

News from the

# National Association of Railroad Passengers

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## Surviving a Zero-Sum Game

### LIGHT RAIL SUCCESS IN ST. LOUIS



—Photo by Barry Williams

The St. Louis MetroLink light rail line opened July 31. Ridership has been very good—around 22,000 on weekdays, and around 35,000 on weekends (and weekdays with home baseball games). That puts it in the same range—in its first month of operation and before the airport extension is complete—with other, more established services such as Buffalo, Sacramento, Portland and San Jose. Cumulative ridership surpassed 1,000,000 on Sept. 4.

Above, DOT Secretary Federico Peña is shown speaking at the opening ceremony at Union Station. "What do I say to questions about whether we need light rail?" he asked. "I say, 'Yes!—and if you want to see a great one, go to St. Louis, and you'll see why we need them.'"

In August we said there was no MetroLink stop at the Amtrak "station," without noting the stop at Kiel Civic Center, two blocks to the north—acceptable for good walkers without a lot of baggage.

### The Budget Noose Tightens

After four years of operating deficits smaller than the enacted federal operating grants, Amtrak has had four years of deficits exceeding operating grants, wiping out cash reserves. Amtrak says it must cut service without the full FY '94 operating-grant authorization—\$381 million, up \$30 mill. (8.5%) from the final FY '93 level.

This is an unfamiliar message for Congress, and, considering the federal budget situation, an untimely one.

Sen. Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ), chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, is expected to put at least \$351 mill. in his bill and to fight in conference for an end result no lower than that (see box on page 4).

#### From "Riches" to Rags

In FY '86-'89, Amtrak's operating deficit was \$19.1 mill. less than was appropriated for operations (\$18 mill. of that "surplus" was in FY '88). (Amtrak is permitted to "bank" the surpluses for future capital—not operating—expenses.) The economy was growing and airline fare competition was limited.

In FY 90-'92, the operating deficit exceeded operating grants by \$84 mill.; a \$15 mill. shortfall is projected for FY '93. Major factors:

- the faltering economy;
- the June 1992 Food and Drug Admin. consent agreement which raised costs permanently and hurt revenues at least in the short run. Service reliability plummeted while Amtrak caught up on the work it "should have been doing all along" (to quote one Amtrak executive);
- growing competition of low airfares—from money-losing carriers and now also from profitable Southwest Airlines;
- many failures to set fares to meet market opportunities;
- the 1992 nationwide rail strike/lockout;
- the 1993 Midwest floods, whose net cost to Amtrak may be as high as \$20 mill.; and
- the fact that a new Amtrak president—identity unknown—has been expected "soon" for over a year.

continued on page 4

## Swedes Develop Safer Crossing

One of the challenges associated with raising passenger train speeds on North American railroads is the grade crossing. The Association of American Railroads policy paper on high speed rail (see *Mar. News*, p. 3) said "total rail-highway grade-crossing protection" was "required" for 100-150-mph service. A train-motor vehicle collision at less than 100 mph is likely to damage the motor vehicle more than the train. But a collision at above 100 mph is likely to do very serious damage to the train, too, and injure many more passengers.

When the Swedish State Railway (SJ) was planning to increase Stockholm-Gothenburg passenger train speeds from 100 to 125 mph, the National Rail Admin. ("Banverket"—controls all Swedish rail infrastructure) confronted the grade crossing issue. Sweden has perhaps the highest number of crossings per rail route-mile of any European country—a level similar to that of the U.S. Of the 300 grade crossings on the 289-mile route in 1983, Banverket closed or replaced with bridges 135 by the time SJ began running the X2000 in 1990, and 210 by 1992.

That left 90 crossings. Full-width gates were installed on those used by more than 50 motor vehicles per day, and those with unique risk factors (i.e., trucks carrying hazardous materials).

The solution proposed by Banverket and ABB Signal was to incorporate sensors located in the grade crossings into the railroad signal system, in areas where trains would run at 125 mph. The Stockholm-Gothenburg line already had cab signals and automatic train stop (ATS). The ATS system was enhanced so that if a motor vehicle is blocking a crossing, the sensors will work with the ATS system to bring any approaching trains to a halt before reaching the crossing. The ATS will also stop trains if gates are broken or not completely lowered. (Similarly, ATS stops two trains approaching each other before they collide.)

Existing grade crossing gate control circuits were also incorporated into the ATS system. This was important because merely moving the circuits further away from the crossing to accommodate the faster X2000's would mean that motorists would wait longer for the other slower trains still using the line. Whenever a motorist perceives that a forced wait for a train is "too long," the temptation to run around the gate increases. The enhanced ATS system allows the gate control circuit to judge the speed of the train, and time the lowering of the crossing gates accordingly.

Along the Stockholm-Gothenburg line, some station platforms to be passed by trains doing 80 mph or more are

equipped with lights and bells connected to the ATS system to warn of approaching trains. Level walkways across tracks between platforms have gates.

The cost per fully equipped crossing is \$87,500-125,000. Banverket budgeted \$10 million for the grade crossing enhancement projects in 1990. The first crossings were in place in the 125-mph zone between Katrineholm and Skovde by January 1991. There, 40 of the 50 remaining crossings were to include the ATS sensors. No accidents have been reported.

The Swedish ATS grade crossing sensor system could be used on future U.S. high speed lines as a low-cost alternative to total grade separation. Assuming that some form of ATS would be used on any U.S. line, an ATS sensor equipped grade crossing costing around \$100,000 is more affordable than a grade separation costing \$2-5 million.

NARP issued a news release in that context March 18, the day after a serious Amtrak grade crossing accident on one of the routes designated as a future high speed corridor under Section 1010 of ISTEA. It pointed out that such an accident (see box) could have been prevented if a system like that in Sweden had been in place. ■

### CROSSING DEATHS DECLINING

Operation Lifesaver, the non-profit, grade crossing safety group, in May released Federal Railroad Admin. figures showing U.S. grade crossing deaths were down last year. In 1992, 575 people (no rail passengers) died at crossings, down from 608 in 1991 and 698 in 1990. In fact, it was the lowest since 1974, when official records were first kept.

Pedestrian/trespasser deaths were up—at 533 in 1992, the second-highest since 1974. Operation Lifesaver says a continuing problem is magazine and television ads that portray walking on the tracks as somehow romantic, adventurous or nostalgic. In fact, it is just plain stupid and dangerous.

Recent notable passenger-train grade crossing accidents (previous accidents, see Sept. '92 *News*):

- Nov. 25, 1992. A Metrolink commuter train near San Fernando, CA strikes a truck trying to beat it through the crossing, killing the driver, injuring 12 passengers slightly and derailling the lead (cab) car.
- Dec. 16, 1992. An Amtrak Capitol train strikes an abandoned car near Davis, CA and deraills, slightly injuring four passengers. The driver was arrested after a struggle and sent to a hospital for psychiatric evaluation.
- Mar. 11, 1993. Amtrak's "Wolverine" strikes a propane truck near Kalamazoo, MI, which then explodes, killing the driver and injuring the engineer.
- Mar. 17, 1993. At Fort Lauderdale, FL, Amtrak's "Silver Star" strikes a loaded gasoline tanker truck stopped on the crossing in heavy traffic (a very basic highway safety violation—*never* enter a crossing if there's too much traffic to get all the way across). The truck explodes, killing the driver, five nearby motorists and injuring 15. None of the 118 people on the train are injured seriously, but, as the train is braking, the dining car comes to a rest in the fireball and was destroyed.

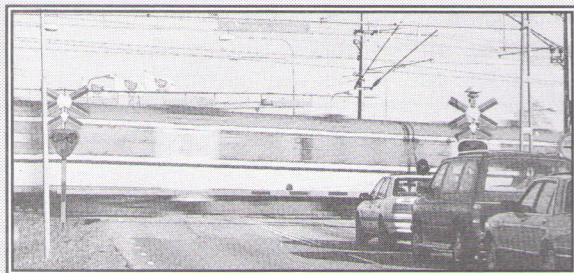


Photo by ABB Traction

X2000s run through high-tech rail/highway grade crossings in Sweden at 130 mph.

## RAILROADS, NOT AIRLINES, PAY FUEL TAX

On Oct. 1, 1993, Amtrak and freight railroad federal deficit reduction payments rise from 2.5 cents to 5.55 cents a gallon. Each penny costs Amtrak \$1 million a year (\$900,000 for diesel locomotives; \$100,000 for maintenance-of-way equipment, fork lifts, baggage tractors, police cars, etc.), so the tax raises the annual federal subsidy required for a given service level by about \$5.55 million—or forces service reductions.

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1993 redirects highway users' 2.5-cents-a-gallon deficit re-

duction payments into the Highway Trust Fund. Congress, "half-sensitive" to railroad opposition to excusing truckers but not railroads from deficit reduction, cut freight railroad and Amtrak payments in half, to 1.25 cents. Also, most transportation except airlines starts paying a new 4.3-cent-a-gallon deficit reduction tax. The law calls for airlines to begin paying this in two years. We'll see. (The law ends commuter rail payments of the 2.5 cents—other transit never paid this—and exempts all transit from the new 4.3 cents.)

LATE FLASH. In a Sept. 23 reply to NARP's Sept. 7 letter (see p. 4), Pres. Clinton said: "I am working with Congress to secure needed funding for Amtrak...."

### TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

#### Amtrak...

...virtually without advance notice on Sept. 20 changed most "San Diegan" schedules to accommodate track work. Beware!—most trains are 5-10 min. later or earlier than before. They will change again Dec. 5 when Metrolink takes over the Los Angeles-San Juan Capistrano local and expands commuter service on the line.

Emeryville, CA became a new stop for Capitol Corridor and "San Joaquin" trains Aug. 14 (code: EMY). The new, city-funded station—with ticket office but as yet no checked baggage—is at 5885 Landregan St., near the end of the Bay Bridge between Berkeley and Oakland (2 mi. from both). Westbound trains stop there 3 min. after Berkeley; eastbound 3 min. after Oakland.

For now, buses for San Francisco (Ferry Bldg. & CalTrain Sta.) still connect with all trains at Oakland 16th St. Sta. which was damaged in the 1989 earthquake and is still scheduled to close this year. Oakland's new Jack London Square station won't be ready until 1994. When 16th St. closes and the Emeryville platform is improved, checked baggage and connecting buses will shift to Emeryville and the long-distance trains also will begin stopping there.

All Amtrak services interrupted by flooding this summer were restored by early Aug. One exception: "Illinois Zephyr" continues to terminate at Quincy, IL, returning to W. Quincy, MO in early Oct.

Until restoration of the bridge damaged in the Sept. 22 "Sunset Ltd." tragedy, buses will substitute for the "Sunset Ltd." New Orleans-Pensacola and "Gulf Breeze" Mobile-Birmingham.

On Aug. 12 several new dining car items were introduced, including a "Choo Choo Chewies" children's meal (in a box with games). A new, uniform policy of orders being written on a guest check by the dining car attendant was also established.

#### Oct. 25 Timetable Highlights

- "Silver Meteor" will run approx. 3:00 later southbound, 1:00 later northbound. Amtrak hopes this will improve on-time performance, as happened when a similar schedule was operated Aug. 17-Oct. 24, 1992. (The equipment turns the same day at New York.)

- For a more civilized Montreal arrival (5p), "Adi-

rondack" leaves New York Mon.-Sat. 3:00 earlier, at an uncivilized 7:15a, making "Night Owl"/"Exec. Sleeper" only Washington-Philadelphia connection northbound. (Tight—35-min.—connection from "Fast Mail" at your own risk.) Southbound "Adirondack" runs 1:00 later. Sunday schedules unchanged.

- The Empire Corridor still will have a New York-to-Syracuse train on Fr/Su evenings. With that exception, the current Mo-thru-Sa Syracuse-New York "Mohawk" will be dropped in favor of three more Niagara Falls-New York round-trips a week (giving Niagara Falls a total of three daily round-trips) and three more Albany-New York round-trips (Mo/Tu/We).

- "Lake Shore Ltd." will continue to provide no connection to "California Zephyr" and "Empire Builder," contrary to hopes Amtrak had raised earlier (May News, p. 2). Because of the same-day turnaround of equipment at Chicago, the only workable schedule would have put the westbound "Lake Shore" through Cleveland around 2a, unacceptable as Cleveland's only other westbound train is around 3a.

- "Cardinal" arrives Chicago 20 min. later in wake of June 30 route change south of there; "Hoosier State" gets 15-20 min. added to schedule. Amtrak had hoped this reroute would not require more time (July News, p. 3). Eastbound "Cardinal" does not change.

- Wolf Point and Malta, MT have checked baggage ("Empire Builder").

- Lewiston, ID Thruway bus extended to Boise.

- Train 666 (Atlantic City-Washington) changed to #668, after comments were received from "superstitious" gamblers.

A new wheelchair lift was dedicated July 7 at Wallingford, CT by Amtrak, Gaylord Hospital (which paid for the lift's shelter) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), who worked on getting the lift on behalf of a local family whose daughter needs the lift to use the Wallingford station. This change is not reflected in the new timetable.

#### Transit

In June the San Francisco Muni regular J line light rail service was extended from 30th St. to Metro Ctr. (Balboa Park BART station/K line connection). Restricted service had run since early 1993. Also, the M line was cut back to St. Francis Cir.; a new terminus for J & M will be built at State College.

## Zero-Sum Game (continued from page 1)

Amtrak's "\$381-mill.-or-service-cuts" position probably also reflects renewed management determination to narrow the gap between available resources and service levels with a view to improving service quality.

### Why Not \$381 Million?

Besides the actual appropriation numbers we normally report, appropriators also face limits on "outlays"—cash actually spent the same year.

Capital project outlays typically go in "bits and pieces" over two or more years, but Amtrak, transit and Essential Air Service operating grants are all spent the year they are appropriated. Thus those operating grants are said to have a 100% first-year "spendout" rate; highway projects only about 16%; Amtrak capital 15%.

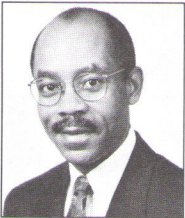
### Amtrak Operations v. Highways and v. Amtrak Capital

Thus, if Lautenberg wanted to appropriate more for Amtrak and less for highways, he would have to take \$6.25 from highways for every dollar he adds to Amtrak operations, an unpleasant process, considering the continuing popularity of highway projects and the Clinton Administration's apparent firm commitment to a big highway-spending increase (see table).

Furthermore, if Lautenberg picks an operating number forcing service cuts, and a legislator opposing a cut pushes the operating grant higher to protect a targeted service, the money most likely would come from Amtrak capital, at the ratio of \$6.66 from capital for every dollar added to operations.

## FRA, FTA Chiefs Confirmed

On Aug. 5, the Senate confirmed the nominations of Jolene Molitoris as Federal Railroad Administrator (see Aug. News, p. 3) and Gordon Linton as Federal Transit Administrator. Linton was sworn in Aug. 20; Molitoris Sept. 8 in a ceremony at Washington Union Station. NARP wrote letters endorsing both Linton and Molitoris.



Gordon J. Linton

When nominated in May, Linton was a six-term Pennsylvania state legislator representing northwestern Philadelphia. He was vice-chair of the House Appropriations Committee and a board member of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). Linton was instrumental in getting the first-ever dedicated transit funding source in that state in 1991.

### A CORNUCOPIA OF RAIL MUSEUMS

The 28th annual (1993) edition of the *Steam Passenger Service Directory* is available from Great Eastern Publishing, with listings for much more than is implied by the title: railroad museums of all sorts (many with steam- or diesel-powered rides), tourist railroads and trolleys, toy-train exhibits and live-steam (miniature, but rideable) railroads in the U.S. and Canada. This illustrated, 300+ page directory is very complete and can be had for \$9.95 (U.S. funds only) + \$2.50 shipping/handling (Vermont residents add 5% sales tax) by writing *Steam Passenger Service Directory*, P.O. Box 246, Richmond, VT 05477. The 1994 edition is due in April.

## NARP PUSHES MORE AMTRAK FUNDING

An Aug. 4 Campaign for New Transportation Priorities letter signed by 13 groups—including Sierra Club and Friends of the Earth—urged Chairman Lautenberg to fully fund transit operations and Amtrak.

From NARP's Sept. 7 letter to Pres. Clinton: "Your campaign comments about rail excited our members and implied that a Clinton Administration would play a *leadership* role in the effort to secure adequate funding for rail passenger service. Now is the time for leadership!..."

"The immediate question is whether...to provide Amtrak adequate resources for existing services and to help expand service in cases where states also make substantial financial commitments.... *Senator Lautenberg deserves and needs your help in doing this...*"

NARP reinforced this message in a Sept. 10 meeting with a senior White House official.

On Sept. 16, Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña wrote to Chairman Lautenberg "encouraging" him, in comparison with Chairman Carr's bill, to add \$20 mill. for operations (i.e. to bring that figure up to \$351 mill.) and to raise the Amtrak capital, Northeast Corridor and high speed rail figures to the levels in the President's budget (see table below).

## APPROPRIATIONS SUMMARY

(Millions of Dollars)

	FY '93 Actual (incl. suppl.)	FY '94		
		Clinton Budget	House Bill	Amtrak Request
Amtrak:				
Operations	\$351	\$331*	\$331	\$381
New 403 (b)	-----	-----	-----	\$10
Capital	\$190	\$165	\$100	\$250
Mandatory Payments	\$146	\$137*	\$137	\$137
NE Corr. Proj.	\$204	\$204	\$130	\$250
High Speed Rail**	-----	\$140**	\$0	\$140**
IC Rail Psgr Total	\$891	\$977	\$698	\$1,168**
Federal Highway	\$18,095	\$20,590	\$19,725	-----
Federal Aviation	\$8,918	\$9,229	\$8,448***	-----
Intercity Rail				
Passenger as % of Road/Air/				
Intercity Rail Total	3.2%	3.2%	2.4%	

\*Budget shows \$468 million for "core operations" including mandatory payments and an estimate of \$147 million for those payments. (\$468 mill. = \$331 mill. plus \$137 mill.)

\*\*The \$140 million (which includes \$29 million for a maglev prototype) of course was not included in Amtrak's budget request but for purposes of comparability is included here in the Amtrak column and the "Amtrak Request" total.

\*\*\*The FY '94 decline in aviation funding is partly due to resistance from airlines, which must themselves pay part of airport-improvement costs and which are eager to keep costs to a minimum.