



News from the
**National Association of
 Railroad Passengers**

Vol. 28, No. 2  February 1994



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News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers (ISSN 0739-3490), is published monthly except November by NARP, 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 308, Washington, DC 20002-3557; (202) 408-8362, fax (202) 408-8287. ©1994 National Association of Railroad Passengers. All rights reserved. Membership dues are \$24/year (\$12 under 21 or over 65) of which \$5 is for a subscription to NARP News. For the latest rail passenger news, call the NARP Hotline: 1-900-988-RAIL (\$1.20 per minute, most messages last 4 minutes; service available 24 hours a day; callers under 18 must have parental permission to use this service; updated at least every Friday PM).

Postmaster: send address changes to National Association of Railroad Passengers; 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 308; Washington, DC 20002-3557.

(This has news through Feb. 15. Vol 28, No. 1 was mailed Dec. 29.)

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Los Angeles Earthquake

Commuter Rail Shines

"We've got to take advantage of Metrolink and the rail network in Southern California."

—Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), at earthquake "roundtable" at Burbank Airport chaired by Pres. Clinton Jan. 19

The fledgling Metrolink system got national attention after the Jan. 17 earthquake centered on Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley. With key freeway ramps and bridges destroyed, Metrolink (and Red Line subway and Blue Line light rail) was undamaged and simply needed inspection after constant aftershocks Jan. 17. (Metrolink service between Van Nuys and Moorpark and Amtrak Santa Barbara service resumed Jan. 19, after cleanup of a freight train derailment at Northridge, the earthquake epicenter.)

CLINTON PROPOSES TO INCREASE SPENDING ON AMTRAK (see page 3)

Weekday ridership skyrocketed on the traditionally weakest line, Santa Clarita, rising from an average of 1020 the week before the earthquake to 6400 on Jan. 19, and 12,600 Jan. 21. It peaked at 21,900 on Jan. 25 and seemed to have stabilized in mid-Feb. at 8000 (still up an impressive 684%). This growth prompted DOT Sec. Federico Peña's Jan. 24 *NBC Nightly News* reference to "the fastest growing commuter system." [Systemwide, Metrolink's mid-Feb. ridership was 17,700; 88% above a previous level of 9415.]

Peña arrived in the San Fernando Valley hours after the earthquake hit. At the Jan. 19 roundtable, he explained efforts to make more cars available to Metrolink.

On Jan. 24, Santa Clarita round trips rose from seven to ten; two round trips were extended 44 miles beyond Santa Clarita (formerly Saugus on the Southern Pacific) through the twisting, steep Soledad Canyon to Palmdale and Lancaster.

The Oct. 17, 1989 earthquake in the Bay Area produced a similar increase in transit use (June '90 *News*). Daily ridership on BART—whose route parallels the damaged Bay Bridge—rose 64% from 215,000 before the earthquake to a post-earthquake peak of 353,000 on Nov. 3, 1989. The current level is 254,000, 18% above pre-earthquake levels.



—1992 photo by Ed Von Nordeck

Metrolink commuter trains such as these at Union Station carried crush loads over largely undamaged track in the wake of the Jan. 17 earthquake in Los Angeles.

By Feb. 14, Lancaster had three round trips; Santa Clarita 12 trains north and 11 south. Major track and signal work on the new segment could reduce the 2:25 Lancaster-Los Angeles running time to 1:55 by June 1. Federal emergency relief funds enacted Feb. 12 are funding these and many other earthquake-related transit costs.

Amtrak freed up some Metrolink cars by substituting Amfleet cars on the *Orange County Commuter*; Metrolink also leased eight CalTrain coaches. Numerous agencies, including Navy Seabees and Los Angeles County road crews, quickly built new facilities: Sylmar-San Fernando (bus and carpool parking only initially, full parking ready Feb. 21), Via Princessa and Vincent-Acton. A second track is being laid between Lancaster and Palmdale, and Union Station has gained another track. On the Ventura County line (towards Santa Barbara), Metrolink extended some trains 11 miles from Moorpark to Camarillo starting Feb. 14, with a new stop at Northridge. Ventura County wants to extend one Camarillo train nine more miles to Oxnard.

On Feb. 1, a third Amtrak *San Diegan* was extended to

(continued on page 2)

NARP Blasts Station-Killing "Exercise"

"Deep pockets" make people look smart. Funding shortages, however, can do the opposite, as illustrated by last year's Amtrak study of discontinuing stops at 78 unstaffed stations.

According to the internal document (reported in the general media perhaps only in Arkansas), the list would have been even longer, but for concerns about leaving "too large a geographical gap." Even so, by NARP's count, 39 of the 78 stations listed would have created gaps of 101-567 miles. People usually accept a 50-60-mile drive to a long-distance train, so gaps over 100 miles would cause most of a cancelled station's revenue to disappear rather than shift to another station. Even shorter gaps can make sense due to the low cost of providing service and high political cost to end it.

In an Oct. 25 memo to Government/Public Affairs Asst. VP Thomas J. Gillespie Jr. and Passenger Services VP Arthur F. McMahon (and subsequently given to Pres. Downs), NARP's Ross Capon called the station study "perhaps the most depressing document ever in terms of what it says about the author's awareness of why Amtrak exists...Cities/towns should be notified at least a year in advance of any planned station discontinuance, so they can both promote the service and come up with any required capital...[The study notes that ADA compliance must be completed by July 26, 2010. Ed.]

"Part of the supposed justification is trip-time savings and reduced crew costs. On [one Oct. day], at Waterloo, IN, 10 minutes elapsed from the start of first stop to end of fourth stop of the eastbound *Capitol Ltd.*, so Waterloo took at least 15 minutes total. One employee commented, 'it depends on how lazy the conductor is.' Let's solve this problem rather than justifying service cuts using savings based on sloppy operations....

"Leave Arkansas alone [Malvern and Arkadelphia were on the list. Ed.]. Amtrak already has created enough ill will [in Arkansas] to last a lifetime."

NARP has been assured that no station discontinuances are planned and that, if this changes, communities will be given advance notice. ■

SOME NARP STAFF HIGHLIGHTS

Invited presentations at state-sponsored intermodal transportation conferences were made last July by NARP's Ross Capon (New Orleans) and Harriet Parcels (San Francisco). The Jan. 8 *New York Times* carried Capon's letter underlining Amtrak's capital needs but correcting an overly bleak Dec. 26 news report. Two letters of his were published Dec. 6. One clarified a Nov. 25 *Washington Post* reference to Northeast Corridor safety; the other responded to a strange Nov. 22 *Barron's* attack on Amtrak.

Los Angeles Earthquake (from page 1)

Santa Barbara with full state funding, eight months earlier than planned. Southbound pm departures from Santa Barbara now are 1:45 and 5:45.

Metrolink hoped to get 15-25 coaches from GO Transit in Toronto, along with locomotives and cab cars, so Metrolink's planned Mar. 28 takeover and expansion of Orange County service will not reduce capacity on other Metrolink lines. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Amtrak

Amtrak's general timetable change will be May 1, not Apr. 3 as previously planned. NARP has asked Amtrak not to wait until Oct. to restore connections from the *Lake Shore Ltd.* to the *California Zephyr* and *Empire Builder*. Chances for action May 1 seem good.

Amtrak's first discount for one-way medium- and long-distance trips began Jan. 6 (for sale through Feb. 28 and travel through Apr. 30). Regular one-way fares \$75 and over are cut 55%; discount round-trips are double the reduced one-way fare. Not good on Auto Train, within the Northeast Corridor or in the Province of Ontario.

Provo, UT lost its Thruway bus service connecting to the *Pioneer* Jan. 4.

On Dec. 8, the Amtrak/United Airlines Air-Rail Travel Program gained 86 more cities, those served by the five airlines in the United Express feeder network.

China and linen dining car service came to the *California Zephyr* Dec. 1, and will come to the *Texas Eagle* this spring once a proper water source is arranged at Little Rock. The *City of New Orleans* is to gain full dining service (including china and linen) upon conversion to Superliner equipment, now set for Mar. 3.

The Tampa-Fort Myers Thruway bus will add Port Charlotte, FL as a stop May 1 (Texaco Rally store, King's Hwy. at I-75).

Cold Jan. weather cancelled or shortened many Northeast and Midwest trains; freeze-damaged cars out of service at once peaked at 148 on Jan. 24; cumulative total by Feb. 8 was 325. In mid Feb., the NY-Wash. *Executive Sleeper* remained out of service; other cars still were cancelled sporadically.

Transit

On Jan. 31, MARC commuter rail (Maryland) increased total weekday round-trips on the Camden and Brunswick lines from seven to nine each. The Penn line went from 21 round-trips to 19 trains south and 20 north. Morning foreign language courses are offered on one Penn and one Brunswick train. Around Mar. 1, extra-fare parlor car service will be offered on one peak-hour Brunswick round-trip and two off-peak Penn round-trips.

The Chicago CTA closed its Green Line (Lake-Jackson Park/Englewood el) Jan. 9 for two years for reconstruction.

SMOKING ON AMTRAK: BEGINNING OF THE END?

At the Jan. 26 Amtrak board meeting, Deputy DOT Sec. Mortimer Downey, noting the Clinton Administration's goal of a smoke-free environment, asked that the board review Amtrak's smoking policies. Chairman Downs promised a staff presentation as part of the board's Feb. 22-23 meetings.

The *Coast Starlight* became Amtrak's first all-no-smoking long-distance train Jan. 18. Amtrak lists seven "smoking stops" lasting 5-25 minutes (no change in schedule) where passengers may smoke on the platform.

Clinton Seeks Amtrak Increase; Amtrak, NARP Support More

Pres. Clinton's FY '95 budget puts intercity rail passenger is 12% above current levels, 13% above actual FY '93 levels and 197% above Pres. Bush's FY '93 request. Also, intercity passenger rail got prominent, favorable treatment in DOT's Strategic Plan (to get a copy, call 202/366-5571 or write DOT Office of Public Affairs; Washington, DC 20590).

NARP released a statement "praising President Clinton's reversal in policy towards intercity rail passenger service compared with pre-Clinton budgets."

Amtrak's Feb. 7 statement referenced "the first presidential budget in more than a decade that realistically addresses [Amtrak's] needs." However, Amtrak said its higher request—officially submitted Feb. 15—"will be based on an inflation rate of 4.5% for Amtrak. This rate is higher than the 3% assumed for national inflation. This higher rate for Amtrak results from several factors, including...the fiscal impact

TRANSPORTATION BUDGET REQUEST

Compared with Current Levels
Appropriations (\$ millions)

	FY '95 Clinton Request	FY '95 Amtrak Request	FY '94 Enacted	Change (Clinton '95 v. FY '94)
Administration				
Federal Highway	\$20,162		\$19,965	+ 0.9%
Nat'l Hwy. Traffic Safety	277		298	- 7.0%
Federal Aviation	8,807		8,645	+ 1.9%
Federal Transit	4,762		4,583	+ 3.9%
U.S. Coast Guard	3,743		3,602	+ 3.9%
Federal Railroad	1,197		1,023	+ 17.0%
* (Amtrak + N.E. Corridor)	988	1,195	909	+ 8.7%

*These numbers also in Federal Railroad Administration total.

Intercity Rail Passenger Categories

Amtrak: Operations	\$ 380.0	\$ 430.0	\$ 351.7	+ 8.1%
403(b)—old & new	*	8.0	*	
Capital	252.0	337.0	195.0	+ 29.2%
**Mandatory payments	156.0	150.0	137.0	+ 13.9%
Northeast Corridor Improvement Project	199.6	270.0	225.0	- 11.3%
High Speed Rail	32.5		3.5	+828.6%
TOTAL	\$1,020.1		\$ 912.2	+ 11.8%

*Included in operations line.

**Formerly paid by Amtrak and now paid directly to IRS by the Federal Railroad Administration, these are Railroad Retirement and Unemployment Insurance Taxes in excess of costs Amtrak imposes on those systems.

ANTIQUATED SHOPS A MAJOR HEADACHE



—Amtrak photos

Electrician Technician Mike Murdoch inspects an ice-coated Amtrak train outside in freezing weather in Philadelphia. Such conditions hurt on-time service and worker morale. Among cold-weather maintenance points, only Washington, DC has substantial enclosed facilities. New York's big Sunnyside Yard (below, in Queens, east of Penn Sta.) handles most Eastern long-distance and many Northeast and Empire Corridor trains, but only has two small buildings: one for "bad-order" repairs and one for dumping retention toilets; preventive and turn-around maintenance is all outdoors. Amtrak's capital budgets have not allowed a much-needed aggressive maintenance facility improvement program.



resulting from operational problems caused by floods and severe weather in 1993 and early 1994. Also, Amtrak needs to restore service quality levels that were cut back during 1992 and 1993...These [staff] restorations and others should have a positive long-term effect on revenue."

NARP's statement also supported higher operating and capital levels than Clinton requested, citing rising interest payments (an estimated \$44 mill., up from \$21.8 mill. in FY '93) due to greater-than-planned reliance on private financing of new cars and locomotives, the need to replace antiquated Heritage cars, the competitive impacts of noncompensatory airfares, and Amtrak's shares of new, partly-state-funded services in the states of Maine and Washington and partly-state-funded track work in Wisconsin, where service to Madison and Green Bay is expected in FY '96.

Clinton also seeks \$32.5 mill. for a "Next Generation High-Speed Rail Program" that includes development of an ISTEA-mandated national plan for high-speed ground transportation but no grant program for states.

Also sought is \$90 mill. for the Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment Project, contingent on commitment of state, local and private funds to cover the rest of the estimated \$315 mill. cost. This project would convert the Farley Post Office Building into an Amtrak facility (Aug. '92, Apr. '93 News, p.4).

Clinton proposes cutting the \$800 mill. federal transit operating grant to \$600 mill. He would increase total transit appropriations by \$179 mill., but Congress could not fix the damage by a simple transfer of capital to operations. Congress must meet outlay targets (Sept. '93 News). Transit capital has a first-year spendout rate of only 5% (highways 17%) vs. 60% for transit operations. Thus, appropriations cuts of \$706 mill. for highways, or \$2.4 bill. for transit capital, or cuts to other programs, would be needed to reverse the transit operations cut while achieving the same outlay savings. ■

Downs:

Consumer Age Dawns at Amtrak?

"One of my goals for the company is to provide our customers more consistent performance. We can do this by working together to build a focused, innovative, risk-taking company."

*—"A New Year's Message from our New President,"
Dec. '93 Amtrak Ties (employee newsletter)*

Over 360 passengers spent 5-1/2 hours without heat or light on Amtrak's *Crescent* in Manassas, VA, the night of Dec. 29. Amtrak's new chairman and president, Thomas M. Downs, personally decided to offer those people an Amtrak travel credit equal to the value of the trip they were on when the delay occurred, giving Amtrak another chance with some people who otherwise might never have ridden again.

Reflecting another aspect of Downs' consumer orientation, when he met with NARP Dec. 17, he already knew that only one Amtrak staffer was surveying customers and that this person spent most of 1993 on X2000 and ICE passengers.

Downs wants to survey customers annually on key issues (including train cleanliness, employee courtesy). This would more accurately measure overall trends than do counts of letters from passengers. This also would be a departure from Amtrak's history of "surveying one thing one year; something else the next year." Downs invited NARP's input in developing the surveys to "help us understand the customer."

Clearly, Downs intends to maintain the emphasis of his predecessor, W. Graham Claytor Jr., on Amtrak's need for more capital investment. Amtrak concentrated heavily on survival during the 1980's, he said, but "if you do nothing but work on surviving, you die." To illustrate Amtrak's capital needs, he cited regular derailments in the Beech Grove (IN) yards because of track problems.

He shares NARP's dismay that ISTEA, the highway/transit authorization law, generally prevents states from spending

THE LAW DOES NOT EXPIRE

Amtrak's "basic agreement" with the freight railroads expires in 1996, but the Rail Passenger Service Act does not. It entitles Amtrak to use virtually any railroad property in the U.S. and says that, when Amtrak and a railroad cannot reach agreement, "The Interstate Commerce Commission shall, in fixing just and reasonable compensation in excess of incremental costs, consider quality of service as a major factor in determining the amount (if any) of such compensation."

Incremental costs are costs that would not exist if Amtrak did not exist. Incentive payments (most of which are payments above incremental costs) are significant, equalling 29% of Amtrak's total payments to freight railroads with incentive contracts in FY 1993 (\$19 million of \$67 mill.). In that year, only Illinois Central and Grand Trunk Western failed to earn incentives in 1993—and GTW's sister, Central Vermont earned \$622,000 in incentives.

Because of the statutory compensation standard, 1996 should not see a major change in Amtrak's costs, except possibly on lines with little freight traffic.

DOWNES LIKES BIKES!

NARP's Harriet Parcels has been facilitating a dialogue between Amtrak, NARP, the League of American Wheelmen (LAW) and the Environmental Defense Fund on improving bicycle access to Amtrak. Downs' Jan. 24 letter to Parcels and the LAW's Alan Greenberg was Amtrak's most positive bicycle communication ever. From the letter:

- "[Amtrak's] Equipment Design Committee will examine the feasibility of handling unboxed bicycles on the San Joaquin service, as well as installing racks in some of our baggage cars;

- "[Amtrak's] Station Committee is developing a revised set of station standards, and bicycle parking was already included as a topic of discussion. It would certainly be appropriate to...elicit your detailed suggestions regarding bicycle parking at stations...

- "I am going to recommend we test the concept of providing sheltered parking or lockers on a concession basis to gauge the level of use and interest."

flexible highway funds on Amtrak-related projects. Downs is eager to work with Amtrak's allies to change that.

Meanwhile, he is excited about prospects under ISTEA (as it stands) to fund station repairs, on which Amtrak now spends \$2 million a year. Downs sees a potential of \$50-70 million a year under ISTEA programs; he praised NARP's effort to notify local officials of station eligibility (Dec. *News*, p. 3).

Downs "sees labor as part of the solution, not part of the problem," he began meeting with rail union leaders in January."

Downs noted that the trade press seems unaware that, while Amtrak's 25-year "basic agreement" with the railroads expires May 1, 1996, the law authorizing Amtrak to operate over the railroads—and to ask the Interstate Commerce Commission to resolve contract disputes—does not (see box).

As for Amtrak's safety image problem, "It doesn't help to see footage of Mobile every night on television," Downs said. Accidents caused by other parties—barges and heavy trucks—have been particularly frustrating. After the *Broadway Ltd.* on Dec. 21 hit a truck at a grade crossing in Gary, IN, Downs issued a statement which said in part, "Amtrak intends to pursue whatever action is necessary against those commercial transportation companies, including their management, that are not demonstrating corporate responsibility for the safety of their commercial vehicles." ■

GET AMERICA ON TRACK,...

...a new publication of NARP's Campaign for New Transportation Priorities, explains with text, photos and graphs why rail is such a sound investment for the U.S. The six-page booklet presents the economic, environmental, energy and social benefits of investments in Amtrak, rail transit and rail freight. It contains in one place a lot of the information NARP members and other advocates need to make the case for rail. *Get America on Track* is available from NARP for \$3 (\$2 each for 6 or more).
