



News from the
**National Association of
 Railroad Passengers**

Vol. 25 No. 7  July, 1991

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News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers (ISSN 0739-3490), is published monthly except November by NARP, 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 308, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 408-8362. Membership dues are \$20/year (\$10.00 under 21 or over 65) of which \$5 is for a subscription to NARP News. Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC.

Postmaster: send address changes to National Association of Railroad Passengers, 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 308, Washington, DC 20002.

(This has news through July 26. No. 6 was mailed July 9.)

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Maine Has Rail Passenger Law!

NARP Testifies on House Appropriations

In his annual appearance before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, NARP's Ross Capon expressed concern that "Amtrak may be placing too big an emphasis on increasing the revenues-to-costs ratio." His written testimony lamented that "the problems of late trains and equipment failures don't seem to go away." (See "Consumer Corner" for the Committee's view of Amtrak services.)

Coughlin Praises NARP

"It has been your dedication that has steamed passenger rail service through some dark days and into what is really a new beginning. Thank you for what you have done."

—Rep. Lawrence Coughlin (PA), Ranking Republican on the Appropriations Subcomm. on Transp., to NARP's Ross Capon, during his April 30 testimony



NARP Exec. Dir. Ross Capon testifying April 30 before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation

Capon also highlighted efforts to start a Chicago-Atlanta-Florida Amtrak route, the need to include a rail link in the Boston Central Artery Project and the cases for New Haven-Boston electrification and for improving "many other corridors including several around Chicago, Vancouver-Seattle-Portland, and Florida and Texas routes."

He reported encouraging new weekday rail transit ridership figures:

- Miami Metro rail (50,000),
- Miami-West Palm Beach commuter trains (8,000 now vs. 3,000 in 1989),

- Sacramento (24,400 in Feb., up 900 from the previous high last Oct. in spite of a Jan. 6 fare increase), and

continued on page 4

First-Ever Citizen-Initiated Bill Adopted by Legislature!

Gov. John R. McKernan (R-ME) on July 14 signed into law a citizen-initiated bill requiring the state "to seek and use" at least \$40 million to restore Boston-Portland passenger-train service.

The members of Portland-based TrainRiders Northeast—through its political action committee, RailVision—collected over 57,000 signatures last fall to put what is now law on the November 1991 ballot. In a turn of events reflecting the popularity of passenger trains in Maine, the hard work of TrainRiders and its president, NARP Dir. Wayne Davis, and the support of Commissioner of Transportation Dana Connors, the state legislature adopted the bill verbatim and sent it to the governor.

This was the first citizen-initiated bill ever to be adopted by the state legislature, and the first time such a bill became law without a referendum.

In a front-page story July 17, the *Portland Press Herald* reported Davis "said passenger trains could be running by 1993 if enough federal and state financing is found in the next year to lower the amount that would need to be borrowed to a level acceptable to voters. Toward that end, Davis and Connors will travel to Washington [July 24] to lobby for money to aid the startup of Boston-to-Portland passenger train service."

The voters' decision on borrowing enough to bring the total to \$40 million will come on a state DOT bond issue in June 1992. ■

HOUSE HIGHWAY/TRANSIT BILL

The House Committee on Public Works and Transportation July 23 approved H.R. 2950, a "pro-concrete" highway/transit reauthorization. Unlike S. 1204, H.R. 2950 would not allow use of highway trust funds for Amtrak projects. H.R. 2950 assumes a 5-cent gasoline tax increase (only 20% for transit) which faces an uncertain future.

Consumer Corner—#2

When Should Amtrak Pay Airfare?

On Christmas Eve, NARP Member Keith Perry of Faubush, KY, and his family got off “California Zephyr” in Omaha to take “Amtrak Thruway Connecting Bus Service” to Kansas City, and then the train to St. Louis, but bitter cold forced cancellation of the bus and the Perrys flew from Omaha to St. Louis. Amtrak refused to pay the Perrys’ airfare but did pay to fly the one other Amtrak passenger who had planned to take the canceled bus.

For the Perrys, this made a mockery of Amtrak’s Thruway promotions (“Now you can arrange *guaranteed* bus connections to and from Amtrak trains!”). Perry says he was simply offered cab fare to the Greyhound station, although the agent thought the evening bus might also be canceled and—even if it ran—the Perrys would have spent their whole night either in Kansas City or taking the bus all the way to St. Louis. The Perrys’ Christmas would not have been much happier if they had accepted the Omaha hotel arrangements which Amtrak claims to have offered but Perry says was not.

Amtrak Pres. W. Graham Claytor Jr. and VP—Passenger Services Eugene N. Eden defended Amtrak’s decision in letters of May 8 and June 10, respectively, though Eden conceded “my employee could have handled the situation more tactfully.”

NARP Pres. John R. Martin’s June 21 letter to Amtrak said, in part: “Agents’ decisions should rest on fairness and a desire to get repeat business from travelers who have suffered misfortune beyond their control. Here, it appears the decision was based on a calculation of what was cheaper for Amtrak—flying the single traveler was cheaper than paying for her hotel. . . .

“[Amtrak’s Omaha agent] said that, given the inconvenience experienced by the family and the fact it was Christmas Eve, he had leaned toward flying them to St. Louis, but was prevented from doing so by lack of cash-on-hand. [Amtrak policy] states that when a station has insufficient cash, an

Passenger Complaints Alarm Capitol Hill

“The [House Appropriations] Committee is alarmed at the rapidly increased level of complaints received by Amtrak regarding their service during the past year. Complaints by the traveling public were up over 40% in only one year, and the increases were in all categories, including personnel, reservations, equipment and baggage services. Amtrak’s explanation of this increase seems to largely blame their customers for expecting an unreasonably high level of service which Amtrak is having trouble providing. The Committee does not accept this explanation, and expects Amtrak to take whatever steps are needed to ensure that trip quality and customer service are adequate. The Committee believes that Amtrak can reach operating self-sufficiency while providing clean, safe, efficient, and cost-competitive transportation. In fact, Amtrak is not likely to improve revenues significantly if it continues to disenchant its customers at an increasing rate. The Committee expects to see some improvement in these statistics during the coming year.”

—Report accompanying the House FY ’92 Transportation Appropriations Bill

Same Problem, Different Response

“I was particularly interested in the Perrys’ situation because a few years ago I was traveling Oakland to Denver via Bakersfield, connecting bus to Barstow, and ‘Desert Wind.’ Due to engine failure we were about three hours late at Bakersfield, making the ‘Wind’ connection impossible. I was one of about 12 connecting passengers taken to Los Angeles by bus and provided with air transportation later the same evening—in my case, to Denver. Amtrak paid cab fares to LAX, made air reservations, and provided each passenger with the cash necessary to pay for tickets waiting at the airport. The other connecting passengers were flown to their destination of Las Vegas.”

—NARP Corporate Secretary Robert W. Glover of San Francisco

Emergency Exchange Voucher (EEV—NRP form 75) may be issued and the passenger given the ‘Vendor coupon #1’ to exchange at an alternate carrier’s terminal for a ticket. Even if Omaha had run out of EEV’s as well, the policy also suggests Mr. Perry could have been reimbursed through his credit card.”

Martin said even a conservative reading of Amtrak policies would entitle the Perrys “to a partial refund. The policy says that when alternate transportation is provided, and the disrupted segment of travel was by coach, and ‘if the passenger elects not to use the alternate transportation and to continue travel on his own,’ the Amtrak agent must refer to section E-34(D) of the tariff. This states that ‘refunds [on partially-used All Aboard America tickets] should be based on one-half of the lowest round-trip excursion fare . . . between the origin and destination points not traveled,’” which Martin calculated at \$232.

Martin concluded, “That is nowhere near what the Perrys paid for their airfare—\$932—nor does it compensate them for their inconvenience. . . . We think a full refund of the Perrys’ \$932 airfare would be fairest and make the best business sense. At a minimum, the Perrys clearly are eligible to receive the \$232 hardship refund. Please reconsider again Amtrak’s decision regarding the Perrys, as well as ways to prevent this type of problem from recurring.”

In a July 5 reply, Amtrak Exec. Vice Pres. William S. Norman defended Amtrak’s refusal to pay airfare but added: “Nevertheless I do agree fully that we should not lose a customer, and that it is time for a waiver of policy.” He approved a \$203 refund using Section 34, modifying Martin’s figures to reflect that one of the Perry tickets was half fare. ■

High Speed Rail vs. More Airports

NARP Director Ronald P. Boardman Jr. spoke at a May 15 panel on efforts to locate a third major airport in the Chicago region. He argued that developing high speed rail would eliminate the need for such an airport.

The Chicago-based Center for Neighborhood Technology sponsored the panel, held at the Chicago Academy of Sciences. For a copy of the material the NARP staff researched for Mr. Boardman in connection with his presentation, send \$3 and a s.a.s.e. to the NARP office. Proceedings of the entire workshop are available from the Center (2125 W. North Ave., Chicago 60647). Ask for “Building a Sustainable Future for Chicago’s Southeast Side: Is an Airport the Answer?”

Amtrak on "Self-Sufficiency"

To eliminate the need for operating subsidies by the year 2000, Amtrak estimates it needs capital grants totalling \$4.637 billion during the 9 fiscal years 1992-2000. Also, private financing generally may not be advisable for future rolling stock purchases.

These are the most notable observations in Amtrak's June 1 report, "Towards Self-Sufficiency in the Year 2000," which was mandated by Congress (NARP News, July '90, p.2).

The capital grant needs average \$515 mill. a year compared with \$311 mill. appropriated for FY '91 and \$211 mill. in the FY '92 bill the House passed July 24 (these figures include capital for the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project and for Amtrak nationwide).

Rolling Stock

Amtrak would like to spend \$2.3 bill. on new orders, mostly to replace worn-out locomotives and cars. Amtrak wants to:

- "replace its fleet of (about 250) F40 diesel-electric locomotives that power nearly all trains outside the electrified zone of the Northeast Corridor" with more efficient locomotives; and

- buy "about 250 new (single-level) Viewliner cars to complete replacement of the Heritage fleet, additional cars to replace Turboliner equipment plus more mail handling cars." Turbos are fuel-guzzlers and have fixed consists not easily adjusted to meet changing capacity requirements.

No More Private Financing for Rolling Stock

"Amtrak has stated that it will match each dollar of federal grant funds for equipment purchases with a dollar of capital borrowed on the private market without federal guarantees. To date Amtrak has greatly exceeded this goal by privately financing nearly 100% (of 104 Horizon cars), about 80% (of 140 Superliners) and about 90% of the cost of 70 locomotives.

"Amtrak, therefore, believes that future equipment purchases must be made primarily with grant funds . . . to bring the public/private financing ratio back to the 50/50 split initially contemplated" [ed.: so debt payments don't drive up operating costs too much].

From Amtrak's Self-Sufficiency Report

"We assume that additions [to Amtrak's route structure] will be relatively small and incremental. . . . A major new route, with Amtrak expected to absorb multi-million dollar operating losses, would constitute a major setback to the self-sufficiency program. . . .

"\$2.8 bill.—over 60% of [the \$4.6 bill. in needed capital]—would be required to maintain present services and much of that investment should have occurred in the 1980s. . . .

"[Amtrak expects] continuing aggressive marketing and innovation to prompt revenues to grow at an average rate of 3-4% per year more than the rate of increase in expenses. . . .

"We do not seek wage reductions or deferrals. Our labor relations strategy will consist of the pursuit of flexibility in the duties of all employees to ensure maximum responsiveness to the needs of the customer and in the provision of competitive benefits programs. . . .

"[We assume Congress will provide] relief from the Federal Employers Liability Act and certain tort claims costs. . . ."

Self-Sufficiency: Another View

Amtrak's "revenues-to-costs ratio must stay high enough to keep legislators happy and low enough to enable Amtrak to carry lots of people who, in W.S. Gilbert's words, 'occupy a station in the lower-middle class.'"

—NARP Exec. Dir. Ross Capon in
Passenger Train Journal, May 1991

Amtrak's benefits—congestion relief, energy efficiency, environmental soundness, safety, service to otherwise-isolated communities—"offer clear, bipartisan rationales for Amtrak subsidies—even if the revenue-to-cost ratio stops rising. For my tax dollars, Amtrak would be a bargain if steadily increasing passenger mileage and market share enabled Amtrak to offer those benefits in increasing quantities—even if the revenue-to-cost-ratio remained 72% and federal support around \$600 mill. a year. But an Amtrak that provided no such benefits would be a candidate for extinction even with a 95% revenue-to-cost ratio and smaller federal support."

—Capon in *Trains*, November 1990

Track Improvements

Amtrak would spend \$1.7 bill. on right-of-way. Amtrak is not prepared to spend money alone on privately owned tracks, so Amtrak's share of Los Angeles-San Diego track improvements—a joint program with Santa Fe Railway and the state and counties—is the only non-Northeast Corridor track money in Amtrak's calculations. Hopefully, increased rail passenger activity elsewhere will force Amtrak to expand the geographical extent of its track improvement funding.

The \$1.7 bill. would "focus on the Northeast Corridor, for the most part north of New York." Amtrak estimates this work, including establishing air-competitive New York-Boston service, could cut the operating subsidy \$74 mill. in FY 2000. (The report wrongly says "the New York-Boston travel market is larger than the New York-Washington market." It is true that, due to the large inroads trains have made below New York, the New York-Boston air market—and thus Amtrak's market growth opportunities—is larger.)

"Other"

Other operating-subsidy reductions:

- \$111 mill. "from new and expanded non-intercity rail business ventures" including commuter rail contracts, real estate development, and expanded mail and express business; and

- \$114 mill. "through higher productivity obtained in large measure by innovative use of information technology" for more sophisticated, airline-style pricing policies "to ensure that every seat is sold at the maximum possible price" and better maintenance and distribution of cars, as well as ending many "obsolete and historical practices among Amtrak's numerous labor agreements."

Other capital expenditures: maintenance facilities, \$216 mill.; information/communication \$138 mill.; stations/on-board service \$137 mill.; "other," \$100 mill.

"Can You Afford to Board . . . ?"

If the self-sufficiency goal helps increase capital invest-

Campaign Policy Paper #5 Is Out!

"Intercity Passenger Transportation: Neglect of Rail and Intermodal Facilities," published by NARP-hosted Campaign for New Transportation Priorities is now available. Price per copy: NARP members—\$5 (quantities 4 or more: \$4); others—\$6.

ment, fine. Unfortunately, Amtrak's pursuit of self-sufficiency by 2000 has meant fares escalating beyond the means of more and more people. The trains remain full because more and more people with money want to ride. If capital funding falls short of Amtrak's requests while pressure to move toward self-sufficiency continues, the fare-escalation problem will grow more serious. Therein lies a riddle Amtrak and Congress may have to confront at some point.

Also, Amtrak's revenue goals may be unrealistic, particularly for the next four years before start of the payoff from current capital investment. The double-digit percentage passenger revenue growth Amtrak enjoyed in 1984, 1986, and 1988-89 probably will not repeat soon. Confronted with lower growth and a declining cash balance, a big self-sufficiency push might force Amtrak to spend less on critical maintenance and services. Such cuts must be avoided.

Amtrak's 29-page report is available while supplies last from Amtrak Public Affairs, 60 Mass. Ave., NE, Wash., DC 20002. Specify the self-sufficiency report. ■

The Auto's Legacy of Death

"In the United States, the automobile had cost its first million dead by 1952, its second million by 1975, and the third million is likely by 1994. Along the way, some 90 million Americans have sustained disabling injuries in auto accidents. In all, the more than 2.5 million Americans who have died violent deaths on our highways represent more than four times the 641,691 Americans killed in World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam combined. . . . The 1.8 million Americans who sustained disabling injuries in traffic accidents during 1987 alone represents more than a half-million more injuries than the number sustained by Americans in all 20th-century wars. . . ."

"And that's not counting deaths from the many toxic byproducts of mass motorization. A recent University of California study found that ground-level air pollution from cars is responsible for 30,000 deaths each year, primarily through respiratory problems. Moreover, cars are a major contributor to the double threat of global warming and ozone-layer depletion, as well as a persistent hazard to crops and wildlife, and a debilitating drain on government expenditures. . . ."

"In Europe, close to 60,000 people are killed each year in car accidents, and 2 million injured. And auto fatalities have become a major cause of death in Third World countries, many of which have fatality-per-mile traveled rates 20 times higher than those of industrialized nations. This led to the estimate that more than 350,000 people are being killed each year worldwide in automobile accidents, with more than 10 million suffering disabling injuries . . . [and not counting in most countries] fatalities that occur several days after accidents or off-road."

"It is conservatively estimated by the Humane Society that a million animals die each day on U.S. roads, making road kills second only to the meat industry in total animal deaths. States routinely report more deer killed by cars than by hunters. . . ."

—"Car Culture: Driving Ourselves Crazy"

by Attorney Andrew Kimbrell of the Washington-based Foundation on Economic Trends, The Washington Post, Sept. 3, 1989

FY '92 Transportation Appropriations

On July 10, the House passed H.R. 2942, including \$3.8 bill. for mass transit (vs. \$3.3 bill. this year), \$36 mill. for Northeast Corridor Improvement Project "routine capital expenses" only (vs. \$179 mill.), \$175 mill. for Amtrak capital (vs. \$132 mill.), and a very tight \$328.9 mill. for Amtrak operations (vs. \$343.1 mill.). Nothing for Chicago-Florida. Report language criticizes both magnetic levitation and Boston electrification.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Amtrak's "Cardinal" uses Cincinnati Union Terminal instead of infamous River Road Station starting July 29, serving points Chicago to Hamilton 15 minutes later eastbound, 15 minutes earlier westbound; no change in New York-Cincinnati times. (Opening ceremony Sat., Nov. 2 in conjunction with other activities of the museum that now occupies most of the building.) Send NARP s.a.s.e. for revised "Cardinal" timetable.

Amtrak's "Keystone Classic Club Luxury Daytime Service between New York and Pittsburgh" runs on "Pennsylvanian" west Thurs./Sat., east Fri./Sun. Service starts Aug. 1; during Thanksgiving week will run west Tues., not Thurs., east Wed., not Fri. This is a lounge car with observation windows at one end; "passengers will be able to view out the rear between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh." Smoking only in one designated room.

Amtrak Enlivens Main Street

Amtrak ridership at Centralia, WA got a boost when local merchants inaugurated the "Shoppers Special," designed to bring people from Seattle into Centralia aboard the "Coast Starlight" for a day of shopping.

Centralia already had a large outlet mall on the edge of town on I-5 but—as in many other small towns—many vacant storefronts along the main street, adjacent to the Amtrak station. So Mayor Missy Buzzard, the mall and downtown merchants bought a used "trolley" bus, provided a shuttle for shoppers between the station, downtown and the mall, and assembled a package to bring the shoppers in by Amtrak.

The "Special" was inaugurated last Oct. 24, was the subject of a feature story in the Oct. 26 *Seattle Times*, and was still going strong in July 1991.

The \$29 package includes a round-trip rail ticket, shuttle rides and discount coupons. Reservations are available by calling 800/525-3323.

NARP Testifies (continued from page 1)

● Los Angeles-Long Beach (18,000 in Jan.—3 times the projection—even before the mid-Feb. extension to the Los Angeles terminal at 7th and Flower; the line was up to 31,000 by June).

Shortly before Capon testified, Houston officials appeared seeking funding for their planned monorail, saying this technology would fit in best in their neighborhoods. So Capon in his presentation noted that "light rail is economical, attractive, and can actually improve the urban/suburban environment."

For a copy of NARP's testimony, send \$1 and a s.a.s.e. ■