



## House Appropriations Committee Likely to Have Very Bad News

The House transportation/housing fiscal 2012 funding bill is likely to zero out the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) grant program and impose sharp cuts on Amtrak. The subcommittee markup was expected July 14, with full committee action July 26. The bill may be on the floor Labor Day week.

To eliminate funds for HSIPR would ig-

nore that this program is oversubscribed, creates or maintains jobs and offers benefits to travelers and national security.

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Patty Murray (D-WA) would like to provide the authorized \$850 million for HSIPR, but this requires that her subcommittee get a funding allocation larger than this year's.

If the allocation is unchanged, HSIPR would be reduced. If the allocation is reduced, the House's zero may prevail.

Most Senate appropriations bills await outcome of the debt ceiling fight. The White House says an agreement is needed by July 22 to avoid an August 2 first-ever default on the nation's debt.

*(continued on p. 2)*

## House Transportation Committee Considers Amtrak Privatization *NARP's Comments Call Attention to Negative Consequences*

House Transportation & Infrastructure (T&I) Committee Chairman John Mica (R-FL), though known for referring derisively to Amtrak as a "Soviet-style" railroad, showed a more nuanced view at his June 22 passenger train hearing.

At issue was a draft bill prepared at the request of Mica and Subcommittee Chair Bill Shuster (R-PA), "Competition for Intercity Passenger Rail in America Act."

In contrast with their May 26 hearing, "Opening the Northeast Corridor (NEC)

to Private Competition for the Development of High-Speed Rail," Mica accepted two witnesses rather than one from the Democrats' wish list—Amtrak President Joseph Boardman (not invited for the May 26 hearing) and AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department President Edward Wytkind.

As drafted, the bill would transfer the NEC from Amtrak to U.S. DOT. The goals are to maximize private investment and *within 10 years* realize two-hour New

York-Washington and 2 1/2-hour New York-Boston service while doubling the number of departures.

The bill also would allow private carriers to bid to operate *any* Amtrak route.

Later in the hearing, Boardman told the chairman, "Anything you want to do can be done through Amtrak."

Mica: "I'm not sure I want to create another entity. I'm not trying to do away with Amtrak or national service. Do you have

*(continued on p. 3)*

## Amtrak Fights High Water and Wildfires



- Ross Capon

The Minot, ND Amtrak station, shown Oct. 15, 2008, with the westbound *Empire Builder*. An extensive renovation was completed in Nov. 2008, done by a volunteer crew funded by a state DOT grant.



- BNSF Railway

Souris River surrounds station, protected by a temporary levee, on June 24. The flood, the worst in 120 years, has curtailed service temporarily and taken homes of thousands, including some Amtrak agents.

Fires in New Mexico forced some *Southwest Chief* runs to detour via the Texas panhandle, and high water curtailed some *California Zephyr* trips.

*Empire Builder* had the biggest weather-related issues, all involving floods. Most dramatic is flooding at Minot, which

has caused temporary cessation of service Havre-St. Paul service (see Travelers' Advisory).

Earlier, many trips bypassed Devils Lake due to high water there or were canceled due to high water on the main freight route through New Rockford.

Efforts to protect Devils Lake service long term may succeed, based on three-way cost split BNSF/Amtrak/state and federal funds. At this writing, the latter third has not been nailed down (*Devils LakeJournal.com* June 16) ■

## Budget Threat *from page 1*

As part of a compromise with Republicans, the White House reportedly has identified \$1 trillion in budget cuts over 10 years; what those cuts involve is not known.

The higher the Senate's number, the better the final result (from House-Senate conference committee) is likely to be.

Some have said the structure of the White House \$8 billion passenger train budget request has not been helpful for Amtrak. The budget does have a table that shows what is intended for Amtrak and other intercity rail programs. (See "Crosswalk from FY 2010 Passenger Rail Grants to National High Performance Rail System" at [www.dot.gov/budget/2012/budgetestimates/fra.pdf](http://www.dot.gov/budget/2012/budgetestimates/fra.pdf))

But *all* transportation interests are frustrated with the lack of leadership on finding revenues just to maintain today's inadequate investment levels.

Reports say a House Republican surface transportation bill will have \$230 billion over six years, compared with \$286.5 billion in the six-year 2005 law. The new bill assumes no increase in the gas tax and no further general fund bailout of the Highway Trust Fund (HTF). Transit, partly funded by the HTF, would also get hit.

The situation does give train advocates an opportunity to make common cause with other transportation interests.

In more outrageous news, the House Appropriations Committee on June 15—during consideration of the energy/water funding bill—approved a Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) amendment. This could kill \$1.028 billion in unobligated HSIPR funds (June News) including the \$450 million to raise Amtrak's New Brunswick, NJ-Morrisville, PA (west of Trenton) to 160 mph in the Congressman's own state. ■

### TAKE ACTION

Members of Congress pay attention to constituents who show up at meetings in their districts or write letters to their local newspapers.

**Go to [www.bit.ly/narplte](http://www.bit.ly/narplte) to quickly and easily send a letter to the editor of your local paper. There is a draft which you can easily edit to reflect your own reasons for supporting trains.**

## Dr. Vuchic: History Is On Our Side

University of Pennsylvania Professor Emeritus of Engineering and Urban Planning Vukan Vuchic, recipient of NARPs first-ever Academic Award, gave an overview of the challenges facing passenger train advocates before the NARP Council in Alexandria, VA on May 2. Excerpts from his presentation:

National goals should guide the design of our passenger rail system. We should always have a picture of the future, not only of short-term solutions to the current crisis.

National transportation systems need government leadership, including policies, regulation and various degrees and forms of financing. The federal government should not subsidize some modes—such as highways, transit and air—while it hardly keeps intercity rail on minimum survival level.

In practice, we still have many policies and developments that maximize oil use. ... Airline lobbies have been instrumental in preventing high-speed rail in Texas and other parts of our country. Rubber-tire companies have also contributed to obstacles in introducing contemporary high-speed rail systems.

Two years ago came what could be called "the Obama/LaHood revolution." Finally, we have someone who understands different transportation modes, and who wants to develop all modes that the country needs and will need even more in the future.

That is an important reversal from the anti-rail attacks, when some university professors launched the slogan that "Rail is a 19th-century technology." The answer to that is easy: "Highways are from Pharaohs times, and they are certainly not obsolete."

What is our immediate task? We should use an aggressive approach to upgrading passenger rail, as well as the introduction of high-speed rail in the U.S. Without high-speed rail we are losing competitiveness with about 20 industrialized countries which have or are building this most modern mode of intercity transportation...The arguments are on our side but we should make them more available to the country and the press. ■

*Our July 2010 News reported Dr. Vuchic's retirement and the forum held in his honor, and reviewed his career and accomplishments.*

## Sen. Collins Receives NARP Golden Spike



- Office of Sen. Collins/Official Photo

Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) receives the Golden Spike Award for her work to make Amtrak's *Downeaster* a reality. She is flanked by (L to R) NARP Vice Pres. Sean Jeans-Gail, TrainRiders/Northeast Pres./NARP Council Member Wayne Davis, NARP Pres. Ross Capon and Chairman Bob Stewart, Eugene K. Skoropowski (HNTB Corp.; former long-time NARP board member).

Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) was honored with NARP's Golden Spike Award on May 3, along with her colleague Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-ME) and Olympia Snowe and Rep. Louise Slaughter (D-NY) (June News).

Snowe and Collins were recognized for support of Amtrak and for working to restore Boston-Portland, ME service after a 35-year absence. The *Downeaster* is a big success, with five daily round-trips and 478,463 riders last year.. ■

the authority to offer a turnkey package [to private interests] or to separate the infrastructure? Have your attorneys looked at this? I don't mind giving Amtrak the authority to do this. Then I'm going to direct you to receive those offers. I realize federal money is needed."

Also in the hearing, American Public Transportation Assoc. President William Millar said the NEC is "incredibly complex, old and must be updated. About 700,000 Americans use it every day. We must be careful. When Conrail was divided up, it was found that some of it was too complex to disentangle."

Coalition of Northeastern Governors Exec. Dir. Anne Stubbs expressed concern about shifting costs, liability and insurance exposure to the states, as well as the fate of trains that use the NEC for part but not all of their runs, including the Harrisburg service, *Vermont* and Empire Corridor (New York-Niagara Falls).

Wytkind took strong exception to the contrast between the wording of the draft bill and Mica's assurances that "we are committed to preserving labor's existing benefits and wages."

Wytkind saw little value in the bill's giving displaced Amtrak employees hiring preferences. He objected to the lack of any requirement that the Railway Labor Act and other rail labor laws would apply to entities providing passenger rail under the Mica-Shuster bill.

**NARP's statement** submitted before the June 22 hearing said, "We do not believe the specific actions outlined in the

draft [competition] legislation will lead to the identified, attractive outcomes." As an alternative, NARP suggested serious review of specific opportunities for public-private partnerships, including to modernize the electrification infrastructure and integrate it into a wider grid.

We noted the bill's mandate for an "operating subsidy [for a private carrier] less than Amtrak's on average over the life of the contract." We suggested this would not be feasible since the carrier:

- lacking Amtrak's statutory right to track access (outside the NEC), inevitably would have to pay more than Amtrak;
- would have to reach a separate agreement with host railroads allocating responsibility for damages and indemnification;
- would want a profit; and
- *might* face host railroad demands that it insure against third party damages.

Noting repeated criticism of Amtrak by committee Republicans because Veolia underbid Amtrak by \$70 million for the Tri-Rail (South Florida) commuter rail contract, NARP said Veolia's exemption from rail labor laws was a big factor in the difference.

NARP noted that existing law offers more flexibility than the draft bill implies. For example, the California-funded Capitol Corridor (CC) contracts with BART to run the call center. [CC also does its own marketing; *Downeaster* has a private on-board food vendor.]

NARP criticized the bill for forcing Amtrak to give up any rolling stock a winning

contractor "identifies [as] required for the performance of the covered service." In the hearing, Boardman said most of the rolling stock is actually owned by banks and could not be transferred.

NARP questioned the ability of a multi-headed NEC Executive Committee to "make key decisions effectively" and to protect "optimum pathways for intercity trains, whose expeditious passage requires coordination with commuter schedules in multiple metro areas."

Seeing that Chairman Mica reiterated "apples-and-oranges" NEC ridership figures originally presented May 26 although corrected data had been provided, NARP repeated part of its May 26 statement: "On an apples-to-apples basis, ridership on the Boston-Washington spine rose from 6.4 million in 1976 and 6.8 million in 1977 to 10.4 million in 2010. Thus 2010 ridership was 62.5% higher than the 1976 level and 52.9% above 1977."

Growth was not greater because Amtrak has been required to maximize revenues, not ridership; does not have the rolling stock that would be required for the crowds that would ride with lower fares; and faces "'choke points' that partly stem from the tripling of NEC commuter trains since 1976." ■

*Our May 26 hearing statement is at [www.bit.ly/narp526](http://www.bit.ly/narp526), our June 22 statement is at [www.bit.ly/narp622](http://www.bit.ly/narp622). You can watch both hearings by going to [transportation.house.gov](http://transportation.house.gov), then clicking "Hearings & Legislation," then "Hearings" (Windows Media Player required).*

#### IN BRIEF

**Florida:** Gov. Rick Scott finally on July 1 gave a thumbs up to SunRail (Central Florida Commuter Rail) by July 1 (March 2009 *News*). On June 28, "he sent his top transportation adviser...to warn local officials that they'll be on the hook if the project ultimately fails."

A June 28 *New York Times* report, "A Congressman's Pet Project; a Railroad's Boon," spotlighted Rep. John Mica's (R-FL) advocacy for the project, noting project benefits for CSX. Mica's prompt responding letter said, in part, "There is no more cost-effective solution to provide near-term relief to the region's increasing highway congestion."

**Iowa's** 2012 budget has a small amount to keep the proposed Chicago-Quad Cities-Iowa City train alive, but not full funding to begin construction. Train advocates must convince legislators to commit more funds in the 2013 budget in order to receive \$280 million in federal funds.

**North Carolina:** The latest version of the 2012 budget restores funding to extend Charlotte's light-rail line northeast to the UNC at Charlotte campus, but still requires legislative approval for the state to accept further federal funding for intercity passenger trains.

**Vermont's** 2012 budget enables \$55 million in mostly federal rail spending.

This includes \$34 million to upgrade the New England Central Railroad tracks for Amtrak's *Vermont*. Project should be completed by summer's end. The state will continue to pursue federal grants to extend the *Ethan Allen Express* north to Burlington.

**Northeast Corridor:** DOT Secretary Ray LaHood on June 29 announced a \$562.9 million federal "RRIF" loan to Amtrak for 70 high performance Siemens electric locomotives, spare parts, and maintenance facility upgrades. Amtrak expects to fund the debt service payments from improved revenues thanks to more reliable locomotives



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

## More NYC-Pittsburgh Trains?

The Keystone West High Speed Rail Study was set up to look at ways to improve passenger train service between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh. The Federal Railroad Administration is covering half of the \$1.5 million cost through the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail grant program (HSIPR), matched by state funds.

A Pennsylvania Department of Transportation official described the study's goal as modest, aiming for gradual improvement in service. The result should be faster, more frequent service and better connectivity to other modes of transport.

Robert Garrett of PennDOT, Project Manager for the study, and consultant Rick Shannon

talked about the project at the monthly meeting of Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail (WPPR). The audience included Pittsburgh and Greensburg planning and elected officials and representatives from nonprofits and private industry.

Garrett will make another presentation at the Railroaders Memorial Museum in Altoona, PA, in August.

WPPR was founded less than two years ago to bring more and better passenger train service to western Pennsylvania. NARP State Representatives Michael Alexander and Ken Joseph are co-organizers of WPPR.

Our thanks to Michael for providing the information for this article. ■

## NARP Well Received on Train Tour



-Gary Pancavage

Amtrak's 40th anniversary exhibit train leaves Strasburg, PA on the Strasburg Railroad Jun. 26. The train is on a cross-country tour, showcasing Amtrak memorabilia and a NARP-sponsored display on the future of American passenger trains.

NARP Chairman Bob Stewart says many visitors at Strasburg expressed support for more trains. "It was a wonderful opportunity to interact with folks. Volunteering is a great experience and helps us get new members and spread the message."

On weekends July 9-Sept. 3, the train will visit Springfield MA, New Haven, New London CT, Providence, Boston, Freeport ME, Burlington VT, Albany and Scranton (Steamtown) in that order. After that, it will head to the west coast through Chicago, returning to Washington via the south and southeast.

Contact the NARP office if you'd like to help promote NARP at any of the train's upcoming stops.

### TRAVELER'S ADVISORY

**Builder suspended St. Paul-Havre:** Due to historic flooding in Minot, ND, at least until July 19, the *Builder* will operate only Chicago-St. Paul (coaches & lounge only) and Seattle-Havre, MT (full-service train) with connecting motorcoach Spokane-Portland. No alternate transportation for missed stops.

**Vermont bus substitution:** On selected dates now through Sept. 15, buses will replace trains north of Springfield, MA, while New England Central Railroad does a major overhaul of its track for faster passenger service using Recovery Act funds (Dec. 2010 *News*). Details at [www.bit.ly/vtbusing](http://www.bit.ly/vtbusing)

**Michigan delays:** Norfolk Southern has restricted top speeds to 30 mph on portions of the line between Kalamazoo and Dearborn, delaying Detroit trains at least 75 min. and the Port Huron train at least 30 min. Michigan DOT has funds to buy the line and make repairs; negotiations continue.