

Publication of All Aboard Washington
A Not-for-profit Consumer Organization
"Moving forward... On Rail."

High-speed rail funds are still hung up, as Congress tightens its belt

By C.B. Hall

This article was published January 5, 2011 in Crosscut.com, operated by Crosscut Public Media. It is reprinted here by permission.

C.B. is a member of All Aboard Washington. He is a freelance writer and has been following Pacific Northwest transportation issues since the 1990s.

Washington state's quest for more than a half-billion dollars of federal high-speed rail (HSR) funding has become a race against time, as advocates seek to get the money through the federal pipeline before Republicans in the new Congress try to rescind the funding in the name of deficit reduction.

Since January 2010, in two rounds of awards, the feds have promised Olympia \$782 million for HSR, but nary a penny has made it through the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the agency charged with dotting all the

Chambers, senior transportation fellow with Seattle's pro-rail Cascadia Center for Regional Development, who works primarily in D.C. "I hope the FRA can find a way to obligate that money as soon as possible."

While President Barack Obama and the Democrats who control the Senate support HSR, last month's tax-cut compromise suggests that the president may accept quid pro quos with Republicans sharpening their fiscal knives.

"Who knows what's going to happen," Chambers said.

The director of the State Rail and Marine Office, Scott Witt, said the state and the BNSF Railway, which owns Washington's high-speed rail corridor, are in the final stages of negotiating an agreement for the program's implementation. But he said that agreement will then have to get FRA's imprimatur.

Asked how long that might take, he said, "Your guess is as good as mine."

FRA spokesman Warren Flatau said that just over half the first round of grants have been dispersed, but none of the later-round awards have gotten out the door. The agency is aiming to get all the first-round grants out "by the middle of the year if not sooner," he said, but he offered no more precise timeline for Washington's payout.

A spokesman for Sen. Patty Murray, the Washington state program's most powerful congressional

backer, says she "wants this job-creating investment to be created as soon as possible, and has made that clear to all the parties involved."

Our Priorities: What's important in 2011

by Loren Herrigstad, President

Although economists tell us America's latest recession is over, Washington State still faces the worst state budget conditions since the Great Depression. Fortunately, the state Transportation Budget is in far better shape than the state General Fund Budget, but revenues are declining some and there are practically no moneys for major new transportation projects or initiatives. Plus, as of this writing, the US Federal Railroad Administration has yet to release over \$700 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funding pledged for passenger rail development in our state, and the US Republican House looks to be adopting a "Pay-Cut" rule as well as possibly conduct "reviews" of all unspent stimulus funding and infrastructure plans.

The good news is that the political leadership in Washington State remains soundly committed to our state's passenger rail program. While your board at All Aboard Washington has decided with regret not to push to make the 2011-13 state budget biennium a period of aggressive growth for our trains as we had originally wanted to, we will still press for improvements in the Legislature that will produce results without costing much. One key area will be bank stabilization...and we're not talking about the type that makes loans. You probably have heard a number of times now about continuing Sounder and Amtrak train cancellations due to another mudslide in our region, usually north of Seattle. Every time one of these happens, hundreds of millions of dollars in state investment in pas- (See **Priorities**, page 4)



Amtrak Cascades train 506 comes off the Columbia River bridge and into the Vancouver, WA station on January 14, 2011.

Photo by Jim Hamre

legalistic i's before "obligating" the money — paying it out — to the recipient states.

"The whole game of the Tea Party types is to cut everything," said Ray

Record ridership for the Amtrak Cascades and for Amtrak nationally. See page 4.



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

Good News; Modest Requests; WHEN?; More Good News

The good news concerning our Amtrak Cascades is represented by the record ridership statistics on page 4. The overall trend is continued strong growth in ridership, with only a couple of years since 1993 that experienced slight declines from the previous year. We rail advocates must concede that these train trips are still a small percentage of total trips along the so-called I-5 Corridor, with private motor vehicles responsible for most personal travel between Vancouver, BC and Eugene. But the Cascades' small market share has continued to increase. With more investment and more daily services offered, and with the predicted ongoing rise in gasoline prices, these positive trends will continue. The people of our Northwest Rail Corridor want more trains.

The most enjoyable part of my Executive Director work is meeting with members of our Washington State Legislature. (Also, on those occasions when I've had the opportunity to visit members of our US House and Senate delegations.) This year's Session of the Legislature (commenced January 10th, my initial meeting was on the 13th) is going to be difficult for all concerned because of the State's well-publicized fiscal problems. Nonetheless, all of my meetings have been pleasant, with returning members, their staffs, and the newly electeds and their staff people most cordial to this very veteran (this is my 26th year!) Capitol habitué. The record ridership numbers are a great leave-behind. Solid supporters of our rail program and those potentially lukewarm have been very impressed by the 17-year emphatic upward trend in ridership on our Cascades trains.



AAWA, conscious of the State's monetary limitations, is making a modest ask of the Legislature again this year. (See AAWA President Loren Herrigstad's suggestions in the article on page 1.) To Loren's ideas, I would add a bit of advertizing money, with particular focus on marketing the "Second Train" to Vancouver,

BC. As we were delighted to report last fall, the Canadian Federal government waived – for another year – a \$1500 per trip "Border Services" fee. The Canadian Feds had sought to impose it, until strong binational pressure persuaded Ottawa to make the decision to abstain from literally cutting off a significant source of income to the Greater Vancouver business community by imposing this fee that neither Amtrak nor WSDOT felt was appropriate and refused to pay.

Those passenger rail advocates who plan to come to Olympia for Transportation Advocacy Day on February 10th (see page 5 for details) should accentuate the positives and not spend much time pushing for lots more state monies at this time. Spreading the good news, as summarized by the Cascades' record ridership, is most important. What I have al-

It has been nearly a full year since we heard the good news that Washington, based primarily on record and merit, had received \$590 million in ARRA High(er) Speed Rail grants.

ways found is even many of those legislators who support rail are not familiar with some of the basics. I'll have these "basics," in written form for use of those of you who join us on February 10th.



It has been nearly a full year since we heard the good news that Washington, based primarily on record and merit, had received \$590 million in ARRA High(er) Speed Rail grants. Following that, another \$31 million and finally \$161 million from that which the incoming governors of Wisconsin and Ohio rejected. Now we anxiously wait for contracts to be signed and those very good sums of the "Stimulus" dollars to begin putting Washingtonians to work at improving our state's rail infrastructure! WHEN?! When will those monies be obligated to the point that ideologues in the new Congress won't attempt to take the money back before it crosses the Potomac?!

Let me again emphasize our Governor and WSDOT, from top management to the hard-working Rail and Marine Division people are doing all reasonably possible to secure these Federal dollars that will help our state's transportation network and bring good jobs. Same from our Congressional delegation. And I have not encountered anyone in our Legislature, including Republicans I have met with (unlike some members of the GOP in some other states), who does not want

to see our rail system improved with these ARRA grants.

A January 21 conversation with a very credible source in Washington, DC told me the FRA is working hard to get agreements between the freight railroads and states signed and out the door before the rail investment funds can be snatched away. I agree with this source that it is more important to get the grants formally obligated than to lose them entirely over some sticky issue that can be worked out at a later date. So WHEN? Let's hope it is very soon. There is some risk of losing this perhaps one-time-only very important investment in our rail infrastructure. That would emphatically not be good news.



Many people from the Olympia area, around the State, and even nation and world-wide are pleased to hear that Mr. Ralph Munro, longtime Washington Secretary of State, and until recently a very effective advocate for passenger rail and many other worthy causes, is now at home with his wife Karen, recovering from serious but successful mid-December heart surgery.

Among the most universally-respected elected officials in our state in a generation, Ralph had been working essentially full time in support of a wide variety of excellent causes since his retirement from elective office in 2000. We of All Aboard Washington have been privileged to have had Mr. Munro devote considerable time and energy to very effective public support for Washington's successful passenger rail program.

AAWA will patiently wait for Ralph to regain full strength and then welcome his very important return to rail advocacy in the Pacific Northwest.



Final thought: I read the excellent professional periodical, the International Railway Journal. With the rest of the developed world, from ultra-capitalist, ultra-democratic Switzerland to authoritarian China, from tiny Israel to giant Brazil, making huge investments in often already-good passenger train service, IRJ editors find it incomprehensible that there are significant American politicians who are stridently anti-passenger rail. Perhaps some of these folks are taking the doctrine of "American Exceptionalism" to the comic-opera extreme of a strangely popular talk show host who has said he "...hates soccer, because the rest of the world loves it." That is among the few reasons I can discern for their irrational opposition to the transportation mode the rest of the world is so strongly embracing.

Amtrak ridership at all time high, nationally and in the Northwest

Amtrak carried a record 28.7 million passengers in fiscal year 2010 (ending Sept. 30). This was an increase of 5.7% over 2009's nearly 27.2 million riders. It was just 450 people above the previous ridership record, set in 2008, when gas prices soared above \$4 a gallon. With gas predicted to again go above \$4 a gallon by summer and the public now more willing to spend money on travel, Amtrak could be in for another record setting year.

The main issue holding back ridership continues to be Amtrak's too small fleet of passenger cars. Many trips throughout the busy times of the year continue to sell out weeks or even months in advance.

Amtrak also collected a record \$1.74 billion in ticket revenue in FY 2010, a 9% increase over 2009.

In the Northwest, the *Cascades* also set new ridership and revenue records in 2010 for the 16 years since Amtrak and WSDOT partnered to improve and expand service in the Northwest Corridor. Ridership on the *Cascades* hit 838,251 in 2010, a 10.1% increase over 2009. Revenue was nearly \$26.6 million, a significant increase of 31.6% over 2009.

"This tremendous growth in ridership confirms the demand for Amtrak *Cascades* and the need to continue improving the service and reliability," said Washington State Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond. "The next steps in our long-term plan will improve rail infrastructure, reduce freight and passenger train congestion and expand Amtrak *Cascades* service."

Ridership at Bellingham and Mt. Vernon was affected by both Amtrak blocking intermediate trips during the Vancouver Winter Olympics and late summer uncertainty over whether the Canadian Border Services Agency was going to continue servicing train 516 without out the onerous \$1500 a day fee it wanted to collect. Amtrak had blocked availability after Sept. 30 until CBSA found funding just the day before Amtrak was to post official train off notices. Mt. Vernon and Everett ridership also has been affected by the opening of the Stanwood station.

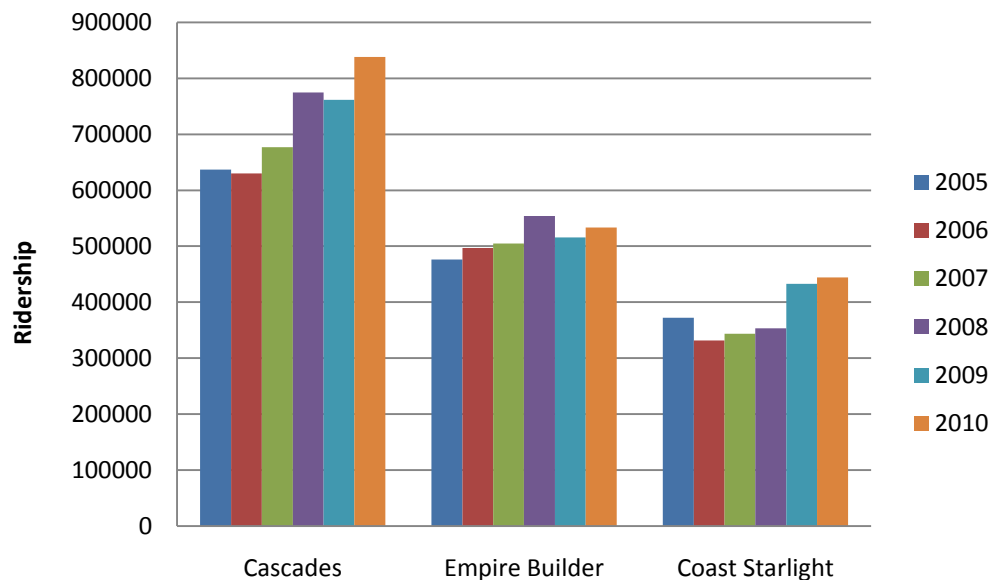
The *Empire Builder* carried 533,493 passengers in 2010, an increase of 3.5% over 2009. Revenues totaled \$58.5 million, up 8.2% from 2009. The second

Amtrak Station Data							
Six-Year Washington State On & Off Totals (calendar year)							
Station	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	'10-'09 % Change
Bellingham	56,087	52,356	51,315	70,990	72,033	62,562	-13.1
Bingen-White Salmon	1,938	1,924	2,307	2,959	2,835	3,253	+14.7
Centralia	19,089	18,816	21,060	23,663	24,279	23,270	-4.2
Edmonds	28,404	27,320	27,543	31,204	30,770	31,845	+3.5
Ephrata	2,985	3,469	3,923	4,365	4,020	3,574	-11.1
Everett	39,532	40,047	41,567	48,420	46,785	44,103	-5.7
Kelso-Longview	20,956	21,411	23,519	28,330	27,406	28,603	+4.4
Leavenworth					3,370	9,149	+171.5
Mt. Vernon	21,172	20,206	19,328	24,280	24,935	18,662	-25.2
Olympia-Lacey	42,404	44,205	49,659	58,133	59,884	60,415	+0.9
Pasco	22,056	27,147	28,072	29,202	24,765	24,992	+0.9
Seattle	650,061	609,104	634,193	668,037	648,774	655,036	+1.0
Spokane	42,491	46,096	48,484	59,001	47,670	49,058	+2.9
Stanwood					818	4,639	+467.1
Tacoma	102,255	102,703	110,869	124,351	122,763	124,451	+1.4
Tukwila	14,214	16,082	18,887	22,292	22,265	24,892	+11.8
Vancouver	72,266	74,907	84,766	97,554	97,889	98,395	+0.5
Wenatchee	18,157	19,992	19,085	20,945	19,301	16,062	-16.8
Wishram	2,446	1,403	1,683	1,814	1,330	1,570	+18.8
TOTALS	1,156,513	1,089,235	1,186,260	1,315,540	1,281,892	1,284,531	+0.2

Station totals include Thruway bus ridership numbers.
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)



Portland-Chicago sleeping car (and fourth sleeper overall) for the *Empire Builder* that Amtrak promised for last summer never did materialize. Let's hope it is put on America's premier long distance this summer. The additional ca-

capacity is urgently needed.

The Coast Starlight saw 444,205 boardings in 2010, up 2.7% over 2009. Revenue in 2010 hit \$37.4 million, up a strong 14.6% from the previous year. (Data provided by Amtrak and Teresa Graham, WSDOT Rail and Marine Office.)

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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

February 10, 2011:**Transportation Advocacy Day**

All Aboard Washington will again be participating in Transportation Advocacy Day (TAD), Thursday February 10 in Olympia. As has been the case in past years, most All Aboard Washington members and any whose primary interest is intercity rail transportation will be cooperating with others attending TAD, but be somewhat independent in our advocacy and the legislators we hope to visit.

Most of the other TAD attendees will be focusing on local transit, pedestrian and bicycle issues within metropolitan areas. AAWA members usually support these positions, but our emphasis is intercity and encompasses much of our state, not just within metro areas. Our outreach must also include rural areas and small towns and the legislators who represent these more distant places.

AAWA members who wish to come to Olympia should inform AAWA Executive Director Lloyd Flem (360-943-8333; 360-870-6286; washarp@q.com) who will register you and, if you wish, set up appointments with your legislators. Individual registration is found on line at "WA Transportation Advocacy Day 2011."

Again, AAWA will have "limos" to provide rides to/from Olympia-Lacey's Centennial Amtrak Station and the United Churches, 110 11th Ave SE, and the very nearby Capitol. From the north, Amtrak 501, and from the south, Amtrak 500 will get you to the Capitol in time for most TAD activities. Please inform Lloyd if you plan to attend, ride the train and have him make appointments.

AAWA members who have attended in the past find this a good experience. Lloyd will provide "talking points" for legislator visits, for those wanting such.

See you in Oly on February 10th!

Priorities, from page 1

senger rail is brought to a standstill, usually for several days. Both revenues and riders are lost, all for lack of fairly basic hillside protections that even the most minor of two-lane state highways usually enjoy. So we will be asking Washington State, along with the BNSF Railway, and even Amtrak and Sound Transit to work together to start reducing both the number of slides, and their impacts and delays, perhaps with just little fixes here and there that might not cost much.

We also want to encourage the state to take a look at spreading the reach and convenience of our successful and popular Amtrak *Cascades* service, as well as other Amtrak services in our state, with better bus connections and service. You may know about the US and Canadian buses that connect the *Cascades* trains from the south that terminate in Seattle with Bellingham and Vancouver BC, but did you know that there's also a state-sponsored bus service between Seattle and Port Angeles? Or between Ellensburg, Wenatchee and Omak? Or Walla Walla to the Tri-Cities?

WSDOT's Travel Washington Intercity Bus Program coordinates four different routes in our state, all of which serve Amtrak stations. Locals who use these buses know about them, but do the rest of us, or tourists? We think this program could be better integrated and easily expanded to make train and bus travel better for everyone in our state. We would also like state and local agencies to improve bus services, like developing an express bus between the Olympia-Lacey station, the Capitol Campus, and downtown Olympia, at least when the Legislature is in

session.

But in this coming state budget biennium, many state agencies, programs and services will be cut. Some will even be eliminated. You can bet supporters of education, health care, senior services, and even emergency services will be contacting their legislators, urging them to reduce or reverse cuts in those areas. The governor is even proposing to offload Washington State Ferries to the counties that rely on them. So nothing is really safe or should be taken for granted. If you care about rail, I urge you to let your local legislators know, politely and positively (believe me, it will be a refreshing change from much of the other messages and mail they'll be receiving), that you ride the trains our state funds, and that you just want to see them continue to run. We realize we can't ask for much more in terms of state rail investment than we have in this climate, but let's you and I work together to at least keep the trains we use now, while making them at least a little better.



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
RAILROAD PASSENGERS**

TRAINS: A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT

Tracks to Prosperity

Annual Membership Meeting

NARP Northwest Division

(Alaska, Colorado, Idaho, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Washington, Wyoming)

Saturday, February 26, 2011

**Embassy Suites Downtown Portland (Former Historic Multnomah Hotel)
319 SW Pine Street. Portland, OR (Convenient Light Rail Access)**

11:00 AM Registration/Exhibits/Networking

12:15 PM Luncheon, Speakers, Presentations

4:00 PM (Approximate) Adjourn

Guest Speakers (confirmed)

► **Robert Doty**, Vice President and High Speed Rail Programs Director, HNTB Corporation; former Director of Systems Engineering for the Taipei Rapid Transit System, Project Manager and Chief Negotiator for Korean High Speed Rail Project, and Project Manager for Systemwide Works for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link.

► **Robert Stewart**, Chairman, National Association of Railroad Passengers. NARP's national chairman will travel from his home in Fort Meyers, Florida to provide rail advocates with an overview of the challenges and opportunities presented by recent changes in the political environment.

Extra Attraction –

Informal Social Gathering on Friday evening, February 25. All registered participants will be invited to attend. (Details will be provided to all registrants.)

\$39 per person, if paid by Fri. Feb. 18, 2011, which includes registration and opulent luncheon buffet of local Willamette Valley specialties. Fine Northwest wines and microbrews offered at no-host bar.

Register Today!

Send your check, payable to *AORTA*, for **\$39.00 for each registrant** to:

AORTA – P. O. Box 2772 – Portland, OR 97208-2772. **Payment must be received by Friday, February 18, 2011** to obtain this advance purchase rate. After this date the price is \$48.00 for each person. *AORTA*, Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, is organizing this year's NARP NW Division event. Please include an E-mail address, if possible, for each attendee. **FOR UPDATES ON THIS EVENT PLEASE GO TO:** <http://www.aortarail.org>

Hotel Accommodations

You can make room reservations by calling 1-800-673-8792 (1-800-HILTONS).or on the Hilton website. Remember, this is the **Embassy Suites Downtown** as there are other Embassy Suites in the Portland area.

See you in Portland on Friday evening February 25 and Saturday, February 26, 2011!

REGISTRATION FORM

<p>I/we wish to attend <i>Tracks to Prosperity</i></p> <p>Name(s) _____</p> <p>Address _____</p> <p>Phone _____ E-mail _____</p> <p>Number Attending: _____ X \$39 = \$ _____ (\$48 after 2/18/2011)</p> <p>Donation: \$ _____ Total Enclosed: \$ _____</p>	<p>Please mail to:</p> <p>AORTA</p> <p>PO Box 2772</p> <p>Portland, OR 97208</p>
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All Aboard News

February 10: Transportation Advocacy Day in **Olympia**. See article on page 5 for details.

February 26: Annual joint spring rail conference with Northwest NARP and the Assoc. of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates. AORTA is hosting the meeting in **Portland**. Details and registration information are in this newsletter.

March 12: All Aboard Washington Meeting at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, **Tukwila** at noon. Address: 15920 W. Valley Hwy, adjacent to Sounder/Amtrak Tukwila Station. We will order off the menu, with individual settlement. AAWA asks for a \$5 donation to help cover meeting costs. Meeting will begin at noon, allowing travel from the north and the south on the *Cascades*.

April 9: All Aboard Washington Board of Directors meeting at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, **Tukwila** at noon. Address: 15920 W. Valley Hwy, adjacent to Sounder/Amtrak Tukwila Station.

At the January 8 Board of Directors meeting the AAWA board added Jim McIntosh and Mark Foutch, former mayor of Olympia, to the board.

All Aboard Washington welcomed the following new members in December and January: Cindy L. Barber, W. Lebanon, NH; Barney Retallick, Seattle; Joshua D. Coran, Seattle; The Andersen Family, Tumwater; and Eric Korndorffer, Seattle. We particularly welcome Eric to the All Aboard Washington family as he and board member Kathy Davis were just married on January 20. The happy couple then embarked on an extended honeymoon trip on Amtrak.

All Aboard Washington members contributing to this newsletter include: C.B. Hall, Zack Willhoite, Warren Yee, Lloyd Flem, Loren Herrigstad, Harvey Bowen and Barry Green.

"If President Eisenhower had waited until he had all the cash on hand, all the lines drawn on a map, and all the naysayers on board, America would not boast the state-of-the-art interstate highway system we have today."

The above quote is from Fast Lanes, USDOT Secretary Ray LaHood's official blog. This January 13 blog post was in response to a highly negative high speed rail editorial in the Washington Post. To read LaHood's full post go to <http://tinyurl.com/lahoodrailexpansion>.

Join All Aboard Washington on Facebook and Twitter. Go to our website allaboardwashington.org and click on the links near the bottom of the page. The latest Northwest Rail development are posted to our website and Facebook page. You can also make contributions to All Aboard Washington at our website via PayPal.

