

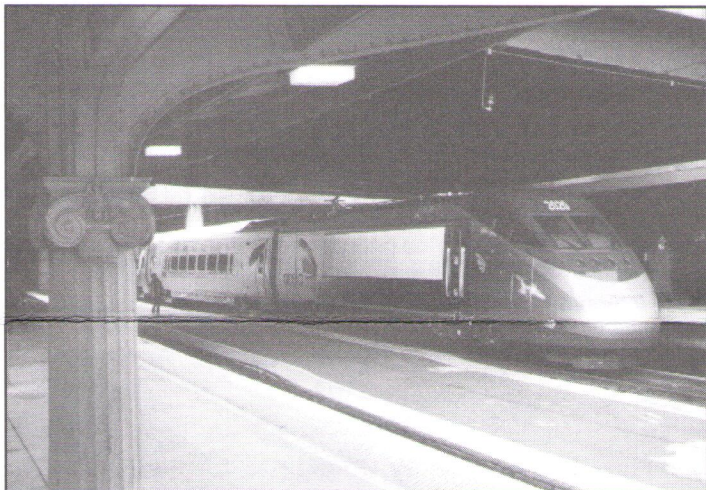
News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

December 2000

11
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www.narprail.org



—Scott Leonard

Amtrak's Acela Express moments before departing November 16 gala in Washington Union Station.

Acela Express is Launched

Amtrak formally launched its Acela Express service on November 16, with events that got positive coverage nationwide (especially television). After a gala send-off at Washington Union Station, the train (filled with dignitaries) ran non-stop to New York in 2:26; then non-stop to Boston in 3:14. There were more celebrations at New York and Boston. On board were the full Amtrak Board of Directors, several Amtrak Reform Council members, Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg (D.-NJ), Rep. Robert Borski (D.-PA), and Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater. In New York, noted sex therapist Dr. Ruth Westheimer pronounced the train "very sexy."

Acela Express revenue service begins December 11. Tickets went on sale November 29, when Amtrak also announced a new customer loyalty program (see story at right).

Acela Express is the first "Tier II" equipment to be qualified by the Federal Railroad Administration. Under FRA's Passenger Equipment Safety Standards that took effect in May, 1999, Tier II refers to trains that may carry passengers at 125-150 mph. (Acela Express has reached 168 mph in tests.) Tier II has very strict vehicle qualification requirements, especially as to crash energy management.

Launch of Acela Express is the most visible step in a ten-year program to electrify the New Haven-Boston segment and improve the entire corridor. This larger program benefits all passenger trains using the corridor, not just Acela Express.

Much more work remains to realize Acela Express' full potential—mainly updating electric catenary in portions of the Corridor's South End to allow the top speed there to be raised

(continued on page 2)

Nationwide Frequent User Program

Amtrak on November 29 announced a new "Amtrak Guest Rewards" customer loyalty program, generally analogous to the frequent flyer program run by airlines.

Complete terms and enrollment information are at the program's web site <<http://www.amtrakguestrewards.com/>>, in brochures at "select" stations, and by calling 1-800-307-5000. Generally, the program runs on a point system (not miles, like on airlines). You are awarded 400 points for enrolling (but for a limited time, 500 points if you enroll on-line)—if you travel within 90 days of enrollment. Then you earn two points per dollar spent on Amtrak travel (but not for travel before November 29)—or 500 points for Acela Express/Metroliner trips (or 750 points for first-class Acela Express/Metroliner travel between certain stations).

Points can be redeemed for future Amtrak travel or (after January 1) for airline miles, hotel stays, car rentals, or retail gift certificates of participating companies. Amtrak's November 29 release lists: United, Continental, Midwest Express, Hertz, eight major hotel chains and the ability to "exchange points with the Hilton HHonors program."

For future Amtrak travel, the program divides the U.S. into three zones. We don't have all the details yet on zone boundaries or point-values for every conceivable trip, but examples we have seen include:

- A free, one-zone, reserved-coach trip is worth 5,000 points;
- A free, two-zone, reserved-coach trip is worth 7,500 points.
- A free upgrade to a standard sleeping car room in two zones is worth 20,000 points.

There is more information at the program web site referenced above. The Guest Rewards program itself was set up and is being run by Carlson Marketing Group of Minneapolis.

People enrolled in Guest Rewards can call Amtrak (800-USA-RAIL) to have their program number applied to trips they already reserved, but have not yet taken.

NARP long has asked Amtrak to create a nationwide loyalty program, so this news is especially welcome. ■

HSRIA FAILURE = CAPITAL FUNDING CRISIS

At present, nothing is clear about Congress' December session, but Amtrak's fiscal 2001 capital budget is very tight. If the High Speed Rail Investment Act does not pass in 2000, the new Congress and Administration will face an urgent need to address passenger rail capital investment in the new year.

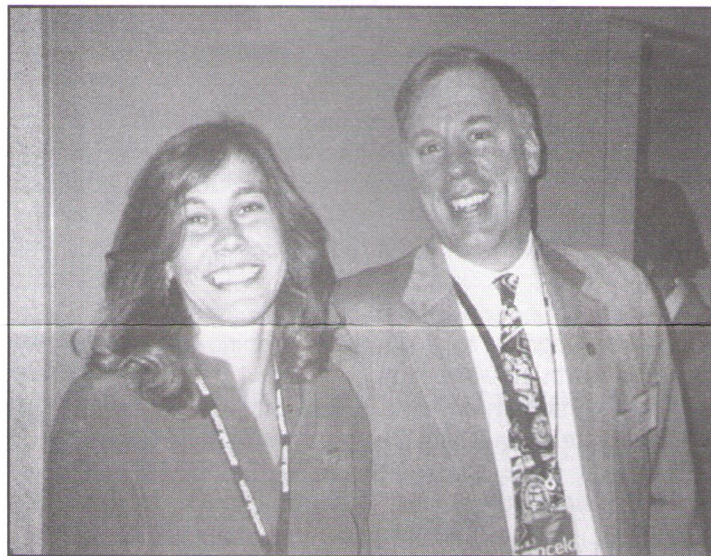
On-Board Cultural Guides

For several years, the National Park Service and Amtrak have coordinated the Trails & Rails program. It mainly uses volunteer guides on trains to educate passengers about the natural and cultural heritage of an Amtrak route segment that passes through or near a national park. In that way, the Park Service fulfills an outreach goal by reaching an audience that might not otherwise visit the park. Amtrak benefits by making the trip more enjoyable and interesting to its passengers.

Currently, there are 241 participating volunteers. The program is preparing printed route guides for three trains (*Sunset Limited*, *Crescent*, *City of New Orleans*) and is developing station exhibits to be used across the country.

The several route segments currently served include:

- *Adirondack*, Albany-Montreal (Saratoga National Historical Park); New York-Albany (Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site).
- *City of New Orleans*, New Orleans-Jackson (Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve).
- *Crescent*, New Orleans-Atlanta (Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve).
- *Heartland Flyer*, Oklahoma City-Fort Worth (Chickasaw National Recreation Area).
- *Sunset Limited*, Del Rio-Alpine (Amistad National Recreation Area); New Orleans-Houston (Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve).
- *Texas Eagle*, Chicago-St. Louis (Illinois and Michigan Canal National Heritage Corridor).
- *Vermont*, St. Albans-Springfield (Springfield Armory



—Ross B. Capon

Amtrak Government Affairs Vice President Sandy Brown and NARP President Alan M. Yorcker on Acela Express inaugural, November 16.

Acela Express

(from page 1)

from 135 to 150 mph (as will already be the case on parts of the North End), and addressing speed and capacity issues on the Metro North-controlled portion of the North End between New Rochelle and New Haven. Also, the Boston Rail Link is needed to replace today's "dead end" at South Station with access to many markets in northern New England. ■

National Historic Site).

Route segments expected to be in place by May 2001:

- *Coast Starlight*, Los Angeles-Oakland (Channel Islands National Park).
- *California Zephyr*, Grand Junction-Denver (Colorado National Monument); Denver-Grand Junction (Rocky Mountain National Park).
- *Empire Builder*, Portland-Spokane (Fort Clatsop National Historic Site); Williston-West Glacier (Fort Union Trading Post National Historic Site); Shelby-Williston (Lewis and Clark National Heritage Trail Center); Minot-Malta (Knife River Indian Village National Historic Site).
- *Kansas City Mule*, St. Louis-Kansas City (Jefferson National Expansion Memorial).
- *Southwest Chief*, Albuquerque-Las Vegas (Pecos National Historical Park).

Twelve other segments are currently being considered. ■

More information: James E. Miculka, Amtrak Partnership Program Coordinator, National Park Service, 1001 Loyola Ave., Room 210, New Orleans, LA 70113-1998, 504/528-1630, <jim_miculka@nps.gov>.

BOSTON RAIL LINK UPDATE

The Citizen Advisory Committee for the (Boston) North Station-South Station Rail Link met October 25, for the first time in almost two years. The Rail Link would dramatically improve transportation in New England by physically connecting northern New England to the Northeast Corridor, by giving direct South Station and Back Bay access to commuters whose trains now terminate at North Station, and by improving the usefulness of the just-completed Boston-New Haven electrification. Only in the U.S. would planners have a project as important as the electrification come to such a "dead end" at South Station.

Part of the committee's job is to review progress on the long-overdue Major Investment Study; Environment Impact Study; and (Massachusetts) Environmental Impact Review. For the first time, a high-ranking Amtrak official was present, John Bennett, Vice-President, Northeast Corridor Transportation Planning and Policy. He emphasized the need to get these reports out for public comment as soon as possible. There was much discussion about protecting the alignment from new construction projects that would hinder building the Rail Link. The alignment will be easier to protect once these reports are final.

Amtrak President George Warrington has said the earliest this could happen is next April. This depends on full cooperation among Massachusetts (Executive Office of Transportation and Construction), Federal Transit Administration, Amtrak, MBTA and Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

The FRA, meanwhile, weighed in against a 47-story skyscraper planned atop South Station. An October 26 *Boston Globe* editorial said the project would "produce a dreadful environment for everyone inside the station...This is no time to threaten a building that is one of the major transportation hubs of New England."

Rail Vision for California

Amtrak's "California Passenger Rail System Five-Year Improvement Plan Summary Report" is a draft plan for \$3.9 billion in improvements to be made over the next five years to California's passenger rail corridors. The plan, released May 15, was designed to enhance regional mobility throughout the state and to complement longer-term plans for a statewide high-speed rail network (Apr. News).

The plan is the start of what will be a 20-year vision for frequent service on existing rail lines at speeds up to 125 mph. Amtrak is investing \$5 million in the planning effort. Amtrak intends for this vision to reflect community consensus on rail service, where shared investments generate shared benefits for intercity, commuter, and freight services.

The report was produced with input from task forces for each of four corridors, representing commuter elected officials, rail agencies, freight railroads, California High-Speed Rail Authority, and others. Three NARP directors were involved

representing various agencies—Doras Briggs, George Gaekle, Art Lloyd.

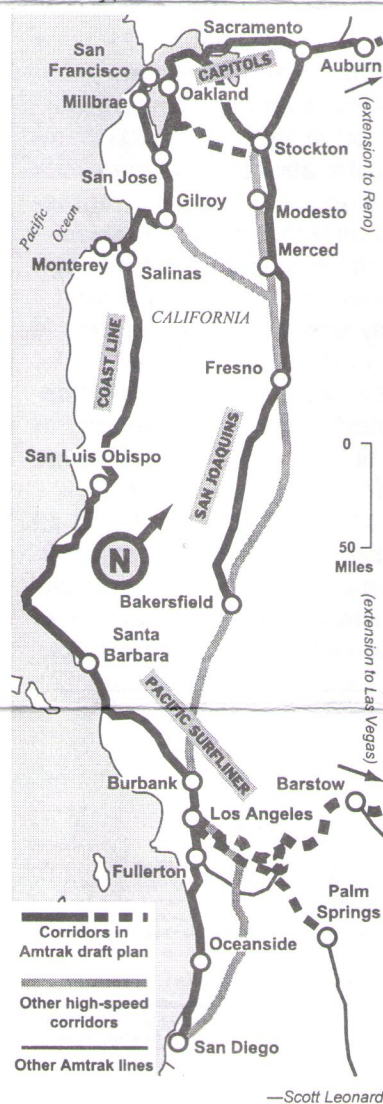
The corridors roughly encompass the three existing corridors (with extensions), and a fourth:

• Capitol Corridor.

The plan would increase Sacramento-Oakland daily round trips from today's seven to 12 by 2005 and 16 by 2010; Oakland-San Jose trips would go from four to ten, then 12. More trips would run east to Auburn, with eventual (after 2005) extension east to Reno. Sacramento-San Jose running times would be cut about 45 minutes to 2:20. Annual ridership would increase from today's 630,000 a year to about 2.66 million.

• Pacific Surfliner Corridor.

The plan envisions San Diego-Los Angeles service in under two hours, with 110 mph top speeds. Daily round trips would increase from 11 to 14 (near-term) to 16 (running hourly, long-term). Los Angeles-Santa



Barbara service would increase from four trips a day today to five by 2005 and seven by 2010; Santa Barbara-San Luis Obispo trips would go from one (not counting the *Coast Starlight*) to two, then three (see also Coast Corridor, below). Ridership would rise from 1.5 million to 6 million.

Running times north of Los Angeles would be cut by a

quarter. Major infrastructure projects include a through-track loop at Los Angeles Union Station and a third (and later fourth) running track between there and Fullerton (the segment with the most freight traffic), plus potential flyovers at busy junctions.

Near-term (by 2005) plans in the Pacific Surfliner region also call for a daily round trip from Los Angeles to Las Vegas and to Palm Springs, together requiring \$200 million in additional track capacity. [The Las Vegas train is delayed about another year—primarily due to the need for a permit to build 20 miles of double track in the Mojave Desert on endangered desert tortoise habitat.]

• **San Joaquin Corridor.** By 2005, the plan envisions two Bakersfield-Oakland trains (from one today), five Bakersfield-Oakland trains (from four today), and some service over Altamont Pass (ACE route) to San Jose. By 2010, there would be four Sacramento trains and six Oakland trains. Bakersfield-Oakland travel times would drop by a fifth. Ridership would increase from 740,000 to 1.29 million in 2005.

Proposed capacity improvements include 70 miles of new double track, for which \$210 million has been proposed by the Governor's Traffic Congestion Relief Plan. The plan also calls for three new train sets and a signal system to support 90-mph operation.

Due to thick freight traffic on the existing, circuitous Tehachapi route, the plan defers development of Bakersfield-Los Angeles rail service to efforts by the California High Speed Rail Authority (Apr. News).

• **Coast Corridor.** The plan calls for introduction of a "Coast Daylight" daily round-trip between Los Angeles and San Francisco on the coast line "as soon as possible," with a second when demand warrants it. This would use two sets of tilt equipment. Corridor services from San Francisco to Salinas/Monterey are also envisioned, with two conventional equipment sets. The new Coast services would connect at San Jose with the expanded Capitol and San Joaquin services.

Of the total \$3.9 billion in investments, over half (\$2.4 billion) are needed in the first three years—including \$737 million in 2001. Passage of S.1900/H.R.3700, the federal High Speed Rail Investment Act, is important to achieving that.

The Amtrak plan is available on-line at <<http://www.amtrakwest.com>>.

NEW CORRIDOR DESIGNATIONS

Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater made additional high-speed rail corridor designations on October 11. There are two new corridors:

• **Northern New England (Boston-Portland/Montreal).**

• **South Central (San Antonio-Dallas/Fort Worth-Tulsa/Little Rock).**

Five extensions to existing corridors were named:

• **Midwest (Chicago-Toledo-Cleveland).**

• **Midwest (Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati).**

• **Midwest (Indianapolis-Louisville).**

• **Southeast (Macon-Jesup).**

• **Gulf Coast (Birmingham-Atlanta).**

Slater also clarified that the 1992 California corridor designation is not limited to a specific (San Joaquin Valley) route, but could include the coast.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Transit—Jacksonville Skyway was completed November 1 with extension to Kings Ave.

New Jersey Transit's Hudson-Bergen light-rail line was extended north from Exchange Place (Jersey City) to Newport November 18. Further extension to Hoboken is now expected for spring 2002.

Vermont Agency of Transportation begins Charlotte-Burlington "Champlain Flyer" commuter service December 4 (three weekday round-trips, more in April).

Atlanta's MARTA rail system opens a 4.7-mile extension of its North Line December 16, from Dunwoody to Sandy Springs and North Springs.

NEXT NARP REGIONAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Reg. 5 (AL, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN); Fri., Jan. 19-Sat., Jan. 20, 2001; Nashville, TN; Union Station Hotel, 1001 Broadway (615/726-1001); speakers include Mayor Bill Purcell, NARP President Alan Yorker, Amtrak Intercity Vice President Al Edelston, CSX Vice President Lyle Key, Metro Transit Authority Executive Director Bob Babbitt. Features include luncheon train ride on Nashville & Eastern and Saturday banquet in station/hotel's former waiting room. Special room rate \$89 per night available through Dec. 20, call 800-Wyndham. For registration form (including fees), contact Bob Stewart, 118 Governors Point Blvd., Hendersonville, TN 37075, <stewarttravel@juno.com>.

MARKETING AWARD TO CASCADES

Amtrak and Washington State DOT in November were awarded the prestigious Odyssey Award for 2000 by the Travel Industry Association of America. They won in the category of domestic travel advertising, for campaign last year meant to attract "30-some-things" to trains in the Pacific Northwest Corridor and launch the Cascades brand. Ridership in the corridor was 565,000 in 1999, and was expected to be over 600,000 in fiscal 2000.

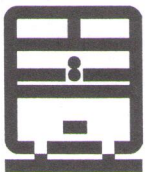
UPDATE ON AMTRAK LABOR CONTRACTS

Since we last reported on Amtrak's labor agreements (Aug. '98), the three remaining contracts have been signed: United Transportation Union (Conductors; Yardmasters) and the American Train Dispatchers Department (of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers).

The main rule-change in the UTU Conductor agreement, which took effect October 27, 1999, improved the cost-effectiveness of the long-distance trains. Second assistant conductors (AC's)—formerly required on all trains with seven or more revenue cars—now are assigned only at management's option on such trains which have one or more sleeping cars. ["Revenue car" is defined as revenue coach or sleeping car, or baggage car that is "worked" en route.] UTU crews working on trains without second AC's get an allowance for working where the previous agreement required a second AC. The new agreement permits elimination of an estimated 121 "full-time equivalents" positions through attrition, reassignment and voluntary moves among crew-bases.

Following the pattern of other agreements, UTU employees got pay raises equal to about 90% of the raises given to freight railroad workers. Under the agreement—which included some retroactive pay raises—Amtrak received 20% of the savings target through September 30, 1999. A "second lump sum payment," estimated at \$4.5 million, was held in a reserve to ensure that any shortfall in the 20% target would be met. Further, starting with fiscal 2001, Amtrak is assured of annual UTU-related crew consist savings of over \$4.5 million a year before any excess savings over that amount are shared with conductors.

Starting November 1, 2000, management and all Amtrak unions could serve Section 6 notices seeking contract changes. But union/freight railroad bargaining—probably resulting in new contracts—is likely to come before unions focus on Amtrak talks.



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