



Senate Passes Amtrak Reauthorization

The Senate passed the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) on a 70-22 vote (eight absent) on October 30. The decisive, veto-proof majority showed broad, bi-partisan support for passenger trains. It followed floor debate which began the afternoon of Oct. 24 and took most of Oct. 25-26 and 29-30.

The bill reauthorizes Amtrak and establishes the first federal matching program for states' intercity passenger rail investments. Staff work on a companion House bill is under way and House action is anticipated in early 2008; *please urge your representative to support this!*

S. 294 authorizes about \$1.9 billion a year of for intercity passenger rail for Fiscal Years 2007-2012. These funds, of course, also must be appropriated.

Amtrak capital grants rise from \$813 million in 2007 to \$1.231 billion in 2012. Some of these funds would cover up to 80% of the cost of approved state investments to improve existing services and start new ones—starting at 3% (\$24.4 million) of Amtrak's capital grant and, by 2012, increasing to 33% (\$406.2 million) for a six-year total of \$1.42 billion.

Amtrak operating grants fall from \$580 million in 2007 to \$455 million in 2012.

The bill also:

- gives Amtrak the resources to bring the Northeast Corridor up to a "state of good repair;"
- gives the Surface Transportation Board (STB) authority to investigate on-time performance problems of Amtrak trains either independently or upon request by a host railroad, Amtrak, or a state that supports Amtrak service, and allows the STB to fine host railroads that fail to give preference to Amtrak trains as required under current law.;
- strengthens host railroads' ability to seek relief from the obligation to give passenger trains dispatching preference in certain situations by giving jurisdiction to the STB instead of U.S. DOT;
- permits refinancing Amtrak's debt

where advantageous, and provides for a new financial accounting system;

- requires Amtrak to set new quality standards, and to develop action plans to improve each long-distance route, beginning with the three with the weakest performance numbers; and

- allows for private operation of one long-distance route starting in Fiscal 2009 and one more starting in 2011.

The STB can investigate "substandard performance" if, for two consecutive calendar quarters, a train averages less than 80% on-time or service quality falls below

minimum standards established under Section 208 of the PRIIA. Those standards include OTP and minutes of delay but also "cost recovery, ridership, on-board services, stations, facilities, equipment and other services...[and] measures of connectivity with other routes..."

Lautenberg, Lott Lead The Push

The lead sponsors, Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Trent Lott (R-MS), who championed nearly identical legislation in the 109th Congress, were floor managers.

Lautenberg: "There is enthusiasm for
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NARP's Capon Accepts *Railway Age's* Claytor Award

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon received the 2007 W. Graham Claytor, Jr. Award for Distinguished Service to Passenger Transportation at *Railway Age* magazine's 14th annual Passenger Trains on Freight Railroads Conference. The award, also 14 years old, honors those who have contributed to the advancement of passenger rail in America. [Claytor was Amtrak Chairman and President from 1982 to 1993.]

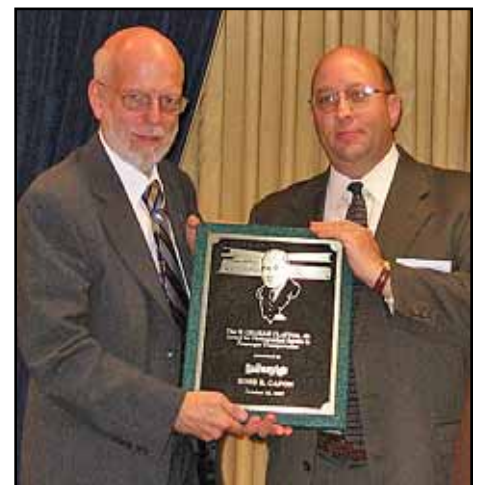
Capon was honored at the Oct. 23 luncheon. In the presentation, Editor William Vantuono said, in part, "For 32 years, Ross has led the only national organization advocating for the users of passenger trains of all modes. Ross' credibility, political skills, and in-depth knowledge, as well as the respect he has earned from his constituents and Capitol Hill, have ensured that the concerns of rail passengers are heard and acted upon by railroads and by state and federal policymakers." [Capon joined NARP in 1975; coverage of his 30th NARP Anniversary is in February 2006 *NARP News*.]

In response, Capon thanked Vantuono and *Railway Age* for their own contributions to passenger rail in establishing and maintaining the award.

He noted the importance of Vantuono's continuing effort to remind railroaders—

passenger and freight—that railroading is one industry and, the more unified its actions, the more successful we are likely to be in getting rail-friendly public policies.

Capon added that success also "depends on something else...enthusiasm. When you think about enthusiasm and railroads, who do you think of? Graham Claytor. As I wrote in our June 1982 newsletter, 'Claytor is known as the railroad executive who most enjoys being on
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NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon accepts the W. Graham Claytor, Jr. Award for Distinguished Service to Passenger Transportation from *Railway Age* Editor William Vantuono.

Attend Your NARP Regional Membership Meeting!

Each year, NARP Regional Directors run membership meetings across the country. This is a good way to meet and hear NARP officers, staff, board members, fellow rail advocates, and informative outside speakers.

NARP members are welcome to attend any meeting (in addition to their own) and of course to bring guests. International members also are welcome.

Meeting details—location, program, registration fee, contact information—are at www.narprail.org (click on the link on the right side under “What’s Hot?”) and are updated as we get new information.

The 2008 meetings also mark NARP’s bi-annual election of Directors. Members in regions with contested elections will get ballots after the first of the year. Statements of *all* candidates are in the members-only section at www.narprail.org. Click on “Members-Only Resources” and either log in or fill out the electronic registration form. You also will find supplementary statements (beyond the usual 75 words) from candidates who responded to our invitation to provide these.

The list at right notes where the NARP president and staff (listed on back page masthead) are scheduled to speak.

Region 1 (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT): March 8, Boston (Chilson)

Region 2 (NY): March 8, Schenectady (Johnson)

Region 3 (DE, NJ, PA): February 16, Philadelphia (Capon). Part of larger, two-day regional conference; visit www.dvarp.org for more information

Region 4 (DC, MD, VA, WV): March 15, Baltimore (Melzer and Transportation Associate Darryl Yates)

Region 5 (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN): March 1, Tampa (Melzer or Capon)

Region 6 (IN, MI, OH): March 15, Toledo (Capon)

Region 7 (IL, MN, ND, WI): March 29, Milwaukee (Johnson)

Region 8 (AK, ID, MT, OR, WA): February 23, Portland, OR (Chilson)

Region 9 (AR, KS, MO, OK, TX): February 2, Dallas (Capon).

Region 10 (CO, IA, NE, SD, UT, WY): Mar. 15, Omaha (Johnson)

Region 11 (AZ, NM, El Paso, TX): To be determined.

Region 12 (CA, HI, NV): To be determined (Chilson is confirmed to speak) ■

NARP and Passenger Rail In the News

NARP’s Ross Capon was on the nationwide Diane Rehm Show on public radio October 30. Also in the studio: former Rep. Ernest Istook (R-OK), now with The Heritage Foundation and still an Amtrak critic. The hour-long segment had phone interviews with Senators Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Wayne Allard (R-CO).

The Wall Street Journal on October 31 ran its second major, positive Amtrak report by Dan Machalaba in about two months. The headline perfectly conveyed the environmental and energy reasons we need trains: “For Amtrak, the Climate Changes; With Oil Soaring, Senate Approves Big Spending Boost.”

A November 1 pro-train *New York Times* editorial, “A Little Hope for Amtrak,” cited NARP as source for passenger train energy efficiency statistics. The Sunday Nov. 23 *Times* Escapes section sported an upbeat, front-page travelogue by Ralph Blumenthal, “Strangers on the *Sunset Limited*.”

The cover of the November 4 *Parade*—a Sunday newspaper magazine supplement with a circulation of 32 million nationally—showed a railroad track

and this: “With plane delays and high gas prices, Americans are asking...Can We Save Our Trains?” Among the people quoted in the accompanying Peter Richmond story: Lou Drummeter, a noted sleeping car attendant on Amtrak’s *Capitol Limited* (Dec. *NARP News*, p. 2).

Among regional stories quoting NARP was *The Day* (New London, CT) Nov. 24, about Amtrak’s plans to close New Haven-Boston service for four days in May with “no alternate service” while a new bridge is installed east of New London. Capon advocated a limited alternate service, noting that “you’ll wind up handling people that really need the service that do not have the ability to alter their travel days.” (NARP has asked Amtrak to consider actions such as running some Acela trains to New London, and providing connecting buses at Hartford and New London to/from points East.)

Columnist Neal Peirce quoted both Capon and NARP Board Member/Midwest High Speed Rail Assn. Exec. Dir. Rick Harnish in an upbeat Dec. 2 column “Has Amtrak’s Time Come?” ■

Appropriations Update

A House-Senate conference committee produced reasonably positive Amtrak numbers for the fiscal year that began Oct. 1. Intercity passenger train funding would rise \$152 million to \$1.45 billion (compared with \$1.294 billion in Fiscal 2007), with Amtrak getting \$1.375 billion and the state grant program \$75 million.

However, President Bush has threatened to veto Congress’s domestic spending bills. Democratic Capitol Hill leaders have proposed to “split the difference” between their numbers and Bush’s. Clearly, this should not be done program-by-program, which would mean intercity passenger trains would see a *decline* in funding.

Also, the bill again has many detailed reporting requirements and policy restrictions. These will continue to make Amtrak one of government’s most micro-managed programs, and force Amtrak managers to pay attention to many things other than the bottom line and good customer service.

It also perpetuates the idea that we should measure only the economics of passenger trains while ignoring their contributions to public policy objectives like more travel choices, better fuel efficiency, lower carbon emissions, and less highway and airport congestion.

Tell your Representative and Senators not to cut Amtrak funding in whatever final product results from the budget negotiations.

Claytor Award

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the rails.” Capon saw that first hand as a college student in the late 1960s when, as a passenger on the *Pelican-Tennessee*, he was invited by Claytor to join his family on the office car on the train’s rear.

Conference and luncheon attendees included NARP Board Members George Chilson, Ronald Boardman, Wayne Davis and Eugene K. Skoropowski (2005 Claytor Award winner, notably for his work as Managing Dir. of California’s Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Auth.). Also present: NARP founder Anthony Haswell. ■

passenger rail service in America, and States are planning rail corridors throughout the country. They are prepared to spend their limited funding for rail projects. But our Federal policies encourage them to build more roads. That is why we need to pass this bill...

“Conserving energy and reducing our dependency on foreign oil has never been more important, passenger rail service offers significant fuel-saving benefits...”

Lott: “I want Amtrak to succeed...I do not think it is wise to continue putting money into a system that is not enough, and then complain because it is not doing the job. We are slowly starving it, using it more, and complaining that it is not doing better...I believe we need Amtrak. I believe we need a national passenger rail system...I do not believe that lanes and planes will always be enough. There is a limit to what you can do in the air and on the ground with highways. I think we need passenger rail service also.”

Mission Statement

Amtrak’s “mission,” under Sen. Christopher “Kit” Bond’s (R-MO) amendment, “is to provide... high-quality service that is trip-time competitive with other [modes] and consistent with the goals of subsection (d)” [Minimizing Government Subsidies]. This replaces the current law’s “Purpose” section that urges Amtrak “to completely develop the potential of modern rail transportation.”

Studies Due 1 Year After Enactment

Amtrak must study restoring the *Pio-*

neer (Chicago-Boise-Seattle) and *North Coast Hiawatha* (Chicago-southern Montana-Seattle). The Government Accountability Office must study “cost and benefits of expanding passenger rail service options in underserved communities.”

Support for A National Network

Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) was among those who spoke eloquently for a national system: “The Senator from New Jersey has worked diligently for a national system...The national system connects other routes to each other...It is important that we stay together...I could not in good conscience support only a northeastern line. My constituents would be robbed of the *Texas Eagle* and the *Sunset Limited* lines, and there are other States that have legitimate needs as well. If we actually had done better by Amtrak all these years, we would require fewer subsidies.”

At www.narprail.org, click on “What’s New?” for lists of relevant floor amendments, adopted and rejected, and of senators who were supportive in debate, and Hutchison’s “Sense of the Senate” amendment (adopted) on the need for a national system. Sen. Lott’s announced retirement makes other supportive Republicans even more important.

Say Thank You!

The big votes that defeated four hostile amendments and secured cloture and final passage (box at right) mean most readers should thank one or both senators. This is particularly vital if your senator has not been an Amtrak supporter but cast one or more pro-train votes here. ■

Votes on S.294

Six roll call votes were taken, defeating four hostile amendments, and then approving cloture and the bill itself:

Amendment #3453 by Sununu (R-NH): prohibit federal funds from being spent on a route that loses \$200 or more per passenger “during the first fiscal year beginning after the date of the enactment of this Act,” with the threshold descending in steps to \$100. **Vote: 22-68.**

#3456, Sununu (R-NH): permit unlimited privatization of Amtrak long distance routes. **Vote: 27-64.**

#3467, DeMint (R-SC): require Amtrak to print the per-passenger subsidy on each ticket sold. **Vote: 27-65.**

#3474, Coburn (R-OK): require that, if a route incurs a loss on food service, Amtrak must cut costs and renegotiate contracts in the first year and, if the route loses money in a second (consecutive) year, the food service is to be dropped on that route. **Vote: 24-67.**

Cloture vote to limit debate (critical to allowing final vote on the bill). **Vote: 79-13;**

Final Vote on S.294: 70-22.

Full voting information is available on the members-only section of our website, www.narprail.org.

NARP Leaders Present Vision Plan at Railway Age Conference

NARP President George Chilson and Executive Director Ross Capon presented “NARP’s Road Map to the Future”, the organization’s 40 year vision for passenger trains in the United States, at the conference where Capon received the Claytor Award (page one). The Vision is detailed at www.narprail.org and was featured in the July, 2007, *NARP News*.

Chilson and Capon noted the benefits of more passenger trains, as well as state initiatives. Capon praised North Carolina’s service development plan, noting it was “more aggressive than NARP’s”: the state plans service linking Wilmington with Raleigh via Goldsboro, and with Charlotte.

Chilson said a recent Cambridge Systematics study for the Association of American Railroads indicated that the pri-

vate sector will not be able to fund the additional capacity needed just to maintain current rail freight market share.

He continued, “While the need for public funding is great, the political outlook for railroads is not necessarily bright... The seas are troubled, or—to put the metaphor in terms of our earlier discussion about the *California Zephyr* (a joint Amtrak/Union Pacific presentation on how they improved CZ reliability)—there may be slow orders ahead.

“Railroads are going to need friends... Passenger trains provide voters with visible, tangible evidence that their investment of public funds in the railroads is delivering relevant public benefits.”

During the question period, Union Pacific’s Tom Mulligan, noting that Capon had shown Las Vegas as the largest met-

ro area without passenger trains, said UP has “a great agreement with Amtrak and BNSF to establish passenger service between Las Vegas and Los Angeles...The [U.S.] DOT pulled the plug on finances for improvements to allow for that service. At the time [about 2002] that was a \$49 million deal.”

Asked about statistics showing Amtrak diesel trains to be slightly more energy efficient per passenger-mile than the electrics, Capon noted the Northeast Corridor’s high fares and limited capacity, along with the world’s heaviest high speed trains (Acela), and contrasted this with diesel-powered trains that run in corridors where states are supporting much lower fares that drive up the ridership. ■



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our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Thruway changes in Colorado—Denver-Cheyenne-Casper buses' last trips are Dec. 9. Another carrier is entering the market, but it is unclear whether it will have an Amtrak agreement, serve Denver Union Station or offer schedules that connect with the *California Zephyr*.

From Nov. 15, the Denver connection to/from Arizona/Los Angeles via Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* switched from Raton to Albuquerque—doubling bus ride time from four to eight hours—and one of two Albuquerque-El Paso round-trips was cancelled. Changes due to restructuring by Greyhound-owned TMN&O Coaches.

VT seasonal Thruway bus—Between Okemo (location: The Inn at

Jackson Gore, station code: OKO) and Rutland, connecting with Amtrak's *Ethan Allen*. Service runs through April 6.

Sleeping car meals—To receive complimentary meals, you must hold a sleeping car ticket, even if sharing a room with someone who does. Coach passengers can be added to a sleeping car reservation up to time of departure—even after ticketing—without re-booking or having to pay anything other than railfare for the added traveler. (If you are told otherwise, or told you have to now pay more for your sleeper, ask to speak to a supervisor.)

The new policy aims to prevent coach passengers from claiming free meals after joining up with a sleeper passenger they just met on board.

NEC Fares, Specials—Amtrak has

raised many Northeast Corridor fares, but new weekend excursion fares are available in certain markets on *Regionals*. Details at www.amtrak.com

Cascades service resumed normal (all-Talgo) operations on October 21. At press time, flooding and mudslides had temporarily halted service north from Portland.

New Surfliner stations—Trains 565, 566, 567, and 578 now serve Orange (OGE) and Laguna Niguel (LNL), which had been Metrolink-only stops.

More Keystone changes—Schedules were modified from Dec. 3 for final phase of Keystone Corridor trackwork.

Amtrak Labor Update: Bush Appoints Emergency Board

On November 1, the National Mediation Board (NMB) released several Amtrak unions from mediation after they refused "proffered" arbitration, as expected.

Also as expected, the NMB notified the White House that "these disputes threaten substantially to interrupt interstate commerce to a degree that would deprive sections of the country of essential transportation service" (White House release). Thus, President Bush on Nov. 28 announced he would appoint a Presidential Emergency Board (PEB) to investigate the disputes, effective Dec. 1.

The PEB normally would have 30 days to issue recommendations. Under the Railway Labor Act, a 30-day period for

negotiations follows issuance of the recommendations, so Jan. 31 is the earliest a strike could come if the PEB requested no extension, the parties did not reach agreement and Congress failed to act in a timely manner.

Congressional committees already are considering legislation that could prevent a strike. Such legislation might send all issues to binding arbitration or send some items while directly incorporating PEB recommendations on other items. This Congress is unlikely either to legislate every recommendation from a Bush-appointed PEB or to pass something (such as Hill-authored contractual provisions) assured of President Bush's veto. ■

Blog Invites Comments

Our blog (at www.narprail.org/blog) now welcomes feedback as we offer registered members the opportunity to post their own comments. Comments must be "on topic;" that is, they must respond to the initial commentary which we post. We're eager to facilitate lively conversations that can help us all become more effective passenger rail advocates. Go to www.narprail.org and click "Register" under "Stay Connected" to sign up!