



Current Year Funding in Doubt

New House Leadership Threatens to Cut Amtrak to 2008 Levels; Slash High-Speed Rail

Until March 4, federal funding for transportation and much of the rest of the government is being determined by a Continuing Resolution (CR) that generally maintains fiscal 2010 levels. The new Congress is already beginning to determine final 2011 levels.

House Republicans are pressing to roll 2011 spending levels back to those of 2008. For Amtrak, this implies an \$88 million operations cut, down to \$475 million, and a whopping \$166 million reduction in capital funds, down to \$572 million.

There are major programs—Seattle maintenance facility; Niantic River (CT) bridge replacement—already begun with Recovery Act funds that must be completed with general capital. The statutorily mandated replacement of Amtrak’s financial system also gets priority.

Thus, slashing the capital grant by 22.5% likely would start a decline in car and locomotive fleet and Amtrak-owned tracks and facility conditions—a devastating setback for a company still working to fully reach a “state of good repair.”

An operating grant at the fiscal 2008 level, among other ramifications, would mean an indefinite halt on implementing Performance Improvement Plans for overnight trains (Oct. 2010 *News*), including daily operation of the *Sunset Ltd.* and *Cardinal*, and running Chicago-Pittsburgh-Phila.-New York through cars.

For capital grants to states for high speed and intercity passenger rail (HSIPR), interim funding at the \$2.5 billion level may be meaningless, as federal grant applications likely will not be accepted from states until well after the



- Mike Miley on Flickr, Sept. 14, 2010

Amtrak cab-baggage unit no. 90200 leads a Chicago-bound *Lincoln Service* train past the Illinois capitol with what appears to be duct tape covering the center red-light socket (between the two number panels).

This is emblematic of the maintenance deficiencies that could become more prevalent if Amtrak’s budget is cut to fiscal 2008 levels.

final level is set. Even the last Congress voted to cut HSIPR back to the \$1 billion
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NARP Defends Fla.

Bullet Train

Private Sector Would Cover Operating Losses

With federal funds now covering almost all the Tampa-Orlando capital costs, and the private sector offering to cover operating costs, efforts to get a pro-rail decision from Gov. Rick Scott (R) have reached a fever pitch.

Signaling a different climate than rail faced in Wisconsin or Ohio, the 90-year-old Associated Industries of Florida, a major pro-business lobby, is assembling a coalition to back state funding.

However, the libertarian Reason Foundation—long a foe of passenger trains—is drumming up fears of Florida taxpayers being saddled with unspecified future annual operating costs.

NARP countered Reason’s report by issuing a release to national and Florida media outlets.

“The seven international private-sector groups bidding to win the right to operate high-speed trains on this corridor have in-
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Virginia: Strong Passenger Train Program Still Growing



Crews cheer as the first train over the new Alexandria, VA, flyover—southbound Amtrak train 67—crosses on June 2, 2010. This bridge, jointly funded by Virginia and CSX, carries CSX’s main over NS’s.

Courtesy Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation

In creating commuter train service and expanding intercity service, the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) has approached the railroads that host passenger trains in a spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit.

Passenger service levels and ridership have gone up on both Amtrak and Virginia Railway Express (VRE), most notably on the new Amtrak *Northeast Regional* extensions to Richmond and Lynchburg,

the latter of which has not initially needed a state subsidy thanks to unexpectedly high patronage.

DRPT has developed what Rail Transportation Chief Kevin Page describes as a “great working relationship” with host railroads Norfolk Southern (headquartered in the state) and CSX, as well as Amtrak. The state is
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- Office of the Governor
Gov. McDonnell



- Norfolk Virginian-Pilot
DRPT Director,
former U.S. Rep.
Thelma Drake (R)

Defending the Planning Principle

The following are excerpts, edited for brevity, of a white paper by NARP Communications Director Sean Jeans-Gail, available at [www.bit.ly/travchoice]. Sources are cited in the full document.

The idea that any new transportation project requiring ongoing public support is a misuse of government funds seems to be predicated on a few key fallacies: about how roads are planned and paid for, how the benefits of transportation investment should be measured, and the government's decision making process (both past and present).

By correcting these mistaken premises about transportation investment, advocates of smart development can create an environment where discussion takes place over the proper direction and levels of investment for a balanced, multi-modal transportation system—and stop arguing with those who ask if such a thing is even possible.

2008 Federal Highway Administration data show that 'user fees' (including gas taxes, road tolls, and vehicle registration fees) cover only 51% of highway costs.

Compare that to Amtrak, which recovers around 75% of its operating costs from generated revenues. Or U.S. commuter rail, which—on average, nationwide—covers 53% of its operating costs through the fare box, according to data

Virginia

one of VRE's largest funding partners.

Northeast Regional extensions to Richmond and Lynchburg have been added to Virginia's century-plus-old rail network while preserving freight capacity. 60% of the projects the state has invested in and plans to invest in will jointly benefit passengers and freight.

An example is the construction of a new triple-track bridge carrying CSX's Washington-Richmond main line over NS's main line in Alexandria, which opened last year. VRE's 14 daily (except weekends) Fredericksburg Line trains, experiencing record ridership, now share this line with up to 40 daily freights and up to 22 Amtrak trains

One of the state's four funding sources is three cents of a ten-cent tax on car rentals.

Gov. Robert McDonnell (R) wants the state to build on these advances by investing \$4 billion in transportation, includ-

from the Federal Transit Administration. The relative outlays are in fact equivalent for roads, transit, and passenger rail.

Measuring only how much additional passenger or freight capacity a new project will create ignores that we build transportation to enhance people's lives and support businesses, instead of conforming our lives and businesses to suit transportation projects. By expanding the benefit metrics to include the impact of projects on peoples' lives, it becomes clear how necessary trains and public transit are to keep Americans and American business moving.

A U.S. Department of Commerce study estimates that for every \$1 billion invested in rail, 20,000 jobs are directly created. A similar study showed that every \$1 billion invested in public transportation supports and creates 36,000 jobs.

The average U.S. household spends 18% of its collective income on transportation. Of that money, 94% on average is expended buying, maintaining, and operating cars—the single largest financial obligation after housing. Public transit, by saving 4,400 fewer miles of driving on average, saves families that are likely to use it on a given day \$9,000 annually .

Perhaps the most insidious argument put forth by the roads-only group is the idea that a high- and higher-speed inter-

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ing rail, over the next four years—despite calling for spending cuts in most areas.

Under DRPT's 6-year plan, approved by the Commonwealth Transportation Board, Virginia—uniquely among states—purchases advance capacity from railroads for passenger service after doing computer modeling and agreeing with railroads on what planned capacity improvements will permit.

Work is underway to extend a state-funded *Northeast Regional* round-trip currently terminating in Richmond to Norfolk via Petersburg and Suffolk over NS rails (with a new CSX connection) by 2013. CSX will allow this train to use its Richmond-Petersburg trackage at no additional capital cost to the state based on capacity modeling and planning for future additional train frequencies.

One of DRPT's long-term goals is to bring all trains serving Richmond through Main Street Station. This comes with a

city passenger rail network should not be developed because government is incapable of any sound planning on a large scale. It is this thinking that attaches the label "boondoggle" to every project of any significant cost.

Passenger trains' environmental and livability benefits have, for the most part, swayed American liberals towards their desirability. So the answer to the above problem may lie in making a case that appeals to conservatives: trains and public transit are about providing travelers choice. Only when real choices exist is it possible to let consumer preference in the transportation market help direct future investment.

According to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, as the U.S. population increased 15% from 1995 and 2009:

- Amtrak ridership grew 32%;
- Commuter rail ridership grew 28%;
- Public transit ridership went up 31%
- Highway use rose by 21%.

Advocates must point to the fact that Americans will clearly choose trains and public transit, even in the absence of European-style high-speed service. Travelers want a reliable, easy way to get around. All that requires is frequent service with good on-time performance—not necessarily 200 mph top speeds. ■



-Malcolm Kenton

Northbound N.E. Regional train 94 rounds the curve towards Richmond Main Street Station's platform on Jan. 14. DRPT hosted members of the OneRail Coalition, including NARP staff, at the station that day.

\$600 million price tag for track improvements, placing it in the distant future.

A more immediate concern is the \$15 million increase Virginia expects it will have to pay Amtrak starting in FY 2013 under Section 209 of the 2008 passenger rail law (August 2010 News), in order to retain the Richmond & Newport News trains that Amtrak initiated and are currently 100% Amtrak funded. ■

LaHood Reminds Train Doubters of Big Picture

U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood penned an excellent letter to the editor, excerpted below, that appeared in the Washington Post on Jan. 14. The editorial he responds to (www.wapo.st/anti-hsr) in effect criticizes a kindergartener (the California project is still in its early stages) for not having finished the fifth grade.

"[I]n much of the country passenger rail can't compete with car travel by interstate highways," the editors claim, completely overlooking the fact that more people every day are opting for trains over driving.

The Jan. 12 editorial "Hit the brakes," criticizing California's high-speed rail plan, was shortsighted and parochial. If President Dwight D. Eisenhower had waited until he had all the cash on hand, all the lines drawn on a map and all the naysayers on board, America wouldn't have an interstate highway system. We stand at a similar crossroads today when it comes to high-speed rail.

High-speed rail will revitalize America's manufacturing sector, spur economic development and create green, high-wage jobs for tens of thousands.

The people of California understand this, which is why they approved a nearly \$10 billion bond measure to build a high-speed rail system in their state. [The Administration's] \$3.6 billion investment

New Study:

Drivers Pay Only Half of Highways' Costs

So finds the Florida Public Interest Research Group (PIRG) in an analysis released Jan. 4. Over the past 60 years, around \$600 billion in taxpayer funds—aside from gasoline tax revenue—have gone to road construction. This accounts for 49% of the total spent on road construction over that period.

This vindicates NARP's frequent rebuttal to those who claim passenger trains always require high subsidies from non-users while highways do not.

Gasoline taxes are not actually "user fees," the study points out, because the amount one pays in gas taxes is not directly connected to the amount one uses the roads they fund. In addition, federal gasoline tax revenue funds urban transit and commuter rail along with highways—but not intercity passenger trains. ■

Read the executive summary, with link to the full report, at www.bit.ly/roadcost

[...] will jump-start the project by funding the first section of the corridor ready to be built, in the Central Valley.

The *Post* creates a false choice between the Central Valley and other sections of the project that are not ready for construction. The Central Valley segment will [improve] passenger service even before other sections of high-speed rail are built. And, perhaps most important, the

project will put Californians back to work.

The administration has also invested billions of dollars in other promising high-speed rail corridors across America, including \$1.7 billion for the Northeast Corridor. Focusing the total sum of our federal dollars in one project, as *The Post* suggests, is a poor strategy that will not serve our long-term goal of creating a national high-speed rail network. ■



- Both photos: Ross Capon

Amtrak Superliner coaches rehabbed at Beech Grove in 2010 now feature what appear to be shorter leg rests (left) and recycle bins on the lower level (right).

ATTEND A NARP MEMBERSHIP MEETING

These meetings let you learn more about issues affecting passenger train service and network with other NARP members. Any NARP member may attend any meeting.

Portland, OR, Feb. 26: Embassy Suites Downtown Portland, 319 SW Pine St. Cost: \$39 per person (\$48 at door), includes lunch. Register by mailing check to A.O.R.T.A.; P.O. Box 2772; Portland, OR 97208. More at www.aortarail.org.

Denver, Mar. 5: NARP/ColoradoRail joint annual membership meeting. Keynote by fmr. Capitol Corridor exec. dir. Gene Skoropowski. 11:00 AM at Englewood City Center, at the Englewood light rail station. Free.

Schenectady, Mar. 12: NARP/Empire State Passengers Assoc. annual membership meeting; 11:00-4:00. Holiday Inn Downtown, four blocks from Amtrak station with free parking. Before Feb. 18, \$34; after that, \$39. More info and registration form at www.esparail.org.

Washington, DC, Mar. 19: Union Station's Starlight Room, noon. Speakers will include Amtrak V.P.—Govt. Affairs Joseph McHugh and NARP Pres.

Ross Capon. More speakers listed at www.bit.ly/narpc11. Cost is \$15 donation to NARP, payable by cash or check at the door.

Los Angeles, Mar. 19: Annual NARP/RailPAC Steel Wheels in California conference. Speakers: former Capitol Corridor managing director Eugene Skoropowski; Metrolink CEO; NARP Chairman Stewart. Includes tour of Amtrak's L.A. maintenance facility. Cost \$45. Register at www.railpac.org or mail to RailPAC Meeting Registration; 1017 L St, PMB-217; Sacramento 95814.

Boston, Mar. 26: 3:00 to 6:00 PM at the John Hancock Conf. Ctr., 40 Trinity Pl. (walking distance from Back Bay Station). Keynote by Amtrak VP—High Speed Rail Al Engel. Registration & further info at www.narprail.org/calendar or in the February News.

Bordentown, NJ, Apr. 9: Speakers: NARP Pres. Capon; John Conlow of Amtrak Capital Planning. Farnsworth House Restaurant, short walk from station on NJT's diesel light rail River Line. \$25 if received by Apr. 2. Registration, details at www.bit.ly/panjde



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

Defending Florida HSR *from page 1*

dicated they are willing take the ridership and revenue risk," NARP President Ross Capon says in the release.

"There would be no state subsidies required for operations, the state of Florida will still own the system, and the travelers will have access to a world-class travel choice—this is the definition of a win-win for the public. This is the first segment of the State of Florida's plan to extend the line to Miami, where it can operate at its maximum 220 mph speed potential."

The Reason Foundation also ignores that, due to the weak economy, construction projects are coming in at substantially less cost than projected by contractors eager for work. ■

2011 Funding

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in President Obama's budget.

It is encouraging that Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood remains committed to its goal. He wrote in the *Orlando Sentinel* Dec. 19: "If we work together, a national high-speed rail network will be our generation's legacy."



- Ross Capon

A RailRunner train rests at Albuquerque, NM. A new Republican governor and majority in the state House are threatening to cut state funding for the popular service between Santa Fe and Belen. ■

Nevertheless, a proposal that House Republicans introduced Jan. 20 would cut \$2.5 trillion in federal spending, including complete elimination of Amtrak and HSIPR funds. Your calls, emails, letters and visits with Members of Congress are especially important now. ■

Frequency is Key

A fact sheet (www.bit.ly/freqkey) prepared by NARP Transportation Assistant Malcolm Kenton uses the stories of successful U.S. corridors to demonstrate that train ridership almost invariably grows as new frequencies are added. The paper is intended to assist in advocacy for more frequent service on existing rail lines.

"Frequent[and affordable]service will draw more travelers from their cars if there are plenty of convenient departure times to choose from," the paper concludes. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Major Coast Starlight change through Apr. 1: Northbound departs Los Angeles two hours later (12:15 PM); Emeryville 11:59 PM; skip Richmond. Same-day connection to *Empire Builder* at Portland temporarily eliminated.

Southbound leaves Seattle two hours later (11:45 AM); misses connection to 10:10 PM *Surfliner* 796 at Los Angeles; buses will be provided to San Diego. Station hours are adjusted to preserve staffing at train time. Northbound Mt. Shasta daylight view gained.

Full temporary schedule is at www.bit.ly/cstemp.

Related changes through Apr. 1: On certain days, no *Surfliners* north of Santa Barbara. Every day, *Pacific Surfliner* 784 leaves Goleta 1:30 PM, Santa Barbara 1:45 PM, and Carpinteria 2:01 PM. 5:15 PM *Cascades* from Portland (with connecting bus from Eugene) replaces the 6:15.

North Carolina schedule changes Feb. 14-Apr. 21: Midday *Piedmonts* (nos. 74 & 75) canceled Mondays-Thursdays. *Carolinian*, other *Piedmonts* have slightly modified schedules. See pdf at www.bit.ly/nctrains.

No Atlanta-New Orleans service Mon-

days-Thursdays Jan. 10 to Feb. 17: To accommodate NS's annual trackwork exercise during this time, *Crescent* trains 19 & 20 will only run the entire route Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays, but delays should be expected. All other days, Atlanta will be the southern terminus.

Sunset Ltd. leaves Los Angeles 20 minutes later, at 3:00 pm, effective Jan. 23, restoring connection (via Thruway bus) from *San Joaquin* 702.

Newark, DE, gets more weekend service: a 3:04 PM D.C.-bound Friday departure (#133) and an 8:41 PM New York-bound train Sat. & Sun. (#182).