



AORTA Bulletin

A publication of the
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

Issue 121

December 1999

Since 1976

Progress made with New Pioneer

CB Hall

AORTA continues to push for restored passenger rail service along the *Pioneer* route. Progress was made recently when Amtrak representatives accepted *AORTA*'s invitation to come to Oregon and Washington to exchange information with prospective shippers regarding the potential for express services on Amtrak's Pacific Northwest trains, the *New Pioneer* in particular. The meetings, tentatively scheduled for January, are expected to get down to the specifics of potential carload volumes, routes, and logistical arrangements.

AORTA stepped up its efforts on the *New Pioneer*'s behalf over the fall, publishing an op-ed piece in nine papers, including *The Oregonian*, and simultaneously sending a detailed proposal for new service to Amtrak President George Warrington and a large number of other concerned parties.

The fruition of many months of careful analysis, the proposal includes the possibility of Amtrak service on a branched route beginning in Portland and Yakima, Washington. The two sections could join in Hinkle (near Hermiston) and proceed via southern Idaho and Wyoming to Chicago.

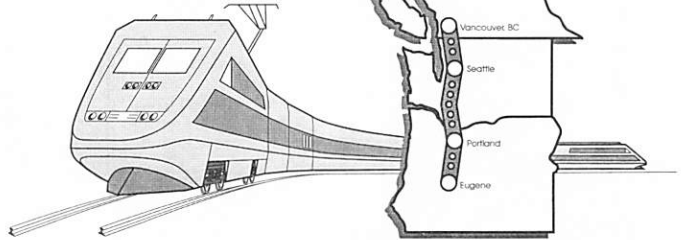
continued on pg 7.....see New Pioneer

Rail/bus program moves forward

Robert Krebs, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) intercity passenger rail coordinator, says that a major expansion of Willamette Valley passenger rail service and feeder bus routes serving eastern and central Oregon will fall into place within the next several months.

The service expansion is being financed largely by a \$10 million funding package

Keep High Speed Rail on Track!



approved by the 1999 legislature after a concerted campaign by *AORTA* and other rail and transit advocates.

Krebs is looking forward to getting the second Willamette Valley corridor train on track next spring, with an outside deadline of July 1. Several scheduling possibilities are being considered in cooperation with Union Pacific, owner of the Portland-Eugene route. Various equipment options, including temporary leasing of a Talgo trainset in advance of more permanent arrangements, are being weighed.

continued on pg 3 see Rail/bus program

Year
2000

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PO Box 2772, Portland, Oregon 97208-2772

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High speed rail lapel pins are also available. The cost for these cloisonne pins (glass-filled brass) is only \$6 (includes shipping).

***Asphalt Nation, How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back*, by Jane Holtz Kay, is also available for \$17 (includes shipping).**

A free bumper sticker will be included on pin and book orders received by 3/1.

Melbo addresses AORTA membership

Willamette & Pacific President Bob Melbo addressed the 1999 Annual Membership meeting at First Congregational Church in Portland November 20. Over 50 *AORTA* members and guests were treated to an informative and entertaining presentation on the status and potential of one of Oregon's key transportation providers. An article on Melbo's presentation will be included in the next *AORTA Bulletin*.

AORTA Board elects officers for 2000

Eugene- At a meeting in Eugene on December 18, the *AORTA* Board elected officers for the year 2000. President-elect is Dan McFarling (Aloha); Vice President, Patricia Noyes (Eugene); Treasurer, Kenneth Peters (Portland); Secretary, Jon Nuxoll (Eugene).

The board passed a motion urging ODOT to ensure that the Rogue Valley Thruway bus serve Ashland, either directly, or through a clearly coordinated "quality" connection.

Ashland (pop 19,220) is a rapidly growing (18.3% in 1990-98) transit-oriented community, with over 7,000 students at Southern Oregon University and the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (over 340,000 visitors annually).

Fred Nussbaum reported that AORTA now has official representation on Wyden's Portland-Boise rail task force.

West Coast Rail Summit planned

Portland- Rail advocates from California, Washington and Oregon will convene in Portland on February 4 and 5 to discuss the passenger rail service on the West Coast and to formulate strategies for future growth.

The tentative agenda includes the role of Amtrak West and Amtrak's national headquarters, the status of service enhancements on the *Coast Starlight*, the future of long distance service, service expansion (including a *Coast Daylight* in Southern California and restoration of service to Eastern Oregon and beyond), the Amtrak Reform Council and the role of NARP and rail advocacy on the West Coast.

State and Amtrak West officials are also expected to participate.

By summer, ODOT hopes to serve Oregonians and visitors on three Thruway round-trip bus services (Portland-Eugene) and a new Thruway running between Eugene and the Rogue Valley, in addition to the two corridor trains and Amtrak's *Coast Starlight*.

East of the Cascades, a Thruway connection between the *Starlight* (at Chemult) and Redmond is scheduled to begin service January 2. The bus will run on Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays only (see separate article). Thruway service between Portland and Boise, via Bend, Burns, and Ontario, is expected to begin in March. Service connecting the *Starlight's* Klamath Falls station with the Rogue Valley is in the planning stage, but is expected to be functional by July.

While the prospects look good, Krebs emphasizes that "we're going to need a real push. Once the new services are in place, *AORTA* and other advocacy groups will have the job of helping make sure legislators value the program."

Gov. Kitzhaber's budget request called for \$14 million in funding for the service network. The approved budget thus represents a \$4 million shortfall. Krebs said that the \$4 million was mostly coming out of the equipment budget.

Asked about Washington State voters' rejection of funding for that state's share of the Pacific Northwest passenger rail program, he said the vote had not as yet had any impact on Oregon's program. He warned, however, that "we're waiting for the other shoe to drop. We're very dependent on the Washington program.

There isn't enough business in the Willamette Valley alone to sustain the service."

[see "Need to contact Washington friends, page 8]

New Thruway Service Chemult-Bend-Redmond

Financed in part by the Oregon Department of Transportation, Amtrak Thruway bus service between Chemult, Bend and Redmond will begin on January 2. The service will operate on Sundays, Tuesdays and Fridays only, and will meet Amtrak's northbound and southbound *Coast Starlights* at Chemult. The service will also take passengers on a flag-stop basis on the positioning runs to Chemult in the morning, and back to Redmond in the evening.

Moody's raises Amtrak rating

Washington—Moody's Investment Services raised Amtrak's credit rating to A3 just before Christmas. After assessing Amtrak's finances and its Strategic Business Plan, Moody's assigned the A3 rating that means a "stable outlook" and noted that it "reflects Moody's assessment of the financial strength of Amtrak in relation to its unique operations and prominence in the U.S."

Further, Moody's noted that the rating is based on "...Moody's expectation that operational self-sufficiency will be achieved, but that the Federal government will continue to provide financial support for Amtrak's capital program."

"We are pleased with Moody's decision and proud because it reflects the private sector's confidence in our continuing commercial success as well as the strengthening relationship with our public partners," said Gov. Tommy Thompson, Amtrak's chairman of the board.

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Coos Bay rail bridge future uncertain

Coos Bay- Recent underwater evaluation of the railroad bridge that spans Coos Bay indicates the structure is not as badly deteriorated as originally thought, according to a December 2 article in *The World*.

Divers working for the Oregon DOT provided their inspection report to the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay Commission on December 1. The Port is negotiating with Union Pacific to take over ownership. Once in public hands, badly needed repairs should commence, both above and below the surface. The estimated cost of repair is over \$6 million.

Most of the Coos Bay branch line, connecting with Union Pacific in Eugene, is owned and operated by Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad. The rail line features several tunnels and trestles, and is subject to slides. The swing-span bridge, and trackage from the bridge south, are leased to the shortline operator.

With shortline operator RailAmerica planning to take over RailTex in early 2000, there are serious concerns about the future of Central Oregon & Pacific, according to AORTA Director Art Poole.

The International Paper mill at Gardner was responsible for about 40% of the traffic on the Coos Bay line. The rail line is critical to the economy of the Coos Bay area.

Failure to address urgently needed repairs will likely result in closure of the bridge, and would seriously threaten the struggling shortline. The shortline operator carried about 400 fewer carloads in 1999 than the previous year. According to *The World*, the operator hopes to sign contracts for moving logs and rock in 2000. The railroad bridge is 86 years old.

Coquille city officials want to abandon the southern end of the Coos Bay line to facilitate development of a retail complex proposed on the former Georgia Pacific site. Abandonment would further weaken the line's future potential

for growth, and possibly lock the community into future truck congestion and increased road maintenance costs.

Federal Railroad Administration officials inspected drawbridges in Coos Bay, Reedsport and Cushman November 15-18.

The Wave lowers fares

Tillamook County Transportation District (TCTD) will begin 2000 with a simplified fare structure. For most riders, the simplified structure will result in significantly lower fares.

The District will be divided into three zones. One-way fare within a single zone is \$1. The fare for two zones is \$2, and \$3 for three zones. Passengers whose trip includes the central zone are entitled to unlimited use of the Tillamook town loop route for the entire day.

The Tillamook-Portland fare has been reduced to \$10, \$15 for round trip. A monthly bus pass for in-county service is available for \$35. The pass for senior citizens and students is only \$25. TCTD expect fare revenue to increase, inspite of the reduced fares. Ridership is expected to go up significantly after the lower, simplified fare structure goes into effect. More service improvements are expected in the Spring.

More information can be obtained by calling the transit district at (503) 815-8283 or 1-800-815-8283.

Coos Bay transit service praised

Coos Bay- Ridership on the new public transportation system in Coos Bay is exceeding expectations. Patronage has more than doubled since the service started in late September.

A survey conducted by the South Coast Business Employment Corporation indicated customers like the on-time performance. The survey revealed customers want the hours of operation expanded later on weekdays and Saturday service.

The buses operate on a fixed-route loop route. The loop, with 44 stops, takes 90 minutes, and operates from 7:30 am until 6 pm. The fare is \$1 for adults, and 50 cents for children through high school.

Sue Holmes, Director of the new transit service, is planning a new bus route which will connect Bandon, Coquille, Myrtle Point, Coos Bay and North Bend.

Ed note: Unlike highways and roads, public transit (bus, rail) is available to people both with, and without, driver's licenses. Decision-makers often fail to acknowledge the high percentage of residents who do not have, or should not have, access to an automobile (close to 40%). Public transportation, unlike the automobile, can meet everyone's needs when it is made available.

SET continues work on intermodal center

Astoria- The Sunset Empire Transportation District (SET) is still in negotiations with the property owner for the proposed Astoria intermodal center. It is starting to look like it is a "go," according to SET Board Chair Jim Santee. "The biggest hang up is parking. The property owner [wants] parking from our project for another building he owns."

During a recent community meeting in Seaside, several local community leaders asked about an intermodal center in the downtown core area. Santee hopes to start working with the City and community groups to help this along. A merchants' committee would like a rubber tired trolley to serve the core area and local motels. SET offered to help out in this area as well.

South of Astoria, the City of Canon Beach is exploring the possibility of turning over their free shuttle to SET to operate.

This will still be a free shuttle, according to Santee, with the City subsidizing the cost. The shuttle is dual fuel, both LNG and gasoline. If LNG fueling stations can be built in Astoria and Seaside, this might offer the opportunity to start ordering new buses with LNG capabilities.

Trolley enjoys successful year

Astoria- The Astoria Trolley has been placed in storage for the winter. It was a very successful year. The City and community groups want more trolley equipment. A search is on for newer equipment that might be more in line with transit standards.

Astoria-Portland service planned

Jim Santee reports that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) will be releasing a request for proposals for private subsidized motor coach service between Astoria and Portland either late winter or early spring. The specific route is not yet determined, but at least one portion will be through Columbia County via Highway 30, according to Santee.

It is desired to have the service connect into the Portland MAX system. Rubber should hit the road by June. This will be a three year project. After three years, it is hoped that ridership will be sufficient to cover costs of operation.

Southern Oregon Signals

Promote transit; discourage SOVs

Ashland- The October 30 *Ashland Daily Tidings* carried an open letter from Michael Donovan, business owner and member of the Ashland Downtown Development Association. Donovan, who owns the Chateaulin restaurant, pointed out that high real estate prices are forcing members of the work force and Southern Oregon University students to seek housing in outlying communities.

Donovan stated the area must "act soon to thoughtfully implement a reliable, dependable system of mass transit for locals and visitors..." Donovan pleaded for both incentives to encourage transit use, car pooling, and shuttles, and disincentives for use of single-occupant vehicles.

Polar lander, bombers, or transit?

Talent resident Jill Iles expressed appreciation for the recent completion of the Greenway Bike Path (in Ashland?).

Iles also suggested that using a small fraction of the tax dollars now going to NASA and the Pentagon might better be spent providing public transportation.

**Round-Up city rides improved
Dial-A-Ride service**

Pendleton- Pendleton initiated new, week-day dial-a-ride bus service Nov 15, using a 14-passenger bus equipped with a wheel-chair lift. The service will operate Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, from 1 pm until 4:30 pm. The bus will serve the Northeast section of the city on Monday, SW on Tuesdays and Thursdays, SE on Wednesdays, and NW on Fridays.

Reservations are made by calling 276-6476 between 9 am and noon on the day the ride is desired. The service is available to the general public. Donations of \$1 per ride are requested.

Baker City receives funds

Baker City- Baker County received an additional \$15,886 from ODOT to help provide transportation services to the elderly and disabled. Over \$24,000 was previously awarded by the Baker County Transadvocacy Committee to Community Connection and Step Forward. The money will be used to help restore services that were cut when rural county transit funding was cut.

Consideration will be given to restoring bus service to Halfway, Richland, the Haines area, and to North Powder. Community Connection provides transit services to the general public, as well as elderly and disabled citizens. *Baker City Herald*, 11-9-99.

**Bus service to Stayton, Sublimity,
ahead of schedule**

The Statesman Journal reported that the "City Loop," a new bus line serving Stayton and Sublimity, began operating December 7. The service, which is provided with a 13-passenger van, was not expected to start until early next year.

Utilizing an 11-mile, fixed route, bus stops include Stayton Library, Stayton Mall, Santiam Memorial Hospital, Ace Hardware, Peacock Cafe (Marian Estates), Sublimity Mobile Village, Chemeketa Santiam Campus and Roth's. Hourly service is provided on Tuesdays and Thursdays only, from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm.

Over \$8,000 was raised from private donations to help cover the \$10,000 start-up costs. The vans will use volunteer drivers much of the time. Tickets and schedules are available at stores near the bus stops.

Platform work progresses slowly

Salem- Work on the south end of the Salem Amtrak station platform has been making very slow progress. While the September *AORTA Bulletin* projected a station re-opening date in September or October, opening ceremonies will be in January 2000 or later.

Passengers boarding and arriving in Salem will find the remodeled station and new platform a very significant improvement.

Shortlines and Quotes . . .

A December 19 release from the Associated Press carried the headline, "Two killed in St. Louis Train Crash." The truth, however, is that an automobile driver swerved around the traffic barrier, complete with brightly flashing red lights, and into the path of a MetroLink light rail train. The story claimed it was the "first fatal wreck in the light rail's six-year history." The truth is this is just another in an endless stream of fatalities and serious injuries that have plagued our transportation system and cost our nation billions in terms of health care, disabilities, property loss, etc., since the advent of the automobile. But the incredibly high cost from trauma associated with highway vehicles is only one aspect of the high cost we pay for the addiction.

ACAC to Meet in Portland

AORTA invites you to attend the upcoming meeting of the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee (ACAC) in Portland, February 6-7. The event will include a forum designed especially for the general public on Sunday, Feb 6, from 1:30 to 5:00 p.m. at the Benson Hotel, 309 SW Broadway, Portland. The hotel is immediately adjacent the Westside light rail line.

Amtrak West CEO Gil Mallory has been invited to give the forum's opening address. Oregon Senator Ron Wyden, Oregon Representatives Peter DeFazio and Greg Walden, and Boise Mayor Brett Coles, have also been invited to speak about plans to restore passenger service between Portland and Boise.

On Monday morning, the event will continue with a panel discussion on "Passenger Trains on Freight Railroads: How to Improve On-Time Performance." Representatives of the BNSF, UP, Federal Railroad Administration and Washington State DOT have agreed to attend, and Lee Bullock, a vice president at Amtrak Intercity, has been invited.

A breakout session is planned on the new service-standards initiative, and invitations have also been sent to Kurt Laird, Amtrak's Cascades product line manager, and to John Bennett, who is in charge of the Amtrak market-based network analysis.

Dog story

A multitude of fleas plagued the dog of a Highway Official. He fixed the problem by getting a second dog. [He has a perpetual argument for sprawling his kennel.]

The problem with increased roadway space is not that it merely induces more driving. Land smothered beneath asphalt has ceased to be available for useful purposes, which thitherto could be accomplished by shorter trips. And by environmentally healthful means of travel.

The consequence of paving is not merely inducement; it's compulsion.

New Pioneer.....continued from pg 1

Thruway bus service would link the Yakima terminus with Seattle.

Oregon would be served by passenger stops in Portland, Troutdale (Gresham), Hood River, The Dalles, Stanfield (Hermiston), Pendleton, La Grande, Baker City and Ontario.

In contrast to the Portland-to-Boise stub route proposal also under discussion, **AORTA's** long-distance *New Pioneer* has the advantages of connecting both passengers and express goods with the entire Amtrak network, including the vast markets in the East. That connectivity is essential to boost revenue and thus avoid reliance on a government subsidy for the operation.

The proposal to Amtrak noted that "the vast open space appearing on the Amtrak system map between the *California Zephyr* and *Empire Builder* routes runs counter to the pledge Amtrak has long made to maintaining a truly national system. ... Our proposal is aimed at bringing that goal of genuinely national coverage closer to fruition."

Interest among prospective large-scale users of Amtrak's refrigerated and nonrefrigerated express services is very encouraging. **AORTA** is working in several contexts to facilitate communication between Amtrak and possible shippers. The next few months will determine whether Amtrak can translate that interest into a viable business, whose revenues can support long-distance service, not simply along the *Pioneer* route, but everywhere else in the country.

AORTA is working on alternative proposals for the *Pioneer* that provide connectivity to the east. Amtrak's corporate headquarters is giving close consideration to **AORTA's** efforts.

Anyone interested in working on the *New Pioneer* initiative should contact C.B. Hall at 541-929-6086 (phone/fax) or cbhall@proaxis.com.

ExpressTrak orders refrigerator cars

ExpressTrak, which contracts with Amtrak for coordination of shipping perishable commodities on regularly schedule passenger trains, has ordered 350 refrigerated cars. The first of the 57-foot refrigerated boxcars is expected to go into operation in April 2000. The order should be completed by Fall 2001.

Amtrak can move produce across the country at speeds up to 90 mph. This saves highway maintenance costs by reducing heavy truck traffic.

Co-sponsors needed for HSR bill

An appeal is going out for rail advocates to encourage their US Senators to endorse the recently proposed Lautenberg-Jeffords HSR Act (S.1900). If passed, S. 1900 would provide about \$10 billion for high-speed rail projects, including the Pacific Northwest's Cascadia Corridor. Oregonians should be proud of Senator Gordon Smith (R-OR), who has signed on as a sponsor of this important bill.

NARP is asking Oregonians to contact Senator Wyden to urge him to also sign on as a co-sponsor of the bill. Phone calls and letters of appreciation should go to Oregon's Senator Smith, and Washington's Senator Patty Murray (D) who is also a co-sponsor. Nearly on-third of the Senate is currently "on-board."

NARP is also urging advocates to ask their Senators to co-sign a letter to President Clinton urging the full Amtrak authorized level of \$989 million in his 2001 budget. Senators Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) and Richard Durban (D-IL) are leading the effort.

Need to contact Washington friends

The Washington Association of Railroad Passengers is urging AORTANs to contact family and friends in Washington. Why? Because decision-makers need to hear about the importance of the state's rail program.

The passage of I-695, an initiative which eliminated the state's motor vehicle excise tax, threatens the existence of the rail program. Without strong support from Washington residents, the rail program is in jeopardy.



AORTA TimeTable

Thursday, Jan 20, 6:30 PM

AORTA Portland Chapter meeting
Portland Union Station, Room 208

Saturday, Jan 22

AORTA Board Meeting
Portland Union Station, Room 208

Tues, Jan 25, Yakima, WA

Weds, Jan 26, Hood River

Package Express meetings

Feb 6-7 ACAC Meeting

(see article on pg 7)

AORTA's Portland Chapter normally meets on the 3rd Thursday of each month in Room 208, Union Station. The Board normally meets on the 4th Saturday of the month in Portland, Salem or Eugene. Please call (503) 642-4077 to confirm dates/locations.

Commuter rail demo reaches Beaverton, Tualatin; discovers "forgotten bridge," reaches Milwaukie!

A special commuter rail demonstration train traveled from Beaverton to Tualatin, then returned to Milwaukie, on Friday, December 3.

AORTA Director Jim Howell, who has expended much effort to bring the potential of commuter rail to the attention of metro-area decision-makers, was on-board. As the train crossed the Willamette River into Milwaukie, an announcement was made, "we are now crossing 'the forgotten bridge.'"

Under Howell's leadership, **AORTA** has given special attention to the potential of a rail shuttle between Milwaukie and Lake Oswego. Rail service implemented on this corridor would be much faster than highway vehicles, and could be implemented with minimal costs. Planners recently tabled discussion of a new highway bridge in the area because of prohibitively high costs. (see Sept 99 and Mar 99 **AORTA Bulletins**)