



Bigger Focus on Service Quality

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) requires U.S. DOT by April 13, 2009, to adopt standards for intercity passenger train performance as to reliability, service quality, service availability and financial performance. The law also directs, "to the extent practicable, Amtrak and its host rail carriers [to] incorporate the metrics and standards into their access and service agreements."

The joint Federal Railroad Administration/Amtrak "provisional staff exposure draft" shows solid knowledge of the business and sincere commitment to the law's goal of improving service.

On-Time Performance (OTP)

The standard proposed is that Amtrak trains would "maintain an effective speed equal to or faster than that in effect at the time the FY 2008 Appropriation Act was enacted." *Enactment was Dec. 26, 2007, so FRA uses running times from Amtrak's Fall/Winter 2007-2008 timetable.*

Effective speed "is essential to protect the public...by preventing long-term 'schedule creep,' in which the running times of a number of routes have lengthened appreciably since 1971, even as OTP has declined." Accordingly, effective speed is a route's mileage divided by the sum of its scheduled end-to-end running time **and average lateness of its arrivals at its endpoint terminals.**

Moreover, trains will be expected to meet tightening standards for both endpoint and all-stations OTP. Thus far, OTP reports have been based solely on when a train reaches its final destination. Thus, people using certain intermediate stations may have experienced very unreliable service on trains with impressive reported OTP.

Starting in FY 2009, **all-stations OTP** figures will be published. These give equal weight to every station a train serves. From 2010, all-stations OTP will be applied as a standard—at least 80% (90% for Acela, 85% for other Northeast Corridor trains). For *endpoint* per-

formance, the same percentages apply starting this year.

By FY 2013, endpoint *and* all-stations OTP must be at least 85% for long-distance trains and 90% for other trains (but 95% for Acela).

FRA also plans to report minutes of delay per 10,000 train-miles of operation for each route, based on "pure run-time."

Pure run-time—"the fastest possible trip time for an Amtrak train over a route, with no interference or delays"—is not subject to bias by "padding" of schedules, reflects all direct causes of delays, and provides a basis for remedial action "as it tracks train number, date...delay location, duration, type, and" whether the cause is Host Railroad, Amtrak or a third party.

Service Quality

"Since 1995, Amtrak has measured the adequacy of its intercity passenger train service through its Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI)...based on responses from

mailed surveys. Each month, Amtrak sends out 14,300 surveys to previous customers of all Amtrak routes requesting feedback..."

Results generally show "higher scores for the information [Amtrak] provides and the helpfulness of Amtrak employees [but] restrooms, food, and clarity of announcements tend to receive lower scores...Amtrak's overall CSI score reached 80% in 2008; an increase of eight percentage points since 2004."

FRA and Amtrak will add survey questions on "station accommodations including basics like heat and restrooms" and "sleeping car service [which] accounts for significant revenue on a number of routes, and imposes a large price differential on its patrons."

The draft also notes lack of "space for a free response which will allow respondents to specifically identify problems that Amtrak personnel can in turn act upon."

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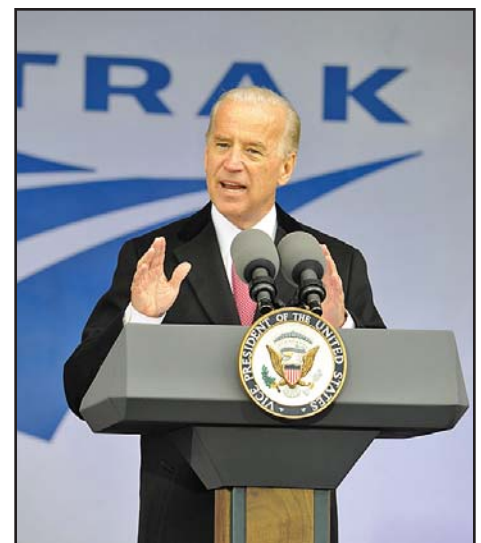
Biden Unveils Amtrak's Stimulus Funding

From U.S. DOT's March 13 news release: "Standing at Washington, DC's Union Station, one of the most traveled railway stations in the nation, Vice President Biden announced that Amtrak will receive \$1.3 billion in grant funding from the recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to expand passenger rail capacity.

"Over 28 million passengers ride Amtrak each year. That's about 500,000 passengers a week – or 80,000 a day," said Vice President Biden. "For too long, we haven't made the investments we needed to make Amtrak as safe, as reliable, as secure as it can be. That ends now. The funds in the Recovery Act for Amtrak will help create jobs and at the same time, repair and update critical needs of our nation's infrastructure."

"This is the Obama Administration keeping its promise to America," said

(continued on p. 4)



Vice President Biden holds a news conference at Washington Union Station, March 13, 2009. —Reprinted with permission from Amtrak

LaHood on Amtrak Board, Hunter Biden Resigns; NARP Plugs Three Candidates

President Obama on February 26 named U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood to the Amtrak Board. Senate confirmation is not required.

On January 29, the board voted as its chair former Macomb, IL, Mayor Tom Carper. The other voting members are Donna McLean (Vice Chair) and Nancy Naples; there are three vacancies.

R. Hunter Biden resigned February 26. He said, "Serving on the board has been a great honor...Now that Amtrak has a supportive administration in the White House, I believe my service on the board is not as crucial...I have tremendous con-

fidence in the board and current leadership of Amtrak."

The 2008 authorization expands the board, effective April 16, to nine voting members; the Amtrak president becomes a voting member. As under the old law, one slot is for the DOT Secretary, who must be appointed by the President.

Under the new law, directors serve five year terms and may continue beyond then if a successor is not seated.

On February 25, NARP wrote to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel endorsing three board candidates: Carl Fowler of Putney, VT; Bennett Levin of

Washington, PA; and Dennis Sullivan of Virginia Beach, VA.

NARP said, "All three possess both extraordinarily detailed knowledge of Amtrak and a strong commitment to the success and growth of the U.S. intercity passenger train industry. Were all three to be appointed, the board would have an unprecedented level of knowledge, and a dramatically reduced 'learning curve' need compared with most previous boards." ■

The letter to Emanuel, including candidates' qualifications, is at www.narprail.org/amtrakboard

Service Quality

from page 1

Late trains can bias results, thus "Amtrak encounters difficulties in gauging whether a low score for on-board services [may simply represent] passenger anger over the train's lateness."

Nonetheless, "collecting data on the adequacy of Amtrak's service is a very resource-intensive effort and Amtrak's CSI is an available, if imperfect, proxy for" understanding the customer.

FRA and Amtrak propose a minimum standard for each CSI-based metric of 80% "very satisfied" in FY 2009 and 90% in FY 2013, but—for "overall perceptions

of Amtrak service"—82% and 90%, respectively.

FRA also will provide, for information only, reports from Amtrak's Mechanical Department on "equipment-caused service interruptions per 10,000 train-miles," and information on "passenger reactions—both positive and negative—that [Amtrak] receives via letters, e-mails, and telephone calls."

Service Availability/Connectivity

FRA and Amtrak will use Amtrak's annual data on "percent of passengers connecting to and from other routes in the Amtrak network." However, "with respect to a standard for this measure: Connectivity depends on the service that is offered (routes and frequency) and the quality of that service...Amtrak currently has little flexibility to add routes and frequencies that would enhance connectivity; accordingly, any standards that might be proposed to enhance connectivity [other than improved OTP]...would not be realistically achievable within the planning horizon of the PRIIA authorization."

FRA and Amtrak also will produce "percent of passenger-trips involving rural origins and/or destinations," tentatively defining rural as "those places beyond 25 miles of a community of 50,000 or more."

Financial/Operating

FRA and Amtrak expect "continuous year-over-year improvement" on:

- Percent of short-term avoidable operating costs and of fully allocated operating costs (excluding capital charges) covered by passenger-related revenue;
- Long-term avoidable operating loss per passenger-mile (excluding capital charges);

ARC Update

It was disappointing to read the new Administration's response to NARP's Feb. 18 letter urging Secretary LaHood to act to make sense out of New Jersey Transit's Hudson River tunnels project, which as planned will not connect to New York Penn Station.

A Mar. 16 letter by Matthew J. Welbes, a Bush appointee who is Executive Director and Acting Deputy Administrator of the Federal Transit Administration, revealed the "hands-off," dark side of FTA's "New Starts" program: "The decision of how best to provide transportation services within a specific geographic region is not made by the Federal Government. It is, instead, the responsibility of local decisionmakers and the project sponsors."

NARP has requested a meeting with DOT officials. Better news might flow once new appointees are in place, but that is far from assured.

- Passenger-Miles per Train-Mile; and
- Adjusted (Loss) per passenger-mile, where "Adjusted (Loss)" is "net operating loss (before net interest expense), less Depreciation, Other Post-Employment Benefits and project costs covered by capital funding." ■

Quotations are from the joint FRA/Amtrak "provisional draft" at www.regulations.gov – enter FRA-2009-0016 in box in middle of screen. NARP's comments will be at www.narprail.org.

More Trains For Virginia!

The Commonwealth Transportation Board approved \$17.2 million for a three-year pilot program to add an additional frequency between Washington and Richmond and establish a Washington-Lynchburg local train.

In a statement, Governor Timothy Kaine (D) said, "In the past, Virginia has not been as big an investor in mass transit, but we've been able to shift that balance and put a greater percentage of resources into our rail and public transportation."

The state is also investing \$32 million in capital investments on the Lynchburg line and has over the past several years been investing \$131 million on the Richmond line.

The Lynchburg service is slated to begin in October and the Richmond train in January.

Federal Dollars For—and Potentially For—Trains

Fiscal 2009 Omnibus Appropriation

Signed into Public Law 111-8 by President Obama on March 11, this huge law includes \$1.49 billion for Amtrak, of which \$550 million is allocated for operations, with “such sums as shall be necessary” designated for the second and final tranche of back pay recommended by Presidential Emergency Board 232 appointed by President Bush (Feb. 08 *News*). The law also has:

- \$940 million for Amtrak capital investment and debt service payments (the latter not to exceed \$285 million);
- \$90 million for intercity passenger train capital grants to states—up from \$30 million in Fiscal 2008, the program’s first year. The federal share of projects cannot exceed 50%.

A \$25 million “rail line relocation and improvement program” directs funds to 23 projects, including:

- \$3.8 million—“Grand Rapids Amtrak Railroad Relocation”;
- \$1.9 million—passenger aspects of CREATE, the big Chicago-area railroad upgrade program;
- \$950,000—Sacramento’s “Intermodal Terminal Facility” and track relocation;
- \$475,000—Duluth High Speed Passenger Railroad Service; and
- \$190,000—“Downeast Rail Rehabilitation, Maine”

DOE Funds for Passenger Trains?

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds the Department of Energy’s Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program to help states, cities, counties and Indian tribes

improve energy efficiency. This was authorized in the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 [its Title V, Subtitle E] signed into Public Law 110-140 December 19, 2007. ARRA provides \$3.2 billion—\$2.8 billion to be allocated by formula, the remaining \$400 million for competitive grants.

ARRA also has \$9.3 billion for passenger trains and the potential for states and cities to “flex” highway and intermodal funds to passenger and freight train projects (Mar. *News*),

How much money rails get from the flexible programs depends on how effective citizen advocates and carriers are in pushing train-related expenditures.

Amtrak’s Spending Plans and FY 2010 Request

Amtrak issued its FY 2010 Grant and Legislative Request on time Feb. 17.

Amtrak seeks \$975 million for capital, \$264 million for debt service, and a \$580 million operating grant (not counting the Inspector General’s \$21 million). The operating grant—compared with the forecast 2009 numbers—has a 7% increase in wages and benefits and 1% increase in operating revenues.

Amtrak ridership rose 11% in Fiscal 2008, the sixth straight annual increase. Amtrak projects a 3.6% drop in 2009 and then no change in 2010.

Expanding the Fleet: “Modernization of Amtrak’s fleet is a key priority.” Using Recovery Act and Fiscal 2009 and 2010 funds, Amtrak anticipates to return to service most of its parked cars, but “these improvements...are no substitute for new equipment, which is urgently needed... The average age of an Amtrak car is

An Opening for “non-ready-to-go” HSR Projects

DOT likely “will initially seek [high-speed rail] projects that are ‘ready to go,’ but will also provide opportunities for subsequent applications that include projects with a longer build-out period.”

This, from the answer to question 13 in the Federal Railroad Administration’s “Frequently Asked Questions” on the Recovery law, and a similar answer to question 8, should encourage Texas, Ohio and other states whose HSR projects are in very early stages to press ahead with applications anyway.

now 25 years, topping the previous high of 24.7 years, which Amtrak reached in 1975 [just before taking] delivery of the first of 492 Amfleet I coaches...”

The 2008 law authorizes Amtrak to establish the “Next Generation Corridor Equipment Pool Committee” working with states to determine what kinds and numbers of cars are needed “as state-supported corridor services expand.”

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance: Amtrak serves 527 stations “and 481 must be made ADA-compliant; moreover, most of these stations are [non-Amtrak] owned, making for a complex pattern of ownership and responsibility...Under existing law, the cost of compliance could range from \$1.38 to \$1.56 billion, from all sources. Amtrak estimates that it is responsible for between 63% and 76% of the costs to achieve compliance,” but notes that “both the cost and the time required to attain full compliance would more than double” if the DOT implements a requirement for full length platforms for level boarding which NARP, Amtrak and commuter and private railroads have strenuously opposed (Aug. 06 *News*).

A Congressionally mandated report Amtrak submitted February 1 says Amtrak will need at least six years just to meet existing ADA requirements. Thus, Amtrak asks that its compliance deadline be moved to September 30, 2015.

Amtrak’s report also discusses investments for Positive Train Control and Infrastructure (both Amtrak and Host Railroad). ■

The report is at www.amtrak.com click on Inside Amtrak and then Other Reports.

George Billmyer, 1936-2009

NARP Council of Representatives member George Billmyer died suddenly March 9. He was 73. He had served on the NARP Board and then Council since 1990.

Virginia Association of Railway Patrons Pres. Michael Testerman recalled that “George worked for the New York Central in his early years and later...traveled the world extensively, to observe best practices in railroading. He was an early advocate for the Virginia Railway Express and

after its start-up was a daily commuter on VRE to his job at the Department of the Navy.”

Testerman said Billmyer worked “for high-performance rail corridors that would allow through trains to bypass congested urban centers. He believed that, ultimately, rail infrastructure should be designed and maintained for high levels of service, used by multiple operators, providing benefits that the private sector alone does not offer.”



OUR MISSION: A MODERN, CUSTOMER-FOCUSED NATIONAL PASSENGER TRAIN NETWORK THAT PROVIDES A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT.

Working With the Railroad Industry

Recognizing that Amtrak and much commuter train service depends on good tracks and thus a healthy private-sector railroad industry, NARP President Ross B. Capon began participating in the industry's "Railroad Day on the Hill" a year ago, continuing this year on February 26. The event includes organized Capitol Hill visits by groups of railroaders, mostly from out-of-town.

With those groups in which Capon and some other "passenger folks" participated, this demonstrated that the industry has key allies on prospects for use of Recovery Act funds and on regulatory issues, and provided a chance, where appropriate, to inject passenger considerations into the conversations.

At the evening's dinner, Association of American Railroads President Ed Hamberger asked Capon to stand, highlighting the One-Rail Coalition (Feb. *News*, page 4; www.transact.org/onerail) and the fact that we have many interests in common. Capon and thus NARP got a round of applause.

The annual dinner is attended by members of Congress, and representatives of the short line and Class One railroads and railway suppliers.

Biden

from page 1

Secretary LaHood. "We are investing in jobs that will allow Amtrak to add and modernize cars and engines and upgrade its tracks. We are getting transportation money to Americans quickly in order to get the American economy going again."

Biden's ridership numbers do not include people on commuter trains that use Amtrak tracks and facilities.

The release listed these items:

- Replace 102-year-old Niantic River movable bridge in Connecticut, \$105 million, estimated 860 person-years of work for those directly employed.

- Rehabilitate and return to service 68 stored passenger cars, \$82 million. "Amtrak anticipates hiring 125 workers," the work to be done at Amtrak's Bear, Delaware, and Beech Grove, Indiana shops.

- "Entirely rebuild three [vintage 1920s] rotary frequency converters [in Chester, PA] which form a key element of the power supply system for the Northeast Corridor," \$63 million, estimated 504 person-years of work for those directly employed.

- Repair Amtrak facilities nationwide, \$105 million, using local contractors, estimated 860 person-years of work.

- Restore Wilmington, DE, station, \$21 million "plus additional funding from the State of Delaware and other sources." Includes building a third high-level platform "which will...increase the capacity of the station." Estimated 168 person-years for those directly employed.

- Build new Auto Train station in Sanford, FL, \$10.5 million, 84 person-years of work.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Boston Lake Shore sleeper returns—First eastbound trip is April 2, first westbound April 4. Through coaches began last October.

Downeaster schedule change—Effective April 18: trains 681, 689, 699 will operate later. Also, the seasonal Old Orchard Beach stop will begin for all trains.

- Install Positive Train Control Kalamazoo, MI-Porter, IN and New York-Washington, \$60 million. ■

A complete list of Amtrak's ARRA projects is at www.amtrak.com, click on "Inside Amtrak" at the bottom of the homepage, then on "Other Reports".

Final Back Pay On May 1

On March 19, the Amtrak Board of Directors approved payment of the second and final installment of retroactive wages to all eligible workers on May 1.

Amtrak last year paid \$428 million of the \$573 million that PEB 242 ruled Amtrak had to pay its employees. The remaining \$145 million comes from a combination of Congressional appropriations and Amtrak operational funds.

Amtrak's Fiscal 2009 operating grant is very tight, but even talk about a strike possibility during the busy summer travel season would have seriously hurt revenues.