

# AORTA Bulletin

A publication of the  
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

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Since 1976

## ARC: "Liquidate Amtrak" Congress says: "No!"

In 1997 Congress adopted a bill which requires that Amtrak attain operational self-sufficiency by January 2003.

On Friday, November 9, the Amtrak Reform Council (ARC) met and approved a resolution on a 6-5 vote, formally notifying Congress that it, the ARC, believes Amtrak will continue to require operating grants after December, 2002.

Under the 1997 legislation, this would have meant that Amtrak, and the ARC, would each be required to develop a plan for liquidation within 90 days. That deadline would have been February 7, 2002.

*continued on pg 2- "Amtrak threatened"*

## Memorial Coliseum: a NW Transportation Center?

*by Thomas McCann*

A July 12 guest editorial in *The Oregonian* by **AORTA** member Jim Howell ponders the possibility that Portland's Memorial Coliseum could become a passenger rail hub.

Memorial Coliseum, constructed in the late 1950s, served as the city's major sports arena until the completion of the adjacent Rose Garden in 1995. It continues to serve as the venue for a variety of sports events, concerts and other activities, but is in danger of disappearing as the owner of adjoining land seeks to redevelop the land it occupies. The two facilities, along with adjacent shops,

*continued on pg 3- "Transportation Center"*

## Waiting for the bus?

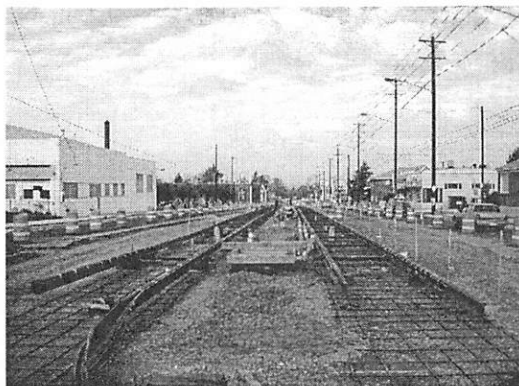
*by Thomas McCann*

If you travel by Tri-Met bus, you may find yourself standing at your bus stop wondering "what time does the next one arrive?" And what if you're waiting along a route that has limited or no off-peak service?

Thanks to **AORTA** Director Jim Howell, Tri-Met riders are reaping the benefits of a project to post convenient bus schedules at stops throughout metropolitan Portland – not just at larger stops with shelters, but even at stops that are nothing more than a sign hung on a utility pole.

The signs provide information on when the bus arrives, where it goes, and a small

*continued on pg 8- "Bus Schedules"*



Portland's North light rail line construction on Interstate Ave.- reaching toward Vancouver, WA! (November 10)

## Association of

### Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

PO Box 2772, Portland, Oregon 97208-2772

A nonprofit 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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## **AORTA promotes travel by rail**

**AORTA** members helped staff the Amtrak booth at Rose Festival of Floats at Memorial Coliseum on June 9 and 10. Ken Mantel, Dan Block, Tom McCann, Rich Carlson, Ed Rynerson, Jennifer McFarling and Dan McFarling worked with Amtrak's Rose Blackson and Scott Hurd.

This was one of the most successful booths **AORTA** has participated in, with a near continuous flow of visitors. Many reported on recent trips, or planned rail trips. It was not unusual to have two or three simultaneous conversation at the booth. The public appeared both well-informed about and interested in rail travel. The new *Cascades* service is really making a difference in Oregon!

During the exhibit your editor had a conversation with a lady from Holland. "From Holland? Well, then you have good rail service!"

"No, we don't," was the reply. "Trains don't run on time, and the service is very poor," she stated. She said Holland had good train service, but privatization has ruined it.

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has received in its entire history.

One of the lessons our nation should have learned on Sept 11 is that we need a balanced transportation system.

Another lesson is that it is relatively easy to turn an airplane into a very dangerous weapon. As terrorists have demonstrated before, it is also relatively easy to turn a highway vehicle into a dangerous weapon.

But given the inherent safety of trains, it is nearly impossible to kill large numbers of people with a train. The train is not a "weapon of choice." It is a highly efficient means of transporting people and materials from one place to another.

The demand that Amtrak expend considerable effort writing a plan for its own demise was inherently unfair, and incredibly badly timed. ■

### **Amtrak threatened . . . continued from pg 1**

After submission of liquidation plans, Congress would have had 90 days in which to act on the plans. But now that Congress has instructed Amtrak to stop work on any liquidation plan, attention may be redirected toward possible restructuring.

One small piece of good news from the ARC action was that DOT Secretary Mineta voted against the resolution. This Bush Administration rep appropriately argued that, because of the turmoil created by the events of Sept 11, more time should be allowed.

Resolutions requiring self-sufficiency for airlines, highways and waterways have never been considered. In fact, Congress has appropriated more money for the airline industry in the past 9 months than Amtrak

restaurants and parking facilities, make up the Rose Quarter complex.

Howell believes the Coliseum, located on the east bank of the Willamette River across from downtown Portland, could more usefully become a transportation hub, serving regional and intercity rail services, future high speed services, commuter trains and light rail.

Tri-Met's east-west Blue Line/Red Line light rail corridor runs along the south side of the Rose Quarter. Construction crews are building the new Yellow Line up Interstate Avenue along its west side. The lines will join at the southwest corner of the complex.

The site, Howell says, has tremendous potential to accommodate a major headquarters hotel, office towers, residential high rises, shops, theaters and restaurants. The centerpiece would be Memorial Coliseum with its main structure turned into the concourse for a below-ground rail station, with platforms for all of the services previously mentioned.

Trains would reach the station on tracks diverging from the existing Union Pacific Railroad main line that runs along the base of the bluffs across Interstate Avenue from the Rose Quarter. The tracks would run in a tunnel underneath Interstate Avenue.

South of the Rose Quarter, the tunnel would continue under the city's central eastside industrial district to a connection with UP's former SP main line north of Brooklyn Yard. The tunnel would also include two tracks for freight, away from the station platforms.

Howell contends that the existing Portland Union Station complex on the west side of the Willamette River is poorly situated for service expansion, particularly high-speed rail. It is increasingly hemmed in by adjacent residential and commercial building construction as the City of Portland redevelops industrial land around it.

Also, its approaches include two bridges across the river, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway's Willamette River Draw-bridge about five miles north of the station, and the UP-owned Steel Bridge immediately south of it. Both of these are lift spans that open frequently, and the Steel Bridge is nearly 90 years old.

He believes that the Rose Quarter site, given its emergence as the hub of MAX services, is the most accessible site in the Portland metropolitan area. By 2004, light rail trains to and from Gresham, Hillsboro, Portland International Airport and north Portland will converge here, and future MAX extensions south into Clackamas County could easily run down the east bank of the river, instead of crossing the Steel Bridge into downtown and then recrossing south of there.

Memorial Coliseum is actually two structures: a concrete bowl covered by an immense glass box. Four large freestanding columns support the outer structure, which encloses a space seven stories high and covers an area of more than two city blocks. Howell asks us to imagine this space as the main concourse of a modern passenger railway station.

A core structure would replace the bowl, housing restaurants, theaters and a variety of shops and services. This structure could also support a large hotel with a tower rising out of its center. A top-story observation deck would provide panoramic views of the city, the river and the surrounding mountains.

The High Speed Rail Investment Act, currently under consideration in Congress, could provide up to 80 percent of money to build the station's rail infrastructure. This act would provide for the development of high-speed corridor services throughout the U.S.

A similar project is currently underway in New York City, where the old General Post Office building on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue next to Penn Station is being remodeled as the train station's main concourse. Built in 1913, it was

## LOCAL LINES: News around Oregon

### COASTAL TIDINGS

#### Contain pollution with a parking lot?

*Astoria-* According to *The Daily Astorian* (Nov 15), the best solution for a lot contaminated with toxic chemicals may be to cap it with pavement. Developers hope to use the empty lot between Second and Third Streets, along Marine Drive, for a parking lot. According to the Department of Environmental Quality, the concrete cap may be one of the best solutions to reduce exposure to the contaminated soils.

No mention, however, was made of the role automobile dependency has played in increasing problems with contaminated soils. Parking lots serve to promote the addiction, and contribute to contamination of both soil and water. A solution!? No, actually one of the primary problems.

DEQ has not yet completed their assessment of the contaminants at the site, or continues to evaluate how far they are dispersed.

### SOUTHERN OREGON SIGNALS

#### Eugene-Roseburg "light rail"

*Roseburg-* According to *The News-Review* the Roseburg City Council is dreaming about "light rail" to Eugene. According to the November 14 front page article, the council would like to see "light rail" between the two cities within the next ten years.

The (approximately) 75-mile rail line was completed by the Oregon & California Railroad Company in 1872. The line was leased to Southern Pacific Company five years later.

## EAST OREGON EXTRAS

#### Sumpter Valley rail line damaged

*Baker City-* U.S. Forest Service personnel damaged or destroyed part of the Sumpter Valley Railway, according to Ontario resident Kathleen Hanson. According to the Nov 13 *Baker City Herald*, Hanson says part of the rail line, including remnants of an old trestle, were apparently damaged during an effort to burn underbrush south of Phillip Reservoir.

Part of the former right-of-way appeared to have been bulldozed, the "rails had been pushed aside and the ties piled up into slash pile and burnt."

The Forest Service is taking the complaints seriously, and, according to the article, will be investigating.

A nonprofit organization, Sumpter Valley Railroad Restoration Inc., has exerted much effort and expense restoring part of the railway, and restoring equipment to operating condition.

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**Transportation Center** . . . *continued from pg 3*  
designed by the same architects who created the original Pennsylvania Station in 1910.

That famous structure was razed in the mid-1960s for a high-rise office complex and the new Madison Square Garden sports arena, in what many people termed "a monumental act of vandalism". Its demise sparked a preservation movement that later saved the equally famous Grand Central Terminal from a similar fate.

And think of the irony – if New York City could downgrade a railway station into a sports arena, why couldn't Portland upgrade a sports arena into a railway station? ■

**ACTION NEEDED:** Oregon's Legislature is expected to consider deep cuts in the state budget to overcome an estimated \$720M shortfall. The rail and feeder bus service are threatened. **Legislators and the Governor** must be reminded that it is **far more** expensive to reinstate service than it is to maintain existing service. *Save the Trains!*

# NE Oregon Counties Eye Oregon Rail Line

By Thomas McCann

A long-dormant railroad branch line in northeast Oregon may chug to life again if Union and Wallowa Counties have their way.

The two counties are attempting to raise enough funding to purchase the line between Elgin and Joseph from the Idaho Northern & Pacific, which acquired it from Union Pacific in 1993 and operated it until 1996. A combination of weather-related damage and a sagging forest products economy resulted in its closure. IN&P still operates the line from Elgin to LaGrande, where it connects with the UP.

The counties have offered IN&P lines \$3 million for the route, but the company has requested \$5.75 million. IN&P had earlier rejected a \$4 million offer from the counties, citing an assessed value of \$7.2 million. Meanwhile, the counties were able to block the IN&P plan to tear up the line. It had already contracted with a salvage company to pull up the rails and ties, but the counties managed to stay the operation until Dec. 14. They hope to have the purchase completed by then.

The Oregon Legislature appropriated \$2 million in lottery-backed funding last July to help purchase the line. The Oregon Department of Transportation also offered to purchase the line for \$1.89 million on behalf of the counties last summer. County spokespersons have said that if the IN&P would accept their offer, they would also try to obtain an additional \$1 million from the Oregon Economic Development program.

Reopening the line would allow two recently reopened lumber mills – the Joseph Timber Co. and Wallowa Forest Products – to resume shipments by rail. Joseph Timber, for example, is spending up more than \$100,000 annually to ship its products by truck. The line could also boost the area's tourism potential. It borders the

picturesque Eagle Cap wilderness area and passes through an otherwise roadless area along the Grande Ronde and Wallowa Rivers. Excursion trains could provide access to the region for whitewater rafters, kayakers and steelhead fishermen.

Wallowa County, which has just 7,200 residents, posted the state's worst unemployment rate twice in 2001. Reopening the rail line would provide a much-needed economic improvement and help add up to 100 additional forest products jobs to the area.

The route dates back to 1906, when it was built by the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company, which later became part of the vast UP system. IN&P, the current owner, is part of the Rio Grande Pacific network of railroad short lines. It also operates several former UP branch lines in Idaho. ■

## Register Early!

### NARP Region 8 Meeting

Saturday, March 23, 2002  
Embassy Suites Hotel  
319 S.W. Pine Street  
Portland, OR

#### The Future of Northwest Passenger Rail: *Taking Action Now*

##### Key Speakers:

The Honorable Brent Coles  
Mayor of Boise, ID  
Mr. William Greenwood,  
former CEO, Burlington Northern Railroad

Banquet and Meeting: 12:00 - 4:30  
Display booths: 9:00 am - 4:30 PM

Early registration: \$25

Join rail advocates and friends at the NARP Region 8 Spring Membership Meeting to hear Mayor Coles and Mr. Greenwood discuss the past, and the future, of rail passenger service in the Pacific Northwest. Learn what can, and must, be done to turn passenger rail into a 21st century success story!

## September 11 points to need for transportation balance

*A Train of Thought Editorial*

 Thomas McCann

Following the horrific Sept 11 attacks on New York City and the Washington, D.C. area, the airline system shut down. NOTHING flew. A look at any air traffic control screen showed no vast sea of electronic traces displaying aircraft aloft.

If you were stranded here in the U.S. or abroad, unable to fly home, or on business, or on vacation, you know full well what it was like to scramble for alternate transportation, or not scramble at all and resign yourself to staying in place until the planes flew again.

But when the airlines had to shut down, another form of intercity transportation kept right on going. Amtrak - our sometimes creaking, often much maligned, always inadequately funded national rail passenger system — ran when the airlines could not. Amtrak added cars to many regional and national trains. Some trains carried more than 500 passengers.

Amtrak honored the airline tickets for many stranded travelers seeking to get from one place to another. It provided a special train to the American Red Cross to carry emergency supplies and personnel from Washington to New York. Amtrak trains ran full; they also ran late, including circumstances when they were slowed for security reasons; but the bottom line is that they RAN.

Now the airline business, reeling from losses, has received about \$15 billion in emergency funding from the Federal government. Make no mistake; airlines should get help. They are an integral part of our economy and our national transportation network. Not to assist them in this time of crisis is to set them up for massive failures

that have already rocked our economy in the past weeks and threaten to do so in the future.

However, we must finally understand that railways also are an integral part of this national transportation network. Railways reach every corner of our country. Passenger trains, from workaday commuter runs to the high speed Acela trains on the Northeast Corridor, carry millions of people daily. Amtrak's daily ridership in the first week after the attacks increased an average of 20,000, from 60,000 to 80,000. Two months later, it continues to carry larger than normal crowds.

Yet Amtrak continues to survive on a paltry federal appropriation — paltry, that is, compared to the billions provided to the aviation and highway interests through their trust funds and through government largesse. For FY 2002, Amtrak is expected to operate with a \$521 million appropriation, all while aviation and highway spending *increased* by billions of dollars. And Amtrak is also called upon to reach self-sufficiency by FY 2003, facing the threat of dismemberment and privatization.

Even now, as Congress debates additional emergency funding for Amtrak, the proposed amounts are also paltry — less than \$2 billion, with most of it going only for safety and security improvements on the Northeast Corridor. And the legislation includes no funds for repairing or for adding rolling stock; no funds for starting new service or expanding existing routes.

Recent events have shown us the absolute need for an integrated transportation system that uses all forms to complement one

## ***Shortlines and Quotes . . .***

- Americans end more than 90 percent of auto trips in free parking spaces. But they aren't really free. Fully 50 percent of the cost of parking is paid by employers, businesses drivers patronize, and citizens. Another 40 percent of the cost of parking is paid through rent and mortgages for off-street parking at home. With everybody sharing the cost, it's no wonder that drivers have almost nothing to gain by leaving their autos at home. The problem, plus some potential solutions, at: <http://www.mlui.org/projects/growthmanagement/sprawl/dumparkedit.asp>

another. Think about it. With tighter security already implemented at airports and more on the way, many people have changed their minds about air travel. They will make others fearful, lest they too wind up as unwilling pawns on an airliner suddenly transformed into a guided missile.

We have the opportunity to correct some of the inequities of our transportation network. We must fund Amtrak at a higher level to help it improve its system, add new routes, acquire new equipment and improve its business structure. We must urge our elected representatives to support initiatives at the national, regional and state level to create high-speed rail routes and to expand the existing network.

The High Speed Rail Investment Act is already before Congress. We must urge its prompt approval and implementation. And maybe now is the time to think seriously about sharing highway trust fund money, or to set up a trust fund specifically for railways. And we should, absolutely, get rid of the absurd self-sufficiency mandate.

Many of the air corridors that have suffered are shorter ones connecting smaller, regional

cities, or routes such as the East Coast air shuttles. These are services that are or would be best provided by passenger trains. We can and must also integrate transportation modes so, for example, passengers arriving at a major airport need only walk down the concourse, pick up their bags, and board a commuter train or a high-speed intercity train to continue their journeys.

Many European cities do this, and do it quite well. Yet, only two major U.S. airports — Baltimore-Washington and Newark — have stations located on major passenger railway routes. And at each, you must transfer to a shuttle to get to the terminal.

Only two U.S. airports — Philadelphia, Pa. and South Bend, Ind. — have regular train service to and from their terminal concourses. Both are served by commuter rail systems. A few others, such as Portland, Ore., Atlanta, Ga. and Chicago, Ill. have light rail or rapid transit routes into their main terminals.

Sept. 11, 2001 has opened up our eyes to many things. Improving the passenger rail portion of our total transportation network should and must be moved toward the top of the list. ■

### ***Contact Washington D.C. today!***

Ask your Senators and Representative to support the  
**High Speed Rail Investment Act and continued funding for Amtrak**  
Write and/or call 1-800-962-3524

route map. This basic information is essential, especially for the first time or novice riders. Howell understands that transit systems cannot attract significant market share when the public has difficulty determining when and where it goes.

Howell, a retired Tri-Met planner and longtime public transit advocate, along with several **AORTA** members and friends, have posted the schedules. And he has done so largely at his own expense and without the support by Tri-Met. The transit agency has insisted that, although the idea is good, it proceed on Tri-Met's schedule and on its terms.

Howell, as a U.S. serviceman in Germany in the 1950s, noticed that every bus stop, however small, had a schedule posted.

He took the idea to Tri-Met in January 2001, and shortly received a form letter stating the project had merit and Tri-Met would look into it.

He decided to go ahead with the project on an experimental basis. Howell produced several schedule strips on paper, with a glue applied to the back. He began posting them in March. The testing revealed that paper schedules would not hold up, given Portland's often rainy weather and the day-to-day wear and tear from riders checking them.

The schedules are now produced on durable polyester strips with an adhesive backing. They fit on the small poles that Tri-Met uses at many of its stops. Some schedules have metal mounting plates for surfaces where the adhesive will not easily stick. The polyester strips have a much longer service life.

The posted schedules include a bus route map and arrival times at the closest time point before the stop. Time points are major intersections or locations, such as transit centers, where the buses stop.

Howell has shown the idea will work, and points out the strips are convenient for all stops, not just for larger ones with shelters and "bus catcher" schedule displays. The larger schedule displays are also subject to vandalism and graffiti, and are not cost-

## AORTA TIME TABLE

**Saturday, March 23, 2002**

**Save the Date!**

**Spring Membership Meeting**  
for NARP Region 8, AORTA and  
WashARP in Portland.

**AORTA's** Portland Chapter normally meets 6:30 pm, 3rd Thursday of the month, Room 208, Union Station. The **AORTA** Board normally meets on the 4th Saturday of each month. Call (503) 642-4077 to confirm.

efficient for stops that have just a posted sign.

"The places where you need the schedules the most are where the service is the worst," he said. This refers primarily to routes that have little or no off-peak service.

During a trip to post schedules along bus route #87, Howell noticed a lady at one of the bus stops. He inquired, and learned she was waiting for a bus. He informed her that bus #87 was peak hour service only; the next bus was nearly a three-hour wait! Howell gave the lady a ride to another route with more frequent service. *Editor's note: This clearly illustrates why schedules and route information are essential if transit is to build a loyal customer base.*

Howell says the biggest challenge for him and his volunteers is ongoing maintenance. This includes annual schedule changes, usually in September; replacing missing or mangled strips; and replacing strips that have had their printing worn away by riders running their hands up and down the strip checking for specific stop times. He checks the posted schedule strips about every two weeks and replaces them when necessary.

The project had, through last Sept. 24, covered about 7% of the bus stops in the Tri-Met system. This includes 627 stops, including the entire #12 and #87 lines, as well as portions of the #6, #9, #10, #17, #20, #33, #75 and #77 lines. ■