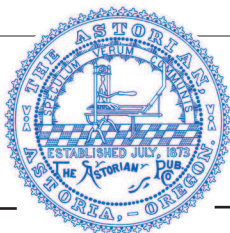


OPINION

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OUR VIEW

Amtrak crash mustn't derail mass transit along I-5 corridor



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson

Cars from an Amtrak train that derailed lay spilled onto Interstate 5 alongside smashed vehicles Monday in DuPont, Wash.

In what some are calling “the Titanic of train wrecks,” Monday’s deadly crash of the inaugural run of a new higher-speed passenger Amtrak train between Seattle and Portland will certainly cause some to question the viability of improving rail transportation along the Interstate 5 corridor. Horrific as it was, we should not be so quick to give up.

The loss of life was tragic, along with injuries suffered by dozens of other passengers, crew and passing motorists. Economic damage also will be substantial, with Washington Gov. Jay Inslee declaring a state of emergency in two counties. Traffic delays, reconstruction costs, equipment damage and inevitable lawsuits will easily add up into the tens of millions against a rail-improvement project that had a budget of about \$181 million.

Investigation of precisely what caused the derailment will take weeks, if not months. It is, however, safe to say that officials can never be overly careful

when it comes to ensuring all assumptions are correct and all risks have been mitigated to the maximum extent possible. But just as passenger steamships didn’t collapse as an industry following the Titanic disaster, neither will the move toward high-speed rail end due to this incident.

The failing race to address traffic congestion by adding more lanes to I-5 — a strategy particularly prevalent in Washington state — has about reached its inevitable conclusion. There must continue to be steps toward better mass-transit options throughout the interconnected megalopolis stretching between Vancou-

ver, B.C. and the mid-Willamette Valley.

This isn’t necessarily to say that European or Japanese-style ultra-high-speed rail lines are the immediate answer. In an example of supremely bad timing, just last week consultants estimated such a line connecting Vancouver and Portland could cost up to \$42 billion — somewhat more than Oregon’s current total annual state spending. Massive federal aid would be required. Infrastructure spending on such a scale — not yet counting other steps that would be needed to link communities to the new train — are almost impossible to imagine in today’s national political environment.

In a longer time frame — and assuming we resist wasting more trillions on pointless foreign wars — rapid economic growth in this region may fully justify such a massive expenditure.

Ultra-high-speed rail, depending on

the technology used, brings speeds of up to 270 mph — compared to the 81 mph Monday’s Amtrak train was estimated to be traveling. Such amazing speeds are facilitated by dedicated routes, including some partially or totally underground. These trains have outstanding safety records in other countries, and are certainly far safer than traveling by highways in private vehicles.

While we await such marvels, it’s vital to learn from whatever mistakes were made leading up to Monday’s crash. The remainder of the Seattle-Portland route must be intensely examined. Technology and protocols must be implemented to further minimize the potential for human error.

In our rush toward a brighter future for mass transit, let us not get into such a big hurry that lives are needlessly sacrificed. But after every precaution is taken, we must try again.

GUEST COLUMN

Oregon Youth Authority seeks second-chance families in Clatsop County

Charlene Hall gets so many phone calls on Mother’s Day that she has to turn off her ringer so she can enjoy the holiday with her family.

But no matter how many messages the Junction City resident receives, she returns them all. She only has three biological children, but about 500 young people can call her mom — the youth she took into her home over the past 33 years as an Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) foster parent.

For these young people, Charlene was their second-chance family — their second chance at having a home that was positive, supportive, and safe; and their second chance at trying to change their lives for the better.

OYA has many youth who could benefit from foster parents like Charlene, but we don’t have nearly enough homes to send them to.

Clatsop County currently has zero OYA foster homes. Statewide, OYA only has 36.

What is OYA? We’re the state’s juvenile justice agency. We provide safe environments and opportunities for rehabilitation for youth ages 12 through 24 who are committed to our custody by the courts.

Some youth in our custody go to our juvenile correctional facilities. But the majority

live in the community, where we try to place them in the most appropriate setting for them to get the treatment and support they need to be crime-free, productive members of their communities.

OYA’s foster care program is different from others you may have heard about — we only provide homes for teenagers and young adults, and we don’t do adoptions. We serve teens who are working their way toward returning home, as well as youth ages 18 to 24 who need help learning independent-living skills.

We often try to place youth in foster homes that are near their regular home so that they can be near their families and local support networks. But with no foster homes in Clatsop County, that means local youth who are good candidates for foster care would have to go live elsewhere in Oregon. Or we may not have any available homes at all.

So who may qualify to be an OYA foster parent? You must be:

- At least 21 years old, or 25 if you are working with youth 18 and older.
- A U.S. citizen or permanent resident.
- Able to pass a background check.
- Emotionally mature and able to help youth build positive relationships and develop life skills.

Our youth have their own state medical card to pay for their medical, mental health, and other necessary treatment costs. Fos-



Oregon Youth Authority

Charlene Hall is a foster parent in Junction City.

ter parents provide their basic housing, food, clothing, transportation, recreational opportunities, spending money and reasonable incidentals. Our foster families receive a monthly payment to reimburse them for the services they provide.

You don’t need previous foster care experience to sign up. We provide a wide range of training, from first aid and CPR, to how to work with youth who have been through the court system, to how to help youth dealing with mental health or drug and alcohol issues.

OYA foster parents also have a strong support network. We call at least once a week and visit at least monthly, in addition to providing continual support via phone or email. OYA parole and probation officers include our foster parents in case planning for their youth.

Our youth reap countless benefits from supportive foster homes, but our foster parents also see rewards. Just ask Charlene. She loves that her former foster youth keep calling year after year. They often share news of how they’ve moved on to find satisfying jobs, go to college, and have spouses and children.

She gave them a second chance. And it made all the difference.

Jered Schlunegger is the Oregon Youth Authority foster care certifier for Clatsop County. To learn more about being an OYA foster parent, please contact him at Jered.Schlunegger@oya.state.or.us or 971-718-7902, or visit their website at bit.ly/oyafostercare.



Jered Schlunegger