

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

USDOT Secretary Ray LaHood: High-speed rail is coming to America; There's no going back

US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood (a former Republican representative from Illinois) addressed the National Assoc. of Railroad Passengers annual Capitol Hill reception in Washington, DC on May 3. The reception was held in the Rayburn House Office Building. LaHood was flanked by Federal Railroad Administrator Joe Szabo and Deputy Administrator Karen Rae.



USDOT Secretary Ra LaHood, speaking at the NARP Capitol Hill Reception in Washington, DC on May 3. *Photo by Jim Hamre*

Attending the reception, as well as the NARP council of representatives meeting and doing Capitol Hill visits to federal legislators, from our state were Bob Lawrence, Bill Myers (subbing for Stephanie Weber) and Jim Hamre.

Below is a condensed version of Secretary LaHood's remarks to the enthusiastic gathering of rail advocates from around the country.

"High-speed rail is coming to America. There's no going back. We're on our way. But you all laid the groundwork for it. We would not be in the position we're in if it weren't for the advocacy of so many of you, over a long period of time, who have believed in passenger rail, and believe that passenger rail should really be a part of America's

intermodal transportation system.

"The second part of that partnership is the President. You all have traveled to Europe and Asia, you all have ridden the rails over there, you know how magnificent they are, you know how good they are, you come back to America and say 'why haven't we made the investment?' Because we never had a President who was willing to make the kind of investment that President Obama has made.

"That's one of the reasons we love working for the President: because of his vision to connect 80 percent of America by high-speed and intercity rail over the next 25 years – now that's half the time it took to build the Interstate [Highway] System. And we're on our way. We invested \$11 billion.

"The President's 2012 budget, if you look at it, [has] \$50 billion for high-speed intercity rail over the next six years. No one's [topped] that.

"I want to thank you because we would not be in the position we're in, the President would not be in the position he's in, if you all hadn't worked so hard over so many years. It's just so important that we continue the momentum, and we will continue the momentum. There's just no stopping us now.

"There's two other groups I want to thank. I want to thank our friends at Amtrak. We would not be in the position we're in were it not for our friends at Amtrak. They've been in the rail business a long time; they've taken their lumps. I am so happy, and you all know this, Amtrak is making money. People like riding their trains. The passenger loads are way, way up. In some instances, particularly along the Northeast Corridor, they're full all the time. I took the train to New York a couple of

weekends ago and it was full. I didn't take the Acela. I took the regular train; I'm a government worker... The train was full coming up and it was full going back. There were no seats on either train. So we're happy for Amtrak.

They've got great leadership. They've got a great Board. They're making money. And they have said to America that the investments that you've made of your hard-earned tax dollars have paid great dividends. So a big, big round of applause for our friends at Amtrak.

"Secondly, I want thank our friends in the Class I rail[roads], because we could not make the kind of investments we're making without the Class I freight [railroads]. There's not enough money to build all the track we need to be building if we didn't have the opportunity to use the freight rail system. That's the reason we invested half of our TIGER money, over \$500 million, [in] the Class Is to fix up the tracks. We did it selfishly to fix up the tracks, to fix up the infrastructure, so that we could put passenger trains on these rails that [would go] a little faster than the freight [trains] do. So our friends at the Class 1s, they've been partners; they really have. We've reached agreements with UP, BNSF, the Norfolk Southern, Canadian Pacific. Let's hear it for the Class Is!

"You've sold your Member of Congress [on high speed rail]. Make sure they're in there fighting for high-speed rail money. We're going to be fighting for it. That's what we'll be doing over the next several months as they work on a budget and we come up with a (See **LaHood**, page 4)

Join us on the second annual All Aboard Washington train trip to Portland on August 13. Included is an excursion on the Oregon Pacific Railroad in Portland. See page 6 for complete details and how to register for the excursion.



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

North to Alaska: The Alaska Railroad

While several All Aboard Washington members were staffing the AAWA table at the "Train Celebration" at Tacoma's Freighthouse Square on May 14 and 15, wife Darleen and I were taking a break in Anchorage and south-central Alaska visiting Darleen's brother Robert McCoy and experiencing the rapid transition from a winter to spring botanical landscape. By May 22 well over 19 hours of daylight and gaining several minutes daily at 61° north.

Anchorage, population 250,000, is a real city (would easily be WA's second city), with a thriving, attractive downtown. (OK, so the unattractive post WW II car dependent scatteration and sprawl that infects most US metro areas is all too evident in Anchorage, too.)

Anchorage's existence is based on it originally being the center for construction of the Alaska Railroad (ARR), built by the Federal government as a means to access the then-territory's ample potential natural resources. This vital steel road, constructed 1915-1923, runs from the ice-free ports of Seward and Whittier in the south, north to Anchorage, then north to Denali National Park (Mt. McKinley) and on past Fairbanks.

While providing high-quality rail passenger services, freight movement is the more important role for the state-owned railroad. While visiting Anchorage, I met with several key ARR people plus a leading AK rail advocate couple. These gracious Alaskans provided much of the information below.

Bulk raw materials, such as coal, timber, gravel and petroleum; industrial commodities like jet fuel, chemicals, cement, fertilizer and lumber; and equipment and supplies for mining, the oil fields and Pipeline constitute much of the ARR freight loads. However, there is significant growth of trailers

and containers on flatcars. Rail cars on weekly barges from Seattle and Tacoma to the Port of Whittier are an excellent example of intermodal efficiency. Obviously, interconnects with trucks are needed to areas of AK away from the ARR, including the infamous Haul Road to the Prudhoe Bay oil fields.

While trucks, small and large planes, the Pipeline, and watercraft for the important fishing industry are essential, the ARR remains a vital transportation link in the 49th State.

ARR passenger trains from Anchorage to Fairbanks provide essential transportation, somewhat similar to our Amtrak *Cascades*, but with a higher percentage of tourist and excursion travelers on the ARR. The Alaska Rail-

Even more important is ARR's operational approach to landslides and avalanches, which can occur in the extreme physical environments through which ARR trains pass. Trains are delayed until tracks are cleared and deemed safe for any trains to travel.

road is laudably innovative in offering new and varied excursion packages to Alaska visitors, including many in the winter, but still provides the legendary flag stops in a 65-mile isolated area (Talkeetna to Hurricane) for both bush-dwelling residents and adventurers. Darleen and I enjoyed the Anchorage-Fairbanks trip on our first Alaska visit in 1999.

The Anchorage-Seward line (which was freight only 1954-1985), provides May-September passenger service and primarily has an excursion and tourist clientele. The highway between the cities allows a faster travel time and functions year round.

Darleen, Robert McCoy and I enjoyed the "Coastal Classic" to Seward. We experienced superb service, excellent food, and spectacular scenery. Definitely not "High Speed Rail!" For example, the locomotive engineer, with whom we had an informative meeting just before our northbound trip, slowed to a stop to allow observance of the wild Dall sheep balanced on rocky ledges far above the tracks. Also, we slowed to observe a nest of eaglets. This is an excursion train; Amtrak trains do not and should not be expected to

operate this way, even though Amtrak also accesses fine scenery unseen at 35,000 feet or from the Interstates.

Seward, established in 1905 (a decade earlier than Anchorage), remains an active fishing and shipping port, as well as being the center for tourist activities in that part of south-central Alaska. We enjoyed the superb Sea Life Aquarium and the local history museum in Seward, which has a climate similar to coastal Washington, albeit somewhat cooler in winter and wetter in summer than Aberdeen or Raymond.

The rugged mountains, deep riverine canyons, snowy mountain passes, nearby glaciers, and emerging spring on boggy flats, including abandoned settlements and dead forests – a result of the 1964 9.2 earthquake – make for a truly superb train trip.

I heartily recommend that rail advocates who want great train mileage to venture north to Alaska and experience the Alaska Railroad (unfortunately, no train connections from the Lower 48!).

Like Amtrak, ARR is a public corporation. ARR freight division is profitable and the passenger trains also operate in the black. The State of Alaska provides some capital monies for the railroad.

Two added characteristics of the ARR passenger service worth mentioning here:

- First, coaches on the Seward run are hand-washed **DAILY**, every other day on the Fairbanks service. (AAR is fully unionized, although their train washing crews are independent contractors.) Even the locomotives receive a weekly bath. The entire trains' exteriors simply sparkle, even in drizzly weather.
- Even more important is ARR's operational approach to landslides and avalanches, which can occur in the extreme physical environments through which ARR trains pass. Trains are delayed until tracks are cleared and deemed safe for any trains to travel. But no difference is made on which ARR train type moves through the area of disturbed

(See **Flem**, page 4)



The View Down the Tracks

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with Jim Cusick

It's all about the money

"Amtrak Chugs Deeper Into the Red," the headline reads in the May 18th Wall Street Journal.

They point out the conundrum that even though Amtrak's ridership is up they require more in subsidies, because their operating expenses are also going up.

Of course, there are a few Republicans that seem to relish the idea of keeping the "Horrible Subsidy to Amtrak" bogeyman alive, so the choice of headline for the article by the WSJ shows a kindred spirit.

Of course, it's imperative that all transportation systems should "pay for themselves," right?

I wonder how Boston's I-90/93 Big Dig, or for that matter, any urban freeway, would fit in with that point of view.

Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is profitable.

I also wonder how the rural parts of the Interstate Highway System would fit into that picture.

If Amtrak's long distance routes aren't profitable, what profit does the Interstate Highway System generate?

They require subsidies, which is an anathema to the folks at the Wall Street Journal. How could they agree to that type of government support?

Wall Street needs no government support, right?

Oh,...what's that you say? What about the \$190 billion in unpaid TARP loans (a.k.a. the Bank Bailout) still outstanding?

"Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain!"

HUMBUG!

An interesting observation about the threat of a government shutdown earlier this year was the question of what would happen to Amtrak?

Turns out, Amtrak would have been able to operate on its revenues for about a month.

How is that?

Well, Amtrak's Farebox Recovery

Ratio, compared to other rail systems, is quite healthy.

Whereas the "sardine systems" of Tokyo, Hong Kong, Osaka and Taipei operate above 100%, and the London Underground operates at around 100%, it appears that Amtrak needs, according to the WSJ, a whopping 16% subsidy.

What that means folks, is that Amtrak operates at an 84% Farebox Recovery Ratio.

That can't be right, can it?

I mean, New York's Subway and Commuter Rail system (MTA) operates at 55%, and it's held up as the best example of a system that can only work because of density. Philadelphia/New Jersey PATCO operates at a 61% ratio, and only Toronto's GO Transit beats Amtrak by 4% at 88%.

If Amtrak's long distance routes aren't profitable, what profit does the Interstate Highway System generate?

And speaking of a cost/benefit analysis, which combines capital and operating costs, it would be fitting to go along with Amtrak's critics.

They state that capital expenditures aren't included in Amtrak's subsidy, and that we also need to include that in any Amtrak analysis.

I'm all for that, as long as we include a project's capital and operating costs in EVERY roadway analysis.

While we're at it, we should let the driving public know what their private operating costs will be, too. Don't mask it in the per mile figure, keep that separate, and add any toll costs for the project.

Everyone reading my column, including you road fans, should be able to agree with that.

It's all about whose money?

The City of Edmonds had a proposition on the ballot earlier this year that was to fund road rehabilitation and improvement. It was voted down. Why?

Tax-a-phobia?

How do you know why people vote for or against a ballot proposal?

By writing a simple, clear proposal that lists the specific projects, their costs, and who would benefit. Like the Sound Move proposals.

The first Prop 1, the Roads and Transit Initiative, failed. However, the

second Prop 1, Sound Transit 2, passed.

The conclusion could be that it was the **roads** portion that was the albatross around **transit's** neck that caused the Roads and Transit Prop 1 to fail.

How do you tell?

Now is the time for road proponents to put their money where their mouth is.

Instead of Tim Eyman throwing nails under the tires of government, it's time for him to do something constructive.

He should put an initiative forward that sells a package of road improvements that solves the problem.

Along with State Senators Mike Carrell, (R-Lakewood), and Randi Becker, (R-Eatonville), these people must stop attempting to channel the spirit of Robert Moses.

In their opinion piece in the Tacoma News Tribune on May 22nd, other than showing their less than stellar understanding of the rail data, they feel that any and all government funding

should be directed to their mode of choice, without question.

The credibility of their argument is hurt by statements such as "a maximum of 1,500 commuters" on the rail line. A simple calculation multiplying the six future *Cascades* round trips possible with the Point Defiance Bypass project, plus the *Coast Starlight* puts the figure at potentially 3500+ riders a day with just the trainset configurations of today.

Robert Moses, if you don't know, "improved" the New York Metropolitan Area's highways by building the Cross Bronx Expressway using federal Housing and Urban Development monies. The system of parkways in that area used park monies to build those connecting highways, hence the term "parkway." Parkways are not accessible to transit use, by the way.

Step up to the plate. Show us the specifics of your plan.

How would you get a ballot measure passed, and not rely on taking money away from other sources?

How would you get it to pay for itself?

It's all about toll money

So if our "Roads Only" friends don't have a defined package, is there any (See **Cusick**, page 4)

Federal government awards WSDOT additional higher speed rail funds

In two separate announcements the US Dept. of Transportation awarded our state Dept. of Transportation an additional \$160 million for higher speed rail projects in the Pacific Northwest Corridor between the Canadian border and the Columbia River. These projects will continue to improve the BNSF infrastructure and lead to faster and more reliable service for both passenger and freight trains. The number of Seattle-Portland Amtrak *Cascades* round-trips will increase from four to six over the next five or so years.

On April 8, Federal and state officials signed documents that guarantee Washington state will get \$145 million in high speed rail funding originally intended for Ohio and Wisconsin. Washington was initially awarded this portion of federal funding in late 2010 when the USDOT redirected money returned by governors of the two states.

The \$145 million adds to \$590 million already obligated by the FRA to our state.

On May 9, WSDOT was awarded only \$15 million from the \$2.2 billion returned by Florida's governor. The agency had applied for \$120 million of that money but other projects DOT wanted to apply to funding to, including preliminary engineering and environmental work to begin mitigating the mudslide problems, were not deemed "shovel ready" by the Federal government.

"This funding reinforces our vision of upgrading and expanding Amtrak *Cascades* passenger rail service in Washington," said Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond. "It will allow us to advance our work to address problem areas in the corridor, resulting in better on-time performance with fewer disruptions and delays."

Twenty-four states applied for the returned Florida money. And eleven of those states have Republican governors. This shows the bipartisan support for high and higher speed rail throughout most of the USA. The Wisconsin governor actually had the temerity to apply for funding for Milwaukee-Chicago improvements after turning back the state's earlier grants for Milwaukee-Madison. His state did not receive any of the money.

Northwest Corridor project information is at:

www.wsdot.wa.gov/Funding/stimulus/passengerrail.htm

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transportation program. We need a transportation bill that reflects the idea that we want to continue to make investments in roads and bridges and transit and all the things that we've been doing, but also we want to have a transportation bill that really reflects the President's vision for high speed and intercity rail. It's so important that that is included in the transportation bill. It's what all you want; it's what Americans want. They're looking for other ways to get around this country.

"Here's what I say about high speed rail: it's the next generation of transportation for the next generation. Some of us will never ride on it. But what our predecessors...did for us, they built an Interstate [Highway] System. What we're going to do for our kids and grandkids is build a class one, state-of-the-art passenger rail system. The next generation of transportation: high speed and intercity rail. Thanks for all your hard work."

Read or listen (MP3 audio) to LaHood's complete remarks at www.bit.ly/lahoodnarp

Flem, from page 2

right-of-way. Alaska Railroad's passenger trains, like their freight trains, are seen as important enough to begin through revenue operation without any arbitrary added delays.

Thanks to the following ARR people who provided much of the information in this column: Mr. Lyle Madsen, Senior Account Manager, Business Development; Ms Lorri Winchester, PE, Project Manager, Civil Projects; Mr. Chris Cederberg, Locomotive Engineer; Mr. Eric Rangel, Conductor; Mr. Ethan Henderson, Brakeman. (The "brakeman" on ARR passenger trains is actually an assistant conductor. Ethan also serves as a locomotive engineer for both freight and passenger trains).

Added insight was also a result of a delightful lunch as a guest of Bob and Letha Flint of Anchorage. Bob is the NARP Council member from Alaska. At lunch we discussed the status of ARR, Amtrak, the Amtrak *Cascades*, WA's

recent substantial ARRA funding and pending projects, and the recent NARP meeting in DC, where Bob was a delegate. We also discussed the bipartisan support for passenger train investments we enjoy in Washington state. It is hoped the Flints can be speaking guests at an AAWA meeting in the near future.

With many of the ARR people and with the Flints, I emphasized the generally good working partnerships existing in our state among the BNSF Railway, Amtrak, WSDOT, Talgo, and All Aboard Washington. By the standards of most states, Alaska and Washington have access to fairly good intercity passenger train opportunities. But, at least in Washington's case, work for rail advocates surely remains.

Cusick, from page 3

other way to gauge what the public wants to do for congestion relief?

Avoid a toll!

If people think that not paying a toll is more important than waiting in traffic, then they are essentially voting with their pocketbook.

What's that, you say? There is no toll on a major freeway?

Well, not for all lanes, but the HOT lanes on SR 167 are representative.

It seems that they are not generating enough revenue to cover costs.

Why?

One would think that if avoiding congestion was important, then a toll to shorten their commute time would be of extra value to these folks.

Apparently, they don't, and not enough people are taking advantage of those wide-open (in their view) HOV/HOT lanes.

Worse yet, if the message that they are "happy with the level of congestion as it is," is NOT a valid conclusion, then what are they saying?

That they want **ME** to pay for their wish for an unfettered commute?

Who is subsidizing whom?

Raise the gas tax? But that means I still subsidize commuters. Start up a vehicle miles traveled taxing scheme? Same issue.

Why can't we just face the issue head on?

Give Us Your Road Projects!

Let The Public Decide!

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

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 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/cms/index.php/hotline/
 Amtrak: www.amtrak.com
 Amtrak Cascades: www.amtrakcascades.com
 Sound Transit: www.soundtransit.org



Photo courtesy Sen. Cantwell's office

Visiting with Sen. Maria Cantwell (D) and her staff in Washington, DC on May 3 were, from left, All Aboard Washington board members Bob Lawrence, Jim Hamre and Bill Myers. The trio also met personally with Rep. Rick Larsen (D-Everett) and his staff, as well as the staff of Sen. Patty Murray (D), Rep. Jamie Herrera Beutler (R-Camas), and Rep. Jay Inslee (D-Bainbridge Island). The Democratic offices voiced strong support for our Amtrak Cascades and higher speed rail in the Northwest Corridor. Rep. Herrera Beutler's office was noncommittal. Below is a handwritten note from Rep. Larsen, thanking us for our visit and reemphasizing his support passenger rail.

Below is the All Aboard Washington table at the National Train Day event at the Northwest Railway Museum in Snoqualmie. Our table was staffed by Harvey Bowen and his daughter Claire. This was one of several National Train Day events AAWA members participated in around the state. Photo by Harvey Bowen

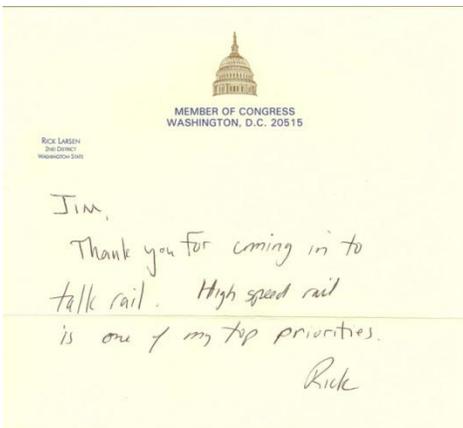


Photo by Jesse Burkhardt

A BOOST FOR PASSENGERS — New construction next to the Amtrak station in Bingen is designed to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The above picture from the White Salmon Enterprise shows the new platform under construction at the Bingen Amtrak Station. Amtrak is upgrading platforms throughout the country to make them and the trains more accessible to all passengers.



Three photos by Jim Hamre

Above, pictures from Amtrak's 40th Anniversary train in Washington, DC on May 4. Top, Bob Lawrence next to an F40 locomotive now turned into a cab car. Middle: Amtrak on-board attendant uniform from the 70s. Bottom: P42 locomotive in heritage Phase III paint. The train contains three cars of exhibits on Amtrak's 40-year history. It is expected to tour the country, including stops in Seattle and Portland. No dates yet beyond the Northeast.

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All Aboard News

June 11: All Aboard Washington meeting at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, **Tukwila** at noon. Address: 15920 W. Valley Hwy, adjacent to the Sounder/Amtrak Tukwila Station. We will order off the menu, with individual settlement. Our speaker will be Martin Young, operations manager for Sounder. With the meeting beginning at noon, you can travel from the north and the south on the *Cascades*.

July 9: All Aboard Washington Board of Directors meeting at **Basil's Kitchen**, Embassy Suites Hotel, **Tukwila** at noon. See above for location details.

August 13: Train Meeting & Trip to Portland. Join us for our second annual **on-train meeting and trip on the Amtrak Cascades to and from Portland**. We will be riding *Cascades* 501 south and returning on train 508 in the evening. We will try to secure a group coach for us all to ride in together, but you will be responsible for purchasing your own tickets. We will work with Amtrak staff to make sure you're

boarded at the right coach with us, whether you get on at Seattle or further south. **An option in Portland is an excursion ride on the Oregon Pacific Railroad.** This short line in southeast Portland operates through the Oak Bottoms Wildlife Refuge and along the Willamette River. The excursion will include the Oregon Pacific train ride, a tour of the Oregon Pacific Shops, charter bus service between Portland Union Station and the Oregon Pacific, and lunch. **All this for only \$30!** There is limited space available on the Oregon Pacific excursion so send in your check early to reserve your spot. Mail you check for \$30 to All Aboard Washington at the address at the top of this page. Be sure to note that your check is for the Oregon Pacific excursion. The charter bus will depart Union Station after arrival of train 501. We should be back to Union Station by 4 p.m. Remember: reserve your spot on the excursion early and you are responsible for your own Amtrak tickets to Portland. Families are welcome on our trip to Portland. Contact Lloyd Flem if you have questions. Contact info on page

5. A big **Thank You** to Karen Keller who has made all the arrangements for the Oregon Pacific excursion.

www.oregonpacificrr.com

All Aboard Washington welcomed the following new member in April and May: John Stewart, Seattle; Robert Hendricks, Blaine; and Mike Morrison, Portland, OR.

All Aboard Washington members contributing to this newsletter include: Karen Keller, Lloyd Flem, Jim Cusick, Zack Willhoite, Bob Lawrence and Harvey Bowen.

Lloyd Flem and long-time Washington Secretary of State Ralph Munro had an op-ed in the Tacoma News Tribune on May 26 supporting the proper use of our federal higher speed rail funding. State Sens. Mike Carrell (R-Lakewood) and Randi Becker (R-Eatonville), in an op-ed on May 22, calling for all the rail money be diverted to I-5 expansion through Joint Base Lewis McCord.

<http://tinyurl.com/pronwrail>
<http://tinyurl.com/anitwrail>