

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

Northwest Rail News

First Quarter 2020

**AAWA**
ALL ABOARD WASHINGTON

Welcome, [AAWA](#) and [AORTA](#) members!

Baker County Train Petition Signed by 250+

By Jon Nuxoll

Over 250 northeastern Oregonians have signed a petition asking for restoration of rail passenger service. Most of them come from the Baker County community of Halfway, some 54 miles from the nearest stop, Baker City.



The petition effort is headed by Spring Bartlett and Judith Fisher of Halfway, following AORTA's October "Amtrak to the Blues and Boise" meeting in La Grande. "What I came away with [from the meeting] was that this is going to be a

grassroots effort," said Bartlett.

They gathered petitions until February 5 and were on Baker County commissioners' February 15 agenda, to ask for their endorsement of bringing back passenger trains. They will then approach state legislators. They have also sent a letter to U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkeley, Bartlett said.

"It's really not a controversial issue," she said. Visiting family members is most often cited as a reason to bring back service, but not the only one. With an older population, she said, "it would be nice to take the train for medical things in Boise or Ontario." Weather along I-84, especially Ladd Canyon, adds to the need for passenger trains.

Bartlett said she is hoping to revive and work with other local community advocacy groups in support of the effort.

February AAWA Events in Olympia

AAWA will be hosting two major back-to-back events in Olympia at the end of February: the Whistle Stop dinner and Legislative Action Day.

The Whistle Stop dinner is a Rail Caucus event scheduled for 6:00 PM at the Waterstreet Café on **Tuesday, Feb. 25th**. Legislators and AAWA board members will gather to discuss the need for a new transportation vision in Washington, AAWA's 2020 efforts, and the future of intercity passenger rail in the Pacific Northwest.

AAWA's Legislative Action Day will happen the next day, **Wednesday, Feb. 26th**. We will meet with state legislators from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM, and we will be hosting a Rail Caucus lunch at noon. Plan to arrive between 8:00 AM and 9:30 AM to receive materials, learn more about the day's events, and receive tips on how to lobby in Olympia.

Welcome To Our First Joint Newsletter!

You're reading AAWA and AORTA's first jointly-produced newsletter. This has been many months in the making and we're glad to be cooperating on this project to provide important updates to our members across the Pacific Northwest. We're happy to take any feedback you may have at editor@aawa.us, or at our respective mailing addresses. Enjoy!

AAWA
PO Box 70381
Seattle, WA 98127-0381

AORTA
P.O. Box 2772
Portland, OR 97208-2772

AAWA Testifies For Rail Safety Legislation

The impacts of the tragic December 18, 2017 Cascades 501 derailment on the Point Defiance Bypass are still being felt in Olympia. In response to the incident, which took the lives of three passengers, including our valued colleagues and friends Jim Hamre and Zack Willhoite, the House Transportation Committee (HTC) convened on January 15. The committee heard testimony on [HB 2287](#), a bill intended to improve cooperation and coordination among the large number of responsible state and federal agencies.

AAWA's [Luis Moscoso](#) and [Lloyd Flem](#) endorsed the bill on behalf of AAWA. We agreed that the lack of coordination between federal, state, and local agencies and private entities was a contributing factor to the disaster, and we applauded the proposed improvements in the institutional framework for rail safety. However, we emphasized that passenger trains are very safe, many times safer than private motor vehicles. We also emphasized that the excessive speed in this incident — 79 MPH in a 30 zone — would have brought about disaster, regardless of who owned the track, who operated the trains, or what specific passenger car equipment was involved.

We concluded with two additional requests:

1. Return to full service on the Bypass as soon as possible, and
2. Place a tangible, permanent memorial to those who lost their lives at the new Freighthouse Square Amtrak station in Tacoma. Jim and Zack were Pierce County residents who would have used the new station.

Among the others testifying were representatives of Lakewood and DuPont, whose safety concerns included grade crossings and train speeds through their communities. Rail labor and a small freight railroad also asked to be among those involved in the proposed consultant study HB 2287 would mandate.

Response from HTC members was affirmative, to both HTC staff and the prime sponsor Rep. Mari Leavitt, whose 28th District included the site of the derailment. There were few questions from HTC members. Our feeling is our testimony and that of other speakers was heard and respected. Based on our observations, we feel the bill will pass the 2020 Session of the Washington Legislature.

Bob Krebs is New AORTA President

On January 18, the AORTA Board of Directors elected long-time board member Bob Krebs of Salem as the new AORTA president, replacing Jon Nuxoll who served for three years and will remain active in the organization. Bob is an Oregon native with more than 50 years of experience in the transportation and



tourism industry. He served as president/CEO of Grand National Tours, Inc. a nationally licensed transportation broker. He developed and operated many educational and marketing programs for passenger carriers (airlines, bus lines, and Amtrak). He has managed special train and tour operations in North America, Europe and Asia.

In 2004, Bob retired from the Oregon Department of Transportation as the intercity passenger rail coordinator where his activities included the Amtrak Cascades project, renovation of railroad stations in the Willamette Valley, and improvements to the Oregon intercity bus network. He currently serves as an elected member of the Salem-Keizer Transit Board as well as a volunteer on the board of several other non-profit transportation and public service organizations.

A Busy 2020 Ahead for AAWA

All Aboard Washington has several upcoming events throughout 2020! More info and registration is available at <https://www.aawa.us/events/>

March in Yakima

AAWA is coming to the Yakima Valley! All Aboard Washington and the Greater Yakima Chamber of Commerce are co-sponsoring a Passenger Rail Summit **Saturday, March 14** from 11:00 AM – 2:00 PM at the Yakima Convention Center. We plan to discuss the history of East-West passenger rail in the Yakima Valley, what the current project would look like, and the progress of the East-West study that seeks to make it a reality. The general public, business owners, and state/local government officials are invited to attend.



April in Tacoma

AAWA is the host of this year's Rail Passengers Association Northwest Division meeting, which will be held at UW Tacoma on **Saturday, April 18** from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Be ready for an exciting discussion on the need for a broad-based vision for our conventional and high-speed rail network in the Pacific Northwest, a panel on improving multi-state and regional cooperation among passenger rail agencies and advocacy organizations, and reports from AAWA, AORTA, and the RPA Northwest Division.

August Picnic in Lacey

AAWA's annual picnic has a new date: **Saturday, August 15th**. Save the date!

AORTA News Shorts

As promised, **the new AORTA website is up and running** at the same web address:

<https://www.aortarail.org/> The site will continue to be enhanced and updated in the following months, but all the most important functions are available, including membership and donation information.

AORTA is proud to be one of the few (if not the only) state passenger train advocacy groups in the U.S. with a physical office space! As a reminder, **AORTA members meet every Wednesday (except holidays) from noon to 1:00 PM in Suite 253 of Portland Union Station**. Whether you're in between trains or have a specific issue to discuss, everyone is welcome (and complimentary snacks and beverages are available). The suite is also available other times by appointment. Located on the second floor near the Amtrak crew office, access is available by stairs or elevator near the Amtrak baggage claim area.

Urban and Regional Planning student **Jeff Broderick and his group at Portland State University continue to work with AORTA** in an attempt to build partnerships with other non-profit transportation-related entities in the area. A focus of the work is how to attract younger people to causes championed by AORTA.



PSU student Jeff Broderick gives a presentation at AORTA's office at Portland Union Station.

AAWA Comments on Draft State Rail System Plan

All Aboard Washington has commented on the Draft 2019 Washington State Rail System Plan to WSDOT for evaluation. AAWA is pleased with some of the new ideas incorporated into the plan, and we expect that the 2019 plan could serve as an excellent foundation for our region's rail system with some careful consideration of our ideas.

Following are excerpts from AAWA's comments. The full document is available at <https://www.aawa.us/railplan/>

Creating a Fully-Integrated, Multimodal Transportation System

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.

The Rail Plan should recognize the need for:

- 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.
- Convenient connections between existing transportation infrastructure.
- Continued commitments to transportation investments that are environmentally-sustainable, and which promote mobility justice.
- Prioritizing maintenance, while incorporating ongoing maintenance and life-cycle costs into funding decisions for new infrastructure.
- Fare payment policies and media (such as smart cards or mobile payment) that promote seamless entry, travel, exit, and transfers between multiple modes.
- A cooperative, comprehensive information sharing system between all of our state's public transportation agencies and those of our neighbors.

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.

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:

- Implementing passenger train service to the Yakima Valley, as is currently being studied by the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee.
- Implementing additional station stops where needed to improve service, such as:
 - Blaine, where previous studies have indicated a significant need for, and support for, a stop that would benefit the community and the region.
 - Auburn, especially in conjunction with Yakima Valley service.
- The Rail Plan should include a commitment to working with local communities and proposed County Rail Districts to cooperate on rail improvements.

Maintaining Previous Goals

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.

Rail Plan (continued on page 5)

Rail Plan (continued from page 4)

AAWA strongly urges that the performance objectives listed in the 2014 plan be maintained, including:

- Run-time performance objectives of 2:30 from Seattle to Portland and 2:37 from Seattle to Vancouver, BC.
- Continue incremental implementation of increased service: Seattle to Portland, 13 round trips per day; Seattle to Vancouver, British Columbia, four round trips per day.

Responding to Our Environmental Crisis

Active transportation and rail transit are by far the least carbon-intensive forms of transportation, and they can support each other when properly coordinated.

The Rail Plan ought to consider:

- How to quantify the environmental benefits of rail services so that they can be factored into cost-benefit analyses of our overall transportation network.
- 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.

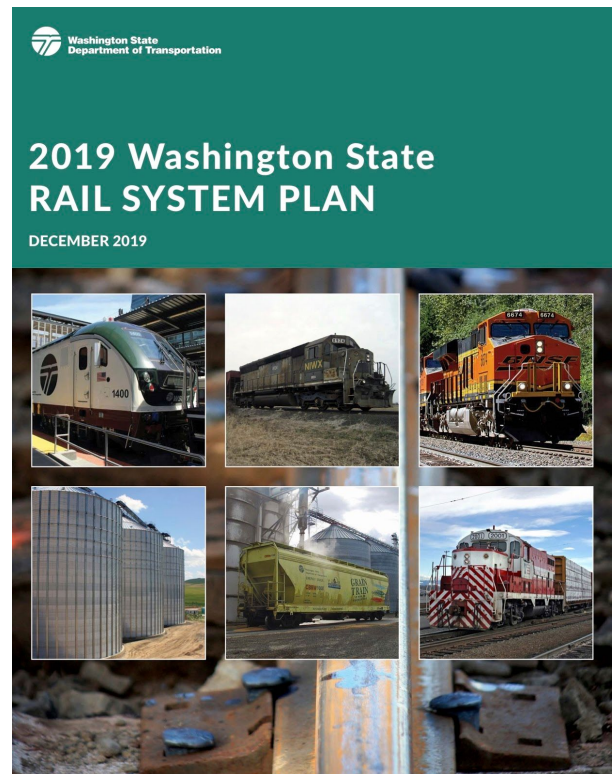
Mobility Justice in a Booming Region

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.

Therefore, we believe the Rail Plan should consider:

- 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.

- How changes to transportation funding sources, amounts, and priorities will improve or hurt individual communities and our state's economic health.
- The various audiences of each transportation mode and route, so that benefactors of investment in each mode can be well understood.



Winter Weather Delays Amtrak

After an abnormally dry November and early December in the Pacific Northwest, precipitation played catch-up by mid-December and resulted in landslides covering BNSF's Seattle subdivision between Tacoma and Olympia/Lacey. As a result, buses replaced Amtrak *Cascades* and *Coast Starlight* service between Seattle and Portland for two days over the weekend prior to Christmas. These particular slide-related service interruptions in Tacoma will end when Amtrak trains begin using the "Point Defiance Bypass" (via Lakewood and DuPont).

AORTA Greets PDX Holiday Travelers



Station Greeter Volunteers: Human AORTA members Dan McFarling and Jeff Wells with canine volunteer, Gill.

For the second year in a row, AORTA volunteers performed a “Station Greeter” service at Portland Union Station during the winter holiday busy season. In 2018, volunteers were there for both Thanksgiving and Christmas; in 2019, for Christmas on December 21, 22, and 23. This year, the information booth near the snack bar was open from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM each day, and offered free information about local and national passenger train advocacy challenges to Amtrak passengers. Printed material from AORTA, the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) and All

Aboard Washington (AAWA) was distributed, along with bright blue AORTA tote bags and Empire Builder 90th anniversary posters. Participating AORTA members were Dave Crout, Dan McFarling (and his able therapy dogs Parker and Gill), Mark Meyer, Mike Morrison, Marian Rhys, and Jeff Wells.

The station was packed to capacity on the first day, December 21, because of the mudslide between Olympia and Tacoma, requiring passengers to be bussed down from points north of the slide. They arrived long before the train departure time, necessitating a long wait in Portland and giving AORTA volunteers a large captive audience.

Passengers comprised the typical mixture you find dealing with the public: some crackpots, and some

really interested. The highlights included a young couple from Cordova, Alaska who flew to Seattle and were taking the train (their first time on the train) all the way to San Diego and loved it so far; a surprising number of people riding the 3:00 PM northbound Amtrak Cascades train (that goes through to Vancouver, BC); a lady from China who was taking Amtrak for the first time with her American husband and was amazed (since she was familiar with Chinese high speed rail) that the Coast Starlight would be averaging less than 80 km/hr; a lady from Leavenworth, Washington (who doesn't use the Internet) who swears that the only safe way across the Cascade Mountains is in a train piercing them through an 8-mile long tunnel instead of chancing the likes (especially in the winter) of US 2 or I-90; a young woman planning to go off to college at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, Washington, who was eager for service to be expanded to that city; and a lady from Libby, Montana who rides the Empire Builder to Portland at least six times a year to access her beach house on the Oregon Coast because she hates to drive and her husband can't. All in all, quite a cross section of people, but nearly all enthusiastic rail passengers.



Marian Rhys and Dave Crout.

After the station greeter event and removal of the Christmas model-train display from the Union Station lobby, a rack with train advocacy literature was permanently set up at the kiosk, increasing our visibility and hopefully drawing in new passenger rail supporters.

Don't Forget to Join or Renew Your Membership!

The continuing work of AORTA and AAWA is made possible only through your dues and generous donations. Remember, AAWA and AORTA are certified 501(c)(3) non-profit consumer organizations under IRS provisions. Dues and donations to AORTA and AAWA may be tax-deductible as charitable contributions for income tax purposes.

Please join or renew today and help us make our goals a reality. Thank you for your continued support!

All Aboard Washington (AAWA)	Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA)
<p>AAWA is a nonprofit organization that promotes a safe and robust passenger rail system in Washington State.</p> <p>Join, renew or donate online at https://www.aawa.us/support/</p> <p>You may also send a check, with the form below, to: All Aboard Washington PO Box 70381 Seattle, WA 98127-0381</p>	<p>AORTA encourages the development of a balanced and integrated system of transportation for people and freight within and beyond the State of Oregon.</p> <p>You may join or renew online at https://www.aortarail.org/get-involved/</p> <p>You may also send a check, with the form below, to: Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates P.O. Box 2772 Portland, OR 97208-2772</p>
<p>Name:</p> <p>Address:</p> <p>City/State/ZIP:</p> <p>Phone:</p> <p>Email:</p>	<p>Name:</p> <p>Address:</p> <p>City/State/ZIP:</p> <p>Phone:</p> <p>Email:</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> Address Change</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal <input type="checkbox"/> Address Change</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Corporate</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$200 Leadership</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Contributing</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$75 Sustaining</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$50 Family</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Basic</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$18 Senior</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$12 Student (electronic newsletter only)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Extra Donation of \$_____.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> \$1,200 Steward - Monthly (\$100/month; up to 5 persons)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$500 Corporate (up to 10 persons)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$250 Sponsor (up to 5 persons)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$100 Steward (up to 5 persons)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$30 Family (up to 5 persons)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$25 Individual</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> \$18 Living Lightly</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Extra Donation of \$_____.</p>
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Please send newsletter via postal mail only.</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Please send newsletter via postal mail only.</p>

*AORTA members - NOTE: Although we are sending out this hard-copy newsletter to everyone on our mailing list, to let everyone know that we do have a newsletter again, **this will be your LAST PAPER COPY** of the newsletter, unless you either let us know that you prefer a hard copy, or we have no email address for you. If you are not in one of those categories, you will continue to receive our newsletter, but only electronically. Please call AORTA, or fill out the address change form and check the box saying "Please send newsletter via postal mail only."*

Northwest Events Calendar

Wednesday, February 26, 2020, 9:00 am
AAWA Legislative Action Day
Capitol Building, Olympia

Saturday, March 14, 2020, 11:00 am
AAWA Central Washington Passenger Rail Summit
Yakima Convention Center
10 North 8th St., Yakima

Sunday, March 29, 2020
Rail Passengers Association RailNation:DC
Alexandria, VA
See <https://www.railpassengers.org/> for details.

Saturday, April 18, 2020, 11:15 am
Rail Passengers Association NW Meeting
University of Washington Tacoma Student Center
1710 Market Street, Tacoma

AAWA/AORTA Northwest Rail News
All Aboard Washington
PO Box 70381
Seattle, WA 98127-0381

Saturday, May 9, 11:00 am
AAWA General Meeting
Bellingham

Saturday, July 11, 2020, 11:15 am
AAWA Board Meeting
Olive Branch Cafe and Tea Room
2501 East D St., Tacoma

Sunday, July 19, 2020
Pacific Northwest Economic Region Summit
Big Sky, MT
See <http://www.pnwer.org/> for details.

Saturday, August 15, 2020, 11:00 am
AAWA Picnic
Rainier Vista Community Park
5475 45th Ave SE, Lacey

Every Wednesday (except holidays), noon
AORTA Meeting
Portland Union Station, Suite 253