



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

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FLORIDIAN THREATENED

NARP has protested the Amtrak Board of Directors' June 29 decision to approve the holding of "public hearings" regarding possible discontinuance of Amtrak's Chicago-Florida service. In a July 7 letter to Senator Birch Bayh of Indiana, Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee, NARP's Orren Beaty insisted that Amtrak must pursue the matter of getting the train rerouted through Atlanta before holding any public hearings. Copies of this letter have been provided to the staffs of other concerned House and Senate members.

Beaty stated in his letter: "Public hearings at this time will do nothing more than to underscore the fact that Amtrak has failed to follow through with its responsibilities under 'Task III' of the 'Route and Service Criteria'."

We have since been told by Amtrak that talks with the railroads are continuing.

In proposing at the June 29 meeting that the board approve such hearings, Amtrak's President Reistrup expressed the view that the preceding day's action by the joint House/Senate Conference Committee, which approved \$11.5 million less than Amtrak expected for FY 78 operating grants, left the board no choice but to move toward discontinuing service over this route. (See separate article on appropriations.)

The "Floridian" has for some time been the least productive of Amtrak's long-haul routes. The train, however, has also been at the same time the most poorly routed and poorly managed train in the Amtrak system.

NARP has insisted since 1970 that the "Floridian" must be routed through Atlanta. Amtrak officials (including President Reistrup speaking to the NARP Board at its April meeting — April News) have expressed their agreement on many occasions and have offered assurances that the Atlanta option was being investigated.

The "Floridian's" current schedule misses all through connections in Chicago. The train also runs on a detour route bypassing Indianapolis because of poor track conditions in Indiana. The train's schedule has been changed back and forth between day-night-day and night-day-night four times since Amtrak's May 1971 startup.

NARP believes that the "Floridian" will not have had a fair test until it is routed through Atlanta. Furthermore, we believe that the law requires Amtrak to make this move. Under the "Route and Service Criteria", which are effectively part of the law, where an economically weak route can be upgraded and restructured to improve its economics, such actions are to be undertaken and the route is to be continued with the revised service.

Even the language of the House Appropriations Committee's June 1977 report, which expressly calls for service cuts, says that such cuts should not be made where a "restructuring of service" is expected to significantly improve the financial performance of a currently uneconomical route.

At the June 29 Amtrak Board meeting, Amtrak's corporate planning staff presented a report on progress in attempts to have the train rerouted, a report which made it clear that serious negotiations with the railroads involved had not as yet taken place. The report included the following items of interest:

—The Louisville and Nashville Railroad has claimed that it lacks capacity to handle even one daily passenger train between

No Capacity on the L&N?

"On Capitol Hill, railroads won major victories as...the House Interior Committee decided not to consider until next January at the earliest legislation that would grant a right of eminent domain to coal slurry pipelines. The House Interior Committee's action was seen by some as evidence that railroads are succeeding in their efforts to convince legislators that they have the capacity to carry the coal that will be necessary to wean the nation away from oil..."

Railway Age, July 11, 1977

Chattanooga and Atlanta. (L&N is at the same time arguing on Capitol Hill against construction of coal-slurry pipelines, insisting that it has excess capacity now to move more coal.)

—Southern has told Amtrak that it will accept a passenger train

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Hard Work Ahead

by Orren Beaty

Enough disturbing things have been happening on the rail passenger front this summer to startle the most complacent among us out of our dreams of more and better service.

What has happened should certainly reduce the number of letters we get at NARP headquarters now and then suggesting that our work has been done — that rail passenger service will continue to grow and improve unthreatened into the distant future.

It isn't happening that way, as other accounts in this issue explain. Congress is cutting down on Amtrak's appropriations; Amtrak management and Board of Directors appear ready and willing to terminate some important routes; and the bus owners persist in their so-far unsuccessful efforts to destroy government support for Amtrak.

In short, the fight for a nationwide rail passenger system and for improved equipment and service is not over.

We received an interesting letter recently from a former NARP member, E. Harry Beltzig of Salinas, CA, who said:

"On April 8 I wrote you regarding the reason for my decision to terminate NARP membership. A just completed Starlight-Southwest-National trip...has convinced me that my decision was

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On-Board Services: Hope at Last

One of the resolutions passed at the Boston meeting of NARP Region I last January mandated an in-depth study of "Amtrak's service record, employee preparation, and conditions".

To begin work on this assignment, George Lerrigo of Bennington, VT, Vice Chairman of the Vermont Association of Railroad Passengers, and I recently spent two days meeting with relevant Amtrak people, including H. Rex Holland, Director of On-Board Services systemwide, and Frank J. Forcione, Eastern Region Director of On-Board Services.

(Under Amtrak's "decentralization", the organization chart shows Forcione and his Central and Western Region counterparts reporting to their respective regional Vice Presidents, with dotted lines — "denoting indirect staff support and interdepartmental communication" — to Holland, who sets overall On-Board Services policies and procedures.)

Holland has been on the job since April 1, and some of his key people for even shorter times. I predict that Amtrak, in its fifth On-Board Services Director to join in less than six years, has at last found the right man for the job.

His background is with Cunard Lines, Fred Harvey, and some airlines — all in transportation and hospitality-related services. (His right-hand man, Bruce Heard, is well-versed in the application of these services to rail.) Holland comes across not as a slick p. r. type, but as a hard-working pragmatist who knows how formidable is the job ahead of him — and who knows how to motivate people.

One key to motivation is the willingness to listen, and Holland makes clear his genuine interest in what the Amtrak regional people — and NARP — have to say.

He plans, for example, to expand systemwide a pilot program initiated by Forcione. Nicknamed "Mother Goose", the program is formally called "Personalized Supervision". It is a response to two important causes of problems for on-board services personnel: not knowing to whom they report, and not having someone to "bird-dog" problems which hinder their work — especially mechanical problems with the rollingstock which are not corrected after repeatedly being "written up". Holland says, "Everyone, including myself, needs to know who their boss is" so that they can have someone to explain problems to — and to receive praise and criticism from.

Forcione assigns two train supervisors to a route, and all of the service personnel on the route report to those two supervisors. This includes food service people; coach, lounge, and club attendants; and sleeping car porters; but not the railroad-employed conductors and trainmen.

The program began on the Washington-Montreal "Montrealer" on May 1, and on the NY/Wash.-Kansas City "National Ltd." on June 20. One of the supervisors meets with the "Montrealer" crews in Washington after the southbound train arrives and again before the northbound one departs; the other supervisor is on the road making spot checks. The "National" is handled in a similar manner, with the meetings held in New York.

This appears to be Amtrak's first meaningful response — albeit six years too late — to the perennial complaint of Amtrak passengers: service inconsistency — "last-week-I-had-a-great-crew-yesterday-I-had-a-terrible-one". It is too early to draw sweeping conclusions about "Mother Goose", but the 100% response Amtrak received from a questionnaire sent to the "Montrealer" employees indicated that all 43 know who their boss is, 42 believe the program should continue (1 was undecided), and 39 enjoy coming to work more.

Bruce Heard is in charge, among other things, of on-board services for the "superliners" (Amtrak's name for the new bi-level cars to be introduced this winter on some Western long-haul routes), and plans a dinner-reservation system which should eliminate another long-term complaint: ridiculously long waits in dining car lines. This program will be expanded systemwide as soon as possible.

To get regional viewpoints on Amtrak's dining car menus, and

to bring more variety and creativity to them, Holland set up a meeting of the regional chefs in Chicago to produce new menus for the fall.

Though not directly under Holland's control, training of on-board service personnel is said to be improving, and is now a six-day program with hopes of expansion to two weeks; it was once a pitiful single day. (Most airline training programs are three weeks or longer.)

Perhaps of greatest interest to NARP members is Holland's request that the NARP office contact him whenever we learn of situations warranting praise or criticism of employees or changes in policy (including comments on menus). Some encouragement that action will be taken is suggested by the following sequence:

"I was in the Parlour Car. . .In order to accommodate the overflow, they used every seat on the train, including Parlour Car, for coach passengers. . .one of 2 stewards in the Parlour Car simply disappeared. His approach was that he was not going to serve any passengers in the Parlour Car since some were coach passengers—too bad for us; we paid for Parlour reservations and were completely ignored. . ."

—NARP Director Lorena F. Lemons, of Silver Spring, MD, in letter to Amtrak's former Vice President of National Operations, David A. Watts, Jr.

"Why produce unhappy club passengers like Mr. Barber when the alternative might be to convince a few would-be coach passengers that they ought to travel club in the future? It's not as though the food is being given away!"

—NARP's Ross Capon, in June 6 cover letter to Amtrak forwarding the complaint of NARP Member Keith Barber, of Albany, NY, which was similar to the one from Lorena Lemons

". . .THIS MUST NOT HAPPEN AGAIN. It must be understood by all attendants that club service will not be suspended. . .When coach passengers. . .are assigned space in the club car you must perform the same service to them you would for any other club passenger. In doing this you can generate future club business and good will for our company. . ."

—Frank J. Forcione, in July 1 memo to "All On Board Service Employees, Eastern Region"

(In addition to the Forcione memo, a letter from Robert A. Herman, Amtrak's Interim Vice President—National Operations, stated that "all conditions described by Mr. Barber have been investigated, and where applicable, corrective measures have been implemented. Crew briefings are now being held before each trip, and Mr. Barber's complaint has been discussed at these briefings.")

Our meeting with William Grimmer, Director of Station Services, encouraged me to solicit comments relating to stations as well.

When you send comments on particular situations, please provide enough specifics to enable management to take appropriate action, and please let us know of the situations as soon as possible after they occur. We are equally interested in hearing from Amtrak employees who have information that will help NARP play its role as an independent force for improving Amtrak's performance. In acting on such letters, we will respect any request that a correspondent's name not be revealed.

NARP Region I's Task Force on Amtrak Employee Service solicits your comments about what levels of service Amtrak's passengers should receive. Send these to George Lerrigo, Polygraphic Lane, North Bennington, VT 05257.

Unfortunately, budget cuts and equipment shortages are working at cross purposes with the new On-Board Services management. The "Montrealer" is plagued with an inadequate supply of coaches now, and soon it will be "Amfleted" (partly to

reduce on-board service costs by eliminating the conventional dining car). The "National Ltd.", though lounge service was added on June 22, also is hampered by an equipment shortage.

Budget-tightening within Amtrak is casting an ever-lengthening shadow over many operations, including on-board services.

—Ross Capon

FLORIDIAN THREATENED (cont'd. from p. 1)

on the Central of Georgia route between Atlanta and Savannah (Central of Georgia is a subsidiary of Southern that joined Amtrak) only if Amtrak pays \$14 million for improvements between Atlanta and Macon and \$6 million between Macon and Savannah. It was stated that Amtrak had not confirmed or questioned these figures.

—Southern has told Amtrak in "informal discussions" that it is not willing to accept an Amtrak train between Chattanooga and Atlanta. It is NARP's understanding that the tracks involved are well maintained and have adequate capacity. No mention was

"The right of eminent domain for coal slurry pipelines seemed assured in Texas at press time. . . There were reports that slurry proponents made heavy use of lack of rail capacity in their campaign. They were able to quote from testimony of some Texas railroads in Amtrak hearings that addition of even one extra train daily would overtax their lines."

—Modern Railroads, May 1977

made of Southern's mainline tracks between Atlanta and Macon, for which the current employee timetable shows a 60 mph speed limit for passenger trains.

NARP finds it hard to believe or accept either railroad's claims about capacity and right-of-way constraints. In our view, it is Amtrak's first responsibility to challenge the claims of Southern and L&N, to negotiate with both, taking the matter to arbitration if necessary. Both Central of Georgia and Louisville and Nashville are bound by law to enter into contracts to operate passenger trains for Amtrak.

NARP members who wish to get involved could help back up NARP's Washington efforts by urging their legislators to call for an investigation of L&N and Southern's true capabilities — perhaps

"In the long term and the short term, the [railroad] industry is going to have a very, very bright future. The energy shortage is going to have a profound effect on all our lives, and certainly the railroad is one of the most efficient forms of land transportation.

". . . But I don't see us going back to passenger service in the short term by any means. . . . In densely populated corridors — like Washington . . . to Boston — there is a need for a reasonable high speed ground transportation service. But elsewhere in the country there is none. The trains simply aren't being patronized."

—L. Stanley Crane, President of Southern Railway, in a July 11 interview with the *Macon News*

From 1971 through 1976, Amtrak ridership increased an average 7% per year. 1976 ridership was 18.6 million. January-May, 1977, ridership is up 5% over the same period in 1976.

through a study by one of the authorizing Congressional committees.

Letters should insist that Chicago-Florida service must not be dropped without a fair test through Atlanta.

Most legislators will be in their home districts during Congress's Aug. 6-Sept. 6 recess, so NARP members could make appointments to meet with them during this time.

Amtrak has also been working on possible ways to provide service connecting New Orleans-Mobile-Montgomery with either Atlanta or Birmingham-Nashville, linking with a rerouted "Floridian". Implementation of such connecting service appears very unlikely if the "Floridian" reroute falls through. Discontinuance of the "Floridian," in other words, would mean a total demise, except for the NY-Florida route, of all Amtrak

service in the Southeast.

The \$488.5 million figure may well place a severe squeeze on Amtrak's FY 78 operations, and a supplemental appropriation may be necessary for the national system before the end of the coming fiscal year. Amtrak's chances for getting a supplemental grant will be much greater if Amtrak can go before the Congress with a specific plan for improved ridership and improved financial performance. Amtrak should put together a positive package, showing members of Congress in clear terms what can be done, how much it will cost, and what tangible benefits and improvements will result. If such a case were made regarding a dramatic reorganization and improvement of rail passenger service in the Southeast, there is a good chance that Congress would support it. Such a package might do well to include consideration of feeding the currently untapped Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati-Louisville corridor into a restructured "Floridian" route.

"The citizens—and taxpayers—of Atlanta and other central Georgia cities support rail passenger service throughout the country. . . It is time that these citizens—and taxpayers — receive benefit from such support and are not denied such benefits by. . . unreasonable positions assumed by the local railroads."

—NARP Director John R. Martin, in the July 22 *Atlanta Constitution*

"If it makes sense for the President to want people to save gas by driving small cars instead of large ones, doesn't it make even more sense to have people leave their cars at home and use public transportation instead?"

—Sen. Russell Long (D-LA), to U.S. DOT's Chester Davenport, at the hearing on aid to intercity buses (see p. 4)

HARD WORK AHEAD (cont'd. from p. 1)

ill-advised. . . Problems of very considerable magnitude still exist in such areas as finance, schedules, route, personnel, governmental relations, etc., and I would like to feel that I was participating to some degree in the attack on these problems."

I am going to write to another former NARP member who once felt as you did, and hope that he will reconsider. He wrote last fall that, with NARP's help, the national rail passenger system is "at last progressing, . . . I feel that the work of NARP is done." We hope that he (and anyone else who may have dropped a membership because they felt that with a new and friendlier administration and a new and more aggressive president in charge of Amtrak, no more effort by NARP was needed) will rejoin and help us in the difficult period ahead.

On a slightly different subject, we must report that we had some doubts last year when Amtrak decided to become a member of the Association of American Railroads. After all, the members of AAR had not done a lot toward preserving rail passenger service and some key ones still resist. But—Amtrak President Paul Reistrup's decision apparently paid off when AAR's veto ended an effort by the bus industry to get the Transportation Association of America to take a step which would have forced a sharp increase in Amtrak's fares. TAA has never supported Amtrak, to my knowledge, and, if AAR had agreed, TAA would now be actively working to force Amtrak's fare schedule under the jurisdiction of the Interstate Commerce Commission; ICC's rules do not permit below-cost fares — a fact which was understood by Congress when it created Amtrak, knowing that after decades of neglect, rail passenger service couldn't become instantly profitable.

Amtrak successfully carries full loads of passengers on the West Coast; the Northeast-to-Florida trains normally run at or near capacity. But Amtrak has been unable to produce the same results with the Chicago-Florida service of the "Floridian."

We think that train service between the huge population concentration around Chicago in Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana and the vacationland of Florida is a natural. There are problems, but they can be solved if there is determination.

Kim Tieger is our new circulation manager. We thank Wendy Chick for seeing us through the transition to computer, and wish her good luck with her writing.

Amtrak's Money Problems

Amtrak's FY 1978 appropriations are now set to be \$488.5 million for operations and \$108 million for capital improvements. The joint House/Senate conference committee, which approved these figures on June 28, required that \$19.2 million of the capital monies be spent as follows: \$13.6 million for improvements to the Beech Grove Repair Facility near Indianapolis; \$4.1 million for restoring 12 miles of track near Albany, expected to reduce Boston-Albany running times by about 45 minutes; and \$1.5 million for work on what will be essentially a commuter rail station, on the Northeast Corridor at Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

The full Senate had earlier passed by unanimous vote a DOT appropriations bill which included \$500 million for Amtrak operations and \$130 million for Amtrak capital improvements.

The conference's \$488.5 million operations figure was the amount approved by the House. The \$108 million capital figure is \$13 million more than the House figure, and \$3 million more than President Carter and Amtrak requested.

The chart below traces the history of these numbers.

Note that the Carter Administration made dramatic cuts from the Amtrak Board request. In testimony March 7 before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Amtrak's President Reistrup did not argue with the Administration's cuts. He did say that, with the lower figures, "we would need to reduce service and repattern the system somewhat. We hope to make this as analytical as possible, but we cannot guarantee that the results will be painless to all the areas served."

Note also that, at least before consideration of any supplemental, Amtrak's operating budget rises by only 1.2% (\$5.9 million) from FY 1977 to 1978. Since Reistrup also told the House Subcommittee that "total inflationary impact" on operating subsidies is 7.6% ("an estimated \$56 million"), and since Amtrak is providing more service now than early in FY 1977, the present FY 1978 figures point towards either very serious cutbacks in service, near-miraculous improvements in efficiency, or a supplemental appropriation.

There are indications that Amtrak is heading now, in the current fiscal year (ending Sept. 30), into a much bigger budget crisis than has been publicly admitted. The net cost of Amtrak's winter and locomotive problems (Jan. News) is estimated to be in the \$15 million range, but Amtrak did not request a supplemental. Some of the manifestations are:

- elimination of the dome lounge and planned elimination of the transcontinental sleeping car from the "Southwest Limited";
- the Amtrak Board's July 27 approval of cutting back service on the Chicago-Seattle "Empire Builder" west of Minneapolis from daily to four times per week, effective Sept. 8. (This train has been daily since Amtrak's startup.)
- planned cutbacks in on-board service personnel, some resulting from conversion to Amfleet equipment of the Chicago-Laredo "Inter-American" and the Washington-Montreal "Montrealer".

The Floridian is said to represent the "tip of the iceberg". We will alert you as we learn the true dimensions of the problem.

Buses Seek Federal Subsidy

"It is now all too clear that we cannot continue to be a viable industry without federal financial assistance."

—Charles Webb, President of the National Association of Motor Bus Owners, in testimony before the Long Subcommittee

Trailways, Greyhound, and National Association of Motor Bus Owners (NAMBO) officials appeared June 16 before the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation to ask for government aid.

NAMBO's legislative proposals include (1) capital grants for bus station construction and improvements, (2) operating subsidies, (3) exemption from ICC jurisdiction over fare increases that are less than 10% per year, (4) exemption of intercity buses from Federal highway user charges, and (5) increased investment tax credits for the purchase of new buses.

In light of the bus industry's uninterrupted 20-year decline in ridership and of the devastating impact of inflation during recent years, the bus industry's decision to seek federal aid is not surprising (see February News).

Fortunately, the bus executives were more interested in arguing the need for public transportation than in belaboring the trains vs. buses argument, although they did offer some criticism of Amtrak. The bus executives should recognize that the Committee is not interested in funding their feud with Amtrak.

In a statement prepared for the record, NARP Assistant Director Tom Crikelair told the Committee: "Our members have long recognized that this nation must have a viable public transportation system." He indicated that NARP would be prepared to support federal aid for buses "if and when such aid is demonstrated to be necessary for the continuation of intercity bus services."

NARP pointed out that the absence of intermodal connections too often leads travelers to turn away from public transportation, taking their automobiles instead. "Passenger trains should function as interlocking components of a larger transportation system," Crikelair stated, "one that includes local, regional, and intercity buses."

In his statement, Crikelair pointed out that buses should not be subsidized to fight with and to work at cross purposes with subsidized train service. If new indirect or direct bus subsidies become necessary, he said, "they should be tied to legislation that will require cooperation between rail and bus modes."

"Capital assistance for terminal construction and improvements should be earmarked, where appropriate, for rail/bus intermodal facilities.

"In no case should direct operating subsidies be made available for routes deliberately designed to miss accessible rail connections. Intermodal routes and services should be given top priority."

Crikelair told the Committee: "**The motor bus industry, if it can be prevailed upon to integrate its services with rail schedules, can benefit directly from the ability of trains to attract people to public transportation.** Any forthcoming bus-oriented legislation should reflect the need to develop this relationship."

Progress of Amtrak's FY 1978 funding

(\$ Millions)

	(Appropriation FY 77)	PL 94-555 Authorization	Amtrak Board Request (10/19/76)	President Carter's Budget	House Bill (HR 7557)	Senate bill (Amended HR 7557)	Conference Report 6/28/77
Operating grants	\$ 482.6	\$ 545.0	\$ 534.1	\$ 500.0	\$ 488.5	\$ 500.0	\$ 488.5
Capital grants	\$ 93.1	\$ 130.0	\$ 316.8	\$ 105.0	\$ 95.0	\$ 130.0	\$ 108.0*
Payments on NE Corr. purchase	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0
Retirement of long-term debt	\$ 0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0	\$ 25.0
Total	\$ 600.7	\$ 725.0	\$ 900.9	\$ 655.0	\$ 633.5	\$ 680.0	\$ 646.5

*\$19.2 million in capital funds restricted as noted above.