

GAME DAY TRAIN REPORT

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OSU Policy Analysis Laboratory
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Abstract

The concept of a train to shuttle football and other sports fans between Portland and Corvallis for major home games has been discussed in several forms before. However, each previous attempt was a “solo” trial put together by individual departments without coordination or sufficient planning and forethought. OSU has the capacity to be a leader and trendsetter in this kind of endeavor, so long as it is able to sustain the necessary logistical and personal efforts. With graduate students examining transportation opportunities and policy, OPAL can provide critical support through networking, data gathering, and analysis.

Introduction

During the Fall term of 2014, OPAL began exploring the opportunity for collaboration with faculty, students, and organizations in the OSU College of Engineering for the purpose of demonstrating alternative transportation opportunities in Corvallis. After reaching out for collaboration with faculty of the Transportation Engineering program within the School of Civil and Construction Engineering, professor Kate Hunter-Zaworski expressed interest in the project, leading to a meeting to discuss potential transportation projects. Kate teaches railroad engineering, advises students on railroad engineering projects, and in general has many connections to rail professionals (both in industry and government) in Oregon. OPAL, OSU administrators, and the Oregon Department of Transportation have had several meetings to discuss the feasibility of bringing a “Game Day Train” to Corvallis for home sporting events. The purpose of this report is to detail the progress made during these discussions and inform current and future champions of alternative transport.

Concept

The Game Day Train (GDT) is a proposed passenger rail service that would travel from Portland to Corvallis for major sporting events, starting with home football games. Home game days bring a significant number of cars to Corvallis. The OSU Athletic Department estimates that between six and seven thousand cars come to Corvallis on game days, with approximately 60% of these cars coming from Portland. This leads to parking and traffic congestion in Corvallis, especially along Highway 34 leading to I-5. Passenger rail would have a number of benefits, including but not limited to:

- Reducing the number of cars in Corvallis on game days
- Increasing overall transportation efficiency (reduces carbon emissions)
- Increasing road safety
- Demonstrate the viability and convenience of rail as a means of transportation

Timeline

- October 9 Email sent to all OSU Transportation Engineering faculty
Response from Dr. Hunter-Zaworski requesting time to meet
- October 10 Meeting held between OPAL staff member Zachary Dunn and
Dr. Hunter-Zaworski
- October 20 Meeting held between OPAL team and Dr. Hunter-Zaworski
(See Attachment A for meeting minutes)
- November 11 Meeting held with OSU Athletic Department administrators, Dr. Hunter-
Zaworski, and OPAL collaborators (See Attachment B for meeting minutes)
- Mid-November Dr. Hunter-Zaworski met with several ODOT railroad staff to discuss
possibility of GDT. Concept was referred to ODOT's Kathy Holmes for
further discussion

History

In November of 1996, Amtrak operated a special Civil War game train from Portland to Corvallis and return chartered by a Newport travel agency. Operationally, the trip was a success but financially it was a failure. The trip was put together without a great deal of advance notice. With more time for marketing and support from the two universities, the outcome might have been different.

For the 2013 Civil War game in Eugene, the University of Oregon athletic department price-shopped a 500-seat train from Portland but elected not to go forward with it. With more lead time to plan and advertise, a different decision might have been made.

During the meeting with the OSU Athletic department on November 11, a tentative target date for the first GDT was set for the 2016 Civil War game. In 1941, the OSU football team took a train from Corvallis to Durham, North Carolina to compete in the Rose Bowl with Duke University. The game was moved from Pasadena, California over fears of a Japanese attack following Pearl Harbor. After a five-day journey across the country the train arrived in Durham (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1942_Rose_Bowl). As the 75th anniversary of this game, the OSU Athletic department thought it would be a timely opportunity for the first GDT.

Next steps

While the concept is sound and there appears to be great interest in a GDT from many of the necessary stakeholders, it will require significant sustained effort to keep this project moving forward. To ultimately reach fruition, several things need to happen including identifying the rolling stock/operator that will be used for the train, the schedule and itinerary of the train, how tickets will be sold, what liability issues need to be addressed, etc. Currently the GDT is merely a concept and needs time and sustained energy behind it to become a reality.

- Survey (be led by Athletic dept with faculty assistance to OPAL students)
- Kate has begun conversation with Portland & Western about a west Willamette side train. Amtrak and P&W could also operate an east side train. Pick up points need to be determined that are convenient to Portland metro area fans, possible Salem and Albany. Some in the Athletic Department felt that Albany to Corvallis was the most valuable link to them.
- ODOT: Kate has talked to Bob Melbo – he has brought forward others' expressions of interest
- Reconvene interested parties, discuss operational and technical issues, building the business case, partnering with UO, subsequent planning/marketing/outreach

Critical contacts

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Attachment A: OPAL/CCE Transportation Meeting minutes

October 20, 2014

Owen 308

Attendees: Kate Hunter-Zaworski (CCE Professor), Dylan Anderson (M.Sc. student, OSU AREMA chapter president), Sally Duncan (OPAL Director), Court Smith (OSU Professor Emeritus), Zachary Dunn (MPP student)

Action items

1. Meeting with Bobby DeCarolis/Marianne Vydra/Meg Reeves to be initiated by Kate
2. Meeting with Brandon Trelstad to be initiated by Kate

Minutes

- Sally: OPAL's purpose is to facilitate collaborations between policy and non-policy students to give practice in hands-on projects where policy theory tends to break down. Opportunity for bridging the gap between city/university
- Court: Background in mechanical engineering, taught anthropology at OSU for many years. Looking for opportunity for action on climate change, education.
- Kate: Transportation engineering, focus is on human-centered design (not necessarily car-centered design). Many ideas and projects over the years with student involvement (e.g. commuter rail to Albany). One startup idea: Bus to lifelong learning
- Consensus: there are two "big ideas" we can pursue: a gameday train from Portland, and a commuter line (most feasible is bus) for Lebanon/LBCC/OSU. Gameday train will need to be discussed with several key people (John Cheney, Marianne Vydra, Bob De Carolis)
- Other ideas: CE 594 transportation facilities class (taught by Kate winter term) could be an opportunity for engineering/policy student collaboration. Also public transportation (CE 597). Possible collaboration with railroad club.

Attachment B: Game day train meeting minutes

November 11, 2014

Gill 110

Attendants:

- Sally Duncan (OPAL Director)
- Zachary Dunn, (OPAL employee)
- Court Smith (Professor emeritus)
- Dylan Anderson (Civil Engineering student)
- Kate Hunter-Zaworski (Civil Engineering Professor)
- Ivan Kuletz (OPAL employee)
- Mark Massari (Deputy Athletic Director)
- Dan Van De Riet (Associate Athletic Director for Football Operations)
- Todd Phelps (Associate Director of Athletics)
- Maryann Vydra (OSU general counsel)

Kate: time for gameday train conversation. Gameday train happened in the past. Party trains are very successful at other schools. Good relationships with Union Pacific

Mark: lots of what-ifs and variables that need to be considered. Tracks from Portland or Albany have been vetted in the past and we ran into problems. Overall athletics department is very interested in enhancing the fan experience and finding alternative ways to bring fans to games. What can we do to bring people in on train?

Kate: track maintenance has been done to meet federal guidelines. Two main problems: the way the tracks interface with Albany. The track is Y-shaped. Second problem is insurance. Who will operate and where will you get the train. May take 2-3 years to get pieces in place. Short term option: express buses. Passenger rolling stock Telgo. Mr. Franklin in Albany running excursion trains from Albany to Sweet Home.

Mark: 90% of gameday traffic are trying to go east on 34 or north on 99/20. 60% are coming from Portland (north of Wilsonville).

Todd: Push is to get people onto Philomath Hwy more efficiently. 6-7,000 cars coming into Corvallis on gamedays.

Mark: OSU campus has “village” atmosphere. All athletic buildings in close proximity. Problem is the infrastructure has not grown with the university. I agree that bringing a train to campus would fit our Northwest culture.

Kate: Another option is to run the train on Willamette & Pacific line. DMU (diesel multiple unit). They look like MAX trains. Travel time is 2 hours from Portland. Four cars could be used with a capacity of 150-200 people. Another option is bus rapid transit (BRT), this is safer and more convenient than individual driving.

Sally: what would it take to own our own rolling stock? Is leasing an option?

Kate: this is viable if athletics was going to use the rolling stock frequently (M-F). One of the first steps is to talk to ODOT about public transportation problem on gamedays.

Options

1. Amtrak: convince them to alter schedules on gamedays
2. Portland & Western track
3. Albany and Eastern excursion train. Kate will link Athletic Department staff with owner.
4. Bus rapid transit (BRT)

Contact information

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Next steps

- Survey (will be led by Athletic dept)
- Kate will start conversation with Portland & Western
- ODOT: first step is talk to Bob Melbow – Kate will start conversation
- Work on a general plan and list of required actions