

# The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



## WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 30, No. 4

July/August 2006



### Thendara Railroad Bridge Completed

Pictured above is the Adirondack Scenic Railroad's Fathers Day Weekend excursion train switching on the new bridge. The bridge is a historical recreation of a standard New York Central Railroad girder bridge. The Syracuse chapter of the National Railway Historical Society sponsored the Special train.

The \$4.2 million project by the state D.O.T. included a paved extension of the recreation Tobie trail and new tour bus parking area at the station.

Adirondack Scenic Railroads 2006 Special events include: Loomis Gang Train Robberies, Evening BBQ Train, Eco Tour Train Ride and Nature Walk, Bike & Rail Train, Canoe & Trail Train, Wine Tasting Train, among others. Schedules: [www.adirondackrr.com/ofspecial.htm](http://www.adirondackrr.com/ofspecial.htm)

### State Fair Service Returns for Fifth Season

Amtrak will again be making special stops at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse during this year's Fair, scheduled for August 24 through September 4. 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.

### Saratoga Race Season Service

Amtrak will again be offering special Saratoga Race Track Packages this season, with direct service provided from New York City and all other Hudson Valley points every Saturday and Sunday, starting July 29 and running through Labor Day.

Northbound service will be provided directly to Saratoga Springs on # 71, leaving New York at 7:45am and arriving at 11:16am. Southbound service will be provided from Saratoga Springs on #296 departing at 7:07pm, both Saturdays and Sundays, with a 10:45pm arrival back in New York. 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, fares and more information.

### 2006 New York By Rail Travel Guide Available

The 2006 edition of the 'New York By Rail' Travel Guide is now available! Loaded with information on Amtrak's services and destinations across New York State, the 50 page, full color guide is the perfect planning tool for both experienced and first-time rail travelers. Get your copy by stopping by your local staffed Amtrak ticket office, on board Empire Corridor trains or by contacting Amtrak by phone or ordering through their web site. Higher Gas Prices, More Flexible Rail Fares and Continued Improvement In Reliability Help Boost Ridership Across Upstate New York. Ridership continues to increase across upstate New York State. As reported in Amtrak's April 2006 Monthly Performance Report, ridership on trains operating west of Albany was up a whopping 22.5% in April 2006 as compared to April 2005, with revenues up 26.8% as compared to the previous year. Year-to-date (October through April) figures show overall ridership west of Albany is up 9.0%, with revenues up 13.9%.

Other impressive year-to date ridership increases are noted on the *Ethan Allen Express* to Rutland, up 10.6%; on the *Lake Shore Limited*, up 17.3% and on the *Adirondack* up 3.2%.

Overall YTD ticket revenue for all New York State service trains was up \$2,297,974, with the *Lake Shore Limited* showing an increase of \$1,848,565.

April's on-time performance of 75.0% all New York State service trains was significantly better than last year's dismal 54.9% tally. YTD on-time performance is 74.6%, which is still behind Amtrak's goal of 85%. Unfortunately, the *Lake Shore Limited* lagged far behind at only 17.5% on-time in April and an YTD tally of only 23.6%.

Bruce B. Becker

### House Appropriates \$1.1 billion

On June 13 the House of Representatives appropriated \$1.114 billion for Amtrak for next year but inserted requirements that may be impossible to meet. The \$1.114 billion amounts to a 14% cut from the current \$1.294 billion level, but represents a significant increase over the \$900 million shutdown figure proposed by President Bush and approved by the House Appropriations Committee. It is still well short of the \$1.4 billion the Department of Transportation Inspector General says Amtrak needs to barely survive, and even farther short of the \$1.598 billion Amtrak has requested to continue operations plus the rehabilitation initiated by former president David Gunn.

Language in the bill contains many restrictions including the following:

1) No federal funds can be used to subsidize losses from food or sleeping car service on any route after July 1, 2007 unless the Inspector General can certify that Amtrak has achieved operational savings by this date.

(Cont'd on page 4)

## The View from the Cab

It is very encouraging to see sustained ridership and revenue increases for most of Amtrak's New York State services and in particular for trains operating west of Albany. After several years of declining rail patronage attributable to unreasonably high fares and fierce competition from low cost airlines, it appears that the traveling public is once again rediscovering Amtrak. Certainly high gas prices may be driving this increase, but more flexible fares, improved on board service and better on-time performance all help too.

This ridership surge comes at a very important time, particularly for the efforts being spearheaded by State Senator Joe Bruno to launch a new era of improvements in passenger rail services across the state. As with any such burgeoning government program, widespread political support will be critical to the ultimate success of the Senate's High Speed Rail Task Force's multi-year plan. The best way to convince our elected representatives from across the state that their support of funding for the Task Force's plan is needed now, is to demonstrate to them that the public wants and will use improved rail service. Dramatically higher ridership is the best to do this.

I urge all ESPA members to contact their State Senator and Assemblyperson and ask them to support funding for the High Speed Rail Task Force plans. Particularly important is gaining support from upstate representatives and for those ESPA members who live west of Albany, I strongly encourage you to refer to the positive ridership statistics noted in this issue when you write or speak with your representatives.

As this issue goes to press, two issues are affecting upstate services. First, the worst flooding in the Mohawk Valley in decades has brought back to mind the old New York Central adage, the 'Water Level Route'. Unfortunately with water over the rails in many places, washouts in others and the signal systems knocked out for miles, it may be some time before Amtrak service can fully return to normal.

The second unfolding issue is potentiality more troubling however. News has started to filter into ESPA of U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency activity negatively impacting both passengers and train operations at Rochester. Reportedly, significant delays have been caused by Border Patrol agents boarding the *Lake Shore Limited* to conduct inspections of passengers and baggage on more than one occasion. ESPA will be further investigating this matter in the coming weeks and we will take appropriate actions if the facts warrant a response.

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

## Letter to the Editor

Since you were Very helpful in answering my original question regarding fares and discounts for Amtrak travel, I thought I would offer a comment on the service suspension within NYS due to flooding.

First, I did reserve a ticket for my son to travel from Buffalo to NYC on July 3. Due to flooding, I've called Amtrak and observed the website, etc... New suspension through July 2. So Amtrak is not offering any help for travel between Syracuse and Albany. BAD move. I feel that ESPA should bring this issue to the attention of the right people. If we are all trying to boost service/awareness etc., it seems not too difficult to have a bus available to bridge the gap.

Regards, Bill Maiman 6/30

## Mineta Omits Rail in Congestion Plan

On May 16th U.S. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta launched a 6 point campaign to reduce congestion in the United States.

The plan advocates no new funding although it cites a growing consensus that "existing financing mechanisms for highway and aviation infrastructure are unsustainable." Instead, specific steps include

- 1) Congestion pricing (higher tolls during rush hour), express bus service, flexible work hours and expansion of telecommuting;
- 2) Encouraging public-private partnerships under which private interests will buy highways and charge tolls to pay for maintenance, expansion and to generate a profit;
- 3) Better real time traffic information for drivers and better incident management on highways;
- 4) A "Corridors of the Future" competition to develop multi-use, multi-state corridors;
- 5) Sponsor shipper and freight carrier CEO summits to develop ways to reduce freight congestion;
- 6) Speed up aviation capacity projects by fast tracking approvals and "streamlining" environmental reviews.

But the plan does not even mention rail passenger service as a solution—or rail transit. Nor does it mention better land use policies to reduce the need for driving.

National Association of Railroad Passengers President George Chilson wrote to Mr. Mineta saying NARP is "dumbfounded" by the absence of any mention of rail.

The plan is available at: <http://isddc.dot.gov/OLPFiles/OST/012988.pdf>

Frank Barry

## 2006-2007 ESPA Meeting Dates

- |                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Saturday, August 5, 2006     | Utica – Trackside Tavern              |
| Saturday, September 30, 2006 | New York City - Municipal Art Society |
| Saturday, November 18, 2006  | Schenectady – The Parker Inn          |
| Saturday, January 20, 2007   | Schenectady – The Parker Inn          |
| Saturday, March 10, 2007     | Annual Meeting – Schenectady          |

ALL dates, times and locations are subject to change...Please refer to the ESPA Web Site, [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org), for the most current information

If you would like to become more active in ESPA, these meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how YOU can make a difference! ALL ESPA members (and other interested persons) are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Bruce Becker, 716-741-6384 or [bbecker@esparail.org](mailto:bbecker@esparail.org), for more information or if you are planning on attending a meeting.

Don't forget...our completely new web site, [www.esparail.org](http://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...

Please sign up NOW for the e-news alert feature, bookmark the site in your 'favorites' and it a regular part of your time on the web!

ESPA thanks Mischler's Florist and Greenhouses of Williamsville N.Y. for donating flowers to help beautify the Buffalo/Depew station.



## States Expand Passenger Rail

In what might be the largest Amtrak and commuter rail expansion in recent years, almost a dozen US states will (or would) benefit from increased passenger train service. This expansion comes through the initiative of various states and organizations despite the lack of federal matching funds for intercity passenger rail service.

Since July 1, the Pacific Northwest has been served by an additional Seattle, **Washington** - Portland, **Oregon** train (the first Amtrak expansion there since 1999), bringing to five the number of daily round-trips along the 186-mile route. This addition is made possible by the Washington State Legislature, which appropriated \$2.75 million for the improved service, which uses European-style *Talgo* equipment. The Washington State D.O.T has sponsored the Amtrak *Cascades* service since 1994, which served over 600,000 riders last year.

Later this year, the other Portland (**Maine**) will have an additional round-trip *Downeaster* frequency connecting with Boston, **Massachusetts** via southeastern **New Hampshire**. The Northern New England Rail Passenger Authority, that has managed the service since its December 2001 inaugural, is finalizing the increase in service with Pan Am (formerly Guilford) Railways, owner of most of the track. A total of \$6 million is being spent for siding and track upgrades to accommodate the line to serve five daily passenger round-trips along the 116 mile route. *Downeaster* annual ridership is about 300,000, and is expected to increase with additional frequency.

The **Illinois** Legislature doubled to \$24.3 its annual Amtrak subsidy, which will allow four additional Amtrak round-trips (RT's) on three different routes which link Chicago with Quincy (258 miles via Galesburg for a total of 2 RT's), St. Louis (284 miles via Springfield for a total of 5 RT's), and Carbondale (310 miles via Champaign for a total of 3 RT's). Amtrak is expected to begin these trains on October 1.

The Illinois increases have spurred communities along the former *Black Hawk* route, which linked Dubuque, **Iowa** and northwestern Illinois with Chicago prior to 1981, to form a coalition. Officials from Rockford, Freeport, Galena and Dubuque, as well as the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, and the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, are holding meetings to persuade Amtrak and state officials to restore daily service. US Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) wrote to Amtrak's acting President David Hughes to meet with Rockford-area officials regarding service restoration. Rockford officials are also pushing to extend Chicago's METRA service.

The **Missouri** Department of Transportation (MoDOT), which funds two Amtrak round trips between Kansas City and St. Louis, proposed in June to start daily Amtrak passenger rail service between St. Louis and Springfield, MO (near the popular tourist spot of Branson in the south-west corner of that state). The soonest service could begin would be in two years, but the former Frisco (now BNSF) route is in good condition with available capacity for the train. Previous service ended about 40 years ago. MoDOT Multimodal Operations Director Brian Weiler said in a statement: "Population and travel is way up in the Springfield/ Branson area and with highways becoming more congested and fuel costs going up, more people than ever are looking for other ways to travel".

In **New Mexico**, a 50-mile, nine-station commuter rail system will operate over former Santa Fe tracks (used by Amtrak's *Southwest*

*Chief*) that run from Belen north to Bernalillo via Albuquerque. The *Rail Runner* is set to begin July 14 with 7 weekday round trips served by 5 locomotives and 10 bi-level Bombardier commuter cars. The \$125 million project is part of Governor Bill Richardson's \$1.5 billion state transportation initiative that includes both highway and non-highway funding. In addition, the state has commenced engineering to extend the system north to the capital at Santa Fe, a project that will include the construction of 16 miles of new track, with a completion time of 30 months.

Under a \$100 million proposal, the St. Louis and Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority hopes to establish a high-speed link between Duluth, **Minnesota** and the Twin Cities (St. Paul/Minneapolis) by 2010. The first step in restoration of passenger train service in this market, located along the Minnesota-**Wisconsin** border, a new \$1.3 million appropriation (which needs an equal match) to be used to restore the Duluth depot. Previous passenger train service ended in 1985.

The **New Jersey Transit** Board of Directors has approved a three-year demonstration of direct New York City-Atlantic City rail service, expected to begin in late 2007. From Friday afternoons through Sunday nights, 18 trips are expected to run (via Frankford Junction in North Philadelphia), with limited stops in New Jersey. NJT has a contract with the Casino Reinvestment Development Authority (CRDA) and a partnership of Atlantic City hotels (Atlantic City Express Service, LLC). NJT Executive Director George Warrington said, in an NJT release, "I applaud the [CRDA], Borgata, Caesar's and Harrah's for their leadership and Amtrak for their cooperation in making this special service possible." The deal includes \$15 million to add eight cars on to NJT's current bi-level car order and \$4.5 million to lease four dual-mode locomotives from Amtrak. The direct service from Manhattan is possible thanks to Amtrak's life safety improvements in the Hudson River tubes that reactivated the long-dormant third rail between Penn Station and the New Jersey side of the tunnel. *Andrew J. Cabal* (Sources: AP, Bloomington Pantograph, CNS, MoDOT, Rockford Register Star, St. Louis Business Journal, Seattle Times, TrainRider, WSDOT)

## Oak Ridge Publishes New Energy Statistics

The Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which publishes energy statistics, has issued a new report assessing energy use in transportation from 1970 through 2003. Amtrak consumed 2935 British Thermal Units per passenger mile (BTU/PM) in 2003, compared to 3587 for certificated airlines and 3549 for cars. In other words Amtrak used 18% less energy per passenger mile than airlines and 17% less than automobiles. (It used 6% more than commuter railroads, which used 2751 BTU/PM).

While Amtrak has increased its energy efficiency over time—it's BTU/PM is 20% less than in 1975—it has not done so as dramatically as the airlines, which have cut their BTU/PM by 54% over the same period. (Automobile BTM/PM has dropped by 25%) However more recent Amtrak figures will be lower because since 2003 Amtrak has virtually stopped hauling mail and express, the extra fuel for which was attributed to passengers and included in Amtrak's BTU/PM calculation. (Air cargo is also included in the airline BTPM calculation).

In another measure of efficiency improvement, Amtrak has increased its train miles by 24% since 1975 while its passenger miles have risen by 51%.

The relevant sections of the report are available at: [http://cta.ornl.gov/data/tedb25/Edition25\\_Chapter02.pdf](http://cta.ornl.gov/data/tedb25/Edition25_Chapter02.pdf), (and Chapter 9).

*Frank Barry*

## Rail Options Narrowed for Tappan Zee

After some narrowing down there are now 6 alternatives as part of the NYS DOT, NYS Thruway Authority, and MTA list of options for the Tappan Zee corridor:

1. Keep the bridge and repair it, estimated cost about \$ 1.0 billion.

2. Rehabilitate the span and add more park-and-ride lots and priority lanes for buses. Cost \$2.5 billion.

3. Build a wider bridge with express bus service. Cost: \$ 6.5 billion.

4. Build a wider bridge with commuter rail and Bus Rapid Transit service. Cost: \$11.5 billion. Commuter rail would allow rail service from Rockland County across the bridge and merging into the Hudson line, with a one-seat ride to GCT. Bus service would travel across the Route 287 corridor, either from Suffern to Tarrytown, White Plains and Port Chester or just from Tarrytown to White Plains and Port Chester. The Bus Rapid Transit service would travel within its own right-of-way.

5. Build a wider bridge with commuter rail and a light rail connection. Cost: \$12.5 billion. Commuter rail would provide a one-seat ride to GCT. At a proposed new station located a couple hundred feet north of the existing toll plaza, passengers could transfer to a light rail system that would travel across the Route 287 corridor from Tarrytown to White Plains and Port Chester.

6. Build a wider bridge with commuter rail. Cost: \$14.5 billion. Commuter trains would provide a one-seat ride to GCT and across the 287 corridor to White Plains and possibly east to Port Chester.

To the surprise of many people, the option of light rail across the 30-mile corridor from Suffern to Port Chester was eliminated. More hearings are scheduled later in 2006 to review the Environmental Impact Study of the above six options.

With the recent announcement of Senator Schumer's support for a new tunnel connecting New Jersey with mid-town Manhattan, Riverkeeper's senior attorney, Robert Goldstein stated, "The proposals for a new Tappan Zee bridge with mass-transit alternatives are not necessary as a new tunnel connecting rail lines in New Jersey with Manhattan obviates the need for mass-transit links across the Tappan Zee." But the NYS Thruway Authority has stated that surveys and traffic patterns have indicated that over half of the eastbound traffic across the Tappan Zee Bridge continues across Westchester (Route 287), not into New York City on Route 87.

The Westchester Rockland Tappan Zee Futures Task Force, which was created by the county executives of the two counties, has stated its support for a new bridge that would feature a one-seat rail ride across the two counties (the Route 287 corridor) and a one-seat rail ride to Manhattan.

*Gary Prophet*

## House Appropriates (Cont'd from page 1)

2) Amtrak must submit detailed plans to make food and sleeper services "revenue neutral" by October 1, 2008, and report quarterly to Congress on implementation.

3) Amtrak must reduce its overhead expenses by 10% each year from the previous year, beginning on October 1, 2008.

4) Amtrak must reduce its costs for reservations and ticketing in ways that enhance revenue and "assure accurate manifests of passengers... at all times."

According to the National Association of Railroad Passengers these requirements "suggest an attempt to kill Amtrak through the

back door, the front door having failed." (6/23 Hotline) While the first requirement extends wording introduced last year, the last three are new. Expecting any organization to reduce its overhead costs by 10% each year seems absurd, especially when prices are rising overall. Making food services and sleeping cars "revenue neutral" may require eliminating them altogether—a move recommended last year by the DOT Inspector General.

Getting the amount up to \$1.11 billion took some doing, as the full Appropriations Committee defeated two amendments to increase the \$900 million Bush figure that had been accepted by the sub-committee responsible for transportation. Both amendments were tripped up by the offset requirement—if a budget item goes up, something else must compensate. John Olver, (Mass.), the ranking subcommittee Democrat, proposed to increase the Amtrak amount by \$400 million and pay for this, plus an increase for housing, by raising the tax on millionaires by \$4700.

But this was unacceptable to subcommittee chair Joe Knollenberg (R., Mich.) and other Republicans and it was defeated by a voice vote. New York Representative John Sweeney, (R., Clifton Park), the Subcommittee Vice Chairman, offered a more modest amendment to increase Amtrak's appropriation by \$291 million by taking small amounts from administrative budgets of various other agencies. He cited Amtrak's energy efficiency compared to cars and planes and its response to last year's Congressional demand to reduce costs—"We have asked Amtrak to reform and they have," he said. But his offsets were unacceptable to both Knollenberg and Olver. "It would tear this bill apart," Knollenberg said. It was also defeated by voice vote.

When the bill reached the House Floor Stephen LaTourette (R., Ohio), and James Oberstar (D., Minn.) in a repeat of last year's struggle, again offered a bi-partisan amendment, fairly similar to Sweeney's to increase Amtrak funding by \$214 million. John Mica, one of Amtrak's perennial enemies, made perhaps the most colorful opposing statement: "giving Amtrak more money would be like giving at this point an alcoholic another drink and asking him to sober up."

But many others, including Sweeney, spoke in favor: "Amtrak has saved in excess of \$19 million with the institution of these new reform plans that we demanded of them," Sweeney said. "To now shut them down would go back on our word...Amtrak is an essential service. Support this amendment."

And the full house did, by a vote of 266 to 158, with 71 Republicans and all New York Representatives voting yes. LaTourette's and Oberstar's sponsorship is significant because they hold key positions on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee responsible for developing legislation governing Amtrak. Amtrak's legislation expired in 2002 and none of their proposals for renewal have been allowed onto the floor for a vote since. If legislation governing Amtrak were in effect it is likely the Appropriations Committee would not have felt so constrained to impose its restrictive language.

While the vote on the LaTourette-Oberstar amendment was a decisive victory, there is still a long way to go. In order to avoid a downward spiral, the Senate must come up with substantially more—at least the \$1.6 billion Amtrak has requested, and hopefully another \$275 million recommended for improvements. It must also delete the destructive language in the House bill. Then when the two bills are reconciled there may be enough to allow Amtrak to move forward—or at least avoid sliding backward.

*Frank Barry*



## Homeland Security to Transit Advocates — “It’s Not Our Problem”

In response to a letter co-signed by five transit advocacy organizations, including ESPA, calling for a careful examination of the security risks involved in building two new Deep Cavern commuter rail terminal stations in Manhattan, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security passed the buck (not the bucks!) and suggested that the organizations check with the NYC Police and Fire Departments. The NYPD passed the buck back to MTA and asked them to investigate themselves. The Deep Cavern terminals proposed by MTA and NJ Transit would tie into new tunnels under the East River and the Hudson River, permitting additional trains from Long Island and West of Hudson points (including Orange and Rockland Counties in NY) to reach Manhattan.

Transit advocates object to building new Deep Cavern terminals, some 150 feet below street level, when existing tracks and platforms and platforms at Grand Central Terminal and Penn Station are available. If there were no other solutions the Deep Cavern terminals might be acceptable, but there are alternatives that are less costly to build and provide more passenger-friendly access.

In this age of concern about terrorism it seems completely unwarranted to not consider alternatives. As many as 8,000 passengers could be trapped in either terminal, if a fire broke out or a bomb exploded. The indifference expressed by Federal and city fire safety and security officials became the subject of considerable attention in the media. ESPA along with the other organizations was mentioned in the NY Times during the height of the hoo-hah.

This sorry exchange of correspondence is posted on the Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc. website [www.irusm.org](http://www.irusm.org) Concerned rail users are asked to contact elected officials and demand a thorough risk assessment of alternatives.

*George Haikalis*

## Downstate ESPA busy with plans for Municipal Art Society Regional Rail Exhibit.

Transit advocates from the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area continue to meet the third Wednesday of each month as the Regional Rail Working Group. Meetings are scheduled for July 19, 2006 and August 16, 2006, 6-8pm at the Conference Room, NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington Street, just north of Rector Street in Lower Manhattan. For more information please check [www.rrwg.org](http://www.rrwg.org) or call George Haikalis at 212-475-3394. Now that the Municipal Art Society has agreed to host an exhibit and series of programs about regional rail a good deal of assistance is required. (See accompanying announcement). Plan to attend.

Thanks,

George Haikalis

President, Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc.

One Washington Square Village, Suite #5D

New York, NY 10012 212-475-3394 [geo@irusm.org](mailto:geo@irusm.org)

[www.irusm.org](http://www.irusm.org)

97% of registered voters throughout New York State think that trains used for long distance travel should be improved and modernized.

*Marist College Institute for Public Opinion*

## Make Plans NOW To Attend ESPA’s September 30 Meeting In New York City

ESPA, in collaboration with the Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc (IRUM) will be holding it’s September 30, 2006 meeting in New York City at The Urban Center of the Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Avenue at 51st Street in Manhattan.

From September 7<sup>th</sup> though November 15<sup>th</sup>, the Municipal Arts Society will be hosting an exhibit focusing on efforts to move forward initiatives aimed at rational improvements in the metropolitan region’s regional rail systems. Spearheaded by IRUM President (and ESPA Coordinator) George Haikalis, the exhibit will highlight, among other topics, the advantages of the increased use of through running trains at Penn Station and the construction of a rail link between Penn Station and Grand Central,

This meeting, which will be open to all interested persons, will provide a forum for the discussion of the issues and will include speakers knowledgeable on the plans being proposed. The exhibit will also be available for viewing.

Full details on this important meeting and forum will appear in the September edition of the ESPA Express and will be available on-line at [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org) starting September 1.

## Metro - North On-Time Stats

In April 2006, Metro-North achieved new height in the on-timeliness of the trains on its 3 lines, as follows:

Hudson line: 99.3% on-time

Harlem line: 99.5%

New Haven line: 98.4%

Overall (all 3 lines): 99.0%

Metro-North’s percentage on-time across all its 3 lines, for the period January to April 2006 was 98.2%. Metro-North considers a train on-time if it arrives its final destination station less than 6 minutes late.

*MTA website*

## Bush Nominates Two for Amtrak Board

In mid-May President Bush nominated R. Hunter Biden and Donna R. MacLean to serve on Amtrak’s Board of Directors. Hunter Biden is the founding partner of a Washington law firm and the son of Senator Joseph Biden (D, Del.), one of Amtrak’s most passionate supporters in the Senate. MacLean served as Chief Financial Officer for the U.S. Department of Transportation from 2001-2004 after serving in the Federal Aviation Administration and on the staff of the Aviation Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.

The Senate Commerce Committee held a hearing on both nominations on June 8th. Senator Tom Carper (D., Del.), introduced Biden, pointing out that he not only has experience in business but is very familiar with train travel, having commuted from Delaware to his job in Washington for many years. In her opening statement, Donna MacLean mentioned the need for a viable train system in view of rising oil prices. Committee Chairman Ted Stevens (R., Alaska) told them they were being appointed to the Amtrak Reform Board and charged them to support significant change at Amtrak.

If confirmed by the Senate, the two will fill seats on the Board that have been vacant since 2003.

*Frank Barry (from NARP hotlines, 5/19, 6/9).*

## Mineta Resigns

U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta resigned on July 7th after 5-1/2 years as the only Democrat on President Bush's cabinet. He has promoted the Administration's concept of a rail system based on short runs between large cities on the East and West Coasts and perhaps some short distance runs out of Chicago. He has seemed not to understand the importance of long distance trains, and last year attacked them repeatedly in talks and press conferences around the country, saying no one rides them and they serve no useful purpose. This was refuted by the National Association of Railroad Passengers and in some cases by protesting demonstrators who spoke with reporters at his events.

Jeff Rosen, the deputy who has represented Secretary Mineta on Amtrak's Board of Directors, has also resigned to take a position in the Office of Management and Budget. *Frank Barry*

## Portable On-Demand Video

Amtrak passengers can enjoy movies, TV shows, cartoons, and music videos on the new portable digEplayer system from Railway Media. Rental kiosks are available at Amtrak stations in Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland Ore. and Emeryville, Cal.

The digEplayer features a 7-inch screen and weighs only three pounds with an 8-10 hour battery with the quality of DVD's and CDs. Full report available under Media at Amtrak.com

## There's Always a Reason to Ride Amtrak

Niagara Falls ..... [www.niagara-usa.com](http://www.niagara-usa.com)  
Buffalo ..... [www.buffalocvb.org](http://www.buffalocvb.org)  
Rochester ..... [www.visitrochester.com](http://www.visitrochester.com)  
Syracuse ..... [www.visitSyracuse.org](http://www.visitSyracuse.org)  
Utica ..... [www.oneidacountycvb.com](http://www.oneidacountycvb.com)  
Albany ..... [www.Albany.org](http://www.Albany.org)  
New York City ..... [www.nycvisit.com](http://www.nycvisit.com)  
Montreal ..... [www.tourisme-montreal.org](http://www.tourisme-montreal.org)

### Ethan Allen Schedule to Change

Amtrak will run its Saturday southbound Ethan Allen in the evening instead of the morning during the Saratoga racing season from June 30 through Labor Day. It will run on the Sunday schedule as Train 296, leaving Rutland at 5:15PM and Saratoga at 7:07PM instead of 10:45AM and 12:37PM. (Train 292 will be annulled on Saturdays). The evening schedule will be used on both September 3 and 4th. Schedules on other days will remain the same

## Amtrak & Lionel Essay Contest

Amtrak and Lionel are partnering this summer for the seventh annual Lionel Kid's Essay Contest. Children ages 12 and under will have a chance to win the grand-prize, the Santa Fe El Capitan toy train set, by describing what they like best about riding Amtrak.

Fourteen lucky first-prize winners will receive The Polar Express train set. Winners will be judged on content and originality and continues through August 31, 2006.

Entry forms are available onboard 43 Amtrak routes across the country including the Empire Service, Lake Shore Limited, NEC Regional, Adirondack, Maple Leaf, Acela and Metroliners.

## 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...

### 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.

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 31, 2006. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.

**THE ESPA EXPRESS**  
10531 Main Street  
Clarence, NY 14031-1684

Please take a moment to check your mailing label.  
Your membership may be due for renewal.  
We appreciate your support.

FIRST CLASS  
US POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
PERMIT #2  
CLARENCE, NY

Forward & Address Correction Requested