

THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.trainweb.org/espa>



Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

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Jan/Feb 2004

Amtrak Ridership Hits November Record

Amtrak ended the busiest November in its 32-year history with a system-wide ridership total of 2,076,054, up 11.7 percent over last year's total of 1,858,345. New York State routes increases included Empire Corridor trains up 6.3%, *Ethan Allan Express* up 2.3% and the *Lake Shore Limited* up a huge 30%. *The Adirondack* was modestly down .4%.

During the seven-day Thanksgiving travel period approximately 595,000 passengers rode Amtrak trains nationwide, making it the busiest week in Amtrak history. Thanksgiving ridership was up nine percent over last year and up five percent over the previous Thanksgiving record set in 2000 when ridership was 566,759. Overall Empire Corridor holiday ridership was over 4%.

Amtrak attributes the increases to an improving travel market and to Amtrak's "back-to-basics" approach to running the railroad.

CSX Doing an About Face

"This is pathetic," Amtrak President David Gunn said last January, as Amtrak's Beech Grove business car lurched through an interlocking on the CSX mainline west of Hoffmans. He was commenting on the track to his staff and three ESPA members aboard as invited guests—Bruce Becker, Bob Lenz and myself. We were on the rear of the westbound *Maple Leaf* enjoying snowy views along the ice-covered Mohawk River from the car's magnificent rear picture window.

But a lot has changed since then. For one thing, Chairman John Snow left CSX to head the U.S. Treasury Department. According to a December 16th Don Phillips article in the Washington Post, Snow had been more concerned about CSX stock prices than its physical condition. Between 1991 and 1998, during Snow's tenure, CSX spent less per mile of track than any other major railroad, while CSX stock prices nearly quadrupled. According to Phillips, current Chairman "(Michael) Ward and other CSX officials concede that CSX for years limited capital spending in part to make its finances look better."

But short-term thinking caught up with them. Two Amtrak trains derailed on CSX tracks in 2002 as a result of heat kinks, and four

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New York by Rail Travel Planner Coming

For the first time ever, in the spring of 2004 Amtrak will be presenting a New York by Rail Travel Planner, solely dedicated to meeting the needs of rail passengers on New York State routes. With an estimated distribution of over 175,000 copies, this full color publication will feature information on trains, destinations, vacation packages and more.

The Planner will be published by Martinelli-Slocum Publishing of Poughkeepsie. Businesses interested in advertising in the Planner should contact the Publisher by January 23, 2004 at 800-472-0634 for rates and more information

DOT offers Funds for Syracuse Bridge

New York State DOT has offered \$750,000 to the Onondaga County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) to finish building the bridge over Park Street in Syracuse so OnTrack shuttle trains can enter the Amtrak Station and the baseball stadium. Materials for the bridge have been sitting idle for five years while the parties involved have argued over liability issues. The Central New York Regional Transportation Authority (CENTRO) took responsibility for building the bridge initially, but stopped in January, 1999 when the adjacent Conrail bridge began sinking slightly, apparently as a result of pile driving for the new bridge. Although the contractor quickly proposed a safe alternative method, work has not resumed because CENTRO refused to continue unless Conrail guaranteed not to sue for any damages to the existing bridge. First Conrail, then CSX, refused to make such a guarantee.

Responsibility for building the bridge was eventually transferred to the New York Susquehanna & Western RR, which operates the trains that would use it. But the funds would flow through the IDA—which also wants to avoid liability for any damage to the CSX bridge. So it remains to be seen when or whether construction may actually resume. Over the last five years inaction due to liability concerns has effectively demonstrated that the surest way to avoid lawsuits is simply not to run trains.

About \$1.6 million of work remains to be done.

Frank Barry (from Syracuse Post Standard, 11/14)

Big Improvements for New York City

The last two months saw more rail service improvements in New York City than have occurred in at least a decade. On November 23rd a ceremonial PATH train returned to the World Trade Center site, reopening the service from Newark, Jersey City and Hoboken, which had been closed since September 11th, 2001. Since then the tunnels have been rebuilt and \$323 million has been spent for a "barebones" temporary station at Ground Zero. This is expected to alleviate crowding on NJ Transit trains by southern New Jersey commuters bound for downtown Manhattan who had to detour via Penn Station after 9/11.

On December 15th the new Secaucus Transfer station in the Jersey Meadows began full operations, allowing passengers from northern New Jersey-Hoboken trains to transfer to Northeast Corridor trains to Penn Station. The new facility had begun serving Bergen County trains on August 4th, then expanded to weekend service on other lines on September 6th. Full weekday service was delayed until the WTC site PATH reopened in order to avoid excessive crowding by new northern New Jersey passengers wanting to go to Midtown while the NJ Transit trains to Penn Station were still crowded by commuters wanting to go downtown. With the Secaucus Transfer and PATH WTC line now

(Cont'd on page 4)

Editorial:

On New York's High Speed Program

Bad financial times strain relationships, both personal and organizational, and the strains between New York State and Amtrak spilled into the newspapers last month. Amtrak says it can't afford to meet the terms of the 1998 High Speed Rail agreement with New York State, while New York's Transportation Department (DOT) says it expects full compliance with that agreement.

The New York State Legislature frittered away three years by not passing the rail property tax reform CSX required if its tracks were to be upgraded for faster passenger trains. When the reform finally did pass in 2002, the window of opportunity had all but closed, as it soon became apparent that Amtrak had deferred critical maintenance during the Warrington years. And both State and Federal governments had built up massive deficits as well.

After five years, the chief results of the high speed program are the three rebuilt turboliners, at least one of which is in daily service. Amtrak says the State must pay the extra costs of running them, but has not said what those costs are. Turboliner proponents have long denied that there are extra costs. It is clearly important to conduct a fair comparison of operating costs between the turboliners and conventional trains, as economics will obviously play a key role in the future of turbo technology.

The State has received federal CMAQ funds to reduce air pollution by getting more people to ride the train. In 1998 DOT proposed a dual strategy of faster trains and faster track, because fixing up trains to run faster won't reduce running time unless the track is upgraded too.

However there's an equally important priority in our view—reliability. The people most concerned about saving time worry even more about getting there on time. To accomplish this, constraints and operating problems must be identified and fixed. For many of us in ESPA, the two most obvious constraints on the Empire Corridor are insufficient track capacity in the Rensselaer station and the Rensselaer-Schenectady single-track bottleneck. When your train has to wait outside the station or in a siding, it sort of undermines the high speed concept. In short, we believe track and other reliability improvements are just as important as faster trains, if not more so. The final results must go beyond rebuilding turboliners, even if that means scaling back the turboliner project.

Both DOT Commissioner Joe Boardman and Amtrak President David Gunn are highly respected leaders in the struggle for a strong, healthy rail passenger system in the U.S. For all of us in New York it is critical that they continue to work well together to do what is possible within the financial constraints they both face.

If Congress continues its reluctance to invest in U.S. rail passenger service, and Amtrak cannot pay its share of New York's High Speed Program, Governor Pataki and other elected officials must look elsewhere for funds. The need for relief from congestion and pollution in New York State has not abated.

Frank Barry

Amtrak to Get Enough to Continue

On November 13th House and Senate negotiators finished ironing out differences between their respective transportation appropriation bills. Amtrak would get \$1.225 billion for fiscal year 2004, much closer to the Senate figure of \$1.345 bil. than the \$900,000 million Bush/House figure.

Amtrak President David Gunn immediately issued a statement saying, "This number will allow us to continue to operate the national system. However we will have to assess the impact on our current budget over the next month or so" (to determine its effect on repairs Gunn has said are essential to prevent further deterioration of service).

A Nov. 14th Washington Post article said an earlier Gunn announcement of a \$200 million carryover from FY2003 helped congressional negotiators reduce next year's amount below the Senate figure. And a few days later they reduced it even more—to \$1.218 billion, through an across-the-board .59% cut for the entire appropriation. While far less than the \$1.8 billion Gunn said is needed to overcome deferred maintenance, the new figure still represents an increase over last year's \$1.05 billion.

Normally a negotiated compromise such as this would be quickly approved by each chamber and sent on to the President for signature. But this time the White House subverted the process by forcing the negotiators to insert several highly controversial provisions which had nothing to do with transportation and had not been approved by either chamber. One provision reverses earlier votes in both chambers that had barred the Administration from relaxing restrictions that now prohibit any corporation from buying up enough local TV stations to reach more than 35% of American homes. Another will allow gun dealers to destroy background-check information on gun buyers after 24 hours rather than keeping this data for 90 days as presently required. It is hard to see how such a law could have passed Congress on its own merits as it would appear to make background checks virtually useless for police in tracking criminal acts by gun users. It was presented by Todd Tiahrt, (R., Kans.) with strong backing from the National Rifle Association (NRA). A third provision would make it easier for private contractors to do federal work, a change strongly opposed by Democrats.

Even House Republican leaders apparently felt the bill would not pass with such hot-button provisions added. They decided to combine the transportation bill with six other appropriation bills to make an Omnibus funding bill so large, and essential to so many constituencies that no one would dare hold it up. The resulting Omnibus bill did pass the house on December 5th, with the hot-button provisions intact.

House Appropriations Committee Ranking Minority member David Obey (D, Wis.) called the result "a new low in terms of House willingness to reflect the will of its membership." When the White House threatened a veto, "the conferees caved in and went against the positions of both Houses. I think that is a national scandal. (It's) a backroom deal to strengthen the hands of the national media giants."

Senator Hollings of South Carolina was equally blunt: "The Republican's decision to make the broadcast ownership cap 39% was no 'compromise' at all. It was a total violation of the conference agreement. Both Houses included the exact same wording.

(Cont'd on page 4)



Warning to Snowmobile operators and cross-country skiers...stay off the tracks. It can take a train up to two miles to stop and do not have the ability to swerve to avoid collisions.

Susquehanna County Rail Authority

The Susquehanna County Rail Authority (SCRA) has been empowered by the Pennsylvania State Legislature on November 20, 2003 to improve and market the Canadian Pacific (CP) Mainline in Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania. The SCRA efforts are crucial to the development of this route, which connects Scranton and Binghamton and ultimately New York City via the New Jersey Transit terminal at Hoboken. To prepare for passenger operations on the line in the future, certain capacity enhancement capital projects are required and planned by this new Authority.

The majority of the Susquehanna County trackage is part of the 40 mile Clarks Summit- Hallstead high-speed cut-off realignment. This Lackawanna Railroad project was completed in 1915. It straightened the old Main and provided the Railroad with a completely grade-separated through route on this portion of the line. Included in this project are the landmark Tunkhannock and Martins Creek poured concrete viaducts used in the complete relocation of the railroad from the valley floor to the mountain tops.

SCRA Rail Committee Chair Roland Sharp tells ESPA he is looking forward to working with his neighbors in New York on the promotion of the line. Mr. Sharp goes on to say " we see the Binghamton Station project as a positive step forward and a sure sign that New York is serious about providing rail service via the Scranton gateway". Major priorities of the Authority will be the establishment of a passenger station in New Milford, Pa. and seeking additional funding for freight related projects.

Currently the 59 miles of railroad between Binghamton and Scranton has just two passing sidings, one between Dalton and LaPlume and another in the Hop Bottom area; both are approximately two miles long. PennDOT has partially funded a major signaling upgrade between Dalton and the Taylor yard outside Scranton with a capital grant of \$1,760,00 during the 2003 fiscal year.

SCRA, CP and PennDOT intend to build on a close working relationship with one another in the ongoing effort to improve this critical rail link. CP currently runs about 16 trains per day on the line and expected tonnage increases and future passenger plans will require that all parties work closely together to achieve their respective goals.

As the pieces of the puzzle continue to fall into place for renewed passenger rail service for New York via the Binghamton gateway, the formation and empowerment of the SCRA is a major step forward. ESPA looks forward to working with SCRA to achieve their objectives and in turn to better serve the future transportation needs of New York. Welcome aboard. *Ben Gottfried*

Trains to Syracuse University Football Games

The New York, Susquehanna, and Western Railroad operated a special seven-car passenger train from Binghamton to Syracuse on November 22, transporting Southern Tier fans to the Syracuse football game at the Carrier Dome Stadium. The approximate 200 football fans that made the trip from Binghamton on the train disembarked at the Syracuse University station platform within two blocks of the Carrier Dome.

NYS&W general manager, Robert Colucci, integrated the arrival of the Binghamton special into the regular "Orange Express" train operations that occur during every Syracuse University football home game. It allows fans to park at the Armory Square and Carousel Mall parking lots and take the train to the Carrier Dome, thus avoiding the automobile traffic.

Ed Post

Hollings Introduces Long Term Rail Bill

On November 26th, after months of anticipation, Senator Ernest Hollings (D., S.C.) finally introduced ARRIVE-21, the American Railroad Revitalization Investment and Enhancement Act of the 21st Century, (S-1961). With this bill Hollings aims to finally put rail on an even keel with air, road and transit, all of which get guaranteed federal support. Hollings is the Ranking Minority Member of the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, which is chaired by Senator John McCain, (R., Ariz.), one of Amtrak's most vocal critics.

S-1961 would provide a 6-year, \$42 billion investment of public and private funds for freight and passenger rail projects that would strengthen Amtrak and improve freight mobility. To do this it would create a non-profit Rail Infrastructure Finance Corporation to issue \$30 billion in tax credit bonds over 6 years for rail infrastructure improvement. It would award discretionary capital grants to both states and Amtrak for high speed and intercity passenger rail projects and to states for freight projects.

To receive grants, states would have to prepare a state rail plan and provide a 20% non-federal funding match as they do for highway and transit funds. S-1961 also directs the federal government to develop a national rail plan and a 50-year intermodal blueprint for an efficient transportation system.

The bill authorizes over \$1 billion annually in additional appropriations to Amtrak for capital and operating expenses. This would cover the full costs of long distance trains, but states would be required to contribute to corridor routes according to a formula that would treat all states equally within 5 years. This could have potentially serious implications for New York, which currently contributes no operating funds for the Empire Corridor.

S-1961 is designed to become an amendment to S-1072, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act (SAFETEA)—the Senate renewal for TEA-21, which funds highways and transit. Inclusion of rail in the key surface transport law would finally establish it as a viable transport mode worthy of federal support, breaking the 30-year impasse that has prevented rail from reaching its potential in North America.

But to achieve this, S-1961 must surmount major obstacles. First, it must gain the support of McCain as well as Surface Transportation Subcommittee Chair Kay Bailey Hutchinson, (R., Tex.), both of whom have submitted other bills. McCain submitted the unpopular Bush Administration bill (S-1501) with no co-sponsors. Hutchison submitted her own bill, S-1505, with three Republican co-sponsors last July; it has many similarities to S-1961, but key differences as well.

S-1961 must also gain approval of the Finance Committee, chaired by Senator Charles Grassley, (R., Ia.), who is not a friend of Amtrak. Then S-1961 will have to survive a conference with the House, whose counterpart SAFETEA legislation will almost certainly exclude rail. And finally it must gain the consent of the Bush Administration, which not only opposes tax credit bonds but also insists on more privatization of Amtrak as a condition for meaningful funding. To accomplish all this, rail interests including freight railroads and suppliers, will have to exert far more leadership than they have shown to date.

Hollings reportedly delayed introducing S-1961 in order to allow time to attract more Republican co-sponsors. Although only two Republicans have signed on, it is so far the only long-term rail Senate bill with any bi-partisan support at all. Initial co-sponsors are Susan Collins, (R., Me.), Tom Carper (D., Del.), Arlen Specter, (R., Pa.), James Jeffords, (Ind., Vt.), Frank Lautenberg, (D., NJ) and Joseph Biden, (D., Del.).

Frank Barry

Downstate ESPA advances regional rail

ESPA members in the NY metropolitan area are welcome to attend monthly meetings of the Regional Rail Working Group — a consortium of rail advocates from New York and New Jersey. Meetings are held at the Conference Room, NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington Street, just north of Rector Street, in Lower Manhattan, from 6-8pm on the third Wednesday of each month. The next three meetings will be January 21, February 18 and March 17, 2004.

Key areas of interest include advancing a near-term plan for “through running” at Penn Station — eliminating conflicts at the station and increasing peak hour capacity by 25% to 50%. The working group has already met with NJ Transit officials about the plan, and is scheduling meetings with LIRR, Metro-North and MTA officials. A full description of this plan is posted on www.auto-free.org

Longer-term initiatives including the PATH/Lex connection - constructing a direct track link between these two rail rapid transit lines, through the World Trade Center site in Lower Manhattan — and the Penn Station-Grand Central connection — which could be part of NJ Transit’s plan for a new Trans-Hudson tunnel to Midtown Manhattan. Other proposals include a one-seat ride to Manhattan from Kennedy Airport — a vast improvement over the recently opened AirTrain shuttle link to the Jamaica and Howard Beach Stations.

Making these proposals actually occur will require a substantial effort. Your help is definitely needed. For more info contact George Haikalis, ESPA’s Manhattan Coordinator, at 212-475-3394 or by e-mail at geohaikalis@juno.com

Big Improvements

(Cont’d from page 1)

operational, passengers from all NJ Transit routes except the Atlantic City line can now reach either Downtown or Midtown Manhattan without changing stations. They can also transfer easily between NJTransit routes for the first time ever.

And finally, after a year’s delay, the Jet Train light rail line to JFK airport began operations with an inaugural run from Jamaica to the airport on December 17th, hosting both Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg. Its two routes connect all JFK terminals with the A subway route to Penn Station and other points at Howard Beach, and with Long Island RR trains at Jamaica to Penn Station and nearly everywhere on Long Island. Computers rather than drivers control the cars and some problems have arisen when doors have closed prematurely, trapping passengers. This in fact happened briefly to Mayor Bloomberg on the inaugural run. Later in the day the line was closed temporarily because the doors would not open to release passengers. The 8-mile system cost \$1.9 billion; it remains to be seen whether the sophisticated technology that replaced human operators will turn out to be cost effective.

ESPA and many others pushed for a direct route using an abandoned but intact Long Island RR right of way to Howard Beach, which would have allowed a quick one-seat ride directly from Midtown to the airport—a service similar to those many Europeans take for granted. But according to the New York Times (12/18/03) “community opposition and expense” forced the compromise service now in operation. In addition it would have been extremely difficult to add new trains to Penn Station during rush hour. But even with the required changes at Jamaica or Howard Beach, two New York Times reporters who tested both rail routes beat a colleague who took a taxi by ten minutes and saved roughly \$40 as well. However the new rail route may be awkward for those with lots of luggage.

Frank Barry

North Pole Limited

The 2nd annual North Pole Limited, in conjunction with the Buffalo-based Western New York Railway Historical Society, operated on Sunday, December 7, 2003 utilizing Amtrak #288. This train runs practically empty on the 23 mile run from Niagara Falls, NY to Buffalo’s Exchange Street Station. Children accompanied by their parents or grandparents rode chartered school busses from Depew, NY station to Niagara Falls.

The return trip of nearly one hour covered 26 miles by rail. Making a special guest appearance were none other than Santa Claus and Mrs. Claus. In 2002, the North Pole Limited had 87 participants. This year the event was listed twice in The Buffalo News “Gusto” event section resulting in 200 holiday excursionists utilizing five school busses. An additional 100 requests could have been accommodated, but were turned away due to the uncertainty about the logistics. Plans are already underway for a bigger and better North Pole Limited in 2004. *Greg Jandura WNYRHS*

Amtrak to get

(Cont’d from page 2)

The item was not in dispute. All had agreed to the 35% cap. The Republicans went into a closet, met with themselves, and announced a ‘compromise.’ New York’s Senator Charles Schumer was appalled by the concession to gun dealers and the NRA: “This (90 day requirement) is the one tool investigators have that actually provides...a paper trail and evidence that could be used to convict suspected terrorists. Why in the world would the (Bush) Administration and the Justice Department think weakening this system is a good thing?” A Republican staffer conceded, “The process was not pretty.”

Although Democrats were largely excluded from the negotiations, the bill seems likely to pass the Senate after the first of the year despite objections from Schumer and many others.

But Amtrak’s money won’t come without strings. Instead of receiving it directly, Amtrak must apply to the Department of Transportation (DOT) for grants for each route giving a “detailed financial analysis,” projecting revenue and expenses. Also, Amtrak must prepare a business plan for FY2005 within 60 days of enactment of the FY2004 appropriation and post this on its website, along with its current business plan, and it must report progress to Congress monthly.

Congress will defer payment on the \$100 million FY2002 federal loan for another year, but Amtrak must abide by its provisions, which ban starting any new routes. Finally, DOT may take \$2.5 million from the Amtrak appropriation to develop procedures to allow other operators to bid against Amtrak to operate state-supported services. And DOT could force Amtrak to let a competitor use its facilities with “reasonable compensation.” This apparently resulted from Amtrak reluctance to allow the Herzog corporation to use its facilities to operate Missouri Mule trains between St. Louis and Kansas City when Missouri requested competing bids.

Besides Amtrak, the Appropriation includes earmarks for several specific projects of interest to New York: \$75 million for East Side Access to New York City (bringing Long Island trains into Grand Central); \$2 million for New York’s 2nd Avenue subway; \$2.5 million to complete the engineering study to restore passenger service to Scranton, Pa. (the first step in restoring passenger service to New York’s Southern Tier). There is also \$1.25 million earmarked to complete Rome station renovations and \$2.5 million to help build a new station in Niagara Falls.

An additional \$37.4 million is allocated for High Speed projects but \$5 mil. of this will go for maglev and approximately \$3.7 mil. to crossing improvements on non-high speed rail lines, leaving \$28.7 mil. for actual high-speed rail projects.

Frank Barry (from NARP hotline reports, Congressional Record)

Station Developments

Saratoga Springs' refurbished Amtrak Station is slated for a mid-January 2004 opening, according to developer Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA). While the original 'late Fall 2003' date was missed, the station is now nearing completion, with the project slated to be on budget.

In **Rome**, renovations to the historic New York Central station are also nearing completion, with final work expected to be wrapped up over the winter. Reportedly, Turning Stone Casino in nearby Verona, NY is exploring operating dedicated buses from the Rome station, coordinating with Amtrak schedules.

Efforts leading to the construction of a new station in **Niagara Falls** have received a boost with the inclusion of \$2.5 million for the project in the 2004 Federal Transportation Funding bill awaiting final passage.

Schenectady officials have decided to shelve plans for a new intermodal station partly because of the uncertainty regarding the State's High Speed program. In its 2002 Fall schedule change, Amtrak dropped the city's last early morning train to New York, ending this station's viability for most business travel. According to Amtrak figures, over 4000 fewer people used the Schenectady station during FY2003 than in FY2002. But Rensselaer ridership grew by more than twice this amount during the same period.

Assuming the Schenectady passengers are now boarding in Rensselaer, dropping this train makes economic sense for Amtrak, but at the expense of Schenectady and its passengers.

Bruce Becker and Frank Barry



Since 1990, more than **5,500 people** have been killed while trespassing on railroad rights-of-way and property.

Bombardier to Build Trucks in Auburn

Bombardier will fabricate 858 new truck frames for Metro North and Long Island Railroad cars at its Auburn plant between now and 2007 under the terms of contracts with both railroads. It has a third contract to build trucks for 100 New Jersey Transit cars, beginning in 2005. Once trucks are completed in Auburn they are shipped to Bombardier's Plattsburgh plant for assembly with wheels, brake rigging and electric motors. The new contracts are expected to add 30 jobs at the Auburn plant in 2004. This plant has been making truck frames for about 20 years.

(From Syracuse Post Standard, Nov. 11).

Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

Amtrak's Empire District Superintendent, Philip Larson, continues to solicit your feedback on your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Phil welcomes our input, as he strives to provide the best possible service on the Empire Corridor. Please send your written trip reports and comments, including specific dates, train numbers and employee names as appropriate to: Philip Larson, District Superintendent, Empire District, Amtrak 525 East Street, Rensselaer, NY 12144.

Please also send a copy to Bruce Becker, so we can track trip experiences and follow up as necessary. Thanks for your help

Fare Discounts Available

For travel on UNRESERVED trains within New York State and to all points along the Northeast Corridor, Amtrak is now offering a 20% discount off regular fares when passengers reserve tickets using Promotion Code V729. This discount is not valid on Acela Express or Metroliners and will not be honored during peak travel times and holiday periods. Contact Amtrak for full details.

24th ESPA Annual Meeting

**Empire State Passenger Association and
National Association of Railroad Passengers - Region II**

Saturday, March 6, 2004 12:00n- 5:00pm

Holiday Inn Downtown, 100 Nott Terrace, Schenectady, NY

Four Blocks from the Amtrak Station, Ample Free Parking

A Complete Lunch Buffet will be Served at 12:30 pm

Confirmed Speakers: Ross Capon - Executive Director National Association of Railroad Passengers

Invited Speakers: Senator Charles Schumer, Congressman John Sweeney, Amtrak President David Gunn,
New York State Transportation Commissioner Joseph Boardman

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(Transportation and Walking Maps will be provided)

CSX Doing an About Face

(Cont'd from page 1)

passengers died. CSX maintenance was faulted. The company responded by slapping extreme speed restrictions on passenger trains, forcing them to run even slower than its own freight trains in hot weather.

Actually by that time the tide had already begun to turn, but not fast enough. In 1999 Snow appointed Ronald Conway of Conrail as CSX President; Conway immediately recognized the effects of long term neglect and began pumping money into maintenance despite poor earnings, according to Phillips. Even so the Federal Railroad Administration issued a scathing audit report the following year as a result of a 60% increase in track related derailments over the previous five years. After Conway's 1999 appointment, track maintenance jumped from \$18,000 per mile to \$27,000 the following year, according to the Post.

But there were still problems. Snow fired Conway as a result of the audit, according to Phillips, and replaced him with Michael Ward, who nevertheless continued the track repairs. However Ward also continued to articulate what had been a negative corporate attitude toward passenger trains under Snow.

Phillips says a major turnaround began early this year, about two weeks after Ward became Chairman, when a heavy snowstorm hit the East Coast. CSX cancelled all service in the Washington-Baltimore area and even refused to allow commuter trains from Norfolk Southern onto a short stretch of CSX track between Alexandria and Washington. CSX, which inherited the flat Richmond Fredericksburg & Potomac route through Richmond, became completely paralyzed, while Norfolk-Southern continued to operate its more hilly ex-Southern line through Charlottesville.

Ward told Phillips "We were taking more hits than we needed from certain publications." The well-publicized criticism sparked a dramatic turnaround in attitude toward passenger service within CSX, Phillips believes. Between 1999 and 2002, during the high delay summer months, CSX paid Amtrak \$3.88 million more in late train penalties than it received in on-time incentive payments, but last summer CSX got \$1.5 million more in incentives than it had to pay for delays, Phillips wrote. Ellen Fitzsimmons, the Senior Vice President for Law, told Phillips that when the system becomes congested, "Passenger trains come first under all circumstances."

When Hurricane Isabel came through last Fall, CSX brought in hundreds of workers to clear downed trees quickly and protect crossings when the power went out. It got high praise from commuter operator Virginia Railway Express, and according to Phillips even Gunn said, "They are trying to do better."

How did this affect New York State? "I totally agree there's been improvement," Empire Corridor District Superintendent Phil Larson told ESPA "I was very impressed by the amount of money they spent on ties, rail and surfacing this year."

Frank Barry

2004 ESPA Meeting Dates

Saturday, January 10, 2004 The Parker Inn, Schenectady NY 11:30am - 4:00pm Advance reservations are required. Please contact Bruce Becker by January 7.

Saturday, March 6, 2004 Annual Meeting - Schenectady

See Registration Form for Complete Details

Sunday, April 25, 2004 Penn Station, New York

Saturday, June 19, 2004 Amtrak Station, Saratoga Springs

Saturday, August 7, 2004 Union Station, Utica

Saturday, October 2, 2004 The Parker Inn, Schenectady

Saturday, Nov. 2004 Amtrak Station, Rensselaer

Saturday, January 8, 2005 The Parker Inn, Schenectady

Saturday, March 5, 2005 Annual Meeting - Schenectady

If you are interested in becoming more involved in ESPA, these meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how you can make a difference. ALL ESPA members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Bruce Becker, 518-383-5985 or bbecker@albanycc.cc, if you need more information or are planning on attending a meeting.

Always expect a train!

Freight trains do not follow set schedules.

ESPA MEMBERSHIP - NEW OR RENEWAL

The Empire State Passengers Association is a volunteer network of people working to improve intercity rail, mass transit and bus service in New York State. Keep informed with The ESPA Express. Keep the pressure on for safe, efficient, environmentally sound transportation. Dues and contributions support ESPA's publications and advocacy on the passengers' behalf.

- Introductory membership (\$10.00 for one year)
- Renewal membership (\$20.00 per year)
- Renewal - Student or Senior Citizen (\$12.50 per year)
- Family membership (\$25.00)
- Sustaining membership (\$50.00)
- Patron membership (\$75.00)
- Corporate membership (\$100.00)
- Lifetime membership (\$300.00)

Individuals that join or renew at the sustaining membership or higher will receive the new ESPA lapel pin as a gift.

Please make checks/money orders payable to ESPA and mail to ESPA P.O. Box 434 Syracuse, NY 13209

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 1-716-759-2315, Fax: 716-759-2791. e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. Deadline for material for the March/April issue is March 6, 2004. Material may be reproduced if credit given to ESPA and to the writer.

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