



All Aboard Washington Comments on December 2019 Draft of *2019 Washington State Rail System Plan*

1. Introduction

- 1.1. All Aboard Washington (AAWA) wishes to submit comments supporting the effectiveness of this 2019 Washington State Rail System Plan, especially with regard to Amtrak Cascades and other state-supported passenger rail service.
- 1.2. AAWA is a nonprofit advocacy group representing those with a common interest in rail transportation. We champion safe, reliable, frequent, competitive, and convenient passenger rail services that meet the needs of all Washingtonians. We are especially active supporters of intercity passenger rail service and high-quality intermodal transit connections that make it easy to get anywhere.
- 1.3. AAWA appreciates WSDOT's continued efforts to update our state rail plan. We believe this particular rail plan is of great significance, given the momentum that is building for both expanded state-supported passenger rail services and a new regional high-speed rail system.
- 1.4. We urge WSDOT to incorporate comments received on the draft Rail Plan, and to create a prioritized list of projects, as well as an executive summary of the rail system's greatest needs.

2. Creating a Fully-Integrated, Multimodal Transportation System

- 2.1. AAWA believes that the current fiscal environment, after the passage of Initiative 976, provides elected officials and State agencies with an unparalleled opportunity to re-consider how transportation is planned and funded. It is clear that Washington voters are dissatisfied with "transportation as usual." Our state has already made significant investments in more efficient, environmentally-friendlier, and less expensive ways of moving people and goods. The voters are telling us to do things differently and make the most of these existing investments. We agree with the draft Rail Plan that, "A comprehensive, multimodal planning approach, which considers rail along with highways and public transportation and incorporates land use considerations, is essential to achieving this vision." We expect that a comprehensive multimodal plan will be created with information from this 2019 Rail System Plan.
- 2.2. The draft Rail Plan should recognize the need for:

- 2.2.1. State investment to create a fully-integrated transportation system, making the best use of existing investments in roads, ferries, air, public transit, active transportation, and passenger rail service.
 - 2.2.2. Convenient connections between existing transportation infrastructure.
 - 2.2.3. Continued commitments to transportation investments that are environmentally-sustainable, and which promote mobility justice.
 - 2.2.4. Prioritizing maintenance, while incorporating ongoing maintenance and life-cycle costs into funding decisions for new infrastructure.
 - 2.2.5. Fare payment policies and media (such as smart cards or mobile payment) that promote seamless entry, travel, exit, and transfers between multiple modes.
 - 2.2.6. A cooperative, comprehensive information sharing system between all of our state's public transportation agencies and those of our neighbors.
- 2.3. AAWA believes that the Rail Plan should include a specific plan for upgrading Amtrak Cascades service as a catalyst for, and eventual feeder to, ultra high-speed ground transportation. As a federally-designated high-speed rail corridor, the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor should be seen as a practical alternative to driving and flying. We are supportive of high-speed rail as an asset with long-term value for this corridor. In the shorter term, our existing Cascades service should be used to maximize our region's freedom of movement. The Rail Plan should reflect a commitment to fostering a region-wide train-riding culture.
- 2.4. AAWA believes that the Rail Plan should reflect a commitment to improving the Cascades at a reasonable cost and within a reasonable amount of time. Such improvements should include:
- 2.4.1. Implementing passenger train service to the Yakima Valley, as is currently being studied by the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee.
 - 2.4.2. Implementing additional station stops where needed to improve service, such as:
 - 2.4.2.1. Blaine, where previous studies have indicated a significant need for, and support for, a stop that would benefit the community and the region..
 - 2.4.2.2. Auburn, especially in conjunction with Yakima Valley service.
- 2.5. The Rail Plan should include a commitment to working with local communities and proposed County Rail Districts to cooperate on rail improvements.

3. Maintaining and Achieving Previous Goals

- 3.1. As discussed above, AAWA feels that all transportation planning should be re-evaluated in the current fiscal environment. However, we believe that many of the goals and projects listed in the 2014 Rail Plan (especially those in Table D.1) should be maintained.
- 3.2. We recognize that funding may be limited at present. However, the State Rail Plan should include all projects that will benefit passenger and freight rail services, especially Cascades. Thus, these can and should be funded as finances permit.
- 3.3. AAWA strongly urges that the performance objectives listed in the 2014 plan be maintained, including:
 - 3.3.1. Run-time performance objectives of 2:30 from Seattle to Portland and 2:37 from Seattle to Vancouver, BC.
 - 3.3.2. Continue incremental implementation of increased service: Seattle to Portland, 13 round trips per day; Seattle to Vancouver, British Columbia, four round trips per day.

4. Responding to Our Environmental Crisis

- 4.1. There is no time to waste in reducing our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Every government agency involved in transportation and land use matters must act boldly in support of our 2030 targets for state-wide GHG reductions. Active transportation and rail transit are by far the least carbon-intensive forms of transportation, and they can support each other when properly coordinated. Walkable communities with rail connections offer inhabitants and visitors environmentally conscious travel options without sacrificing cultural vibrance or economic productivity. We must support transit options that make more of these sorts of communities viable in our region.
- 4.2. The draft Rail Plan ought to consider:
 - 4.2.1. How to quantify the environmental benefits of rail services so that they can be factored into cost-benefit analyses of our overall transportation network.
 - 4.2.2. In keeping with our expectation of a comprehensive plan, how a mix of effective land use and transportation policies and practices can be applied to our rail network to minimize environmental costs and maximize economic productivity, geographic harmony, and cultural connectedness.

5. Mobility Justice in a Booming Region

- 5.1. AAWA believes it is important for Washingtonians on both sides of the mountains to be well-connected with safe, reliable, frequent, and fast transportation that is reasonably priced. While no one mode can do all of this perfectly, we believe providing a plethora of good options is the right thing to do. State-supported intercity trains are an excellent way to provide a useful transportation service that connects communities of all sizes with existing rail infrastructure. If planned and executed well, these services can be time competitive with driving, price-competitive with flying, and less carbon intensive than either.
- 5.2. AAWA has supported Cascades for decades because of its ability to conveniently serve cities small and large. The Puget Sound's phenomenal economic growth since the 1990s has made this kind of service even more useful for our region's travelers, who make up the most air-competitive U.S. train travel market outside the Northeast. While high-speed rail will certainly offer tremendous reductions in travel times, it will neither be cheap nor local; ticket prices for high-speed rail are universally higher than competing services, and even the most localized service patterns envisioned for our high-speed rail system lack stops in several markets.
- 5.3. Therefore, we believe the draft Rail Plan should consider:
 - 5.3.1. How access to public transportation or the lack thereof benefits or harms communities across the state according to need, and how to quantify or describe these benefits and costs.
 - 5.3.2. How changes to transportation funding sources, amounts, and priorities will improve or hurt individual communities and our state's economic health.
 - 5.3.3. The various audiences of each transportation mode and route, so that benefactors of investment in each mode can be well understood.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1. All Aboard Washington is proud to be the voice of Northwest rail passengers. We look forward to continued engagement with WSDOT through its various public input processes and expect to see great things come of this 2019 State Rail System Plan.

Respectfully submitted,
Luis Moscoso, Government Affairs Director
All Aboard Washington
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