



AORTA Bulletin

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Since 1976

Port takes over Coos Bay line

by Jim Long

The Oregon International Port of Coos Bay acquired the Coos Bay rail line from the Central Oregon & Pacific (CORP) Railroad, a unit of RailAmerica, Inc. on March 13, 2009, after a one month extension of the acquisition deadline set by the Surface Transportation Board. The purchase price of \$16.6 million was funded by a \$4 million grant from Connect Oregon 1, plus a loan package of \$12.6 million from the Oregon Economic & Community Development Department (OECDD). The Port will repay \$7.2 million of the OECDD loan with proceeds from a federal grant, while the remaining \$5.4 million will be repaid by the Port from operating revenues once the line reopens.

The Port received significant governmental assistance in assembling the financing package, at both the state and federal levels. The \$7.2 million component of the funding was originally appropriated by Congress under the SAFETEA:LU (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users) legislation enacted into law during 2005, and was intended for rehabilitation of the Coos Bay rail bridge. The \$4 million received under Connect Oregon 1 was also originally earmarked for rehabilitation work.

However, rehabilitation of the line became a secondary concern with CORP's embargo of the line in 2007, and their subsequent motions toward abandonment. The Port mobilized to obtain assistance from governmental agencies to repurpose the federal and state grant funds allocated for rehabilitation of the line so that they could be used for acquisition. According to Martin Callery, director of communications and freight mobility for the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay, United States Rep. Peter

DeFazio (D-OR) sought a technical correction to the SAFETEA:LU legislation to allow the Port to use the \$7.2 million for rail line acquisition, and cosponsored legislation in late summer 2008. Although it failed to pass before the end of the session, a similar bill was introduced early in 2009 and was approved during the spring. The Oregon Transportation Commission similarly approved a reprogramming of the \$4 million ConnectOregon grant award so that it could be used for rail line acquisition rather than bridge rehabilitation.

Callery said that although the line could be pressed into service for perhaps as little as \$12 to \$15 million in renovations, the Port's goal is to upgrade the track to at least Class 2 standards at an estimated cost of \$24 to \$30 million. The additional investment will yield lower operating costs once service resumes on the line.

"Working with a variety of engineering consultants, Port staff has developed a scope of work necessary for restoring freight rail service," Callery said in a written statement. The Port is seeking funds from any viable source at the state and/or federal level to fund rehabilitation of the line. Rehabilitation work will proceed as funds become available, making it difficult to define a time frame for restoration of freight rail service. Callery estimated that restoration of service would probably take at least 18 months and could extend beyond 24 months.

A recent story in the Coos Bay World newspaper reported that work will soon begin on refurbishing four of the line's tunnels. LRL Construction of Tillamook won a contract for the work, but the project has been delayed by federal administrative procedures and equipment availability. According to The World, work on tunnel supports and drainage systems was expected to begin in late July.

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Union Station
800 NW 6th Avenue, Room 253
Portland, OR 97209-3715
(503) 241-7185

A non-profit 501(c)(3) 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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Vice-President	Jim Long	503 313-7382
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Dan L. McFarling	503 642-4077

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**E-mail: OregonRail@aol.com
Web site: <http://www.aortarail.org>**

ODOT applies for \$2.1 billion in HSR funding

Salem, OR – Governor Ted Kulongoski announced on July 16 that the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) has applied for \$2.1 billion in federal funding through the High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program, an opportunity provided by the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. If Oregon is successful and receives this funding it would create tens of thousands of jobs, according to a press release from the Governor's office.

"I am excited about the prospect for improved passenger rail service in the Northwest," said Governor Kulongoski. "This is another example of the state looking at ways to reduce carbon emissions and encourage alternative transportation methods. The Oregon Department of Transportation is a leader in sustainable transportation planning and development."

Eleven specific projects are proposed for consideration for receiving federal funds. Some of the projects include:

- Improvements to North Portland Junction, Peninsula Junction, Willbridge, and Guilds Lake Yard to improve the flow of UP and BNSF freight trains and reduce congestion for passenger trains.

- Permanent structural and seismic repairs to Portland Union Station, and reconstruct the sixth depot track which was removed by the Portland Development Commission

- A new connection from the UP Brooklyn subdivision to the UP Graham Line, including restoring the crossover at East Portland between the Steel Bridge and the Graham Line.

- Double-track south from UP's Willsburg Junction to the south end of Clackamas siding.

- Two stub tracks at Eugene to permit Cascades trains to park overnight, plus improved freight train access to Eugene yard.

- Acquire passenger cars and possibly locomotives sufficient to equip at least two trainsets.

- Upgrade Amtrak Cascades route to 110 MPH, electrify, and improve service frequency and on-time performance.

Formal applications will follow in the coming months, according to the press release. The pre-application document is available from AORTA's web site at: http://www.aortarail.org/ODOT-PreapplicationPNWRC_OR.pdf.

"AORTA supports most elements of this application," said AORTA President Donald Leap. "Some of these projects have been awaiting funding since 1992 even while study after study shows that the traveling public seeks more frequent service, improved on-time performance, and reduced travel times. We are encouraged that the ODOT Rail Division is looking at Oregon's Cascades service with these same goals in mind."

Based on recent press coverage, ODOT appears intent on running 110 mile-per-hour trains on the former Oregon Electric rail line, a narrow and winding right-of-way which travels uncomfortably close to numerous residential areas in the Willamette Valley. ODOT bases its proposed use of the OE line on the June 2009 Draft ODOT Intercity Passenger Rail study by the Portland office of Parsons Brinckerhoff, a global consulting firm.

"AORTA has looked closely at the Parsons Brinckerhoff study and we believe that a large number of its assumptions and conclusions are not credible," Leap explained. "AORTA seeks to address these issues with both ODOT and Parsons Brinckerhoff to prevent Oregon's passenger rail program from being needlessly delayed or reduced because of a proposal that is not thoroughly vetted."



Members of Iron Workers Local 516 and IBEW Local 48 stand in front of the first American-made streetcar to be produced in nearly 60 years. Clackamas, Oregon company United Streetcar, a subsidiary of Oregon Iron Works, is expected to bring hundreds of family-wage manufacturing jobs to Oregon by selling Buy America-compliant streetcars to transit systems throughout the United States. *photos by Donald Leap*



In addition to large "Made in USA" lettering, the streetcar carried greetings to US DOT Secretary Ray LaHood, who attended the streetcar unveiling ceremonies.

Poole elected to ORULE board

On June 17 the Oregon Rail Users' League (ORULE) elected passenger rail advocate Art Poole to a seat on the ORULE board. Poole, a resident of Coos Bay, serves on AORTA's board of directors, and as Vice Chair and Northwest Division Leader for NARP, the National Association of Railroad Passengers. He also chairs the Coos County Area Transit District Advisory Committee.

Other officers and board members elected at the meeting were: Terry Finn, BNSF Railway Company; Brock Nelson, Union Pacific Railroad; Ronald Russ, Portland & Western Railroad, Inc.; Dan Lovelady, City of Prineville Railway; Annette Price, Port of Portland; Gary Cardwell, Northwest Container Services, Inc.; Mark Nickerson, Stimson Lumber Company, Inc.

The purpose of the Oregon Rail Users' League (ORULE) is to provide an association for all public and private interests that operate, utilize, and support railroads in the State of Oregon to advocate for the rights and needs of railroads and their customers, as well as to encourage economic growth within the State of Oregon.

Help AORTA collect \$1,000!

AORTA Directors and members are being challenged to help underwrite the budget for 2009. A \$1,000 donation has been pledged if AORTA Directors and members raise another \$3,000 in membership dues and donations by September 30, 2009. AORTA requires significant donations above membership dues in order to sustain the high current level of activity. Please do what you can to help us promote safe, efficient, environmentally sound and cost effective transportation in Oregon.

In the last several months AORTA has been working hard to promote responsible decision-making in three primary arenas: (1) The Columbia River Crossing; (2) the expansion of Amtrak Cascades train service on the Union Pacific Railroad alignment serving Portland, Oregon City, Salem, Albany and Eugene; (3) restoration of Amtrak's Pioneer route serving Hood River, The Dalles, the Hermiston-Hinkle-Stanfield area, Pendleton, LaGrande, Ontario and beyond. All three projects, along with supplementary and feeder Thruway Bus service, are critical in meeting Oregon's future transportation needs in a sustainable manner. Your contributions help AORTA work for a prosperous economy and healthy environment for all people in Oregon.

Please use the enclosed card to renew your membership, purchase a gift membership, or make a donation in addition to membership dues. AORTA is an IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Membership fees and donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.



AORTA's public outreach booth was prominent at an April 5 rally in opposition to the multi-billion dollar megabridge proposed for the Columbia River Crossing. Hundreds of attendees shared their support and made their voices heard while also receiving encouragement from local politicians who oppose this bloated, outdated and wasteful project. *photo by Fred Nussbaum*

Stimulus dollars complete Gateway EmX funding

Lane Transit District's Gateway EmX Extension has received \$2.9 million in funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funds to complete the \$41.3 million project budget. More than \$38 million of Gateway EmX funds come from state and federal grants and will create over 400 local jobs during the next two years of construction.

Oregon Congressman Peter DeFazio and Senator Ron Wyden have played key roles in securing funding for transit projects in Lane County.

"Oregon's economic future is tied to its infrastructure and investing in mass transit is one of the best ways to put people back to work," Wyden said. "The expedited funds for these projects will have a swift impact on the local economies they serve. They'll create jobs, reduce congestion on streets from Portland to Eugene to Springfield, and improve the quality of life for students and commuters alike."

Congressman DeFazio noted, "LTD's current bus rapid transit service in Eugene-Springfield has been a huge success and surpassed 20-year ridership projections in the first year. The money LTD is receiving today to complete the Gateway EmX Extension will provide clean, efficient transit for thousands more people every day and will build on the success of the Franklin corridor BRT service. [...] This project will put people back to work and produce a product for generations to come."

AORTA Timetable

- August 20, 2009 ... AORTA Portland Chapter meeting, 5:30 pm, AORTA Office, Union Station Room 253, 800 NW 6th Avenue, Portland Oregon.
- August 29, 2009 ... AORTA Board of Directors meeting, 12:00 noon, Eugene Oregon, location TBA, phone 541-684-8883.
- September 17, 2009 ... AORTA Portland Chapter meeting, 5:30 pm, AORTA Office, Union Station Room 253, 800 NW 6th Avenue, Portland Oregon.
- September 26, 2009 ... AORTA Board of Directors meeting, 12:00 noon, AORTA Office, Union Station Room 253, 800 NW 6th Avenue, Portland Oregon.

The public is welcome at AORTA meetings. Please phone 503-642-4077 to confirm meeting details.



photo courtesy of John Bauer

Light rail testing on Portland Mall

TriMet MAX light rail operators began training on the new Portland Mall on Monday, May 4. Trains traveled the length of the new tracks on 5th and 6th avenues between Union Station and Portland State University.

All MAX operators, along with rail supervisors, systems controllers and others will participate in training that will familiarize them with the new light rail systems and signals, as well as the general traffic environment. All light rail operators and vehicles must have a minimum number of training and testing hours completed before service officially begins in September.

Trains ran from the south terminus north along 6th Avenue to Union Station and then south along 5th Avenue to Portland State University. Trips were scheduled during various times of the day and days of the week, offering a variety of traffic operating environments for the trainees.

Each loop of the Portland Mall takes about 25 minutes.

Donate to AORTA Today! AORTA's important work depends on funding from concerned grass-roots citizens *like you!* AORTA has no paid staff, so 100% of your donation directly funds our ongoing efforts to improve Oregon's transportation system.