



Diner Changes Herald “Operational Savings”

Amtrak is moving to a dining service that requires less staff, and no on-board skillet or dishwasher. This began Dec. 7 on the *City of New Orleans* and *Texas Eagle* and is planned in January on the *Sunset* and *Capitol Limiteds*.

Longer term, Amtrak plans to convert existing lounges and diners into combination diner-lounges, which will be ready for service some time in 2007. The redesigns will feature open-all-day food service—no more “sorry, the diner is closed,” or “we can’t just serve you dessert.” The Superliner versions will offer upper and lower level seating.

Superliner diner-lounges will be based on existing Sightseer Lounges, although peak seasons will find two diner-lounges on the biggest trains, the second based on the existing Superliner Diner.

The planned sequence of service development is:

Phase I — Introduction of revised dining service and menu changes.

Phase II — Appearance of diner-lounges (in Superliner trains, based on converted diners).

Phase III — Appearance of diner-lounges (in Superliner trains, based on converted Sightseer lounges). On the four trains mentioned above, the separate lounge cars will disappear.

The Fiscal 2006 appropriations law requires the DOT Inspector General to certify by July 1, 2006, that Amtrak has achieved “operational savings.” If he does not, federal funds after July 1 may not underwrite on-board food and sleeping-car services.

Amtrak is keeping stainless steel flatware and linen napkins, and says the food will be about the same as what is currently offered, but the “delivery platform” will be similar to what many “on-the-ground” restaurants use. Food is pre-cooked “off site” (in this case, off the train), and then heated in convection (not

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—Mike Duprey

Amtrak's Downeaster arrives in Dover, NH. The State of New Hampshire has directed \$1.6 million towards the construction of a passing siding near Dover on the Guilford-owned line that will permit faster schedules and addition of a fifth round-trip. Co-ordinated bus schedules with C&J Trailways make the service even more attractive. For more, see story on page 3.

NARP Presents Golden Spike Award to Oberstar



—David Johnson

Rep. Jim Oberstar (D-MN) accepts the George Falcon Golden Spike Award from NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon (l.) and NARP Intern Matt Melzer (r.). Oberstar received the Award in recognition of his many years of support for passenger rail.

At its October Board of Directors meeting in Minneapolis, NARP presented the George Falcon Golden Spike Award to Rep. James L. Oberstar (D-MN), ranking member of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (T&I).

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon said, “Representative Oberstar is a long-standing supporter of passenger rail. At virtually every Amtrak-related House Committee hearing Oberstar attends, he spells out the progress France, Belgium, and other European countries have made in developing high speed rail and decries inadequate funding for passenger rail here.”

The award states, in part, “Representative Oberstar has one of Capitol Hill’s most extensive records in support of a modern transportation system. He has

worked tirelessly both in defending Amtrak and in promoting development of world-class high speed rail...For his efforts to bring the U.S. ‘up to speed,’ we shall always be grateful.”

David Heymsfeld, Minority Staff Director for T&I, represented Oberstar in Minneapolis. Heymsfeld also addressed the NARP Board on legislative matters, and participated in a tribute to NARP Executive Director Ross Capon for his 30 years of service to NARP.

Oberstar received the award in person from Capon, NARP Assistant Director David Johnson, and Intern Matthew Melzer in the Congressman’s Washington, D.C. office December 8. Oberstar then invited his guests to sit down for a 30 minute discussion about prospects for passenger rail. ■

S.1516, and Probably Express Provision and Money, Dropped

Authorization

The House-Senate conference committee on S.1932, the budget reconciliation bill, dropped S.1516, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which the Senate had attached to S.1932 on a 93-6 vote Nov. 4 (Nov. News). [The House passed the conference report Dec. 19, the Senate Dec. 21. However, it goes back to the House, due to non-rail-related changes the Senate made Dec. 21.]

Action on S.1516 is possible in 2006 (second session of the 109th Congress; bills don't die between sessions).

The hoped-for chance to enact something close to S.1516 this year probably evaporated Nov. 3 when Chairman Don Young (R-AK) of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure announced formation of an "Amtrak Working Group," mandated to report by Feb. 17 on whether a formal task force should be created to review Amtrak's status.

Young had wanted to create a task force, but relented due to complaints that this would require formal committee ac-

tion, and that creation of anything undercut the Subcommittee on Railroads and its chairman, Steve LaTourette (R-OH).

The working group's members are Richard Baker (R-LA, Chairman), Vernon Ehlers (R-MI), Sam Graves (R-MO), Mark Kennedy (R-MN), John Boozman (R-AR), Elijah Cummings (D-MD, Ranking Democratic Member), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), and Brian Baird (D-WA). Democrats agreed to participate with reluctance.

Appropriation

On Nov. 30, President Bush signed into law H.R. 3058, the appropriations bill funding Amtrak in Fiscal 2006. The huge bill became Public Law 109-115.

Congress, however, was poised to delete from that law the "revenue service demonstration of...5,500 carload shipments of premium temperature-controlled express," and to rescind the \$8.3 million earmarked for that demonstration.

This change was the work of Chairman Joe Knollenberg (R-MI) of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury and Housing and Urban

Development, the Judiciary, District of Committee.

The New York Times reported Dec. 11 that Knollenberg, the provision's author, decided to pull it after learning that \$8.3 million also was ExpressTrak's target for settling its lawsuit with Amtrak.

A Dec. 14 Booth Newspapers report said, in part, "A spokeswoman for Knollenberg...said...that he wanted primarily to help put Amtrak on a 'path toward self-sufficiency' by pulling the freight."

But most knowledgeable observers agree that the Amtrak express "experiment"—ongoing since 1998—failed. It meant slower schedules, reduced reliability, and more friction between Amtrak and the host freight railroads, who saw the initiative stealing their own revenues. In short, it slowed passengers more than it speeded express.

The "take-out" language was in the defense appropriations conference report. The Senate passed it Dec. 21, but another House vote is needed due to the Senate action on Alaska oil drilling. ■

Amtrak: Doing More With Fewer Employees

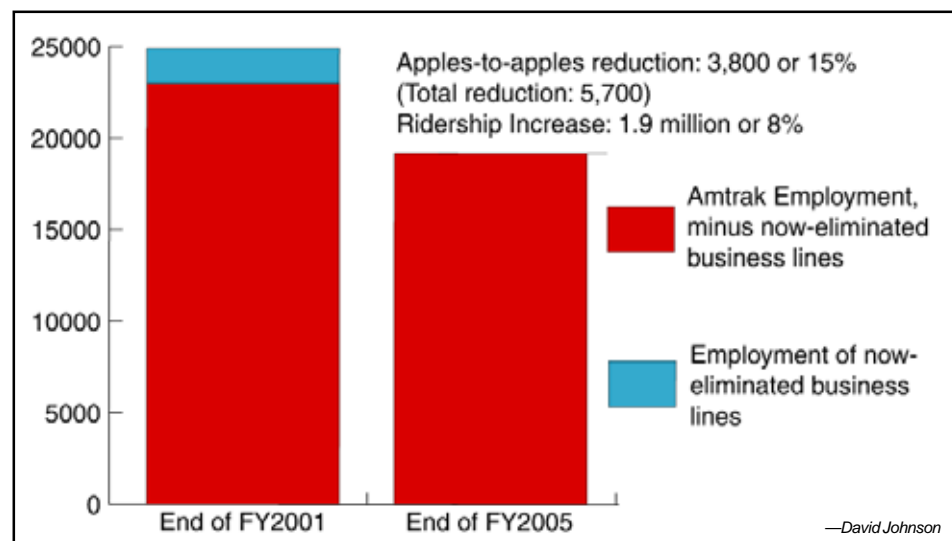
"In four years [end of fiscal 2001 to end of fiscal 2005], headcount has been reduced 5,700 or 23%. Simply stated, we are delivering more service, and better service, with fewer employees. At the same time we have undertaken the largest capital program in recent memory."

—Then-President/CEO David L. Gunn, in his Nov. 9 "year in review" report to Amtrak Chairman David M. Laney (available at <http://www.narprail.org>; click on "What's New?")

"However, a significant portion of the reduction in headcount came as a result of termination of a commuter rail service and mail and express freight services—not necessarily from finding efficiencies while offering the same level of service."

—Government Accountability Office, Report GAO-06-145 "Amtrak Management" (October 4, 2005; requested by Rep. Don Young, R-AK, available at the GAO website, <http://www.gao.gov>)

The GAO quotation belittles Amtrak's accomplishment, but the numbers clarify its significance. Gunn's statement says 1,500 and 127 Amtrak commuter rail employees, respectively, in Massachusetts and southern California were transferred to MBTA in 2003 and Metrolink in 2005. Amtrak says that getting out of the



mail and most of the express businesses caused a reduction of 273 people.

Amtrak ended Fiscal 2001 with 24,877 employees, and Fiscal 2005 with 19,177 employees. Thus, the "genuine" or apples-to-apples headcount fell 15% or 3,800 (5,700 less the sum of 1,500 + 127 + 273), while intercity ridership rose 1.9 million or 8%. ■

Thanks, Matt!

NARP Intern Matthew Melzer (September News) returned to California on December 9 to complete his last two quarters at UC-Santa Cruz. Matt has been at the NARP office since June on a six month field study/internship. We are grateful for his hard work and the enthusiasm he brought to the office. *Best of luck, Matt!*

Amtrak Passengers: “Why I Chose The Train”

Passengers on the sold-out *Empire Builder* that left Chicago June 1 chose the train for many reasons:

“(I’m a) recent college graduate, traveling to my summer employment. The train was a lot cheaper than flying. When I visited Europe a couple of years ago, I loved the train travel and wanted to experience it here. I get sick on planes but not on trains, so I definitely prefer this.”

—Kristyn Bollig, Minneapolis to Spokane

“I make this trip two or three times a year. We can move around and I can point out the sights to my grandchildren. It’s the only way to see America: you can’t do that in a plane.”

—Marian Lemke, Fargo to Everett, Washington, traveling for her grandson’s graduation

“(Rail travel is) a better experience, especially since 9/11. The first time we traveled this train was our honeymoon...we didn’t do it again until 2001 but we’ve been doing it ever since. My mother needs oxygen to travel. Since 9/11, I couldn’t go to the (airplane) gate and help her. Amtrak said she’d be welcome to bring her oxygen.”

—Jon Wilcox, Milwaukee-Seattle

“We’re on the train because if we want to take the plane we have to go to Minneapolis and change twice to get to Pasco. By taking the train, we are ‘door to door’ and don’t have to go out of our way.”

—Vivian Dunford, Fargo to Pasco, Washington

Kidd Joins NARP Staff

Douglas Kidd joined the NARP staff as Director of Finance and Administration in January, 2005. He has over 20 years experience in private practice as a certified public accountant. He holds a B.A. in accounting from George Washington University (Washington, DC).

He and his wife, Pat, live in Vienna, VA. They have two grown daughters. He is a welcome addition to the staff.

Ed Von Nordeck Wins NARP’s Martin Award

The second John R. Martin Passenger Rail Advocacy Award was presented to Ed Von Nordeck of Riverside, CA, October 21 at the NARP Board of Directors’ meeting in Minneapolis.

The award, named after the late Jack Martin, NARP’s President from 1979 until he died in 2000,

Von Nordeck, of Riverside, CA, has devoted his career to passenger railroading. He worked for Southern Pacific from 1952 to 1963, primarily in the Los Angeles and Colton reservations offices. He worked briefly for Santa Fe and Amtrak and for a time was a Greyhound franchise agent, the latter in Perris and Lake Elsinore, CA.

Ed and Mary Lee, his wife of 47 years and also a railfan, in 1966 founded Let’s Travel Tours, featuring group rail travel. They continued to plan, sell and escort tours until April, 2004.

Ed has been an active NARP member for most of the association’s existence, much of that time (included presently) on the board. He also has served on the board of Train Riders Association of California. He is a past president of Orange Empire Railway Museum (Perris, CA).

Even in “retirement,” he puts in many hours—paid and volunteer—working for Riverside County Transportation Commission at their five Metrolink stations.

His encyclopedic knowledge of the



—Jim Hamre

Ed Von Nordeck (c.) receives the John R. Martin Passenger Rail Advocacy Award from NARP President George Chilson (r.) and Executive Director Ross B. Capon (l.) at NARP’s Awards and Recognition Banquet on October 21 in Minneapolis, MN. Von Nordeck received the award for his efforts to improve U.S. passenger train service.

passenger rail business and what is really going on “in the field” has been invaluable in helping keep NARP and Amtrak focussed on what is important.

The award states, in part, “His wealth of knowledge, his insights into how things can be done better, and the enormous amount of time and energy he devotes to sharing and advancing helpful ideas have benefited countless passengers and are greatly appreciated by fellow rail passenger advocates.” ■

New Hampshire Funding for Downeaster

One of Amtrak’s most successful services, the Boston-Portland, ME *Downeaster*, has grown exponentially since its launch in December 2001. But New Hampshire had not contributed any funds, even though the state has three stops. That has changed.

The Governor’s Advisory Committee on Intermodal Transportation (i.e. Executive Council plus DOT Secretary) voted to redirect \$1.6 million of the state’s Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) federal funds to finance a crucial siding (see front page caption). At first, C&J Trailways, which runs Boston-Dover, NH local bus service, strongly opposed this.

However, a broad spirit of cooperation ultimately prevailed. The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA, the Maine agency which underwrites *Downeaster* funding) now offers

joint Amtrak-C&J ticketing and schedules. Both operations are working together to promote the use of public transportation. NNEPRA also will help C&J to attract its own federal funds to purchase new buses and operate new service.

“Working together, we have a better chance of attracting riders than if we act competitively,” said NNEPRA Executive Director Patricia Douglas. She added that *Downeaster* revenues and ridership are expected to grow by about 30% with the new round-trip, which should begin within a year.

TrainRiders Northeast President and NARP Board Member Wayne Davis said, “this is everybody’s dream: A train that works, is functional and is not a novelty. It’s good, reliable transportation—not just a tourist train.” It’s a success story that could be repeated across the nation. ■

NARP Dues Increase

Effective February 15, 2006, the basic individual NARP membership will be \$35 a year (vs. the present \$30).

Other new levels: Family \$45, Donor \$50, Sponsor \$75, Sustainer \$125, Senior \$25, and Student \$20. The last increase (\$2 for basic) was three years ago (January, 2003).

We plan to introduce new membership categories shortly that will offer new benefits for people who join at higher levels of support.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Dining car service changes— See lead story for full details: *Texas Eagle* and *City of New Orleans* were converted on December 7; *Capitol Limited* and *Sunset Limited* will be converted in mid January.

Portable entertainment available on Auto Train—Railway Media is teaming up with Amtrak to offer digEplayers (small, pre-programmed electronic units with 7" viewing screens) to Auto Train passengers for a \$19 rental fee. Units have eight movies and a battery life of 8-10 hours.

Amtrak and Railway Media plan to expand service to other long distance routes.

Discounted Crescent, City of New Orleans travel—To encourage tourism in areas affected by Hurricane Katrina, Amtrak is offering a 20% rail fare and sleeper accommodations discount for travel on the *City* to points south of Memphis, and on the *Crescent* to points south of Atlanta. The discount is available with promotion code V545, and can be combined with the 50% children's rail fare discount.

Diners

(from page 1)

Initially, food is being preplated off the train. However, Amtrak quickly determined that good service requires giving staff the flexibility to mix and match food items.

Thus, if a passenger needs a special meal (i.e., Kosher, vegan) and the relevant special meal does not show up, staff—as before—can assemble a satisfactory meal from food on hand.

In mid-January when the revised dining service extends to the *Sunset* and *Capitol Limiteds*, this flexibility will be maintained on those trains, and re-established on the *Eagle* and *City*.

NARP has urged, and Amtrak is reviewing, implementation of more flexible meal hours as part of "Phase I." ■

Customs Takes Aim at New York-Toronto Train

"Not content with killing off the *International*, the US authorities are now working to kill the *Maple Leaf* [Amtrak-VIA Rail Canada New York-Toronto train]. The procedures will appeal to those seasoned travelers who liked the stops at the Iron Curtain border stations on such trains as the Paris-Moscow overnight sleeper train."

That's how Harry Gow, president of our sister organization Transport 2000 Canada, reacted to unwelcome news that United States Customs and Immigration requires *Maple Leaf* passengers who are not U.S. or Canadian citizens to disembark at Niagara Falls for supplemental screening.

Travelers must submit to a finger scan and digital photograph. A personal interview with Border authorities is conducted and a \$6.00 fee (US cash only) is col-

lected.

This program, using kiosk-style computer terminals, is not in place at the adjacent US-Canadian highway crossings. It has been used at U.S. international airports—a less relevant comparison—for about a year.

The *Maple Leaf* is scheduled to sit in Niagara Falls for two hours, whereas bus schedules allow only about 20 minutes for border crossing formalities. Innovations such as en-route border crossing inspections should be pursued rather than ridership-killing policies like this one. ■

For the latest news, visit our website at <www.narprail.org>. Our news hotline is posted Friday afternoon.



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