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At Washington, D.C.

NEWS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

Vol. 24, No. 3 March, 1990

News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers (ISSN 0739-3490), is published monthly except November by NARP, 236 Massachusetts Ave., NE, Suite 603, Washington, DC 20002. 202/546-1550. Membership dues are $20/year ($10 under 21 or over 65) of which $5 is for a subscription to NARP News. Second-class postage paid at Washington, DC.

Postmaster: send address changes to National Association of Railroad Passengers, 236 Massachusetts Ave., NE, Suite 603, Washington, DC 20002.

(This has news through Apr. 2. No. 2 was mailed March 7.)

RETURN REQUESTED

Policy Progress

Skinner's Positive Comments about Amtrak

What Will DOT's Amtrak Study Show?

"Right now, Amtrak is a very important part [of the national transportation system]. We're moving towards self-sufficiency. They're over 70% self-sufficient today. I have started a study, recently, of passenger rail and its future, including high speed rail technology. Once we've got that study done—sometime this summer—we'll be in a better position to decide what the federal investment should be."

—Secretary of Transportation Samuel K. Skinner, Mar. 8 interview with Jim Lehrer on McNeil/Lehrer NewsHour

"It is Federal transportation policy to:

"● Continue to promote increased efficiency, service improvements, and cost-effective capital investment in intercity passenger rail operations;

"● Assure recovery of the costs of rail passenger service from passengers and from private, State, and local interests to support operations, capital expenditures, and expanded service;

"● Support repeal of burdensome statutory requirements that unnecessarily inflate the cost of operating intercity rail passenger service; and

"● Encourage future development of rail passenger service in high-volume corridors, including introduction of high-speed rail or maglev service."

—*A Statement of National Transportation Policy,* p. 66
Unveiled by President Bush on March 8

R.W. Apple Jr. of The New York Times: *"Wouldn't it make more sense to get people out of cars rather than into more cars?"* Skinner: *"Yes. We should get people out of autos and into transportation that's more efficient and cleaner."*

—NBC-TV's "Meet the Press," Mar. 11

The administration's long-awaited transportation policy was unveiled at a Mar. 8 White House ceremony. On the cover is a color photo of O'Hare Airport's people-mover. The policy refers to "the pressing need for investment in aviation capacity" but also has many statements consistent with NARP's views.

We obviously have a fight on our hands unless and until the Bush administration supports adequate federal funding for Amtrak and transit and modifies the second bullet above.

Human nature being what it is, however, the best way to work for the administration's support may be to praise administration statements we like, while continuing to make clear what we think federal spending priorities should be.

Secretary of Transp. Samuel K. Skinner

More than perhaps any previous secretary, Mr. Skinner is widely admired for his intelligence, involvement in the issues, and willingness to respond to new information. Thus it makes us look good when we can quote his policy to our advantage. Republican legislators are always glad for opportunities to support "their" President, but the secretary's excellent reputation makes points of commonality unusually useful with Democrats as well.

Policy development, of course, is a continuing process which did not end with publication of the policy. This may be especially true with Amtrak because Mr. Skinner has no previous intercity-rail-passenger experience and evidently awaits his new Amtrak study with interest.

After he mentioned the study (quotation at start of story), Lehrer said: "But right now, you're calling for elimination of all federal funds."

The secretary's adroit response: "No. We're calling for self-sufficiency, a move to self-sufficiency. We believe Amtrak can pay for itself."

Later, after the secretary affirmed that the marketplace should determine the fate of intercity bus service, Lehrer

(continued on page 4)

Maglev—A Capitol Hill Status Report

The Subcommittee on Surface Transportation of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation heard testimony Mar. 21 on S. 1898, the Mag-Lev Guarantee Pilot Program Act, and S. 2286, the Magnetic Levitation Transportation Act of 1990, introduced by Sen. Harry Reid (D-NV) and Senate Commerce Chairman Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC), respectively.

(Powerful magnets lift "magnetically levitated" trains above a guideway and propel them on a cushion of air.)

S. 1898 provides Federal government guarantees of investments of state and local government pension funds in high-speed, intercity rail facilities. The bill also establishes a High-Speed Rail Loan Guarantee Fund.

S. 2286 provides funding for the Federal government to enter into cooperative research and development agreements with U.S. companies to address technical barriers impeding the development and construction of magnetic levitation transportation systems.

NARP Favors Broad Definition

In a letter to Chairman Hollings submitted for the record, NARP urged "that high speed rail, broadly defined, be eligible for any funding made available for high-speed intercity passenger ground transportation . . . . We understand the 150 mph minimum in S. 1898 refers to average speed, so qualifying systems would need top speeds much faster than 150. We hope you will consider broadening S. 1898's definition of high speed rail to include any fast trains that divert significant air travel demand. Such diversion is probably the most oft-mentioned reason for interest in high-speed ground travel.

"In the New York-Washington market, with Metroliners averaging 77-84 mph (top speed 125 mph) and other trains averaging 70 mph or less (top speed 110 mph), Amtrak carries almost 40% of air-plus-rail travel (70% with intermediate points)."

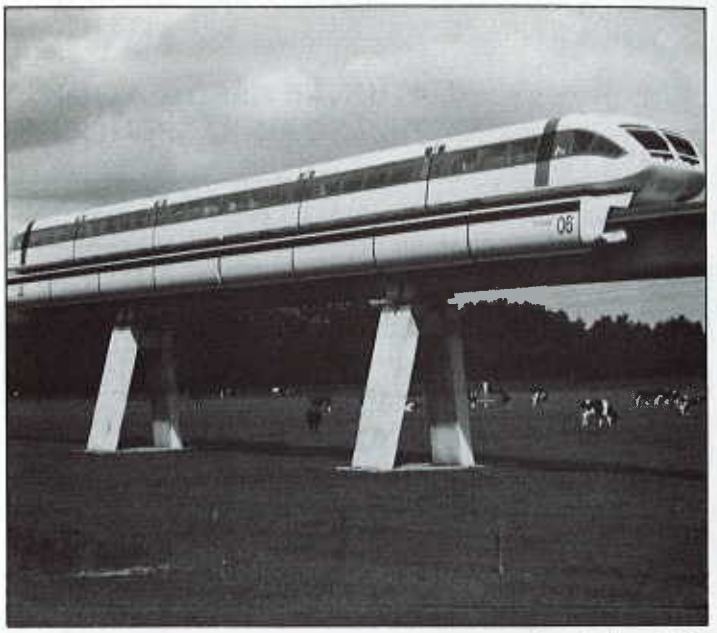
NARP is concerned that fascination with technology is encouraging people to forget the low-cost *incremental* rail improvements that are the logical next steps and the need to correct—not intensify—federal neglect of those improvements. We think states like Michigan and Illinois would be upgrading key Amtrak corridors today with a mix of federal and state money—if federal money was available.

NARP's letter acknowledged "that maglev *may* become significant in the next century." But it is not yet clear that the incremental benefits of maglev over high speed rail are great enough to justify the incremental costs.

Maglev Status Report

At the House Energy & Commerce subcommittee's May 17, 1989 Amtrak authorization hearing, Amtrak Pres. W. Graham Claytor Jr. said "maglev as a commercial venture is quite a way off. It works mechanically but the big question is costs. I don't think any big system will go in until we have experience with a shorter commercial system." Claytor thinks the proposed Orlando Airport-Disney World maglev line would be long enough to provide the "real-world" test.

Similarly, at the recent Senate hearing, Federal Railroad Administrator Gil Carmichael said he had seen maglev right-of-way cost estimates ranging from $7 mill. to $40 mill. a mile and that his agency is doing a "quick and dirty" study of maglev that should be available by June.



—PHOTO BY TRANSRAPID INTERNATIONAL

The Transrapid maglev, shown on its 15-mile test track near Emsland, Germany. Such a German design would be used for the Orlando International Airport line. It uses electromagnetic technology, considered closer to being ready for building than the competing Japanese superconducting technology.

DON'T FORGET THE SHORT TERM!

"Existing rail technology could make significant contributions to our transportation system almost immediately . . . . Our members are incensed at the priorities reflected in the administration's proposal to continue to do nothing for Amtrak and high speed rail while spending 73% more on aviation in the next 5 years compared with the last 5 years."

—NARP Exec. Dir. Ross Capon, in Mar. 21 letter to Senator Hollings

The Japanese are seriously considering building a Tokyo-Osaka maglev; with 16-car bullet-trains every 9 minutes, existing rail capacity is effectively saturated. Serious technical problems remain with the Japanese "superconducting" maglev, but most U.S. maglev researchers think the Japanese version will prevail over the German electromagnetic one: the Japanese is believed capable of higher speeds—500 mph vs 300 mph—and to have fewer guideway problems because of the bigger air cushion separating vehicle and guideway—4 inches vs. 1/2 inch. But the Japanese have yet to produce as smooth a ride as the Germans, and "the superconducting magnets, cooled by liquid helium, generate magnetic fields in the carriage that can interfere with everything from pacemakers to wrist-watches and may be hazardous to the passengers' health" *(The New York Times,* Dec. 13).

Meanwhile, a 1.1-mile maglev "people-mover" is being built in Las Vegas based on a "low speed" design operating in West Berlin and a high-speed German design would be used for the Orlando maglev if a route ever gets approved—and funded. (The firm planning to build the latter may try to change state law so the project could gain access to state funds. *Orlando Sentinel,* Mar. 25.)

German efforts to build a commercial intercity maglev have been mired in controversy, with the transport ministry and the federal railway opposed and the research ministry in favor. The federal government decided on Dec. 20 that a

50-mile maglev should be built between Essen, Duesseldorf Airport and Cologne/Bonn Airport, but most of the funding must come from the private sector. Construction would take 4 years but planning consent must be obtained first; this can be a long process and involves resolution of the many expected objections.

The Argonne Study

Last year, Argonne National Laboratory researchers recommended replacing short-haul jets with a 2,000-mile network of 300 mph maglevs connecting airports, some intermediate mainline stops, and other points on spur lines. The study assumed $15 mill. a mile costs—including terminals, vehicles, and design work. The report said airlines should operate the system, whose costs would be largely offset by multibillion-dollar savings in airline and passenger delays, as well as energy, aircraft acquisition and airport expansion and construction costs *(The Chicago Tribune,* May 10, 1989). Don't hold your breath for airlines to make these investments; they never assumed they would pay for new airports and they aren't really paying for passenger delays.

The Senate Hearing

Witnesses included Sen. Reid, Federal Railroad Administrator Gil Carmichael, and representatives from major firms interested in maglev, including Grumman Corp. and Bechtel Corp. The High Speed Rail Assn. was represented by its vice chairman, Robert K. Pattison, who is Technical Director—Railroads with Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas Inc., another big engineering firm. Dr. Gordon P. Danby of Brookhaven National Laboratory testified on behalf of the "Super Mag Coalition"; he is the U.S. scientist most closely associated with maglev.

Witnesses uttered not one doubtful word about maglev, although Carmichael opposed federally-guaranteed use of public pension funds. He said this would increase the government's contingent liabilities when the administration is trying to reduce them. He said the $10 mill. for maglev research in President Bush's FY '91 budget was a carefully considered figure and the administration stood behind it.

S. 1898 is limited to systems whose rolling stock is manufactured in the U.S. of materials produced in the U.S. Pattison urged "expanding S. 1898 by making a portion of the federal guarantees available to all intercity high speed rail facilities, regardless of origin of manufacture . . . . For every high speed rail project now under consideration, . . . high speed rail rolling stock and trainsets accounted for at most 20% of the total capital investment . . . .

MUDDYING THE WATER

The administration's new transportation policy states: "High-speed rail and magnetically levitated trains are already operating in Europe and Japan" (p.106). This wording obscures the fact that high-speed rail is a major force in Europe and Japan while high-speed maglev exists only on test tracks.

The policy also says "private investment will be the central feature in putting any [new-technology] systems into place." Although private investment clearly can participate in such systems, we think talk implying private funds will do it alone or virtually alone is unrealistic.

We are constantly told that the French TGV Paris-Lyon service is profitable. In fact, 12 million of TGV's 17 million passengers in 1988 rode TGV trains to points beyond Lyon. The key to TGV's success is its compatibility with existing infrastructure: the through service the modern trainsets offer to points on 11 different conventional lines beyond Lyon, lines which are not necessarily "profitable." TGVs also share tracks with conventional trains for the first 17 miles out of Paris and benefit from a high-quality network of local and intercity connecting trains at major stations. Also, the pump price for gasoline in France is more than triple the U.S. price.

So reasonable prople are entitled to wonder whether the U.S. is likely to get balanced transportation without balanced federal transportation spending as DOT would have us believe.

A BOON FOR U.S. INDUSTRY

U. S. industry would benefit from building *any* form of high speed ground transportation—not just maglev—just as France's industry (especially steel) has benefited from that nation's intense rail development. 80% or more of project costs are in infrastructure and even foreign-designed rolling stock could easily be assembled in the U. S.

"HSRA asks only for a level playing field. The highway and air modes receive substantial direct federal support not currently available to high speed rail. While the 1988 amendments to the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 introduced tax-exempt bond financing for high speed rail projects, such financing is subject to overall state volume caps and is thus of relatively limited benefit. Provision of federal loan guarantees for all high speed rail intercity facilities would help equalize the substantial advantage of highway and aviation proponents, and would enable the implementation of the most suitable transportation technology in each of the various regions of this country requiring new intercity motive capacity."

(Since maglev may use highway rights-of-way, and the Army Corps of Engineers is studying maglev, the Environment & Public Works Committee is also involved. Sen. Daniel Moynihan, D-NY, chairs the latter's Subcomm. on Water Resources, Transportation and Infrastructure, and strongly supports superconducting maglev and a U.S. victory in the maglev technology sweepstakes. He apparently sees a major role for maglev in local as well as intercity travel and has characterized TGV as "not much faster" than New York Central's steam engine 999, which hit 112.5 mph in 1893: "There is just so much you can do with a 19th Century machine." More recently, on Dec. 5, 1989, TGV hit 299.7 mph on a test run. He has always voted for Amtrak and mass transit, but says "Amtrak is a 19th-Century machine that works not quite as well as those machines worked in the 19th Century." Newsday, June 26, 1989. Send NARP a self-addressed stamped envelope for a copy of NARP's Jan. 1988 letter to him.) ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Apr. 1 national timetable has wrong times for #58/59 Fulton-New Orleans. #58 dpts. N.O. 3:05 PM, not 3:50; #59 arrs. N.O. 1:40 PM—not 12:50—with Hammond-Lafayette bus for connections to "Sunset Ltd.," & checked baggage arriving "Sunset" points 2-3 days later than passengers. Syracuse has new New York round-trip 6 days/week; Richmond-Atlantic City train is 6th daily Richmond-Wash.-Phila. service. Chicago-St. Louis "State House" now has custom class service (not in tt) as does Chicago-Detroit-Toledo (in tt). ■

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