



News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

www.narprail.org

January 1999

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Vol. 33

## South Gets Expanded Corridor Designations

Secretary of Transportation Rodney Slater has defined the Gulf Coast High Speed Rail Corridor and announced two big extensions of the existing Southeast corridor.

At a New Orleans conference Nov. 18, he said the Gulf Coast line will link "New Orleans with Baton Rouge, Houston, Mobile, Meridian and Birmingham." Attendees included Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), Mississippi Gov. Kirk Fordice, Wisconsin Gov./Amtrak Chair Tommy Thompson, Meridian Mayor (and Amtrak board member) John Robert Smith, New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial, NARP President/Georgia Rail Passenger Auth. Chair John R. Martin and representatives of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas state DOT's.

In Charlotte, Slater extended the Washington-Richmond-Raleigh-Charlotte corridor to Atlanta-Macon and from Raleigh to Columbia-Savannah-Jacksonville. North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt and Bank of America Vice President and CFO James Hance hosted the Dec. 1 event. Attendees included Amtrak Board Members Linwood Holton (former Virginia Gov.) and Amy Rosen; the Georgia, North Carolina and Virginia DOT secretaries; and a South Carolina transportation commissioner. Federal Railroad Administrator Jolene Molitoris and Acting Amtrak Chair George Warrington were at both events.

Slater (in Charlotte): "**High-speed rail is coming South—and it is coming in a mighty way...**[It] will be an essential part of a world-class 21st-century transportation system."

He can designate three new corridors. There is much interest in Chicago to Cleveland and to Indianapolis-Cincinnati (both could simply be extensions of the existing Midwest corridor). The Dec. 11 *Federal Register* seeks state input on new designations and on uses of hazard-elimination funding.

Designation makes lines eligible for the very limited amounts of federal high speed funding in the TEA-21 law (except last item is from 1994 Swift Act):

- Planning funds are authorized at \$10 million a year through 2001; the 2000 appropriation should be \$20 million (including 1999 authorization not previously funded).

- Grade-crossing funds include \$5.25 million a year "guaranteed" money in TEA-21 plus \$15 million a year authorized (both categories: 1999-2003; the \$15 million for 1999 was not requested or appropriated, so the 2000 budget should include \$30 million in addition to the guaranteed money).

- The Next Generation High-Speed Rail program (for technology improvements) is authorized at \$25 million a year through 2001; the fiscal 2000 budget should include \$34 million, of which \$9 million would be fiscal 1998 and 1999 authorized funds that were not requested or appropriated. ■

### AMTRAK IN SYRACUSE: BIG IMPROVEMENT!



—Bob Lenz

After opening to intercity (Greyhound/Trailways) and local (Centro) buses July 14, Syracuse's new William F. Walsh Regional Transportation Center welcomed Amtrak November 17. A \$5 Centro airport shuttle began six days later. Above, main building is at right, with Amtrak waiting area in the connecting concourse, and Amtrak high-level platform and canopy at left. The high platform makes boarding faster, easier. The graded area on the near side of the platform (left of concourse) is for the local OnTrack trains, which should start serving this station in the spring. The station "feels much more alive than the former bus and rail stations," says NARP Dir. Frank Barry. There are two fast-food outlets and a gift shop.

## DOT Inspector General: Mostly Positive on Amtrak

The job of the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General—as with all "OIG's"—is to probe for program shortcomings. In that light, the OIG's new Amtrak report (Nov. 23; released to public, Dec. 1) is remarkably positive.

This is the first of a series of reports on Amtrak financial performance and requirements through 2002, required of DOT by Amtrak's 1997 reauthorization law (Dec. '97 *News*). This report analyzes Amtrak's March, 1998, strategic business plan. However, Amtrak revised that plan in September; the OIG plans to issue a report on that revision in the spring.

The law requires DOT to contract with an independent party to assess Amtrak's financial requirements through 2002 and its bidding practices. The OIG is administering the studies. The lead "independent party" was The Battelle Memorial Institute. Other consultants involved were: Snavely King Majoros O'Connor & Lee, Inc.; Charles River Associates; Vanness Brackenridge Group; and Wilbur Smith Associates.

Kenneth M. Mead is Inspector General. He is a respected, veteran Washington analyst who—before coming to the DOT in 1997—was Transportation Issues Director of the Resources, Community, and Economic Development Division

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## Wheels of Progress

Here is our annual list of major rail passenger improvements planned to enter service and the dates of planned openings (if available). Dates and projects subject to change. *NARP News* regularly reports actual start-up dates.

### 1999

- **Feb.**—Amtrak West starts sixth daily Capitol round trip.
- **Feb.**—Amtrak West starts fifth San Joaquin daily frequency. Unlike the existing four trips that run Oakland-Stockton (ex-Santa Fe station)-Bakersfield, the new train will run Sacramento-Stockton (ex-Southern Pacific station, shared with Altamont commuter trains)-Bakersfield. It may be timed to connect with the Coast Starlight at Sacramento. The two Stockton stations are 1.5 miles apart. The train will run temporarily on a former Western Pacific route while repairs are made to the ex-SP route.
- **Feb.**—Rutland, VT, new station, built by city with federal funds.
- **Mar.**—Bombardier delivers first American Flyer high-speed train to Amtrak, for tests at Pueblo, Northeast Corridor.
- **Apr.**—Extension of Cape May Seashore Lines Cold Spring-downtown Cape May (2 mi.). Formal opening was December 18. The 10 miles from Cold Spring north to Cape May Courthouse opened in May 1996 using rail diesel cars as shuttle. Call 609/884-2675 for information.
- **May**—Amtrak passenger area/ticket office at Memphis Central Station complete. Platform and platform-level parking area were finished in November 1998; passengers use a temporary structure until May. Building renovation proceeds—to come are a police precinct office adjacent to the Amtrak area and transfer of transit agency offices to the station.
- **May**—Los Angeles Metro Red Line branch from Wilshire & Vermont to Hollywood & Vine.
- **May**—Single, daily Fort Worth-Oklahoma City Amtrak round-trip begins, funded in part by Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 funds received by the State of Oklahoma. Connects in Fort Worth with north- and southbound *Texas Eagle*.
- **Spring**—Regular 100-mph Amtrak service on Chicago-Detroit line in southwest Michigan, with completion of experimental positive train control signal system (Sept. '96 *News*). This is fastest regular speed outside the Northeast; track and signals—but not diesels assigned initially—good for 110 mph.
- **June**—New Amtrak San Diegan stop at Surf, CA.
- **Summer**—*Coast Starlight* Auto Train.
- **July**—Completion of Amtrak's New Haven-Boston electrification project.
- **Fall**—Amtrak West and Washington DOT start second Seattle-Vancouver *Cascade* (pending legislative approval).
- **Fall**—Vermont Agency of Transportation commuter rail, Burlington-Charlotte, 12 mi.
- **Fall**—At Route 128 (MA), to replace a 970-space surface lot, tiny station and ugly pedestrian bridge (steps, no elevator), MBTA is building a 2,800-space garage, Amtrak a spacious, modern station with high-level platforms, elevators, escalators.
- **Nov.**—First American Flyer high-speed train set (see Jan. '99) enters regular Amtrak service. Remaining sets gradually enter service through Fall 2000 timetable change.
- **Nov.**—The City of Modesto (CA) completes new, 3000-

sq. ft., \$1.7-million Amtrak station within city limits, replacing current station at Riverbank.

- **Nov.**—Kansas City Union Station renovation complete.
- **Nov.**—Los Angeles-Las Vegas Talgo train service begins, operated by Amtrak and Nevada DOT, with Nevada stops at State Line, Strip and Downtown Las Vegas.
- **Dec.**—Washington Metro U St.-Ft. Totten (Green Line—completes system but for a last Green Line segment in 2001).
- **Late**—Jacksonville Skyway extension San Marco-Riverplace-DuPont (0.4 mi.). This completes the 2.5-mile system. Extensions Hemming Place-FCCJ and across St. Johns River to San Marco opened October 30, 1998.
- **Late**—San Francisco Muni extension of F/Market streetcar line from Embarcadero to Fisherman's Wharf.
- **Sometime**—Jacksonville and West Palm Beach (FL) Amtrak service over Florida East Coast. This is the first passenger rail service to places like Daytona Beach and Melbourne since 1968 (first through-service from the Northeast since 1963). NARP opposes a version of this plan that would cut from two to one the number of daily round-trips between the big Orlando market and the Northeast.
- **Sometime**—Phase I of the Richmond (VA) Main St. Station intermodal terminal project is complete. Amtrak trains to and from Newport News begin calling there (they pass by now without stopping), in addition to Richmond Staples Mill.
- **Sometime** (or as early as possible in 2000)—Boston-Portland Amtrak service, four times a day, partly funded by State of Maine. Supplementary bus round trips planned as well, with interchangeable tickets. Real progress! Amtrak, Guilford and Maine have agreed on all issues except rail weight, which will be submitted to Surface Transportation Board.
- **Dec. 31**—Sounder, Tacoma-Seattle commuter rail (40 mi.), two trips daily, more service added in 2000 and 2001.

### 2000

- **Mar.**—New Jersey Transit (NJT) Hudson Waterfront LRT phase 1, Hoboken-Bayonne (10 mi.).
- **Mar.**—Transit Express (TRAX) light rail, Salt Lake City-Sandy, 15 mi.
- **Early**—Santa Clara Tasman West LRT extension Old Ironsides (Great America)-Moffett Field-Mountain View (Caltrain), 7.6 mi.
- **Early**—Tampa-Ybor City streetcar circulator.
- **Spring**—Kenosha Transit's downtown streetcar circulator line, running on 54th and 56th Sts. from the Metra commuter rail station almost a mile to the lakefront Harborpark development. With five PCC's already bought from Toronto, this will be Wisconsin's first electric rail transit in over 35 years.
- **Spring**—Twice daily Amtrak service between Cleveland and Columbus, sponsored by the State of Ohio as a transportation alternative to a massive I-71 reconstruction project.
- **May**—Los Angeles Metro Red Line extension from Hollywood & Vine to North Hollywood (6.3 mi.).
- **July**—Denver LRT extension, I-25/Broadway to Mineral Ave. (Littleton).
- **"Mid"**—Amtrak's Sacramento San Joaquin rerouted to ex-Southern Pacific route north of Stockton; serving Lodi.
- **"Mid"**—Metro-North commuter rail extension Dover Plains-Wassaic, NY, 4.4 mi.

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## OIG Report on Amtrak

(from page 1)

of Congress's General Accounting Office. Then, as now, his responsibilities included reviewing Amtrak.

Mead's new report has two key bottom lines. **First**, OIG found that, in fiscal 2003, Amtrak *might* have an unfunded cash loss \$167 million greater than the \$137 million loss Amtrak projected last March. ["Unfunded cash loss" excludes (a) "excess" Railroad Retirement and Railroad Unemployment Insurance; (b) depreciation and certain post-retirement employee benefit expenses; and (c) capital for progressive equipment overhauls. For fiscal 2002, Amtrak revised plan projects a zero unfunded cash loss and total revenues of \$2.5 billion, up 46% from \$1.7 billion in 1998.]

Many reporters took this OIG sentence out of context: "The bottom line is that the March [Amtrak Strategic Business] Plan would not achieve Amtrak's mandated goal of operating self-

sufficiency by 2003."

To those who noted the word "would," these other, widely-ignored sentences from the report will not be surprising: "We do not expect [the \$167 million divergence] to actually occur, because Amtrak has already indicated that it has made adjustments in the 1999 business plan and will make additional changes in future years...Amtrak has 5 years in the Plan period, which may be enough time to respond to our concerns with alternative plans for achieving its financial goals. Amtrak has shown its ability to compensate for non-performing or withdrawn [business plan actions] in the past..."

**Second**, the report underlines that, starting in fiscal 2001, Amtrak will need more capital funding than would come from TRA funds already enacted plus appropriations the Clinton Administration has promised.

The OIG says the fiscal 2001 shortfall would be \$501 million for its "**developmental**" scenario, which lets Amtrak partner with states to upgrade corridor services outside the Northeast Corridor and replace elderly New York-Washington infrastructure, increasing speeds there from 135 to 150 mph.

The report notes, "Amtrak is beginning a market-based study that will recommend changes to services and route structure. This information should be used to refine and justify the future capital needs for Amtrak's national system."

The report also outlines two, less-desirable capital-spending scenarios: a "**sustainable**" level just enough to permit long-term survival without a fall in service quality; and a "**minimum,**" **limp-along** scenario.

The fiscal 2001 "sustainability" shortfall would be \$183 million. Funding that gap would keep equipment heavy overhauls on schedule, upgrade mechanical facilities in Seattle, Oakland and Los Angeles, and permit investment in various station, Auto Train and mail and express facilities.

Even just to limp along at the minimum level, however, "TRA-plus-promised" funding would fall \$60 million short in 2001.

**The danger is that Amtrak might get limp-along funding falsely billed as adequate for service expansion the public wants.**

The OIG endorsed most of Amtrak's cost estimates, and gave a clean bill of health on bidding practices, where Amtrak competes with private firms. OIG suggests Amtrak overestimates projected revenues, particularly in the Northeast Corridor. However, the report includes Amtrak's response, devoted largely to a persuasive rebuttal on this point.

For both express and NEC revenues, the OIG's disagreement with Amtrak is one of timing. For express, the disagreement is primarily over 1999 and 2000 estimates. For NEC revenues, the OIG says its "calculations indicate that by 2006, Amtrak's projections and ours may converge."

Why the fuss about 2002, when projections for shorter periods are unreliable? The 1997 Amtrak law requires the Amtrak Reform Council and Amtrak, respectively, to develop restructuring/rationalization and liquidation plans if—any time after October 12, 2000—the Council tells Congress and the President that Amtrak is missing financial goals and/or will require operating grants after 2002. (A short-term cash loss that commercial borrowing could cover would not spell doom.) ■

The OIG report is available on-line through a NARP web site link, <<http://www.narprail.org/res.htm#reports>>, or by calling OIG at 202/366-9970.

## Wheels of Progress

(from page 2)

- **"Mid"**—NJ Transit Newark City Subway (light rail) extension Franklin Ave.-Bloomfield Ave. (1/2 mi).
- **Dec.**—NJ Transit Montclair Connection, allowing direct access to Manhattan from Boonton Line stations.
- **Dec.**—Atlanta MARTA North Line extension Dunwoody-North Springs (4.7 mi.). ■

### NEW TALGOS DEDICATED TO CASCADE SERVICE



—Jim Hamre



Ceremonies were held along the Cascade Corridor in the Pacific Northwest November 30 to christen the three new Talgo tilt-train sets assembled in Seattle. Due to late delivery of some on-board components, start of revenue service on Amtrak's *Cascade* trains was delayed into December.

The sets, owned by Amtrak and the State of Washington, are named *Mount Rainier*, *Mount Hood*, and *Mount Baker*. The first train was delivered November 9 and sent to the Transportation Technology Center at Pueblo, CO, for testing.

At left is the bistro car interior (note map on ceiling).

—Warren Yee

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**New Mileage Plan:** Starting February 1, Amtrak West passengers (*Coast Starlight*, *Cascades*, California corridors) can earn Alaska Airlines miles. Fill out an application (available in stations and on-board) and mileage accrual forms (for each trip, also available in stations and on-board, to be given to conductor when ticket is lifted). Miles also usable on Amtrak West trains, some Northwest, Qantas, SAS, and British Airways routes. Information—Alaska Airlines, 800/654-5669.

**Thruways:** New buses connect Miami Amtrak station (to/from *Silver Star* and *Palm*) with University Metrorail Station (Amtrak code USM) and Dadeland North Metrorail Station (MDF).

Since December 15, a bus from Silverthorne, Vail, and

Eagle, CO, connects to the westbound *California Zephyr* at Glenwood Springs (previously, only the opposite direction was possible).

Pittsburgh-Hagerstown-Frederick-Washington starts Jan. 12, connects with *Pennsylvanian* to/from west. (New stops, ticketing for existing Greyhound runs.)

Macon-Atlanta starts January 12, connecting with *Crescent* to and from north (transfer provided between Atlanta Amtrak and Greyhound stations).

**Bikes on Trains:** Amtrak's existing policy for handling unboxed bikes on Kansas City-St. Louis trains (June '97 *News*) has been extended to Chicago-St. Louis trains, the Chicago-Quincy *Illinois Zephyr* and the Chicago-Carbondale *Illini*. Reserve at least 24 hours before travel (\$10 charge).

1999 AMTRAK CALENDAR—The *Texas Eagle*, shown at Fort Worth in a watercolor by Ted Rose, is featured on the 1999 Amtrak 12-month wall calendar. They are available

from Amtrak Calendar, P.O. Box 7717, Itasca, IL 60143. It costs \$6 (2 for \$10, 3 for \$14, and bigger discounts for larger quantities), delivery takes two weeks.

## NEW STATION REVIVAL BOOK

The Great American Station Foundation has released the *Guidebook on Train Station Revitalization*, calling it "a must if you're considering revitalizing or rehabilitating a train station in your community" of any size. It is written by Ronald C. Sheck, Ph.D. (deeply involved in restoring Tampa Union Station) and Will James. The 200-page book costs \$79 (\$49 for Foundation members), plus \$7.50 per book for shipping, with discounts available for five or more copies. The Foundation is at 10 G St., N.E., 3rd fl. east, Washington, DC 20002, 202/906-4195, <www.stationfoundation.org>.

UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE			Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation (Required by 39 USC 3685)		
1. Publication Title News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers	2. Publication Number 0 7 3 9 - 3 4 9 0	3. Filing Date 12/10/98			
4. Issue Frequency Monthly	5. Number of Issues Published Annually 11	6. Annual Subscription Price \$ 24.00			
7. Complete Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication (Not printer) (Street, city, county, state, and ZIP+4) 900 Second Street, NE Suite 308 Washington, DC 20002-3557			General Purpose Jane Colgrove Telephone (202)408-8362		
8. Complete Mailing Address of Headquarters or General Business Office of Publisher (Not printer) See Above					
9. Full Names and Complete Mailing Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor (Do not leave blank) Publisher (Name and complete mailing address): Ross B. Capon NARP - 900 Second Street NE Suite 308, Washington, DC 20002-3557 Editor (Name and complete mailing address): See Above Managing Editor (Name and complete mailing address): N/A					
10. Owner (Do not leave blank. If the publication is owned by a corporation, give the name and address of the corporation immediately followed by the names and addresses of all stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of the total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, give the names and addresses of all individual owners. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, give its name and address as well as those of each individual owner. If the publication is published by a corporation or other organization, give its name and address.)					
Full Name National Association of Railroad Passengers			Complete Mailing Address 900 Second Street, NE #308 Washington, DC 20002-3557		
11. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities. If none, check box. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> None Full Name Complete Mailing Address					
12. Tax Status (For completion by nonprofit organizations authorized to mail at special rates) (Check one) <input type="checkbox"/> The purpose, function, and nonprofit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes. <input type="checkbox"/> Has Not Changed During Preceding 12 Months <input type="checkbox"/> Has Changed During Preceding 12 Months (Publisher must submit explanation of change with this statement) 501 (c) (3)					
PS Form 3526, September 1995 (See Instructions on Reverse)					

13. Publication Title News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers		14. Issue Date for Circulation Data Below January, 1999	
15. Extent and Nature of Circulation		Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
a. Total Number of Copies (Net press run)		14,429	14,500
b. Paid and/or Requested Circulation (1) Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales (Not mail) (2) Paid or Requested Mail Subscriptions (Include advertiser-solicited copies and exchange copies)		-0-	-0-
c. Total Paid and/or Requested Circulation (Sum of 15b(1) and 15b(2))		11,518	12,176
d. Free Distribution by Mail (Carriers, complimentary, and other free)		1,726	1,730
e. Free Distribution Outside the Mail (Carriers or other means)		200	200
f. Total Free Distribution (Sum of 15d and 15e)		1,926	1,930
g. Total Distribution (Sum of 15c and 15f)		13,444	14,106
h. Copies not Distributed (1) Office Use, Leftovers, Spoiled (2) Return to News Agents		985	394
i. Total (Sum of 15g and 15h)		14,429	14,500
Percent Paid and/or Requested Circulation (15c plus 15d plus 15e)		86%	87%
16. Publication of Statement of Ownership <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Publication required. Will be printed in the January, 1999 issue of this publication. <input type="checkbox"/> Publication not required.			
17. Signature and Title of Editor, Publisher, Business Manager, or Owner Date Ross B. Capon Executive Director 12/10/98			
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## News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers

Vol. 33, No. 1  January 1999



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News from the National Association of Railroad Passengers (ISSN 0739-3490), is published monthly except November by NARP; 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 308; Washington, DC 20002-3557; (202) 408-8362, fax (202) 408-8287, e-mail [narp@narprail.org](mailto:narp@narprail.org), web [www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org). ©1998 National Association of Railroad Passengers. All rights reserved. Membership dues are \$24/year (\$12 under 21 or over 65) of which \$5 is for a subscription to NARP News. For the latest passenger rail news, call the NARP Hotline: 1-900-988-RAIL (\$1.20 per minute, most messages last 4 minutes; service available 24 hours a day; callers under 18 must have parental permission to use this service; updated at least every Friday PM).

**Postmaster:** send address changes to National Association of Railroad Passengers; 900 Second Street, NE, Suite 308; Washington, DC 20002-3557.

(This has news through Dec. 11. Vol 32, No. 11 was mailed first-class Dec. 2.)

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At Washington, D.C.