



# California Proves Trains Are For Real



—both photos, David R. Johnson

At left, a *Pacific Surfliner* prepares for boarding at San Diego. Above, a *Capitol Corridor* train is shown at Oakland-Jack London Square. State investments for equipment, infrastructure, stations, and promotion have led to huge ridership gains on these services. Neighborhoods surrounding stations have been revitalized.

California's rail renaissance continues to evolve. There has been double-digit ridership growth over the past ten years on the San Diego-Los Angeles-San Luis Obispo *Pacific Surfliners*, the Bakersfield-Stockton-Oakland *San Joaquins*, the Auburn-Sacramento-Oakland-San Jose *Capitol Corridor* and the state's many Thruway connecting buses.

The key was an initial massive investment of state dollars but—since federal policy is skewed against intercity rail—there was no federal match. In 1990, voters approved initiatives with \$3 billion in rail bond funds. The biggest, Proposition 116, was on the ballot "because the Planning and Conservation League, Train Riders Assn. of California (TRAC), California NARP members, and their allies collected 696,000 signatures (372,000 were needed)" (*NARP News*, June, 1990).

Eugene K. Skoropowski, managing director of the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA), administers the Capitol Corridor. He emphasizes that the renaissance began with "a mandate from the people"—the rare occasion when the public was allowed to vote 'yes or no' on specific state-wide rail transportation projects and the money to build them. Voters knew what they were buying, and

how much was allocated to each project.

### Capitol Corridor: Birth of a Service

Until the early 1990's, travelers between the San Francisco area and the state capitol in Sacramento had but two rail options: the *Coast Starlight* and the *California Zephyr*. These trains are not designed for the short-distance traveler.

On December 12, 1991, however, the *Capitol Corridor* Service began. The initial three round trips a day has grown to 12 on weekdays, nine on weekends.

Frequency increases have been crucial to the *Capitol Corridor's* success. People generally can use the service without altering their schedules!

Also, Skoropowski says that—even with station stops and a 79 mph top speed—trains usually are time-competitive with highway travel, as Interstates 80, 680, and 880 have "hopeless congestion."

The *Capitol Corridor* primarily uses lines owned and dispatched by Union Pacific (UP). Skoropowski says that—notwithstanding UP's widely publicized congestion problems—he has an "excellent" working relationship with UP. He said separation of incentive payments for this service from Amtrak's overall UP agreement quickly led to much-improved on-time performance results: February, 2004 was 78.8%; March 90.9%. Reliability, of course, is critical to maintaining and expanding ridership.

However, the one daily trip that continues east of Sacramento to Roseville, Rocklin, and Auburn presents a particular challenge. The train passes UP's heavily-congested Roseville classification yard. The Auburn-Sacramento service has an on time performance only around 50%. This hinders further service expansion here. Skoropowski and his team continue to work with UP on this.

Equipment maintenance also has

TRAINS ARE FOR REAL ACROSS AMERICA TOO!	
(Figures in millions)	
Fiscal Year	Amtrak Ridership
1996	19.7
1997	20.2
1998	21.1
1999	21.5
2000	22.5
2001	23.5
2002	23.4
2003	24.0

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## New Rail Platform Standards Now Law

The new accessibility guidelines published in the July 23, 2004 issue of the Federal Register will require all newly constructed rail station platforms to be at least eight inches above rail height. This will better serve all passengers (generally eliminating the need for step boxes) but especially the mobility impaired community. The railroad industry's engineering association has long supported minimum station platform heights of 8 inches above the top-of-rail.

NARP member Dietrich R. Bergman, Ph.D, PE, of St. Clair Shores, Mich. has worked tirelessly since the early 1980's for the eight inch standard.

In April 1999, after seventeen years of work to incorporate the standard in Amtrak stations in Michigan, Bergman learned about a federal Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) process aimed at major changes in the structure and content of the Access Board's design guidelines. He pushed for inclusion of the eight-inch platform issue. The NPRM was published in the Federal Register in November 1999. It included this: "Question 47: Should the final rule require that new platforms for commuter or intercity rail stations have a height of 8 inches above top-of-rail?"

With the question in the NPRM—thanks to the efforts of Bergman, the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers (MARP) and other rail advocates—the next task was to generate favorable responses to Question 47. Bergman and MARP submitted a written response and

asked other rail advocates to get involved.

The pertinent part of the new Access Board guideline incorporated most of the proposal:

**810.5.3 Platform and Vehicle Floor Coordination. Station platforms shall be positioned to coordinate with vehicles in accordance with the applicable requirements of 36 CFR Part 1192. Low-level platforms shall be 8 inches (205 mm) minimum above top of rail. EXCEPTION: Where vehicles are boarded from sidewalks or street-level, low-level platforms shall be permitted to be less than 8 inches (205 mm).**

For Bergman, the adoption of this rule is the culmination of a 22 year effort to make passenger rail vehicles more accessible and passenger rail service more attractive to everyone, not just the handicapped. Bergman, the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, and all others who played a role in this important task deserve thanks!

### NEWS FLASH: SENATE AMTRAK ACTION

As we went to press, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee approved a \$1.217 billion funding level for Amtrak in fiscal 2005. More coverage is on our internet hotline and will be in October's *NARP News*.

### News from NARP

- David Johnson was promoted to Assistant Director on August 16, 2004. He succeeds Scott Leonard (July News).

- NARP members, please consider sending the NARP office your e-mail address! *We promise not to sell or distribute your e-mail address to any third party.* You will receive important action alerts, service updates, and other issues affecting rail service. The more e-mail addresses we have, the more effective we can be in our efforts to preserve and expand rail service

- Don't forget to bookmark our website, <<http://www.narprail.org>>. It has rail-related information, statistics,

news and other items of interest. And you can renew, join or contribute to NARP by clicking on "Member Login" or "Join NARP!"

- What is the best thing you can do to preserve and expand rail service? At our website, click on "Action Alert." This page is updated when an important issue needs your attention. It also has a revised action leaflet for distribution on trains, in stations, and elsewhere, as well as a leaflet for signing up more NARP members.

- Also on our website: our continually-updated calendar of events. It's accessible from the homepage, click on "Resources" then "Events." If you know of a rail-related meeting or event coming up, please tell us!

### End of Mail on Amtrak

Amtrak said Sep. 3 it would stop handling mail, saying mail and express business was "marginal" and did not justify "the toll it took on passenger operations." Final mail shipments will be received Oct. 1. Amtrak has been scaling back its carload express business for over a year, but the profitable small-package business will continue. See our Sep. 3 internet hotline and release.

### TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Transit**—New Jersey Transit opened an extension of the Hudson-Bergen light rail system on Sept. 7 (2.6 mi.). The extension runs north from Hoboken Terminal to Lincoln Harbor in Weehawken. For the time being, riders must change trains at Hoboken to continue north to Weehawken.

**Service Changes and Curtailments**—Citing its exit from the mail business (above), Amtrak on September 3 announced the following:

- Effective November 1, *Silver Star's* Florida route is modified, adding a run into and out of Tampa (Lakeland stop both ways), restoring convenient schedule times plus sleeping and dining cars to Tampa and Lakeland, for travel to/from both Miami and points north.

- But *Palmetto* is cut back to New York-Savannah, replicating its schedule of the late 70's and all of the 80's. Daytime Thruway bus will replace middle-of-the-night *Palmetto* rail service at Waldo, Ocala, Wildwood, and Dade City (Fla.). Bus connects with *Star* at both Jacksonville and Lakeland, and also will serve Gainesville, home of the University of Florida.

- *Silver Star* will run faster. Southbound, this will offset most of the 1:50 time the Tampa run adds. But northbound *Star's* schedule will be padded north of Washington, for a 7 PM New York City arrival (earlier slot not available during the busy Penn Station rush

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been a challenge, with on-the-road breakdowns becoming more common. Skoropowski feels that a renewed focus and new management in Amtrak's mechanical department, and the new maintenance facility nearing completion in Oakland, will help address this problem.

Additional infrastructure work is planned; faster speeds at critical junctions should allow more trains to serve San Jose, and perhaps another Sacramento-Oakland round trip. But the added cars and locomotives that would permit even more service expansion—and longer trains—are not on the immediate horizon.

### From *San Diegan* to *Surfliner*

The Santa Fe Railroad began Los Angeles - San Diego service in 1888. On March 27, 1938, diesel locomotives and streamlined coaches were introduced and the service was branded as the *San Diegans*. The *San Diegans*, like many other services around the country, saw highs and lows: from a peak of seven daily round trips in the 1950's to a low of two at the birth of Amtrak in 1971.

Through the 1970's and 1980's, an additional round trip was added every few years with state support. In the mid 80's, ex-Metroliner rebuilt cab control cars were introduced to the line. Push-pull operation meant trains no longer needed to be physically turned (a process that can take upwards of an hour in San Diego), greatly improving equipment utilization.

The 1990 referendum helped the *San*

*Diegans*. In 1999, at a grand event in Los Angeles, the *San Diegan* name was retired in favor of *Pacific Surfliner*. New General Motors locomotives and Alstom bi-level cars were introduced. Both feature the latest in technology (including emissions controls) and amenities.

Ridership has boomed. Six car trains are the norm; seven and even eight car trains are used on occasion. The last set of Horizon equipment, normally used as a protect in the event of mechanical



(above) Trains in the State of California have also been pioneers in terms of transporting bicycles as carry-on luggage. Each trainset has bicycle tie-down space.



The extensive Bakersfield Transportation Center is a true intermodal hub. The train platform (just out of sight to the right) provides seamless access to the many bus bays, from which Amtrak's Thruway buses

serve Los Angeles and many other Southern California points. As many as 80% of *San Joaquin* passengers make a transfer at Bakersfield to a motorcoach. An attractive waiting area serves local passengers.

failure, has been pressed into regular service due to the demand.

Amtrak managers in Los Angeles closely monitor demand and passenger loads and try to adjust consists accordingly. However, as with Capitol Corridor service, there simply are not enough cars. Thus, standee conditions do occasionally happen. Many trains on the weekend routinely carry over 700 passengers, and some swell to as many as 1,000!

### *San Joaquins*: an Amtrak Veteran

On March 5, 1974, the *San Joaquin* made its first journey. Today, this route has been operating longer than all other Amtrak state-supported routes except the Chicago-Quincy, Ill. *Illinois Zephyr*.

Second and third frequencies began in February, 1980 and December, 1989. Again, passage of the 1990 referenda were key. New locomotives and double-deck passenger cars, from General Motors and Morrison-Knudsen, were purchased in the mid-1990's and direct, all-rail Bakersfield-Sacramento service began in February 1999. Now there are six daily *San Joaquin* round trips (four Oakland- and two Sacramento-Bakersfield).

Dedicated "Thruway" buses link the *San Joaquins* at Bakersfield with Los Angeles and many other southern California locations. (Buses can attack the mountains below Bakersfield much faster than trains could.) Nearly 80% of *San Joaquin* passengers at Bakersfield are connecting Thruway passengers.

### Thruway Buses: The Tie That Binds

Buses operated by Amtrak and CalTrans are critical to the *San Joaquins*, but important for all three corridors. These services feed passengers to the trains from nearly every part of California that does not have rail service. Destinations accessible by Thruway bus include San Francisco, Yosemite National Park, the cruise ship terminal at San Pedro, the Northern California coast and Las Vegas, Nev. In addition, Thruway buses supplement the *California Zephyr's* service to Reno, Nev.

### Federal Match Needed

These successes show the need for a federal match for rail. Except for some specific "earmarks," intercity rail passenger projects are hard for states to justify because they are not eligible for the generous federal matches that apply to highway, aviation, and even transit projects. A meaningful federal program could permit many more "Californias." ■

—both photos, Ross B. Capon

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY (from page 2)

hour). Faster running is due to elimination of mail-carrying RoadRailers from the northbound *Star* and southbound *Palmetto* which permits a return to "graduated-release" brakes.

- Also Nov. 1, the existing New York-Pittsburgh *Pennsylvanian* train disappears. The *Pennsylvanian* name will apply for six months to a coach and business class-only New York-Pittsburgh-Chicago train on the schedule of today's *Three Rivers*.

- On March 1, 2005, that New York-Pittsburgh-Chicago service is discontinued west of Pittsburgh (180 day notification of intent to end service has already been posted). Youngstown, Akron, Fostoria (O.), and Nappanee (Ind.) will lose their only Amtrak service.

- In late April, 2005, the New York-Pittsburgh *Pennsylvanian* will revert to the eastbound schedule of today's *Pennsylvanian* (around 7:15 AM from Pittsburgh), while the westbound schedule will remain in today's *Three Rivers*'s slot.

Amtrak has urged Pennsylvania DOT to consider funding a second frequency, to put Harrisburg-Pittsburgh frequency back to the present two-train a day level.

NARP opposes discontinuance of the New York-Pittsburgh-Chicago

service by whatever name, and reduction of Harrisburg-Pittsburgh service. We regret loss of schedule choices in Florida resulting from the *Palmetto*'s cutback, but acknowledge the many positive aspects of the overall Florida changes. Our September 3 release is on our website, or send us an s.a.s.e.

**Thanksgiving All-Reserved Service**—Repeating the successful pattern of recent years, *Pacific Surfliners* in California and all *Regional* services in the Northeast Corridor will be "all-reserved" for the Thanksgiving holiday. Sales are open now; book early to avoid not getting a seat on the train you want. Extra trains will operate, but will be added to the reservation system later.

**Empire Corridor**—Effective September 10, trains traveling exclusively within New York State, plus the *Ethan Allen* to Rutland, Vt., become unreserved. Reservations required for all trips on *Lake Shore Limited*, *Adirondack* and *Maple Leaf*. On the latter, reservations now are required for all trips—now including travel local to the New York-Albany segment.

**For the latest news, including Amtrak service modifications or temporary disruptions, visit our Hotline, updated every Friday, at <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)>.**

## Rail Travel Tips, #1

Welcome to our new feature. We hope our tips will help make your rail travel easier, more efficient and less expensive. The tips we publish in the newsletter will accumulate at our website—click on "Resources," then on "Travel Tips"—and be included in the packages we send to new members. We welcome your tip suggestions!

**Tip #1—When visiting a prospective college with your high school senior or junior, take advantage of Amtrak's Campus Visit "Buy One Ticket, Get One Free" deal. Book on-line at least seven days in advance at <[www.campusvisit.com/amtrak](http://www.campusvisit.com/amtrak)>.**

Fill out on-line form indicating name of student, parent/guardian, year of student's high-school graduation, and the number of colleges you will be visiting. Restrictions apply; they are posted on the website listed above

**Tip #2—When traveling alone in a Viewliner Standard Bedroom, consider sleeping in the upper bunk. This will let you keep a sitting area for working (with papers, laptop, etc.) or watching the in-room television.**

Setting up your room in this manner helps make it seem bigger and more user-friendly. It also makes accessing the toilet during the night more simple.



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