

# More Service; Fewer Routes

## Who Shot Dallas?—Broken Fed Promises, An Amtrak Mistake?

### NARP Works to Save Services

Amtrak said five routes would regain full-daily service—but four others would lose all service on November 10. The Amtrak Board likely will give final approval September 11 or 25. Amtrak President Thomas Downs and Intercity CEO Mark Cane (via television from Chicago) met with reporters and NARP August 8 in Amtrak's Washington board room.

Amtrak says the new plan focuses on driving down costs and increasing reliability. Train-miles would rise 1.1 million a year (send us an s.a.s.e. for a list). The plan is a big change from the December, 1994, plan under which most long-distance trains run less than daily; Amtrak now says this confuses customers and employees alike.

However, loss of Dallas-Fort Worth, and of the other routes, would be a severe blow to an already skeletal Amtrak system, and to passengers who rely on those services. NARP welcomes cost-effective, service-improving ideas Amtrak (and NARP) may have overlooked. NARP is pressing Amtrak to keep Dallas in the system, considering—if need be—a connection with the *City of New Orleans* at Memphis, and for other changes. (Items below are keyed to the map.)

1. The *Texas Eagle* is eliminated south of St. Louis, ending all service to Arkansas and northern Texas—including Dallas.

2. The *Desert Wind* is eliminated, ending all service to Las Vegas, and breaking links from southern California to Utah and central Colorado.

3. The *Pioneer* is eliminated, ending service to Wyoming, southern Idaho and between Seattle and Denver.

4. The Boston section of the *Lake Shore Limited* is eliminated, cutting Boston off from upstate New York, Ohio and Chicago. An 11-mile track segment east of

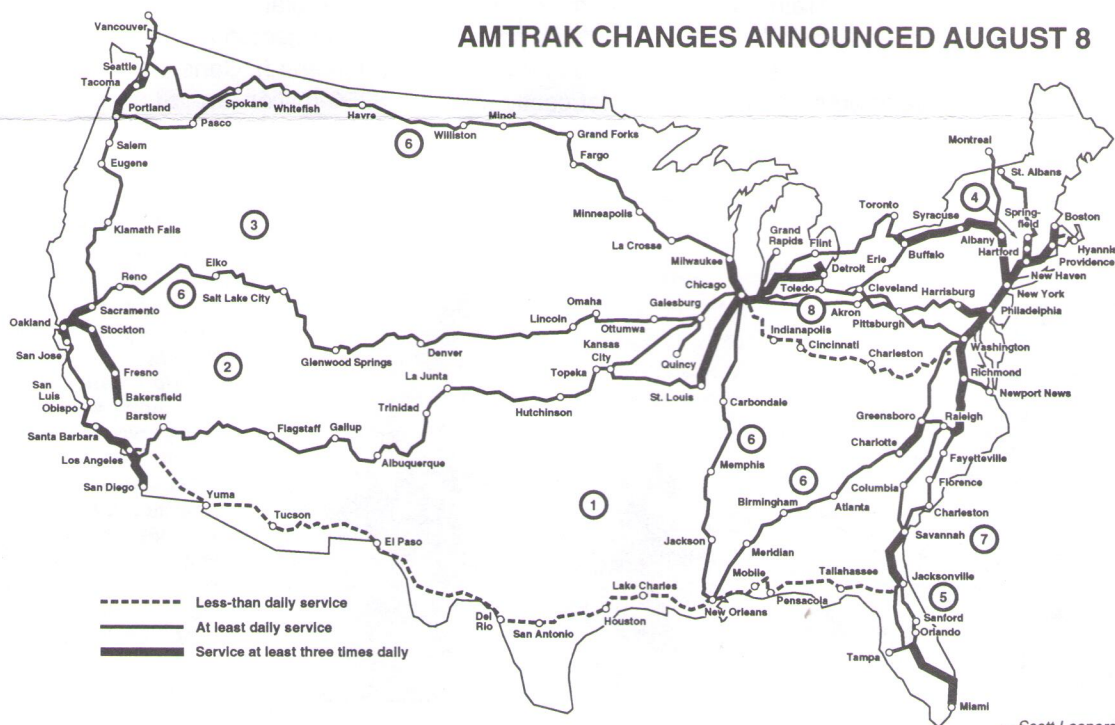
ON PAGE 4—Senate rejects “kill-Amtrak” amendment 82-17; approves Hatfield’s Amtrak funding levels. House-Senate conference could decide whether Amtrak is on the road to recovery or ruin.

Albany, owned by Amtrak, would remain in service so that New England-based Amtrak diesels can reach their Rensselaer, NY maintenance base.

5. The tri-weekly *Sunset Limited* is eliminated between Miami and central Florida. Amtrak initially said Sanford would be the train’s new terminal, but NARP noted at Amtrak’s news conference this meant stopping 24 miles shy of Orlando—Amtrak’s biggest Florida market. The August 9 *Washington Post* said: “[Amtrak] Spokeswoman Debbie Hare said some arrangement is likely before November 10 to extend the train to Orlando.” The train will be serviced at the Sanford terminal of the Auto Train, which (like the *Sunset*) uses Superliners. To save eight cars by allowing same-day turns in Los Angeles, two westbound days of operation likely will change in December.

(continued on page 2)

### AMTRAK CHANGES ANNOUNCED AUGUST 8



—Scott Leonard

## Amtrak Leaving More Markets (from page 1)

**6. Full daily service returns** to the *California Zephyr*, *Empire Builder*, *City of New Orleans* and *Crescent*. (On July 30, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott [R-MS] announced that, due to “encouraging performance along the route,” Amtrak would continue the *Crescent’s* daily operation, which—as reported in our March Travelers’ Advisory—originally was to have been only during the Olympics.)

**7. A third New York-Miami train**, the *Silver Palm*, is to leave New York early mornings, arrive there late evenings, and run via Charleston, Ocala, and in-and-out of Tampa en route to/from Miami. In Florida, the *Star* and *Meteor* get the same routes—Miami via Orlando. The *Star’s* Tampa section is dropped, allowing closure of the Tampa maintenance base.

**8. The New York-Pittsburgh-Akron-Chicago *Broadway Limited*** is restored, replacing the New York-Pittsburgh *Three Rivers* and ending the need for time-consuming switching maneuvers at Pittsburgh. This new train will give Amtrak the capacity needed to pursue more mail business between Chicago and the Northeast.

**Use of Superliners (double-deck cars):** For better equipment utilization, Amtrak plans to run some trains “through” Chicago on roughly the existing schedules, starting between October 15 and November 10. It will pair the *Southwest Chief* with the *Capitol Limited* to save 19 cars, and the *Empire Builder* with the *City of New Orleans* to save 13 cars. Chicago staff will clean restrooms and take trash off trains, toilet tanks will be dumped as needed, and—weather permitting—windows will be hand-washed.

The westbound *Empire Builder* will have a noticeable time change, leaving Chicago 1-1/2 to two hours earlier, for better times at St. Paul, Glacier Park and Whitefish, and to allow same-day West Coast turnarounds, saving 11 more cars.

Amtrak says that, even with the service increases, these changes and the service cuts will allow creation of a 58-Superliner, nine-locomotive “growth opportunity pool” for special trains and new Auto Train routes which Amtrak believes will maximize the equipment’s revenue-earning potential. Amtrak also plans to retire the 46 ex-Santa Fe bi-level cars, which Amtrak says need new trucks and other costly work.

**Eastern single-level long-distance trains:** To improve

equipment utilization, Amtrak plans to standardize the consists of the six planned single-level Eastern trains. Train-sets for the three Florida *Silver* trains (*Star*, *Meteor*, *Palm*), *Crescent*, *Broadway*, and *Lake Shore* will have four Amfleet II coaches, two Viewliner sleepers, one Heritage diner and one Amfleet lounge. (In the peak season, the *Crescent* will have two additional Washington-Atlanta coaches. NARP has been assured that other trains will get added capacity where this helps Amtrak’s bottom-line.) In general, any train will be able to “turn” to another at shared terminals—Chicago, Miami, and New York. Train-sets no longer will be captive to one route, sitting idle for nearly 24 hours awaiting the next departure, so 18 train-sets (plus three “maintenance sets”) will run six trains, vs. 21 (and no protect) sets for today’s four trains.

One maintenance set will be based at each of two (later all three) of the shared terminals—allowing, for example, the *Silver Meteor* to leave New York on time if an inbound *Lake Shore* is hours late. That, plus the arrival of more Viewliner sleepers, should allow retirement of 61 Heritage single-level cars (that is, all such cars except diners) by late January.

**The bad side of standard consists:** Last runs of the *Silver Star’s* slumbercoaches are September 8, ending affordable, private-room service on single-level trains. NARP has repeatedly pointed out this need to Downs and Cane; they are concerned but have no quick answer.

The *Lake Shore’s* Boston section is a victim of standard consists, not low demand. Indeed, Cane considered another run-through—sending the *California Zephyr* to Boston—but gave up due to clearance problems in Boston (Superliners clear by just three inches). NARP is pushing Amtrak hard to run at least a Boston-Albany connecting coach train, to provide much better service than the announced Thruway bus.

**Locomotives:** New General Electric locomotives soon will replace 102 aging F40’s and three GP40’s, to be sold, leased, or redeployed to Amtrak’s Northeast or West business units.

**Employment:** This streamlining is expected to result in a net loss of 400 jobs—600 positions abolished, 200 added.

The plan is expected to save Amtrak Intercity \$44 million, of a projected gap of \$87 million (\$43 million remains to be addressed); Cane says the plan was needed even if Amtrak’s \$250-million operating grant request had been approved. Amtrak’s Northeast unit is working on an \$86 million gap. ■



—Brad Fuller

### STEP FORWARD, STEP BACK IN DALLAS

Light rail cars and intercity trains began sharing Dallas Union Station this summer (left, with Amtrak’s westbound *Texas Eagle*—the terminal is on the left, and track platforms are connected by an underground walkway).

Unfortunately, the future of intercity rail in Dallas is in doubt (see story). But Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) will introduce Union Station-South Irving Transit Center commuter trains (“Trinity Express”) in December, using rebuilt rail diesel cars. At the same time, DART’s new light rail line will be extended six miles from Pearl to Park Lane along the North Central Expressway. Further expansion for both systems is planned (eventually to Fort Worth and the airport for the commuter trains).

DART’s first light rail segments totaling 11.2 miles opened June 14. Within two weeks, weekday ridership averaged 18,900, well above the 15,000 projected.

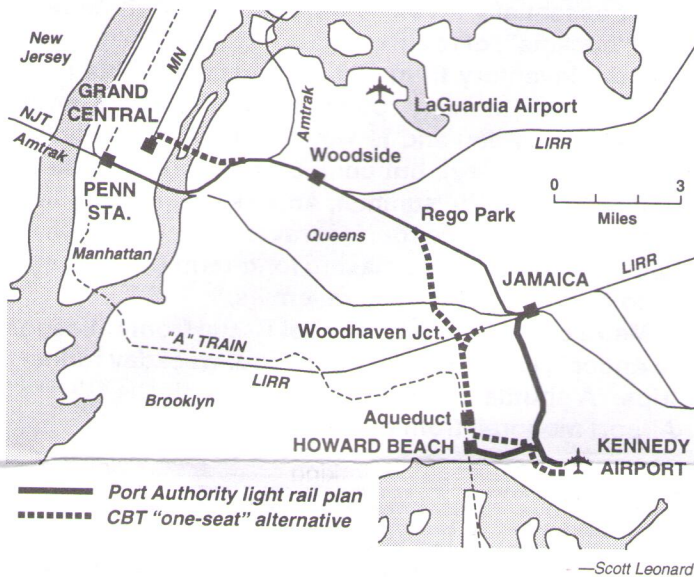
## Rail Access for Kennedy Airport?

Since Cleveland opened its link in 1968, rail access to U.S. airports has grown slowly (see table). [*Intercity* rail access—the kind found to work best in Europe—has not grown at all.] This year, New York's Kennedy Airport, one of the most glaring omissions, has gotten much attention.

In May, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (which runs Kennedy, LaGuardia and Newark Airports and the PATH rail lines) released a \$3-billion improvements plan, including a \$1-billion proposal for a light rail line. It would serve all airport terminals in an underground loop and have two branches—one to the Howard Beach A-train subway station (where there are now free airport shuttle buses), and the other to subway and commuter rail connections at the Jamaica Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) station. The Jamaica branch would be elevated over the Van Wyck Expressway.

The Regional Plan Association (RPA)—a private research group in New York City—supports the plan. Indeed, the plan squares with a recent RPA paper, *RX: Regional Express Rail*, calling for 25 miles of key new rail links to unify the area's huge transit network (*New York Times*, February 14).

The Port Authority plan would provide reasonably good access to Kennedy from points further east on Long Island (via the LIRR at Jamaica). But the requirement of a transfer at Howard Beach or Jamaica will blunt the service's appeal to many Manhattan-bound passengers—though not *all* of them,



### AIRPORTS WITH DIRECT RAIL TRANSIT ACCESS

City	Agency	Type	Opening
Atlanta	MARTA	metro	1988
Chicago O'Hare	CTA	metro	1984
Chicago Midway	CTA	metro	1993
Cleveland	RTA	metro	1968
Philadelphia	SEPTA	commuter	1985
St. Louis	MetroLink	light rail	1994
South Bend	South Shore	commuter	1992
Washington-National	WMATA	metro	1977

### AIRPORTS WITH PLANNED RAIL LINKS

Baltimore	MTA	light rail	1997
Dallas	DART	commuter	2005
Miami	Tri Rail	commuter	1996
Newark	NJT	commuter	2001
New York Kennedy	PA	light rail	2001
San Francisco	BART	metro	2002

### AIRPORTS WITH BUS SHUTTLES TO RAIL LINE

Baltimore	Amtrak	intercity
	MARC	commuter
Boston	MBTA	metro
Chicago O'Hare	Metra	commuter
Los Angeles	MTA	light rail
New York Kennedy	NYCTA	metro
Oakland	BART	metro

since even a two-seat ride is better than the current highway-congestion chaos that Kennedy passengers face.

The plan has opponents, including the Committee for Better Transit (CBT). Their ideal would be rebuilding the abandoned LIRR Rockaway Beach branch (from Rego Park to Howard Beach), and finishing a decades-old project to bring LIRR trains into Grand Central Terminal (also favored by RPA). That would allow for a one-seat, Grand Central-Kennedy service. CBT proposes a connection at Woodhaven Jct. for LIRR trains from Jamaica and the east. CBT's plan also would allow New Jersey Transit commuter trains and Amtrak intercity trains from Penn Station and the west to serve Kennedy.

Unfortunately, while alternatives like the CBT's have been around for years, they have been stymied by a strong NIMBY presence along the abandoned portion of the Rockaway line. Also, the Port Authority and CBT disagree on whether trains from the Rockaway line could maneuver the curves proposed under the Kennedy terminals.

The Port Authority says it may start building the light rail line by the end of the year, and be done in 2001. ■

### IMPORTANT AMTRAK-RELATED ITEMS

**Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE), in Senate debate on the McCain amendment (July 30, see page four):** "I think it is a mistake, but...the Congress has agreed—any subsidy would end by the [end of the] year 2001...Whether we get [the half-cent] or not, in the year 2001 [operating grants] are gone. I think Amtrak made a mistake agreeing to that..."

**A bipartisan group of 19 governors sent a June 25 letter to Senators Hatfield and Lautenberg, strongly supporting Amtrak capital investment:** "The General Accounting Office [GAO] estimated that in order to keep Amtrak running and to reduce its dependence on federal operating assistance, Amtrak requires an annual capital subsidy of \$500-600 million."

**The General Accounting Office's July 24 report, "Amtrak's Strategic Business Plan,"** notes the "critical assumptions

that must be met if Amtrak is to have any chance of operating self-sufficiency. These include "continued federal capital support...; large revenue increases; [labor-related] improvements in productivity...and increased state support."

**Texas Eagle reaction: NARP's August 12 release—**"We find the end of service to Dallas unacceptable and unnecessary—Amtrak must and can reverse that decision." **Sen. David Pryor (D-AR)—**"I was disappointed...I will review the details of the proposal before the Amtrak Board meets in September to see if it is possible for passenger service to be retained in our state." **Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)—**"I do not believe that Amtrak should look to the *Texas Eagle*, which has already reduced service [in the effort to reach operating self-sufficiency]." **Rep. Jim Chapman (D-TX)—**"I intend to express [to Tom Downs] my profound disappointment..."

## Senate Passes 1997 Funding Bill

The Senate passed its version of HR 3675, the 1997 DOT appropriations bill, July 31. A conference committee to reconcile it with the House version (passed June 28) is expected in early or mid September. The Senate's \$872 million Amtrak total is much better than the House's \$542 million. All the difference is in capital (see table, July News).

**It is crucial to Amtrak's survival that the conferees approve the Senate figures.** House conferees were not named at press time, but are sure to include Transportation Appropriations Chairman Frank Wolf (R-VA) and ranking member Ronald Coleman (D-TX). The Senate conferees will be the 11 Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee members.

During July 30 floor debate, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) offered an amendment to cut the Amtrak figures to the destructive, low House levels. Fortunately, it was trounced, 82-17. Only the following voted for it (all Republican)—Ashcroft (MO), Brown (CO), Coverdell (GA), Faircloth (NC), Gramm (TX), Grams (MN), Gregg (NH), Helms (NC), Inhofe (OK), Kyl (AZ), Mack (FL), McCain (AZ), Nickles (OK), Shelby (AL), Smith (NH), Thompson (TN), and Thurmond (SC). Sheila Frahm (R-KS) did not vote.

Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (D-DE) spoke eloquently against the McCain amendment (see excerpt, bottom of page 3), as did John H. Chafee (R-RI), Byron L. Dorgan (D-ND), James M. Jeffords (R-VT), Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ), Claiborne Pell (D-RI) and William V. Roth, Jr. (R-DE).

Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-AK) offered and withdrew an amendment that would have cut Amtrak's operating grant needs \$20 million, essentially by allowing it to purchase electricity from any producer. He said that it is "extraordinary...that the potential cost of power wheeled in for the availability of Amtrak could be as low as three cents, yet Amtrak is currently paying in many cases six cents [for traction power], up to 12 cents [for non-traction electricity]." Bennett Johnston (D-LA) apparently was ready to fight the amendment. Amtrak will continue working with Murkowski to enact this provision.

The Senate adopted Mike DeWine's (R-OH) amendment encouraging states to *close* highway-rail grade crossings, by increasing the federal share of closure costs to 100%. ■

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Chicago-Milwaukee:** These trains are funded both by Wisconsin and Illinois. Illinois DOT said June 28 its contribution to this service would end June 30! Then, after discussions with Wisconsin, Illinois agreed to pay at least through September 30. It is unclear what will happen to the *Hiawathas* after that, but chances of continuation seem to be over 50%.

As a test, Amtrak put seats and special air circulation in the baggage part of a former coach-baggage car. Smoky air does not reach the rest of the car, which is now in one of the *Sunset Limited* train-sets.

Amtrak opened its first-class lounge at Portland, OR August 5.

The *Coast Starlight*, since May 1, has had a unique service guarantee—"if the service aboard the *Coast Starlight* does not meet or exceed your expectations then we do not feel we have earned the cost of your ticket and will issue you a voucher for the full value of your fare."

The Amtrak station at Spartanburg, SC burned July 27. The site was judged unsafe for use by *Crescent* passengers, and has been closed indefinitely.

The introduction of yield management to Amtrak's sleeping cars has not gone smoothly. Yield management essentially involves introduction of three levels ("buckets") of room charges. The goal is to manage the inventory to maximize revenues. This normally results in many rooms available at the lowest charge when demand is weakest (early December, January, February), but computer difficulties meant that, for part of the summer, Amtrak offered only the most expensive charge for travel next winter—not helpful either to those making long-term travel plans or to Amtrak's fiscal 1997 revenues.

Metra opens its North Central Route from Chicago to Antioch, IL on August 19, with four weekday round-trips. A shuttle bus is required to reach the O'Hare Airport monorail from the Metra station.



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