

Advancing Northwest Corridor infrastructure projects point to new *Cascades* runs in 2017

David Smelser, WSDOT *Cascades* HSR Program Manager, updated All Aboard Washington on the capital investment projects on BNSF's Northwest Corridor mainline between the Canadian border and the Columbia River during a Jan. 6 interview. The work is mostly funded by \$767 mill. in federal money.

Corridor Reliability Upgrades: These projects improve the tracks between Nisqually Jct and Vancouver, WA, and between Everett and the Canadian border. WSDOT's funding adds to annual maintenance funds programed by BNSF, resulting in improved track quality for faster travel times and increased passenger comfort. Work being performed this year include new ties and ballast, track resurfacing and replacements of rail joints at movable bridges.

Advanced Wayside Signal System: This project provides the backbone for an upgraded digital signal system at all control points, sidings, turnouts and other locations between Blaine and Vancouver, WA. The work supports Positive Train Control deployment. PTC is in final testing and awaits Federal Railroad Administration approval before being implemented in the corridor.



Left: The Kelso to Longview Jct. third main track project requires an additional bridge over the Coweeman River near Longview Jct. Construction is just starting on the bridge. Right: In Vancouver, WA, construction of the yard bypass track (in the foreground) is nearing completion. This track will allow freight trains moving between the Columbia Gorge line and the Northwest Corridor towards Seattle to bypass the yard and the current slow connection between the two lines. This will improve traffic flow on the north-south mains and allow Amtrak trains to more easily move through the Vancouver Station.

Mudslide mitigation: Four additional projects were constructed in 2015 between Mukilteo and Everett. The first two projects were done in 2013. The work includes retaining walls to catch debris, slide detection fences to provide advance warning, improved drainage and erosion control. The Legislature's 2015 transportation package includes additional mitigation funding; \$1 million is available in the 2015-17 budget to continue developing additional practical solutions. WSDOT is also supporting local storm water management projects. Sound Transit is working to refine slide prediction technology.

King St. Station Track Improvements: This project completes station track upgrades to the south by adding new automated signals and interlockings, and rebuilding the tracks, including the west track which is currently used only for storage or private cars. The project provides increased capacity and flexibility at the station. All station tracks will have access to all mainline tracks leaving and entering the station. Amtrak has completed the design and will manage the construction. The plans are awaiting FRA approval. Construction (See **Infrastructure**, page 5)



Photos by Jim Hamre

King Street Station passengers want to know...

All Aboard Washington recently received the following letter from Don Campton, a member from Longview:

Can you advocate for an electronic message board at the Seattle Amtrak station? I have traveled to/from/through Seattle on Amtrak several times since the outstanding restoration of King Street Station, and I have found the absence of any public display showing scheduled arrival/departures of trains a real deficiency. I have seen some of the other recommendations for the King Street Station (e.g., food vendors, gift shop), but the need for an electronic message board is so fundamental that it should have been part of the restoration plan. Thank you.

It's not just All Aboard Washington's leaders that think it is unacceptable that the beautifully restored King Street Station, which will have been reopened for three years in April, still has no passenger information display system (PIDS). The over 600,000 Amtrak passengers passing through the station each year think so, too.

Amtrak has been long on promises and short on results. We have heard a variety of reasons:

- No money was budgeted when the station reopened. But Amtrak found money for electronic displays in recently restored stations such as at Grand Forks and St. Paul Union Depot, as well to upgrade the existing system at Portland Union Station.
- Amtrak and the station owner, the City of Seattle, have not signed a lease so Amtrak cannot install an information display. We find it puzzling they are still negotiating a lease after nearly three years of efforts. The lease

(See **Passengers**, page 5)



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

**Thanks Talgo; Benson Trolleys;
AAWA Task Forces; Eastside Rail;
At the Capitol**

Talgo has again shown its support for All Aboard Washington and the work we do with their extraordinary act of buying AAWA Holiday gift memberships for all their US-based employees. This continues the Talgo tradition of support for AAWA. as they acknowledge our long-time and distinctive efforts on behalf of the development and growth of intercity passenger rail service in Washington State. Talgo is already a corporate AAWA member. Other AAWA members might also consider AAWA gift memberships for relatives or friends. We are biased, of course, but feel an AAWA gift membership just might be more valued by the recipient than a trinket from a big box store!



It seems two of the five “Benson Trolleys,” which served Seattle’s very popular and successful Waterfront Streetcar before they were removed from service years before reconstruction on the Waterfront began, will be saved and put into use as a practical and delightful form of transportation in downtown Seattle.

The five streetcars were named for the late George Benson, who was a personal friend, as he served as a Board member of WashARP (AAWA’s “old” name) and was a fellow UW grad and active member of the Husky Alumni Band. Mr. Benson was a respected and beloved Seattle City Councilman for many years. He personally arranged for securing the five cars from Melbourne and physically assisted in their preparation for use on the Waterfront line.



Photo from KING 5 TV.

Many considered it an affront to George’s memory when the cars were removed not long after his

passing.

I trust that the \$200,000 from St Louis’s purchase of the three remaining cars will be used for the required adaptations of the two Seattle cars so they can reenter regular service. Mr. Tom Gibbs, the dedicated leader of Seattle’s retaining and putting to use the Benson Trolleys, will lead the public campaign for added funds needed for the adaptations.



There is still room for you to volunteer to serve on a number of AAWA’s task forces (see last issue for a list), designed to make tangible and measurable gains toward goals we set to accomplish in 2016.

*With only some restraint, I’ll growl
a bit now about what is happening
to the Eastside RAIL Corridor...*

President Karen Keller is holding a meeting of the “Outreach” group at the Starbucks near the King Street Station at about 12:30 PM on Saturday Jan 30.

Chairs of other task forces should be gathering their people in the next few weeks to constructively proceed.

“Trains for the Yakima Valley,” one of AAWA’s goals, has people from that part of the state sufficiently interested that we have made four presentations in recent months, one in Kittitas County and three in Yakima County. The latest was in Toppenish on January 20. Seventy people, mostly leaders of cities of the lower Yakima valley, heard Loren Herrigstad and my presentation. While pleased with the response, we emphasized that returning regular intercity rail service via Stampede Pass will probably be a long, tough process. But with persistence and particularly with support from state legislators and members of Congress serving the area, it can be done.



After thirty years as executive director of WashARP/AAWA (as of December 1, 2015), I still believe and practice our long-established, and nationally-copied motto, Praise and Push ... most of the time. We rightly praise the good work done by those who administer, partially-fund, and operate our intercity passenger trains, often under difficult institutional and physical

conditions. But we also push the sometimes bogged-down bureaucracies who often proceed, as my late North Dakota-born mother would say, “like molasses in January.”

Think, the absence of essential passenger improvements at King Street Station nearly three years after the restoration was completed. Or, for past examples, the “won’t work, cost too much, something might go wrong” incantations we heard: A) Concerning the development of Olympia-Lacey’s Centennial Station or B) The return of Amtrak service to Vancouver, BC. Both of these became successes, contradicting the nay-sayers.

After these thirty years, you might notice, “Praise and Push, but Old Coach Lloyd is gettin’ a bit more growly at times.”

With only some restraint, I’ll growl a bit now about what is happening to the Eastside **RAIL** Corridor: While the AAWA Board was holding its January 9 meeting in Tukwila, a couple of our people attended what was essentially a pep rally on the Eastside celebrating the continued destruction of that irreplaceable transportation corridor. We heard of the gleeful announcement of a “reverse golden spike” ceremony, with tracks destroyed, reversing indeed the celebrating of the vital joining together by iron rails the American west and east at Promontory, Utah.

Hopefully we all can finally learn that when the business philosophy of a Class One railroad, in this case BNSF, becomes near-totally very long hauls on very long, often-unit trains, it does **NOT** mean the “abandoned” rail infrastructure that once served local customers, freight and passenger, with shorter trains and shorter distances, somehow has no value. (Except to be given to adjacent property owners or be permanently converted, at high cost, to **ONLY** recreational uses?!)

AAWA has always supported the shared use of the Eastside Rail Corridor, rail and trail. And we concede the existing tracks and ties are not in sufficient repair to accommodate rail use as is. And we lament that some Eastside communities and WSDOT have already removed some rail infrastructure. (The claim that “saving the taxpayers money” by not replacing the Wilburton track crossing as part of a multi- (See **Flem**, page 5)



WITH
JIM
CUSICK

Gloom of Night

Well, I'm sorry to say I'm in a dark philosophical mood. It's time to put on an old Ozzy Osborne record, maybe followed by some Alice Cooper.

Is it because someone is building a ginormous road project in my front yard and I'll have to pick apples from my own trees from the shoulder of the highway?

Is it?

You might ask "is that what's troubling you, Bunkie?"

Surprisingly, the road project, whilst not my preferable mode of transport, is actually not as bad as it would seem, since it isn't a massive road widening project, but an intersection upgrade on a state highway. They've chosen a roundabout for the preferred traffic control method ... with very pedestrian friendly additions.

It's still a road project, but at least they're not celebrating the tearing up of a perfectly viable rail line.

Here's what's got me down, friend:

The news ...

(I will only name names if they're already a public figure. I will include the quotes, but will let you decide who said it, since my point of contention would be the statement, not the person who said it.)

Am I feeling bad because Kirkland tore up the tracks for their Cross Kirkland Corridor, and I don't believe they'll ever put them back?

I'll have to admit, I was actually surprised to hear that the Kirkland City Council "[authorized \\$250,000 to develop concepts for bus rapid transit \(BRT\)](#) on the [right of way] that would be more in keeping with Kirkland's quality of life."

They say that if they have to deal with Sound Transit's easement on the corridor that somehow bus rapid transit is the preferred alternative to light rail.

Sound Transit's detailed plans ([Option](#)

[E3](#)) for light rail would keep costs down on that section of the corridor by keeping it at grade, and since it won't share the ROW with anyone, it should be able to perform fairly well without the expense of an elevated line. It will operate slower though, than if it were fully grade separated.

However, grade separation doesn't mean the rail line must be the one going over or under. The tracks could operate without any crossings by taking the minor roads that are now at-grade and having them go over or under the tracks. A much more affordable option than elevating the whole line.

However, it seems what's really happening is that the well-heeled neighbors

Am I feeling bad because Kirkland tore up the tracks for their Cross Kirkland Corridor, and I don't believe they'll ever put them back?

that live along the right of way will make sure NOTHING offends their faux-environmental sensibilities.

One man who spoke against transit on the corridor during the public comment section at the city of Kirkland's [Jan. 5 meeting](#) told the council that "we are very organized and we are ready to take this fight to the next level."

I wonder what 'The Next Level' means?

What they really want is for everyone to stay out of their backyard.

And Stay On 405!!

Is that what's getting to me, cousin?

And now we've got a Republican senator, of all things, looking to repeal the tolls on I-405.

Why? A toll is a perfect example of infrastructure that 'Pays for Itself.'

It's the same as a fare that's paid on transit.

I've even suggested (during my I-405 Corridor Program Citizens Committee tenure) that buses should also pay a toll (during commute hours), and the fare (which would be based on the idea of it being one vehicle, and maybe I'd even go with a slight weight surcharge) would be split amongst all the riders.

I mean, is this senator expecting to raise taxes on the rest of us to pay for the privileged few (who demand an unfettered

commute)?

Is there something else that's getting me down, pal?

[King County is another fun bunch](#), who, amazingly, with the [bicycling community](#) are actually [celebrating the removal of the rails in the county's portion](#).

And I quote: "***There are no active or currently anticipated uses of the existing rail infrastructure.***"

Really? REALLY?

I mean, REALLY??

Is that bothering me, Bunkie?

To show you how local politics is subtly changing history there are those who keep parroting the line "BRT was selected for the corridor over rail because of superior numbers."

From a Bothell Reporter article in **2008**:

"This resolution will be shared with the Sound Transit Board, the lead agency on the development of a new regional transit-enhancement plan for the central Puget Sound Region. The significance of this resolution

is to ensure that the Sound Transit Board **considers all viable transportation-improvement options** in addressing the Eastside-area transportation mobility in all directions. By implementing a Bus Rapid Transit plan along the I-405 Corridor, area commuters are expected to experience traffic-congestion relief between Bothell and Renton, as BRT can effectively move commuters faster and improve overall level of service. "

The Puget Sound Regional Council/Sound Transit study on commuter rail was completed in **2009**.

And yet there are still those, some on local transit and bike blogs even, who keep repeating this.

Does all this darkness get me down, cousin?

Well, there is one really dark thing that gets to me: **OIL**, as in **Oil Trains!!**

Edmonds is going through a process of what to do about the horror of having trains along the waterfront.

Of course the fact that they've been here over 100 years is of no importance.

Oh, they are especially concerned about oil trains, with the faux-environmentalism that everyone professes, while driving ... of course ... to their anti-oil train meetings.

(See [Cusick](#), page 4)

All Aboard Washington Officers

Karen Keller, Lacey - President 360 918.8234.. karenk@allaboardwashington.org
 Jim Hamre, Puyallup - Vice President 253 848-2473.. jimh@allaboardwashington.org
 Harvey Bowen, Seattle - Vice President 206 322-2729.. harveyb@allaboardwashington.org
 Rocky Shay, Federal Way - Secretary..... 253 925-2085.. harmons@allaboardwashington.org
 John Carlin, Edmonds - Treasurer 425 778-4529.. jcarlin@allaboardwashington.org
 Zack Willhoite, Puyallup - Membership & IT Director zackw@allaboardwashington.org
 Lloyd Flem, Olympia.. Executive Director .. 360 943-8333

LloydFlem@allaboardwashington.org
 620 Boundary St SE, Olympia 98501

Jim Hamre, Puyallup - Newsletter Editor ... 253 848-2473.. jimh@allaboardwashington.org
 Warren Yee, Seattle - E-newsletter 206 300-6918.. warreny@allaboardwashington.org

All are evening numbers, except Lloyd's, which is available 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. daily.

Important Addresses and Phone Numbers

U. S. House of Representatives:
 Washington, DC 20515

U. S. Senate: Washington, DC 20510
 Capitol Switchboard (all members): 202 224-3121

State Legislature: State Capitol, Olympia 98504
 Hotline for leaving messages: 800 562-6000

Amtrak Reservations/Information: 800 872-7245

All Aboard Washington: AllAboardWashington.org

NARP: www.narprail.org

NARP Hotline: www.narprail.org/news/hotline/

Amtrak: www.amtrak.com

Amtrak Cascades: www.amtrakcascades.com

Sound Transit: www.soundtransit.org

Infrastructure, from page 1

tion is expected to begin soon.

Pt. Defiance Bypass: This project builds on what Sound Transit constructed to extend Sounder service from Tacoma Dome Station to Lakewood. There are several parts:

- BNSF rebuilt Nisqually Jct where the bypass reconnects to the mainline. This project is complete.
- Track and signal upgrades between Lakewood and Nisqually are underway. New rail and ties have been delivered and the track laying machine will be on site this spring.
- A second main track will be installed from 66th St in Tacoma to Bridgeport Way in Lakewood.
- A project by Sound Transit will replace the 0.65 mile long wooden trestle east from the Tacoma Dome Sounder Station with a double track concrete bridge. Included is a platform extension onto the new bridge to accommodate Amtrak's *Coast Starlight*. Construction is expected to start in late 2016.

New Tacoma Amtrak Station: The bypass project requires the Tacoma Amtrak Station be relocated to Freighthouse Square. The new station will be in the west-central part of the historic 100 year old Milwaukee Road Freight House. Final design plans have been

Drawings courtesy WSDOT



submitted to FRA for approval and construction is expected to start this spring. The



project includes a second platform on the south side to provide improved operational flexibility.

Kelso to Longview Jct: Construction has started on this 3-mile project to construct a third main track. This project will relieve congestion at a major chokepoint at Longview Jct where freight traffic moves to and from the Port of Longview.

Kalama – New Sidings: One project add a 4-mile siding by shifting the mainline to east and a second project extends the Toteff siding by 7400 feet. Construction is well underway and ahead of schedule. The projects eliminate conflicts between mainline trains and trains entering the Port of Kalama.

Vancouver Yard: Several projects to increase yard efficiency and improve Port of Vancouver access have been completed. The 12,500-foot long yard bypass track for traffic from the Columbia Gorge going north is scheduled to be operational in March.

New Amtrak Cascades Locomotives:

Eight of these Siemens Charger high performance locomotives are under construction in Sacramento for WSDOT. Delivery of the first locomotive for testing is Nov. 2016.

For more information on these projects, visit WSDOT's [High Speed Rail Projects](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov) page through www.wsdot.wa.gov.

Passengers, from page 1

Was finally approved by Amtrak last fall. The city council has been mulling it since November. We keep getting promises that it will "soon" be approved.

- Amtrak is designing a new integrated nationwide PIDS that is ADA compliant and they don't want to install a system that would then have to be upgraded. But they've done this elsewhere. (See bullet number one.)

All Aboard Washington feels this issue has dragged on far too long and continues to

push Amtrak to provide interim visual train information, even if it's the old stick-on letter board that was once in the station or a shiny new white board. The PIDS for KSS is supposed to go in this year but we cannot get a timeline from Amtrak. -JH

Flem, from page 2

billion dollar I-405 project is a caricature of "penny-wise, pound foolish"! But in recent decades when railroad tracks have been totally removed and replaced by other uses, rail will almost never be returned. NIMBYs and trail-only advocates have successfully prevented it, nationwide. In some cases, surely in this one, it is an appalling misallocation of scarce resources.

This entire scenario is so baffling, as the Eastside suburbs continue to agonize over the severe and increasing traffic congestion plaguing their fast-growing and prosperous communities. AAWA will continue to attempt to save and restore rail, along with trail, on the Eastside Rail Corridor. End of growl for now. Stayed tuned.



For my office this is the busy season. The 2016 Legislature underway. I'll be spending parts of every weekday at our Capitol through mid-March.

Our annual "February" receptions with the Legislative Rail Caucus (LRC) were held Jan. 21 at the Capitol at noon and Mercato's Ristorante in the evening. The events were seen by AAWA members and others attending as a success. Bruce Agnew did much of the planning. Special guests were leaders of the Association of Independent Passenger Rail Operators. Rail labor; the Washington Public Ports Association and other rail stakeholders were joined by the four chairs of the LRC, WSDOT and other legislators who had to jockey among a half dozen competing events!

All Aboard Washington
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All Aboard News

All Aboard Washington's annual "February" reception for the Legislative Rail Caucus happened on January 21. See Lloyd Flem's column for a report.

March 5: Northwest Rail Advocates meeting from noon-5:15 at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, 15920 W Valley Hwy, **Tukwila**, WA, adjacent to the Tukwila Sounder/Amtrak Station. Registration information has been sent via postal mail or email. To register (required) online or print a mail in form and participate in our great program, go to <http://allaboardwashington.org/springrail/>. For more information, contact Jim Hamre or Lloyd Flem (see page 5). Use the Amtrak *Cascades* to and from the meeting.

April 9: All Aboard Washington meeting from noon-4:00 at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, 15920 W Valley Hwy, **Tukwila**. This will be a board meeting and reports from our task forces working to implement our goals for 2016. Everyone is welcome.

All Aboard Washington recently welcomed the following new members: **Larry Yok**, Seattle; **Hendrik de Kock**, Seattle; and, from Talgo Seattle generously providing all their employees with a membership, **Natalie Crawford**, Seattle; **Diana Duong**, Renton; **Christopher Massie**, Olympia; **Curtis John Anton**, Bremerton; **Jose-Antonio Barrera-Rios**, Renton; **Allen Burt**, Bremerton; **Chad Bylsma**, Seattle; **Julia Camacho**, Orlando, FL; **Fernando & Gemma Canals Figueras**, Seattle; **Mariana Cardozo**, Seattle; **Javier Chavez**, Arlington; **Christopher Crist**, Brier; **Donald Yamat Dove**, Kirkland; **Martin Frazier-Fouts**, Vancouver; **Scott Geerdes**, Tacoma; **Jeffery Hart**, Des Moines; **George Hlebechuk**, Seattle; **Daniel Jackson**, Renton; **Richard Lindsay**, Bremerton; **Yolanda Martinez**, SeaTac; **Curt Massie**, Tumwater; **John Miller**, Woodinville; **Andy Pardee**, Bothell; **Raul Pelayo**, Everett; **Ketsada Phanivong**, Seattle; **Robert Richards**, Federal Way; **Victor Sanchez Artigas**, Seattle; **Phillip Shuman**, Auburn; **Kristen Smithy**, Seattle; **Corey Stacy**, Milwaukee, WI; **Namgyal Tsedup**, Seattle; **Hilario Valdez**, Seattle; **Ricardo Vila-Guillen**, Sumner; **Joshua Vonhagel**, Everett; **Larry Westling**, Mukilteo; **Mason Worley**, Seattle; **Michael Yee**, Renton; **Wilfredo Yee**, Everett; and

Gary Young, Redmond. (Talgo's Antonio Perez and Joshua Coran are already AAWA members.)

All Aboard Washington members contributing to this newsletter include Mark Meyer, Kirk Fredrickson, Warren Yee, Zack Willhoite, Karen Keller, Lloyd Flem and Jim Cusick.

At the Jan. 9 board meeting All Aboard Washington reelected the current officers: Karen Keller, president; Harvey Bowen and Jim Hamre, vice presidents; Rocky Shay, secretary; John Carlin, treasurer, and Zack Willhoite, membership and IT director.



Thank You!

Your contributions in 2015 are making a difference in Washington State

In 2016 All Aboard Washington will continue building on our successes from 2015 as we work in implement our goals and improve passenger rail service.