

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

July 1996

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Hatfield Raises Amtrak Capital

Senate Appropriations Committee Leaves Operations Funds Unchanged

"Given the overall funding limitation, the chairman [Mark Hatfield] has done a remarkable job. This is a more balanced approach than the House... The House singled out Amtrak for destructive cuts."

—Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ), at July 16 markup of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation

Thanks to retiring Senate Appropriations Chairman Mark O. Hatfield (R-OR), and to Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ), ranking Democrat on the Subcommittee on Transportation—which Hatfield also chairs—Amtrak's prospects are a bit brighter. On July 16 and 18, respectively, the subcommittee and full committee approved a fiscal 1997 appropriations bill—the Senate version of HR 3675—increasing Amtrak and transit funding above House levels (see table at right), but leaving Amtrak operations \$50 million (20%) below Amtrak's request.

Full Senate action may come August 1. Then come House-Senate staff negotiations. The House-Senate conference would follow Labor Day, **so legislators have time to listen to hear your views on how to resolve differences between the Senate and House bills. Amtrak says "it couldn't exist" at the House level** (*Congressional Quarterly*, June 29).

The Senate committee report recommends that, of \$27 million approved for nationwide high speed rail, \$11 million go to Portland-Eugene infrastructure improvements (including stations) and \$6 million for rebuilds of New York turboliners.

House Approves Appropriations Bill

Earlier, as expected, the House Appropriations Committee and the House, on June 19 and 28, respectively, approved the House subcommittee plan (*June News*) that essentially freezes aviation, highways and transit funding, but singles out Amtrak for a 28% cut. The floor vote was 403-2.

On the floor, Mike Castle (D-DE) criticized the low Amtrak figures. He said passage of HR 2789 (the Amtrak gas-tax half-cent bill in the House) is needed for Amtrak's survival. Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Frank Wolf (R-VA) agreed: "Amtrak will not make it unless there is a dedicated revenue source... Amtrak will not be able to rely on the appropriation process and it is going to fail. So if there is not one-half cent, Amtrak is going to go under."

Nancy Johnson (R-CT), who introduced HR 2789 in December, emphasized that bill's importance. However, Wolf expressed concern about the Amtrak half cent coming from the Mass Transit Account of the Highway Trust Fund, but did

1997 TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Appropriations, HR 3675 (\$ millions)

	1995 Enacted	1996 Enacted	1997 Amtrak Request	1997 Clinton Request	1997 House Bill	1997 Senate Bill
Administration						
Federal Highway	19,879	19,969	—	19,423	19,682	20,042
Federal Aviation	8,392	8,216	—	8,103	8,155	8,261
Federal Transit	4,614	4,051	—	4,296	4,051	4,380
Federal Railroad	1,162	874	—	1,048	713	1,007
* Amtrak + N.E. Corr.	994	750	1,066	919	542	872

*These numbers also in Federal Railroad Administration total.

Intercity Rail Passenger Categories

Amtrak:	1995	1996	1997 Request	1997 Clinton Request	1997 House Bill	1997 Senate Bill
* Operations	392	285	250	200	200	200
Capital	230	230	360	297	120	250
**Mandatory payments	150	120	142	142	142	142
Northeast Corridor	200	115	314	280	80	280
High Speed Rail	23	24	—	27	20	27
TOTAL	1,017	774	1,066	945	562	899

* 1996 operating figure includes \$100 million earmarked for "transition costs" related to Amtrak restructuring, service cuts, equipment retirement. Unspecified transition costs also are included in operations in 1995 and 1997.

** Federal railroad retirement and unemployment insurance costs in excess of Amtrak's demands on system, therefore not part of true cost of operating Amtrak system. Amtrak is requesting this as a separate, non-subsidy item.

not say where he thought it should come from and did not comment on the fact that use of the Mass Transit Account for Amtrak is unlikely to affect actual transit spending levels.

Bud Shuster, chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said, "This reduced funding could jeopardize Amtrak's future and highlights the critical need for the reforms embodied in HR 1788 [Amtrak reauthorization], which was passed by the House last November. We continue to look forward to working with the Senate [where S 1318 has been stuck all year] on this much-needed legislation. In addition, I hope when we consider a conference report [on HR 3675] we will provide additional funds."

Jerrold Nadler (D-NY) spoke in support of Amtrak and Bob Wise (D-WV), Connie Morella (R-MD), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) and Edward Markey (D-MA) added statements to the record in favor of better Amtrak funding. DeLauro criticized Wolf's zeroing out of the Northeast Corridor. Wolf implied zero funding for electrification was no problem because Amtrak still has uncommitted project funds. But Amtrak says funds on hand would leave Amtrak \$138 million short of what it needs during fiscal 1997. Amtrak also says the higher revenues the project will generate are essential to help the national system

(continued on page 2)

House Endangers Trains

(from page 1)

survive if the federal operating grant ends in 2002 as planned.

Service Changes

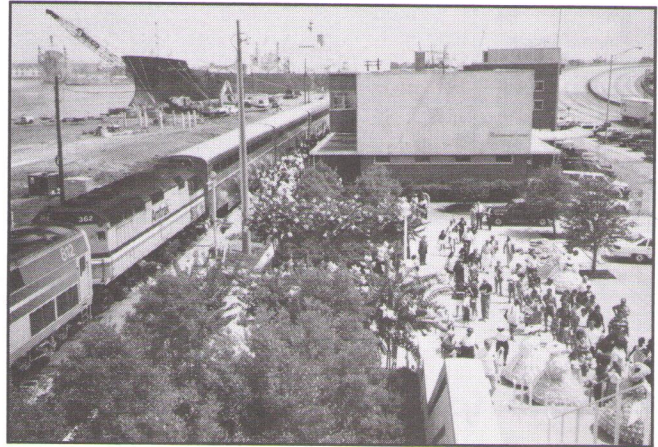
While meeting Amtrak's \$250-million operating-grant request for 1997 was a big order for the three business units, the likely \$200-million grant presents even bigger problems. The units are studying every idea they can find to try to avoid a "system meltdown." They are trying both to address a short-term cash problem, and to create a service pattern likely to survive the multi-year, operating-grant-reduction campaign the White House and Congress want—without more annual upheavals that eliminate service and create uncertainty.

Major changes are likely to take effect. October 27 and/or in early January. Amtrak's Board meets September 11 and 25. Final decisions are not expected before the 25th. Meanwhile, there is broad speculation over what changes—some of them drastic and dismaying—Amtrak is considering. Amtrak generally is confirming only that everything is under review.

However, Amtrak Chairman Thomas M. Downs "said he anticipates that the 1997 budget will mean 'three or four major routes will be eliminated,' ...[including] the Denver-Seattle *Pioneer*" (*Washington Post*, July 16). Others have speculated that the other routes are the Chicago-St. Louis-Little Rock-Dallas-Austin-San Antonio *Texas Eagle*, the (Chicago-Denver-)Salt Lake City-Las Vegas-Los Angeles *Desert Wind* and the Boston-Albany section of the *Lake Shore Limited*.

There also are reports that restored, full daily operation of all surviving long-distance trains (except *Sunset Limited*) is possible. Amtrak confirmed it may run the *Southwest Chief* and *Capitol Limited* as one Los Angeles-Washington train, making more efficient use of equipment and ending the need for some passengers to change trains in Chicago. "Trains between Detroit, Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis" also are potential run-through candidates (*Chicago Tribune*, July 23). Amtrak also confirmed it may standardize long-distance train consists to improve service reliability and limit costs.

BIG WELCOME FOR GULF COAST



—Scott Leonard

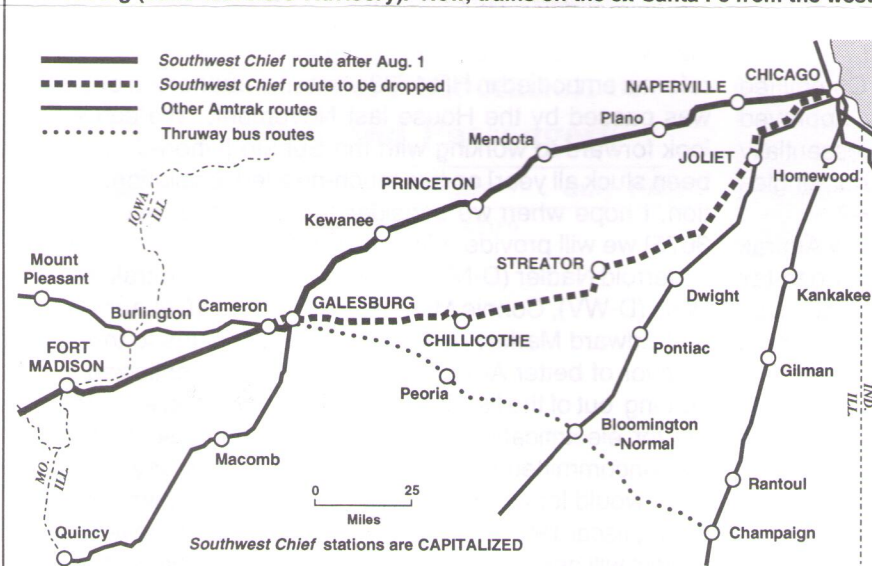
Thousands gathered to watch the *Gulf Coast Limited* make its inaugural run from New Orleans June 27. Above, some of the hundreds who rode the train make their way from the Mobile Amtrak station to the adjacent Convention Center for a reception. The train began a 90-day trial June 29, supported by Amtrak and the Southern Rapid Rail Transit Commission (whose members are Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama).

The *Gulf Coast's* schedule allows for day trips in New Orleans. While its schedule is similar to that of the transcontinental, tri-weekly *Sunset Limited*, the *Gulf Coast* runs daily and should have a much more reliable on-time record.

There is speculation that the New York-Pittsburgh *Three Rivers* may be extended to Chicago via Akron, with sleeper and meal service, and that one New York-Springfield-Worcester-Boston train may be restored. Amtrak may restructure Florida service, replacing *Silver Star's* Tampa section with a new New York-Charleston-Tampa-Miami train, strengthening Amtrak service where air competition is weakest. This means worse times in Tampa and on the Ocala line. NARP has been pressing Amtrak to improve the planned Tampa times and, overall, to save as much service as possible. ■

SOUTHWEST CHIEF TO SHARE ILLINOIS TRACK WITH ZEPHYRS

The *Southwest Chief* has a new Chicago-Galesburg route, as of August 1, due to a new track connection at Cameron, nine miles west of Galesburg (June Travelers' Advisory). Now, trains on the ex-Santa Fe from the west can enter Galesburg on the ex-Burlington Southern.



—Scott Leonard

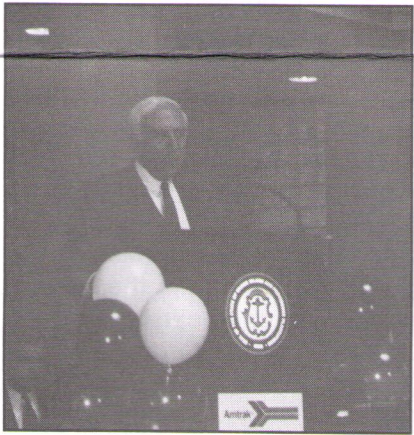
The *Chief* will switch to Galesburg's staffed, attractive S. Seminary St. station, built in 1984 and used by the *Zephyrs*. The unstaffed, ex-Santa Fe (N. Broad St.) station will close. The *Chief* will serve Princeton and Naperville instead of Chillicothe, Streator and Joliet. (Joliet still has Chicago-St. Louis trains.) *Chief* schedules will change slightly east of Fort Madison. BNSF's Chicago suburban "raceway" will be far more reliable than the delay-prone Joliet line, which has at-grade rail crossings controlled by "foreign" railroads.

To avoid conflicts with hoards of detraining, outbound Metra commuters, the westbound *Chief* will use the "inbound," station-side track in Naperville.

Amtrak expects to save over \$100,000 a year by using this 15-mile-shorter route serving fewer stations. It also avoids the new costs of being sole user of a short track segment in Chicago.

Thruway connecting buses still will serve Peoria, whose closest Amtrak stop was Chillicothe. But those buses are oriented to the Chicago-St. Louis trains at Bloomington-Normal; connections to the *Chief* at Galesburg are possible, but rather lengthy.

ELECTRIFICATION KICK-OFF IN RHODE ISLAND



—all photos, Scott Leonard

Providence, RI was the scene on a rainy July 3 for the groundbreaking ceremony for electrification construction on the New Haven-Boston Amtrak line. Above, at the north end of the Providence Amtrak station, is the drill and ceremonial tent for making the hole for the first new catenary pole. Above left, speaking inside the station, is Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), whose book *Megalopolis Unbound* was a catalyst 30 years ago for subsequent Northeast Corridor improvements. At left is Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), who has shepherded the electrification and high-speed train project through the appropriations process for the last six years. Other speakers were Providence Mayor Vincent A. Cianci, Jr., Rhode Island Governor Lincoln Almond (R), U.S. DOT Secretary Federico Peña, Sen. John H. Chafee (R-RI), Rep. Jack Reed (D-RI), Federal Railroad Administrator Jolene Molitoris, Rhode Island DOT Director William F. Bundy, Project Director Darryl Wiede (of contractor Massachusetts Electric-Balfour Beatty) and Amtrak President Thomas M. Downs.

Customer Committee Forming

A new, national Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee is being formed by NARP, under a contract with Amtrak. The 15-to-17 member committee will include users of seven types of Amtrak service—Western and Midwestern short-distance services, Western and Eastern long-distance services, Empire Corridor, NortheastDirect/Keystone services and Metroliners. There will be one college student, two senior citizens and three people with disabilities.

The committee will expand Amtrak's ability to get useful customer feedback. The committee's national scope will help insure that the best, transferable ideas within each business unit will in fact be transferred.

Seven meetings a year are planned: two each in Chicago, Washington and on the West Coast, and one in New York. Amtrak will cover reasonable travel expenses, but there will be teleconferencing equipment for those who cannot travel to a meeting. A minimum level of travel as a paying customer is required to serve. (Amtrak and NARP board and staff members and their relatives may *not* serve.)

If you are interested in serving, please send a statement explaining why to: Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee, c/o NARP, 900 Second St., N.E., Suite 308, Washington, DC 20002. List as best you can your Amtrak trips over the past 12 months and indicate likely trips for the next 12 months. To be assured of full consideration, your statement should reach us by the end of August. ■

AMTRAK HONORS WORKERS WHO DIED ON JOB

Amtrak has unveiled a plaque in Washington Union Station dedicated "TO ALL THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES, In recognition and tribute to Amtrak employees who lost their lives in the performance of their duties."

Amtrak Spokesperson Cliff Black, who hosted the July 18 ceremony, began by requesting a moment of silence in memory of those who died or lost loved ones in the previous day's TWA tragedy.

Amtrak Chairman Tom Downs said some questioned whether the memorial plaque's prominent location would scare customers. However, he said any company that can't honor those employees who made the ultimate sacrifice for the company would not stay in business long. The plaque contains the names of all 57 employees killed in the line of duty.

"Clinton and Dole think I'm mad because gasoline prices are rising...what I'm really mad about is having to buy the stuff just to go to the grocery...(that's) relocated from just around the corner to three miles away in what used to be a cornfield out in the country...I'm mad about not having a bus or streetcar system left like the one that once enabled people to travel those miles for a little pocket change...I'm mad about people who can't drive being rendered immobile by the national drive-or-else policy..."

—Russell Baker, in a May 24 New York Times column (by way of the Surface Transportation Policy Project)

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

California: New California Car diners have begun appearing on corridor services in that state...New corridor schedules were issued June 17. *Capitols 722* and *727* now serve San Jose daily (train *734*, which was used to position equipment, is dropped)...*San Diegan 583* now leaves San Diego 5:36 pm, making a shorter connection to the eastbound *Southwest Chief*.

Amtrak Fares: In California, through August 29, kids ride free (one or two per adult or senior fare) on the *Capitols*, *San Joaquins*, and (Monday-Thursday only) *San Diegans*...Monthly passes (and other multi-ride tickets) are now available on the *Capitols*.

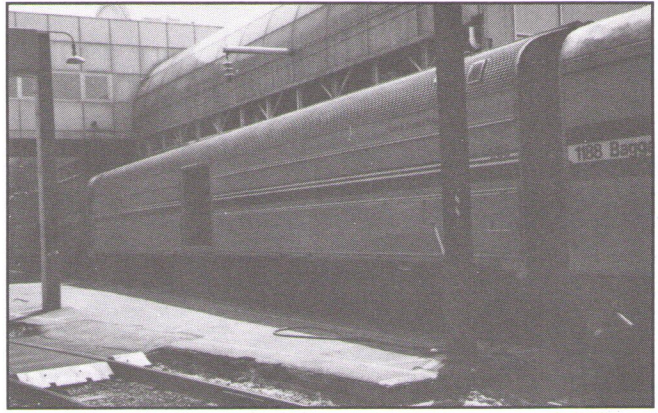
Amtrak and Universal Studios offer a vacation package ("Ride the Movies") through September 30 that includes train fare, hotel accommodations, entry to Universal's theme park (and Sea World and Wet and Wild). Package is good on Florida trains from Lorton, VA and points south, and *Sunset* points New Orleans and east. Call Amtrak Vacations, 800/321-8684.

Checked Baggage: To be eliminated as a cost-cutting measure at Elkhart, IN on August 1. The station is staffed only in the morning (for the westbound trains)—a caretaker opens the building at night.

Atlanta: A much needed \$500,000 renovation of the Brookwood (Peachtree) Station, built in 1918, was dedicated by Amtrak and the City of Atlanta July 15, in time for the Olympics.

Transit: Cleveland's Waterfront light-rail extension (2 mi.) opened July 10, connects Tower City with Amtrak station...Los Angeles' Red Line metro extension, MacArthur Park-Wilshire/Western (2 mi.) opened July 13...Cape May Seashore Lines began weekend service over a 10-mile line in the Cape May, NJ area May 18 (but daily in summer). The line uses old rail-

RECYCLED COACHES FOR MORE REVENUE



—Scott Leonard

Amtrak has been converting retired Heritage coaches into revenue-producing mail cars (above, at Washington on the *Silver Star*). Work is being done on 40 cars at the Beech Grove, IN shops. At 85 feet, the cars have more capacity than many Heritage baggage cars (mostly 70 ft.), and mail handling cars.

diesel-cars and hopes next year to extend north to Tuckahoe and south to downtown Cape May (where there's heavy car traffic). Call 609/884-2675 for information.

Bikes on Trains: Besides the *Vermont* (May News) and western corridors (Aug. '95), Amtrak in the second half of August will allow unboxed bike carriage on the *California Zephyr*, soon followed by the *Capitol Limited*, *Cardinal*, *City of New Orleans*, *Texas Eagle*, *Southwest Chief*, *Desert Wind*, *California Zephyr*, *Sunset Limited*. There will be racks for 17 bikes in Superliner coach-baggage cars. Bikes can be brought on/off at any station; reservations needed (\$10 per bike per rail segment). Members of the League of American Bicyclists may have all Amtrak bike-related fees waived by then.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project's *Progress* newsletter is available for free. In coming months, it will have important information on the renewal of ISTEA (the surface transportation authorization law). To sign up, write Sonya Jubar at STPP, 1400-16th St., NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20036, call 202/939-3389, or e-mail <stpp@transact.org>.



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