



SPECIAL TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM

PO Box 1083
Corvallis, Oregon 97339-1083
Phone: (541) 754-1748
Fax: (541) 766-6920

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Oregon State Legislature
Joint Ways and Means Committee
Transportation Sub-Committee
Via: jwmtr.exhibits@oregonlegislature.gov

Dear Sub-Committee Members:

This letter is offered in testimony for your Sub-Committee hearing on March 28, 2017, as regards the Northwest Cascades passenger rail service. I wanted to provide Committee members with some information which I believe may demonstrate the popularity and significance of the Cascades service, here in the mid-Valley area. The two items I wish to discuss are the success of the recent Cascades promotional voucher program, and a status report on the Corvallis-Amtrak Connector pilot project.

Last fall, the Cascades began a promotional campaign offering buy one, get one free adult fares for one-way or round trips anywhere on the Cascades train line between Eugene and Vancouver, BC, valid until April 27, 2017. These were offered by way of a reusable voucher coupon with an on-line promotional code. As ODOT's local Amtrak contact for Benton County, I received an initial supply of these, and we issued a press release as well as noticing the media and our local Chamber of Commerce Visit Corvallis regarding their availability.

The response from the public has been tremendous. I have gone through the initial supply of 200 or so vouchers and excellent accompanying travel planning brochures developed by ODOT, and twice since have had to re-order hundreds more vouchers. Requests have come in by phone and email from not just Benton County, but referred "friends of friends" who have heard about this program, and have called me from around the state. People were calling not just to arrange a short trip for themselves, but to arrange large group trips on the Cascades for four or six passengers at a time.

This to me is strong evidence that there is a great and continuing interest in traveling on Cascades trains – not only for business, but also for recreation. This of course brings valuable tourism income to Oregon businesses along the Cascades route.

I wanted to also give you an update on our recent grant funded project to provide improved connectivity to the Amtrak Cascades line here in Benton County.

In early Fall of 2016, Benton County Rural Transportation was awarded a competitive three-year Grant (\$99,650) for a modest pilot project to develop a Corvallis-Amtrak Connector bus service, which would operate five days per week to move passengers between key points in Corvallis and the Albany Amtrak Station, serving all the major daily northbound trains.

We have been working hard on planning and development for this project, and expect to launch the service this June. So far to date, we have accomplished the following:

- Identified vehicle specifications and a separate source of funding for a vehicle for the service; developed and released RFQ for the vehicle; moving to vehicle selection and ordering this coming week
- Held planning meeting with stakeholders from ODOT Public Transit, ODOT Passenger Rail, LB Loop, OSU Transportation, and Benton County Transportation
- Reviewed existing station service providers and Cascades ridership data; identified target days of service and target high-ridership train and some Amtrak Cascades bus stops
- Finalized travel Connector route and five collector sites in Corvallis to include OSU campus; Corvallis Transit Center; two downtown hotels; and a North Corvallis location
- Conducted RFP for marketing consultant and selected local Eugene area, transit-experienced marketing company and have a draft marketing plan
- Working with Benton County Public Information Officer to discuss press releases and public meetings for kick-off
- Drafted tentative schedule with existing contractor for five runs per day to meet five incoming trains starting at 5:05am and ending at 7:45pm – moving to test schedule in live runs in April
- Begun work on the written Connector Operations Plan, and Connector Marketing and Public Outreach Plan, for required submission to ODOT; will complete this in April

There has again been very strong and continuing interest from the community, elected officials, the media, and community groups involved with transportation issues, as well as from ODOT, on the progress of this project. We hope and expect this pilot project to be successful.

We will have the summer months to launch the pilot, find and address any glitches in and/or tighten up the schedule or reservation process, build service awareness in the community, and gear up for the OSU Fall Term and the return of students. At that time we will launch a second outreach campaign, and we do expect this convenient service, at a reasonable \$5 fare, to also be popular with students.

So in summary, please consider this information, and the obvious popularity of the Amtrak Cascades service here in the mid-Valley, during your Sub-Committee hearings. On a personal note, I hope that you will continue your support for this important mode of passenger travel in Oregon.

If you have any questions about the voucher program, or the Amtrak Connector pilot project, I would be more than happy to answer them. My contact information is below.

Very Truly Yours,

Lee K. Lazaro, CCTM
Benton County Rural/Special Transportation Coordinator
 C/O City of Corvallis, PO Box 1083, Corvallis OR 97339-1083
 541-754-1748
Lee.Lazaro@corvallisoregon.gov

cc: Benton County Board of Commissioners & PIO