

On-Time Performance Challenges

Six years ago, a NARP letter to the Surface Transportation Board ultimately led to big improvements in many Amtrak trains' punctuality. Now we are seeing big delay problems again.

Some of these are due to track conditions and capacity constraints that will require public or private investment to alleviate, or to heat-related slow orders. Some are due to host railroad dispatchers prioritizing freight trains in violation of the law.

Empire Builder: Amtrak tells passengers to expect delays of two to five hours. A major cause is track work. BNSF is adding capacity for growing freight traffic related to the North Dakota/Montana oil shale boom, and replacing the Devils Lake bridge—com-

(continued on p. 4)

Where Trains are Few, Their Benefits Can Still Be Many

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Passenger trains can improve life for many people who never ride them.

In Meridian, MS, then-Mayor John Robert Smith (R) spearheaded an impressive redevelopment of Union Station. The catalyst was Amtrak's one daily round-trip (New York-New Orleans *Crescent*). The station also serves intercity and local buses.

The \$6.6 million project is credited with rejuvenating the surrounding neighborhood, including attracting \$135 million in private development. Much of the historic downtown was redeveloped and restored, with apartments, condominiums and a performing arts and conference center.

The benefits thus include:

- Jobs for the station project itself;

by ROSS CAPON



-Reconnecting America

Waiting area at Meridian Union Station

- Even more jobs for the neighboring development;
- Attractive, new, public, indoor space making it easier to use all forms of public transport—particularly important in these days of extreme weather;
- A new venue for special events;
- Less crime; higher property values.

There is a similar story in Champaign, IL. Here, there is a big, new

(continued on page 2)

NARP Honors Sen. Inouye

Long-Serving Appropriations Chair Wins Golden Spike Award



The Senate winner of our 2012 Golden Spike Award is Sen. Daniel Inouye (D-HI), shown with NARP Chairman Bob Stewart (right) and President Ross Capon (left). The plaque reads: "In appreciation of his decades of strong support for Amtrak and intercity passenger trains generally, and for mass transit, including yeoman work on behalf of the Honolulu Rail Transit Project. For his efforts to preserve and expand the choice to travel by train, America's travelers are grateful."

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- Bridge reopens ahead of schedule 2
- NARP backs FRA effort to speed project completion 3
- Popular Canadian train suffers cuts 3
- House T&I Amtrak food hearing 3
- CREATE: Modernizing Chicago rails 4
- Amtrak's vision for DC Union Sta. 5
- *Eagle* speed boost sought in E. Texas 5
- The expanding Alaska Railroad 6
- Correction re: NC hosts & attendants 6
- Travelers' Advisory: eTicketing 6

(1999) building—Illinois Terminal—across the street south of the old Illinois Central station that I used as a student.

The Illinois Terminal project was spearheaded by NARP Member Bill Volk, long-time Managing Director of the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District. The project helped propel the dramatic transformation and redevelopment of downtown Champaign.

C-U boasts one of the nation's highest per capita local bus usage rates. The Terminal strengthens the system by giving passengers a comfortable place to transfer between buses. Illinois Terminal is an important intermodal center with extensive bicycle facilities, taxis, intercity buses, intrastate buses, and Amtrak. Illinois Terminal also houses various offices, and handles special events.

In Holland, MI, another one-train-a-day city, the 1926 station has been

beautifully redone and also serves as a hub for the local bus system.

These situations are replicated all across the nation. Michigan, North Carolina and California have outstanding station development programs—Michigan's dating to the early 1970s. ■



-Top: Wikipedia. Bottom: Ross Capon

Holland, MI: trains, buses, bicycles.



-Ross Capon

Illinois Terminal multimodal station in Champaign on May 17, 2009.

NARP News

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This has news through August 3.
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THANK YOU INTERNS!

NARP's four volunteer summer interns finished their time at NARP on Aug. 2. They each did yeoman's work researching and compiling databases of amenities convenient to Amtrak stations, compiling better demographic information about our members, and furthering NARP's outreach to potential partners and supporters, such as local Chambers of Commerce.

Yufan Cui, Chris Romero, Davis Strench and Riley Whitelock are each returning to school for the fall semester. NARP gave them each a gift bag and a one-year NARP membership to thank them for their work.

NARP's new internship program, spearheaded by Resource Development Coordinator Luis Olmo-Rivera, will continue when we bring aboard one intern for the fall semester.

Amtrak Bridge Reopens Ahead of Schedule

Amtrak's new bridge carrying the Northeast Corridor over the Niantic River in eastern Connecticut was to be closed from Sunday night, July 14 through Tuesday night, July 17, in order to jack the structure for adjustments to the finalized alignment. But Amtrak was able to reopen the bridge on Tuesday morning.



The new Niantic River Bridge at East Lyme, CT, seen June 24, is just upstream (to the left) of the original century-old bridge to its right. U.S. Route 1 is curving in the background.

The need for a realignment of the new lift span arose after the new bridge, whose construction began in April 2010, compressed more than the mathematical models predicted it would, resulting in the lift span being slightly out of the originally proposed alignment.

The bridge replacement has long been on Amtrak's list of capital needs, but was not doable until the company received a \$1.3 billion grant for capital projects from the 2009 Recovery Act.

Currently, trains are alternately operating on track 1 on the original 1907-built bridge while a new Track 2 on the new bridge and on its approaches is constructed. Having progressed according to schedule, construction is scheduled to be completed some time in 2013, at which point all trains will use the new span. The old one will be demolished.

More about the project is at www.bit.ly/nianbrg.

Ocean Ridership Up; Service Down



Passengers board VIA Rail Canada's Halifax-to-Montreal *Ocean* at Moncton, New Brunswick, May 18, 2012. Starting in October, this train—the only one serving Nova Scotia and New Brunswick—will run three days a week instead of six. Full details on this and other VIA frequency reductions, and the company's rationale for them, are at www.bit.ly/viacuts. A Nov. 2011 report for the Canadian Parliament on VIA's current and historical performance is at www.bit.ly/viarpt.

NARP Backs FRA Effort to Speed Project Completion

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on June 13 proposed new rules that would exclude certain types of railroad improvement projects, mostly benefitting passengers, from the detailed review process required under the National Environmental Policy Act for any infrastructure project that receives federal funds.

Categorical Exclusions (CE) would speed projects which simply modify existing rights-of-way or facilities. Examples include track, signal and station upgrades and construction or rehabilitation of locomotives and railcars in existing facilities.

In comments submitted for the record, NARP called the proposed CEs "a common-sense way to achieve this important national goal [a more robust national passenger train network] efficiently, without expending resources on environmental reviews whose conclusions are predictable." The OneRail Coalition, of which NARP is a member, also submitted positive comments.

Following a July 13 submission deadline, FRA is reviewing comments received before issuing a final rule. We expect the result will be the swifter completion of many upgrades to passenger train service.

NARP's comment, with a link to the FRA proposal, is at www.bit.ly/narpce

AMTRAK FOOD SERVICE HEARING

House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Chairman John Mica (R-FL) held a hearing Aug. 2 entitled "A Review of Amtrak Operations, Part I: Mismanagement of Food & Beverage Services."

There was discussion about whether Amtrak is complying with a legal requirement that food service break even.

Committee Ranking Member Nick Rahall (D-WV) and Rep. Corrine Brown (D-FL) defended Amtrak, calling the hearing a waste of the committee's time.

More on the hearing is in NARP's on-line Hotline for August 3. Witnesses prepared statements, Mica's staff Briefing Memo and hearing video are at www.bit.ly/atfood.

CREATE: Modernizing Chicago's Rail Network

The \$3.2 billion Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program includes 70 projects designed to improve safety and speeds on the road and rail network. The program, launched in 2003, includes:

- six rail/rail grade separations. Construction begins this fall on the Englewood Flyover to elevate Metra commuter trains over the NS mainline that serves most Chicago-East Amtrak trains.
- 25 new road/rail grade separations. The most complex and largest project by dollar value (\$165 million) is the grade separation of four roadways and two pedestrian/bicycle paths from Norfolk Southern tracks at 130th Street and Torrance Avenue on Chicago's South Side.
- Other road/rail grade crossing safety enhancements;
- 36 projects to improve track, switches, and signal systems;
- improvements to existing viaducts;
- integration into a single display of information from dispatch systems of all major railroads in the region.

As of mid-June, one quarter of planned work was complete, 12 projects were

under construction, 15 were in environmental review or final design and 25 other projects remain on the docket.

CREATE program manager Bill Thompson of the Association of American Railroads said so far every project is running 10% under budget. He says CREATE's success is causing other major rail-hub cities to look to it as a model for improving their networks.

Financing has come from the US De-

partment of Transportation (\$328.4 million from four different grant programs) and from the Class I railroads (\$170 million). Thompson says the project's partners have "explored all avenues" to generate more funding, and are working to ensure that the rest of the work is compliant with all federal requirements, and to complete engineering work. ■

See the *OneRail Coalition's CREATE success stories*: www.bit.ly/1rlsuc

Amtrak Delays

pletion by years end (Apr. News).

Also, BNSF Railway has been more aggressive than federal requirements in limiting train speeds to 60 mph (rather than 79) when the temperature tops 85 degrees.

High temperatures can cause welded rail segments to expand and form kinks, which can derail trains. CSX is doing the same on its Washington-Florida line and in upstate New York.

Finally, since *Empire Builder* equipment turns the same day in Seattle and Portland, very late inbound arrivals can delay eastbound departures.

Cardinal: On Buckingham Branch Railroad (BBRR) in Virginia, Amtrak cites freight train interference and slow orders, but BBRR says it is upgrading its infrastructure (July News, p. 5).

CSX and Norfolk Southern trackwork, now completed, have also delayed the *Cardinal*. Also, in Indiana the train uses a patchwork of under-maintained lines with little freight traffic.

Inspector General Analyzes Delays (2002-2007): The DOT Inspector General (IG) on July 10 released a report, "Analysis of the Causes of Amtrak Train Delays" (www.bit.ly/oigdelay). The IG concluded that most delays

from page 1

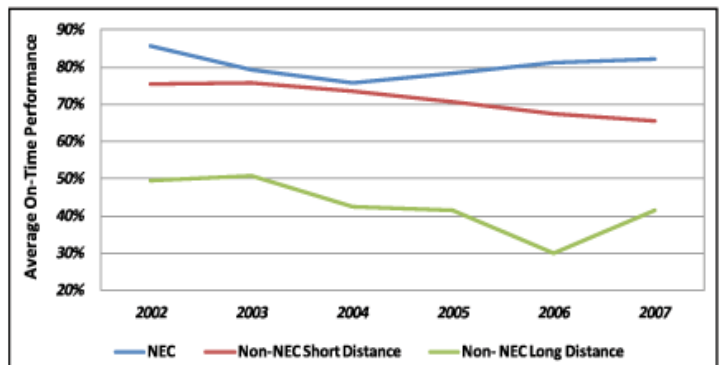


Chart appearing on page 4 of the DOT Inspector General's report.

outside the Northeast Corridor (NEC) stemmed from slow orders and "host railroad effects," that is, "the effects of operating on track owned and dispatched by a particular host railroad or group of host railroads." This indicates that most of the delays are caused by actions the host railroads can control through their own dispatching practices and/or how they maintain their plants.

The IG said that, from 2002 to 2007, NEC trains arrived at final destinations on-time on 75% to 85% percent of trips; other short-distance trains dipped from 75% in 2002 to 65% in 2007; long-distance trains sank from 50% in 2002 to 30% in 2006, back up to 42% in 2007.

The report breaks down performance by railroad but 2007 is the most recent year considered. CN ranked second best for overnight trains, yet in January Amtrak filed a complaint against CN before the Surface Transportation Board claiming CN is illegally delaying Amtrak trains operating out of Chicago – Amtrak's first such complaint under the 2008 law (Feb. News, p. 5). ■

MONTANA SENATORS CALL FOR BUILDER CAPACITY BOOST

Montana Senators Max Baucus and John Tester (both D) issued a statement Aug. 3 urging Amtrak to add capacity to the daily Chicago-Seattle/Portland *Empire Builder* to serve the influx of workers to the burgeoning Bakken Shale natural gas fields in eastern Montana and western North Dakota.

"Reliable long-distance passenger rail service is vitally important for our constituents, especially as many residents commute from central or western Montana to jobs in the Bakken," the Senators wrote to Amtrak President Joseph Boardman. "The *Empire Builder* route is an essential part of spurring economic development in Northern Montana communities, many of which face great distances to reach the nearest airport."

Vision for a Washington Union Station Bursting at the Seams

Over 100 people crowded the Columbus Club at Washington Union Station July 25 to hear Amtrak officials, joined by DC Mayor Vincent Gray, Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) and other local officials, unveil a grand, \$7 billion “Master Plan to bring Washington Union Station into the 21st Century.”

The station was rehabilitated and reopened in 1988. Since then, Amtrak’s ridership has grown about 60%—to 4.85 million in Fiscal 2011. Maryland commuter rail ridership (roughly estimated) jumped 300% from 8,000 to 30,000 a day. Virginia Railway Express—now 5,000 a day—began operating in 1992. Some intercity buses came later. The new plan would use the station for *all* such buses, replacing the existing Greyhound station.

The Plan envisions building above and below tracks north of Daniel Burnham’s structure (which will remain intact) and completely rebuilding tracks and platforms to create efficient, multiple points of access that conform with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Above will go concourses and wait-

Higher Train Speeds Sought in E. Texas

Members of the East Texas Corridor Council met July 19 with Arkansas, Texas and Louisiana DOT officials to formulate plans to improve Amtrak service through the region. Council Chairman Richard Anderson says the Council wants to double the *Texas Eagle’s* Dallas-Texarkana average 35-mph speed in the next 6 to 12 months.

“The long term goal is for double-tracking, so that there can be tracks dedicated to either freight or passenger cars along the Union Pacific Corridor,” Anderson told the *Longview News-Journal*. “We’re hoping to increase the speed of passenger rails to somewhere



Architect’s rendering of the envisioned central concourse of Washington Union Station, circa 2028. The glass-enclosed space is meant to resemble Berlin, Germany’s central station.

ing areas under a new, light-filled Train Hall. Below, retail-lined concourses and several parking levels.

A central, north-south concourse, lined with retail, will divide the stub-end tracks to the west from the run-through tracks (plus two stub-end) to the east.

New pathways will link platforms with First Street NE (just west of the tracks) and with H Street NE. A big public plaza will be along H Street, where the bridge is now, with a new, modern north entrance to the station. There will be a stop on the DC streetcar line which is to begin running next year (Aug.-Sept. 2009 *News*). Escalators and elevators will connect streetcar platforms with an expanded Metro subway concourse below, parallel to First Street.

Flanking the plaza will be Burnham

in the range of 80 and 115 mph, but that’s probably 10 to 15 years out.”

A consultant has been working with UP and Amtrak to develop a freight and passenger train timing and sequence.

Anderson noted that Interstate 20 between Dallas and Shreveport has remained essentially unchanged for 50 years while the area’s population has doubled and commuter traffic on the highway has risen 70% in less than 10 years. At the same time, the number of flights serving Longview’s airport has dwindled. “We’re pursuing an expansion of passenger rail as an alternative driving to alleviate traffic,” he said. ■

Place: high-rise buildings with hotels, office space and ground-floor retail. Developer Akridge LLC is partnering with Amtrak and the US Department of Transportation on the project. In 2006, Akridge purchased the air rights over the tracks from the federal government for \$10 million.

A public train-viewing platform is envisioned at the north end of Burnham Place, along K Street NE. Amtrak’s K Tower’s train control functions will be moved to another location as part of a modernization of the interlocking, communications, signaling and electric traction infrastructure in the terminal. The tower will be moved to along First Street, becoming part of the neighborhood as perhaps a bar or restaurant.

Four phases are envisioned (timeline to vary based on available funding):

1 (2013-18): existing concourse improvement; two new tracks & platforms; crew base, commissary and other building relocation;

2 (2018-22): east side through track, platform reconstruction; new below grade parking; added track capacity;

3 (2023-28): demolish parking garage; stub-end tracks & platform improvements; train shed construction;

4 (2028+): lower level tracks, new concourse; new Metrorail line.

The Plan, coupled with the newly-revised Vision for High-Speed Rail in the Northeast Corridor, represents a major long-term planning effort by Amtrak.

Funding is not in place but Amtrak President Joseph Boardman told reporters, “If you don’t have a vision for the future, they’re not going to give you the dollars to develop that view of the future...We have...a lack of balance and investment in a mode that moves a lot of people, that is an environmentally responsible mode, and that changes the way people are going to be able to travel in the future with the technology that is available today,”

NARP Chairman Bob Stewart applauded this work and urged a similar vision for the national system. ■

See NARP’s *Blog* July 25, 26, 31. The *Master Plan*: www.bit.ly/wasplan

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

The Expanding Alaska Railroad

The Alaska Railroad (ARR) is entering the first phases of a construction project, funded by the military and the State of Alaska, to extend its main line at the north end. ARR serves four military installations, including Eielson Air Force Base, 28 miles southeast of Fairbanks. A \$200 million rail/highway bridge over the Tanana River is under construction near Salcha, about 13 miles south of Eielson AFB. This project will provide year-round access to the largest US Military joint combined arms training facility in North America. Known as the "Joint Pacific Area Range Complex," the land bridge will be a critical update to the facilities infrastructure.

The railroad gets 30% of its \$100 million in annual freight revenues from traffic that interchanges with the Lower 48 on originating in Prince Rupert, BC, and Seattle. A physical link to Canada's railroads would require these further steps: a \$1 billion extension to Delta Jct., an extension costing about as much to the Canadian border, and construction within Canada.

ARR also has begun construction on a roughly 40-mile line to connect Port MacKenzie (across Knik Arm from Anchorage) to the railroad near Wasilla.

A Ukraine news team recently visited Alaska to report on a possible western extension of ARR towards Bering Strait and a link-up with Russian Railways.

ARR Federal Funding Saved: Fortunately, the new surface transportation law does not have Senate-passed

language jeopardizing ARR and especially its passenger trains. For reasons relating to how much ARR trackage can be used to calculate eligibility for Federal Transit Administration funds, the Senate bill would have cut ARR's federal funding from \$36 million a year to just \$6 million. But the funding actually was cut much less, to \$31 million. ARR Pres. Chris Aadnesen and VP—Corporate Affairs Wendy Lindskoog visited the NARP office to thank us for our pro-ARR stand on this issue.

ARR passenger revenues rose from \$20.8 million in 2010 to \$22.4 million in 2011. ■

NORTH CAROLINA CORRECTIONS

There are no Amtrak agents at Burlington, High Point, Salisbury, Kannapolis and Selma (*News*, July, p. 4). Here, North Carolina Department of Transportation has station attendants who are dedicated contract employees. They meet all trains, assisting passengers such as by answering travel and ticket kiosk questions.

The correct Web address of the North Carolina Train Host Association, which provides *on-train* volunteers, is www.bytrain.org/passenger/hosts.html.



-Timothy Wildey on Flickr.com

The Alaska Railroad's flagship passenger train, the Anchorage-Fairbanks *Denali Star*, is seen here southbound, having just departed Denali National Park station on Aug. 23, 2010.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Amtrak eTicketing now in effect nationwide: Paper tickets holding monetary value have been replaced by travel documents that the conductor simply scans. These documents can be printed at home, displayed on a smartphone or tablet, or issued at the station by a ticket agent or QuikTrak machine.

This change, which was effective July 30, makes the reservation and ticketing process more customer-friendly. You no longer have to worry about losing your tickets, or about getting new tickets if your reservation changes!

Value-bearing paper tickets will continue to be issued for most reservations involving Thruway buses and for group tickets, tickets purchased through a travel agent, and multi-ride tickets.

More details about eTicketing can be found in the January 2012 *News* (pg. 6) or at www.bit.ly/etkting.