

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

July 1995

7
Vol. 29

Poll Shows Public Supports Amtrak Funding

A nationwide telephone poll by Bruskin Goldring Research of Edison, NJ, an independent market research firm, showed strong support for a gasoline tax penny dedicated to Amtrak, and for allowing states to use federal transportation funds on Amtrak programs.

NARP commissioned the poll, which was conducted May 19-21. A total of 1006 interviews were completed among a random, nationally representative sample.

On both questions (see box), 63% of the respondents replied favorably. This supports NARP's long-standing claim that the general public's views on transportation funding are closer to ours than to those of the highway lobby (see "Highway Users Federation vs. the Users," May News, p. 3).

"Yes" responses to both questions were slightly higher among women than men (65% v. 62% on the first question; 64% v. 62% on the second).

Negative responses were significantly higher among men than women (30% v. 22% on the first question; 31% v. 23%

on the second). Only 10% of women and 16% of men "strongly" opposed both questions.

"Yes" responses were the majority in all geographical sections of the nation, even where service is sparse. The "yes" showing ranged from 58%/59% (penny/flexibility) in the South to 70%/67% in the Northeast (for this poll, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and New England).

Who Rides the Train?

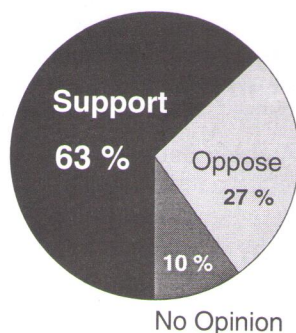
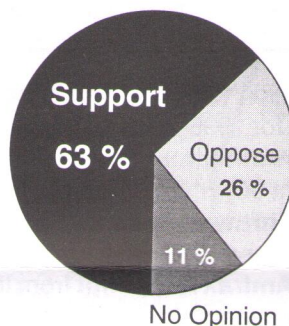
Among respondents, 6.7% had been on a non-commuting train trip of over 75 miles in the past year. Naturally, the figure was higher—12.4%—for those in the Northeast.

Employed people—at 6.9%—were near the average, but 7.4% of retired people had taken the train. Among racial categories, 10.9% of blacks had ridden, but Amtrak usage was spread evenly among those of different income and education levels and different ages. (The poll would not pick up the disparate profiles of Metroliner—high-income—and long-distance coach—low-income—customers.) ■

POLL QUESTIONS

1. Amtrak was created by Congress to provide intercity rail passenger service. Amtrak currently receives passenger fares and federal grants. You currently pay a federal fuel tax, most of which goes to the Highway Trust Fund to be spent on roads and mass transit. The need for a more stable funding source for Amtrak—comparable to the highway and aviation trust funds—has prompted a proposal

that one penny of the fuel tax be used to create a trust fund to pay for long-term Amtrak improvements. This would not result in your paying any additional taxes, but would reallocate a small percentage of the total funds to Amtrak. Please [say] which of the following best describes your feelings about this proposal.



2. It also has been suggested that states be allowed to use, for intercity rail passenger service, a portion of their federal transportation funds now restricted to highways, mass transit and recreational trails.

Big Senate Victory; Labor Flap Erupts in House

The Senate on June 21 voted 64-36 to allow states to use two categories of transportation funds—Surface Transportation Program and Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality—for intercity passenger rail. At the same time, contentious labor issues threatened Amtrak's very survival.

At a June 22 news conference, Chairman Susan Molinari (R-NY) of the Subcommittee on Railroads (Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure) said Amtrak would shut down October 1 if labor issues keep the House from reauthorizing Amtrak. Chairman Frank Wolf (R-VA) of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation—in whose hearing room, not coincidentally, the conference occurred—and Nick Smith (R-MI) of the Budget Committee were on hand to reinforce her message. Wolf said his Amtrak appropriation (see box below) was conditioned on enactment of an authorization.

The apparent issues: how—not whether—to end the statutory prohibition on Amtrak's ability to contract out (the law

(continued on page 2)

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE...

...on June 21 approved these Amtrak levels: \$216 million for operations, \$62 mill. for transition/downsizing, \$230 mill. for nationwide capital, \$100 mill. (a 50% cut) for Northeast Corridor. Transit fell 13% (\$618 mill.); highways rose 3% (\$523 mill.).

Senate Votes on Amtrak Issues

Key: + indicates a pro-Amtrak vote, X an anti-Amtrak vote, — “not voting,” and a blank “not in office.” Though the first vote shown is two years old, it’s good for reference because recorded Senate votes on Amtrak are not common. The second vote is from May:

Column A: Danforth amendment to strike \$188 million in Amtrak funding from Clinton economic stimulus package, March 31, 1993. **Amendment defeated 61-38.**

Column B: Domenici tabling amendment on a Baucus amendment May 25, 1995 expressing the sense of the Senate that one-half cent of federal fuel taxes now going to deficit reduction should go to Amtrak operations and capital (not transit) for fiscal years 1996-99. **Tabling amendment approved 50-49.** (See text below for June 21 vote on “flexibility,” discussed on page three.)

ALABAMA	A	B	HAWAII	A	B	MASSACHUSETTS	A	B	NEW MEXICO	A	B	SOUTH DAKOTA	A	B
Heflin (D)	X	+	Akaka (D)	+	+	Kennedy (D)	+	+	Bingaman (D)	+	+	Daschle (D)	+	+
Shelby (R)	X	X	Inouye (D)	+	+	Kerry (D)	+	+	Domenici (R)	X	X	Pressler (R)	X	X
ALASKA			IDAHO			MICHIGAN			NEW YORK			TENNESSEE		
Murkowski (R)	X	X	Craig (R)	X	X	Levin (D)	+	+	D’Amato (R)	X	X	Frist (R)		X
Stevens (R)	X	X	Kempthorne (R)	X	X	Abraham (R)		X	Moynihan (D)	+	X	Thompson (R)		X
ARIZONA			ILLINOIS			MINNESOTA			NORTH CAROLINA			TEXAS		
Kyl (R)		X	Moseley-Braun (D)	+	+	Grams (R)	X	X	Faircloth (R)	X	X	Gramm (R)	X	X
McCain (R)	X	X	Simon (D)	+	+	Wellstone (D)	+	+	Helms (R)	X	X	Hutchison (R)		X
ARKANSAS			INDIANA			MISSISSIPPI			NORTH DAKOTA			UTAH		
Bumpers (D)	+	+	Coats (R)	+	X	Cochran (R)	X	X	Conrad (D)	+	+	Bennett (R)	X	X
Pryor (D)	+	+	Lugar (R)	+	X	Lott (R)	X	X	Dorgan (D)	+	+	Hatch (R)	X	X
CALIFORNIA			IOWA			MISSOURI			OHIO			VERMONT		
Boxer (D)	+	+	Grassley (R)	X	X	Bond (R)	—	X	DeWine (R)		+	Jeffords (R)	X	+
Feinstein (D)	+	+	Harkin (D)	+	+	Ashcroft (R)		X	Glenn (D)	+	X	Leahy (D)	+	+
COLORADO			KANSAS			MONTANA			OKLAHOMA			VIRGINIA		
Brown (R)	X	X	Dole (R)	X	X	Baucus (D)	+	+	Inhofe (R)		X	Robb (D)	+	+
Campbell (R)	+	X	Kassebaum (R)	+	X	Burns (R)	X	+	Nickles (R)	X	+	Warner (R)	X	X
CONNECTICUT			KENTUCKY			NEBRASKA			OREGON			WASHINGTON		
Dodd (D)	+	+	Ford (D)	+	+	Exon (D)	+	+	Hatfield (R)	+	+	Murray (D)	+	+
Lieberman (D)	+	+	McConnell (R)	X	X	Kerrey (D)	+	+	Packwood (R)	X	X	Gorton (R)	X	X
DELAWARE			LOUISIANA			NEVADA			PENNSYLVANIA			WEST VIRGINIA		
Biden (D)	+	+	Breaux (D)	+	X	Bryan (D)	+	+	Specter (R)	+	+	Byrd (D)	+	+
Roth (R)	+	+	Johnston (D)	+	X	Reid (D)	+	+	Santorum (R)		+	Rockefeller (D)	+	+
FLORIDA			MAINE			NEW HAMPSHIRE			RHODE ISLAND			WISCONSIN		
Graham (D)	+	X	Cohen (R)	+	+	Gregg (R)	X	X	Chafee (R)	+	+	Feingold (D)	+	+
Mack (R)	X	X	Snowe (R)		+	Smith (R)	X	X	Pell (D)	+	+	Kohl (D)	+	+
GEORGIA			MARYLAND			NEW JERSEY			SOUTH CAROLINA			WYOMING		
Coverdell (R)	X	X	Mikulski (D)	+	—	Bradley (D)	+	+	Hollings (D)	+	X	Simpson (R)	X	X
Nunn (D)	+	+	Sarbanes (D)	+	+	Lautenberg (D)	+	+	Thurmond (R)	X	X	Thomas (R)		X

Senate Victory; Labor Flap

(from page 1)

does allow contracting-out in food service only), and how to end the generous labor protection payments certain laid-off employees can get.

Molinari’s bill would have done both immediately, but labor lobbied hard for more gradual proposals offered by Rep. Jack Quinn (R-NY). On May 25, Molinari’s subcommittee approved his labor protection amendment 13-3 but rejected his contracting-out language on an 8-8 tie vote.

Then, on June 14, these full-committee votes led Chairman Bud Shuster (R-PA) to call off the markup:

- 21-36 against Molinari’s attempt to undo the subcommittee’s labor protection vote;
- 38-22 for Quinn’s approach to contracting-out; and
- 29-25 for a Borski (D-PA) amendment to strike from the bill the provision to increase transit authority payments to Amtrak for use of Northeast Corridor tracks—which divided members mostly along party rather than geographical lines.

At her news conference, Molinari warned that many members would shut down Amtrak rather than approve a bill with the Quinn labor provisions. (However, she said that, on the House floor, she would “fix” the bill so that the contracting-out ban would continue to apply to train and engine crews.)

Some other features of the House authorization as it stands:

- **Funding is authorized** at levels in the House budget

resolution (June News), generally freezing Amtrak at 1995 levels for 1996-98; **Northeast Corridor** is \$200 million a year.

- **Amtrak must give 180 days’ notice** (rather than the current 90) when discontinuing a service.

- **Thruway buses** Amtrak charters may carry non-rail passengers only where state/local funds are involved.

- **Amtrak is exempt** from the Freedom of Information Act (in its capacity as a “private” corporation), but states have open access to Amtrak’s financial records.

The key Senate vote related to giving states badly needed flexibility actually came on a motion to table; a “no” vote was pro-Amtrak. With these exceptions, senators voted as they had on May 25 (Column B above):

- 19 switched from anti- to pro-Amtrak, including all senators from Alaska, Florida, Louisiana, New York and Utah plus McCain (AZ), Campbell (CO), Abraham (MI), Lott (MS), Hollings (SC), Pressler (SD), Gramm (TX), Gorton (WA) and Kohl (WI);

- 5 switched from pro- to anti-Amtrak: Baucus (MT), Bryan (NV), Bingaman (NM), Conrad (ND) and Nickles (OK); and
- Mikulski (MD), absent May 25, voted pro-Amtrak.

The actual amendment, offered by William V. Roth Jr. (R-DE), then passed on a voice vote. The next day, the Senate accepted a Nickles amendment to let states without Amtrak service use certain transit funds to pay for Amtrak service. ■

Amtrak, Illinois Central Reach 15-Year Agreement

At last there is good news on a topic of great concern to rail passengers: whether good, post-1996 agreements with major freight railroads are possible. Recent conclusion of a 15-year operating agreement between Illinois Central (IC) and Amtrak—Amtrak's first such agreement—shows that they *are*.

(The "basic contract" between Amtrak and most railroads expires April 30, 1996. Amtrak's legal right to use tracks on an incremental cost basis does not expire, but there are worries—fanned by anti-Amtrak comments in the latest CSX Annual Report and a Conrail proceeding before the Interstate Commerce Commission—that railroads will fight to "redefine" incremental to Amtrak's disadvantage.)

City of New Orleans Reroute: A positive aspect of the IC agreement is that—although Amtrak's Chicago-New Orleans train is to be rerouted between Memphis, Tenn. and Jackson, Miss. on a line that is about 10 miles longer than the present route—overall running-time will be only about five minutes longer. Amtrak will be able to run 79 mph on the new route.

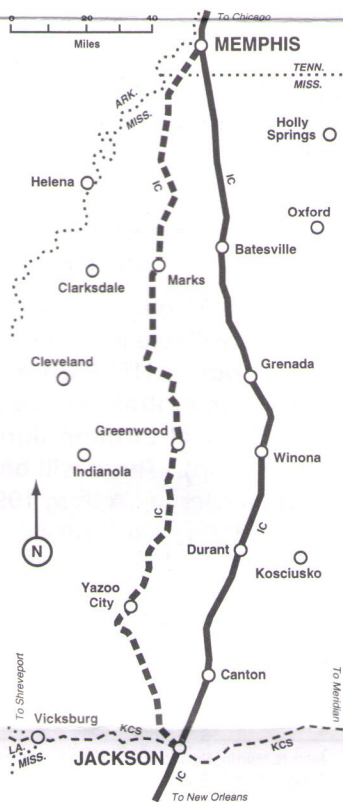
In recent years, IC installed welded rail and signals on the new route, which—because of gentler grades—always was used by heavy freights.

Now, the IC plans to downgrade the present Amtrak route from 79-mph passenger standards. The line has little through-freight traffic, except for detours (as when a bridge was washed out on the new route in May), but IC reportedly plans to continue local freight operations here. Some had hoped IC would continue the line for high-speed container trains.

However, preserving 79-mph speeds here would take \$50-60 million in capital investment and \$2-3 million a year in ongoing maintenance costs—all Amtrak expenses under IC's current plans. Amtrak felt these costs would jeopardize the very existence of the *City of New Orleans*, whose 1994 revenues totaled \$14.4 million.

Amtrak has proposed stops at Greenwood (where a waiting room may be restored in an existing station) and Yazoo City (where a platform and shelter would be needed) to replace existing stops at Batesville, Grenada, Winona, Durant and Canton. NARP has asked Amtrak to consider a stop at Marks to serve the large towns of Batesville and Clarksdale.

Exact date of the route change depends on completion of necessary work; the earliest probable date seems to be October 29.



—Scott Leonard

HIGHWAY LOBBY FIGHTS "FLEXIBILITY"

The highway lobby worked hard against—but lost big on—the Senate's June 21 vote to let states spend certain categories of federal transportation funds on Amtrak ("Big Senate Victory," page one). The Roth Amendment was attached to S. 440, the National Highway System bill.

As the focus on this shifts to the House, the Highway Users Federation (HUF) is saying Amtrak "could become a black hole" for Highway Trust Fund dollars. HUF is not explaining that Roth *merely lets states make a choice*; given the power of the highway lobby at all levels of government, this hardly means a collapse of "highway civilization."

Currently, highway funds can be spent on all forms of surface transportation except intercity passenger rail. Nonetheless, HUF argues that Roth would destroy the Highway Trust Fund's "sanctity," the notion that gasoline tax funds should be spent only on highways.

In this regard, American Petroleum Institute President Charles J. DiBona says Roth "would shred the promise Congress made when it first began taxing motorists," as if balanced transportation supporters are not also motorists.

Budget Committee Attacks Transit

The House Budget Resolution (June News) has a big cut in transit funding. From the Budget Committee justification:

"...A DOT study by Harvard economists indicated that busways can be built and operated for one-fifth the cost of new rail systems. [Ed.: See also "HOV=HOAX," July, 1993, News.] Additionally, according to Census Bureau statistics, no U.S. metropolitan area that built or expanded urban rail systems in the 1980's experienced an increase in transit's market share. For example, transit's work trip market share decreased 33% in Portland, Oregon, despite the opening of a new light rail line. Transit work trip market share in Atlanta declined 36% despite an expansion of the heavy rail system. Furthermore, there is no evidence from anywhere in the world that building new urban rail systems reduces traffic congestion...Clearly, mass transit systems are costly and are not meeting their stated objectives."

Hello? Urban road construction does not reduce traffic congestion long-term either; drivers clearly will accept fairly high congestion levels, given the current driving costs. But well-planned rail lines *do* increase total transport capacity in an environmentally-sound manner, while improving mobility for the transit-dependent and giving a region more protection against an energy shortage (or a road-killing earthquake).

Focussing on market-share lets one show declining transit numbers even where *ridership* is rising. Also, many metro areas grew geographically 1980-1990; new acreage is in far suburbs with low transit use, so the change in definition automatically reduces market-share of even the most effective systems. (San Diego transit—with an above-average investment in rail—did *not* lose work trip market share.)

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Frequency cuts announced (Apr. News) by Amtrak for June 11 took effect on the *Hoosier State*, *City of New Orleans* and *California Zephyr*.

They did *not* take effect on the three Chicago regional services marked for cuts. Due to intervention from the State of Illinois, they are preserved through December 31. The *Illini* (Chicago-Carbondale) and *Illinois Zephyr* (Chicago-Quincy) remain daily. The *State House* (Chicago-St. Louis) is saved (daily). The *Loop* (Chicago-Springfield) is also saved, but loses its Saturday round-trip, running only Monday-Friday. Fares go up 10-30% July 1, and food service will be "modified" on the *Loop*.

Missouri and Amtrak plan to revive the Kansas City-St. Louis *Mules* July 1, restoring service cut April 2.

Wisconsin and Amtrak were set to restore two more Chicago-Milwaukee frequencies July 16, creating a pattern of six round-trips Monday-Saturday, five Sunday.

San Diegans: Caltrans and Amtrak on June 3 extended another *San Diegan* to Santa Barbara, Saturday-Sunday-holiday: depart San Diego 8:00 am, arrive Santa Barbara 1:50 pm; depart Santa Barbara 4:45 pm, arrive San Diego 10:40 pm; related weekend/holiday

changes to other *San Diegans*.

Northeast: Corridor fares went up an average 5% on May 22. Excursion black-outs were extended to 11 am-11 pm Friday and Sunday. Fees were extended to reservations on New England Expresses south of New York (they were already in place north of there).

Amtrak's reserved New York-Hyannis *Cape Codder* (Fridays up/Sundays back) runs June 16-September 10.

Bikes on Trains: All Amtrak Capitol Corridor trains and certain *San Joaquins* carry passengers' bikes, without box. New California Cars hold three bikes each. You may ask crew how to operate bicycle rack. For now, only groups need to reserve space in advance. Equipment modifications are bringing similar—but all-reserved—service to Pacific Northwest corridor trains.

Transit: SEPTA is running a historic streetcar loop in downtown Philadelphia, on 11th and 12th Sts. (between Noble and Bainbridge) along part of the 23/Germantown line shut down in July 1991. "The Welcome Line" ran weekends after May 20, and daily after June 18. The Chestnut Hill Trolley Loop is still being run by a private group on the north end of Route 23 on weekends (Dec. '92 News).

THE PRIVATE SECTOR WILL DO WHAT?

"The March 15 editorial 'The \$925,000 Minute' which opposed Michigan's investment in high-speed rail, contained some pretty bad logic. First, *The [Detroit] News* said, 'If there is real demand for high-speed rail, the private sector will build it.' Oh yeah? If there was such demand for a freeway between Detroit and Chicago, why didn't the private sector build I-94? If there was so much demand for a commercial airport in Detroit, why didn't the private sector build Metro Airport?"

"Second, *The News* calculated the cost of the grant at \$925,000 per minute of travel time saved. Since when is a capital investment supposed to be paid off in one trip?..."

—John DeLora, Chairman, Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, March 31, in letter to The Detroit News

AMTRAK ON INTERNET

Some 50 pages of Amtrak photos and text were made available in May on World Wide Web. The access code is [HTTP://WWW.AMTRAK.COM](http://WWW.AMTRAK.COM). Browsers of the Amtrak feature qualify for a 10% discount on all travel through June 15 (except Metroliners, Auto Train). There will be an internet travel sweepstakes every month in 1995. Timetables will be online "in the near future."

CORRECTION: The man third from right in the Burch Award group photo (June News, p. 2) was misidentified—he is Amtrak Assistant General Manager-Operations (Philadelphia) Joseph D. Wall.



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