The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

http://www.esparail.org

WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 30, No. 1 January / February 2006

Hudson Valley Food Service Ends Again

Amtrak's experiment with contracting out food service on the Empire Corridor stopped as quickly as it started. With little advance notice, Subway began selling food on selected trains that operate between Albany and New York City. The service began on Nov 17 and ended on Nov 23, although it was stated that it would operate as a 4-month trial. The food items sold included coffee, soda, danishes, potato chips, sandwiches, and pizza. Beer and wine were not sold. Three subway employees, including a supervisor, sold food on the selected trains from the cafe car and also by walking through the train offering to deliver food directly to a passenger's seat. Amtrak would receive a portion of the revenue and was to incur no cost. Therefore, if any food was sold, Amtrak would get a better return than it does today from these trains. Many passengers liked the prices of the food, most of which were 40-50% less than what the Amtrak cafe charges.

Back in July, Amtrak ended all food service on Empire Corridor trains which start or end in Albany, stating that they would save one million dollars a year. Amtrak continues to operate the cafe car on trains that operate west and north of Albany, and trains which operate exclusively between Albany and New York City still have a cafe car, which also has business class seating – but no food.

When the Subway employees started selling food on-board some Amtrak trains between Albany and New York City, unionized Amtrak workers began to work against the food service and distributed leaflets to the passengers. The leaflets stated that Subway was taking away union jobs and that the Subway food service was creating a safety issue for passengers.

Gary Maslanka, a union official, said his members are opposed to the project and that their members had qualifications that went beyond food service, and they were there to help out in an emergency.

After the leafleting started, Amtrak and Subway ended the experiment and no further information is known about plans for food service on trains that operate solely between Albany and New York City. We hope that all involved can come to some agreement that permits a return of needed food service on these trains.

Gary Prophet

Amtrak Funded at $1.315 billion, but...

On November 30th President Bush signed the FY2006 funding bill for transportation, which appropriates $1.315 billion for Amtrak, a 9% increase over its 2005 figure of $1.208 billion. But the bill contains so many restrictions it may leave Amtrak in worse shape than before, as the amount available for actual operations was cut from $570 million last year to $495 million in 2006. And $5 million of that must go to develop a new cost accounting system rather than running trains.

(Cont'd on page 5)

NARP Takes Cautious Position on Firing

In a November 22nd letter to its members, National Railroad Passenger Association President George Chilson explained why the organization has not harshly criticized Amtrak's Board for firing David Gunn. Chilson asserts that the firing does not necessarily mean Amtrak's Board will carry out the Administration's expressed desire to rid the country of long distance trains and break up the Amtrak system. As evidence it presents the following:

*The Board asked for $1.8 billion when the Administration proposed no funding at all for Amtrak. (Secretary Mineta has said the zero funding proposal was merely an attempt to get Congress' attention—not a move to destroy Amtrak).

*The Board approved upgrading the Empire Builder even though Mineta has characterized all long distance trains as unneeded and unused.

*The Board selected David Hughes—a highly regarded former railroad president (and) one of Gunn's early hires at Amtrak—as acting President and CEO. It is unlikely Hughes would have accepted if the board expected him to reverse course.

*Laney stated under oath at the November Congressional hearing that the board planned no sale of NEC assets and will not create a separate infrastructure subsidiary if further study makes the idea appear unwise or impractical.

*Laney has also made a public commitment to expand service.

Chilson says NARP will monitor Amtrak Board actions closely, particularly with regard to:

*selection of the next president;

*approval of investments needed to make food and beverage service on long distance trains more efficient;

*outreach efforts to Congress and the states;

*continued absence of any 180-day train off notices.

As an advocate for passengers, NARP clearly wants to maintain communications with the Amtrak Board now that it has taken over direction of the company much more aggressively than in the past. What happens will depend greatly on the extent to which Chairman Laney disagrees with, and is willing to stand up to the Board's only other member, Secretary Mineta. NARP might play a constructive role here. Much also depends on whether more board members are appointed and what their objectives may be.

Passage of Rep. Castle's HR-4394 and the Senate's counterpart are clearly and urgently needed.

Frank Barry (info from Nov. Chilson letter on NARP website)

Free Congress Foundation Hires Gunn

Former Amtrak President David Gunn, whose skills and persuasiveness saved Amtrak from bankruptcy in 2002, has been retained as an Adjunct Scholar by the Free Congress Foundation, headed by Paul Weyrich,

(Cont'd on page 6)

The View from the Cab

As we begin 2006 I am hopeful that this *may* be the year we will start to see meaningful progress towards the accomplishment of our many goals. Senator Bruno's current leadership and efforts in the State Senate to promote higher-efficiency rail service are to be applauded. And this coming year's race for governor presents a crucial opportunity for ESPA to actively advance our cause with the candidates and thus help shape the future of rail service and public transportation for years to come. Our message to the gubernatorial hopefuls will be that New York State **MUST** once again become the leader in the nation in the development of a high speed, reliable and cost efficient passenger rail system.

I strongly encourage you to make plans to attend our 26th Annual Meeting in Schenectady on March 11, 2006. George Chilson, President of the National Association of Railroad is confirmed to speak and many other influential speakers have also been invited. Full details and registration information are enclosed. As the saying goes, there is strength in numbers and a record turnout will send a clear message that the members of ESPA demand positive action now.

Don't forget...our completely new web site, www.esparail.org **is now on-line and ready for use!** Among the features you will find . . .

- Up To Date News Bulletins, Action Alerts and Press Releases
- On-Line Membership Registration and Payment Capability
- Improved On-Line Versions Of The 'ESPA Express' Newsletter
- A State-Wide Rail and Tourism Event Calendar
- Expanded Empire Corridor Rail Travel Information
- And much, much more...

I urge you to visit our new site soon, sign-up for the e-news alert feature, bookmark the site in your 'favorites' and then make it a regular part of your time on the web!

I'll look forward to seeing many of you on March 11th in Schenectady. As always, I welcome your comments, critiques and suggestions, on how ESPA can better attain our goals of improved passenger rail service in New York State. Don't hesitate to contact me at anytime. *Bruce B. Becker, President*

High Speed Rail Zeroed Out

The House-Senate Conferees working on transportation funding eliminated all funds for Next Generation High Speed Rail, even though each chamber had allocated more than $10 million for this purpose. However $7.19 million was included for rail corridor planning, most of which will be spent for potential high-speed routes in the Southeast. This is down from $19 million last year and $37.2 million for FY2004.

The final bill allocates $55 million for Railroad Research and Development, including $6.5 million for positive train control and $500,000 for a diesel multiple unit demonstration. Such a train has been developed and tested by a Colorado firm and Amtrak had hoped to buy several sets for its New Haven-Springfield route, but lacked funding to do so.

The bill also funded several New York Metro Transit projects for FY2006:

East Side Access:	$340 million
NJ Trans Hudson Midtown Corridor:	$12.3 million
Second Avenue Subway:	$25 million
Hoboken – Scranton Service:	$10 million

Frank Barry

Rep. Castle Files Bill to Fix Amtrak Board

On November 18th Rep. Michael Castle, (R. Del.) filed the "Amtrak Board Leadership Enhancement Act" (HR 4394) to improve the quality and effectiveness of Amtrak's Board of Directors. The bill would expand the Board from 7 to 9 members, including the President of Amtrak and the Secretary of Transportation or his appointed representative.

Amtrak's President does not currently vote on the Board, and then-president David Gunn was excluded from a critical meeting in September when the Board passed a resolution to take steps toward creating a subsidiary to run the Northeast Corridor, a move he opposed.

Under HR4394 the US President would nominate seven members for five-year terms and "shall" consult with majority and minority leaders of both chambers in doing so; (current legislation says only that he "should" consult). Nominees would be subject to Senate approval. Only four could be of the same party, and all must either have knowledge or experience in transportation or be representatives of rail passengers or state government—qualifications not required at present.

Currently Amtrak's Board membership is down to just two—Chairman David Laney and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. Terms of the other members have expired and the Senate has not approved Bush's nominations, due in at least one case to lack of prior consultation. But Bush appointed two members temporarily last summer, bypassing the Senate by acting when it was out of session. However by law such "recess appointments" end when Congress finishes its work for the year.

HR4394 is now awaiting Transportation and Infrastructure Committee approval. It currently has three co-sponsors—Joe Schwarz (R., Mich.), Jim Costa, (D., Cal.) and Earl Blumenaer, (D., Ore.) It's wording is similar to board provisions in the Senate Amtrak Reauthorization bill, S-1516. Unfortunately the latter, which was added to the Senate budget reconciliation bill on November 3rd by a 93-6 vote, did not make it into law, since the House has not passed its own version and its conferees did not accept the Senate's.

Frank Barry

State Announces Funding for *Adirondack*

The New York State Department of Transportation in early December announced that over $8.0 million in state funding is included in a new rail improvement program to insure the continued operation of Amtrak's *Adirondack* service between Albany and Montreal for at least the next two years. As a part of an overall five-year $100 million program, the *Adirondack* money will also be complemented by additional state capital investment in the Canadian Pacific line used by the *Adirondack*.

The program also funds track improvements for more than 15 short-line freight carriers across the state, in addition to aiding class-one carrier CSX expand capacity on it's freight line along west side of the Hudson River.

ESPA will continue to press for currently unallocated program funds to be used in future years towards specific passenger rail improvements.

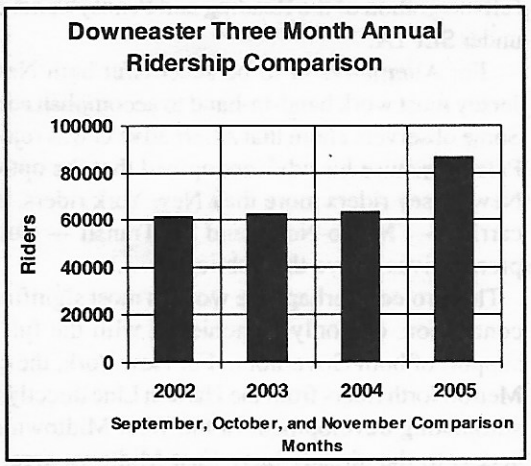
Receive the ESPA Express earlier!

Provide your e-mail address and receive the ESPA Newsletter one to two weeks earlier than by mail. The postage savings can be used for passenger rail advocacy. E-mail address submitted will only be used by ESPA and not given to any other group. Please send your e-mail address to www.rwlenz@aol.com

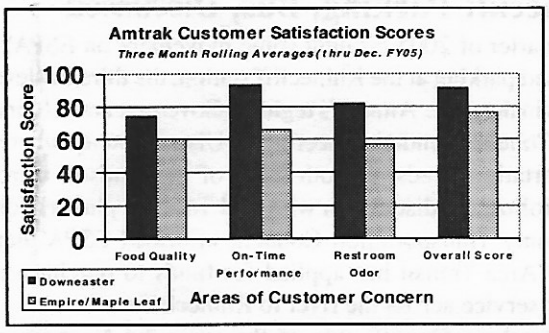
Rail Corridor Done Right: *DOWNEASTER*

Maine's *Downeaster* rail corridor between Boston, Ma. and Portland, Me., is performing well in all important customer service aspects and serves as an example of successful rail corridor management and operation. The service began on December 15, 2001 and is managed by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) which contracts with Amtrak for the operation of the trains. The initial success of the new service was due in large part to the leisure and first time riders who wanted to see what the train had to offer. As the service is now maturing the Authority needs to serve as an alternative form of transportation along the I-95 tri-state corridor between Portland and Boston.

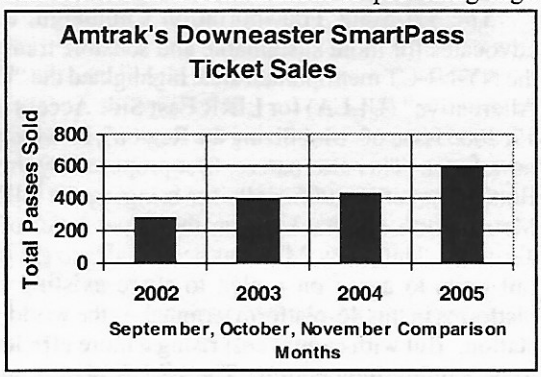
Trip times were reduced 15 minutes this summer to 2 hours 30 minutes after significant new investment to track structure along the Guilford owned segment of the line. On time performance has been in the 90% range since the service began in 2001. The long dispute between Guilford and Amtrak over the weight of the rail used in the project to allow for the faster speeds now being enjoyed by *Downeaster* riders is part of railroad history. Today, an excellent working relationship with service providers Amtrak, Guilford Transportation and MBTA is the key to the operational success of the train according to NNEPRA spokesperson Patricia Douglas. Ms. Douglas credits Amtrak, Guilford Transportation and Boston's MBTA with the high quality railroading necessary to make the train popular and make it "part of the landscape" along the "downeast" coast of New England.



All trains include café food service provided thru the use of an outside contractor. NNEPRA considers food service an essential for **all** trains it operates. The Authority has found this basic amenity crucial to providing passengers with a rail travel experience worthy of using on a regular basis. Furthermore, the Authority estimates that the food service is provided with a net cost of only 50 cents per passenger. Downeaster enjoys high customer satisfaction ratings in many important customer satisfaction categories. The corridor significantly outperforms New York's "Empire Corridor" in many of these basic categories as illustrated in the accompanying customer satisfaction graph (excludes *Lake Shore Limited).* Sales of "SmartPass" monthly and "10 ride" passes would seem to indicate that efforts to attract frequent riders are working well.



Downeaster rail service is a commitment to providing high quality passenger service by a responsive Rail Authority, something New York's beleaguered "Empire Corridor" passengers are sorely without.



Ms. Douglas of NNEPRA sums it up well in saying that *Downeaster* is bringing "growth all around" to the service area and communities served by their trains. *Ben Gottfried*

Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

Amtrak's Empire District Superintendent, James Turngren, wants to hear of your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Jim 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: James Turngren, 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...

Amtrak 2005 Statistics

Amtrak System	FY 2005	FY 2004	% Change
Total Ridership	25,374,998	25,053,564	+1.3
Passenger Miles (000's)	5,419,720	5,557,588	-2.5
On Time Performance	69.8%	70.7%	-1.3
Delays in Minutes	5,713,000	5,710,000	+0.05
Load Factor	48.4%	47.7%	+1.5
Locos out of Service	16.2%	17.3%	-6.4
Cars out of Service	15.5%	15.4%	.6
Ticket Revenue	$1,248,751,435	$1,256,424,267	-.6
Average Ticket Price	$49.21	$50.15	-1.9
Operating Ratio	1.60	1.63	-1.8
Ridership in New York State			
Empire Corridor	1,088,052	1,093,965	-.5
Adirondack	125,165	132,700	-5.7
Ethan Allen	111,621	108,192	+3.2
Lake Shore Limited	312,779	279,662	+11.8
Northeast Corridor			
Acela	1,772,868	2,568,935	-31.0
Metroliner	680,034	397,608	+71.0
Regional NEC trains	7,024,021	6,405,087	+9.7
Clockers	1,560,856	1,945,553	-19.8
Total, NE Corridor	11,037,779	11,317,183	-2.5
October Figures			
System Ridership	2,035,882	1,973,259	+3.2%
Ticket Revenue	$109,395,920	$102,307,159	+6.9%

Amtrak Sept. 2005 Year to Date Report

Tri-State Campaign Shows New Interest in Less Costly LIRR East Side Access Option.

The Tri-State Transportation Campaign, a consortium of advocates for more sustainable and sensible transport options for the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area, highlighted the "Upper level Loop Alternative" (ULLA) for LIRR East Side Access in the December 19, 2005 issue of "Mobilizing the Region", its widely read electronic newsletter. This alternative, first proposed by the Committee for Better Transit in 1996, calls for bringing the LIRR into existing Metro-North rail trackage on the upper level of Grand Central Terminal. Until now, MTA has been unable to get its two commuter rail units to agree on a plan to share existing track space and platforms in this 46-platform terminal — the world's largest railway station. But with capital cost rising a more efficient design seems to be gaining momentum. The ULLA plan is supported by real estate interests in Manhattan's East 50th Street neighborhood, who objected to a large ventilation building necessitated by the "deep cavern" option — MTA's scheme to construct a new station some 150 feet below Park Avenue.

Transit advocates have traditionally favored more efficient designs, because limited transit investment funds can be used to advance more projects. Understandably, environmental and civic organizations are often reluctant to embrace concepts advanced by transit advocates, when transit operators strongly object. In the case of LIRR East Side Access, opponents of the vent building engaged a well-respected Canadian engineering firm Delcan which confirmed the practicality of the Upper Level Loop plan. The Delcan study found that the Upper Level Loop plan would save $1.2 billion and could be completed much sooner.

Transit advocates are especially concerned about the deep cavern feature of the MTA plan. Over a third of the travel timesavings from East Side Access are lost in accessing the deep cavern. In this age of concern about security an alternative that places travelers so far underground is especially worrisome, particularly when a cheaper and better option is available. Transit experts and fire safety professionals have raised serious questions about the ability of thousands of passengers to quickly evacuate the deep cavern station in the event of a serious fire.

The Delcan study is posted on the Institute for Rational Urban Mobility website www.irum.org . Also posted are concerns expressed by MTA and responses by transit advocates. To read the Tri-State Transportation Campaign's newsletter go to www.tstc.org. *George Haikalis*

NJ-ARP Opposes NJ Transit Tunnel Plan

The New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers, the Garden State's counterpart to ESPA, has called on NJ Transit to drop its costly new tunnel plan that centers on a new deep cavern station under Macy's in Midtown Manhattan and advance a far superior plan — Alternative G. The Alternative G plan was one of three finalists in the Major Investment Study (MIS) phase of the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) initiative that was the precursor to the new tunnel plan. This option would include the new Trans-Hudson tunnel but would pass through existing trackage at Penn Station and continue under 31st Street and Park Avenue to existing lower level platforms at Grand Central Terminal. With two stops in Midtown Manhattan the Alternative G plan is far more attractive to passengers. In contrast, NJ Transit's current tunnel plan virtually replicates existing access at Penn Station. The MIS phase found that Alternative G cost less to build and less to operate, attracted more passengers, diverted more motorists and saved more travel time than the other two options considered. The study found that the track connection was feasible from an engineering point of view and could be constructed with only a modest amount of disruption. Though rivals with no thought of ever connecting their two magnificent terminals, both the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central made provision for extensions – at Penn Station and at Grand Central. Engineers for Alterntive G found ways to resourcefully use these features.

It is not clear why Alternative G was rejected. A shortcoming of the plan was that it did not call for significant integration of Metro-North and NJ Transit rail services. Instead, each carrier would operate separately through the Penn Station-Grand Central connection. Preserving the integrity of each carrier required costly supplemental storage yards and reduced peak hour capacity to a degree. In contrast, the successful Philadelphia Center City Connection, now in place for many years, was accomplished with full integration of the Reading and Pennsylvania commuter service under SEPTA.

For Alternative G to be successful both New York and New Jersey must work hand-in-hand to accomplish common objectives. Some observers claim that Alternative G was rejected by Governor Pataki because his advisors opined that the option would benefit New Jersey riders more than New York riders. Others blame the carriers — Metro-North and NJ Transit — putting institutional prerogatives above the public interest.

This project, perhaps the world's most significant train terminal connection, can only be achieved with the full and enthusiastic support of both Governors. For New York, the connection brings Metro-North riders from the Harlem Line directly into Penn Station, stimulating development in the West Midtown area. It improves access to the already busy East Midtown area, raising property values and tax revenues. The Boston-Washington Northeast Corridor line would pass through the two key business centers in Manhattan, increasing the viability of this service. A through Empire Corridor service to Philadelphia and Washington would be possible. And NY's West-of-Hudson Orange and Rockland Counties would benefit from Alternative G.

New Jersey transit advocates have called on their counterparts in New York to assist them in gaining support for this legacy project.

George Haikalis

Rhinecliff Parking, Bus, Discussed

The final quarter of 2005 brought some movement on ESPA's goal of increased parking at the Rhinecliff station, the third busiest Amtrak station in the state. Amtrak's regional Governmental Affairs staffer, Peter Cohen, attended a meeting in Ulster County where public transportation needs on both sides of the Hudson were discussed. A follow-up discussion with Bill Tobin, a planner for the Ulster County Transportation Council, informed ESPA that Ulster County Area Transit has applied for funds to purchase a shuttle bus for service across the river to Rhinecliff station.

On the Dutchess County side of the river the November elections resulted in changes in the leadership of the Town of Rhinebeck. Four newcomers will take over in January as Town Supervisor, Council members and Highway Superintendent. The new Highway Superintendent is a recent emigrant from NYC and a friend of Amtrak. She is open to the idea of more parking; however, there is a concern about the traffic impact of additional spaces. That's a valid issue that should be reviewed by both Dutchess and Ulster county planners. *Steve Strauss*

ESPA Endorses LIRR Improvements Project

ESPA Officers and Coordinators at their November 2005 meeting unanimously adopted a resolution in support of the Long Island Railroad's proposed Main Line Improvements Project. ESPA's support is based on the positive benefits of the proposal's three key components:

- The elimination of the current eight at-grade highway crossings will greatly improve safety for motorists, pedestrians and train passengers. In addition, the reduction in noise and pollution associated with these grade crossings will substantially improve the quality of life for surrounding residents and businesses.
- The proposed improvements to stations and bridges which will enhance the appearance, desirability and economic growth of communities along this route.
- The addition of a third main track which will provide the necessary additional rail capacity to allow for future enhanced peak hour services; expanded 'reverse' commute opportunities and the introduction of through service from Long Island locations to midtown Manhattan at Grand Central, as a component of the East Side Access initiative."

The supporting resolution noted that **ALL** Long Islanders and Metro New Yorkers will benefit from the safety and efficiency of the overall improved transportation network that will be offered upon the completion of this project and these positive attributes far out weigh any short-term or narrowly focused concerns that may be raised by the project details. *Bruce Becker*

"Intelligent" Subway Train Introduced

New York City Transit has displayed a five car prototype train of new R160 cars which will be tested this summer before production begins on a 660 car order from Kawasaki and Alsthom. The R160 cars will be similar to the R143 cars now used on the Canarsie (Brooklyn) L line except for one thing: the R160's will feature a running display showing train destination, progress and upcoming stops. This should help defuse passenger anxiety, especially for infrequent riders.

Amtrak Funded *(Cont'd from page 1)*

However $40 million more was allocated for a "New Efficiency Incentive Grant Program" to be used at the discretion of Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. This could be applied to operating costs, but only if deemed necessary to continue operation of routes or to avoid bankruptcy, and then only if both the Secretary and Inspector General Kenneth Mead agree that "an emergency situation exists."

Since Mineta has advocated closing routes it cannot be assumed that he will want to use these funds to retain the national system. And not even all these funds can be used for passenger operations because $8.3 million was earmarked by Rep. Joe Knollenberg (R., Mich.) to expand freight service provided by Amtrak for ExpressTrak, a Michigan based firm. (Knollenberg chairs the House subcommittee responsible for Amtrak's appropriation.) This means the maximum available for operations if Mineta and Mead agree, would still be only $521.7 million—$48.3 million below 2005 funding.

How can Amtrak's national system survive? One possible solution might be to utilize some of the unspent capital funds left over at the end of FY2005. But this would require board approval, which may be problematic since the Board now has only two members, one of whom is Mineta.

Cutting back on service is a second possibility. During their negotiations, House and Senate Conferees received a letter from Mead asserting that Amtrak could survive with $1.275 billion, far less than the $1.4 to $1.5 billion he had specified earlier in the year. Unfortunately the new lower figure apparently assumed elimination of sleeper and food service, which he recommended in a report last July.

The conferees did not require such extreme action but did specify that no funds could be spent for food or sleeper service "on any Amtrak route" after July 1st unless Mead certifies that savings have been achieved. All in all, the bill gives more power to Mead and Mineta than ever before—a disquieting prospect since both have advocated major cutbacks in routes and services. This could set the stage for route cutbacks and/or elimination of food and sleeper service while allowing Congress to pass the

(Cont'd on page 6)

26th ESPA Annual Meeting Registration

Empire State Passengers Association and National Association of Railroad Passengers – Region II

Saturday, March 11, 2006 12:00n-5:00pm Hot Lunch Buffet served at 12:30pm

Holiday Inn Downtown 100 Nott Terrace Schenectady, NY *Four Blocks from the Amtrak Station*

Confirmed Speaker: **George Chilson, President - NARP**
Invited Speakers: **State Senate Majority Leader Joseph Brun**
Amtrak's New York Division General Superintendent Lenore Slimboch
US Senators Charles Schumer and Hilary Clinton
New York State Transportation Commissioner Thomas Madison

Please complete and return this stub with a check for $30.00 per person for the complete program (lunch and meeting) or $15.00 if you will **ONLY** be attending the meeting, by February 28, 2006. (NO cancellations after this date).
Make checks payable to 'ESPA' & mail to: Bruce B. Becker 8175 Old Post Road East, East Amherst, NY 14051

Name(s): _____

Address: _____ City, State, Zip: _____

Telephone No: _____ E-Mail: _____

_____ I will be arriving in Schenectady on: ❒Tr. # 282 ❒Tr. #71 (Transportation and Walking Maps will be provided)

Amtrak Funded *(Cont'd from page 5)*

blame to the Bush Administration. However changes in food service and dining cars now being planned may produce enough savings to avoid triggering this provision.

The bill also gives Mineta power to review and revise amounts charged to commuter agencies for their share of maintenance and upgrading of Northeast Corridor infrastructure. This could lead to increased charges for commuter trains, which would likely be vigorously opposed by the states involved. But revenue from these charges could be used only for capital improvements, not operations.

Finally, the bill orders Amtrak not to discount fares to less than half its "normal, peak fares" after March 1st. It's not clear what "normal, peak fares" refers to, since under revenue management there is no such thing as a normal fare. This will have to be interpreted by the Federal Railroad Administration; hopefully their guideline document will not end up reducing ridership and costing Amtrak revenue.

Although House-Senate negotiations are supposed to work out differences between the bills passed in each chamber, many of these micro-managing provisions were not approved by either body—they were instead added after the fact by conferees on their own initiative.

Nine days after President Bush signed the bill, Rep. Knollenberg announced his intent to withdraw his $8.3 million earmark for ExpressTrak. This coincided with a December 11 *New York Times* exposé which revealed that ExpressTrak's payment to the law firm it hired to secure this funding would have been much lower if the earmark ended up less than $8.2 million. Knollenberg said he had not known about this arrangement and could not support it.

The $8.3 million was intended to expand business for ExpressTrak, the company that still moves apples from Washington State on the Empire Builder despite former president David Gunn's attempts to get Amtrak out of freight business. ExpressTrak has the last Amtrak carload freight contract still in effect because it is now bankrupt, and a court has ordered the service to continue until the bankruptcy is settled. The *Times* article also indicated that ExpressTrak's owner and his family
and employees have contributed roughly $46,000 to Knollenberg's campaign fund since 1997. (In some years they contributed more than General Motors).

Knollenberg inserted language to revoke the ExpressTrak earmark in the Defense Department appropriations Conference Report, passed by the House on December 23rd. *Frank Barry*

Free Congress Foundation *(Cont'd from page 1)*

a former Amtrak Board Member. Weyrich, a self-described conservative, tried unsuccessfully to recruit Gunn to head Amtrak in 1992. After accepting the job a decade later, Weyrich asked him why he had waited so long. According to Weyrich, Gunn responded, partly in jest, that "Amtrak wasn't in bad enough shape for me to take it over when you asked me!"

The Free Congress Foundation, unlike most other conservative advocacy groups, supports public transportation, especially rail passenger service. It has retained Gunn to help conservatives "understand how passenger trains...can support important conservative goals, such as increasing property values and reducing our country's dependence on vulnerable...oil supplies," according to Weyrich. *Frank Barry*

(NARP 12/9 Hotline and Free Congress Foundation Website)

2006 ESPA Meeting Dates

Saturday, January 21, 2006 Schenectady - The Parker Inn
Saturday, March 11, 2006 Annual Meeting - Schenectady

Other 2006 meeting dates will be announced soon...

If you would like to become more active in ESPA, these meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn about the Association and how you can make a difference. ALL ESPA members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Bruce Becker, 716-741-6384 or bbecker@westwoodcc.cc, for more information or if you are planning on attending a meeting.

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.

- ❑ Introductory membership ($10.00 for one year)
- ❑ Renewal membership ($24.00 per year)
- ❑ Renewal - Student or Senior Citizen ($12.50 per year)
- ❑ Family membership ($30.00)
- ❑ Sustaining membership ($50.00)
- ❑ Patron membership ($75.00)
- ❑ Corporate membership ($100.00
- ❑ Lifetime membership ($300.00)

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

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