

Washington Rail News

August/September 1991

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

Pioneer Wyoming inaugural smash hit with public

June 13 dawned sunny and hot over the Crossroads of the West, Salt Lake City. It also dawned early for the four NARP Region 8 directors who had to fly in the evening before. Amtrak's deadhead move with the inaugural run left for Ogden at 6:00 a.m. In addition to

in perfect mechanical condition, indicating that it had just been through the shops.

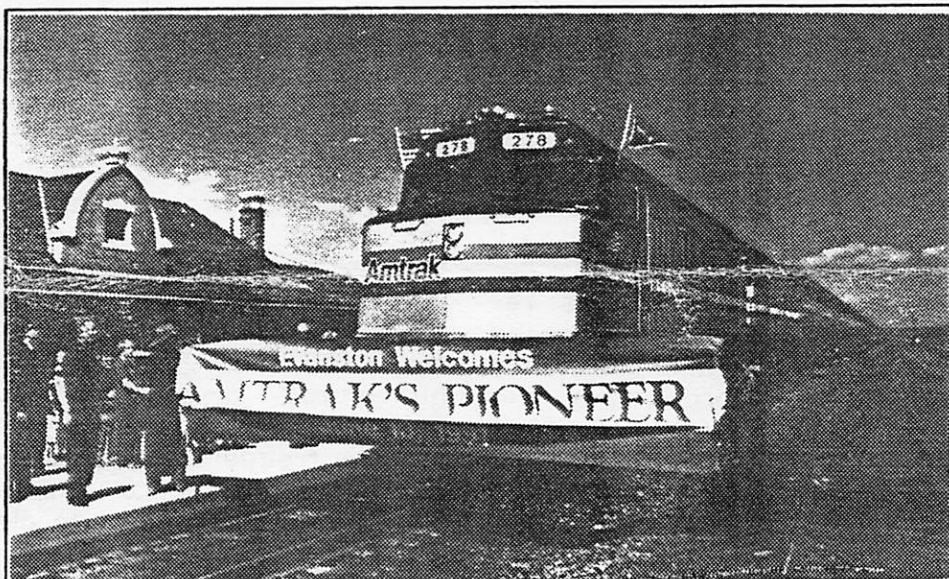
Amtrak took good care of the passengers whether they rode the entire Salt Lake-Denver trip or only a segment or two. Complimentary buffet breakfasts and lunches, champagne, piña

Station update

The new Olympia-Lacey station building is finally underway. After a lengthy and arduous voyage through the Thurston County government bureaucracy all necessary permits were obtained. Amtrak Depot Committee general contractor Bob Bregent had threatened to start work without permits if they did not cooperate.

The foundation is poured and curing. By the time you read this the floor slab should be finished. Bob is coordinating all labor and materials. He expects the building to be completed in November.

In Seattle, preliminary plans for transforming King Street station into a beautiful intermodal terminal are underway. Seattle Councilman and WashARP director George Benson showed WashARP members at the July meeting sketches of design ideas that city staffers have developed. Renovation of dilapidated King Street station will be a lengthy process but the wait surely will be worth it.



"Outlaws" hold the Evanston, WY banner for the *Pioneer* to break through.

Photo by Jim Hamre

Region 8 directors Hans Mueller, Barry Green, Art Poole and Jim Hamre, were rail advocates from Colorado, Idaho and Iowa.

The Superliner equipped inaugural consisted of 2 F-40 engines, 4 coaches, a lounge car, a diner, another coach and a sleeper. The front four coaches were for the invited passengers. The rear coach and sleeper were for Amtrak personnel and for entertaining VIP's, media and travel agents. All of the equipment was spotless and

coladas and bloody marys were always available. Mineral water was supplied by a Utah firm and a special label Pioneer beer was brewed by Wynkoop Brewery in Denver.

In addition to Ogden, ceremonies were held in each town gaining *Pioneer* service: Evanston, Green River, Rock Springs, Rawlins, Laramie, and Cheyenne, WY and Greeley, CO. Crowds were large and excited, numbering over 200 at most stops.

Amtrak throws a great in-See *Pioneer*, page 4

A message from Wash-ARP President Chuck Mott: In order to continue our effective rail advocacy we again ask for your generous financial support. Money from this appeal will go directly to WashARP's continuing campaign for improved rail transportation. Please mail a generous contribution today, using the enclosed return envelope.

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

Congres-
sional
Hearing:
Good Music
From the
viewpoint of

WashARP (your Executive Director and four Board members were present), the July 1 hearing of the Subcommittee on Transportation and Hazardous Waste of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, chaired by Congressman Al Swift (D-Bellingham), played all the right tunes. The Congressional field hearing, at Seattle's Federal Building, was on improving intercity passenger rail service in the Pacific Northwest.

Swift opened the hearing with strong praise for the leadership of Amtrak President W. Graham Claytor. Other committee members present were Don Ritter (R-PA), Ron Wyden (D-OR) and W. J. "Billy" Tauzin (D-LA). Ritter also praised Claytor, stressed his support for "trains, planes and automobiles" (balanced transportation), and advocated both conventional rail and maglev.

Wyden talked of the regional unity of the corridor from Vancouver, BC to Eugene, OR, the need to reduce North America's allocation of two-thirds of all fossil fuel energy to transportation (with energy-efficient rail as one major means), reduction in ever-increasing demands for I-5 and airport expansion (with rail as the answer), and the need for Federal investment to be in earthly transportation infrastructure, not outer space experiments.

Tauzin was most interested in high-tech solutions and seemed to be the only one present who questioned the "subsidies" of conventional-rail Amtrak. (Note: A recent Time article praises the French TGV conventional rail for its overwhelming success and total compatibility with existing rail systems.)

Cong. John Miller (R-Seattle) appeared briefly, though not on the Swift committee, with his support for intercity rail and the "regional-ity" of Vancouver to Eugene.

The first witness was Sen. Brock Adams (D-WA). Adams praised Claytor, urged the House to grant states flexible use of transportation trust funds, felt passenger rail service should be a growing part of an intermodal transportation system, wants to fund a Seattle-Tacoma commuter rail service, and endorsed eventual high-speed rail from Seattle to Bellingham and Portland. Adams supports Federal shifts from "building" transportation infrastructure to more efficient utilization of same.

Amtrak President Claytor thanked pro-rail congress people for their support during the 80's, when the Executive branch tried repeatedly, but vainly, to kill our passenger rail system. He summarized Amtrak's recent economic progress and pointed out the need for capital for locomotives and cars to begin fulfilling public demand for rail and to allow Amtrak to attain operational self-support by 2000.

Claytor focused on potential return of Seattle-Vancouver passenger rail service, a topic of great interest to Swift and his northwest Washington constituents. Claytor then spoke past the Congressmen to state people. Amtrak supports a resumption of Vancouver service but state and local monies, not Amtrak, must fund all capital investment and operating costs. Claytor said current speed limits must be lifted north of Seattle and on existing Amtrak in-state routes. (Note: Many limits are now lifted; Amtrak has done little to implement the speed increases they, WashARP and the Wash. Utilities and Transportation

Commission worked for!)

Claytor strongly stressed the need for reform of Customs and Immigration processes, which currently pose severe problems for U.S.-Canada train travel. He repeated his desire to operate a Puget Sound commuter rail system and said Amtrak and BN were developing a good cooperative relationship.

BN VP for Operations Wayne Hatton talked of the problems of running fast (79 mph+) passenger trains on tracks with dozens of slower freights. He talked of a third track option between Seattle and Portland, but warned of the high capital cost. Hatton discussed the need for a "special agreement" to run Amtrak trains on BN tracks in Canada. Congressmen questioned and the railroad people answered issues of costs, market studies, and the false public assumption that fast trains are more dangerous than slower ones.

State House Speaker Joe King emphasized his support for both conventional and high-speed passenger rail. He underlined the need for service frequency and quality as a means to impact overcrowded highway and air corridors.

Legislative Transportation Committee Chair Ruth Fisher endorsed managed growth, the need to move people rather than vehicles, and that implementation, not just talk, is required. She said the original \$10 mill. proposed for in-state Amtrak enhancement was cut to \$1.9 mill. because no specific improvements (as mandated by HB 1825) were yet in place.

WSDOT's Jim Toohey, speaking on behalf of Secretary Duane Berentson, pled for another hearing addressing problems facing the state's shrinking freight rail infrastructure, on the scoping process upon which consultants will bid to complete

1825-mandated plans for improved Amtrak service, and problems associated with the Seattle-Vancouver, BC test train. Toohey cited Amtrak's unilateral decision to drastically change the westbound *Pioneer's* schedule, which effectively ends Amtrak day trips to Portland, without sufficient notice to our state as an example of the need for still more cooperation and communication between Amtrak and state transportation officials.

With the above presentations affirmative by predictable, WashARP was most delighted with the strong pro-rail positions taken by Seattle Port Commissioner Paul Schell and by Andrea Riniker, the Port's aviation director. Their support for passenger rail as an answer to crowded runways and air space was refreshing. Schell's point that rail investments should be seen in terms of "cost avoidance" for other modes is a type of analysis all-too-often ignored. He urged improvements of existing services as well as planning for future high-speed trains.

Don Fleming, Port of Bellingham, gave a ringing endorsement for return of Amtrak service to his city with Amtrak trains connecting to Alaska state ferries, intercity busses, transit, cabs, and bikes at Bellingham's elegant Fairhaven intermodal transportation hub.

The "good music" played at the hearing was tempered in that no money is set aside to fund all the great ideas for expanding passenger rail service in our state. In fact, the Legislature's \$1.9 mill. for Amtrak enhancement was vetoed by the Governor! WashARP learned Gardner vetoed this relatively modest sum because the 1825 Amtrak enhancement plan had not been completed at the 1991 session's end. Some think a

reinstatement might be possible when the DOT consultant (not chosen at this writing) completes its specific recommendations this December. We hope the state can move ahead rapidly with implementation and that we can get out of the station and a good way down the track, as Calif. has, toward improved intercity passenger rail service.

Our state is fortunate in that most of our delegation is now strongly supportive of passenger rail. Swift's role is of particular importance to our rail future. Although WashARP is nonpartisan in its political leanings, Al Swift's continuation in Congress is vital to WashARP's goals and objectives.

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Washington Rail News frequently mentions the public efforts of this writer and NARP board members Jim Hamre and Hans Mueller. Other WashARP board members serving valuable public roles include Seattle senior and greatly-respected Councilman George Benson, whose work for balanced transportation in the Emerald City will be a lasting legacy; Richard Tait, whose rail knowledge and dedication is helping move Bellevue and King County toward a greater rail future; Loren Herrigstad, chair of Thurston County's efforts to save and utilize rail infrastructure; and WashARP President Chuck Mott, a key member of WSDOT's Rail Advisory Committee.

I and all WashARP members are privileged to have such a well-informed and effective core in our low-budget organization.

NARP director Carl Fowler, formerly from Wash., reports Claytor told him *Pioneer* boardings at Wyoming stations are ahead of Amtrak's original projections.

NARP Agenda

At the spring NARP Board meeting in DC, the directors adopted a "NARP agenda" process. This involves a list of up to five items that NARP will aggressively pursue for the next six month period. It is hoped this process will help us to focus on several key issues so that progress on resolving them can be made.

The Executive Director will report to the Board at each semi-annual meeting on the status of each item currently on the agenda. At that time the Board can delete an item, leave it on the list, and add additional items, so long as the agenda does not exceed five items at any one time.

The list adopted at the May meeting includes:

- o NARP finances.
- o *Pioneer* serving Salt Lake City directly.
- o A penny of gas tax for Amtrak.
- o Work with Amtrak to improve its level of passenger service quality and maintain that level.
- o Urge adoption of our views in the surface transportation reauthorization before Congress.

Amtrak Notes

First Class meals on the Portland section of the *Empire Builder* are due for an upgrade in the near future. While still a box meal, it will be of a higher quality....Coach seats in the new Superliners will be more comfortable. Included in the redesign is removal of the bar between the seats. We can only hope the new design will be used in the existing coaches as worn out seats are replaced....Top contract railroad operator in on time performance in June was BN at an amazing 92%. Best improved train was the *Empire Builder*, going from 23% on time in June 1990 to 70% this June.

WashARP News

The monthly meeting for August is the 10th at 12:15 p.m. It is at Andy's Diner, Seattle. This meeting was originally planned for Edmonds but an acceptable location could not be found.

In September, the meeting is on the 14th at the Burien King's Table, 137 SW 160th St., at 12 noon. The restaurant is one block west of 1st Ave. S. which is served by Metro's 130 route. If you're driving SR 509, use the SW 160th St. exit, then go west two blocks and the King's Table is on the left. From I-5, take the SR 518 Burien/Sea-Tac exit at Southcenter west to 1st Ave. S., left on 1st Ave. S., right on SW 160th St., and left into the King's Table.

We are also planning a fall membership meeting and are working to get a major speaker. Details in the next newsletter.

Pioneer, from page 1
augural run bash. From an Amtrak point of view the trip was nearly flawless. Jim Larson, Art Lloyd, Sharon Mahoney and their fellow Amtrak employees did a great job both on the train and at each ceremony.

Sharon was master of cer-

emonies at each stop, inviting various politicians to speak. Jim spoke last, going over Amtrak's recent accomplishments and record setting performance. He then presented Amtrak's *Pioneer* to the crowd. "Jimmy" Larson also had a noose slipped around his neck at several stops and was threatened with hanging after a quick trial found him guilty of removing Amtrak service from Wyoming in 1983.

The only flaw (and it was big) on the first day was a completely incompetent Union Pacific dispatcher in Omaha. She allowed an eastbound container train to lap us during the stop in Green River. We don't even need to discuss the safety aspects of this with a large crowd gathered at trackside. This train made it to the station area in Rock Springs, 20 minutes from Green River, where it prompted parked for about 90 minutes.

There was only a single track east of Rock Springs account of track work. This caused a huge traffic bottleneck. We were parked behind the container train no more than a mile from the Rock Springs station but couldn't move! Arrival at the ceremony was 97 minutes late.

Many of the people had given up and left. Without saying extremely naughty things about UP, Art Lloyd let it be known that Amtrak was in no way responsible for this disaster.

The delay also hurt the program in Rawlins, where the train tied up for the night. But the barbecue and street dance at the old state penitentiary were still a go.

On the 14th, UP made sure the train was properly handle. Jim Larson said "we went out behind the roundhouse and had a talk" with UP officials.

Although the Cheyenne ceremony was downtown Amtrak will again stop at Borie, a rail junction west of town. This is to eliminate a backup move that apparently gives UP heartburn. Larson promised they were negotiating with UP and hoped to serve downtown in the future.

Media from Salt Lake and Denver and all points in between provided good coverage to the inaugural run.

NARP continues to work on *Pioneer*/Salt Lake City issue. Amtrak now provides only a bus connection from Ogden. The bus does serve Provo to and from the Northwest, including a stop at Brigham Young University.

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Railroad Passengers
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