IMPROVING AMERICA’S PREMIER LONG-DISTANCE TRAIN

Presented and Prepared by

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COAST STARLIGHT COMMUNITIES NETWORK

BACKGROUND
The Coast Starlight Communities Network (CSCN) is a coalition of various interests with the goal of protecting and improving rail service between Washington, Oregon and California.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
- Increase community knowledge of the Coast Starlight and the benefits of train travel
- Support community efforts to promote train travel to and from their communities
- Inspire communities to improve their Amtrak stations
- Work with Amtrak to improve and refine onboard service standards
- Encourage Amtrak and host railroads to improve on-time-performance and shorten travel times

FOR MORE INFORMATION
Our website (www.coaststarlight.net) has additional information about our group and current projects. We have worked hard to provide valuable information to assist with travel planning. We also personally respond to potential travelers to answer any questions they have leading to the reservation process.

We encourage you to join our Facebook page (www.coaststarlight.net/facebook/) and follow us on Twitter (www.coaststarlight.net/twitter/). We frequently post updates with current news, quick and simple ways you can support the Coast Starlight, and communicate with potential travelers and passengers while they are onboard. We limit our posts to quick points with links to additional information.
INTRODUCTION

The Coast Starlight has been described as “one of the most fascinating journeys on the West Coast. It will take your breath away.” The route offers unparalleled experiences of the western states as well as incredible untapped potential as a tool for improved mobility. The Coast Starlight has been a proud West Coast asset for nearly thirty-nine years and, as it prepares to enter its fourth decade of service, still has much potential for growth.

A true world-class experience, with faster, more reliable and more frequent service, can be achieved. Equipment can be expanded, improved and better maintained. Onboard service can once again be a first-class experience. The route can become a coordinated effort that other transportation efforts aspire to match and seamlessly integrate with.

The Coast Starlight Communities Network has compiled this document to outline possible strategies to improve the Coast Starlight and reassert its importance to the West Coast.

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BACKGROUND AND HISTORY OF THE COAST STARLIGHT

Running daily between Los Angeles and Seattle, the Coast Starlight is one of Amtrak’s fifteen long-distance trains. The route ties the West Coast together by providing convenient travel that does not contribute to congested airports and highways.

Prior to Amtrak it was necessary to transfer between trains and various railroads to travel the length of the Pacific Coast. Service from San Diego was provided by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. The Southern Pacific Railroad operated the full-service Coast Daylight and the Lark service between Los Angeles and San Francisco. Southern Pacific also operated the Cascade between Oakland and Portland. Union Pacific, Northern Pacific and the Great Northern Railroads provided service between Portland and Seattle. In 1970, the Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroads merged with the Burlington Northern Railroad.

When Amtrak began operations on May 1, 1971, a single route was formed to run between Los Angeles and Seattle and, for a short while, down to San Diego. This unnamed, tri-weekly train was simply #11 going southbound and #12 going northbound. A Los Angeles to Oakland train (#98 northbound and #99 southbound) supplemented this service. Service was also provided between San Diego and Los Angeles (the San Diegan, now the Pacific Surfliner) and also between Portland and Seattle (Mount Rainier/Puget Sound, now Amtrak Cascades).

In the November 1971 timetable, the Los Angeles to Oakland train revived the Coast Daylight name and was also extended to San Diego under its new assigned numbers of #12 and #13. The San Diego to Seattle train received its new name, the Coast Starlight, and became #11 and #14. A few years later, the Coast Daylight merged with the Coast Starlight to become a daily train. The San Diego to Los Angeles segment was later dropped, although for a few years in the mid-1990s, the Coast Starlight sent two through-coach cars down to San Diego as #511, the last Pacific Surfliner of the night. These cars returned the next morning and were re-coupled to #14 to continue to Seattle.

The Coast Starlight was re-launched in 1995 with delicious food, entertainment and first-class service, as well as the Pacific Parlour Cars. These cars, unique to the Coast Starlight, are dedicated First Class domed lounges. The Coast Starlight quickly became Amtrak’s premier long-distance train. Slowly, over the subsequent years, service levels dropped and ridership began to dip.

During the summer of 2008, the Coast Starlight was once again re-launched with refurbished equipment, new amenities and a rejuvenated spirit. The Pacific Parlour Car now offers First Class passengers an alternative dining experience, espresso coffee service and an onboard movie theater. Already one of Amtrak’s most popular routes, the re-launch has spurred a fifteen percent jump in ridership.
Improving On-Time-Performance (OTP) and shortening travel times is essential to increase ridership. Amtrak, Union Pacific, Burlington Northern Santa Fe, and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority must work together to dispatch passenger trains quickly, on time and with top priority.

OTP can be encouraged utilizing the same method Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA) uses in their relationship with Union Pacific. Their incentive payment program has proven to be effective and successful. Following their model, incentive payments would be paid by Amtrak to host railroads starting at ninety percent OTP. Payment would rise based on performance levels.

Over time, travel times should be shortened. The Coast Starlight runs over the same route its predecessors did, but now takes several hours longer.

Amtrak and Metrolink need to completely overhaul the schedules of trains traveling on the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor (LOSSAN). Metrolink's Ventura County line makes nine station stops between Oxnard and Los Angeles Union Station with an hour and a half scheduled. The Coast Starlight travels the same route making only two station stops, yet has nearly two hours scheduled.

There are many segments where significant time could be removed from the schedule in both directions. The following are suggestions for immediate time reductions, with additional reductions recommended in the future.

- 5-8 minutes between Seattle and Portland
- 3-5 minutes between Portland and Sacramento
- 3-5 minutes between Oakland Jack London and San Jose
- 10 minutes between San Jose and Salinas (significant padding here)
- 5-8 minutes between Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo
- 5-8 minutes between San Luis Obispo and Los Angeles

In the short term, #14 should continue to leave Los Angeles Union Station at 10:15 AM in order to keep its current time slot. When the proposed Coast Daylight train begins, we recommend a later departure with the Coast Daylight departing at 9:05 AM.

Going southbound, #11 should arrive into Los Angeles Union Station earlier in the evening to enable other Amtrak connections. Time should be removed from the schedule starting
in Emeryville. We feel that this would benefit all stations, as well as provide additional
daylight viewing along the coast. Removing time further north would allow for a later
departure from Seattle. This would allow for a departure geared towards tourist
schedules.

We would also like to see additional frequencies of service along the route. The Coast
Daylight would travel from San Francisco to Los Angeles a few hours ahead of the Coast
Starlight. Making all Pacific Surfliner stops, as well as new stops north of San Luis
Obispo, the Coast Daylight would sweep up passengers along the coast and allow them
to travel to their destination or transfer to the Coast Starlight.

CONDITION OF THE COAST STARLIGHT ROUTE
The Coast Starlight operates on a 1,377 mile rail corridor between Los Angeles and
Seattle. Like most routes Amtrak operates on, this rail corridor is almost entirely owned
by private railroads. Amtrak in turn pays for trackage rights to operate the Coast Starlight
on their tracks.

Ownership of the Coast Starlight Corridor
- Seattle - Portland (187 miles): BNSF Railway
- Portland - Moorpark (1,142 miles): Union Pacific Railroad
- Moorpark - Los Angeles (48 miles): Southern California Regional Rail Authority
  (Metrolink)

The Coast Starlight is unique among Amtrak's long-distance trains in that large portions of
its route are on rail corridors used by commuter rail and Amtrak corridor services. Such
services operate at high frequencies compared to long-distance trains and therefore are
the targets of many publicly-funded capital improvement projects to improve reliability and
capacity. These projects benefit both the commuter/corridor services and the Coast
Starlight. As a result of these past investments, most of these corridors feature two main
tracks, ideal for fast, reliable and frequent rail service.

Commuter and Amtrak corridor services on the Coast Starlight corridor
- Amtrak Cascades (310 miles): Seattle - Eugene
- Capitol Corridor (130 miles): Sacramento - San Jose
- Caltrain (32 miles): Santa Clara - Gilroy
- Amtrak Pacific Surfliner (220 miles): San Luis Obispo - Los Angeles
- Metrolink (72 miles): Montalvo - Los Angeles

Within these corridors, the Coast Starlight and local rail services complement one another
to provide travel choices for various types of travelers, and maintain their track with
passenger comfort in mind. Outside of these developed corridors, however, track
conditions are largely left at the discretion of the host railroads. For example, in 2006,
Union Pacific received extensive media attention for allowing their tracks to degrade to a
poor quality, significantly impacting Coast Starlight performance.

To improve overall performance of the Coast Starlight, it is imperative that improvements
are implemented on non-corridor segments, whether funded by the freight railroads or
public rail agencies.

Outside the developed rail corridors, most of the route is single-tracked. Due to an
inadequate number of passing sidings for opposing trains, travel time is greater on these
segments. One example is the twenty-six mile segment between Santa Barbara and
Ventura, with only one passing siding. Trains often wait up to twenty minutes for
oncoming trains to pass. A single-track railroad also has low reliability because disabled trains block all other traffic from passing.

The majority of the route is equipped with Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) signaling, allowing dispatchers to control train movements, signals and turnouts from a centralized location. However, the segments between Salinas and Santa Margarita and between San Luis Obispo and Goleta (together account for sixteen percent of the Coast Starlight's route miles) still operate with 1940's-era Automatic Block Signaling (ABS), Track Warrant Control (TWC) and manual turnouts. Train movements are controlled by the dispatcher, who manually issues authority to occupy track by radio. Each passing event at sidings can take up to ten minutes as the crew must stop the train in order to manually operate each railroad turnout switch.

A number of proposed and pending projects will allow for additional time to be removed and increased frequency in the future. Both Washington and California's Divisions of Rail, along with the CCJPA have identified over fifty short and long-term capital improvements to their lines that would directly improve route efficiency and OTP. Additionally, the Coast Starlight Communities Network has identified seventeen projects to shorten route times and increase capacity along the line.
The comfort, style, appeal and safety of equipment are all essential for an experience that builds loyal ridership. Equipment must receive constant attention, repairs and upgrades.

**FLEET STRATEGY PLAN**

We do not believe, that under Amtrak’s recently released Fleet Strategy Plan, that cars will be able to be designed, built and delivered fast enough to meet demand. We need cars now and Amtrak must place an order as soon as possible. While old equipment must be phased out and retired over time, capacity must be increased now to meet demand.

In the Fleet Strategy Plan, Amtrak reports that the Coast Starlight currently runs with three sleepers and four coaches. They predict that in order to satisfy demands, the Coast Starlight will need to run with four sleepers and six coaches by Fiscal Year 2018 and five sleepers and seven coaches by Fiscal Year 2023.

While we agree that consist size needs to be increased, we feel that Amtrak must begin looking not only at increasing consist size, but also increase train frequency. Twice-daily service is more useful to prospective passengers than once-daily service with a double-length train.

It appears that Amtrak is planning to retire the current Pacific Parlour Cars by 2012 but does not address if/what cars will replace them. The Pacific Parlour cars are a unique amenity not possible on competing modes of transportation and greatly enhance the desirability of the train. Any monetary gains by past improvements, including the 2008 re-launch, would be lost by the discontinuance of the Pacific Parlour Cars.

**ELECTRICAL PLUGS**

Electrical plugs are the most requested item on Amtrak trains today. Amtrak California and Cascades cars have plugs at each seat and passengers have come to expect electrical plugs when traveling Amtrak on the West Coast.

Superliners cycle on a four-year maintenance program. Amtrak began installing electrical plugs in the Superliner Coaches in the Summer 2007. On this schedule, all cars should be completed by Summer 2011. Approximately 50-55% of the Superliner Coach cars are currently completed. Plugs should also be installed in Sightseer Lounges and Dining Cars.
WINDOW CLEANING
After traveling along the salty Pacific Ocean and over the Cascades, windows are often quite dirty, making it difficult to enjoy the beautiful views. Windows should be cleaned mid-route during a regularly scheduled extended stop. Sacramento would be the ideal location for this, as water is already available at the platform and the train is serviced during late night and early morning hours.
ONBOARD SERVICE AND EXPERIENCE

The Coast Starlight’s 1995 re-launch sparked the beginning of its reputation as one of Amtrak’s premier long-distance trains. In recent years, onboard service levels and the overall experience have not retained the train’s reputation.

PROMISED RE-LAUNCH AMENITIES

In 2008, the Coast Starlight was re-launched with refurbished equipment and new amenities promised. Onboard amenities do not consistently measure up to those promised. Inconsistency means passengers are often not receiving the value advertised and paid for. Amtrak’s “Rediscover the Coast Starlight” pamphlet, released just before the re-launch promises the following:

**Coach Car Service**
- Each seat has its own menu and route guide
- New, larger pillows
- In-seat meal service upon request

**The Sleeping Car Experience**
- Welcome Gift of sparkling wine or cider and fresh fruit
- Personal Amenities Kit that includes shampoo, soaps and lotions
- Breakfast in Bed: A basket with juice, coffee and a newspaper

**The Pacific Parlour Car: A Living Room on Rails**
- Specialty coffee bar offering espresso, lattés, cappuccino and hot chocolate
- Exclusive daily regional wine and artisan cheese tastings for a nominal fee
- Onboard theatre showing new and classic movies
  (A news release entitled “Rediscover the Coast Starlight: Amtrak Re-Launches Service” dated June 4, 2008 states that movies will be shown three times a day.)

In addition to delivering the promised re-launch amenities, the onboard experience needs not only to remain elegant, but also taken to the next level and brought into the twenty-first century.

DINING CAR EXPERIENCE

The Dining Car experience is extremely important. Service should be first-class. The entrées should look spectacular and taste delicious. Food should be fresh and cooked to order, rather than reheated. We hope Amtrak continues to enhance the Dining Car experience with improved menu selections.

Some of our concerns were recently addressed by Amtrak’s return to full china service and linen in the Dining Car. Dispensing with the use of plastic dinnerware and synthetic tablecloths has reinstated a quality Dining Car experience.

To support dishwashing, the Food Specialist, previously a seasonal kitchen position, has been converted into a full-year position. The train is already staffed with two Service Attendants year-round. Due to higher ridership, a third will be added seasonally.

We are pleased that the dining experience in the Pacific Parlour Car has been enhanced by providing full china service at all meals, as opposed to only at dinner.
MENU HOLDERS
Menus are currently tackily taped to the wall. The installation of menu holders in the Sightseer Lounges would be a simple, inexpensive improvement that would make a large aesthetic difference.

WIRELESS INTERNET
With the exception of electrical plugs, onboard wireless internet is the most requested item we hear about. WiFi would boost the appeal of train travel. Amtrak recently rolled out WiFi on Acela and is looking at adding WiFi to long-distance trains using a combination of satellite, 4G and WiMax. Pacific Parlour Cars are currently being equipped with WiFi. We hope that means the Coast Starlight is a priority for consist-wide installation.

HD FLAT SCREEN TELEVISIONS
Televisions, previously used for documentary and movie viewing, should be replaced with new high-definition flat screen televisions, usable for various purposes such as:

- Displaying onboard movies in the evening
- Documentaries to supplement the National Park Service program (i.e. “the Most Beautiful Train in the World”)
- GPS location of train, upcoming scenic highlights and photo opportunities
- Displaying upcoming stations stops, weather, and to advertise other Amtrak routes

TABLETOP DISPLAYS
Replacing current Sightseer Lounge table tops with glass window tops would create a space to display detailed route maps with scenic photo opportunities and could be sold for relevant, route-specific advertising to increase revenue.

TIMETABLE HOLDERS
Existing timetable holders in the Sightseer Lounges should be filled in Los Angeles, Seattle and, if needed, Oakland.

ONBOARD MAGAZINE AND READING MATERIALS
The Northeast Corridor and Empire Builder, along with most airlines, feature onboard magazines. A similar Coast Starlight magazine could provide station information, a route map, information on scenic highlights and photo opportunities, as well as feature stories. This type of onboard reading material would generate additional advertising revenue.

Complimentary daily newspapers and magazines should be available in the Pacific Parlour Car for First Class passengers. Reading materials should also be available for purchase in the Sightseer Lounge and from the seat attendants. Available materials could be advertised through a seatback card subsidized by the publishers.

BUSINESS CLASS
Significant revenue could be generated by catering to passengers who would like to experience First Class amenities but are only traveling during daylight hours and not in need of a private room. We propose adding a Business Class section to the Coast Starlight, providing similar amenities as First Class passengers.
INTERCONNECTIVITY

IMPROVE AND RESTORE CONNECTIONS
The matrix of communities accessible by train increases exponentially with each train that connects with another. Several connections have been lost over the years. These should be restored as soon as possible.

- #14 to #28 (Empire Builder) in Portland
- #1 (Sunset Limited) and #3 (Southwest Chief) to #14 in Los Angeles
- #11 to #4 (Southwest Chief) in Los Angeles
- #2 (Sunset Limited) to #14 in Los Angeles
- #11 and #6 (California Zephyr) in Sacramento, Davis, Martinez and Emeryville

In addition, scheduled transfers to and from #11 and #14 to the Capital Corridor to serve remaining stations between San Jose and Sacramento. #11 should connect to the Capital Corridor in Sacramento, while #14 should connect to the Capital Corridor in San Jose. Scheduled transfers should also be in place to connect to and from Amtrak Cascades.

IMPLEMENT THRU-TICKETING
Scheduled transfers and thru-ticketing to and from non-Amtrak lines further increase the matrix of communities serviced and subsequently increases revenue.

- Caltrain in San Jose – serves several of the proposed Coast Daylight stations
- Metrolink at Los Angeles, Van Nuys, Oxnard and Simi Valley
- Sounder at Seattle

ACCESSIBILITY OF SCHEDULES AND TICKETS
We have been working closely with Amtrak and Google since 2009 to add the Coast Starlight to Google Transit. Google Transit and other 511 applications make researching schedules, ticketing and connections to regional transit easier.

CONNECTIONS WITH REGIONAL TRANSIT AND AIRPORTS
All local transit must coordinate schedules with and feed to and from the Coast Starlight. Local transit schedules should be adjusted to accomplish this. Where available, regional transit passes should be offered. This program could begin by adopting the Capitol Corridor transit transfers program to Coast Starlight passengers de-training throughout the Bay Area and could easily be expanded to include Salinas and Monterey regional transit.

Los Angeles Metro is currently extending the Orange Line to Chatsworth. Once expansion is complete, Amtrak should make Chatsworth a Coast Starlight stop.

The ability to transfer to and from local airports can only increase ridership. The Coast Starlight stopped at Richmond from 1978 to 1996. Reinstating the Richmond station stop would provide a connection with BART to San Francisco International Airport and additional bus lines. If our proposed Capitol Corridor connections are implemented, this stop could remain eliminated. A stop at Burbank Airport would provide an airport connection for Southern California.

Expanding the FlyAway bus service to the Van Nuys station to meet the Coast Starlight would be a great asset to passengers traveling from Los Angeles International Airport.
STATIONS

A passenger’s trip begins and ends at the station. Because of this, the experience and service standards must begin from the moment the passenger enters the station. Improved service while picking up tickets, checking baggage and pre-boarding must be experiences that heighten anticipation of the passenger’s arriving train.

BETTER SIGNAGE
While additional station staff would be ideal, with the current economy we must look to signage to direct passengers to their trains. Ticketing counters, track numbers, car markers and checked baggage areas should all be clearly marked and be uniform at each station. In addition, local information with taxis, car rentals, local transit, nearby restaurants and hotels should be posted.

FIRST CLASS LOUNGES
Dedicated First Class lounges need to be available at major stations. Seattle, Emeryville and possibly Sacramento should have lounges, as they serve two or more long-distance trains per day. A dedicated lounge should eventually be added to Los Angeles Union Station to address the needs of all long-distance train passengers. A pre-boarding reception should also be offered in Seattle.

PASSENGER INFORMATION DISPLAY SYSTEM (PIDS)
PIDS electronic status screens do not currently list long-distance trains. This causes frequent confusion and should be a simple fix. As locomotives continue to be upgraded, all equipment will have the same technology onboard making this possible.

QUIKTRAK MACHINES
QuikTrak ticket vending machines should be placed at or near all unstaffed stations to make the ticket process easy for passengers boarding in smaller communities.

WIRELESS INTERNET
Just as WiFi should be available onboard, it also should be available in major stations. The City of Sacramento has already added free WiFi access at their station. We would like to see Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Oakland, Emeryville, Martinez, Portland, Eugene and Seattle implement a similar program as soon as possible.
We would like to thank RailPAC, the Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada, for their generous donation to defray printing costs.

www.railpac.org