



Officials, NARP: Restore New Orleans-Florida!

On Friday, August 26, 2005, New Orleans saw Amtrak's last arrival from—and departure to—Florida, the latter reaching Orlando the next day just four minutes late. Soon thereafter, Hurricane Katrina hit the New Orleans-Mobile rail line with severe flood damage.

Freight trains were rolling again by March, 2006. But—as of May, 2007—passenger service is still in limbo. Amtrak is widely assumed to be using the Katrina-related interruption to justify permanently eliminating the service.

NARP has pushed hard for its restoration (page 3). NARP's Ross Capon discussed this in a March 29 meeting with Rep. Corrine Brown (D-FL), House Railroads Subcommittee chair. She shares NARP's concern and is working on convening a meeting of Gulf Coast governors

on the subject. As seen below, other officials and political leaders agree:

"Our point (to Amtrak) is you were providing the service, the hurricane came and went, the tracks are repaired, why haven't you resumed the service?"

— Nazih Haddad, Manager, Passenger Rail Development, Florida DOT, quoted in *Tallahassee Democrat*, May 4, 2007

"I understand and share the frustrations of many at the disruption of the *Sunset Limited* service and am hopeful that regular, convenient service can be restored as soon as possible."

—Rep. John Mica (R-FL), in April 24, 2007, letter to a constituent

"The City of Tallahassee has recently been notified that Amtrak is considering a permanent service discontinuation of Amtrak's *Sunset Limited*...We are con-

cerned about this decision and the limitations that it will provide to citizens who have depended on Amtrak to transport them...both east and west...as well as the obstacles it may present to visitors who wish to come to our community. This potential scenario is exacerbated by the fact that air service is limited and generally cost prohibitive for short destinations and for many would-be travelers."

—Tallahassee Mayor John R. Marks III, in May 26, 2006, letter to Amtrak

"...AMTRAK is strongly urged to do all in its power to restore the Gulf Coast portion of the *Sunset Limited*...services."

—New Orleans City Council Resolution #06-301, passed July 20, 2006

"The *Sunset Limited* is an important

(continued on page 3)

Durbin, Rehberg Honored with George Falcon Golden Spike Awards

The National Association of Railroad Passengers presented Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT) with the George Falcon Golden Spike Award.

Senator Durbin was honored for his efforts to expand Amtrak service in Illinois, his leadership in the face of last fall's attempt by Canadian National Railroad not to operate previously-agreed new trains, and his long-time support for rail—ever since his first election to the House of Representatives in 1982.

NARP Executive Director Ross Capon said in a release, "Since he came to Congress more than two decades ago, Senator Durbin has been among the strongest supporters of intercity passenger rail and of rail safety. His leadership made possible the expansion of Amtrak service in Illinois last year, leading to a near-doubling of ridership on those lines."

In the same release, Senator Durbin said, "Rail expansion is moving in the right direction while creating jobs, promoting travel and spurring economic

development...The state's commitment to fund Amtrak is a wise investment into our transportation future. I am honored to receive this award and proud to have played a part in creating this partnership that has helped boost service to Illinois residents."

Rep. Rehberg knows how important

the *Empire Builder* is to Montana. Shortly after Rehberg's 2005 swearing-in, President Bush proposed zeroing out Amtrak funding. Rehberg spoke strongly and eloquently in favor of Amtrak funding. At a June 2005 *Empire Builder* rally in White-

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(left photo) NARP Members present award to Sen. Durbin in his Capitol office (l. to r.: Dr. Eugene Thomas and NARP Board Member Rick Harnish, both of Chicago, NARP Vice-Pres. David Randall of Alton, Sen. Durbin, NARP Board Members Gordon McCoy of Chicago and Ronald Boardman Jr. of Lake Bluff, and Joan Heath of Chicago.



(right photo) Rep. Rehberg (r.) accepts his award from NARP Pres. George Chilson at NARP's Capitol Hill reception (p. 2).

NARP's Annual Capitol Hill Reception

Wednesday, May 2, saw NARP's third consecutive annual reception in the Foyer of the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, DC (right).

The event included presentation of the George Falcon Golden Spike Award (lead story) and the Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Safety Award. The latter was presented to Amtrak employee J. Wes Wilkins of Middletown, DE; more on this in our next issue.

About 200 people attended, including several legislators, many Capitol Hill staff people and a Japanese television crew who was particularly interested in the Burch Award. They are preparing a report on U.S. rail safety issues for broadcast in Osaka. ■



(Above left) NARP President George Chilson thanks the corporate sponsors of the reception: PB, WABCO, Innovac, Bombardier, and Talgo.

(Above right) An important function of our reception is NARP board member interaction with Capitol Hill staff. Here, NARP Board Member Bill Strong of Memphis talks with staff from the office of Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN).

(Left) Chilson (r.) welcomes Rep. Bob Etheridge (D-NC) to the reception

(Below left) George Falcon Golden Spike Winner Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT, I.) and Rep. Howard Coble (R-NC, second from r.) with NARP Board Members Jim Stevenson of Pinehurst, NC (between the Congressmen) and Jim Churchill of Alexandria, VA, (r.)

(Below right) Association of American Railroads Senior Vice-President, Safety and Operations, Robert C. VanderClute (l.), with Chilson and NARP Executive Director Ross Capon (r.).



NARP's Longstanding Support For Restoring New Orleans-East Service

NARP strongly urges Amtrak to restore service between New Orleans and Orlando as soon as it is operationally feasible. We understand that CSX has rebuilt the railroad to a higher standard than existed before Katrina...

Prior to Katrina, the [New Orleans-Orlando] segment [of the Sunset Limited] generated 41% of the route's revenue and 39% of its ridership but accounted for only 28% of its train miles.

—NARP President George Chilson,
March 2, 2006, letter to Amtrak Chairman
David Laney

NARP repeatedly has urged Amtrak to restore service between New Orleans and Florida, whether by:

- reestablishing the pre-Katrina service, as the NARP Board called for in an April 2006 resolution (May, 2006 News);
- extending *City of New Orleans*, per a NARP Board October, 2006 recommendation (January 2007 News, p. 2); or
- establishing a separate, new train in line with a recent Amtrak staff proposal (which included daily New Orleans-Mobile service, presumably to be state supported eventually on "non-Florida" days;

Sunset Limited (from page 1)

resource for our community. There is definitely a need in Biloxi for the service offered by the *Sunset Limited*."

—Biloxi (MS) Mayor A.J. Holloway,
Aug., 2006 letter to Florida Coalition of Rail
Passengers (FCRP)

"Until Hurricane Katrina, Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* linked the City of DeLand to New Orleans and points west. This service is important to tourism and commerce in the Central Florida area...We hope that you will consider allowing this service to resume as soon as possible so that this vital link is restored."

—DeLand (FL) Mayor-Commissioner
Robert F. Apgar, in July 12, 2006, letter to
Amtrak Chairman David Laney

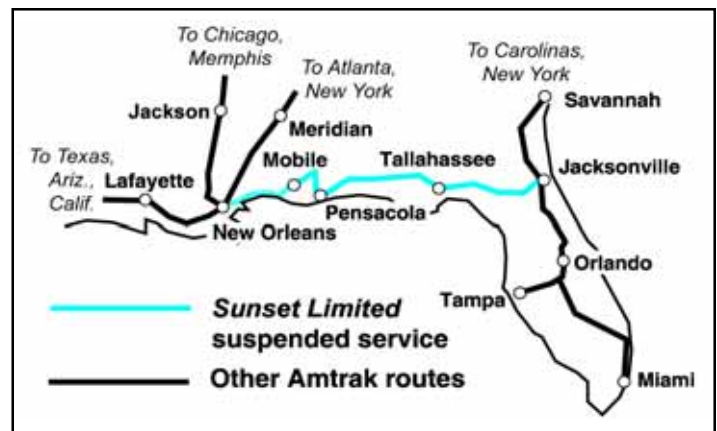
"(The *Sunset Limited*) provided Palatka and all of Putnam County much needed access to numerous cities in Florida, in addition to several cities in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and points west...Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* is vitally important to the growth of tourism and commerce in our region."

—Brad Purcell, Chairman, Putnam
County Board of Commissioners, in
March 13 letter to Amtrak CEO Alex
Kummant

attractive times at Mobile; and thus a westbound New Orleans arrival that would connect with departures to both Chicago and Los Angeles and an eastbound departure that would connect from Chicago).

In a March 22, 2007, letter to NARP, Amtrak President and CEO Alex Kummant acknowledged "that a passenger link between Florida and the central and western parts of the country is desirable, given Florida's large population and the high volume of travel on all modes in and out of that state." But he questioned "the relevance" of the service Amtrak previously operated there, and did not comment on other ways Amtrak could restore New Orleans-Florida service.

NARP's Ross Capon responded to Kummant on April 23, saying in part, "Given past Amtrak research which identified Chicago-Florida as one of two ma-



...major, potential Auto Train markets, and given the existence of the Sanford Auto Train terminal, this is to request that Amtrak analyze extension of the *City of New Orleans* to Florida, including Auto Train service. It is important that this be studied before Amtrak makes any final decision on the [New Orleans-Florida] route." ■

Southern Rapid Rail Transit Commission's letter (excerpted below) and its Oct. 20, 2006 resolution, the NARP resolution, and NARP's March 2, 2006, letter are at www.narprail.org, click on "What's New?" on the left side.

"...Amtrak service is sorely missed... the City of Atmore hopes that service can be restored in this area."

—Atmore (AL) Mayor Howard Shell, in
Dec. 14, 2006, letter to U.S. Rep. Jo Bonner
(R-AL)

"The...ChIPLEY City Council and the citizens of ChIPLEY are deeply upset to find that Amtrak will no longer be stopping...in ChIPLEY. The City of ChIPLEY is centered on the railroad and the railroad has played an important role in our prosperity...We are asking that Amtrak services in ChIPLEY be reinstated immediately. The need for this means of transportation is extremely important."

—ChIPLEY (FL) Mayor Linda Cain, in
January 26 letter to FCRP

"Southern Rapid Rail Transit Commission formally requests...restoration of the *Sunset Limited* until permanent corridor service is in place. As our previous resolution to you indicates, we believe restoring the train along its complete route should be part and parcel of an alternative service package. The Commission is amenable to and will encourage evaluating service modifications that provide more efficient operations and greater

public benefits...

"Please note many of the communities were devastated by Hurricane Katrina. In the post-Katrina environment, basic services most communities take for granted remain insufficient...In addition, the municipalities, having experienced a great loss, have a limited capacity to respond to the stoppage of the *Sunset*."

—Commission Executive Director
Karen Parsons, April 25 letter to Amtrak
President and CEO Alex Kummant

International Magazine Publishes NARP on Food Service Economics

NARP President George Chilson's paper, "The Economics of Passenger Train Food and Beverage Service," appears as a handsomely illustrated article in UK-based *Railway Interiors International* (April-June issue). Our website has both a PDF of the magazine pages and our original version of the essay; go to www.narprail.org and click on "What's New?" on the left side.



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OUR MISSION: A MODERN, CUSTOMER-FOCUSED NATIONAL PASSENGER TRAIN NETWORK THAT PROVIDES A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT.

Golden Spike

(from page 4)

fish, Montana, Rehberg said, "I've been taken to the woodshed by the Administration on this issue. But I try to explain it to them that we're different than the east coast cities. Government subsidies built the west: rural electrification programs, essential air service, the west is the breadbasket of America. Let's have an acknowledgment from the administration that (Amtrak) is an essential service. It's not just for leisure, it's important for the people of the nation for us to have the same access to quality transportation that the rest of the country has."

NARP Executive Director Ross Capon said, "Even in his earliest days as a freshman member of Congress, Rep. Rehberg spoke out clearly and forcefully against efforts to bankrupt and shut down Amtrak, steadfastly supporting both Montana's *Empire Builder* and the entire national network."

The text on the award concludes with this: "For his continuing, strong efforts, America's travelers are grateful."

In accepting the award at NARP's reception (p. 2), Rehberg said, in part, passenger trains "in many cases in Montana" are the only alternative; without them, "we wouldn't have access to many of our other places in Montana. It provides an alternative to others, especially seniors...So it's easy for me to support your endeavors...we will always be there to support you. I thank you for honoring me today; it gives me a great deal of pleasure. And on behalf of all of us in Montana I say thank you for your support of Amtrak." ■

White House Correspondents' Association Annual Dinner



NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon (right in both photos) was a guest at the annual dinner of the White House Correspondents' Association on April 21. Seated next to Capon was Corporal John Callahan, an injured Iraq war veteran whose story was central to a front-page, February 23 *New York Times* article, "Long Iraq Tours Can Make Home a Trying Front." Above, Presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani and actress Teri Hatcher ("Desperate Housewives") greet Callahan and Capon.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Some California Zephyr trips to bypass Rockies—Denver-Salt Lake City detour is for Moffat Tunnel construction, for Emeryville and Chicago departures on June 25-26, June 30-July 3, July 7-10, July 14-17, and July 21-24 (train runs non-stop across Wyoming the next day). Substitute bus service to/from Denver only for Glenwood Springs and Grand Jct.

Pilot Project Provides Free Use Of digEplayers on Coast Starlight—One player will be given to each *Starlight* sleeping car room (2nd player permitted for two or more occupants)

through the summer. Passengers boarding at Los Angeles, Emeryville, Portland, or Seattle will get player prior to boarding; those boarding elsewhere will get theirs on board. The promotion will also test inclusion of an AC electrical adapter for unlimited use. Passengers return equipment near end of journey.

Keystone Service Temporary Change—Schedules in effect through August for last segment of trackwork (Paoli-Philadelphia). Schedules lengthened and some departure and arrival times shifted.