



# NARP to Commission: Include Passenger Rail

The National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission held Washington field hearings in mid-March. NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon was a witness on a panel with railroad, transit, bus and trucker officials (see photo caption).

Capon's written statement urged:

- ending the federal air/highway bias which supports overdependence on "road and air – the two least efficient forms of transportation [for] energy consumption, environmental impact, land foot print and capacity returned per dollar invested."

- support for creation of a federal matching-grant program for state passenger rail investments;

- a rail "infrastructure program targeted at eliminating 'chokepoints' [to] reduce delays and trip times for [passenger] trains and [to] enhance goods movement."

But, after a morning with much testimony touting the "need" for vastly increased highway construction and ignoring global climate change and energy supply issues, Capon tried to balance the record (see shaded box, p. 3). He cited U.N. statistics showing that low gasoline pump prices leave the U.S. vulnerable to

oil price swings. He noted that, in the U.K., climate change quickly went from getting lip service to defining people's everyday lives, in part thanks to the *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate*

*Change*.

Among other points, Capon:

- cited California's A.B. 32 enacted last year, which in 2009 imposes an

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NARP Exec. Dir. Ross B. Capon (left) testifies before the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission March 19. At rear is his Power Point slide documenting that overnight trains are important and well used. Other panelists shown are, center, Craig F. Rockey (Vice President for Policy and Economics, American Association of Railroads) and Bill Graves, President and CEO of the American Trucking Associations.

## NARP to House: Support Growth, Not Downsizing

In a statement submitted April 16 to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, NARP Executive Director Ross Capon focused on the importance of Amtrak's national network of overnight trains, since those trains remain under the microscope.

- An unsuccessful amendment was offered by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) to H.R. 1401, a transportation security bill. Sessions tried to prevent Amtrak from spending any security money on "the 10 long-distance routes that have the highest cost per seat/mile ratios" in Amtrak's September 2006 monthly report. Pre-

sumably he meant highest *loss* per seat-mile, a more useful measure and what the Amtrak report actually shows. The amendment was defeated 130-299 on March 27.

- Rep. Joseph Knollenberg (R-MI) asked Amtrak President Alex Kummant about trains with the highest loss per passenger at a House hearing (see page 3);

- Maria Cino asked Capon a similar question at the March Surface Commission hearing (lead story). Cino, former DOT deputy secretary and acting secretary, remains a Commission member.

- Before the April 25 mark-up of S. 294, Sen. John Sununu (R-NH) proposed and withdrew an amendment that would bar

federal funding of trains with certain per-passenger losses; his thresholds tightened annually). As Capon told several Senate offices, "subsidy per passenger is not an economic measure but a statement of prejudice against trains whose passengers have long average trip lengths."

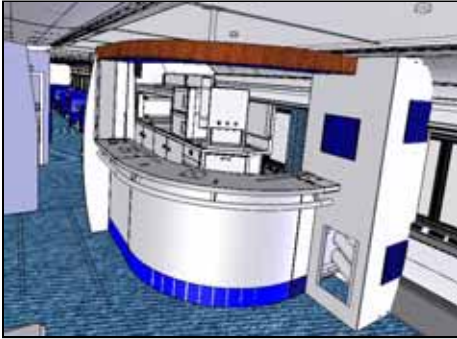
Capon's statement to the House subcommittee noted that, in Amtrak's report, "11 of the 15 overnight trains rank closely together—ranging from *Cardinal* 16.3 cents [loss per seat-mile] to *California Zephyr* 9.6 cents—with no gap [between any two routes] greater than 1.2 cents." If properly analyzed, *Sunset Limited*—the

*(continued on page 3)*

# Amtrak's Diner-Lounge: Lessons Learned and Changes Made

Ever since our first inspection of the mock-up and engineering plans of a Superliner Diner-Lounge car (October 2006 *NARP News*), NARP had grave concerns about the layout. At our urging, Amtrak did extensive passenger survey work with the planned prototype car.

That car, 37000, ran nearly two months on the *Capitol Limited*. It also hosted



—Photos, David Johnson; Computer renderings, Amtrak

A computer rendering of the food counter service area on the upper level of a diner-based Superliner Diner-Lounge. Sales have been strong because the upstairs snack bar is more visible and easier to get to.

luncheons for the Amtrak Board of Directors and Executive Committee and inspections by Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee and NARP members.

The car served an “all day” menu (11 a.m. to 11 p.m.) with a variety of food at lower prices, and new appetizers—quesadillas, spring rolls, buffalo wings and potato skins—which have sold well.

NARP Staff Members Ross Capon, David Johnson and Darryl Yates took separate, Washington-Chicago round trips to try out the 37000. Johnson brought his fiancée, Amanda Bechtel, along for her “unbiased” opinion.

By early Fiscal 2008, Amtrak expects to convert one route to diner-lounge operation, using diner-based diner-lounges with seating shown at bottom.

Meanwhile, prototypes are planned for Sightseer [lounge] based diner-lounges, for both Superliner I and II designs.

## Single-Level Cars

There are no current plans to replace full service, single level dining cars with diner-lounges; the limited space makes

this harder than on two-level Superliners.

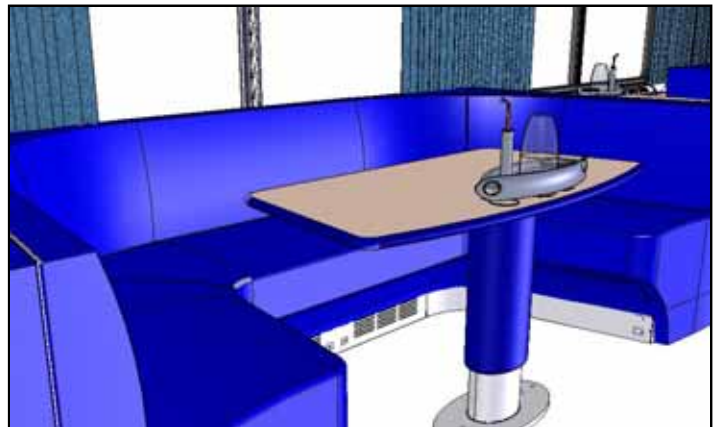
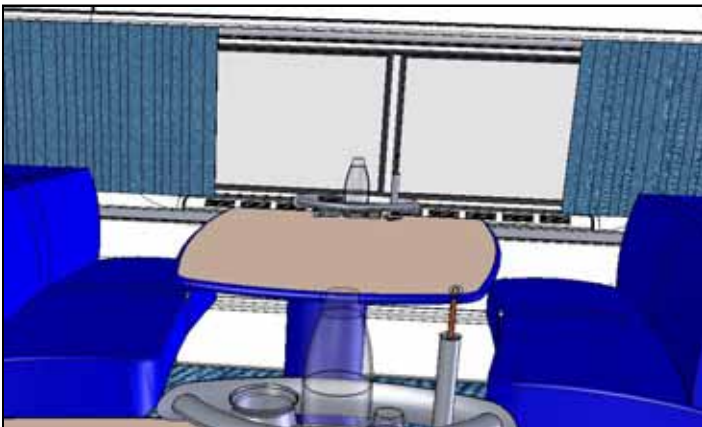
But, by the end of 2009, Amtrak expects to have upgraded all 25 Amfleet II lounge cars to diner-lounges, with steam tables, combi-ovens and more food storage. The first conversions already are improving food service on the *Cardinal*. As more cars are done, service will improve on trains where they run—single-level, overnight trains and *Palmetto*. ■

## S.294 Passes Committee

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee unanimously passed S.294, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2007, on April 24. The bill reauthorizes Amtrak, strengthens Surface Transportation Board powers to address freight railroad delays to Amtrak trains, and creates a federal funding partnership with states for intercity passenger rail corridor development.



Chief among passenger (and NARP) complaints was that the original seating designs (above, left and right) were confining and did not provide adequate dining space. Amtrak designed replacement seating to meet these concerns (below), but questions remain about the advisability of placing anyone's back to the scenery, and of intermixing lounge and dining functions.



## Commission

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economy-wide cap on greenhouse gas emissions, including from transportation;

- said A.B. 32 should benefit Amtrak and bus companies, giving them credit for their superior energy efficiency, perhaps by selling credits to airlines;

- said Amtrak is a Chicago Climate Exchange charter member; Altamont Commuter Express (northern California) is the only other rail member; and

- emphasized the importance of Amtrak's overnight trains, which averaged 326 passengers per run in FY 2006 and 176 passenger-miles-per-train-mile.

Also plugging balanced transportation was Indianapolis Mayor Bart Peterson, representing the National League of Cities. Asked to identify "what one recommendation you would want us to make to Congress," he said "we must have greater respect for transit—we can lower cost per passenger in our transportation system." He also urged a greater role for local governments in transportation decision-making.

As for Indianapolis, Peterson said, "I

## Appropriations

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only route above 16.3 cents—would come in at 14.4 cents.

Bottom line: "The most effective strategy to improve the economic efficiency of all routes is to focus on actions that increase volume and revenue, not reduce or eliminate service."

Capon highlighted rail's superior energy efficiency, citing 2003 data (British Thermal Units per passenger-mile) in Oak Ridge National Laboratory's latest *Transportation Energy Data Book*:

- Commuter Railroads: 2,751
- Amtrak: 2,935
- Automobile: 3,549
- Certificated air carriers: 3,587
- Light trucks (2-axle, 4-tire): 7,004

Capon also quoted Simon Retallack, Climate Change Chief of the Institute for Public Policy Research, which Reuters called "a leading British think tank." Urging that ads for flights or vacations including flying be required to carry a tobacco-style health warning to remind people of the global warming crisis, Retallack said, "The evidence that aviation damages the atmosphere is just as clear as the evidence that smoking kills." ■

*Capon's full statement is at our web site, or send NARP an s.a.s.e.*

## Excerpts from Capon's Oral Testimony

"It's kind of scary how little we've heard this morning about global climate change and energy supply. Non-OPEC, non-former-USSR oil production has been flat for about five years while world demand has grown substantially. New technology will not preserve low-fare air service, and will not save us from the need to change many aspects of how we live..."

"You've heard that Europe is becoming more like us, but that is not up-to-date and the question of degree is missing. The average U.S. vehicle travels 42% more miles than the average car in Germany. As a low [gasoline] tax nation, we're more vulnerable to world oil prices. In the two years ended last August, the average fuel cost per car per year rose \$290 in Germany but \$600 here, and the pump price increased 22% in Germany but 59% here. Even compared with Canada, we use 21% more fuel per vehicle per year..."

"It is wrong to dismiss London as unique with regard to center city zone tolling. After implementing tolling, Stockholm found traffic reduced [at cordon points] by 100,000 vehicle passages per day [or 25%], train and transit ridership up 40,000, parking fines down 29%, and city buses running so much faster that new schedules were required."

*[Statistics in the second paragraph are from a January 24 presentation in Washington at the Transportation Research Board by Lewis M. Fulton, of the United Nations Environmental Program in Kenya. The Stockholm statistics are from a March 6 news release by IBM, "prime contractor responsible for solution design, development and operation; [IBM] has worked closely with the Swedish Road Administration and the city of Stockholm to launch a trial congestion charging system covering a 24 sq km area of the inner city."]*

cannot go a day without someone telling me how wonderful our old interurban system was...this is the year for us to make a decision (to build rail transit)...I believe the consensus is there..." ■

*For Capon's written statement and PowerPoint presentations, along with those of other witnesses, go to [www.transportationfortomorrow.org](http://www.transportationfortomorrow.org) and click on Information Central and then, under Field Hearings, on "March 19, 2007 -Washington D.C."*

"Transit ridership growth of 30% since 1995 is outpacing both the growth of our population—12 percent—and the growth in the use of the nation's highways—24 percent—since then. Each weekday, 34 million trips are made on public transportation in our nation."

—American Public Transportation Association President William Millar, in Commission Testimony

## House Appropriators Hear Kummant, Boardman

Amtrak President and CEO Alex Kummant and Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Boardman were the only witnesses at a March 28 hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies, chaired by John Olver (D-MA).

In his opening statement, Olver said, "Faced as we are with clogged highway traffic and congestion in our air transportation system we simply cannot afford to abandon what has been established as a highly serviceable and, where properly planned, convenient form of transportation. The record of this legislation does

not attack the technological achievements of the motor vehicle and aviation industries, however, transportation should not rest on one or two modes. To solve the problems arising from the side effects of several modes such as pollution and congestion, we must preserve and improve railroad service."

Olver then surprised the room by saying he was quoting the late House Interstate & Foreign Commerce Committee Chairman Harley Staggers' (D-WV) opening statement at a 1970 hearing on what became Amtrak. Olver's point: things have changed very little over the years.

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OUR MISSION: A MODERN, CUSTOMER-FOCUSED NATIONAL PASSENGER TRAIN NETWORK THAT PROVIDES A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT.

### TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Transit**—San Francisco's MUNI opened its "T-Third" line to the Bayshore Caltrain via Third St. and Bayshore Boulevard on April 7.

**NEC schedule changes**—Amtrak will be replacing bridge timbers on the Susquehanna River Bridge, beginning April 16. Southbound trains have between 5 and 10 minutes added to their schedules. In addition, most MARC trains are terminating in Aberdeen. Changes effective through June 4.

**Zephyr schedule change**—Amtrak and Union Pacific have agreed to slow *California Zephyr* by three hours from June 13 to permit on-time operation during a major, overdue Union Pacific tie replacement program in Nevada. East: Emeryville departure is two hours earlier, Salt Lake City-Chicago times are one hour later. West: Chicago-Salt Lake times do not change, but Salt Lake City to Emeryville is three hours slower.

### Join a Route Support Team

Inspired by the successful Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization (TEMPO), NARP is establishing volunteer "Route Support Teams" for other long distance routes. Activity ideas are at [www.tempo-rail.org/NGS.htm](http://www.tempo-rail.org/NGS.htm) or call the NARP office at 202-408-8362.

If you would like to join a team, e-mail us at [narp@narprail.org](mailto:narp@narprail.org) or phone us. If you want more information before deciding, go to our web site or phone us.

### House Hearing

(from page 3)

Kummant re-emphasized Amtrak's need for \$1.53 billion. Boardman supported the Administration's \$800 million request, saying it would "force tough choices," but Kummant said "it really would be very difficult to keep [Amtrak] running" on an \$800 million grant.

When asked by Rep. Joseph Knollenberg (R-MI) about progress on reductions in sleeping and dining car costs, Kummant said that there has been and will be progress on reducing food and beverage losses. As for proposed reductions in sleeping car capacity, Kummant said, "I am concerned that we didn't look closely enough at the revenue impact. I think there is much less [savings] to be had on sleeper cost reductions and probably more risk on revenue reductions, so...we're focusing on (improved economics) of dining car service."

Kummant also said that there is a con-

ceptual idea of letting private operators run sleeping cars on some long distance trains, possibly the *Southwest Chief* or *California Zephyr*; he said Amtrak likes the *Empire Builder* the way it is.

Rep. Virgil Goode (R-VA) asked Kummant the first three things he would do "if you were profitable." Kummant: "I view that as a trick question. Passenger rail is not going to be profitable." Goode: "Some people tell me they could make money." Kummant: "A lot of the private sector people that say that have zero experience with running infrastructure. I'm not convinced that taking out the unions would change the equation...As for high speed rail, I think we can get there in steps. The route where TGV runs was 80 mph before it was TGV."

Boardman said he was surprised at how many CSX track problems FRA found after several freight derailments, including in East Rochester, NY Jan. 16 and Oneida, NY, March 12 (box at right).

### FRA Inspects CSX Tracks

After dramatic freight derailments, the FRA undertook comprehensive inspections on CSX-owned lines.

Systemwide, January 19-22, FRA found 3,518 defects and 199 serious violations (376 and 13 in New York) related to equipment, tracks and operating practices.

In New York track inspections March 19-28, FRA found 78 defects and one serious violation.

Boardman told Rep. James Walsh (R-NY) at the House Subcommittee hearing, "I think there needs to be an improvement in safety culture."

New York inspections are continuing with more sophisticated equipment and including other railroads.