

# 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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### Adirondack Potentially Threatened

Amtrak has notified New York State that it intends to discontinue the *Adirondack* as early as September 30, 2004, unless the state makes long overdue operation support payments and enters into an operating agreement for the current year. The *Adirondack* has been a state supported train since 1974 and serves over 140,000 passengers annually.

ESPA has written Governor Pataki and Commissioner Boardman strongly urging them to make the overdue payments and to honor the State's commitments to Amtrak, thus insuring the continuation of this vital service.

*Bruce Becker*

### Manhattan - Montreal Corridor Study

Quebec and New York State have been studying the feasibility of high-speed rail along Route I-87, between Manhattan and Montreal. The study recommends incremental improvements to reduce travel time. In addition, the study identified the delay of Customs and Immigration at the border as something which could be better handled in a different way, such as performing all border inspections in Montreal's Central Station.

A 150 mph option was explored, but at a cost of \$4 billion is not feasible for this corridor. More appropriate for the I-87 Corridor north of Albany is curve improvement, which would save 40-60 minutes of travel time north of Albany. The study indicated that ridership would almost double on the corridor if \$40 million of upgrades were made to the track, signals, and sidings, which would result in 2 hours of reduced travel time. An additional hour of time would be saved if Customs and Immigrations were moved to the train station in Montreal. The study states that both governments will work to determine how to move the border processing away from the actual border at Rouses Point.

The current journey of 10 hours 15 minutes needs to become 7 hours 15 minutes to make passenger rail a much more competitive travel option along the I-87 Corridor.

*Gary Prophet*

### Kids Ride Free

As long sought by ESPA, Amtrak has introduced a 'Kids Ride Free' promotion for the Empire Corridor, valid now through November 15, 2004. Designed to spur family ridership west and north of Albany, the promotion allows up to two children (ages 2-15) to ride free with each regular adult ticket purchased. Travel must include arriving or departing from any station west or north of Albany and is valid to or from any other Empire Corridor destination. Certain other limitations apply, including holiday period restrictions. Refer to Discount Code H412 when making reservations and purchasing tickets. Visit your local New York State Amtrak Ticket Office or call 1-800-USA-RAIL for more information. This discount is not available through the internet.

### "Must Pass" Bill Includes Rail Tax Credits

After years of unsuccessful attempts by rail supporters, Senator Tom Carper (Del.) has managed to get rail tax credit funding into a "must pass" bill. S-1637, the Jumpstart Our Business Strength Act, was introduced by Senator Charles Grassley (R, Ia.) last Fall to end penalties against U.S. Corporations imposed by a World Trade Organization ruling. Thanks to Senator Carper, the bill also allows for \$165 million in tax credits annually from 2005 to 2008 for intercity rail passenger service improvements. To receive this funding, a project must be included in a state rail plan that designates a rail transportation authority to prepare and administer the plan. Eligible expenses would include planning, track, signals, rolling stock and stations. The bill includes a similar amount for regional freight railroads and shortlines.

The credit would cover half the cost of an eligible expense and would be deducted from the federal tax of a taxpaying entity. If the responsible agency is tax exempt the credit could be transferred to a taxable entity (possibly a freight railroad or other contractor). The \$165 million would be allocated among states by a formula based on existing ridership and number of grade crossings. The bill also includes \$200 million for rail transit in New York City's Liberty Zone—subway; commuter rail or airport access would be eligible.

S-1637 passed the Senate 92-5 on May 11th. The House passed its version, HR-4520, on June 17th—but without any rail tax credits. To become law the credits must survive a House-Senate conference where differences are reconciled. This may be very difficult because Democrats have recently been largely excluded from conferences in recent months. (Senator Carper, a Democrat, received the Falcon Golden Spike Award for his efforts at the NARP Board Meeting in April).

But Senator Carper was not the only one to use the bill for a special interest. So many others have done so that the bill is being widely criticized as a Christmas tree for a host of business interests, including payouts for tobacco growers and tax breaks for the energy industry and whalers in Alaska. In a June 19th editorial the *New York Times* said it began "as a simple \$5 billion fix for a tariff problem but was transformed into a \$143 billion juggernaut of special-interest favors (that) have nothing to do with the trade issue at hand."

Rail supporters may find it sobering to participate in what is widely viewed as a huge porkfest. But in view of the consistent failure of more straightforward attempts to fund our national rail passenger system, this national "member item" approach with something for everyone may be the only way that works. So rail supporters should ask their Congressional Representatives to work to ensure inclusion of the rail tax credit in the final bill.

*Frank Barry*

## The View from the Cab

• Unfortunately the ongoing saga between New York State and Amtrak to resolve Amtrak's withdrawal from the 1998 Joint High Speed Rail Program continues, with the citizens and rail passengers of New York caught in the middle. While progress has reportedly been made to reach an agreement satisfactory to both parties, significant issues still remain. As no efforts to improve or expand service in the state can be even considered until a final agreement is approved and signed, ESPA strongly urges both New York State and Amtrak to resolve their differences as quickly as possible.

• ESPA will soon be providing testimony at a series of NYSDOT public hearings being held around the state, in support of the goals contained in our most recent Five Year Plan - "A Vision for Passenger Rail and Public Transportation 2004-2008". We will strongly advocate for a greatly increased emphasis on passenger rail service and related intermodal connections in the State's next Transportation Master Plan.

• Congratulations to Amtrak on its **recently published New York By Rail Travel Guide**. The beautiful 40-page full color guide highlights travel destinations accessible by train across the State and includes information for Toronto, Montreal and Vermont also. The guide is being distributed to over 80,000 travel professionals across the country, as well as being available at all Empire Corridor stations.

• It is with regret that I must announce that Thom Coates has resigned as our Association's Secretary. Thom has served in this position for several years and he will be missed. Chris Nadelbach, Long Island Coordinator, who has held the Secretary's post in the past, has agreed to resume these duties.

• If your summer travels bring you to Central New York, don't miss an opportunity to visit the newly restored station at Rome. Officially re-opened June 4<sup>th</sup>, the historic New York Central R.R. structure looks as great as it did when new over 90 years ago!

• 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*

## Rome Multimodal Center Dedication

On June 4, 2004, the city of Rome unveiled its newly renovated train station, now called the "Rome Multimodal Transportation Center". On hand for the dedication was Congressman Sherwood Boehlert, who obtained \$800,000 for the project. Also on hand were Assemblywoman Roann Destito, who obtained \$325,000 in State funds and State Senator Nancy L. Hoffman, granddaughter of a railroad engineer, who pledged to work to provide any future support needed to help build the means for attracting international tourism to see "Rural New York".

The station's \$4.3 million in renovations were paid for from all levels of government and several service groups such as the Rome Rotary and the Great American Station Foundation. Phase One included renovating the tunnel access to the platform, the platform itself, elevators and stairs, and a new boiler. Phase Two included bathrooms, new flooring and benches, and environmental cleaning in addition to the restoration of historical windows and tile roof. The Rome station has the distinction of being the only train station in New York State with a heated platform. The creation of space for Rome's local city "VIP" bus service headquarters was done as part of Phase Two.

*Gary Gianotti*

## Transportation Bill Negotiations Difficult

Dramatically different price tags for the Administration, Senate and House versions of the next surface transportation bill have created tensions between Congressional Republicans and the White House. According to the National Association of Railroad Passengers May 14 web bulletin, the White House refused to budge from its \$256 billion figure, which most in Congress feel is too low. According to a May 13 story in The Hill newspaper, House Speaker Dennis Hastert "expressed outright dismay with the White House staff for the way the transportation bill had been handled. They did not give (it) the priority...the speaker had wanted." One lawmaker said Hastert felt "He had not been dealt with openly and fairly (or) given accurate information." According to the Hill article, members of the Republican caucus meeting where this occurred "burst into applause when Hastert criticized the Bush Administration." As a result negotiations literally broke down and formal meetings stopped.

But they are under way again as this is being written and current plans are to extend the current TEA-21 law through July to give negotiators more time. Negotiators include New Yorkers Sherwood Boehlert (R., Utica), Jerry Nadler (D, New York) and Charles Rangel (D., New York). As reported last month, the House version contains funding for a number of rail projects. In addition to those cited, ESPA coordinator Roy Davis reports that Jack Quinn (R., Buffalo), obtained \$1 million to reopen the station in Dunkirk.

*Frank Barry*

## Ferry Service Starts Rochester to Toronto

Regular high-speed ferry service started Saturday, June 19, 2004 between the Port of Rochester, NY and the City of Toronto, Ontario. The Spirit of Ontario, a \$42.5 million aluminum catamaran, was constructed in Australia and will have a Bahamas Maritime Authority registration and is owned by the Canadian American Transportation System or CATS. The ship has a capacity of 774 passengers and 238 cars and will use the \$16 million Rochester terminal located, on the mouth of the Genesee River, at intersection of Lake and Beach Avenues.

Two round trips per day, are scheduled through June 26th, and three daily round trips are planned for the remaining summer season. The journey between Rochester and Toronto will take two hours and fifteen minutes traveling along the southern shoreline of Lake Ontario. Schedules: [www.thebreeze.com](http://www.thebreeze.com). *Karl Greenhagle*

## 2004 - 2005 ESPA Meeting Dates

Saturday, August 14, 2004 Rome Amtrak Station, Rome, NY 12:00pm - 4:30pm **Please Note: The date has been changed to August 14<sup>th</sup> Advance reservations are required to attend this meeting. Please contact Bruce Becker by August 11<sup>th</sup>**

Saturday, October 2, 2004 The Parker Inn, Schenectady

Saturday, November 20, 2004 Rensselaer Amtrak Station,

Saturday, January 8, 2005 The Parker Inn, Schenectady

Saturday, March 12, 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, 716-741-6384 or [bbecker@westwoodcc.cc](mailto:bbecker@westwoodcc.cc) if you need more information or are planning on attending a meeting.

### **Bruce Becker's Revised Contact Information:**

8175 Old Post Road East East Amherst, NY 14051

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## **Business Organizes to Support Amtrak Funding**

On May 5<sup>th</sup> Northeastern business groups in every state from Maine to Virginia met in Washington to launch the new Amtrak Business Coalition to work for adequate funding for Amtrak. Its mission statement includes ensuring that "funding for rail improvements is available as a viable and potentially more cost effective .. alternative to traditional transportation solutions." It will also "advocate .. policies and capital funding (to) preserve and improve the quality and reliability of Amtrak, commuter and freight service along the Northeast Corridor." This includes feeder corridors such as New York-Albany.

New York participating organizations include the New York State Business Council, New York City Partnership and Chamber of Commerce, Metropolitan Development Association of Greater Syracuse, Greater Syracuse Chamber of Commerce and the Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"I was impressed by the breadth of representation; it's a very comprehensive group," Ed Reinfurt of the State Business Council said in a conversation with ESPA about the May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting. "Each state group has its own core interests in transportation, but when you put it all together it demonstrates the enormous economic importance of Amtrak. Then when you look at the fight in Congress, it's clear Amtrak should have greater clout." Reinfurt was also impressed by David Gunn's presentation: "It was very important to hear first hand what Amtrak needs. You'll see more business support now that we understand the needs. You walked away with confidence in backing the program." As a result of this meeting and the Business Council's participation, "Amtrak will be ratcheted up a bit on our agenda," Mr. Reinfurt concluded.

Douglas Small, who heads the Syracuse Convention and Visitors Bureau, says his group will do more to let visitors know they can get to Syracuse by train. "Any time you can draw attention to the diversity of transportation to this area it's positive," he said; "we can't continue relying just on airlines and driving to get people here."

The new coalition is good news for Amtrak, as the current administration and Congress seem especially receptive to business interests.

Also in May, 200 members of the House of Representatives signed letters urging full funding for Amtrak's \$1.8 billion request. A letter signed by 21 House Republicans went to Appropriations Committee Chairman Bill Young, (R., Fla.), and its Transportation Sub-Committee Chairman, Ernest Istook, (Okla.). A similar letter signed by Democrats went to the full committee and subcommittee Ranking Minority Members, David Obey, (Wis.) and John Olver, (Mass). Last year 219 members—a majority in the 435 member House signed a similar letter. The decrease in co-signers this year likely resulted in part from Istook's Feb. 12 letter threatening last year's Republican signers with a reduction in local highway funds if they signed such a letter this year. Last year 33 Republicans signed; this year only 21 did.

All but two New York Democrats signed this year as they did last year (Jose Serrano and Nita Lowey who both strongly support Amtrak did not sign because they serve on the Appropriations Committee to which the letter was addressed). However New York signers dropped by two as Republicans Peter King (L.I.) and Sue Kelly, (Westchester) who signed last year, did not do so this year. Republicans John McHugh, (Watertown) Amo Houghton, (Corning), Sherwood Boehlert (Utica) and Jack Quinn (Buffalo) all signed again despite Istook's threat. Republicans Tom Reynolds

(Amherst), Jim Walsh (Syracuse) and John Sweeney did not sign either year; Sweeney and Walsh serve on the Appropriations Committee and both have been supportive in other ways.

Overall, the outlook in Congress appears to have worsened as we go to press. According to the National Association of Railroad Passengers June 4 website bulletin, the House Appropriations Committee has cut funds by 10% for its Transportation Subcommittee that funds Amtrak; no other subcommittee was cut at all. Although Amtrak funding represented only 4% of this subcommittee's total for last year, Istook, an outspoken Amtrak foe, may use this as a pretext to cut Amtrak much more deeply. The support of the new business coalition and many others, including ESPA members, will be critical as the process continues.

*Frank Barry*

## **Saratoga Race Season Service Offered**

Amtrak will again be offering special Saratoga Race Track Packages this season, with service provided on Saturdays and Sundays, starting July 24 and running through Labor Day. For the first time in several years through Race Service directly to Saratoga is being offered every Saturday and Sunday of the seven week Saratoga Race Meet.

Northbound service will be provided directly to Saratoga on #71, leaving New York at 7:45am and arriving at 11:16am. Southbound service will be provided from Saratoga on #296 departing at 7:10pm, both Saturdays and Sundays, with a 10:45pm arrival back in New York. Offered from all Hudson Valley stations, the Race Packages will include round trip Rail, Bus Transfer from the Saratoga Station to the Racetrack, Clubhouse Admission and a Program. Contact Amtrak for reservations and more information.

*Bruce Becker*

## **State Fair Service Returns for 3rd Season**

Amtrak will again be making special stops at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse during this year's Fair, scheduled for August 26 through September 6. All Empire Corridor trains (excluding the *Lake Shore Limited*) will provide service directly to the Fair Entrance Gate. This service is especially convenient for Western New Yorkers, as current schedules provide excellent same day trips to the Fair. Special Fair Service Discounts will be announced soon. For complete information, contact Amtrak...

## **Empire Builder and Heartland Flyer Celebrate Anniversary**

In June, the Amtrak *Empire Builder* – one of the great trains in American history, celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary with celebrations held at 12 designated stops between Chicago and Seattle/Portland. The *Empire Builder* boasts an above average on-time performance with the assistance of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe. In Montana alone, the *Empire Builder* has a total economic impact of nearly \$14 million, provides good-paying jobs, reduces highway maintenance and brings in at least \$5 million tourist dollars a year.

Also in June, the *Heartland Flyer* operating between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This train is consistently being ranked number one in customer satisfaction on Amtrak's national surveys that rate 19 factors including cleanliness, food quality and on-time performance. Ridership on the *Heartland Flyer* was up 17 percent in the last Amtrak fiscal year, and up again by more than 19 percent so far this year.

## House Develops Rail Security Bills

On May 13 Eleanor Holmes Norton, (D., DC), submitted HR 4361, called SafeTRAINS, to provide funding, planning and coordination against terrorist attacks on public transportation. The bill authorizes \$2.8 billion over three years for capital projects including tunnel life support systems as well as security operations such as monitoring and training. It requires coordination between the Department of Transportation (USDOT) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in planning and implementation.

HR4361 now has 33 co-sponsors, all Democrats, including five New Yorkers: Louise Slaughter (Roch.), Nita Lowey (Harrison), Carolyn Maloney, (Manhattan), Major Owens and Edolfus Towns, both of Brooklyn. This bill has been referred to the Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee.

But on June 17th T&I Chairman Don Young (Alaska), and outgoing Rail Subcommittee Chairman Jack Quinn, (Buffalo), submitted a more modest Republican version, authorizing \$1.1 billion over five years. Their HR-4604 bill is designed to "harden our rail system against possible terrorist attacks and improve our ability to recover from such an incident," according to the National Association of Railroad Passengers 6/18 website bulletin. It would require increased monitoring and co-ordination between USDOT and TSA as well as development of contingency plans for rerouting traffic in case of attack. The bill would authorize \$570 million for life safety improvements in New York tunnels, lesser amounts for tunnels in Baltimore and Washington and other projects including emergency bridge repair. This bill has only one other co-sponsor, Vice Chairman Jon Porter, (R., Nev.).

HR-4604 somewhat parallels Senator John McCain's S-2273, which provides similar amounts for tunnel upgrades over the same 5-year period (see our last issue). McCain's S-2273 was approved by the Commerce, Science and Technology Committee, which he chairs, on April 28th.

*Frank Barry*

## Amtrak Rethinks Farley Building Participation

Amtrak doesn't plan to move out of Penn Station entirely if a new station is built in the Farley Post Office building on the other side of 8th Avenue, according to its spokesman Cliff Black. "We believe the Farley Building would provide additional access and egress," Black told ESPA, "but most of our passengers come from the East—the 7th Avenue subway, the Long Island RR, New Jersey Transit or 7th Avenue itself. Moving everything a block west would be a disservice to our passengers; we should be looking to make our service more convenient for passengers, not less so."

For this reason, Black said, Amtrak would maintain some facilities in the current station. If everything were moved, "we would have

access only to the western end of the platform; we'd have fewer stairways and escalators than we have now, which wouldn't work for long trains or through trains."

These statements should be welcome for many in ESPA who have raised similar concerns; they reinforce the words of Lew Hoppe, who has articulated eloquently the problems for passengers from moving to the Farley Building.

Whether this will be a serious blow to the Farley Building remains to be seen, as its promoters were counting on retail sales revenue from Amtrak passengers to help finance the project. If the number of passengers passing through the building is reduced substantially, this could have a negative impact.

Black also made it clear that Amtrak cannot pay rent in the new building or contribute to its construction. "We're concerned about costs: we don't pay rent now, and we're not in a position to take that on," he said.

According to a May 28th New York Times article, Empire State Development Corporation officials accused Amtrak of renegeing on a 1999 agreement to contribute to the costs. At the same time New Jersey Transit President George Warrington has asked his staff to look into whether NJT might be able to use the new station. And, says the Times, the Moynihan Station Development Corporation still plans to seek construction bids in September.

*Frank Barry*

### 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 (\$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 c/o Andrew Cabal, 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: 716-759-2315. e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. Deadline for material for Sept/Oct issue is August 25, 2004. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.

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