



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."

Transportation boss addresses WashARP membership meeting

Duane Berentson, secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation, spoke to 40 WashARP members at our Fall membership meeting. The September 14 meeting was at the Burién King's Table.

Berentson brought several of his public transportation



Secretary Duane Berentson at WashARP meeting.

Photo by Jim Hamre

staffers with him: Jim Toohy, Asst. Secretary for Planning, Research, and Public Transportation; Jim Shanafelt, Multimodal Branch; Brian Ziegler, Systems Planning; Tom Hanson, High Capacity Transit; and Janette Ingham, Administrative Asst. and WashARP board member.

The Legislature appropriated \$5.2 mill. for purchasing the Stampede Pass rail line from BN. The purchase is supported by WSDOT, the ports of Seattle and Tacoma, economic development groups on both sides of the Cascade, and the City of Tacoma (the line passes through the city's Green River water-

shed). WSDOT and Tacoma are developing a joint purchase agreement and are negotiating a purchase price with BN. The state also continues its efforts to preserve other light density rail lines around the state. The Legislature is very supportive of freight line preservation.

WSDOT is funding planning of the regional transit project in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. The Legislature approved \$8.5 mill. for this during the 1991-1993 biennium. The joint regional policy committee is preparing a transit package that may go before the voters of King and Snohomish counties in Nov. 1992. A vote in Pierce County will follow a couple of years after that.

Wilbur Smith Associates has been retained by WSDOT to determine the state's role in improving and upgrading intercity Amtrak service. (See the Executive Director's report.)

The Legislature matched \$500,000 in federal money to fund a study of high-speed ground transportation in Washington. The state is developing a scope of work so a consultant can be hired to perform the study.

Included in the study is the corridor from Vancouver, BC to Portland. Oregon would like the study to also include the Portland-Eugene segment. The minimum speed looked at is to be 150 mph.

George Benson, Seattle councilman and WashARP board member spoke about (See Berentson, page 4)

Seattle-Tacoma commuter trains advance

According to a Sept. 12, 1991 *Morning News Tribune* article, officials in King and Pierce counties were pleased that U.S. Senate appropriations transportation subcommittee chair Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) supports providing \$25 mill. to the "dome to dome" commuter rail project. The \$100 mill. project would still require \$75 mill. of local and state funding.

Sen. Brock Adams (D-WA) received assurances that \$15 mill. would be included in fiscal 1992 and that Lautenberg supports providing another \$10 mill. in 1993. "That's enough to get them started," Adams said.

The House version contains only \$1 mill. so the final amount will be determined by House and Senate negotiators.

The federal funds would pay for a third track, centralized traffic control, and park and ride lots between Seattle and Tacoma.

Plans call for five trains for both the morning and evening commute, running 30 minutes apart. Metro estimates that 6600 riders a day would initially use the service. Trains could be running by 1995 if funding is secured.

Metro officials should look closely at the Miami-West Palm Beach Tri-Rail commuter train operation. With only peak hour service ridership was stuck at 3000 passengers a day. By just adding a noon departure from each (See Commuter, page 4)

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

Spokane,
Sacramento,
and Olympia

Only good
things were
said at the

15th Annual Washington State Transportation Conference held in Spokane in late August. Unlike last year, no session on passenger rail was held, freeing your executive director, with invaluable assistance from WashARP board member Paul Scott of Davenport, to staff the joint Amtrak/WashARP display booth and to attend workshop sessions.

Generally acknowledging the era of massive freeway construction is over, a major conference focus was on transportation demand management (TDM), with strategies and tactics given for encouraging people to car-pool, use transit or travel by other than the still-dominant but inefficient single-occupant vehicle.

WSDOT's Brian Zielger summarized the state's new high-speed ground transportation study. His presentation featured the media-genic superspeed mag-lev trains being tested in Europe and Japan. Several session attendees were concerned that affection for spectacular technology not keep the study from considering the far lower cost conventional mid-high-speed (80-150 mph) trains that today serve millions in Europe, Japan, Australia, our Northeast Corridor, and soon, in California.

Of course your executive director traveled to and from Spokane by Amtrak and, a week later, was on the *Coast Starlight* to Sacramento for a "current status of California rail" fact-finding trip. (And to Palo Alto on Sept. 7 to witness our beloved Huskies accomplish the first, over

Stanford, of a season-long series of crunching victories over hapless opponents.) [Ed: wait till the Apple Cup.]

The Caltrans bureaucracy has yet to fully gear up for the planning work required to implement the two successful June 1990 rail bond initiatives.

Rail advocates in California still believe highway interests are too dominant in their state. Californians for Better Transportation, a principal lobbying group, though possessing an excellent staff and acceptance of rail and transit as part of the state's transportation future, does still push for more money for more highways, opposes highway trust fund monies from being "encroached" upon by other transportation forms, and is cautious about air quality legislation that "...has become the excuse to oppose highway improvements...."

A very different view is held by a northern California rail advocate group, the Modern Transit Society, which even opposes high occupancy vehicle lanes as diluting rail demand. This observer supports HOV lanes, TDM, and all transportation initiatives except more lanes of pavement so we all can drive alone forever!

The most interesting document acquired in Sacramento was written by the Chair of the state Senate Advisory Commission on Cost Control in State Government. This pro-cost-cutting commission, consisting primarily of leading California business people, took a strong pro-rail, pro-transit, anti-build-more-highways stance from the fiscal conservative position! One hopes the Senate and Assembly read and heed!

State-sponsored Amtrak trains between Auburn (35 miles northeast of Sacramento) and San Jose are due by December or early 1992.

All parties report difficulties in reaching agreement with SP to establish service.

On Sept. 18 our Legislature's subcommittee on Growth and Urban Mobility held a public hearing in Olympia. Reports on Metro reorganization in King County and high capacity transit planning for central Puget Sound were reviewed.

WashARP testified briefly following reports on the Amtrak enhancement study being done by the consulting firm of Wilbur Smith Associates (WS has a fine record of work on rail in California and on the Stampede Pass rail line preservation issue here), and on the high-speed ground transportation study.

We praised the work now being done but urged the two studies to not ignore future train services within the 80-150 mph speed range.

Dale Jeremiah of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers testified in support of increased rail passenger service, particularly an eventual return of trains to Vancouver, BC. WashARP will happily ally with the BLE on these issues.

Incremental: the key word

What does the new Sacramento-Oakland-San Jose Capitol Corridor have in common with the Chicago-St. Paul/Minneapolis high-speed study? Incremental improvements are best.

The Capitol corridor will start with three round trips at 80 mph maximum. Proposed are gradual improvements: six round trips by mid-decade, 10 by 2000, and ultimately, 24 round trips on a 125-mph electrified line.

The Chicago-Twin Cities study, starting out to look only at mag-lev, recommends upgraded tracks and suggests 125 mph tilt trains may be nearly as good as 185 mph TGV-type trains.

Mt. Rainier "speedup"?

WashARP has learned that, effective with the new timetable on Oct. 27, the *Mt. Rainier's* Seattle-Portland schedule will be speeded up by a whopping five minutes! Running time will now be 3 hours and 55 minutes.

Crews operating this train say that the schedule has considerable padding. One conductor feels that the train could consistently operate over the route in 3 hours and 40 minutes. The *Mt. Rainier* usually waits for time at most of its stops. This has been verified by WashARP members riding the train.

Pioneer running time of 4 hours and *Coast Starlight* running time of 4 hours and 10 minutes are considered tight due to factors such as longer trains, passengers with more destination possibilities and luggage, and the handling of checked baggage and express.

But Amtrak has not yet implemented any of the second round of speed increases was granted over a year ago. It is still dickering with the BN over costs. Yet the costs could be recouped in only a couple of years if the running time on the *Starlight* is reduced to four hours or less. Then a second engineer would not be required in the cab on the Seattle-Portland segment.

There are many places that additional speed increases have yet to be addressed. These include: electric switches at King St. and Portland Union stations, speed restrictions in Seattle and Portland, platform length problems at Olympia-Lacey, and speeds on crossovers between main tracks and on curves. WashARP will work to see that speed issues are addressed in the Wilbur Smith Associates Amtrak study.

Amtrak Notes

Amtrak and BN, after threatening each other with lawsuits, held high level meetings to discuss BN's less than adequate handling of passenger trains. BN management has now adopted a goal of operating Amtrak trains 90 percent on time or better. It wants to earn as much of Amtrak's \$1 mill. per month on-time incentive payments as possible. BN has consistently met this goal since early May....But why isn't UP paying attention? The *Pioneer's* performance, which had been slowly, but steadily improving for several years has **SUNK** to new lows. Here are recent on-time percentages before the Wyoming reroute: Feb.: 82%; Mar.: 71%; Apr.: 71%; May: 82%, first half of June: 70%. Now percentages after the reroute: second half of June: 30%, July: 15%, Aug. 0% (yes that's a zero!). NARP pres. Jack Martin called it UP's "comedy of foolish" and wondered "if the UP ever got a train between Cheyenne and Ogden". He is hammering Amtrak on this. So much for the theory that rerouting the *Pioneer* would improve it operating performance....Train Riders Assoc. of Calif. has started a campaign to add a second train on the *Coast Starlight* route. TRAC pres. Dan McNamara appointed Doras Briggs to head the project. The *Starlight* is Amtrak's busiest train. It carried 596,408 passengers in the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 1990, an average of 317 per train. Amtrak operates four daily trains between the Northeast and Florida. Briggs has written the entire Congressional delegation of Washington, Oregon and California, urging them to mandate that Amtrak study the issue. We will certainly be working with TRAC and OreARP on this....The Persian

Gulf war may be responsible for Amtrak's record 42% of the air/rail New York-Washington market in the January-March period. It appears the share will be similar for April-June. Amtrak should win permanent converts to its superior service.

Amtrak backs down in Portland station dispute

By Jerome Sheldon

In Portland, Amtrak has signed a three-way agreement quieting fears for now that Amtrak would pull out of landmark Union Station and move to a new station.

Amtrak's threat came last spring in a dispute over the cost of moving a track and a loading platform and shelter. Its share was estimated at \$700,000. Amtrak instead wanted to leave the track and trim up to 4'4" from the 16-foot wide shelter.

The problem arose during renovation of Union Station as part of Portland's Old Town redevelopment. The station was built almost 100 years ago by railroad pioneer Henry Villard. The shelters date from 1905 and are designated as part of the historic structure.

The agreement between Amtrak, the Portland Development Commission, and Portland Terminal RR calls for a five-track layout. The west side of outer shelter will be trimmed by not more than 28 inches. Additional clearance is needed as the outer two tracks will be mainlined and will be used by both Amtrak and freights.

OreARP has been strongly involved in Amtrak's plan to severely alter the shelter and in its threats to abandon Union Station. The group is concerned that trimming 28 inches maximum will not meet the approval of the state and the railroads. They continue to pursue the matter with Amtrak.

(Jerry is a WashARP board member.)

WashARP News

The next two monthly meetings are Oct. 12 and Nov. 9. Both meetings start at 12:15 p.m. and are at Andy's Diner, Seattle.

Again this year WashARP members helped staff the Operation Lifesaver booth at the Evergreen State Fair in Monroe. Assisting the state Utilities and Transportation Commission this year were Ollie LaFreniere, Roger Mumm, David and Michele Whelan, Bob Hackley, and Noel Hancock.

clean Greyhound station adjacent to Union Station.

The city has \$80,000 to develop a plan and is seeking a consultant to prepare it. Interestingly, BN is considering moving back into a redeveloped King St. Station.

service. This helped boost Weekday ridership to 8000 and Saturday ridership is already up to 6000.

There are 20 daily trains during the week and 18 on Saturday. Sunday service is now being considered. Farebox cost recovery is 42.2%, above the state mandated 40%. Most bus systems are below 30% farebox cost recovery.

Commuter, from page 1 end ridership quickly climbed to 6000 a day. Now Tri-Rail has added Saturday

Berentson, from page 1 the King St. Station redevelopment proposal. He has contacted Amtrak, BN, Sea-Tac Airport, King County (owner of the Kingdome), Metro Transit, the bus companies, and representatives of the International and Pioneer Square districts.

The intermodal proposal has been well received by most groups. However, the local neighborhoods have concern about Greyhound operating out of King St. Looking at Greyhound's seedy Seattle terminal they could have concerns. But they must also look at Portland's modern, safe, and



Duane Berentson, center, is presented a signed print of an original painting by Bellevue artist J. Craig Thorpe of the new Olympia-Lacey Amtrak station. Presentors are Thurston County Commissioner George Barner, left, and Amtrak Depot Committee member Rich DeGarmo. Signed prints are available for \$25 (free mailing) and unsigned prints for \$10 (plus \$1.25 for mailing) from the ADC, PO Box 1964, Dept. W, Olympia, 98507. All funds raised go to station building construction as Thorpe and Capital City Press donated their services.

Photo by Jim Hamre

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