



News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

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## Momentum Building for Amtrak Half Cent

### Price of Failure High: No Intercity Trains

The idea of earmarking a half cent of the federal gasoline tax for intercity passenger rail capital improvements was warmly embraced by most members of the Senate Finance Committee at an April 23 hearing. The issue at hand was

S.436, the "Roth-Moynihan" bill (March News). Friends of the Earth President Brent Blackwelder, NARP Board Member Doras Briggs and NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon were among the witnesses.

The next day, H.R.1437, an identical House bill, was introduced by Reps. Michael N. Castle (R-DE), Nancy L. Johnson (R-CT), Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD) and Spencer Bachus (R-AL). As of May 5, the bill had a total of 26 co-sponsors.

Senate Finance Chairman William V. Roth, Jr. (R-DE) and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), the Ranking Member, were present during the entire two-hour hearing April 23. At least one other Senator—usually more—also was present at all times. Chairman Roth's opening statement quoted Mark Twain: "When confronted with a difficult decision, do what is right. You'll please a few and amaze the rest." We must do what is right—provide for the future."

The hearing was notable for the sense of unity which seemed to develop between those primarily interested in corridor services, and those for whom the long-distance trains are most important. The first witness was Senator Ron Wyden (D-OR), who continued his impressive work defending passenger trains as lifelines in the rural West. He said Amtrak had convinced him that, long term, the key to providing passenger service along the *Pioneer* route is to develop the mail and express business.

Senator Moynihan and Amtrak President Tom Downs emphasized the one-time nature of the decision at hand.

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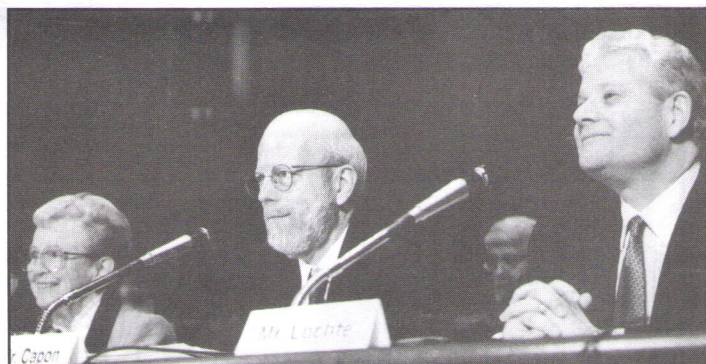
### GOLDEN SPIKE TO TEXAS SENATOR



—Ankers Photographers

NARP President John R. Martin presented the George Falcon Golden Spike Award for 1997 to Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX, above) at NARP's annual Washington reception at Union Station, April 24. The plaque presented to her read, "In her tenure as Chair of the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine, Senator Hutchison has become a leading advocate on intercity passenger rail issues and has worked tirelessly to maintain existing intercity passenger rail in Texas, to educate Congress about the importance of Amtrak service outside the Northeast and to help improve the efficiency of Amtrak nationwide. Since long before joining the Senate, she has been a leader for the cause of improved safety at railroad-highway grade crossings."

Senator Hutchison pushed hard—and successfully—for the Texas legislature to approve the loan that will extend operation of Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* through September 30, by which time it is hoped that Amtrak will have enough mail and express revenue to make the service permanent without further state aid. Her most recent op-ed column on the subject, "Texas needs passenger rail service," appeared in the April 13 *Dallas Morning News*.



—Dupont Photographers

At the April 23 Senate Finance Committee hearing (from left), Doras Briggs, NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon, and William Lochte, Vice President for Marketing and Business Development, Bombardier Transit Corporation, speaking for the American Passenger Rail Coalition, an industry advocacy group.

FRA CHIEF WINS BURCH AWARD—p. 2

## THE DR. GARY BURCH MEMORIAL AWARD



Federal Railroad Administrator Jolene Molitoris (right) won the Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Safety Award for 1996. Bette Burch (left) and her family have sponsored the award since 1994. The annual award goes to the individual judged to have done the most to enhance rail passenger safety. It honors the memory of Mrs. Burch's husband, who was a victim of a 1991 passenger train derailment in South Carolina. The presentation was at NARP's annual Washington reception at Union Station, April 24.

The selection committee took special note of FRA Emergency Order No. 20, issued after Molitoris visited the site of the tragic MARC accident in Silver Spring, Maryland, in February, 1996, as well as the subsequent refinements to that order.

The committee believes, as a result of that order, train travel is becoming safer than ever before. Molitoris' initiatives make train operations a team effort and require communications among crew members regarding certain signal indications. In addition, luminescent or retro-reflective materials marking emergency ingress and egress will help both passengers and responders in emergencies.



—Ankers Photographers

Richard Tidwell (left) of Chicago commuter railroad Metra introduces Molitoris, with NARP President John R. Martin and Vice President Eugene K. Skoropowski (right).

## U.P. TO UPGRADE PHOENIX LINE

*Trains* magazine (June) says Union Pacific will keep its ex-Southern Pacific, 138-mile, Phoenix-Wellton line, rather than double-track its Tucson-Yuma main line. Amtrak moved its *Sunset Limited* to the main line in June 1996 (May '96; Aug. '95 News), due to bad track conditions on the Phoenix line. Now, UP reportedly is restoring signals and may use the Phoenix line for through service. UP's 1996 annual report highlights the line for Phoenix-Seattle "new single-line service." Although Arizona DOT recently gave Maricopa (30-minute drive from Phoenix) funds for a main-line station—and although Amtrak likes the main line's faster running times—NARP believes the train belongs back in downtown Phoenix, the nation's 7th largest city.

## NEW CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER AT AMTRAK

Alfred S. Altschul became Amtrak's new Vice President and Chief Financial Officer November 7, 1996, replacing Betsy Reveal. He came from A. Epstein and Sons International, a Chicago architectural, engineering and construction management firm, where he was Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer in 1995 and 1996.

Other highlights of his career: chief financial officer at Sage Enterprises (food service company for airlines and health food stores in Des Plaines, IL; 1993-95), chief financial officer at Midway Airlines (Chicago, 1981-92), and financial positions at GATX Corporation (Chicago, 1965-81). Altschul has a Masters of Business Administration degree from the University of Chicago and a Bachelor of Science degree (Economics) from the University of Wisconsin.

## AMTRAK ON THE CONRAIL BREAK-UP

On March 20, Amtrak Northeast Corridor President George Warrington testified before the Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee on the proposed splitting of Conrail between Norfolk Southern and CSX. Amtrak's issues included:

- the effect on on-time performance (Warrington said Conrail's Harrisburg-Pittsburgh main line had been a "particularly poor performer," but should improve under Norfolk Southern, which has a good record with Amtrak trains);
- ensuring that Amtrak's excess mandatory federal railroad retirement and unemployment payments do not rise;
- a "more business-like relationship" with the new freight operator on the corridor, Norfolk Southern, which will mean more revenues for Amtrak.

## LOTT—A NATIONAL AMTRAK NEEDED

"[Mayor John Robert Smith of Meridian, MS] continues to be involved and concerned because he does think we need a national rail system, and I agree. I think we need to get some of the restrictions off the back of Amtrak and let them get out there and provide the service at the cheapest possible rate and as many places as possible..."

"The answer is to give [Amtrak] a small piece of the funds in the transportation account. One of the ways to get more people off the highways is to give them good rail service. I think there's a chance we may get this [half-cent] designated for Amtrak this year. I'm a supporter of that."

—Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, quoted in  
The Meridian Star, March 14

# Senate Finance Hearing

(from page 1)

Moynihan called this "make-or-break time": "If we do the right thing, we'll be forgotten, but if we don't, we'll be remembered... We have heard epic testimony. We're at a moment of decision. We can save it and watch it grow, or we can see it disappear. We're grateful to be told bluntly and clearly what the choices are."

Downs said, "If it is not now time to make [the tough decisions about funding Amtrak], it never will be. If we let Amtrak die, passenger rail won't come back again in the future, even if we desperately need it again." He said the cost of an Amtrak shut-down would exceed the cost of properly capitalizing it.

Briggs, a Kensington, CA, resident who had just crossed the country by train en route to the NARP Board meeting (and who didn't know she was testifying when she boarded the train in California!) used warmth and humor to underline the importance of Amtrak to seniors. She called train travel "joyous, educational and practical," and told of some of the interesting people she had met on the train.

When she finished, Roth said "I think we'll need you on the



—Dupont Photographers

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon (left) with Chairman William V. Roth, Jr. (R-DE) after an upbeat Senate Finance Committee hearing on the Amtrak half cent, April 23. Committee members Al D'Amato (R-NY) and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) confer in the background.

## HUTCHISON INTRODUCES AMTRAK BILL

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) on May 14 introduced a new Amtrak authorization bill, the Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act of 1997. The bill has capital funding levels consistent with the half cent and operating levels consistent with the much-neglected "glide path" (see graph at right).

The bill generally is similar to last year's S.1318 (Jan. '96 News). However, Hutchison's bill changes the Amtrak Board, deleting one of two commuter-rail board representatives and adding one mayor and one representative of the general public. Also, it does not require the "reform council" to wait three years before determining whether Amtrak is meeting its financial targets, or should be shut down.

Senate floor when the debate comes on [S.436]." She quickly replied, "I don't think I'm that foolish." When the laughter subsided, Roth said: "Well, we'll try to talk you into it." Later, he called her the hearing's "star witness."

Capon submitted a graph that tracked federal dollars per capita in road spending and annual intercity and commuter railroad passenger-miles per capita. There is an inverse relationship, of course. However, the chart also shows that, since about 1972, passenger-miles per capita have stabilized, and even risen a bit. This suggests that federal commitments to Amtrak and commuter rail have done some good.

Recent S.436 co-sponsors are Kennedy (D-MA), D'Amato (R-NY) (our March lead story had the first 11). ■

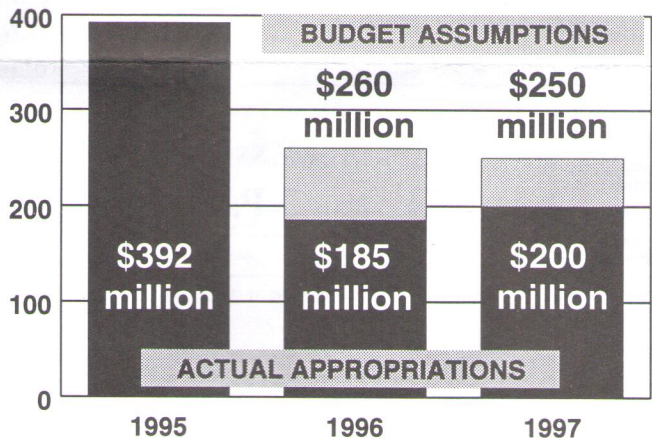
## THE "HALF CENT PROCESS"

The half cent could become part of a larger ISTE bill or a budget reconciliation bill. Some key "larger" bills already include the half cent. S.634, by Senators Max Baucus (D-MT), John Warner (R-VA), and Robert Byrd (D-WV), transfers to the highway and transit accounts of the Highway Trust Fund all the 4.3 cents of the federal gas tax now earmarked for "deficit-reduction," except that, for the first six years, one half cent would go to Amtrak.

Senators Bob Graham, D-FL, and Carol Moseley-Braun, D-IL, plan an "ASSET" bill using the 4.3 cents for schools, the environment and transportation—including a five-year Amtrak half cent.

The Senate Finance Committee could add the half cent to any ISTE bill reaching Finance without it. Success involves overcoming skepticism in the House, where some key members dislike Amtrak and others condition their support on transfer of all 4.3 cents out of deficit reduction—something Hill budget leaders and the Clinton Administration oppose.

## OPERATING GRANTS: 25% BELOW BUDGET LEVELS



As reflected in this chart, House budget resolutions assumed a total \$510 million for Amtrak operations for fiscal years 1996 and 1997. Yet appropriators gave Amtrak only \$385 million, a \$125 million shortfall. Had the appropriators funded that gap by sticking to the budget-resolution "glidepath" to operational self-sufficiency by 2002, Amtrak's current operating shortfall would be wiped out. On the capital side (core and Northeast Corridor) in those years, appropriators came in below Amtrak requests by a total of \$417 million.

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

### Highlights from Amtrak's new, May 11 timetables:

- Daily service is restored to the *City of New Orleans*, *California Zephyr*, *Empire Builder* (replacing the tri-weekly—and very reliable—Chicago-Twin Cities train).
- The westbound *Empire Builder* leaves Chicago at 1:20 pm (1:55 earlier), breaking an important connection from the *Texas Eagle*. This allows same-day equipment turns at Seattle and Portland, saving 11 cars. Also, the *Empire Builder* equipment begins running through with the *City of New Orleans*, saving another 13 cars.
- The eastbound *California Zephyr* departs Oakland 10:40 am (1:40 later), arrives Chicago 4:20 pm (0:05 later). One *Zephyr* stop is shifted 27 miles west, from Thompson, UT, to Green River.
- The *Lake Shore Limited* (Boston section) will run, after Massachusetts agreed April 28 to fund a new mail and express facility at Springfield.
- The last vote in Austin on the *Texas Eagle* loan was May 12. No trips were missed, though some ran on short notice and without sleepers. Assuming Governor Bush signs the bill promptly, sleepers were to return May 18 (from Chicago) and May 20 (from San Antonio), and Los Angeles through cars by June 5. [Pending restoration of through cars (next column), through passengers can use the Longview-Houston Thruway bus to avoid overnighting in the San Antonio "station"—a trailer in the parking lot of the old SP station, which Amtrak was forced to vacate November 21.]
- A Thruway bus paralleling the discontinued *Pioneer* route runs from Portland (Greyhound, across from Union Station) to Hood River, The Dalles, Hermiston, Pendleton, La Grande, Baker, Ontario, Boise. A second new bus runs Portland-Redmond-Bend, and a third Portland-Grants Pass-Medford-Ashland.
- Las Vegas, on the discontinued *Desert Wind* route, gets a new Thruway to Los Angeles (depart 9:05 am, arrive 6:25 pm). Las Vegas keeps the existing *San Joaquin* bus to Bakersfield. The Los Angeles bus will

use the Las Vegas Greyhound station (next to the Plaza Hotel/Amtrak station); the Bakersfield bus still will use the Plaza Hotel. ColoRail activists have been working for a Denver-Trinidad bus connecting with the *Southwest Chief*; action is expected within a few weeks.

- *Three Rivers* stops: Youngstown is restored May 16 (with Fostoria is expected around May 31; Akron in the summer). Amtrak has no current plans to reinstate sleeper and diner service (or the *Broadway* name).
- The *Cardinal* runs 0:30 later westbound—New York connections are no better, Cincinnati times worse—and is about to get a somewhat-improved food service.
- Food and beverage service on NortheastDirect trains whose entire runs are New York-Washington is restored, after a 13-month absence.

### Other changes:

On May 31, two of the three days of operation of the westbound *Sunset Limited* and *Texas Eagle* will change:

	Current Days	After May 31
Leave Sanford/Chicago	Sun.-Tues.-Fri.	Sat.-Tues.-Thurs.
Arrive Los Angeles	Wed.-Fri.-Mon.	Tues.-Fri.-Sun.

This will allow same-day equipment turns in Los Angeles, and cut the *Sunset's* car requirements by eight (Aug. '96 News). However, this means replacing popular Fri/Sun. Chicago departures with Thurs./Sat. departures. NARP persuaded Amtrak to keep the high-revenue through cars (Chicago-San Antonio-Los Angeles), whose longer-distance customers presumably will be less sensitive to the changed days of operation than Illinois-Texas customers traveling just one night.

This summer, Amtrak will replace the *Night Owl* with a Boston-New York-Washington-Richmond-Newport News train (Viewliner sleepers; different schedule).

**Clockers:** This New York-Philadelphia service became the first Amtrak product line to get a toll-free, customer service number (800/520-4538) on March 23.

**Hold Limits Update:** The one-day test hold limit for the *Southwest Chief* is raised to seven days, like most other reserved trains (Mar. News).



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