



Rail Week Recap and the Second Train (Vancouver, B.C.-Seattle) Victory

CASCADIA CENTER'S RAIL WEEK FROM May 26-29 and held in Portland, Seattle, Woodinville and Snohomish demonstrably heightened awareness of the need for improved intercity passenger and freight rail systems, and for longer-term efforts to establish high-speed rail in the Cascadia Corridor from Eugene to Vancouver, B.C. Sponsors of Cascadia Rail Week included: Talgo, Amtrak, TriMet, Yarrowbay Holdings, Pacific Northwest Economic Region, 1000 Friends of Oregon, Transportation Choices, All Aboard Washington, IBI Group, Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, Portland Development Commission, Siemens, Wilbur Smith, Cambridge Systematics and CH2MHill.

RAIL WEEK OVERVIEW

"Rail Week" began Tuesday evening, May 26 at the Columbia Tower Club in downtown Seattle with a welcoming dinner honoring Vancouver, B.C.'s Mayor Gregor Robertson. It ended on Friday evening, May 29, with a closing dinner and discussion at Novelty Hill Winery in Woodinville, Wash., one of several of the cities on Seattle's "Eastside" that would be served by a 42-mile Eastside commuter "rails and trails" corridor from Snohomish in the north to Renton in the South.

Sharing key insights were representatives of state and city governments, the Federal Railway Administration, the U.S. Congress and Senate, and the Washington state legislature, plus think tanks, train manufacturers, railroads, and commuter rail advocates and experts. Participants included: U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (Ore.), Mayor Robertson, Mayor Sam Adams (Portland), Washington Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond, Washington State Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Washington State Representative Judy Clibborn, and industry leaders such as Talgo and Siemens. Additionally, two key figures in turning a 70-mile corridor into a commuter rails and trails corridor in Sonoma-Marín (Calif.) also joined us: John Nemeth, Rail Planning Manager for Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit District and Andy Peri, Marin County Bicycle Coalition, who discussed their experience at a luncheon with the Snohomish Chamber of Commerce and presented and led a similar discussion at Novelty Hill Winery. (Cascadia will host a tour of that corridor in September, so please let me know if you'd like to join us.)

KEY “TAKEAWAYS” FROM CASCADIA RAIL WEEK 2009

- **Incremental Approach & Defining High-Speed Rail:** An understanding of the need to take an incremental approach to developing the corridor, and a broader and consensus understanding of what high-speed rail for the corridor might really mean—instead of a European and Japanese model of 150 mph, our corridor would most likely at first be looking at speeds up to 125 mph;
- **Corridor Cooperation:** Memorandum of Agreement between Mayor Gregor Robertson (Vancouver, B.C.) and Mayor Sam Adams (Portland), committing them to working together to bring high-speed rail service to the Northwest, making this issue a legislative priority, and meeting semi-annually to review progress;
- **Industry Relationships:** Valuable relationships with key industry representatives strengthened (Talgo, Siemens, BNSF and Union Pacific)—opening the door to possible partnerships for corridor efforts;
- **Media:** Extensive media coverage in print, television and radio, including: The Seattle Times, TheSeattlePI.com, The Oregonian, Daily Journal of Commerce (Seattle and Portland), Oregon Public Broadcasting, KOMO-AM 1000, Dave Ross Show, KOIN-TV (Portland), CBC Radio (B.C.), and others.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the week was Wednesday's sold-out train tour on Amtrak *Cascades* from Seattle to Portland. Cascadia Center organized a delegation to ride the train between the two cities. (Karen Rae, Deputy Administrator for the Federal Railroad Administration, and in Seattle for an FRA field hearing about high-speed rail, joined the delegation for part of that trip.) Upon arrival, the 75-person delegation, joined by several dozen more conference participants, discussed high-speed rail (technology, legislation, etc.) and Amtrak in the corridor. Later that day, participants toured and rode Portland's Westside Express and MAX to get a sense of how Seattle might use similar technology for its Eastside corridor.

A highlight on Wednesday was a chance to hear from keynote speaker and U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, a senior member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and Chairman of its Highways and Transit Subcommittee. He emphasized the need for the United States to really focus its priorities on national high-speed passenger rail.

"If just a fraction of the money the nation spends on space travel was spent on high speed trains, the 70 minute Seattle/Portland commute could soon be an everyday occurrence." —**U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio** speaking to Rail Week participants in Portland, and referring to his hope that high-speed rail would make the commute between notoriously congested Portland and Seattle much easier. (As reported on Oregon Public Broadcasting.)

For Thursday and Friday, the conference moved from Portland back to Seattle, with sessions at the Washington Athletic Club in downtown Seattle, a public lecture hosted by

Councilmember Jan Drago at Seattle City Hall, a luncheon in Snohomish (north of Seattle and one end of the line for the Eastside rails and trails corridor), and Friday's concluding dinner at Novelty Hill.

"True" high-speed rail would exceed 150 mph, but the Amtrak Cascades line between Eugene, Ore., and Vancouver, B.C., is more likely to see incremental progress from the current top speed of 79 mph to between 110 and 125 mph (the top potential speed of the current Talgo trains), **Cascadia Project rail fellow Ray Chambers** said at a forum in downtown Seattle on Thursday. (As reported by Aubrey Cohen in the SeattlePI.com.)

The Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor has been one of the most successful intercity rail corridors in the country. With the strongest federal commitment to rail in generations melded together with a collaborative approach in the corridor, there is every reason to believe that the corridor's ridership, on-time performance, farebox recovery, etc., will only continue to improve and that our corridor can become the one against which others are measured. Although there is a lot of work to do, Rail Week left no doubt there is a well-equipped coalition coming together to advance a crucial 21st Century rail agenda that builds on Northwest investments already made.

A VICTORY FOR THE SECOND TRAIN. Only a little more than one month after Rail Week concluded, an issue that is important to the overall health of the corridor finally moved in a positive direction: The Canadian government dropped its insistence that Amtrak pay \$1,500 per day for immigration and customs inspections for passengers on a planned second daily train between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. This is not a final victory by any means, but it is a step in the right direction.

As a result of the decision, service will expand next month, and continue on at least through the 2010 Winter Olympics and paralympics in Vancouver, B.C. The second daily train will allow same day round-trips on Amtrak *Cascades* between Seattle and Vancouver's Pacific Central Station and will speed travel times on the Portland to Vancouver route, as well. The second daily train could bring an additional \$1.87 million (Canadian) annual tax revenues north of the border and an additional \$16-\$33 million in annual economic activity.

Cascadia Center has worked closely with the Washington State Department of Transportation, the Pacific Northwest Economic Region, The Border Policy Research Institute at Western Washington University, Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson and other allies to win approval of the increased frequency.

The next step is that *we all work together*. It will be very critical that our entire corridor "markets" this train and that the ridership is strong through the Olympics. To that end, Cascadia is working with Vickie Sheehan of WSDOT to help pull together about 40 business, tourism and environmental groups to help build awareness and ridership of the second train.