

For over a decade we have been working hard to improve the rail system in Oregon and its connection in Eugene. This Eugene Depot, originally built in 1908, was acquired and refurbished into a multi-modal station. The renovation was completed in 2004 and required a collaboration of multiple parties, including the City of Eugene, the Federal Government, and Amtrak.

Today, collaboration is again providing the opportunity to advance rail in Oregon. The current federal administration shares our vision for the future of passenger rail. Governor Kulongoski's office shares the same vision and has applied for federal funds in partnership with our sister state of Washington. A regional approach increases the benefits beyond what either state might accomplish on its own. Many private citizens feel passionate as well. Together we can elevate passenger and freight rail in Oregon.

Oregon's application for federal funds promotes 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.

Improving passenger rail is a benefit to Oregon in several ways. With faster, better, and more passenger rail, we create a viable option to the personal automobile. This will lead to reduced emissions from cars, and less demand for widening, creating and maintaining more highways.

Improved passenger rail can also lead to improved freight rail. Better freight rail 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. In short, better rail makes our state and region more competitive nationally and globally, and in turn gives us a stronger economy.

We need serious improvements to rail to help move Oregon into the future. We can't just build our way out of truck and auto congestion on highways; we need more transportation options. 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 central 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. For passengers, and for freight - we need faster, better, and more options. Our state has recognized the need to expand our railroad system. This is the time for Congress to follow through with leadership and funding.

Northwest in running for new speed rail

Proposed high-speed line would span 466 miles from Eugene to Vancouver, BC

By Alex Zielinski | News reporter, Oregon Daily Emerald

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The Pacific Northwest remains in the running with 10 other regions for a shiny new item this Christmas: a sleek, streamlined rail line shooting up from Eugene to Vancouver, B.C., in less than four hours, reaching up to 110 mph.

Eugene mayor Kitty Piercy and Oregon House Rep. Nancy Nathanson are joining both the University of Oregon and Lane Community College OSPIRG chapters today to promote the creation of a 466-mile-long Pacific Northwest corridor rail and urge Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden to reinstitute recently lost funding.

In July, Gov. Ted Kulongoski announced that the Oregon Department of Transportation had applied for \$2.3 billion in federal stimulus money, to be taken out of the House's bill that dedicates \$4 billion to high-speed rail investments. Following this announcement, the Senate quickly cut the amount by 75 percent, allocating only \$1.2 billion nationwide toward rail systems.

Today's 10 a.m. gathering at the Amtrak station aims to gain public and legislative attention on why the \$4 billion should be returned to the high-speed funds in Congress' 2010 transportation allocation bill. This bill is to be finalized in a conference committee by the end of December.

Piercy, Nathanson and OSPIRG board chair and University student Charles Denson will speak at the event.

"While we need funding for all aspects of public transportation," Denson said, "a high-speed rail can compete with all forms of transportation, especially cars."

Denson claimed that a high-speed rail would be a carbon-cutting option, as it replaces car usage and has potential run solely on renewable energy in the future.

OSPIRG spokesperson Jenn Lavelle said the state group believes a high-speed railway is an environmental necessity.

"Federal investment in high-speed rail in Oregon will create tens of thousands of quality American jobs, reduce our global warming pollution, make our air cleaner, and facilitate travel along the congested (Interstate) 5 corridor," Lavelle said.

ODOT estimates that the proposed Pacific Northwest line project will reduce carbon emissions by more than 69,000 pounds per year and create more than 44,000 jobs. In addition, the rail could increase round trips from Portland to Eugene from two per day to six per day.

Out of the 10 other regions competing for the rail funding, the Pacific Northwest rail is one of two proposed for the West Coast, along with a California line running from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Each region's PIRG chapter is holding a high-speed rail "day of action" to publicize the underfunding and promote high-speed rail support, similar to OSPIRG's, today, Denson said.

"I feel like the Pacific Northwest would be a top contender for a line, once Congress realizes we need more funding," said Denson.

Nathanson agreed that the future of the Pacific Northwest corridor is bright, based on the strong collaboration between Oregon and Washington.

Nathanson, who has been working to improve passenger and freight rail since the 1990s, believes the new administration finally understands the importance of high-speed travel.

"If the leadership is not interested in what you're working to promote, it's like swimming upstream," Nathanson said.

She said she now feels more confident than ever for the rail's future.

"We're looking for something that is achievable and shows that we can obtain faster, better, and more rail in Oregon," Nathanson said.