

THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

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Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

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Left to right - Joe McHugh, Norman Schneider, Phil Larson, Tim Gillespie.

Gillespie, McHugh, Schneider, Speak at Annual Meeting

Eighty-five ESPA members and others came to ESPA's annual meeting in Schenectady on March 1st. Joe Landry, who is the organizations State Government representative, reported on ESPA's biggest victory, the railroad property tax legislation, which ESPA and CSX have been promoting for 3 years. "We won't see any improvement this year, but the groundwork has been laid," he said, referring to planned trackwork that had been blocked by CSX pending tax reform.

Landry said there is \$20 million in the governor's budget for rail capital improvements. The line item for Amtrak's *Adirondack* was removed from the budget, but this train can be
(Cont'd on page 6)

On-time Performance Emphasized for 2003

Ed Walker, the Vice President of operations at Amtrak, is emphasizing on-time performance in 2003. Amtrak's on-time percentage has suffered in recent years, and was down to only 58% for long-distance routes in fiscal 2002. Amtrak estimates that the company lost \$28 million in sales because trains were so often late, while late trains were also the leading cause of customer dissatisfaction and service guarantee payouts.

Some of the problems can be blamed on Amtrak's express initiative, as switching boxcars frequently delayed trains. Those delays got even worse when Amtrak trains failed to leave in time to make dispatching slots between freight trains. The express is being jettisoned as fast as David Gunn can do so, so improvement should be seen almost immediately.

Walker is also meeting with Amtrak's freight railroad hosts to see what track and dispatching improvements can get the passenger trains running more reliably. Supervisors will ride some trains to see first-hand what is causing delays.

Delaware Valley Rail Passenger

Pataki Signs Rail Tax Bill

On January 31st, nearly three years after it was first proposed, Governor Pataki finally signed a bill to lower the high property tax paid by freight railroads in New York State. Lowering the property tax was essential to get cooperation from CSX for upgrading tracks for higher speeds and to lay a second track between Albany and Schenectady. New York's taxes were some of the highest in the nation and would have gone up still further if the tracks were upgraded. CSX said it would not allow such an increase in value with no benefit for freight service.

The new law cuts railroad taxes by 45% over seven years and provides a 10-year exemption on new and renovated tracks and properties. It also compensates towns and localities for up to \$70 million over ten years for lost tax revenues.

While this should be a major triumph for ESPA, it may now be too late to see the faster passenger service the law was supposed to bring. The second track to Schenectady and upgrades south of Albany were agreed to in a \$185 million agreement between Amtrak and New York State in 1998. But now neither Amtrak nor the State has funding for such projects, and it is not certain when the work can be done.

Frank Berry

Amtrak Considering Big Schedule Changes

Changes being considered for the April 28th Summer timetable may deprive business travelers from Central and Western New York of reliable early morning service to Albany. Under a proposal being seriously considered, the *Lake Shore Limited* would become the first train in from the West, arriving Albany around 11AM. Train 284, which presently arrives Albany at 9:50AM, would arrive around noon, followed by 286 about 4 hours later. The Maple Leaf would presumably remain as is.

The Lake Shore Limited would run later westbound, leaving New York about 3PM instead of the current 12:45, arriving Chicago after 9AM instead of the present 7AM. This will allow the diner to serve breakfast at a reasonable hour before arrival in Chicago. However this would become the last train to Western New York; 281 and 283 would leave around 10AM and 2PM respectively.

Amtrak officials have indicated that decisions have not been finalized, and even after Amtrak decides what it wants, any schedule changes must be approved by CSX and Metro-North.

Amtrak officials reportedly feel they can no longer afford to run train 284 on its present schedule due to low ridership before it reaches Syracuse. Ridership has fallen significantly from Buffalo and Rochester since inauguration of JetBlue air service to those locations.

Frank Berry

The View from the Cab

As I enter my third year as ESPA President, let me reflect back on the past year...

- Rail Property Tax Reform, long supported by ESPA, has become a reality in New York State.
- The beautiful new Rensselaer Train Station opened. Station improvements at Utica and Rome were completed and rehabilitation of the Saratoga Springs station got underway.
- David Gunn, perhaps Amtrak's last hope, took over the reigns in Washington and has earned Amtrak a new level of respect, even among its most ardent opponents.

Sadly however, too much has been left undone and the future holds much uncertainty

- Funding for long-sought capital improvements, including the desperately needed Albany to Schenectady double tracking, remains elusive.
- Overall Empire Corridor ridership is down, with serious losses continuing across upstate.
- The Turboliners are still not running and service consistency issues continue to negatively impact the Corridor,

However, I'm very proud of the accomplishments ESPA has made in the past twelve months

- With the financial support of the membership, we were able to engage both Tim Gillespie and John Boffa to represent our interests in Washington. In addition, Joe Landry has continued his excellent efforts to represent our priorities here in Albany.
- ESPA's has gained unprecedented respect from Amtrak's top management.

What will the next year bring? Hopefully the long needed national debate on the future of passenger rail in our country and meaningful work towards a source of stable long-term capital funding. My thanks go to the Association's Officers and Statewide Coordinators who spend countless volunteer hours advancing our cause, and to each of you, the over 1,400 members of ESPA, who make our Association the finest state rail advocacy group in the country.

I draw your attention to the enclosed 2003 Special Contribution Request. Only with your ongoing support is our Association able to continue investing in the promotion of our cause. I thank you in advance for your generous contributions.

While many challenges and opportunities lie ahead for us in 2003, I am hopeful that this time next year I will be able to reflect back on a year of even greater accomplishment and progress. 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

ESPA Honors Outgoing Treasurer Jack Ross

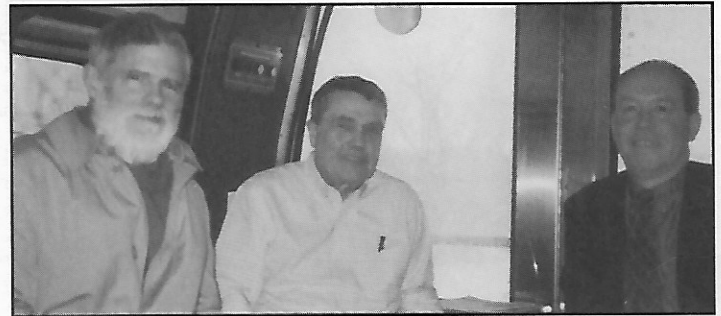
At the 2003 ESPA Annual Meeting, President Bruce Becker honored outgoing ESPA Treasurer Jack Ross by presenting him with a certificate of appreciation for his 18 years of dedicated service to the Association. Jack remains a NARP National Director and an active member of the Amtrak Customer Advisory Council. Meeting attendees elected Andrew Cabal of Syracuse as the new ESPA Treasurer.

ESPA Coordinator Positions Open

ESPA Regional Coordinator positions for Westchester County, the Capital Region and Central New York areas are currently vacant. ESPA members interested in being considered for one of these openings should contact Bruce Becker by April 15.

As information, the ESPA By-laws define the Regional Coordinator's positions as follows: "The Regional Coordinators shall report on membership activity in their respective regions and shall relate Association activities to the regions." Attendance at the bi-monthly Officers and Coordinators Meeting is encouraged.

ESPA Travels with Amtrak President David Gunn



Frank Barry

David Gunn

Bruce Becker

In early January, Bruce Becker, Frank Barry and Bob Lenz were invited to travel with Amtrak President David Gunn and other top officials on Amtrak Office Car 10001, as part of an Amtrak inspection trip across upstate New York.

The trip afforded ESPA an unprecedented opportunity to discuss our priorities with Gunn, Vice-President of Government Affairs Joe McHugh, Vice-President Planning and Business Development Gil Mallary, and Vice-President of Marketing Barbara Richardson.

ESPA provided Gunn with a list of service improvement suggestions, including a detailed New York State fare reorganization plan and a number of possible marketing initiatives. As a direct result of the trip, ESPA and Amtrak have recently met to jointly advance cooperating on several of the marketing and promotion concepts.

Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

Amtrak's Empire District Superintendent, Philip Larson, wants to hear of your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Phil welcomes our input as he strives to provide the best possible service on the Empire Corridor. Please send your written trip reports and comments, including specific dates, train numbers and employee names as appropriate to: Philip Larson District Superintendent, Empire District, Amtrak, 525 East Street Rensselaer, NY 12144 Please also send a copy to Bruce Becker so we can track trip experiences and follow up as necessary. Thanks for your help.

Traveling? Take along ESPA's Rail Report form. Through this ongoing project, ESPA hopes to better serve the public by documenting any needs for service improvements as well as to pay compliments for outstanding service. For copies write: ESPA 10531 Main St. Clarence, NY 14031 or rwlenz@aol.com

Turboliners to Start Soon?

After five years of rehabilitation and obstacles, it looks as if the first rehabilitated turboliners may soon enter service. On January 6th David Gunn told Transportation Commissioner Joe Boardman the first turbo should enter service within 90 days. More recently the word has been "soon." Two sets have been tested and both were sitting in the Rensselaer shop complex early in March.

The current obstacle involves availability of parts. Supersteel President Scott Mintier told ESPA on March 1st that his factory can produce and deliver any part needed. But Amtrak spokesman Dan Stessel told ESPA, "We need the parts on our shelves so we have them on weekends, the middle of the night, whenever they're needed." Presumably this means at Sunnyside yard in New York as well as Rensselaer. Both parties met recently to work this out.

Where will the trains run? "That's New York State's decision," Stessel said. "That's in return for their financial contribution."

Frank Barry

Boston Sleeper Temporarily Cancelled

Amtrak's car shortage has become so acute that it has withdrawn the sleeper from Train 448-9, the Boston section of the Lake Shore Limited, during the entire month of March. This was done after a number of trips on which there was simply no sleeper available and people who had paid for sleeper accommodations were forced to travel in coaches that were often over crowded and sometimes lacked leg rests. Some passengers were understandably upset, as many had made reservations months in advance.

Amtrak has promised that the sleeper will be restored on April 1st. This underscores the necessity of full funding for 2004 so disabled cars can be restored to service.

Amtrak Fare Discounts Available

Amtrak continues its ongoing series of discount fare promotions, with a return in mid-March of the popular 'One-Two-Free' fare plan, which provides for discounts of up to 50% when three persons travel together. As with most Amtrak promotions, restrictions and blackout periods will apply with these discounts. For full information and reservations, contact Amtrak.

For travel within New York State and to all points along the Northeast Corridor, Amtrak continues to offer a 20% discount off regular fares when passengers reserve tickets using Promotion Code V529. This discount is not valid on Acela Express or Metroliners and will not be honored during peak travel times and holiday periods. Contact Amtrak for full details.

Of interest to parents and their high school juniors and seniors making plans now to visit universities and colleges this spring, Amtrak is offering discounts of up to 50% off the lowest available coach fare, with a coupon available at www.campusvisit.com.

Latest Technology Visits Binghamton

The one of the latest developments in passenger rail technology made an impromptu appearance in the Southern Tier this past fall. Colorado Railcar's new DMU or Diesel Multiple Unit is the successor to the Budd RDC car and offers a practical new concept for passenger service nationwide.

In mid-October the car was being demonstrated in New Jersey, and through a sponsorship with Senator Tom Libous and NYS&W's Walter Rich, it was brought to Binghamton to help introduce a new passenger service to local political leaders.

Passenger service is slated to resume on the New York, Susquehanna & Western Railway's former Lackawanna Syracuse branch later this year. Service ended on the Binghamton to Syracuse line in 1958 and the tracks fell into disrepair over the years. Funding to repair the tracks and operate a daily service is in order and a late 2003 startup date is expected. The DMU was operated between Binghamton and Cortland, running under its own power northbound and pulled back to Binghamton by an NYS&W GP-18 diesel. The car was very well received, and demonstrated that even over rough track where the diesel would be swaying, the DMU remained steady. The car accelerates quickly and can reach speeds of 55mph in 40 seconds. The Susquehanna plans to use refurbished RDC cars for the new service.

With passenger service set to begin this year, it's unlikely that the DMU will be a part of any new rail services in the Empire State for the immediate future. Thus far, New York State officials haven't made a decision to purchase any DMU's for passenger service.

This new technology shows much potential. We can only hope that such technology can someday soon be a part of an expanded passenger rail system in New York State and in the rest of the country.

Rob Piecuch

Metro North Express

Special express trains run by New Jersey Transit now bypass all station stops in New Jersey to speed New York commuters to New York City. These speedy trains run on a precise schedule during the morning and evening rush hours to accommodate Metro North passengers who ride these trains between Port Jervis, N.Y. and Hoboken, N.J.; the non-stop running between Suffern and Hoboken saves about 30 minutes in commuting time.

These special express trains are eastbound trains #'s 48,50,52 and 56 in the morning and in the evening westbound #'s 55,57,63 and 65. According to Assistant Superintendent of Transportation-Hoboken Division Daniel Biernacki, their route is all former Erie Railroad mainline for a total mileage of 95.1 miles between Port Jervis and Hoboken. The extraordinary non-stop run these trains enjoy between Suffern, N.Y. and Hoboken is a sharp departure from previous schedules, which included many station stops in New Jersey Transit's namesake state.

Mr. Biernacki tells ESPA that using the theoretical maximum track speeds between Suffern and Hoboken (60 to 70 mph), the best possible transit time would be 36 minutes; these trains cover the 30.5-mile route in 38 and 40 minutes. The dispatchers see to it that the engineers receive a green signal at Suffern and clear blocks until they reach the end of track bumpers in the majestic Hoboken Lackawanna Terminal.

This unique service is an excellent example of two transit agencies coming together to provide a service which benefits the passenger interests of an adjoining state. Mr. Biernacki and his Hoboken Division employees and New Jersey Transit deserve recognition for a job well done and their "can do" attitude. ESPA would like to take this time to do that very thing; Thank you, we appreciate your work.

Ben Gottfried

Amtrak Gets \$1.05 Billion

On February 13th Amtrak was funded \$1.05 billion for the 2003 fiscal year—over four months after the year had started. The legislation also postponed payment of the \$100 million loan awarded by the Bush Administration last summer when Amtrak was on the verge of shutting down.

Although this was less than the \$1.2 billion Amtrak President David Gunn had said was necessary for Amtrak to get through this year, he has accepted this amount, saying survival will be difficult but possible. Unfortunately this continues the Congressional tradition of providing just barely enough to keep the trains running, but not enough to undo the damage caused by the last 5 years of deferred maintenance and borrowing. As a result Amtrak's debt service now exceeds \$250 million—almost a quarter of its appropriation. Last summer one out of every 15 cars was out of service according to Trains Magazine (2/21 hotline).

Amtrak's funding came as part of an omnibus spending bill funding almost all government programs because last year's Congress adjourned without passing any appropriations besides Defense. The final amount was a compromise between Amtrak critics led by Harold Rogers (R., Ky.) in the House who pushed that chamber's \$762 mil. figure, and Senate supporters who pushed for the \$1.2 billion passed by the Senate last summer.

But Rogers got his "pound of flesh" according to Washington Post columnist Don Phillips (Post, 2/18). Phillips said negotiations on Amtrak were "heated" and Congress ended by kicking the hard decisions to the Bush Administration, partly in frustration with the Administration for not developing its own plan during the past year.

As a result, the money will not go to Amtrak directly, but to the Department of Transportation (DOT). Amtrak must apply for it and can only spend it for items in its business plan. Funds must be requested specifically for each long distance route, and each train "shall be funded" only after the application is "reviewed" by DOT and the financial analysis justifies the request to the Secretary's satisfaction. But according to Phillips it is unclear whether this "review" actually implies the power to deny funding; if so, it would allow DOT Secretary Norman Mineta to get rid of the long distance trains he has long criticized as unnecessary.

Whether he will actually do so remains to be seen. As of this writing Mineta has been hospitalized since November for back surgery and is functioning only via e-mail. It's not clear that either Congress or Mineta actually want the heat that would result from closing major routes. Congress has criticized trains with the highest per passenger subsidy, (over \$200) which include the *Kentucky Cardinal*, the *Sunset Limited*, the *Texas Eagle*, the *Southwest Chief* and *Pennsylvanian*. Gunn has given notice that the *Kentucky Cardinal* will be discontinued to Louisville in July and the Philadelphia-Chicago *Pennsylvanian* was returned to its earlier New York-Pittsburgh route in February. (Both trains had their runs extended primarily to haul express, which Gunn has now determined to be unprofitable).

The *Texas Eagle* and *Sunset Limited* are the only trains linking Texas with the rest of the country and both Texas Senators are now strong Amtrak supporters and also Republicans. Any DOT attempt to discontinue these trains could bring embarrassment for President Bush in his home state. The *Southwest Chief* actually had the 5th best operating ratio of any long distance train in 2001.

The National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) says the Chief's high per passenger subsidy is misleading because it

results from many travelers traveling long distances rather than making less expensive shorter hops. (The *Southwest Chief* is the fastest train from Chicago to the West Coast). The \$200 per passenger figure was established as a ceiling for the Essential Air Service program, which subsidizes short distance flights that often carry only a handful of passengers. NARP says the appropriate standard for trains is cost per passenger mile, which is not skewed by the distance traveled.

There was strong support for the \$1.2 billion figure in both houses; 163 members of the House (37.5%) signed letters of support to the Appropriators—129 Democrats, 33 Republicans and one Independent. Signers included 18 (62%) of New York's 29 representatives—Gary Ackerman, (D., Bayside), Timothy Bishop, (D., Eastern Suffolk Co.), Sherwood Boehlert (R., Utica), Eliot Engel (D., Bronx), Maurice Hinchey, (D., Kingston), Amo Houghton (R., Corning), Steve Israel (D., Bay Shore), Sue Kelly (R., Katonah), Peter King (R., Massapequa Park), Carolyn Maloney (D, Manhattan), John McHugh (R., Watertown), Michael McNulty (D., Albany), Jerrold Nadler (D., New York), Jack Quinn (R., Buffalo), Edolphus Towns (D., Brooklyn), Nydia Velazquez (D., Brooklyn), James Walsh (R., Syracuse), Anthony Weiner (D., Rockaway). If your representative is listed, please send your thank you and ask their help in meeting Amtrak needs in the 2004 budget. Nine Republican Senators and an equal number of Democrats signed a similar letter in the Senate.

Thanks to generous contributions from our members last year, ESPA was able to contract our former Washington Representative John Boffa to mobilize support for adequate funding in the House.

Frank Barry

2003 Transportation Funding (Billions)

	2002	2003	2004 (Bush Budget)
Highways	\$31.8	\$31.8	29.3
Aviation	13.5	13.6	14.0
Transit	6.87	7.23	7.23
Amtrak	.827	1.05	.9
High Speed Rail	.032	.031	.023

Gunn Wants More for 2004

With the 2003 appropriation settled, Amtrak President David Gunn has kicked off the fight for next year (which begins October 1st), by asking for \$1.812 billion—twice the \$900 million President Bush proposed in his 2004 budget. It's an audacious move—but one that's needed if Amtrak is to overcome the deterioration of the last five years when it was forced to try to manage with declining federal support. Its debt increased by more than \$2.5 billion as a result of borrowing, sometimes just to meet payroll—a practice Gunn says, "cannot be sustained."

Gunn would use the 2004 money to restore 20 cars and 10 locomotives, which have been damaged in wrecks (two cars have already been put back in service). Amtrak would also spend \$45 million to buy DMU (diesel multiple unit) self-propelled cars. Gunn believes these would provide good service on short runs between Chicago and Milwaukee as well as New Haven and Springfield much more economically than the present locomotive hauled trains.

Other funds would be spent to replace 120,000 ties, reconstruct 5 major interlockings and rebuild several key bridges in Connecticut. Failure to make these investments will result in slow orders on the Corridor, according to Gunn.

Of the \$1.8 billion, \$768 million would go for operations and \$1.044 for capital. Gunn believes it will take five years of spending at close to \$2 billion to overcome the damage from five years of deferred maintenance.

But getting this amount will be tough. Although former House Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee Chair Harold Rogers has taken another post, his replacement, Ernest Istook, (R., Oklahoma City), is an even more outspoken Amtrak foe. He opposed Oklahoma's effort to bring the *Heartland Flyer* into Oklahoma City—the state's first rail passenger service since 1979—saying it would be cheaper to drive people to Texas in limousines. He voted against Amtrak funding in the most recent recorded votes in 1993 and 94, and continued to speak out against the Heartland Flyer even after it was proving popular in his district. Fortunately his Democratic counterpart, Steny Hoyer (Md.), who supports Amtrak, has status—he is the House Democratic Whip.

President Bush's \$900 million proposal entails getting rid of a number of the long distance trains Secretary Mineta and Office of Management and Budget Director Mitch Daniels disparage. But Gunn says eliminating them would not save much because employees would still have to be paid for several years after the trains stopped generating revenue.

Meanwhile, on January 7th Ernest Hollings (D., S.C.) reintroduced his National Defense Rail Act (S-1991) with minor changes as S-104. S-104 would reauthorize Amtrak at \$4.6 billion annually for five years, with funding for security, upgrading the Northeast Corridor, new high-speed corridors, and upgrading short and long distance routes. When this bill was introduced last April, Hollings chaired the Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, which passed it 20-3. Unfortunately it never reached the Senate floor.

Last Fall's election put Senator McCain, one of the three who voted against it, back into the Chairman's seat, returning Hollings to Ranking Minority Member. The bill now has 31 co-sponsors (vs. 33 last year) including both Clinton and Schumer of New York. Six are Republicans. But this year it seems unlikely to get far, given opposition from both committee and Senate leadership. New Senate leader Tom Frist has shown little interest in Amtrak, given its small presence in Tennessee and total absence from his hometown of Nashville. However it will serve for bargaining against any bill McCain may propose.

Frank Barry

Battle Begins over TEA-21 Renewal

TEA-21, the federal highway and transit-funding bill, expires this year, and highway interests are maneuvering for more funding, often at the expense of transit and rail. House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Committee Chairman Don Young (R., Alaska) has proposed raising the 18.4¢/gallon federal gasoline tax by 2¢. This would be part of a plan to nearly double highway spending by 2009. But tax increases are opposed by the Bush Administration, which appears to favor reducing the federal share of transit projects from 80% to 50% while maintaining the 80% federal share for highway projects.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R., Iowa) and Ranking Minority Member Max Baucus (D., Mont.) have announced their intent to terminate all federal transit funding for cities with more than one million people. The \$4 billion "saved" (of transit's \$7.23 billion) would be transferred to the highway account, which is already at its highest level ever—in fact it is 15% higher than the TEA-21 authorization allows. This mean spirited proposal is unlikely to survive as proposed, but

may be used as a bargaining ploy to strengthen highway funding at transit's expense. Baucus is the Ranking Minority Member of the Senate Subcommittee on Transportation and Infrastructure, which will draft the Senate version of this bill.

Senator James Inhofe, (R., Okla.), who replaces Senator James Jeffords (Ind, Vt.) as head of the Environment and Public works Committee, has indicated his interest in "reexamining" (presumably weakening) environmental requirements for building highways. Inhofe has previously called for reopening the Clean Air Act.

In the House the T&I committee has circulated a survey asking House members to submit wish lists of highway and transit projects they would like for their own districts for special earmarking.

Frank Barry

from Surface Transportation Project Newsletters (Jan. & Feb.)

Support Grows Broader for Rail

Despite reluctance and opposition from key members of Congress and the Bush Administration, support for a healthy national rail system is growing in ways not previously seen. For almost the first time in memory serious coalitions are forming between rail and other transportation groups. Perhaps most striking is the stronger support for rail at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, (AASHTO) which for the first time released major reports on funding needs and potential of railroads. This report, featured in our last issue, resulted from New York State Transportation Committee Joe Boardman's leadership of the Standing Committee on Rail Transportation. AASHTO has been and continues to be a major member of the highway lobby, but is broadening its scope.

A group called the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission has pulled together nearly 50 organizations to sign a manifesto requesting dedicated funding for intercity passenger rail. Signers of the "Chicago Agreement" include not only the National Association of Railroad Passengers and many of its state affiliates, but the National Conference of State Legislators, the Council of State Governments (Eastern Regional Conference), the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the United Transport Union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Environmental Law and Policy Center and Parsons Brinckerhoff Construction Co. ESPA Officers voted to sign the document.

The Great American Station Foundation is developing a new project called Reconnecting America, (www.reconnectingamerica.org) to advocate for a seamless intermodal transportation system in the U.S. It would promote coordination of long distance air flights with high-speed rail corridors and comfortable bus service.

The Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers has joined 45 transit authorities and advocacy groups, cyclists, the rail to trail conservancy, aviation interests and civic groups to push for a more balanced transportation system in Ohio. This has resulted in formation of new coalition called the Ohio Mobility Partners. This group has formally asked the state legislature to form a legislative task force to develop a strategy to finance all modes of transportation through "a cohesive transportation policy that integrates all transportation modes...to create a truly integrated, statewide transportation network."

These developments may signal a new stage in the struggle over transportation in the U.S. Rail advocates have not been terribly successful in our lonely 30 year struggle against the well financed transportation modes. It just might be that joining with other transportation interests in pursuit of "balance" could bring results not possible when advocating for trains alone.

Frank Barry

Metro North to Lease, Purchase Port Jervis Line

Metro-North has approved a 49 year lease with Norfolk-Southern for the 65 miles of track from Suffern to Port Jervis, which could lead to its purchase in 2006. The old agreement allowed Metro-North to use the tracks and specifies that Norfolk Southern must maintain them for 79MPH operation. However this standard far exceeded Norfolk Southern needs for its two daily freights, and last summer N-S gave notice that it would not renew the agreement on these terms.

This led to a negotiated result with advantages for both carriers. It gives Metro-North immediate responsibility for maintaining the track and signals, including upgrading the current signal system, which has caused many delays. M-N did not want to do this work when someone else owned the signals, and N-S did not want to spend the money for something it didn't need. The customers suffered as a result.

Metro-North will now maintain the tracks and signals, but N-S will have free use and will no longer have to pay property taxes (\$475,000 last year). Tracks owned or leased by commuter lines or Amtrak are not subject to property taxes in New York.

According to the Middletown Times Herald-Record, Metro-North's payment will jump from \$583,420 last year to \$3 million in 2005 and will climb still further in 2006. The agreement allows either party to initiate a sale in 2006, at a price to be determined then.

"This deal puts us in the same place as when we took over [the Hudson and Harlem lines from Conrail] in 1983," Peter Cannito, Metro-North's president, told the Times Herald-Record. "We now, to some extent, have control over our own destiny."

Commuters will only benefit as a result. At last they should enjoy quality comparable to that on Metro-North's lines East of the Hudson, since 67 new cars now being built for the line should be able to run on time.

From Times Herald-Record (Jan. 23), furnished by Orrin Getz

MTA Fares to Rise

The New York Metropolitan Authority will increase bus and subway fares from \$1.50 to \$2.00 in May. Metro-North and Long Island fares will rise by approximately 25%. Tokens will disappear as most passengers now use Metrocards. MTA had earlier considered cutting service instead of raising fares, or a combination of cuts and smaller fare increases. A vote of the MTA Board on March 6 approved the large fare increases but ensured there will be no service cuts, (although some part time token booths may be closed).

This will be MTA's first fare increase since 1995.

From Westchester County Journal—submitted by Gary Prophet

Port Authority to Reopen WTC Stop

PATH hopes to restore service from Newark, Jersey City and Hoboken to the World Trade Center site using a temporary station by December. This line has been closed since 9/11 due to extensive damage and tunnel flooding. This should relieve crowding on some NJ Transit trains to Penn Station as many passengers bound to lower Manhattan have had to detour via Penn Station.

PATH also expects to begin honoring MTA Metrocards on its trains by the end of the year. This will be a convenience for New York bound passengers going beyond PATH Terminals, as well as New Yorkers going to New Jersey—it is a significant step toward integrating regional transportation.

From Mobilizing the Region, 2/25, 3/7

Downstate ESPA continues to promote Penn Station Metro-Hub Plan

In cooperation with other transit advocacy groups, including the NJ Association of Rail Passengers and the Committee for Better Transit, Downstate ESPA convenes a monthly meeting—the Regional Rail Working Group. Plan to join us at the Conference Room, NYPD Downtown Center, 104 Washington Street, just north of Rector Street in Lower Manhattan. Meetings are the third Wednesday of each month, 6-8pm, March 25, April 16, May 21 and June 18, 2003.

The key effort is to advance a plan to greatly increase train service at Penn Station by "through-running", which eliminates conflicts at interlockings and can result in a 50% increase in capacity. Frequent off-peak and weekend service and fully integrated fares will convert the region's commuter rail lines into a true "regional rail" system, like the Washington Metro or San Francisco's BART.

While the recently approved MTA fare hikes are a major loss for transit advocates, the new "City Fare" that MTA agreed to put into place on the LIRR and Metro-North is a positive step in implementing the Penn Station Metro-Hub plan.

The Regional Rail Working Group has been considering other proposals, like linking the Downtown PATH with the #6 Lexington Avenue local subway and "streamlining" the plan for LIRR access to Grand Central Terminal. The PATH/Lex link will provide transit riders on both sides of the Hudson River better service and improved access to more places. Using existing Metro-North trackage at Grand Central, rather than building a new LIRR station in solid rock deep below the existing terminal, has the potential to save 80% of the cost of this \$5 billion project. For more information; contact George Haikalis, ESPA Manhattan Co-coordinator, at: 212-475-3394 geohaikalis@juno.com or check out our website www.auto-free.org

Annual Meeting (Cont'd from page 1) funded from the \$20 million, thanks to new language added to this item. However this will reduce the amount available for capital improvements and there are already more than \$20 million worth of rail projects waiting. Landry said he will look for opportunities to get the Adirondack line item back in.

Joe McHugh, Amtrak's Vice President of Government Affairs, congratulated the group for its work, saying ESPA is one of the best NARP affiliates—"You help us, you make us better, your criticism is constructive." McHugh works closely with Amtrak President David Gunn, who says none of the transit agencies he directed were in as much trouble as Amtrak was when he took over. "We were just weeks away from insolvency."

Gunn began by working to establish credibility with Congress and to get control over Amtrak's budget and spending. He has eliminated many layers of management and reduced staff by more than 600, most of whom were managers. Amtrak is getting out of the express business, which will allow long distance trains to operate faster and more reliably—*California Zephyr* and *Southwest Chief* trip times will be cut by as much as an hour. "Our mission is moving passengers," McHugh said; "we will work with the freight railroads and our own managers to improve on time performance." McHugh also said Amtrak hopes to have a simpler fare structure next year rather than its current one which follows the airline model. "We'd like a structure we can publish in our timetables."

McHugh said the focus would be to stabilize the current system rather than expand it or contract it further; "there will be no new services unless states pay the full cost." States are now being asked to pay the full cost of services they are partially subsidizing, such as New York State's *Adirondack*. But Amtrak has decided not to require New York to pay for all the Empire Corridor operating costs just yet. "Dave likes the 80%-20% federal-state funding ratio used for transit; that would be helpful," McHugh said.

This year provides an opportunity to address intercity rail in a broader context, as all three major transportation authorizations—surface transportation (highway and transit), airlines and Amtrak will be up for renewal. Critical long-term funding decisions are required. "We'll develop a 5 year plan to inform the discussion."

McHugh singled out three New York Congressmen for special thanks—Jack Quinn, (R., Buffalo), who chairs the Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) Rail Subcommittee, John Sweeney (R., Saratoga Springs), who serves on the Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee, and Jerry Nadler (D., New York), who also serves on the T&I Rail Subcommittee.

Until 1997 Tim Gillespie held Joe McHugh's job at Amtrak—and in fact supervised Joe during the last of his 19 years there. Last year Tim provided extra representation for ESPA in Washington thanks to our member's response to our special appeal.

Gillespie pointed out that since 1997 there has been a major change in the method of funding transportation and some other government programs. While authorizing committees used to set the parameters and ceilings, the actual amounts were determined by the all-powerful Appropriations Committee. But today 70% of all transportation funds get allocated by laws passed by the authorizing Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (T&I) rather than through the appropriation process. As a result the T&I now sets the floor as well as the ceiling, leaving very little room for the Appropriations Committee to maneuver. Today Amtrak must compete with the Department of Transportation itself, the National Transportation Safety Board and everything else for the remaining 30%, which can be appropriated.

Gillespie said states ought to have the ability to use TEA-21 money for rail if they wish, and AIR-21 money should be fully flexed as well. This could eliminate many short distance flights in favor of rail corridors.

Finally Gillespie asked whether Amtrak should have to come up with the burden of finding the money for the Northeast Corridor every year. "I don't think they will ever be able to get the money they need as long as they own it." ESPA and the National Association of Railroad Passengers have advocated giving ownership to a federal body that would be more likely to get adequate funding, while Amtrak would continue to operate the trains.

Norman Schneider, who oversees rail projects at the State Department of Transportation, listed accomplishments during the past year: two turboliners delivered to Amtrak, the Rensselaer station opened, rail property tax legislation enacted and an upgrade announced for the Delaware & Hudson, used by the *Adirondack*. Work has also begun on the Saratoga Station.

Infrastructure—track improvements—have been the most disappointing aspect, Schneider said. "We thought that when we got the contract with Amtrak and the property tax law, we'd be able to do it." But the fiscal problems at Amtrak have made it "much more challenging. We're continuing to look at what's the best approach to the double tracking (to Schenectady), rebuilding the Livingston Avenue Bridge over the Hudson River and the Rensselaer shop improvements. The contract with Amtrak now may not be the best way to go. We're trying to get help on the federal level."

Schneider said the joint user study of the Hudson line should be finished by Fall. We're "creating a simulation process to identify key needs in the future." The Cleveland Hub Study, which includes train service from Cleveland to Toronto, via Buffalo, should be finished shortly. Unfortunately "We have not been able to start the West of Albany study," Schneider said, due to restrictions on service expansion mandated as a condition of the \$100 million loan Amtrak received from the federal DOT last summer.

In response to a question, Schneider said the Susquehanna Railroad would provide Binghamton-Syracuse passenger service as a "demonstration" in return for state help in upgrading its tracks from Binghamton to Syracuse and Utica. He also said DOT has been working to get the Park Street Bridge completed in Syracuse, and hopes the work can proceed this summer. This will allow On-Track trains into the Amtrak station and beyond to the baseball stadium.



Platform at stadium awaits Park Street Bridge completion

Furthermore, he said, DOT has put together a \$2 million proposal to connect this track to the CSX mainline east of the station, which will allow the station to handle two trains at once, (as is now possible in Utica, Rome and Schenectady). "The Governor has endorsed it and Congressman Jim Walsh (R., Syracuse) has agreed to request it as a TEA-21 project."

Schneider ended by praising DOT Commissioner Joe Boardman for his plan to reorganize the Transportation Department to make it more of a transportation agency and less of a highway department. Deputy Commissioner Mike Fleischer is heading up a task force to look into "reinventing the Department." This brought applause from the audience.

Sadly from ESPA's perspective, Norm Schneider will retire at the end of March through a state buyout program. He will be missed as he was able to move a number of stalled projects during his tenure.

Supersteel President Scott Mintier brought two turboliner train seats that were set up in the anteroom, with a table between them. Several ESPA members used the same word to describe them: "firm." For some, this may have been a polite understatement. They are definitely a far cry from New York Central's comfortable Sleepy Hollow seats.

Finally, Al Papp of NARP Region III (New Jersey-Pennsylvania) presented a proposal to link the Port Authority trains from Newark and Jersey City with New York City's Lexington Avenue subway line that passes Grand Central en route to the Bronx. Papp noted that 70% of mid-town office space is within a 10 minute walk of Grand Central while only 30% is close to Penn Station or the Port Authority's midtown Terminal. He also noted that both lines use small cars to fit through tunnels that were among the first built in New York and so would be compatible with each others track and platforms. He urged that this be done in connection with the rebuilding of the World Trade Center terminal where the two lines come close. This has generated interest in New Jersey and will be discussed at the next ESPA meeting.

Frank Barry

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2003 ESPA Meeting Dates

Sunday, May 4, New York - Penn Station	11:00am - 2:30pm
Saturday, June 2, 2003	Schenectady
Saturday, August 2, 2003	Utica
Saturday, October 4, 2003	Rensselaer
Saturday, November 22, 2003	Schenectady

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

Name Change

Amtrak will drop the Acela name from all but its high-speed trains effective March 17th. After that "Acela Regionals," (formerly Northeast Direct) will be called "Regionals." This should end confusion and disappointment among conventional train passengers who expected a modern high-speed trainset when they boarded their "Acela Regional" train.

ESPA MEMBERSHIP

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

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