



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."

Amtrak vows to kill *Pioneer* but increase *Builder* frequency; Congress funds six-month reprieve

On March 27, 1996, Amtrak President Tom Downs told the National Press Club, "Amtrak is back, on solid footing, and ready to usher in a new and exciting era of American travel, both long distance and high speed." "The country is ready for expanded passenger rail service." "We will eliminate the need for operating subsidies over the next five years—without massive disruption in service."

It appears at that time Amtrak Inter-

city budget gap. The remaining \$43 mill. still needs to be addressed.

Mayors from Mineola, TX (where the *Eagle* only began stopping in May) to Baker City, OR, governors, and federal and state legislators went through the roof.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) and the people of eastern Oregon swung into action on the *Pioneer*, the triweekly and only train serving eastern Oregon, southern Idaho and Wyoming. A public

meeting attended by about 80 people was held on Aug. 30 in Hermiston. The Senator; local representatives from The Dalles, Hermiston, Pendleton, La Grande, Baker City and other cities; Amtrak employees; citizens; and rail advocates Tim Wilson, Warren Yee and Jim Hamre were in attendance.

Amtrak officials said the *Pioneer* is a poor performer (even though their own figures show a half dozen other runs lose more money each year), has light loads much of the year (why was it running with two sleepers last February and March?), doesn't serve tourist destinations (huh?) and Amtrak needs to concentrate its resources on trains that have more potential.

Sen. Wyden was not impressed with what Amtrak had to say. He stated we must get to the bottom line and come up with a solution for continuing operation of the *Pioneer*. He is "not going to rest" until there is decent transportation for eastern Oregon, and that includes passenger rail service. The Senator announced the Transportation subcommittee of the Senate Commerce committee would hold a hearing on the (See **Cuts**, page 3)

RTA opposition diminished, but still fighting

By Roger Pence

The revised Regional Transit Authority plan is a big improvement and responds to most of the criticism of the plan defeated at the polls last year. Many former opponents, such as Everett mayor Ed Hansen, now actively support the new plan.

In spite of this, there is still opposition from a few people who appear to worship the automobile as the socially-preferred mode of transport for every trip to every destination at every time of the day and night, no matter what the price.

Predictably, this opposition is centered in Bellevue around suburban developer Kemper Freeman, Jr., a foe of transit in general and rail transit in particular. In a recent newspaper article, Freeman was quoted as saying his opposition to the RTA is a "fight to the death."

Freeman will be fighting with few allies this time, however. Virtually all of the east side mayors, city councils, and chambers of commerce now support the RTA with the exception of Bellevue. Even there, the city council split three-three, with one fence-sitter. Major east side employers such as Microsoft, Puget Power and Boeing actively support the plan. And there is no visible opposition in Snohomish or Pierce counties.

The diehards' opposition to the RTA plan is hard to fathom. They correctly point out that the RTA plan will not "solve" traffic congestion, yet they present no alternative that would. If they did propose an alternative, judging from past rhetoric, it would be more roads, bridges and freeways designed for rush hour commuters. We know from experience, however, that kind of road building won't solve traffic congestion either.

The new I-90 bridge is a \$1.4 billion (See **RTA**, page 4)



At the Hermiston meeting, Amtrak officials explain why the *Pioneer* must be eliminated. From left, Lee Bullock, VP Customer Services for Amtrak Intercity; Hermiston Mayor F. J. Harkenrider; Senator Ron Wyden; and Tim Gillespie, VP Government Affairs, Amtrak HQ.

Photo by Jim Hamre

city was already laying plans to slash long distance service, particularly in the west. On August 8, after months of public denials, Amtrak announced elimination of the Denver-Seattle leg of the *Pioneer*, the Salt Lake City-Los Angeles leg of the *Desert Wind*, the St. Louis-San Antonio leg of the *Texas Eagle* (ending all service to Dallas), the Boston-Albany leg of the *Lake Shore Limited*, and the Sanford, FL-Miami leg of the *Sunset Limited*.

Amtrak did announce that the *Empire Builder*, *California Zephyr*, *City of New Orleans* and *Crescent* would return to daily service; the *Broadway Limited* would be restored between New York and Chicago; and a third Florida train would be added.

The proposed changes, which were to take effect on Nov. 10, are supposed to close \$44 mill. of an \$87 mill. Amtrak

From the
Executive
Director's
Desk by
Cloyd A. Flem

Election 96, Spokane 96, Short Lines 96, Pickin' on Pals, Part II

In recent weeks, WashARP's Olympia office has worked with those of influence in our state who could help work our Congressional delegation for Amtrak funding and for a stay of the *Pioneer's* execution. Many of you also wrote, called, faxed, e-mailed, and we probably helped. The *Pioneer* has a reprieve and Amtrak FY 97 funding is better than feared. (See lead story.)



One long-term solution to Amtrak's perennial financial agonies is to elect officials who are knowledgeable and serious about balanced transportation. Though Election 96 is but weeks away, there is still time for rail advocates to become directly involved in Congressional and state campaigns. Donations, coupled with volunteer electioneering (signs, calling, mail out labor, doorbell-ringing, etc.), "buys"—not always agreement with "your" positions—but access to winning candidates. Nothing at all wrong with this system. But rail advocates must combine willingness to work for favored candidates with education of candidates or their "policy people" on the importance of balanced transportation and rail. With a few exceptions, candidates or incumbents rarely have passenger rail or even transportation investment as the center of their campaigns. Your job, besides doing stoop labor for your favorites, is to patiently introduce balanced transportation and rail into their agenda. Most candidates are more competent, qualified and sensible than the sound bite clichés and negative attack ads would suggest.

WashARP President Chuck Mott is setting the example, directly working for three campaigns, combining his support for them on non-rail issues with a short course in the value of passenger and freight rail. Time is dear: spend it with candidates who will win or have a reasonable chance. Dicks, Dunn and McDermott are powerful Congressional veterans who **will** win. Highly contested Congressional races include the First (White-Coopersmith), Third (L. Smith-Baird) and Ninth (Tate-A. Smith). If geographically practical, work for one of those and/or statewide and legislative

candidates. (Again, potential winners; you'll likely get to work directly with the candidate in the latter case, with ample opportunities to "tutor.") As a many-campaign veteran, I'll be happy to share tips and techniques. But we don't want to hear you whining next year about "bad" elected officials unless you tangibly helped elect "good" ones this fall.



The Amtrak/WashARP booth at the late-August state Public Transportation Conference in Spokane was again among the most visited. WashARPer Paul Scott and Loren Herrigstad were our excellent booth staff.

"How Rail Built Washington State" was a retrospective panel on which WashARPer J. Craig Thorpe, Ray Allred and I—along with a geographer and an historian—did presentations. Our panel was well received with most of the work using the past to point to the future, not as an exercise in nostalgia. A couple of us were asked by top transportation officials to take our show on the road because of the implications for future transportation policy. We will.

A final session was an overview of WSDOT's *Options Report for the Northwest Rail Corridor*. Present was a traveling critic of *Options* who repeated his assertion of errors in the analysis and the lack of cost-effectiveness of **most** of the Corridor's intercity rail future vision. I, while applauding accuracy in analysis, vocally supported *Options* and cost/benefit analyses that consider the **full** costs of a near-exclusive reliance on private motor vehicles versus the economic, social and environmental benefits of a balance that includes intercity rail. Superficial analyses that consider only how many people are moved—in short term—rubber tires versus steel wheel never manage to consider these broader impacts.

The Amtrak trips from Olympia-Lacey to Spokane and back were flawless. A shame so few public transportation people used public transportation to and from Spokane. (Note below!)



I attended the Sept. 30 a.m. session of the American Short Line Railroad Assoc. meeting in Seattle. FRA boss Jolene Molitoris gave her usual pep talk; Canadian Class I representatives told those assembled (a large undiverse crowd of suits; ASLRA is all business) of opportunities to buy CN and CP branch lines; a video of an American Assoc. of Railroads CEO urged the short lines to get behind his political

agenda (most of which we'd agree with); and a good panel on ISTE II. In it, WSDOT's Jim Slakey did his always-good act, to genuine praise from short liners nationwide.

Ray Chambers, executive for the "medium size" Regional Railroad Assoc., spoke on the need for even-handed public transportation policies and urged greater state flexibility in the use of federal transportation dollars for intercity rail. He directly referenced the massive subsidies water and, especially, highway transport have enjoyed. In months past, Chambers took heat from NARP and others for his advocacy of potential Amtrak privatization. I see Ray as essentially on "our side." He has consistently advocated continued federal capital investment in rail, a condition too often forgotten by both friends and foes of "privatization."



To my traditional Praise & Push, Pickin' on Pals now needs to be added. But any good coach reserves his most pointed comments for those with promise and ability, not for those hopeless to the team's success! Indeed, my last issue's grumping about my beloved Olympia's disconnect between the excellent, sustainable vision and implemented policies that contradict that vision should have been prefaced by mention of Olympia's consistent and strong support to state and federal officials for adequate funding for Amtrak and for balanced transportation policies. Olympia has probably the state's best public sector support for Amtrak as Centralia has the best sustained private sector efforts on Amtrak's behalf. I argue now that in part **because** Olympia is the best, implementation of policies that continue to favor driving over alternatives requires reconsideration here more than in a place hopelessly devoted to asphalt and mall sprawl. Oly is first team; other places languish at the end of the bench.

Now I'll pick on my WSDOT pals. Loren and I may have been the only attendees in Spokane who neither flew or drove. The sometimes intemperate critics of "intrusive gov'munt" have a point when they say policies and regulations that regulate or influence private citizen behavior are in fact rarely practiced by the regulators! Not just to a state public transportation conference, but state employees (including the all-important management), and especially, WSDOT employees, ought to be encouraged to use alternate transportation and actively discouraged from **always** fly-ing/driving! Sure, sometimes fly/drive is essential, but often buses and trains **will** work, costing taxpayers much less. And friends, you darn well can work better and safer on trains and buses than fighting your way up I-5 to Seattle. Firmly implemented policies should be sympathetic to addicts but should at least try to encourage a tapering off of such habituation.

WashARP adopts Mission Statement

The WashARP board of directors, at its Sept. 14 meeting, adopted a mission statement for WashARP. Member John Deeter did much of the work on this statement. He was ably assisted by members Stephanie Weber, Hans Mueller, and Lloyd Flem with additional suggestions by many more. A big thank you to all. Here is the text of the WashARP mission statement:

The Washington Association of Rail Passengers is a consumer oriented, rail advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the improvement of rail transportation services in the Pacific Northwest. We cooperate with similar rail passenger groups in Oregon, California, and British Columbia, and with the National Association of Railroad Passengers based in Washington, DC.

We believe that a modern national rail passenger network is an essential element of a truly balanced transportation system in which each mode of transport (highway, rail, ferry, and air) is used to its best advantage. We support continued federal funding for capital improvements to Amtrak, and to enable the operation of a complete national passenger network.

We support continued expansion of intercity passenger rail in the Pacific Northwest and strongly endorse the incremental program being developed and implemented by the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation.

We recognize the need to preserve freight railway lines which provide infrastructure for passenger trains and increasing freight traffic in the next century. We encourage cooperation between WSDOT and the private railroad

companies to increase track capacity to avoid interference between freight and passenger operations; to work towards improving grade crossings; to improve cross-state rail links; and to provide modern intermodal facilities, including renovation of King Street Station in Seattle as a priority project.

We believe that current transportation funding priorities are out of balance at all levels of government, with a preference for expanding highway capacity at the expense of other, less costly surface modes. We believe that current policies encourage unnecessary single-occupancy automobile usage. We therefore support alternatives to single-occupancy transportation, including carpools, vanpools, motorcycles, bicycles, and bus transit, as well as local and regional rail transit. We also support non-capital intensive projects, such as transportation demand management, commute trip reduction, congestion pricing, and reduced parking subsidies.

We accept the necessity of an incremental approach toward implementing passenger rail improvements, since it will take a long-term effort to reform transportation priorities. We will form flexible alliances, solely on the basis of agreement on transportation policies, while remaining politically nonpartisan. We will encourage federal, state, and local governmental entities to implement balanced transportation policies, through education and other appropriate forms of dialogue.

We will at all times push forward our views of rail transportation priorities, and we will praise all those who help in achieving these goals.

Cuts, from page 1

cuts on Sept. 10.

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) chaired the hearing. Local officials, including Baker City Mayor Larry Griffith, were among those testifying about the importance of all the trains slated for elimination. Tom Downs, a number of senators and representative and NARP's Ross Capon also testified.

Much of this disaster for passenger rail service can be laid at the feet of Congress and the President. Both offered Amtrak a \$200 mill. FY 97 operating grant when Amtrak asked for \$250 mill. (which they have since admitted wasn't enough), the Senate has not passed the Amtrak reauthorization that Congress has been working on for a year and a half, and Amtrak has not been provided with a dedicated capital funding source, such as a 1/2 cent of the gas tax currently going to deficit reduction. At the hearing, Sen. Larry Pressler (R-SD) did an excellent job of helping Downs lay out the \$100-200 mill. in annual savings Amtrak could achieve

if Congress passed the reauthorization.

In late Sept. the House and Senate did agree on USDOT funding levels, including Amtrak. Fortunately, they did better than the usual split-the-difference between the horrible House numbers and the fair Senate numbers. Unfortunately, the Amtrak operating grant did not increase, setting the stage for the service cuts.

However, as Congress rushed to adjourn by the end of Sept. to get home and campaign, the ground swell of

support for the targeted trains was building as local and state officials and citizens put on the pressure.

In a span of two weeks Sens. Mark Hatfield (R-OR, who is retiring) and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) achieved an unprecedented success: they got \$22.5 mill. added to the continuing resolution that funds all the programs Congress didn't finish appropriation bills for! The funding is to keep the threatened trains running for an additional six months. Now, though, Amtrak is backing off

many of the planned service enhancements, which we are opposing.

Is this an election year gimmick or will the new Congress finally work toward a solution to the funding imbalance that has Amtrak often teetering on the brink? Will the states step up? Only time will tell. We can help influence what happens in the next Congress by making passenger rail service and transportation policy in general an issue with the candidates and by keeping the pressure on the new legislators after the election.

Important Addresses and Phone Numbers

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

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All are evening numbers, except Lloyd's, which is available 24-hours a day (answering machine).

WashARP News

November 16: Meeting at noon at Rose's Highway Inn, 26915 Pacific Hwy S. just north of 272nd St., west from I-5 exit 147 and accessible from Metro route 174. (Note that the meeting is on the third Saturday.)

December 7: Meeting at noon at Tony Roma's, 166 S. King St, one block west of King Street Station. (Note this meeting is on the first Saturday.)

(If you didn't hear, Andy's Tukwila Station closed in August, the cars and other fixtures were auctioned off, and a gas station/mini mart (ugh!) will replace the restaurant.)

WashARP has a new secretary: Ellen Barton of Bellingham. She has agreed to give us a three trial run at a job that is among the most time consuming in any organization. Thanks for stepping forward, Ellen!

WashARP also has a new representative to ALT-TRANS: Hal Cooper of Kirkland. Thank you too, for volunteering, Hal!

WashARP is looking for someone to write grant requests to foundations. If you are interested in helping with this please contact President Chuck Mott (phone number on p. 3). We'll even send you to a seminar to learn how.

WashARP needs more members! Members are the backbone of our or-

ganization. How about giving a gift membership to a friend or family member? A membership would be a great Christmas present. Send a us check (rates below) with the name and address of the person you're giving a membership to and we'll let them know of your generosity.

Members contributing to this newsletter include Warren Yee, Jerry Sheldon, Aric van Devord, Art Poole, Tim Wilson and Phil Meany.

RTA, from page 1
improvement of the kind the opponents admire, and it expanded freeway capacity from four to eight lanes. Those lanes are rapidly filling up, however, and in a few more years the new bridge will be just as jammed as the one it replaced. Instead of having four lanes of immobilized traffic each rush hour, we will soon have eight.

Don't look for opponents to publicly offer specific road building proposals. They read the polling data, and they know that even in suburbia new freeways are vastly unpopular because of the enormous cost and environmental damage.

Occasionally, though, opponents' real desires become apparent. Last year, Freeman lieutenant Bruce Nurse opined to an east side newspaper that I-405 should be double-decked and I-605 (an outer ring road) should be built.

And he said this with a straight face! Some opponents also play an intraregional warfare game. One civic

leader in Issaquah is alleged to have described Seattle as "that dying city west of the lake." It is sad when someone thinks he can benefit his own community by working to harm another.

We shouldn't underestimate the opposition. What they lack in numbers, they can compensate for with a ton of money and "big lie" media messages. But in the end they will not prevail.

With a fundamentally sound plan, an effective campaign organization, and the tide of history on our side, the RTA will win in November. And a few years after its completion, most of the opponents will wonder how they could have been so wrong.

Roger Pence is past president of People for Modern Transit and is now working for the Committee for Regional Transit, the campaign organization supporting the RTA. This article is reprinted from PMT's August 1996 *Puget Sound Transit News*.

The WashARP board favors the RTA plan and adopted a resolution of support which was printed in the last newsletter.

The "Regional Express" campaign to support the RTA needs your help. Volunteer your time or make a financial contribution. Contact the Committee for Regional Transit at 2328 6th Ave (corner of Battery St), Seattle, WA 98121. Phone: 206 728-6051.

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