



Photo courtesy of WSDOT

Amtrak Cascades

PROJECT TEAM: Cesar Vergara, Chief Designer, Amtrak (1990-2000)
Amtrak Rail Design Center
Washington State Department of Transportation-Office of Rail
Talgo Engineering (Madrid)

CLIENT: Washington State Department of Transportation
Amtrak West
Talgo
EMDiesels

COMPLETION DATE: 1997

AWARDS: Smithsonian Institution 2003 National Design Triennial
Art Institute of Chicago 1998, Modern Trains and Splendid Stations: Architecture, Design, and Rail Travel for the Twenty-First Century

The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design in 2003 recognized the *Cascades* as one of the most influential designs of the decade in selecting the train for its coveted Design Triennial. The tailfins, which solve the height difference between the F-59 locomotives and the Talgo pendular cars, are an iconic element that became the signature image of the train. But the tailfins are not the only distinctive feature of the *Cascades*.

- ◆ The interior colors, textures and shapes were all inspired by the landscapes of the Pacific Northwest
- ◆ Applying ADA guidelines creatively resulted in the *Cascades* becoming the most accessible train in the Amtrak system
- ◆ The ceiling in the bar car boasts a spectacular print with 1,500 fiber optic lights depicting the population densities of the Pacific Northwest

This combination of unique features produced a design not just with initial appeal, but longevity.

CESAR VERGARA, serving as chief designer, steered the Amtrak Rail Design Center in Philadelphia in producing this award-winning train.

The Washington State Department of Transportation and Amtrak West had procured a fleet of Talgo trains to operate the Portland-Seattle-Vancouver, BC route of the *Cascades*. Intent on producing a world-class design, the Washington DOT's Office of Rail conducted customer focus groups to evaluate concepts of train interiors and exteriors. The resulting list of desirable and required features was then turned over the Amtrak design team.

Bringing this project to fruition required close communication between Washington DOT, Amtrak and Talgo in Spain and the United States. The idiosyncrasies of the company cultures and countries made the program challenging and complex. Familiar in bridging such differing cultures, CESAR VERGARA worked comfortably with all parties in producing 3D drawings, mock ups, patterns and color palettes that answered each point in the design criteria.

The *Cascades* continues to be recognized as one of the best train designs in North America.



