Other "bad weather" is provided by those, including frequently quoted U.W. academics, who celebrate costly and destructive sprawl development and continue to insist the Puget Sound area does not have (and people "do not want") sufficient population/development density to support rail transit. Metropolitan Puget Sound, absolutely bounded by water and corralled by topography, is still a near textbook case for rail transit. Many people do "want" single family homes and access to work, shopping, school, recreation, etc. But they don't necessarily "want" the isolated subdivisions and long car commutes developers now make available, the social costs of which are borne by the region as a whole, the ecosystem, and future generations, but not by those doing the sprawling and celebrating.

☆☆☆☆☆☆

Silver Linings: WSDOT's rail program continues on the fast track. Good cooperation with BN, Amtrak, our congressional delegation, potential rail equipment suppliers, involved communities (including the majority totally supportive of the rail program; only a few with legitimate and specious NIMBY concerns). WashARP continues our close relationship with the Rail Branch, offering frequent cheers and applause!

WashARP is involved in numerous transportation committees, forums, task forces, advisory groups, public meetings, roundtables, etc. Nearly everyone is now saying Good Things. Our job is to urge implementation, practical action, not just more Good Talk, meetings and study.

Seattle City Council President George Benson will be properly honored at a retirement party at Seattle's Union Station Tuesday Dec. 14 from 5 to 7 p.m. WashARPer's are encouraged to attend! No charge or RSVP! Invitations say "The truly dedicated will ride the Waterfront Streetcar to the

event." George, a WashARP board member, was "Dad" of the streetcar, a now successful part of Seattle's transportation system, not just a fun ride. George also insisted rail tracks be placed in the transit tunnel for (hoped for) future use, and has been the catalyst for the much-needed King Street Station project. A friend of rail, a fellow Husky bandsman (your executive director will wear the pin of WashARP and the purple and gold at the party), a friend! George told me (during the Dawg's recent decisive victory over the Cougars) he'll remain active in rail issues, at his pharmacy and in the Alumni Band. Good news for all.

Bright Silver Lining: Although Congresswomen Jennifer Dunn (R-Bellevue) had not supported Amtrak in 1993, her D.C. office called wanting WashARP to meet with her during an in-district visit. On Nov. 12, President Chuck Mott, WashARP planning committee head Hal Cooper and I experienced a very cordial and productive meeting with Rep. Dunn. WashARP focussed on the need for environmentally sound, balanced transportation where passenger rail could serve a larger role, with our corridor as a good example. We offered that other transportation modes, especially SOVs are highly subsidized, and, as major petroleum users, are significantly responsible for America's trade imbalance.

We urged the congresswomen to consider federal operating, as well as Amtrak capital investment, with the latter eventually making the former less needed. Finally, we addressed our concerns that new Amtrak leadership must become more entrepreneurial, pro-active, and open to the views of Congress, its well informed, patient, dedicated riders, and of its own people, white and blue collar, who want to "do better." WashARP neither asked for or received a "promise" of support. We did open what we assume will be a continuing dialog with a strong and, we believe, increasingly influential representative from our state.

A final bright light: Washington Senators Gorton and Murray, Maine's Mitchell and Cohen, Oregon's Hatfield and several congresspeople (including Washington) (See Flem, page 3)

fruits of contemporary industrial civilization, but want the farms, factories and transportation infrastructure "NOT IN MY BACK YARD."

*NIMBY: usually affluent, articulate middle-class folks who fully enjoy the

Cuts (from page 1)

Lake City and Las Vegas. As WashARP member Mark Meyer points out, it may be only 24 miles from Cut Bank, MT to Shelby but in the winter it can be life threatening, if not impossible, to drive.

The \$742,000 loss of revenue is greatly understated while savings in station, fuel and on board crew costs of \$1,066,000 appear overstated and speculative. The author is also worried about the average of \$20,000 per station that will need to be spent over the next fifteen years to bring these stations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This is just one example of an Amtrak management that is not pro-active and lacks entrepreneurship and a can-do attitude. The situation has deteriorated significantly in the 15 months since Graham Claytor announced his retirement as president. Amtrak has seemed paralyzed while waiting for the new president.

Another example: an Amtrak official who spoke at the Fall NARP meeting in Chicago was amazed when officials from the City of Devils Lake, ND (pop. 7500) asked what they could do to keep their ticket agent. Why wasn't Amtrak pro-active? It should have approached all the cities where agents were to be removed and, without threats and confrontation, asked the cities for help. At least these cities would have had the opportunity, if they were interested, to support their agent. Devils Lake and Amtrak are still negotiating.

In Malta, MT, Amtrak spent a year finding and training a new part-time agent after BN eliminated the shared agent. Six months later they axed this person. And this after they promised the Mont. Public Service Comm. they would staff the station for a minimum of one year.

Amtrak still fails to realize the importance of an agent goes beyond his or her revenue to cost ratio. Many small isolated stations, such as along Montana's highline, depend on Amtrak Express for shipments of such things as medicine, flowers and newspapers. Have you ever wondered, on a cold and stormy night, when the train would arrive and no one was there to help? Have you noticed the ever growing piles

RTA floundering; can our transit plan be saved?

The Regional Transit Authority, barely three months, may be trying to kill the rapid rail part of the regional transit plan. Half the RTA members are new to transit, and knowing little, if anything, about it, think busways are the way to go.

Quoting from transportation consultant E. L. Tennyson's letter to the (Tacoma) *News Tribune*: "The world has no example of a successful busway, although several successes are claimed....[N]o busways have ever achieved an areawide gain in transit ridership or cost reduction. All but one have been accompanied by a reduction in transit patronage in favor of the private automobile, with its congestion, pollution and sprawl....Ottawa...after investing one-half billion dollars, [has] no gain in system patronage, and [has] experienced losses in some years, while fares have skyrocketed to \$2 or more."

If the RTA doesn't put an acceptable plan before the voters soon the \$300 mill. authorized two years ago by Congress with be redistributed to other cities around the country. Some of it will probably stay in Washington State as Vancouver and Portland are proceeding rapidly with plans to bring MAX across the Columbia River (on a new bridge). WashARP predicts Vancouver will be the first city in Washington with a modern rail transit system. What

of baggage in the coaches as fewer stations accept checked baggage?

These service cuts have brought an unprecedented amount of heat on Amtrak from rail advocates across the country, local government officials, DOT's in our state and Illinois, among others, the Washington House delegation and many other members of Congress. We can only hope Thomas Downs, the new president, and his management team will bring entrepreneurship and a can-do attitude to Amtrak. The front line employees appear ready to work with a new management if they have a stake in the company and management shakes it's outmoded authoritarian style.

a pathetic commentary on Puget Sound area politicians. Spokane could even beat out this region. The intermodal station project in Spokane is even designed to accommodate light rail in the future.

Another major sticking point with some on the RTA is the cost of tunneling under Capitol Hill to reach the University District. This would cost about \$170 mill. a mile versus \$50 mill. a mile on the surface. However, this leg is actually one of the most cost effective segments per passenger carried because it would have the highest passenger loads. It is ironic that in Portland, Tri-Met originally wanted to use the slow curvy route up the Sunset Hwy. canyon for the westside MAX extension and transit advocates had to fight for the higher speed tunnel under Washington Park. In our area many are opposed to the higher speed tunnel option.

At least the naysayers on the RTA seem to support the Seattle-Tacoma commuter train plan. Hopefully, this part of the system will continue moving ahead.

The RTA's strong supporters of rail (DOT Secretary Sid Morrison, Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, Seattle Councilwoman Martha Choe, among others) must make their voices heard. It has been twenty-five years since our first vote on rail and the current plan has been three years in the making. It has been thoroughly reviewed by politicians, citizens, advocates, and transit experts. We challenge the RTA to determine how to phase the plan (most cities started with a small first segment) and get it before the voters.

Flem (from page 2)

ton's Swift, McDermott, Unsoeld, Cantwell and Dicks) urged in a letter for USDOT Secretary Federico Peña to include 403b funding for Amtrak in 1994! Let's hope it's a go for our planned 1994 corridor trains.

WashARP Officers

Chuck Mott, SeattlePresident
Jim Neal, Ephrata.....Vice President
Steve Spear, Pacific Secretary
Hans Mueller, Seattle Treasurer
Jim Hamre, Puyallup..... Editor
Lloyd Flem, Olympia.Exec. Director
24-hour phone: 206 943-8333

WashARP News

The January 8 and February 12 meetings will be at Andy's Tukwila Station, 16200 W. Valley Hwy., just south of Exit 1 from I-405. Our annual joint WashARP/OreARP/NARP Region 8 meeting will be March 5. Speaker: NARP's Harriet Parcells. It is hosted by OreARP and will be in Vancouver, WA. Details in the next newsletter.

If you haven't had a chance to respond to President Chuck Mott's request for a special contribution, please do so soon. The initial response has been good. Thank you!

WashARP members in the press: Lloyd Flem wrote an article concerning Amtrak's current status and near term potential in our state for the Washington Transportation Policy Institute's report on transportation options. Dennis Fait wrote an article about train travel past, present and future for the Bristol Myers Squibb employee newsletter. Jim Hamre wrote an article about X2000's Northwest visit for the state DOT District 3 employee newsletter. Terry Scott and James Doubleday had letters to the editor published in the *Seattle Times* supporting restored Seattle-Vancouver, BC rail service.

WashARP is again selling Entertainment '94 books for \$40. Call Hans Mueller (784-9232) for info.

Amtrak fares, senior discounts, ski packages

Once again, Amtrak is offering special nonrefundable All Aboard America coach fares: \$138 for one region, \$178 for two adjacent regions, and \$218 for the whole country. (Fully refundable coach fares are \$179, \$229, and \$259, respectively.) Children 2-15 are half fare. These tickets are available for travel Jan. 4 through June 16, 1994. Reservations must be made by Dec. 16.

Amtrak's senior citizen discount has been expanded to every day of the week. The 15 percent discount, for those 62 and older, is taken on the lowest available fare, including the above nonrefundable AAA fares. Certain holidays and trains are blacked out.

Ski packages are available on the *Empire Builder* to Schweitzer Resort, near Sandpoint, ID and The Big Mountain at Whitefish, MT and on the *Pioneer* to Sun Valley (Shoshone, ID).

New Amtrak Pres. Thomas Downs (from Dec. 1 *Wall Street Journal*): He plans to instill in Amtrak a "fixation" for surveying and understanding its customers, improving cleanliness and boosting on-time performance. "There are a lot of people who want to believe that passenger rail transportation can fit as a viable part of the nation's transportation network. Amtrak has to improve its services and dependability," said Downs.

21st century exhibition train slated for national tour

By Jerome Sheldon

Corporate sponsors are being sought for a \$400 mill. exposition train that is expected to tour the nation, visiting 75 cities, starting from Florida in Jan. 1996. The *21st Century Limited*, described as an entertainment and educational exposition, will have 25 exhibit cars and be drawn by the Millennium Machine, an 8000 horsepower, high speed engine symbolizing the future of rail, according to an article appearing in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

The *21st Century Limited* project is headed by Ross Rowland, who is descended from a railroad family. He was founder of the *Freedom Train* which drew 40 mill. visitors during its bicentennial tour in 1975-76.

The train will stretch to 84 cars. Its exhibits will feature inventions, artifacts and memorabilia from more than 150 collectors and institutions. Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad's No. 614, the last high speed steam engine built in this country, will also be part of the train.

The 35,000 mile tour will continue until Dec. 31, 1999. Two of everything will be built so that the exposition may remain open in one city while duplicate pavilions are erected in the next. An advance train will tour the country in 1994 to promote the project.

Washington Association of
Railroad Passengers
P.O. Box 70381
Seattle, WA 98107

Address Correction Requested

Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
Puyallup, WA
Permit #468

D/J MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION RENEWAL FORM ADDRESS CHANGE

Basic Membership \$15.00 per year
Student/Fixed Income \$10.00 per year
Family Membership \$25.00 per year
Patron \$50.00 per year
Extra Contribution \$_____

(always welcome and appreciated)

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

Name _____
Address _____
City/State/Zip _____
Phone _____