

# OREGON INTERCITY TRANSIT

A photograph of an Amtrak train crossing a bridge over a river, surrounded by dense green trees. The train is white with green accents and has the number 470 on its front. The bridge is a steel truss bridge. The background is filled with lush green foliage.

**AORTA – AAWA  
Annual Meeting  
Saturday  
November 9, 2024**

**AORTA  
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates**



# Intercity Oregon's Orphan Stepchild Mode

- A deteriorating system that once provided convenient access to all parts of the state.
- It was the Backbone of Oregon's Transit Network linking urban and regional services.
- Dedicated intercity funding is needed for infrastructure, capacity and safety projects and for essential service improvements.



Early Oregon  
Travelers had to  
provide their  
own resources.

- Walking
- Horseback
- Wagon
- Watercraft



Steamboats proved to be faster and more comfortable. Soon they were plying between river towns on the Columbia, Willamette and many smaller tributaries.





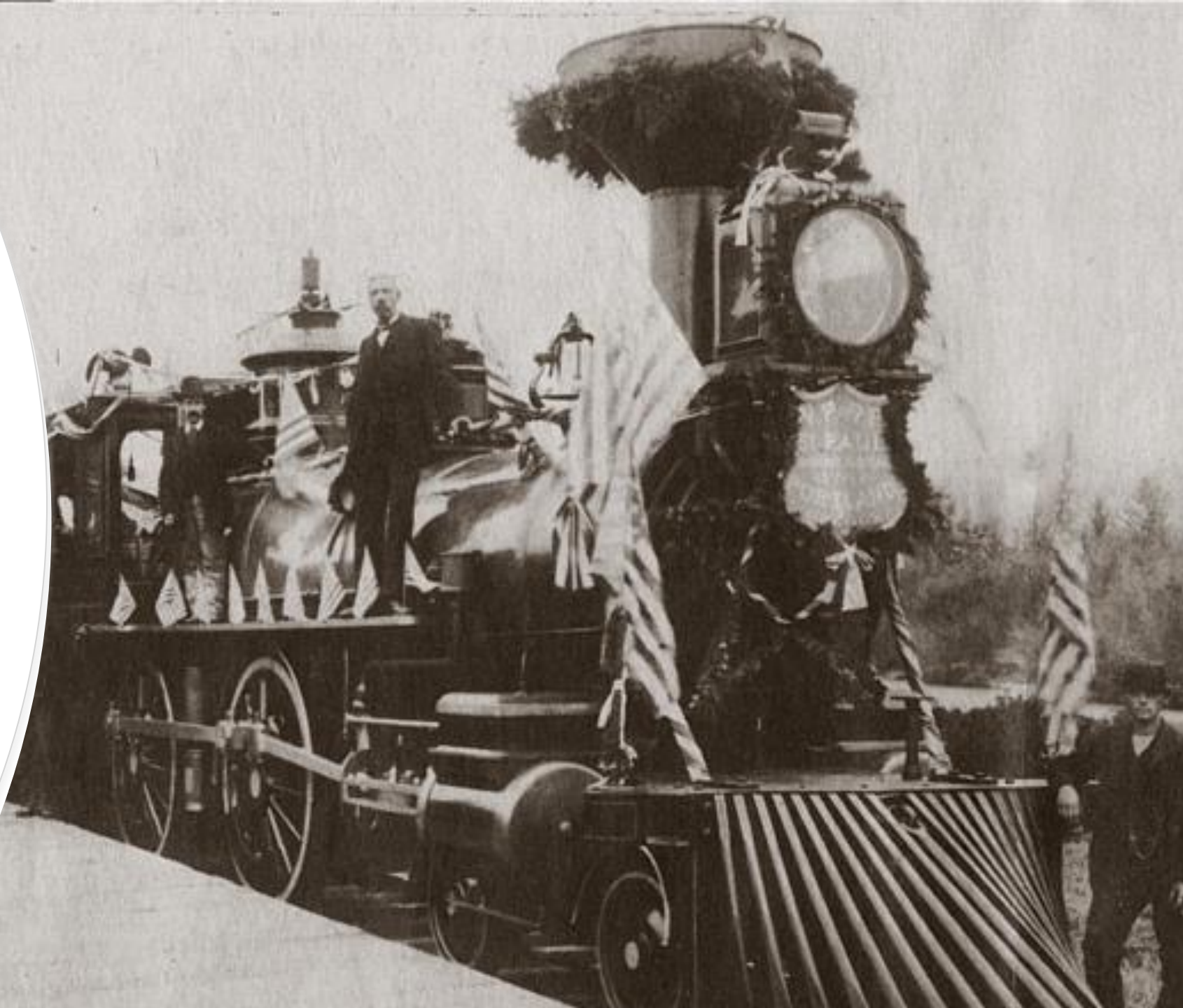
# Stagecoaches

- Another early intercity transport option.
- Rough and dusty in the dry months
- Cold, wet and treacherous in the wet months



## Oregon Railroads were built by Private Investors.

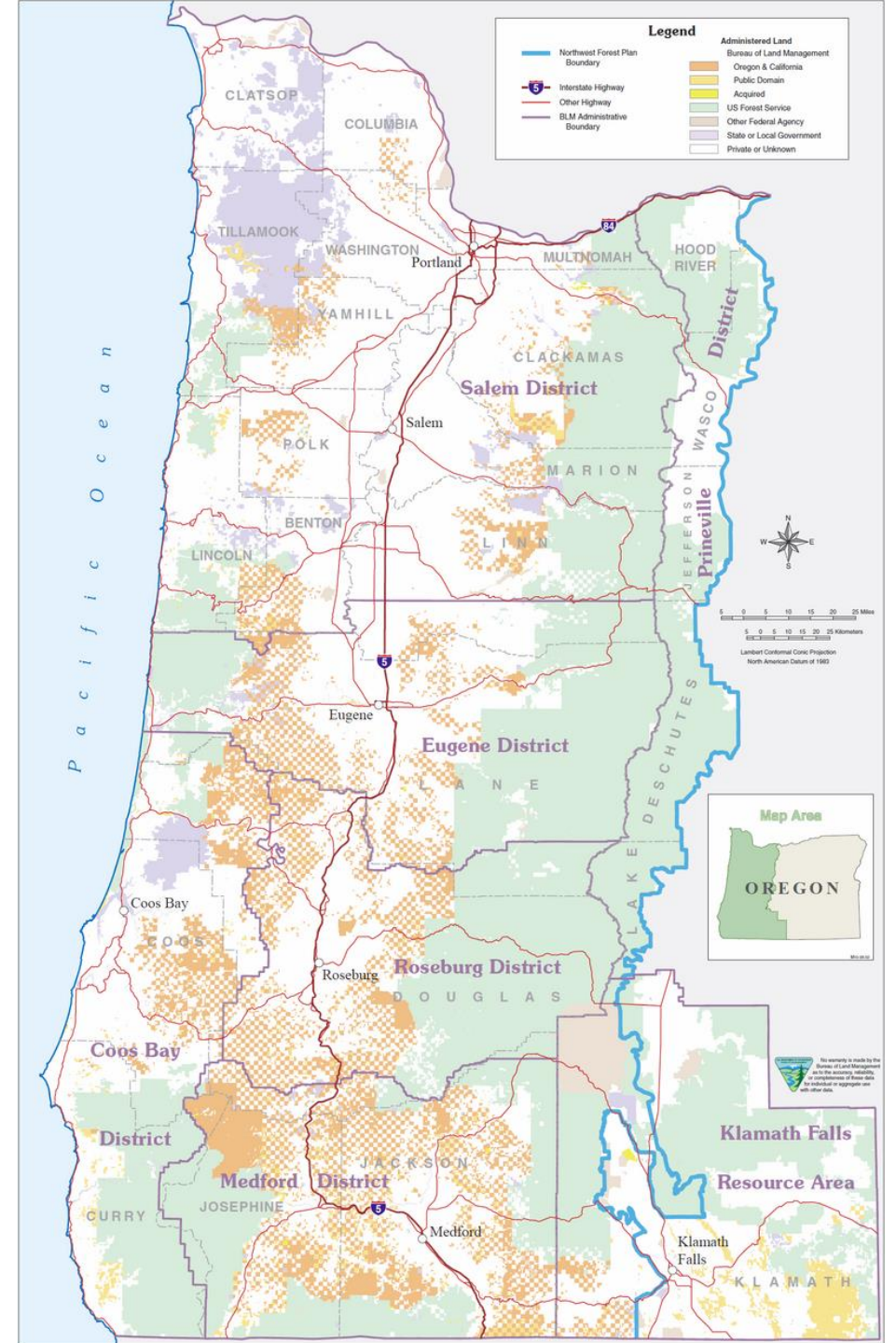
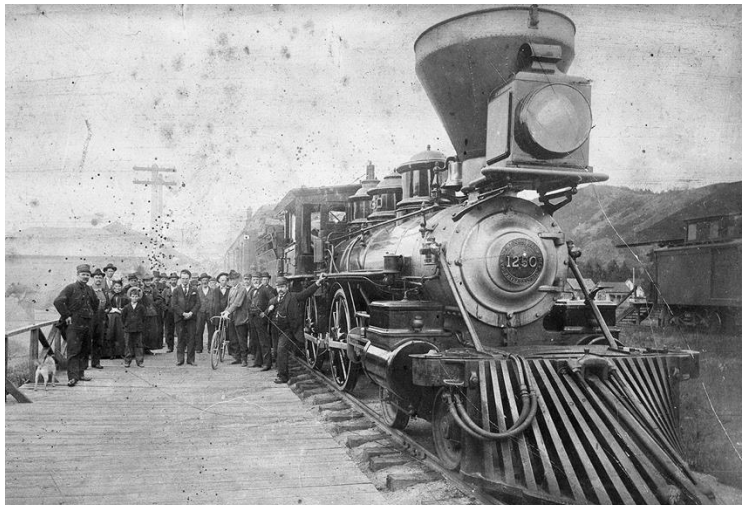
- The first railways were along the Columbia River to portage goods and passengers around the rapids.
- The East Side Railway constructed 20 miles of track south from Portland in 1869.
- The first Northern Pacific Railway transcontinental train arrived in Portland on September 11, 1883.
- The rail line to California was completed in 1890.



## The Oregon & California Railroad (O&C) Lands

Congress passed legislation that resulted in the grant of nearly 4,000,000 acres in Oregon to the **Oregon and California (O&C) Railroad Company**. The land grant was in exchange for construction of a rail line through Western Oregon from Portland to the California border near Ashland.

The railroad defaulted on the terms of the grant. Congress responded by passing an Act declaring that all grant lands still held by the Railroad Company were “revested” to ownership by the United States.





An aerial photograph of a vast, snow-covered evergreen forest. The trees are densely packed and their branches are heavily laden with white snow, creating a textured, white landscape. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down into the forest canopy.

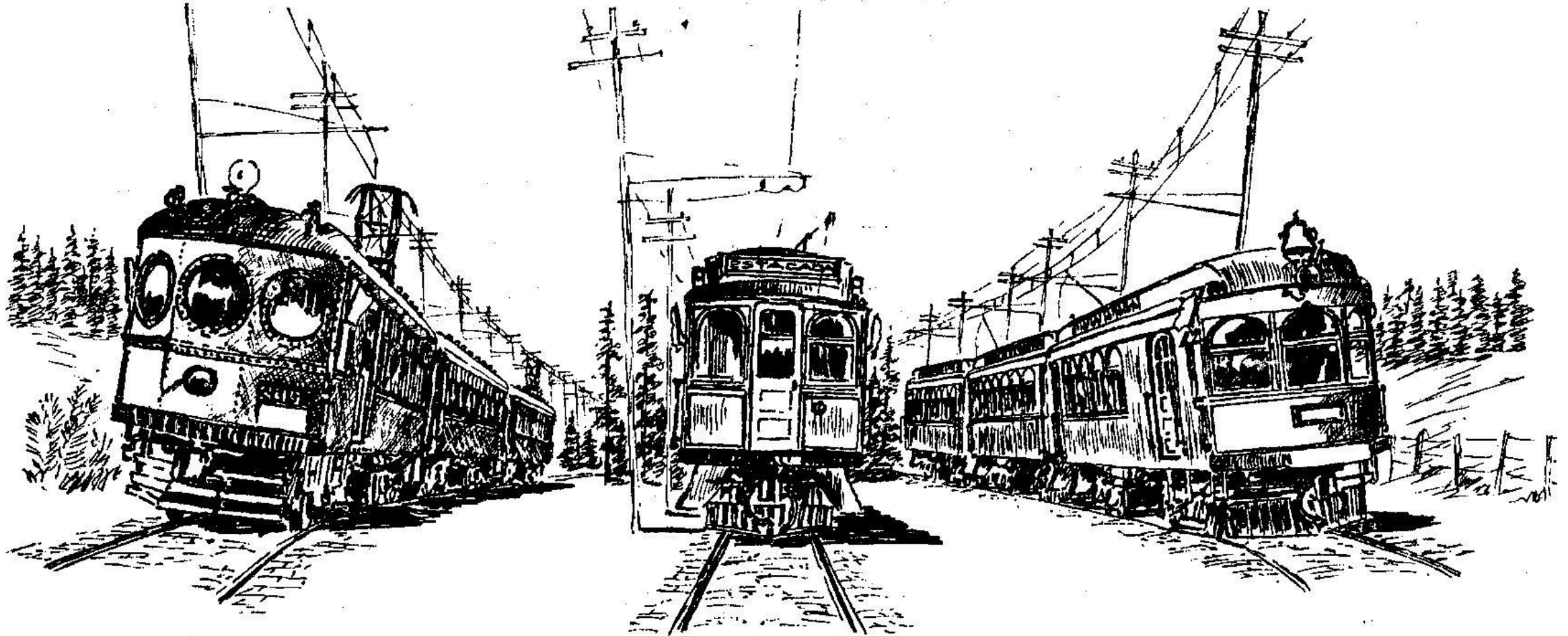
# The O&C Lands

The Oregon & California Railroad (O&C) Lands consist of **nearly 2.6 million acres** of federal land in 18 counties in western Oregon.

Publicly owned land is not on the tax roles. The railroad and local governments lost the advantage of having this land in private ownership.



In the late 1890s the Electric Interurban made its debut in Oregon. Soon there were hundreds of miles of electric lines radiating from Portland.



Southern Pacific Red Electric

Portland Traction Co.

Oregon Electric Railway





**Motor coach (bus) services were introduced with the upgrading and improvement of public roads.**

**The motorcoach network grew and expanded providing access to most Oregon communities.**

**In Oregon all of these modes (Bus and Train) were financed by private investors and operated as a for-profit business.**



# Early Intercity Providers were For-Profit Businesses

Freight (Package Express) Service and U.S. Mail were revenue sources that often exceeded passenger fares.



**Mail trains carried passengers**

**Railway Post Office (RPO) cars operated on many trains.**

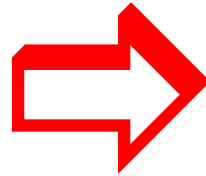
**Intercity trains and buses offered dependable package express service as a popular shipping option.**





# Four events had a negative impact on the financial stability of intercity services.

1. The Post Office shifted First Class Mail from trains to planes.



2. Reduction in Passenger Trains, due to lost mail contracts, resulted in the Railway Express Agency closing in 1975.



**Passenger Trains became unprofitable with the loss of mail and express revenue. Service deteriorated until the government got involved and AMTRAK was created in 1971.**





# Intercity Bus Events

**3.** In 1982 Congress passed a bill that changed the rules for intercity bus services. It allowed other firms to enter into the package express business without the requirement to carry passengers.

**Greyhound converted several Scenicruisers to freight buses. They had eight seats and a restroom on the lower level and the upper level was totally dedicated to cargo.**



**4.** The 1990 Greyhound labor strike caused the company to lose most of its package express business to emerging FED EX, UPS and DSL competitors. This was a big revenue loss to the bus lines.



# The Decline of Intercity Bus Service



Loss of Package Express(Freight) Revenue forced cutbacks on the national intercity bus network.

In Oregon, Greyhound and Trailways abandoned all regional service, focusing only on the I-5, I-84 and US 101 Corridors.

Local operators emerged taking over routes that the national carriers had dropped.

*Portland – Astoria ● Portland-Tillamook ● Newport-Corvallis-Salem-Bend ● Coos Bay – Eugene - Bend ● Klamath Falls – Medford ● John Day – Bend*

ODOT Public Transit Division stepped in using Federal 5311 Funds, to support cross state service.

*Portland-Bend-Burns-Ontario- Boise ID*



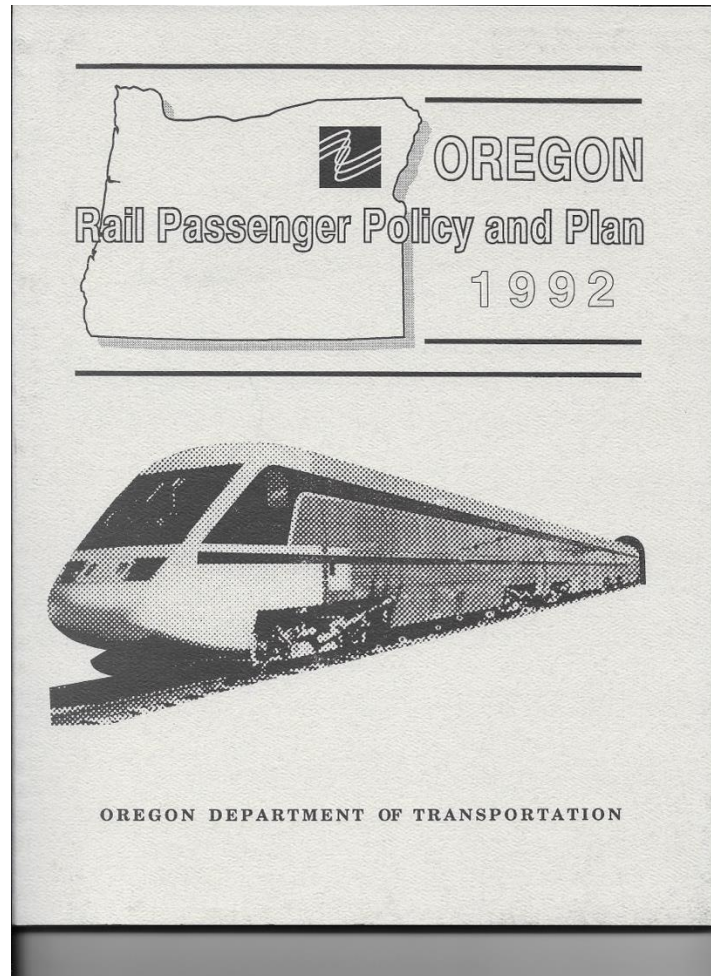
# Intercity Bus Service Continues to Decline



- Continental Trailways discontinued service on the I-5 Corridor.
- Several regional Trailways franchise operators attempt to reinstate the service but are unable to fill the gap between Sacramento and Medford. The service operated for a few months before being cut.



# Oregon Rail Passenger Policy and Plan 1992



**The new rail plan and the Federal designation of the Pacific Northwest High Speed Rail Corridor stimulated new interest in Passenger Rail.**



# Modern State of the Art Trains visited Oregon

Danish Flexliner



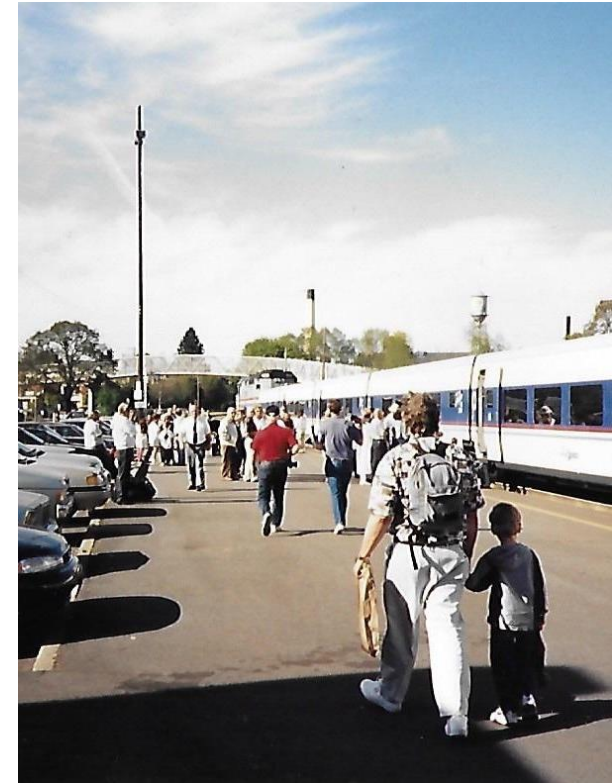
Swedish X-2000



Colorado Railcar DMU



Spanish *Talgo* Tilt Train





# Corridor Train Service Extends to Eugene



**Willamette Valley  
Express operated in  
1980-81 between  
Portland and Eugene.**

- 1994 a regional (Seattle-Portland) Amtrak Train was extended to Eugene – Making one daily round trip.
- Thruway Buses were added to connect with Amtrak trains at Portland, and as a placeholder for future Willamette Valley trains.
- 1998 American Made *Talgo* tilt trains begin corridor service.
- 2000 the second Eugene-Portland train started service.



# Passenger Rail Station Upgrades

- Railroad stations at Salem, Albany and Eugene were renovated using Federal Transportation Enhancement Funds.
- A new station opened at Oregon City.



**It is  
becoming  
more  
difficult to  
get there  
from here.**



Since 2000 there has been little improvement to rail passenger service and intercity bus services continue to decline



In 2004 there were ten daily round trip intercity buses on I-5 between Portland and Medford



Today there is no through intercity bus service and only one daily option that requires transfers to different carriers.



# A Quarter Century without much Progress

- Still two round trip trains since 2000
- Train ridership continues to grow exceeding earlier months
- Capacity/Infrastructure improvements promised railroads have not been Implemented.
- Intercity bus service is fragmented and difficult to use.



# Dedicated Funding is the Solution

- Intercity Transit has been the Orphan Stepchild for Funding.
- The “For Profit” Business Model no longer works.
- Revenue does not cover all the operating and capital costs.
- A Dedicated Funding source is needed to develop intercity transit’s full potential.
- A one tenth of one percent increase in the STIF might be a means to accomplish this.





# Benefits from Realistic Intercity Funding

- Capacity/Infrastructure improvements on the Willamette Valley rail corridor.
  - Better “On Time” performance
  - Additional train frequencies
  - Faster run times
  - More efficient freight operations
- Vehicle procurement (Buses and Trains)
- Adequate levels of service on Oregon’s major corridors.
- Coordination of schedules to assure convenient connections.
- Public information to aid in using the network.



# Benefits for People

- Addresses ADA requirements by providing intercity mobility for travelers with disabilities.
- Offers an option for people with driving restrictions. This includes elderly who can't drive after dark, youth and those who lost their license due to a DUI or carelessness.
- Is an attractive alternative to driving.
- Reduces the need to own or rent a motor vehicle for intercity trips.





# Economic Benefits

- Tourism activities bring new dollars into Oregon communities.
- Oregon family wage Jobs to operate, maintain and support services.
- New revenue for Oregon businesses.
- More passengers for all transit providers.
- Environmental impact – Intercity passengers are not bringing motor vehicles onto crowded highways. Producing less greenhouse gas.



# Commuter Rail an Overlooked Opportunity

- There are miles of former electric interurban and lightly used freight railroads that can be upgraded to accommodate Commuter Trains.
- These routes run parallel to busy highways.
- Trains are not delayed by road congestion and can offer competitive travel times.
- It will take far fewer tax dollars build capacity on rail rather than expand roads.





# Commuter Rail

---

- Psychological Benefit – Rail service offers an attractive alternative to driving.
- Will get people out of their cars.
- Will have a positive impact mitigating VMT on adjacent roadways.
- Uses proven technology to address current mobility needs.
- Frees more dollars for critical rural road needs.



# Potential Commuter Rail Routes



- **Portland Metro** – **WES** currently operates Beaverton to Wilsonville.
  - **WES** could extend to Salem and beyond (Independence and Corvallis)
  - McMinnville serving Tualatin, Sherwood, Newberg and Dundee.
  - St. Helens serving Linnton and Scappoose
- **Rogue Valley**
  - Serving Central Point, Medford, Talent, Phoenix and Ashland.
  - Gives locals an alternative to the I-5 viaduct.
  - Possible extension to Grants Pass serving Rogue River and Gold Hill.
- **Central Oregon**
  - Serving Redmond, Bend, Sun River and La Pine.





# It is Decision Time

- The 2025 Legislature will be developing a new transportation funding bill.
- Traditionally roads are the means used to address mobility issues.
- User fees/taxes pay for less than 50% of road costs. Taxes and fees on homes and businesses subsidize the difference.
- Lower cost transit options are often overlooked because roads have a dedicated funding source.
- Hopefully, the 2025 bill will include funding for intercity transit so decisions can be made based on benefits rather than an available funding source.



# Making the Vision a Reality

- How many years before something significant, other than road expansion, happens to address Oregon's mobility needs?
- Dedicated Funding is the essential element. Without funding intercity transit will remain in the doldrums.
- There also needs to be some policy review.
  - What is ODOT's future role?
  - Is a new agency needed to manage the Commuter Rail Services?
  - Who provides the public information and connection coordination services?
- Funding for intercity services must be an essential element of the 2025 Transportation Bill to fully benefit from this overlooked mode.



# Questions?

Robert Krebs

**AORTA**

Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

[www.aortarail.org](http://www.aortarail.org)

