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TO: Jake Fey (Chair, House Transportation Committee)
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FROM: Harvey Bowen
Board President, All Aboard Washington

SUBJECT: Future of the Amtrak *Cascades*

All Aboard Washington (AAWA) has been the voice of Northwest rail passengers for over 40 years. AAWA recognizes that our state faces many challenges in the upcoming 2021 legislative session. As always, we are committed to supporting a responsible state transportation budget that provides sound investments in our future. Restoring the full Amtrak *Cascades* passenger train schedule, and expanding *Cascades* service to Central and Eastern Washington, are critical components of statewide economic recovery and development.

Passenger rail satisfies a public need by connecting Washington across geographic, economic, and cultural barriers. AAWA expects passenger trains to meet the same safety, reliability, and frequency standards as other modes of public transportation such as buses and ferries. Passenger rail is our state's most realistic transportation option for achieving mandated reductions in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) [RCW

47.01.440], CO₂ emissions from the transportation sector (RCW 70A.45.050), and traffic fatalities (2019 Washington State Target Zero Strategic Highway Safety Plan).

AAWA is concerned that apparent indifference by our Legislature and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) regarding Amtrak *Cascades* will eventually result in elimination of the service. Washington has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in local, state, and federal funds toward creating and maintaining the *Cascades* over the past 30 years. In 2019, the *Cascades* service provided nearly 829,000 annual trips as an alternative to driving and flying along the I-5 corridor. To put this into perspective, this number is over 60% the size of the far more frequent Seattle-Portland air market.

The *Cascades* is an established, essential public transportation service. As such, our State should move to achieve the *Cascades* service improvement goals outlined in WSDOT's 2006 Long-Range Plan (LRP) for Amtrak *Cascades*, as well as the East-West passenger rail expansion goals promulgated by the 1993 legislature (RCW 47.79.020).

Thank you for addressing these questions that are essential to understanding Washington State's commitment to intercity passenger train service.

Questions from All Aboard Washington

1. WSDOT's LRP proposes 13 round trips daily between Seattle and Portland and four between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. with much faster run times by 2023.
 - a. How, and when, does WSDOT plan to resume the four Seattle-Portland *Cascades* round trips it was running before the pandemic, as well as the two cancelled Seattle-Vancouver, B.C. round trips? Can trains north of Seattle temporarily terminate in Blaine to allow a partial resumption of service until the Canadian border reopens?
 - b. How does our State plan to provide the six Seattle-Portland round trips WSDOT promised when it received nearly \$800 million of federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds?
 - c. How will WSDOT reach its service goals by 2023 as specified in the LRP?
2. Amtrak *Cascades* requires at least seven trainsets in order to accommodate the six Seattle-Portland, two Seattle-Vancouver, B.C., and two Portland-Eugene round trip frequencies that were to be implemented in December 2017. WSDOT and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) collectively lack this amount of equipment at present.
 - a. Is WSDOT pursuing the use of the Amtrak Horizon equipment only for a few more months, or is it considering utilizing the Horizons beyond spring 2021?
 - b. What is WSDOT's plan to serve its passengers prior to the Amtrak procurement of new national network equipment, which is at least five years from delivery?
 - c. Has WSDOT engaged ODOT about working jointly to acquire passenger train equipment?
3. AAWA believes close cooperation with Oregon is beneficial to the Amtrak *Cascades* program and its riders.
 - a. What is the status of the *Cascades* operating agreements with Amtrak and ODOT?
 - b. What formal agreements/laws guide cooperation between WSDOT and ODOT? Are there opportunities for improvement in this area?
 - c. What is WSDOT doing, and planning to do, to promote passenger rail service so that ridership numbers increase?
4. Subsequent to the 2017 DuPont accident, 30 year-old Horizon equipment was provided temporarily by Amtrak. We are concerned that, with Horizon equipment alone, it is not possible for the state to achieve its goals.
 - a. How does the safety of Horizon equipment compare to newer equipment? Are safety features on the Horizon equipment equivalent to newer trainsets? Are 30-year old Horizon trains required to be modified to meet an equivalent level of safety compared to today's train safety standards? If so, what refurbishment and safety enhancements would be necessary? At what cost?

- b. News reports and public records indicate that three trainsets compatible with those owned by Oregon have been prepared for possible use in *Cascades* service. These trainsets are newer, lighter, more fuel-efficient, and have other advantages over Horizon equipment. Why is WSDOT seeking to use older, less fuel efficient Horizon equipment that could result in increased operating costs and a less desirable passenger experience?
 - c. What alternative equipment has WSDOT studied? Are there options that would be safer, ADA compliant, and more economically advantageous?
 - d. What equipment, beyond that already provided, could be acquired in the near term from Amtrak or other sources? Would this equipment remain available once Amtrak resumes normal operating frequencies?
5. Amtrak *Cascades* is far behind achieving its goals as stated in the 2006 LRP, but now is an excellent time for us to begin in earnest to catch up.
 - a. What is the cost to acquire equipment that enables WSDOT to meet both its immediate service needs and its LRP goals?
 - b. What is the estimated cost to maintain that equipment annually, and how would maintenance be performed?
 - c. What is the estimated cost to operate that equipment annually in passenger service?
6. Decisions made regarding Amtrak *Cascades* should be based on accurate, comprehensive, and transparent information.
 - a. What are the passenger-focused metrics WSDOT is utilizing to evaluate the options for passenger train equipment?
 - b. Has WSDOT comprehensively analyzed and compared the accessibility, fuel efficiency, and safety of equipment options it is considering?
 - c. Has WSDOT performed an analysis of the increased traffic fatalities resulting from the loss of passenger rail service? How will the department achieve Target Zero if its actions put thousands more vehicle trips on I-5?
 - d. Has WSDOT analyzed greenhouse gas emissions relating to mode shift toward or away from passenger rail service? What mitigation of the increased emissions is WSDOT contemplating?
 - e. Is the above data publicly available? Is WSDOT committed to providing more transparency about the process for adding additional equipment and about its service goals for the next five years?
7. How does the legislature plan to implement the Amtrak *Cascades* service improvement goals articulated in WSDOT's 2006 LRP?
8. How will the Legislature prioritize the budget to implement the service described in the 2006 LRP?