

NARP Testifies at House Hearing



NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon, testifying July 25 before the House Subcommittee on Railroads, chaired by Jack Quinn (R-NY). At left is Sam A. Williams, president of the Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce; at right, Clyde Hart, Jr., of the American Bus Association. This witness panel, one of three, also included North Carolina DOT Deputy Secretary for Transportation David D. King.

"People Will Ride in Droves"

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon was one of eight witnesses who testified July 25 at a hearing on the "Current Status and Future Prospects of Amtrak and High Speed Rail." The hearing was before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's (T&I) Subcommittee on Railroads, chaired by Jack Quinn (R-NY).

Chairman Quinn said, "I'm an unabashed supporter of Amtrak." Commenting on Amtrak's imperfections, he said (as we have said before), "You get what you pay for." He said the committee may have a passenger rail "summit" in the fall.

Capon's central message: Where people are given half-decent service, they ride; give them great service and they will ride in droves. His written testimony is on the NARP and T&I Committee web sites, or send NARP an s.a.s.e.

He also urged passage this year of the High Speed Rail Investment Act (HSRIA). Capon noted that people could figure out "improvements" to such a complex bill forever, but

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Amtrak's Jack Martin Memorial

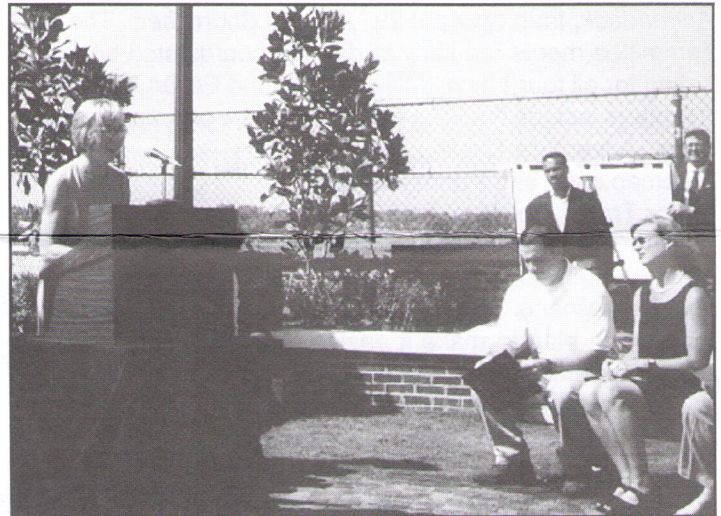
"This garden is dedicated to the memory of Jack Martin, gentleman, proud Atlantan, accomplished Coca-Cola attorney, passionate advocate for a national rail passenger system, lover of trains, Amtrak champion and long-time president of the National Association of Railroad Passengers."

Amtrak dedicated a garden at its Atlanta station as a memorial to the late John R. (Jack) Martin, NARP's long-time president who died September 1, 2000. Speakers at the July 23 ceremony included NARP President Alan M. Yorker, Faye Martin (Jack's wife), daughter Meredith (Mimi) Addy, and from Amtrak Intercity, Cheryl Jackson, VP-Government and Public Affairs, and Allan Edelston, VP-Customer Services (East).

Amtrak unveiled a memorial granite marker reading "Jack Martin 1932-2000, 'I simply love trains.'" and a mock-up of the decorative brass wall plaque (soon to go in the garden) with the above text, followed by this list of financial contributors to the garden project: Amtrak; NARP; Georgia Association of Railroad Passengers; NARP Region 12; the Patti Martin Coppedge Family (Jack's sister) and Meredith Martin Addy.

Yorker calls the garden a "beautiful," good-weather waiting place for passengers. He said Deborah Wetter, Amtrak's General Manager-Gulf Coast Business Group, and Consultant Jerome Trahan "deserve lots of credit for a project well done."

Yorker's speech included this: Jack Martin "was unique to the cause, and I have spoken often...of his wondrous blend of native intelligence, quick wit, instant recall, savvy insight, good



—Richard E. Hodges

Faye Martin addresses the July 23 gathering at the Atlanta station. Matthew Martin, younger son of Jack and Faye, and her sister, Linda Kumal, are seated at right. (Mark, Matthew's brother, was at school.)

humor and unselfish dedication. And furthermore, he knew the railroad scene from both habits of blue and white collars. His fingers had both the stains of cinders and executive ink."

NARP's own memorial to Jack is an annual rail passenger advocacy award bearing his name. Award winners get \$1,000; NARP is still accepting earmarked donations. ■

COLUMNISTS WILL, KUTTNER, FAVOR TRAINS

“Any sensible country would use rail service on trips between major cities of less than 300 miles. This would take more than enough pressure off airlines...A first class high-speed rail system would cost about \$2 billion a year in federally financed capital improvements...over the next 20 years...”

—Robert Kuttner, Co-Editor, *American Prospect* (op-ed column, July 25 *Washington Post* and elsewhere)

“A government study concludes that for trips of 500 miles or less—a majority of flights; 40% are of 300 miles or less—automotive travel is as fast as or faster than air travel door to door.

“Columnist Robert Kuttner sensibly says that fact strengthens the case for high-speed trains. If such trains replaced air shuttles in the Boston-New York-Washington corridor, Kuttner says that would free about 60 takeoff and landing slots per hour.”

—George Will, Aug. 2 *Washington Post* and elsewhere

Amtrak Reorganizing (Again) To “Eliminate Overlap”

Amtrak President George D. Warrington announced July 27 (statement on Amtrak’s web site, amtrak.com) the creation of “an organizational restructuring transition initiative” that “over the next four to six months...will seek opportunities to eliminate overlapping operations, tighten cost controls and improve revenue opportunities for the company.” This confirmed what Don Phillips reported July 17 in *The Washington Post*.

Warrington indicated that the newly created position of Executive Vice President of Operations “will be responsible for the management and direction of Amtrak’s Strategic Business Units (Amtrak West, Intercity, Northeast Corridor, Mail and Express), headquarters staff and field operations, support functions such as Mechanical and Engineering, as well as the Environmental, Safety, Police, CNOC [Central National Operations Center in Wilmington] and Crew Management departments. Certain overlapping functions currently handled in each of the business units will be consolidated under this position to increase efficiency and eliminate duplication.”

E. S. (Stan) Bagley, Jr., the current Northeast Corridor (NEC) president, officially will assume the new position October 1, but is already on the job. Lynn Bowersox, NEC Vice President-Communications and Government Affairs, is temporarily overseeing day-to-day management of the NEC.

Warrington concluded that as part of this restructuring, “Amtrak will also intensify its review of all operations for further efficiencies. The magnitude of these changes will depend, in part, on the continuing success of current cost management and revenue generation initiatives and the impact of current economic trends on Amtrak’s financial performance. The results of this review and additional details concerning restructuring plans will be announced at a later date.”

Don Phillips, in his July 28 report, stated, “Warrington did not say what that [intensified review] might include, but other sources said last week that the company might eliminate trains and lay off 10% to 12% of its unionized workforce.” ■

Working on Better Bike Access

Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor business unit earlier this year set up, in partnership with the East Coast Greenway Alliance (ECGA), a “Bikes-on-Board” (“BoB”) advisory committee to coordinate and advise on issues relating to expanding “roll-on” bike access to Amtrak trains in the Northeast. Such access is economical and convenient for users, in that there is no need to partially disassemble and box a bike—unlike the policy on most of Amtrak’s system.

Roll-on access had been instituted in a piecemeal way on three Northeast trains—*Vermont*, *Ethan Allen Express*, *Adirondack*; then on April 29, *Twilight Shoreliner*. The BoB committee meets regularly to discuss coordinated bike marketing for all four trains. With Amtrak and ECGA, committee members include NARP, US DOT, League of American Bicyclists, Adventure Cycling Association, Bikemap.com, and Pennsylvania Center for Travel, Tourism, and Film.

Pat King, chair of ECGA, said in a May 1 statement that adding the *Twilight Shoreliner* is “just the first step in a long-range plan to make it easier and more convenient for travelers to bring their bikes on Amtrak trains.” Northeast Corridor President Stan Bagley added, “This service is currently limited to trains with baggage cars. Amtrak will be keeping a close watch on the popularity of the service, with an eye towards expansion as the market dictates.”

The NARP web site has information about bike carriage policy on Amtrak nationwide, including rates and routes. There is also information about roll-on access to local and regional rail transit systems, which has greatly increased in the past ten years. ■



—East Coast Greenway Alliance

On May 5, as part of the larger Bike New York event, a Bikes-on-Board group, with unboxed bikes, took Amtrak’s *Vermont* to Penn Station. Shown on arrival (from left) are John Boyle, Bikemap.com; Pat King, East Coast Greenway Alliance chair; Scott Leonard, NARP; Nicole Seitz, Amtrak; and Chris Scott, Cindy Brown, Matt Grason, all of League of American Bicyclists. ■

House Rail Hearing

(from page 1)

immediate action is needed. He said next year's update of the Rail Passenger Service Act (Amtrak reauthorization) could modify the HSRIA and other relevant laws if necessary.

In response to concerns that total HSR funding needs exceed \$12 billion, Capon said each improvement the HSRIA would fund would yield benefits even if the corridor was not "fully developed."

Capon noted concerns of many NARP members that in many markets Amtrak's aggressive fare policies are pricing "family and leisure travel" off the rails.

Earlier in the hearing, Amtrak President George D. Warrington noted that "we need to forge a clear consensus about Amtrak's mission...My personal feelings are that it is important to have a national network. The one we have now is a mere skeleton of what existed 30 years ago." He said half the nation's passenger trains were discontinued when Amtrak began operating in May, 1971. Capon noted that there are many ideas about how to expand the network, and cited Chicago-Atlanta-Florida as one example.

Warrington also said Amtrak has \$900 million in losses "in a classical accounting sense" (i.e., including depreciation and about \$200 million of excess Railroad Retirement payments). He said other revenues cross-subsidize the national network.

Bob Clement (D-TN), ranking member of the subcommittee, noting the absence of passenger trains in Tennessee—and amid a lot of discussion about high speed rail—said, "We'd be happy to have some slow trains." He sought Capon's response to those who favor eliminating long-distance trains. Capon noted these trains' importance to smaller communities, to people who don't like to—or can't—fly and to those who enjoy viewing the nation's natural beauty from the train. He said the express initiative has hurt economic and on-time

"Our business leadership knows that we need a sufficient infrastructure to connect the cities of the Southeast in order to compete as a global economic region. We appreciate that it will take a lot of time and a considerable amount of money to achieve a viable high speed passenger rail system in the Southeast. Now is the time to start. Failure to act now will only make the [rail] solution more expensive in the future."

—Sam A. Williams, Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, testifying July 25 for the Southeastern Economic Alliance, a 13-city group in the Southeast promoting high-speed rail.

performance but that Amtrak was working to fix that.

There were three other witnesses on the same panel:

- David King, North Carolina's Deputy Secretary for Transportation, also urged action now on the HSRIA: "The states are ready to go!" He presented ideas about how the bill could be improved but felt that the bill as written gives states reasonable control of projects—a project cannot move unless states pay at least 20% of the cost and "if the deal isn't right, the [state] money won't be on the table."

- Sam A. Williams, president of the Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce (see box, above).

- Clyde Hart, Jr., Vice President-Government Affairs, American Bus Association, urged making intermodal terminals

eligible for HSRIA funds, even though TEA-21 funds already can be used for such terminals and most people agree that the HSRIA's \$12 billion falls far short of rail needs.

Dissenting Views

Most committee members shared Quinn's and Clement's upbeat views, but Howard Coble (R-NC) and John Mica (R-FL) were critical of Amtrak. Mica said restructuring and liquidation should begin "now"; "Politics, rather than a vision of the future, is driving us. Amtrak has reached the meltdown stage."

DOT Inspector General

Kenneth M. Mead said Amtrak has "a very short window in which it needs to make tremendous progress" to fulfill the statutory mandate of "operational self-sufficiency" by December 2, 2002. He also said, "We have no doubt that Amtrak could make the kinds of draconian cuts necessary to meet its self-sufficiency mandate on time, but it should not do so at the cost of the assets and human resources necessary to maintain a healthy railroad beyond 2003. Such a victory would be hollow and have serious repercussions for the future of inter-city passenger rail." ■

Acela Express Update

Though airline ridership is falling, Amtrak posted system-wide increases in ridership, passenger-miles, and revenues. In June 2001, on Amtrak's Boston/Springfield-New York-Washington trains overall, revenues jumped 13%, ridership 2%, and passenger-miles 5%, from June 2000.

Acela Express, with its new high-speed train sets, has been criticized because the few sets now running are not sold out, there have been lapses in reliability, and there is very little 150-mph running. Using absurd hyperbole, the August 2 *Wall Street Journal* said that, outside the 18 miles where 150 mph is allowed, "the rest of the way [Acela Express] pokes along."

- Today, we mainly have a test of various time slots, many of which obviously are weak. In June (actually, April 30-July 6) on weekdays, there were three Acela Express New York-Washington round-trips with half the departures decidedly off-peak—10:00 am and 9:00 pm from New York and 5:00 am from Washington. New York-Boston had four round-trips, with 7:03 am and 8:03 am from New York obviously weak.

- Reliability has suffered due to temporary problems. "Amtrak will quickly install lightning arresters so track signals will not be knocked out by summer storms; rock slides in Connecticut will be remedied by the fall" (*Boston Globe* editorial, July 11). Need for work on the rock cuts east of New Haven, which has slowed trains, was revealed when a big boulder fell on the tracks (and was hit by a Shoreline East commuter train) January 17, just over a month after Acela Express began.

- So far, the Federal Railroad Administration Office of Safety only permits 150 mph on straight track. Of course, trip time is more important than top speed. Given the response of the New York-Washington market to three-hour service 30 years ago, and given today's air and road congestion, it is likely that *reliable* 3:30 South Station-New York Penn service should do well, if not at current Acela Express fares. (Back Bay/Route 128/Providence/Stamford have shorter times.)

Fortunately, many reports—including the *Globe* editorial noted above—have cited the imperfections of Acela Express as a reason to enact the High Speed Rail Investment Act. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Acela Express—Effective August 13, there will be two more Washington-New York weekday Acela Express frequencies in each direction (replacing Metroliners 107, 115, 120, 124). One in each direction will also serve Boston (depart there 9:12 am, arrive 10:31 pm).

Hold limits—Amtrak tightened hold limits for passengers booking six or fewer days before departure. (At 3:00 am Eastern, Amtrak dumps reservations with expired hold limits.) If you book three to six days before departure, you now must pick up tickets by the day after you book. But if you book one or two days before departure, you now must pay for tickets the day you book, even if your local station or travel agency has closed for the day! (Exception: day-of-departure hold limits continue to apply to Metroliner/Acela Express.)

Amtrak does not accept credit-card payments by telephone for tickets to be picked up at a travel agency or on board. So, if your station is not staffed, your reservation will be lost, as will reservations of many who book one or two days before travel and board at staffed stations closed at train time.

While conductors routinely let coach passengers board trains without reservations, many people don't know that or care to rely on it. Also, conductors may

have to charge a higher fare than was quoted the day before. NARP asked Amtrak to change this policy or at least allow staff to make reasonable exceptions.

New Charges August 28—If you board at a staffed station when its office is open, but buy your ticket on the train, you will pay an "on-board fare" that includes a fee of \$9 (or half the ticket price if basic fare is under \$18), unless the conductor has received a waiver from station personnel.

Amtrak does not mail tickets if they are bought by phone within ten days of departure. Amtrak will charge \$9 to send tickets by Federal Express, if bought at least four days before departure.

Coast Starlight—Effective August 26, a new schedule changes some times mid-route, but leaves the endpoint (Seattle and Los Angeles) times the same.

Boston-Portland service—The Surface Transportation Board on June 29 favorably decided the pending speed question (April News). Agreements have been signed for all station facilities. Amtrak service could start as early as mid-October.

Transit—The Portland Streetcar, a 2.5-mile route in downtown Portland, OR, opened July 20. It intersects Tri-Met's MAX light rail line, and uses new, low-floor streetcars built by Skoda in the Czech Republic. The new MAX branch to the airport opens September 10.

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

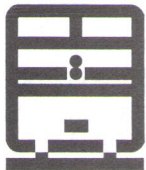
Be sure to contact your two U.S. Senators and one Representative and urge them to *work for* enactment—this year—of the High Speed Rail Investment Act (S.250 and H.R.2329). Between now and Labor Day is a particularly good time, because many legislators are back home. If you can generate similar messages from local business and political leaders, so much the better! Any Member of Congress can be written to at U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510; or House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

NEXT REFORM COUNCIL MEETINGS

The Amtrak Reform Council will have public hearings:

- Los Angeles, September 20, Wilshire Grand Hotel, open business meeting 8:30-10 am, hearing 10 am-5:30 pm.
- Atlanta, October 12, Renaissance Atlanta Hotel, hearing 8:30 am-4 pm, open business meeting 4-6 pm.

The Council is taking comments on its Second Annual Report (April News). The hearings mostly consist of testimony from several invited state DOTs, but have an opportunity for individuals to speak. Both hotels offer special room rates for those attending ARC hearings.



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