

# Reviving a Rail Revolution

Presentation by All Aboard Washington  
to the Washington State Transportation Commission  
July 21, 2021

Gary Wirt, Vice-President

Patrick Carnahan, Co-Executive Director

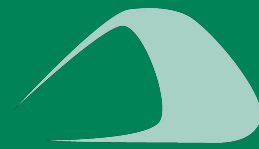
Charles Hamilton, Co-Executive Director

Luis Moscoso, Government Affairs Director

# Background

- Passenger service via Stampede Pass discontinued in 1981
- *Empire Builder* rerouted over Stevens Pass





## The Need for Passenger Rail

- No service is available to many central and eastern Washington cities.
- Bus service has decreased.
- I-90 congestion has increased.
- Some do not drive; others do not want to drive due to safety and congestion concerns.
- Some cannot afford to fly, are fearful of flying, not physically able to fly, or their community has no air service.

# June 2001 WSDOT Feasibility Study

“...analysis indicates that Amtrak service along Stampede Pass is physically and operationally feasible.”

Washington State

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**East-West Passenger  
Rail Feasibility Study:  
A Preliminary Analysis**

# 2017 Ridership Assessment Study

Marketing study showed considerable interest in, and need for, cross-state passenger train service through South Central Washington.

- Commissioned and funded by AAWA
- Performed by Central Washington University

[Available online at aawa.us: Stampede Pass Rail Study](http://aawa.us:StampedePassRailStudy)

AN ASSESSMENT OF REINSTATING PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE ON THE STAMPEDE  
PASS CORRIDOR

Noah Westbay & John Bowen  
Central Washington University  
December 2017

A report sponsored by All Aboard Washington (AAWA)

# 2020 JTC Feasibility Study

Final Report  
July 2020

Feasibility of an East-West  
Intercity Passenger Rail System  
for Washington State



Washington State Joint Transportation Committee  
Our ref: 23685001



steer

- AAWA supported a 2019 budget proviso to fund a \$250,000 study of the East-West Intercity Passenger Rail System.
- Study conducted by STEER under the direction of the Joint Transportation Committee.
- Final report issued July 2020.

# 2020 JTC Feasibility Study

**Purpose:** To assess the feasibility of Spokane-Seattle service through Central Washington via BNSF Stampede Pass tracks (Tri-Cities, Yakima, Ellensburg)



# July 2020 JTC Feasibility Study (*STEER*)

## Key findings:

- The service is technically & operationally feasible.
- High level of community support.
- Could generate ridership above or comparable to other Amtrak State supported services.
- Cost (based on 2 Spokane-Seattle round trip trains daily):
  - Infrastructure improvements: \$140M
  - Equipment: \$280M



# AAWA Comments re *STEER* Study

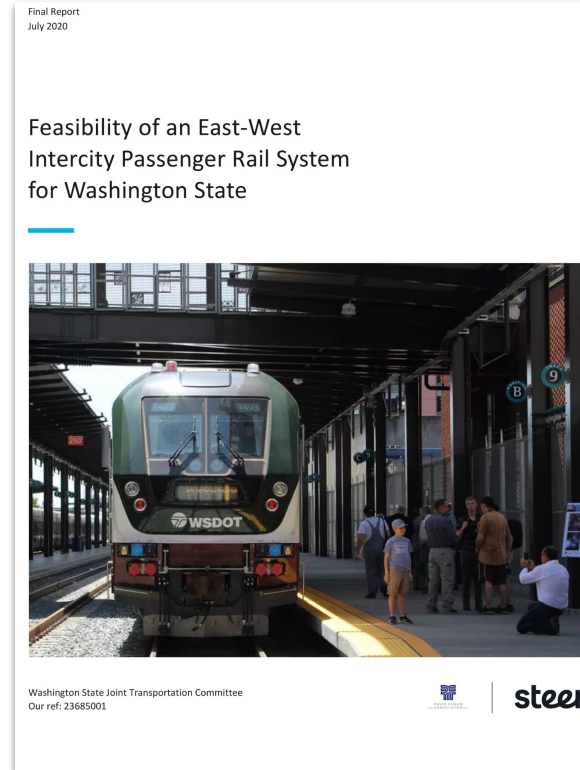
STEER comment	AAWA response
<p>Ridership model was developed using cell phone data and surveys of existing travelers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● STEER includes only ridership diversion from automobiles, not from other modes.</li> <li>● Amtrak data shows only 47% of rail passengers in Washington are derived from cars.</li> <li>● 20% of Washingtonians do not have a driver's license.</li> </ul>
<p>Journey times will be long due to slow speeds and the high number of freight services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Slower travel time through mountainous terrain can be expected.</li> <li>● Primary use of the service is to travel to/from cities along the route, not necessarily from Seattle to Spokane.</li> <li>● Time competitive with other modes between some city pairs.</li> </ul>

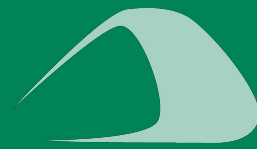
# AAWA Comments re *STEER* Study

<b>STEER comment</b>	<b>AAWA response</b>
Infrastructure cost includes 4 new stations, \$17M ea. (Cle Elum, Ellensburg, Yakima, Toppenish)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Ellensburg and Toppenish stations are privately owned. Both are potentially available for passenger rail use.</li></ul>
Infrastructure cost includes 2 platform extensions, \$6M ea. (Auburn, Tukwila)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Only needed if 8 coach trains are used</li><li>● Could benefit Sound Transit</li></ul>

# STEER Recommendation

“... further work will be required to confirm or refine...findings, including service definition, track and station design along with possible ridership and financial outcomes.”



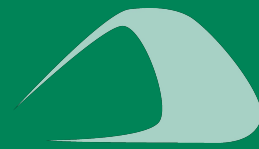


# What is Needed Next?

**Benefit-Cost Analysis** to measure the value of:

- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions
- Safety benefits (reduced highway fatalities, injuries, property damage)
- Reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- User benefits (reliability, accessibility, increased resilience)
- Transportation to rural and underserved areas

Required as part of application for U. S. DOT discretionary grant programs.



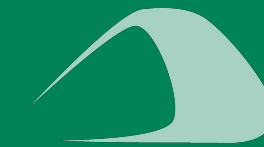
# What is Needed Next?

**Economic Analysis** to measure the impact on:

- Retail spending
- Business activity
- Tax revenues
- Jobs/wages
- Quality of life
- Property values

## Our Requests to WSTC

- Recommend that a **Cost-Benefit Analysis and Economic Analysis** be performed to evaluate restoration of passenger rail service via Stampede Pass.
- Establish a Passenger Rail Opinion Group.
- Name the Tacoma Amtrak station at Freighthouse Square in honor of those who lost their lives in the Amtrak accident at DuPont in 2017.



# AAWA's Vision

We believe that Washington state can **revive its rail revolution** and get back on track toward **creating a world-class passenger rail network**.

Our vision has been [published](#) in *Speedlines*, the [newsletter](#) of the American Public Transportation Association.

## REVIVING A RAIL REVOLUTION:

Contributed by: Patrick Carnahan – All Aboard Washington

### HOW WASHINGTON STATE CAN GET BACK ON TRACK TOWARD CREATING A WORLD-CLASS PASSENGER RAIL NETWORK

Amidst the fallout of the coronavirus pandemic, interest in passenger rail has increased markedly across the United States. With an enthusiastically pro-rail federal administration now in power, talk of our nation's "second great railroading revolution" has begun among advocates and transit blogs from coast to coast. But is this only our second, or even third, attempt at such a revolution? What about the one that started in the Pacific Northwest about 30 years ago, the one that aimed to create the most advanced rail system in North America?

### WHERE IT STARTED

It was the early 1990s, and change was afoot in Western Washington. Many parts of the region were still recovering from the last recession in the 1980s, in addition to earlier declines of Boeing's space program and the logging industry. Bellevue and Redmond were feeling the impacts of Microsoft's meteoric rise. Amazon didn't even exist yet, but Washington's leaders were taking proactive steps to accommodate major economic and population growth. There was a new awareness of the environmental pollution caused by car dependence and the impossibility of "building our way out of" congestion with more highway lanes. The state was

steadily easing its way into implementing the 1990 Growth Management Act and several Commute Trip Reduction provisions, all to mitigate the impacts of a projected population boom in the Puget Sound. In 1991, the Washington State Legislature directed that a comprehensive assessment be made of the feasibility of developing a statewide 'High Speed Ground Transportation' (HSGT) system. The next year, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) designated the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor, which runs through the heart of Seattle, as a high-speed rail (HSR) corridor.

With the results of the earlier HSGT study in, the 1993 Washington State Legislature passed RCW 47.79 and created something revolutionary: a goal to build a regional HSR network connecting Seattle with Portland, Vancouver, BC, and Spokane by 2030. As recommended by the study, Washington and Oregon began implementing modern intercity passenger rail service on existing tracks between Vancouver and Eugene, OR, with the goal of increasing this service's top speed to 110 mph. From this, Amtrak Cascades originated, one of the nation's most successful intercity passenger rail services. Following the study's vision, the Washington State and Oregon Departments of Transportation both created bold long-range plans for Cascades that would dramatically increase their frequency and usefulness. Washington also studied the idea of using existing



## AAWA's Current Efforts

- Lead the Pacific Northwest Rail Forum at the [Pacific Northwest Economic Region 2021 Summit](#).
- Conduct discussions throughout the state on community transportation needs during the [AAWA 2021 Train Trek](#).
- Support creation of a Greater Northwest Passenger Rail Working Group.
- Support the Amtrak reauthorization bill and the Invest in America Act for rail infrastructure.



# Questions?

Contact us at  
**(360) 529-5552**  
**(509) 213-0070**  
or  
[aawa.us](http://aawa.us)



Amtrak's *Empire Builder* at Yakima, Aug. 1971. Photo: Drew Jacksich.