



## Harris Poll: Americans Want Trains!

Two recent opinion polls—one conducted nationally, one conducted in Nebraska—show that Americans want more rail service, and believe that this should be a responsibility of the Federal government.

Harris Interactive, Inc. asked, "In the future, as more people travel, which two of the following would you like to see have an increasing share of all passenger transportation?" Americans overwhelmingly chose commuter and long range trains (44% and 35%, respectively) compared to long distance travel by car (10%) and bus (6%).

When Harris asked, "... which of the following would you like to see have an increasing share of all goods and commodities movements in the United States?" the response was even more striking: Fully 63% of respondents favored freight railroads, more than air freight (35%) and trucks (24%) combined.

The survey then asked: "Who do you think should be mainly responsible for

maintaining and improving the transportation system in the nation as a whole?" More than two-thirds (68%) of adults responding believed this should be a responsibility of the federal government."

The Nebraska Annual Social Indicators Survey, funded in part by ProRail Nebraska, echoed the theme of Federal responsibility for funding. An overall 66.7% of respondents indicated "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" that, "Congress should provide a dedicated source of funding for Amtrak so that we can have a good nationwide passenger rail system."

In addition, three fourths (75%) of survey respondents felt, "Nebraska should support a plan to establish high speed rail service between Omaha and Chicago and extend it from Omaha to Lincoln." These results are remarkable, particularly since Nebraska passenger rail service is currently limited to one train each day, the Amtrak *California Zephyr*, in each direction.

The Harris Poll can be accessed online at [http://harrisinteractive.com/harris\\_poll/index.asp?PID=638](http://harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=638); the Nebraska poll is not available online. ■

## Bush: \$900 Million for Amtrak in Fiscal 2007

Although the public clearly wants more rail (lead story), the Bush Administration again has requested an Amtrak funding level that would shut down the railroad. Fiscal 2007 begins October 1, 2006.

Certainly, \$900 million beats last year's zero request. Also, the President's bud-

get credits Amtrak with responding to the Administration's call for "real reform [with] some progress on multiple fronts, but much more action is required..." (page 220).

### Attacking Long-Distance Trains

Taking aim at the only Amtrak trains serving 25 states, the budget says: "The Administration believes Amtrak, working with DOT, could achieve needed savings by moving aggressively in a number of areas, including: phasing out costly overnight trains and restructuring its train schedules to emphasize regular short trips..." In practical terms, "restructuring" would mean eliminating thousands of route miles of service.

The budget highlights a December 3 *Washington Post* editorial claim that long-distance routes "make little sense today but (have) entrenched political support in Congress." The budget condescendingly notes "Amtrak's 15 long-distance trains that travel along World War II-era routes" (page 221). This sounds like a double standard: few highway routes that were important in 1945 have been abandoned, or have lost importance today.

At \$900 million, the capital budget would be emasculated. Assuming a realistic op-

## Light Rail Takes Shape in Charlotte



—Donald Stewart

The maintenance building (far left) and catenary poles (center) for the Charlotte Area Transit System's Operations Facility are beginning to take shape. Members of the Carolinas Association for Passenger Trains toured the facility on February 4. The South Corridor, the first transit route of six light rail and commuter routes proposed in the "2025 Plan" will open in 2007, connecting Pineville with downtown (9.6 miles). Plans for an intermodal station—to include Amtrak, local and intercity bus, and commuter rail—are moving forward as well.

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# Americans with Disabilities Act Milestone Just Four Years Away

Although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is detailed, the vast majority of detail is in Department of Transportation regulations issued in 1991 (49 C.F.R. Parts 27, 37, and 38). The article below attempts to highlight key issues but of course is not comprehensive.

DOT issued a "guidance" in Sept., 2005, which—among other things—acknowledged that the tiny 3" horizontal gap between train and platform, specified in the 1991 regulations, works for subways and light rail transit, but not railroads.

DOT is expected to release a new Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) shortly, which could give more insight into the direction DOT expects to take in carrying out the law. DOT would take public comments on whatever the NPRM covers. We will report on that NPRM later.

On July 26, 2010, new requirements for Amtrak stations take effect under the Americans with Disabilities Act [ADA; Public Law 101-336; the relevant portion: 42 U.S.C. Sections 12161-12165 (1990)]. Regulations promulgated under ADA require that all stations be equipped with railings, tactile strips on platform edges, appropriate signage including Braille, and ramps connecting parking lots, stations and platforms. Railings are not required on backs of platforms if there is no drop-off. Also, where provided:

- restrooms must be accessible;
- "ticketing areas shall permit persons with disabilities to obtain a ticket and check baggage...";
- interior pay telephones must include "at least one text telephone"; and
- public address systems must be supplemented by electronic signs (that is, "a means of conveying the same information to persons with hearing loss or who are deaf").

If the platform is not structurally sound enough to support tactile strips and railings, it must be rebuilt, providing for level boarding along its entire length—except where U.S. DOT and the U. S. Access Board agree that the requirement would create an "undue burden" or where engineering problems are insurmountable.

Where the platform is structurally sound, but short, Amtrak trains must make as many stops as needed to get the disabled to their assigned car(s).

## General ADA Philosophy

The ADA regulations are built around the concept that when one builds new, or

has to rebuild an existing facility, the new construction must comply with ADA.

Thus, new stations and trains must be fully compliant. Similarly, rebuilt facilities must be compliant. This includes—in the case of partially rebuilt stations—the part that is rebuilt.

There is concern that, with no special provisions for experimental or temporary service, such service—like last year's extension of the *Heartland Flyer* to Guthrie, OK—might become impossibly costly. Likewise, the cost and complexities of new services in general would rise.

Some interesting ongoing discussions involve existing facilities, notably:

- New York Penn Station, where the platform clearance between train and stairways is five feet rather than the six feet ADA requires.
- Metra's (Chicago area) fleet of gallery cars which are essentially high-platform cars that normally would require high-level platforms, but have vestibule steps incompatible with such platforms.

Amtrak rolling stock is in compliance; we will cover commuter rail rolling stock in a future issue.

## Heights: Car Floors, Platforms

For Amtrak, level boarding may mean 48" platforms (measured from top of rail to top of car floor) where only single-level trains operate. Such platforms exist at most Northeast Corridor stations, Albany and Syracuse. Stations served only by Superliners and California cars may need 15" platforms.

Where a station handles both car types, the platform must match the lower-floor cars, and lifts used to make higher-platform cars accessible.

## Exceptions

The "undue burden" exemption presumably will apply to low volume stations; consideration also should be given to stations with just tri-weekly service.

The engineering exception applies, for example, at New London, CT. The station is on a nine degree curve; tracks have three inches of super elevation (that is, the curve is 'banked' with the outside rail three inches higher than the inside rail). [Acela requires high platforms, so a high-level Acela platform was built on the short tangent track west of the station.] But high-level platforms have been installed on gentler curves, including at Boston (South Station and Back Bay), Providence and Bowie State, MD.

Stations that were flagstops in 1990 are exempt. This applies at most to 16 existing stations; seven are on the *Crescent*, and Essex, MT, is the only one of the 16 that is west of Chicago. Converting 1990 regular stops to flagstops to circumvent ADA will not be allowed. It is not clear whether two other groups of stations will get "passes."

Twelve stations that were regular stops in 1990 later became flagstops due to ridership analysis, not "ADA subversion," on the *Sunset Ltd.*, *City of New Orleans* and *Pennsylvanian* routes. Three 1990 flagstops are current regular stops—Port Kent, Port Henry and Ticonderoga, NY.

If any (or all) of these stations qualify for the "undue burden" exemption, their flagstop status would be irrelevant.

## New, Higher Platforms?

Thus, hundreds of stations, mostly with 8" or lower platforms now, may need to convert to 15" (or 48") platforms by July 26, 2010—or later, when they become structurally unsound. Some current platforms, as at Columbus, WI, are so deteriorated that the platform is *below* the rail.

July, 2010, will see some changes even where platforms are sound but non-compliant, as lifts replace those ramps that are steeper than the regulations allow.

Amtrak is surveying its stations to determine the real short-term and long-term costs of ADA compliance in particular, and getting stations to a state of good repair in general. Also under review are staffing issues and opportunities to install more Quik-Trak machines. Amtrak says it has

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—George Read

An Albany-bound Superliner-equipped *Lake Shore Limited* Feb. 14 on the special siding for the Syracuse high-level platform. A shortage of single-level cars caused Amtrak to run the Superliner round-trip. Passengers used an "emergency" platform (west of the station) built to give access to a mainline track.

## Funding

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erating grant, the capital grant would fall almost to \$100 million.

Replacing operating grants are \$400 million of "Efficiency Grants" that, in the make-believe world of the DOT's *Fiscal Year 2007 Budget In Brief* (the document that explains the budget), "allow Amtrak to keep the trains running and act on its mandate to reshape the company." The reality is that the trains would not keep running (see box, below center, for more on why \$900 million would not work).

Amtrak Acting President and CEO David Hughes issued a statement which avoided criticizing the Administration request. Hughes said, in part, "This is the first step in a nine-month process. Last year, Congress voted and the President signed an appropriation for Amtrak of \$1.3 billion for FY06. This year, we again look forward to working with Congress and the Administration as we make the case for federal support."

Amtrak has not yet submitted its own request; the board's next meeting is on March 2.

### Transit, Highways

Transit funding is up from fiscal 2006, but—when compared with levels in SAFETEA-LU (the highway/transit authorization law)—the budget seeks \$100 million less for transit, and \$800 million more for highways. The American Public Transportation Association said: "Funding transit below the authorized and guaranteed level means that needed improvements to the transit infrastructure will occur at a slower rate, thus prolonging what the President correctly described in his State of the Union Address as America's addiction to oil, which is often imported from unstable parts of the world." ■

## Contact Your Elected Officials

Tell them to support full funding for Amtrak, not the 30% cut proposed by the Administration.

- **Visit our website**, <<http://www.narprail.org>>, which is updated regularly with news, information, and other useful data. Download and print our new Action Alert flyer; give it to fellow travelers when you ride Amtrak and hand it out at the station.

- **Contact your Senators and Representative**, even if they already support Amtrak. The budget this year is one of the tightest in history. Cuts to hundreds of programs will be demanding legisla-

PROPOSED FISCAL 2007 TRANSPORTATION FUNDING						
Compared with Previous Years						
Appropriations (\$ millions)						
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Bush
	Enacted	Enacted	Enacted	Enacted	request	vs. 2006
						Enacted
<b>Administration</b>						
Federal Highway	31,593	34,689	36,120	39,060	39,822	+ 2.0%
Federal Aviation	(1) 15,886	13,840	13,853	14,310	13,749	- 3.9%
Federal Transit	7,179	7,266	8,604	8,504	8,875	+ 4.4%
Federal Railroad	1,261	1,449	1,425	1,503	1,085	- 27.8%
*Amtrak	1,043	1,218	1,201	1,294	900	- 30.4%
*also in Federal Railroad Administration total.						
<b>Intercity Passenger Rail Categories</b>						
Amtrak Operations	582	598	570	490	0	
Amtrak Capital	213	345	369	495	(4) 500	
Efficiency Incentive Grants	0	0	0	(3) 31	(3) 400	
Debt Service (2)	248	275	262	278	(4) 0	
<b>AMTRAK SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>1,043</b>	<b>1,218</b>	<b>1,201</b>	<b>1,294</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>- 30.4%</b>
High Speed Rail + Farley	50	37	19	0	0	-100.0%
<b>PASS. RAIL TOTAL</b>	<b>1,093</b>	<b>1,255</b>	<b>1,220</b>	<b>1,294</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>- 30.4%</b>

#### NOTES:

1) Includes \$2.396 billion in war supplemental funding in 2003.

2) Unlike in tables we have published in the past, we show this separately for clarity.

3) "Efficiency Incentive Grants" that can be used to fund operations at Secretary of Transportation's discretion.

4) In reality, a \$900 million grant could not support much more than a lame, \$100 million capital program, particularly since an estimated \$295 million in debt service payments are not optional.

### Why \$900 Million Would Not Work

- Debt Service: \$295 million
- Operations: \$495 million
- Capital: \$110 million

To the extent that Amtrak could slightly reduce its operating grant requirement from the tremendously aggressive FY 2006 target, the capital program could be slightly larger, but still nowhere near what is needed to maintain heavy overhauls and thus equipment standards, much less the infrastructure program.

### NARP Responds

"Despite the insistence of the Administration, Amtrak's long distance services are well used...In FY 2005, the average long-distance train handled 356 people; the average number on board at any time (passenger-miles-per-train-mile) was 156."

This is from "Amtrak Fact Check," our one-stop shop for responses to incorrect public statements. The 2006 and 2005 editions, as well as "Amtrak Facts and Myths," are linked from our homepage, <<http://www.narprail.org>>.

Our news release, issued the day the budget was released, said in part, "Ending the interminable debate over intercity passenger rail, and resolving to develop a stronger system, would be consistent with President Bush's expressed concern over America's addiction to oil. A key ingredient in any fight to beat that addiction must be development of a more robust rail passenger system."

The full news release is also available on our website. Both Fact Check and the release are also available by sending a S.A.S.E. to the NARP office.

tion's attention. The Capitol Hill switchboard, 202-224-3121, connects to any office, or visit the Action Alert page on our website for electronic contact info. The "Blue Pages" of your phone book has District office contact information.

- When writing to Congress, keep your letter to a single page and subject. **Include your postal mailing address** to show that you are a constituent. You might include a personal statement about your most recent Amtrak trip and/or why Amtrak is important to you. To Washington, e-mail or fax is best; send regular mail to your legislator's district office. ■

## Travel Tips Wanted

Over the past year, we published a series of "Travelers' Tips" which have been collected and are available on our website (click on "Amtrak Policies and Travel Tips" under "Info & Links"). If you have a tip you'd like us to consider publishing in the newsletter, please let us know. To receive a hard-copy version of the tips already published, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to NARP.

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

### Simplified Dining Service

(Dec. 2005 and Feb. 2006 *News* front page stories) is tentatively scheduled to be extended April 15 to *Silver Star*, *Lake Shore Limited* and *Southwest Chief*, May 3 to *Crescent* and *Coast Starlight*, May 24 to *California Zephyr* and *Silver Meteor*.

### Santa Barbara Car Free—

Travelers to Santa Barbara, CA can take advantage of a new program called the "Car Free Experience." The program includes two-for-one bus or Amtrak coupons to the city, discounts at hotels and restaurants, and special pricing for tours, trolley rides, whale watching and other activities. Details at <<http://www.santabarbaracarfree.com>>.

## Platforms

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no immediate plans to unstaff any more stations.

### 48" Platforms?

Requirements to install 48" platforms would raise many questions. For passenger service, there would be loss of flexibility—low-floor Superliners are incompatible with high platforms—and higher costs where high and wide freight loads require a separate track, a gauntlet track (separate pair of rails which move the train a few feet away from the platform), or moveable platform edges.

The administration conceivably might require 48" platforms all along the *Silver Service*, *Crescent* and *Cardinal* routes, and on the New York-Erie part of the *Lake Shore Ltd.* routes. (Cleveland-Chicago would be spared the 48" requirement since Superliners regularly operate there.)

Amtrak at different times has run Superliners—its most economically efficient cars—on all four routes, including a single Chicago-Albany trip in February 2006.

The Superliner-equipped, non-stop *Auto Train* (with a large elderly clientele) normally does not share stations with *Silver* trains, but an emergency stop requiring evacuation at a 48" high platform would pose serious problems.

Freight railroad concerns about the ability to run high and wide shipments could force costly gauntlet tracks, separate tracks—as at Greenbelt, MD, and Syracuse—or moveable platforms. The railroads dislike rarely used switches and anything that introduces potential problems, and the passenger carrier likely

would have to pay for periodic switch inspections, which are required whether or not the switches are used.

The law prohibits private station owners from unreasonably withholding cooperation, and apparently requires state and local governments that own stations to make them compliant.

In light of all this, serious consideration should be given to making 15" the standard "compliant" platform everywhere outside the NEC.

### ADA vs. Bush Budget

ADA potentially puts the Bush Administration in the ridiculous position of simultaneously advocating a budget that shuts down the national system while enforcing major ADA-related station investments (some perhaps not justified by ADA) that would be superfluous if Bush ever wins the Amtrak budget battle.

That battle may make it tougher to get communities to invest in their stations, yet communities are a likely source of much of the funding needed to get stations into ADA compliance.

The ultimate absurdity would be ADA regulations forcing service to end at stations which currently serve the disabled, albeit with lifts or ramps rather than full-length level platforms. While ADA cannot be used as a reason to stop serving a station, accumulated ADA costs at many stations conceivably could help kill *an entire route*. ■

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## National Association of Railroad Passengers

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