



News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

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—Scott Leonard (both)

Christening the *Heartland Flyer* with bottles of confetti at Fort Worth are (from left) Amtrak Intercity President Lee Bullock, Amtrak Intercity Senior Director of Government and Public Affairs Debbie Hare (in door), Katie Moore, Sen. Don Nickles (R-OK), Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Neal McCaleb. Moore, age 11, of Del City, OK, won Nickles' contest to name the train, which had entries from 450 Oklahoma schoolchildren.

House Approves Amtrak Funds

The House of Representatives approved a fiscal 2000 transportation appropriations bill with Amtrak's request for \$571 million in capital. The bill also has the flexible definition of capital Amtrak sought, allowing appropriated funds to be used both for maintenance of equipment and maintenance of way.

Amtrak warned it would have a major cash problem without this definition. The definition is a response to the earlier-than-expected end last year of federal operating grants, but does not change the traditional, narrower capital definition that Amtrak will use to meet its "operational self-sufficiency test." Amtrak expects to meet that test starting in fiscal 2003.

The overall transportation bill (H.R.2084) was approved June 23 on a 429-3 vote. To deal with "fiscal hawks" led by Rep. Tom Coburn (R-OK), the House sharply cut aviation spending, with the expectation that most of it would be restored in House-Senate conference.

The Senate was expected to take up its transportation bill (S.1143) in late July. Delays are possible because of a controversial provision that would change distribution of federal (TEA-21) transit dollars, reducing funding for California and New York and increasing it for other states.

A threatened amendment by Rep. Joel Hefley (R-CO) to cut the House's Amtrak figure by \$114 million (20%) to \$457 million (25% below the 1999 level) was not brought up,

(continued on page 2)

Oklahomans Flock to New Train

The sun smiled on the Lone Star and Sooner States on June 14 as Amtrak and the Oklahoma DOT inaugurated the first passenger train service between Fort Worth, TX, and Oklahoma City since the 1979 Carter Administration service cuts. About 700 guests rode a northbound special train, greeted by about 4,300 spectators at stops along the way—Gainesville, Ardmore, Pauls Valley, Purcell, and Norman.

Oklahoma, with a lot of help from Senator Don Nickles (R), has been investing federal funds from sources like the Taxpayer Relief Act (1997) and TEA-21 (1998) made available because it had no Amtrak service. Maine is also using TRA funds for this purpose, and—once Boston-Portland service starts—only South Dakota and Wyoming will remain as states without Amtrak service in the "lower 48".

Heartland Flyer ridership has been so strong—daily average 260 the first four weeks—that NARP President Jack Martin on June 27 asked Amtrak to run a fourth coach. It started running July 15. The ridership is all the more impressive in light of the train's limitations: layovers at Fort Worth to connect with the quad-weekly (!) *Texas Eagle*, circuitous routings to most *Eagle* points (i.e., Oklahoma City to Tucson via San Antonio and to St. Louis via Fort Worth), difficult access to Dallas (a major destination for this market), and no connections to points north of Oklahoma City. NARP continues to urge Amtrak to start a Dallas Thruway bus—either from Fort Worth or Gainesville—to provide a prompt, daily connection.

Revenue service began June 15, with an F-40 locomotive, two ex-Santa Fe Hi-Level coaches refurbished by Amtrak at its Beech Grove shops, a Superliner snack-coach, and a "cabbage" car (an F-40 converted to a cab car for push-pull service). The work on the Hi-Level

cars was justly admired by many guests. The lower levels have spaces for bicycle racks (not yet in use) and vending machines for food and beverages (similar to the automat car on the Chicago-Grand Rapids *Pere Marquette*). Initially,



Sen. Nickles mixes with guests and entertainers in a lounge car on the inaugural *Heartland Flyer*.

(continued on page 2)

Return to Oklahoma

(from page 1)

Amtrak and the state agreed to limit food and beverage service to that, but added the snack-coach after criticism that vending machines wouldn't be enough for the 4 hour, 35 minute (each-way) trip.

[Downstairs, off the vestibule, the Hi-Level cars have a large restroom for disabled passengers and a large washroom for everyone else. Totally enclosed toilets for men and women open off the washroom; mixing sexes in the washroom is a first for Amtrak—customer acceptance is uncertain.]

The state and Amtrak have studied various northern connections and intend to review these routes further. Possibilities include (but are not limited to) Oklahoma City-Tulsa (via Stroud or Perry)-Kansas City; Oklahoma City-Perry-Wichita-Newton-Kansas City (and perhaps Chicago).

Stations—The Santa Fe Depot in Oklahoma City was like a darkened mausoleum (but with bunting) on opening day, but ongoing platform, canopy, and interior work were evident. In Norman, a community group began restoration in 1988 and a plaque proclaiming the station's listing on the National Register of Historic Places was installed on June 14. Purcell's station is gone, but there is a wooden platform now and plans for a shelter. Pauls Valley was within a day of being razed in 1993, but local preservationists saved it. The Burlington Northern Santa Fe donated the Ardmore station to the Ardmore

Main Street Authority, which has restoration plans.

Exterior work at Gainesville, TX, is done, but another year of interior work lies ahead. It will be an intermodal station with Greyhound and possible shuttles to a large outlet mall nearby. Meanwhile, there will be a temporary building. The 100-year-old Fort Worth Santa Fe/Union Depot may be replaced. The local transit agency plans a new intermodal terminal several blocks to the northwest. There are many remaining questions, and NARP is urging all parties (including Amtrak) to be sure the new facility can handle current and future intercity passenger needs efficiently before any thought is given to vacating Union Depot. ■

The platform at Oklahoma City is jammed with locals, visitors, and a brass band, greeting the first Amtrak service there in 20 years. A welcome ceremony followed.



Amtrak Funding

(from page 1)

apparently because a whip count indicated it would fail badly.

Hefley sent a "Dear Colleague" letter to all representatives. It was silent on the merits of maintaining or terminating rail passenger service, and focussed on Amtrak's funding needs. Hefley lamented that the DOT Inspector General (Jan. *News*) found that Amtrak would need "roughly \$2 billion over the next three fiscal years" beyond Taxpayer Relief Act funding "just to have a decent chance at operating self-sufficiency."

High Speed Rail: The House approved \$22 million for the Federal Railroad Administration's Next Generation high speed rail technology program. This compares roughly with the Senate committee's \$20.5 million and \$20 million enacted for 1999.

Both bills have \$4 million for grade crossing and innovative technologies and \$1.2 million for track and structures. In addition, the big TEA-21 law includes \$5.25 million a year for grade crossing work in designated high-speed-corridors-to-be. The Senate bill earmarks part of the \$5.25 million for New Orleans-Mobile, the Wisconsin portion of the Chicago-Twin Cities corridor, and the Stampede Pass (freight-only) rail corridor near Yakima, WA (\$1 million each).

The House bill has \$6.8 million (Senate, \$8 million) for a demonstration turbine high-speed locomotive (Dec. '98 *News*). This Acela-like locomotive will tour the nation's prospective high-speed corridors next summer.

The major likely "high-speed" disagreement for a House-Senate conference is over advanced train control systems. The House has \$10 million for that—\$7 million for Illinois (Chicago-St. Louis) and \$3 million for Michigan (Chicago-Detroit), as the Administration requested. But the Senate bill so far provides just \$7.3 million, with earmarks for the Alaska Railroad (\$5 million) and a joint CSX/Norfolk Southern project (\$0.5 million), but not for Illinois and Michigan. ■



—Scott Leonard (both)

Above are but a small fraction of the total turnout at Gainesville, TX. Hundreds turned out at each stop to greet the new train.

S.1144 UPDATE

There are now 14 Senators' names on S.1144, the Voinovich-Chafee bill that would let states spend TEA-21 funds on intercity passenger rail. These Senators have signed on since our May report: Max Cleland (D-GA), Richard J. Durbin (D-IL), Joseph I. Lieberman (D-CT), Frank H. Murkowski (R-AK), Charles S. Robb (D-VA), Olympia J. Snowe (R-ME). [Harry Reid, D-NV, withdrew.] Expressions of appreciation are in order for these Senators, and pleas to "sign-up" should go to their colleagues.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors passed a resolution in support of S.1144 at New Orleans on June 15.

Around the States

Illinois

Governor George Ryan's "Illinois FIRST" bill was enacted in June, creating a \$12 billion infrastructure bond program. The Illinois Commerce Commission gets \$150 million for grade-crossing improvements. Illinois DOT gets \$250 million for rail: \$150 million more for grade crossings and \$100 million for "preparing existing rail lines for the advent of high-speed passenger rail and freight rail service" (May 4 release from Ryan's office), including (preliminary estimates):

- \$70 million for Chicago-St. Louis high-speed rail. This includes much work on a 123-mile segment running north from Springfield to north of Dwight—\$20 million (to match rail industry funds) for the positive train control project, \$30 million for track and infrastructure improvements and \$20 million (which Amtrak may match) for four sets of equipment.

- \$15 million for other corridors, including about \$11 million for cab signals for Amtrak trains between Aurora and Galesburg, allowing 90 mph running and cutting 20 minutes from schedules, and \$1.5 million for other items on the Milwaukee and Carbondale lines.

- \$5 million for station improvements statewide.

- \$10 million for the freight program.

September release of a draft environmental impact statement on Chicago-St. Louis rail improvements is likely, with September-October public hearings. A strong, positive response is vital! If all goes well, trains in four years will run 110 mph on that Springfield-north segment, speeding Chicago-St. Louis runs by 30 minutes. But north of Dwight, the state may want trains to go via Kankakee and Peotone (to serve a controversial, state-proposed, Peotone airport), adding 40 miles to the route. (Also in Illinois FIRST: \$4.1 billion for transit, \$3.7 billion for highways, \$160 million for airports.)

Michigan

This month, Amtrak should begin revenue service over 20 miles of the Kalamazoo-New Buffalo segment with the experimental positive train control system activated (still at 79 mph; more in Sept. '96 *News*). The other 55 miles will be cut in during the rest of the year. In January 2000, revenue speeds should reach 90 mph, with Amtrak and Federal Railroad Administration testing continuing. By the end of 2000, tests are to be complete and revenue speeds will rise to 110 mph.

Nebraska

The legislature passed on May 20 and the governor signed on June 1 a bill to create a Nebraska Transit and Rail Advisory Council. It will work with the state Department of Roads to produce a study by 2002 on the feasibility of a passenger rail system in Nebraska. While the bill allows for funding from federal and private sources, it allocates no state funds, an issue that may be revisited in a future legislative session.

Vermont

Governor Howard Dean announced on June 23 that in early August, daily passenger train service would begin between Burlington (Union Station) and Rutland, connecting there with Amtrak's *Ethan Allen Express*. It will use equipment that has been sitting idle because proposed Burlington-Charlotte commuter service has been delayed (it should start next year). The train will be operated by the Vermont Railway, which already leases the tracks from the state for freight operations.

It will travel at about 30 or 40 mph, so the 70-mile trip will take 2-1/2 hours. However, officials note that it still will be faster for Burlington passengers headed for New York than taking Amtrak's *Vermont* from nearby Essex Junction.

Washington

Governor Locke on May 27 signed into law a two-year budget for 1999-2001 (starting July 1) with \$126 million for the state Rail Office (up from \$55 million in 1997-99). Of that, \$18.3 million is to continue the *Cascades* (two Seattle-Portland, one Seattle-Vancouver). Another \$6.3 million in operating money is for a second Seattle-Vancouver train (plus \$4.2 million for infrastructure improvements to go with \$26 million already coming from Amtrak and BNSF), to start running by the end of the year. Up to \$55.4 million is provided toward mainline track and safety projects. The King Street Station (Seattle) restoration project gets \$9.4 million, with some work starting this summer. The antiquated Amtrak coach yard in Seattle gets \$15 million toward a \$50 million repair project. Six more Talgo coaches will be bought for \$3 million. ■

AMTRAK REFORM COUNCIL FUNDING

Before passing its big transportation funding bill (H.R.2084, lead story), the House approved 289-141 an amendment by Robert E. Andrews (D-NJ) cutting funding for the Amtrak Reform Council (ARC) by \$300,000, from \$750,000 to \$450,000.

House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Bud Shuster (R-PA) and Frank R. Wolf (R-VA), chairman of the transportation appropriations subcommittee, opposed the Andrews amendment. The *Washington Letter on Transportation* said, "Andrews' real concern was that the council will jump into Amtrak labor issues...Andrews described his cutback as a 'compromise between those of us who believe that maybe there is no role at all for the Amtrak Reform Council and those who would wish to see it do more.'"

The Senate committee approved \$950,000, but put a \$200,000 limit on what the Council could pay to consultants. The administration had requested \$750,000. The Council itself had requested \$1.3 million and wanted to spend up to \$500,000 on consultants.

Starting in October, 2000, the Council has the power to find that Amtrak is unlikely to be operationally self-sufficient by the end of fiscal 2002. This finding would trigger a requirement that Amtrak draft a liquidation plan, and the ARC an Amtrak restructuring plan, after which Congress would choose between the two.

GOVERNOR VENTURA—"I LIKE TRAINS"

"Walking down a long corridor at the state DOT building shortly after he took office, Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura [Ref.] saw on the walls endless photos of highways. He turned to his transportation chief and said, 'I don't see any pictures of trains. I like trains.' Since then, some train pictures have appeared on those walls."

—Constance Beaumont, National Trust for Historic Preservation, in July 8 talk

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Broken Connection—Amtrak no longer honors same-day Washington connections from the eastbound *Capitol* to the southbound *Silver Star* because of the delays outlined below. Many passengers have been bussed from Pittsburgh to make this connection. Instead, passengers for Richmond will use NortheastDirect; for Rocky Mount and Savannah (and south) will use the *Silver Meteor*. Passengers already ticketed for other Carolinas points are offered use of the *Silver Meteor* and alternate transportation to the final destination; new reservations will be for the next day's *Silver Star* (for Raleigh, next-day *Carolinian*). Amtrak says it will work to restore the connection for the fall timetable.

Chicago-East Coast Delays—Conrail was divided June 1 between CSX and Norfolk Southern (NS). Since then, serious delays have beset Amtrak's *Lake Shore Limited* (Chicago-New York/Boston), *Pennsylvanian* (Chicago-Philadelphia), *Capitol Limited* (Chicago-Washington). They use the Chicago-Cleveland line (now CSX); the last two also share the Cleveland-Pittsburgh line (now NS). Delays of two and three hours are common due to freight-train congestion. The *Three Rivers* and *Cardinal* have largely avoided these problems.

Hold Limits—After July 12, Amtrak passengers booking 6-29 days before departure have three days to pay for them (4-5 days before, two days to pay; 2-3 days, one day; over 30 days, still seven days). Amtrak says it wants to reduce "no-shows." NARP expressed concern about the impact on those who live far from staffed stations and on college students.

New Concierge Service—On June 15, a special desk

at Amtrak's Philadelphia reservations center began making hotel, rental car, and limousine arrangements. This service initially is offered only to those booking Metroliner reservations (both First and Business class), but it also is available to other passengers who request it. Besides providing "one-stop shopping" to passengers, this lets Amtrak earn commissions.

Business Class—The Amtrak/VIA New York-Toronto *Maple Leaf* now has cafe tables and Business Class (not in May 16 timetable). The wider (2-1) seats make this a cut above other Business Class services.

Auto Train—September 13-16 northbound, September 14-17 southbound departures will not run due to extensive track work at the north (Lorton, VA) terminal. This work, when completed, will improve reliability and capacity on the Washington-Richmond line by eliminating the need for Auto Train to park for about 20 minutes each afternoon on one of the main tracks.

Stations—The first *Southwest Chief* stops at Williams Jct., AZ, will be August 2.

Checked baggage—Amtrak restored this service July 1 at Montreal Central Station, for the *Adirondack* only, and only inbound. To satisfy customs needs, passengers must be on same train as bags, and bags must be checked unlocked. Outbound service will begin as soon as VIA Rail station personnel are trained.

Thruways—The Indianapolis-Peoria bus was re-extended to Galesburg, Moline, and Davenport in June, after being cut back to Peoria May 1.

A Thruway van started July 1, linking Eugene with Florence, Reedsport, and Coos Bay; and with Bend, OR (same-day connection from Bend to *Coast Starlight*).

ANNIVERSARIES FOR TWO GREAT TRAINS

The 50th anniversary of the first *California Zephyr* was March 20. Though this train gave birth to the dome car, no train by this name operated from 1970 until Amtrak restored the name in 1983.

The 70th anniversary of the *Empire Builder* was June 11. It and the *Sunset Limited* are the only two Amtrak trains running over most their original routes without interruption. Amtrak product lines observed both events.



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