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## Testimony in support of HB 2287 Addressing the assessment of rail safety governance in Washington state January 15, 2020

I am Lloyd Flem. This is my 36th year of working with the Washington legislature in support of intercity passenger train service for our state. I applaud the steady, strong growth in legislative support for passenger trains as part of multi-modal transportation.

HB 2287 is another commitment by you toward better and safer rail travel. Despite the loss of two close friends, Jim Hamre and Zack Willhoite, in the tragic Amtrak 501 derailment on Dec 18, 2017, I submit that rail, including our Amtrak Cascades trains, remains the safest mode of passenger travel.

Three men died on that grim December morning, the only rail passenger fatalities in our state in the past 50 years. But well over 500 people lose their lives on Washington highways every year. Passengers on America's trains are 17 times less likely, per million passenger miles, to die than in private motor vehicles. Highway victims' friends and families are as bereaved as the friends and families of Jim, Zack, and the third man who did not survive. Unfortunately, traffic deaths are so common that they scarcely make the news. Here we are, 25 months later, still properly working toward a "never again" repeat of the Amtrak 501 disaster.

HB 2287 seeks to improve the institutional framework that can help ensure a "never again". But the cause of the three fatalities and 57 injuries was only in part due to insufficient institutional oversight. The direct cause was extreme excessive speed. On other multiple rail passenger deaths incidents nationwide in recent decades, the common variable was excessive speed, whether 105 MPH in a 50 zone near Philadelphia, or 79 in a 30 zone in our case, not who owned the tracks, who operated the service, or who built the equipment involved. But improved institutional coordination, as sought by HB 2287, is important, and AAWA fully supports it.

Jim, Zack, and probably some others on Amtrak 501 were on board simply to enjoy the "first run". Our friends were effective rail advocates. They were vital as key officers in All Aboard Washington in helping push for increased, and modestly faster, service. Were they with us today, they would be pushing Luis and I to work with you in restoring service on the Point Defiance Bypass.

Why were they on board the initial run on December 18? Because they were rail fans as well as rail advocates. Nothing wrong with that.

Jim and Zack were Pierce County residents. Tacoma was "their" Amtrak station. They were deeply pleased that the new Tacoma Amtrak stop will be in Freighthouse Square, directly adjacent to bus and light rail facilities.

AAWA would like to see some kind of remembrance within the new Tacoma station honoring those we lost on December 18, 2017. This will be a permanent reminder of our state's continuing commitment to rail safety and the dedication of rail advocates that have helped make Washington a national example of commitment to passenger train service.