



# AORTA Bulletin

A publication of the  
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

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Since 1976



Photo courtesy of TriMet

## WES commuter rail is on track

by Tom McCann

In October 2008, Oregon's first true commuter rail service is scheduled to become part of the Portland area's future, carrying passengers around the metropolitan area and helping remove traffic from the region's congested highway network.

It represents the long efforts of local government, civic and transit advocacy groups and could become the start of a comprehensive regional commuter rail network.

The service, known as Westside Express Service or WES, will operate between Beaverton and Wilsonville, using a combination of new and re-

built trackage. This includes portions of the former Southern Pacific Tillamook Branch from Beaverton to Tigard, and the former Burlington Northern (Oregon Electric) line from Tigard to Wilsonville. These lines are currently operated by the Portland & Western Railroad.

Service is tentatively scheduled to begin October 20. TriMet will operate it in partnership with the Portland & Western. The initial schedule has 16 round trips (eight each during the morning and evening rush hours). Trains will operate in both directions every 30 minutes, and will take approximately 27 minutes to run between the two endpoints.

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

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A non-profit citizen advocate group working to educate the public about the need for safe, fiscally responsible, environmentally sound transportation. Incorporated as the Oregon Association of Railway Passengers.

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## **From the editor**

I wish to apologize for the lateness of this issue of the AORTA Bulletin. The beginning months of 2008 have been a busy time for AORTA. From planning and hosting the largest-ever NARP Region 8 Passenger Rail Conference in the early part of the year, to moving AORTA's office to a new location in Portland's historic Union Station in May, time to work on gathering and editing news stories for the Bulletin has been scarce.

I hope you enjoy this issue. As always, AORTA welcomes your comments and suggestions about issues of concern to you, as well as sources for news and opinion about the state of rail and transit in Oregon.

*Jim Long, Editor*

## **AORTA thanks NARP Region 8 conference sponsors**

On February 23rd, 2008, AORTA hosted the Region 8 spring conference of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, at the Multnomah Hotel Embassy Suites in Portland, Oregon. The 168 attendees enjoyed speeches and presentations from US Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Amtrak's Western Director of Government Affairs Jonathan Hutchison, and NARP Associate Matthew Melzer. AORTA thanks these dignitaries for their travel and time to attend the conference.

AORTA also extends its sincerest gratitude to the many sponsors who helped make the 2008 conference a success:

- LTK Engineering Services, [www.ltk.com](http://www.ltk.com)
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- Portland Streetcar, [www.portlandstreetcar.org](http://www.portlandstreetcar.org)
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The conference would not have been possible without the generous support of these sponsors, and AORTA thanks them all.

## **AORTA moves to Union Station**

*by Donald Leap*

AORTA has moved to Room 253 in Portland Union Station. Lack of space at the Stevens Building office and a change in building management motivated the AORTA board to pursue new office arrangements. The new location offers increased space and improved transit, Amtrak rail and Thruway bus access.

After a search process led by directors Dan McFarling and Fred Nussbaum, a small number of potential sites were identified. Thanks to the board, and the courtesy of Cathy Boshears of Income Property Management and Diana Holuka of the City of Portland, an agreeable set of terms and time frame for the move were negotiated.

Thanks also to Dave Jannuzzi, Jim Long, and everyone else who helped bring about this successful and positive office relocation.

## WES commuter rail is on track

*(continued from page 1)*

At the north end of the route, service will begin at the Beaverton Transit Center, providing direct cross-platform connections to two MAX routes (the Gresham-Hillsboro Blue Line and the Beaverton-Portland International Airport Red Line) and 11 bus lines. To reach the transit center, construction crews laid a new stretch of single track along SW Lombard Street in downtown Beaverton from a connection with the existing rail line.

Three intermediate stops are currently under construction. These are Hall-Nimbus, off Hall Boulevard near the Washington Square shopping complex; Tigard, on SW Commercial Street at the Tigard Transit Center; and Tualatin, along SW Boones Ferry Road on the west side of the downtown area. Park-and-ride lots will be available at all stops except Beaverton Transit Center. The Tigard stop will also provide direct connections to five TriMet bus routes. The Wilsonville terminus will provide connections to three bus systems: South Metro Area Regional Transit (SMART); Canby Area Transit (CAT); and Salem Area Transit (Cherriots).

TriMet and the Oregon Department of Transportation sponsored a demonstration service on portions of this route as early as 1998. On Sep. 12-13, excursion trains operated over the Portland & Western freight line in conjunction with the opening of the Westside MAX light rail line between Portland, Beaverton and Hillsboro. They connected with MAX light rail at the Beaverton Creek light rail station using an adjacent freight spur. The trains used equipment provided by the Willamette & Pacific RR and the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society.

The project has received both state and federal funding; construction began in October 2007, and included the reconstruction of most of the

grade crossings along the route, as well as installation of new signals, concrete crossties and continuous welded rail. A new two-main-track alignment was added through Beaverton at the north end of the route. The newly-added track diverges from the existing former SP track at Lombard Street. Construction crews also built a maintenance shop in Wilsonville adjacent to the rail station.

The project also included a major right-of-way relocation through downtown Tigard. The existing former OE line was relocated next to the former SP line, forming a single two-track right-of-way. The old OE right-of-way was removed. A new connection between the two lines was installed north of the Tigard stop. P&W also received a Connect Oregon grant from the state to construct a small freight yard along the former SP line south of the Transit Center.

TriMet has purchased three single-level diesel multiple unit (DMU) railcars and a cab-equipped trailer coach from Colorado Railcar. The rolling stock will enable them to provide both one-car and two-car trains. The design is based on Colorado Railcar's Aero DMU, which demonstrated in the Portland area in November 2002. The first cars were shipped from the builder in early June. Route testing is tentatively scheduled to begin after June 15.

The \$117.3 million project is funded by:

- \$58.65 million in federal funding
- \$35.34 million from state lottery bond proceeds
- \$15.56 million from TriMet and GARVEE bonds
- \$7.75 million from local cities and Washington County

TriMet and Washington County are contributing a total of \$4.1 million toward annual operating costs.

Meanwhile, officials in the Salem-Keizer area are looking into an eventual extension of this route all the way to Salem.

# Short Lines from Around Oregon

## Southern and Coastal Oregon

### Fortress deal raises questions

by Greg Stiles, courtesy of the Medford Mail Tribune

Medford, OR – Private equity firm Fortress Investment Group, owner of Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad's cash-strapped parent RailAmerica, raised eyebrows in mid-March when it dropped a big wad of cash on a quirky piece of Southern California real estate. Fortress unveiled a "confidential" agreement with singer Michael Jackson in a deal that allowed the pop icon to retain possession of Neverland Ranch in Los Olivos, Calif.

The move helped Jackson come up with the \$24.5 million he needed to keep Neverland from going to auction and puzzled representatives of the wood products industry, which lately has been at odds with CORP.

The local shortline operator shut down its Coos Bay line last September and on January 15 reduced service over the Siskiyou Summit to two days a week, prompting protests from shippers and government officials, including Gov. Ted Kulongoski. RailAmerica has balked at spending money on repairing tunnels on the Coos Bay line and said it is losing money running trains between Eugene and Weed, California.

"Obviously, Fortress has the resources to do what is right as it relates to CORP and RailAmerica investing in the infrastructure on the Siskiyou and Coos Bay lines," said Bob Ragon, executive director of the Douglas Timber Operators and spokesman for the Coos-Siskiyou Shippers Coalition. "But they've chosen not to make those investments. It's good to know Fortress has significant resources to invest, but until someone at CORP or RailAmerica makes the decision to bring those lines up to standards needed to operate, we're left out in the cold."

Last month, RailAmerica offered to spend \$2.9

million on tunnel repairs. However, it wanted assistance in raising the rest of the \$20.4 million for other needed infrastructure improvements to the line. Kulongoski responded that once work was done on the tunnels, the state would release \$5 million in grant money ticketed for a new railyard in Winchester, north of Roseburg.

Coalition members Timber Products and Roseburg Forest Products have complained to the Surface Transportation Board, and Kulongoski's letter pitching a compromise to the Fortress unit has gone unanswered.

When U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (D-Oregon) queried RailAmerica Chief Executive John Giles about a response to the governor's letter during a hearing earlier this month, he was told, "We're working on a response."

DeFazio told the Roseburg News-Review that the amount Fortress poured into Neverland "is just about what it would cost to fully repair the rail line from Coquille to Eugene."

Ragon said service over the Siskiyou has been sporadic.

"The service is poor, worse than ever before, and Roseburg Forest Products and Timber Products are having a very difficult time getting products shipped over the Siskiyou Line," he said.

Dave Schott, spokesman for the Southern Oregon Timber Industries Association, said the region desperately needs attention paid to local rail service.

"If (Fortress) has extra cash right now," Schott said, "I could point out a couple of tunnels that could use some sprucing up and maintaining."

Also in mid-March, RailAmerica announced it was moving its headquarters from Boca Raton, Fla., to Jacksonville, Fla.

## Willamette Valley

### ODOT adds Thruway service

**Salem, OR** – On April 18, ODOT Director Matt Garrett approved the addition of a third Amtrak Thruway bus schedule operating roundtrip between Eugene and Portland effective May 12, 2008. The new schedules connect with trains 513 and 516 that the State of Washington added in July 2006.

Northbound schedule 5516 originates at the University of Oregon, with continuing service to all Willamette Valley Amtrak stations except Oregon City. Bus 5516 connects at Portland to Amtrak Cascades train 516 operated by the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Southbound schedule 5513 will allow Amtrak passengers arriving on Amtrak Cascades train 513 to continue their journey to Willamette Valley stations (excluding Oregon City) with a significantly reduced layover, compared to the previous schedule.

Combined with three rail roundtrips, the new Thruway service brings total Willamette Valley daily frequency to six trips in each direction. ODOT Rail Planner Bob Melbo said, "We believe patronage will grow as more options become available to the traveling public."

The northbound schedule 5516 also benefits Coos County and western Lane County residents by allowing passengers from Thruway schedule 8309 operated by Porter Stage Lines to transfer at Eugene for travel on Thruway 5516 and Amtrak Cascades train 516. Passengers originating in Coos Bay or Florence now have same-day through travel connections to destinations as far north as Bellingham, Washington or Vancouver, British Columbia.

### TriMet sets ridership records

TriMet MAX and bus ridership broke several new records in the spring of 2008. More than two million trips were taken on MAX and buses each week of April, the first time TriMet has topped two million trips for weekly ridership. Nearly 69,000 more trips were taken weekly

during April 2008, as compared to April 2007. And 5,400 additional daily trips were taken on transit during the morning rush hour (7-9 a.m.), as compared to April 2007. This adds up to an 11.6 percent increase over April 2007.

TriMet ridership went on to set more records in May:

- A record 8.9 million monthly rides were taken during the month.
- Weekly rides on MAX and buses were up 4.4 percent from May 2007, averaging 2,064,800 rides. This record is also a 3.3 percent increase over the April 2008 weekly figures.
- Weekday trips increased to an average of 225,200 bus rides and 112,100 MAX rides. Bus increased 4.4 percent and MAX increased 1.6 percent from May 2007.
- Weekend ridership averaged 217,500 bus trips and 160,800 MAX trips. Bus increased 7.6 percent and MAX increased 11.2 percent from May 2007.
- More commuters are riding during morning rush hour (7-9 a.m.): an additional 5,400 trips were taken as compared to May 2007, an 11.2 percent increase from May 2007. This brings the total morning commute trips to 52,500.
- New record trips taken during evening rush hour (4-6 p.m.): an increase of 6,000 trips as compared to May 2007, a 10.2 percent increase. This adds up to 65,100 daily commuter trips in the evening.

"This continuation of record ridership shows that riders are looking for alternatives to driving and ways to help offset high fuel prices," said TriMet General Manager Fred Hansen. "Our transit system provides an alternative to getting around without always having to drive."

Please notify AORTA  
if you have a *change of address*.  
Make sure your *dues* are paid for 2008.  
*Dues information on page 2.*

## **CORP signals intent to abandon**

*By Elise Hamner, The World, Wed. May 14, 2008  
www.theworldlink.com Used by permission.*

Coos Bay, OR – The Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad has given notice it's ready to abandon the Coos Bay Rail Line.

The news came as no surprise this week to the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay and others who already have seen signs of disuse. Trees blown down by winter storms are visible on the tracks between Mapleton and Florence. Sand has drifted over sections of the almost 3-year-old port-owned, CORP-leased rail spur on Coos Bay's North Spit.

Martin Callery, port director of communications and freight mobility, said the sand, if left on the tracks, could sink into the ballast and eventually throw the rail and ties out of alignment.

"There used to be weekly inspections, and CORP sent in a crew to shovel sand off the line," Callery said.

That hasn't happened in months. RailAmerica's Western region vice president, Bob Jones, said earlier this spring that no company inspectors had checked the tracks over the winter.

Callery recently flew over the tracks and looked at the line from public access points with staff from the transportation consulting firm R.L. Banks & Associates. The checks are part of the port's due diligence effort to try to wrest control of the rail line away from CORP.

"There were only two small slide areas that we saw from the air," he said.

One was between Florence and Lakeside, the other on the north end between Eugene and Swisshome.

The port hasn't heard from railroad officials for a couple of months, and Callery doesn't believe they've made efforts to maintain the tracks since closing the line in September.

"At this point in time, communication is attorney to attorney," he said.

CORP's parent company, Florida-based RailAmerica, filed the abandonment notice Monday afternoon with the railroad-regulating U.S. Surface Transportation Board.

The 79-page document listed who and what are to blame:

- Three tunnels are dangerous.
- The Union Pacific, which owns and leases the tracks to CORP from North Bend to Coquille, won't help pay for repairs.
- The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay refused to pay into CORP's proposal to fix and subsidize the railroad.
- Shippers likewise wouldn't pay.
- The state of Oregon repeatedly refused to discuss public-private partnership offers from CORP, unless the railroad were to open the line first.

"Accordingly, following the rejection of its most recent proposal by the State of Oregon on April 21, 2008, and subsequent statements by UP indicating that it has no intention of participating financially in any plan to save the Coos Bay Rail Line, CORP has begun the process of seeking authority to abandon the line," the document said.

The company says it won't reopen the 136-mile rail line. It said in legal documents it intends to start the formal process to abandon the tracks and tunnels within three years. The filing came in response to a demand by the STB last month that the railroad justify why it shouldn't be forced to fix the tunnels and reopen the tracks or give up ownership. The STB characterized the track closure as an unlawful abandonment.

In Monday's filing, RailAmerica contended it did invest in its tracks and tunnels, so much that from 2003 to 2007 CORP spent 28 percent of the annual gross freight revenues just on normal maintenance. In 2006, the company said, it spent 32 percent of its \$2.93 million in revenues for maintenance.

The filing is just the first step in abandonment, but apparently not a formal notice of intent to walk away. That could come mid-summer.

Company officials weren't readily available to comment Tuesday. RailAmerica's assistant general manager of engineering, Patrick Kerr, said he wasn't able to say much about the situation when asked late Tuesday afternoon if the company intends to sell the line or rip up and recycle the steel tracks.

"I think that just gives us all those options," he said.

No other company or public entity can step in immediately to repair tunnels and tracks or open the line. Engineers already have said bids for any summertime tunnel repairs had to have

been issued this spring. Without willing partners, CORP didn't move on repairs.

The Port of Coos Bay has attorneys working to file a feeder line application to the STB to force the railroad to fix the line or sell it. That will take months. The port will have to submit a plan for buying and operating the line for three years. Even then, the port has no intention of running the railroad. It would seek another

company to do it.

In a May press release, Senator Gordon Smith, R-Ore., said, "The railroad's choice to abandon these tracks is leaving our rail-dependent communities out to dry." Smith continued, "If they will not repair them, we need to move ahead with a plan to get another carrier in and get these tracks up and running."

## Train of Thought Editorial

✍ By Ross B. Capon, Executive Director  
National Association of Railroad Passengers

### Oil prices underline need for more passenger trains

Transit ridership is at its highest level in 50 years, as reported recently on NBC Nightly News. There have been many other news reports about growing Amtrak and transit ridership. Most stories also have highlighted the historical underinvestment that prevents Amtrak and transit authorities from dealing with much more growth in the near term, and the budgetary problems that are forcing transit service reductions even as more people want to climb on board.

Today's GM announcement about the closure of four more plants should send a clear message to Washington: we need a rapid and long-overdue ramping up of investment in Amtrak and transit to give people jobs when other parts of the transportation industry are retrenching and to let Americans leave their cars at home when they want to—which they increasingly do. The time to invest in trains is now. Nationwide, Amtrak ridership is up 11% for October-April, the first seven months of FY 2008, compared with the same period a year earlier.

American Public Transportation Association (APTA) reports that transit trips rose 3.3% in the January-March quarter, compared with a year earlier, with light rail up 10.3% and commuter railroad trips up 5.7%. Preliminary data indicate an even bigger increase in April.

Meanwhile, the Federal Highway Administra-

tion (FHWA) says March vehicle miles traveled (VMT) on the nation's highways fell 4.3% from a year earlier, "the sharpest yearly drop for any month in FHWA history... The estimated data show that VMT on all U.S. public roads have dropped since 2006." In addition, some small airlines have shut down, many small cities are losing air service, and major airlines plan big service reductions.

Last year, NARP released its Grow Trains Campaign to bring intercity passenger rail service to over 300 cities nationwide. In our June 25, 2007 news release, we correctly predicted the current days' events when we said that "the average price of gas [is] expected to top \$4 per gallon in the near future."

The Grow Trains Campaign is needed now more than ever. Congress and the Administration need to make it happen.

### Let us hear from you!

AORTA welcomes opinion pieces from all members, and all viewpoints. If you have an opinion you would like to share regarding passenger rail and transit service in Oregon, or elsewhere, please send your submission to:

AORTA Bulletin Op-Ed  
Union Station  
800 NW 6th Avenue, Room 253  
Portland, OR 97209-3715  
or [oregonrail@aol.com](mailto:oregonrail@aol.com)

The editorial staff of the AORTA Bulletin reserves the right to determine which submissions will be published, and to edit submissions for clarity and to fit available space.

## House passes passenger rail bill

*Washington, DC* – On June 11, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 6003, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, by a veto-proof margin of 311-104. An anti-rail amendment by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) failed, and Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) withdrew his amendment which would have jeopardized funding for Amtrak NEC corridor tunnel improvements. The bill now goes to conference committee to reconcile differences with the Senate counterpart, S.294.

According to a report from the Congressional Budget Office, H.R. 6003 authorizes the appropriation of an estimated \$14.9 billion over the 2009-2013 period for rail programs administered by Amtrak, states, and the United States Department of Transportation. That amount includes \$9.9 billion for grants to Amtrak to cover its operating expenses, capital projects, and debt repayment; \$4.3 billion in grants to states for rail projects, including high-speed rail; and \$520 million for grants to states and Amtrak to reduce rail congestion. Assuming appropriation of the amounts specified and estimated to be necessary, the CBO estimates that enacting the legislation would cost \$12.4 billion over the 2009-2013 period.

## AORTA Timetable

- June 28, 2008 ... AORTA Board of Directors meeting, 12:00 noon, AORTA Office, Union Station Room 253, 800 NW 6th Avenue, Portland Oregon.
- July 17, 2008 ... AORTA Portland Chapter meeting, 5:30 pm, AORTA Office, Union Station Room 253, 800 NW 6th Avenue, Portland Oregon.
- August 2, 2008 ... AORTA Board of Directors meeting, 12:00 noon, AORTA Office, Union Station Room 253, 800 NW 6th Avenue, Portland Oregon.
- August 21, 2008 ... AORTA Portland Chapter meeting, 5:30 pm, AORTA Office, Union Station Room 253, 800 NW 6th Avenue, Portland Oregon.
- October 16-18, 2008: NARP Directors' Meeting, Lloyd Center DoubleTree Hotel, Portland Oregon.
- October 20, 2008: Washington County Commuter Rail Service begins operation between Beaverton MAX Station and Wilsonville.

All members are welcome. Please phone 503-642-4077 to confirm meeting details.

## Rail passengers applaud passenger rail bill passage

*by Ross B. Capon*

*Washington, DC* – The House of Representatives is to be commended for its overwhelming approval today of H.R. 6003, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act. The bill, which passed on a veto-proof margin of 311-104, aims in a number of ways to improve and expand U.S. passenger train service. That is exactly what the public has wanted for years. If properly funded through annual appropriations, tax credit bonds, cap and trade revenues, or some combination of these, this bill will allow for significant investment in rolling stock and tracks, including the addition of needed track capacity at key "chokepoints" where Amtrak and freight trains both suffer delays.

With Amtrak and mass transit ridership going off the charts as Americans respond to high prices for gasoline and jet fuel, it is disappointing that over 100 members voted against the bill.

It is equally disappointing that the Bush Administration issued a veto threat because, in the Administration's words, the bill "provides scant opportunity for competition on existing Amtrak routes and does not include provisions that would condition Amtrak's funding based on progress on reforms."

To put those comments into perspective, one must remember that the Amtrak Board of Directors for a long time has been composed exclusively of Bush appointees, that the Secretary of Transportation is a board member, and that existing law gives plenty of opportunity for the Administration to kill individual routes, which would make even less sense now than a year ago, but which is what some Amtrak critics consider a key "reform." Also, Amtrak largely operates over tracks of private railroads which have made clear their opposition to other carriers performing the same function.

The need for expanded train service is clear. Today's action shows that Congress wants to make that happen. The crucial test will be its ability to provide the necessary funding.