

CA Legislature's Big Pro-HSR Votes

Gov. Brown, Sen. Steinberg, Citizens' Work Rewarded

California's high speed rail project passed a crucial test July 6 when the state's Senate voted 21-16 in favor of selling \$4.5 billion in voter-approved bonds. The Assembly's 51-27 approval came a day earlier. Gov. Brown planned a July 18 signing ceremony.

This unlocks nearly \$8 billion in state and federal funds for rail in the state.

Addressing the 8th World Congress on High Speed Rail in Philadelphia July 11, California High Speed Rail Authority (CAHSRA) Board Member Thomas Umberg and new Executive Director Jeff Morales expressed confidence that construction on the nation's first dedicated high-speed rail line will start in

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NARP Honors Rep. Meehan

Pennsylvania Republican Wins Golden Spike Award



NARP presented our 2012 Golden Spike Award to Rep. Patrick Meehan, shown with NARP Chairman Bob Stewart (left) and President Ross Capon (right). The plaque reads: "In appreciation of his recognition of the importance of transit and passenger trains. For his work within his caucus and across party lines to maintain and improve transportation choices in the U.S., America's travelers are grateful."

2013 Funding Bill Clears House; Senate Cmte.

The FY 2013 Transportation-HUD spending bill (H.R. 5972) that the House approved 261-163 on June 28 has \$1.8 billion for Amtrak. This compares with the current year's \$1.42 billion and Amtrak's \$2.1 billion request. The Senate Appropriations Committee on Apr. 19 voted 28-1 for a bill with \$1.45 billion for Amtrak.

Two-year Highway/Transit Authorization Enacted

Just before Congress's week-long July 4 recess, a deal finally was reached to avoid a June 30 end to the federal gasoline tax that would have crippled the highway and transit programs and put hundreds of thousands of people out of work.

The law does not address the long-term funding problem. The federal fuel tax remains at 18.4 cents per gallon of gasoline and 24.4 cents per gallon of diesel, unchanged since 1993.

The House and Senate voted June 29 to send a 27-month surface transportation authorization to Pres. Obama, who signed it into law on July 6.

The bill transfers \$18.8 billion in general tax dollars to the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). This means a total of \$53.3 billion in general funds has been transferred to the HTF since 2008 due to lack of support for raising the gasoline tax.

Overall, the bill continues an outmoded, highway-centric policy approach. Democrats gave up forward-looking "smart transportation" provisions in exchange for Republicans accept-

The House bill zeroes out the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) and TIGER (Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery) grant programs. The Senate bill has \$100 million for HSIPR and \$500 million for TIGER.

Reps. Sessions (R-TX) and Flake

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ing elimination of their energy provisions.

The bill does preserve states' ability to use federal Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality (CMAQ) funds to cover intercity trains' operating costs (the *Downeaster's* main funding source). It also preserves the Alaska Railroad's ability to utilize the Highway Trust Fund's transit account to pay for its passenger service.

Some of the dropped provisions:

- making Amtrak eligible for certain federal rail grants and letting Amtrak use its own revenues to provide the 20% match for federal grants;
- creating a 100% federal program for improvements to routes over 750 miles long;
- improvements agreed to by House and Senate to a federal rail loan program. ■

See page five for the statement of the OneRail Coalition (www.onerail.org).

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In Praise of *Trains*' Bob Johnston

As soon as my new *Trains* magazine arrives, one of the first sections I turn to is the Passenger column written by Bob Johnston. It is always full of accurate and interesting information about passenger service in the U.S. and Canada. Periodically, he will also do a feature story, such as the cover story in the July, 2011 issue: "Amtrak at 40."

So, when I had an opportunity to meet with Bob in Chicago, I jumped at the chance.

Bob grew up in Arlington Heights, IL, 5 blocks from the Chicago & North Western Railroad, and he often went down to the station with his mother to see his dad arrive on a steam-powered commuter train from Chicago. His interest in trains has not diminished over the years. In 1989, he became a correspondent for *Passenger Train Journal* and then went over to *Trains* in 1991.

I started looking back through some of his recent columns and saw articles about the new Hialeah shops, getting space on sold out sleepers, the new schedule for the *Sunset Limited*, Amtrak handling of private cars, new ticketing in Maine, Thanksgiving service, WiFi, last year's North Dakota floods, Amtrak's 40th anniversary exhibit train, daily *Sunset Limited* service, and the list goes on.

California HSR

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the first quarter of calendar 2013.

They expect to award a design-and-build contract by the end of 2012. The authority has qualified five consortia to submit bids for the 130-mile Bakersfield-Madera initial segment.

Gov. Brown deserves credit for contacting wavering senators individually. And, as Morales observed, Senate President pro tem Darrell "Steinberg committed to getting it done, and did it." NARP members and other citizens also weighed in.

Of the funds, \$2.6 billion will match \$3.2 billion in federal funding for those 130 miles. There is also \$1.1 billion for San Francisco-San Jose and Los Ange-

les Metrolink upgrades, and \$900 million for connecting rail projects. Morales said the San Jose segment could see electrified operation by 2019.

Some state regulatory approvals remain. Lawsuits from agricultural interests are possible but, answering a question from NARP Pres. Capon, CAHSRA officials expressed confidence that "our environmental work is solid" and that "we'll prevail."

Opponents cited the state's budget problems, but near-term impacts on state finances are hard to see. Spending on construction would be spread over many years; the state bonds would be repaid over 40 years. ■

Bob travels extensively to do these stories, so he learns firsthand what is happening. I asked him what was his most fun assignment, and he said riding the cab of EMD's prototype F69 AC in 1990 out of the Association of American Railroads' Pueblo Transportation Technology Center on an Amtrak test train and then to Chicago leading the *Southwest Chief*. And his most challenging is one he is working on right now for the November issue of *Trains*: tracking the travels of three Amtrak locomotives for a year.

I asked him what was his biggest concern for passenger service and he said capacity on long-distance trains. Amtrak desperately needs more equipment to meet the needs of the customers. Too many folks are turned away due to sold-out trains or high prices. He also thinks we need more frequencies on many lines, like having a daytime extension of an *Empire Service* train to and through Cleveland.

We all need to thank *Trains* and Bob Johnston for providing valuable information on our passenger service here and in Canada.

By the way, **we will be having our fall Council of Representatives meeting in Milwaukee on October 20 and 21 and will have a tour day on the**

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This has news through July 17.

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19th that will include visiting the offices of *Trains*. You don't want to miss this opportunity! So mark your calendars and look on the Website for details. Remember, any NARP member is welcome to attend. It is a great opportunity to see some of the inner workings of NARP and hear some great speakers. ■

NEW REPORT ON COSTS OF *NOT* INVESTING IN MODERN TRAINS

The American Public Transportation Association's report, "Opportunity Cost of Inaction: High-Speed Rail and High Performance Passenger Rail Service," shows that the net benefits of high-speed rail to the economy and society far exceed its costs.

Investing in trains will help mitigate the cost of maintenance, replacement and the capacity expansion needs of airport runways, highways and roadways, the report finds, noting the scarcity of land for new roads and runways.

Read the report at www.bit.ly/aptahsr.

Sequestration and 2013 Funding

A big part of the “fiscal cliff” the nation faces at year’s end is the automatic cuts that may hit appropriations Jan. 2.

The Budget Control Act of 2011 (BCA) mandated these cuts if—as happened—the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction failed to reach a compromise. BCA’s goal is to reduce the entire federal budget by more than \$1 trillion over the next 10 years, relative to the Congressional Budget Office’s 2010 baseline. Because the Joint Cmte. failed to reach its goal of achieving \$1.2 trillion in deficit reduction through FY 2021, automatic cuts will occur each year until then unless Congress acts to repeal or modify the process.

Most affected non-defense programs may be cut 8.4% in 2013 and by a gradually shrinking percentage in subsequent years through 2021. Defense spending may be cut 7.5% and non-Medicare mandatory programs by 8% in 2013. Medicare provider payments will be cut 2% each year through 2021.

For 2013, it is unclear whether the January 2 start-up means the 8.4% reduction applies to the entire fiscal year (making the actual impact even worse), or just the last nine months of it. The White House Ofc. of Management & Budget will decide the exact percentage to be cut across the board, though the President can exempt military pay.

Freeport, Maine, Ready for Amtrak Service!



-Natalie Ellen, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority

TrainRiders/Northeast Chairman and NARP Council member Wayne Davis speaks June 14 at the opening ceremony for the new Freeport, ME Amtrak station. Daily *Downeaster* service will start in November (June News, lead story).

Former Senate Budget Chair Pete Domenici’s (R-NM) coauthored column in the July 11 *Financial Times* says sequestration in 2013 would cut “almost every domestic program” 12% and the Pentagon 15%.

If the House-passed \$1.8 billion for Amtrak in 2013 is enacted, and then each DOT program is cut 8.4%, Amtrak could end up with \$1.65 billion after January. That compares with the \$1.4 billion Amtrak received this year.

Sequestration’s effect on the grant programs for states is unclear as the House bill contains zero for these programs, while the Senate bill only has \$100 million for High-Speed & Inter-city Passenger Rail.

Most veterans’ funding and Pell Grants are exempt from sequestration. Community and migrant health centers and Native American health services and facilities cuts are limited to 2%.

Many legislators are pushing bigger domestic cuts so Pentagon cuts will be smaller. But some military experts do not think sequestration would be a “disaster” [Secretary Panetta’s word] for the Pentagon. An especially aggressive disagreement comes from William S. Lind, a leading, conservative Pentagon expert. In *The American Conservative* (Oct.-Dec., 2011 and Feb. 2012) he explained why he thinks a properly

designed \$100 billion a year program would provide better security than today’s budget [absent sequestration, \$700 billion in 2014]. ■

More BCA info is available from *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities* (www.bit.ly/sequest) and *Bipartisan Policy Center* (www.bit.ly/domenici).

NARP ELECTS LEADERS; LOOMIS JOINS BOARD

NARP’s Council of Representatives elected the following individuals to serve as officers and directors of NARP until April 2014:

Chairman: Robert J. Stewart (Fort Myers, FL)

Vice Chairs: John Delora (Saint Clair Shores, MI); Albert Papp, Jr. (Millington, NJ); Arthur Poole (Coos Bay, OR); W. David Randall (Alton, IL)

Secretary: Stephen Salatti (Mexico, NY)

Treasurer: Kenneth Clifford (Medway, OH)

Directors: Bruce Becker (East Amherst, NY); Kenneth Briers (Washington, DC); George Chilson (San Diego); James Churchill (Alexandria, VA); Richard Harnish (Chicago); Bill Hutchison (Clearwater, FL); James Loomis (Haiku, HI); William Pollard (Conway, AR).

The Council also elected the following to serve as Council Representatives At-Large through April 2014 (asterisk = re-elected incumbent):

William O. Greene, III* (Nashville); Wayne W. Rose* (Colonial Beach, VA); Steve Strauss* (Washington, DC); Phillip Streby* (Peru, IN); Geza John Vamos (Cleveland).

The Board’s new member is Jim Loomis. He has served as Hawaii’s representative on the Council since it was formed in 2008. A professional travel writer and prolific Amtrak rider, he is the author of *All Aboard: The Complete North American Train Travel Guide*, whose 3rd edition was released in 2011.

Loomis is the founder and former president of Loomis-ISC, a Honolulu-based marketing and public relations consulting firm.



2013 Funding Bill

(R-AZ) withdrew floor amendments to end Amtrak's long-distance trains and cripple food and beverage service.

But Rep. Denham's (R-CA) amendment forbidding use of the the bill's funds for California high-speed rail passed 239-185. This is symbolic; this bill has no high-speed rail funds. In floor debate, Rep. John Olver (MA), the subcommittee's top Democrat, strongly

defended the California project.

The House committee's report (like the bill, a Republican product; 1.usa.gov/appro13) has some kind words for Amtrak. "The Committee appreciates the level of detail in the fiscal year 2013 budget justifications...[and] commends Amtrak for taking steps to lower the needed Federal subsidy for operating losses" (page 47).

Amtrak was criticized for requesting more for operations than turned out to be needed in the past. However, for 2013 the House proposes just \$350 million for operations (vs. Amtrak's \$450 million request).

True, the Secretary can approve transferring to operations up to \$80 million of a special \$500 million "Bridges and Tunnels" part of the House's Am-

Volunteer Hosts: More Friendly Faces for Amtrak

The first volunteer hosts to help Amtrak passengers were in North Carolina. They addressed this problem: at most stations without an Amtrak agent, there is no one to help with baggage or give information about local transportation, lodging and points of interest.

In the early 1990s, a group of rail advocates organized by the Carolinas Association for Passenger Trains (CAPT) partnered with the NC Department of Transportation to put a volunteer train host aboard most state-supported trains between Charlotte and Rocky Mount.

North Carolina Train Host Assn. members (www.bytrain.org/passenger/hosts.html) walk the train, welcoming passengers and asking how their trip is going. They point out sights along the

way and share their stories and experiences with those who want to chat.

This inspired a dedicated group of California passenger train supporters, led by lifetime NARP member Doras Briggs, to establish a program for people interested in volunteering as station hosts along the *Capitol Corridor* and *San Joaquin* routes (July 2002 *News*, p. 3; www.stationhost.org); the first host was at Emeryville in March, 2001.

Volunteers cannot issue Amtrak tickets or handle checked baggage, but they can do a lot to make a passenger's experience easier and more pleasant, serving as goodwill ambassadors for Amtrak. They help arriving passengers find a bus, local train or taxi. They recommend places to stay, eat or visit.

They give train information, including updates about delays.

North Carolina's program expanded to include Station Attendants in the early 2000s. Now, every unstaffed station on the Raleigh-Charlotte corridor (plus Selma-Smithfield) has an attendant who meets every train (including the *Crescent*, which calls at Salisbury and High Point in the wee hours).

Contrary to our June report, Maine adopted this as a best practice, learning from North Carolina and California.

There are also volunteer station hosts at Olympia-Lacey, WA, the station serving the state capital. They have diligently met every train since 1993, even staying to meet the northbound *Coast Starlight* when it is very late. ■

Gulf Coast Rallies to Bring Back Amtrak

A good crowd came to Tallahassee's former Amtrak station on June 23. This produced positive media coverage for the effort to restore Amtrak service on the New Orleans-Florida route.

There was food, live music and a party-type atmosphere, but most attendees came to show support for restoring train service to their communities. Residents told WCTV-TV that the train's absence limited their ability to travel.

NARP Chairman Bob Stewart gave a keynote speech. Tallahassee NARP member Bart Bibler helped organize the



-Stephen Sayles

Attendees gather on the former Tallahassee Amtrak platform to hear the keynote speakers at the June 23 "Rally to Bring Bak Amtrak," the spelling referring to "Amtrak" being spelled without a C. A NARP banner is seen behind them.

rally. NARP Director and Southern Division Leader Bill Hutchison and Council member Steve Sayles also came.

Besides NARP, the Florida Coalition of Rail Passengers is actively supporting

service restoration. ■

Stewart is quoted in stories at www.wtxl.com and www.wctv.tv.

From NARP Chairman Stewart's Tallahassee Talk

"This is the state capital. The capital ought to have air service, highway service and train services available.

"This is a critical need for our nation, not only just for Florida but for the country as we face oil situations, Middle East crisis, we face gas prices coming down now but it's a very big concern for people. We have an aging population and—with 100 million more people in the country by 2050—how are we going to move around the United States?"

trak capital grant. That full \$80 million would bring the operating grant within \$20 million of Amtrak's request. But the Committee "strongly believes" the switch to operations should only be approved "in the event of an unanticipated and emergency shortfall."

"Bridges and Tunnels" money only can be used on Amtrak- and state-owned infrastructure. This primarily means the Northeast Corridor, Raleigh-Charlotte, part of Chicago-Detroit, some Chicago, New Orleans and Los Angeles terminal trackage, and—probably—most of the Fullerton-San Diego route (technically

owned by the counties).

The Amtrak Inspector General must submit to Congress by Nov. 1 an analysis of the cost of providing food service, including "comparison of current services vs. the alternative of Amtrak contracting out these services."

The bill transfers unobligated magnetic levitation funds to rail-highway grade crossing hazard work.

Remind legislators (202-224-3121) that passenger trains create jobs and improve mobility—and that our senior population is growing and our youth are becoming less car-oriented. ■

Some Amtrak Updates

NARP Chairman Bob Stewart, accompanied by Pres. Ross Capon, and Special Assistant to the Chair Larry Scott, met June 20 with two Amtrak vice presidents: D.J. Stadler (Operations) and Joseph McHugh (Government Affairs and Corporate Communications).

Below is a partial list of the issues discussed.

- Like many other enterprises, uncertainty about the size of Amtrak's federal grant drives up the company's costs. There is the constant need to guess, for example, about how much to spend on training workers for jobs that will only materialize if funding becomes available. With the right funding level, more wrecked and bad-ordered cars being stored at Beech Grove could be brought back to revenue service.

- *Cardinal* on-time performance problems are due partly to CSX trackwork between White Sulphur Springs, WV, and Clifton Forge, VA, but Buckingham Branch Railroad (BBRR) track conditions also are a problem.

BBRR is a short line which leased 200 route miles from CSX for 20 years in December, 2004. The *Cardinal* is on BBRR track in Virginia for the 127 miles between Orange, Charlottesville, Staunton and Clifton Forge.

Since CSX coal trains don't fit on BBRR sidings, and thus can delay Amtrak, CSX tries to send the trains on days Amtrak does not run. But BBRR needs a certain level of CSX business in

order to have enough money to maintain the railroad—although speed limits in some places are just 25 mph.

- *Texas Eagle* is one of a few overnight trains that runs with a single locomotive, making it vulnerable to delays when there is a breakdown. Stadler said that adding a second locomotive would increase costs by about \$1 million a year. Amtrak is reviewing options—including those proposed by TEMPO, the *Texas Eagle* Marketing and Performance Organization—that could improve the *Eagle's* financial performance and reliability.

- Amtrak's Board recently approved upgrading the WiFi on *Acela Express* from 3G to 4G, which the *Northeast Regionals* already have and which should significantly improve the quality of the service. (3G and 4G refer to the "size of the pipe," or capacity of the WiFi system. Providing WiFi on the railroad is a challenge because of the large numbers of passengers who want to use it—particularly on *Acela*—and because most cellphone towers are closer to highways than to the railroad.

- The 40th Anniversary Train, currently parked in Philadelphia, is being repurposed as a special events train: one car has displays about Amtrak history, another about the overall railroad industry, and a third about rail's impact on community development. The train will continue to be used at special events across the nation. ■

OneRail Coalition Statement on Transportation Bill

issued July 3 • www.onerail.org

The OneRail Coalition congratulates both parties and both the House and the Senate for working together to advance transportation reauthorization legislation which saves and creates millions of jobs by maintaining federal transportation spending at current levels. The agreement provides certainty for transportation planners by setting policy and funding levels for 27 months. In addition, the bill properly maintains the historic funding allocation between highway and transit programs.

The final agreement moves the country forward and provides a necessary step in a long-term process. The bill includes several items that the OneRail Coalition has advocated for:

- continues the focus on safety by maintaining dedicated funding for the Section 130 rail-highway crossing safety program,
- authorizes funding for the merit-based Projects of National & Regional Significance (PNRS) program,
- continues to make operating intercity passenger rail service an eligible use of CMAQ funding, and
- helps leverage transportation dollars more efficiently by expanding and enhancing the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program.

The OneRail Coalition is disappointed the final agreement did not include several rail provisions such as the ability for State DOTs to flex funding for freight rail projects when that is the most efficient option, rail planning provisions, and restoration of tax parity for parking and transit commuter benefits.

As the next major pieces of surface transportation legislation are developed, the OneRail Coalition looks forward to working with Congress to ensure that rail issues and the long-term funding challenge are addressed. America needs to continue to advance an efficient, multi-modal freight and passenger transportation network with robust public and private funding.

OneRail believes that public and private investments in rail infrastructure and operations will create and maintain good domestic jobs, enhance productivity and the competitive position of the United States in the world economy, spur both near-term economic recovery and long-term prosperity, relieve road and air congestion, protect the environment, reduce our exposure to volatile gasoline prices and our dependence on imported oil, and contribute positively to public health and well-being.

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

NARP Interns Experience Capitol, Learn About Issue Advocacy

NARP's summer interns (June *News*, p. 4) have learned much about how an advocacy organization works to push public discussion in a positive direction.

Chris Romero grew up in southern California and is studying at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He hopes to attend law school after graduating and become an attorney in southern California.

At NARP, Chris develops his customer service skills by answering phone calls and working the NARP kiosk at Washington Union Station. He is researching car rental services at Amtrak stations, something not shown in NARP's or Amtrak's on-line station profiles. He is also brainstorming on ways to improve NARP's service to its members and rail passengers.

Yufan Cui of Yantai, Shandong, China, is pursuing a master's degree in business, focusing on finance, at the University of Maryland, College Park.

At NARP, she is analyzing our membership, including by location and dollar amounts given. She has learned about the U.S. railroad system and its management methods and future plans. NARP encourages and provides Yufan chances to let her find and think about new things and share her opinions with others. But most of all, she has experienced American office culture and developed her English communication skills through working with other interns.

Davis Strench, a NARP mem-

ber, will be a senior this fall at South River High School, Edgewater, MD. He is an active Amtrak rider and passenger train advocate. He is on the Engineering Pathway in his school's STEM Magnet Program. After high school, Davis intends to study business, with focus on transportation management. His goal is to become a manager at a rail company.

Davis has gained greater insight into the inner workings of American passenger rail and has come to appreciate NARP's vital role in supporting this system. He has assisted people at our Union Station kiosk and communicated via phone and email with NARP members. Davis's research will help NARP to better communicate with towns and cities along Amtrak's lines, in an effort



-Elizabeth Oblinger, Office of Sen. Portman

NARP's interns met June 13 with Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH). From left: NARP Resource Development [and Intern Program] Coordinator Luis Olmo-Rivera, intern Davis Strench, Sen. Portman, interns Chris Romero, Riley Whitelock and Yufan Cui.

to strengthen the advocacy of Amtrak communities at the grassroots level.

Riley Whitelock of Vancouver, BC, majors in U.S. Studies at the University of British Columbia. He aspires to a career in diplomacy, lobbying, and government. He would like to pursue his graduate degree in the U.S.

At NARP, he has done research supporting California High-Speed Rail and the restoration of Amtrak service from New Orleans to Florida. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Missouri River Runner changes July 9-Oct. 20: Due to Union Pacific trackwork west of Jefferson City, westbound train 311 departs St. Louis at 7:15 AM, making all stops two hours *earlier* than normal; eastbound train 314 departs Kansas City at 7:15

AM, making all stops one hour *earlier* (breaking connection from eastbound *Southwest Chief*); eastbound train 316 departs Kansas City at 5:00 PM and makes all stops one hour *later*. No change to evening westbound train 313.