



# PIONEER RAIL LINE COULD RETURN TO RURAL OREGON

**EASTERN OREGON** Freight trains clatter through Eastern Oregon all day, but ever since Amtrak discontinued the Pioneer line in 1997 because it was losing money as passengers dwindled, no passenger train has stopped in Pendleton, Ontario or Baker City. In fact, the Pendleton train station

is now a museum. But that may change as Amtrak considers reinstating the Pioneer, a move that could give an economic boost to Eastern Oregon.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 requires Amtrak to re-evaluate several former train lines throughout the country, including the Pioneer. Amtrak will present the results of this study to Congress this fall.

A major aspect of Amtrak's decision to reinstate the Pioneer, which started in Seattle and ended in Chicago, is whether or not there's a renewed interest in riding the train. Throughout the country, ridership is up; 2008 was the sixth consecutive year of growth nationwide, with ridership on the Cascades line between Eugene and Vancouver, B.C., up more than 12%.

"If there's ridership, the communities can benefit," says Vernae Graham, Amtrak spokesperson. "It can stimulate all sorts of economic growth in those communities."

Baker City and the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners have written letters to their representatives encouraging the reinstatement of the Pioneer. In October 2008, Sen. Ron Wyden, Rep. Earl Blumenauer, Rep. Greg Walden and two Idaho congressmen sent a letter to Amtrak CEO Alex Kummant supporting the reinstatement of the Pioneer.

Jake Jacobs, Baker City economic development manager, and Tracy Bosen, Pendleton economic development director, agree that the Pioneer would increase tourism, particularly to historical downtown areas.

"It's going to require a lot of change at the terminals," says David Richey, Ontario planning and zoning administrator. "There should be other types of transportation, taxi cabs and bus services."

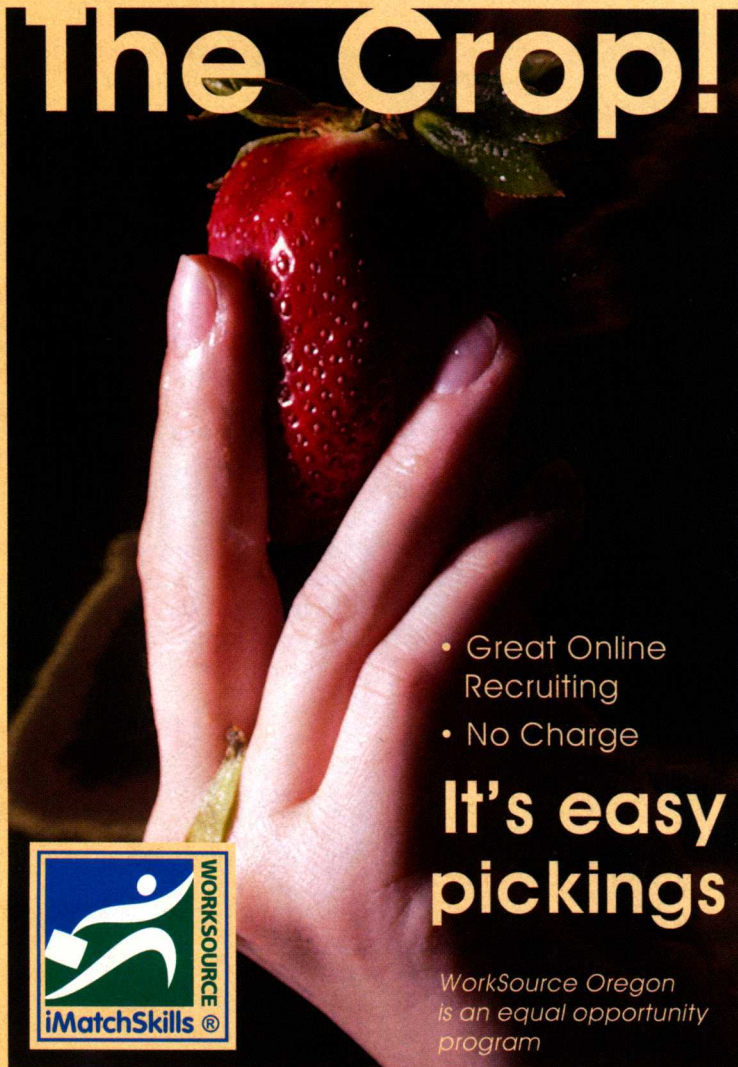
For some, riding the train would be an activity in itself.

"There would be a lot of people who would take a train ride, including myself, just to take the train ride," says Jacobs. "It's a recreational thing as well."

Reinstating the Pioneer is more than nostalgia for a time when train stations were busy centers of communities. It's a way for green transportation options to be extended east of the Cascades to rural Oregonians.

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