



NARPnews

“Transportation leaders came to the table with one clear goal: improve travel in the most heavily traveled corridor in the Southeast by investing in road and rail improvements.”

VIRGINIA GOVERNOR TERRY MCAULIFFE

Congress Adjourns to Campaign, Leaving Budget Business Unfinished

Both houses of Congress adjourned for the election-year recess in July without passing a single one of the 12 annual appropriations measures.

As previously reported by NARP, unconnected partisan disagreements hampered progress on positive transportation appropriations bills. These bipartisan measures would increase funding for Amtrak, passenger rail, and transit.

The Senate had already passed its version of the transportation budget, and was simply waiting on the full House to vote before reconciling the bill before sending it to the President’s desk.

The lack of movement on the transportation bill means that it will now have to be included in a short-term budget extension in September, freezing Amtrak funding and leaving the exciting new FAST Act rail programs unfunded. ■

Hearings Examine Passenger Train Progress

Budget gridlock didn’t keep some members of Congress from holding hearings on the status of various transportation and rail programs, and NARP was there to track the action.

On July 12, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation held a hearing on the status of the FAST Act, exploring stakeholder perspectives on its implementation. Senators spoke with Amtrak, which again made a strong case on the need for funding.

In his testimony before the committee, Amtrak’s Stephen Gardner summarized the railroad’s estimated nationwide economic impact of \$7.9 billion, and an all-time high satisfaction rating from customers earlier this year. However, he also noted the mixed blessing this year of simultaneously growing ridership and diminishing revenue when compared to the previous year.

Gardner indicated that the mandate to isolate Amtrak operations into separate

accounts, concerning the NEC’s operational “profits,” is underway for introduction next year. He included brief mention of the Gulf Coast program, as well as the State Route Committee, both as positive developments.

His major plea was one of predictable and dedicated funding, as opposed to the discretionary approach that has been taken since Amtrak’s inception. He lauded many tools within the FAST Act, but pointed to this as the major obstacle concerning Amtrak’s future success.

NARP also attended a hearing held July 14 by the House Committee on Oversight & Government Reform. It was chaired by Rep. John Mica of Florida, who—compared to past hearings he’s held on Amtrak—was relatively subdued in his criticism of President Obama’s passenger rail initiatives.

Rep. Mica opened up the hearing, calling himself one of the biggest advocates of passenger rail in Congress, and lamented the gap between the U.S. and the rest of the

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developed world. He said that, while initially optimistic about President Obama’s plan, he was disappointed that most of the funding went to “snail speed rail,” and that while 99% of the funds were obligated only 51% of the funds had been spent.

Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) delivered the opening remarks for the Minority, and defended the High Speed and Intercity Rail Program. Rep. Duckworth argued that the \$10 billion has been well spent investing in Amtrak and state-supported services, while pointing out that the elimination of funding for the program since 2010 has slowed progress on introducing true high-speed rail. Similarly, Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA) chided opponents of high-speed rail who have been criticizing project delays while simultaneously throwing up obstacles to construction and eliminating funding for trains. Rep. Costa managed to have a constructive back-and-forth with Rep. Mica, setting the record straight on the the project’s timeline for construction. ■

Transit Agencies Look to New Amenities to Attract Riders

Big windows, comfortable seats, and spacious interiors - these may not be first things that come to mind when you think of public transit, but today's transit agencies and manufacturers are looking to change that. With transit agencies like the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) and Florida's Brightline looking to expand and develop new or existing rail connections, attracting riders with new and enhanced amenities is a top priority.

In the Bay Area, BART's new Fleet of the Future train cars have several new features to make commuting more enjoyable. With a new interior, the rail car is designed to maximize passenger seating and room so passengers don't feel like they're traveling in a sardine can.

With its new fleet, manufactured by Bombardier Transit Corporation, BART will host 54 seats per car, down from 58.6 seats previously, but with a goal of 1,081 train cars, the new fleet will provide more than 58,000 seats overall.

Other features for new BART trains include a quieter ride with micro-plug doors that seal out noise, padded seats with lumbar support, and a cooling system that will direct air to the ceilings.

The cars even come with bike racks

that have enough space to hold three bikes.

The rail cars for Florida's Brightline, which will provide huge windows for riders and will offer service between Miami and West Palm Beach in 2017 and eventually Orlando in 2018, have amenities that appeal to a variety of passengers, including the accessible riders.

To accommodate people with wheelchairs or mobility assistance devices such as walkers, the trains not only offer wider aisles, but also ramps that automatically bridge the gap between cars and stations. Not only does this assist people with wheelchairs, but also people with baby strollers or bikes.

These new cars are being manufactured by Siemens in Sacramento, CA.

Transit agencies are also looking at safety when it comes to new features. The Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART) is currently implementing Positive Train Control (PTC) on its fleet, and is set to be the first passenger rail system in the country to have all of its cars outfitted with the system. PTC is a safety system that can control the train's movements electronically, which can help prevent train accidents.

SMART has spent \$50 million on PTC

for its line from downtown San Rafael to the Santa Rosa Airport, which will start passenger service this year. SMART has also applied for \$3 million from the federal government to have PTC installed on its 2.1-mile extension from downtown San Rafael to Larkspur, which could open in 2018.

These features, and others, are important for attracting new riders who are seeking opportunities to travel and want to avoid commuting on congested highways.

As rail agencies and manufacturers continue to develop rail cars with new amenities, rail service will become more pleasant and appealing for passengers across the country. ■



Interior of New BART rail car.

(Photo credit: BART)

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NARP Hosts Annual Fall Conference In October

Interested in how freight rail and passenger rail can share the road? Or what the future of rail might look in the U.S.? Mark your calendar for October 14-16 to come to Denver and take part in NARP's annual Fall Conference! We think the program is our strongest yet, but we need YOU to make it even stronger!

Panel discussions will include:

- **"How Can We All Get Along?"** - an examination of options for shared use of rail infrastructure by passenger operations and freight railroads;
- **"Is Transit-Oriented Development the answer?"** - bringing together academic voices and appointed officials to talk over how innovative TOD might help spur

passenger-service growth;

- **"Sneak Peek At The Future: U.S. Passenger Rail In 2025 And Beyond"** - featuring a review of what we might see in rolling stock, on-board services and more;

- **"Solving The Infrastructure Conundrum: The \$300 Billion Elephant In The Room"** - devoted to wrestling with how we can look for innovative answers to paying for the network we all know we, and our economy, need. We'll also bring together speakers on young riders' issues, Colorado-specific projects such as new Front Range service or the Ski Train and even more.

Come join in the conversation, and tell your friends to come too. Together we can help realize A Connected America! ■

Virginia Looks to Expand High-Speed Rail in Southeast

Relieving the country's congested highways and developing new connections in rail transit are top priorities for officials in Virginia. Known as the "Atlantic Gateway," Governor Terry McAuliffe has touted the initiative as a package of transportation projects that would relieve traffic congestion on Virginia's I-95 corridor, but it would also help push forward the groundwork for high-speed rail in the Southeast region. Overall, the entire "Atlantic Gateway" initiative would cost approximately \$1.4 billion, and Virginia was awarded a \$165



Virginia Railway Express (Photo Credit: Virginia Railway Express)

million federal FASTLANE grant in July. "The Atlantic Gateway project is both unique and forward thinking, focusing on more than just highways," said Jim Mathews, President and CEO of NARP. "It is about connecting cities in new ways that will now provide people with additional opportunities for commuting and traveling throughout the region."

The rail projects that make up the initiative include:

- Building 14 miles of new rail track to improve mobility for the Virginia Express Railway and Amtrak, as well as freight rail.

- Rebuilding the Long Bridge, which takes rail traffic across the Potomac River, as well as the widening of track segments in Northern Virginia.

- Purchase from CSX the abandoned S line rail corridor, which runs between Richmond, VA and North Carolina. This effort could lead the way to extending high-speed rail in the Southeastern U.S.

- Outside of passenger rail improvements, the Atlantic Gateway project includes:

- Reducing congestion on Interstates 95 and 395 by extending express lanes by 10 and 7 miles, respectively;

- Constructing a new southbound bridge on I-95 across the Rappahannock River, which would help commuters and vacation traffic from the D.C. region.

- Adding new commuter parking and expanding bus service for the I-95 corridor.

"Winning this significant federal grant will allow Virginia to move forward on a project that will transform travel conditions and stimulate economic growth across our Commonwealth" stated Governor McAuliffe in a response to the FASTLANE grant.

"Our administration worked with federal, state, local and private sector parties to submit a package of transportation improvements that will have far-reaching benefits for everyone who travels the Commonwealth, whether by car, bus or train."

The \$165 million grant from the government was issued under the FAST Act, and it will be combined with \$710 million in other public financing from the Commonwealth, and \$565 million in private investment by Transurban and CSX Transportation. ■

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In New York, well-known transportation official, John D. Porcari, is expected to be named the interim executive director of the Gateway Development Corp., which will oversee the development of the Hudson River rail tunnels. Mr. Porcari's naming would follow other steps to make the new tunnels a reality after New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie pulled the plug on a similar project in 2010 because of budget worries. As deputy transportation secretary, Mr. Porcari served as chairman of the Moynihan Station Development Corp., a New York state entity overseeing an effort to transform a former post office across from Manhattan's Penn Station into a train terminal.

In Florida, city commissioners in Miami's South Beach are working towards development of a \$380 million light rail loop. In a big step forward, the city voted to negotiate an interim agreement with French rail company, Alstom, which submitted a proposal last year to build a streetcar system that would be one-third of a future rail system that would connect to downtown Miami. The city used that proposal as the basis for a bidding process that attracted Alstom and two other teams, who competed on the basis of their designs and technologies for a streetcar—not the price.

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) made the critical decision to put safety first by removing damaged rail cars from service. The transit organization took all 120 Silverliner V cars out of service after finding a fractured beam on one car and fatigue cracks on almost all other cars. Following inspections of the Silverliner cars, only five of the 120 were found to have no problems. The Silverliner cars made their debut with SEPTA on Oct. 29, 2010, and SEPTA is currently coordinating with other transit agencies to see if it can temporarily borrow rail cars to accommodate ridership.

New options are being explored in order to bring commuter rail service to the South Coast in Massachusetts. The SouthCoast



SEPTA's Ron Hopkins points out the location of a cracked equalizer beam. (Photo Credit: The Philadelphia Inquirer)

Development Partnership said that in light of revised state estimates that show increased costs and a lengthier timeframe, it is open to learning more about a route that would redirect the South Coast Rail corridor along a commuter rail line terminating at Middleborough. The current route would need to run through the environmentally sensitive Hockomock Swamp and cost \$3.4 billion. In 2012, the state predicted the project would cost \$2.23 billion.

In Minnesota, high-speed rail is advancing as a possibility between Rochester and the Twin Cities. North American High Speed Rail Group, through a preliminary study, found no major problems that would prevent the construction of high-speed rail. Currently, the company is proposing to build the line at \$4.2 billion, and wants to build it through private money. The project, however, has faced criticism from some NIMBY landowners who live along the proposed corridor. ■



A rendering of a Greater Miami Tramlink Partners' streetcar

Important Membership Reminder

■ Please do NOT use any old envelopes, membership renewal forms or donation requests you may have saved from previous NARP mailings prior to March 2016. These forms and the PO Box address on the old envelopes are no longer in use and your checks or credit card payment submissions will NOT reach NARP. Please only use the new envelopes and renewal/donation forms you receive with our current mailings, which are addressed to: NARP, PO Box 17082, Baltimore, MD 21298-9485. If in any doubt, you may always send checks and other payments directly to our office at: NARP, 505 Capitol Ct, NE, Suite 300, Washington, DC , 20002-7706.

There are still openings for state representatives on the NARP Council of Representatives in several states, including one each in Alabama; Arizona; California; Delaware; Hawaii; Idaho; Iowa; Louisiana; Massachusetts; Missouri; Nebraska; Nevada; New Jersey; North Carolina; Ohio (2 Seats); Texas (2 Seats); West Virginia and Wyoming. If you are interested in becoming more involved with NARP and advancing our goal of 'A Connected America', please visit our website, www.narprail.org under 'About[Leadership[Council of Representatives[Open Seats]' for more information on applying and for a complete list of the positions available.

NARP Member Benefits

■ If you haven't done so already: claim your Travelers United Advocate Membership, and further broaden the support for consumer focus at <https://travelersunited.org/welcome-narp/>

Review the full and growing list of NARP benefits by logging into <https://www.narprail.org/for-members/membership-benefits/obtaining-discounts/> ■

Save the dates of Friday, October 14 - Sunday, October 16 and make plans to attend the NARP Fall Membership & Council Meeting being held in beautiful Denver, CO. Meeting highlights will include a tour of the newly-expanded Denver Regional Transit District rail lines on Friday; a welcome reception at Denver Union Station on Friday evening; a full day of exciting and motivating speakers and panels on Saturday and a keynote presentation on Sunday. The Embassy Suites Downtown at the Convention Center is our host location and discounted NARP group-rate room reservations are now available via a link on the Fall Meeting event page on the website. Event registration will open on August 1, with a full-range of options for attendees. ■



Photo courtesy of Amtrak.

WEB EXCLUSIVE! Renovations for Chicago Union Station Moving Forward

Only weeks after Amtrak opened the new Metropolitan Lounge at Chicago Union Station, Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced that global engineering company Arup, will be the lead for the next phase of renovations at the historic landmark. Under a new \$6 million contract, Arup will develop and design solutions to many of Union Station's ongoing problems, which have plagued the 125-year old facility.

Included in its designs, Arup will look to reduce overcrowding on the passenger concourse, redesign platforms so they're no longer too narrow, and find a way to improve ventilation in order to clear up the smell in some areas of the country's third busiest rail terminal.

The designs created by Arup, which are projected to take up to 18 months, are only the next step in renovating Chicago Union Station. According to city transportation officials, the entire renovation process will cost hundreds of millions of dollars, and will take several years to complete. To reduce the burden on taxpayers, Mayor Emanuel will work with the U.S. Department of Transportation in an effort to receive federal

grants to assist in funding the renovations.

Amtrak, which is partnering with Metra, Chicago's Department of Transportation and the Regional Transportation Authority on the renovations, has already started making improvements at Union Station with the opening of the Metropolitan Lounge. For first-class passengers traveling in Sleeping cars or Business class, the new \$7 million two-story lounge has more than doubled its previous space and provides a variety of new amenities. Features range from available Wi-Fi service, complimentary snacks and beverages, showers, and even access to pre-boarding directly from the lounge.

"Not only does this project greatly improve the Amtrak experience for these customers, it also clears the way for changes at the Concourse Level that will improve those boarding areas," said Mark Murphy, Chicago-based Amtrak Senior Vice President & General Manager.

The Metropolitan Lounge replaces its predecessor, which first opened in 1991, with only space for 90 seats. The new lounge allows seating for 360 people at 13,500 square-feet. ■

NARP Traveler's Advisory

- ❖ Track work being performed by Metra will affect Hiawatha Service arrival times at Chicago and Milwaukee, from June 4 through August 21, 2016. For weekdays, trains 331, 333, 335 and 337 will arrive in Milwaukee 10 minutes later than the current published schedule. Trains 332, 334, 336 and 338 will arrive in Chicago 10 minutes later than current published schedules. On weekends, trains 331, 333, 335, 337, 339, 341 (and 343 on Saturdays only) will arrive in Milwaukee 10 minutes later than the current published schedule. Trains 332, 334, 336, 338, 340, 342 (and 344 on Saturdays only) will arrive in Chicago 10 minutes later than current published schedules.
- ❖ To accommodate a long-term track work project, several Springfield Shuttle trains will be canceled. Monday through Friday service changes, effective through July 29, 2016: Springfield Shuttle Trains 470, 490, 493 and 495 will be cancelled on Monday through Friday until July 29, 2016. Passengers will be provided bus service between New Haven, Wallingford, Meriden, Berlin, Hartford, Windsor, Windsor Locks and Springfield. All southbound weekday buses will depart all stations 30 minutes earlier than the respective trains
- ❖ Due to track improvements being performed along the Northeast Corridor, a number of changes are being made to Acela Express and Northeast Regional schedules through October 31: 1. Schedules of both Acela Express and Northeast Regional trains will change by up to 10 minutes in both directions between Boston, New York and Washington. 2. All Acela Express trains will depart Washington at five minutes before the hour, rather than on the hour. Some Acela Express trains will depart Boston a few minutes earlier than the times shown in the Amtrak Winter-Spring 2016 System Timetable. 3. Most northbound Northeast Regional trains will depart Washington three minutes earlier than the times shown in the Amtrak Winter-Spring 2016 System Timetable
- ❖ Due to extensive track work being performed by CSX Transportation, Empire Service and Maple Leaf schedules are adjusted between Albany-Rensselaer and Niagara Falls from July 14 through Sept. 2, 2016. ■