



# WASHINGTON RAIL NEWS

DECEMBER 2015/JANUARY 2016

www.AllAboardWashington.org

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

## Update on Amtrak Cascades operations, other rail issues at AAWA membership meeting

The annual All Aboard Washington membership meeting was held at the Centralia Amtrak Station meeting room on November 14. We were welcomed by Mayor Bonnie Canady, who is a strong supporter of passenger trains. She assured the attendees that the city will explore how to have the station waiting room open for all departures. Currently, it is closed for the last three trains of the day as there is no agent on duty.

Kirk Fredrickson, Amtrak Cascades operations supervisor for the WSDOT Rail Division, was our featured speaker. He showed a great new [Cascades video](#) (search the WSDOT YouTube channel). Kirk then provided an update on Cascades operations. Highlights:

**Wi-Fi:** Kirk acknowledged there are reliability issues with the on-board Wi-Fi network. He is working with Amtrak and the vendor. It is more of an issue with the on-board equipment than the cell towers. The blades and wiring are being upgraded. The public should soon see positive results.

**Tukwila Sounder/Amtrak Station:** There are 40 parking spaces at the south end of the park and ride lot designated for Amtrak customers but they are often usurped by commuters. WSDOT is working with Sound Transit to install better signing. There will be outreach to illegal parkers and a ticketing policy will be adopted. In

the future towing may be considered. One idea to identify Amtrak customers is a parking pass that could be printed when people ticket an Amtrak trip from Tukwila. The permanent train information signage project is not moving as fast as Kirk had hoped. Better interim signage is being developed to help guide passengers to the correct platform for their train.

**Additional Station Stops:** WSDOT has put together a station stop policy working group to help it establish criteria for approving additional Cascades station stops. Criteria will include the level of additional passengers and revenue. The stop cannot degrade running times. Bruce Agnew pointed out the new Canadian Liberal government has promised to ramp up infrastructure spending and there is hope for track improvement funding north of the border, reducing running time into Vancouver. Thus a stop in Blaine would not add to the current running time.

**Infrastructure Upgrades:** There are twenty separate projects on the BNSF mainline between the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and the Columbia River funded by federal dollars. These projects will allow two more Cascades round-trips between Seattle and Portland, decrease running times and guarantee a minimum 88% on-time performance. Ten projects are complete, nine are under construction and one is in design.

**New Tacoma Amtrak Station:** Design is nearing completion for the new station that will be located in Freighthouse Square adjacent to the Sounder concourse. The 10,000 square foot facility will be under construction in early 2016.

**King Street Station:** Seattle city (See **Update**, page 4)

## AAWA Goals Approved

By Karen Keller

These goals are the result of almost one year's work beginning with the SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats) and ending with a positive vote at our annual meeting on November 14<sup>th</sup>.

How can you be a part of reaching these goals? What appeals to you? All of us can find a way to help to reach these goals. It might be by attending events, writing letters, lobbying your legislators, volunteering at an AAWA information booth and more.

Although membership enhancement is not listed, building membership is always a goal of AAWA. If you have a friend or family member who supports public transportation and passenger rail, consider a gift membership. It's affordable and for most of us, we don't need "one more thing" to display or dust. See page 6 for more information.

### Short Term Goals

- Increase passenger amenities at King Street Station, including but not limited to:
  - Food and beverage service
  - Clearer, easier to understand announcements
  - Signage for arrivals and departures
  - Newsstand
  - More refined boarding process
  - Better pedestrian access to 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, transit, Sounder
- Expand our cooperation with other organizations including NARP, AORTA, "green" groups, commuter rail, bicycle groups, hospitality and travel industry
- Increase emphasis on technology via platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, our website and YouTube to expand our reach and message
- Focus on intermodal connectivity – train to train, train to transit, etc.

(See **Goals**, page 4)



President Karen Keller leads a discussion on adopting the 2016 goals for All Aboard Washington.  
Photo by Jim Hamre



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

## On “Forgetting” Passenger Trains; To the East; Today’s Communications

Very few of our citizens dislike intercity passenger trains. There are a few wedded to driving no matter how brutal or dangerous the situation. (Passenger trains are, per million passenger miles, seventeen times safer than private motor vehicles.) And there are some ideologues who erroneously preach that drivers totally pay for streets and roads while passenger rail is subsidized. (All transportation modes, with the partial exception of freight rail, are subsidized. But it can be argued that these subsidized modes – passenger rail, transit, air, water, and road – offer public benefits equal to or greater than the subsidies.)

In fact, even many opposing public support of passenger rail often say trains would be fine if “they made a profit.” My concern here is not that debate. My issue is passenger rail, particularly intercity passenger rail, is overlooked, “forgotten,” when transportation is discussed or considered. Our favorite mode of travel has few real enemies; just too many who ignore it. How many of you have been asked, when you mentioned a trip taken within North America, “Did you fly or drive?” Rail or even intercity bus seems not to have occurred as choices. I have been known to answer, with a smile, “Neither, I went the way civilized adults in the rest of the industrialized world travel, by passenger train.”

Even passenger rail’s good friends in State government, folks who support intercity passenger trains with policies, votes, and funding, will sometimes omit passenger trains when speaking or writing of transportation issues in which the State is interested or supports. I also recall times when user stakeholder groups were assembled by WSDOT. Representatives from ferries, transit, air transportation, bike and pedestrian, highway users, even freight rail

were invited. Intercity passenger rail was not on the list. We gently reminded folks in charge. We always received a “Sorry, we somehow forgot you guys; of course you should be included.”

The private sector, in discussing personal access to and from their facility, will often detail parking and access to nearby airports. Travel by passenger train and transit, even when handy and convenient, is rarely mentioned. Every All Aboard member, every advocate of multi-modal transportation, should be an educator and reminder to any and all who discuss transportation and yet “forget.” This is a theme I’ve pushed before. We need to keep politely pushing.

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North America, “Did you fly or drive?”***

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Among the “Short-Term Goals” for 2016, as mentioned in AAWA President Karen Keller’s article on page 1, is “Focus on Intermodal connectivity.” One of the best means of ensuring a growing percentage of trips are by other-than-single-occupant vehicle is to make connections among other modes convenient and easy. Current policies of the Washington State Transportation Commission and WSDOT support such. AAWA members can do some on-the-ground research in two ways.

As transportation users, you can find out what kind of connections exist between and among: ferries, transit (both bus and rail), intercity passenger rail, air, bike and pedestrian, and private vehicle. I see your investigations as different from that of the professionals at WSDOT (including Rail Division people with whom I’ll be working on this issue) in that you should make this personal: How do these connections work for you.

The second form of your research is simply to find out if information is made available for connections that now exist. Often it is not, particularly information about our intercity passenger trains. In my view, public-supported transportation agencies should be required to have information readily available about all modes with which they connect. Whether in

person or on the phone, in print or online, information, maps and schedules need to always be easy to secure and use. I once told the representative of a large Seattle-based public transportation provider that their employees at the information desk at the provider’s offices, just blocks from King Street Station, not only did not have information about Amtrak trains, they seemed oblivious to the existence of the trains! The response to me when I relayed this to the representative, “That’s not their job!” I firmly believe it is.

So, fellow passenger train advocates: Your “job” is to find out what intermodal connections exist that can serve you and your household. And also to see to what

degree information about these connections is readily available to a general public not as doggedly dedicated to finding such information as you might be! I hope I can be proved wrong, but I perceive intercity rail is most often the “for-

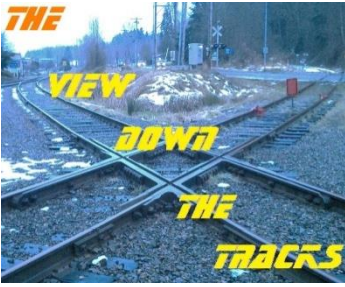
gotten” mode in information from other transportation providers. If so, let’s help change that.



One of the “Long-term Goals” mentioned is “Restore passenger rail to Eastern Washington via Stampede Pass.” AAWA has a rolling start on this one. Several of us have met with community leaders in Kittitas County and on two occasions in Yakima County. The support expressed is total among those with whom we’ve met.

In addition, key legislators representing the people of those counties have expressed support to restore service to this original Northern Pacific line, which runs through the largest populated area without passenger train service in the Pacific Northwest. I also phoned the DC office of Congressman Dan Newhouse (R-Sunnyside), who expressed his support if that’s the desire of his constituents.

And that is the point: AAWA can and will help, but the push must come from those in the greater Yakima Valley who want a return of intercity passenger trains to their communities. A couple of highly-motivated and effective AAWA Board members have undertaken leadership in pursuing this goal, which would likely take years to accomplish. It will take lots of (See **Flem**, page 5)



WITH  
JIM  
CUSICK

### Drives me Nuts

This is one hard nut to crack.

I can't tell you how many discussions I've had with people about making the decision on whether to drive or take the train to a destination.

This decision is made, even when they have chosen the train, based on one phrase:

"Cheaper than paying for gas!"

Now while I applaud their choice to take the train, I'm still astounded as to how people do their accounting.

It's as if they really believe the cost of driving is just what you pay for a gallon of gas.

And I'm not talking about the external costs (environmental, police and fire response, etc.), which is usually the argument made by those who are trying to sway the decision for people to give up their cars.

I'm talking about direct costs!

What it actually takes in Dollar\$ to use an automobile for transportation.

Maybe it's because I do all the work on my own cars.

Yes, you've seen me rant here about modern automobiles and how sometimes it appears that there is needless complexity added.

Well, I'm no troglodyte, and I can still navigate my way around modern cars better than most people I talk to, so I feel qualified to speak authoritatively on the subject of car cost.

So when I hear the "Cheaper than paying for gas!" phrase, the first thing I want to say

is: [Are you out of your Vulcan Mind !?!?!?](#)

Seriously, when I argue the point that even AAA states that it costs upwards of 50 cents per mile, I find myself being drawn into an argument that rationalizes car ownership by stating that most of that cost is sunk.

(Yeah, like a sinking ship).

The rationalization is that AAA's cost figure factors in depreciation, insurance, and interest on the car payment as unavoidable expenses, so driving any more doesn't affect the cost.

By looking at an example vehicle that [Consumer Reports selected in a cost comparison](#) for estimating the difference between vehicles with various repair histo-

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***Now while I applaud their choice to take the train, I'm still astounded as to how people do their accounting. It's as if they really believe the cost of driving is just what you pay for a gallon of gas.***

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ries, I decided to use the 2010 Buick LeSabre to explore that idea.

Take that vehicle, and go to your [friendly NADA Guide](#), and compare the value when you enter different mileage figures.

If you take the difference between using the car for everything, versus driving it to church and back (which, if you understand anything about cars, isn't really good for a car), you can have value difference of up to \$3500 over that 5 year period.

What that is telling you is, that **YES**, driving your car has a direct effect on the amount of depreciation that you will see.

This can be up to \$0.07 per mile.

So in addition to AAA's operating cost of about \$0.18 per mile (gas, tires, consumables), by adding that extra cost, you get to around \$0.25 per mile.

That you cannot claim as Sunk Cost (in your attempt to rationalize your driving).

And here's something else for you to chew on ... If you keep your car longer, to keep from having to buy a new car, your Maintenance Costs will go up!!

The more you drive, the closer you get to that major repair.

Plus, the car won't always perform at that new car level, and if you want it to perform flawlessly, and look and smell good, you have to keep up on all the maintenance.

Cleaning, conditioning, fluids, minor electrical devices ... this all costs money.

From my years selling auto parts at a local chain, I can tell you that most people let the condition of their cars

gradually deteriorate, to where they are essentially driving something close to your classic "beater."

They don't realize this, because it has happened so gradually, but let me tell you, I have smelled - I mean **SEEN** - this myself.

One should calculate twice yearly detailing sessions into that operating cost, too.

So, when you take that trip to Portland, which is 187 miles from Seattle (according to the Amtrak *Cascades* schedule) you will have spent:

\$46.75 if you use only the operating cost, or \$108.46 if you use [AAA's per mile cost for a medium sedan](#).

Currently, the price spread for a Seattle to Portland train ticket is \$35 to \$63. (Special one-way fares can be as low as \$26.)

Go on a day that's not so busy, or buy enough in advance, and **THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR DRIVING!**

Last time I looked, \$35 is less than \$46. (See **Cusick**, page 5)



**Of course, stress and frustration levels (and travel time) are also factors besides costs that people consider when traveling south to Portland. Here is I-5 at the Puyallup River on a typical Saturday afternoon and an Amtrak *Cascades* peacefully approaching the Lewis River.**  
*Left photo from a WSDOT traffic camera; right photo by Jim Hamre*

## Spreading the AAWA message

By Karen Keller

Lloyd Flem and I recently had the pleasure of accompanying twenty passengers on a short Amtrak *Cascades* trip from Olympia/Lacey to Centralia. All were senior citizens who reside at Panorama City, an upscale retirement community in Lacey.

The idea was hatched about two months ago during Panorama's "Drive Less-Go More" seminar. By providing information on convenient and affordable ways to travel without using a personal vehicle, the hope is residents will take advantage of these options.

Planning the trip was easy for Lloyd and for me. Lloyd arranged with McMenamans Olympic Club for the folks to have a nice meal. I arranged with Amtrak to set aside one coach for them to ride together. On the other hand, Panorama City's social planner Jean Jacobson hit some road-blocks.

First, Amtrak group sales runs on Eastern Time. By 1:30 PM our time, they are closing. Jean is often in meetings in the morning and relies on her afternoon time to make phone calls. She kept bumping up against their closing time.

Next, she was guaranteed twenty seats southbound, but could not be guaranteed the same heading back north. After a day or two of wrangling, she was able to get a reservation for each direction.

Then Amtrak group sales wanted a passenger list. Jean asked if she should include payment at the same time. She was told "no," to wait. She emailed the list, but got no response so two days later called again and was told that because she did not include payment with her passenger list, the reservation was cancelled!

Lloyd and I were unhappy over the apparent clumsy handing of this group reservation. Calls to Amtrak and to WSDOT's Ja-



The Panorama City group prepares to board *Cascades* train 501 on Nov. 10.

Photo by Karen Keller

son Biggs did result in getting some wonderfully prompt assistance from Amtrak Seattle's Mari Hirabayashi, who put everything in order for Jean. Our concern was not only for disappointed passengers and our bruised reputation should this trip be cancelled, but also that all these Panorama City residents would tell their friends that Amtrak travel is too confusing and complicated.

In the end, the travelers had a great experience, with a smooth, quiet ride both directions, and they complimented the look and comfort of the *Cascades'* Talgo equipment.

## Beech Grove, Iowa Pacific highlight NARP meeting

by Mike Morrison

The Oct. 16-18 Indianapolis NARP Council meeting, held at the city's Union Station, included many sessions, but among the more significant were a tour of the famed Beech Grove maintenance shops and a presentation from the private company that now operates Indiana's state funded intercity service.

The Beech Grove tour gave attendees a rare opportunity to see the inner workings of Amtrak's major maintenance facility, originally built a century ago for the Big Four RR (later New York Central). The 100 acre property, southeast of central Indianapolis, employs about 500 skilled workers who rebuild and maintain most of Amtrak's diesel locomotives and passenger cars. Visible on sidings were numerous Superliner cars which appeared intact but await repairs for which funding is reportedly insufficient.

Of special interest to Northwest delegates were two Talgo Series 8 trainsets parked prominently outdoors. Built for Wisconsin but rejected by that state's incoming governor, the trains still have a brand-new feel. Talgo representatives were present to educate the NARP delegation regarding ready availability of the sophisticated tilt body trains.

The next day's keynote session focused on the nation's one state funded Amtrak route contracted out to a third party operator (though Amtrak still provides the operating crews). That train is the *Hoosier State*, connecting Indianapolis with Chicago. Iowa Pacific Holdings, operator of numerous short lines, including the Mount Hood RR in Oregon, has since August been

running the train under a contract with the state of Indiana. Ed Ellis, a former Amtrak executive, is CEO of the firm, and he gave an upbeat presentation about how in the absence of high speed the train must emphasize passenger comfort and service. A number of attendees rode the train to the meeting and saw this first hand, with Business Class seating in a refurbished dome car and freshly cooked dining car meals. The contract runs for two years and bears close watching by other states that pay for short haul Amtrak routes.

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## Update, from page 1

Councilman Tom Rasmussen is pushing hard to get the lease through the city council. Kirk is working with Amtrak to provide station food service in 2016. He does have concerns that this may reduce on-board food sales. Part of the revenue must be shared with WSDOT. The passenger information system is also supposed to finally be operational in 2016.

Rep. Luis Moscoso (D-Bothell) and Bruce Agnew gave an update on the Eastside Corridor (former BNSF Woodinville subdivision). The region missed a real rail transit opportunity years back. Now the corridor is being chopped up. Policy met politics and there was too much politics. The corridor is a regional asset and should be used to help mitigate Eastside traffic issues, including thousands of dump trucks hauling materials for upcoming I-405 and East Link light rail construction projects. But locals politicians and NIMBYs are the making decisions. We need to mobilize a political movement at the state level.

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## Goals, from page 1

### Medium Term Goal:\*

- Establish an Amtrak *Cascades* station stop in Blaine

### Long Term Goals:\*

- Restore passenger train service to central/eastern Washington via Stampede Pass
- Add daytime service to Spokane (route to be determined)
- Bring Sounder service to Thurston County

\*Both medium and long term goals have short term components, for example ramping up local support for the Blaine stop. Working with decision makers, mayors, county commissioners, etc. will be essential as AAWA plants the seeds for daytime passenger train service to central and eastern Washington communities.

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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 News Updates: www.narprail.org/news/  
 Amtrak: www.amtrak.com

Amtrak Cascades: www.amtrakcascades.com  
 Sound Transit: www.soundtransit.org

**Flem,** from page 2

dollars and a motivated population to cause this to come to pass. Now we need more AAWA members from Central Washington to volunteer to work to restore service to **YOUR** part of the State.

One step forward will be the location of our annual east-of-Cascades AAWA meeting in Toppenish in (probably) May of 2016, in the lower part of the Yakima Valley. Toppenish Mayor Loren Belton and City Manager Lance Hoyt are pleased with our plans to hold our meeting in their city and strongly support the restoration of passenger trains to serve their people. Hopefully we'll have good attendance in Toppenish from both sides on the Cascades.



Another Short-term Goal is "increase emphasis on technology," particularly contemporary communication technology. Whereas I am quite comfortable being deeply involved in "Focus on intermodal connectivity" and "Restore passenger rail...," I am pleased we have several on our Board and many among our AAWA membership who have the knowledge and skills to further bring AAWA into the communication era that has become so dominant among particularly those born since about 1980. That is **NOT** an area of expertise I possess!



**Exec. Dir. Lloyd Flem uses his technology – a flip phone – to conduct business on the road – here at the Centralia Amtrak Station.**

*Photo: Karen Keller*

AAWA does need to attract a greater number of younger people to active rail advocacy. You who are savvy to these new communication technologies need to volunteer your interests and skills to help spread the mission of passenger rail.

There are several other goals as mentioned in Karen Keller's article. Please contact President Karen, Vice Presidents Jim Hamre or Harvey Bowen or me to volunteer for one or more of these task forces. The SWOT Analyses completed earlier this year included a message from membership: We need greater involvement by the members. This is **YOUR** opportunity. We hope to hear from you.

**Cusick,** from page 3

If you calculate with AAA's numbers, 3 adults can go on the train for that same price.

Once the number of occupants in a vehicle reaches 3-4 adults, the "carpooling effect" comes into play, and yes, then the cost to drive is cheaper, especially if the train ticket prices are getting near the high end.

Unfortunately, I had to use a number of paragraphs, words and links to other websites, to just lay out a simple argument.

I need a Really **REALLY**, good Meme. (Saying "Are you out of your Vulcan mind?" just doesn't seem to play very well.)

Hmmm ... "Who does your accounting? Dewey, Cheetum, & Howe?"

(Obviously the same ones [who think SOV riders on 405 should get their extra lanes for free.](#))

No, that doesn't sound much better. "Hey, can I use your car whenever I want? I'll fill it back up to make up what

gas I've used!"

"Wow!! I wish I could get someone to Gift Me a Car!"

Although, I wish I had the ability to do Spock's one-eyebrow raise.

Help me out, here folks.

I suppose I can just start by saying: "Taking the train is cheaper than what AAA says it costs to drive."

With the information I've provided, you can have the confidence to think:

"Go ahead, argue with me!"

URLs for links above:

Consumer Reports article:

<http://www.consumerreports.org/cro/2012/12/what-that-car-really-costs-to-own/index.htm>

NADA guide for 2010 Buick:

<http://www.nadaguides.com/Cars/2010/Buick/Lacrosse-4-Cyl/Sedan-4D-CX/Values>

AAA – what it costs:

<http://newsroom.aaa.com/2015/04/annual-cost-operate-vehicle-falls-8698-finds-aaa/>

A state legislature who thinks everything should be free:

<http://www.king5.com/story/news/traffic/2015/11/19/state-lawmaker-i-405-express-toll-lanes/76040044/>

And we can't forget:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4HczsDUSNtg>



*Photo by Warren Yee*

One would hope that Dawn's Delectables is at King Street Station, but it's not. This great little food cart is in the Centralia Amtrak Station! Though the waiting room is not open for three of the ten daily departures the cart, operated by a nearby business of the same name, is doing good business.

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## All Aboard News

**January 9, 2016:** All Aboard Washington board of directors meeting from **noon-2:00 p.m.** at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, 15920 W Valley Hwy, **Tukwila**, adjacent to the Sounder/Amtrak Station. The board will be electing officers for 2016 and continuing to develop plans to implement AAWA's goals for 2016 and beyond.

**February 2016:** All Aboard Washington will host its **third annual reception for the Legislative Rail Caucus** at the State Capitol on a weekday to be determined. This also provides a good opportunity to meet with your legislators. If you are interested in participating contact Lloyd Flem (info on page 5). Transportation from the Amtrak Station is available.

**March 5: Northwest Rail Advocates** meeting from noon-5:00 p.m. at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, 15920 W Valley Hwy, **Tukwila**, adjacent to the Sounder/Amtrak Station. Registration for the meeting will be available by mid-January online or via postal mail. We are planning a great program.

All Aboard Washington recently welcomed the following new members: **Mike Elliott**, Tacoma; and **Berl Colley**, Lacey.

All Aboard Washington members contributing to this newsletter include: Mike Morrison, Warren Yee, Kirk Fredrickson, Zack Willhoite, Karen Keller, Lloyd Flem and Jim Cusick.

At the November 14 annual All Aboard Washington meeting in Centralia Charlie Hamilton was elected to the board of directors. John Carlin and Bob Lawrence were reelected to the board.



If you shop at Amazon, don't forget the company's AmazonSmile program. When you select All Aboard Washington as your charity we receive one-half of one percent of your eligible purchases at no cost to you. Follow the link from our website or search for us at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com).

Looking for a holiday gift for someone special that supports passenger rail service like you do? Then consider giving that person an All Aboard Washington gift membership. You

can do this by going to [allaboard.washington.org](http://allaboard.washington.org), follow the Join and Support Us link and fill in the giftee's information. Or use the above coupon, filling in the giftee's information and adding your name and that the membership is a gift. We will take it from there. The more members All Aboard Washington has, the greater our influence can be. Help grow your organization by adding to our membership ranks.



Photo by Jim Hamre

At the NARP fall meeting in Indianapolis All Aboard Washington's own Claire Bowen moderated a panel discussion with 25 millennials from various universities in Indiana and Illinois. The discussion centered on the future and importance of intercity passenger rail service in the United States.