



# Washington Rail News

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

## Congress takes significant step toward balanced transportation; however, Amtrak left in the cold

Balanced transportation in the United States took a giant leap forward during the dying moments of the first session of the 102nd Congress. On November 27, Congress passed a six year \$151 billion surface transportation bill containing \$325 million for Puget Sound area rapid transit projects. The House vote was 372-47. Senate approval was 79-8.

Also included in the bill is \$100 million for ferryboats and terminals. As Washington has the largest ferry system in the country the state should be able to snag a major chunk of this appropriation.

The biggest disappointment had to be that (and the reason why) intercity rail was deleted from the bill. More on that later.

NARP Executive Director Ross Capon said, "Increased funding for mass transit means the highway/transit reauthorization bill passed [Nov. 27] by the House and Senate represents progress towards an environmentally sound, truly balanced transportation system."

Transit gets \$31.5 billion over the next six years, up substantially from the drought years of the Reagan Administration. In addition, \$24 billion is flexible and can be spent for either highways or transit. \$15 billion of that \$24 billion goes directly to metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in areas of 200,000 population or more.

Washington state could re-

ceive at least \$2.35 billion in highway and transit funds from the bill, or \$1.18 for every \$1 our motorists pay in federal gas tax.

Senators Brock Adams (D) and Slade Gorton (R) and Rep. Jim McDermott (D-Seattle) were instrumental in convincing the House-Senate conference committee to skim \$300 million from other projects across the country for Puget Sound rapid transit. "They got it in at the last minute," said Ron Posthuma, Metro government affairs manager. "They scrambled. Adams and Gorton said our project should be included and McDermott kept pounding away."

Metro continues to determine what our Puget Sound rapid transit system will look like. Voters in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties could vote on the plan and its funding mechanism next November. Speculation is, however, that the vote may not come until early 1993.

McDermott said, "I am pleased that Congress understood the critical traffic congestion and air quality problems of our area and has provided this crucial commitment to help overcome them."

The \$300 million will "ensure that the federal government will be a partner in this joint transportation venture," stated Adams.

Gorton called the legislation "a landmark bill which provides Washington state increased flexibility and control (See Transit, page 3)

## Report: NARP fall meeting

The NARP fall board of directors meeting was held in Milwaukee; WI Oct. 17-19. Region 8 directors Barry Green (MT), Art Poole (OR), Hans Mueller (WA), and Jim Hamre (WA) were in attendance. WashARP's Lloyd Flem was an alternate to Carl Fowler (VT), a former WashARP director.

Inconsistent service quality of Amtrak employees was a major point of discussion. Many, if not most, Amtrak personnel provide good to outstanding service to the traveling public. There is still that certain percentage who's attitude is "the customer be damned" as long as they get their next pay check.

While we support decent working conditions and just pay, the ongoing protracted and often contentious labor negotiations between employees and Amtrak are not the fault of the traveling public. Frustrations should not be taken out on them.

NARP will continue its efforts to communicate service quality shortcomings and suggested improvements to Amtrak management.

The NARP agenda (see Aug./Sept. 1991 *Rail News*) was expanded to include: 1) rail as alternate to airport expansion (Chicago, Boston, Sea-Tac, Minneapolis-St. Paul cited as examples); 2) what can NARP do towards 1996 when Amtrak's contracts with most of the freight railroads expire and must be renegotiated; 3) push for rail link between North and South sta- (see Report, page 3)

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

A Refocus  
on Intercity  
Rail  
Advocacy  
The Wilbur  
Smith Asso-

ciates' first draft of the Amtrak enhancement study mandated by the May 1990 passage of legislation has been submitted to WSDOT. WashARP President Chuck Mott, this writer, and other WashARPer's have had a chance to critique parts of the document and give it high marks. This detailed Wilbur Smith examination of "what is" in our state's intercity rail will give WashARP an invaluable factual basis for our work with the Legislature and WSDOT and for education of the media, other influentials, and Amtrak management.

Two problems: 1) our state's tax revenue shortfall will make it challenging to get investment in the modest amounts desirable to improve Amtrak service, and 2) the just passed federal Surface Transportation Act, although excellent in its giving the states the ability to invest in transit, not just more highways, and its specific funding of the Puget Sound region's transit plan, had the Amtrak funding choice torn from it at the last minute.

The "balanced transportation" WashARP has and will continue to support is doing pretty well at the state and federal levels. Bus and rail transit, commuter rail, TDM,\* HOV\* lanes, car and van pooling, and coordination of transportation and land use planning all now have political, legal, and significant financial support in Olympia and DC. Intercity rail, Amtrak, is often the forgotten stepchild. Even otherwise excellent balanced transportation people sometimes ignore or "forget" intercity rail. (Anyone read or hear about Amtrak's elimination from the Surface Transporta-

tion bill anywhere else?) While continuing my support for all balanced transportation, my 1992 resolution is to refocus on intercity rail advocacy. If WashARP does not so advocate, no one else is likely to.

Such advocacy does not mean being uncritical cheerleaders for all Amtrak management decisions, however. The Pacific Northwest's NARP Board members have been among the leaders in the national organization's adopting a greater move toward rail consumer advocacy and less being simply unpaid lobbyists for Amtrak in Congress, a position unfortunately needed during the Amtrak-under-seige Reagan years. Also, we lament Amtrak's nonimplementation of Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission approved speed increases which could significantly improve Seattle-Portland schedules. Instead Amtrak cut a token five minutes from the *Mt. Rainier* time, enraging rail labor in the process, as it allowed the elimination of the second person in the locomotive cab. (WashARP firmly supports safe faster trains; the jury is still out on whether a one-person cab between Seattle and Portland is in the public safety interest.)

WashARP, lead by Olympia Board member Rich DeGarmo, joins with Oregon and California counterparts in working for a badly-needed second west coast train, despite Amtrak President Graham Claytor's recent contention that such a train would increase Amtrak losses greatly and total ridership modestly. That position directly contradicts Claytor's Congressional testimony that he needs federal investment for more trains in popular corridors (and the *Coast Starlight* is Amtrak's single "best" long distance train) to simultaneously improve Amtrak's revenue to cost ratio

and serve the growing public demand for more intercity rail.

Now, some praises for Amtrak: the thousands of miles I've ridden America's passenger trains in recent weeks were overwhelmingly pleasant. And BN, finally acknowledging the many bonus bucks it can get from running Amtrak trains on time, has, following a welcome edict from Ft. Worth HQ, been excellent in its on time dispatching behavior, showing public and corporate interests can coincide.

Amtrak Government Affairs-West chief Ron Scolaro arranged for what state Rep. Jeanette Wood (R-Woodway) and husband Ross said was a thoroughly enjoyable and informative Veteran's Day riding Amtrak and LA Metro trains and learning of their operations. WashARP believes other elected officials and transportation decision makers would be less likely to ignore intercity rail if they could also experience high quality rail services now being offered to Californians.

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Concerning southern California: it is rumored USC, a declining football power, conducted an academic study of middle class males persuaded to use Amtrak's *San Diegans* or LA-Long Beach Blue line rail transit instead of driving alone to work. After six weeks of training rather than SOVing,\* the researchers reported: a) the men's voices were as deep as before; b) the subjects' totals on the bench press did not decline; and c) the gentlemen had no added desire to increase their quiche consumption!

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I am scheduled to meet with Amtrak's Ron Scolaro on January 2. WashARP appreciates again being able to learn and share with Scolaro. This writer will then presumably be celebrating our glorious Huskies'

New Year's Day Rose Bowl victory and a perfect 12-0 season. One regret: wish the Montlake Dawgs could quiet the infamous Miami Hurricanes on the football field. Believe the most significant damage the Canes could do would, again, be to their hotel rooms, not the UW's defense!

Finally, in recently visiting all Amtrak stations and most key station personnel in the state, I was very favorably impressed with many of these people's dedication to a "more and better" Amtrak that goes beyond just doing their jobs.

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\* **TDM:** Transportation Demand Management. A set of strategies that seeks to increase use efficiency of existing (street and highway) infrastructure rather than simply adding evermore pavement to accommodate evermore SOVs.

**HOV:** High Occupancy Vehicle. Can be anything from a Bellevue-based Beamer with two yuppies on board to a full transit bus or commuter train. Any wheeled contrivance with multiple riders. Not an SOV.

**SOV:** Single Occupant Vehicle. Auto or truck only carrying the driver. About 80-90% of our traffic! Interestingly, motorcycles, with their small size, flexibility, and economy are allowed in HOV lanes in our state, even with a single rider.

**Transit, from page 1)** in designating highway and mass transit funds."

The bill also authorizes \$25 million for the Seattle-Tacoma commuter rail project. Although Congress only appropriated \$10 million for 1992, lawmakers are optimistic the remaining \$15 million will be approved for 1993. The local share will be \$75 million. Ser-

vice could start by 1995.

Now, why was allowing states to use some of the \$24 billion in flexible funding for Amtrak capital projects ripped from the bill? When it was in the Senate version of the bill? When there was a strong consensus that Amtrak should be included in the bill?

Because of a "turf war" in the House. Rep. Robert Roe (D-NJ) is chair of the Public Works committee. Amtrak and, historically, all railroads are under the jurisdiction of the Energy and Commerce committee, chaired by John Dingell (D-MI). Roe refuses to allow any program not controlled by Roe to get "his" trust fund money even though it is "our" (the taxpayers) money. Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and other senators put up a valiant fight to include Amtrak, but Roe would not give in.

Capon stated, "Passenger demand for existing Amtrak services and public demand for new Amtrak services far exceeds existing resources. It is outrageous that Congress could pass a \$151 billion

transportation bill without addressing this problem. We hope Congress will act on this next year."

WashARP worked with Rep. Al Swift's (D-Bellingham) office on this but the final bill came together so quickly that it was too late. We will be working with Swift, a key member of the Energy and Commerce committee and a strong supporter of increased funding for Amtrak service, on these issues in 1992.

**Report, from page 1** tions in Boston's Central Artery reconstruction; and 4) flexible federal funding for cost-effective Amtrak service expansion.

*Pioneer* ridership in Aug. 1990 was 14,640. In Aug. 1991, after the Wyoming reroute, it was 21,571, a 47.4% increase. Reports indicate on time performance is somewhat improved this fall.

(Report concludes next issue. Also, look for a report on the Train Riders of Calif. (TRAC) fall conference.)



Los Angeles-Long Beach Blue Line train at the Del Amo station. TRAC meeting attendees toured the light rail line and its control center and maintenance shops. Weekday ridership in October was 34,850. Weekend ridership was 23,000. On-time performance in October was 99.32%. In 1988, the express bus service replaced by the Blue line carried an average 2510 weekday riders.

photo by Jim Hamre

## WashARP News

January Meeting will be on the 11th at Andy's Diner, Seattle at 12:15 p.m.

The joint spring membership meeting with NARP Region 8 and OreARP is set for February 15 in Olympia. Details and registration will be sent out at the first of January. Speakers are NARP's Scott Leonard and (tentatively) Art Lloyd, recently retired from Amtrak.

### WashARP Historian appointed

By Jerome F. Sheldon

Recently, Treasurer Hans Mueller asked me if I would be interested in serving as historian of WashARP, and with my assent, he entrusted to my care a box containing correspondence, early newsletters, various flyers promoting rail travel, and other miscellanea--all dating from the mid-1970's.

WashARP had been organized then, not long after the U.S. government created the National Railroad Passenger Corp. (Amtrak). Our nucleus was composed of rail advocates centered in Seattle and Spokane. Jim Neal of Ephrata had organized a rail passenger

group in Grant County that became affiliated with WashARP. He is currently WashARP's vice president. In the 1970's, C. R. Curjel of Seattle was the western Washington chairman and Paul Phillips of Spokane, the eastern Washington chairman.

While a history buff enjoys delving in the files, he finds a gap--as though WashARP's activities stopped in 1976. I've added my own copies of the WashARP newsletter for the past five years, as well as various meeting notices. If any member has material that might make the records more complete and provide some historical continuity consider sending it to me:

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### Northwest Rail Briefs

Amtrak is offering special fares between Seattle and Portland this winter. The fares are good Monday through Thursday and are \$25 from Seattle or Tacoma to Portland. They are not available December 20 through January 5 and other

restrictions many apply. Friday through Sunday fares to Portland are \$36 and \$33 from Seattle and Tacoma, respectively...A Seattle-Leavenworth excursion train is being offered by Cascade Productions. The January 18 trip is during the Bavarian Ice Fest. Stops will also be made in Edmonds and Everett. Fare is \$77.75. Call (800) 676-8668. This is a significant event. Until recently BN corporate policy prohibited Amtrak from providing equipment for chartered excursions on its tracks. Another sign of the new more friendly BN. We welcome it...North Coast Hiawatha service resumption across southern Montana will be studied. Rep. Ron Marlenee (R-MT) had language inserted in the 1992 Transportation Appropriations bill directing Amtrak to perform this study. It is included under provisions of the Amtrak Reauthorization and Improvement Act 1990 that direct Amtrak to study the economic feasibility of providing new service to areas not presently served. It's unclear if the study includes the entire route between Chicago and the Northwest.

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