



Needed: More Investment in Rail, Transit, Highways

At a crowded National Press Club event January 15, the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission unveiled *Transportation for Tomorrow*, a report on the status and future of America's highways, bridges, and transit systems.

The Commission's majority opposes reauthorizing the federal transportation program in its present form, believing it no longer has a "sense of purpose or mission." They advocate replacing today's 108 programs with 10 that are "performance-oriented, outcome-driven and generally modal neutral." Intercity passenger rail is the only mode-specific pro-

gram among the 10.

Commissioners voted 9-3 for the report, with five Republicans and the four Democrats voting yes. Vice-chairman Jack Schenendorf has been the lead spokesman, since Chair (and DOT Secretary) Mary Peters voted against the report and was absent from the Press Club event and the January 17 House and February 6 Senate hearings where most other Commissioners testified.

Schenendorf said "we can't solve our problems without strong intercity passenger rail and strong transit." The Commission thinks "world-class" high speed rail is essential, focused on 13 to 15 major

corridors that are 300 to 500 miles long.

Transportation for Tomorrow has the maps from the Passenger Rail Working Group report (January News). They are the basis for the Commission's identification of the need for \$9 billion a year in passenger rail investment. The report says "a rigorous quantitative analysis would need to be conducted before embarking on specific investments in the passenger rail system."

The report envisions transitioning from the gasoline tax to a vehicle-miles traveled tax by about 2025, saying civil liberties and logistical issues will take a long

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Bush Administration Negative 2009 Budget; Amtrak's Own Request

President Bush, sadly, surprised no one with a budget whose transportation elements were widely condemned by informed observers. Treatment of mass transit but especially Amtrak did not reflect any appreciation of the much bigger and even more crucial role these forms of transport could play in addressing key issues the nation faces, some of which are oil prices, greenhouse gas emissions and a growing senior population.

Amtrak released its request on February 20. The railroad is seeking \$1.671 billion, not counting \$114 million for the 60% of back pay due during FY 2009

On Page 2: Our Annual Modal Funding comparison table

(see page 2 table, especially footnote 4).

Yet another Amtrak board consisting only of Bush appointees has recommended a federal grant substantially larger than the Administration has requested.

Amtrak says "much of our fleet is aging and will reach the end of its service life in a few years." Amtrak seeks \$176.1 million for rolling stock, and says some of this will be used "for pilot programs, pro-

urement of new equipment for short distance corridor service, and the testing or demonstration of new equipment for the Northeast Corridor."

In the Bush budget, transit was recommended at \$202 million below the level authorized in the SAFETEA-LU law. Moreover, because the Highway Trust Fund's highway account otherwise would run a negative balance in Fiscal 2009, the budget "borrows" \$3.2 billion from the Fund's transit account and uses it for highways. There is no proposal for repaying the transit account.

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Train Passengers in Albuquerque Get Beautiful, New, Intermodal Terminal



—both photos, Ross B. Capon

Mid-January saw Amtrak move into a station shared with Greyhound, which moved there in 2006. This is the final element of the Alvarado Transportation Center, which started with the 2002 opening of a city transit center, an architectural twin of the new station just north (east) of it. The new station did not change where Amtrak trains stop.

New Mexico Rail Runner commuter trains, a major achievement of Gov. Bill Richardson (D), call at the north end of the platform opposite the transit center. The new station is especially good news because of past talk about relocating Amtrak outside downtown.



Inside new station, looking towards street. Amtrak ticket office at right; Greyhound left.

Proposed Fiscal 2009 Transportation Funding Compared with Previous Years Appropriations (\$ millions)

Administration	2004 Actual	2005 Actual	2006 Actual	2007 Actual	2008 Enacted	2009 Bush Request	Bush vs. 2008 Enacted
Federal Highway [FHWA] ⁽¹⁾	32,928	33,331	34,183	39,624	42,180	40,138	- 4.8%
Federal Transit [FTA]	7,266	7,646	8,504	9,010	9,492	10,135 ⁽²⁾	+ 6.7% ⁽²⁾
FHWA flexed to FTA	1,022	959	1,368	977	t.b.d.	n/a	
Federal Aviation	13,840	13,853	14,310	14,100	14,915	14,643	- 1.8%
Federal Railroad	1,449	1,425	1,503	1,479	1,561	1,091	-30.1%
*Amtrak	1,218	1,201	1,294	1,294	1,325	800	-39.6%

*Amtrak Grant Detail	2004 Enacted	2005 Enacted	2006 Enacted	2007 Enacted	2008 Enacted	2009 Bush Request	Bush v.s 2008 Enacted	Amtrak 2009 Request	Bush vs. Amtrak Request
Operations	598	570	490	490	475	0	- 100.0%	525	- 100.0%
Capital & Debt Service	620	631	773	773	850	525	- 38.2%	1,146	- 54.2%
Efficiency Incentive Grants ⁽³⁾	0	0	31	31	0	275			
AMTRAK SUBTOTAL	1,218	1,201	1,294	1,294	1,325	800	- 39.6%	1,671	- 55.2%
Other Passenger Rail	37	19	0	0	30	100		114 ⁽⁴⁾	
PASSENGER RAIL TOTAL	1,255	1,220	1,294	1,294	1,355	900	- 33.5%	1,785⁽⁴⁾	- 49.6%

NOTES:

1) These figures are highway "obligation limits". For years 2004-2007, numbers indicate funds expended less unobligated balances that states returned to DOT; hence the differences between these numbers and what we have published in previous annual funding tables. Not shown: funding for **Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (about \$500 million a year)** and **National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (about \$800 million)**.

2) Funding increase proposed, but DOT would "borrow" \$3.2 billion from Transit trust fund to keep Highway trust fund solvent.

3) Efficiency Incentive Grants can be used to fund operations at Secretary of Transportation's discretion.

4) Amtrak said the \$114 million (60% of retroactive wages the Presidential Emergency Board recommended be paid in 2009) "is not included in [our] FY 2009 request, nor do we believe it will be covered by increased revenues... the PEB made clear its belief that the decision to fund this amount lies with Congress."

2009 Budget

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The proposed Amtrak grant again is \$800 million, which would trigger bankruptcy. This request "reflects that Amtrak has taken few steps to align its business with the traveling public's demand for intercity rail service and that it consequently continues to hemorrhage taxpayer funds." Suspected translation: Amtrak hasn't cut enough routes.

There is also \$100 million to match state investments in passenger trains. There is broad support for the matching grants program, and hope for the success of this year's \$30 million program, but it would be pointless if the federal government simultaneously removes the foundation on which state programs depend (by forcing an Amtrak shutdown).

The House Appropriations subcommittee scheduled a February 25 hearing on Amtrak's Fiscal 2009 funding, with Senate hearings likely to follow suit. Appropriations bills are usually submitted for consideration starting in June.

Amtrak's 14-page Grant and Legislative Request is at www.amtrak.com, click on Inside Amtrak, then Other Reports.

Needed in Climate Change Legislation: Trains!

Given trains' superior energy efficiency and benign impact on the environment—summarized at the end of this article and detailed in our August, 2007, newsletter—one might think that climate change legislation would have putting more people on trains as one objective.

There are two major Senate bills on climate change. The Lieberman-Warner bill (S. 2191), would establish a "cap and trade" system to limit greenhouse gas emissions. The bill earmarks for mass transit 1% of the revenues generated by this system for each year from 2011 to 2049. There is no such "set aside" for intercity passenger trains—only inclusion of passenger trains on a list of 11 "allowable" items, with the nature of the list making it unlikely that Amtrak would get anything. Under a cap-and-trade proposal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the allowances will gain value over time as the price of the right to emit greenhouse gases increases as the cap on emissions becomes tighter.

The Bingaman-Specter bill (S. 1766) has a "safety valve," which protects consumers and the economy from escalating

energy prices, something considered vital to get the business community to support or at least acquiesce in this effort. However, S. 1766 has no allowance set-aside for either mass transit or intercity passenger service.

Final passage of a bill is unlikely this year, but how the bills are written this year is likely to influence what does get enacted in the next year or two. **Bottom line:** legislators need to hear about the importance of adding intercity passenger trains to S. 2191, and including set-asides for both transit and trains in S. 1766.

Based on data from Amtrak and Carbonfund.org, airline greenhouse gas (CO₂) emissions per passenger-mile are 2.25 to 3.25 times greater than Amtrak's, with short-distance flights producing the worst results. Oak Ridge National Laboratory numbers indicate that Amtrak used 21% and 15% less energy per passenger-mile than cars and airlines, respectively. The greenhouse gas comparison makes planes look worse because Carbonfund.org multiplies airline emissions by 2.7 to reflect the impact of high altitude emissions (NARP News, August, 2007). ■

SMART Organizes to Improve the Sunset Limited

The Sunset Marketing and Revitalization Team (SMART) held its first meeting Saturday, January 18, in New Orleans. Formed in 2007 as a grassroots citizen group, SMART is an early priority in NARP's effort to organize support for individual Amtrak long-distance routes.

SMART seeks a constructive relationship with all *Sunset Limited* stakeholders and was honored to welcome Mayor (and former Amtrak Board Chairman) John Robert Smith of Meridian, MS; Karen Parsons, Executive Director of the Southern Rapid Rail Transit Commission; Gwenn Voigts, President of the Pass Christian, MS Chamber

of Commerce; Amtrak representatives; and several Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization (TEMPO) people.

Last year was TEMPO's 10th year of leveraging a broad coalition among pas-

senger train, civic, and business interests to save and improve Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* (*NARP News*, Oct., 2007).

In a Jan. 19 release, NARP Communications Associate Matthew Melzer said team members were very interested in restoring the New Orleans-Orlando part of

alternatives and at the mercy of \$3 per gallon gas prices."

Melzer emphasized that SMART's activities will be broad. "Members of SMART along the entire route are eager to reach out to their local political and business leaders to educate them about the ben-

House Field Hearing Touts Rail, *Sunset Limited* For Emergencies

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads held a Feb. 11 field hearing—"The Role of Intercity Rail During National Emergencies"—in New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal.

Houston NARP Member John Bertini, M.D., who helped organize Rita evacuation trains [*NARP News*, Oct., 2005], testified to trains' value for evacuating the elderly, disabled, and those without cars: "People can be cared for and fed while rapidly fleeing danger under the care of a small crew."

New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin

said the city's evacuation strategy has a "major component" using rail to move "our elderly and those with minor medical conditions." He and Karen Parsons, Executive Director of the Southern Rapid Rail Transit Commission, both urged restoration of Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* east of New Orleans and said it "could be a vital link for hurricane evacuation." (Parsons' words). She said that, if Amtrak "noticed" the New Orleans-East service for discontinuance, it would be devastating to service restoration efforts.

More at <http://transportation.house.gov/hearings/> then click on 2/11/2008.

efits of passenger trains, and to work to improve Amtrak's stations and awareness of Amtrak's product. The official mission of SMART is to preserve, restore, and expand Amtrak passenger train service along Amtrak's original transcontinental *Sunset* route... SMART stands ready to assist Amtrak and other stakeholders to

the *Sunset Ltd.* route that was suspended in 2005. "Today's trackage is superior to what existed pre-Katrina, citizen demand continues high, and yet Amtrak has not restored the service, leaving entire communities stranded with no easy access to

improve ridership, revenue, and brand image along this historic, key route."

Other route support teams are getting organized. **Join a team today!** Contact the NARP office for more information. ■

NARP Presses Amtrak on Coast Starlight Service

A massive landslide near Oakridge, OR Jan. 19 severed the route of Amtrak's Los Angeles-Seattle *Coast Starlight* north of Chemult. For the first few days, Amtrak commendably ran a full-service Los

Angeles-Klamath Falls train and a "bus bridge" around the closed track.

Then Amtrak canceled all *Starlight* service, offering no alternate transportation.

In Jan. 22 and Feb. 12 messages to Amtrak, and a Feb. 13 release, NARP urged Amtrak to restore the Los Angeles-Klamath train, a Klamath-Eugene bus bridge, and a train north from Eugene.

Amtrak began a small Los Angeles-Sacramento train February 6, and will add an overnight, Sacramento-Portland motorcoach on Feb. 29, serving Medford, but skipping regular, intermediate points except Eugene and Salem.

NARP and other passenger train advocates continue to press for restoration of *real* substitute service, particularly in light of a Feb. 25 *Oregonian* report suggesting that the Union Pacific line may remain closed until late April. ■

The Benefits of NARP Web Members-Only Access

One of the great advantages of registering as an e-mail member is the ability to get your newsletter well in advance of when the snail mail copy arrives—the gap could be two weeks or more.

In addition, you have ready, online access to back issues of the newsletter, to tables showing how members of Congress voted on key passenger train issues and, "in season," statements by all candidates for the NARP Board.

Go to www.narprail.org and click on "Register" under "Stay Connected" in the lower left hand corner.

Commission website:
www.transportationfortomorrow.org

Commission

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time to work out. The Commission also foresees more tolling but, for immediate needs, favors a 5-8 cent a year increase in the gasoline tax the next five years.

Commissioner Paul Weyrich said, "I am a conservative Republican...I generally don't favor raising other taxes [but] I don't see any alternative [to increasing the gasoline tax now]."

The minority report (also signed by Commissioners Maria Cino and Rick Geddes) favors a quicker shift away from the gasoline tax, opposes continuing such a big federal role, and says "it is not clear that \$9 billion per year in cost-beneficial investment opportunities in [intercity] passenger rail could be found."

Initial media coverage was so fixated on the proposed gasoline tax increase that Geddes on January 17 scrapped his written testimony (which emphasized highway tolling and did not mention passenger rail) to focus on his many points of agreement with the majority, including the need for more investment in surface transportation. [See website, left] ■



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our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

Federal/State Partnership Starts Small, But Starts!

The fiscal 2008 appropriations law has \$30 million to match state intercity passenger train investments, with the federal share limited to 50% of a project's cost. The Federal Railroad Administration will accept grant applications starting March 18. The "Notice of Funding Availability" was in the Feb. 19 Federal Register and is at www.fra.dot.gov.

The FRA wants small projects that can be completed within the funding made available this year. Real accomplishments would make the best case for continuing and expanding the program.

A Feb. 19 news release quoted Transportation Secretary Mary Peters saying, in part, "Projects that demonstrate an on-time performance standard of 80% or greater, reduce travel time, increase service frequency, or enhance service quality for intercity rail passengers will receive favorable consideration for funding.

"Eligible projects include, but are not limited to: upgrading existing track to permit higher maximum operating speeds, adding or lengthening passing tracks to increase rail line capacity, improving track switches and signaling systems to advance reliability and safety, and purchasing new passenger rail cars to enhance the travel experience."

The release also included this: "Rail passengers demand improved service and quality and this grant program will allow states to address these concerns," said Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph H. Boardman, highlighting that individual or multiple states working together can submit applications...The expecta-

tion [is] that awards will be made later this year."

Peters noted that ridership has grown much faster on state corridors than other Amtrak trains. That, however, reflects state investments in rolling stock and in low fares even as the national network (long-distance) fleet has shrunk and Amtrak remains under pressure to push Northeast Corridor fares, even on the *Regionals*, as high as possible. Fortunately, many state corridor investments could improve the performance of national network trains as well. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Coast Starlight—See page 3.

Midwest Corridor trains operating with Superliners—Several Midwest Corridor trains are operating with Superliners due to the cold weather. When a train has Superliner equipment, Business Class is not offered.

NARP Membership Meetings; Speakers Updates

—**Region 4, March 15, Baltimore**, Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Boardman, NARP Comm. Associate Matthew Melzer, and speakers from VRE and MDOT

—**Region 6, March 15, Toledo**, NARP Executive Dir. Ross Capon

—**Region 10, March 15, Omaha**, NARP Assistant Director David Johnson, Union Pacific Director-Passenger Operations Tom Mulligan, Amtrak Chief-Product Management Brian Rosenwald

—**Region 7, March 29, Milwaukee**, NARP Assistant Director David Johnson, Wisconsin DOT speaker invited. Meeting follows 10 am tour of new Milwaukee Station.

—**Reg. 12, April 19, Sacramento**. NARP Pres. George Chilson, *Trains* magazine columnist Don Phillips, Amtrak, Caltrans speakers.

Details, updates: www.narprail.org

St. Louis Gateway Station Nears Completion



The opening of the St. Louis Gateway Station this year will solve one of Amtrak's most critical terminal problems. The facility will serve Amtrak, Greyhound, light rail and city buses. This Feb. 3 picture, looking east, shows where the new platform tracks will run, as well as the building (since demolished) that for years has served as the city's "temporary" Amtrak station. After the new station opens, possibly in late April, the current station (behind photographer; see *NARP News*, Jan. 2005) will become a crew base.

—photo, Ross B. Capon