

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

## Northwest rail advocates hear plans for continued expansion of the Amtrak Cascades

On March 13, rail advocates heard about the expansion of the Amtrak Cascades service in the Northwest corridor as plans progress to implement higher speed rail along the Vancouver, BC-Seattle-Portland-Eugene route. The successful meeting was attended by 105 people at the downtown Seattle Red Lion Hotel.

Speakers included Jonathan Hutchison, Government Affairs-West for Amtrak; Antonio Perez, President and CEO of Talgo USA; and Andrew Wood, Deputy Director, WSDOT Rail and Marine Office.

As the conference started, MC and NARP Vice Pres. Art Poole allowed us to first enjoy several minutes of the St. Patrick's Day parade passing by on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. outside the meeting room. All Aboard Pres. Loren Herrigstad welcomed everyone to the Emerald City and took us on a quick tour of high speed rail and modal integration in Europe and Asia to highlight what we need to be building in the Northwest and around the country.

Our first guest speaker was Amtrak's Jonathan Hutchison. He highlighted how Amtrak's reality has changed in the last two years:

- October 2008: Pres. Bush signs the



Hutchison

- December 2009: Pres. Obama signs Amtrak's fiscal year 2010 appropriation.
- January 2010: Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) awards the high speed rail grants, including \$598 mill. for the Northwest Corridor.

The Amtrak reauthorization, among other things, formalized Congress' expectation that Amtrak operate a national system, established a framework for federal capital assistance in developing state-supported corridors, increased attention on host railroads' performance when handling Amtrak trains on their tracks, and required Positive Train Control installation on lines used by passenger trains by 2015.

The \$1.3 bill. Amtrak received directly from the stimulus funds is being used for capital projects nationwide. Among the projects with impacts in the Northwest are returning 81 cars and 15 locomotives to service and ADA station and platform improvements. With Superliner cars being repaired the *Empire Builder* will gain a 4<sup>th</sup> sleeper and a diner-lounge to supplement the existing dining and lounge cars. The ADA improvements will be done at many rural stations along the routes of the long distance trains.

Amtrak ridership started recovering from the effects of the recession last fall. For fiscal-year-to-date (Oct. 09-Feb. 10) Cascades ridership is up 17.9%, *Empire Builder* ridership is up 0.8% and *Coast Starlight* ridership is up 7.1%.

Hutchison applauded the growth Oregon DOT's passenger rail program, noting particularly the ODOT purchase of two Talgo trainsets. He is extremely proud of Amtrak's partnership with WSDOT and Sound Transit.

He noted that phase one of the long-

delayed new Seattle maintenance base is finally under construction. The maintenance building will accommodate two Talgo trainsets so they can be serviced indoors. The administration building will house offices, a materials warehouse and facilities for the over 300 people that work at the site.



Perez

Lloyd Flem introduced Talgo CEO Antonio Perez by stating we are very fortunate to have Talgo as a partner in the Northwest.

Perez began his presentation with a history of Talgo. It was founded in 1942 in Spain. The first trainset tested in the US was built in 1949. Testing by several US railroad resulted in only a few sales here. The trains did not stay in service all that long. In 1994 WSDOT leased a trainset from Talgo. Operation of this train in the Northwest Corridor let WSDOT and Amtrak to purchase four Talgo trainsets in 1996 and the Cascades Service launched in 1998. With Wisconsin DOT and ODOT now purchasing two trainsets each, Talgo is preparing to manufacture the equipment in a former auto assembly plant in Milwaukee. The new trainsets will be Talgo Series 8 equipment; they are fully compliant with all FRA safety standards.

Talgo's philosophy is to be a full partner with its customers from beginning to end. The company starts working with a customer on concepts, then moves to design and manufacture of the equipment to meet the customer's needs. They will then provide maintenance and overhaul of the equipment throughout its lifecycle.

The Talgo Series 8 trainsets coming to North America are the company's basic design and are capable of 125 mph operation. In the Northwest there are plans to increase maximum speeds in the short term from 79 mph to 90 mph, with an eventual goal of moving to 110 mph in certain rural areas.

Talgo also offers two higher speed trainsets: the Talgo 250 (250 km/hr – 155 (See **Rail Conference**, page 5)



Attendees at the Northwest Spring Rail Conference in Seattle listen to Talgo CEO Antonio Perez's presentation.  
Photo by Jim Hamre

Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act that reauthorized Amtrak for five years.

- February 2009: Pres. Obama signs the federal stimulus legislation that provided \$9.3 bill. for investment in passenger trains and high speed rail.



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

## **More Passenger Trains Everywhere, Now Including Here!; Countering the Naysayers**

One of my jobs as AAWA's executive director is to stay current on rail policy issues, from local to international. A prime source for the latter is the International Railway Journal (IRJ), published in Cornwall, England and a publication in close cooperation with Railway Age, which deals with rail in North America.

IRJ has been to me, until recently, both inspiring and depressing. It's inspiring that virtually worldwide, major investments in freight and passenger trains are happening.

A few examples from the February and March IRJ: Russia last year invested \$8.9 bill. in rail. Saudi Arabia is building a high speed line from Mecca to Medina. In north Africa, Morocco will build a high speed line from Tangiers to Casablanca. The tiny Himalayan land of Bhutan is building its first railroad, south to India. Panama City is constructing its first metro at \$1.5 bill.

"But those are either Third World countries or have authoritarian governments, not like us," the naysayers might point out. OK, how about Paris, which will spend \$7 bill. enlarging an already fine metro. Spain, a world leader in high speed passenger train development, invested \$6.5 bill. in 2008, \$7 bill. in 2009 and \$7.5 bill. this year in rail infrastructure alone. Stuttgart, the prosperous economic hub of SW Germany, has a \$5 bill. rebuild of its main rail station and infrastructure. And from Stuttgart east to Ulm a \$2.4 bill. high speed line is being built.

Also, very conservative, intensely capitalist and democratic Switzerland plans to spend \$16 bill. to "modernize" an already superb network of passenger and freight trains.

While the investment prize winner is indeed an authoritarian state that tends to ignore concern for the environment or the wishes of most of its people, China will be investing \$120.6 bill. in its rapidly expanding rail system this year alone! I do not suggest we North Americans emulate China in most respects, but they, like democracies Spain, Germany, France and Switzerland, know that rail investment is a vital engine of economic growth and success.

Complete disclosure: there are international failures. Uruguay, with its rich environmental base, once had a good rail sys-

tem. They, under a military dictatorship, let it die, assuming roads and air were sufficient. Contemporary efforts to rebuild rail there have stalled. And Zimbabwe's rail system, like its economy, has also suffered badly under a dictatorship.

So while I had been inspired by most of the above, I was, until a year ago, depressed when realizing we rail advocates and allied elected officials in North America had to fight hard just to keep a bare-bones Amtrak system alive. Then came the delightful surprise of the Obama Administration putting \$8 bill. into the "stimulus package," with more to come for high(er) speed passenger rail. As Obama, VP Biden, and USDOT Secretary LaHood have said, "This is just a down payment." While relatively modest, compared to other countries in a relative or absolute sense, the US is now in the game.

As for the naysayers, they are by far fewer in number than in past years but still persistent.

## ***Russia last year invested \$8.9 bill. in rail. Saudi Arabia is building a high speed line from Mecca to Medina. In north Africa, Morocco will build a high speed line from Tangiers to Casablanca.***

An increasingly larger percentage of the general public shows support for investments in and availability of more passenger trains. They no longer buy the fiction that "Americans only want to fly or drive."

The Naysayers now cannot say trains aren't wanted, but claim they are too costly for the benefits and "don't cure traffic congestion." No, trains don't. But neither does the adding of more lanes, which is their stock answer to "curing traffic congestion." LA tried that for decades; it never will work, as long as the immediate out-of-pocket cost to drivers remains relatively low. What the Naysayers always ignore is a more comprehensive look at costs and benefits to individuals and, very importantly, external costs and benefits.

First, trains, whether moving goods or people, are dramatically safer than road travel. Whether one is 20, 30 or 40 times safer in a train than in a motor vehicle can be debated; but it's simply an order-of-magnitude debate. Injury and death are certainly costs that cannot be ignored. Railroads are more energy-efficient and are environmentally cleaner than either road or air travel. A public benefit for rail; higher costs for other modes.

Another Naysayer-promoted myth is that private motor vehicles "pay their own way" and passenger trains are subsidized. Even for the moment ignoring the safety/fuel/environmental/cost advantages of rail, Naysayers ignore the reality that streets in our towns and cities are substantially paid

for by other-than-driver taxes and fees. A high percentage of support for urban street infrastructure comes from property taxes. A homeowner will pay those, based upon his home's assessed value, not whether his household members drives zero or twenty thousand miles per year in the urban area.

"Ample, free, and convenient parking" in all but larger center cities became an obsession in the fifties through the nineties. Valuable urban land was given to drivers, a gift of the municipality's citizens as general taxpayers, not as drivers. Businesses use the cost and development of land for parking as a tax write-off, indirectly foisting the costs of public services on general taxpayers again.

Interestingly, one of the best analyses of the public gifts to drivers is found in the little book "Elephant in the Bedroom." The authors use "the market," a favorite concept of "libertarian" Naysayers, to show that market distortions – giving to drivers vast amounts of valuable urban space – create a situation

which pleads with folks to drive. When "think tanks" posit that the market should guide transportation investments, they are in part right, but a more accurate measure of the market would benefit rail and bus transit, as opposed to the high value land subsidies to drivers which these "libertarians" have rarely, if ever, considered.

Among the most passionate advocates for passenger rail are William Lind and the late Paul Weyrich, founders of the very conservative New Congress Foundation. In several conservative (in the traditional, cultural sense) publications, the two gentlemen demonstrate that the dominance in much of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of private vehicle transportation was not from natural market forces or free choice, but substantially because government policies at all levels enabled the domination of cars and the diminishing of rail to occur.

Are there advantages associated with private motor vehicles and commercial airplanes? Of course. North Americans will continue to fly and drive for both rational (air – travel time over long distances; private vehicle – maximum spatial flexibility) and irrational (flying reinforces my sense of importance; driving, my sense of "being in control") reasons. OK, rail advocates can be guilty of irrationality, too. We sometimes choose the train even when it's more costly, slower, and less convenient.

But in recent years, and particularly this past year, Americans have come to realize that steel wheels on steel rails make good economic, social and environmental sense. Though still way behind much of the world in passenger train service, we as a nation have awakened and are trying to catch up. To the Naysayers: We are winning; you are losing. Get used to it!





## The View Down the Tracks

=====

with Jim Cusick

### The Old Bridge and The New Mayor

*Just build it! Stop studying it. We need it, we paid for it, we want it, give it to us! Bulldoze the homes of all the NIMBYs.*

Mayor McGinn has made his mark. He came out publicly against the latest plans for SR 520 because he felt they were too short sighted and should include plans for rail, not just the extra HOV lanes.

As usual, when this was reported, the regular cast of characters had comments. This included Microsoft, who took out a full page ad to say "Stop Studying It, Just Build It!"

Joni Balter's opinion piece in the Seattle Times called him "Seattle's stumbling 'un-mayor,'" in part because of his desire to challenge the draft design from WSDOT, especially in the area of transit, and specifically rail readiness for SR 520. Notice I said 'draft design.'

So I wondered, having spent most of my time on the I-405 Corridor Program, what was going on with the SR 520 project? Did Mayor McGinn just toss out the conclusions of WSDOT in the Final EIS to satisfy his train fetish? After all, we got to the Final EIS on I-405 just fine and without satisfying my train fetish, by the way.

How does one find out? I simply went to one of the SR 520 open houses and asked.

One of the interesting things to come up in a conversation with one of the staff was...the SR 520 Project HASN'T MADE IT TO THE FINAL EIS!

They are still in the Draft EIS stage. After a little research, I discovered that the project suffered from lack of funding to continue the design process.

No one has "Made the Decision"; they just haven't gotten all the way through the process.

Lack of money, hmmm, boy these road projects sure are expensive!

So Mayor McGinn isn't going back to 'square one,' he's just making known his input at the DRAFT stage of the planning.

Given that Sound Transit hasn't gotten into planning ST4, or ST5, where use of this corridor would eventually occur, I wonder what Mayor McGinn is up to. In spirit, I agree with him, and since he has expressed his desire for a city-wide light rail system, maybe he has some good input.

There was another interesting thing that I saw in the 'Reader Comments' on the news sites. The most vociferous critics of rail transportation couldn't come up with the simple answer to one question: "How does adding a new lane reduce congestion in the adjacent lanes?"

For those of you who read this column regularly, you have an idea from my experiences with the staff on the I-405 project, but I had a hard time finding a 'man in the street' answer from the people who are proposing the solution, including Highways.org and the FHWA.

Essentially, the most efficient use of a lane is 2000 vehicles per hour and when you exceed that, the 'extra' cars spill over into the adjacent hours. When a lane is not being fully utilized, which happens at both the congested state and the wide-open state, it is roughly carrying 1000 vehicles per hour.

During the I-405 program, it came up in conversation that maximum throughput could be as high as 3100 vehicles per hour, but at a slower speed of 35 mph, and 2100 vehicles per hour was what was achieved at around 45 mph. No matter, the conclusion is roughly the same.

The issue for good utilization is really... reliability. When you start putting more than 2000 vehicles per hour into a lane, the difference in driving skill and techniques will cause the flow to break down. At 2000 vehicles per hour it can reliably stay at that maximum.

Here's the gist of it: To keep the lane from going beyond its most efficient state where traffic is moving about 45 mph, you must keep 'resetting' the amount of cars in the lane.

Essentially, about 1000 vehicles need to be removed from one lane to 'reduce the congestion' and to keep it from getting to that state for a period of time by having excess capacity.

Obviously, if you built a brand new lane and it drew all 2000 vehicles over to it, it would just mean you didn't really need the lane in the first place.

If a new lane has a capacity of 2000 vehicles per hour, then adding one lane can handle overflow from adjacent lanes. Population growth of the region will determine for how long. In our region, that's about 5-7 years.

If you want to go longer, add 2 lanes. That's why the I-405 Corridor Program chose the alternative it did (#3).

ST doesn't have plans right now for SR 520, but Mayor McGinn does. I like Mayor McGinn's ideas, but that's only because I'm a one subject voter. McGinn, Promoter of Light Rail. Why? Personally, I think it's because he saw all the pictures of Mayor Nickels commanding the South Lake Union Streetcar and he wants to do that too!

Do we really need a new bridge? Does it make sense? What is the real life-span of the bridge? The pontoons still float, but were they under-designed? How long will they last? Forty years? The I-90 pontoons sunk because of contractor error, not because they rotted away. There is still one up at the Echo Bay Marina in Canada. I've even been on it!

However, judging from pictures of the pilings and descriptions of the pontoons for SR 520 from some who have visited them, I would say that they probably are under-designed, and do need to be replaced.

But McGinn has the right idea, it needs to be built to last, and be ready for a future beyond just the 30 years normally used for planning these structures.

### Olympic TRAINing

Now that you've given everyone a taste of it during the Olympics, everyone will now be expecting it.

Give them a sense of Entitlement, that's the ticket!

And that's a good thing.

I haven't seen reports yet, but the ridership pattern is encouraging for the second train to Vancouver, BC. The evening train appears to be enticing not only more Seattle to Vancouver travel, but a number of Portland to Vancouver trips. What looked like a precipitous drop-off in riders immediately after the Olympics seemed to rebound as people discovered the availability beyond March, now extended to Sept.

The morning trains to the Olympics were regularly sold out, and even though there is no report yet, I would think it would have been profitable.

Yes, profitable... when potential train passengers aren't given FREE access to other modes via airports (paid by locals and their property taxes, etc), and roadways (paid by me and my excessive gas tax and property tax and sales tax and...).

Once the Cruise season starts, the morning train will no doubt fill up, and the evening train will have the steady ridership it needs to grow.

Please Canadian Border Services Agency, just SIGN on the Dotted line!

### Take it off, Take it ALL Off!

Who needs Bikini Baristas? Who wants to ogle the Barista Boys?

If you really want a grand unveiling, drop by King Street Station.

It is rumored that sometime in April, the false ceiling will come down. What the specific schedule is, I don't know.

Personally, I think they should remove the false ceiling, and 'recover' it with a tarp until they are finished, and then do a dramatic release of the cover, showing it all in one swoop... one grand striptease!

This might shock the systems of the Amtrak employees being exposed to the naked cornices, pilasters, medallions and other grand architectural beauty. I also have concern for their retinas when sunlight starts streaming back through the second story windows the false ceiling now hides.

Work has already begun near Door 1, and at some time in the future, the baggage room will move across the lobby, and the area occupied by the baggage room will become the new ticketing area.

It's great to finally see this project happening!

## A critique of the North Coast Hiawatha study

By Barry Green

(This is a summary of a critique of Amtrak's North Coast Hiawatha study, done by Chuck McMillan, Warren McGee, Barry Green, Kirk Thompson, Michael Ackley and Milt Clark, with input from many others. Their analysis was sent to over 80 federal and state political leaders and state DOTs along the Seattle-Missoula-Billings-Bismarck-St. Paul-Chicago route, as well as to Amtrak.)

During the week of Nov. 16, 2009, a group of interested individuals met in Livingston, MT to critique the "**Amtrak North Coast Hiawatha (NCH) Passenger Rail Study –October 16, 2009.**" This group was made up of Montana residents who are either current or retired employees in the rail industry, as well as a civil engineer and a business owner, all of whom would like to see the NCH return as an integral part of Amtrak's long distance network.

It was disappointing that this document was a "Final Report" in the eyes of Amtrak instead of a "Draft" to allow for feedback, corrections and additions that would have produced an even better document.

The following is not meant to personally criticize those involved with the research and authoring of the report as they were probably instructed on how to put it together. We hope this analysis will generate further discussion for the purpose of finding a way to return the NCH and other long distance routes to the Amtrak network which, in the end, will only help Amtrak's bottom line.

We fully understand and recognize that all budgets are very tight and that restoration of service will not happen immediately. However, there are many individuals and businesses along the route that would benefit socially and economically from the return of this passenger train. We recognize the energy efficiency of rail, both freight and passenger, over other types of transportation. This should be an important consideration in the planning of future rail passenger projects such as the NCH.

It is not a foregone conclusion that the NCH would have to operate over the Stampede Pass route between Pasco and Auburn, WA because the Cascade Tunnel route has a significant number of trains operating on it. While there is a large number of trains through the Cascade Tunnel, this is not a total "gridlock" operation that wouldn't allow for one additional passenger train over the route. Another option would be to operate the NCH from Spokane to Portland, the current route of the Portland section of the *Empire Builder*. Passengers could then utilize *Cascades* service to get to their final destination.

The route through Helena, Montana's state capitol, is preferable account the former route through Butte has been out of service for many years and would incur large capital expenses to reopen. The He-

lena station stop could serve as a connecting point to both Great Falls and Butte.

We do not buy the *Empire Builder* revenue loss argument, even though it is true! The revenue that would be transferred is really NCH revenue the *Empire Builder* gained in 1979 when the NCH route was ended. It is estimated that one coach and one sleeper of *Empire Builder* business is really NCH passenger business. This estimate fits with the consist changes of both trains prior to and after the NCH was discontinued. Historically, both trains carried the same level of business with similar coach and sleeper capacities prior to Amtrak. The NCH lost business under Amtrak because it was under equipped in the 1970s.

We believe the *Empire Builder* will suffer little to no net loss of business if its current consist remains intact after an NCH startup. A significant amount of business is turned away each year by Amtrak's own admission due to inadequate equipment capacity on the *Empire Builder*. Amtrak plans to rectify this issue this summer by adding a 4<sup>th</sup> sleeper and a diner-lounge to the consist for the first time in decades. Overall passenger counts for the *Empire Builder*, and the former and a returned NCH route have been verified through conversations with former and current Amtrak managers that have been involved with these routes during their careers. There should be enough business for both trains.

The 58% Cost Recovery Ratio reported is not surprising given the NCH's historical performance prior to the train being discontinued. Certainly air, bus and auto competition were factors in the 1970s but, as the report points out, all of these are no longer the competitive issues they once were. Now, rising costs of fuel and harmful emissions are also issues. The 58% cost recovery would be 4<sup>th</sup> best among existing Amtrak long distance trains. This is further evidence that this train should never have been discontinued in the first place.

The report states an estimated cost of \$330 mill. would be required to purchase 18 locomotives and 54 passenger cars. This breaks down to an outlandish price tag of \$4,583,000 per piece of equipment. There isn't a single rail carrier in the country, or the world, that pays this amount per unit of equipment. This figure needs to be further scrutinized and not taken at face value.

Interesting admission by Amtrak where it's stated "*Most or all of this equipment would have to be purchased new, as Amtrak's current long distance equipment fleet is insufficient to meet even existing passenger demand.*" While we believe that Amtrak should have requested from Congress capital investment funding for new equipment years ago, on Feb. 4, 2010, Amtrak released a report entitled: "*Amtrak Fleet Strategy: Building a Sustainable Fleet for the Future of America's Intercity and*

*High-Speed Passenger Railroad.*" While this is a positive step on the part of Amtrak, their equipment proposal for the next 14 years is solely for existing services and routes and does not take into consideration any route expansions or restorations.

Amtrak says 6 trainsets are needed for the NCH which is odd since Amtrak has operated the *Empire Builder* with a total of 5 trainsets for many years.

While Yellowstone National Park is an important tourist draw, there are many other locations to be found along the entire route that were omitted from this study. Some of the other locations that would benefit include major medical facilities, colleges and universities, state capitals, other tourist attractions, veterans' services and even the major airports along the entire route from Illinois to Washington. The NCH is not just a Montana/North Dakota train.

We believe the timeline of 4 to 5 years shown in the report to restore service is excessively long. A timeline of 3 to 4 years would be more reasonable. Bi-level commuter rail equipment can be produced in 3 years so it would seem logical that bi-level Superliner equipment could also be produced in the same 3 year timeframe.

Federal funding should be allocated for the NCH equipment and its operation while the states and respective communities should contribute monies towards stations.

The \$17.6 mill. in capital for station facilities seems woefully inadequate. There are currently no stations along the route that can immediately handle a passenger train today other than those already serviced by other trains. The NCH Study states that the train would serve 17 new stations. The \$17.6 mill. cost means about \$1 mill. per station, which won't buy much. The new station at Leavenworth, WA cost about \$1 mill. which bought an ADA compliant platform, parking and lighting, and nothing more.

The study alludes to the fact that Amtrak doesn't plan to staff any new stations in ND, MT or WA. Consideration should be given to staffing the more populated station stops along these portions of the route.

The potential schedule is similar to the one from 1979 but it should be revisited account the eastbound NCH doesn't make any connections to other Amtrak trains in Chicago. The westbound departure time from Chicago does allow for some connections from corridor and eastern long distance trains. However, the westbound NCH is likely to generate connecting business at Seattle. Additional revenues for the *Cascades* and the *Coast Starlight* were not mentioned nor calculated in the NCH study.

Infrastructure costs listed in the study are little more than semi-educated guesses. Nothing accurate can be determined without a more detailed analysis, which even Amtrak admits is needed. The host rail- (See **North Coast Hiawatha**, page 6)

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NARP Hotline: www.narprail.org/cms/index.php/hotline/  
 Amtrak: www.amtrak.com

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

### Rail Conference, from page 1

mph) and the Talgo 350 (350 km/hr – 217 mph). These trainsets are in service in Europe. Talgo is currently developing its next generation trainset – the AVRIL – and it will be capable of 235 mph.

The introduction of the Talgo trainsets and launch of the *Cascades*, along with all the infrastructure and running time improvements have resulted in substantial increases in ridership.

Perez outlined what he considers the keys to success in the Northwest Rail Corridor:

- Having a good plan outlining development of the corridor
- Strong support from the Legislature
- Increasing the frequency of service
- Using proven technology
- Having very reliable equipment
- Talgo's proven equipment maintenance capability
- Good on-time performance
- Strong partnerships with Amtrak, WSDOT, ODOT, BNSF and UP

Up next was

WSDOT's Andrew Wood. He has been at WSDOT for 4 years and before that spent 30 years working in the rail industry in Great Britain. WSDOT received \$590

mill. in stimulus funding from FRA, the 5<sup>th</sup> highest amount awarded. (ODOT received \$8 mill.) To receive the money, each state had to commit to providing ongoing operational support for expanded rail service in its corridor. Wood noted that WSDOT's application ran some 900 pages in length. Nationwide, a total of \$57 bill. in requests were received for the \$8 bill. available. This year's transportation appropriation contains another \$2 bill. in HSR funding for the FRA to distribute.

WSDOT is waiting to find out which specific projects FRA provided funding for. The agency submitted requests for 17 projects but the \$590 mill. is not enough to build all of them. WSDOT thinks the award will allow the addition of two more Seattle-Portland roundtrips, increase on-time performance from 68% to at least 88% and allow a 10% reduction in Seattle-Portland running time. The additional roundtrips are planned to provide before 7:00 a.m. and after 7:00 p.m. departures from both Seattle and Portland, which will encourage more travel for both work and personal business. (See adjacent article for updated details.)

Wood outlined five keys for success in a high speed rail corridor:

- Operational reliability
- Sufficient frequency of service
- Competitive journey time (top speed is not the critical factor)
- Accessibility for the travelers (fares, rental car availability, rail transit and bus connections, etc.)
- Cultural acceptance (it's a major undertaking to change how the public views rail travel)

From Feb. 11 to Mar. 1, during the Vancouver Olympics, 16 trains between Seattle and Vancouver were sold out. A total of 11,403 passengers were carried on this route during the Olympics. Though the Canadian Border Services Agency has not made a final decision on collecting the fee to service the second Seattle-Vancouver train they have allowed bookings to be opened through Sept. 30, 2010.

The busy meeting wrapped up with state reports. Barry Green covered events in Montana and provided an analysis of the *North Coast Hiawatha Study*. Jim Hamre gave a report prepared by C.B. Hall on the *Pioneer* study. Donald Leap updated us on happening in Oregon and Lloyd Flem shared his thoughts on rail issues in our state.

### WSDOT poised to move ahead on Northwest corridor projects

Washington State is poised to be one of the first states given approval to move forward on projects funded by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act's High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program.

In mid March, Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond sent a letter to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) proposing a specific list of five projects worth more than \$311 million that could begin construction this year and be finished by 2011 or 2012. The letter also proposed five additional projects and the purchase of a new high speed trainset as part of WSDOT's plan beyond this construction season.

"These investments will make it more convenient for travelers between Seattle and Portland as we improve speed, reliability and capacity on this rail line," said Gov. Chris Gregoire.

"We are ready to put this Recovery Act grant to work immediately to complete these rail projects," said Hammond. "This funding will improve our Amtrak *Cascades* service by adding more travel options, increasing reliability and safety, and helping reduce rail and road congestion."

Since FRA did not initially identify specific projects it would fund, states had to resubmit project lists. FRA still needs to concur with WSDOT's proposed list.

WSDOT's "Fast Track" projects, which are those ready to go for construction within 60 days and are required to achieve the 88 percent reliability and two additional round trips between Seattle and Portland, include:

- Tacoma – D to M Street Connection - \$34.3 million
- Advanced Signal System- Positive Train Control (PTC) - \$62.3 million

Fast Track projects ready to start during the 2010 construction season include:

- Tacoma – Point Defiance Bypass - \$91.6 million
- Vancouver – Yard Bypass Track - \$29.1 million
- Corridor Reliability Upgrades South - \$94.1 million



Wood

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### MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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\$ 25 Individual Membership

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Please send me my newsletter through e-mail only.

Note: if you move, let us know in advance and save us the fee for address correction service.

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## All Aboard News

**May 8: National Train Day.** Events in our state are planned for Seattle, Olympia, Centralia and Kelso. If you want to volunteer to help at one of these events or want to host an event in your city contact Lloyd Flem for more information (see page 5 for contact info). Plan to attend an event even if you are not able to volunteer.

**June 12:** All Aboard Washington meeting in **Mt. Vernon, 10:30-2:00.** Location: Il Granaio Restaurant, just north of the Skagit Transportation Center. An Italian buffet will be served. **Cost is \$22; cash or check only.** Take *Cascades* 510 from Seattle and return on the 3:25 p.m. Amtrak Thruway bus or *Cascades* 517 at 8:12 p.m. Greyhound options are also available. Speaker will be Mike Pracht of US Railcar. Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen (D-Camano Island) will also be invited. Since the room size limits the number of attendees please RSVP to C.B. Hall (kaannos@centurytel.net) or Lloyd Flem. Otherwise, we may not be able to accommodate you.

All Aboard Washington welcomed the following new members in February and March: Dennis Cramer, White Salmon; Joseph Langdon & Mary Starman, Seattle; Dennis Wood, Renton; John Aurelius, Indianola; Patricia Mack, Tacoma; Sally Woehrle, Federal Way; Robert J. Kruse, Port Townsend; Mike Beehler, Olympia; Ben Gran, Auburn; Dr. Winfield Hutton, Seattle; Athole G. Hubbard, Granite Falls; Kathleen Wallace, Olympia; Joseph Hayes, Bellingham; and Michael Simpson, Olympia.

All Aboard Washington members contributing to this newsletter include: Barry Green, Zack Willhoite, Warren Yee, Bob Lawrence, Lloyd Flem, Jim Cusick, C.B. Hall and Art Poole.

**Correction:** In the January/February 2010 *Washington Rail News*, due to an error on the part of your editor, there was an incorrect amount shown on pages 1 and 4 for the fee the Canadian Border Services Agency is trying to impose to provide immigration and customs service for the second *Cascades* train from Seattle to Vancouver, BC. The correct amount is \$1500 per day.

**North Coast Hiawatha**, from page 4 roads appeared to toss out large dollar figures to use as starting points for negotiations. Some of the railroads' proposals are questionable since they make it sound as though a restored *NCH*, one east and westbound train a day, will totally destroy the fluidity of their current operations.

Positive Train Control (PTC) is definitely a large cost issue. The federal government needs to step up and be a major funding partner with the freight railroads and Amtrak to cover the costs of PTC or we may begin to lose rail passenger routes or portions of routes that the freight carriers don't feel support enough of their own traffic to justify the costs of PTC.

The study doesn't attempt to take into account the effect of connectivity, more travel choices or more stations served. It appears Amtrak only sees costs instead of a variety of growth opportunities and economic benefits for the entire Amtrak network. The study opened up more questions than it answered and doesn't really tell Amtrak anything it didn't already know.

All Aboard Washington expresses its thanks and appreciation to **Talgo USA** and the **Cascadia Center** for being major sponsors of our rail conference.