

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS NARP NEWS

October-November 2011

Vol. 45, No. 10

www.narprail.org

Trains: A Travel Choice Americans Want

# New Threat: "Crumbling Edge of Quality"

Debt Ceiling Law and Senate Committee Action Preserve Amtrak, But Just Barely

If all goes smoothly on Capitol Hill Oct. 4, Amtrak will be funded at \$1.461 billion for the first 49 days of Fiscal 2012 (Oct. 1-Nov. 18). This is \$23 million below the 2011 level and consistent with the bipartisan August debt-ceiling agreement.

But 2011 already was too low and the

new funding is \$104 million below the 2010 level.

The Oct.-Nov. "continuing resolution" could set the pattern for the rest of the fiscal year, but Tea Partiers are pushing for still deeper cuts, so the Nov. 18 deadline could see another major funding battle.

## Federal Grant Jumpstarts Southeast HSR

### 110-mph Washington-Richmond-Raleigh Service Closer to Reality

A \$48.3 million grant to Virginia and North Carolina, announced Sept. 27 by US Transportation Secretary Ray La-Hood, will let environmental and engineering work begin towards frequent, reliable train service connecting both state capitals to the nation's capital. The grant requires a 20% state match and comes from the fiscal 2010 appropriation for the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail program.

North Carolina's \$4 million plus \$3.9

## \$291.4 Million in New Passenger Train Capital

*More Reliable Service for Northeast, Pacific Northwest States* US Transportation Secretary Ray La- lion: \$16.1 million to stabilize and improve

US Transportation Secretary Ray La-Hood recently announced awards of \$291.35 million in High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) grants from the 2009 Recovery Act to six northeastern states and Washington state. The grants will mean much greater reliability on five popular Amtrak routes.

The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, which is responsible for Amtrak's *Downeaster*, gets \$20.8 million to double-track the Wilmington-Ballardvale, MA, segment, rebuild three grade crossings on the Wildcat Branch and replace rail between on the Western Route between Lawrence and the MA/NH state line. The latter segment is shared with Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA) commuter trains and has become a bottleneck resulting in frequent delays.

Washington state gets \$31.1 mil-

million in state funds, allows work to begin towards rebuilding the abandoned, direct Petersburg-Raleigh line that Amtrak stopped using in October, 1986.

Virginia's \$44.3 million plus the state's \$11.1 million will fund preparations for building a Richmond-Washington highspeed line roughly parallel to the existing CSX mainline that hosts 22 daily Amtrak trains and 14 weekday Virginia Railway Express commuter trains.

BNSF track structure on the Cascades

route between Blaine and Vancouver. WA

(making it less vulnerable to weather-re-

lated disruptions), plus the \$15 million for

a Port of Vancouver flyover reported in

(continued on p. 4)

(continued on p. 2)

Anticipating a freestanding transportation/housing spending bill, the Senate Appropriations Committee on Sept. 21 ap-

STAND UP FOR TRAINS!

Visit http://act.narprail.org to easily email your Representative, or call 202-224-3121 and ask for your Representative's office.

proved an Amtrak level \$20 million above the continuing resolution plus \$100 million for the state capital grants program.

But, apparently due to a \$15 million capital set-aside for the vital NJ-NY Gateway project (Feb. *News*), the Senate's operating grant is even smaller (\$544m vs. \$552m in the continuing resolution).

Amtrak's "barebones" capital and debt service needs (in millions):

- \$271 debt service to avoid default;
- \$250 for rolling stock good repair;
- \$175 for ADA station compliance;

• \$350 to keep the Northeast Corridor (NEC) running (engineering dept.)

Even ending work on the backlog of NEC deferred investment (another \$350m), the above is \$109 million over the continuing resolution level. Service cuts are avoided, but not layoffs, and service quality declines. The fate of alreadyplaced new equipment orders is uncertain.

Figures are Appropriations in millions of dollars	2010 Enacted	2011 Enacted	2012 Amtrak Request	2012 Obama Request	2012 House Approps Subcom.	2012 Senate Approps Approved
Operations	563	561	616	659	227	544
General Capital incl. Fleet	594	337	1,150	2,278	628	
ADA Compliance	144	281	175	1,184		
Debt Service	264	305	271	280	271	
Capital & Debt Service Total	1,002	923	1,556	3,742	899	937
AMTRAK SUBTOTAL	1,565	1,484	2,212	4,401	1,126	1,481
High-Speed & Intercity Rail	2,500	0		3,645	0	100
PASSENGER RAIL TOTAL	4,066	1,484		8,046	1,126	1,581

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR INTERCITY PASSENGER TRAINS

#### \$115 Million in New HSIPR Grants

the June News.

**New York** can spend \$149.3 million for three Empire Corridor projects (including two reported in June), after reaching an agreement with host railroad CSX and the Federal Railroad Administration. Albany-Schenectady at last will be double-

## Green light for Chicago-Rock Island; Study west to Omaha

Planners at the Iowa Department of Transportation asked the Federal Railroad Administration to split Iowa's share of a \$230 million High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail grant from Illinois' share, allowing Illinois to move forward with implementing Chicago-Quad Cities Amtrak service while Iowa continues planning work towards extending the new train to/from Omaha.

Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad's (R) refusal to back ongoing state support has stalled progress in Iowa. The initial, Illinois-funded service will go as far west as Rock Island, IL.

Meanwhile, the Iowa DOT will conduct engineering and environmental reviews for Quad Cities-Omaha service via Iowa City and Des Moines, including allowing for a top speed of 90 mph. Public input will be sought throughout the process. Once the study is complete, the entire route will be eligible for federal aid.

#### BNSF vs. UP: Sharply Different Attitudes on PTC

In upbeat comments about the technology, Positive Train Control, BNSF Railway CEO Matt Rose told the *Seattle Times*, "We're going to have positive train control on our railroad by 2015, and you know, the horrific accident in Kelso, Washington [Nov. 11, 1993 head-on crash between two freight trains] that claimed five lives is the reason...[PTC is] the biggest change in the railroad industry" since dieselization.

In sharp contrast, Union Pacific CEO Jim Young told Bloomberg News on Sept. 9 that he thinks PTC will be "a terrible waste of money, and President Barack Obama should junk the idea." He added that forcing UP to adopt PTC "could strand goods on tracks and in terminals."

These comments send a terrible message to UP employees and raise doubts about whether UP will get the benefits that it should from its \$1.5 billion dollar PTC investment. tracked and signal wires will be buried south of Rensselaer for greater reliability, along with the Albany and Schenectady station work reported in June.

U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said, "We're going to create jobs and modernize our rail infrastructure that is going to be key to bringing even more jobs and economic opportunity to the Empire State."

**Oregon** gets \$13.6 million to modernize Portland Union Station. Waiting areas will be expanded, making the facility fully accessible to those with disabilities and improving its energy efficiency. A study will identify desired improvements to Portland-Eugene Amtrak service.

**Rhode Island** gets \$29.2 million to add a 1.5-mile third track in Kingston, and improve Providence and Kingston stations.

**Connecticut**'s \$30 million will doubletrack Hartford-Windsor (six miles) on Amtrak's New Haven-Springfield line, and add a new 8,500-foot siding through Hartford Yard, was reported in June.

**Vermont**'s \$2.7 million buys 16 miles of improved signal and train control technology on the New England Central Railroad within the state, and upgrades

to the dispatch communication system, to enhance the Amtrak *Vermonter's* reliability. This comes on top of the \$50 million to replace track on the NECR (Dec. 2010 *News*).

"These are the kinds of investments that will improve reliability and on-time performance and attract more passengers," said

Secretary LaHood. "We are creating jobs
throughout New England, building our
rails with American-made materials and
growing the New England economy."

**Delaware** gets \$13.3 million to eliminate a key chokepoint by adding a third track just south of Wilmington station.

**Pennsylvania** received \$1.35 million for preliminary engineering and environmental analysis towards installing a modern train control system on parts of the Philadelphia-Harrisburg line. This will let trains run in both directions on all tracks more efficiently, and replace the line's remaining staffed signal towers. The project should generate hundreds of construction jobs.

#### **Run for NARP's Council!**

Dec. 1 is the deadline for submitting your Candidate Information Statement to run for State Representative on NARP's Council of Representatives. Two-year terms start Mar. 1, 2012. See Aug. *News* (p. 4) or www.narprail.org



Eastbound *Keystone* train 666 crosses over PA Route 230 near Salunga, PA on July 31, 2011.

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## NARP at AARP's Big "Life at 50+ National Event" in Los Angeles

"My approach was to say to visitors,

'So, you like passenger trains? Well,

NARP had an exhibitor table at the American Association of Retired Persons' (AARP) Life at 50+ National Event, September 20-22. About 800 people visited the NARP table, many of whom took brochures, newsletters and bookmarks and signed up for NARP's

email list.

NARP Resource Development Coordinator Mary Beth McCall, Special Assistant to the Chairman Larry Scott, and NARP Members (and former Directors) Carl Scheiermeyer and Pat Montague represented the Association.

Schiermeyer said we attracted "a steady stream of visitors including several who were mo-



or volunteer...



tivated to donate money NARP's Mary McCall at the AARP event

## **Upgraded Amtrak Stations for the Gulf Coast**

Brookhaven, Mississippi: A former city physical plant became an attractive waiting area with restrooms. It was rededicated as the Godbold Transportation Center and opened Aug. 17. Planning for the Center began nearly 10 years ago under Bill Godbold, Brookhaven's late former mayor.

Beaumont, Texas should have a new ADA-compliant 550-foot platform and brick shelter by the end of November. The design is based on a nationwide Amtrak prototype for unstaffed stations, and is similar to ones recently built in Connellsville, PA and Okeechobee, FL. All three were funded through Amtrak's \$1.3 billion Recovery Act grant.



The Godbold Transportation Center's new shelter and platform greet the southbound City of New Orleans in Brookhaven on Aug. 17, 2011.



- Amtrak/John Bender New ADA-accessible platform at Hammond, LA serves the Chicago-New Orleans City.

Birmingham, Alabama: Construction should begin late this year or early next on a modern multi-modal station on the site of the former Louisville & Nashville Railroad depot, but occupying the entire

city block along Morris Avenue. It also will serve intercity and local transit buses.

Anniston. Alabama: Renovations the 1925-built on Southern Railway station are nearly complete.

Hammond, Louisiana: A new ADAcompliant 550-foot platform was added to the staffed, 1912built Illinois Central station. 

encounter it was important to maintain friendly eye contact with the guest and to gauge whether I needed to adjust the spiel based upon [their feedback].

"After making clear that our organization is non-profit and describing our goals, [I stressed] that—if they really felt it was a priority to keep passenger trains-we needed them in our organization. I would stress the strength in numbers argument and generally speaking they were with me."

## **Georgia Seeks New Atlanta Station**

The State of Georgia wants to build a train station at a good location along the Norfolk Southern mainline in the City of

Peachtree Station, originally a suburban stop, is inadequate to the needs of over 109,000 passengers a year. The waiting and ticketing areas are cramped. Access to the platform is by a slow elevator or a long flight of stairs.

The short-term parking lot-a former highway bridge-has been condemned, though Georgia DOT is contemplating repairs. There is no long-term parking.

The State Road and Tollway Authority owns one of the parcels contemplated for the new station. This is on 17th Street, which has a MARTA bus route and where long-term plans call for a light rail line.

GDOT applied for a federal High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail grant to cover construction costs of the new station, but the request was denied in June.

Long term, GDOT wants to put Amtrak in a major downtown intermodal terminal, which won't be built for at least ten years. But Amtrak has resisted this because it would be impractical for the New York-New Orleans Crescent to serve such a station.



Front of Atlanta's Peachtree Station. Short-term parking area (shown) is now off-limits to autos. The old road bridge on which it sits has been condemned.

Katchooo on Flickr



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OUR MISSION: A MODERN, CUSTOMER-FOCUSED NATIONAL PASSENGER TRAIN NETWORK THAT PROVIDES A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT.

Amtrak unaccompanied minor policy from Nov. 1: Children 12 years and under must travel with a companion 18 or over. Youths 16+ are treated as adults-have unlimited solo travel.

Children 13-15 may travel alone if accompanied to the boarding station by a companion 18 or older. Boarding and arriving stations must be staffed. Travel must be involve scheduled departures and arrivals between 5:30 AM and 9:05 PM and may not involve transfers, Thruway buses or international border crossings. Station personnel interview the child to determine

Oberlin. OH: NARP State Representative Philip Copeland and his wife Lois hosted an outreach table at Oberlin College's Community Connection Fair. Several students signed up for NARP's email list, and one expressed interest in volunteering for us during winter term.

Washington, DC: NARP co-sponsored the District DOT's annual observance of Car Free Day and hosted a table



Phil & Lois Copeland at Oberlin College Sept. 14.

#### TRAVELER'S ADVISORY

suitability for travel. The child must wear a wristband.

Vermonter was to resume normal operation Oct. 1. A substitute bus had run north of Springfield during a federally-funded track replacement project on the New England Central Railroad. Continuous welded rail installation will be completed in October.

Minot, ND, service resumes Oct. 22, after station flood damage.

New Wisconsin Thruway bus route: A Lamers Bus Lines "Lamers Connect" route between Green Bay, Appleton, Columbus and Madison is

available through Amtrak as a Thruway connection with Amtrak's Empire Builder at Columbus, for passengeres traveling between Green Bay, intermediate points, and Builder points west. The bus also connects Madison passengers to the westbound Builder. but not from the eastbound.

A second Lamers route connects Wausau and intermediate points with points west on the Builder through Portage. Connections between Chicago and Green Bay, Wausau and intermediate points are available at Milwaukee.

### NARP on Campus, on the Air, in the Community

at the evening's outdoor party Sept. 22. About 150 people visited our table, 93 of whom signed up for the email list and got a bumper sticker and bookmark.

Greensboro, NC: NARP Outreach Director Malcolm Kenton on September 24 was one of two featured speakers at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Alliance for Transportation Reform. This advocacy group works to refocus the state's

transport investments on public transportation, including intercity rail. Kenton emphasized the importance of public involvement in the political process.

Baltimore: NARP Pres. Ross Capon appeared Sept. 28 on the hour-long call-in "Midday with Dan Rodricks" on WYPR-FM. Capon discussed Amtrak's inadequate federal funding vs. the public's demand for more trains. Petra Todorovich on the phone discussed her new report, High-Speed Rail: International Lessons for U.S. Policy Makers, which says California and the Northeast Corridor are the strongest U.S. candidates for service "that meets the international definition of high-speed rail." Listen at www.bit.lv/ narpwypr (also has May 17 program with Capon).

The report is at www.lincolninst.edu

Southeast High-Speed from page 1

Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Szabo praised the level of cooperation between the two states and his agency. He also noted, "The population growth we have seen over the last decade in the Southeast is just the tip of the iceberg compared to what we will see by the middle of the century."

Plans are to extend the Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor (SEHSR) through Charlotte to Atlanta, through Columbia and Savannah to Jacksonville, and from Richmond to Newport News.