



News from the
**National Association of
Railroad Passengers**

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(This has news through Dec. 17. Vol 27, No. 11 was mailed Dec. 8.)

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Peña Invites Debate

A Single Transportation Fund?

"Right now we don't have the capacity or the tools to decide whether rail would be a better alternative than building a new airport runway. We question how much money is there in the aviation trust fund, in the highway trust fund. We have to change. It will not be easy."

—Secretary Peña, at Dec. 9 news conference

Thanks to the initiative of Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña, the Dec. 9 unveiling of the Administration's plan for the Congressionally-mandated National Highway System (NHS) marked a turning-point in a long-running debate over U.S. transportation funding.

Traditionally, top federal transportation officials have opposed the idea of a consolidated transportation fund ("fiscal intermodalism")—in effect, supporting the notion that funding mode-specific trust funds should dictate what modal choices are made. To suggest otherwise has been thought tantamount to touching the "third rail" of transportation politics.

However, Peña, in statements such as the one quoted above, provoked this key question from a reporter: "Do you contemplate a single overall fund?"

Peña: "I don't know...[That is] the reason we want to do extensive public outreach...It is a very controversial idea. We need to dialogue about it, discuss it."

The Secretary seemed to be sending a message also with his choice of location. The quasi-public unveiling of the NHS was in the Columbus Club at Union Station and the follow-up news conference was upstairs in the Amtrak board room.

And Peña called the NHS "the backbone of the National Transportation System (NTS)...a system which we are launching work on here today." Federal Highway Administrator Rodney E. Slater noted the NHS will serve "104 major ports, 143 major airports, 321 major Amtrak stations, 191 rail/truck terminals, and 242 military and defense-related installations."

As for the NHS itself, Slater said that, of the 158,674-mile network in his plan, "less than 2% is new mileage, and that's because it's already in State plans."

Send NARP \$2 for DOT's packet (NHS map, fact sheet and booklet, NTS statement and Dec. 9 remarks of Peña and Slater). ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Amtrak's City of New Orleans is to be converted to Superliner/Hi-Level equipment Feb. 1...Relocation of Amtrak's Detroit station and extension of service to Pontiac now is expected Feb. 9.

Dec. 6 saw introduction of new San Joaquin, San Diegan and connecting bus schedules. Watch out! First train to Santa Barbara leaves San Diego week-ends 6a (was 6:20a)...On Nov. 19, Amtrak made Tallahassee, FL a staffed station.

Correction of Dec. Advisory: the westbound Chief makes its last Pomona and Pasadena stops the morning of Jan. 14; substitute buses will run Jan. 15-21. The eastbound Chief last served these points Nov. 26; buses will run through Jan. 14. After that, to reach Pomona and Pasadena, Chief passengers can use San Joaquin Thruway buses; replacement stops to be announced—Amtrak must vacate these stations.

On Dec. 26, passenger trains begin running Portland-Bethel, ME—75 mi. OW. The privately-operated Sunday River Ski Express will use the former Grand Trunk yard in Portland's East Deering section, running daily except Tu/Th (daily during Christmas and Presidents Day vacations) to end of Feb., then week-ends until the end of April. Info: 207/824-RAIL.

Conferees Approve '94 Funding Bill

House-Senate conferees approved the final version of HR 2750, the 1994 Department of Transportation Appropriations bill, on Oct. 15. Both houses approved it Oct. 21, and President Clinton signed it Oct. 27 (Public Law 103-122).

Intercity rail passenger appropriations rose 3% in a tough budgetary climate. Aviation spending fell 2%, while highway spending rose 8%, rather than the 14% the Clinton Administration sought.

To its credit, however, the Administration supported the higher Senate-passed rail passenger numbers in the House-Senate appropriations conference even though they exceeded the President's original budget request.

Thus Clinton deserves some credit for the fact that House-Senate conferees did not "split the difference," but came closer to the Senate's Amtrak and Northeast Corridor Improvement Project (NECIP) numbers.

The single person most responsible for good rail results, once again, was Senate Transp. Appropriations Chair Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ).

Although his House counterpart, Bob Carr (D-MI), is not as enthusiastic about rail, in fairness to Carr, his subcommittee did face tighter budget targets than did Lautenberg's.

Carr defended Amtrak on the House floor in the face of the Hefley amendments (Oct. News). In an extraordinary Dec. 6 tribute letter to retiring Amtrak Pres. W. Graham Claytor Jr., a letter that dealt exclusively with Claytor's work at Amtrak, Carr concluded: "You have served your country in a way that only future generations will be able to appreciate fully."

Some Amtrak highlights from the FY '94 DOT appropriations law and conference report:

- Some "old" NECIP money was reassigned. Of \$14 mill. appropriated in FY '91 for dual-mode locomotives, \$2 mill. will support a New York State project to put a new turbine in

an existing turbo-train. The remaining \$12 mill. was added to \$51.6 mill. of the "new" NECIP funds, giving Amtrak a \$63.6 mill. "green light" to proceed with acquisition of 26 high speed train sets plus two prototype non-electric high-speed locomotives for use on non-electrified corridors.

- While agreeing that Amtrak should make every effort to "maximize the U.S. content of the new [Northeast Corridor] train sets," the report rejected Senate language setting a goal of 80% domestic content.

- The \$700,000 in operating support in excess of the Senate amount is for Amtrak's (35%) share of a second 403(b) service between Raleigh and Charlotte, NC. This train was to begin running in 1993, but has been delayed by problems in setting up turning tracks at both terminal cities.

- "It is the conferees' intent that, to the maximum extent possible, any further reductions in force to [Amtrak] be focused at the managerial level." Amtrak says that in the last three years, its unionized work force grew 5% while management was cut 9%, and that cuts implemented this fall amounted to about 1% of both categories.

- House language limiting Amtrak's use of operating grant money to certain categories was removed. Further action deferred pending Congressional review of a Government Accounting Office report on Amtrak's financial management and accounting systems, due September 30, 1994. This review will include a look at how Amtrak accounts for Thruway bus operations, which would have been jeopardized by language initially approved by the House subcommittee.

High Speed Saga

High speed capital appropriations were limited to \$2.5 million for Chicago-St. Louis (grade crossing design work and environmental impact statement), \$1 mill. for Raleigh-Charlotte and \$20 mill. for magnetic levitation. Carr insisted

(continued to page 3)

FY 1994 TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATIONS HISTORY

(\$ millions)

	FY '93 actual (incl. suppl.)	FY '94				
		Amtrak request	Admin. budget	House bill	Senate bill	Conf. total
Amtrak:						
Operations	351.0	381.0	331.0	331.0	351.0	351.7
New 403(b)	0.0	10.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Capital	190.0	250.0	165.0	100.0	208.6	195.0
Mandatory payments*	146.0	137.0	137.0	137.0	137.0	137.0
Northeast Corridor Improvement Project	204.1	250.0	204.1	130.0	250.0	225.0
High Speed Rail	5.0**	—	111.0	5.5	107.9	3.5
Magnetic Levitation	13.6	—	29.0	0.0	27.9	20.0
Federal Transit Admin.	3,799.6	—	4,601.9	4,476.5	4,506.5	4,582.6
Federal Aviation Admin.	8,918.0	—	9,229.2	8,450.4	8,801.3	8,644.8
Federal Highway Admin.	18,430.2	—	20,590.0	19,737.3	20,337.0	19,938.4

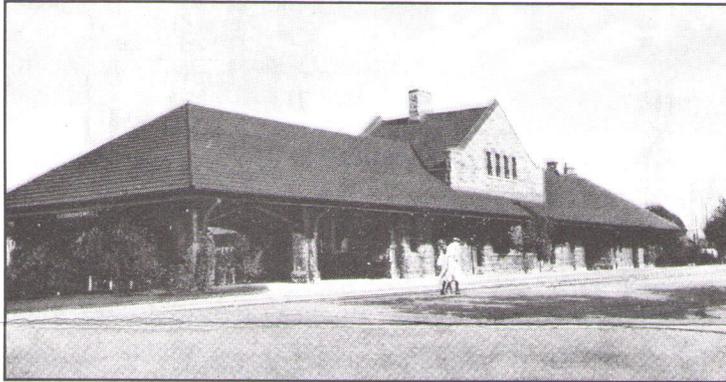
*Federal railroad retirement and unemployment liabilities in excess of Amtrak's demands on those systems.

**Funds available for rail or maglev.

NARP Alerts Officials to Station Needs; Funding

Think of an Amtrak station that could use major repair work. It probably didn't take long for one or more stations to come to mind. If the station is a historic structure, there is now good news.

NARP is working to steer more federal funds into rail passenger station improvements by insuring that state and local officials know the needs *and* know those needs can be met with



—Collection of Scott Leonard

The former Milwaukee Road depot at Oconomowoc, WI (above, from historic post card) is eligible for ISTEA enhancement funds. It would need some repair to be suitable for proposed Chicago-Milwaukee-Madison 403(b) Amtrak service.

Funding Bill (from page 2)

that the \$20 mill. be only for research, not for construction of a prototype.

High speed rail appears to have fared poorly for three reasons:

- The program was not yet authorized (S.839 had not even passed the Senate Commerce Committee), with significant disagreements remaining over labor protection and liability (Dec. News).

- To get the budget authority needed for Administration high speed rail proposals, the Administration proposed using some highway trust fund money originally authorized for maglev in ISTEA, the 1991 highway/transit authorization. Just a day before the appropriations conference, Chairman Norman K. Mineta (D-CA) of the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation wrote Carr opposing use of highway trust funds for high speed rail. Thus, at the 11th hour, Mineta was attacking a funding proposal the Administration laid on the table last April. Carr, fresh from a bitter battle with Mineta on other aspects of the bill, was not inclined to do battle again.

- In the zero-sum federal budget game, providing more dollars for high speed rail would have forced more politically difficult cuts in other programs. Members couldn't see making other programs suffer for the sake of a high speed rail program whose ability to spend funds was still unclear, particularly since the Clinton Administration itself did not make recommendations about what to cut to make way for high speed rail. ■

CORRECTION

In the Dec. News item "How to be a NARP Director," incorrect dates were given for the next board meeting—it will be Apr. 28-30 at Rockville, MD.

80% federal funding under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), if state and local officials make the right choices.

The NARP Enhancements Project, funded largely by a grant from NARP Region 12 (CA, HI, NV), produced a state-by-state list of 430 historic Amtrak and commuter rail stations eligible for ISTEA enhancements funding. After incorporating comments from NARP's Board of Directors, NARP sent the data on a state-specific basis, along with an explanatory letter, to 1,258 state and local officials—state legislators and DOT rail officials, mayors, councilmembers and key metropolitan planning organization staff.

Officials began calling NARP to learn more about funding opportunities and to tell us about ISTEA-funded station work underway or planned. The mailing went out Nov. 22-24; within three weeks, we had heard from officials in Alabama, California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, Oregon and Texas.

Nationwide, over \$25 million already has been committed to restoration of historic railroad stations, with more projects planned. A future *NARP News* will detail some of the exciting developments. To cite just two examples: Tampa's Union Station will get almost \$1 mill. for a major redevelopment that includes returning Amtrak to the main building; North Carolina is using enhancement funds to restore many historic stations along Amtrak routes. But hundreds of historic railroad stations throughout the country remain in serious need of rehabilitation.

NARP's list, produced by NARP and Campaign for New Transportation Priorities staff, also includes stops on potential routes and potential stops on existing routes. Stations on the National Register of Historic Places are indicated; other stations are on state or city registers or historic stations that have not yet received formal designation. A station need not be on the National Register to qualify for ISTEA funding.

ISTEA requires states to spend 10% of their flexible Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds on "enhancements." The ISTEA enhancement list includes "rehabilitation and operation of historic transportation buildings, structures or facilities (including historic railroad facilities and canals)."

Send NARP \$10 for the entire national list. If you want only one or a few states, send \$2 per state and list the states. ■

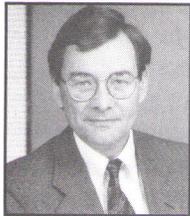
DOES AMTRAK SQUEAK ENOUGH?

"Take the time [American President Lines Pres. Tim Rhein] complained to Union Pacific that his stack trains were being delayed by grain trains in the Blue Mountains of Idaho and Oregon. His version of the railroad reply: 'But we have grain contracts to meet.' His face turned slightly red as he related that experience. The solution, Rhein said, was to raise hell. 'It's a squeaky-wheel operation,' he said. 'If you squeak, you get service.' Therefore, a shipper can never turn his back on a railroad, he said."

—Don Phillips (of The Washington Post), in Dec. Trains

Amtrak Chairman Downs

At the Union Station unveiling of the National Highway System (NHS; front page), the introduction of Thomas M. Downs, who became Amtrak's president and chairman Dec. 7, sparked such an ovation that Secretary Peña quipped, "We must have chosen the right person." The ovation was important because the crowd was not rail-oriented; almost every transportation person in the city was there.



Thomas M. Downs

Peña praised New Jersey's NHS plan for including transit, commuter rail and Amtrak. (Downs had been Commissioner of New Jersey DOT and Chairman of New Jersey Transit Corp. since March 1990.)

Downs told NARP he has often taken Amtrak to Albany, Boston and Chicago, the latter via the *Cardinal* because of the scenery. However, his wife is reluctant to ride long-distance trains because she once took a *Cardinal* that reached Chicago 11 hours late—partly because the diner caught fire.

The *Washington Post* on Dec. 1 reported: "Downs said he will resist efforts to cut back long-distance national routes, but he added...there's no guarantee that trains will continue to operate on current routes if other routes make more sense. 'In my mind, this is America's railroad,' he said. 'It is not a series of regional railroads.'"

Downs holds a B.A. from Rockhurst College, Kansas City (1964) and M.A.'s in Political Science (U. of MO, Columbia, 1966) and Public Admin. (U. of Kansas, Lawrence, 1970). He was administrative intern, City of Lawrence (1969-70); admin. asst. to the Little Rock city manager (1970-72); Asst. City Manager, Little Rock (1974-77); White House Fellow and Special Asst. to the Secretary, U. S. DOT (1977-78); Assoc. Administrator for Planning and Policy Development, Federal Highway Admin. (1978-80); Exec. Dir., Urban Mass Transp. Admin. (1980-81); Director, DC DOT (1981-83); City Administrator, Washington, DC (1983-88); and Pres., Triborough Bridge & Tunnel Auth., NY (1988-90).

When his seven years of work for the District of Columbia government ended, *The Washington Post* editorially lamented the loss of a "loyal, respected city administrator [who] served the city and its mayor long and well."

In a mid-Dec. meeting with NARP, Downs showed an impressive awareness of the issues Amtrak faces. He is appalled that some maintenance facilities are so antiquated. He said their condition is obscured by the proximity to Capitol Hill of Ivy City, Amtrak's most modern facility.

NEEDED: PRO-AMTRAK LETTERS

Please write the President (The White House; Washington, DC 20500)—and your legislators (House 20515; Senate 20510)—in support of Amtrak's 1995 funding. Tell them further cuts, and possibly even the failure to make a modest increase, will produce a "corporate meltdown." There are no new potential subsidy-reducing service cuts out there like the ones Amtrak just made. As noted in the story to the left, Amtrak desperately needs to modernize antiquated maintenance facilities (and replace elderly rolling stock).

Tell Washington offsetting cuts for incremental corridor improvements—and for Amtrak funding increases—should come from the huge highway program, which has had a "free ride" in the budget process in recent years, including a whopping 8% rise in FY '94.

In an ominous note about the overall budget, Office of Management & Budget Dir. Leon Panetta told department heads in early Dec. to cut their FY '95 requests by \$33 billion to live within budget targets. The budget Congress adopted in Aug. will cut discretionary spending \$68 bill. (12.5%; real dollars) over 5 years (per Democratic Study Group).

Sign on door to the outer office of Amtrak Chairman and President Thomas M. Downs: "It is better to ask Forgiveness than Permission."

Amtrak Travel is Safe — But Many Don't Believe It

Traveling Amtrak is far safer than driving, but the laws of probability tell us accidents will not be evenly spaced. Two freak accidents—*Sunset Ltd.* on Sept. 23 and the non-fatal *Silver Meteor* grade-crossing crash Nov. 30—and coverage of the Dec. 13-15 National Transp. Safety Board *Sunset* hearings have left many people afraid to ride Amtrak.

Why do we say "freak" accidents? A passenger train last went into water in 1958; the cause of *that* New Jersey commuter train accident was corrected—working drawbridges now are tied into railroad signal systems. (*Sunset* was not on such a bridge.) Sec. Peña already has called for tougher maritime regulations to further reduce the threat to highway and railroad bridges, and for further investigation of ways to sensitize railroad signal systems to Alabama-type bridge mishaps (i.e., that do not *break* the rails).

Grade-crossing accidents usually do not injure passengers but, in the one near Kissimmee, FL, a flatbed truck carrying a huge electric turbine under police escort parked on a private grade crossing while workers studied how to make it the rest of the way across. The railroad did not get the advance notice required by state law (and which had been given for three public crossings used by the same truck earlier that trip).

The *Sunset* shot Amtrak's ten-year average passenger fatality rate (per 10 billion passenger-miles) from 5.55 to 13.05—still eight times lower than for autos/light trucks (104.49). Moreover, the *Sunset* accident, Amtrak's worst by far, is an aberration unlikely to have the predictive value people read into these historical figures.

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 Title: **President and Chairman**
 Date: **12/15/94**