Current and Emerging Passenger Rail Needs

Presentation to the
House Transportation Committee
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Washington's Mobility Crisis

Amtrak *Cascades* and expanded passenger rail must be used to

- **Speed economic recovery**
- **Pursue environmental goals**
- **Enhance equitable mobility access**

in our state.

Significant Cuts to Passenger Rail

Due to the pandemic, *Cascades* service has been:

- **Discontinued entirely** north of Seattle, to Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom Counties
- Reduced to **one train daily** Seattle - Tacoma - Olympia - Vancouver WA - Portland - Eugene

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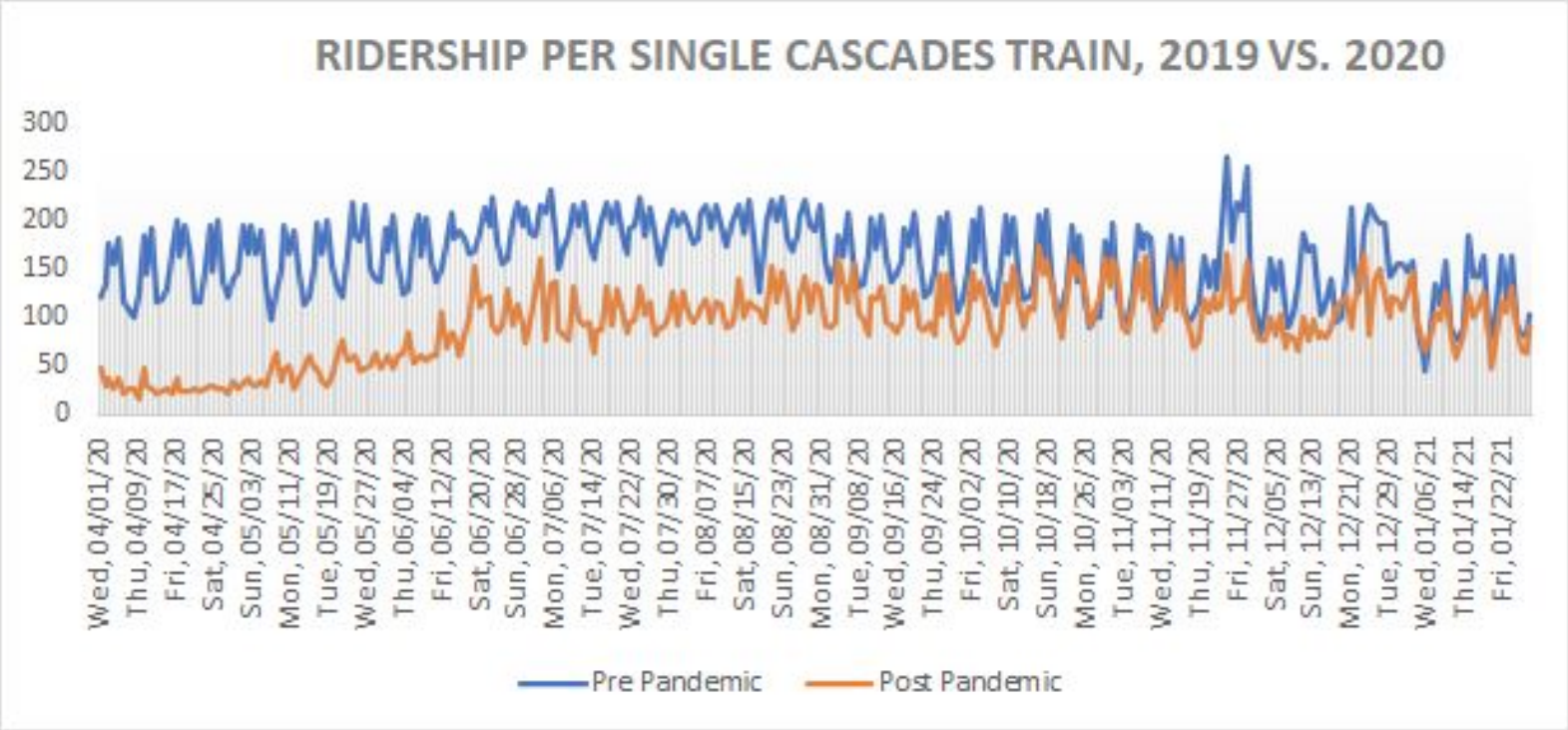
Some Cuts Restored

In addition, these trains were reduced from daily to three departures weekly (restored to daily service by American Rescue Plan beginning May 24):

- ***Empire Builder***, serving Seattle - Everett - Wenatchee - Spokane and Portland - Vancouver WA - Pasco - Spokane
- ***Coast Starlight***, serving Seattle - Tacoma - Olympia - Vancouver WA - Portland - California

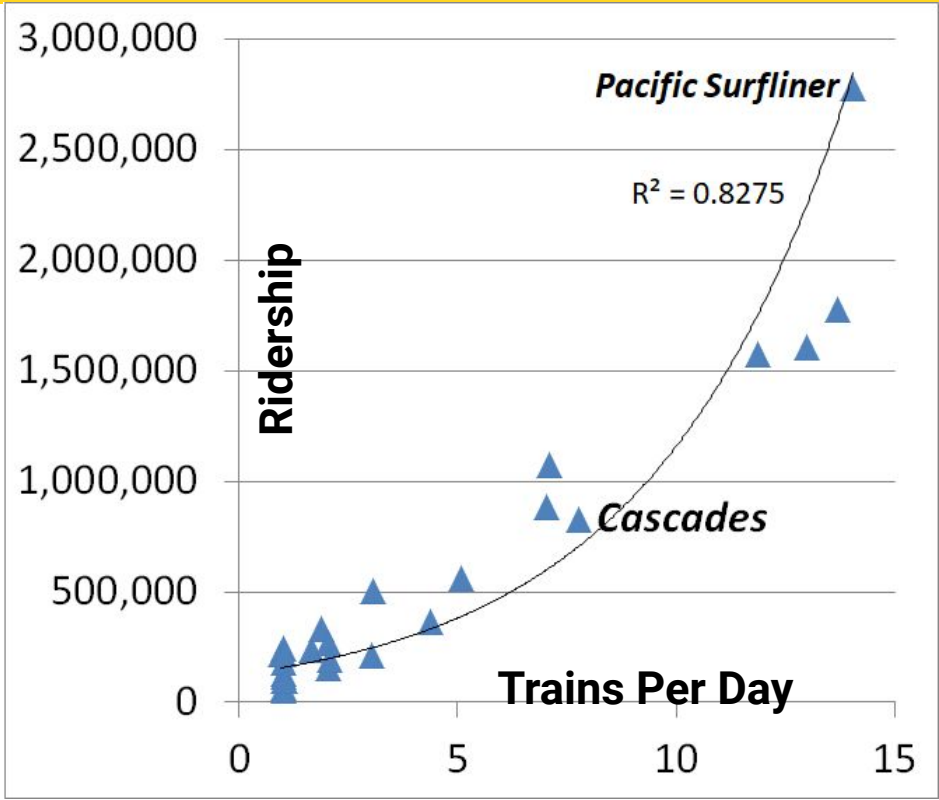
Pre-pandemic Amtrak *Cascades* service has not been restored.

But *Cascades* Per-Train Demand <u>Has</u> Returned



Restore *Cascades* Service

- **Restore pre-pandemic frequencies** as have ferries and local transit
- Increase Seattle-Portland *Cascades* service **from 4 to 6 round trips** as planned before 2017 DuPont accident
- If *Cascades* behaves like other rail corridors, 6 daily SEA-PDX round trips could easily generate **well over 1 million annual riders**



Cascades ridership in 2019 vs. other state corridors

Restore Service to NW Washington

Offer *Cascades* service to Blaine serving Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom Counties.

- Provide critical connections to the state ferries, better linking the mainland to San Juan and Island Counties
- Restart service to Vancouver BC when border reopens

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Extend *Cascades* Service E-W

Fund complete analysis recommended by the limited preliminary research of the 2020 JTC Study, which assumed ridership would only be derived from car trips:

- Assess local **economic impacts and benefits**
- Evaluate **need for equity** in transportation access to underserved rural communities, including state's largest populations without service
- Investigate **capital and operating costs**

Future Needs

- Develop more **efficient and effective connections** between passenger rail and other modes of transportation (recommended by 2019 Rail Plan)
- Create **integrated network of services** including UHSR in Cascadia megaregion, and frequent services to smaller cities in all of Washington

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- **Enhance and expand Amtrak *Cascades*** (recommended by 2006 Rail Plan, delayed due to revenue shortfalls)

Increase Mobility Access

As recommended by several plans and studies:

- Connect **local public transportation** more conveniently with intercity rail operations
- Provide **convenient and equitable rail services** throughout the state, both in existing *Cascades* corridor and east to west

- Reduce focus on **travel times,** following new USDOT guidance

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Approve a Northwest Rail Commission

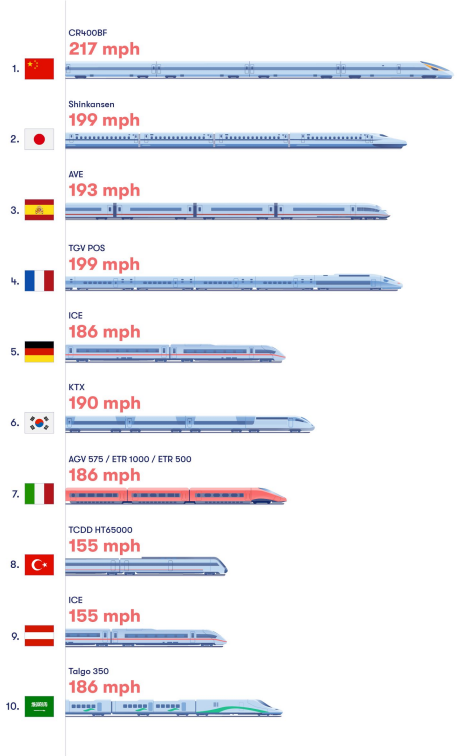
Legislation needed to authorize gubernatorial appointments to a regional rail commission. Such commissions, to be authorized by legislation currently under consideration in DC, will:

- **Coordinate interstate planning** for HSR and other rail corridors
- Increase state competitiveness for **federal matching funds**
- Allow for **cross-border cooperation** between states and provinces

UHSR Must Build On Amtrak *Cascades* Service

9 of the world's top 10 HSR systems were built atop services like Amtrak *Cascades:*

- Creates the constituency that demands HSR service
- Unites the entire region in support of rail services and public transportation
- UHSR's challenges will be magnified without better *Cascades* service



UHSR Must Build on Amtrak *Cascades* Service

"Ultra-high-speed ground transportation is **not intended to replace the Amtrak *Cascades*** intercity passenger rail system…. Amtrak *Cascades* **trains serve 18 cities** in Canada, Washington and Oregon - more than an ultra-high-speed option would serve."

WSDOT website:
https://wsdot.wa.gov/planning/studies/ultra-high-speed-travel/ground-transportation-study

UHSR Must Build on Amtrak *Cascades* Service

- Airports and highways **depend on local nodes** and routes for access
- Similarly, UHSR depends on a **broad-based constituency** with **well-connected transit access**
- Without a strong statewide *Cascades* network, **UHSR *<u>will not</u>* have enough support** to succeed in WA

Questions?

Contact us at (360) 529-5552 or aawa.us

Presentation available at
https://www.aawa.us/take-action/

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