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RETURN REQUESTED

Amtrak Comes Of Age

By Barry Williams

It used to be that traveling by train in the United States required, in addition to a ticket, a good deal of stamina and courage. Railroad passengers had to be prepared for all kinds of adversity: hours-late trains, stranded trains, dining car fires, heating and air conditioning failures, filthy accommodations, et al. Indeed, the railroad traveler was a second-class citizen.

But, alas, that bleak era is coming to an end. A new and better day is now dawning for rail travel in the U.S., thanks to years of persistence and dedication on the part of many people—citizens who voiced outrage over lousy trains, journalists who amplified those cries, members of Congress who faithfully responded with necessary legislation (in the face of constant opposition from the Executive Branch), and men and women of Amtrak who worked to make their company succeed despite great obstacles.

During the 1970's, Amtrak made substantial progress in many areas, such as schedule coordination, train cleanliness, personnel behavior/morale, and information/reservation matters. Now, Amtrak is overcoming its critical equipment problems.

MODAL TRENDS

In Oct. 1980, domestic airline revenue passenger-miles were down 6% from Oct. 1979, while gasoline consumption was down 5.7% and vehicle-miles of road travel were down 0.7%. Amtrak passenger-miles were UP 12.4%.

SOURCE: *Travel Printout,* **U.S. Travel Data Center.**

"Because of declining business, airlines are cutting schedules and this results in a serious erosion of air service in and out of (Spokane, WA). Airport boardings are down 17% this year. . . .

"If air travel is off, train travel is booming.

"'We were up at least 20 percent this year. It's wonderful,' Spokane Amtrak supervisor Dick Schnieder said.

"'It's our new Superliners. People love them.'"

—*Spokane Spokesman-Review,* **Dec. 25, 1980**

"Passenger trains, while part of the country's heritage and history, have little place in a federal budget which is heavily in deficit."

—President Reagan's Office of Management and Budget

Equipment Modernization

When Amtrak began operations in 1971, virtually all of its trains except NY-Washington Metroliners employed temperamental steam-heated passenger cars inherited from the private railroads. Suffering from neglect, these steam cars proved unreliable and expensive to maintain; yet they remained Amtrak's primary type of equipment on long-distance trains until 1980.

As of Jan. 31, 1981, all but three Amtrak trains were operating with new (Amfleet-I, Superliner) or rebuilt (Heritage) electric-powered equipment, featuring reliable heating, cooling, and lighting.

On Aug. 9, 1980, Soon-to-be House Republican Leader Robert H. Michel (right) joined Illinois Lt. Governor Dave O'Neil (center) and Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers State Legislative Chairman D.L. Lindsey in festivities heralding the start of Amtrak's Chicago-East Peoria "Prairie Marksman," which is funded partly with state money.

As for the last three steam trains: the Los Angeles-New Orleans "Sunset Ltd." should be reequipped with Superliners by Feb. 28, the NY-FL "Silver Meteor" should receive Heritage cars by late March, and the NY-FL "Silver Star" should gain Heritage and Amfleet-II cars by late summer. Thus, if all goes well, Amtrak's trains will consist entirely of dependable, head-end electric passenger cars before autumn. No more steam!

That's a significant accomplishment, and one which is already paying large dividends, including: reduced car maintenance costs, fewer mechanical failures—and thus greater passenger comfort, higher crew morale, better on-time performance, improved relations with contracting railroads, and increased ridership, revenue, and cost-recovery. Moreover, retirement of the steam fleet will enhance Amtrak's energy efficiency, since the replacement equipment is lighter per revenue space.

On-time Performance Up

En route mechanical failures, which plagued Amtrak's steam

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Apr. 26 will see inauguration of through coaches to and from New York on the Washington-Cincinnati-Chicago "Cardinal" and, hopefully, the extension of the New York-Niagara Falls "Niagara Rainbow" to and from Toronto.

Denver & Rio Grande Western has agreed to a timetable footnote spelling out its policy of holding the "Rio Grande Zephyr" limousine at Ogden for up to 15 minutes (until 6:45 AM) when Amtrak notifies it that this would permit east-bound passengers to make the connection. A check of actual arrivals shows that even passengers coming from Boise-Portland-Seattle on the "Pioneer" would normally make this connection. You're on your own if you miss! (See Jan. Travelers' Advisory.)

cars, were a major source of train delay, and as such, were perhaps the primary source of animosity between Amtrak and its contracting railroads. Wherever new or rebuilt electric equipment has replaced steam, on-time (OT) performance has improved markedly. The Chicago-Seattle "Empire Builder" is illustrative. (See graph.) During FY 1979, operating with steam cars, the train was notoriously unreliable, with OT performance below 25% in 7 of the 12 months, and below 43% in all but one month. By contrast, in FY 1980, operating with electric Superliners, the train was OT 70% or more in nine of 12 months! The November OT rate of the Washington-Chicago "Broadway Ltd." rose from 47% with steam cars in 1979 to 100% with electric Heritage cars in 1980; it rose from 35% to 95% on the Chicago-Oakland "San Francisco Zephyr" whose steam cars were replaced with Superliners. Since gaining Superliners late last summer, the "Zephyr" has become so punctual that employees of the Burlington, IA, *Hawkeye* newspaper are now taking their morning coffee break on cue from the *eastbound* train's arrival. (Burlington is 2185 miles from Oakland.) Had this practice been followed prior to Superliners, many morning coffee breaks would have "arrived" after lunch!

Amtrak train performance is also improving because of better service from the majority of railroads which handle Amtrak trains on contract. Two factors explain this: fewer disabled passenger trains make for more cooperative railroads; and Amtrak's law suit against Southern Pacific sobered the railroads. Interestingly, during the 25 consecutive months prior to December 1979, when Amtrak sued SP, on-time performance for the Amtrak system never once reached 70%. During the 12 months which followed the law suit, system performance *exceeded* 70% in all but four months.

Complaints Down

With more and more trains operating on schedule and featuring reliable, high-quality equipment, passenger complaints are dropping off sharply. In FY 1980, passenger complaints were down 40% from the previous year on long distance routes, and down 50% on short distance routes excluding Metroliners. Specific trains which received improved equipment showed even more dramatic results:

TRAIN	COMPLAINTS PER 10,000 PASSENGERS FY 1979	FY 1980	% Change
"Empire Builder"	53.7	11.2	-79.0%
"Lake Shore Ltd."	57.5	10.9	-80.9%
"Broadway Limited"	58.3	17.4	-70.1%

NOTE: "Empire Builder" received factory-new Superliner cars, and "Lake Shore" gained rebuilt Heritage cars, during first month of FY 1980. "Broadway" received Heritage cars halfway through FY 1980, just in time for peak summer travel season.

Appropriately, commendations are increasing.

Ridership Up

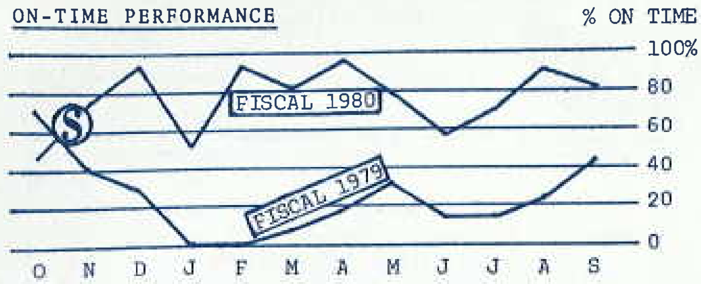
Despite the recession and the abundance of gasoline for autos, Amtrak ridership in FY 80 was up 3.4% over FY 79 (excluding trains discontinued at the end of FY 79, for accurate comparison). Amtrak had feared a ridership decline because it only expected to retain 25% of the ridership induced by 1979's gas shortage. Scott Hercik, Michigan DOT's rail passenger manager, admits that he too had expected train usage to fall once gasoline became plentiful again. But he says the ridership growth in FY '80 indicates to him that people who changed their travel habits during the 1979 gas shortage have become permanent train riders. With improved trains and service, "we feel fairly confident now that once we've got them (on trains) we will keep them."

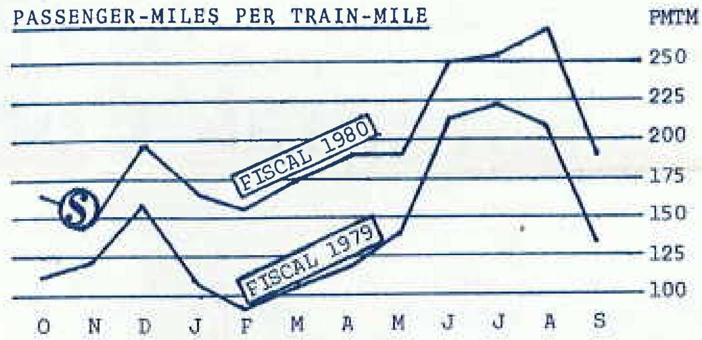
All Amtrak trains which received new or rebuilt cars in FY '80 showed healthy ridership gains: the "Lake Shore" up 8.4%, the "Broadway" up 13.2%, and the "Empire Builder" up 37.4%.

Passenger-miles per train-mile (PMTM) indicates the average number of passengers aboard a train throughout its run. From FY '79 to FY '80, the "Empire Builder's" PMTM count rose 43% from 145 to 208, placing it well above the congressionally-mandated level of 150. The "Broadway's" PMTM climbed from 178 to 190, and the "Lake Shore's" from 164 to 183.

(continued on page 4)

The Empire Builder





(S) — Superliner equipment assigned to "Empire Builder" during first month of FY 1980 (October 1979).

CONRAIL mo-pac

RAILROADS IMPROVE SERVICE TO AMTRAK

Amtrak trains operated on-time more often this past year, thanks to improved equipment and to better service from Amtrak's contracting railroads. Thirteen of the 19 railroads improved their handling of Amtrak trains in 1980, with Conrail and Missouri Pacific showing the most dramatic improvements.

Railroad	% Trains on Time Fiscal 1980	Fiscal 1979	% Change
Grand Trunk Western	93.8%	75.7%	+24%
Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac	90.2%	90.5%	0%
Union Pacific	90.0%	82.0%	+10%
Boston & Maine	86.9%	68.7%	+26%
Canadian National	84.1%	83.4%	+ 1%
Seaboard Coast Line	82.1%	84.9%	- 3%
Burlington Northern	80.6%	67.7%	+19%
Central Vermont	78.3%	73.7%	+ 6%
Missouri Pacific	77.0%	52.5%	+47%
Southern Pacific	76.8%	79.4%	- 3%
Southern	75.5%	77.0%	- 2%
Chesapeake & Ohio/ Baltimore & Ohio	72.3%	63.4%	+14%
Conrail	70.8%	45.0%	+57%
Amtrak NE Corridor	70.3%	60.6%	+16%
Santa Fe	67.7%	70.4%	- 4%
Illinois Central Gulf	66.7%	47.8%	+40%
Milwaukee Road	63.0%	53.4%	+18%
Missouri-Kansas-Texas	43.4%	67.4%	-36%
Delaware & Hudson	38.4%	29.1%	+32%

How to Cut Federal Transport Funding

(Excerpts from a paper prepared for the CONTACT U.S. Coalition by Gary G. Nelson, a Troy, NY, planning consultant, and presented to members of the Reagan DOT Transition Team.)

We began with solvent and viable intercity rail and intracity transit systems. We have now promoted a multiplicity of modes which each suffer from congestion, environmental, and economic problems. This can be attributed to piecemeal and poorly thoughtout federal interventions in the transport industry. The bureaucratic imperative is to enhance its own prestige and satisfy its vested constituencies by continually increasing this intervention, and more of the same has had predictable results. . . .

If federal transport funding were stopped today, the funds for projects would still be there but would revert to state, regional, local, and even private control. The funds would be redistributed in their use, geographically, modally, and even for non-transport purposes according to more localized perceptions of need and benefit.

ARIZONA GOVERNOR SUPPORTS DE-FEDERALIZATION

"Arizona's Gov. Bruce Babbitt (proposes) to phase out the Highway Trust Fund, which is going broke anyway because of reduced revenues, and turn 100% of highway and bridge funding back to the states. . . .It is a sad day indeed for the U.S. federal system, (he) adds, 'if the states are incapable of operating and maintaining their own roads.' A return of total highway funding would, in fact, be totally in line with President-elect Reagan's promise to return programs and taxing sources . . . back to the states."

—Neal R. Pierce, The Plain Dealer (Cleveland), Dec. 29

Contrary to the prevalent belief, large urban areas would not suffer the most. It is the large urban areas and heavily urbanized states that now have a net outflow of transport funds from their local sources of taxation to other areas via taxation at higher levels of government. This was documented for New York State in a study by this writer ("Transportation Cash Flow Analysis for New York State" by Gary G. Nelson for the President, City Council of New York, May, 1980). The results are generally clear from federal funding formulae where smaller areas get more transit aid per rider, smaller airports get preferential federal matches and highways receive more funds per user revenue in less developed areas. Left to their own resources, metropolitan regions could take care of their own needs and would almost surely shift more toward transit modes. . . .

Above all, reliance on localized financing for transport would reestablish the accountability that is now lacking. . . . **The present system is designed to eliminate responsibility for inefficient and damaging projects. In the "ping-pong planning" approach, local project advocacy bureaucracies design projects to fit federal and state dollars, not local needs. They then blame these upper levels of government for project responsibility. The feds then say that the projects are purely local decisions and that they cannot override aspirations of the localities. No one is accountable. Citizens are robbed of a right of accountability for use of their resources. . . .**

Rail service would fold in many areas. But if continuation of rail service is necessary to national objectives, then that has to be explicitly addressed. **The merit of rail service has nothing to do with revenue/cost ratios that have meaning only when the system returns to a true market environment. Right now, a lot of remedial funding would be necessary to undo past damage. . . .**

Practically, federal involvement may not cease entirely, but its objectives have to be explicitly reexamined and all the unwarranted programs and expenditures built up around these basic federal objectives will have to be cut away. The results will be less cost, greater accountability, and more public benefit. . . .

Previous administrations have never grasped the fact that a transport system dependent on federal dollars is a system controlled by federal policy. It is meaningless to talk about "deregulation" of such a system unless there is also disengagement from project funding. . . . It would be an abrogation of responsibility to end federal regulatory and planning protections for firms and individuals while leaving the project promotion activity intact. This would do nothing to get arrogant bureaucrats out of the lives of individuals. . . . ■

CHANGE IN WILLIAMS' TRAVEL PLANS

NARP Assistant Dir. Barry Williams will get off the "Inter-American" in Dallas on Mar. 20. He will arrive Oklahoma City by bus at 12:15 PM on Sat., Mar. 21 and meet with members of the Oklahoma Passenger Rail Assn. (details from Ron Coffman, 2752 W. Eubanks, Oklahoma City, OK 73112), then take the 3 PM bus to Little Rock and make a tight connection to the northbound "I-A."

How Not to Cut Federal Transport Spending

Washington's most-Xeroxed document in early February was the Office of Management and Budget's "black book" listing early targets for budget cuts. The Amtrak pages make clear Budget Director David Stockman's desire to reduce Amtrak to virtually a Northeast-Corridor-only operation immediately. President Reagan's Feb. 18 budget announcements should indicate whether or not DOT Secretary Drew Lewis succeeded in moderating OMB's position.

Notice what transport programs OMB wants to hit hardest, remembering that FY '82 is the most important year (FY '81 cuts will be hard to achieve and President Reagan may not survive FY '85 in office):

	Proposed Cuts in Outlays from Carter Budget Levels		
	FY '81	**FY '82**	**FY '85**
Federal Highway Admin.	No cut	4.7%	17.3%
Airport Construction	9.4%	9.4%	38.3%
Mass Transit Capital Grants	4.3%	15.7%	39.7%
AMTRAK Subsidies	3.3%	40.3%	74.0%
Local Rail Freight Aid*	14.3%	40.0%	89.0%

***This program would be phased out.**

OMB grudgingly admits "there is some Federal interest in promoting mass transit due to its contributions, in varying degrees, to urban development, pollution control, increased mobility and energy savings." OMB wants the feds to be "more selective," which means halting all new rail construction except "where completion of an operational segment would yield short term benefits in excess of short term costs. . . . an operational segment 90% complete should probably be completed. . . ."

Translation: "We're interested only in the short term. Don't tell us one train can do the work of over 20 buses. Don't show us that certain new rail lines would give a more efficient, energy-secure, and inflation-resistant transportation system to our grandchildren. They don't count."

AT ANY PRICE, U.S. OIL FINDS DOWN

". . . the rise in oil prices has not boosted production as oil company representatives and politicians once argued it would. . . . At a recent meeting of oil forecasters from organizations as varied as Exxon and the U.S. Congress, there was a general agreement that U.S. oil production, even accounting for the Alaskan fields, would fall by 10 to 20% during the '80s. . . . The resource base is indeed in decline and only a small fringe element of the oil industry now believes that U.S. production can be increased on a sustained basis."

—Christopher Flavin of the Worldwatch Institute, Washington, in *The Chicago Tribune*, **Dec. 27, 1980**

OMB wants $25 million cut from Amtrak's FY '81 budget authority and outlays, forcing a nationwide shutdown of Amtrak unless Congress acts swiftly to permit Amtrak to cut trains before Oct. 1. OMB proposes total FY '82 outlays of $563 million, while admitting that "an Amtrak system consisting of only the Northeast Corridor would have costs of $400-500 million annually. . . . Substantive legislation should be submitted to require each Amtrak train's revenues to cover 50% of total costs by the end of 1982 (note: three years before the 1979 authorization's target), 60% by 1983, 70% by 1984, and 80% by 1985. Legislation should also stipulate that if appropriations are constrained, Amtrak shall be free to drop . . . marginal trains."

OMB acknowledges the relative strength of long-distance routes. It says such fare increases as these are needed to cover 50% of total costs: NY-Florida 26%; Southwest Ltd. (Chi-LA) 39%; Los Angeles-San Diego 146%; Chicago-Milwaukee 193%.

"Compared to the 15% annual fare increases already planned, fares in future years (and/or State subsidy) should exceed those already planned by (the range is from 2% in the Northeast Corridor in FY '82 to 161% on non-NEC Short-haul routes in FY '85)."

These percentages assume demand won't be affected by the fare increases. Since OMB admits "these increases are well outside the range of demand elasticities with which Amtrak is familiar," it's clear the real aim is to wipe out Amtrak.

DOT must make the case to OMB that, with a nationwide foundation of fixed facilities almost completely laid, Amtrak can increase service levels while total subsidies approximately keep even with inflation, and the subsidy per-passenger-mile declines. Amtrak must outline the changes needed to make that possible. We must write to our legislators and tell them to fight service cuts (The Honorable Jane Doe, House of Representatives, Wash., DC 20515; The Honorable Ditto, U.S. Senate, Wash., DC 20510). We must get our local officials to speak out as well. ■

LATE FLASH!

REAGAN & AMTRAK PROPOSALS

President Reagan, in material given to the media on Feb. 18, advocated a $25 million cut in Amtrak's FY '81 budget. He called for *total* FY '82 outlays of $669 million.

In addition, he proposed to reduce the total Northeast Corridor Improvement Project authorization from $2.5 billion to $2.19 billion, eliminating New Haven-Boston electrification among other things. He would reduce 1982 funding by $288 million, and defer $125 million of 1981 funding "until 1982 as the Project is restructured. . . .The project (currently) places needless emphasis on improving trip time. . . .75% of Corridor riders are commuters. They would not reap noticeable benefits from increased speed."

Amtrak has proposed a $50.5 million FY '81 supplemental appropriation. For FY '82, it seeks the $254 million capital budget already authorized and $716 million for operations—the first year-to-year cut in current dollars ($2 million) and the biggest-ever cut in "real" dollars ($132 million taking inflation into account). It proposes $87.4 million in cost-cutting measures, including $32 million from these route changes:

- Reduce St. Louis-San Antonio service to tri-weekly but interchange cars with the "Sunset" to provide this long-awaited through service: Chicago-St. Louis-Little Rock-Dallas-Ft. Worth-Austin-San Antonio-El Paso-Tucson-Phoenix-Los Angeles; kill the San Antonio-Laredo and Temple-Houston segments ($12 million);
- Reroute Washington section of "Broadway Ltd." via Cumberland, probably reducing Washington-Pittsburgh trip-time by over two hours; kill Wash.-Charleston, WV-Cincinnati-Chicago "Cardinal" and Wash.-Parkersburg, WV-Cincinnati "Shenandoah" ($11 million);
- Restructure Northeast Corridor service, eliminating three lightly-used round-trips ($9 million).

Amtrak says it could cut its budget request further if it were relieved "of several hundred million dollars of unnecessary annual operating costs imposed by law or contract or which are borne by Amtrak but not borne by other transportation modes."

MEANWHILE, IN CONGRESS . . .

House Appropriations DOT hearings expected Mar. 11-12; Sen. Approps. Mar. 24; both Commerce hearings early Mar. These committees' powers will be less and Budget Committees' powers greater than previously if Congress quickly uses the 1974 Budget Control Act to set total spending limits. Sen. Budget Comm.: Domenici (Chrmn), Armstrong, Kassebaum, Boschwitz, Hatch, Tower, Andrews, Symms, Grassley, Kasten, Quayle, Gorton, Hollings (Rank.), Chiles, Biden, Johnston, Sasser, Hart, Metzenbaum, Riegle, Moynihan, Exon. House: Jones-OK (Chrmn), Wright, Obey, Simon, Mineta, Mattox, Solarz, Wirth, Panetta, Gephardt, Nelson, Aspin, Hefner, Downey, Benjamin, Donnelly, Anthony, Gramm, Latta (Rank.), Regula, Shuster, Frenzel, Kemp, Martin-NC, Trible, Bethune, Martin-IL, Smith-AL, Johnston, Fiedler.

More on Regional Meetings; A Great ORTA Film

Tom Shedd, editor of *Modern Railroads,* will be the luncheon speaker at the Chicago meeting (Mar. 21, 401 N. Michigan Ave.) which will also include: noon reception; 1 PM lunch; business meeting; and "Transportation for Tomorrow: The Challenge from Overseas," an Ohio Rail Transportation Authority film with excellent coverage of modern intercity passenger trains in Japan, France, and U.K. J. Michael Morrison, 7306 N. Ashland Ave., #1-D, Chicago 60626 must receive your $11 check (payable to Illinois Rail) by Mar. 17. If you want to attend but not eat, there will be a minimum $3 donation required, payable at the meeting.

To reserve the ORTA film for your own use, contact Bob Chizmar at ORTA, 30 E. Broad St., Suite 3414, Columbus, OH 43215. The film or a video-cassette for use by TV stations are loaned without charge—you just pay the return postage.

HERE WE GROW AGAIN!

Three NARP-affiliated rail passenger associations have been formed within the past 6 months, in Virginia, New York, and Utah—bringing the total number of affiliates to 26, representing 29 states. For more information, please contact:

Virginia Assn. of Railway Patrons (VARP), P.O. Box 867, Richmond, VA 23207.

Empire State Passengers Assn. (ESPA), P.O. Box 92, East Northport, NY 11731.

Intermountain Assn. of Railroad Passengers (Interrail), 840 Nibley Circle, Salt Lake City, UT 84106.

The Detroit meeting will be at the Book-Cadillac Hotel, 1 PM. Michigan ARP meets there at noon (Ohio ARP's meeting will be on train 353 between Toledo and Detroit). John DeLora, 14273 Jane, Detroit 48205 must receive your $10 check (payable to MARP) by Mar. 16. This covers registration and luncheon; no discount for those who don't eat.

New Region 6 candidates: Nancy Ross, 125 Dixie, Kalamazoo, MI 49001; Lori Sweetland, 3312½ Adams, Kalamazoo, MI 49008; Norma Ward, 420 Fitzgerald St., Durand, MI 48429. Nicholas Noe has withdrawn his candidacy. Mail ballots should be sent to John DeLora at the above address in separate envelopes marked "Ballot." Remember to include your own name and address.

Rep. Albert Gore, Jr. (D-TN), leader of the 1979 fight against Amtrak route cuts, will be the luncheon speaker at the Nashville meeting (Quality Inn, 10 Interstate Dr.) on Sat., Apr. 4. The meeting will run 9 AM-5 PM that day and 9 AM-Noon Apr. 5. John R. Martin, 4183 Paran Pines Dr., NW, Atlanta, GA 30327 must receive your $13 check (payable to him) by Mar. 30. Those not eating lunch: $6 registration (preferably also sent in advance). ■

Amtrak Comes of Age *(continued from page 2)*

Fares Covering Bigger Portion of Costs

The percentage of Amtrak operating costs covered by commercial revenues—primarily from passenger and package express transportation—rose from 38.3% in FY '78 to 41.1% in FY '80, a more respectable showing than many urban transit systems make.

Driven by inflation, Amtrak's deficit in actual dollars has increased annually. But, in terms of constant dollars (dollars adjusted to remove the inflation factor), Amtrak's deficit actually *declined* after FY '76 for *three successive years.* And although the FY '80 deficit was 1% above that of Energy Crisis FY '79, it still was lower than that posted in either FY '77 or '78.

Amtrak Is Succeeding

Amtrak boasts: "We're making the trains worth traveling again," and that has never been more evident. Despite difficult odds and many antagonists, Amtrak is succeeding. We doubt that even Reagan's budget cutters will be able to stop this, because Amtrak's product, rail passenger transportation, is intrinsically sound and increasingly essential. John A. Volpe, the Republican Transportation Secretary who presided over Amtrak's birth, said it all two years ago when he wrote to Rep. James J. Florio (D-NJ):

"I have long been convinced that the passenger train has inherent characteristics as the most efficient mover of large numbers of people. It is by far the safest mode of travel. Our friends abroad in every industrialized nation can't all be wrong. They are far ahead of us in developing new passenger train systems to meet growing demand and to offer their citizens an alternative to higher fuel costs and shortages. . . .

"As I said in 1971, 'Amtrak is a beginning and the base upon which to build.' It is time, right now, to build our nationwide rail passenger system, not let it be destroyed." ■