

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

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10  
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## Manufacturing Delay For High-Speed Trains

### *First Boston Electric Service in January*

The consortium of Bombardier and Alstom—manufacturers of the Acela Express high-speed trains—have told Amtrak that they will be unable to provide “a thoroughly tested trainset and high-horsepower locomotive in the fall of 1999 to ensure high-speed rail revenue service by the end of this year” (quotations from a September 1 Amtrak news release).

In the same release, Amtrak President George Warrington said Amtrak will “take advantage of the other completed improvements to introduce faster service, more seats, and refurbished trains in January between New York and Boston...” The release said Amtrak “will launch new Acela Regional electric service between New York and Boston in January. With two round trips daily, Acela Regional will offer travel times of less than four hours and refurbished trains with interior designs similar to Acela Express. Amtrak will add 800 more seats to the route between Boston and New York.” (Acela Regional will replace today’s NortheastDirect service.)

Existing Amtrak AEM-7 locomotives will power the two round trips. More Boston schedules will go all-electric as new high-horsepower locomotives enter service in later months.

Regarding the train sets, again quoting the release, the manufacturers “attribute the delay in part to the need for additional testing and refinements. Excessive wheel wear has been exhibited during testing of the equipment at the Transportation Technology Center in Pueblo, CO. However, the train has demonstrated its ability to achieve top speed.”

“This delay is unfortunate but not unusual when new technology, although proven, is being introduced in a new environment,” said Jacques Laparé, President of Bombardier Transportation, North America. “This refers to the fact that, in conformance with more stringent U.S. crashworthiness standards, the new train sets will be much heavier than high-speed trains in service in Europe and Japan.

In July, a problem was identified at the test track in Pueblo: excessive “truck hunting” (side-to-side motion of the wheel sets) at high speeds. Unfortunately, modifications that ended the hunting caused excessive wheel wear, and thus higher maintenance costs, primarily on the passenger cars. The delay is to find a solution without those higher costs.

The release also quoted Amtrak President and CEO George Warrington: “Nobody wants delays, and we’ve worked hard to avoid them. We are faced with a choice—cut corners to get the train out, or get it right the first time. I am absolutely committed to making sure this train is right, and meets our

(continued on page 2)

### U.S. TOUR FOR ACELA “LOOK-ALIKE” IN 2000

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) set a November 19 deadline for states to express interest in co-sponsoring a nationwide tour of a high-speed, “Acela-look-alike” non-electric locomotive and three tilting coaches (*Federal Register*, Sept. 3). The locomotive, product of a joint FRA/Bombardier venture (Dec. ’98 *News*), will be capable of at least 125 mph.

No line outside the Northeast can support that speed now. But the mere presence of this locomotive (rather than Amtrak diesels pulling electric European trains) should show the public that much better service is possible where states invest in the tracks.

FRA seeks states to co-sponsor and fund the tour. A “concept demonstration” tour starting in late summer 2000, with three- to 14-day stints on some designated high-speed corridors, will be followed by a “service demonstration” tour with “revenue service for three to six months in one or two corridors.”

If your state has obvious opportunities for fast, modern trains, be sure to urge your governor and state DOT to meet the FRA’s deadline.

### MARSHALL DEPOT TO REOPEN



—Marshall Depot, Inc.

A grand reopening ceremony for the historic Texas and Pacific depot in Marshall, TX, will be held November 13, 10:30 am. The 1912 Mission-style station has been the subject of an 11-year restoration effort by a local citizens’ group, Marshall Depot, Inc. (see also Sept. ’91 *News*). The group was instrumental in getting a long-term lease of the abandoned building for the city from owner Union Pacific in 1990, raising over \$1 million (including working to get ISTEAF funding through the Texas DOT), and starting reconstruction (the roof in 1990-91, other work starting 1997).

Besides a lobby and ticket counter for Amtrak *Texas Eagle* passengers, there will be a snack area, rentable offices, and museum focusing on the role of the T&P Railroad in local and state development. Group tours available, call 903-935-2173 or 800-710-9789.

## More On Electronic Ticket And Food Sales

Amtrak at last is becoming sophisticated in handling its sales of tickets (Aug. *News*) and on-board food (Dec. '98 *News*).

**The Motorola automated fare collection system** will facilitate prompt sales—both by down-line stations and on-board crews—of space held by “no-show” passengers. Amtrak will “manage smarter” by getting revenue and ridership data promptly, rather than after tickets go through a costly, up-to-six-week-long (!), mostly manual accounting process.

Getting prompt sales information is basic to surviving in the modern business world, and should reduce the amount of space that (a) runs empty due to too-high fares, or (b) sells at below-market rates.

The new system will provide real-time off-train passenger manifests. Passengers will get automated receipts for on-board ticket purchases, and will be able to pay easily for seats with cash, credit card, checks or smart card.

Plans to introduce the Motorola system have changed since our August report. So that any system bugs can be worked out before Acela Express begins, the beta (test) version will debut on another train in February. Acela Express will have the system from Day One; Amtrak plans nationwide implementation by October 2000.

**The Point of Sales (POS) computer system for food sales**—already in place on *San Diegans*, *Texas Eagle*, *Cascades*, *Empire Corridor* (and *Metroliners*, *NortheastDirect*, *Chicago corridors* in October)—will give passengers receipts for food as a matter of course and will let passengers use credit cards to pay for food from all on-board outlets on all Amtrak trains. Without POS, credit cards are limited to long-distance trains, and there to dining cars only.

Amtrak estimates that POS—which should be in place system-wide by the end of September—will mean an annual savings of \$3.7 million, before counting the extra sales that should result from snack bars opening earlier and closing later. For years, cumbersome, manual inventory requirements have led employees to open snack bars quite a while after a train originates and to close them well before its destination. Thus, seasoned passengers buy food in or near stations where trains originate—food they would buy on board if the snack bars opened reliably on departure.

On Acela Express, the “bistro” will sell food during the entire journey; the goal is to extend that practice system-wide.

For both ticket and food sales, Amtrak and its employees will benefit from accurate records. The system should reduce or eliminate clerical errors that wind up costing innocent employees money and demoralizing them, and should provide Amtrak tighter controls over both inventory and food and beverage revenues. Finally, both systems will be programmed to include the exchange rate for Canadian cash, making life easier for passengers and employees alike.

The POS vendor is CacheBox, Inc. (previously Telecom Design Group) of Arlington, VA. Eatec is the name of the company and the software to be used for the back office (commissary) portion of the new system.

The Amtrak project directors are Julie Green for the fare collection system and Bill Lerch for Point of Sales. ■

## OIL PRODUCTION: DAYS NUMBERED

“Now that [gasoline] prices are inching back up, people may be more receptive to a warning from a growing number of geologists that the end of cheap oil is in sight... ‘We haven’t found a major new oil basin in 30 years,’ [said] University of Colorado geology professor Jack Edwards... He says the inevitable peak of production will hit around the year 2020... Edwards is considered an optimist...”

“So we asked a pessimist. International Petroleum Consultant Colin Campbell thinks there are only one trillion barrels left, half the reserves Edwards estimates... For each barrel of oil discovered, four are consumed. Campbell says within 10 years production won’t be able to keep up with demand...”

“Long before an actual oil crunch occurs, Campbell predicts a political crisis will happen, as five Middle Eastern oil producers—Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Iran and the United Arab Emirates—regain control of the market. ‘When these five countries produce 30% of the world’s oil, that gives them the power to control the market and they can really impose whatever price they wish. They will reach 30% by about 2000.’”

“Campbell and others think the only way to avoid gas shortages, price increases and maybe even more oil wars is by reducing demand. That means someone has to come up with an alternative to the number one petroleum burner: the internal combustion engine that drives the world’s 700 million cars.”

—Marketplace (*Public Radio International*), May 25

## Acela Delay

(from page 1)

standards of excellence.”

Amtrak’s release stated that the manufacturers have “set a revised, tentative delivery timeframe of spring 2000,” but that Amtrak would not announce a final service launch date until early November, “when the manufacturers will be in a position to commit to a new delivery schedule...”

Amtrak says this would not hurt its ability to become “operationally self-sufficient by the end of FY 2002.” ■

### THE 1999 TOP-TEN ENDANGERED STATIONS

The Great American Station Foundation and National Trust for Historic Preservation released on July 22 their 1999 list of “Top Ten Most Endangered Stations.” This is the second year the groups have done this to raise awareness of the need to save these structures.

Of the ten, seven are active Amtrak stops:

East Glacier Park, MT	Raton, NM
Elkhart, IN	Petersburg (Ettrick), VA
Harper’s Ferry, WV	Sanderson, TX
Minot, ND (G.N. depot)	

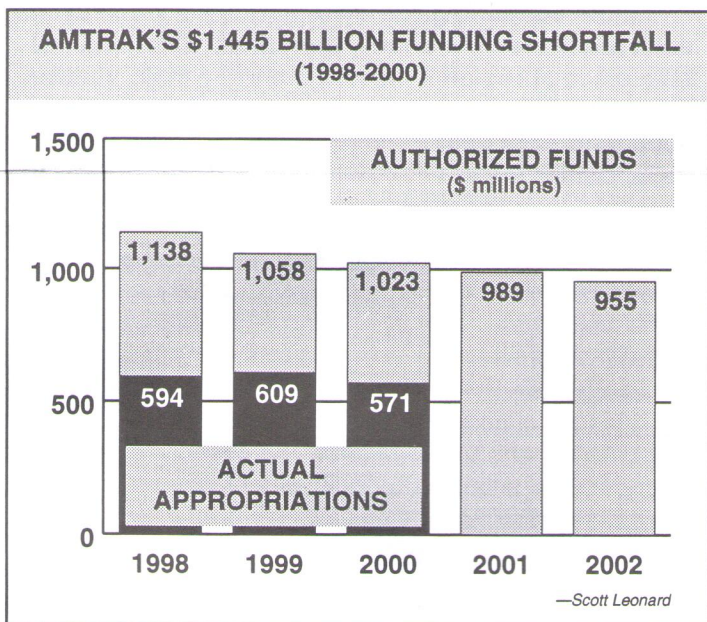
Another—Antonito, CO—may be renovated for use by the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad. The other two are at Lewistown, IL, and Mineral Point, WI.

## Future Amtrak Funding Must Increase

A big gap separates funding authorized for Amtrak in the 1997 Amtrak Reform and Accountability Act and dollars actually appropriated. The law authorizes \$5.163 billion for capital and operations over five years. The funding shortfall has totaled \$1.445 billion over the first three years (1998-2000).

Amtrak and the Administration claim Amtrak is on schedule to meet the mandate in the 1997 law that Amtrak receive no operating funding after 2002, but the DOT Office of Inspector General and the General Accounting Office (Aug. News) are not so sure.

If Amtrak misses the mandate deadline, the just-mentioned



shortfall must be considered by those who will decide the fate of passenger trains in this country—the Amtrak Reform Council and the U.S. Congress.

And—even if Amtrak does meet its goal—Amtrak has made clear that current funding levels preclude meaningful expansion, including nationwide corridor development on which the Administration has lavished considerable rhetoric.

It is unfortunate that the Administration has not requested higher funding levels, and that Congress has treated Clinton requests as “ceilings.” But this Administration and this Congress still have time to change directions—and to launch a critically-needed infrastructure program that would be a popular, lasting legacy of which they would be proud.

The fiscal 2001 budget process is already underway. The Amtrak authorization is for \$989 million, far above business-as-usual. This is the funding level that should be adopted.

**FY 2000 Appropriation:** The Senate on September 16 approved its DOT appropriations bill, which—like its House counterpart—has \$571 million for Amtrak. Floor action had been delayed due to Richard Shelby’s (R-AL) controversial provision to shift transit funding from New York and California to other states. He withdrew this after a cloture vote failed.

The bill includes \$950,000 for the Amtrak Reform Council (vs. Clinton’s \$750,000 request and House-passed \$450,000).

There also was a non-binding promise of \$20 million in 2001 toward turning New York’s Farley Post Office into an Amtrak station. At a June 29 ceremony launching the redevelopment, President Clinton urged approval of \$60 million in added funding over three years. The project aims to address increasingly crowded conditions at Penn Station, and restore a grand entrance to the city for rail passengers. ■

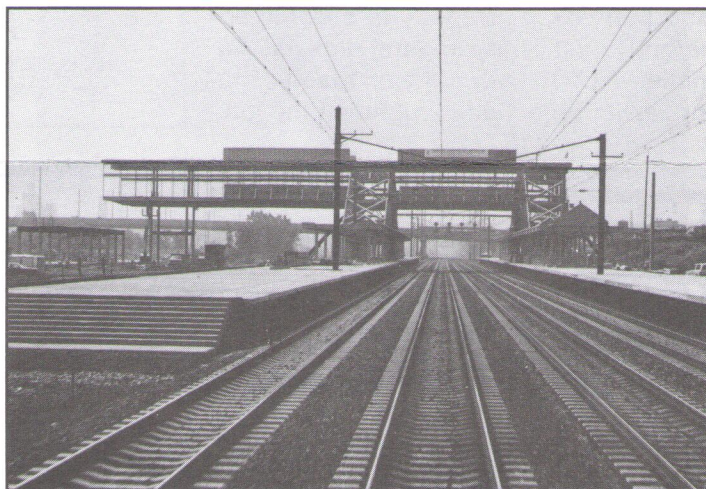
## Newark—Amtrak’s First Real Airport Link

Intercity passenger trains can *replace* planes for shorter trips; New York-Washington is the best Amtrak example. Or, people taking long trips can train one way and fly the other. The United Airlines/Amtrak air-rail plan encourages this.

Finally—if intercity trains go right to the airport—the train can be *one leg of a long trip that also involves flying*. This helps keep intercity trains relevant in Europe, where they serve many big airports. Frankfurt is the best-known example, but others include Geneva, Zurich, Paris (Charles de Gaulle), Lyon, Manchester. Some European airport trains are shown in airline computers just like connecting flights.

Newark will be Amtrak’s first direct airport service. Hopefully, Newark and a station planned for the Providence airport will start a trend that enhances overall U.S. transport efficiency, boosts rail passenger revenues, and helps solve airport access problems (both road- and airway-related).

Direct service to Chicago O’Hare Airport would greatly enhance the ridership and financial viability of the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative. The federal “commercial feasibility” study on rail corridors (Sept. ’96; Jan. ’98 News) found that a big part of potential revenues comes from direct linkages between smaller on-line cities and O’Hare. Union Station-O’Hare tracks already exist, thanks to the O’Hare Transfer station on Metra’s newest (North Central) commuter-rail route, and an airport



—Ross B. Capon

The Newark (NJ) Airport station atop Amtrak’s main line—seen here September 9—will be served by all Amtrak Acela Regional trains and most NJT commuter trains. A monorail will link station and airport. Work should be done in February 2001, with service starting late 2001.

parking-lot people-mover could be extended to the trains. (If MRRI can serve airports in other major cities, so much the better. Airports where current Amtrak routes pass by fairly closely include Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Cleveland.) ■

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Stations**—The grand reopening of Memphis Central Station was September 25.

**Thruways**—A bus connecting with the *Sunset Limited* to/from the west at Houston serving South Houston, LaMarque, and Galveston began September 15.

**Transit**—Washington Metro opened 2.9 miles of the Green Line September 18, linking two separate segments that opened in 1991 and 1993. There are two new stations, at Columbia Heights and Georgia Ave.-Petworth, both in Northwest Washington. A rush-hour "Green Line Connection" that began in 1997 to give outer Green Line commuters a transfer-free ride downtown (on Red Line tracks) is canceled.

The only remaining Metro segment still under construction is Anacostia (in Washington)-Branch Ave. (Prince George's County, MD), due to open March 2001.

## HOW TO BE A NARP BOARD MEMBER

To become one of NARP's 70 regional directors, send your statement of candidacy **not exceeding 75 words**, plus name, address, phone number(s). Candidates must have been NARP members for at least a year. First-time candidates must provide letters of recommendation from three other NARP members living in their region. Directors serve two-year terms.

Send items to "NARP Candidate"; 900 2nd St., NE, #308; Washington, DC 20002 (*not to P.O. box on our reply envelopes!*), postmarked by January 3, 2000—or hand-carried, faxed, or e-mailed by January 7.

Ballots containing the statements will be sent to each NARP member shortly thereafter. Elections will take place at regional meetings and by mail. Future board meetings include Washington, DC, April 27-29, 2000 (and April 2001); Pittsfield, MA, October 19-21, 2000; Dallas, October 2001.

## NEW CROSSING PENALTIES

Drivers of commercial motor vehicles (CMV's) will be disqualified from operating them if convicted of violating federal, state or local laws or regulations on railroad-highway grade crossings. Carriers will be penalized for knowingly allowing, permitting, authorizing or requiring a driver to operate a CMV in violation of such laws or regulations. The rule—in Sept. 2 *Federal Register*—takes effect October 4, "completing an action" the 1995 ICC Termination Act required. Comments on the draft were due May 1, 1998; NARP filed comments (May '98 *News*). The Bourbonnais, IL, tragedy this March apparently pushed the Federal Highway Administration to overcome or resolve motor carrier objections and finish the job.

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