



# AORTA Bulletin

A publication of the  
Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates

Issue 124

Feb 2001

Since 1976

## California's Capitol Corridor commuters flock to rail

A dramatic increase in ridership: 41.2% in the past 12 months, clearly demonstrates that California's Capitol Corridor AIA Managing Director Gene Skoropowski is doing something right. Skoropowski addressed **AORTA** members and guests at **AORTA's** Annual Membership Meeting in Portland, October 28.

The Capitol Corridor provides Commuter rail service reaching San Jose, Oakland/San Francisco, Sacramento and Auburn. Feeder buses extend the service south to Santa Barbara, east to Reno and Carson City, and north to Eureka/Arcata, Redding and Nevada City. The highly successful service serves many intermediate points.

The ridership growth rate appears to be accelerating. In July it was 40%; in August 52%; and September, a phenomenal 75%! Today, the corridor is the 4<sup>th</sup> busiest rail corridor in the nation. The heaviest rail corridor is in the Northeast (Boston to Washington DC), second is the San Diegan (San Diego-Los Angeles-Santa Barbara-San Luis Obispo), and third is the New York Empire State corridor (NYC-Albany-Buffalo). Skoropowski believes the Capitol Corridor will climb into second place after additional equipment, expected in May 2001, and track capacity enhancements (double tracking and some triple tracking) allow an increase in frequency.

One of the most important keys to the program's success, according to Skoropowski, is frequent service. He states that, in the Capitol Corridor, the sixth train was the key to the latest surge in ridership. When the sixth frequency was added, business travelers reached a point where they no longer needed to "schedule their day around the train," but could rely on the rail service to get them to work and back without modifying work schedules. Hourly service,

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## Claudia Howells addresses **AORTA**

Claudia Howells, Manager of Oregon Department of Transportation's Rail Division, reports remarkable progress with both passenger and freight rail in Oregon over the past 15 years. Speaking at **AORTA's** Annual Membership Meeting on Oct 28, she paints an exciting picture of what Oregon's future holds.

Howells, who spoke following the presentation by Capitol Corridor's Gene Skoropowski, said Oregon is learning many of the same lessons. In our Cascadia Corridor, we work with two host railroads, primarily Union Pacific (UP) in Oregon, and Burlington

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Register now for  
**Spring Membership Meeting**  
**Saturday, March 31**  
**Tacoma, WA**  
(see insert)

**AORTA NARP WashARP MTWYarp**

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**Money pledged to support office, staff**

At the Annual Membership meeting Oct 28, **AORTA** received more than \$7200 in gifts and pledges toward the goal of opening a permanent office, and possibly hiring part-time staff.

A subcommittee has identified prospective office space in Portland's central business district which is within the **AORTA's** draft budget guidelines. The office space under consideration is close to light rail, the transit mall, and the soon-to-be-operating Central City Streetcar line.

If you have not yet made a pledge to help **AORTA** open and furnish an office, please give this important matter serious consideration.

**Howells ... continued from page 1**

Northern-Santa Fe (BN-SF) in Washington. Howells stressed that, UP and BN/SF are first and foremost businesses that "are required by their stockholders to make a profit. If you make your case, a good business case, they will talk with you."

Howells announced that ODOT had signed a memorandum of understanding with UP the previous week, allowing for the second Cascades round-trip, which started Oct 6.

Next spring, efforts will be underway to improve movement and the quality of the ride past Brooklyn Yard. ODOT will help cover part of the \$12 million project.

Another project Howells has her eyes set on is double-tracking the main line from Portland to Eugene. The total cost will be in the neighborhood of \$60 million. Union Pacific operates many freight trains between Portland and Eugene, and Oregon must help solve capacity problems in order to add passenger service.

*Editor's note: In contrast to the estimated \$60 million cost for improving 124 miles of rail line, ODOT recently completed widening 5 miles of I-5 in Salem at a cost of about \$250 million.*

Howells is cautiously optimistic about the rail program's future in the 2001 Legislature. In spite of serious problems with the state budget for next biennium, Oregon's Governor John Kitzhaber makes it clear that the rail program will retain a place in the budget. The Rail Division is the only branch of ODOT that includes new positions for the next biennium. She reports the program appears to also have good support in the Legislature.

The "highway side of our organization has finally hit the wall," stated Howells. "The highway system you are looking at now in this state is the same system you are going to have for a very long time." There is no money for roadway expansion; it's just too expensive.

Howells says the absence of increased funding for roads has forced some creative thinking. It causes planners to weigh how we

*Continued on page 6*

### *Skoropowski, continued from page 1*

however, is what is needed to draw most business travelers, a goal that is in Skoropowski's sights.

In 1995, the corridor offered only three trains/day, and "nobody was riding. The commuter rail service was a candidate for abandonment."

His second day on the job, Skoropowski faced a board whose meeting agenda started with (1) Abandon service east of Roseville, eliminating three stations, and (2) Take the host rail company, Union Pacific to court. "This is great; this is a wonderful way to start a new challenge of expanding service and good relations!"

Skoropowski was able to get both agenda items tabled, and immediately began working to improve relations with Union Pacific, and to improve the service. While he cut 18 miles of service to Colfax, where the system averaged 0.8 boardings/day, he retained stations at Rocklin and Auburn. Skoropowski added feeder bus service from Auburn to Colfax, Soda Springs, Truckee and Reno. More importantly, he added a second rail roundtrip between Sacramento and San Jose. While costs increased a mere 8%, service increased 17%, and increased revenue was sufficient to cover service expansion.

Auburn averaged only 5-6 passengers/day in 1995. Increased frequency and improved connectivity have increased boardings to 40-50/day. A year ago, 15% of the riders purchased multi-ride tickets and passes. This number has grown to over 40%. Cost recovery has increased from 29% in 1995 to 37%, and is projected to be over 40% in two years.

Another key to success is the active participation by local governments and businesses, says Skoropowski. "Local entities understood the importance of rail service and were effective at lobbying the governor and legislature."

The improved service and increased ridership resulted in formation of on-board ridership groups, according to Skoropowski. "These Silicon Valley riders are highly sophisticated, and very politically active ... And they have the e-mail address of every political official in the state." Silicon Valley businesses are also vocal advocates for expanded service.

### **Relationship with Union Pacific**

Improved relationship with the host railroad is also important. It is a busy corridor, with 35 freight trains per day. After six month's effort, Skoropowski crafted a memorandum of understanding with Union Pacific which "clearly laid out (1) Where we are today, (2) Where we want to go, (3) What we expect from Union Pacific, and (4) What Union Pacific can expect from us."

Understanding mutual needs is important when working with the host railroad, according to Skoropowski. "We want to be a valued customer of Union Pacific. We want them to make money off us."

One of Skoropowski's goals is to create a UP maintenance-of-way crew that is specifically dedicated to the Capitol Corridor. Maintenance crews must understand the needs as they relate to passenger rail, not just freight. Skoropowski has improved on-time performance by bringing dispatchers from Omaha, Nebraska to California to acquaint them with the needs of the Corridor. Six months ago, on-time performance was only 61%. After bringing dispatchers to view operations in California, on-time performance improved to 80%.

Effort is being made to reduce travel time by eliminating padding from the schedule. Reduced travel time increases customer satisfaction, reduces employee costs, and maximizes equipment utilization.

### **Expanding the System**

Skoropowski wants to continue expanding the rail system, including east to Reno, now served by connecting buses. When Skoropowski was asked by a California official why state taxpayers should help people take their money to Reno, he pointed out, "We already are! It's called I-80. If you don't like it, rip it up!" Clearly, maintaining/expanding the rail system to Reno is much less expensive for California taxpayers than maintaining/expanding the road system.

### **Bonus Pay Incentive for Employees**

The Capitol Corridor surveys riders twice a year to determine customer satisfaction. Amtrak employees working on the corridor receive bonus

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**Coastal Tidings****From St. Louis to Astoria**

Nearly 200 years after their first historic venture (1804-1806), explorers Meriwether Lewis and William Clark are helping blaze another trail. In preparation for the celebration, the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial Association's transportation committee is seeking \$5 million in federal funding to bring passenger rail service to the Portland-Astoria rail line. Local and state support will also be required.

Portland and Western Railroad, under the capable leadership of recent past president Bob Melbo, has exerted much effort to return the line to a sound financial footing.

Restoration of the rail line is viewed as an important key to improving the economy of Astoria and Clatsop County. As demonstrated in Hood River County, a combination of freight and excursion passenger service can truly turn a short-line into a financial success.

Georgia-Pacific's recent acquisition of the Wauna Mill, and Washington Marine Group's purchase of Tongue Point facilities, helps paint a promising future for rail traffic on the Astoria line.

Restoration of rail service could also help Oregon retain a more significant role as an international port for transoceanic shipping. It would reduce the perceived need to deepen the Columbia River channel, an expensive and environmentally costly proposition. Reconstruction of a railway bridge across Youngs Bay to Warrenton, however, would be required.

While interest in passenger service during the celebration is focused on excursion trips, the long-term potential for regular passenger service has not gone unnoticed. And the 91-mile line from Portland is merely the tail end of Lewis & Clark's westward journey. The project also ties in nicely with efforts to bring back the *Pioneer* back to Portland through Eastern Oregon from ... St. Louis?! Perhaps we should rename it the *Sacagawea*?

**Astoria airport flush with federal funds**

The Astoria Regional Airport learned in January that it will receive an additional \$551,700 in federal funds. This brings the total more than \$4.5 million for the small, rural airport. Astoria is not served by any commercial passenger air service.

**Willamette Valley Whistles****Corvallis Transit ridership grows**

*Corvallis*- Ridership for the Corvallis Transit System (CTS) for 1999-00 was 479,417, more than a 14 percent increase over the previous year's total of 418,963 (also a record).

That's good news for all Oregonians. Assuming an average bus trip of 2.5 miles, those 479,417 rides represent 1,198,542.5 vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Because these trips weren't taken in a separate automobile, CTS has kept 1,181,886 pounds of pollutants out of the air. Also, thousands of gallons of gasoline and other non-renewable resources have been saved, and automobile congestion and demand for parking reduced. And reduced consumption of gasoline means that more of Oregon's dollars stay in Oregon, rather than being exported overseas.

According to CTS Manager Bernaette Barrett, there are many reasons for the ridership growth:

- Service more visible and convenient as a result of more bus shelters;
- Introduction to the service through special events, such as daVinci Days, Fall Festival, Try Transit Week, and the holiday trolley;
- Promotion of the service through work with the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, OSU and ASOSU;
- Service to youth events and programs through partnerships with Parks and Recreation and the Library;
- Use of the service for school field trips;
- Maybe the price of gas????

So, who is riding the bus? CTS knows from surveys that about 35% of the total bus ridership is OSU faculty, staff, and students (about 86%

## Shortlines and Quotes . . .

- A study by Peter Swift of Swift and Associates, Longmont, CO, concluded that “the most significant relationships to [vehicular] injury accidents were found to be street width and street curvature.” Evaluating about 20,000 accident reports in Longmont, Colorado, Swift concluded “that as street width widens, accidents per mile per year increase exponentially ...  
“The findings support the theory that narrower ... streets are safer than standard width residential streets. Since municipal code generally mandates a minimum of 36 foot [width], ... this study indicate[s] that current street design standards are directly contributing to automobile accidents.  
“This brings up a larger question of public safety issues concerning fire apparatus and emergency vehicle access with narrow streets. The service reports from the Fire Department ... were evaluated. There were no fire related injuries or accidents during the eight year period of the study. There were fires in the older part of town ... that have alley access and narrow streets, but no injuries were attributed to those fires ...  
“This study supports the hypothesis that injury accidents are related to vehicular speed and vehicular speed is a function of street width ... and alignment.”
- The following is from an article in *The Oregonian* (Oct 2) regarding the October 14-15, 2000, meeting of the Motor Bus Society meeting in Portland. “As for buses, Sebree [transit consultant who edits the quarterly magazine, *Motor Coach Age*] sees them as a necessary part of transit, but he remembers the days when buses replaced streetcars. ‘People were screaming about riding the old rattletrap trolleys, but when they were replaced by new buses, boardings dropped a lot. If a route had been carrying 20,000 people on the [streetcars], suddenly the new buses were hauling 12,000. It’s a psychological thing; People have always felt a train, even a rattletrap, was a higher class ride than a bus. That has not changed.’ As for the other camp that wants new freeways, Sebree said: ‘Whose house will be the first to be torn down?’”
- “Light rail systems have to have several lines to reach that critical size when ridership takes off, [Sebree] said. ‘Portland is getting there.’ G. Mac Sebree is a resident of Vancouver, WA. *ibid*
- “Scientists have long documented the detrimental affects of roads on wildlife, [but only recently] discovered conclusively that they isolate populations genetically. This phenomena is especially dangerous for threatened or endangered species in relatively remote areas, which can be uniquely vulnerable habitat fragmentation causing inbreeding, depression and hastening extinction. Scientists measured the effects of inbreeding from three types of roads: a 20-foot railway, a 33-foot wide country road, and a 164-foot-wide, four-lane highway. Whereas the railway and country road had relatively benign effects genetically, the four-lane highway had profound consequences on the species.” *Environmental News Network*, Aug 7, 2000.

of that number is students). Of the other 65%, seniors make up about 8%; youth 17 and under, 23%; and persons with a disability, 9%. CTS customers are riding the bus to jobs, school, medical appointments, shopping, and leisure activities.

Barrett urges Corvallis residents to not “get left behind! Sometime soon jump on the bus and meet your fellow citizens who are doing their part to improve the livability of Corvallis...”

## Eugene to purchase rail station

According to the Feb 8 *Register-Guard*, City officials appear to be close to purchase of the railway passenger station in Eugene. Plans call for renovation of the 93-year old station when the deal is completed.

In addition to increased passenger rail service, the city hopes the site will also serve as the city’s terminal for greyhound bus lines, and as a stop for Lane County Transit.

can more fully utilize existing infrastructure, and to look at the system as a whole. After many years of neglect, railways are being recognized by ODOT as an important component of the transportation system.

### **Other Intercity Rail Projects in Oregon**

Aside from the Cascadia Corridor, Howells reported there are several other inter-city rail projects moving forward in Oregon:

◆ A “low-cost” feasibility study for service between Grants Pass and Ashland is currently underway.

◆ The Washington County Commuter Rail project (Beaverton – Wilsonville) is “moving forward at a very rapid pace. “I think we’re going to see [commuter] trains running on that line, certainly within 5 years.” One of the biggest hurdles will be identifying Federal Railroad Administration approved equipment. Most European trains do not meet FRA standards. She said the equipment problem is “frustrating for those who want to move ahead.”

◆ Excursion service between Portland and Astoria, in conjunction with the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial, is also receiving serious attention. Other than canoe, the Portland-Astoria rail line is the only way to access certain locations, such as Aldrich Point, important to the Lewis & Clark expedition route. Howells said there is an opportunity to tie this project in with restoration of the Pioneer.

◆ Marion County is looking at the feasibility of excursion rail service in the Woodburn-Silverton-Stayton corridor (17 miles). The new Oregon Gardens development is expected to become a major Oregon tourist attraction. This is a destination for which the road system cannot meet the potential demand. Once in place, “making that leap to genuine [passenger] rail service isn’t so big because you already have the corridor in use.” The Mt. Hood Railroad has proven that, in some cases, it is possible to make more money carrying passengers than freight.

Howells predicts one of the next corridors to see “genuine commuter operation” will be

between Albany and Corvallis.” The traffic, with the expansion of Hewlett-Packard and other businesses, is placing heavy demands on the road system.

### **AORTA Praised**

Howells praised the work of **AORTA**. “I have to tell you, I think it is this organization’s perseverance, your absolute tenacity, that has moved our program forward... at least in those times of the darkest moments, kept the embers alive ... The truth is that, without all of you, I wouldn’t be doing what I am today.” She says “there are a whole lot of people out there that don’t even know that [**AORTA**] exists, [people who] suddenly believe in trains ... One of our challenges now is to try to keep up with it.”

Howells pointed out that we would not have a passenger rail system without the leadership of people like Albany Mayor Chuck McLaren and former Eugene Mayor Ruth Bascom, who she referred to as the “mother of the Oregon passenger rail system.” She also said that Bascom’s predecessor, Jim Torrey, is another very important and powerful advocate, and so is Portland Commissioner Charlie Hales.

Howells spoke of the growing relationships with strong supporters along the former Pioneer route. “Those relationships are critical, and they do a great deal.”

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### **Tech Talk**

#### **Maximum Allowable Train Speeds**

FRA Track Classification	Passenger	Freight
Excepted	N/A	10
Class 1	15	10
Class 2	30	25
Class 3	60	40
Class 4	80	60
Class 5	90	80

USDOT Track Safety Standards

## French order 22 bilevel HSR trainsets

**France-** French National Railways (SNCF) placed an order for 22 TGV bi-level high speed trainsets from ALSTOM in Sept 2000. At about 19 million euros a piece, SNCF is expected to order a total of 82 trainsets.

The bi-level trains will provide increased capacity to meet escalating ridership on the popular Paris-Lyons line. Delivery of the new trains is scheduled to start in Oct 2002.

## Nov vote brings transit victories

Transit scored several victories around the nation in November 2000.

One of the biggest margins was in California, where 70% of Santa Clara County voters approved a 30-year half-cent sales tax increase! The county measure includes money for extending BART from Fremont to San Jose, two new light rail lines and electrification of Caltrans commuter service.

Another important vote was in Florida. Voters approved a constitutional amendment requiring that the state begin building a high speed rail system! Several months ago, Gov Jeb Bush single-handedly killed the state's high speed rail project (FOX) shortly after he assumed the office. The initiative petition passed with a 6% margin of victory! The measure calls for construction to begin within three years. It must link the five largest urban areas, and be designed for 120 mph service or faster. The vote is particularly encouraging when one notes that, not only the Governor, but, most state legislators, the Florida Transportation Commission, and nearly all the state's daily newspapers campaigned against it.

Closer to home, and most important to Oregonians and the Pacific Northwest, Washington voters soundly rejected Initiative 745. This measure would have diverted 90% of the sales tax revenues now dedicated to rail and transit and required it to be wasted on highway projects. This dangerous initiative was soundly defeated by a 16 point margin.

King County (Seattle) voters approved an

increase in the sales tax to help raise revenues for local transit. The increased sales tax will help replace funds lost a year ago following the legislature's action to drastically cut vehicle registration fees.

In Utah voters supported a sales tax increase for expanding their new light rail system, commencement of commuter rail service between Salt Lake City and Ogden, and for other rail and bus service increases.

In an election that saw the closest presidential race ever, voters in Austin, Texas, narrowly defeated (50.4 to 49.6) a \$919 million light rail system.

New Jersey voters amended the state constitution to allow motor vehicle taxes to establish a transportation trust fund which may be used for transit, something AORTA has worked for in Oregon for the past 20 years.

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## New York non-electric HSR

In August 2000 New York introduced the 125-mph RTL Three Turboliner which will soon begin service between New York City and Buffalo. This is the fastest non-electric train in the nation. Governor George Pataki is working with Amtrak to expand the state's high speed rail service.

## Denver light rail success

Denver's new southwest light rail line is attracting six times more passengers than the express buses that covered the same route. While the express buses carried 1,900 passengers/day, the new light rail line is carrying more than 11,000 passengers/day.

Year  
2001

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*Skoropowski ... continued from page 3*

pay when the surveys reveal a high level of satisfaction. The program is working; riders are very satisfied. Three months ago, the employees received their first incentive checks. "If you ever want to see a happy group of workers on a railroad, who are very nice to customers, who are loving to work on their railroad, come down to see the Capitol Corridor," Skoropowski declared.

#### **Coordination with Local Transit**

On July 1, 2001, the Capitol Corridor will partner with local transit districts in Sacramento and the Bay Area to provide free transfers with local transit. This cooperation is expected to draw more riders both to the commuter system and to local transit. More importantly, it will reduce traffic congestion and all related problems and costs incurred by the public, and local and state government.

#### **HSRIA**

Skoropowski also commented on the High Speed Rail Investment Act. The West Coast (California, Oregon and Washington) is well situated to take advantage of these funds for rail expansion, should they become available.

#### **Complex Structure**

The Capitol Corridor has a complex organizational structure. The governing body, known as the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA), is composed of eight counties, and six transportation agencies. Rather than creating a new agency, the CCJPA contracts with the Bay Area Rapid Transit District (BARTD) to manage the operations. Daily operations are contracted out to Amtrak. Union Pacific Railroad is responsible for dispatching and capital improvements (excluding stations). Station development is the responsibility of the local government jurisdiction. Capital funds are received through the California Transportation Commission.

Special thanks for assistance with this **AORTA Bulletin** go to Bernadette Barrett, Ken McFarling and Art Poole. Contributions, especially news for "News around the state," are always welcome.



## **AORTA TimeTable**

*Thursday, March 15, 6:30 PM,*  
**AORTA Portland Chapter meeting**  
Portland Union Station, Room 208

*Saturday, March 31, 11 am - 4:30 PM*  
**NARP, AORTA, WashARP, MTWYarp**  
**Spring Membership Meeting**  
Ramada Inn, 2611 East E St, Tacoma, WA

*Saturday, March 24, 9 am - noon*  
**AORTA Board Meeting**  
Rm 208, Union Station

**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.

## **Support HSRIA, (S. 250)**

A new High-Speed Rail Investment Act (S. 250) was introduced Feb 6. The bill has 51 co-sponsors as we go to press. Oregon's Senators Smith and Wyden have not yet signed this bill, a bill very important to the Cascadia Corridor. Both senators were co-sponsors of the previous HSRIA.

S. 250 allows Amtrak to sell \$12 billion in bonds over a ten-year period. Bond holders receive federal tax credits instead of interest payments. **Revenue from the sale of bonds would be available to match local funds Oregon and Washington have invested in the corridor.** For every dollar of local money, the federal government could provide \$4.

The bill also allows up to \$1 billion for non-corridor improvements. **This could help provide capital funding needed to restore service on the Pioneer route.**

Please contact Senators Smith and Wyden and urge them to become co-sponsors of S. 250.