

## Tough Sledding on Capitol Hill

### NARP Testifies at House Appropriations

In order to survive, Amtrak needs:

- **Healthy appropriations** each year;
- **A good reauthorization bill** that helps Amtrak cut costs and increase its revenues;
- **A half-cent** of the federal gasoline tax earmarked to Amtrak, as outlined in S 1395 and HR 2789; and
- **Flexibility for states** to spend their federal transportation funds on intercity passenger rail, as on other modes.

#### Appropriations

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon testified

February 28 before the House Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee, chaired by Frank R. Wolf (R-VA). Capon thanked Wolf for the positive tone of his Amtrak hearings both this year and last, and urged that Amtrak—having taken a big hit this year—be spared in fiscal 1997. He noted the special importance of Amtrak's operating grant request, which was especially hard hit last year.

Wolf asked Capon to indicate in a written follow-up which of the National Transportation Safety Board's unimplemented ("open") recommendations NARP feels are most important.

As usual, this Presidential election year brings added pressure to complete the appropriations process on time. Much of July and August is for party conventions; lawmakers want October for full-time campaigning. House Republican leaders hope the House will pass all appropriations bills by July 4.

Members of both Appropriations Committees need to hear from constituents about Amtrak's importance.

#### Authorization

Every effort to improve Amtrak's bottom line affects someone else, so enactment of the long-awaited reauthorization has been delayed as legislators struggled with issues raised by labor, electric utilities and trial lawyers, among others.

The bill was scheduled for consideration the week of April 29, but the liability issue (see box on page 4) still had the potential to prevent the Senate from even taking up the bill.

#### The Half-Cent

We remain hopeful that Senate Finance Chairman William V. Roth Jr. (R-DE), with good support from colleagues, will find a way to move this legislation and get it enacted. House members, especially members of the Ways and Means Committee, need to hear support for this.

#### Flexibility for State Use of Federal Funds

The Senate overwhelmingly approved this last year but backed off due to House resistance in the House-Senate conference committee. Flexibility is back again—this time as part of the reauthorization bill the Senate will consider. This sets the stage for another interesting conference, one in which Amtrak's chances may be better, since the Senate Commerce Committee—with jurisdiction over Amtrak—will be at the table in conference. Senate Commerce was not on the conference committee that dealt with flexibility last year, when it was part of the Senate-passed National Highway System bill.

#### Budget

It is widely believed that Republicans in Congress will not significantly change their 1995 multi-year spending blueprint, whose Senate version was vague and whose House version continues total Amtrak funding at current levels before steep declines begin in the year 2000.

### Amtrak's Slimbock of Philadelphia Wins Burch Award

Lenore Slimbock, Assistant General Manager—Customer Services with Amtrak in Philadelphia, has won the third annual Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Award. The \$1,000-award, sponsored by the Burch family and presented by NARP, honors the memory of Dr. Gary Burch, who died in a South Carolina derailment in 1991.

Amtrak President Tom Downs, in nominating Slimbock, said her "creative, energetic leadership style has made Amtrak proud....She initiates and fosters an environment that promotes safety excellence and passenger satisfaction." He cited these examples:

- **Station maintenance.** After passengers fell and were injured on 30th Street Station's marble floor, she "ensured that the entire station floor was stripped and re-waxed with a non-slip product...Procedures were changed to place carpets at all entryways to the station on rainy and snowy days."

- **Escalator safety.** "Recognizing the potential dangers associated with the five station escalators, Slimbock launched an escalator safety training



—Tom Kane, Amtrak

(continued on page 3)

# Advanced Signal Tests Coming

Three tests are planned to explore different positive train control (PTC) systems. As defined by Federal Railroad Administrator Jolene Molitoris, PTC is the use of "on-board computers, global position system (GPS) receivers on trains and maintenance equipment, and digital communications links between trains, maintenance equipment, and control centers to reduce significantly the probability of train collisions and overspeed accidents" (from her March 27 statement to a joint hearing of the House Railroads and Technology Subcommittees). Each test has similar goals—increasing safety, increasing capacity, and allowing higher speeds—but uses different technologies. Also, each test involves Amtrak routes.

The safety benefits are timely, as it is generally acknowledged that more advanced train control systems could have prevented the two fatal commuter train accidents in February (Mar. News). The National Transportation Safety Board long has advocated such systems. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a Congressionally-mandated report—*Railroad Communications and Train Control*—in July 1994. Capacity issues are timely as well, with freight and passenger traffic growing on many lines.

In recent Congressional hearings, the FRA discussed its 1994 report which found that installing PTC nationwide would have saved railroads \$30 million a year in prevented accidents [NARP has said that the business benefits to railroads of prevented accidents should be counted, too]. It found that installing PTC overlaid on existing signal systems (where they exist) would cost \$859 million; \$1.137 billion if all signal systems were replaced. Installing existing train control technology (which uses more hardware) would cost about \$3 billion. Through the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center, the FRA is working to identify which rail routes should get a PTC system first (if the tests find a system is feasible), based on a risk assessment. The FRA's goal is to have a PTC sys-

## CALIFORNIA BY TRAIN, BUS AND FERRY...

...by NARP member Kirk Schneider, is the 1995-96 update to the *California Transit Guide*, covering transit, Amtrak, intermodal connections and access to many points of interest. The book is 224 pages (with 16 pages of color maps). Send \$18.95 to California Transit Publications; P.O. Box 6427; Whittier, CA 90609.

tem working on "priority corridors" by 2000.

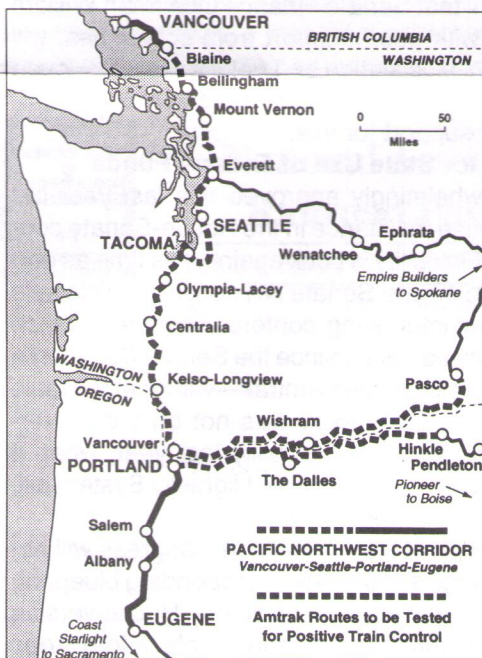
The FRA, freight railroads, state DOT's and Amtrak are all working on the tests:

- **Pacific Northwest:** In August 1995, the FRA granted \$750,000 to Washington DOT to test the Positive Train Separation system being developed by GE-Harris. The test begins in August on 843 miles of freight and passenger lines in the Northwest, owned by BNSF and Union Pacific (see map). This test will examine potential costs and benefits of the system, and the effect of adding high-speed passenger trains to the current freight traffic on the Seattle-Portland segment.

- **Illinois:** The FRA has committed to provide Illinois DOT with \$7 million for a test of the Association of American Railroad's Advanced Train Control System. Illinois was to match that with \$2 million, but at press time the state's commitment seemed in doubt. The test will cover 150 miles of the Chicago-St. Louis corridor, between Dwight and Springfield, on tracks owned by Southern Pacific. Operations are expected to begin in early 1998, if state funding holds.

- **Michigan:** In 1995, FRA agreed to provide Michigan DOT with \$6 million for a test of the Incremental Train Control System being developed by Amtrak and Harmon Industries. It uses a digital data link and on-board location system and computer to augment the existing centralized traffic control system on a 75-mile Amtrak-owned segment (Kalamazoo-New Buffalo) of the Chicago-Detroit line. Hardware installation has begun, and testing should start in September. ■

## PACIFIC NORTHWEST RAIL CORRIDOR ACTIVITY



—Scott Leonard

RENFE, maker of the Talgo, is the only manufacturer that met Washington DOT's specifications for their planned purchase of two train sets. The parties are discussing final details, including ADA compliance. Purchase of the train sets would be a big step forward in efforts by Washington DOT to improve Pacific Northwest corridor service.

Already, over \$80 million has been committed by Washington, Oregon and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF, the line's owner) for incremental track improvements.

In early 1996, the DOT's of Washington and Oregon and the British Columbia Ministry of Employment and Investment released a report on the corridor. The report says "the efficient movement of people and goods within our region is crucial to the ability to compete in world markets, to protect the environment, and to maintain a high quality of life. Improving the rail system within the region is an option that could cost effectively ease our 'growing pains.'" The report makes the case for incremental improvements to the rail corridor.

Similarly, Jim Slakey, head of the Washington DOT Public Transportation and Rail Division, told the NARP Board in Seattle in October, "We have two freeways, I-5 and I-90, and that's all we will build." Better rail is needed, "otherwise we'll choke to death."

Slakey discussed survey results showing modern trains would attract significant numbers of people who—without rail—would drive their cars. To get more business travelers on trains, Slakey has \$1 million from his state legislature (to go with \$500,000 from Amtrak) for corridor-specific advertising. He said the Oregon and British Columbia parts of the program are struggling, and the corridor might shrink without more financial support from those governments. One good sign—the governor of Oregon and some of the state's key business leaders went to a "rail stakeholders" meeting in Salem on April 12.

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Fares:** Most long-distance fares rose April 17.

Amtrak is offering an Explore America Fare, using the All-Aboard zones. The fare is good for 30 days with unlimited stopovers, \$158 in one region, \$198 in two, and \$278 anywhere (but add \$50 during summer peak (beginning June 17)). Passengers on this fare get a trip journal which (when ticket purchased with a Visa card) has coupons good for 5% off sleeping car charges, and other hotel and car rental discounts. Tickets must be booked by May 15 for travel through August 18.

Air parts of the Amtrak/United air-rail fares (take Amtrak one way, fly the other) were cut 22% last fall.

More April 14 Amtrak changes

**NOTE**—See Mar. News for other April 14 changes.

**Stations:** Randolph, VT, is added; Williamsburg Pottery Factory (VA) is dropped (no shelter, few riders).

**Adirondack:** NortheastDirect northbound train 180 is a guaranteed 24-minute connection to the Monday-Saturday *Adirondack*—meaning Washington passengers leave at 4:40 am (not 3:00) and Philadelphia passengers leave at 6:50 am (not 5:05). The *Adirondack's* Sunday connection leaves Washington at 8:15 am.

**Cape Codder** runs June 30-September 2. It will be a Boston-Providence-Hyannis train (out Fridays, back Sundays; runs Labor Day instead of Sunday, September 1). New York passengers connect at Providence.

**Crescent:** Dining car service restored to all runs (even New York-Atlanta only trips). This is the first train whose sleepers are all new Viewliners.

**Illinois:** Last trip for weekday Chicago-Springfield Loop is June 28, unless the state renews its funding.

**California Zephyr/Desert Wind/Pioneer:** Reportedly for this timetable only, eastbound trains leave 0:55 earlier from Los Angeles (10:45 am) and Oakland (9:00 am) (no change from Seattle). *Zephyr* loses its direct connection from Bakersfield; for now, the connection requires using the Stockton-Sacramento Thruway bus.

There again is a restaurant in Denver Union Station, called Flat Pennies. Eastbound *Pioneer* passengers may want to try it—they have a 2:30 layover in Denver, and may not want the one 4:00 or 4:30 pm on-board dinner seating. Apparently, dinner can't be served in the station due to a city ordinance against dumping kitchen water on the ground.

**Missouri Mules:** From St. Louis 7:30 am (0:40 earlier) westbound; Kansas City 3:30 pm (1:05 earlier) east.

**Southwest Chief:** Schedule "restrung" due to lower speed across Kansas (79 mph, from 90 mph). Leaves Los Angeles at 8:55 pm (0:10 earlier), taking 0:15 more overall, with 0:48 guaranteed connection at Kansas City to St. Louis train. No change in overall time westbound, but leaves Chicago at 5:10 pm (0:30 earlier)—so connection from *Empire Builder* now is guaranteed only on days the *Empire Builder* originates in St. Paul.

**Coast Starlight** leaves Seattle 9:45 am (1:15 later), is 1:05 slower, with only a 20-minute connection to last *San Diegan* (now leaving Los Angeles 9:35 pm). Connections with *San Joaquins* are more complicated.

**San Joaquins:** Two round-trips extended to Oakland. Through late June, when a new schedule is planned, speeds will be slower due to BNSF track work, and train 714's (10:55 am from Emeryville) passengers will be bussed Hanford-Bakersfield.

**Mount Baker International** (Seattle-Vancouver, BC) is 20 minutes faster. Leaves Seattle at 7:45 am (0:30 later).

**Thruway buses:** Chicago-Dubuque dropped; Galesburg-Peoria added; St. Louis-Carbondale restored.

### Transit

Less than two weeks before Opening Day, CSX told the State of Maryland there would be no MARC baseball specials this year. CSX, which recently upgraded the signals with federal transit funds, unconvincingly cited interference to freight trains. State officials—who had already printed 100,000 brochures promoting the specials—were caught off guard.

Fans are limited to regular weekday MARC trains. On weekends and to return from weekday games, fans must use buses connecting at Greenbelt with Metro's little Green Line shuttle ("all change at Fort Totten"). Regular trains work both ways for the August 14 day game.

For now, CSX has defeated part of the reason for building Oriole Park at Camden Yards (opened in 1992). Transit will be even more important soon when 5000 parking spaces are lost when construction of an adjacent football stadium begins this year.

GOP fund-raiser Charles Schwarz said the trains were a chance "to get out of Washington with a whole group of people that was focused on going to a sporting event. There's always lots of talk, and none of it is about politics...I'll see what I can do to get the Republicans involved in getting the Baseball train back" (*Washington City Paper*, April 5).

## Burch Award

(from page 1)

program for her ushers. In a bold move, she brought all her ushers off the floor to attend the training program while management staff covered their vacancies. Inspired by an idea from Disney, Slimbock arranged for the purchase and installation of an automated message system that asks passengers to watch their step and hold the handrail as they use the escalator."

• **Walk, don't run.** "Alternation of signs and placement of kiosks are carefully thought out and are centered on pas-

senger safety and utility. The addition of vendor service carts to the station floor resulted in the control of the pace at which passengers moved throughout the station. This...resulted in fewer injuries. She instituted announcements [with] phrases such as 'Carefully make your way to stairway #7 as the southbound Train #95 approaches the station.'"

To win the award, an employee must be nominated by the chief executive of his or her railroad or union. All employees of railroads and agencies which operate or contract for the operation of intercity passenger or commuter trains, or whose tracks are used by such trains, are eligible. ■

## CONSERVATIVES FOR TRANSIT

"Traditionally, mass transit has not been of much interest to conservatives. Their disinterest stems from three perceptions: mass transit is a government creation that would quickly cease to exist in a free market; no conservative constituencies use mass transit; and mass transit does not serve any important conservative goals.

"Each of these perceptions has some reasons behind it...But all are also open to question, on conservative grounds. The dominance of the automobile is not a free-market outcome, but the result of massive government intervention on behalf of the automobile. That intervention came at the expense of privately owned, privately funded, tax paying public transit systems. Without government intervention, public transit might have a substantially higher market share than it now enjoys.

"...As high quality commuter rail, light rail and busway systems reach out into suburbia, they carry a growing number of people whose demographics indicate they vote conservative...Mass transit can serve some important conservative goals, including economic development, moving people off welfare and into productive employment, and strengthening feelings of community..."

—from the executive summary of *Conservatives and Mass Transit: Is It Time for a New Look?*, a report by Paul M. Weyrich and William S. Lind of the Free Congress Research and Education Foundation for the American Public Transit Association. For a free copy, call or write Bill Lind at the Free Congress Foundation; 717-2nd St., NE; Washington, DC 20002; 202/546-3000.

## RAILROAD LIABILITY REFORM IS CRUCIAL!

Concerned that the vital Amtrak reauthorization bill (S 1318) might founder on the controversial liability issue, NARP wrote to Sen. John Breaux (D-LA) detailing our support of railroad liability reform. The five-page letter, available for \$2, says "the ultimate irony would be to lose" Amtrak service "because liability issues are resolved in a way that unreasonably inflates the cost of operating passenger trains."

## MOST RAILROAD CONTRACTS EXTENDED

May 1, 1996—the 25th anniversary of the beginning of Amtrak operations—is when the basic operating agreements between Amtrak and most railroads whose track Amtrak uses expire. Many railroads have signed one-year extensions. Conrail signed a new ten-year agreement with its first-ever rewards for good on-time performance; "incentive" contracts have improved Amtrak reliability on other railroads. BNSF has not signed; Amtrak has asked the ICC-successor "Surface Transportation Board" to insure that BNSF continues to run the trains.

## REGIONAL FORUMS ON NEXT ISTE A

The U.S. Department of Transportation is scheduling all-day hearings on what the federal highway/transit program should be after the current law expires September 30, 1997. Oral testimony is by DOT invitation, but public attendance is encouraged and there will be evening "town meetings" in Philadelphia (and perhaps other cities). There will be a general-issue session each morning; afternoon topics are listed below. Most dates and cities were not final at press time (see below). For details and up-to-date information, call the DOT at 202/366-5682.

Date	City	Afternoon Topic
May 13	Philadelphia	Urban Needs
May 21	Chicago	Intermodal Freight
June 7	New York	Intercity Passenger
* June 11	Providence	Community Design
* n.a.	Los Angeles	Innovative Finance
* June	Portland, OR	Environment
* n.a.	Richmond or Huntington, WV	Safety
* Aug.	Billings, MT	Rural Economies
* Aug.	Minneapolis	Intelligent Transportation
Sept. 16	St. Louis	Planning
* Sept.	Miami	Global Trade/Tourism
* Sept.	New Orleans	Special Community Needs

\*date or city not confirmed (Portland may be in July).



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