



## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

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RETURN REQUESTED

# THE INTER-AMERICAN

Despite ridership far greater than the quality of service seems to justify, continuation of Amtrak's Chicago-Laredo/Houston train, the "Inter-American" (I-A) beyond Sept. 30, 1981, is in doubt. I-A is the only passenger train in Arkansas, one of only two passenger trains in Texas, and the only Texas train which operates daily (the state's other train, the New Orleans-Houston-San Antonio-Los Angeles "Sunset," operates thrice-weekly). It is the only train serving Dallas, Ft. Worth, or Austin.

Under present law, I-A must exceed 150 passenger-miles per train-mile (PMTM) in order to survive. Our purpose here is to examine what's wrong and what is being done—and what could be done—to improve the "Inter-American."

Knowledgeable observers foresaw trouble as soon as they saw what was to be done with Amtrak's Texas services effective Oct. 1, 1979. On that day, the Chicago-Houston "Lone Star," the stronger of two Chicago-Texas routes, was dropped. At the same time, Houston cars were added to the Chicago-Laredo I-A; they are switched in northbound and switched out southbound in Temple, Texas (see map).

### Houston Today . . .

Operationally, the Houston section has proved to be a liability. Requiring contemporary U.S. passenger trains to switch en route is often an invitation to disaster—an opportunity for things to go wrong. To begin with, the Temple switching required length-

ening I-A's Ft. Worth-Austin schedule by 55 minutes northbound and 31 minutes southbound, compared with the pre-Oct. 1979 operation. On top of that, the long-established and better-patronized service from Austin and San Antonio is often subject to further delays northbound at Temple while it waits for arrival of the Houston section, which is frequently late due to interference from other trains on the congested Temple-Houston line.

Consequently, I-A is actually less useful now for intra-state trips such as San Antonio-Ft. Worth and Dallas-Austin than it was before the 1979 "rationalization."

At first glance, an important benefit of the rationalization might appear to be the establishment of through service between Dallas and Houston. But the circuitry of the route means the Houston section is of no interest to short-distance riders. A train leaving Dallas must go west to Ft. Worth, where it backs up into the station before it can head south, on to the time-consuming switching at Temple, and then onward to Houston via Rosenberg, a city located 38 miles southwest of Houston! This adds up to 346 miles, vs. 243 via I-45; scheduled running time is 9:05 south and 8:50 north, compared with 4½ hours via express bus and Rand McNally's suggested auto time of 5:05.

The Houston run takes so long that even less time-sensitive long-distance passengers show little interest in it. Houston area passengers have been known to drive 200 miles to catch I-A at

### TRAVELERS' ADVISORY—NEW CONNECTIONS

Oct. 1 will see the restoration of Chicago-Indianapolis rail passenger service for the first time since March, 1975.

West Virginians will gain direct westbound connections to major Western cities, and Washington-to-Denver trips will be 7½ hours shorter (DC-to-Portland, OR 7¾ hours shorter) on Oct. 26 when schedule adjustments will establish a westward connection from the Washington-Chicago "Cardinal" to the Chicago-Oakland "San Francisco Zephyr" and its LA and Seattle connections.

Passengers who must now leave Washington on the "Broadway" at 1:45 PM will be able to leave at 9:05 PM on "The Cardinal" and arrive in Denver 10 minutes earlier than at present on the "Zephyr." Since the Chicago layover will be only 60 minutes, the connection will undoubtedly be missed from time to time, but it is guaranteed. The "Zephyr" schedule will be tightened by one hour in both directions.

The Toronto-Buffalo train will probably be discontinued from Sept. 29 (see separate story).

Other changes on Oct. 26:

- the eastward Cardinal-to-Shenandoah connection in Cincinnati, broken Oct. 28, 1979, will be restored so that those on the line through Cumberland and Parkersburg will once again have direct Chicago connections in both directions;

- the westward "Lake Shore" Boston section will gain a Springfield connection to Hartford/New Haven, so Boston-

Hartford, Worcester-Hartford, and Worcester-New Haven passengers will once again have rail service in both directions;

- under the same Amtrak-Connecticut agreement that covers the state's purchase of new Budd SPV-2000 cars, service frequency will increase on the New Haven-Springfield line; there will be a new stop at North Haven, CT;

- Chemult, OR (for Bend, OR, ski resorts) will become a stop on the LA-Seattle "Coast Starlight";

- Baltimore-Washington International Airport Station (MD Route 170 between the airport and the Westinghouse plant) will be opened, with seven southward and seven northward trains. To quote *The Washington Star*, "Shuttle buses will shunt travelers the half mile between the Amtrak station and the airport.;" and

- prospects look good for startup of a second St. Louis-Kansas City round-trip, departing St. Louis at 8 AM west and Kansas City at 5:30 PM east.

The improved West Virginia connections had been promoted by NARP, its Region 3 membership, and Retain the Train, our West Virginia affiliate.

On Sept. 8, Auto-Train Corp. filed a petition for reorganization in bankruptcy. A-T Chairman Eugene K. Garfield insisted the trains would continue to run. NARP reminds prospective A-T patrons of the company's slowness in making refunds (Dec. '79 News, p. 1).

Longview. The present Chicago-Houston schedule is 90 minutes slower than that offered last year by the "Lone Star"—and even the "Lone Star" and its Santa Fe predecessor, the "Texas Chief," never adequately served Houston because of Santa Fe's roundabout approach through Rosenberg.

One observer described the 1979 "rationalization" of Chicago-Texas services as salvaging 60% of the "Lone Star's" least productive segment (Ft. Worth-Houston), which had helped lead to the train's downfall, and attaching it to the weaker I-A where it is having the same negative impact.

I-A's Houston section evolved this way because it appeared to be the only way to continue linking Houston with northern points after the demise of the "Lone Star." The tragedy is that, one year later, there is still nothing underway to put the Houston service on a more logical routing.

#### ... And Houston Tomorrow

The best way to link Houston with Little Rock, St. Louis, and Chicago is via Palestine, TX, on the Missouri Pacific (see map), following the route of MP's old "Texas Eagle." This should cut running time between Longview and Houston by over 6 hours, permitting passengers who depart Chicago at 5:20 PM to arrive in Houston at 4:30 the next afternoon instead of the exceedingly unattractive 10:35 PM arrival now offered. In the opposite direction, passengers who now depart Houston at 8:50 AM could leave instead at 3 PM and still be in St. Louis at 8 the next morning and Chicago at 2:05 PM. This would even produce some Houston-to-St. Louis business travel!

It would also establish reliable, convenient connections in Houston with the "Sunset," finally enabling Amtrak to provide an all-rail service between Tucson/Phoenix and the upper Midwest—an important market which NARP has been pushing since before Amtrak was created.

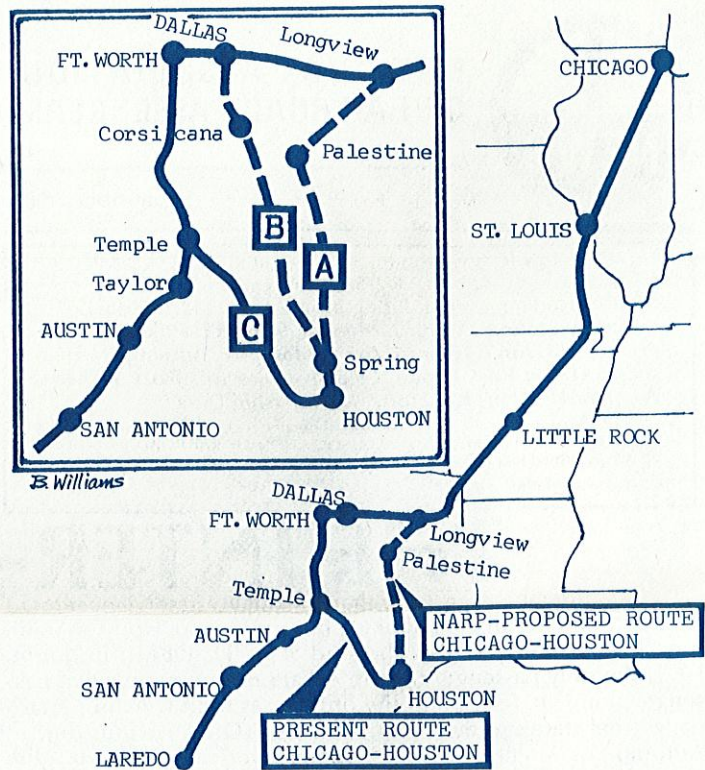
Running the Houston section via Palestine would mean switching cars at Longview rather than at Temple, which would cause less disruption and would reduce schedule times and increase reliability between Dallas/Ft. Worth and Austin/San Antonio.

The principle obstacle to immediate implementation of this plan is congestion on the 23-mile Houston-Spring segment. MP will be double-tracking this segment soon, and, under a plan to provide commuter rail service there instead of a new freeway (March News, p. 2), the line would be triple-tracked. As the map shows, the Houston-Spring segment could also be used by Dallas-Houston corridor trains whenever they emerge.

#### Scheduling

When Amtrak had two daily departures from Chicago to Texas, I-A left at 11:15 AM and "The Lone Star" at 4:10 PM. Although this meant no same-day westward connections to I-A from Michigan or the NY/Boston-Cleveland-Chicago "Lake Shore," it had some logic because it offered a choice of times for those traveling between city-pairs common to both routes, including Chicago-Dallas/Ft. Worth.

Obviously, however, the more attractive late afternoon departure should have been assumed by I-A when it became the sole Chicago-Texas service. At least one NARP member recommended just such a change during the summer of 1979. NARP's Washington office did not want to "admit defeat" by putting forward such a proposal unless and until "The Lone Star" was actually dropped. We formally requested the change in a Nov. 27, 1979, memo to Amtrak, and it was implemented at last on Aug. 3, 1980.



- A** NARP-proposed route for "Inter-American's" Houston section. Longview-Houston via Palestine: distance 232 miles, running time 5:45. Railroad: Missouri Pacific.
- B** NARP-proposed route for future Dallas-Houston corridor trains. Dallas-Houston: distance 250 miles, running time subject to track improvements (4 hours was once possible). Railroad: Ft. Worth & Denver—the shortest, most direct rail line between Dallas and Houston.
- C** Present route for "Inter-American's" Houston section. Longview-Houston via Ft. Worth, Temple: distance 473 miles, running time 12 hours. Railroads: Missouri Pacific, Santa Fe. NARP would end Amtrak service between Temple-Houston.

The negative side of the move was to saddle Laredo with an unmarketable southward arrival (1:20 AM) to go along with its long-standing unmarketable northward departure (5:55 AM—which should at least be 6 AM for elementary marketing reasons).

Now, Amtrak is considering a further improvement recommended by NARP: rescheduling the San Antonio-Laredo segment as a separate train at convenient daylight hours. If the schedule permitted connections with Mexico's Nuevo Laredo-Mexico City "Aztec Eagle," substantial San Antonio-Mexico travel would develop. The goal would be to extend the Mexican train itself to San Antonio, which Mexican railway officials are interested in doing, according to an Amtrak Board member who has met with them.

In addition to establishing a useful service for Laredo, this would solve two other problems. First, reliability of the entire northbound I-A would improve with elimination of the tight turn-around time in Laredo (4 hours 35 minutes if the train arrives on-time) and the difficulties Amtrak has experienced getting the

#### HOW TO SAVE THE INTER-AMERICAN

##### IMPROVEMENT

Reschedule southward train to give better connections at Chicago  
Provide direct service to Houston via Palestine

Reschedule San Antonio-Laredo segment with attractive daylight times, Mexican connection(?)  
Provide (relocate to) station in San Antonio  
Build and occupy attractive Little Rock station

Replace Malvern, AR, stop with Arkadelphia  
Provide lounge cars  
Provide full dining cars  
Provide crew dormitory to free up more sleeper space for sale to public  
Provide slumbercoach so "average" income people can afford private room and bed

##### STATUS

Implemented Aug. 3, 1980

No action likely, though major improvements would also benefit Dallas-Houston corridor and Houston commuter rail prospects  
Amtrak studying; action possible Feb., 1981

##### Possible when Laredo segment rescheduled

Amtrak awaiting plan from developer; relocation unlikely at least until Fall, 1981

Amtrak studying; action possible in 1981

Expected before end of Oct., 1980

Budgetted for Oct., 1981

Dorm and 2nd sleeper budgetted for Oct., 1981

Expected to replace 2nd sleeper around FY '85



—Photo by Lester Noble

**THE RABBIT PATCH:** Waiting for Amtrak's "Inter-American" at the non-station in San Antonio. A NARP-recommended schedule change would permit the train to use the well-located SP station already used by Amtrak's "Sunset Ltd."

equipment serviced there during the night.

#### Stations

The other problem which the "San Antonio split" would solve relates to I-A's San Antonio station—it has none now! It stops at "W. Commerce St. & MP R.R." which has "Transfer service provided from Amtrak Station 30 minutes prior to departure." When the split is put into effect, both pieces of the I-A could move into the well-located "Amtrak" (SP) station already used by the "Sunset," the transfer service could be eliminated, and the effective running-time reduced for those who used it. Consolidating operations downtown thus would cut costs and increase revenues.

NARP has urged Amtrak to implement this change quickly so that its benefits can be reflected in the data used to measure I-A against the criteria.

I-A has also been harmed by inadequate stations at two other major cities: St. Louis, which has a temporary, hard-to-reach trailer; and Little Rock, with a large, antiquated building lacking heat and air-conditioning and requiring passengers to wait their turns to ride an elevator down to ground level after which they walk through a long, dark corridor to the platform.

Amtrak is awaiting a proposal from the Little Rock station developer for a separate, new building which would accommodate Amtrak passengers and some other offices and provide dedicated parking for Amtrak patrons.

NARP Director Bill Pollard has identified another improvement which should increase I-A ridership: substitute Arkadelphia, AR, for Malvern as a station stop. Malvern was originally selected by Amtrak because it possessed a bus connection to nearby Hot Springs, but the bus was subsequently withdrawn, and Malvern has generated little train ridership.

#### SENATE APPROPRIATIONS STATUS

**The Senate Appropriations Committee on Sept. 9 approved \$900 million for Amtrak's FY '81 budget—\$13 million over the House appropriations bill, a larger capital budget (\$221 million), but nothing for emerging corridors. Amtrak will do the best it can for the Feb. 15, 1981 report (July News, p. 4), seeking information from state and municipal officials and others.**

#### EQUIPMENT NOTES

**Deliveries of cars in Amtrak's latest 150-car Amfleet order are expected to begin in late 1981. The cars will have larger windows (4" taller; to be precise, ½" higher and 3½" lower) and larger capacity air-conditioning units than the existing Amfleet cars.**

**Amtrak already has designated 48 domes for inclusion in its "HEP" rebuilding/conversion program, and NARP members are working to increase that number. The 48 includes 34 coaches, 7 sleepers, and 7 lounges.**

Arkadelphia is slightly larger, boasts two universities with an enrollment of 4,000, has a downtown railroad station at the intersection of two U.S. highways, and is linked to Hot Springs by Trailways buses, though schedule changes would be required to make them useful to Amtrak connecting passengers.

#### The Train

When "The Lone Star" last ran, it had modern hi-level Santa Fe coaches and full dining and lounge service. I-A did not inherit these amenities and has operated for almost a year with no lounge or full diner, an extremely spartan prospect for such long rides as the train handles. Amtrak hopes to get lounges into service before the end of October.

The train started off in Oct., 1979, with food service so inadequate for long trips that Amtrak's VP—Passenger Services, Rima Parkhurst, harshly criticized it in speaking with NARP officials.

**This month, NARP will do a major mailing of NARP membership information in an effort to gain new members. If you are already a NARP member and you receive an invitation to join, please pass it along to a friend.**

It has been nominally improved since then; the four tables now have waiter service. Food service, however, remains the greatest target of criticism from passengers, and inadequate storage space on the Amdinette car causes it to run out of some items regularly.

The new Amcoaches used on the run had serious air-conditioning failure problems earlier this summer, but the situation improved significantly as Amtrak tightened up its maintenance procedures. What has not improved is the reliability of the EPA-imposed chemical retention toilets on these cars which go without servicing for 15½ hours—when the train is on-time—between

#### SERVICE CUTBACKS AND THE LAW

Under the Amtrak Reorganization Act of 1979 (Sept. '79 News), "The Inter-American" and certain other Amtrak long-distance trains would have to be discontinued one year from now if they flunk the criteria tests of at least 150 passenger-miles-per-trainmile (PMTM) and an avoidable loss of no more than 7¢ per passenger-mile.

A sensible change in the law would exempt from discontinuance those trains which stand to benefit from the coming emerging corridors program. There is little doubt that "The Inter-American" would carry many more riders if it could run at reasonable speeds on direct routes between Dallas and both Houston and San Antonio.

Rep. Robert Duncan (D-OR), the outgoing chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, has very different thoughts about how to change the law. Consider this passage from the House Appropriations Committee's report accompanying its "DOT and Related Agencies Appropriation Bill" for Fiscal Year 1981: "In addition to the regular fiscal year 1982 budget request, the Committee directs Amtrak to submit a detailed budget estimate for fiscal year 1982 and projections for future years assuming the termination of the five least cost effective long-haul routes on Sept. 30, 1981. The budget submission should contain the detailed revenues and costs associated with each of the five routes.

"The Committee believes that the Congress should consider reductions in the Amtrak route structure during hearings on the fiscal year 1982 budget. . . ."

The approach suggested here is much more dangerous than the criteria approach. Under the law, if a train meets the criteria, it continues; NARP believes adequate capital investment for "The Inter-American" and "The Cardinal" (Chicago-Cincinnati-Charleston, WV-Washington) would permit continuation of all long-distance trains under existing law.

With the approach hinted at by Rep. Duncan's language, even if all long-distance trains operated year-round at 100% load factor, five could still be discontinued. Since the economics of each route will remain slightly different, it will always be possible to identify "the five least cost-effective long-haul routes."

### THE SAFEST MODE

Between Dec. 1976 and July 1980, Amtrak carried over 65 million passengers without a single passenger fatality. During that same period, more than 172,000 Americans—roughly the population of Salt Lake City—died in auto accidents. Even Amtrak's outspoken critic, UCLA professor George Hilton, admits "Amtrak provides an extremely safe form of transportation, with a fatality rate a third that of bus and a sixth that of air." (George W. Hilton, *Amtrak, The National Railroad Passenger Corporation*; p. 53.) Hilton refers to the following table, comparing safety by mode, which appears on p. 886 of the House 1979 Appropriations Hearing Report-Part III:

#### FATALITIES PER 10 BILLION PASSENGER-MILES (3-Year Average, 1974-76)

Amtrak .....	1
Bus .....	3
Airline .....	6
Automobile .....	140

Although Amtrak's safety record is quite good, some passenger train systems' are even better. For example, Japan's Shinkansen "Bullet" trains, which travel as fast as 130 mph, carried more than 1.2 billion passengers from 1964 to presstime in early Sept.—without a single accident or fatality!

St. Louis and Ft. Worth. The problem has become so severe that unpleasant odors often enter the main body of the coaches, and some of the sleeping-car rooms have been reserved for "toilet protection."

The one reliable car is the rebuilt sleeper, but the space which can be sold to the public is limited. The car has 10 roomettes (single rooms) and 6 double rooms. Since the train has no crew dormitory car, the on-board services crew must use the sleeper. Between that and the rooms set aside for "toilet protection"—use by coach passengers whose chemical toilets no longer work—more than 25% of the 22 spaces on the sleeper can be blocked off from sale to the traveling public. On some occasions, rooms have been taken away from the crew so the coach passengers could use the toilets.

Because of these problems, Pollard fears up to 80% of this summer's riders on the I-A never want to ride again.

#### Conclusion: There's Hope!

Today, I-A operates under tremendous handicaps. If Amtrak can get the equipment problem under control and improve the Little Rock station situation, the Chicago-Ft. Worth portion of the run could be attractive to travelers. Until implementation of the San Antonio split and restructuring of the Houston leg, however, the route south of Ft. Worth constituting 38% of route miles and trainmiles is not useful and cannot be considered a fair test of anything.

PMTM has averaged 93.3 during the first ten months of the new operation (Oct. '79-July '80), ranging from 53.7 in Oct. to 161.4 in July. When you consider the formidable array of service problems passengers face, there should be no question that, with all or perhaps just a few of the problems fixed, the train will pass the criteria test with flying colors. Let us work to see that Amtrak makes enough improvements fast enough so that our legislators will believe this. ■

### A REQUEST TO NARP MEMBERS

NARP would like to compile an inventory of locations in the U.S. where state or local ordinances restrict the speed of Amtrak trains. If you know of any such ordinances, please forward this information to the NARP office in envelopes marked "Speed Limits." If possible, please include location and distance of speed restriction, maximum speed allowed, apparent reason(s) for restriction, and speed limit which would otherwise prevail without the ordinance. Consultation with local railroad employees should prove helpful in gathering information.

## FAREWELL, TORONTO!

Toronto's only rail passenger service to the U.S., the Toronto-Buffalo Budd car that connects with Amtrak's NY-Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY "Niagara Rainbow," probably will be discontinued Sept. 29 as the result of a disappointing Aug. 14 order (R-31299) by the Railway Transport Committee of the Canadian Transport Commission.

Rail advocates had hoped that CTC would mandate continuation of the service until the "Rainbow" itself could be extended to Toronto. Such an extension would improve Amtrak's equipment utilization as well as the revenues of both Amtrak and VIA Rail Canada Inc., Amtrak's counterpart in Canada. The Amtrak train that now stands idle in Niagara Falls, NY for 17 hours daily (from 6:20 PM to 11:30 AM) could use part of the time running through to Toronto and return, improving service to international travelers.

Unfortunately, Amtrak has not yet asked VIA about extending the "Rainbow," VIA management seems very opposed to implementing the idea in the short term, and Canadian National is reportedly unhappy at the prospect of having passenger service restored on its bridge between Niagara Falls, Ont. and Niagara Falls, NY.

In a letter to NARP, VIA Chairman & President J. Frank Roberts emphasized that "the complexities involved in operating through trains between our respective countries, over this route, are both numerous and serious. It is still our belief that if train schedules could be at least co-ordinated permitting a limousine or bus connection across the border, we could begin to develop the concept of through service. We will be discussing this and other possibilities with Amtrak officials later this year."

NARP, in reply, noted that a limousine between the two Niagara Falls stations would be a step down from the existing service, replacing a single rail-rail transfer with two intermodal transfers. We fear such an arrangement might be so poorly used that it would dim rather than enhance prospects for further improvements. NARP has urged both Roberts and Amtrak President Alan S. Boyd to see what could be done about early establishment of the "Rainbow" run-through.

### NARP ELECTION TIME AGAIN

Any NARP member who wishes to be listed in NARP News as a candidate for election to the 1981-82 NARP Board of Directors should notify our office by Nov. 1. Directors will be elected at meetings held in each of our 13 regions. Most meetings will be in February or March.

The key need appears to be massive pressure by Canadians on their government and on VIA management to establish the through service, although New Yorkers who live in the Buffalo area should also alert their representatives to the prospects for through service to Toronto. One of the benefits of establishing such service would be more intensive use of the New York DOT's investment in track and station improvements to restore service to Niagara Falls, NY last year.

The CTC decision also requires VIA to "perform an in-depth study to investigate the feasibility of operating a rail connection between Niagara Falls, Ont. and Niagara Falls, NY, which study should be available by Dec. 31, 1980. . . . As a part of this study, VIA should contact Amtrak and other concerned bodies, such as the governments of Ontario and the State of New York, to discuss the implementation of uninterrupted passenger train service between Toronto and New York City." ■

### MORE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

At the suggestion of NARP Director Jim Clark of Galena, IL, here are the campaign addresses for two more Presidential candidates: (Barry Commoner)—Citizens Party, 525 13th St., NW, Wash., DC 20004; (Ed Clark)—Libertarian Party, 2300 Wisconsin Ave., NW, Wash., DC 20007. Commoner has placed great emphasis on the need to expand public transportation generally and Amtrak in particular.