



News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

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Mitchell Strongly Supports Rail Projects

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Service problems increased in the wake of an Amtrak/Food and Drug Admin. consent agreement the judge signed June 12. Amtrak agreed to undertake a major program to improve on-board cleaning, sanitation and food handling. The immediate result was many short-distance trains running without food cars (club service was hit hard), many long-distance trains originating at least two hours late awaiting acceptable diners and lounges, a few long-distance trains replaced with buses for lack of acceptable food cars. To end these traumas quickly, some employees were set to work repairing and cleaning food cars instead of being laid off when the strike/lockout ended most service June 24.

"River Cities" will run for at least another year.

The extension to Miami of the "Sunset Limited" is postponed to Apr. 4, 1993. From Amtrak's June 4 release: "Extensive track and signal improvements and modifications are required to permit speeds that will support acceptable schedules. . . . Funds for these improvements are being provided by Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Due to the legislative and administrative complexities of coordinating this funding, the initial payment has just recently been forwarded to CSX to permit work to begin."

Amtrak reversed a hasty uneconomic decision generated in an early round of "budget-saving" ideas: the "Empire Builder's" Chicago-St. Paul coach, removed in January, was restored in early June. While the car was off, after a certain level of sales, Amtrak did not sell travel local to the Chicago-St. Paul segment (even to those connecting in Chicago) more than three days in advance, frustrating many NARP members and others.

On May 18, Amtrak shortened the Northeastern excursion blackout period. Friday/Sunday restrictions are noon-7p (were 11a-7p). Also, Amtrak extended VIA Rail Canada's senior citizen fares to the "Maple Leaf" and "International"—10% discount daily for those 60 or over.

Amtrak opened its first-class lounge at Philadelphia

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New Hampshire Governor's Attack Gets Little Sympathy

"Rail service has become the stepchild of the American transportation system. . . . Passenger rail service is an idea whose time has come, then gone, now come again. . . . I believe a (cross-Boston) rail link is essential to the long-term viability of the Boston-Portland line. . . . I believe nationally, high-speed rail—whether existing technology or maglev—will play a much larger role than anyone now believes."

—Senate Majority Leader George J. Mitchell (D-ME), May 26, in Keynote Address opening New England Center Conference on "Building Regional Rail"

Senator Mitchell was the first of many speakers supporting Boston-Portland service and a rail link between Boston's North and South Stations at a two-day conference, "Building Regional Rail: The Track to Economic Recovery." The May 26-27 conference was at the New England Center at the University of New Hampshire at Durham.

Other presenters at the conference included NARP's Harriet Parcels, Gene Skoropowski and Ross Capon. NARP Director and TrainRiders Northeast President Wayne Davis played a major role in putting the conference together.

The conference also seemed to produce the first official criticism of the Boston-Portland rail service, though it soon appeared the fundamental issue was not transportation but the desire of New Hampshire Gov. Judd Gregg (R), a candidate for U.S. Senate, to "run" against Mitchell. The June 4 *Foster's Daily Democrat* (Dover, NH) quoted Gregg: "It's become a matter of senatorial macho, or liberal senatorial macho, to have a railroad running in your district. What we're talking about here is the classic liberal, 'How much money can you throw at a district to get votes?'"

Gregg's comments were surprising since the project is supported by the state's two U.S. Senators and two U.S. Representatives and the 10,000 New Hampshireites who signed



Sen. Mitchell

(continued on page 4)

State Transport Policies Changing—Mostly for the Better

But Not in Missouri, New Hampshire

Alabama

The state rail commission and Amtrak sponsored a test train Jan. 14 Birmingham-Decatur-Huntsville. The Alabama Highway Dept. is working on getting \$142,000 to extend grade crossing signal circuits on the route of the "Sunset Limited," set to begin operation east of New Orleans in Apr. 1993.

Arizona

On June 8, Gov. Fife Symington (R) signed into law legislation creating a joint legislative study committee on rail transportation. The 21-member committee is to study the feasibility of rail passenger service in Arizona and report by Dec. 31, 1993. The legislation, H.B. 2280, creating the committee, was introduced by three Republican state representatives as a result of an April proposal by the Arizona Rail Passenger Association (ARPA).

The proposal, prepared for ARPA by rail technology consultant John J. Gale, includes a 430-mile, five-county rail passenger system with 42 stations. There would be intercity service, including a daytime train to Los Angeles, and Phoenix-area commuter rail.

ARPA Vice Pres. George Loulan said the five counties contain about 83% of the state's population.

(To get ARPA's proposal, send \$5—payable to ARPA, P.O. Box 7482, Phoenix, AZ 85011-7482.)

Georgia

The state budget office has committed the 20% matching funds needed to get the federal dollars earmarked in ISTEA (Jan. News) for the design and engineering study of downtown Atlanta's intermodal terminal (Aug. '91 News). Georgia DOT appears ready to spend significant funds on building the terminal and on rebuilding tracks needed to let Amtrak's "Crescent" reach the terminal without backing up.

There is great interest in Atlanta-area commuter rail; Georgia DOT is studying 12 potential routes. Georgia Assn. of Railroad Passengers is represented on a new technical advisory committee to this study. To draw attention to the Marietta (northwest) line, the Cobb County Chamber of Commerce organized a trip by state and local officials on Amtrak to Washington for an inspection of Maryland commuter rail facilities, which included a special Washington-Germantown train ride Sun., Feb. 23.

The legislature is considering creating a transportation trust fund that would allow rail projects to get state gasoline tax revenues.

Iowa

The Iowa Transportation Commission voted unanimously Mar. 3 to begin talks with Amtrak on starting Chicago-Omaha 403(b) service over the Chicago and North Western route through central Iowa. "California Zephyr" service would remain on the Burlington Northern route in southern Iowa.

On Apr. 20, the Iowa House voted 53-44 for a bill which instructs Iowa DOT to proceed with negotiations, establishes a state rail passenger fund, and appropriates \$4 mill. from the road use tax (not gas tax) to the new service in Fiscal Year 1994 and \$2.5 mill. a year for the next four years. The Senate-passed bill was identical except that it provided no appropriation.

The final version of the bill, House File 2471, passed both houses overwhelmingly. On May 15, the governor signed it into law at a ceremony at which Iowa ARP presented a \$2,500 check as the first deposit to the fund. Iowa ARP hopes state funding will be approved next year.

During the debate, NARP provided a memo assuring those along the existing Amtrak route that their service would not be jeopardized by a new route.

Maine

Efforts are proceeding to get Boston-Portland rail service in place by the end of 1993. This includes deciding where Portland's station should be and picking four or five intermediate stops from among eleven "wannabes." In February, Maine DOT selected the Amtrak operating proposal over a rival plan from Guilford, which owns most of the tracks involved. The next step is to ensure that the \$30 million in track-work money which the highway/transit law ("ISTEA") authorizes for this route is also in the FY 1993 DOT appropriations law.

A bond initiative on the June 9 state ballot provided the state match for the ISTEA money. The transportation part of the initiative passed 59%, thanks to heavy promotion by Train Riders Northeast. Of \$42 mill. in transportation bonds, \$4.5 mill. is for rail, including \$3 mill. for the Boston-Portland track-work and \$1 mill. for upgrading the state-owned Brunswick-Rockland branch, which has freight and summer tourist service.

Massachusetts

Rail labor, businesspeople, the Sierra Club's Greater Boston Group (GBG) and NARP are represented on the board of a new organization, Citizens Transportation Action Campaign (CTAC), which has presented to Gov. William Weld (R) and the MBTA a detailed plan—including a preliminary engineering plan—for putting a railroad link in the Central Artery Project. To support this effort, Sierra Club's GBG and rail labor are collecting signatures on "Go Rail" petitions.

CTAC's initial letter to Gov. Weld, Pres. Bush, and Sen. George J. Mitchell (D-ME) produced a Mar. 21 *Boston Herald* news story which was the most positive rail-link story in recent years in a major Boston daily.

On June 18, Mass. Sec. of Transportation & Construction Richard Taylor met with CTAC representatives—after a memo from the governor's office ordered him to.

He received CTAC's proposal coolly and his aides quickly tried to discredit the proposal, contrary to the memo's directive to Taylor to "review [CTAC's] ideas and plans . . . to determine whether or not their proposal warrants further exploration. As you know, the governor and lieutenant governor think that not having a [rail] link-up is crazy; the only issue is funding" (*The Boston Herald*, June 17).

Anticipating this reaction, CTAC alerted the governor, lieutenant governor and the media about the group's message to Taylor, which included CTAC's offer to "assume responsibility for coordinating [the rail link's] funding . . . if the two-track design is incorporated into the depressed Artery alignment."

Meanwhile, NARP is working in Washington to see that the rail link study which ISTEA authorized focuses on the Central Artery alignment, the only tunnel across Boston likely to be built in our lifetime.

Missouri

With two major urban areas and perhaps the nation's most anti-transit state DOT, this is the state where ISTEA's supposed "balanced" approach to transportation should make a big difference. Evidently it won't, however, until federal officials or citizen lawsuits can force progress.

Missouri remains one of a handful of states that provides absolutely no aid to mass transit systems, and the state legisla-

AMTRAK'S FY '93 GRANT: TIGHT!!

The House Appropriations Subcomm. on Transportation on June 11 approved a FY '93 Amtrak capital grant of \$74 million, far below Amtrak's \$300 mill. request and the actual FY '92 level, \$175 mill. The bill has Amtrak's operating and mandatory payment requests—\$332 mill. and \$146 mill., respectively—and nothing for NE Corridor improvements. Transit gets this year's level (\$3.8 bill.). Senate markup may be soon after they return to session July 21.

ture recently voted to intensify the state's worship of highways, rejecting various proposals that would have allowed Missourians to vote on state aid to transit, and approving a six-cent gas tax increase earmarked for roads only.

In promoting the tax, Missouri's "Highway and Transportation Department" touted plans to extend the "benefits" of four-lane highways to every town with over 5000 people and to every major lake resort—this would involve 1700 miles. Kansas City and St. Louis would get outer belt highways and I-70 between them would be widened to six lanes.

Missouri could have used some of its "flexible" ISTEA money for transit, but chose not to, despite efforts of members of NARP and the Missouri-Kansas Rail Passenger Coalition.

New Hampshire

The constitution was changed in the 1930s to earmark revenues generated by motor vehicles exclusively for roads. To consider broadening allowable uses of such revenues from "highways" to "transportation," the state legislature's Committee on Public Works held a hearing Jan. 29. NARP Dir. Wayne Davis was among the many witnesses speaking for progress, but the truckers carried the day and two weeks later the committee voted unanimously that the bill was "inexpedient to pass" and the full House (General Court) subsequently killed the bill by voice vote.

Unfortunately, Gov. Judd Gregg (R) sat out this battle.

Washington

On Jan. 15 the DOT presented its new "Statewide Rail Passenger Program" report to the legislature. Four phases of improvements were outlined at a total cost of \$165 mill. That includes improving speeds on all Amtrak routes in the states, and enhanced corridor service (three daily round-trips Vancouver-Seattle, six Seattle-Portland, four Portland-Eugene).

Washington ARP noted that the 1.5-mi. I-705 spur in Tacoma cost \$120 mill. and 7 mi. of I-90 between Seattle and Bellevue is approaching \$1.5 bill.

In March the legislature passed a \$5 mill. supplemental for Amtrak projects in the state, and created a regional transit authority for the Puget Sound area to oversee plans for a rail system there.

Wisconsin

On April 7, voters passed a constitutional amendment that allows the state for the first time ever to spend money (through appropriations or bonds) on passenger and freight rail capital projects. Wisconsin's 1848 constitution prohibited state support of "internal improvements." Over time, amendments were adopted to make exceptions—including for highways, airports, and ports. A 1976 attempt to add railroads to the exception list failed, but this year's attempt was approved by 58% of the voters.

NARP Dir. Patricia V. Robbins of Madison served as an officer of the Wisconsin Rail Coalition, which was formed last year to increase voter support for the amendment. ■

A Role for NARP

Senate's Amtrak Reauthorization

The Amtrak Board would gain a true consumer representative—one picked by the Secretary of Transportation from a list of three provided by NARP—under S. 2608, the Amtrak reauthorization bill approved June 16 by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation.

The bill was introduced Apr. 9 by the chairman of the Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, J. James Exon (D-NE). Other original co-sponsors: Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC, full committee chair), Robert W. Kasten Jr. (R-WI), Conrad Burns (R-MT), Trent Lott (R-MS), Brock Adams (D-WA), Paul Simon (D-IL) and Bill Bradley (D-NJ). Kent Conrad (D-ND) is an additional co-sponsor.

S. 2608, a three-year bill, authorizes \$331 million a year during FY '93-'95 for Amtrak operations and \$300 mill. each year for capital. For mandatory excess railroad retirement and unemployment payments, \$146 mill. is authorized for 1993; "such sums as may be necessary" for '94-'95. S. 2608, unlike H.R. 4250 (Mar. News), does not address the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project.

As in the House bill, there is a separate line for new 403(b) services: \$5 mill., \$7 mill. and \$10 mill. for '93-'95, respectively.

S. 2608 also requires the Secretary of Transportation to consult with states to develop a plan to eliminate remaining grade crossings on the Northeast Corridor, and Amtrak to report to Congress on its plans for high-speed service outside the Northeast Corridor and on new equipment or technology it plans to implement.

A Consumer Voice

S. 2608 states: "One of such members [of the two on the Amtrak board representing "preferred stockholders," i.e., U.S. DOT] shall be specially qualified to represent the interests of rail passengers and shall be selected from a list of three qualified individuals recommended by the National Association of Railroad Passengers."

On the Senate floor April 9, Chairman Exon called that provision an example of the way S. 2608 would "address certain managerial and financial issues, sharpen Amtrak's overall mandate, and improve rail passenger service and safety." ■

SIMON PRAISES NARP

"[S. 2608] puts a consumer member on the Amtrak Board for the first time, and I cannot think of a more dedicated or better qualified organization to recommend that member than the National Association of Railroad Passengers. Time and time again we have counted on their leadership and support to lead us into the next step of Amtrak service or help us prevent the worst passenger train wreck of all: The Administration's call for crippling cuts in Amtrak's budgets."

—Sen. Paul Simon (D-IL), on Senate floor Apr. 9

NEW SEATS ON TRIAL

This summer Amtrak is testing three prototype coach seats, to get consumer reaction before possibly picking one of the seats as the next generation to be put in old and new coaches. The seats are in Amfleet coach #25118 operating on the Auto Train: Seats 17-18, 21-22 are by Artcraft of Milwaukee; 29-30, 33-34 by Coach and Car of Chicago; and 35-36, 39-40 by Compin, a French company that plans to build a plant in Pennsylvania.

Mitchell Supports Rail (continued from page 1)

TrainRiders Northeast petitions.

A few days before the conference, New Hampshire Transportation Commissioner Charles P. O'Leary Jr. said "he finds it incredible that such a huge chunk of money (\$30 million from the recently passed Highway Bill) could be awarded without a full environmental review" (*The Union Leader*, Manchester, NH, May 22 editorial).

However, Mitchell—answering a question following his Durham talk—explained that an environmental impact statement is not required for restoration of an existing line, only for construction of a new line; that an "alternatives analysis" is required only in projects involving over \$25 mill. in federal funds (which may not be true for Boston-Portland); and that all stations will be subject to environmental assessments.

Rhetoric escalated May 27 when the *Portland Press Herald's* front-page story highlighted O'Leary's statement at Durham that, "In New Hampshire we like to live free or die. You're asking for our money. We'd rather die."

But the article also said "some within the Maine Transportation Department believe O'Leary is simply holding out because he knows the train will stop in his state" even if New Hampshire contributes no funding. And O'Leary's play on his state's license-plate motto, "Live free or die," caused the *Bangor Daily News* to editorialize May 28 that the state's motto should be changed to "Live free or freeload."

In fact, Maine officials, who have yet to ask New Hampshire for any money, are seriously considering *not* stopping the train in New Hampshire.

Progress: O'Leary Praises Some Types of Transit

Before Gregg took off the gloves, O'Leary offered a more subtle attack on trains. He called subsidizing Amtrak "elitist" and 'unethical' when rural and urban bus systems, vans for the elderly and commuter rail services must fight one another for scarce funding" (*Maine Sunday Telegram*, Portland, May 31).

[In a subsequent talk, Joseph Vranich, author of *Supertrains* (Oct. '91 *News*), ridiculed O'Leary's use of the term "unethical," noting Federal Railroad Administrator Gil Carmichael's frequent references to rail as an "ethical" form of transportation because of its environmental, energy-efficiency and safety benefits.]

In a letter-to-the-editor published June 14, NARP's Ross Capon responded that it was good that "the transport chief of the only New England state that does not fund public bus or rail service acknowledged transportation problems that automobiles and airplanes can't solve! . . . Middle-class people, however, are not going to start riding buses simply because O'Leary now thinks they should. This is where Amtrak comes in. Amtrak trains can help get middle-class people to think about all public transport.

"Middle-class people *do* like trains. Once they consider riding a train, many will consider a connecting bus as well. California has developed a massive dedicated bus feeder network for Amtrak trains; 54% of the riders on the trio of San Joaquin Valley trains use feeder buses. Connecting Amtrak passengers often outnumber 'regular' bus passengers on some Michigan intercity buses that handle both. . . .

"Likewise, Amtrak would help all local bus systems serving Amtrak stations. These systems—long viewed as only for the poor, the sick, and the elderly—have tried for years with little success to attract bigger markets and thereby provide everyone with more and better service. Amtrak's existence in New Hampshire and Maine would help them do that."

Strong Rail Link Support

At Durham, Amtrak's Tim Gillespie called putting the rail

link in the Central Artery Project the "quickest, cheapest, easiest way" to get the link built, expressing doubt it would ever be built "if we miss this boat. . . . When the box [tunnel] is open, that's the time to get it [the rail link] in."

Vranich spent 10 minutes ridiculing the idea of building the Central Artery Project without a rail link, calling Boston today "the single biggest gap in our entire national rail system. . . . Life gets better if you put rail in the Central Artery."

He also continued his skillful attacks on airport construction, saying:

- of the 10 biggest U.S. airports, Boston's Logan is tops in terms of being overwhelmed by local flights;

- 450,000 flights a year are late but not reported as such because the cause is mechanical failure and FAA fears counting these flights would encourage maintenance "corner-cutting"; and

- airport opponents are no longer just NIMBYs (not-in-my-backyard) but increasingly are PRIMBYs (put-rail-in-my-backyard).

The View from Michigan

Scott Hercik, long-time manager of Michigan's successful Rail and Marine Programs, was the closing speaker. He assured conference participants they were on the right track. His department does a lot of market research, including interviews with people driving on Interstate highways: over half of the interviewed drivers were unaware of the parallel Amtrak service though it had been in existence for 20 years!

Hercik emphasized the importance of publicity—mailers, billboards, trailblazers, and roadshows at malls, festivals, and campuses. He said Michigan promotes train travel at highway rest stops with the slogan, "rest stops with no stops." ■

Travelers' Advisory (continued from page 1)

30th St. Sta. May 25. Hours: 6:30a-9:30p daily.

Amtrak's "Keystone Classic" luxury parlor car service makes its last run June 28.

Beginning July 1, Auto Train handles passenger vans. Transit/Commuter Rail

On Apr. 5, SEPTA closed its ex-Reading commuter trunk line (between Wayne Jct. and Market East) north of downtown Philadelphia for much-needed rebuilding, through Oct. 3. For most of the affected riders, there is expanded Broad St. subway service, accessed at Fern Rock Transfer Station. New timetables were issued Apr. 5; information at 215/580-7800 (6a-midnight ET daily). The line closes again May 2-Sept. 4, 1993. Also, SEPTA streetcar route 56 ended permanently June 13, 1992; route 15's last runs are Sept. 30, 1992

Maryland MTA's new Timonium-Camden light rail line began regular, daily service May 17. MTA's Owings Mills-Charles Ctr. heavy rail began Sunday service (11a-7p) Apr. 5.

NEW CONVENTION FARES AVAILABLE

This spring Amtrak began providing a new Convention Fare—10% off lowest available fares when a meeting planner suggests Amtrak as a preferred way to reach a meeting or convention. To get the fare, the planner should contact their local Amtrak District Sales Office or call the 800 number (972-7245—USA-RAIL). The planner will be asked to supply the name of a contact for the sponsor organization, name of the meeting, address of meeting site, dates and expected attendance.