

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

Stimulus: \$9.3 Billion for Passenger Trains; Washington State is ready to claim its share!

It has been said that until we change what we invest in, the way America travels or uses energy will not change much. We cannot continue to fund the same old things and expect different results. The new federal funding for intercity and high speed rail is a step away from investing in the same old things. It is a beginning.

NARP News, March 2009

The 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed Congress on Feb. 13. The vote in the House was 246-183, with no Republicans voting for the bill, and 60-38 in Senate, with just three Republicans supporting it. Pres. Barack Obama signed the Act on Feb. 17.

It looked as if little intercity passenger rail infrastructure investment funding would be included in the Act as the House and Senate negotiated the final package. Then suddenly, as the conferees put the final touches on the compromise, \$8 bill. in intercity passenger

rail money for the states and \$1.3 bill. for Amtrak ended up in the bill. News reports credited the inclusion of this huge investment directly to Pres. Obama, Vice Pres. Joe Biden and USDOT Secretary Ray LaHood, a former Republican congressman from Illinois. The president wants investment in rail, particularly high speed rail, to be a signature issue of his administration. Obama has already done more for rail development in this country than any president since Abraham Lincoln, who pushed to tie our nation together with passage of the Pacific Railway Act to build the transcontinental railroad.

Of the \$9.3 bill., \$1.3 bill. is for Amtrak infrastructure investment. Amtrak is spreading this funding throughout the system. In the Northwest, projects include:

- Platform and wheelchair accessibility improvements at many stations to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

(See **Stimulus**, page 4)

Location	Project	Request (millions)
Vancouver (WA)	Rail yard bypass and W 39th St. bridge	\$45.1
Tacoma	Pt. Defiance bypass	\$60.0
Stanwood	New station platform and shelter	\$0.6
Everett	PA Jct. curve realignments and storage tracks	\$2.1
Cascades service	4 new trains sets	\$108.0
Cascades service	Capitalized maintenance	\$97.4
Kelso-Kalama	Kelso-Martins Bluff - 3rd main track and storage tracks	\$222.0
King St. Station	Complete track and signal upgrades	\$120.0
Blaine	Swift Customs Facility siding	\$3.8
Northwest Corridor	Advanced signal system/Positive train control	\$30.2
Centralia	China Creek crossovers	\$3.0
Total		\$692.2

This is Washington State DOT's proposed list of rail projects for which the agency will request federal stimulus money. All these projects directly support the state and Amtrak's ability to add more Northwest Corridor passenger trains, improve service reliability and on-time performance, and reduce running times, while at the same time providing continued efficient movement of freight on BNSF's mainline.

Northwest Rail Advocates meet in Essex, MT



Photo by Jim Hamre

Above, some of the 72 people in attendance at the Northwest rail advocates meeting on March 28 in Essex, MT.

The historic Izaak Walton Inn hosted the annual meeting of Northwest rail advocates on March 28. The Essex, MT inn is located adjacent to the BNSF mainline on the southern border of Glacier National Park. Most people coming from Washington and Oregon arrived via the *Empire Builder*.

After lunch in the dining room, where many feasted on Montana buffalo burgers, the 72 attendees filled the Signal Room to capacity. NARP Vice President Art Poole was master of ceremonies for the meeting.

Our featured speaker was Jim Lynch, Director of the Montana Dept. of Transportation. He has been director for five years, appointed to his first public service job by Gov. Brian Schweitzer (D).

Lynch first discussed the *Empire Builder*. He noted that it continues to be the United States' most popular national network train. Its operation is critical to the residents of Montana's Hi-Line. The *Builder* makes 12 stops across northern Montana and each stop is important and unique. Total on and off ridership in Montana in 2008 was 164,551, up 7.0% over 2007. Whitefish, with its many recreational opportunities, is by far the most popular stop, accounting for nearly 43% of Montana's ridership. Lynch said, "We (See **Essex**, page 6)



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

Moving Forward after Friday the 13th

Advocates of passenger trains in the Northwest and nationwide were happily surprised when, following the US Senate and US House budget proposals to once again put passenger rail on a starvation diet, the Obama administration inserted \$8 billion (yes, with a “b”!) for capital investments in rail corridors such as ours into the American Recovery and Investment Act, commonly called the “Stimulus Package.” This is in addition to the \$1.3 billion for Amtrak. These monies are also plus the potential best-ever funding in the Amtrak authorization bill passed last October. (Of course, a congressional authorization is but a “good idea”; appropriations are what count.)

There is more! Within the “Stimulus” there is \$1.5 billion in supplementary discretionary grants for surface transportation and \$27.5 billion in “highway” funds that can potentially be used for passenger rail and transit projects. (Given the costs of highway “mega-projects” in and around Seattle plus ferry funding needs, “flexing” any of these dollars to rail in Washington state would be a very long shot.)

Our greatest potential lies with a piece of the \$8 billion. Our Northwest Corridor has been a modest if genuine success. Detailed plans for future growth, with the addition of more trainsets and more service, are in place. Washington’s rail capital projects are “shovel ready,” a criterion said to be essential for a state or some other entity getting Stimulus funding.

But rail advocates and our state’s passenger train program’s provider partners endured a jolt when informed on the evening of Friday March 13, that a “reorganization” of the rail section of the Freight Systems Division included elimination of the position of passenger rail manager in the person of Ken Uznanski, who more than any single individual had built and maintained Washington’s rail program and the high national regard in which it is held. Reaction (from some of you reading this) was generally hostile. (Part of my job was to try to “hold back the mobs” until at least we could learn what these changes at WSDOT entailed,

beyond the elimination of the passenger rail manager position.)

Sometimes alone, sometimes with AAWA board members Rob Eaton and George Barner (both are also elected officials; Rob is mayor of Leavenworth, George an Olympia Port commissioner) and with Nora Friend, a vice president of Talgo, Inc. (the Spanish-based manufacturer of the Amtrak *Cascades* trains and an excellent partner in our rail corridor), I, in the next several days, arranged and met with well over a dozen legislators, most being members of the House or Senate Transportation Committees. Most had been unaware of the organizational and personnel changes at the DOT, as we expressed worry about the future of our passenger rail program.

On Monday March 16, Rob Eaton and I met with Scott Witt, Andrew Wood and two other members of the now-changed

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Rail office. I was very candid in my concerns about the personnel changes and Washington State’s passenger train future. What emerged from the somewhat tense meeting was assurance given Rob and me that the passenger rail program would continue to be emphasized as strongly as before and that I, representing the passenger rail advocate community would be “in the loop” in all significant policy decisions – as would other partners and key stakeholders. I said I would encourage my AAWA colleagues to keep a close watch on the progress of our passenger train program and also said I would continue working with the Legislature and others of influence as well as staying “in the loop.”

Our meetings with legislators bore quick responses, as a senator, and separately, a House member, went to ranking WSDOT management with concerns. In addition, letters and emails (again, from some of you) were sent or hand delivered to the governor, Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond and key legislators. Again, responses were quick, with written words of assurance that the passenger rail program would continue to be a high WSDOT priority.

Now, cautiously moving on: While we are not and will not be persuaded that the personnel changes were desirable, it is my judgment that we should work with

the reorganized Rail Office team to Praise and Push for more and better passenger train service for our state and region.

Indeed, from justified concerns about Friday the 13th, I quickly had to transition to concerns about the Legislature’s and governor’s rail budgets. (The DOT, now an Executive Agency, must advocate and defend the governor’s budget as their own.)

The governor’s and Senate’s proposed budgets essentially just maintain existing Amtrak services, with relatively little state money for either infrastructure or new trainsets to meet rapidly growing demand for more service. The assumption seems to be that those needs would be met by a nice chunk of the \$8 billion Stimulus money. I question this assumption, while hoping, if needed, it would be true. Letters to fifteen House members, nearly all on the House Transportation Committee, were hand delivered just hours before the HTC was to meet to consider the House’s budget. In the letter, I cautioned against assuming that the merits of our program’s success, plans, and shovel-readiness would necessarily

overcome the political clout of the likes of California, Texas, Florida, Ohio and New York and their aggressive campaigns to grab most or all the \$8 billion.

Whether our efforts or that of others were the proximate cause, the House did substantially increase the budget totals for rail capital over that of the Senate. Our job now is to try to persuade House and Senate transportation conferees to accept or come close to the House numbers.

Perhaps these latest efforts are not needed. Perhaps, along with the considerable influence of pro-rail and well-positioned members of our Congressional delegation, the merits of the Washington state rail program will trump the clout of much bigger, more politically potent states and regions. But we believe that to assume the Evergreen State’s added rail needs will be met by Federal dollars may not be as well received as we would wish by those in Washington DC making the Stimulus grants in months to come. Our Legislature has been excellent in putting State money on the table for rail investments. Legislative transportation leaders have rightfully asked in recent years, “Where are the Federal Dollars?” But perhaps now is not the time for Washington State to rest on past (See **Flem**, page 4)



The View Down the Tracks

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with Jim Cusick

If I Were a Rich Man...

What defines rich?

How does one define "the rich life"?

Are you living the rich life?

In this case, let's put aside the romantic notion of richness, such as the comfort of family, friends, good cheesecake, and the richness of traveling by rail.

What I'm talking about is MONEY!

More precisely – COST and Benefits.

No, I don't plan to go into a cost/benefit (C/B) analysis now.

What I do want to talk about is why things cost what they do.

The local transit pundits love to debate the cost of all the different transit modes. Light Rail vs. Monorail. Light Rail vs. Commuter Rail. Light Rail vs. Bus Rapid Transit. The latest in the debate is over the cost of light rail to the Eastside, versus the cost of putting commuter rail on the Woodinville Subdivision.

They are in two different corridors after all, one with a 41 mile contiguous right-of-way, the other needing to define its own right-of-way. So it really doesn't reflect the cost differences accurately. What does though, is a comparison of Sound Transit's analysis of commuter rail on the Woodinville Sub and the numbers that the Cascadia Institute and All Aboard Washington came up with while they were working to save the rail line.

Why does it cost Sound Transit that much more for providing service on the Woodinville Sub? Well, one thing you have to remember is that Sound Transit isn't building just for the short term horizon that was used by the I-405 Program, but for a system that will be lasting a lot longer than 30 years. The specifications Sound Transit uses for subcontractor supplies is much higher than is normally used by commercial builders. Commercial builders don't overbuild – it makes it too hard to blow them up when they want a new building – because it cuts into the profit when they rent space or sell.

If it is Sound Transit's corporate culture to build things that has them erring on the more costly, but more robust side, then I'm fine with that.

If the Vanderbilt family had con-

structed Grand Central Terminal "on the cheap" would it still be functioning at the level it does now? It hardly needed any ADA upgrades because the need to move baggage efficiently solves the same problem as moving people the same way.

If James Hill had built King Street Station "on the cheap" would we even be able to be talking about the restoration now taking place? King Street Station has withstood a number of Nisqually-size earthquakes quite well. Even the contractors and engineers working on the restoration project are pleasantly surprised to see that things were built for the ages. (That's right you little whipper-snappers, in our day Real Men built Real Infrastructure.)

The rail systems will be in place, the way they are built now, for 100 years. This is why the systems back East are

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still functioning without major rebuilding.

They were built to last.

Now does Sound Transit's plans for the Woodinville Sub preclude start-up service on that line, since it fails a short-term cost/benefit analysis meant for an infrastructure lifespan of only 30 years?

Certainly not!

Startup commuter rail service can be accomplished much the same way commuter service started up in other areas around the country, as I explained in my last column (used equipment; modest speeds; simple platforms, same as how Sound Transit built the Tukwila station for around \$350,000; basic parking; etc.).

Sound Transit's build-out plan might not be necessary now, but it is what will be needed in the future.

The other big problem Sound Transit is faced with when we talk about trying to build a light rail system between and among the denser areas, is that they have to acquire right-of-way.

Just try building our current freeway system in modern times. It cost Billions back then, and we would consider it unaffordable and indefensible now.

In fact, during the I-405 Program's analysis it was shown that the cost of

purchasing right-of-way through Bellevue was more than the cost of tunneling, which is the highest cost alternative.

Light Rail, now having to be built where no continuous right-of-way corridor exists, is expensive. And if you think the answer is to build on the freeway right-of-way, then you haven't thought about one problem with the freeway. Nobody lives next to the freeway.

They do live next to train stations.

All day long I'd...

Pour my money into the gas tank. How often have I heard the reason people have moved to taking the train was because of the price of gas.

Having been a gearhead for most of my adult life, I'm mystified how these people figure out how much cars cost to own and operate.

Now I'm certainly not going to complain that gas prices aren't a big deal.

After all, Amtrak and many commuter rail agencies are enjoying an increase in ridership because of Big Oil. However, ridership numbers were already trending upward before gas jumped to over \$4 a gallon (\$4 a gallon, now that's RICH!).

My question is, given that most people are AAA members, especially for the benefit of emergency tow-

ing, do they ever investigate how much it does cost to drive? After all, whenever the cost of driving comes up, news organizations are always quoting AAA.

The cost of driving isn't just gas and how good of mileage your car gets. It includes a myriad of other things.

It also isn't just the addition of minor maintenance, such as oil changes, filters, tune-ups and all the other consumable items.

It's the value of the car itself.

It's called Depreciation.

When you drive a car, you use it up. The more mileage you put on it, the lower the resale value is.

That's how AAA comes up with the numbers they do. It's really a part of a C/B analysis. How much does it cost up front, how long does it last, and how much do you have to spend to do it again?

Currently, AAA puts the figure around \$.58 a mile. The gas price is only a portion of that total. At \$2.00/gal, it's around 20 percent of the cost, at \$4.00/gal it gets closer to 33 percent.

If you really want to save money, you can do what I do. Fix it yourself and keep (See **Cusick**, page 4)

Stimulus, from page 1

- Seattle Maintenance Facility –construction of two new buildings. One will be a 75,000 square foot train service and inspection building for handling the *Cascades* and Sounder fleets, the *Empire Builder* and the *Coast Starlight*. The other building will be 60,000 square feet and contain material control facilities and employee welfare areas.
- Commissary improvements.

One of Amtrak's major projects is to return to service dozens of wreck-damaged cars, putting them out on the railroad to earn revenue. Of particular interest to the northern tier states is Amtrak's plan to expand the consist of the *Empire Builder*, America's most popular national network train. Six rehabilitated sleepers will be used to add a fourth sleeping car to the fleet during peak times. Amtrak will also increase food service capacity by adding dining cars previously converted to diner/lounges. These will complement the existing dining and Sightseer lounge cars.

Amtrak has put information on all its stimulus projects on its website. Check out the "AARA Budget Documents" by going to Amtrak.com, click on Inside Amtrak at the bottom of the page and then click on Other Reports.

The remaining \$8 bill. will be distributed through three programs:

- High speed rail corridor development for the 10 designated corridors (including Vancouver, BC-Eugene, OR).
- Intercity passenger rail service corridor capital assistance grants.
- Congestion grants.

As there is no existing program for disbursing the funds, the process is slower than with the road funds. The secretary of transportation must develop a strategic plan for implementation of the program by April 18 and issue guidance to prospective applicants by June 17.

The State of Washington has earned its fair share of the rail stimulus funds. All Aboard Washington is working hard with WSDOT, our Congressional delegation, the governor, the Legislature, Talgo and others to ensure that this happens.

For more information go to www.fra.dot.gov, click on American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, then FRA (at left).

Flem, from page 2

investment merits, not when the biggest states are trying to shove to the front of the rail Stimulus money line.



To a much lighter topic: The trips to and from Olympia to Essex, Montana's delightful Izaak Walton Inn, by Amtrak *Cascades* and *Empire Builder*, to attend the Northwest

NARP meeting, were a welcome respite from the challenges in Olympia. Greeting fellow rail advocates from Oregon and Montana, as well as the large number from Washington, most of whom traveled by train, is always a pleasure. Temps in low 30s with lots of snow...and the BNSF mainline at front door.

The Izaak Walton had been purposely kept mercifully clear of new technology (No radios or TVs in the rooms, cell phones don't function, etc.) But evidently the demands of some technophiles forced the management to "wire" the wonderful basement bar and rec room, and sure enough, instead of enjoying craft beers, Ping-Pong, pool, 1940s swing music on the classic juke box, and wonderful old posters and pictures, many of my beloved colleagues simply could not keep from fiddling with their electronic toys during many spare hours! (Ok, I'm a little bit guilty, too. I made pay phone call – there is one for such "emergencies" – to AAWA VP Jim Hamre before he boarded the train in Tacoma on Friday...needed to bring copies of our brochures and newsletters.)

Our keynote speaker at the meeting, Montana DOT boss Jim Lynch, gave a great presentation. I also really appreciated his right-from-central-casting appearance; boots, jeans, casual jacket, full but neat grey beard...Ok, so I tend to like Montanans generally. I see Big Sky, Big Hearts and they are our big, little brothers and sisters in the world of advocacy for American passenger trains.

Cusick, from page 3

the car for 20 years. Just make sure you pick a style you can live with that long.

Yes, there are many things on a modern car that don't require a special computer to repair.

Buy yourself the factory manual along with the more friendly do-it-yourself manuals such as Haynes or Chiltons. If your "check engine" light is on, it's simple to just pull into your friendly parts store and they will lend you their code reader. Then you know what the dealer knows. They can even translate the meaning of the code if the factory description isn't too cryptic.

Why are they so friendly? Is the auto industry really, at heart, an altruistic entity, thinking only of you?

Well...yes, but what they really are thinking of is you buying the replacement part at their store!

There, now all you need is special tool #J-12345XYZ to remove and replace the part. However, that tool will cost you a million dollars!

If I were a wealthy man!

I'd lean back in my seat, while a chauffeur takes me where I want to go.

Why that sounds just like taking the train!

Actually, it all boils down to what you consider a luxury, such as traveling by yourself in a conveyance that requires the square footage of a small studio apartment. In case you forgot, that's the space a Single Occupant Vehicle occupies on the freeway traveling at an uncongested speed of 45 mph at a safe following distance.

And if you are still apologizing for passenger rail because it's subsidized, then you haven't been reading my column! Remember what Vice President Joe Biden said when he announced that Amtrak would receive \$1.3 Billion dollars in Stimulus money at a March 16th, 2009 event at Union Station in Washington, DC.

To quote (from various news media): [that he was] "tired of apologizing for help for Amtrak. Every passenger rail service system in the world relies on subsidies. We subsidize our highways and airports more than we subsidize Amtrak. So let's get something straight here. Amtrak has not been at the trough. Amtrak has been left out. Amtrak has been left out much too long, in my humble opinion."

Drivers, especially those who demand an uncongested commute in the urban areas, and those who live in the rural areas, don't pay as much a percentage in gas tax for the facility they use, as the users of rail do by paying a fare.

Driving an SOV is a luxury, especially when you can use OPM (Other Peoples Money).



Many travelling from the west to the **Essex meeting** arrived by train on a snowy March 28 morning. Icy roads across Montana but the *Empire Builder* was right on time. See page 1 article. (Photo by Warren Yee.)

A thank you to **People for Modern Transit!**

PMT was formed in 1995 to support improvement of public transportation in the Puget Sound region. PMT was a leading voice supporting the successful passage of Sound Move in 1996 and the Sound Transit 2 plan last November. The PMT board decided the time had come to disband the group and voted to donate their remaining funds of about \$500 to All Aboard Washington. We thank PMT Pres. Richard Borowski and the rest of the group for their generous donation.

Seattle-based **Talgo, Inc.** (www.talgoamerica.com) has become a corporate member of All Aboard Washington with a very generous donation. We also thank them for their great support.

Does Freight Rail Have a Future on the Eastside Line?

By C.B. Hall

As discussed in the first article in this series ("Can Railbanked Corridors Be Rerailed for Passenger Trains?" December-January *Washington Rail News*), the controversy over King County's section of BNSF's Woodinville Subdivision – the Eastside corridor – has centered on whether the corridor should be used for commuter rail service or bicycle and pedestrian traffic, or both. However, the fate of freight rail service on the Eastside also hangs in the balance as the process of railbanking the corridor moves forward.

Railbanking means that a carrier abandoning a line conveys it to a so-called interim trail user (ITU) and retains the possibility of taking possession of the line again should it wish to resume freight service thereon. The line remains subject to federal jurisdiction. In the present case, BNSF is selling the Eastside trackage to the Port of Seattle, which will then grant an easement to King County, allowing the latter to maintain the route as a trail or for other public purposes: the county will be the ITU. While the law would not prevent the county from putting passenger trains on the route, freight service is another matter.

In railbanking practice to date, the right and/or obligation to restore freight rail service – the so-called restart right – has always remained with the railbanking railroad or its successor-in-interest, meaning a railroad company that has assumed the railbanking road's interest in the trackage, normally through a corporate acquisition. (While the language includes the word *obligation*, all reactivations to date have been matters of a railroad exercising a *right* at its discretion; no railroad has ever been ordered to reactivate service on any line.) In this fashion railbanking keeps corridors in a dormant state, should they be needed again for freight carriage. Railroads have

successfully applied for the reactivation of railbanked corridors in several instances through the Surface Transportation Board (STB), the federal agency that regulates these matters. Indeed, the principle that the railroad's reactivation takes precedence over the interim trail use is well established in STB practice.

Railbanked lines in Georgia, Iowa, Ohio, Missouri, Washington, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana and Arizona have thus been reactivated for freight use. Reactivation, however, amounts to only a paper change, the reassumption of possession by the railroad. What happens next is another question; resuming actual service involves many hurdles. The railroad that has taken fresh possession of the line can't always find financing, for example, to restore infrastructure and get steel wheels rolling. Circumstances vary widely from case to case, but on no such reactivated line has a real live train resumed operations on what had been a developed trail.

Against this background, enter King County, Washington. In 2006 county executive Ron Sims announced plans to turn the railbanked segments into "the granddaddy of all trails" ("Granddaddy of all trails" could come from land swap," *Seattle Times*, October 26, 2006); he went so far at one point as to declare that plans to convert the corridor into a hiking-biking trail would be "off the table" if the Port of Seattle kept the tracks in place once it acquired them from BNSF ("Port OKs Eastside trail deal," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, May 13, 2008). The county has since softened its stance somewhat in regards commuter rail, but the question here is, Will the line ever see carbon-conserving freight railroading again or are we ceding the I-405 corridor to trucks in perpetuity?

As if these developments weren't enough, the fine print in the Eastside deal introduces a new and disconcerting twist. The draft trail use agreement between BNSF and the county states that BNSF,

assuming STB approval, will transfer the restart right to the county, the ITU. The county petitioned the STB to approve this novel arrangement last September. If the STB says no, the port will ask the STB to approve transferring the right to the port or another party instead.

Of course, neither the port nor the county has shown any interest in running a freight railroad. The draft trail use agreement in fact states that "the Port does not desire to take on any rail operating responsibility with respect to the Subdivision," and the county obviously has other plans for the line. To all appearances, then, a legalistic oddity has been inserted into the agreements whereby the restart right is to be transferred to a party that under no foreseeable circumstances would ever exercise it. It is impossible to see how the extraordinary language would ever protect the possibility of restoring freight rail to the Eastside.

The death knell for freight railroading in eastern King County? Maybe not. Eyes snagging on the precedent-setting implications of the county's petition for the restart right, the STB has extended the time frame for its deliberation of the request to give it thorough scrutiny before reaching a decision.

In January, AAWA's Board of Directors authorized sending STB a protest objecting to the restart right's transfer.

True, restoration of freight rail traffic in eastern King County would encounter other obstacles in addition to legalisms – including in particular the outcry from abutting property owners who don't want a freight train clanking by, whatever federal policy or environmental sanity might say about the matter. The strong hand of federal administrators, fortunately, is beholden to motives larger than NIMBYism. Let's hope those administrators see the ridiculousness of rendering freight rail in eastern King County extinct and that they act accordingly.

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 State Legislature: State Capitol, Olympia 98504
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 Amtrak Reservations/Information: 800 872-7245
 All Aboard Washington: AllAboardWashington.org
 NARP: www.narprail.org
 NARP Hotline: www.narprail.org/cms/index.php/hotline/
 Amtrak: www.amtrak.com
 Amtrak Cascades: www.amtrakcascades.com
 Sound Transit: www.soundtransit.org

All Aboard News

May 9: Second Annual **National Train Day**. This year, All Aboard Washington is planning events at several stations around the state. Events are already scheduled for Seattle, Olympia/Lacey and Kelso. If you want to help at these stations or host an event at another station, please contact Lloyd Flem as soon as possible (see page 5). We will provide you with information and brochures.

June 13: All Aboard Washington meeting in **Vancouver, WA** at Little Italy's Trattoria Restaurant, 901 Washington St. Time: 11:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Use train 501 southbound and 516 northbound. A buffet will be served. Pay All Aboard Washington at the door (cash or check only). The cost has not yet been set. RSVP strongly urged. Contact Lloyd Flem or Jim Hamre with your reservation (see page 5).

All Aboard Washington welcomed the following new members in February and March: Sandra Heinke, Mercer Island; Carole Richmond, Olympia; Khorsian Blanc-Ridings, Lopez Island; Doug McDonald, Eastsound; Antonio Perez, Seattle; Eric Helgeson, Seattle; David Harris, Philadelphia, PA.

Members contributing to this newsletter include Barry Green, Zack Willhoite, C.B. Hall, Lloyd Flem, Jim Cusick, and Warren Yee.

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Return Service Requested



Jim Lynch

Essex, from page 1 will not lose the *Empire Builder*. We will do everything we can to keep it operating."

Lynch then discussed restored

Amtrak service on Montana's southern route, where the *North Coast Hiawatha* operated on its Seattle-Chicago run until axed by Congress in 1979.

HR 2095, the Amtrak reauthorization passed by Congress last fall, mandated Amtrak to study restoring the *North Coast Hiawatha*. The state is conducting a second analysis at a part of the MDT State Rail Plan update. The state is looking at two scenarios: Billings to Missoula and Spokane or Sandpoint to Williston, ND. Lynch noted cost issues are a big part of any plan to expand rail passenger service and states such as Montana, Idaho and North Dakota can't pay 50% of the cost of operating a long distance train. Restored southern Montana service would have to be part of the national Amtrak system.

In addition to the southern route study in the new state rail, last revised in 2000, other elements include updates to technical information, the impacts of 110-car grain shuttle loading facilities, potential branch line abandonments and tracking state and federal requirements.

Lynch thought that we have let too much of our rail system slip away. Railroads are just as important as the other parts of our transportation system.

One issue that comes up time and again in Montana is grain shipping rates charged by BNSF. Lynch said the gover-

nor puts a lot of time into pressing BNSF on the rates they charge.

Our second speaker was Virginia Sloan, field director from Sen. Jon Tester's (D-MT) Kalispell office. She noted that Tester is an outspoken leader for the needs of rural Montanans and is very supportive of both the *Empire Builder* and the studies on returning service to the southern route. Sloan was impressed by the numbers at the meeting and the passion everyone showed for enhancing rail passenger service. She noted that Tester supported the stimulus bill and also supports Amtrak's 2010 budget request.

Art Poole and Lloyd Flem then teamed up to provide the latest information on Amtrak and intercity passenger rail issues.

Michael Ackley, MT NARP member, provided an overview of successful local grassroots efforts in Missoula to garner support for the restored southern route service. He and others have been to Helena several times to testify on various bills before the Legislature. They have been able to generate numerous media interviews and articles.

Chuck McMillan, MT NARP member, spoke about a proposal to reopen the Livingston rail shops to build and renovate rail passenger cars and locomotives. Business students from Montana St. are drawing up a business plan and designs for the facility.

Barry Green, MT NARP representative, read letters of support from Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT) and Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT). They will be setting up a website to support the return of southern Montana passenger rail service, as has been done in support of the return of the *Pioneer* (www.pioneertrain.com).

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