



WASHINGTON RAIL NEWS

APRIL/MAY 2016

www.AllAboardWashington.org

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

Northwest Rail Advocates hear about improvements that will provide better passenger rail services

Just over one hundred people attended the March 5 Northwest Rail Advocates conference in Tukwila. We heard about construction of the California High Speed Rail project, the infrastructure work in Washington State that will allow expanded Amtrak *Cascades* service and make it more reliable, how a *Cascades* stop in Blaine could boost ridership and more.

As he has for many years, National Assoc. of Railroad Passengers Vice Chairman Emeritus Art Poole ran the meeting with professional poise as master of ceremonies.



Art Poole, right, makes final preparations before the start of the conference while Harvey Bowen and daughter Claire make last minute adjustments to the PA system.

All conference photos by Zack Willhoite

All Aboard Washington presented its Tom Martin Award to Joni Earl, Sound Transit's retiring CEO. The award was presented by AAWA Vice Pres. Harvey Bowen. Here are Harvey's remarks:

"The Tom Martin award is named for the late Tom Martin, a civil engineer and founding member of All Aboard Washington's predecessor organization, The Washington Association of Railroad Passengers. He was an active member and strong supporter of passenger rail service, and many of our earliest meetings were at his home. When he passed away he be-

queathed part of his estate to our organization. All Aboard Washington continues to honor Tom's many years of service and his generous contribution through his name on the Tom Martin Award, which recognizes contributions to Passenger Rail services in Washington State.

"Sound Transit was voted into existence in 1996, and within 4 years was at risk of losing public and government support. Joni Earl joined Sound Transit just as overly optimistic plans were being called in to question by the federal government and the public. Joni took the reins, managing the creation of realistic plans, and then delivered on those plans, turning Sound Transit around so well that at-risk Federal funding was re-secured and a second round of investment was approved by the voters in 2008. This turnaround challenge was not trivial. Without Joni's leadership Sound Transit could have been at risk of being dissolved, as a Seattle voter-approved transit agency was during this same period.

"Joni started out with Sound Transit as Chief Operating Officer, a position she held for only a few months before the then-CEO resigned. Joni was called upon to take interim leadership and then selected as the new Chief Executive Officer. Over a 15 year period, she was in a leadership role for the opening of almost all of Sound Transit's rail services and the installation and startup of around 16 miles of new light rail and streetcar services, a number that is growing to around 21 miles this year.

"For her leadership and success at Sound Transit, bringing rail and other transportation services to King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties, All Aboard Washington is proud to present Joni Earl with the

Tom Martin Award."

The award reads:

ALL ABOARD WASHINGTON
Presents to
JONI EARL
Our Tom Martin AWARD
For Many Years OF Exceptional Service
as CEO of SOUND TRANSIT
March 5, 2016



Joni Earl, flanked by Harvey Bowen, left, and her husband Charlie Earl.

In her remarks, Earl told us she was honored to receive the Tom Martin Award and thanked All Aboard Washington for its strong support for Sound Tran-

sit as she lead the agency back from the brink of elimination. She gave credit to her staff for their great work over the years to bring Sound Transit's projects to fruition. Earl noted that she was a regular Tacoma to Seattle Sounder rider while ST's CEO.



Our keynote speaker was Lisa Marie Alley, Chief of Communications for the [California High Speed Rail](#)

[Authority](#). She began by reviewing HSR around the world:

- 12 Countries with High Speed Rail
- Over 3,600 High Speed Rail Systems
- Over 18,500 miles of High Speed Rail
- 1.6 bill. Annual Passengers

None of this of course is in the U.S. But California is changing that. HSR will be a transformative investment for California, the world's 7th largest economy, and will ultimately connect all the major population centers of the state.

(See **Conference**, page 4)



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

WWU's Good Work; Thank You, Joni Earl; ERC- Game Over?; Two Cheers for BNSF; Toppenish May 14; A Tip of the Hat

For a couple of years I had thought that it would be great if students at Western Washington University in Bellingham would research and report on the feasibility of an Amtrak *Cascades* station stop in Blaine, with the huge potential Canadian market just north of the 49th parallel. While I cannot take any credit for the students of WWU's Professor Tom Roehl having done the Blaine station stop research, I was more than pleased to have invited them to present their findings at our March 5 rail advocates conference.

As many of you know, I was an instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, a college similar to WWU. I had upper division students do research projects in political and economic geography. But none of the projects I supervised had the practical value of the work Prof. Roehl's people accomplished. The WWU students' research methods are sound and their conclusions are moderate and responsible, not as rose-colored as some Blaine station optimists would hope, but also more positive than the wails of nay-sayers. (You know: the kind who, for instance, insisted "nobody would ride" either Sound Transit's express buses or the Sounder trains between Tacoma and



The thick red line indicates the area of the British Columbia lower mainland where it would be quicker to drive to Blaine to catch the Cascades than driving to downtown Vancouver.

-from the WWU students' March 5 presentation

Seattle.) Thanks again, WWU!



That Sound Transit's [Link light rail expansion](#) from Downtown Seattle to the University of Washington was completed ahead of schedule and under budget can be seen as another example of the excellent work of Joni Earl, retiring CEO of Sound Transit. All Aboard Washington was pleased to present Joni our Tom Martin Award at the March 5 conference.



Despite efforts by [Cascadia Academy's](#) Bruce Agnew and me, as well as a fine bipartisan group of Washington State legislators, progress is slight in attempts to

The WWU students' research methods are sound and their conclusions are moderate and responsible...

preserve rail infrastructure within the Eastside Rail Corridor (ERC). A small but strident number of legislators, along with well-heeled NIMBYs and aggressive trail-only advocates, all supported by King County government, appear determined to turn this irreplaceable regional transportation resource into a local linear park. It's important to repeat that AAWA favors both a pedestrian/bike trail **and** rail on the ERC right-of-way, which saw trains operating on it many decades before most all the NIMBYs' homes were built.

The Kirkland City Council can have polite applause for at least considering transit (though bus, not rail) as a future possibility. This, however, is even too much for those opposed to anything other than a trail on the ERC. One wonders if these same opponents are also anti-tolls on I-405 and don't want anything other than general purpose (single-occupancy vehicle) lanes on the highway, yet agonize over the rapidly worsening traffic congestion on the

Eastside.



Once again, I'll lead two, if not three, cheers for BNSF. While they tend to behave as any corporation does, with efforts to maximize their value while minimizing their costs, BNSF is arguably the best big North American railroad in terms of reasonable cooperation with passenger rail service. We can surely be pleased with BNSF in comparison to CSX, which opposes all proposed speed increases on New York State's Empire Corridor west of Albany. And according to the April 2016 issue of TRAINS magazine, CSX even prepared a video suggesting more bus and air service would be a better investment!

A similar attitude prevailed on Southern Pacific in the late 1960s. I recall SP station agents rudely telling me to "take a bus" from Oakland to Sacramento, when I sought to buy train tickets. SP's on-board crews in those years also tried to make the passenger experience as unpleasant as possible. However, they couldn't damage the great scenery from the *Shasta Daylight* when I traveled north to Portland from Sacramento.



Now some good news: Kudos, people from Toppenish. The lower Yakima Valley community has made some fine plans as they will host our annual east-of-the-Cascades AAWA meeting, this year on May 14. The Toppenish folks are also strongly working to have good attendance from citizens of the lower Valley, with the long-term goal being restoration of regular passenger rail service on the former Northern Pacific Stampede Pass route. I had a lengthy phone interview with a writer for the Yakima Business Times concerning our May 14 meeting, the campaign to return passenger rail service, and All Aboard Washington as an organization.

We certainly hope a good number of residents of the Yakima Valley attend our meeting, including some of the twelve Washington State legislators which have been given individual personal invitations. For those of us from Western Washington, motor vehicles are our only practical means of travel to Toppenish. Do contact me if you are willing to provide a car pool vehicle or want to ride and share costs in a car pool. The good folks of Toppenish will be providing lunch for only \$10. The meal will replicate that which was available on (See **Flem**, page 5)



WITH
JIM
CUSICK

Perception

“Has it really happened? Does the Puget Sound Region actually have at least the beginnings of a normal mass transit system?”

That quote was from me in our August 2009 newsletter.

So it really bears repeating, with this modification: “The Puget Sound Region actually has the beginnings of a normal mass transit system.”

Certainly the core, the hardest and most useful part of the system, is complete to a point that proves how much of an improvement this is.

As I’ve heard quoted before “Now there is really something physical we can point to.”

It’s so popular, Sound Transit is already planning to run longer three car trains to handle the peak loads.

I was not able to attend the Husky Stadium opening ceremonies for the new part of Central Link, but it was fun to see Joni Earl doing her “Happy Dance” or “Happy Tap” ... whatever that thing was that she and Dow Constantine were hitting to start the party going.

And speaking of which, at the rail advocates conference on March 5 I had the pleasure of talking with Joni.

Now granted, all of you know I am still writing this column because there’s a lot of the Irish Blarney in this old boy. So when I saw there was place open at the table next to her and her husband Charlie during the buffet I asked “Would you like some company?”

When you work in customer service as I do, you try to be perceptive as to what the person on the receiving end of what you’re saying is understanding.

I tend to look at a person’s eyes ... because ‘eye glaze’ is a common affliction to those listening to transportation nerds such as myself.

Joni and I didn’t talk about trains.

We talked about the challenges of life, and the one thing her and I have in common. Physical Therapists.

So while I spoke my mind, whether she realized it or not, I was looking to see what she might be thinking. (Being polite, people don’t always share everything.) So here is my

attempt at ‘mind reading.’

ME: “Yakity, Yakity, yak yak.”

Joni: < Hmmm, who is this guy? Oh yeah, doesn’t he write that column in the AAWA newsletter? > “Oh yes, you don’t say ... You DON’T Say ... Uh huh ...”

Me: “Blah ... Blah ... Blah ...”

Joni: < Maybe if I toss some of this food at him he’ll leave me alone. > <Shoot – missed. Oh ho! Challenge me with that nice white sweater, will you? > “Oh, you don’t say?! And where do you work?” < Maybe I can send one of my minions to take care of you. >

Okay, maybe she really wasn’t thinking those things (I hope), but suffice it to say that I’m not going to give you the full private conversation I had with her.

I will say the conversation can be characterized as me encouraging her to “release her inner child.” All of my faithful readers see how well that approach serves me as exemplified by this column.

Also, whilst we’re talking childlike behavior, I could see Joni was an expert at extracting that from yours truly when she received the Tom Martin Award. (More like a recalcitrant teenager, in this case.)

As she went up front and turned around to see she was getting a standing ovation from the crowd, she said “Sit Down.” Not that I heard it in a motherly tone, mind you ... but I did look at her and mouthed “NO!” in true teenage defiance.

You deserve it, so don’t rob us of the pleasure!

And then Joni stepped into the mode that makes her such a great leader.

The first thing she did is what she has done in countless Sound Transit board meetings. Remembering that Martin Young, Program Manager for Sounder Commuter Rail Operations, was in the audience, she gave her typical “shout out.” And she gave credit for Sound Transit’s success to all her staff.

Over the years, from conversations with the staff at Sound Transit, with their praise for her leadership, she knows, and they all know, that it’s a team effort.

Ride the Wave of that Success.

Perceiving the Obvious

Meanwhile back in the near East, on the Cross Kirkland Corridor (CKC), it was said by someone – [“It’s only been a trail for 13 months. And you would think it was a birthright.”](#)

And who said that?

Some know-it-all transit blogger attacking the Save Our Trail group as a bunch of NIMBY’s? No.

Me? No. (Not that I’d ever be guilty of that.)

It was said on KUOW, during a program about whether transit should be on the CKC and was a comment by Kirkland City Councilmember Penny Sweet.

The Save Our Trail group is making the argument that this corridor, which has been an active rail line for most of its existence, is a precious natural resource, not to be spoiled with transit.

The funny thing is, everyone that wants transit on the corridor (rail in particular) never says that there shouldn’t be an adjacent trail. Rail advocates are willing to, and in fact, insist on sharing the corridor with a trail. After all, the corridor right-of-way averages 100 feet wide.

Why is this feeling not shared by those who strongly believe in the trail? Is it the idea of motorized transportation on the corridor? After all, in the agreement for the purchase there is an easement for use by Sound Transit.

Kirkland is saying it should be bus rapid transit (BRT), that is, frequent all day bus service.

Sound Transit is entertaining light rail, frequent all day rail service.

I’ve always advocated a peak style commuter service, such as the electrified commuter lines back east that have been in existence for over 100 years.

In fact, I’ve lived within 100 feet of one of those systems.

During peak times – when trains passed every four minutes – the only obtrusive sound was the long distance trains coming through under diesel power. Most of the time the frequent electrically powered trains were hardly noticeable.

Currently, I live next to a two lane state highway, with the constant drone of private automobiles.

How noisy is it? Have you ever had your car break down on a busy highway?

Surprisingly, one thing that makes up a large part of the sound is tires on the pavement. Even a muffled exhaust makes noise, fans and fan belts, the resonant sounds from the engine block, transmission and differential (transaxle for FWD folks).

With occasional trucks and buses (having the same sound as BRT would), the sound is louder and more noticeable.

My perception is that electrified rail is preferable.

Should it be LRT? I lean towards com- (See **Cusick**, page 5)

Conference, from page 1

Alley stated that transformative projects have never been easy. The Golden Gate Bridge was ridiculed as an “upside-down rat trap that will mar the beauty of the bay.” It faced over 2,000 lawsuits. And this was in the 1930s! The HSR project currently is dealing with six lawsuits.

BART was once called the train to nowhere. The University of California System and the California State Water Project each passed the Legislature by a single vote. Where would California be today without them?

Why high-speed rail in California? LAX to SFO is the busiest short-haul market in the U.S., with one in five flights out of the Bay Area heading to LA. Six of the top 30 congested urban areas in the U.S. are in California. The state’s population is estimated to reach 50 mill. by 2050. California has some of the worst air quality communities in the country. HSR fills a gap in California’s infrastructure. Equivalent new capacity between the Bay Area and Los Angeles would cost \$158 billion, and would require: 4,300 new highway lane miles, 115 additional airport gates and four new airports.

System requirements include:

- A one-seat ride from San Francisco to Los Angeles in 2 hours 40 minutes
- Capable of operating at speeds up to 200 mph
- Operate without a subsidy
- Connect the State’s major cities

The current capital cost is \$64.2 billion for Phase 1 – San Francisco-LA/Anaheim – and will be fully operational by 2029.



Photo courtesy of CAHRA

The first segment from San Jose to north of Bakersfield is projected at \$20.7 bill. and is fully funded. It will be operational by 2025. Extensions to San Francisco and Bakersfield will cost an additional \$2.9 bill. and will also be operational by 2025, pending funding.

CAHRA is also investing \$4 bill. with its partners to improve the Burbank to Anaheim corridor and lay the groundwork for the system’s extension from Bakersfield.

Three contractor consortiums are currently building 116 miles of the HSR system

in the San Joaquin valley. Alley outlined how this segment will be the backbone of the system and will be the most cost efficient location for testing and acceptance of the new high speed train-sets. The Authority is currently requesting proposals for construction of the trains.



Next up was Ron Pate, WSDOT Rail Division Manager. He noted that of the twenty major construction projects on the BNSF Northwest Corridor mainline in Washington State to

support expanded Amtrak *Cascades* service, ten are completed and ten are under construction. The final project, completion of track work and an additional platform at King St. Station, is just getting underway. (The projects are covered in more detail in the February/March 2016 **WASHINGTON RAIL NEWS**).

Pate outlined the rail provisions of the FAST Act, the new federal five-year legislation to improve the nation’s surface transportation infrastructure:

- Authorizes Three Grant Programs
 - Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Improvements
 - Federal-State Partnership for State of Good Repair
 - Restoration and Enhancement Grants
- Provides Safety Initiatives & Planning
 - Inward Facing Cameras in Locomotives and Cab cars
 - Increases Rail Liability Insurance Cap
 - Establishes a State Supported Route Committee
- Environmental Efficiencies through expedited reviews
- Requires Amtrak Reforms

The United States and Canadian governments are close to finalizing the agreement to allow all security clearances to occur at Pacific Central Station in Vancouver, BC, which will eliminate the second inspection at the border. Pre-clearance has been a goal of both Amtrak and WSDOT for over a decade. This will make the *Cascades* a more attractive travel option by reducing the schedule by 10 minutes and improve on-time performance.

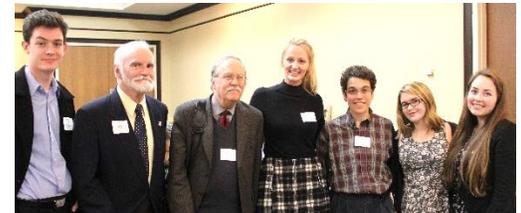
WSDOT’s eight new Siemens Charger locomotives are under construction at the company’s Sacramento plant. The locomotives are being jointly procured with California and several Midwestern states. Delivery is scheduled to start late in 2016.



construction progress.

Check out WSDOT’s [Flickr page](#) for more pictures of the

Four Western Washington University students, under the direction of Prof. Tom Roehl, presented their research on the possibility of establishing an Amtrak *Cascades* stop in Blaine, situated at the Peace Arch border crossing.



From left, Declan Daly, Lloyd Flem, Prof. Tom Roehl, Shannon Peterson, Blaine Public Works Dir. Ravyn Whitewolf, Lora Sonen and Brynne Mosely.

The target market is the nearly one million people living south of the Fraser River as well as the citizens of Blaine and the surrounding area. The students first analyzed time savings to travel to Blaine versus downtown Vancouver. The factors used:

- Drive time savings (varies by city)
- Early arrival at Pacific Central Station to clear immigration (60 min)
- Average wait time to cross the border by car (10 min)
- Train running time saved (60 min)

Total time saved would be between 1:50 and 2:12 for the cities reviewed.

Next the students analyzed competing options for travel, comparing costs and travel times. They laid out the advantages of the train over the other modes, to Canadians wanting to use the *Cascades*, and to the city of Blaine. Surveys of citizens of both countries were conducted to collect data on who would ride, what it would take to get people to consider the train, reasons to travel and frequency of travel.

Conclusions:

- The majority of riders would use the train for leisure purposes. Is this enough rider frequency?
- Target specifically the business travelers to see what they want.
- Blaine station would be convenient for lower mainland residents, but rider frequency may not offset costs.
- Convenience of station and reduced travel time are the biggest incen- →

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tives.

- Canadian riders may influence their local politicians to “increase” government support for the service.
- Lead to support for a 3rd train?

Other speakers: Scott Kubly, Seattle DOT Director, who said the city council should soon sign the King St. Station lease with Amtrak; Rob Eaton, Amtrak Government Affairs, who talked about their strong partnership with WSDOT and noted the new Seattle locomotive shop will soon start construction; and Bob Stewart, who is finishing his term as NARP chairman and provided an update on national NARP issues. (Meeting presentations are available on the AAWA [website](#).)

Cusick, from page 3

muter rail, but if the Eastside Rail Corridor is going to be used for rail, extend a single track LRT spur up to Woodinville.

Perceiving the Not So Obvious

“There will be no rail before its time.”

Seriously? I can’t tell you how tired I am of having to refute this argument, especially with people who don’t understand transportation history. I don’t care if you haven’t lived as long as I have, but really, you can do a little research.

The constant refrain of “density drives transportation” is **COMPLETELY**

BACKWARDS.

Repeat after me: Transportation systems define the growth patterns.

Transportation systems come first, housing comes later. Houses don’t get built out in the fields or the woods unless there is some way to access them.

In the old days, roads were dirt, rails provided the reliable access. Now paved roads can (**mostly**) provide reliable access.

So would you wait until the region looked at least as dense as seen in the below left photo to begin building a rail system?

The building on the corner of 77th St and 4th Ave in Brooklyn, New York looks good for that supportive density. On the left side of the street, another building about a half mile away is another candidate. You can see this intersection from Google Maps Street View.

You might be able to pick out certain features on the left side of the street, right behind the silver car entering the crosswalk to make a right turn.

One being the church since it’s right behind the car. But also, just below the church’s main entrance, is another entrance.

Not upwards ... but downwards.

NO, NOT for SATAN’s Lair, you silly person. It’s an entrance – **to the subway!**

Below right is how this same intersection appeared 100 years ago.

Will we always ‘follow the

curve’ in transportation, and end up as the **WET** Los Angeles?

Or do we plan ahead, so we can have a more livable future?

In closing, I have one question for Joni, that comes from her comment in that August 2009 article – she said she was going to hike the Grand Tetons! When can I see pictures from the top?

Flem, from page 2

the NP’s crack passenger trains over a half century ago. The location will be the [Northern Pacific Railway Museum](#) in the former depot. Weather in mid-May in Toppenish should be just right, probably sunny but not yet the heat that some of us coastal types like to avoid in July and August.



A final hat tip to AAWA member Stephen Hayden of Ellensburg. Not only has Mr. Hayden’s own resources been largely responsible for the preservation and restoration of the Ellensburg NP depot, he has generously donated two fully restored classic train station benches to King Street Station. AAWA is helping facilitate his donation. Thanks to Steve for his dedication to passenger rail – past, present and future – in our state.



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All Aboard News

April 9: All Aboard Washington board meeting from **noon-4:00** at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, 15920 W Valley Hwy, **Tukwila**. This will be a longer format board meeting. There will be reports from each of the task forces working to implement our goals for 2016. Time will also be allocated for the task forces to meet and continue their work. Everyone is welcome.

May 14: All Aboard Washington will be traveling to **Toppenish** for its annual east-of-the-Cascades meeting. The meeting will be at the [Northern Pacific Railway Museum](#) starting at **noon**. The museum is in the former NP depot at 10 South Asotin Avenue. The museum volunteers will be proving a special Northern Pacific lunch for \$10. See Lloyd Flem's column for more information. Also, contact Lloyd if you wish to drive or ride in a carpool (contact information, page 5).

June 11: All Aboard Washington is considering an excursion in lieu of our regular meeting. Plans are being developed. Details will be posted on our [webpage](#) and on social media when available. Information will also be published in the next newsletter.

All Aboard Washington recently welcomed the following new members: **Anton Babadjanov**, Seattle; **Lance Eckhardt**, Seattle; **Joan Marsden**, Bainbridge Island; **Shannon Peterson**, Covington; **Lora Sonnen**, Maple Valley; **Declan Daly**, Bellingham; **Brynna Mosely**, Bremerton; and **Joni Earl**, Tacoma.

All Aboard Washington members contributing to this newsletter include John Neller, Harvey Bowen, Karen Keller, Zack Willhoite, Jim Cusick, and Lloyd Flem.

Google's Transit Trip Finder includes Amtrak

AAWA member John Neller found that Google's Transit Trip Finder feature includes Amtrak trips. John notes that many transit sites and apps do not include Amtrak service. The Google Trip Finder is not as user friendly as it could be. Here at the step for using it:

- Go to Google Maps
- Select the "Directions" icon – it's a light blue diamond symbol with white 'right turn' arrow in the upper left part of the screen.
- Select the transit icon.
- Enter the origin on the first white

horizontal line.

- Enter the destination on the next white horizontal line.
- Select **OPTIONS**.
- Turn on train option.
- Scroll down on the panel on the left side of the screen and select the "Schedule Explorer" icon.
- Use the calendar symbol to select the date.
- Enter the start time and hit the "Enter" key.



New Tacoma Amtrak station moves forward

In February 2016 WSDOT announced an impasse over value with the owner of Freighthouse Square for construction of the new Tacoma Amtrak Station. The state went to court, and after negotiations, the owner signed the possession and use agreement. Compensation will be decided later at a trial. This will allow construction to start in June and keep the Pt. Defiance Bypass project on track for completion by Sept. 2017.