

Amtrak Strikes Gold (cont'd. from p. 1)

In March, a number of standee problems were reported on Portland-Seattle trains. Amtrak has acknowledged the problem, but cites a temporary shortage in the number of available Amfleet cars. Few, if any, extra cars will be sent during April. Severe standee problems were expected the Easter holiday. But Amtrak's National Operations Vice President and General Manager David Watts has assured NARP they become available later this spring, more cars will be in the Northwest.

The importance of having space on hand to accommodate growing markets cannot be overemphasized. We are just beginning to see what a newly equipped Amtrak can do in medium-range corridor areas. Standee problems will really stunt that growth and could begin to drive people to something which must not be allowed to happen.

Amtrak or the State are at a loss for what to do next on the West Coast, they should look to a consumer organization, such as the California Citizens for Rail California. This recently organized group has drafted "A Program for Rational Passenger Railway Development in California." The document sets an example for other state and regional rail passenger groups could use; it is available for \$1.50 from Citizens for Rail California, Box 99782, San Diego, CA 92109.

The California study includes: (1) an introductory statement setting forth the basic beliefs and objectives of CRC; (2) an outline of steps that must be taken between now and 1980 for the development of a skeletal yet functional passenger train network in California; (3) a map which shows clearly the six service areas called for by the group, including on the map itself a description of each; (4) a detailed account of each service, indicating how each will serve demands of California's major travel

PLEASE HELP US!

Members can help us by not sending in renewal payments before they are specifically notified that their renewal is due. Additional contributions are always needed and put to good use, but please mark them as such.

Starting with the next issue, some of our mailing procedures will be changed. You will help us work possible bugs out of the new system by letting us know if you do not receive the next NARP News by the end of May.

markets; and (5) a description of how the basic network advocated in the plan might be expanded over time to become a European-style dense network of trains connecting the most populous parts of California." The six steps called for are numbered according to order of priority.

The six incremental improvements called for in the report are: (1) a through Sacramento-Oakland-Los Angeles train, providing overnight service between the latter two points, while giving the Bay Area a morning departure for Sacramento; (2) operation of a total of six daily round trips between Los Angeles and San Diego with improvements to save 20 minutes operating time; (3) operation of four daily trains Sacramento-Oakland-San Jose, with track improvements to reduce operating times; (4) rerouting of the Bakersfield-Oakland train via the Niles Canyon, northbound in the morning and southbound in the evening; (5) construction of a station at the Oakland Coliseum BART station; and (6) operation of two corridor trains between Santa Barbara and Los Angeles (in addition to the long-haul trains from San Francisco).

The CRC study is helpful in several ways. It is a sober and articulate document which gives CRC both visibility and credibility. It shows clearly how the services advocated relate to existing travel patterns. It is indispensable as a lobbying tool, both for CRC and for NARP's Washington office.

Finally, the study is timely. The Governor and the State legislature have gone on record calling for developed rail service in California — and have begun taking steps to

Back to the Basics: Let Your Legislators Know What You Want!

One of the most effective ways individual NARP members can help to advance the cause of rail passenger service is by writing to their Federal legislators. Your views will carry even more punch if you can get local officials and organizations — mayors, councilmen, state legislators, chambers of commerce, LWV's — to send similar messages to their U.S. Senators and Congressmen.

But never underestimate the power of an individually written letter or postcard to influence the views of its recipients. Particularly with House members, much of the correspondence they receive from constituents is related to personal problems (such as with Social Security), so letters which seek improvements for the public generally are often a welcome change. Similarly, it is effective to visit your legislators (preferably accompanied by a few others who agree with you), either in D.C. or when they are in their district offices.

Two important rules: focus on one subject in any given letter or card, and write your own letter. (Signing a petition or sending a letter printed or worded by the organizers of a campaign is less effective because such actions require less effort and probably indicate less strongly held views.)

Also, if you agreed with a recent vote cast or public statement made by the legislator to whom you are writing, begin with a word of praise.

It's probably best not to write a second letter to the same legislator before he or she has responded to your first — unless you have something which will be of unusual interest, or more than a month has passed without a reply to your earlier letter.

When writing about commuter rail matters, remember that Federal legislators' involvement is generally limited to setting Federal aid policies (such as for the "Section 5" money discussed in "Commuter Mess", this issue). Proposals for new services or schedule changes are usually more appropriately addressed to state officials and/or the public transit authority involved.

Letters are properly addressed and headed as follows:

The Honorable _____
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable _____
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator _____:

Dear Rep. _____:

In some cases, because of committee assignments, you may wish to write to a legislator from another district or state. Always send a copy to your own House member or Senators. When you are writing to a committee or subcommittee chairman, indicate this in the address (i.e., The Honorable Warren Magnuson, Chairman, U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. . .).

Money must both be authorized and then appropriated before it can be spent. The authorizing committee has primary expertise in the subject matter, and the appropriations committee in the overall budgetary situation, although the appropriations subcommittees also are very knowledgeable about the specific subjects with which they deal.

Initial appropriations are often for lower amounts than have been authorized, but supplemental appropriations bills can make up the difference later. (Supplemental authorizations are somewhat rarer.)

Each authorization and appropriation measure is first considered by the appropriate subcommittee; the bill is then written and the appropriate full committee edits it ("marks it up") before it is sent to the floor. The draft written by the subcommittee can be changed by the full committee, and amendments on the floor are common, though usually dealing with less crucial aspects of the legislation.

Since the House and Senate rarely approve identical bills, it is

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Commuter Mess (cont'd from p. 1)

or were inadequate. Funds were provided for 100% of the difference between previous and new subsidy levels for the year starting 1976; 90% for the year starting April 1, 1977; and 50% for months starting April 1, 1978.

The numbering of a "4R" Act paragraph dealing with it appears to have given Conrail the ultimate power (if court action) for deciding what subsidy levels are possible. Conrail, however, has an obvious motive to extract as much money as possible from local transit authorities paying for commuter rail service. Conrail has the Herculean task of saving the northeast's rail freight service (and thus the nation's) from privatization, so, the more Conrail extracts in commuter rail subsidies, the better Conrail will look when measured against the national projections set out for it in the U.S. Railway Association's System Plan.

Conrail says it lost \$205.5 million compared with \$295 million expected by USRA, for its first nine months in operation — the period ending December 31, 1976. However, USRA "has forecast that winter weather added \$100 million of losses to Conrail's losses in January and February, on top of nearly \$70 million reported earlier." *Washington Post*, April 1

Along with these challenges, Conrail's management, not surprisingly, has neglected commuter rail and done a mediocre job of operating those services. Reports from NARP members insist that the quality of the ex-Reading service in the Philadelphia area and the ex-Erie-Lackawanna services in northern New Jersey has declined, as did the ex-Penn Central service on operation.

Conrail has publicly touted new, more efficient freight operating procedures, but, judging from the subsidy requests sent to the public agencies, has done nothing to get Penn Central's outrageous commuter rail costs under control.

Boston was blessed with another railroad operating commuter service: the Boston and Maine, bankrupt but reorganizing independently of Conrail and under a respected management headed by Alan G. Dustin. B&M made a bid to operate the Conrail

We inadvertently omitted Eugene K. Skoropowski, of Melrose, MA (Region I), from the list of elected directors in the Feb. News. Our apologies — and our congratulations on his appointment as Chief of Operations Planning for the Commuter Rail Department of the MBTA. Another hardworking consumerist enters the transportation field professionally! Gene leaves a highly successful architectural practice to make the switch, and we wish him good luck in his new position.

portion of the Boston suburban network. It is a tribute to Conrail's greed and/or incompetence that B&M was able to undercut Conrail's requirement while making a profit itself.

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), which pays for the services, is also happy, since the locally based management will be more responsive. MBTA Director of Operations David Gunn says: "If we need new wheels, for instance, we can tell B&M to buy them and charge them to us, and before long the wheels will be there." Doing this with Conrail was unheard of, he noted. If a schedule needs to be changed, it can be done in a matter of days instead of the six months it used to take just to add a train run or take one off service, Mr. Gunn explained." (*Christian Science Monitor*, March 16)

The Philadelphia area is not so lucky. There, Conrail controls all the commuter rail service, since the well-run Reading was included in Conrail, and Reading's commuter management has been decimated, with many people moving to Amtrak's Northeast Corridor operation. The danger is that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) does not have enough incentive (or bargaining leverage) to strike a fair bargain with Conrail, since SEPTA simply passes on the bills to the counties and the state, who pay

commuter rail bills on grounds they were exorbitant. Bucks County has already refused to pay the full amount demanded by Conrail, and there is talk of running trains "closed-door" through the county, spreading the remaining costs among the other counties. And Conrail has refused to reduce its subsidy demands to correspond with a 20% fare increase just instituted for the purpose of increasing revenues by \$3.6 million, lessening the subsidy requirement by that amount.

The hope in Philadelphia is that, barring a favorable turn-about by Conrail, Amtrak, which owns most of the commuter trackage not acquired by SEPTA, could replace Conrail as the operating company, and be reasonable in its subsidy requirements.

The fate of the Delaware portion of the Phila.-Wilmington line, which just had a 30% fare increase, is in doubt because Delaware has never subsidized it in the past, and may not come forward now.

Indiana did not squawk about the subsidy levels, which were similar to those presented earlier by Penn Central, because it is expected that the two weekday Chicago-Valparaiso round-trips will be discontinued next year, and that most passengers will shift to improved South Shore Line service. (Prospects look good at this point for funding new equipment for the South Shore.)

In New Jersey, negotiations are just beginning over the subsidy requirements.

Meanwhile, on April 1, Conrail posted 60-day notices of discontinuance along several commuter lines, including Washington-Baltimore and all of New Jersey except ex-Erie-Lackawanna lines, because of the failure of the transit authorities to agree to unprecedented demands by ConRail for total, open-ended indemnification against the costs of any catastrophic accidents. ConRail's demands were apparently triggered by the huge claims filed in the wake of the collision between two jumbo jets at a Canary Islands airport.

It is hoped that this problem will be resolved by enactment of legislation drafted by the concerned agencies. Meanwhile, on April 6, New Jersey won a restraining order in Federal District Court in Trenton forcing ConRail to take down the discontinuance notices.

Even if all the ConRail problems are solved, the transit agencies paying for commuter rail still face trouble. Once the Northeast Federal aid program ends, these agencies will be — as most subway systems already are — at the mercy of a Federal operating subsidy program which effectively provides 50% aid for bus operations (even higher if one considers the effect of handicapped/elderly fares) and nothing for rails. The distribution formula is based on the densities and gross populations of urban areas rather than on transit ridership. Thus New York City, where transit dependency is highest, gets, on a per rider basis, the least amount of UMTA Section 5 money.

The Federal budget people who drafted the formula enacted under President Ford were reportedly instructed to tilt it against cities with rail services. We hope the new Administration will seek a ridership-based formula.

Massive changes in Amtrak's long-distance train schedules were to be implemented April 24. On June 7, the Seattle-Salt Lake City "Pioneer" will begin operation. It will connect in both directions with the "San Francisco Zephyr" to and from Denver-Omaha-Chicago, but only westbound with the tri-weekly "Rio Grande Zephyr" from Denver and Grand Junction, perhaps the nation's most scenic ride.

Trackwork on the Northeast Corridor began near Baltimore on March 31, as Secretary Adams and Amtrak's Paul Reistrup watched an 18 man surfacing and welding crew go into action. Larger track gangs were set to begin construction April 4 in Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland. DOT says that "an estimated \$120 million will be spent for manpower, materials and equipment during 1977. Approximately 6,000 people will be hired to lay continuous welded rail, replace ties, rehabilitate interlockings, install turnouts, clean ballast, improve the railroad."

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