



Strong “Pro-Rail” Votes, Ticket Sales

Record Amtrak Ridership; Austin, Denver Endorse Commuter Rail

“We are very happy with our ridership numbers. The increases have been across all our services—corridor trains as well as long-distance trains. The numbers show that people like our trains, and our challenge over the near term is to keep our costs under control while improving the service for our passengers.”

—President and CEO David L. Gunn in Amtrak October 14 release

Amtrak intercity trains carried 25.05 million passengers in fiscal 2004, the twelve months ending September 30. This was a 4.3% increase from the 24.0 million previous record in fiscal 2003.

Ridership growth came in spite of major disruptions from hurricanes and tropical storms (147 trains cancelled, 178 operated short of their destinations), the two national political conventions, the

ongoing Union Pacific capacity crisis, and scheduled track work that reduced Florida service in parts of April-May-June.

The New York-Charleston (WV)-Cincinnati-Chicago *Cardinal* was up 23% thanks to extension of the train to New York City, a move urged by NARP. The Washington-Chicago *Capitol Limited* rose 17% and the *Texas Eagle* 10%.

Midwest corridors showed these impressive increases: Chicago-Grand Rapids 20%, Chicago-Port Huron 17% (aided by rescheduling in April), Chicago-Detroit 12%, Chicago-Milwaukee 10%, and Chicago-St. Louis 9%.

Ridership growth on the Grand Rapids and Port Huron lines contributed to a happy ending to efforts to secure continued funding in the Michigan legislature. As one Amtrak official put it, “The trains sold themselves. If we still had the *International* with declining ridership, we probably would have lost the trains.”

Fiscal 2004 yield (average fare paid per mile traveled by one passenger) rose slightly for long-distance trains overall, and likewise for short-distance trains overall. ■



—Ross B. Capon

Southwest Chief fiscal 2004 ridership was up 6.1% from the previous year. The *Chief* is seen at Albuquerque, NM, on October 6 (sixth day of fiscal 2005). The train waited here one hour 37 minutes, but schedule tightening is expected in April (page two).

Transit—“Clearly Not a Partisan Issue”—Has Banner Election Day

On election day, “initiatives that fund transit garnered 62% support...Of the decided 28 measures, 22 initiatives...that include public transportation funding were approved. [Note: Later results indicate approval of 24 out of 31 initiatives.] Eighteen were approved earlier this year for a total of 40 [now 42] approved initiatives so far in 2004, reflecting a staggering win rate of 80%. **The increase is being driven in large part by citizen demand for more transportation choices,**” according to the Center for Transportation Excellence (CFTE; <www.cfte.org>).

Stephanie Vance, CFTE’s program

manager, said: “**This clearly is not a partisan issue. Of the states that passed initiatives [November 2], seven went for President Bush and four went for Senator Kerry.**”

Denver: The \$4.7 billion issue passed 57%-42% with strong business community support but intense opposition from Gov. Bill Owens (R). The six-county Regional Transportation District sales tax rises to 1.0% (from 0.6%), funding transit improvements in nine major corridors, including more light rail, Longmont-Boulder-Denver commuter rail, and parking facilities at existing transit stations.

Austin: Voters approved a Leander-Austin commuter rail line. Target for service start-up: 2008. Capital Metro has gone “from disgrace in 1997 to a 62% OK for rail from Central Texas voters” (Austin *American-Statesmen*, Nov. 4).

Phoenix: Endorsed by a 57-43 margin, Proposition 400 continues for another 20 years Maricopa County’s half cent sales tax for transportation, adding 27 miles to the already-approved 20-mile light rail system, as well as expanding bus service and the freeway network.

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Mail-related train changes and cuts; NARP's Idea To Save *Three Rivers*

Amtrak left the mail business as planned (see story below), but the decision's timing meant that beneficial changes to many national network schedules must wait until April, 2005. One exception: the November timetable has New York-Florida mail-related changes, since elimination of the RoadRailers used for Florida mail was planned earlier.

NARP told Amtrak that the *Silver Meteor* is scheduled too late north, too early south. For the April timetable, Amtrak is considering moving the southbound New York departure an hour later, 3:15 PM, near the early 1990's time. This would restore connections from upstate New York which were broken November 1.

Northbound, the new, 88-minute connection in New York City from *Meteor* to *Lake Shore Limited* (last departure of the day for points beyond Albany) is unreliable. NARP has urged Amtrak to address that as well. Amtrak may swap Chicago arrivals, with *Lake Shore Limited* running later and the *Capitol Limited* earlier.

Amtrak still plans to end its New York-Pittsburgh-Chicago train March 1, 2005, but—contrary to our report last month—the *Three Rivers* name stays with the now-coach-only train while it lasts.

NARP expressed opposition to dropping the *Three Rivers* in messages to Amtrak President David L. Gunn on September 3 (the day the cuts were announced) and September 10. On October 8, NARP wrote to Gunn again, urging that *Three Rivers* be saved by rerouting it via Cleveland and Toledo (*Capitol Limited* route) and altering the schedule to run New York-Pittsburgh overnight, Pittsburgh-Chicago by day. This would be Amtrak's first Chicago-Cleveland train with attractive times in both directions and

both endpoints (and all Indiana and Ohio intermediate points). Although four cities would lose service, three are relatively close to the new route and Youngstown could retain service (see caption below).

Getting Amtrak to seriously consider this, however, would take a bigger financial commitment from Ohio. If the state will not provide operating grants, capital investment would be needed to improve overall operation in Ohio of both the *Capitol Limited* and *Lake Shore Limited*.



—Jack Slanina

The *Three Rivers* at Youngstown, where service likely will end March 1, 2005 (in addition to previous loss of all commercial air service in April 2004). If Ohio funds construction of a track connection at Ravenna, more frequent, long-term service would be possible.

Amtrak Exits the Mail Business

Carriage of mail on U.S. intercity passenger trains was common from near the rail industry's start in the early 1800's, but ended in early October when Amtrak

left the mail business. Amtrak's September 3 announcement surprised many.

As noted last month, small-package express continues. Its profitability has

not been questioned—although Amtrak needs to give it more visibility—and it has not been accused of adversely affecting scheduling and reliability.

Amtrak's mail—and passenger—operations suffered from the rapid expansion of the freight ("express") program in the 1990's. Mail was hurt again in 2002 when freight railroads limited materials handling cars (MHCs) to 60 mph (vs. Amtrak top speeds of 70 to 79 or even 90 mph), after over a decade of operation at the higher speeds. This confined mail to large box cars purchased for express. These cars could not run at the front of trains because they were not wired to pass through "head end power" from locomotives to passenger cars.

Amtrak President and CEO David L. Gunn says he is open to carrying mail in wired cars—with no mail handling at intermediate cities—but, for now at least, no one wants to pay for the wiring.

Ultimately, the mail operation also was



—Ross B. Capon

ExpressTrak and RoadRailer cars at rear of the *Southwest Chief* in La Junta, CO, June 8, 2003. Amtrak sold RoadRailers to Norfolk Southern, but still handles ExpressTrak cars (refrigerated box cars) by order of the court overseeing the ExpressTrak bankruptcy.

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Jane Colgrove Takes Chorus America Position

Jane L. Colgrove, after 17 1/2 years of service as NARP Membership Director left at the end of September to become director of finance and administration at Chorus America, <<http://www.chorusamerica.org>>, which works to “strengthen choruses and increase appreciation of choral music...”

This fits well with her love of music and her part-time work as organist and choir director—currently at Wesley United Methodist Church, Alexandria, VA.

Colgrove is shown below with Rep. Jack Quinn, R-NY, at the NARP Board's April, 2003, Washington reception. She joined NARP on April 8, 1987 and was introduced to NARP members in the June 1987 *NARP News*. In that article, I wrote, “Jane brings an unprecedented level of



professionalism to NARP's membership function. Her expertise will be critical in our efforts to expand revenues and membership,” which is exactly what she did during her 17 years with us.

Her tenure saw NARP post strong increases in membership and revenue. She also oversaw two overhauls of our membership database (the second of which brought membership functions to our website), computerizing our accounting, and serving as an invaluable adviser to your executive director.

In 1997, NARP recognized Colgrove with its “Golden Spike Award” for ten years of service to the organization. The plaque reads, in part: “The decade has seen her develop professionally so that in reality she serves also as Chief Financial Officer and Accountant. The nation's railroad passengers forever are in her debt.” Especially this one!

—Ross B. Capon

La'Toya Harrington Joins NARP Staff

La'Toya Harrington joined NARP as Director of Finance and Administration on September 20.

Since 2000, she was chief operating officer at Childrens Environmental Health Network, where her long list of responsibilities included overseeing a nearly \$2 million budget, handling all aspects of human resources, maintaining the financial database and reporting books, and advising the board of directors.

From 1998 to 2000, she was office and business manager for Refugees International, where she worked closely with a high profile board that included a former ambassador to the United Nations, a star of the TV show *Law and Order*, and Di-

rector and Animator Paul Berry.

Harrington was a personnel and payroll specialist for the Department of Health and Human Services from 1987 to 1998.

A native of Washington, DC, she has attended Prince Georges Community College (Largo, MD), majoring in business administration, and currently spends some evenings pursuing a theology degree at Tabernacle Bible Institute (Trinity College, Washington, DC). She also volunteers at area homeless shelters, mentors at-risk youths, travels singing gospel music and “spends a lot of time with my three ‘babies’: ‘Mother,’ niece Treasure and nephew Little Wheel.” ■

Railroads in New Tax Law

The American Jobs Creation Act of 2004 (H.R. 4520), which President Bush enacted October 22, fulfills two key rail industry objectives: repeal of the 4.3 cent a gallon deficit reduction fuel tax; \$500 million in tax credits for smaller freight railroads.

Since October 1, 1997, when the 4.3 cent tax paid by other forms of transportation was redirected to their mode-specific trust funds, railroads—which have no trust fund—have been the only transportation paying the 4.3 cents for deficit reduction. The new law cuts that to 3.3 cents on January 1, 2005 and 1.3 cents on July 1, 2005. The tax disappears January 1, 2007. Amtrak pays it, and estimates full repeal will save it \$2.7 million a year.

The tax credits for Class II and III railroads are earned on maintenance investments in track and infrastructure owned as of January 1, 2005. The companies argued that the impact on their track of today's heavier freight cars made such aid vital.

Rail Votes

(from page 1)

Florida: While Florida voters responded to Gov. Jeb Bush's (R) strong push to repeal the pro-high speed rail constitutional amendment they approved in 2000, this was more a vote against the “big bang” or “nothing-to-TGV-in-one-step” development theory than against any rail development. Bush has supported “in-

Mail & Express

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hurt by acquisition of a big RoadRailer fleet—trailers with rubber tires that could easily switch between rail and highway. The Postal Service loved this flexibility, but Amtrak's mechanical people did not love the cars, and—like box cars—RoadRailers could only operate at the ends of trains.

Hopefully, Amtrak will reap big financial benefits from the improved reliability expected with elimination of mail, and from next April's timetable changes, which are expected to include faster schedules (due to removal of time for mail handling at intermediate points) and better time slots. For example, with mail, the *Southwest Chief* could depart from only one track in Chicago—a track that had to be vacated early enough to accommodate an early, eastbound *Empire Builder*. Without mail, Amtrak hopes to set back the *Chief's* Chicago departure from 3:15 PM to 4:00 or later. ■

For the latest news, visit our website at <www.narprail.org>. Our news hotline is posted Friday afternoon.

cremental” development before, including \$64 million over five years to put Amtrak service on the Florida East Coast line (“Florida Gov. Bush: Trains ‘Just the Ticket,’” January 2002 *NARP News* lead story), a project shelved by Amtrak's financial problems. Already, Florida officials are dusting off their 2002 “Florida Intercity Passenger Rail Service Vision Plan” (September 2000 *NARP News*). ■

Rail Travel Tips

Tip #3—Amtrak passengers ride free on SEPTA commuter trains between Philadelphia's 30th Street Station, Penn Center/Suburban station, and Market East station. Outbound passengers show Amtrak ticket; inbound passengers ticket stub.

Useful for travel to or from Center City Philadelphia, including the intercity bus terminal adjacent to Market East. SEPTA's regular fare currently is \$3.50.

Tip #4—Pick up a copy of the New York By Rail Travel Guide for insight into attractions across the Empire State that are accessible by Amtrak train and Thruway Motorcoach connections.

This guide, published in September, has a wealth of information about attractions in New York State—some of which you may not have realized are accessible by train! The 2004 edition is available from travel agents, tour operators, "I Love New York" information centers, Amtrak stations (and 1-800-USA-RAIL), and hotels and attractions near the stations.

Correction

Last issue, the New York-Rutland (VT) *Ethan Allen* should have been on our list of trains that are newly all-reserved (including New York-Albany segment).

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Transit—Little Rock, Ark. opened the first segment of its 2.5 mile River Rail Electric Streetcar route November 1. The route links Little Rock and North Little Rock, on opposite sides of the Arkansas River.

Winter/Fall Timetable—Beyond what we listed in our last issue, these changes also took effect November 1:

- All Saturday and Sunday *Regional* trains in the Northeast Corridor are reserved.
- Boston-Albany section of New York-Chicago *Lake Shore Limited* again became a separate train. Cross-platform transfer at Albany-Rensselaer; checked baggage service continues; sleeping car passengers ride east of Albany in ex-Metroliner First Class car.

[To improve New York-Chicago *Lake Shore Limited* wintertime reliability, Amtrak plans no switching at Albany and New York City; and will cycle equipment in and out of Florida to insure frequent, complete thawing.]

- Times at General Mitchell Airport in Milwaukee for *Hiawatha* trains are listed (code: MKA), grand opening currently slated for November 22.
- Most sleeping car room names change to better match expectations and reality. Standard Bedroom becomes "Roomette," Deluxe Bedroom becomes "Bedroom" (with Superliner

or Viewliner prefix). Viewliner Roomettes have private wash-basin and toilet, Superliner Roomettes do not. No change in naming of Family and Accessible rooms.

• Amtrak says luggage requirements are to be strictly enforced. NARP expressed strong concern about this to Amtrak, noting that the communications barrage seems aimed at discouraging employees from using good judgment. Two carry-on bags per person (but many items don't count). For details, go to <www.amtrak.com> and click on "Traveling With Amtrak" or call Amtrak's toll-free number (1-800-872-7245).

Thanksgiving Reminder—*Pacific Surfliners* and *Regional* trains are all-reserved November 23 -29.

Amtrak Vacations—Private Label Travel, the vendor for Amtrak Vacations, ceased operations. Amtrak is honoring all paid Amtrak Vacations packages, but is not taking new bookings (this includes Air-Rail with United Airlines). Call 1-800-805-9114 if you have paid for an Amtrak Vacations package. Amtrak is not offering monetary refunds for fully or partially paid packages, but will provide a voucher good towards a future Amtrak trip.

Exception: Yankee Holidays (1-877-579-9217) is making new bookings (and honoring old ones) for the Rockette's Radio City Music Hall Christmas Spectacular packages.



National Association of Railroad Passengers

NARP News

Vol. 38, No. 10 October-November 2004

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National Association of Railroad Passengers *NARP News* (ISSN 0739-3490), published monthly (except Nov.) by NARP; 900 Second St., NE, Suite 308; Washington, DC 20002-3557; 202/408-8362, fax 202/408-8287, <narp@narprail.org>, <www.narprail.org>. ©2004 National Association of Railroad Passengers. All rights reserved. Membership dues \$30/year (\$16 under 21/over 65), of which \$5 is a subscription to *NARP News*. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices.

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

(This has news through November 9. Vol. 38, No. 9 was mailed first-class October 1.)