



McCain to Call Hearings on Amtrak

With John McCain (R.-Ariz.) poised to return as chairman of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, Capitol Hill criticism of Amtrak is likely to become even more visible than in the recent past.

A November 21 statement by McCain said that the Committee, when Congress returns, would "hold hearings on the future of intercity rail passenger service, including comprehensive reform of Amtrak, the introduction of competition for the intercity rail market, the extent and nature of the passenger network, state involvement, and long-term funding options."

Insight into McCain's vision for Amtrak can be seen in his authorization bill S.1958, introduced early in 2002. It would have killed nearly all passenger rail service in the U.S. by requiring trains to have their operating losses covered by a state, or not run at all. It would have required privatization of all service within four years.

The only purely positive feature of the bill was to allow states to spend federal surface transportation funds on passenger rail—something the Senate approved in 1991, 1995, and 1997, but which House leaders killed every time.

It is true that McCain has had kind words regarding the frank and open management style of Amtrak President David

L. Gunn. McCain said in a November 14 floor statement, "I'm pleased with some actions taken by the new regime at Amtrak." He said Gunn "is doing a much better job at making tough decisions".

McCain reiterated his support for a \$1.8-billion safety/security Amtrak package (S.1550), which he and Sen. Joseph Biden (D.-Del.) agreed on last year (Oct. '01 News). He said failure to pass that package was due to holds put on S.1550.

McCain also said he opposed S.1991

(the Hollings Amtrak reauthorization, which included security money from S.1550) "because it authorizes as much as \$4 billion annually." He said, "Subsidization forever of Amtrak is nothing that this senator will ever support."

A December 8 Gannett story by Ledyard King said, "McCain said he wants to eliminate federal subsidies of Amtrak, especially for long-distance lines, and has proposed privatizing

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Wheels of Progress

Here is our annual list of major rail passenger improvements planned to enter service and the dates of planned openings (if available). Dates and projects subject to change. NARP News regularly reports actual start-up dates.

2003

• **Jan. 4**—Renovation of Norman, Okla., station (July '02 News).

• **Jan. 6**—An additional Capitol Corridor weekday round-trip runs Sacramento-Oakland-San Jose, bringing total weekday Sacramento-Oakland round-trips to 11. The new southbound train allows better San Jose arrival (7:45 am). Since

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—Booz Allen Hamilton

The first South New Jersey Light Rail Transit vehicle is unloaded from a Russian cargo plane in New Jersey in August 2002. The non-electric vehicle began limited testing in Camden, N.J., later in the fall.

The service will open in mid-2003, Trenton (Amtrak station)-Camden (downtown), connect with PATCO, 34 mi.

Fiscal 2003 Funding Level Still Not Finalized

The final continuing resolution (CR) passed by the 107th Congress extended funding—including Amtrak at an annual rate of \$1.04 billion—through January 11. The new Congress likely will approve a sixth CR, good through January 21. What comes after that is less certain.

In a December 16 letter to appropriations leaders, Amtrak President David L. Gunn reasserted that \$762 million, as approved by the House Appropriations Committee, "would guarantee insolvency by spring and the shutting down of the railroad at that time. As I have advised my Board, which includes the Secretary

of Transportation, there are no easy options to any of us if the funding level falls below \$1.2 billion," the level Amtrak had requested before Gunn arrived.

Gunn noted that he "had to cut or defer nearly \$200 million in activities and projects critical to this railroad just to get to the \$1.2 billion."

He also emphasized that \$1.2 billion "is in reality a small increase of the money made available to Amtrak in FY02. Including \$310 million in supplemental funding, Amtrak received a total funding of \$1.144 billion in FY02." He said "eliminating trains...will not generate any

savings in the near term" and would "likely be an additional cost burden..."

To comply with President Bush's insistence on keeping spending in line with his budget request, Senate appropriators would need to cut total domestic spending \$15 billion from what they previously voted. The Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$1.2 billion for Amtrak.

The most dangerous outcome would be a final CR good through 2003 that offers "flexibility" to cut controversial items. If Amtrak is considered "controversial," that could trigger a replay of last June's shutdown crisis. ■

Wheels of Progress (from page 1)

only four weekday trains can run Oakland-San Jose until track work is completed (see below), train 525 will be cut back to Oakland (with bus connection).

- **Feb.**—BART extension Colma-Millbrae (connect with Caltrain), with spur to San Francisco airport (8.7 mi.).

- **Early**—Rebuilt station, Lafayette, La.

- **Early**—Waterfront Red Car historic streetcar at San Pedro (Port of Los Angeles), 1.5 mi.

- **Apr.**—Phase 1 of the Richmond (Va.) Main St. Station intermodal terminal project. Acela Regional trains to and from Newport News begin calling there (they pass by now without stopping), in addition to Richmond Staples Mill.

- **Early**—Tenth weekday Boston-New York Acela Express frequency

- **Spring**—Additional Capitol Corridor service Sacramento-Roseville-Auburn (pending railroad approval).



—Scott Leonard, 2001 photo

The Hamlet, N.C., station was to be moved back from the tracks late in 2002, and will reopen in early 2004.

- **Spring**—Miami Metrorail extension, Okeechobee-Palmetto Expressway.

- **Spring**—Rebuilt station, High Point, N.C.

- **Spring**—Renovation of Jackson, Miss., station, with intermodal facilities and restaurant.

- **May**—Service begins at new link between Anchorage airport and Alaska Railroad (work completed in December 2002). Summer-season cruise-ship passengers can use rail as a link between the port of Seward and the airport.

- **June**—PATH reopens its Exchange Place station in Jersey City, closed since September 2001 terror attacks.

- **Summer**—Tourist railroad operating from Brunswick to Rockland, Me., on track rebuilt with state funding. It will one day connect with *Downeasters*.

- **Mid**—New Jersey Transit (NJT)

South Jersey diesel light-rail (p. 1 photo).

- **Mid**—Amtrak *Cascades* begin stopping at Oregon City, Ore.

- **Mid**—St. Louis MetroLink light rail extension, Belleville Area College to Shiloh-Scott (3.5 mi.).

- **Mid**—Los Angeles MTA light rail Gold Line, Union Station-Pasadena, 13.7 mi. Formerly designated the Blue Line, the name was changed as there are no longer plans to link it with the “other” Blue Line from downtown Los Angeles to Long Beach (opened in 1990/91).

- **Mid**—Completion of passenger facilities in historic Engine House at Burlington, N.C. (across tracks from current, interim facility opened in 1999).

- **Mid**—Amtrak stop at Kannapolis, N.C., is moved to a different location, with new platform and temporary waiting room. A new station opens in late 2004.

- **July**—Charlotte heritage trolley is extended, will be run by Charlotte Area Transit System, South End-Convention Center-Uptown (9th St.), 1.4 mi.

- **Sept.**—Sacramento RTD South light-rail line, Downtown-Meadowview Rd.

- **Sept.**—New rail station at Tacoma, Wash. (Tacoma Dome; serving Amtrak, commuter rail, Greyhound, airport buses); also new Tacoma Link light rail, downtown-Tacoma Dome (1.6 mi.).

- **Sept.**—San Juan Tren Urbano light metro (10.7 mi.). However, due to slow work, the DOT Inspector General expects this date to slip even further.

- **Sept.**—NJT Secaucus Transfer station opens (limited service), allowing connections between NJT’s Hoboken lines and NJT’s Northeast Corridor services. Station was ready in 2002, but its opening delayed while PATH’s Lower Manhattan station is closed (which caused crowding on NJT’s Northeast Corridor trains). PATH’s reopening in Dec. 2003 should lead to more service at Secaucus.

- **Fall**—New intermodal (Amtrak and Greyhound) station in Salt Lake City, near temporary site Amtrak has occupied since 1999. The site is expected to have commuter-rail service by 2007.

- **Fall**—Renovation of ex-Southern Pacific station in Stockton, Cal., to be used by Altamont Commuter Express and Amtrak’s Sacramento San Joaquins.

- **Fall**—Saratoga Springs, N.Y., new station.

- **Oct.**—New Orleans Canal streetcar line, abandoned in 1964, is restored from downtown to Cemeteries, connecting to

Patricia V. Robbins

Ex-NARP director Patricia V. (“Pat”) Robbins, of Madison, Wis., died November 1, at age 81. She represented Region 9 from 1987 to 1996, when her health caused her to cut back on travel.

Nevertheless, Robbins remained active in the passenger-rail cause. She was a founding member of the Madison chapter of the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers, ProRail, in 1985. She served in a variety of leadership roles in ProRail and WisARP over the years, and was the long-time editor of ProRail’s newsletter, “Keeping Track.”

Robbins was born in Cleveland and educated at Randolph-Macon Woman’s College in Lynchburg, Va. (B.A.), and at Ohio State University in Columbus (Masters). She came to Madison in 1948 to work for the state Legislative Reference Bureau. She retired from there in 1987 having achieved a senior position, editing Wisconsin’s official, annual, statistical index, the Blue Book.

Robbins’ main two passions were retention and expansion of nationwide passenger-rail service, and the return of service to Madison. While it is a matter of deep regret that those goals were not assured in her lifetime, both remain, at times, tantalizingly within reach. When they do happen, it will be in great measure due to people like Pat Robbins. ■

existing Riverfront and St. Charles lines.

- **Nov.**—New intermodal terminal at Pittsfield, Mass.

- **Dec.**—Sounder commuter rail trains extended from Tacoma to Lakewood, Wash. (9 mi.). Also, the first Seattle-Everett round trip starts (33 mi.).

- **Dec.**—PATH opens a temporary station in Lower Manhattan, replacing World Trade Center station destroyed in 2001.

- **Dec.**—New Orleans Canal streetcar spur along N. Carrollton Ave. to Beauregard Circle.

- **Late**—Completion of capacity improvements allows at least three more San Jose-Oakland Capitol Corridor frequencies (bringing the total to at least seven daily on that segment).

- **Late**—Completion of double track on Yolo Causeway, west of Sacramento (4.5 mi.), closing last single-track stretch from Sacramento to Oakland.

- **Late**—New Oakland Coliseum

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Wheels of Progress *(from page 2)*

Amtrak station, direct connection to BART; shuttle to Oakland airport.

- **Late**—Pittsburgh Port Authority Transit completes Stage II Light Rail Transit Reconstruction Program. This includes rebuilding segments of Overbrook streetcar line closed in the 1990's.

- **Late**—NJT Hudson-Bergen light rail extension in Bayonne, 34th St.-22nd St.

- **Late**—Amtrak's Chicago-St. Louis trains run up to 110 mph, Springfield-Dwight, Ill., on track improved with Illinois funds and new signal system (a state-federal-Amtrak project).

- **Late**—Los Angeles-Las Vegas train service, operated by Amtrak and Nevada DOT (service still being evaluated, contingent on the general funding situation).

- **Sometime**—New York, Susquehanna & Western will run a daily, rail-diesel-car round-trip, Binghamton-Syracuse (Carousel Mall), following \$3 million in state-funded track work, top speed 45 mph. Extension of this service to the intermodal station depends on construction of a new overpass.

- **Sometime**—Port Authority AirTrain light-rail line was to open in 2002, Kennedy Airport-Howard Beach (connect with A subway) in Queens, N.Y., 3.3 mi. However, after a fatal accident involving a test operator in 2002, the Port Authority said it was postponed "indefinitely." The Kennedy Airport-Jamaica segment (connect with Long Island Rail Road and three more subway lines) in Queens (3.1 mi.) was to open after Howard Beach.

2004

- **Early**—Houston Main St. light rail, downtown-Astrodome (7.4 mi)

- **Early**—Hamlet, N.C., station renovation (see photo, p. 2).

- **Early**—Renovation of station at San Bernardino, Cal.

- **Early**—Amtrak moves into historic, downtown Greensboro, N.C., station. Local transit moves there in mid-2003.

- **Early**—Sacramento RTD light-rail extension, Mather Field-Sunrise (2.8 mi.).

- **Mar.**—Memphis Trolley branch Madison/Main-Madison/Cleveland (2 mi.); main line shut down two months starting early Jan. 2003 to allow junction of new line to be built at Madison/Main.

- **Apr. 3**—Hiawatha Light Rail first segment, Warehouse District (downtown Minneapolis)-Fort Snelling.

- **Mid**—Caltrain completes its "CTX"

construction (begun July 2002), restoring weekend service and allowing for San Jose-San Francisco express service.

- **Summer**—New Keystone line station at Paradise, Pa.; connects with Strasburg Railroad.

- **Summer**—Santa Clara VTA Tasman East light-rail line, I-880/Milpitas-Alum Rock Ave. (East San Jose), 6.4 mi.

- **Summer**—River Rail heritage trolley, Little Rock-North Little Rock, 2.1 mi.

- **Sept.**—Portland MAX light rail, Rose Quarter-Expo Center (5.6 mi.); run as new Interstate line from downtown.

- **Nov.**—Santa Clara VTA Vasona light-rail line, downtown San Jose-Amtrak/com-muter station-Campbell (4.8 mi).

- **Dec.**—Hiawatha Light Rail extension Fort Snelling-airport-Mall of America (11.6 mi. from downtown Minneapolis).

- **Late**—New Oakland Maintenance Facility, serving San Joaquins, Capitol Corridor, and *California Zephyr*.

- **Late**—Washington Metro Blue Line extension Addison Rd.-Largo Town Center (Md., 3.1 mi.).

- **Late**—Salt Lake City TRAX University (East-West) Line extension, Rice-Eccles to University of Utah Health

DALLAS AHEAD IN TRANSIT

"In Dallas...transit officials celebrated the addition of three light-rail stations in suburban Plano and Richardson. The expansion, finished under budget and six months ahead of schedule, brings Dallas' light-rail system to 34 stations, 44 miles and 60,000 passenger trips daily.

"Houstonians will have to wait more than a year to get the first, 7-mile segment of zero-pollution light rail, a project needlessly delayed by frivolous litigation. Next November, before the first light-rail passenger in Houston embarks, [Houston's] Metro is expected to hold a referendum on a transit plan yet to be drawn."

Those who doubt the merits of light rail and still think Houston would be better off without it owe it to themselves and fellow citizens to visit Dallas and experience firsthand its hugely popular light-rail system."

—Editorial, "Trailing transit," Houston Chronicle, December 15

Sciences Center. (1.5 mi.).

- **Sometime**—Salt Lake City TRAX light-rail branch, Delta Center to intermodal station, 4 blocks.

- **Sometime**—SEPTA restores Philadelphia's 15/Girard line with PCC streetcars (8.2 mi.); last regular service was in 1992.

- **Sometime**—NJT light rail extension, Hoboken-Weehawken.

- **Sometime**—New station on Keystone line at airport at Harrisburg, Pa.

- **Sometime**—Trestle at Back Cove, Portland, Me., which will allow for future, northward extension of Boston-Portland Downeaster service.

- **Sometime**—San Francisco Muni E historic streetcar line Caltrain-Embarcadero-Fishermans's Wharf (along parts of existing F and N lines). ■

FEDERAL POLICY DISCONNECT

"Some opposition to Amtrak has softened since 9/11 and the threatened bankruptcy of some major airlines, most notably United. Add to that the increasing gridlock of the nation's highways, and critics are beginning to have second thoughts. After all, Amtrak isn't the only mode of transport at the public trough.

"Allan Sloan of Newsweek magazine reported that in October, when Amtrak was asking Congress for \$400 million extra in aid, the airlines, which got \$5 billion in post-9/11 damages, were back asking Uncle Sam for yet another handout. 'Amtrak is rebuked for not breaking even, while the airlines, which were in big trouble before 9/11, get treated with respect. Why the disconnect?' Sloan asked."

—Editorial, Indianapolis Star, December 18, 2002

"We believe Amtrak continues to play a vital role in meeting the nation's transportation needs, and it's a system that should receive government support just as air service does. But year-to-year bailouts need to be replaced with a long-term plan for sensible and dependable passenger rail service."

—Editorial, Huntington (W.Va.) Herald-Dispatch, December 17, 2002

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Pennsylvanian—Amtrak will convert the train to a New York-Pittsburgh service, January 26. That's what it was before 1998, when Amtrak made it a Philadelphia-Chicago train tailored to express needs, but on a passenger-unfriendly schedule. Both end points were served at bad times, and New York not at all.

Stations—Amtrak's new waiting and ticketing area opened in Kansas City Union Station, December 10 (dedication December 17). Amtrak vacated Union Station 20 years ago due to rising costs and deterioration.

However, though passengers will enjoy a location off the building's majestic Grand Hall, there is also a longer walk to the platform on a new, elevated, unenclosed walkway.

Amtrak will close ticket offices on January 5 at three Michigan stations—East Lansing, Flint, Port Huron—all served by the *International*.

Discounts—For all modes, travel

demand continues to be weak, so Amtrak is continuing to offer discounts on base rail fares.

There is a winter 25% discount (code H259), and a two-for-one offer (code H255). Both have the same conditions—book January 7-February 15; travel January 10-August 28 (with blackouts); book at least three days before travel; fares non-refundable; not good on some trains (e.g., Acela Express, Metroliner, *Downeaster*).

On-line sales—Amtrak began selling discounted rail tickets on the eBay auction web site in November, in a three-month trial. Opening bid prices are up to 95% off full fares. Winning bidders will be contacted by Amtrak to finalize itineraries and payment. See <<http://www.stores.ebay.com/amtrakauctions>>.

Downeaster—Plans to make it easier to book trips between the *Downeaster* and the rest of the Amtrak system was not put in place (Dec. News), but it may happen in January.

VIA RAIL CANADA'S REVIVAL

The cover story of the August 26, 2002, *Maclean's* (Canadian magazine) said, "Canadian train travel is back on track."

"Transport Minister David Collette...takes special satisfaction in the way the cabinet job he has held since 1997 has let him become the biggest booster passenger rail has had in Ottawa in a long time. In spring

2000, Collette persuaded [Prime Minister] Jean Chretien and the rest of the cabinet to let him inject \$400 million over five years into VIA Rail Canada's capital spending.

"By the end of [2003], VIA expects to have 139 plush new passenger cars in service to go with its 21 new locomotives...but all this will seem like small stuff if Collette can persuade cabinet to embrace—and fund—his vision of faster trains."

McCain

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passenger rail service.

"But he admits overhauling Amtrak won't be easy. 'Look, I'm not making any promises just because I'm the chairman of the committee...I understand what the entrenched interests are that we fight. But we never give up the fight.'"

The Gannett article also quoted John Warner (R.-Va.) as critical of the national network trains. The story portrayed Kay Bailey Hutchison (R.-Tex.) as supportive of such trains. ■

NARP MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Region 5 (Ala., Fla., Ga., Ky., La., Miss., N.C., P.R., S.C., Tenn., V.I.); Fri., Mar. 28-Sun., Mar. 30; Fayetteville, N.C.; Radisson Prince Charles Hotel (adjacent to Amtrak station); contact: Don Stewart, 312 Murray Hill Rd., Fayetteville, NC 28303 (send long SASE for brochure), <www.trainweb.org/capt/>.

TIGHTER DINING CAR CONTROLS

In many ways, Amtrak under David Gunn is tightening financial controls. One aspect is the now-consistent, dining-car requirement that sleeping-car passengers sign their names and room numbers.

Meals are included in the sleeping-car charge, but not in coach fares. Reinstitution of the signature process—and an audit (comparing dining car checks with passenger manifests)—aims to determine more accurately food/beverage revenues and costs and to help eliminate abuse.



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