



Amtrak Chairman Addresses NARP Board

Laney Upbeat on Amtrak, and on NARP

Amtrak Chairman David Laney addressed the NARP board in Austin October 20. With pleasure, he shared the positive evaluation of Amtrak by the DOT Inspector General (see article below).

He also was pleased to report that "lightning has struck the *Heartland Flyer* in the form of TxDOT's agreement to step up and cover a portion of its operating expense."

The one-time Texas Transportation Commission chairman, noting "mind-boggling" population growth projections for Texas, California and Florida, said "to think of Texas without a serious, long-term commitment to commercial passenger rail...is I think a short-sighted transportation policy which will become clear in time even to the most blindly committed highway interests. At the moment, there is little else but highways in their minds, but in time those commercial interests will make room for more broadly strategic transportation policy interests."

As for Amtrak, Laney said, "We're off to a very good start, but sustaining the urgency of focus in our efforts remains

the challenge and will always be a challenge to any large organization. We have a long way to go to ensure the long term survival of Amtrak, or at least passenger rail, in the country..."

He said "passenger rail needs to be recognized as a valuable complement to



—Michael Garey

NARP Pres. George Chilson (r.) presents signed J. Craig Thorpe painting of Seattle's renovated King Street Station to Amtrak Chairman David Laney after his talk and Q&A session with the NARP Board of Directors.

[other] modes. Our job is to set a course that achieves that recognition...It is difficult to get anyone with years of focus on Amtrak's numerous failures to live up to operational service and financial expectations, and to...look forward beyond these crises of the moment—and there will no doubt be other failures from time to time—to envision a future of gradual, incremental resurgence of demand for passenger rail...It is our job at Amtrak and the board to protect, preserve, and enhance that incremental growth and demand."

As Amtrak reviews its equipment fleet and routes, a key concern is that "we don't want to take an action that permanently eliminates any integral piece of the future. We will want to...be able to grow Amtrak, or grow the national passenger rail system, in the future as demand and circumstances merit."

He is encouraged by early results from *Empire Builder* enhancements: "to the extent there is demand enough, we will add capacity" whether coach or sleeper.

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DOT Inspector General on Amtrak's Progress

Saying "we've never seen anything like it," Amtrak Chairman Laney highlighted these points (quotes are from fourth quarterly Amtrak assessment, released Oct. 10 by DOT Office of Inspector General):

- "Amtrak continues to improve its data integrity."
- "Amtrak's overall financial performance continues to be better than expected, and, barring any unforeseen adverse events in September, Amtrak will have successfully managed to operate within its appropriation of \$485 million."
- "Amtrak's financial performance through August reflects savings of \$67.8 million from revenue increases and \$55.7 million from reduced labor costs...The \$67.8 million...includes \$32.1 million in

passenger ticket revenue due in part to...general fare increases and introduction of revenue management [in the Northeast Corridor], and \$35.8 million from commuter revenues and non-passenger revenues...Through August, average ticket prices were 9.3% higher than [last year]."

• "Through August 2006, losses from Amtrak's core operations were \$80.6 million less than...the \$586 million subsidy baseline...The Northeast Corridor is \$31 million of that \$80.6 million; state corridors are \$17 million; long-distance trains [slightly above] \$32 million."

The IG said the Federal Railroad Administration believes that, "on the whole," NEC commuter authorities "paid their fully allocated share of maintenance and capital costs in FY 2006." ■

NARP Staff Published

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon's article on Amtrak on-time performance and the law was in the September-October *Association Highlights*, journal of the Association of Transportation Law Professionals.

"Have we Forgotten About Trains?" is the article Assistant Director David Johnson wrote for *Do It Green* ("Your first and only...guide to 'green' and sustainable living"), a magazine published annually in and for Minneapolis.

Illinois, Pennsylvania Celebrate Added Trains

Two big expansions occurred Oct. 30: more and faster Keystone Corridor trains and four new Illinois round-trips.

October 17, 18, and 19, respectively, saw ceremonial first trips on the Carbondale, St. Louis and Quincy lines (background: page 3 bottom and June

News). NARP Assistant Director David Johnson rode all three trips and took these photos. Chicago-Carbondale and Chicago-Quincy routes each gained one round-trip, while Chicago-St. Louis gained two (and now has five frequencies in all).

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The Saluki (Chicago-Carbondale)



(above, l.) Mary Mechler, Board President, Carbondale Chamber of Commerce, addresses crowd. Other speakers (from l.): Alex Kummant, Amtrak Pres. and CEO; David Phelps, IDOT Assistant Secretary; Glenn Poshard, President, Southern Illinois University (SIU); Rep. Jerry Costello (D-IL); and Carbondale Mayor Brad Cole.

(above, r.) Saluki Inaugural Conductor T.T. Pleasants poses with two saluki dogs who greeted "their" train at Homewood. (Saluki is SIU's mascot.) The community warmly welcomed the inaugural with a cake that read, "Home Sweet Homewood Welcomes the Amtrak Saluki." Aurelio's Pizza donated eight pies.

(l.) A large crowd greeted the train at Mattoon, where the classic Illinois Central station will be fully renovated, including restoration of passenger elevator (platform is below-grade), with federal, state, local and historical society funds.

The Carl Sandberg (Chicago-Quincy)



Big crowds greeted the special train at most stations along the way. Kewanee (above) had one of the largest turnouts. There, October 19 was declared "Amtrak Day." Another strong turnout was at Plano (above r.).

(r.) Rick Harnish, NARP board member and Executive Director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, talks with WGEM-TV in Quincy. The Environmental Law and Policy Center and United Transportation Union also played major roles in getting the state funds.





(l.) Rep. Chaka Fattah (D-PA), appropriations committee member and Amtrak supporter, addresses the crowd in Philadelphia at the 30th Street Station ceremony.

(below) PennDOT Rail Division Director Karen Rae and Amtrak CEO Alex Kummant cut the ceremonial ribbon at Harrisburg Station. Holding the ribbon are two former PennDOT officials who helped make the service a reality: Rick Peltz (r.) was Deputy Secretary; Joe Daversa headed the Rail and Public Transportation Bureau. Peltz now is in Washington as federal co-chair, Appalachian Regional Commission.



Coming in a future issue: Photos of the Lincoln Service (St. Louis) Special

Illinois Success: Get Funding; Overcome Late CN Opposition

The new services cap a major lobbying effort. Advocates built a coalition of 300 municipal leaders, 30 chambers of commerce, 12 university presidents and others. The bill to expand rail service was cosponsored by 144 out of 178 state legislators, in a year when Springfield rarely produced bipartisan legislation.

Advocates achieved a last-minute, second success after Canadian National tried to back out of a July agreement to run the new trains. Amtrak uses CN for virtually all of the Chicago-Carbondale route and the first 37 miles (Chicago-Joliet) of the St. Louis route.

After the ceremonial first runs, CN on Oct. 20 told Amtrak the contract was invalid because CN's signing official lacked authority. A political firestorm ensued, with media coverage nationwide and even in Canada and the U.K.

A letter to CN from Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL), co-signed by most other Illinois delegation members, said, "CN's actions are an affront to Amtrak, the State of Illi-

nois, and the millions of rail passengers across Illinois. Amtrak has hired and trained employees, renovated train equipment, purchased advertising and mounted a series of public events—in some of which your railroad was a participant—supporting the new train frequencies. In addition, since the Carbondale service expansion was announced by the Governor at an event attended by CN on September 25, tickets have gone on sale for the additional frequencies and some trains have already sold out." Similar letters quickly followed from Gov. Rod Blagojevich and 45 state legislators.

Amtrak said in a release it was prepared to "seek relief from a National Arbitration Panel or a restraining order in Federal court."

CN offered to run the *Saluki* and just one of the two new *Lincoln Service* trains, but the firestorm continued.

On Oct. 27, Durbin said Amtrak and CN had reached an agreement and all trains would run as planned. ■

The Keystone line has 110 mph, electric operation, three more round-trips—total of 14 counting *Pennsylvanian* (fewer on weekends), 105 minute all-stop runs, a few 90-minute expresses, and push-pull operation for quick equipment turns.

Long-time rail advocate and State Sen. Rick Geist (R-Altoona), who chairs the Pennsylvania Senate's transportation committee, spoke at Harrisburg and deserves some of the credit for this success story.

More photos of these special trains are at <www.narprail.org>. ■

NARP Urges Common Sense on Platform Regs

Amid growing concern about a logjam blocking needed station investments, the NARP Board, at its Austin meeting, approved a resolution calling on the Department of Transportation and the U.S. Access Board "to end policies which have blocked new station development where full length level boarding is problematic, and [to] make clear that station development can proceed without fear of retroactive application of onerous, new requirements such as 'full length level boarding.'"

This was the subject of a November 2 NARP release. The resolution and release—both at <www.narprail.org>—support NARP's comments submitted last summer in a rulemaking whose outcome rail passenger agencies and advocates are watching closely (Aug. News).

Besides noting cities where investment is blocked by regulatory uncertainties based on new interpretations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the resolution also cites Brattleboro, VT, where the Federal Transit Administration is pressing the state to build a full-length platform even though there is not sufficient property for this and even though the station is served by just one train a day in each direction.



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TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

More Fall Timetable changes

CORRECTION—*Lake Shore Limited* departs New York/Croton-Harmon Monday-Friday 4:00/4:43; Saturday-Sunday-Holidays 3:45/4:28. Other station times are the same seven days a week.

Keystone Service—Full details on Page 2, 3.

Albany-New York Express Train—Listed in new timetable, but not operational at press time. Will run non-stop in two hours, ten minutes, with food service. Last non-stop express here was in 1998.

Additional weekday Downeaster schedule is a bus until trackwork is done in several months; not in national timetable. Separate NH and ME buses leave Boston 11:00 p.m. (train on Sat./Sun./Holidays); southbound ME bus leaves Portland 8:00 p.m., NH bus leaves Dover 8:45 p.m. Easy-to-read schedule with intermediate station times is at <www.amtrakdowneaster.com>.

Greyhound Thruway schedules are best checked at <www.amtrak.com>, due to Greyhound changes not coordinated with Amtrak's timetable changes.

No checked baggage at Santa Ana, contrary to what printed timetables show.

Laney

(from page 1)

Moreover, "I think we are going to end up trying" similar enhancements elsewhere.

But he defended plans to reduce the active car fleet. He said eliminating "excess capacity" would help make the system "financially more efficient...You've got to build credibility...in order to invite and attract the kind of support we need at the federal and state levels and from passengers. That starts with a much more tightly-run operation than we have right now, financially and from the standpoint of the quality of services we provide."

Laney said operating losses, though improved, remain unacceptable: "I guarantee we will do better, period."

To continue improving data integrity, Amtrak is "developing a new project management system...that refines the level of detail for each of the 15 areas of strategic reform, and links the strategic reform initiatives to its final systems for accurate reporting. Amtrak expects to present the new system to the Board later this year, so you'll see it very soon."

Laney expects, during his last year with Amtrak, to focus on the long-distance network; labor issues; involvement of states in corridors; and relations with freight railroads, especially regarding on-time performance.

Asked how NARP can help, Laney credited "prodding from [NARP's Ross] Capon and [George] Chilson" as the reason he pushed development of a system—now being rolled out—to get customer feedback to management quickly, when it is most useful, on long-distance

train service quality, especially food and beverage."

Asked about NARP's provision of administrative support for the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee, Laney said, "Our relationship with NARP is valuable, and will continue."

Laney said "even though I disagree with some of the things I've heard from a number of you, I've learned greatly, and a number of things some of you have raised to me have been very quickly implemented. So we are all ears...at least at the top.

"But we will make mistakes, and you will flinch. You will disagree on occasion, but bear with us and work with us and stand with us. You're leaders in this arena...don't blink!" ■

The Election and Rail

Voters endorsed rail and transit in Kansas City, California, Minnesota, Seattle, Salt Lake City, and Fort Worth (link to DFW Airport).

The fate of unworkable language on Amtrak's overhead (House) and on-board food and beverage and sleeper services (Senate Appropriations Committee and House) was unclear. The NARP Board passed a resolution opposing both.

Prospects are brighter for a passenger rail reauthorization in 2007, but securing funding will be tough.

See NARP Board resolutions, our Nov. 11 release on rail and transit votes, and blog entries, all at <www.narprail.org>.