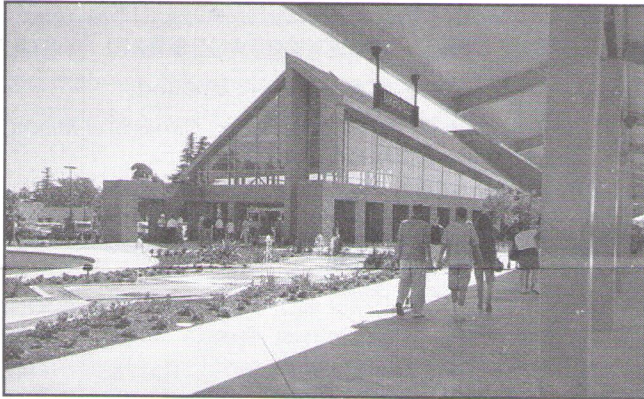


TWO NEW STATIONS IN CALIFORNIA



A new intermodal terminal (above and below) opened in Bakersfield, CA, July 4. Amtrak left a double-wide trailer on F St. for a new, 8,000-square-foot, \$15.5-million facility on S St. The city provided land, Amtrak provided furnishings, state and federal grants provided the rest. Bakersfield is an important Thruway bus transfer point from the *San Joaquin* corridor to Southern California.



Also on the *San Joaquin* corridor, a new, Spanish-colonial-revival Amtrak station at Merced (below) was dedicated August 26. It is on the same site (24th & J) as the old, deteriorated, 1917 Santa Fe station (razed in 1999) and includes a terminal for buses to Yosemite National Park. Funding came from Proposition 116 rail bonds approved by state voters in 1990.



—Caltrans (all)

Satisfaction Guarantee— More Riders!

In July, Amtrak enjoyed record-setting ridership (2.05 million) and passenger revenues (\$107 million). Travel (passenger-miles) was 560.2 million. Compared with a year ago, these figures were up 4.5%, 11.6% and 4.0%, respectively. Compared with five years ago, the increases are 14.7%, 37.6% and 4.1%. Amtrak attributes these increases both to publicity—and better service—associated with its new satisfaction guarantee, and to increased willingness of highway and aviation users frustrated by congestion to try the rail alternative.

Amtrak's on-time performance on long-distance routes has been generally poor (with the happy exceptions of the *Empire Builder*, *Crescent*, *City of New Orleans*; see box below). One wonders how the highly-publicized service guarantee program is working with all those late trains. Is Amtrak getting financially overwhelmed by free, future travel, especially by all the victims of those late trains?

In the first half of August, Amtrak issued slightly more than five Service Guarantee Certificates (SGC) per 1,000 riders, vs. about three in July and a target of one. The average SGC value has been about \$80, ranging from \$98 at Intercity to \$44 at Amtrak West. They must be used within 18 months.

Anecdotal reports indicate that Amtrak staff are more consistently helpful and friendly than in the past. Management claims that initial staff skepticism about whether staff would be supported is fading. The response to service failures is said to have impressed passengers greatly. Amtrak is "banking" that the long-term benefit of the good will the program generates will offset the short-term costs.

When an SGC is issued, the managers responsible for the

(continued on page 3)

A SAMPLE OF LONG-DISTANCE TIMEKEEPING

As noted above, Amtrak's long-distance trains have had some problems. Below is a sampling of Amtrak long-distance departures during August, based on information available on Amtrak's web site. Matters improved generally later in the month, though the *Sunset Limited* averaged over five hours late at destination throughout (see *Travelers' Advisory*, p. 4).

Week in August	Number of trains in sample	Average endpoint delay (hours:min.)	Percent on-time*
1 (Aug. 4-10)	207	2:14	32%
2 (Aug. 11-17)	203	1:37	40
3 (Aug. 18-24)	197	1:38	41
4 (Aug. 25-30)	186	1:13	48
Total	793	1:41	40%

*within 30 minutes

Florida Weighing Incremental Improvements

The State of Florida contracted with Amtrak to study ways to improve intercity passenger rail *incrementally*. Amtrak on May 1 submitted to Florida DOT an executive summary of the "Florida Intercity Passenger Rail Service Vision Plan." (It is on the DOT's web sites, with links from NARP's site.)

This follows the decision by Gov. Jeb Bush (R) to kill the Florida Overland eXpress (FOX) project in January 1999 (Apr. '99 News). Out of the \$70 million allocated for FOX in 1999 (plus the previous two years' unallocated funds), only \$7 million went to intercity passenger rail, as start-up capital for a proposed Amtrak service along the Florida East Coast route.

The Vision Plan acknowledges the sobering need for transportation alternatives in Florida. From 1990 to 2010, Florida population is expected to increase 38%, visitors 82%, and highway vehicle miles per lane mile 52%. The report also acknowledges the progress other states are already making in their own rail corridors.

exceed operating expenses by \$5.7 million in 2005.

Further work is needed before "key partners" commit to the proposals—Florida DOT, Amtrak, freight railroads (CSX and Florida East Coast), and Tri-Rail (the Miami-West Palm Beach commuter railroad). The report envisioned an equal split between the state and Amtrak on capital costs, though the pending High Speed Rail Investment Act (S.1900 and H.R.3700) could provide an 80% federal match for capital costs in the already designated Tampa-Orlando-Miami corridors. ■

POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT STAGES IN FLORIDA

Phase One, complete 2002, services affected:

- Jacksonville-Daytona Beach-Port Canaveral-Miami;
- Jacksonville-Orlando-Lakeland-Tampa.

Phase Two, 2005:

- Tampa-Lakeland-Orlando;
- Miami-Sebring-Orlando;
- Tampa-Lakeland-Sebring-Miami.

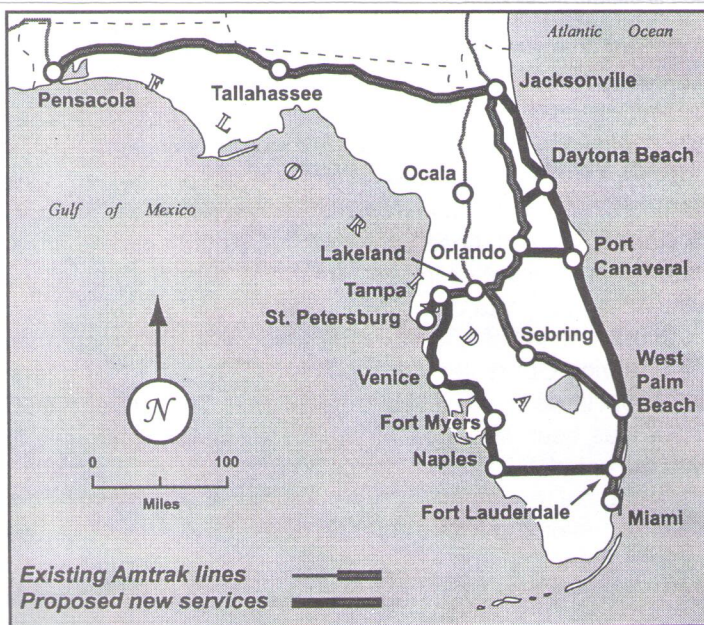
Phase Three, 2015:

- Orlando-Port Canaveral;
- Jacksonville-Daytona Beach-Orlando;
- Miami-Port Canaveral-Orlando;
- Jacksonville-Daytona Beach-Port Canaveral-Miami;
- Tampa-Sarasota-Fort Myers-Naples.

Phase Four, 2020:

- Jacksonville-Tallahassee-Pensacola;
- Naples-Fort Lauderdale;
- Tampa-St. Petersburg

[new routes in italics]



The plan is divided into four phases covering 20 years (see chart). Key elements include making existing services faster and more reliable in corridors of 75-300 miles; partnering with Amtrak, host railroads, and local communities; and an incremental approach that reduces the perceived market and financial risks faced by the high-speed FOX project.

The first phase (by 2002) encompasses the long-distance service changes proposed by Amtrak under its Network Growth Strategy announced February 28 (Mar. News). The second phase (by 2005) encompasses corridors within existing long-distance routes along corridors already designated under the TEA-21 federal grade crossing improvement program. Later phases build on that (including higher frequencies and speeds up to 110 mph), including some segments that never before had passenger rail. Some of these would be along interstate highways. Some other alignment changes may be possible, especially in the Disney-Orlando area.

Phase 2 infrastructure costs (crossings, tracks, etc.) were projected at \$278-393 million; rolling stock (eight train sets) at \$76-92 million. Passenger revenues were projected to

CONTINENTAL SENDS PASSENGERS TO AMTRAK

USA Today (August 11) reported that, "When bad weather hits its Newark, NJ, hub, Continental transfers passengers from short-distance flights to Amtrak trains." Amtrak guarantees seats for air travelers displaced by canceled flights (such as for bad weather), when Continental notifies Amtrak.

"We look at this as a total transportation network," Continental President Greg Brenneman says of the Amtrak partnership" (*USA Today*, August 14).

The August 11 article also said, "Bad weather and over-crowding in the skies made July the third-worst month on record for flight delays, Federal Aviation Administration officials said...Thunderstorms caused 153 delays at major airports in July, up from 99 in July 1999."

Also from August 14: "Though a new system of air traffic control is on the drawing board, along with expansions at most major airports, experts say things could get even worse the next several years...(This year) passengers stranded by weather or labor issues often have nowhere to turn because other airlines' planes are so full, they're setting records."

Both United and America West have reduced flights "to ease disruptions."

NARP Urges O'Hare-Rail Link

NARP has urged linking passenger rail with O'Hare Airport. In an August 23 letter to Illinois Gov. George Ryan and Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, NARP said, "An attractive link between O'Hare Airport and passenger rail (both intercity and Metra) would be so valuable to travelers that it merits high priority in your transportation planning efforts."

NARP called for "extension of Airport Transit [fixed-guideway people-mover] to Metra's O'Hare Transfer station" and "upgrading track capacity on the railroad line between O'Hare Transfer and Union Station." That line currently is used by "a handful of weekday Chicago-Antioch Metra trains." NARP noted that—as the photo shows—no structures occupy the land between O'Hare Transfer and the existing Airport Transit Remote Parking terminal.

NARP said "a direct connection between O'Hare and a Midwest network of fast, frequent trains will enhance the efficiency of U.S. transportation in general and the Midwest in particular. It is also an inexpensive way—without impacting surrounding communities—to add effective airport capacity. Code sharing between airlines and rail services will make the rail trip just another 'flight' segment of many international and other long distance flights...[The link also would] benefit air travelers who decide to make a last-minute shift to the railroad due to weather-related or other air-travel problems..."

"The value of air-rail coordination has been proven at several large airports in Europe...[In the U.S.,] a railroad station for Newark Airport is under construction. Stations are planned to serve airports in Providence and Milwaukee. Maryland just announced plans to replace the cumbersome BWI airport-rail station bus link with a rail link. **O'Hare should join this healthy, customer-friendly trend.**"

Noting a proposed "high-speed" rail line between downtown and O'Hare and Midway Airports (*Chicago Sun-Times*,

Amtrak Ridership Growth

(from page 1)

affected train receive notification by e-mail. In many cases, they next telephone the guest who complained. Guests receiving these calls reportedly are impressed with the followup and the fact that caller is so familiar with the circumstances which led to the complaint.

Amtrak believes that many of these conversations are with customers who, in earlier days, would never have talked with Amtrak or considered riding the train again. All SGC's are mailed out, but the conductors and station agents still can issue "service vouchers" on the spot where they feel this is appropriate. Also, before the new program began, Amtrak mailed "transportation credits" in response to written complaints. That continues to be true for guests with complaints about "pre-July-2000" travel, but such complaints now can be handled by telephone as well. ■



—Ross B. Capon

Can Metra's O'Hare Transfer station be a future, high-volume, intermodal connecting point? Airport Transit's Remote Parking terminal is visible at far right.

August 1), NARP said "building upon the existing Metra service is a far better choice. It would be easier and less expensive to implement, would provide superior service, and would create an important link to the developing railroad system [both Metra and Amtrak]...a tremendous step forward in a city blessed with an extensive public transportation system, but which has at least two key 'disconnects': lack of good links between Union Station and both CTA rail and O'Hare." ■

Full text of the letter is at <www.narprail.org>, along with a similar letter by Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition Vice President Richard Harnish, published in Crain's Chicago Business, August 21.

MESSAGES IN AMTRAK'S GROWTH

As reflected in the numbers at the start of our lead story, ridership has grown more than passenger-miles. This reflects growing strength in corridors in the Northeast and along the West Coast, where travelers increasingly disillusioned with highway and aviation problems are turning to Amtrak on those routes with speeds and frequencies are acceptable, though far below European and Japanese standards. (See box on Continental/Amtrak box, page 2.)

That revenues have grown more than twice as fast as ridership over five years (even as average trip length fell) is a reminder of sharp fare increases set by Amtrak early in the period, and the ambiguous nature of U.S. policy towards trains. One reason often used for building more trains is as a means to address highway and aviation congestion. But Amtrak's high corridor fares (presumably a by-product of the financial targets set for Amtrak) act to depress rail demand artificially, thereby decreasing Amtrak's ability to ease congestion in the other modes.

CORRECTIONS: The correct title of David King (Aug. News) is Deputy Secretary of Transportation of North Carolina...In May, we said that in February, the Capitol Corridor management added a seventh Sacramento and fourth San Jose train (and replaced the Colfax train with a Colfax-Auburn bus) at no additional cost. Actually, the new service scenario required the release to the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority of \$700,000 in previously appropriated state fiscal 1999-2000 funds (covering the seven months from February 27 to September 30, 2000). Still, the cost per train-mile for the added service was low compared to the base service, because the new trains meant better use of crews and equipment.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Sunset Limited—East of New Orleans, a slower schedule starts September 12, due to chronic delays on that CSX line (which, however, seem to be comparable to delays on the UP line west of New Orleans). The westbound *Sunset* leaves Orlando 1:00 pm, arrives New Orleans 9:20 am (increasing running time 1:25 and New Orleans dwell time 2:25). The eastbound train leaves New Orleans 10:30 pm, arrives Orlando 9:00 pm (increasing running time 3:15 and dwell time 1:20). This also reduces the amount of time available (on paper, anyway) to service the train overnight at Sanford, FL (near Orlando).

While CSX participated with Amtrak in creating the new schedule, NARP remains concerned about general, past precedent—i.e., longer schedules have only a short-term beneficial effect on on-time performance.

Detroit-Pontiac line—On August 31, Amtrak restored service on trains 352-353, the *Twilight Limited*, to Royal Oak, Birmingham, and Pontiac, MI. This had been dropped May 21 when the train was renamed from *Lake Cities* in preparation for extension from Michigan to the east. Trains 350-355 (*Lake Cities*, ex-*Wolverine*) has continued to serve Pontiac even though the May 21 timetable showed it running to Toledo—and will continue for the foreseeable future.

With trains 351-354 (*Wolverine*, ex-*Twilight*), this brings Pontiac-line service back up to three trips daily.

Skyline Connection—did not start August 21 as we said last month was possible.

Transit—Trinity Railway Express opens a 17-mile extension of its Dallas-South Irving line to Richland Hills, September 16. This includes a CentrePort station just south of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport with free shuttle buses to each air terminal. A Richland Hills-Fort Worth extension is due fall 2001.

Seattle-Tacoma Sounder commuter rail begins September 18, with—initially—two northbound weekday-morning trips (southbound in early evening).

SENATE PRO-AMTRAK VOTE

The Senate voted 72-24 for an amendment by Arlen Specter (R-PA) and Herbert H. Kohl (D-WI) that would allow Amtrak to maintain through fiscal 2002 its eligibility to lease vehicles from the General Services Administration (GSA). Otherwise, Amtrak foresaw a \$15 million a year increase in costs for leasing vehicles, including road-rail "high-rail" vehicles, buses for track gangs, and police cars. The July 20 vote amended the agriculture appropriations bill.

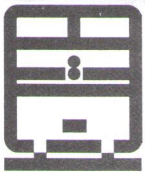
FEDS—100% ON SOME CROSSING WORK

The federal government now will pay 100% of the cost of hazard elimination work at railroad-highway grade crossings under both Sections 130 and 152 (but not the Section 1010 program directed at potential high-speed corridors). This covers the vast majority of federal grade-crossing funds, though not those specifically designated for high-speed rail corridors. Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) pushed the increase (from 90%) to encourage states to spend their safety funds. The provision was dropped during House consideration of its transportation appropriations bill (May News, p. 4), but Wolf persisted and got the measure into the military construction appropriations bill, which President Clinton signed July 13.

WHERE IS ACELA EXPRESS?

"...A spokesman for the [Bombardier/Alstom] consortium building the [Acela Express high-speed] trains, [said] that the first fully tested train sets will arrive in late September...Amtrak officials [could not comment on that], noting they were awaiting official notification. But a high-ranking source at Amtrak said passengers in the Washington-New York-Boston corridor can expect to see service begin sometime in October, *assuming* [emphasis added] the 'late September' delivery comes through..."

—Boston Globe, "Faster train service seen near," August 31



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