



## Closely Watched, Absurdly Late Trains NARP Urges STB to Act; Emphasis on CSX, UP

*"In June...just 15% of trips of the Los Angeles-Seattle Coast Starlight, which primarily uses UP, reached final destinations less than four hours late; the comparable figure for the Sunset Limited (UP) was 32%."*

—NARP's July 12 letter to the Surface Transportation Board

*"UP in particular needs to be held more accountable. The old standard excuse of freight congestion is bunk. Amtrak (and Metrolink) is handled just horribly in the territory that I work. I see it first hand."*

—Locomotive engineer in southern California, July 14 e-mail

Amid indications that slow orders and dispatching issues, not inadequate "track capacity," explain many Amtrak delays, NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon wrote July 12 to Surface Transportation Board Chairman W. Douglas Buttrey. Capon urged Buttrey "to take every action you can—including, but not limited to, investigation and public hearings—to bring about improved performance" of Amtrak trains on freight railroad tracks. [A slow order is a temporary, reduced speed limit, required by a track condition that should be corrected quickly.]

Copies of the letter went to STB Vice Chairman Francis P. Mulvey, Acting Secretary of Transportation Maria Cino, Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Boardman, and to Capitol Hill.

Our entire distribution list received our July 14 release, with link to the letter at [www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org).

The letter led to an outpouring of support, including from state DOT officials frustrated by the performance of trains they help fund, and from Capitol Hill. Boardman expressed concern that railroads are not managing their slow orders well, and said he would see if FRA could help by pressing railroads to fix the slow orders more quickly.

*The Sun* (Baltimore) quoted NARP's letter approvingly in its excellent July 20 lead editorial, "Reviving Rail." The Sun said, "(Some) question whether freight companies...have given priority to Amtrak trains...That's a question raised by the National Association of Railroad Passengers, a nonprofit that advocates for Amtrak passengers. In a recent letter to the [STB], NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon called for an investigation into the behavior of freight carriers that regard Amtrak as a 'costly nuisance'."

Our release added this: "Short-distance runs in which states have invested heavily also are infected by bad on-time performance. Last week alone [June 30-July 6], Union Pacific accounted for 1800

minutes of delays to [Amtrak] *Cascades* service in the Pacific Northwest. The 124-mile Eugene-Portland segment uses UP tracks, and has just two daily *Cascades* round-trips. The 1800 minutes do not include extensive *Coast Starlight* delays."

The precise number was 1844 minutes—up from 1,014 minutes the week before. These figures, from Washington State DOT, include all railroad conflicts: slow orders, signals, congestion.

On July 18, Amtrak Acting President & CEO David R. Hughes and Senior Vice-President—Operations William L. Crosbie met with CSXT Executive Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer Tony Ingram and Vice-President and Chief Transportation Officer David Brown.

*(continued on page 4)*

## Senate Committee Approves \$1.4 Billion

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$1.4 billion for Amtrak in FY 2007 on July 20, about:

- \$100 million more than this year's level;
- \$300 million more than what the House approved;
- \$500 million more than President Bush requested; and
- about \$200 million less than the Amtrak Board's basic request and \$473 million than its \$1.873 billion total.

The Senate bill also has language authored by Senators Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) and Patty Murray (D-WA)—and accepted by Subcommittee Chairman Christopher Bond (R-MO)—that prohibits Amtrak from contracting out jobs overseas.

The bill requires Amtrak to break even on food and beverage and sleeping cars by 2011, with 20% annual improvements each year until then. While Amtrak is cutting costs, "break even" is not doable.

Worldwide, to our knowledge, carriers treat food and beverage as a way to boost ridership, not as a separate profit center.

At the July 18 subcommittee markup, Bond offered language conditioning Amtrak's funding on unions reaching new agreements, with fairly specific descriptions of what should be in those agreements. The language was not adopted.

On July 20, Bond, citing "member objections," said "we were not able to address labor issues in line with the Amtrak Board's strategic plan...We are trying to nibble at reform, but this is like cutting off the puppy's tail one inch at a time."

On July 21, Amtrak began seeking bids from vendors "to supplement agent attrition at its call centers in Riverside (CA) and Philadelphia" starting in early 2007. Amtrak said "there will be no layoffs of current full-time agents, and all part-time agents will be offered full-time positions to begin in early 2007, consistent with the [relevant] TCU labor agreement." ■

## NARP to Senate: More Rail Capacity Needed

While good dispatching and prompt attention to slow orders are critical (lead story), the U.S. clearly needs more rail capacity than current public policy is likely to produce.

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation's Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine held a June 21 hearing on "Economics, Service, and Capacity in the Freight Railroad Industry," presided over by Subcommittee Chairman Trent Lott (R-MS).

This was similar to the House's April 26 hearing (May lead story) but with more shipper witnesses and more anger expressed at the railroads.

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon submitted a statement for the record June 30. It said, in part: "The National Association of Railroad Passengers has both a specific and a general interest in a healthy, reliable railroad network where average speeds are increasing, not decreasing, and where high profile customers like UPS are adding traffic...not moving it from rails to trucks out of frustration over slow rail service.

"Our specific interest...is to see that railroads do a good job of running Amtrak and commuter trains...

"The [Department of Energy's] recently-published *Transportation Energy*

*Data Book: Edition 25* (2003 data) again shows the extent to which railroads are more energy efficient than both domestic water carriers and trucks. Rail averaged 344 British Thermal Units (BTUs) per ton-mile compared with 417 for water carriers. 'Heavy single-unit and combination trucks' consumed 23,461 BTUs per mile, while railroads averaged 15,016 BTUs per freight car mile."

Regarding the 25% investment tax credits the freight railroads seek, Capon wrote: "NARP supports the investment tax credit, but believes that there should be an emphasis on capacity that also benefits intercity and commuter passenger trains or that improves the efficiency of publicly supported entities. Continued tax benefits should be tied to reliable operation of passenger trains—at least 90% on-time performance. The magnitude of the benefits could be increased where the investment speeds up scheduled running

### Amtrak Helps Save Energy

The energy report cited above also shows that Amtrak in 2003 at 2,935 BTU's per passenger-mile was 18% more fuel efficient than airlines (3,587), 17% than automobiles (3,549). Commuter rail was 2,751.

times and/or permits more frequent passenger train operation." ■

Capon's statement is at <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)> or send us an s.a.s.e..

### NARP Intern Darryl Yates

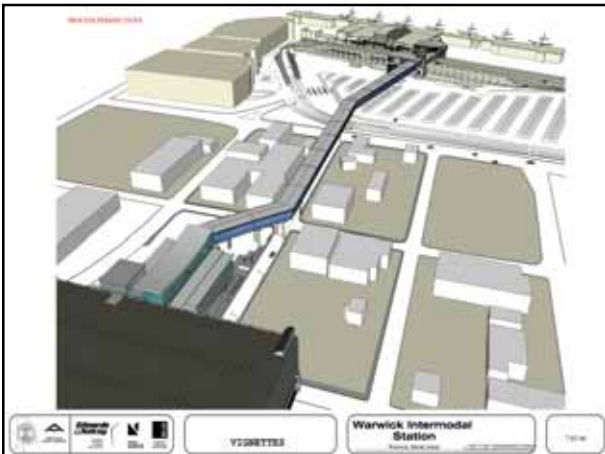
Darryl J. Yates, our intern since May 8, is a welcome addition to the NARP staff. He graduated from Morgan State University (Baltimore) with a B.A. in Political Science on May 21.

Last summer, he was a Capitol Hill intern with Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-MD). He volunteered at The Baltimore Zoo, June 1999-December 2000, in the summer education program. He also cared for tropical animals, did some administrative work, and served as tour guide and docent.

In the summer of 1998, he volunteered at the Baltimore County Public Library, leading various children's reading activities and registering hundreds of children for the summer reading program.

He starts work soon (evenings) on a Masters of Public Administration degree at the University of the District of Columbia.

## Ceremony Signals Rhode Island Air-Rail Link Moving Closer to Reality



—I. Edwards and Kelcey; r. Ross B. Capon

The Warwick Intermodal Station's ceremonial ground breaking was in an airport parking lot July 17; speeches were in an air-conditioned tent. A covered, 1,200-foot walkway bridge with moving sidewalks (defined as a "bridge" to use federal highway bridge funds) will link the station to T.F. Green International Airport (5.7 million passengers in 2005), serving Providence. The \$222.5 million station will consolidate the airport's car rental agencies, reducing road congestion and making rentals very convenient for train riders! But, when station opens in 2009, it appears that only extended MBTA commuter trains will stop. Amtrak indicated late in the game that it does not want trains stopping on the mainline, and the freight track MBTA will use (at right) is not electrified. (Amtrak Regional #172 passes station site, right foreground.) On hand for the ceremony was former Gov. Lincoln Almond (R), who pushed hard for the project. Former DOT Secretary Norman Mineta got reluctant airport officials to support it and later approved a key federal "TIFIA" loan for the station. The ceremony, hosted by James Rosati, Rhode Island Airport Corporation (RIAC) board chair, had talks by: Gov. Donald Carcieri (R); Sen. Lincoln Chafee (R-RI), who as Warwick mayor laid the groundwork for the station; Acting U.S. DOT Secretary Maria Cino; Rep. James R. Langevin (D-RI); Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian; and Mark P. Brewer, RIAC President and CEO.

## Sunset Ltd. Never to see Florida Again?

Tallahassee Mayor John R. Marks III wrote to Amtrak May 26, saying his city "has recently been notified that Amtrak is considering a permanent discontinuation of [Sunset Ltd. in Florida]. We are concerned about this decision and the limitations that it will provide to citizens who have depended on Amtrak to transport them to destinations both east and west of Tallahassee, as well as the obstacles it may present to visitors who wish to come to our community."

The mayor asked that Amtrak consider his views. Amtrak responded that no decision had been made, and much station work must be done before service resumed. Critics note that Amtrak elsewhere has addressed station issues quickly.

Meanwhile, fears that the CSX New Orleans-Mobile line would be abandoned subsided after a House-Senate conference committee deleted \$700 million, seen as the first installment on that abandonment. This was one of many items cut from the Iraq/Katrina emergency funding bill, to forestall a veto.

## Commission to Focus on Funding Solutions

SAFETEA: LU, the highway/transit authorization enacted last August (Oct. News, p. 2), in Section 1909 created two commissions—one to study future revenue sources for the Highway Trust Fund as well as needs, and another to study revenues exclusively—because of turf issues between the transportation and taxation committees.

The Bush Administration never supported two commissions and has appointed just one—the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission.

In creating it, Congress declared, "it is in the national interest to preserve and enhance the surface transportation system to meet the needs of the United States for the 21st century."

One commission vice chairman, Jack Schenendorf of the law firm Covington and Burling, told a conference in January that "the commission should focus on solutions. [Congress] couldn't come up with it in [SAFETEA: LU], which is why you see the mismatch between revenues and spending."

Schenendorf, who as top aide to former Rep. Bud Shuster (R-PA) played a major role in developing the previous highway/transit bill, was referring to the fact that SAFETEA: LU continued to increase highway and transit spending but, since no

gasoline tax increase was included (the last one was in 1991 in ISTEA), the Highway Trust Fund is projected to go into a negative balance by 2009.

A June 26-27 commission meeting heard presentations highlighting benefits of an improved surface transportation system for the American economy.

Jack Wells, Chief Economist for the U.S. Department of Transportation, gave a presentation with this: "Since 1982, the cost of congestion has grown 8% per year, more than double the rate of growth of the economy. In 20 years, continued growth at this rate would bring the cost of congestion to \$890.5 billion."

Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Boardman gave an overview of his agency, and outlined needs. One pressing issue is the "need to establish the Federal Government as a reliable/dependable capital investment participant/partner." He also noted the "need to develop partnerships with the states based upon models developed for other surface transportation programs."

The commission targets July 1, 2007 for its "Congressional Report Rollout." ■

*(A schedule of field hearings and meetings, meeting notes and presentations, and membership list are at <[www.surfacecommission.gov](http://www.surfacecommission.gov)>.)*

## NARP: Why Leave Rail Out of Congestion Report?

On June 13, National Association of Railroad Passengers President George Chilson wrote to then-Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta about DOT's May 16 report, "National Strategy to Reduce Congestion on America's Transportation Network."

The report focused on new strategies to reduce congestion on America's transportation system, but did not mention railroads. Chilson wrote, "While you are right to target congestion as a serious and growing national problem, we are dumbfounded that you failed even to mention rail in [the congestion report]..."

"Your report has no recommendation for public/private partnerships with the railroad industry, and shows no recognition of passenger rail's potential to form the foundation of such partnerships..."

"The Association urges you to expand the dialogue to include all forms of transportation, especially rail. Federal policy

has ignored the nation's rail infrastructure needs for so long that you have an opportunity to harvest a large amount of 'low hanging fruit'—projects where comparatively modest investments would produce large and immediate payoffs in transportation quality and capacity..."

"Modernizing the nation's rail system can be done quicker and at far lower cost than building more highway lanes. There is a growing consensus supporting this ...More than half the states have joined the States for Passenger Rail Coalition that supports federal investment in rail."

The omission of rail is a troubling reminder of our continuing struggle with the federal government to make the investments crucial to development of a transportation system that is more economical and energy efficient, and that gives travelers the choices they want.

The federal government continues to pour billions into highways and airports,

while nickel-and-diming Amtrak and largely ignoring rail freight needs.

Chilson wrote: "Survey after survey shows that the American people in every geographical area strongly desire a national network of modern passenger trains. The Harris Poll released in February [March lead story] makes clear that interest extends also to freight rail."

Chilson concluded, "We urge you to take the foundation laid out in your report and build upon it to include the concept of improving passenger and freight rail service together with—for the first time—the creation of a stable, secure and ongoing mechanism to fund rail improvements. America's future mobility, economic development and quality of life demand it. In this regard, our Association stands ready to serve you as a resource." ■

*Chilson's letter is at <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)> or send NARP an s.a.s.e.*



## Changes at DOT, Amtrak Board

Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta resigned from President Bush's cabinet effective July 7. He becomes vice chairman at Hill & Knowlton, a public relations firm. A major focus will be international projects like the proposed open skies agreement, security, and public-private partnerships investing in transportation infrastructure.

DOT General Counsel Jeffrey Rosen, who represented Mineta on the Amtrak Board, resigned effective July 3, to become General Counsel at the Office of

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### Late Trains

(from page 1)

They discussed the operating crisis which has led to the on-time performance problems. Hughes called the meeting positive but said proof will be in the results. Hughes said he felt both CSXT and Amtrak are now committed to a fresh and very active approach to solving the problems of late trains.

Capon's letter noted good performance by other railroads: "The Chicago-Los Angeles *Southwest Chief* (BNSF) and Chicago-Seattle/Portland *Empire Builder* (BNSF and CP) were on time (no more than 30 minutes late) 63.3% and 80.0%, respectively."

Incidentally, the comparable June on-time figure for the Chicago-New Orleans *City of New Orleans* was 83.3%, a positive reflection on Canadian National. ■

Management and Budget.

Maria Cino, who was deputy secretary, is acting secretary. The *Wall Street Journal* reported July 14 that Federal Aviation Administrator Marion Blakey is "quietly seeking" to succeed Mineta as secretary.

Meanwhile, the Senate seemed headed towards its first Amtrak Board confirmations since David Laney (2002). The Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on July 19 voted out favorably Republican Donna R. McLean, a political consultant and former Hill staffer and DOT official, and Democrat R. Hunter Biden, a lawyer, both of Washington. ■

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Transit openings**—Newark Light Rail (formerly Newark City Subway) one mile extension, Penn Station to Broad Street Station began on July 17. Albuquerque's "Rail Runner" began service July 14; rides are free for the first three months. More information at <<http://www.nmrailrunner.com>>.

**Capitol Corridor Increase**—More trains begin August 28. Schedules not yet determined.

## From NARP's Letter to the STB

"On the...New York-Florida line (mostly CSX), only 57% of [June] trips (including *Auto Train*) reached final destination less than three hours late. [Note: 96% of trips, with over 85,000 passengers, arrived over 30 minutes late; 83% were over 90 minutes late.]

"During [June], more than 100,000 passengers rode Amtrak trains that reached their final destinations over four hours late; the overwhelming majority of these passengers were on routes that use CSX or Union Pacific exclusively or primarily...

"This suggests...UP and CSX do not take seriously 49 USC 24308(c), which requires that Amtrak trains be given 'preference over freight transportation...except in an

emergency' or where the Secretary of Transportation, in response to a railroad's application for relief, has 'established the rights of the carrier and Amtrak on reasonable terms.'"

"Any investigation...should: Identify specific, detailed causes of the freight train interference issues;...and **Most importantly**, identify short and long term remedial actions..."

"Amtrak mechanical and personnel issues also can delay trains, but the root causes of many such delays are relentless, terrible on-time performance. This unreasonably stretches Amtrak crews and equipment, leaving inadequate time for crew rest and equipment maintenance between trips."



## National Association of Railroad Passengers

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