



Trains: Part of the Energy Deal America Needs

An Editorial

Congress adjourned August 1 for five weeks without moving forward on S. 294, the Amtrak reauthorization. Sen. Tom Coburn (R-OK) blocked appointment of senators to a House-Senate conference on the bill (page 2). To protest Democrats' refusal to allow certain votes on expanded domestic oil drilling, Republicans also blocked action on many other items.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) in the July 28 *CQ Today*: "Right now the No. 1 issue in the country is the price of gas at the pump...Why would we want to get off that issue and go to anything else?"

But since passenger trains are part of the answer to energy woes, it is absurd to hold S. 294 hostage to the drilling fight.

Americans should give Congress an earful about legislative paralysis. This inaction is particularly dismaying while job losses mount throughout our economy. We should be *adding* jobs for work like building trains and tracks and fixing out-of-service passenger cars.

"The Senate instead settled for a schoolyard blame game whose main purpose was to exploit public dismay over rising gasoline prices for short-term political gain" (*NY Times*, Aug. 4 editorial).

Lacking the 60 votes needed to overcome Republican objections—a key vote failed 52-40—September could see more paralysis or there could be drilling votes (unless falling gasoline prices weaken bipartisan support for those votes) and legislative progress.

There is a deal to be made here and legislators should make sure the right one gets done:

- Any new oil production should have strong environmental safeguards.
- The package should include revenues that go in part to "green" transportation, including passenger trains.

A self-styled bipartisan "Gang of 10" centrist senators on August 1 unveiled a plan that the group says will "curb soar-

ing gas prices." However, the plan—like President Bush—focuses on technology fixes for highway vehicles...better fuel efficiency and more alternative fuels.

The "Gang" deserves praise for moving beyond the blame game, but needs

Two Drilling Perspectives

"Access to the Pacific, Atlantic, and eastern Gulf regions would not have a significant impact on domestic crude oil and natural gas production or prices before 2030... and production would not be expected to start before 2017."

—*Annual Energy Outlook 2007*, U.S. Dept. of Energy, Feb., 2007

"...support for greater energy exploration is spiking. Nearly half [in our June 18-29 nationwide survey] (47%) now rates energy exploration as the more important priority, up from 35% in February."

—Pew Research Center, July 1

reminding that the energy solution includes cars *and* trains, not cars alone.

A suggested fundamental message to your legislator: "Make investment in trains a part of any energy plan. Tell me how you closed the deal. Don't tell me you failed because of someone else."

Time will be short when Congress reconvenes (Senate: Sept. 8, House: Sept. 9), as an Oct. 1 adjournment is planned so legislators can hit the campaign trail.

To contact Congress, go to www.narprail.org and click on the red "Take Action Now" box (upper right). You also can call NARP's toll-free Congressional Action Hotline at 1-800-679-1581. When prompted, enter NARP's code: 1189. Calls should be made between 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. EDT, Monday through Friday.

—**Ross B. Capon**
NARP Executive Director

The "Gang's" New Energy Reform Act is described in Sen. Kent Conrad's (D-ND) Aug. 1 release which can be read at his web site, <http://conrad.senate.gov>

NARP Honors Senator Smith With Award



Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR) receives NARP's George Falcon Golden Spike Award from Exec. Dir. Ross B. Capon (l.) and Deputy Dir. David Johnson (r.) on June 25 in Smith's Washington office. Smith was recognized for his key role in advancing TriMet's WES Commuter Rail (Beaverton-Wilsonville diesel trains that will extend the reach of Portland's MAX light rail system), work to save freight rail on the Coos Bay line, and getting a *Pioneer* restoration study in S.294.

Durbin, Byrd Support Returning Rail Cars to Service

Efforts are underway to fund rehabilitation of stored Amtrak rolling stock and acquisition of new equipment.

On July 29, Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) introduced "The Train CARS Act" (S. 3360). The bill authorizes funds to:

- restore cars that Amtrak currently has in storage, and
- stimulate construction of new, domestically-produced rolling stock.

Sen. Tom Carper (D-DE) was an initial co-sponsor and NARP was among the four organizations identified in Durbin's release as supporting the bill.

It would be financed through a trust fund and tax credit bonds—up to \$5.25 billion over four years.

Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration would form a "Next Generation Equipment Pool" to explore benefits of private ownership of rolling stock. The Government Accountability Office must study "costs, benefits and economic impacts of providing intercity passenger rail along a national electrification system."

Durbin said, "Driven by the rising price of oil, we are witnessing a fundamental transformation of our economy and our national transportation system. Aviation downsizing and the high cost of driving

have led to a dramatic increase in Amtrak ridership – up 11% from last year.

"**But without more resources, Amtrak will not be able to keep pace with new ridership.** My bill proposes a package of financing options to bring our existing train cars into a state of good repair and lay the groundwork for the next generation of trains built in America" (emphasis added).

Senate Appropriations Chair Robert Byrd (D-WV) on July 30 outlined a second economic stimulus bill. Two items of interest in the \$24.1 billion bill, whose future is uncertain, are:

- \$100 million "to fund capital projects along Amtrak's corridors, including funding to rehabilitate inactive rolling stock";
- \$893 million in transit funding for operating assistance (to avoid service cutbacks due to high diesel prices) and construction of new projects. ■

NARP on Amtrak Reauthorization; Process Slowed

In a July 2 letter to key members of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation and the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, NARP voiced strong support for four points that House-Senate conferees will address in finalizing the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act:

- House requirement for Amtrak to produce a plan within nine months to restart New Orleans-Florida service;
- Senate-mandated studies of restoring service across southern Montana/North Dakota and Idaho/eastern Oregon;
- Stronger Senate on-time performance provisions.
- House funding to address congestion at key chokepoints.

We expressed fear that ADA language in both bills supports impractical accessibility solutions we have long opposed.

Sadly, the Capitol Hill oil drilling fight (lead story) has led to paralysis on S. 294 and halted the appropriations process even before House full committee action.

A House-Senate conference committee must reconcile differences between the House and Senate authorization bills (S. 294 and HR 6003, the latter now also called S. 294). With Sen. Coburn objecting to appointment of conferees for S.294, the House and Senate must consider alternative processes to reconcile differences between their bills and have

NARP Supports California's Proposition 1

A NARP resolution supports the November ballot measure that has \$9 billion for construction of high speed rail "Phase One" (of a \$42 billion system) and \$995 million for conventional intercity passenger and commuter train investments.

The resolution notes important reasons to support high speed rail, such as projected population increases, trains' positive environmental impact, and domestic economic stimulus from construction.

The NARP Executive Committee approved the resolution July 10. It was widely distributed, including to appointed and elected officials in California and the media.

The full resolution is at www.narprail.org. On the right, click on the link under "What's Hot?"

Second Seattle-Vancouver, BC Train Delayed

The advocacy group Transport 2000 Canada says the second Amtrak Seattle-Vancouver, BC, round-trip will not start until the State of Washington, which has underwritten capacity improvements (along with British Columbia) and will fund the operation, reaches agreement with the Canadian Border Security Agency (CBSA).

CBSA is reportedly demanding payment to screen passengers at new "facilities." New international flights are not subject to such fees, but CBSA views the extra train as a new "facility" and demands \$1,500 a day to screen northbound passengers. Transport 2000 calls this anti-rail "discrimination."

The new service (an extension of the existing Seattle-Bellingham round-trip) was to start in August, but has been delayed until arrangements with CBSA are made.

a reconciled bill considered and passed by both bodies.

House conferees: James Oberstar (D-MN), Corrine Brown (D-FL), Elijah Cummings (D-MD), Michael Capuano (D-MA), Tim Bishop (D-NY), Grace Napolitano (D-CA), Dan Lipinski (D-IL), Bruce Braley (D-IA), Michael Arcuri (D-NY), John Mica (R-FL), Tom Petri (R-WI), Steve LaTourette (R-OH), Henry Brown (R-SC), Bill Shuster (R-PA), Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL), and Lynn Westmoreland (R-GA). ■

NARP On Climate Change and Passenger Trains

NARP's June 24 letter to the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation in connection with the hearing that day on "Climate Change Impacts on the Transportation Sector" (August News) is at www.narprail.org, click on What's New. We noted passenger trains' role in addressing climate change, and the disconnect between positive talk about trains in Washington and Congress's inability thus far to "move the needle" on funding.

Clarification: The table in our report on BNSF CEO Matt Rose's presentation to NARP (July News) should have indicated that the percentage changes were from 1980 to 2005.

Memphis Sinkhole Disrupts Amtrak Service Four Months and Counting

Amtrak and its passengers have been dealing with a difficult situation in Memphis since mid-April, but a solution belatedly appears to be at hand.

On or about April 21, a sinkhole was discovered along Canadian National's (CN) tracks, about 100 yards south of the Central Station platform. Collapse of a vintage 1883 brick storm culvert 34 feet underground caused the sinkhole.

CN immediately removed the line—used only by Amtrak's *City of New Orleans*—from service, forcing Amtrak to use CN's "L-A bypass" around Memphis. Amtrak first tried continuing train service to Central Station, but this meant lengthy backup moves and thus long delays.

So Amtrak buses passengers 10 miles between Central Station and a point along the train's temporary route. After trying a few sites unsuccessfully, Amtrak and CN agreed on a spot near CN's Johnston Yard in southwest Memphis.

- Passenger trips are longer. Buses depart the station earlier, and bring inbound passengers to the station later, than published train times.

- The sinkhole has cut off access to Central Station's free parking. Passengers pay to park in a nearby city garage.

- Busing, extra staff, lighting, and trash disposal costs Amtrak \$4,000 a day—plus, of course, any lost revenues from passengers discouraged from riding.

- The detour route is more prone to delays than the passenger-only Central Station line.

Instead of promptly commencing repairs, the city argued that CN was con-



—William B. Strong

The sinkhole in Memphis and the collapsed culvert (lower center). The tower in the background is Central Station; light poles at upper left are on the Amtrak platform.

tractually required to fund the repairs—but no one could find the contract!

In 1995, CN predecessor Illinois Central sold the Central Station buildings and grounds to the city for \$10. On this basis, CN contended the city was on the hook for the repairs.

The city and CN reached agreement, but another problem came up: a Sprint Nextel fiber optic telephone cable buried four feet deep, parallel to and just west of the tracks/sinkhole. With Sprint demanding significant compensation if the cable is cut or has to be moved, the problem dragged on while lawyers worked out liability and cost issues.

However, the Memphis daily, *Commer-*

cial Appeal, reported July 24 that repair work would begin Aug. 9 and take two months, so the station track likely will not reopen before late September.

NARP Board Member William B. Strong of Germantown, TN, has been active in getting the City of Memphis to move. He has contacted public officials and been quoted in news stories. Part of his fine letter to the editor is below. ■

Pithy Letters to the Editor

"If a sinkhole appeared in the middle of the...runway at Memphis International Airport, would the city of Memphis take two months to look for a contract that would show whether Northwest Airlines or FedEx was somehow responsible for repairing the runway?"

"I don't think so. I think the Airport Authority would pull out all of the stops to fix the runway so that flights could continue to land and take off. Then, later, it would sort out any legal tangles as to who owed what for the repairs."

—NARP Board Member William Strong, in July 1 *Commercial Appeal*

"There should have been no delay in getting this [sinkhole] fixed...A campaign should be launched to bring at least one of the Chicago-Carbondale trains on down to give Memphis a choice of northbound rail transit. Nashville has had no Amtrak service since 1979, and we would welcome a rerouting of your train from Chicago-New Orleans through our city if it is not appreciated in Memphis."

—NARP Member Robert Thurman of Brentwood, TN (near Nashville), in July 5 *Commercial Appeal*.

Join NARP's Silver Rail Society

We are sending a special, rail-shaped lapel pin (right, actual size) to every Association member who has given \$1,000 or more—including dues and special contributions—this calendar year.



Please wear it with pride, as an indication of your support for NARP and for one of the most positive policies that our nation could adopt to help Americans maintain their mobility in comfort while helping the world deal with the new realities of a tight energy market.

If you already belong to our Silver Rail Society, please accept our thanks. If you do not, but this is a possibility for you, please give it serious consideration.

NARP needs and very much appreciates gifts of every magnitude. We know that these gifts are a reaffirmation of your dedication. ■

Kiplinger Editor Fred Frailey on Transportation

"We are rolling back the transportation clock 30 years. Airlines are toast. [Yet] every budget director and every president since Richard Nixon has hated Amtrak. Why expect that to change?"

So says "Jim," a former "corporate strategist for a multi-billion dollar company," quoted by NARP Member Fred W. Frailey, editor of *Kiplinger's Personal Finance*, in his Sept. column.

Discussing the high cost of energy, Frailey goes on to say, in part, "I'm not suggesting that our lives will deteriorate in quality...[but] they will change...We'll fly less...[Historically], the end of cheap (if not free) land didn't fundamentally change us as a people. Nor will the end of the era of cheap energy. But we will have to adapt, and those who do it best will prosper most."



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our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

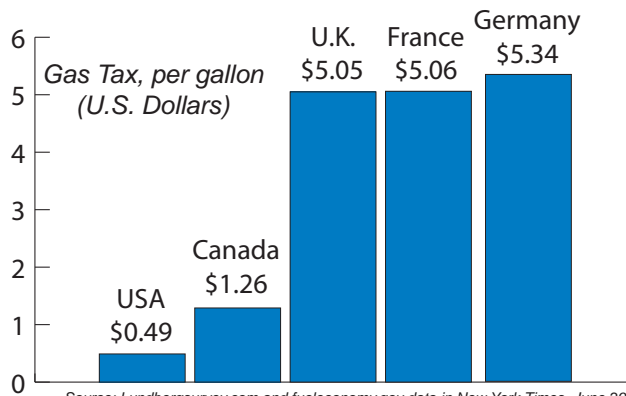
Energy, Bush, and the USA

The Bush Administration deserves credit for reminding Americans—as the U.S. Treasury did July 29—that oil prices are driven primarily by a combination of strong demand and tight supply.

[At this writing, oil prices are falling, but analysts caution that the long-term outlook points to continued increases.]

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

New Thruway Bus Service for Eastern Maryland—BayRunner Shuttle has seven daily round-trips linking BWI Airport Rail Station with Easton, Cambridge, and Salisbury; five of these trips also serve Ocean Pines and Ocean City. To be ticketed by Amtrak, book at least 48 hours before departure; after that, call BayRunner directly (410-912-6000).



Source: Lundbergsurvey.com and fueleconomy.gov data in New York Times, June 29

It is also good that the Administration did not join the rush to cut America's tiny (by world standards) gasoline tax but allowed the world price to flow through to the consumer, encouraging conservation. Of course, U.S. consumers are more vulnerable to world oil price increases than are consumers in other developed countries due to long-standing policies this administration has not changed—our tiny gasoline tax (see graph; the \$0.49

U.S. average includes state and local taxes) and a continuing anti-rail bias in federal policy.

On the negative side, the Administration's terrible "solution" to the impending Highway Trust Fund (HTF) deficit is to take money from the HTF's Mass Transit Account rather than to support the needed gasoline tax increase (or a serious move towards a vehicle-miles traveled tax). ■

NARP Welcomes Sean Jeans-Gail to our Staff

A native of Portland, Oregon, Sean Jeans-Gail, our new intern, in 2005 received a BA in philosophy from the University of Oregon, where he was on the Dean's list and a Phi Beta Kappa.

After work in the fraud prevention department at Wells Fargo Bank, Sean in 2007 joined and help create the "Yes on Measure 49" grass-roots campaign. This focused on a state-wide, Oregon ballot measure aimed at fixing loopholes in land use-laws originally enacted in 1973—loopholes used by large development

interests seeking to exploit protected land. Measure 49 won voter approval in November 2007.

From January, 2008, until joining NARP on June 11, Sean was an intern in the Washington office of Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA). Sean is using his experience to help NARP work effectively for public policies that support rail travel and move America towards a more sustainable way-of-life.

Sean will be Assistant Director—Legislative Relations. ■



Sean Jeans-Gail