

## **FASTER BETTER MORE**

For over a decade we have been working hard to improve the rail system in Oregon and its connection in Eugene. A few years ago (2004) we acquired the 1908 Eugene Depot downtown and refurbished it into a multi-modal station, a partnership between the city, county, state, and federal government, and Amtrak.

Today, collaboration is again providing the opportunity to advance rail in Oregon. A regional approach increases the benefits beyond what either state might accomplish on its own. Many private citizens feel passionate as well. *You do!*

Oregon's application for federal funds promoted our goals of faster, better, and more passenger rail service from Eugene to Portland.

- Faster, by increasing speeds from 42 mph to 65.
- Better, through on-time performance that is now at only 68%, improving to over 90%.
- More, by offering 7 weekday round trips instead of just 3.

With faster, better, and more passenger rail, we create a viable option to the personal automobile.

We need a working economy, too. Well-planned improvements can benefit *both* passenger and freight rail. Better capacity and performance provides reliability for business and manufacturing, and ensures our agricultural and other producers a way to get their goods to port and then export. Congestion on the line hinders freight, hinders manufacturing, hinders our capacity for adding good jobs. In short, better rail makes our state and region more

competitive nationally and globally, and in turn gives us a stronger economy.

Just last week, the Eugene City Club on economic development. One panelist included rail as a critical element in the development of states and cities. Another speaker, talking about what's important to business in deciding where to locate or expand, listed a handful of key questions they ask, including: what is the transportation infrastructure? In other words, how can our employees, our suppliers, and our product, get in and out? We need serious improvements to rail to help keep Oregon moving.

While we work toward *high* speed rail, we should press on for *higher*-speed rail and significant improvements in the near term. Oregon has fallen behind; we haven't put the firepower behind it, and we'd better ramp up our efforts now. Our lack of a more concerted effort stands to impede our state's economy, slow efforts to improve air quality, and stand in the way of a Pacific Northwest corridor.

What can we do? Well, here are two ideas to get some conversation going – no details, just tossing out challenges.

One: how can we encourage improvements in the infrastructure and operations of our rail system? If we were seeing significant investment in track, modern safety communications, sidings, grade crossings, and so on, I wouldn't be so concerned. But what can we do to improve the rail system with the public interest -- and Oregon's economy -- in mind? Maybe a public-private collaboration, or an authority or port district, to oversee improvements and operations for rail transportation. It works for transit districts, it works for airport and maritime port districts. It works in other states. We don't leave air traffic control to the biggest operator in the region. Southwest Airlines

directing traffic – and gate assignments -- for Horizon, Alaska, JetBlue, and all the rest? United making decisions on runway improvements for Eugene? or container shippers responsible for deciding when and where the Columbia River channel needs to be deepened.. The public and private sectors need to work together to manage this critical resource, as critical as any other utility.

Two, we are in danger of losing potential useful – or critical – land that would be used for improving our tracks and capacity. Right of way is a precious commodity, hard to get, and even harder to get back if you've sold it. What are we doing to ensure that the state doesn't sell land that one agency thinks it no longer needs, but could have been important to a rail corridor. And what are we doing to persuade our partner agencies in local and federal government to do the same, consider our shared infrastructure first?

We can achieve results now that will bring us up to speed with 21st century needs. With advantages for both the economy and the environment, the time is right to upgrade rail as a key part of Oregon's transportation infrastructure.

A national network of fast, frequent and dependable trains is a critical tool for reinventing the nation's economy. And a pacific northwest corridor is part of that network. It's time - For passengers, and for freight - we need **FASTER BETTER MORE !**

In remembrance, a tribute to Ben Westlund, State Treasurer, who said in 2003:

"May we stop being politicians who think only of the next election. Instead, let us be statesmen who think only of the next generation."