



## Small But Mighty

### Improving Seattle-Vancouver Cascades Run With Little Capital Expenditure

*by Anton Babadjanov*

When the \$800m worth of ARRA-funded projects were announced for Washington state, nobody expected actual high-speed rail, but we still hoped for moderate improvements in running time and on-time performance. While the Point Defiance Bypass will eventually deliver such improvements for the Seattle to Portland runs, the route to Vancouver remains a relative disappointment.

However, on the subject of running time, it is possible to make some significant improvements with little capital expense.

#### South of the Border

Once Positive Train Control (PTC) is operational, much of the class 4 track today (speed limit 79 mph) could be upgraded to class 5 (speed limit 90 mph). This can lead to time savings of up to 5 minutes between Marysville and the Canadian border. →

The amount of capital work required depends on the section of track, with some sections potentially requiring nothing more than PTC activation and others requiring high-cost work like rebuilding track, new swing-nose switches, crossing gates, etc. Class 5 operation at 90 mph would also require schedule adjustments to be approved by the host railroad (BNSF).

WSDOT recently received federal grant funds for a Service Development Plan which will cover the improvements above. Completing the plan would take 14 - 18 months. After that funding has to be secured, multiple stages of design completed (including environmental review) and eventually construction can commence. How long until we actually see 90 mph operation is unclear, but, judging by the fact that ARRA projects were completed in about 7 years, we are looking at a minimum timeframe of 2-3 years, if not longer.

## North of the Border

A major time sink in BC is the approach to Pacific Central Station (PCS). The yard, which together with the station is owned by VIA Rail, has hand-operated switches and 15 mph speed limits. Currently it is typical to run trains at 10 mph as the engineer has to stop at least twice, to allow for them (or the conductor) to get off the train and adjust a switch before continuing. The result is that the Cascades typically takes about 10 minutes to cover the distance between PCS and Commercial Drive, while the local rapid transit system, SkyTrain, covers the same distance in 2 minutes.

Installing electronic signals and switches and improving track for higher speeds has more benefits than just improving Cascades service:

1. Electronic signals would improve safety - and can prevent derailments in the yard.
2. Service would be improved on The Canadian and The Rocky Mountaineer, trains that run primarily or entirely within Canada.
3. Since the assets are owned by VIA Rail, which is a crown corporation, it makes sense for the Canadian government to pay for them, as opposed to them improving the assets of BNSF, a private corporation. BNSF owns the track north of the border as well, up until the VIA yard (with a section leased out to CN, though still owned by BNSF).

Together these can lead to time savings of 5-8 minutes.

All in all, we have 10-13 minutes of time savings that are achievable with minimal capital expenditure. This would make Cascades rail service relatively more attractive than most bus service which has a scheduled running time of 4 hours, the same as the train today.

These projects would also provide a nice stepping stone for BC, and a great reason for us to establish collaboration with the BC government on improving passenger rail service.

*The statements and opinions expressed in this article are those of Anton and not necessarily those of AAWA.*



## RPA Northwest Regional Meeting in Cut Bank, MT

by Mark Meyer, RPA Representative

This is Montana's year to host the Northwest Division meeting of the Rail Passengers Association (including Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington). The conference was held at the Elks Lodge in Cut Bank on Saturday, May 18. Cut Bank is less than 50 miles east of Glacier National Park and had not previously hosted an RPA gathering.

Cut Bank's heyday was directly following World War II, when it was Montana's oil capital (once home to four refineries). Because it is east of the protection provided against arctic air masses by the Rockies and is a mere 25 miles from the Canadian border, Cut Bank has garnered its share of "fame"

throughout the years as reporting the nation's coldest temperatures. Weather is highly changeable, but the average high temperature in May is 62 (*above zero, that is*).

Despite late arrivals from train 8 that day, the meeting was very successful. More details in the next newsletter. A wide variety of speakers attended the event, including state and federal elected officials and their representatives, representatives of BNSF Railway, and Jim Matthews, RPA president from Washington, DC. Highlighted at the event were the challenges facing Amtrak long distance services, especially the need to retain onboard amenities and the need for new equipment to replace the aging Superliner fleet. On a lighter, upbeat note, the 90th anniversary of the Empire Builder (1929-2019) was also celebrated with cake and a new poster from J. Craig Thorpe.



### Rail Service to Small-Town America

Part of the reason for having the conference in small-town Montana was to expose those from the larger cities of Washington and Oregon to a small community and its limited services where Amtrak is the only intercity public transportation. Lodging in Cut Bank is limited, but for those who might want to explore the area, a short Amtrak day-roundtrip to Cut Bank is easy from places like Whitefish, West Glacier (Belton Chalets), Essex (Izaak Walton Inn), and East Glacier (the Glacier Park Lodge was not yet open for the season, but other motels were).

In 2018, the Washington Post officially named the Empire Builder stop of Glasgow, Montana as "The Middle of Nowhere," citing its (lack of) proximity to major population centers in the continental United States. While a bit less than 300 miles from Glasgow, Cut Bank similarly provided that type of atmosphere along with genuine Montana hospitality. Many All Aboard Washington members made the scenic trip on the Empire Builder through the Cascades and Glacier National Park to the foothills of the Rockies at Cut Bank, Montana. You can now brag that you have detrained at the Northernmost passenger station in Amtrak's long-distance network!

### Dave Catterson to Speak at June 8th AAWA Meeting

Joint Transportation Committee coordinator Dave Catterson will speak with us at our June 8th meeting at River's Edge in Tumwater from 11:30 AM - 3:00 PM. More info at: [www.aawa.us](http://www.aawa.us)



## Whistle Stop

### All Aboard Washington hosts meeting for the Legislative Rail Caucus

*by Luis Moscoso*

The Legislative Rail Caucus (LRC) asked AAWA to organize the first "Whistle Stop" meeting of Rail Caucus stakeholders on March 5th. The goal was to discuss issues previously identified during the LRC luncheon held at the Capitol earlier in the Legislative Session. Loren Herrigstad, former President of AAWA, delivered a video presentation of our Yakima Valley Initiative to restore passenger rail service from Seattle/Auburn to the Tri-Cities, the former route of Amtrak's Empire Builder. Since 2018, AAWA has been promoting this service through a proviso submitted by the LRC to the Transportation Appropriations Budget, the "East-West Intercity Passenger Rail System."

Unfortunately, because of last minute Floor Sessions in both the House and Senate that night, Rail Caucus Legislators were unable to attend their own "Whistle Stop." But nearly 20 other stakeholders did turn out, and they spent several hours discussing AAWA's proposal, as well as the larger issue of expanding passenger rail throughout the Northwest. Feedback from representatives of the WSDOT Rail Division, NW Ports, Solutionary Rail, RR Workers and other interested stakeholders stimulated rich discussion from many perspectives. Bill Moyer of Solutionary Rail and veteran rail consultant Tom White provided succinct explanations of the need for an incremental



approach to expanding Amtrak Cascades now to support development of higher-speed rail in the future. Most importantly, we must address the immediate crisis of climate change by reducing pollution from car and truck emissions by moving people and products along rail corridors.

Most stakeholders stayed beyond the scheduled meeting to continue brainstorming how they and the LRC should advance these discussions about these many topics. The idea is to provide a much-needed opportunity for stakeholders and legislators to undertake a fuller discussion of all things rail: freight mobility, safety, commuter & intercity transportation, tourism, and so much more.

## New Year, New Look

*by Charlie Hamilton*

The AAWA Board of Directors has approved a new logo, which was designed from the ground up with several considerations in mind:

- **Simplicity:** Simple logos are more easily recognized by viewers than complicated logos (think Apple, McDonald's, Mercedes-Benz; these are among the best-known logos in the world)
- **Ease of reproduction:** This logo is much easier to print and display on paper and screens of various sizes than the current logo (people may see it in forms as small as business cards and phone screens, but also as large as banners and PowerPoint presentations)
- **Flexibility:** Though it serves as a solid base, this new logo is general enough that it can incorporate other elements and symbols (people, crossing gates, stations, etc.) when needed, especially on larger materials like posters

We believe that a simpler logo can help us engage the audiences we need to achieve success.

## Reflection on Tom Martin

by Lloyd Flem

As NARP/RPA has given a Passenger Rail Advocacy Award (named after John R. Martin, longtime and universally-respected president of NARP) to individuals in their efforts to support rail passenger service in the USA, AAWA has given an award in honor of Thomas J. Martin to people in Washington who have substantially supported or participated in rail passenger service in our state.

Tom Martin was age 84 when he passed away peacefully at the home of his daughter, Elizabeth Kutter of Olympia, in December of 1997. Mr. Martin had an electrical engineering degree from the University of Illinois, a master's from MIT, and reached the rank of Lt. Colonel in the US Air Force. He worked for many years at Boeing, was active in professional engineering organizations, and in 1989 received the Washington Society of Professional Engineers "Engineer of the Year" award. Tom was active in the Episcopal Church, the Metro Advisory board, and, as written in his obituary, the Washington Association of Railroad Passengers (now AAWA).

I was honored to speak at Tom's memorial Service. His wife of 61 years, Dorothy, thanked me for my statements about Tom and for the floral arrangement given by our organization. In a private note, Mrs. Martin said, "Your group was what Tom missed most," after failing health limited his activities. "Just glad that he could participate in it. It was his main concern in life."



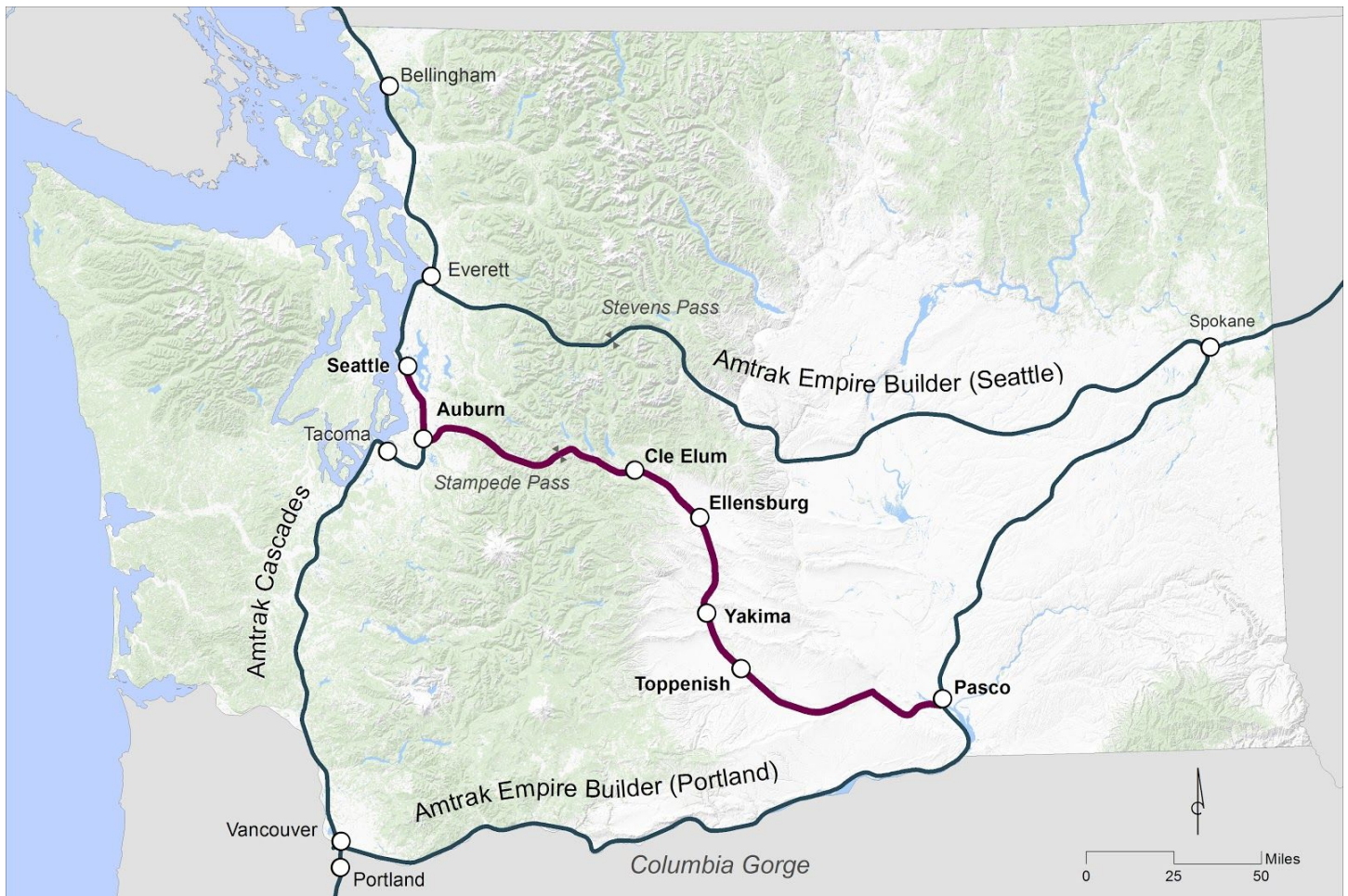
### AAWA Award Honors Tom Martin

Mr. Martin left over \$10,000 to our organization. AAWA has since had other bequests, but at a time when finances were very thin, his was both an honor and a tremendous boost to our organization.

In Tom Martin's memory, we decided in 1999 to create an award in his honor acknowledging persons who were instrumental in advancing passenger rail in our state. Some early recipients were such state legislators as Rep. Ruth Fisher, Sen. Pat Patterson, and Sen. Linda Evans Parlette. In the early years of the Tom Martin Award, the physical award consisted of a hand-made wooden bellows device which, when squeezed, made sounds like that of a traditional steam train whistle. In recent years, more conventional custom-made plaques have been the tangible part of the award. In the last several years we honored Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen and Sen. Dan Swecker. Non-legislators have also been cited by AAWA. They include Joni Earl in 2016 for "Many Years of Exceptional Service as CEO of Sound Transit;" Amtrak's Mark Flanagan in 2017 for his years of matchless service for passengers the Amtrak Cascades; and last year, former Rep. Luis Moscoso, for his founding of the Legislative Rail Caucus and his strong efforts to include passenger trains as part of our state's transportation mix. AAWA has of course not let Luis "escape" from rail work, as he now serves as AAWA's Government Affairs Director.

The late and greatly missed Jim Hamre was closely involved in choosing recipients of the Tom Martin Award, and regrettably the above list of recipients is incomplete. Efforts will be made to acknowledge all who have gone the second mile to help create and maintain passenger train service in Washington and have been so recognized by All Aboard Washington.





## 2019 Session Wrapup

by Luis Moscoso

*Luis is a former three-term former Washington State Representative, Vice Chair of the House Transportation Committee and co-founder of the Legislative Rail Caucus. Luis has over 20 years of experience in transportation, including as President/Business Agent of ATU 1576 with Community Transit, 5 years as Organizational Consultant on Community Transit's Executive Leadership Team, and 2 years on the PSRC Transportation Policy Board. He is a former VP of All Aboard Washington, and has served as AAWA's Government Affairs Director since 2018.*

The 2019 Legislative Session adjourned *sine die* as scheduled on Sunday, April 28. AAWA's sole ask this Session was our proviso to study restoration of passenger rail service through the Yakima Valley that was served by the Amtrak Empire Builder until 1980. AAWA started work on this project over 3 years ago, commissioning a study from Central Washington University Geography Dept. which was presented to the Legislative Rail Caucus in 2017, and is available at <http://bit.ly/StampedePass>

Rail Caucus Co-Chair Legislators submitted a proviso in both the 2018 and 2019 Transportation Appropriations budgets "to conduct a study of the feasibility of an east-west intercity passenger rail system." The proviso was cut out of the 2018 bill but was successfully passed in 2019. The research called for in the bill will be conducted by the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC), whose members consist of legislators from the Senate and House Transportation Committees. The JTC will issue a Request For Proposals (RFP) and hire a consultant this summer who will conduct the research and provide a report by June 2020. AAWA has been assured of a position on the →

Advisory Group that will work with the consultant and the JTC in this project. AAWA's research team will assist in promoting this work with the public, local government, and business interests that have already expressed a desire for passenger rail service along the corridor.

The legislation calls for the following elements:

- Projections of potential ridership;
- Review of relevant planning studies;
- Development of a Stampede Pass corridor alignment to maximize ridership, revenue, and rationale, considering service to population centers including: Auburn, Cle Elum, Yakima, Tri-Cities, Ellensburg, Toppenish, and Spokane;
- Assessment of current infrastructure conditions, including station stop locations;
- Identification of equipment needs; and
- Identification of operator options

The most important aspect of this study is the acknowledgment by the Legislature that expansion of passenger rail service by the state-owned Amtrak Cascades to eastern Washington should be re-evaluated for a number of reasons. Thirteen years ago the Statewide Rail Capacity and System Needs Study recommended that WSDOT develop the Amtrak Cascades service as part of its high-speed intercity rail program. That report also pointed out that the State has had "a longstanding involvement in passenger rail service, investing heavily to develop the Amtrak Cascades intercity rail service."

Since Amtrak Cascades service began 20 years ago, and the earlier studies calling for higher-speed and intercity passenger rail in Washington, it is now time to act on the obvious benefits of inter-city Cascades passenger rail. The public and Legislature have come to realize that high-quality intercity passenger rail service offers an alternative to automobile and air travel.

We need your help in our efforts to secure funding for frequent and reliable intercity passenger rail service.

Please join AAWA, sign up for our email list, and follow us on social media. Details are available at our website:

<https://www.aawa.us/>

## Upcoming Events

- 6/8 AAWA General Meeting, River's Edge, Tumwater
- 7/13 AAWA Meeting, Blaine, Tentative, Details TBA
- 8/10 AAWA Picnic, Rainier Vista Community Park, Lacey
- 9/14 AAWA General Meeting, Pasco, Details TBA
- 10/12 AAWA Board Meeting, Kelso, Details TBA
- 11/9 AAWA Committee Meetings, Venue TBD
- 12/14 AAWA General Meeting, Olympia

**See our website at [aawa.us](http://aawa.us) for the latest news!**



## Don't Forget to Renew Your AAWA Membership!

All Aboard Washington (AAWA) is a nonprofit organization that promotes a safe and robust passenger rail system in our state. We are confident that, with your support, Washington State passenger rail will continue to advance.

Please renew today and help us make our goals a reality. You may renew online at <https://aawa.us/renew/> If you are not a member, we ask that you join at <https://aawa.us/join/>

You may also send a check, with the form below, to

All Aboard Washington  
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Thank you for your continued support.

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