

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

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9
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Highway Interests Attack Passenger Trains

The concept of allowing states the choice to spend some of their federal transportation funds on passenger rail capital items has been a long-term NARP goal. This hardly radical idea was part of the original Senate-passed ISTEA bill in 1991, but knocked out in a House-Senate conference. Therefore, when on June 21 it was included in the Senate-passed version of the National Highway System bill, S 440 (*July News*), it was a big victory for rail passengers.

However, that drew the wrath of highway interests, particularly the Highway Users Federation (HUF), who want to

make sure this idea does not become law. Two items from their anti-rail campaign this summer are worth a look:

The Opinion Column

On August 10, an opinion column by HUF Chief Executive William D. Fay was circulated by the Knight-Ridder Financial News service (which since also has sent out opposing pieces by NARP Executive Director Ross Capon and former New Jersey Governor Jim Florio). Some points raised by Fay:

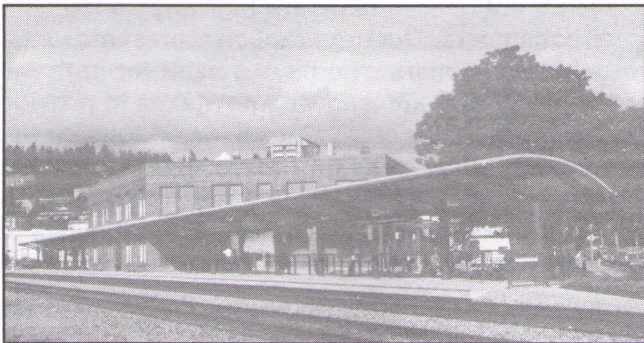
- **"For every 1000** [intercity travelers], only three take Amtrak." This implies that the other 997 travelers all had Amtrak as a travel choice. Indeed, many don't because of decades-old anti-rail public policy, and because of Amtrak's continual capital starvation. Where they do, and where the service is convenient, the Amtrak figure must be higher than that average of three.

For every 1000 Americans of driving age, 124 do not have drivers' licenses. No doubt some of the remaining 876 do not have cars. Many of them are too poor to drive everywhere, or physically unable. HUF never mentions them in their calls for "motorists' rights."

- **"After \$13 billion** in taxpayer subsidies, not a single Amtrak route is profitable." Not surprising, since the U.S. invests less central government money per capita in rail than most industrialized countries—and *their* railways aren't prof-

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NEW STATION FOR BELLINGHAM



The *Mount Baker International*, begun May 26 by Amtrak and the State of Washington between Seattle and Vancouver, BC with the Talgo train set, is already a big success. Bookings on the reserved train average over 90% of capacity. Ridership on local trains north of Eugene, OR in June was up 225% from June 1994.

The intermodal station at Bellingham, WA (above) was dedicated July 21. It is a former salmon cannery owned by the Port of Bellingham, adjacent to the Bellingham Cruise Terminal. Below is the attractive waiting area inside the station. Just beyond the curved ticket counter is the counter for intercity bus and the local taxi and airport shuttle company.



—both photos by Jim Hamre

FOUR GOVERNORS FOR FLEXIBILITY

"...We are not able to make use of our federal highway or transit funds for rail passenger service. This has posed a number of difficulties for our state in forming partnerships with Amtrak for these purposes, even when investments in rail passenger service would produce clear public benefits and improve the service quality of other modes of transportation.

"Adoption of the [Roth-Biden] amendment will provide states with the ability to decide what transportation system best meets their needs and to allocate their funds accordingly. In this time of severe budget constraints...it is essential that we empower state and local officials to make the best use of scarce federal resources. This is clearly a states' rights issue."

—from letter from Governors Howard Dean (D-VT), Tommy Thompson (R-WI), John Engler (R-MI), Tom Carper (D-DE) to Senators John H. Chafee (R-RI) and Max Baucus (D-MT—chairman and ranking member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee), as read on Senate floor June 21 by Senator William V. Roth, Jr. (R-DE).

Highway Interests

(from page 1)

itable either. Nor are America's highways profitable, after billions in subsidies—when was the last time you heard public outcry for a new \$100-million interchange to be “profitable?”

• “[Motorists] are paying for the highways they use, and then some.” While Amtrak subsidies are easy to identify, subsidies to other modes are notoriously diffuse. Statistics from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) can be (and have been) used to prove all points of view, depending on who is doing the interpreting.

HUF appears to include sales taxes on items like tires as a “user fee,” echoing a study by the American Petroleum Institute—hardly a neutral in this area. FHWA correctly does not include sales taxes as a user fee—after all, many other products are subject to sales taxes. If no one calls for an inviolable trust fund for bobby pins, for example, then tires (or fuel or vehicles) should be no different.

That still leaves the question of non-highway costs caused by motorists. The World Resources Institute has estimated

the total U.S. road subsidy at \$300 billion a year, which includes pollution, noise, accidents, military protection of foreign oil sources, and other unpaid social costs.

The Advertisement

HUF ran a newspaper ad in several places this summer attacking Amtrak. Below a drawing of an evil-looking Amtrak train bearing down on a Pauline-style “U.S. motorist,” it included the following misinformation:

• “Because of poor ridership and bloated operating costs, Amtrak is nearly bankrupt.” Amtrak passenger-miles are up 41% from 1982, and up 18% from 1970—when private railroads were running twice as many trains on twice as many routes. Amtrak's estimated operating grant need for 1996 is 62% less than what it was in 1980—or 77% less when adjusted for inflation.

• “For the first time ever, the Senate has voted to break open the Highway Trust Fund.” The Highway Trust Fund has been open to transit programs—urban and rural—since 1982.

Informed readers will know that these pieces hurt HUF's credibility. Policy makers should pay more attention to the 63% of Americans who support ISTEA flexibility for passenger rail (July News), than to the message of those whose primary interest is pouring more concrete and asphalt. ■

ANOTHER HIDDEN HIGHWAY COST

A study released June 12 by the Network of Employers for Traffic Safety says that injuries sustained in highway crashes cost U.S. employers over \$53 billion annually. This is made up of fringe benefits, insurance costs, sick leave, workers' compensation, property damage and legal expenses (for on-the-job accidents), and other costs. The study was commissioned by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (part of U.S. DOT). To produce profits equal to these costs, the study said, employers would have to generate \$530 billion in sales—three times greater than the current annual growth in the U.S. economy.

A DOG'S WELCOME RETURNING FROM CANADA



—Jim Hamre

How often do you see this at an airport or highway border crossing? U.S. Customs officers are shown here on the Bellingham, WA station platform on dedication day, July 21. Typically, on the southbound *Mount Baker International* between Vancouver and Seattle, Customs officers board at Blaine, WA with a drug-sniffing dog. Passengers must place all their belongings on the floor (within reach of the dog) as the officers and dog pass down the coach aisles—a level of scrutiny rarely faced by motorists. Amtrak and the State of Washington have asked that Customs inspections be done at Vancouver, instead.

“We do not believe there are highway consumers or rail consumers. Our organization represents transportation consumers who have a need for both rail and highway systems and who pay taxes to provide a reasonable choice of transportation options for the 21st century. Now is the time for all of us to do what is necessary to build the multi-modal transportation system that will give its users a convenient, efficient and cost-effective way to travel.”

—Michael Bennett Cline of the Train Riders' Association of California, in testimony to High Speed Ground Transportation Outreach session, sponsored by Federal Railroad Administration, at Sacramento, May 17.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Correction: Due to the great benefit of saving a train set, Amtrak moved the effective date of changing the days of operation of the *California Zephyr* and *Desert Wind* to September 29 (see Aug. News).

September 10 Amtrak Schedule Changes

Broadway Limited: Eliminated west of Pittsburgh. New York-Pittsburgh replacement train, connecting with the *Capitol Limited*, is *Three Rivers* (train 46-47). Essentially, this is an extension of current Harrisburg trains 144-145. No checked baggage, unreserved coach seats only, snack menu only, no smoking. Amtrak service ended to Youngstown, Akron, Fostoria, Garrett, Nappanee (all first served in 1990).

Lake Shore Limited: Leaves Chicago 8:00 pm (0:45

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MORE INTERNET ACCESS

Besides the World Wide Web address for Amtrak printed here earlier ([HTTP://WWW.AMTRAK.COM](http://www.amtrak.com)), VIA Rail Canada has one: [HTTP://WWW.VIA.CA](http://www.via.ca).

Studies Favor Incremental Corridors in Midwest

The Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC) of Chicago released on June 26 two studies pertaining to incremental high-speed rail development in the Midwest. One quantified the job impact of building such a network; the other explored financing options. The release of the studies got a great deal of media attention in the Midwest.

All Aboard! The Complete North American Train Travel Guide, a new 390-page book by NARP member/travel writer Jim Loomis, offers history, travel tips, route descriptions, lists of accommodations and rail-oriented travel agents, and information useful to travelers in the U.S. and Canada. There are several black-and-white illustrations, maps, and car floor-plans. The book is available in book stores (\$15.95 in U.S.; \$22.95 in Canada) or by contacting Prima Publishing; P.O. Box 1260BK; Rocklin, CA 95677 (☎ 916/632-4400).

Illinois Crossing Test in '96

In planning for Chicago-St. Louis high-speed rail service (Aug. '94 News), Illinois DOT has seen that highway grade crossings must be addressed—higher train speeds in a grade crossing accident put passengers at greater risk. But grade separation projects are costly (perhaps \$1.5-3.0 million), and crossing eliminations are unpopular with local motorists.

Illinois DOT plans to test a system called the Vehicle Arresting Barrier. It will feature warning lights and gates placed further from the tracks than is currently found. Just inside the gates will be a set of towers on either side of the road, with a bridge across the top. The bridge holds a strong net which is lowered down the towers and across the road when the warning gates are lowered (i.e., when a train is coming). Inside the net is a steel tape strong enough to bring approaching highway vehicles to a stop (if necessary), but with enough "give" to it not to damage them.

Three test locations have been identified:

- **New Chenoa**, Town Road 35A, halfway between the Pontiac and Normal Amtrak stops. Here the tracks run parallel to the I-55 frontage road (old US 66). The crossing has heavy farm traffic and is plainly visible from the interstate.

- **McLean**, US 136, halfway between Normal and Lincoln. This crossing is adjacent to a truck stop, so there is much truck traffic.

- **Hartford**, Hawthorne St., eight miles south of Alton. This is a residential street, but often used by oil tank trucks.

Depending on funding, the barriers will be installed in spring 1996. Each set will cost \$150,000-200,000. The equipment will be made by the Entwhistle Co. of Hudson, MA.

Another option will be tested at Groton, CT (by Connecticut DOT, FRA and Amtrak) as part of the New Haven-Boston electrification project. It is partly based on the model used on the main X2000 route in Sweden (Sept. '93 News). It will have sensors that detect broken crossing gates or vehicles stopped on the crossing. The sensors will give a warning to the train engineer in case of a problem, who can then stop—assuming the train is still far enough away to be stopped. ■

The studies cover the three Midwestern ISTEA corridors: Chicago-Milwaukee/Detroit/St. Louis. The employment study estimated that the Detroit and St. Louis lines would create over 10,000 jobs at the peak of construction. Then over 1500 jobs would be created in connection with the lines' operation.

The financing report recognizes that train service with peak speeds of 100-125 mph can attract significant ridership and be much cheaper and quicker to put into service than very high-speed trains—three years and \$1.2 billion for all lines and equipment. It also says public-sector participation is necessary to getting any high-speed project underway and to getting private investors involved. The following passage accurately shows recent experience in this area:

"The private sector has somewhat limited experience with providing seed capital for major transportation projects, and that record has been checkered at best. Indeed, the Texas TGV experiment has cast a cloud over the private sector's interest in providing the seed capital for high speed rail projects in the U.S. The Texas TGV franchise consortium...invested more than \$40 million of its own and its partners' capital on project development costs. After several years' effort, project costs had escalated beyond a financeable level while rural and airline opposition mounted daily. By late 1993, the consortium was unable to raise the \$170 million of venture capital necessary to continue and the project was scrapped. It is important to note, however, that the Texas TGV project contemplated new construction of a 470-mile, 200-mph TGV-style high speed rail system at a cost of \$6.8 billion. The difficulties of obtaining such massive amounts of private capital for a project with a risk profile like the Texas TGV project cannot be overstated.

"Similarly, the State of Florida attempted a high speed rail initiative, awarding a franchise to Florida High Speed Rail Corp., a corporation comprised of ABB Traction and CRSS. This group invested \$25 million seeking the franchise before concluding that without public support, the project could not be financed.

"Based on these recent experiments with high speed rail, the private sector will be extremely reluctant to provide seed capital for project development costs..."

Of course, private-sector airlines and motorists never have to "go it alone" when faced with raising road or airport capital.

The ELPC approach calls for a two-tier debt structure "to allow a portion of the high-speed rail project financing to be based on a conservative estimate of available cash flow, while using the credit strength of a strong unit of government to guarantee the balance." Operating revenues would be used to pay debt service. ■

SEVENTH LIGHT RAIL CONFERENCE

The Transportation Research Board and American Public Transit Association host the National Conference on Light Rail Transit November 12-15 at the Stouffer Harborplace Hotel, Baltimore. It will provide a forum for policy makers, operators, community activists and others to exchange information. Harriet Parcels, Campaign for New Transportation Priorities, will speak on citizen involvement in planning light rail.

Write to Frank J. Cihak; APTA/TRB National Conference on Light Rail Transit; American Public Transit Association; 1201 New York Ave., N.W.; Washington, DC 20005 (or fax 202/898-4019).

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY (continued)

later than now); New York 6:40 pm (0:30 earlier) and Boston 3:50 pm.

Capitol Limited: Leaves Washington 4:05 pm (0:10 earlier); leaves Chicago 6:50 pm (0:25 later), arrives Washington 1:12 pm (0:50 later).

Cardinal: Runs Chicago-Washington (see Aug. News, p. 3). However, since the Friday/Sunday *Tidewater*, (train 96), departs Newport News 1:15 later than now (4:30 pm), there is a 40-minute Washington connection at 8:50 pm for the *Cardinal* besides the *Night Owl* those two days. On Wednesdays, there is a train 196 leaving Washington at 8:35 pm, providing an uncomfortably close 25-minute connection.

Hoosier State: (Chicago-Indianapolis) is eliminated.

Vermont: Total running time about 1:15 shorter, both directions. Southbound, departs St. Albans 7:00 am, arrives New York 4:25 pm and Washington 7:55 pm (except Sundays, leave St. Albans 11:20 am). Northbound, departs Washington 8:05 am, New York 11:30 am, arrives St. Albans 8:55 pm.

Adirondack: Montreal-New York running time cut about 0:20 both directions. New Thruway bus Whitehall, NY-Rutland-Middlebury-Burlington, VT.

Empire Line: Train 62-65 (*Niagara Rainbow*), the weekend overnight New York-Toronto service begun in June 1994, is eliminated. Weekday trains 259 and 289 skip Rhinecliff, Hudson to create a New York-Albany express service complementing morning express 246.

Keystone Line: An additional Harrisburg-Philadelphia round trip (trains 606-617) is extended to New York (now trains 643-644).

Crescent: Departs New Orleans Monday, Thursday, Saturday (but also Friday, November 3); Atlanta Sunday, Wednesday, Friday (still daily New York-Atlanta). Slumbercoach service ends October 29.

City of New Orleans: Rerouted between Memphis and Jackson (see July News).

Texas Eagle: Dallas-Houston leg (begun in 1988) discontinued. Thruway bus runs express Houston-

Longview (to meet the train), then on to Shreveport. A second bus runs via College Station. All service to Corsicana is ended. Trips from Houston to points north of Longview will be five hours faster.

New Amtrak Thruway buses June 26: Service to Kennedy and La Guardia airports departs New York Penn Station hourly (8 am-8 pm), change at Grand Central. One way fares are \$10 for La Guardia, \$13 for Kennedy. Buses depart La Guardia 6:05 am-12:05 am, Kennedy 6:45 am-12:05 am.

Thruways connect the New London Amtrak station with the Foxwoods Resort Casino in Connecticut, meeting all trains. One-way fare is \$2. (There is also a new Long Island RR service using a fast catamaran across Long Island Sound and shuttle buses.)

Fares: Amtrak now offers discount convention fares on Metroliners (all but weekday peak trips).

Transit: The San Diego East light rail line was extended 3.5 miles from El Cajon to Santee August 26.

Besides the shuttle bus connecting Los Angeles International Airport and the new Green light rail line (Aug. News), there is one connecting the Norwalk Green Line terminus with the new Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs Metrolink commuter rail station, opened July 13.

San Francisco Muni opened its F/Market streetcar line September 1. Historic PCC cars run daily from Embarcadero to 17th & Castro. F line will be extended from Embarcadero to Fisherman's Wharf in 1998.

Bikes/baggage changes, October 1: New policy for Amtrak trains on which bikes must be checked as baggage (see Aug. News) takes effect. Passengers must supply their own bike box, or buy one for \$6—plus, the \$5 handling charge remains. Currently, Amtrak provides a box as part of the basic \$5 charge. Boxes may be reused (if still in good shape).

Also, there will be a \$2 charge for bags for skis travelling as checked baggage. Amtrak is now selling for \$2 a sturdy 18"x12"x12" shipping box, for use by express customers and passengers with items to check whose containers don't look like they'd survive the trip.



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