



Amtrak Seeks \$1.8 Billion

Senators Support Passenger Rail; Lott Plans Action

An Amtrak reauthorization bill is “one of my top priorities, [but] only if [it is] legislation that truly improves the situation...I intend to develop a bill that is bipartisan... We’re going to have something ready to go to the floor this summer.” Thus spoke Chairman Trent Lott (R-MS) of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee’s Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine.

Amtrak has operated without an authorization since late 2002.

Lott’s April 21 Amtrak hearing showed broad support for nationwide passenger rail. He told DOT General Counsel Jeffrey Rosen, “I was stunned and disappointed that [DOT’s Amtrak plan] was sent up. I don’t think the administration is stepping up adequately [on] transportation needs in general...If we’re going to

have a national rail passenger service, we need to know how to pay for it.” Lott said he expected DOT to help figure that out.

Byron Dorgan (D-ND) told Rosen, “Zero funding is not a call to anything. Zero funding means you want to shut it down.”

He cited Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta’s reference—in Detroit, March 24—to the *Empire Builder* handling 53 passengers a day in Montana when the correct number was 353. Dorgan

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NARP’s Letter to Secretary Mineta (Page 4); NARP statement to the House Appropriations subcommittee (Page 3).

Board Supports Nationwide System

The Amtrak Board of Directors—now all appointed by President Bush—unveiled its budget request April 21, at a Senate hearing (story at left). Amtrak Chairman David Laney said “the shaping isn’t over. Our plan basically represents an outline. There will be an implementation plan later this year. We welcome your input.”

Here are key elements of the plan:

- \$1.82 billion federal grant for fiscal year 2006;

- “National Long Distance Operations” would continue to be federally funded, albeit declining from \$537 million in fiscal year 2006 (including \$117 million in capital) to a projected \$450 million in FY 2011 (including \$50 million in capital).

- Amtrak will establish “performance metrics” for the long-distance trains, and—starting in fiscal 2008—“initiate managed route terminations for routes that fall short of performance thresholds, and for which states fail to provide funding.”

- States gradually assume 100% responsibility for corridor operating grant requirements, including overhead costs now fully borne by Amtrak, with transition complete by fiscal 2011. (Overhead includes shared functions “such as finance, human resources, government and public affairs, planning, environmental, and portions of procurement and legal.”);

- Federal government “enacts a federal capital match [for states] comparable to other modes (80%-20%) that becomes effective no later than FY08 in order for this operating transition [previous paragraph] to be effective; it is likely that Amtrak will have to reevaluate its transition policy in the event that there is not a federal capital match program in effect by FY08.”

- Federal government pays to “bring

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Blumenauer Honored with Golden Spike Award



—David R. Johnson

Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-OR) received The George Falcon Golden Spike Award at NARP’s annual Washington reception on April 21. Blumenauer was honored for his strong support of Amtrak in Congress, and for working “tirelessly throughout his career in support of light rail and pedestrian-friendly land use planning.” He was elected to the Oregon House in 1972 at age 23; to the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners in 1978, the Portland City Council in 1986, and Congress in May, 1996. In accepting the award, he said, “We need a comprehensive, coast-to-coast rail service in this country. We just passed an energy bill that’s written for the 1950’s and there is no real plan to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels.”

Pro-Amtrak Bill Passes House Committee

House Transportation & Infrastructure Chairman Don Young (R-AK), Ranking Member James Oberstar (D-MN), Railroads Subcommittee Chairman Steve LaTourette (R-OH), and Ranking Member Corinne Brown (D-FL) introduced an Amtrak reauthorization bill, H.R. 1630, and a high speed rail bill, RIDE 21 (H.R. 1631). They are identical to the bills introduced in 2003 by the same group (except Jack Quinn, R-NY, then subcommittee chair, instead of LaTourette).

H.R. 1630 is a "clean" Amtrak reauthorization without the controversial state contribution and labor clauses of the Amtrak and Administration plans.

Young said, "Although serious disagreements still exist about Amtrak's long-term management strategy and structure, there is a common understanding of the need for near-term funding...The legislation also contains funding accountability procedures closely modeled on those already in effect under the current appropriations laws."

For his part, Oberstar said, "I think very little is understood about the enormous progress Amtrak has made in the past year to improve the quality of the track, the rail bed, its rolling stock and to upgrade its operations. In David Gunn, Amtrak has a true railroader...He is arguably the best person we've had [as President] since Amtrak was created in 1970."

Before the Amtrak reauthorization was passed out of committee on a unanimous voice vote, Rep. Mark Kennedy (R-MN) attempted to introduce an amendment that would have required Amtrak to print the cost of the per-passenger subsidy on each ticket issued. Kennedy withdrew the amendment under pressure from fellow Republicans.

The bill now awaits full House action. The original co-sponsors are looking for more representatives to become sponsors.

\$1.8 Billion

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Northeast Corridor [NEC] up to a state of good repair." By fiscal 2011, commuter railroads using the NEC would pay "their full proportionate share of operating access and annual 'life cycle replacement' capital costs necessary to maintain a reliable infrastructure on an ongoing basis."

- Continued Amtrak ownership of the NEC. Thorough study convinced the board that "cost, complexity and risk simply outweighs the benefits" of the ownership transfer DOT had recommended. Many of the benefits would be achieved anyway through Amtrak's plan to provide financial reports around five business lines—infrastructure management; operations (NEC; state corridor; national long distance) and ancillary businesses.

- "Amtrak is undertaking a series of customer service, outsourcing, and work rule initiatives" aimed at lowering operating grant needs. This includes "eliminating food service on short distance trains" and "modifying and curtailing food service options on all trains"—an apparent emphasis on cutting food service over improving its cost-effectiveness.

- Transition Amtrak to become one of many competing carriers—a conflict with the freight railroads' policy that Amtrak should be the sole intercity passenger operator (March News, front page).

Labor, Tort Reform

Amtrak advocates big statutory changes for intercity passenger rail employees and passengers. First, "transition out of...Railroad Retirement...by allowing all new...employees to be placed in Social Security, with the possible added option of 401(k) retirement plans."

Second, "allow contracts to terminate at expiration." Currently, under the Railway Labor Act, a contract stays in effect until a new agreement is signed or the National Mediation Board declares an impasse in negotiations. Amtrak's goal here may be to energize negotiations on new agreements. Most current agreements "became amendable" over five years ago, on January 1, 2000, though the date for some was January 1, 2005.

Amtrak's report cites productivity-related items for negotiation—work rules for maintenance of way workers and in the shops, and "outsourcing certain station services...[where] trains generally come through once a day in each direction."

Amtrak says Congress should "con-

sider limiting the recovery of punitive damages in personal injury lawsuits...except in wrongful death actions where punitive damages are the sole remedy, and should allow federal court jurisdiction of any such lawsuit without" every party's consent.

Laney on Long-distance Routes

Chairman Laney testified that long-distance trains are the only trains Amtrak operates in 23 states, only five or six of which "probably have corridor potential." He said eliminating such routes would leave many states with no incentive to support any intercity passenger rail funding. He reminded lawmakers that "(c)(2) payments mean that eliminating trains would save nothing [in the early years]; it would actually cost more" to kill the trains. Ultimately, "you might save \$300 million [a year by eliminating all long-distance trains], but another \$300 million would be allocated back to short-distance trains that currently share facilities with the long-distance trains."

Mead Validates Funding Request

DOT Inspector General Kenneth Mead said Amtrak would need \$1.4 to \$1.5 billion in fiscal 2006, plus continuation of state contributions at present levels, "just to maintain the status quo. It won't be sufficient to get to a state of good repair. An appropriation of \$1.7 billion to \$2.0 billion would put us on the road to state of good repair." The report says that, in fiscal 2004, states paid \$135.4 million in operating grants to Amtrak.

Gunn's Congratulations

President and CEO David L. Gunn said it is "important to congratulate [Chairman Laney] and the board. This has not been an easy process. The reform package is interrelated. You have to be careful if you pick and choose."

Responding to Lott's suggestion that "we belly up to the bar and recognize that some of these long-distance routes won't make it," Gunn emphasized that little would be saved by axing individual routes. He urged giving Amtrak the opportunity to improve the routes' performance.

Bush OMB: Request is Still Zero

The same day, at a Senate appropriations subcommittee hearing, Office of Management and Budget Director Josh Bolten reaffirmed that the Administration's budget request for Amtrak is zero. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA): "So, you'll not endorse the \$1.82 billion that [the Amtrak Board] is asking for?" Bolten: "No, I will not, Senator." ■

NARP on the Air

The Senate Commerce hearing, release of the new Amtrak plan, and sidelining of Acela has increased media interest in Amtrak. Nationally, NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon appeared on PBS's *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on April 21. Regionally, he appeared April 26 on *Nitebeat with Barry Nolan* (CN8 for Comcast cable TV customers in the Northeast). Local television news interviews in Washington, DC, were April 11 on Channel 4 (NBC) and April 21 on Channel 5 (Fox).

Local radio appearances available on the web included *The Brian Lehrer Show* (New York City—WNYC, April 20), *Radio Times* (Philadelphia—WHYY, April 25), and *The Koyo Nnamdi Show* (Washington—WAMU, April 27).

In addition to numerous print and radio media interviews, NARP Assistant Director David Johnson taped an interview for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's "CBC News: Business" April 15.

Support

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wondered, "if you miss the mark by this much, what can we expect" about the accuracy of any DOT Amtrak comments? "90,000 people get on and off Amtrak in my state [every year], many of them elderly. It is important to North Dakota...Why don't you just say that you want to shut them down? Then we could fight about it."

Sens. Conrad Burns (R-MT) and Mark Pryor (D-AR) agreed state subsidies for long-distance trains are not practical.

A discordant note came from Sen. John Sununu (R-NH): "\$500 million in operating losses in perpetuity is unacceptable. That is not to say that every route needs to show a profit." He said subsidies per passenger-mile are higher than for other modes. This view partly reflects federal analysts' propensity to consider federal spending only. Over 41% of highway spending comes from non-user payments, almost all at the state and local level. ■

We plan the normal 11 newsletters this year, but instead of "October-November," we are combining "April-May."

NARP Statement Supports Amtrak Funding Request

NARP on April 28 filed its annual House appropriations "public-witness" statement with what is now the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, and Housing and Urban Development, The Judiciary, District of Columbia and Independent Agencies. This is a subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

This year, new chairmen head both the full committee and the subcommittee. These are, respectively, Jerry Lewis (R-CA) and Joseph Knollenberg (R-MI).

NARP's statement, by Executive Director Ross B. Capon, endorsed Amtrak's request for \$1.8 billion, and "\$500 million for a capital program for states investing in rail passenger development. The federal match would be 80%." The \$500 million paralleled what Amtrak recommended, as well as what informed observers believe states actually could spend early on.

The statement noted strong ridership in Fiscal 2004, justifications for the service, and the importance of Amtrak to continued intercity passenger rail. ■

The full text of the statement is on our website, or you can send a request to our office with a self addressed stamped envelope.

Highlights of Spring (April 25) Amtrak Timetable Change

- Southbound *Silver Meteor* departs New York one hour later (3:15 PM), restoring five days a week connection from upper New York State.

- Westbound *Lake Shore Limited* departs New York one hour later (3:50 PM), restoring connection from northbound *Silver Meteor*.

- *Downeaster* schedules 10-15 minutes faster (trackwork improvements).

- Major, trackwork-related *Keystone Corridor* service changes announced in early March continue.

- *Pennsylvanian* name returns to New York-Pittsburgh train—westbound daily New York City departure 9:55 a.m., arrive Pittsburgh 7:05 p.m.; eastbound Pittsburgh departure Monday-Saturday 7:20 a.m., Sunday 1:00 p.m. [Many Northeast Corridor-Chicago passengers now connect with *Capitol Limited* in Washington, for better train-change times and meal service.]

- *Capitol Limited* departs Washington 85 minutes earlier (3:55 PM).

- Hammond-Whiting, IN, which is not well located (and was opened in 1982), is unstaffed and loses all service except two *Wolverine Corridor* round-trips (trains 350, 352, 353, and 355).

- All *Regional* trains in the Northeast Corridor are reserved, seven days a week. Amtrak responded to concerns about passenger flexibility and long ticket-counter lines by saying passengers liked the weekend all-reserved policy, and by emphasizing the importance of eliminating standee conditions on many trains.

- *Vermont* has new times, restored Montreal bus connection. Biggest change: depart St. Albans southbound almost two hours later (8:30 AM). New stop at Newark International Airport at the request of the State of Vermont (which has no international commercial flights).

- Westbound *California Zephyr* departs Chicago one hour earlier (1:50 p.m.).

- Connection point for *Southwest Chief's* Laughlin and Las Vegas, NV Thruway bus service is Kingman, AZ, instead

of Needles, CA.

- Oklahoma City-Tulsa Thruway bus extended to Kansas City with connections to/from *Southwest Chief* and *Heartland Flyer*.

- Denver-Cheyenne (WY) Thruway bus service extended to Wheatland, Douglas, and Casper, WY.

This timetable was printed before *Acela Express* trains were shopped. Subsequent modifications are in a special, NEC-only timetable that supersedes the National timetable until *Acela Express* service returns. Highlights of this schedule:

- 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. hourly *Metroliner* departures from New York and Washington, retaining *Acela Express* 2000-series train numbers,

- Four-times-per-day New York-Boston *Metroliner* service,

- Modifications to *Regional* service, most notably trains 84, 148, and 141.

- Elimination of two *Clocker* trips and their replacement with Trenton-New York City New Jersey Transit trains. ■

Rail Travel Tips

Tip #9—Book NOW for summer travel; trains (especially sleeping cars) sell out early!

Capacity is limited on most Amtrak trains, but especially on sleeping cars during the summer. Several trips of western long distance trains are already sold out.

Call Amtrak's reservations center at 1-800-USA-RAIL (872-7245), go to Amtrak's website at <<http://www.amtrak.com>> or visit your local travel agent or Amtrak station.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Acela Express—Acela Express trains were removed from service on April 15. A temporary NEC timetable is in effect until the Acelas return (see Page 3).

Equipment Changes—Due to the Acela situation, many equipment assignments have been shifted. Horizon cars are on many Empire Corridor trains that run west of Albany; on *Downeasters* Capstone (remanufactured Amfleet) cars have replaced Metroliner cars.

Guest Rewards redemption changes—*Regional* trains in the Northeast are now all-reserved seven days a week. Normally, this would require 5,000 Amtrak Guest Rewards points for an award trip, but Amtrak lowered the requirement to 2,500 for travel after April 25. If you have unreserved NEC Guest Rewards tickets, you may exchange them for reserved tickets at no monetary or point charge. Allow ample time at the ticket window as the agent will need to call Guest Rewards to complete the transaction.

NARP President George Chilson Writes to Secretary Mineta

NARP President George Chilson, in a March 28 letter to Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta, welcomed "an intelligent discussion aimed at developing an intercity rail network that will serve the travel needs of our fellow citizens," but criticized Mineta for both out-of-context and "factually incorrect" statements.

Chilson emphasized that the much-needed "genuine federal/state partnership for intercity rail passenger...must be an addition to—not a replacement for—current funding and service."

Chilson said "reforming" the environment in which Amtrak operates" would "achieve far better results...than [would] dismantling Amtrak...A modern rail passenger network will not emerge from the ashes of Amtrak.

"Without Amtrak, we lose the ability to operate over the nation's rail network at reasonable cost. We also risk losing infrastructure, rolling stock, equipment, facilities and a skilled workforce... Amtrak, whatever its imperfections, still represents the most practical platform upon which to build a better system."

Mineta urged people to read his plan before criticizing, but the "plan"—H.R. 1713, similar to his 2003 bill—was not introduced in the House until April 20, as a courtesy by Reps. Don Young (R-AK) and Jim Oberstar (D-MN), and was not available when Chilson wrote. Based on evidence that proved accurate, Chilson criticized the DOT proposal for:

- Ending "all funding for operations even though the federal government routinely

funds many operating costs of other modes;"

- Failing to define the ultimate network the plan seeks to achieve;
- "Transferring all planning responsibility to states even though most travel crosses state lines...";
- "Offering a...smaller federal match for rail than provided for other modes;"
- "Lacking an adequate long-term funding source..."; and
- Failing to "ensure equitable allocation of federal funds to states." ■

The full text of the letter is on our website, or you can send a request to our office with a self addressed stamped envelope. See also the "fact check" section of our website (click resources, special reports).



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