



News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

October-November 1996

10
Vol. 30

Hope for Midwest Corridors!

Eight states and Amtrak have agreed to participate in a study focusing on the development of a Chicago-based Midwestern regional passenger rail system. The study will be funded with contributions from each of the states, Amtrak, and a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration.

Four of the states already help fund Amtrak services (Illinois, Michigan, Missouri and Wisconsin), and four do not (Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Nebraska). The process began with a presentation by Wisconsin DOT Secretary Chuck Thompson in July at a regional meeting of state transportation department heads. The study's "kickoff" meeting—the first with all parties present—was November 12-13.

Arguably the most-neglected segment of Amtrak's operations—generally hampered by low frequency and low speed—these corridors will be studied by a partnership of two consulting firms, COMSIS of Silver Spring, MD, and TEMS of Frederick, MD. The lead staff member at TEMS, Alex Metcalf, is known to some NARP members as a veteran of British Rail and many North American intercity passenger studies; his most recent work of interest to us is on intercity rail passenger forecasts for Boston's North Station-South Station rail link.

The study will develop a business plan for a "Chicago hub" regional passenger rail network. There is hope that some aspects of the Northeast Corridor can be replicated here, albeit with much of the track owned by freight railroads. The study is to be completed in the fall of 1997. ■

NARP PRESSES AMTRAK ON SERVICE ISSUES

Recently, there has been an unusually high volume of communication between NARP and Amtrak (mostly the Chicago-based Intercity business unit). We have urged Amtrak to explore certain alternatives to route cuts, and to improve day-to-day operations. Regarding the latter:

- NARP told Amtrak it was hurting the revenue-earning capacity of some trains, including the *Texas Eagle* (whose sleepers are often sold out) and the *Sunset Limited*, by putting crew members in Superliner rooms meant to be sold, even though brand-new dormitory cars operated with empty rooms on the same trains! We were told that this strange practice would end, and it has (except on the *Texas Eagle*).

- The *Cardinal* handles large Huntington-White Sulphur Springs groups. Amtrak policy limits such groups to 40 so they do not block sale of a reasonable number of higher-revenue, long-distance trips. But NARP noted three cases of groups of over 80, including one near Christmas when the entire train presumably could have been sold to long-distance customers. Amtrak has taken corrective action.

- Since Amtrak is telling south Florida passengers to

AMTRAK TRAVEL VOLUMES: UP FROM HERE?

Amtrak travel rose late in fiscal 1996 (ending September 30); the good trend continued this fall. But service cuts, bad weather and "too-aggressive" pricing—which Amtrak says it won't repeat in 1997 (report on Steve Scott, p. 2)—meant fiscal 1996 travel overall fell 9% to 5.05 billion passenger-miles (PM—one passenger carried one mile). This third straight decline puts Amtrak just above the 5.00-billion PM level the private railroads had in 1970. (Amtrak, however, has far fewer routes and just half the trains.)

Some 1996 highlights:

- The Pacific Northwest Corridor posted its second straight big increase: ridership of 303,700 was up 13% from 1995 and 140% above 1994's 126,500;

- Ridership on California *San Joaquins* and *San Diegans* was up 8%; *Capitols* ridership rose 29%;

- Northeast Corridor ridership fell 5% (PM -6%), due in part to an 11% drop in train-miles operated and stiff fare increases (average revenue per PM was up 15%; total passenger revenue 5%);

- In July, August and September, respectively, passenger-related revenues of the Intercity unit (most long-distance trains; Chicago-based corridors) rose 3.0%, 5.4% and 15.1% above year-earlier levels. But for Hurricane Fran, the 15.1% might have been 22%.

transfer between the *Silver* trains and the *Sunset* in Jacksonville, NARP urged shifting the transfer to DeLand so that westbound passengers could board the *Sunset* at 7:50 pm instead of 10:50 pm. In an eight-page, October 23 letter to NARP, Amtrak Intercity CEO Mark Cane called this idea "excellent...Amtrak is looking into this proposal and it is very likely we will make this change in the next few days in order to provide better service to our customers."

- After Amtrak backed off its August 8 comment that the *Sunset Limited* probably would continue to run to Orlando, we continued to press Amtrak on this, urging that the locomotives run around the train in Orlando to get the equipment to and from the Sanford maintenance base. Cane's letter did say: "Should we find a profitable way to operate to Orlando, I assure you we will do so."

- We criticized the plan to keep the Sanford station "unstaffed" even though it will become an endpoint for the *Sunset Limited*. It seemed unsatisfactory to rely on announcements by inbound crews (on the eastbound *Sunset* and on buses connecting to the westbound train). Amtrak now is trying to staff the station part-time.

Marketing, Mechanical V.P.'s Address NARP Board

Steve Scott, Vice President—Marketing and Revenue Development; and Doug Sizemore, Vice President—Operations Support, both with Amtrak's Intercity business unit in Chicago, addressed the NARP board in St. Louis October 18.

Meeting the Marketing Challenge with Optimism

Scott's marketing experience includes work for Colorado's Crested Butte Mountain Resort, Northwest Airlines and United Airlines, among others. He joined Amtrak in March, 1995, bringing a refreshing enthusiasm: Amtrak faces a "tremendous challenge," but "there isn't one day that I feel we can't be successful, and that we can turn this company around."

"Amtrak has got a real awareness problem," said Scott, noting that only about three in ten respondents to recent surveys even consider the train in planning trips. However, when asked if they would consider train travel in the next two years, 42% of the traveling public said "yes." Currently, only 3-to-6% actually take the train at least once a year. "That's a tremendous opportunity," Scott said.

He said service quality is "not where we need [it] to be." While 91% of train riders who have ridden at least twice say they'd do it again, only 73% of first-time riders say the same.

Another annual study looks at travelers' social values. Compared to others, train riders turn out to be more environmentally conscious, more likely to reject authority, have more personal creativity, are more concerned about education for its own sake and have lower tolerance for hypocrisy. That last point, Scott said, should have a big impact on how Amtrak handles on-board information for its customers.

Scott illustrated the basic "Four P's of Marketing."

- **Product**—customer research, planning for future products, new equipment, service quality, and special trains ("We get more requests for special trains than we can handle," Scott said). He said some research suggests Auto Train—now a "\$50 million revenue opportunity"—with two additional routes "could become \$175 million."

- **Price**—Scott says Amtrak must maximize price based on the customers' willingness to pay—but the customers must get a good product in return. "**This past year, we probably got more aggressive on price than the market would say is prudent. This year's plan is to not be that aggressive.**"

- **Place**—For Amtrak, this means how the product is sold. Scott wants to raise the share of long-distance tickets sold through travel agents. It's now 50% vs. the airlines' 90%—"That's an opportunity for us." Scott also thinks Amtrak has gone overboard "with hundreds of different promotions," making the product too hard to sell.

- **Promotion**—"We have to create awareness of Amtrak trains...and change the perception of the equipment we have in place, as the new equipment is coming on." Through joint promotions with companies like Disney, Avis and Days Inn, Amtrak is reaching new customers who might never have considered Amtrak otherwise. Amtrak also must "support winning concepts we already have," like the Air Rail Program, with more advertising and improvements. Scott said a second airline (in addition to United) soon might join Air Rail.

Scott said product line managers now will focus primarily

LONG-DISTANCE SMOKING SOLUTION?

Amtrak changed its smoking policies slightly November 10, but—more importantly—says long-distance-train smoking lounges are coming. The November change bans smoking in sleeping cars (except, for now, on Auto Train), and confines it to portions of lounges on *some* overnight trains. The full policy follows:

- **No smoking on all "day" (non-overnight) trains.** On some trains, the crew will announce stops at which passengers may smoke on the station platform.

- **No smoking on these overnight trains: *Coast Starlight, California Zephyr, Pioneer, Desert Wind, Night Owl.*** For all but the *Night Owl*, the crew will announce stops at which passengers may smoke on the station platform.

- **Smoking permitted only in designated lounge areas of these trains, at times designated by crew: *Auto Train* (but permitted in sleeping car rooms until smoking lounges are introduced), *Silver Meteor, Silver Star, Silver Palm, Crescent, Capitol Limited, Three Rivers, Lake Shore Limited, City of New Orleans, Sunset Limited, Texas Eagle* (but not the quad-weekly Chicago-St. Louis train), *Southwest Chief, Empire Builder* (but not the tri-weekly Chicago-St. Paul train).**

This summer, Amtrak inaugurated a smoking lounge on the *Sunset Limited*. The lounge is in the lower level of a Superliner coach, behind a closed door, with a separate air-circulation system—smoky air is kept away from non-smokers. By May, each bi-level, long-distance train will have such a lounge.

For single-level, long-distance trains, 25 Heritage sleeping cars will get smoking lounges (and smoke-free crew dormitory space). Currently, unmodified Heritage sleepers are running as dorms.

on safety and service (including on-time performance). Marketing will set some basic standards so the Amtrak system will have more consistency. Product-line managers no longer will have to worry about marketing and pricing.

Scott acknowledged Amtrak must do better at adding cars to meet demand rather than simply "yield-managing" fares to unaffordable levels. He said Amtrak needs an "equipment czar," and one is on the way. "Every car that is sitting and waiting for maintenance, every car that is on protect, every car that is between x and y and doesn't have customers on it, is an opportunity we have wasted."

Santa Fe Veteran With Broad Responsibilities

Sizemore came to Intercity August 1 after 31 years at the Santa Fe Railway. His last position there was Chief Mechanical Officer. He is responsible for mechanical support, engineering, commissaries, and materials management.

Sizemore wants to improve safety and reliability. In 1997, he wants to cut employee injuries 30%, passenger injuries 15%, delays from Amtrak-controlled factors 35%, and delays caused by freight railroads 15%. He said the 35% cut would give Amtrak a stronger hand in dealing with the freight railroads, enabling Amtrak to tell them: "We could do it [run

(continued on page 3)

St. Louis Meeting Speakers (from page 2)

on-time] if you would hold up your end of the bargain."

Maintenance: Sizemore wants more, better work from the big Beech Grove, IN, maintenance facility, which he calls "Sleepy Hollow...That's the best job on Amtrak...a five-day-a-week operation, weekends and holidays off." He is considering three-shift days and seven-day weeks. He wants heavy overhauls to take cars out of service for 30 rather than 90 days.

Sizemore will centralize maintenance. For example, Chicago will maintain all General Electric diesel locomotives; Superliner running maintenance will be in Los Angeles, New Orleans, Chicago; Viewliner running maintenance will be in Hialeah, FL. Beech Grove will be for heavy maintenance.

Other Reliability Issues: Station delays will be studied (with development of standard boarding plans for long-distance trains), schedules adjusted for better connections and running reliability, freight railroads consulted on their track maintenance plans, and terminal delays reduced by through-running trains (as at Chicago) and using standard train composition.

Transcontinental Run-throughs: He thinks long-distance run-throughs will help improve reliability. In late October, this began with the *Southwest Chief* and *Capitol Limited* equipment; in January, through-passengers will be allowed to stay on board in Chicago. Concern was expressed about mid-point servicing, but it was noted that the *Sunset Limited* already runs coast-to-coast, and experience has shown only minimal need to set out defective cars at New Orleans. At Chicago, the *Chief/Capitol* windows will be cleaned, toilets serviced, floors vacuumed, water tanks filled.

A Younger Fleet: With the retirement of Heritage cars, Amtrak's bad-order ratio (share of cars in for repair) should improve. It is near 25% now, but could be closer to 10% in a few years. [Sizemore said 160 Heritage cars would be stored at Beech Grove, New Orleans and Hialeah. "This is good, valuable equipment...it deserves to be rebuilt," he said. He knows idle cars can be cannibalized or deteriorate in other ways. "We do not want that to happen...We would like a white knight in shining armor to ride up" with the financial backing to fix these cars.]

En-Route Food Run-outs: Sizemore said Amtrak has a new commissaries manager and a toll-free phone number for crews whose trains are not properly stocked.

NARP has heard such upbeat talk before, though perhaps not from someone with so distinguished a private-sector career. The best indication that Sizemore may get results is that his general manager for cars, Ed Tolle, who also came to St. Louis, volunteered: "I've seen more change in the past three months than in all my 22 years with Amtrak." ■

NOTE—The number published in the *September News* for the Great American Station Foundation was a fax number—the voice number is 202/906-2112.



—John A. Ross

Doug Sizemore

AMTRAK WINS "IMPROVED SERVICE" AWARD

As proclaimed on the cover of the new National Timetable, Amtrak won the 1996 "Most Improved Customer Service" award (transportation service category) presented by Knowledge Exchange, a publishing and marketing company in Los Angeles.

Winners were determined by a recent, "first annual" random national survey of private-sector senior executives; 400 were polled, 250 responded. Responses were based on whatever impression these people had of the companies (i.e., as customers, suppliers or friends of same). The survey in turn was inspired by a new book, *Customer Intimacy*, by Fred Wiersema.

Amtrak and the other 21 winners were listed in a nationally-circulated ad for the book (*Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 12). Two awards went to companies in 11 different categories. The other transportation award ("Most Customer Sensitive") went to Delta Air Lines.

In accepting the award for Amtrak in Seattle September 10, *Coast Starlight* Product Line Director Brian Rosenwald credited decentralization of decision making at Amtrak. He said a new menu item used to "go through the Washington menu committee and it would take a year-to-18 months to get permission. Now we can do these things in weeks or days."

"The goal of making Amtrak operationally self-sufficient in six years is built more on hope than reason. But it is a non-starter for certain if Congress fails to provide a dedicated source of funding to meet the railroad's capital needs..."

—Lead editorial, *Harrisburg (PA) Patriot-News*,
September 15, 1996

GREEN LIGHT FOR ELECTRIFICATION

On October 9, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection granted the certification needed for Amtrak to begin electrification construction there. This was the last federal or state regulatory hurdle for the New Haven-Boston project. Construction began in Rhode Island on July 3 (where 80% of catenary construction is complete), in Connecticut near Kingston, RI on November 13), and in Massachusetts in October. Assuming adequate federal capital funding, completion is set for July 1999 (with new, high-speed train sets ready in October 1999).

Amtrak by September 30 also had installed 97% of the needed continuous welded rail, 99% of the concrete ties, 92% of the curve modifications, all of the five high-speed interlockings, 52% of the bridge undercutting, 56% of the bridge decking, and all of the reverse signalling. Work on improving track bottlenecks at Stamford and New Haven also has begun. Major work outstanding (besides catenary and train set construction) includes completion of a train control/positive stop feature of the signal system in 1998 and construction of substations.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

More on "Threatened Trains": The *Pioneer*, *Desert Wind*, *Texas Eagle* and *Boston Lake Shore Limited* will run through May 10, and the *Gulf Coast Limited* through March 31 (day after Easter). Daily *California Zephyr*, *Empire Builder* and *City of New Orleans* service will wait until May 11. (An October 3 Amtrak statement said "an internal task force" is to "report on the fastest means possible to implement a daily *Empire Builder*," but the meaning of this is unclear.)

Other November 10 timetable changes, Amtrak Intercity: Buses from Florida West Coast points to the *Silver Palm* and *Meteor* now go to Orlando (not Winter Haven), forcing a longer bus ride...Charlotte/Greensboro-Florida connections are possible *Piedmont-Star* (at Raleigh), or *Carolinian-Palm* (at Rocky Mount—the *Palm* does not stop at Wilson or Selma)...The *Lake Shore Limited* leaves Chicago 2:00 earlier (at 6:00 pm); the *Capitol Limited* 0:55 later (at 7:45 pm).

Amtrak West: Coast Starlight coaches run Seattle-San Diego (first-class cars still run Seattle-Los Angeles)...Van Nuys is not a *Coast Starlight* stop after all—Glendale remains staffed through January 5, and an active stop during renovation...Southbound Seattle-Portland *Mount Adams* shifts to 8:00 am departure (from 11:30 am)...All four *San Joaquins* now serve Oakland.

Amtrak Northeast: Names of NortheastDirect and Empire Service trains running west of Albany are restored...Boston-Richmond trains diverted to Inland Route (via Worcester) are 85 (depart Boston 10:00 am);

86 (depart New York 2:15 pm)...The *Lake Shore Limited* no longer carries New York-Albany local traffic...The New York-Rutland *Ethan Allen Express* starts December 2 (pm) north, December 3 (am) south...The *Vermont* got Custom Class service in October...Two special, overnight, all-stops, "ski" trains run on the *Vermont* route in late January.

Hiawathas: Wisconsin DOT and Amtrak signed a contract to run the Chicago-Milwaukee trains through June 30. Wisconsin is paying \$2.2 million; Illinois Gov. Jim Edgar (R) will seek \$500,000 from the legislature for this service (Aug. News).

San Antonio: Amtrak vacated the old SP station November 21. It is to be made part of a new hotel. Amtrak occupies a temporary facility in the parking lot until a permanent station is built.

Amtrak Thruways: Services added November 10 (but not in timetable): Chicago-Indianapolis-Louisville, Chicago-Indianapolis-Cincinnati (days *Cardinal* does not run), Cincinnati-Columbus-Cleveland, Atlanta-Macon, GA, Orlando-Melbourne-Cocoa, FL, San Antonio-Laredo, TX; Kalamazoo-Grand Rapids-St. Ignace, MI.

Galesburg-Peoria-Bloomington-Champaign bus service ended October 10, when the bus operator went out of business.

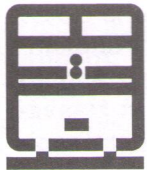
Transit: Tri-Rail extended its commuter rail line five miles north from West Palm Beach to Mangonia Park, FL, October 28.

A five-mile BART extension from North Concord/Martinez to Bay Point/Pittsburg opens December 7.

THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION POLICY PROJECT on October 8 released a paper called *Crying Wolf, the False "Crisis" of America's Crumbling Roads and Bridges—And Why Special Interest Highway Lobbyists Like It That Way*. Highway interests do not want transit or Amtrak to get federal fuel tax money, and have tried to frighten people into agreeing by emphasizing highway and bridge deterioration. But the STPP paper—using Federal Highway Administration data—points out road and bridge condi-

tions actually are improving, and that 44% of ISTEA funds nationwide went to building new roads and new lanes in 1994 and 1995. In one state, Virginia, the amount going to new capacity was actually 78%—so much for crumbling bridges! STPP is calling on Congress, as it considers ISTEA renewal next year, to place a priority on fixing existing infrastructure before building new roads.

The paper is \$10, to order contact Sonya JuBar at 202/939-3470 or e-mail at <stpp@transact.org>.



News from the
**National Association of
Railroad Passengers**

Vol. 30, No. 10 @  24 Oct.-Nov. 1996



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News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers (ISSN 0739-3490), is published monthly except November by NARP, 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 308; Washington, DC 20002-3557; (202) 408-8362, fax (202) 408-8287, e-mail narp@worldweb.net; web www.worldweb.net/~narp. ©1996 National Association of Railroad Passengers. All rights reserved. Membership dues are \$24/year (\$12 under 21 or over 65) of which \$5 is for a subscription to NARP News. For the latest passenger rail news, call the NARP Hotline: 1-900-988-RAIL (\$1.20 per minute, most messages last 4 minutes; service available 24 hours a day; callers under 18 must have parental permission to use this service; updated at least every Friday PM).

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(This has news through Nov 20. Vol 30, No. 9 was mailed first-class Oct. 11.)

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