



## Whittling Away Service Instead of Killing It?

*"With gasoline prices topping \$3 per gallon and the President urging the nation to reduce its dependence on imported oil, one might expect that Amtrak would be asked to play an increasing role in our country's transportation system. But instead, Amtrak is experiencing added pressure to cut expenses and to increase revenues, rather than to raise ridership."*

**-John Dawson, NARP Board Member, in the July 2006 issue of the Delaware Valley Rail Passenger newsletter**

Direct attacks on Amtrak having failed [see sidebar, p.2], House and Senate appropriations committees, and the full House, have approved language that requires Amtrak to meet unattainable and counterproductive economic performance targets for on-board food and beverage services and sleeping cars.

The DOT Inspector General's data show that **cost per passenger-mile for a full-service train with lounge, diner and sleeping cars is no higher** than for a spartan coach train with no checked baggage, food service or attendants.

### Food and Beverage

Worldwide, transportation operators consider on-board food and beverage (F&B) as a means of generating ticket sales. The goal is to control F&B "net cost," not to make it profitable. Amtrak

is working to reduce this net cost. In May, Amtrak completed the first phase

### Amtrak Board Losing Power?

"Efficiency incentive grants" originated as a way to give Amtrak additional funding for achieving certain goals. For Fiscal 2007, however, both the House and Senate bills treat all federal operating funds as "efficiency incentive grants," thus giving the DOT secretary still more control.

If enacted, these provisions would make President George W. Bush and his Secretary of Transportation Amtrak's de facto Chairman and CEO, respectively. Which raises the question, why would anyone want to serve on the Amtrak board?

It's not clear why so much effort is going into destroying passenger rail after the House and Senate have made clear their interest in saving it and improving it. **Legislators need to hear support for getting the appropriators to focus on the bottom line and stop the micromanaging.**

of this effort, modernizing food preparation and reducing the basic dining car staff from five to three, except on *Empire Builder* and *Auto Train*. As before, one or two additional employees handle seasonal peak loads.

Amtrak also plans to reduce F&B costs by replacing separate dining and lounge cars with diner-lounges that will drive up food sales by letting passengers buy anything they want any time of day.

Initially, the plan was to run two such cars on the bigger trains during peak seasons (our December lead story). Planners now are looking at running more routes year-round with a single diner-lounge. NARP opposes this, seeing it as overkill that would backfire.

Other efficiencies would come from greater mechanical reliability (RCM, page 2) and new labor contracts.

These initiatives will not make F&B "profitable" on a stand-alone basis. To our knowledge, that doesn't happen anywhere in the world. In a November 2005 speech, Jonathan Metcalf, Chief Operating Officer of Britain's Great Northeastern Railway, said that food service on his trains, "probably loses [(\$3.5-\$5.4 million US)] a year. If we didn't do food, we'd lose passengers...it's a key reason why

*(continued on page 2)*

## Virginia, CSX, Feds Partner to Eliminate Washington-Richmond Bottleneck at Quantico



Symbol of an inadequate national transportation policy: the "rail version of Interstate 95" has had a "one lane bridge" for 15 years—ever since 1991, when the old Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac replaced its double-track bridge across Quantico Creek (VA) with a single-track bridge. This bottleneck contributes to many Amtrak, Virginia Railway Express (VRE) and freight delays. Progress on a second bridge is seen in July, looking south; the new bridge also has room for a third track. CSX, Virginia and Federal Transit Admin. funds have also rebuilt Alexandria's AF interlocking, and installed crossovers at Arkendale (south of Quantico) and Elmont (south of Ashland) to give dispatchers more flexibility (no VRE trains/FTA money at Elmont).

## Reliability-Centered Maintenance to Improve Amtrak Service

Amtrak approved a new maintenance policy in June. The policy was written by Ken Jacobs, Amtrak's new Deputy, Reliability Centered Maintenance. Jacobs, who joined Amtrak in May, was impressed that the numerous corporate approvals for the new policy were received within a month.

The policy focuses on "condition-based maintenance," that is, maintenance based on evidence.

Far too many maintenance recommendations are incorrectly based on a gut feeling that normal equipment behavior is described by a "U" shaped curve. Theoretically, the U-shaped curve comprises three things:

- a break-in period as the probability of failure slowly decreases to acceptable, though not zero,
- a lengthy period of nearly constant in-service probability of failure,
- a wear-out period where the probability of failure rapidly increases as the equipment or component ages.

In the 1960s, when the first jumbo jets—Boeing 747's—were introduced, the government threatened airlines with onerous maintenance requirements because

of the planes' huge passenger loads and resulting potential for huge loss of life in an accident. Fearing that the plane's profitability was jeopardized, United Airlines endeavored to develop an experienced-based maintenance plan for each component on the airplane.

Research uncovered six different performance curves, with the U-shaped curve applying to only 4% of systems and components. This means much needless maintenance is performed, incurring much needless risk (since maintenance procedures can, and often do, introduce new problems).

Thus RCM was borne into the airline industry—a method and process to develop and validate maintenance requirements.

It took root in the U.S. Navy. Jacobs led the effort there and now leads a similar effort at Amtrak. RCM is credited with contributing to the readiness that permitted the Navy to satisfy the nation's wartime requirements during "Operation Iraqi Freedom" with a fleet of only 284 ships, as opposed to a fleet of 600 ships that President Reagan believed such an effort would require.

Jacobs says RCM is not widely prac-

ticed because the educational system "teaches little or nothing about maintenance" even though many engineering graduates do maintenance much of their lives. (Does this remind you of medical schools not teaching nutrition?)

A team is used to design maintenance procedures, including frontline personnel that understand the real-world environment. At too many organizations, the design is by a few individuals with no recent front-line experience, and based only on written records and theories.

A recent session focussed on *Acela Express* friction brakes. Analysts included 22 Amtrak employees—technicians, including machinists, pipefitters, electricians and carmen, foremen and general foremen from three facilities that service the trains, two locomotive engineers, and a brake design expert.

In any organization, some problems involve mistakes by people in operations or maintenance. Workers typically do not write "I-screwed-up" reports. Maintenance cannot make up for lack of adequate training.

But, in a non-threatening environment where the focus is on creating solid maintenance procedures, employees open up in ways that make for a successful effort.

*Acela* is the initial focus for RCM, because of the magnitude of *Acela* revenues and because Amtrak is taking over maintenance of these trains from the manufacturing consortium. The contractual take-over date is October 1, 2006, but most of the hand-off already has occurred.

Right now, just 14 of 20 *Acela* train sets are in daily service while six trainsets are shopped for some form of maintenance. The goal is to have 18 train sets in daily service with only two shopped for maintenance.

Much of the work on *Acela* powercars also applies to the very similar HHP-8 electric engines. Eventually, RCM will migrate throughout Amtrak, though it has not been decided whether this will happen by train type or—as in the Navy—by types of equipments and systems.

Jacobs told NARP that he is greatly impressed with all the Amtrak personnel he has dealt with: "They are open to change. In some organizations, how change will affect personal advancement looms large, but—from what I have seen—that is not true at Amtrak. Everyone wants only to do what's right." ■

### Stealth Efforts

(from page 1)

they travel with us...we probably would have lost [\$35-\$54 million US] in ticket revenue [without food service]."

#### Sleeping Cars

Sleeping cars would be subject to much of the same "profitability" requirements as food service, with similarly negative results. It might be reasonable to limit the average sleeping-car subsidy to the same level per passenger-mile level as the average long-distance coach subsidy (systemwide, not route specific).

But a zero sleeping-car subsidy would force elimination of most if not all sleeping car service, reduce volume, increase subsidy per passenger mile and lead to the elimination of all long-distance trains. In our view, "coach-only" long-distance trains would not satisfy enough customers to survive; those Amtrak has run before have not.

Thus, a "no-subsidies-for-sleepers" mandate amounts to a death warrant for intercity passenger rail in the 25 states whose only intercity passenger trains are long-distance trains. ■

### Direct Attacks on Amtrak Failed

Last year, the House voted 269-152 to drop appropriations committee language mandating for discontinuance every Amtrak long-distance train plus Chicago-Detroit-Pontiac, New York-Charlotte, and Chicago-Indianapolis.

Last year also, the House on a voice vote increased Amtrak funding from the committee-approved \$550 million to \$1.176. The Senate then approved \$1.45 billion and Amtrak finally got \$1.298 billion after the House-Senate conference.

This year, the House, led by Reps. Steve LaTourette (R-OH) and Jim Oberstar (D-MN), voted 266-158 to add \$214 million to the appropriations committee-approved level of \$900 million. The Senate Appropriations Committee added another \$286 million on top of that.

## NARP Joins Call for Withdrawing ADA Proposal

NARP urged the Department of Transportation to withdraw its Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) regarding station platforms (News, March and April).

Executive Director Ross B. Capon submitted comments to the Department of Transportation on July 28, the revised deadline (postponed from April 28).

The rule generally requires full length level platform boarding, creating a major conflict with freight railroads while limiting passenger railroads' ability to run different types of equipment on certain lines.

NARP said Amtrak and commuter railroads "have a long record of serving disabled passengers well...

"We take seriously Metrolink's [Los Angeles area commuter rail] comment that 'compliance with the proposed regulation will lead...to a reduction in transportation alternatives for both the disabled and the general population, due to the need to spend scarce resources to [comply with] a rule that experience...has demonstrated is not necessary to ensure that the disabled community has reasonable and reasonably integrated access to the commuter rail transportation it provides'...

"Agencies issuing regulations that impose significant...costs on others should identify methods for funding such mandates."

NARP said implementing the NPRM would price "a rail stop out of reach of many communities," and said ADA concerns already have delayed or stymied

much station progress, including at:

- Lyons, NY (currently unserved);
- New Buffalo, MI (developer hopes to relocate stop so two daily Chicago-Detroit round-trips can replace single Chicago-Grand Rapids round-trip);
- Oxford, OH (to replace Hamilton);
- Normal, IL (planning intermodal transportation center); and
- St. Louis (the FRA-required 15" above-top-of-rail platform knocked out a cross-over, reducing capacity and flexibility at the forthcoming multimodal terminal).

Metrolink proposed a joint task force and Amtrak proposed meetings with appropriate parties to see what further improvements might be needed and how best to achieve them.

American Public Transportation Association (APTA), representing most transit agencies and suppliers, and Amtrak were among those urging withdrawal of the rulemaking. APTA also said "these issues are being reviewed in separate efforts...by Federal Transit Administration and the Transportation Research Board," and urged regulators to review study results before acting.

NARP said the NPRM is wrong in saying it "[clarifies] the [DOT's] existing [platform] requirements" and is "not expected to have noteworthy cost impacts..." The NPRM actually "represents significant departures from... general practice over the past 15 years, including that approved by federal officials." It even forbids useful mini-high platforms (and other obstructions) within six feet of a platform edge.

Metrolink estimated it would cost about \$85 million "to reconstruct all of the platforms at stations it serves."

### **Inspector General Certifies Operational Savings**

The Fiscal 2006 appropriations law required the DOT Inspector General to certify by July 1 that Amtrak had achieved "operational savings" for Amtrak to continue using federal funds to subsidize "the net losses of food and beverage service and sleeper car service."

Acting Inspector General Todd J. Zinser gave the required certification July 13 (July 28 on the website): "Amtrak's overall financial performance continues to be better than expected...Savings from operational reforms *not specifically included in Amtrak's FY 2006 Board-approved budget* [totaled] \$3.8 million through May 2006 [from October 1, 2005]. This com-

### **At the NARP Website**

Notable recent additions to the our web site <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)>, available to all, are a "brief chronology of railroad history, with passenger emphasis" and a collection of data and quotations about world and U.S. oil production and consumption.

The historical chronology begins in 1825—Beethoven was still alive when the "first steam engine worked a railway line."

It includes much information about the genesis of underinvestment in railroad infrastructure, notably a 1921 calculation by a railroad executive that—from 1900 to July, 1920—wholesale prices and railroad wages rose 240% while freight rates fell one per cent. By Sept., 1920, the gap had narrowed but was still huge, with prices up 180% from 1900, and rates up 74%.

A September 6, 1991 DOT regulation requires a platform long enough to permit level boarding to all accessible cars of trains stopping at the station. This impractical regulation is at odds with Congressional intent (House Report 101-485; cited at APTA comments, p. 3; Metrolink, p. 4), has largely been ignored where infeasible, and should be changed. ■

NARP's complete comments are at <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)>. All comments submitted to the docket are at <<http://dms.dot.gov>>, under Docket OST-2006-23985 (just enter 23985).

### **Newsletter On-line**

NARP members who have registered for the members-only section of our website <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)> can view NARP News earlier than you get it in the mail. A PDF file is posted when the newsletter is completed, at about the same time it goes to the printer.

Back issues from January 2002 are available (plus October 2000 issue honoring Jack Martin, NARP's president from 1979 to 2000).

A recent addition to the members' site is a newsletter index which goes back even further (August 1993 so far). For back issues (\$1 each, \$3 non-members), send NARP a s.a.s.e.

pares to the \$214,000 in savings we reported...through January 2006...Amtrak has achieved \$46.3 million in savings through May 2006 from *all* its FY 2006 operational reforms" [emphasis added].

Zinser restated the unrealistic view that Amtrak should *eliminate* food and beverage and sleeping car losses, even if that means "alternatives [like] having passengers obtain meals in stations during regular stops," a throwback to the 1800s. ■

DOT IG reports on Amtrak are at <[www.oig.dot.gov](http://www.oig.dot.gov)>, go to "browse our work by agency" at bottom and pick Federal Railroad from the drop-down menu.

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Long-Distance Trains**—Elderly crew dorm cars were eliminated from *Crescent*, *Silver Star* (#91, south) and *Meteor* (#98, north). Crew members occupy some Viewliner rooms formerly sold to public. #91/98 normally carry three Viewliners.

**Transit openings**—Chicago CTA's "Pink Line" began service June 25; uses 54th/Cermak branch of Blue Line and re-built "Pauline Connector" and operates clockwise around downtown elevated Loop. More info at <[www.transitchicago.com](http://www.transitchicago.com)>. Nashville's Music City Star begins service September 18 (see right).

**Capitol Corridor**—Service increases Aug. 28. Also tickets valid on *San Joaquins* Oakland-Martinez without reservation. With new trips, total trains: San Jose-Oakland, seven in each direction; Oakland-Martinez, 20 (with *San Joaquins*); Martinez-Sacramento:16; Sacramento-Auburn: one. All San Jose *Capitols* run San Jose-Sacramento. Major Oakland-San Jose holes filled: 12:03pm and 5:28pm southbound trains, 9:05am and 3:00pm northbound trains. Schedules vary on weekends, but same level of service is offered.

A new Thruway bus (operated by Monterey-Salinas Transit) will link Monterey, Gilroy, Morgan Hill and San Jose, timed to connect with *Capitols*, CalTrains and ACE service.

**Harper's Ferry, WV** station and parking lot will be closed for platform construction August 31-September 14. *Capitol Ltd.* and MARC will not stop. Nearest alternate stations: Amtrak—Martinsburg, WV, and Rockville, MD; MARC—Duffields, WV, and Brunswick, MD.

**Another Starlight change**—To facilitate continuing Union Pacific trackwork between Klamath Falls and Chemult (July News), from July 28 to August 28 the northbound *Starlight* reverts to printed schedule times in California (depart Los Angeles 10:15am), but departs Klamath Falls and points north 2 hours 35 minutes later than shown in timetable.

**Sturtevant's (WI)** new station is at 9900 East Exploration Court (off Highway 20), service begins August 14, with enclosed waiting area, shelters (both platforms), overhead bridge with elevators to cross tracks. Old station had none of these amenities. Parking will be \$2 a day.

**Train to the ballgame**—Amtrak and the Detroit Tigers are partnering to bring baseball fans to Comerica Park for four Sat. night games in Aug./Sept., from Pontiac, Birmingham, and Royal Oak; passengers transfer to rubber-tired trolley at Detroit station. For \$29, you get round-trip, right field box seat, food voucher for refreshments. Call 313-983-6565 to order.

## Rail In "Non-Traditional" Markets



Add two more names to the growing list of American cities that have comfortable, convenient, gas-saving commuter rail:

The New Mexico Rail Runner (above) began service July 14 from Sandoval to downtown Albuquerque (approx. 15 mi.). More stations to open this summer.

September 18 will see the startup of Tennessee's Nashville-Lebanon (30 miles) *Music City Star* (below).

More info on the services' websites: <[www.musiccitystar.org](http://www.musiccitystar.org)>, <[www.nmrailrunner.com](http://www.nmrailrunner.com)>.



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