

THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.trainweb.com/esp>



Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

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Annual Meeting: Good News and Bad

About 75 people came to the ESPA-NARP annual meeting at the Steuben Club in Albany on March 3rd. Those coming by train were able to tour the new refurbished turboliner, which was in the station when they arrived, thanks to Amtrak and the Department of Transportation (DOT).

DOT Commissioner Joseph Boardman was upbeat about the future but spoke frankly about the problems. He also recognized ESPA's contribution. "You're important because you are customers," he said, "and we heard you; that's why we have a \$200 million partnership with Amtrak."

He noted that Governor Pataki "was the first governor to use federal highway money for rail," referring to Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds used to match Amtrak money in the high speed partnership. "He did it because he wants transportation to fit with the environment," Boardman said. But he noted that under pressure from highway interests the Federal Highway Administration is reexamining use of these dollars for rail. He said he was confident New York's choice would not be overridden.

But Boardman voiced serious concern about Amtrak's fiscal situation: "How does Amtrak get ahead when it needs a billion dollars a year and gets only \$521 million? Amtrak is broke." Our auto centered transportation system, he said, is "out of alignment."

John Bennett, Vice president of Planning and Policy for Amtrak's Northeast Business Unit, agreed. He said 36 states now have a rail passenger program and "we're getting a lot of support. But how do we get capital? And how do we break even without it?"

"We have a clear budget problem," Bennett continued. "Acela was 18 months late, and mail and express business has grown, but not as fast as we wanted. As a result, the Northeast Corridor Business Unit must reduce costs by 4% and trains may be cut in the Empire Region. No decisions have been made yet but we have to deal with the break-even requirement from Congress. George Warrington doesn't want to cut; we'll only do it as a last resort." Other sources indicate that endangered trains are Nos. 283-284 and possibly 281-286 to Niagara Falls. An additional New York-Albany train could be cut as well, and food service may end on some New York-Albany trains. (con't on pg. 8)

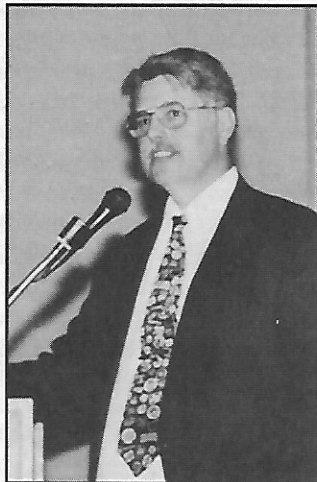


Photo: Jack Ross

Commissioner Joe Boardman

LATE FLASH Warrington Vetoes Cuts

According to the National Association of Railroad Passengers and other reliable sources, Amtrak President George Warrington has ruled out cutting any trains in New York State to meet the budget shortfall.

Amtrak's Future at Stake

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee is planning a series of hearings this spring on the future of federal funding for Amtrak. The hearing dates had not been set at this writing, but committee spokespersons said the hearings will be not just on the High Speed Rail Investment Act (HSRIA), but on the overall federal role in Amtrak's future.

"We need to step back and have a national debate on the future of Amtrak," committee spokesperson Pia Piatorsi said. "We cannot continue on this path of backdoor funding."

"Senator John McCain (R-Arizona), chair of the committee, successfully blocked HSRIA from being included in the catch-all Omnibus Budget bill, even though Senator Biden threatened to veto the budget bill if HSRIA was not included." (cont'd on page 3)



Photo: Frank Barry

Throwing switch by hand adds to Adirondack's delays! See ESPA Pushes - page 5

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Quinn to Head Rail Subcommittee

Congressman Jack Quinn (R., Buffalo) has been named to head the new Railroad Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, which develops Amtrak legislation. Quinn, a strong supporter of rail passenger service, comes from a railroad family—his father was an engineer on the South Buffalo Railroad. He has served on the powerful Transportation and Infrastructure Committee since 1995, and served on the prior Surface Transportation Subcommittee that developed the current Amtrak funding legislation in 1997.

Don Young, (R) of Alaska, has replaced Bud Shuster (R., Pa.) as Chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure committee. Shuster resigned from Congress earlier this year after crafting legislation that has provided huge funding increases for highways and aviation and given Amtrak a mandate to wean itself from federal operating assistance altogether.

Quinn has obtained funding for a badly needed new Amtrak station in downtown Buffalo to replace the current Exchange Street station. He has also worked with Amtrak and Customs and Immigration to improve border-crossing procedures in Niagara Falls. His appointment to head the Rail Subcommittee is likely to mean good news for New York, good news for Amtrak and good news for trail labor unions.

Frank Barry

Boardman Heads National Rail Committee

On January 19th Joseph Boardman, New York's Commissioner of Transportation, was named Chairman of the Standing Committee on Rail Transportation (SCORT) of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO). SCORT oversees all rail issues, both passenger and freight for AASHTO. The appointment was made by AASHTO's President, E. Dean Carlson, who is the Kansas Secretary of Transportation.

AASHTO has been one of the most influential advocates for transportation funding in the U.S., and for many years it has worked closely with the highway lobby. Its "The Bottom Line" report lays out infrastructure needs and sets the stage for the surface funding debate in Congress, according to Boardman. But in a letter to SCORT members, Boardman noted that AASHTO's last report "focused primarily on highway and bridge needs, without adequately addressing the needs of other modes."

Boardman hopes to change that: "As a member of AASHTO's Bottom Line Advisory Committee, I will work to ensure a multi-modal perspective in the emerging report and AASHTO's subsequent policy positions," he wrote, noting that "Rail does not have a dedicated source of federal funding despite enormous infrastructure needs." Boardman says the next report will be useful in the upcoming debate over reauthorization of TEA-21, Amtrak and aviation, which will come up in the next several years.

As head of SCORT, Boardman will add his voice to that of Terence Mulcahy, of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation, who heads the States for Passenger Rail Coalition. Boardman's term will last two years, allowing him to play a major role in the debate over Amtrak's reauthorization, which will come up next year.

Boardman's appointment, coupled with Buffalo Congressman Jack Quinn's appointment to head the Rail Subcommittee in the House, will give Upstate New York new strength in Washington. Boardman, who operated transit agencies in Rome, Utica and Binghamton early in his career, is very familiar with the problems of travel upstate. "I'm pushing for high speed rail," he told ESPA, "because it's the right thing to do."

Frank Barry

Schumer Pushes Major Hike In Federal Transit Tax Benefit

A bill introduced by NY Senator Charles Schumer would increase the amount of pre-tax income employees could set aside for mass transit and van-pooling fares. The "Commuter Benefits Equity Act" which Schumer introduced with Sen. John Warner of Virginia, a senior Republican on the Environment and Public Works Committee, would hike the monthly pre-tax transit spending ceiling to \$175 per month starting in 2002. The current transit limit now is \$65 per month, far below the pre-tax \$175 per month federal law now allows car commuters for parking benefits.

In New York and Connecticut, the pre-tax provisions also apply to state taxes. "The mass transit subsidy program is a great idea, but it is undermined by the fact that we provide a parking benefit that is much more generous," Schumer said at a February press conference in Mineola. "My proposal rewards commuters who choose mass transit and makes drivers think twice about getting in their cars. For Long Island commuters who use the LIRR, this increase could mean hundreds of dollars per year in savings."

The bill was also introduced in the House by Massachusetts Rep. James McGovern. The legislation is so far co-sponsored by a wide range of the region's Senators and Representatives, including NY Representatives Maurice Hinchey, Carolyn McCarthy, Jerrold Nadler and Edward Towns.

From MOBILIZING THE REGION, published by the Tri-State Transportation Campaign

Governor Budgets \$23 Mil. for Passenger Rail

Governor Pataki's 2001 budget, released last month, spells out how the \$80 million for the State's five year program, announced last year, will be spent. Most of it (\$57 mil.) will go for freight projects, which do not affect passenger service. The rest (\$23 mil.) will go for four of the ten rail passenger projects in the bond issue rejected by the voters last Fall. These are: (millions)

Completion of the Rensselaer Station and 4th track	\$10
Saratoga commuter service (will leverage federal funds)	6
Binghamton passenger service	5
Niagara Frontier passenger rail improvements (unspecified)	2
..... Total	23

Bond issue projects not included were station improvements in Utica, Rochester, Rome and Schenectady.

Schneider Replaces Cartin at DOT

Norman Schneider has been named Director of the Department of Transportation's Freight and Economic Development Division, which includes the state's high speed rail program. This position has been vacant since James Cartin retired as its Director late last year. Mr. Schneider previously directed the Passenger and Freight Safety Division and the Public Transportation Safety Board. He has held many other positions in transportation, working as Assistant Secretary to the Governor for Transportation (1983-85), Chief Operating Officer, Department of Motor Vehicles (1985-90) and Assistant Commissioner, Office of Public Transportation in the 1990's. He received his Masters in Transportation Engineering from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1969. He is well regarded both in and outside of DOT.

Bush Budget Freezes Amtrak

The 2002 budget President Bush proposed last month freezes Amtrak at the present \$521 million figure while increasing funding for all other modes:

(\$ billions):

	2001	2002*	Percent Change
Highways	31.421	32.300	+ 2.8%
Aviation	12.009	13.300	+10.8%
Transit	6.271	6.700	+ 6.8%
Amtrak	0.521	0.521	0.0%

Norman Mineta, President Bush's Secretary of Transportation, has a long association with the aviation industry, and developed a strong appreciation for transit when he was a Mayor of San Jose in California. His prepared remarks for his confirmation hearing mentioned nearly all forms of transportation except intercity passenger rail.

From National Association of Railroad Passengers

Scranton Service Postponed

According to the *Pocono Record*, inauguration of rail service to Scranton has been moved back from 2004 to 2005. One million in federal funds has been made available to begin engineering studies, but this is less than the hoped for \$5 million, so the planning will take longer. Also, the Federal Transit Administration has required more reports and studies than anticipated.

Amtrak's Future (cont'd from page 1) "We need to make a fundamental decision about what the government's role will be in a national railway system, and then we need to decide to what degree it will be subsidized," McCain said.

"I think a strong argument can be made by anyone who has tried to fly to Newark, or to LaGuardia, or Kennedy lately that they recognize the difficulties in relying simply on air transportation. I think an argument can be made, but it deserves full support and discussion," McCain said.

Given Senator McCain's reluctance to continue federal funding for a national passenger rail system, combined with his willingness to listen to arguments from all sides, it will be important for passenger rail advocates to express their views to Senator McCain. His address is 241 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510.

Meanwhile, a new High Speed Rail Investment Act (HSRIA), S.250, was introduced February 6. It would provide \$12 billion in rail capital bonds over 10 years. Last year's version (S.1900) would have provided \$10 billion. There were 51 Senate cosponsors when the new bill was introduced. HSRIA would provide a dedicated, steady, federal share of capital funding for passenger rail projects. A state match of 20 percent is required.

Passage of the HSRIA cannot come too soon. Amtrak is again tight on cash, because of the delayed introduction of Acela service, and reduced appropriations in recent years. Last year, Amtrak received a federal appropriation of \$521 million.

This year, Amtrak is pushing not only for enactment of the HSRIA, but also is seeking a much larger federal appropriation of \$955 million. These bold requests will no doubt be scrutinized carefully in Congress, making the challenge for Amtrak supporters greater than ever. It does appear that Amtrak's commitment to be free of federal operating support by 2003 will be unachievable - thus making the case for Amtrak in Washington is more critical than ever.

John Boffa, ESPA Washington representative

Acela Express

For the first 3 months of Acela Express, the one Washington to Boston Roundtrip on weekdays has been operating on-time over 95% of the time. Also, its 304 seat capacity has been averaging more than 304 passengers, due to the multiple use of seats. This happens when a passenger rides Washington to New York, then a different passenger rides in the same seat from New York to Boston. The number of passengers and revenue have been operating 8% above Amtrak's projections, which many people had thought to be too optimistic.

On March 5th, two more AcelaExpress trains were added to the weekday schedule. In April and May, more Acela Express trains will be added to the schedule. This will include morning departures from New York to both Washington and Boston, along with evening returns to New York, and the start of AcelaExpress weekend service.

Gary Prophet

CSX Sues over Taxes

After warning repeatedly that it would have to sue New York State unless its property taxes were reduced, CSX finally went to court on February 14th. The suit was triggered by local tax bills which would nearly double the taxes paid last year, along with a thirty day deadline to protest them or pay. "We had no choice," said John Casellini, CSX Resident Vice President of State Relations.

The increase followed expiration of a settlement reached between Conrail and New York State after Conrail went to court over the same issue in 1992. That settlement temporarily held off the effect of a federally required accounting change which would have nearly doubled Class I railroad property taxes under New York tax law.

But the real issue is not the huge increase, which was unintended and which just about everyone agrees is unwarranted. The main contention is over whether rail property taxes in New York have been reasonable even without the increase, and if not, who should bear the impact of lowering them.

Although state law is at issue, CSX sued in a federal district court because the 1976 federal Railroad Revitalization and Regulatory Reform Act prohibits discriminatory taxation of railroad property vs. other commercial and industrial properties. The *Albany Times Union* noted on February 14th that tax law depreciates track over 99 years compared with a national standard of seven. Rail structures are taxed at the estimated cost to replace them rather than their present market value, and any rail improvement is assessed at 110% of its value to cover design costs. These standards are not universally applied to other industries. They are irrelevant to the railroad's chief competitor, truck operators, who enjoy a publicly maintained roadway in return for the taxes they pay. Class I freight railroads get no such benefit in return for their taxes; they are responsible for all maintenance of their roadway.

As a result, most observers believe CSX will win in court, causing a significant loss in tax revenue for localities. Although such a win would make a noticeable improvement to the CSX bottom line, the railroad has gone to court reluctantly. It prefers legislation which may be less generous. This legislation, incorporated in Governor Pataki's proposed budget, would phase in reductions over seven years to a level about 45% below year 2000 assessments.

The proposed law would reduce tax and depreciation rates and would defer for ten years any increased taxes resulting from projects that improve freight or passenger service if the improvement is approved by the Commissioner of Transportation.

(con't on pg. 6)

1-2-Free fare promotion

With 1-2-Free, groups of three traveling together to the same destination can take advantage of some great savings when they purchase the first ticket at full price, the second ticket at half price, and then receive the third ticket for free. Even if there are only two people traveling together, they will enjoy big savings.

To take advantage of this travel value, Amtrak guests may book reservations through May 12, 2001, for travel between March 11 and June 15, 2001. Some restrictions do apply.

Amtrak Quiet Cars are a Huge Success

Amtrak is adding two more cars to its growing fleet of Quiet Cars on the Northeast Corridor, as it continues to balance the demand of the business traveler with those of the leisure traveler.

Guests who mistakenly end up in a quiet car, but wish to use their cell phone, may relocate to a seat in another car, or can keep their seat in the quiet car, but make the calls from a RailFone booth within the car.

"When the idea of a Quiet Car was first brought up here at Amtrak, we were hoping at the very least it would be accepted by our guests," said Northeast Corridor President Stan Bagely. "Not only do our guests accept them, but they're telling us it's about time!"

PLEASE PATRONIZE THESE AUTHORIZED TRAVEL AGENTS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGER ASSOCIATION

Clarence, NY	Clarence Travel	(716) 759-7203
	(800) 336-3890
New York, NY	Bill Closs Travel	(917) 623-9408
Rochester, NY	Automobile Club of Rochester	(716) 461-5000
Tonawanda, NY	Courtesy Travel	(716) 695-3550

Authorized Amtrak travel agents who wish to join ESPA, and be listed in this DIRECTORY, should send a \$50 check, made payable to ESPA, and mail to: Robert Lenz, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031.

Rensselaer Station Completion may be Delayed

Governor Pataki's allocation of \$10 million in his 2001 budget to finish the Rensselaer station brightens prospects for construction of the 4th track, which appeared to be in jeopardy after the bond issue was rejected last Fall. But the track still may not be completed when the new station opens because building it will require demolition of the current station.

Beyond that, installing this track will require considerable signal work that affects other tracks, and Amtrak and CSX have not yet agreed who will pay for this work and who will maintain and control the signals afterward. CSX also says it does not have enough track workers to do its share of the work immediately, and labor agreements prevent contracting this type of work out.

So, according to the *Albany Times Union*, chances are good that the station will not open by the end of this year as originally promised. But Dennis Fitzgerald, Executive Director of the Capital District Transportation Authority, which is managing the project, told the *Times Union* that at least the new parking garage will be open for the Christmas holidays.

Frank Barry

Turboliner hits 125MPH

New York State's rebuilt turboliner passed a definitive test by proving it could hit 125MPH on the 17 mile high speed stretch between Rensselaer and Stuyvesant in the wee morning hours of February 16th. Testing began at 9PM on February 15th when Department of Transportation (DOT) flagmen were posted at all crossings, since warning signals are not timed for such speeds. ...While this stretch is normally limited to 110MPH, the faster tests were permitted under a Federal Railroad Administration waiver that required the flagmen, and prohibited higher speeds when passing trains on the opposite track. This required working late at night when train and auto traffic are minimal.

The train performed well: "at least as well as we expected," according to one test participant. "The ride was very smooth—no different at 125 than 75 or 80."

This test has been a long time coming. It was expected last Fall, but problems with the transmission in one of the power cars prevented it from achieving top speed. The defective transmission had to be returned to its manufacturer in Germany. Bad weather also delayed the testing. However the train has already met another requirement by successfully making a round trip to Niagara Falls.

Now it will go back to Super Steel for modification of various minor problems that became apparent during the tests involving the electrical system, power supply and the bathrooms. A number of changes have been suggested by Amtrak conductors, engineers, maintenance staff and managers.

The train is expected to enter service sometime this Spring. Meanwhile the second turboliner is nearing completion at Super Steel and may be ready in May—possibly in time for display at the Midwest High Speed Rail Conference in Wisconsin during the week of May 14th.

While the turboliner is expected to eventually reduce New York - Albany running time to two hours, this is unlikely to happen soon. DOT and the railroads sharing the track south of Albany are preparing a request for proposals to hire a consultant to determine the most cost effective way to remove 25 minutes from the current 2:25 running time.

Frank Barry

Utica to begin second platform

Work on Utica's second platform should begin within a month or two," according to Michael Gapin, Oneida county's planner. "We had hoped to start in December, but CSX required us to strengthen supports for the pedestrian overpass," Gapin said; "the cost was relatively negligible, but it involved changing the design and postponing construction."

"We have awarded contracts and met with the contractors," Gapin continued. "We want to see some initial work started." Initial work will mean removing some unused Mohawk, Adirondack & Northern tracks and preparing a roadway across others, as CSX will not allow construction equipment to cross its own tracks.

Gapin expects construction to take about a year, so Adirondack Scenic trains will have to use their present Falvo site about 1/4 mile west of Union Station for one more season. When finished, the platform will serve both Amtrak and Adirondack Scenic trains, and will allow two Amtrak trains to stop in the station at the same time. Passengers will cross CSX tracks on an overhead walkway beginning inside the station. The new walkway will constitute a second level above the present walkway to the existing platform.

Frank Barry

Downstate ESPA to prepare consensus plan for "Regional Rail"

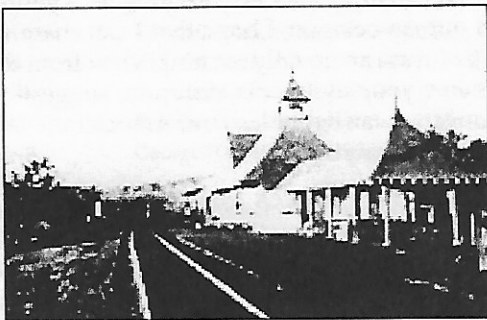
Working with the Committee for Better Transit (CBT) and representatives from the NJ Association of Rail Passengers, Downstate ESPA has launched an ambitious effort to prepare a consensus plan for "Regional Rail". Following CBT's Annual Meeting on February 20, 2001, ESPA convened the first workshop aimed at preparing this plan. The nearly 40 persons who attended suggested "goals" for the plan and proposed specific project elements. Many transit advocates called for the plan to get more use out of the New York metropolitan region's commuter rail system — by making it function more like a rapid transit system, with integrated fares and frequent service. There was a strong feeling that these improvements could be achieved in the short run, without extensive new construction.

ESPA and CBT plan to hold three more workshops to move toward a draft of the plan. Based on the first workshop, attention will be focused on devising a plan that will increase throughput at Penn Station to permit the commuter rail system to optimize its appeal and utility. It remains to be seen whether a workable plan can be achieved. The dates for the next three meetings are March 20, April 17 and May 15, 2001. All meetings will be held from 6-8pm at 104 Washington Street, near Rector Street, in Lower Manhattan. At least a quarter of the time at each meeting will be devoted to intercity rail passenger issues to keep Downstate ESPA members abreast of current happenings. For more information contact: George Haikalis 212-475-3394 geohaikalis@juno.com

Metro-North Introduces WebTickets

Now you can buy your train ticket simply by clicking your mouse. "Webticketing" has come to Metro-North's Web site: www.mta.nyc.ny.us Orders are finalized as soon as submitted using a major credit card. Tickets are sent by First-Class mail.

Metro-North's On-Time Performance for 2000 gives the Harlem line 97.1%, Hudson 96.3%, New Haven 96.6%, and System total 96.7%.



Westport Depot - Station of the Month

The Westport NY station was selected February's station of the month by the Great American Station Foundation.

"The Westport Train Station is a shining example of the value historic train stations can bring to their communities. Once threatened with removal, the Westport station is now the site of a thriving professional theatre company, art gallery, and local history display. The Westport Historical Society can be congratulated on creating an innovative and unique use for a once deserted old train station. With the Depot Theatre Company providing live entertainment in a building surrounded by pristine wilderness with spectacular views, this station has a feast for the eyes as well the ears."

ESPA pushes Rouses Point upgrade

ESPA has requested help from Senator Ronald Stafford and Assemblyman Chris Ortloff to upgrade 1-1/2 miles of 10MPH track used by the Adirondack train in the vicinity of Rouses Point, the train's last stop in the U.S. The deteriorated track begins in the Canadian Pacific (CP) yard south of the station and continues to the border just over a mile north on a connecting track owned by Canadian National (CN).

The track between the station and the border sees little freight service and has deteriorated to the point that passengers must endure an excruciatingly long "crawl". One run last summer took 18 minutes to cover the 1-1/2 miles, including the station stop and switching the train from the CP yard onto the CN connector. To accomplish this, a trainman must get off the train, walk ahead and throw a track switch by hand, as is done in smaller freight yards. The train then pulls slowly through the switch and waits while another trainman gets off at the rear, closes the switch by hand, then reboards the train. Hand switching of trains was common 50 years ago but is rare today where revenue passenger service is involved.

Restoring this track to even 30 miles an hour should save about six minutes; raising it to 45MPH would save another minute. Installing a controlled signal would be expensive but would save several more minutes in summer and considerably more in winter weather.

Eliminating low speed restrictions such as this is by far the most cost effective way to reduce running time. While ESPA has not yet seen a cost estimate, it should fall well under \$1 million, and the trackwork alone could be done for minimal cost. There is probably no place in New York where this amount of time could be saved for so little money. Saving ten minutes by raising top speeds from 79MPH to 110MPH would require upgrading 50 miles of track at a cost of over \$50 million.

Obviously any public funding for this must be accompanied by an agreement by both the CP and CN to maintain the track at the higher speed.

Frank Barry

County may buy D&H branch

Saratoga County is looking to buy the southern half of the 57-mile D&H North Creek branch so it can be used for passenger, tourist trains and ski trains to Gore Mountain. The D&H still uses the line for the first 17 miles out of Saratoga Springs to serve a mill in Corinth. If the county takes over the line, D&H would continue to use it but would not have to pay property taxes.

Meanwhile Warren County, which has already purchased the northern half, plans to begin rehabilitation this summer using \$500,000, which has been made available.

New York's registered voters overwhelmingly support the state using more money to improve intercity passenger train service.

87% of registered voters throughout the state favor an increase in resources for intercity passenger train service in New York. 26% of the state's voters strongly support and 61% support following the lead of several other states and using more state money to improve train service.

Marist College Poll

ESPA: New President Speaks

The View from the Cab...

I wish to start by thanking the members of the Association for their vote of confidence, in electing me your new President. I also wish to thank outgoing President Bob Lenz for his support and advice as I was considering assuming the presidency. As President for the past two years, Bob has served our Association very well. Under his able leadership, the Association has made great strides, most notably being the hiring of Joe Landry, our new representative/lobbyist in Albany. I look forward to working with Bob in his continuing roles as ESPA Express editor and as immediate Past President, council to the current Officers and Coordinators.



Bob Lenz (right) congratulates new ESPA President Bruce Becker (left)

Photo: Jack Ross

A brief summary of my personal background is in order. I was born in Utica in 1958 and remained a resident through graduating high school. My father, William H. Becker, a civil engineer, was employed by the New York

Central, Penn Central and Conrail.

I attended Bryant College in Smithfield, RI, where in 1980, I received my Bachelors Degree in Business Administration. My professional career has been in the hospitality management field, with positions at restaurants, hotels and clubs from Massachusetts to Florida. My current duties as General Manager of the Albany Country Club, brought me back to upstate New York and the Capital District six years ago. Being married with two young children, keeps me active and in tune with the generations of today.

The need for modern, reliable, high-speed rail services has never been greater, as our nations highways and air system slowly crumble from overuse. We see the Acela Express running at 150 mph, attracting new riders to Amtrak and commuter rail systems bulging at the seams.

But we mustn't forget that all is not rosy. Amtrak continues its precarious life just heartbeats away from financial ruin and just as dependent upon the foibles of our political system as on that day thirty years ago, when it was born. Promises made to the residents of New York by countless politicians have brought us little closer to true high-speed rail transportation for the state, than when ESPA was formed twenty years ago. And now increased competition from new, low price airlines threatens rail ridership across Upstate New York. So where do we go from here...

- We need to press on with our vision and mission that passenger rail transportation is the future of our state.
- We need to press our elected representatives, both state and federal, for real commitments to passenger rail.
- We need to press our state representatives and agencies to be ready to act and to take full advantage of the possible funding sources from the pending High Speed Rail Investment Act, now before Congress. New York State can not let this potential opportunity to once again become the true leader in High Speed Rail pass us by.

- We need to press Amtrak to deliver the best possible service it is capable of offering, on a consistent, day in and day out, basis.
- We need to press Amtrak to set fair ticket prices in New York State, that work to keep current riders and helps attracts new riders from all segments of our state's population.
- We need to press CSX and the Canadian Pacific/Delaware and Hudson to maintain their trackage and facilities in the best possible condition and to work with Amtrak to insure that on time performance is their top priority.
- We need to press Metro North to work with Amtrak in formulating more cooperative schedules, which will allow for increased service, better connections and on time reliability. In addition, we need to press Metro North to view Amtrak as a partner, not an adversary, when providing customer services at jointly served stations.
- We need to press New York DOT to speed up the Turboliner rebuilding program, which will provide Amtrak with badly needed additional equipment to help grow the service.
- We need to press NY DOT to speed up the Empire Corridor study process, which will be used in determining the necessary future steps and projects that will lead toward true high-speed rail in the state.
- We need to press for a long-term solution to the state's rail property tax issues, so significant projects such as the Albany to Schenectady double tracking can finally be completed.
- We need to press the state's rail labor unions, to become part of the solution, in helping to grow the service and thus jobs for their members.

Is this all we need to do? Far from it! But it provides the groundwork for a plan of action for the year to come. I urge you to join me and support our Association's efforts in accomplishing these and our other goals. Remember, we are only strong, when we work together as a group.

In closing, a comment on the title of my column. My first locomotive ride came when I was six years old, on the old Mohawk Division between Syracuse and Utica. The view from the cab of that eastbound 'Empire State Express' as we roared along at over 80 mph, was very exciting for a young boy. Now as I lead our Association, I hope that I can share with each of you in the future an equally exciting 'view from the cab'...

I welcome your comments, critiques, suggestions and yes, gripes, on how I can better lead our Association. Don't hesitate to contact me at anytime.

Bruce B. Becker

CSX Sues over Taxes (con't from pg.3)

Given today's emphasis on short term profits, the CSX preference for a legislative solution with less benefit than legal action is laudable—especially in view of the requirement for state approval of projects. Large freight railroads have usually vigorously resisted any form government "interference."

Local government organizations have consistently opposed rail property tax reduction, not because they believe it is unreasonable for the railroads, but because they feel someone else should replace the revenue they will lose. In response, the proposed bill would reimburse localities for all lost revenue for the first two years and for half the gradually increasing amount lost over the next eight years.

Rail passengers have a big stake in early passage of the bill without waiting for the legislature to act on the budget. CSX has made it plain that no passenger rail improvement that increases the value of its property can go ahead until the tax issue is resolved.

Frank Barry

“It’s about Relationships”

“Getting things done in Albany means developing relationships with people,” Joe Landry, ESPA’s new public affairs representative in Albany, told ESPA and NARP members at their March 3rd annual meeting. “You don’t get very far by criticizing government bureaucrats,” Joe said, as he shared insights from his considerable experience in state government.

“People in government get more requests than they can possibly handle from people advocating all sorts of things. When someone is overly critical, or criticizes their response, it’s easy for government workers to ask themselves ‘why did I help this person?’”

Landry helped put \$30 million for rail into the “locked box” transportation program in 1993 when he worked for the Assembly Committee on Transportation. At that time he worked closely with John Casellini, a staffer on the Ways and Means Committee. Casellini now represents CSX in Albany. “People move around,” he said. “The more people you know, the more you can get done. But people have to feel good about dealing with you. It’s really important to say thank you.”

People outside Albany often don’t understand how long things take,” Landry continued. “In the legislature, major issues often take six or seven years before legislators really feel comfortable voting for something. “You don’t always get everything you want and you don’t always get it in the way you want. Sometimes you just have to accept that and come back next year.”

However, Landry said, there is no question that “The state has come a very long way in embracing rail passenger service since the legislature’s first small effort in 1993.”

Incoming President Bruce Becker, who helped select Joe Landry as ESPA’s representative, told the group that “Hiring Joe is likely to be the best thing we have done in a long time.” *Frank Barry*

Fact: Over 50 percent of grade crossing crashes occur at crossings where active warning devices exist.

Fact: Most vehicle-train crashes occur at grade crossing within 25 miles of the motorist’s home.

2001 ESPA Officers & Coordinators

President:	Bruce Becker, 49 Algonquin Rd., Clifton Park, NY 12065	518-383-5985 (H), 518-765-2851 (W) ...	bbecker@albanycc.cc
			Fax: 518-765-3176
Vice President:	Gary Prophet, 86 Cedar Lane, Ossining, NY 10562	212-510-3962 (W)	garyp@ilx.com
Dir. Legislative Affairs:	Frank Barry,* 219 E. Lansing Rd., Groton, NY 13073	607-533-7563 (H), 607-255-7456 (W)	FB12@cornell.edu
Newsletter Editor:	Robert Lenz, * 10531 Main St., Clarence, NY 14031-1684	716-759-2442 (H), 716-759-2315 (W)	rwlenz@aol.com
			Fax: 716-7592791
Secretary:	Thom Coates, 63 Severson Hill Rd, Voorheesville, NY 12186	515-765-4559	TJCoates@aol.com
Treasurer:	John Ross, * 4 Maplewood Court, Greenwich, NY 12834	518-692-2044	
Membership Services:	Stuart Greenberg, 12 Burgoyne, Goram, NY 11727	631-473-8095	
REGIONAL COORDINATORS:			
Chautauqua:	Roy A. Davis, 2912 East Lake Dr., Dunkirk, NY 14048	716-934-7946	davrr@netsync.net
Western NY:	David C. Skoney, 24 Hillside Ave., Cheektowaga, NY 14225	716-835-4188	
Rochester Area:	Karl Greenhagle, 297 Hidden Valley Rd., Rochester, NY 14624-2303	716-247-2426	karl@frontiernet.net
			Fax: 716-247-4048
Central New York:	Andrew Cabal, 313 Walberta Rd., Syracuse, NY 13219	315-487-2887	ajcabal@aol.com
Adirondack:	Dr. Margarethe McCurry, 178 Sunnyside Rd., Glens Falls, NY 12804	518-793-0793	
Mohawk Valley:	Jerry Koller, 49 Lincoln Ave., Amsterdam, NY 12010	518-843-3104	
Utica:	Gary Gianotti, 1813 1/2 Girard St., Utica, NY 13501-2717	315-734-1521	
Capitol District:	Thom Coates, 63 Severson Hill Rd., Voorheesville, NY 12186	518-765-4559	tjcoates@aol.com
Mid-Hudson:	Richard Kulla, * 5 Summit Ave., Pawling, NY 12564	845-855-9102	rkulla@aol.com
Catskill:	Francis MacDowell, P.O. Box 171, White Lake, NY 12786-0171	845-583-4638 ...	franmac1924@aol.com
Southern Tier:	Rob Piecuch, 418 Highland Ave., Horseheads, NY 14845	607-739-5127	rpiecuch@servtech.com
Manhattan:	George Haikalis, 1 Washington Square Village #50, NY, NY 10012-6635	212-475-3394 ..	geohaikalis@juno.com
Brooklyn, Bronx,			
Queens, Staten Island:	George Armeit, * 176-12 76th Ave., Flushing, NY 11366	718-969-7577 (W)	
Long Island:	Chris Nadelbach, 118-18 Union Turnpike, Apt. 6F, Kew Gardens, NY 11415	718-544-7185	CN1LN1@aol.com
Westchester:	Vacant		
Rockland/Orange:	Orrin J. Getz, 5 Carlisle Court, New City, NY 10956	914-683-4494 (H), 212-803-3150 (W)	
International Coordinator:	George Tait, 114 Rock Island St., Gouverneur, NY 13642-1113	315-287-1422	

*Also on the Board of Directors, National Association of Railroad Passengers

ESPA Meeting Dates 2001-2002 - Members Welcome (Please advise President if planning on attending)

Sunday, April 29, 2001	New York City	11:00am-2:00pm	NY Penn
Saturday, June 16, 2001	Schenectady	10:30am-2:30pm	Mohawk Club
Saturday, August 11, 2001	Utica	12:00noon-4:00pm	Union Station Café
Saturday, October 6, 2001	Schenectady	10:30am-2:30pm	Mohawk Club
Saturday, December 8, 2001	Schenectady	10:30am-2:30pm	Mohawk Club
Saturday, January 19, 2002	Schenectady	10:30am-2:30pm	Mohawk Club
Saturday, March 2, 2002	Annual Meeting - Albany	11:00am-4:00pm	Steuben Club

Annual Meeting (cont'd from page 1)

"We'd like to participate with the State in marketing service west of Albany," Bennett said, responding to an ESPA suggestion for joint promotion on a route that has never been seriously marketed.

Commissioner Boardman noted that Amtrak hadn't asked the State for help yet: "We don't want them to reduce service. We know we'll be talking. And the legislature isn't through adding money to the budget." Bennett's response came later: "We'll probably come to Joe with a suggestion."

Bennett was more upbeat about the future, but his comments were tempered with realism. "New York is right up there with California in promoting high speed rail," he said. And "we have just laid out a business plan, which would require \$1-1/2 billion a year."

"But it's hard," he continued; "institutional engineering (dealing with bureaucratic and legal issues) is more complex than the actual physical engineering. The Rail Passenger Council has been very helpful to us here. And we are working with the State on studies from Schenectady south and Schenectady west." They will attempt to identify the most cost effective approaches to achieve state high-speed goals while respecting the needs of each railroad using the tracks.

"We need to be sure this region has a list of projects so we can build support," Bennett continued. "But we have to look at economics. Projects must have a positive return on investment. We have to break even. And we have to honor freight railroad requirements."

Despite numerous requests from ESPA, Amtrak has not studied extending an Empire train to Cleveland. Bennett said this should be taken up by the Rail Passenger Council, which could add it to the scope for the West of Schenectady study.

Amtrak is studying potential ridership at Lyons because of the strong push for a station there, Bennett said. (Senator Schumer has also taken up their cause.)

John Casellini, CSX Resident Vice President of State Relations, noted that "New York State now has a bigger commitment to high speed rail than ever before" and "Commissioner Boardman deserves the credit."

"We're about ready to kick off a major study here that will be similar to what we're doing in Virginia, where all concerned parties participate", Casellini said. "Studies have been done before, but we have a new actor now-- a new DOT, new Amtrak and new CSX. Throw out the previous studies! This one will go farther, because everyone is involved and cooperating. ESPA has played an active role. So has the Empire Corridor Rail Task Force."

Casellini said property tax legislation is in the governor's budget bill but "We'd like it sooner than the budget. Otherwise we'll miss another construction season. We're working on engineering plans,

so when the time comes we'll be ready to go. However until the tax situation is resolved we'll have to hold off on breaking ground." ...Casellini said station projects are advancing or being proposed in Rome, Syracuse, Lyons, Rochester, Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Dunkirk. "We have as many station projects in New York as on all the rest of CSX put together. We can't do them all at once." However, "we are working to advance the Albany-Schenectady double track, and to integrate its signaling with the Hudson River bridge work and the Rensselaer station track and signaling work."

Wayne Davis, the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) Vice President for the Northeast, shared stories from his thirteen-year campaign to bring the trains to Maine. From Boston to Portland, tracks have been upgraded, stations are being built and service was to begin in May. But Guilford Rail, which owns the tracks, suddenly served notice that it would limit speed to 59MPH despite a Surface Transportation Board decision that the tracks were safe for 79MPH. Passenger advocates and state officials believe 79MPH operation is essential to compete with driving time on I-95. It's not certain when the train will begin.

Frank Barry

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel. 716-759-2315, Fax: 716-759-2791, e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. Deadline for material for the May/June issue is April 30.

ESPA Membership

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

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