

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

March 1995

3
Vol. 29

Amtrak Task Force to Visit U.S. Cities

Sen. Lott Requests Public Forums to Look at Future of National System

Seven public forums organized by Amtrak will be held to consider the future of Amtrak service—with an emphasis on maintaining a national passenger rail system. **NARP members should attend where possible!**

Each forum will be hosted by Amtrak President Thomas M. Downs, at least two Amtrak board members, and a regional co-sponsor. Officials and citizens from the areas in which the forums are to be held will make presentations. Attendees will be able to speak to panelists and presenters before and after the presentations. The results of the forums (as well as the input received for the record) will be summarized for the Amtrak board to make recommendations to be presented to the Administration and Congress.

"In helping to more clearly define Amtrak's future mission," said a March 14 Amtrak statement, "each forum will explore how rail passenger service might help to address local and regional issues such as highway and air congestion, economic and community development, environmental concerns, improved energy efficiency...The forums will also consider how rail passenger service might be used to strengthen the commitment to public safety and if the rail system could help America sharpen its [technological] competitive edge..."

AMTRAK TASK FORCE PUBLIC FORUMS

City	Date	Host
Racine, WI	March 28	Gov. Tommy Thompson (R)
Meridian, MS	April 11	Mayor John R. Smith
Sacramento	April 18	Caltrans
Seattle	April 19	Cascadia Alliance
Cleveland	April 25	Gov. George Voinovich (R), Ohio DOT, Ohio Rail Development Commission
Dallas	April 27	Texas DOT
Philadelphia	May 3	Gov. Tom Ridge (R), Mayor Ed Rendell

The impetus for the task force is Chairman Trent Lott (R-MS) of the Senate Commerce Surface Transportation Subcommittee. He has expressed doubt that Amtrak's recent service cuts would have their intended effect, and concern at the lack of opportunity for state and citizen input.

The forums should challenge the Amtrak board's talk of eliminating the federal operating subsidy by 2002—an act that could kill the long-distance trains. (In 1989, Amtrak said it could reach this goal by 2000, but the accompanying statement about capital investment needs was largely ignored.)

Further Cuts

The public forums, though welcome, come too late for outsiders to influence the June service cuts. At a House Transportation Appropriations hearing March 2, Downs said the Amtrak board would deliberate the next (and, as Amtrak now sees it, final) round April 4-5; announcements would be made April 6 and the cuts would take effect June 1. Amtrak Chief Financial Officer Betsy Reveal also said, "All truncations of routes and segments were announced in December. We anticipate almost all of what we will [announce] in April will be frequencies." Downs said, "We assume almost every long-distance train will be affected."

However—unlike in December—Amtrak said it would tell states well before April 6 what is likely to be announced, so that the states would have more time to react. ■

ATM's for Unstaffed Stations

To give better service and increase business at unstaffed stations, Amtrak is developing an "automatic-teller-like" machine offering most services (except checked baggage) available at staffed stations. A ticket agent at one of the nearest staffed stations will control the machine—in fact, the transaction begins with passenger and agent looking at each other through a two-way video display.

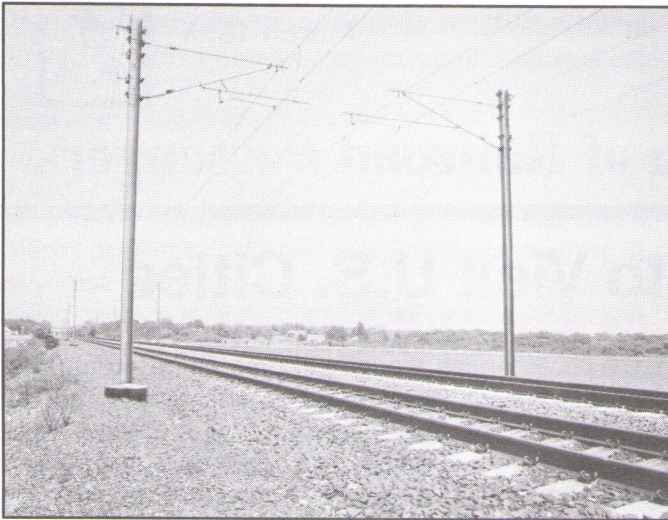
The machine will accept credit cards for ticket sales. For those paying cash, the machine will issue a boarding pass with the fare, reservation number and accommodations (if any). The passenger then pays the conductor on the train, but the transaction will be much quicker since the conductor will rely on the information on the pass. This also permits purchase of discounted tickets not currently sold on board.

Amtrak also envisions using this device to replace partial train-time coverage at two nearby stations with full coverage—agents at one and the machine at the other.

All this would increase productivity of agents at smaller stations, where work is clustered around train times. At other times, when an agent might have no customers present, he or she could serve customers at a distant station where train time was approaching. Also provided for are remote public announcement capability, control of station lighting and doors, and platform viewing. Caretakers still would provide a human presence at unstaffed stations.

Capital costs are envisioned to be paid by states; token operating costs could be paid by hotels and taxi and rental-car operators whose information the machine would provide. Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina and Missouri have been most interested so far. If the project works out, other states should be willing to invest to support their long-distance trains. ■

BOSTON ELECTRIFICATION UPDATE



On November 15, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) gave final approval to New Haven-Boston electrification, in its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). It found that delaying the project would represent "an adverse environmental impact that could not be effectively mitigated." FRA chief Jolene Molitoris told a Senate panel March 23 she would issue a positive record of decision in April.

Some near the tracks have questioned the need for electric trains. But the Statement says, compared to "the proven capabilities of existing, non-electric passenger rail equipment...the electric passenger rail service yields greater transportation and environmental benefits with minimal environmental impacts. It will generate greater ridership, consume less energy, and generate less air pollution."

Also called into question by a few is the alignment, the Shore Line (via New London and Providence) owned by Amtrak and Massachusetts. Three alternatives were rejected: the Inland Route via Hartford and Springfield (mostly owned by Conrail, a freight railroad);



—Amtrak

the old Airline Route via Middletown and Willimantic (despite its name, very curvy and abandoned for great stretches); and an expensive Shore Line realignment away from the shore between Old Saybrook and Westerly. All would cost far more and take far longer to build.

At left, is a photo altered to show what the Shore Line electrification will look like. This is a state-of-the-art design, like what is currently used in Europe. Old lineside telephone poles are being removed. At right, the existing World War I-era electrification between New Haven and New York. Opponents have tried to scare people into believing that is what the new electrification will look like.

Because of FEIS and electrification design delays, construction now is expected to begin this fall. It should be complete in fall 1998, with full commissioning in spring 1999. A contract for the 24 electric, 150-mph train-sets (and two fossil-fuel, 125-mph sets) should be awarded this summer with delivery in 1998 or 1999. Amtrak also has issued specifications for 15 125-mph electric locomotives.

Why Amtrak Can't Be "Privatized"

In the past few months, proponents of Amtrak privatization have come out of the wood work. An example of this thinking appeared in the November 16 Washington Post in a business-section column by James K. Glassman. Later, this column appeared in the Albany Times-Union and the Philadelphia Inquirer (maybe more). The NARP response (by Scott Leonard, Assistant Director) was printed in slightly-edited form in the Inquirer on December 15—the day the first round of sweeping Amtrak cuts was announced. Below is the original:

The word "privatization" is used very easily by James K. Glassman in his annual cut-Amtrak column, but without his explaining exactly what he means by it. This red herring needs a closer look, given the fate of 1980's calls for privatization and the failure of the all-private-sector rail service that existed before Amtrak's creation in 1971.

Glassman cites Sweden and Britain, though their experiences with privatization do not have much relevance to the United States. Here, the public sector controls the operating side of the passenger train system (Amtrak), and the private-sector freight railroads own 95% of the infrastructure Amtrak uses—tracks, signals, etc. [An exception is the 5% of the passenger system where both the infrastructure and operations are controlled by the public sector—the Northeast Corridor and a few other places.]

The opposite is true for aviation and highways, where the government controls and subsidizes the infrastructure, and operations are private-sector.

In Britain and Sweden, as in the U.S., highway infrastructure is public, and operations (cars and trucks) private. Their aviation infrastructure is public-sector, but operations are mixed. SAS is still owned by Scandinavian governments, and British Airways was sold in the 1980's.

Until recently, the railways were entirely public-sector—operations and infrastructure. In Britain, the government began trying to sell off British Rail (BR) operating sectors this year, with few bidders. BR's infrastructure component, Railtrack, is supposed to be sold, but there is great disagreement over when or whether it should be done. In Sweden, where infrastructure and operations were divided in 1989, the main operating company (SJ) is still state-owned but competes for contracts. The state has no intention of selling the infrastructure company, Banverket, and is pouring millions into it for improvements. In other countries not mentioned by Glassman, "privatization" as a concept is no more pure.

All this means that there are no opportunities to "privatize" Amtrak in the sense that other countries' railways are "privatized." All-private infrastructure ownership and operation has already failed, unable to compete with government-

(continued on page 3)

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

April 2 Amtrak Timetable: Due to unusually numerous last-minute changes, new system timetables are not available until mid-April. Some highlights:

Relating to Service Cuts Announced in December

- **Gulf Breeze** (Birmingham-Mobile leg of *Crescent*) discontinued. On days the *Crescent* serves Birmingham, connecting buses will run to/from Mobile via all stations (except to add Clanton, drop Brewton). On other days buses also run from Atlanta and Anniston. Bus handles checked baggage to Birmingham only.

- **Lake Cities** (Chicago-Pontiac) Detroit-Toledo leg rerouted to Pontiac (other Pontiac trains retained). Toledo-Detroit-Dearborn-Ann Arbor bus connects to/from *Lake Shore Limited*. Also new eastbound Battle Creek-East Lansing-Flint connecting bus.

- **Pere Marquette** (Chicago-Grand Rapids) cut to four days a week—northbound Thursday-Sunday, southbound Friday-Monday.

- **Hiawathas** (Chicago-Milwaukee) three of seven round-trips dropped, fares raised 50%.

- **Capitols** (San Jose-Emerlyville-Sacramento-Roseville): still running, but to save cost of deadheading equipment, trains 722 and 725 are replaced with buses San Jose-Emerlyville certain days of the week (other trains still daily to/from San Jose).

- Vermont service: Overnight Montreal-Amherst-New London-New York-Washington *Montrealer* discontinued. New daytime *Vermont* runs daily St. Albans-Amherst-Springfield-New York-Washington. It connects to a St. Albans-Montreal Thruway bus, and replaces existing Springfield-Burlington bus. A complementing Springfield-Burlington night Thruway bus is planned.

- Metroliners—8:00 pm New York departure (Monday-Thursday train 129) discontinued.

- Boston-New York (Shore Line) one Monday-Saturday round trip discontinued; *New England Expresses* realigned.

- Boston-New York (Inland Route) two round trips discontinued east of Springfield, leaving only *Lake Shore Limited* to/from Chicago. One round trip south of Springfield discontinued, leaving six through to/from New York and Washington (a seventh requires change at New Haven).

- New York-Washington: several trains discontinued or consolidated.

- Keystone Corridor (Harrisburg): Retain five weekday, three weekend local Philadelphia round trips; five weekday, four weekend New York round trips.

- Atlantic City line: all Amtrak trains discontinued. New Jersey Transit commuter train round trips from Philadelphia increased from six to nine, Amtrak

through-tickets honored. Richmond-Atlantic City trains replaced by Richmond-New York trains.

- Empire Corridor: One Sunday-Friday New York-Albany round trip discontinued. The Monday-Saturday New York-Niagara Falls *Mohawk* runs west of Albany Thursday-Saturday only. *Adirondack* runs through Montreal-Albany-New York-Washington.

- Thruway buses St. Louis-Carbondale and to/from Fort Wayne discontinued.

Other April Changes

- **Southwest Chief** eastbound leaves Los Angeles 1:00 later (but arrives Chicago only 0:15 later), dining car open to Los Angeles passengers only, on first night.

- **Coast Starlight** (Seattle-Los Angeles) runs 1:00 earlier southbound, connecting to *Southwest Chief*.

- **San Joaquins** (Emeryville-Bakersfield) trains renumbered; northbound schedules shifted significantly; southbound less so.

- **International** (Chicago-Toronto) runs 1:00 later eastbound (except Sunday).

- **Carolinian** (New York-Charlotte) runs 1:00 earlier southbound, adds stop at Woodbridge, VA.

- **Silver Star** (New York-Florida) leaves Washington southbound 3:00 pm (0:45 earlier), but New York 10:42 am (0:03 earlier—0:42 faster on Northeast Corridor).

New Oakland station at Jack London Square may open June 1, served by *California Zephyr*, *Coast Starlight*, *Capitols* (not *San Joaquins*). San Francisco buses may be changed from Emeryville to Oakland except *Coast Starlight* to/from north.

Special All-Aboard America fares: The current Amtrak policy of only three stopovers to use this popular fare has been suspended for travel April 1 through August 20—unlimited stopovers are permitted during this time. Through May 15, both 30-day, non-refundable and 45-day, refundable versions can be reserved:

Total zones:	1 zone		2 zones		3 zones	
Days fare valid:	30	45	30	45	30	45
Spring/off-peak (Apr. 1-June 15)	\$138	\$178	\$188	\$238	\$228	\$278
Summer/peak (June 16-Aug. 20)	\$178	\$198	\$248	\$278	\$298	\$338

Tickets must be purchased within seven days of reservation. As always, seating may be limited; first-class accommodations subject to surcharge. Not valid on Metroliners or Auto Train; All Aboard America routing and exchange restrictions apply.

The Amtrak station at Ontario, CA was dedicated March 22. The site has been a *Sunset Limited* stop since December 4.

“Privatization”

(from page 2)

owned airport and highway infrastructure. No private-sector investor will ever want to compete with government-owned I-95/National/La Guardia/Logan by buying the Northeast Corridor.

Glassman's privatization would only result in elimination of all passenger train services. That would increase energy use, pollution, congestion and travel costs, reduce people's travel options, and isolate many small communities. Glassman should be asking how to get more value out of money invested in Amtrak, not...how to get rid of it. ■

NARP to Amtrak...

NARP President John R. Martin on March 2 wrote Amtrak President Thomas M. Downs on a number of issues of concern and interest to railroad passengers. Below are some excerpts from the seven-page letter:

- "...We remain deeply concerned that Amtrak's failures to do what is needed to generate passenger revenues are leading people—including those at [the U.S. General Accounting Office], on [Capitol] Hill and your Board—to draw the absolutely false conclusion that we face a long-term, secular decline in demand for long-distance rail passenger service."
- "...You made the point that the long-distance trains are there for solid economic reasons. We could not agree more. NARP is not a sentimental organization and has never advocated operation of trains for sentimental reasons...I am absolutely, unqualifiedly convinced that there is a major long-distance ridership market to be tapped in this country and that Amtrak, its historic growth in this market notwithstanding, has only scratched the surface. The opportunities are countless

ALL AMTRAK BUSINESS UNIT CEO'S NOW IN PLACE

- Intercity (at Chicago):** Art McMahon, who had been Vice President of Passenger Services since 1992, and in charge of British Airways customer services before that.
- West (at Los Angeles):** Gil Mallory, who long led Washington State's passenger rail program (and Oregon's too, more recently).
- Northeast Corridor (at Philadelphia)** George Warrington (see Aug. '94 News), former president of PATCO.

NARP REGIONAL MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

- Region 3 (DE, NJ, PA):** Sat. May 13; 9:30-2; Philadelphia, PA, DVRPC Conference Room, Bourse Bldg., 8th fl., 111 S. Independence Mall East (use 5th St. Market-Frankford stop, but use 4th St. elevator in building); \$15; contact: Robert Machler, 215/673-1964.
- Region 8 (AK, ID, MT, OR, WA):** Sat. May 20; Tacoma, WA; speaker: Amtrak West CEO Gil Mallory; contact: Jim Hamre, 206/848-2473.

and they simply have not been realized."

"[Rather than talk of possibly eliminating federal] operating subsidies within five years...It seems the wiser course for Amtrak would be to speak of its opportunities for further *increases* in efficiency, while noting that heavy subsidies to the other modes mean a subsidy-free future is not a realistic goal. Level the playing field, and then we can have a subsidy-free future."

"Your testimony before Rep. [Susan] Molinari [R-NY] implied that long-distance service will 'go away' if states (or someone other than Amtrak) do not pay for it. Your comments also have reflected unwarranted optimism about the willingness of states to fund long-distance trains..."

"We believe Amtrak *already* is stretching beyond the breaking point the degree of Northeast bias that Congress is willing to fund in an Amtrak system..."

"For years we and many within Amtrak watched in frustration as Amtrak hurt revenues on the long-distance trains by avoiding obviously needed, off-peak discounts, and we have observed an institutional bias towards [reducing] train sizes."

"...It is appalling that the *Crescent*—even during Mardi Gras—had only two New Orleans Amfleet II coaches. Compared with three Heritage coaches before, this is a slight reduction in capacity *per train*..."

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