



Washington Rail News

April/May 1991

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

Amtrak stays in Boise, reroutes Pioneer through Wyoming!

Under intense pressure from WashARP, NARP, and the Idaho congressional delegation Amtrak announced in early February that it would stay in Boise and look at other ways to improve Seattle departure times.

Then the bombshell dropped a week later. WashARP learned that the Pioneer was to be rerouted between Ogden and Denver via the Union Pacific through Wyoming. Amtrak officially announced the decision on February 27. Amtrak ended service to Wyoming in 1983 when the Pioneer/California Zephyr/Desert Wind was rerouted through the scenic Colorado Rockies between Salt Lake City and Denver. The Pioneer will still be combined with the other trains east of Denver. Busses from Ogden to Salt Lake City will serve passengers between the Northwest and Salt Lake, and from Wyoming to Salt Lake and points west.

Protests of outrage inundated Amtrak when the Boise bypass proposal was uncovered. The Amtrak board and Idaho Congressional delegation learned of the plan from NARP. The Boise bypass was originally proposed to save 45 minutes in running time so that train 26 would have a later Seattle and Tacoma departure time.

Faced with the unanticipated trouble, Amtrak again reviewed its options. The economics of rerouting the

Pioneer improved because of the Gulf War. Amtrak acquired an emergency Chicago to Oakland mail contract from the Postal Service, as it started diverting mail from the airlines because of the terrorism threat. Amtrak was offered the chance to make this \$3 mill. a year contract permanent, but the summer time "City of Everywhere" is already at its maximum consist in the Rockies.

The exact schedule is still being debated by Amtrak. A continuation of well spaced trains in the Northwest Corridor is unlikely. It is debatable if improved reliability northbound from Portland will offset losses from passengers having reduced schedule flexibility.

At press time it appears train 26 will leave Seattle around 8:00 a.m., arriving in Portland at about noon. Train 25 would leave Portland at about 1:30 p.m., ahead of the northbound Coast Starlight. Thus the Starlight, departing between 2:30 and 3:00 p.m., would be the last train north out of Portland. Day trips to Portland would be virtually worthless. Amtrak plans to start the Pioneer's new schedule and route in June.

The proposed earlier Portland departure results from the UP route being much faster than the Rio Grande route. Train 25 will still be sitting in Denver for two hours and 40 minutes. An additional long layover in Portland was deemed unattractive to through passengers that are near the end (See PIONEER, page 4).

Puget Sound mass transit: Metro's long term planning By Richard Tait

The Metro Planning subcommittee is now concentrating on development of a Rapid Transit System Plan, for the years 2010 and 2020. Rail is favored, although there is still debate over busways. Busways are properly considered as an alternative to an HOV system (car pool/bus lanes which we already have) but some people are still pressing for its consideration as an alternative to rail.

The currently favored system would include a subway extending from the downtown Seattle tunnel under Broadway, Montlake and the University of Washington as far as Northgate, continuing at grade to 164th St. in Snohomish County by 2010, and Everett by 2020.

The system would extend to the South--mostly at grade--via East Marginal Way, SR 99, and Sea-Tac Airport to 348th St. by 2010, and Tacoma by 2020. This is in addition to the proposed commuter rail operation on BN tracks between Seattle and Tacoma, which would serve the Green River Valley.

Service is proposed to and within the Eastside. This is still subject to substantial debate.

Metro has decided not to use busses in any new tunnels it may build. This is largely due to increasing demands by fire safety authorities concerning vehicles with fuel on board, but also (See TRANSIT, page 2)

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

At this writing several bills are working their way through the Legislature that would bring increased state attention to passenger rail, freight rail infrastructure, and would continue the hopeful movement toward balanced, environmentally-sound transportation systems. Not many years ago we who felt "more highways forever" was not the answer to our state's transportation problems were in an apparent small minority. Now the Governor's transportation assistant, Secretary of Transportation Duane Berentson, and Legislative Transportation Committee chair Ruth Fisher (D-Tacoma), among many others in influential transportation roles, have expressed visions for future transportation policies that most in WashARP would find comfortable.

"Not enough!" "Too slow!" I hear from rail advocates, but the Establishment rhetoric is now good. WashARP and other balanced transportation groups simply must keep the steady push for bringing these now-widely-held good ideas into reality.

Many of these good bills may fail to become law, but support for transportation demand management (where commuters are encouraged to carpool, or use transit or other-than-single-occupant-vehicle journeys to work), saving freight rail infrastructure, increasing flexibility in spending motor fuel taxes, and rapidly increased attention to passenger rail is quickly growing and has broad legislative support. We do continue to see positive movement toward responsible transportation in Olympia.

Recent workshops, hearings, and polls in Thurston County and in Bellevue show very strong support for en-

vironmentally-sound transportation and fervent opposition to simply providing more pavement so we may drive alone forever. Keep praising the good work and pushing for better.

While nearly all Americans cheer the rapid and successful conclusion of the Gulf War and give President Bush high marks for the war's conduct, the Administration's announced energy policy should be opposed by all rail and balanced transportation advocates. In a sentence, the Bush policy would have Americans find and use more petroleum with few incentives to use it wisely and to practice conservation of petroleum and other energy resources. Our state's delegation, including those of Mr. Bush's Republican Party, are open to a better energy policy. A single element might be to allow employers the same tax breaks for encouraging/subsidizing car pools, transit use, and facilities for walking and biking employees now allowed for "free" parking which all but assures employees will drive to work alone.

As is seen from the above comments, your Olympia office supports more than just better and more rail passenger service. NARP has parented the Campaign for New Transportation Priorities, a multi-interest advocacy group where more rail passenger service is one of several forms of transportation reform. Of course, efficient passenger trains are our first love, but increased carpooling, transit use, less subsidies for single-occupant-vehicles, and preservation and redevelopment of rail freight are just some of the New Transportation Priorities thoughtful passenger rail advocates should continue to support in our state and nationwide. --->

TRANSIT, from page 1 due to the limited speed (35 mph) to which busses in the tunnel will be restricted.

The Expert Review Panel continues to needle Metro over its persistence in referring to its proposed rapid transit system as "light rail," and has pointed out that there is really no light rail about it. The ERP is urging Metro to consider speeds of 70-80 mph. Metro disagrees, but is willing to talk about 60-70 mph.

Metro is exploring, in Europe, the possible use of low floor cars. This is an attempt to find a compromise on the issue of platform height. Metro now agrees that high platforms should be used outside the existing tunnel, but is concerned about compatibility with busses during the period of joint operation in the tunnel. The low floor cars currently available are not capable of speeds above 50 mph but Metro is hoping to see this substantially increased.

The ERP has made two observations on this matter: first, Metro should not be the first to purchase significant new technical developments--reference was made to problems related to the small wheels on Vancouver's Skytrain; secondly, there would be no room in the tunnel for busses once the North and South rail lines are both operating so the period of joint operation would be close to zero.

Metro has decided to take an aggressive approach to the reduction of air pollution by its fleet, a decision which tends to favor electric over diesel power.

(Richard is a WashARP board member.)

I seek your comments, criticisms, and contributions of information. Mail to 203 E. 4th Ave, #418, Olympia, WA 98501.

Serious Concerns about Mag lev; French, German conventional high speed rail tops

(Ed: the following is condensed from articles in the Jan. California Rail News.)

Magnetically levitated trains are no longer taken so seriously by French and German railway experts, since an off-the-shelf TGV train bested the fastest mag-lev on record by 50 mph last spring.

Both Hermann Eisele of ICE and Denis Douté of TGV-US were dismissive of the technology in their presentations at California Rail 2000. (ICE is the German "Inter-City Express" and TGV is the French "Train à Grande Vitesse.") Eisele told of how he "rode the [German mag-lev prototype TransRapid] in May [of 1989] at...300 km/hr. And before, I came from a test ride on the TGV at 300 km/hr." Mag-lev, according to Eisele, is objectionable. "It's so noisy. It's vibrating. It's just not a train, it's nothing comfortable."

Eisele had other concerns than comfort: "Because it was never tried in revenue service, they say it can go 500 km/hr. Think about a signalling system. You can't operate with signals anymore, it's too fast.

"Think about the track itself. In order to get the vibrations out, the magnets on the track have to be adjusted by the millimeter, just about impossible. The faster you go, every millimeter that the magnet is out, you get a vibration in it.

"Think about the linear motor. It was never proven in revenue service for five, six, ten hours continuous service, so there are a lot of problems. Think just about that here this is a technology which has no touch [between the vehicle and

guideway]. How do you air condition your cabin? If you put a diesel generator [on board] you are defeating the purpose."

Douté was just as doubtful: "You will very often hear that mag-lev has been intended for very many years to operate at 300 mph. But the reality is that even in speed, so far the TGV record is 50 mph above the mag-lev record, so they still have to prove that it is possible to go higher.

"But we don't claim that we will be able to operate 300 mph, even if we have achieved that in tests. The reason is that it would not be economically sound...because the energy you are using at those speeds is tremendous. The minutes you are saving are not worth the cost. This will be the same for mag-lev, as well as wheel on rail.

"As regards the financing, all the figures...on mag-lev show that it is a very expensive technology, the infrastructure is over twice what rail would cost. Douté offered that mag-lev "may be a good transportation means for the end of the next century."

A confidential German Federal Railways report that was leaked has pushed mag-lev further into the future. The test track is in poor condition even though it has seen only light experimental use. Much more research must be done, including tunnel and passing tests. The German government is currently not funding testing because of high costs of reunification.

Douté summarized the advantages of TGV technology succinctly: "It works. It is safe. It is profitable. And it is needed. France, which is less wealthy than California...is planning an investment of \$18 billion in high speed trains." The decision to expand rail was made be-

cause existing TGV lines visibly helped cut auto and air gridlock.

Douté said, "Paris-Lyons auto traffic in 1990 is at the same level exactly as it was in 1972, while on other radial routes in France, it has been multiplied by four." Traffic on the new Nord line will require three minute headways, equivalent to one full jumbo jet every minute.

Many lives have been saved. In nine years and 150 million passengers there have been no fatalities.

Douté emphasized that high speed rail in Europe is profitable. The TGV Sud-Est has a profit margin of 33 percent. Of course, France's gas taxes are 300 percent while in the U.S. they are about 25 percent.

Eisele said that Germany, unlike France, did not have the capital to invest in new technology. It realized that it had to develop a better network using conventional equipment. It devised a crisscrossing network of express trains linking every major city with every other on an hourly basis, and marketed the service with the English name Inter-City.

Northwest Rail Briefs

The Spokane Regional Council has 90 percent of the \$10 mill. needed to renovate the Amtrak station into a hub for Spokane Transit Authority, Amtrak, and intercity bus lines. Restoration of the 1890 landmark will help to revive the east end of downtown. Construction could start in June...Olympia-Lacey station ridership continues to boom. It was up 60 percent in Dec. 1990 over Dec. 1989. Revenue increased \$31,000. Wait till we have a building!...Cong. Al Swift (D-Bellingham) may hold a field hearing on improved Vancouver, BC-Seattle-Portland rail service in July. More later.

WashARP News

The meetings for the next three months are on April 13, May 11, and June 8. The April and June meetings are at Andy's Diner, Seattle. The May meeting is in Tacoma at C I Shenanigan's, 3017 Ruston Way on the waterfront. Transportation from the Amtrak station will be available. Meetings begin at 12:15 p.m.

PIONEER, from page 1 of their journey.

Once again, this points to the need for more true corridor trains between Seattle and Portland. Long distance trains, with lower on time performance and less scheduling flexibility, should not have to serve as corridor trains. WashARP and OreARP will continue to pursue additional trains in the Northwest corridor with Amtrak, federal, and Washington and Oregon officials.

1990 Amtrak Ridership Data (Corrected)

Data for Fiscal Year 1990 (ending Sept. 30, 1990) shown in the February/March *Rail News* were based on preliminary information supplied by Amtrak. Final figures show that 16,000 more passengers boarded in Washington than first reported. Some cities went up, some down. It's rather curious that the preliminary and final data vary so much. Below is the corrected information for 1990.

THREE YEAR WASHINGTON STATE RIDERSHIP					
CITY	1988	1989	1990	% CHANGE '89 vs '90	
Seattle	332,203	338,283	338,852	+0.2	
Tacoma	79,211	79,575	80,347	1.0	
Spokane	51,714	51,236	46,707	-8.8	
Vancouver	39,411	37,221	41,663	+11.9	
East Olympia	14,258	14,822	16,675	+12.5	
Kelso-Longview	17,610	17,890	16,522	-7.6	
Centralia	16,791	17,094	16,061	-6.0	
Everett	11,921	12,288	14,204	+15.6	
Pasco	10,773	11,290	11,948	+5.8	
Wenatchee	8,517	9,238	8,460	-8.4	
Edmonds	6,928	7,030	7,351	+4.6	
Ephrata	2,002	2,013	1,875	-6.9	
Wishram	1,646	1,884	1,333	-29.2	
Bingen-White Salmon	667	862	768	-10.9	
TOTALS	593,652	600,726	602,766	+0.3	

Amtrak Notes

The Bush Administration has included some money for Amtrak in its proposed Fiscal Year 1992 budget--the first in a presidential budget since 1985. Unfortunately, the amount for Amtrak's operating budget is too small, as the Administration's proposal assumes \$91 mill. in

cost savings that are unlikely to be approved by Congress. Urge your representative and senators to support Amtrak's full budget request...A freight rail strike is set for April 17. A national strike would almost immediately be ended by Congress, but a selective strike could last a long time.

BN and UP are two railroads mentioned in a selective strike. Amtrak would not operate on any railroads that are struck...Amtrak has ordered 52 new diesel-electric locomotives from General Electric. Delivery starts in early 1992. Later ones will have more horsepower and a streamlined appearance.

Washington Association of Railroad Passengers
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