

# The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



## WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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March/April 2008

### Commission Recommends More Spending for Rail Despite Bush Resistance

On January 15th the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission released its report, mandated by Congress, to provide guidance in renewing the SAFETEA-LU highway and transit authorization that expires next year. The report, which covers all transport modes, states that "Intercity passenger rail is a critical missing link in the nation's surface transportation system." It recommends an average annual investment of \$225 to 338 billion through 2050, including \$7.4 to 9.4 billion for passenger rail. The \$5 billion federal share of the passenger rail portion would be financed by a combination of

(Cont'd on page 5)

### Bloomberg Joins National Effort

New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg has joined Governors Arnold Schwarzenegger, (R., CA.) and Edward Rendell (D., PA.) in announcing formation of *Building America's Future*, a new bipartisan coalition of state and local government officials. According to a January 19th press release the group aims to "rally support for a renewed federal commitment to funding America's infrastructure needs." Initially it will "work with presidential candidates...to ensure that the next president understands the enormity of the infrastructure crisis and is committed to increasing infrastructure funding. The crisis is far greater than roads and highways...it includes the basic necessities communities and businesses need to survive ....schools, waterlines...hospitals, aviation, rail lines and ports."

### NYSDOT, Amtrak, NARP Speakers Address Annual Meeting

Donald Hannon, Bill Hollister and David Johnson spoke at the March 8th ESPA-NARP Region II 2008 annual meeting. **Hannon** is Acting Director of NYSDOT's Office of Integrated Modal Services and Executive Assistant to Deputy Commissioner Karen Rae, who reports directly to Commissioner Astrid Glynn.

Hannon said New York State will need an investment of \$175 billion in transportation during the next 20 years, including \$5.2 billion for rail, and this will require federal participation. He said recruitment of Commissioner Glynn and Karen Rae demonstrates commitment to rail since both are well qualified in this area. Commissioner Glynn now holds the position as Chairperson of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) Standing Committee on Rail Transportation which former NYSDOT Commissioner Joe Boardman once held.

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### Upstate Newspapers Unite Behind Rail

On Thursday, February 27, six newspapers across Upstate New York published editorials supporting improvements and investment in passenger rail. While each paper's opinion was their own, it was the first time the topic of passenger rail has received such comprehensive and coordinated editorial comment on a single day...

The participating papers were the *Batavia News*; *Buffalo News*; *Elmira Star-Gazette*; *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*; *Schenectady Daily Gazette* and *Syracuse Post-Standard*.

Quotes from the editorials included: "New York State should act now to revive rail traffic as a step toward fast-tracking the future state economy. Today's economy and pressing public needs won't allow the major investment to transform the state's aging railroad infrastructure immediately, but incremental steps can be taken and planning should start." - *Buffalo News*

"What's needed is for Congress and states with regions in economic crisis — such as Upstate — to develop jointly an accelerated rail plan. High-speed rail must become a national priority, with an initial focus on regions with high economic need.... Better rail will mean a better, more appealing upstate. Getting there will take an historic public-private partnership." - *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*

"A penny or two increase in the gas tax would raise enough money. A bond issue is another possibility, because this system would truly be an investment in the future and fare revenues could help repay the borrowed money." - *Schenectady Daily Gazette*

"The technology is proven, the rationale is strengthening. All that remains is summoning the political will to make it happen." - *Syracuse Post-Standard*

EPSA applauds the editorial boards of these papers for recognizing both the need and justification for public investment in our rail system. Such wide-spread support only helps to boost our efforts to advance sensible public policy and funding.

Editorials available at [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org). *Bruce B. Becker*

### Double-Digit Growth in Pennsylvania

Amtrak reports double-digit growth in ridership and revenue during fiscal year 2007 on routes through the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Operating between Harrisburg, Philadelphia and New York, the *Keystones* saw ridership grow to 988,454, an increase of 20 percent for FY07. Ticket revenue for the same period increased nearly 30 percent to \$20,582,838.

Last fall, Amtrak and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation with support from the Federal Transit Administration, introduced all-electric service with speeds up to 110 mph along the Keystone Corridor.

## The View from the Cab

My thanks go to the 70 ESPA members who attended our recent Annual Meeting in Schenectady. As reported in this issue, the attendees heard excellent presentations from a variety of interesting and knowledgeable speakers.

I wish to take this opportunity to thank both Frank Barry and Bob Lenz for their many years of service as Directors on the NARP Board representing Region Two and New York State. As noted below, the five other incumbent Region Two NARP directors were re-elected at the Annual Meeting, with long-time ESPA member George Haikalis being elected to serve for the first time.

I am pleased to announce that over 60 members took advantage of our 2007 'Bring a New Member to ESPA' initiative. I welcome all of our newly sponsored members and I encourage your active participation in our organization.

As reported at the Annual Meeting, our Association completed 2007 in a positive financial position, with a modest increase in our overall net assets. Total income for the year was \$28,817, with expenses totaling \$27,379. Our budget for 2008 predicts a near break-even result, based on similar revenues and expenses.

The Association's Officers and Coordinators are currently reviewing several potential concepts aimed at enhancing our effectiveness and increasing the public's awareness of our cause. As we have seen done so successfully in Illinois, education and out-reach is key in garnering wide-spread public support for passenger rail. Funds previously allocated for our Albany Government Representative Joe Landry, will be utilized in this new effort.

We also continue to work towards the formation of a new 501(c)3 Not-For-Profit educational 'Foundation' organization, that will be able to work in conjunction with ESPA in the coming years and which will provide several significant benefits, including the ability to raise funds on a tax deductible basis and seek grants from foundations and other funding sources interested in our cause. I will keep you informed as to our progress on this effort and we will announce when the new organization is formally established.

I wish to close by thanking all the Officers and Coordinators for their hard work and dedication to the Association in the past year. As we are an all-volunteer organization, these individuals expend considerable time and personal resources in support of our cause. And if you would like to take on a new 'labor-of-love', I encourage you to join us and attend one of upcoming ESPA meetings. You can make a difference!

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

## NARP Region Two Board Election

For the first time in many years, NARP's Region Two (New York State) members were asked to cast votes for their preference of candidates to represent Region Two on the NARP national Board. For the 2008 -2009 period, Region Two was allocated six seats on the Board, with seven ESPA members throwing their hats

in the ring. Two long-time NARP Region Two Board members, Frank Barry and Bob Lenz, chose not to seek re-election this year.

The election results were announced at the recent ESPA Annual Meeting and with a total of 295 ballots cast, the six winners are: (re-elected) Andrew Cabal; Lewis Hoppe; Richard Kulla; Steve Salatti, John Ross and (newly elected) George Haikalis. NARP Board members attend up to two meetings per year (each Spring in Washington, DC and each Fall in cities around the country (Portland, OR in 2008)).

Congratulations to each of the winners.... *Bruce B. Becker*

## NYS DOT Holds Public Meetings

Over the past month, NYS DOT held a series of Public Outreach sessions across the state, as part of its ongoing effort to identify transportation needs and priorities for the next twenty years. ESPA was formally represented at three of the nine sessions by Ben Gottfried in Binghamton, Steve Strauss in Poughkeepsie and Bruce Becker in Buffalo.

At each session, NYS DOT highlighted the need for significantly increased investment in all modes over the coming years and the critical role that the federal government will have to play in years to come. While noting that the State's transportation systems are safe, infrastructure conditions are steadily worsening. Of particular concern are the State's highway bridges, with over 3,000 now projected to become 'deficient' in the next ten years unless adequate funds for maintenance and repairs are made available.

NYS DOT's needs assessment envisions a total of \$175.2 billion in capital investment for the state's transportation systems over the next twenty years. Of this amount, spending on freight/passenger rail and ports is projected to consume \$5.2 billion. To put the enormity of the long-term funding challenge facing the state in context, these figures don't include spending for the MTA, Thruway Authority or Bridge Authority. A link to the complete NYS DOT Needs Assessment Report is available on our web site, [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org).

ESPA's statements at these sessions was loud and clear...State and Federal investment in passenger rail will be critical in the years to come, in order for the state to be capable of providing safe, reliable and cost efficient public transportation for all citizens.

*Bruce B. Becker*

## Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

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

## New Yorker Wins Amtrak Photo Contest

New York resident, Richard Allen, of Cortland has won the 2008 Amtrak Calendar photo contest. His shot of the Coast Starlight passing Mt. Shasta in Northern California adorns Amtrak's wall calendar this year. Copies of the calendar, in two different sizes, can be ordered from the Amtrak website at [www.amtrak.com/store](http://www.amtrak.com/store) or by calling 630-285-9734. Congratulations to Mr. Allen and lets hope he has some interesting Empire State Amtrak photos for the ESPA Express, too.

## High Speed Rail Contract Signed—in South America

The first American true High Speed Railroad apparently will not be built in the United States but in Argentina. The line will link Buenos Aires with Cordoba, over 400 miles northwest. Top speeds will be 186 mph, which should cut travel time from 14 hours to approximately three. Completion is due in 2011. The new railroad will be built for \$1.3 billion by a consortium led by Alstom of France. Argentina's President Cristina Kirchner signed the letter of intent with Dominique Bussereau, the Transport Minister of France, on January 16th.

*From Alstom website*

### Questions (One Reader's Opinion).

The announcement of a very high speed railroad to be built in Argentina should raise profound questions for our country. It is disturbing enough to have given up our pioneer role in railroading to Japan and France over 25 years ago. But 16 other countries now have or are building high speed rail lines. Looking up to Argentina will be a new and not entirely welcome experience.

How is it that Argentina can do something that we cannot? If Argentina is to build this, why do they go to Europe rather than coming here for equipment and expertise? Why is it that we do not even have a high speed rail industry? Why are we falling farther and farther behind? The Bush Administration uses words like "unsustainable" to describe rail passenger service in this country run by Amtrak. How can other countries with far fewer resources sustain high quality rail service when we cannot even start it?

Perhaps there is a deeper question, which may partially answer the above: is it possible to carry out a major war for five years and also replace our entire supply of nuclear weapons without giving up something somewhere? Or is our backwardness in rail and transportation infrastructure really an unacknowledged sacrifice to the War and our attempt to sustain our status as the world's last remaining military superpower? If so, are we really better off than less powerful countries that can provide good rail service for their citizens?

*Frank Barry*

## Ontario, Quebec, Ottawa Join for High Speed Study

On January 10, 2008, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty and Quebec Premier Jean Charest joined the federal Minister of Transport Lawrence Cannon to announce the funding of an up-date study of a high-speed rail line in the Windsor-Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal-Quebec City corridor.

Transport 2000 welcomes the study, noting that, HSR projects are underway on all continents except North America. High Speed trains have proven to be cost-effective alternatives to driving and flying, stimulating economic development on their routes. The advantages of rail take on new urgency today given climate change and the looming energy crisis.

(Transport 2000 Ontario Report [www.transport2000.ca](http://www.transport2000.ca))

## N.Y.S. Shows Increase in Train Accidents

New data released show a steep rise in railroad accidents as well as those involving people trespassing on tracks in New York State. The figures released by the Federal Railroad Administration show 49 accidents at crossings in New York last year, up 53% from 2006. At the same time, the number of so-called "trespassers" killed –

which include pedestrians taking shortcuts and people hiking or riding all-terrain vehicles along tracks – doubled from nine to 18 in 2007. Rob Kulat, a Federal Railroad Administration spokesman, says it's difficult to say why New York's numbers went up in those areas, but he notes that they are particularly difficult accidents for railroads and railroad regulators to control. He says the biggest cause of railroad-crossing accidents is people trying to beat the train, often by driving around the gates. *(Associated Press)*

## Adirondack Café/Business Class Shuffle

In late January 2008, Amtrak began an unadvertised switch from the full lounge car with all table seating on the *Adirondack* to a cafe car with half of the car table seating and the other half 2x1 seating with 5 rows of leather seats, providing 15 business class seats. At first, some were excited at the prospect of having business class on the *Adirondack*, both north of Albany and also between New York and Albany, as the *Adirondack* operates as a morning train to Albany and a late afternoon train from Albany back to New York.

Upon further review, serious issues were raised. They included the fact that business class would only be offered as far north as Rouses Point since the entire cafe car needed to be empty at Customs, so customs officials could conduct their business without business class customers in the same car. This meant that no one could reserve business class through to or from Montreal. This was a little puzzling to many, as the Toronto *Maple Leaf* operates daily across the border at Niagara Falls with business class customers in the same car used by customs officials at the border. An additional issue was that the National Parks Service provides narration on the *Adirondack* on many weekends and the reduction of table seating would make it very difficult to accommodate a narrative when others use the cafe car and still others sit in the business class seats. After about a week, the cafe car was removed and the lounge car with all table seating returned, as the table seating is definitely needed on this route.

On many days the cafe car operated, it did so backwards, with the business class seating facing the coach cars. This meant that every coach passenger who wished to purchase something at the cafe had to pass and often wait for service in the business class seating area.

*Gary Prophet*

## Amtrak to Celebrate National Train Day

To raise awareness of the vital role rail plays in our nation's transportation system, Amtrak will celebrate its first annual National Train Day on Saturday, May 10. This date marks the day the last spike was driven on the first transcontinental railroad at Promontory Point, Utah in 1869.

"With ridership growing to record levels, we continue to see a strong demand for rail travel as a link between growing communities," said Alex Kummant, President and CEO of Amtrak. "Passenger and freight service is on the rise, and there's never been a better time to celebrate the railroad industry and passenger rail service in the U.S."

Amtrak's celebration of National Train Day will begin with special promotions, events, partnerships, and an advertising campaign. On May 10 Amtrak will host events at four of its largest stations, Washington, New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, where visitors may take part in a variety of activities including live musical performances, exhibits, trip planning, VIP appearances and trip giveaways.

## Interstate Crisis: NJ Transit's New Hudson River Tunnel Plan Scuttles Direct Track Connection to Moynihan/Penn Station

The Hudson "Ocean" just got wider! In a dramatic sign of growing hostility between New York and New Jersey, NJ Transit has proposed eliminating a direct track connection between its new Hudson River tunnel and the soon to be redeveloped Moynihan/Penn Station. This connection was scuttled in the revised plan now undergoing environmental review. Regional rail advocates on both sides of the Hudson River have asked the Access-to-the-Region's Core (ARC) partners MTA, Port Authority and NJ Transit to instead "deep six" the Deep Cavern plan for a new six-track station some 175 feet below 34th Street and 460 feet north of the existing Penn Station complex. The two connections were being advanced concurrently in the plan that was the subject of a Draft Environmental Impact Statement debated last year. The Deep Cavern plan was selected in favor a much more attractive alternative developed in the final "Major Investment Study" (MIS) stage of the ARC planning study. This option, dubbed "Alternative G", called for connecting Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal — the mother of all train station connections.

In its 31-page ARC Summary Report published in 2003, ARC compared three final options. Alternative G cost the least to build and operate, attracted the most passengers and diverted the greatest number of motorists. This option used existing tracks and platforms at Penn Station and Grand Central, connecting them with a new tunnel under 31<sup>st</sup> Street and Park Avenue in Manhattan. The study found no fatal flaws in this connection. All other information about the six million dollar ARC planning study has been labeled "draft" and is unavailable for public examination. Transit advocates have called on state and Federal agencies to release this information, which was withheld when the Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO's) made their selection of the Locally Preferred Alternative in 2005.

The direct track connection into Penn Station from the new Hudson River tunnel could be the first step in advancing Alternative G. It was favored by Amtrak as a back-up route, should repairs be needed in the original Pennsylvania Railroad tunnel built in 1910. The connection was analyzed in great detail in the environmental analysis conducted in 2007. This review found that there were no significant obstacles that could not be mitigated. Building only this connection at this time, and postponing or dropping the Deep Cavern station, would save nearly \$1.6 billion.

New Yorkers should have an interest in this debate if for no other reason than because they are being asked to contribute some three billion in Port Authority funds to construct this project. Some of these funds could be used to advance the connection to Grand Central, which would benefit both states. New York would gain because the connection would allow Empire Corridor train riders to reach Grand Central and then continue on to Penn Station and Philadelphia and Washington. Boston-Washington Northeast Corridor trains could be routed through Grand Central and Penn Station, making rail service more competitive with the air shuttles. Regional rail users from Westchester and the Bronx using the Harlem Line could reach West Midtown destinations and could continue on to points in New Jersey. West of Hudson riders, including many from Orange and Rockland Counties would gain access to the East Midtown office concentration around Grand Central — the nation's largest corporate business center.

Transit advocates have already stepped to the plate, calling on

transit agencies on both side of the Hudson to drop their narrow institutional perspectives and consider more comprehensive options that benefit many more transit users. ESPA, and its counterpart in New Jersey — NJ-ARP — together with the Lackawanna Coalition and NARP have now been joined by the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC) and several elected officials in calling for Alternative G — the Penn Station-Grand Central connection. In a hopeful sign, MTA CEO Lee Sander announced some elements of his agency's capital program, at his State of the MTA address delivered on March 3, 2008 upon the occasion of the celebration of MTA's 40th Anniversary. He called for "Interoperability" of Regional Rail lines through Penn Station, an important first step in gaining acceptance of the train station connection.

New York State officials are especially concerned about the tunnel and how it affects redevelopment plans at the Moynihan/Penn Station complex. NJ Transit's plan for bypassing the existing Penn Station is at odds with that agency's commitment to become an "anchor tenant" at the new Penn Station. Amtrak's funding constraints have complicated its participation in this project. The weakening economy has further complicated development plans. Transit advocates point out that building only a track connection from the new tunnel directly into Penn Station as a first step toward Alternative G is a key way to get the redevelopment project on track. This would deal with the basic track layout first, providing some order to the rebuilding that would follow.

New York's new governor David Paterson, known for his cordial diplomatic abilities, is in an excellent position to call for a rethinking of the Hudson River tunnel project so that it greatly facilitates travel between the two states. The key project elements that NJ Transit seeks to advance are within New York state, and the Governor Paterson can request that this work be directed toward a common goal.

*George Haikalis, ESPA Manhattan Regional Rail Coordinator*

For more information about the Regional Rail Working Group's monthly Downstate meetings please see [www.rrwg.org](http://www.rrwg.org) or call contact RRWG Chair George Haikalis at [geo@irum.org](mailto:geo@irum.org) or call 212-475-3394.

For more information about the environmental review of NJ Transit's Hudson River rail plan contact [deis@accesstotheregion.score.com](mailto:deis@accesstotheregion.score.com) or call 877-ARC-0999

### There's Always a Reason to Ride Amtrak

Niagara Falls	<a href="http://www.niagara-usa.com">www.niagara-usa.com</a>
Buffalo	<a href="http://www.buffalocvb.org">www.buffalocvb.org</a>
Rochester	<a href="http://www.visitrochester.com">www.visitrochester.com</a>
Syracuse	<a href="http://www.visitSyracuse.org">www.visitSyracuse.org</a>
Utica	<a href="http://www.oneidacountycvb.com">www.oneidacountycvb.com</a>
Albany	<a href="http://www.Albany.org">www.Albany.org</a>
New York City	<a href="http://www.nycvisit.com">www.nycvisit.com</a>
Montreal	<a href="http://www.tourisme-montreal.org">www.tourisme-montreal.org</a>

### Receive the ESPA Express earlier!

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Thank you! Robert Lenz, Editor

## 2008 - 2009 ESPA Meeting Dates

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 plan to attend a meeting. Advance registration is required!

Saturday, April 26, 2008 ..... Rensselaer, NY  
Saturday, June 21, 2008 ..... Schenectady, NY  
Saturday, August 2, 2008 ..... Utica, NY  
Saturday, September 27, 2008 ..... Rensselaer, NY  
Saturday, November 15, 2008 ..... Schenectady, NY  
Saturday, January 24, 2009 ..... Schenectady, NY  
Saturday, March 7, 2009 ..... Annual Membership Meeting – Schenectady

ALL dates 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 on meeting times and venues...

## Ohio Governor Urges Amtrak Review for 3-C Corridor

Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland, in a letter to Amtrak President Alex Kummant, has asked Amtrak to identify the prerequisites for service in the "3-C" corridor, linking Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati. Strickland asked Amtrak to split any analysis into two parts, focusing on the city pairs of Cleveland-Columbus and Columbus-Cincinnati, the latter via Springfield and Dayton. Amtrak likely would perform any capital improvements needed, with Ohio supplying the funding. Cooperation from host freight railroads also would be required, Amtrak said in a press release, stressing the need to "not only enable passenger service, but increase capacity for greater freight movement."

For more on this story, visit: [Railway Age Breaking News](http://RailwayAge.com)

### Commission Recommends (Cont'd from page 1)

ticket surcharge, increase in the gas tax and general revenue. (The needed amount is equivalent to revenue generated by 3¢ to 4¢ per gallon of the gasoline tax, according to the Commission).

Investment would focus on corridors of up to 500 miles but could also revive the following long distance routes: Salt Lake City to Portland and Los Angeles, St. Louis-Oklahoma City, Meridian-Dallas, Chicago-Florida, Pittsburgh-Cincinnati-St. Louis and Minneapolis-Omaha-Kansas City. The proposed 2050 map shows over 30 new routes, seven of which appear on a 2015 map. No new routes are shown for New York, but the Commission says "exact routes could differ" from its maps.

However the recommendations did not represent the views of the entire Commission. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters and Deputy Secretary Maria Cino, representing the Bush administration, submitted a Minority View which was signed by one other commissioner, Rick Geddes, a Cornell University professor. The minority argued for more emphasis on tolling rather than gas tax increases, to allow market forces to limit use of congested highways. Regarding rail, the minority said, "It is highly unlikely that \$9 billion per year in cost beneficial investment...for passenger rail could be found." The minority report was especially ironic because Mary Peters chaired the Commission. Neither she nor Cino attended the group's presentation to Congress two days later.

According to the National Corridors Initiative, a key section of the report on transit was deleted by White House sources even though this was a Congressionally mandated document approved by a 9-3 vote of the Commission. What's more, Paul Weyrich, its author, who once served on Amtrak's Board of Directors, is a leading conservative activist who founded the Heritage Foundation and now chairs the Free Congress Foundation. But unlike some other prominent conservatives, he strongly supports rail transit and intercity passenger service. The excised section presented evidence that automobile owners are less likely to utilize buses than rail vehicles, hence buses are less likely to reduce driving than rail vehicles. The National Corridors Initiative has posted the deleted section on its website [www.nationalcorridors.org](http://www.nationalcorridors.org) and is arranging for its publication.

*Frank Barry*

## Empire Corridor Travel Tips, Discounts

- o In partnership with the 'I Love New York' tourism program, Amtrak is offering a 20% fare discount program for NYS rail travel now through September 2008. With a 20% discount off the regular adult fares, the program is only available by making reservations directly through Amtrak's 800 number, 1-800-USA-RAIL and specifically mentioning discount code V464 to the agent (it is NOT available via the Amtrak's web site!). Valid on all trains running in New York State and on the Adirondack to Montreal (but not on Northeast Corridor trains or on the Maple Leaf in Ontario), reservations must be made at least three days in advance of travel and early reservations will help insure the best availability of the discount. For more information and other discount restrictions, contact Amtrak directly.
- o All Empire Corridor trains require reservations. While advance reservations are encouraged, last minute passengers will always be accommodated if space is available on a particular train. Booking as early as possible will provide the best possible fare. Amtrak accepts reservations up to 11 months in advance of your travel date! Travel during off-peak periods (mid-week, early morning or late evening) will generally be the least expensive.
- o AAA and NARP members receive 10% off most regular fares, with a three day advance purchase requirement. Senior citizens, veterans and many students can receive a 15% discount off most fares.
- o Visit [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com) and select 'Hot Deals' for the latest discount program information.
- o Join the Amtrak Guest Rewards program and earn points towards free travel and more.

## Late Flash

According to the March 16 Albany Times Union Amtrak and NYSDOT are discussing restoration of food service on New York-Albany trains. Much will depend on budget negotiations.

## OnTrack Ends in Syracuse

OnTrack has ended all service. Regular downtown shuttles stopped last year, but Orange Express specials had continued to operate to the Syracuse U. Carrier Dome. RDC's may be sold.

*(from NARP hotline, 3/14)*

## Bush Makes Last Try to Slash Amtrak

President Bush submitted his last budget, for FY2009, on February 2nd, with a 40% cut for Amtrak, which would essentially shut it down. His \$800 million total is the same figure he proposed last year and it will likely get the same response from the Democratic Congress. No funds are provided for operations, although \$275 million could be used for this with consent of the Secretary of Transportation. (Last year \$475 million was appropriated.) Even Senator Judd Gregg (R, NH), ranking member of the Budget Committee, said Bush's overall budget proposal is "not a serious budget."

However the Bush budget includes \$100 million additional for 50-50 grants to states for passenger rail improvements, more than tripling the \$30 million currently appropriated.

On February 20th Amtrak formally requested \$1.671 billion—more than twice the Bush amount. And this does not include \$114 million needed to pay Amtrak employees the back pay recommended by the Presidential Emergency Board to settle Amtrak's eight year labor impasse. Amtrak says the decision on funding this amount "lies with Congress." On February 26th the House transportation subcommittee held its hearing on Amtrak funding and several Democrats expressed strong support for more rail service. However subcommittee chair John Olver, D., Mass., one of Amtrak's most vocal supporters, said "It will be extremely difficult to more than double the Bush Administration (figure)" because "Unfortunately President Bush has left us other holes to fill." He said "States have got to put a lot more money into passenger rail." Federal Railroad Administrator Joe Boardman said states need a stronger role and noted that support from states has been very uneven, "especially my former state of New York," (which pays nothing for Empire Corridor service). But many states, including New York, have said repeatedly that it's the federal government that needs to put more money into rail. (Actually, in ESPA's view both need to do so).

On March 10th the Senate took a very positive first step, passing an overall Budget Resolution that includes \$1.8 billion for Amtrak plus \$250 million for state grants. This is not binding and will likely be whittled down, but it's a very strong starting point. (The House has also approved a budget but it did not specify figures for individual programs such as Amtrak)

Given the multiple demands on the budget it is still urgent to communicate our support for passenger rail. NARP recommends asking our representatives to work for a) Amtrak's requested amount, b) a House Amtrak authorization counterpart to S-294 passed by the Senate last year, and c) funds for inter-city passenger rail in pending climate legislation (S-2191).

*Frank Barry (from NARP hotlines)*

### Amtrak Funding (Millions)

	Enacted		ATK Request	Bush Budget
	2007	2008	2009	2009
Operations	\$490	\$475	\$525	0
Capital	495	565	801	525
Debt Service	278	285	345	
Incentive Grants *	31	0	0	275
Total	\$1,294	\$1,325	\$1,671**	800
State 50-50 Matching Grants	30			100

May be used for operations with DOT approval

\*\*Does not include \$114 for back pay for employees

## Annual Meeting (Cont'd from page 1)



Hannon praised the high level of cooperation between the State, Amtrak and all the railroads. Current initiatives underway include the *Empire Corridor Joint Users Group*, comprised of Amtrak, CSX, Metro-North, CP, the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) and the Senate Finance Committee, which is developing a joint strategy and identifying projects needed south of Albany. The *Unity of Control Study* focuses on the CSX-owned stretch between Albany and Poughkeepsie. (This follows the Senate High Speed Task Force finding of a need to consolidate ownership and control of the New York-Albany corridor). The study will assess "valuation of CSX right of way, legal options, benefits, fiscal impacts and operating alternatives."

He also reported on Senate High Speed Task Force projects: *George Washington Bridge Cut Stabilization*: Amtrak will do the work and cover \$6 million in costs; NYSDOT will cover up to \$4 million additional. Completion: Summer, 2009

*Rensselaer Station Improvements*: Phase 1, \$3.325 million. Old station to be demolished to make room for more parking and a new track. The existing platforms and canopies will be extended. Phase 2, \$6.6 million. Track and signal layout will be designed to accommodate 4th track, next to station. Construction in 2009.

*New Platform at Hudson*: \$6.6 million. NYSDOT will design a new platform for the outside track next to river. Amtrak will build it, CSX will do track and signal work. NYSDOT will contract a consultant for design work this year.

The High Speed Rail Task Force also allocated \$3 million to study improvements west of Albany. This will entail computer simulations of freight and passenger traffic to identify strategic improvements with cost estimates. Results due by May, 2009.

The High Speed Task Force funding also provided for a *Light Rail Connector Study* to assess transportation options for emerging employment centers in the Capital District, Saratoga and Lower Adirondack Region, including "rail, light rail and bus rapid transit. CDTA will manage this with completion by February, 2009.

Hannon pointed out that New York's last State Rail Plan was produced in 1986 and federal regulations require updates to be eligible for funding. NYSDOT is now working on a blueprint for investments in rail. An initial workgroup included Amtrak, Norfolk Southern, CP, L.I.R.R., New York & Atlantic, NYSDOT and ESPA—represented by Capital District Coordinator Tony Rudman. A draft will be out in May with a 30 day public comment period. "We are planning three public meetings around the State, and I know you will be there," Hannon said. Completion date for the revised rail plan is July 31, 2008

Mr. Hannon ended with appreciation for ESPA as "the voice for passenger rail: "we hear you and we really do listen to you."

**Annual Meeting** (continued from p. 5)

Amtrak's **Bill Hollister**, like many railroaders, has worked his way up. He began as a trackworker, became a station agent, then entered management where he has overseen stations, food service and since 2003, marketing. He now works with media, tourism and travel agencies, Chambers of Commerce and 65 state government



departments. Amtrak offers a government employee discount between Albany and New York and some departments buy tickets in bulk which reduces employee reimbursement and provides immediate revenue to Amtrak. Marketing initiatives include the Saratoga Race Track Special, which carried almost 1000 people last summer. "We used to do this with a special train, but that was very costly. We now use the *Adirondack* northbound and the *Ethan Allen* was rescheduled to accommodate the return. This was a win for everybody." *Adirondack* and *Ethan Allen* ridership went up, Amtrak costs went down and race track ridership has held steady.

The New York State Fair special stop has also been successful; "Last summer we let kids ride free and carried just over 900 people." This was a big improvement over 2006 when only 600 people used the stop due to last minute scheduling as a result of CSX trackwork.

This year for the first time the State's payment for the *Adirondack* includes \$100,000 for marketing. "We came up with a discounted fare for our slowest period, January to March—a \$75 round trip special between New York and Montreal." In partnership with NYSDOT this was promoted through Amtrak.com and station "rack cards" in English and French. Amtrak also ran ads in Montreal papers and on Capital Region TV. Amtrak hosted the nationally syndicated *Stephany Abrams Travel Radio Show*. Stephanie rode the *Adirondack* and broadcast from the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal for two days promoting this train. She and others on board saw over 30 bald eagles north of Whitehall; "They put on a spectacular show, flying above and next to the train; the timing couldn't have been better!"

As a result of all this, *Adirondack* ridership has changed dramatically: the strong points used to be south of Albany—only 30-40 people actually crossed the border. But this past January and February the majority of passengers traveled the entire distance between Montreal and New York.

Hollister also mentioned the *Adirondack Trails and Rails Program* featuring volunteer lecturers in the cafe car. This summer "We'll start guides on the *Maple Leaf* between Albany and Syracuse on weekends in addition to the *Adirondack*."

Last year Amtrak partnered with New York Agriculture and Markets and *I Love New York* to host a New York by Rail Day in Penn Station to promote rail travel to events and destinations of *New York by Rail* advertisers and *Pride of New York* vendors.

The 5th edition of *New York by Rail* is due in May, and Amtrak will distribute 175,000 copies throughout the Northeast on trains, at stations, in travel shows and through its travel and tourism partners. It will feature an upcoming O. Winston Link steam photo exhibit in Rochester, the State Quadricentennial in 2009 and the Hudson River National Heritage Corridor.

**Amtrak New York State Ridership**

Fiscal Year to Date, (Oct.-Feb.) 2008 vs 2007

	<u>2008</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>Increase</u>
<i>Adirondack</i>	38,217	34,518	10.7%
NYC-Albany	402,220	393,289	2.2%
Alb.-NF-Toronto	127,321	110,501	15.2%
<i>Ethan Allen</i>	18,056	17,553	2.9%
<i>Lake Shore Limited</i>	127,864	113,237	12.9%

**David Johnson**, NARP's Assistant Director, said NARP has focused on promoting growth in rail passenger service. The NARP vision published last year adds 106 metropolitan statistical areas to the present 174, to reach 280. "We're not looking mainly for true High Speed Rail," he said—"just Class IV 79MPH service. "The problem with High Speed is money; \$5 billion will be needed just to upgrade to Class IV and another \$7 billion to install CTC on dark (unsignaled) track, plus \$7.5 billion for new sidings and running tracks."

The Lieberman-Warner environment bill could provide an opportunity: "Amtrak should get a percentage of the funds generated by cap and trade." Johnson noted that NARP Executive Director Ross Capon was appointed as a member of the Passenger Rail Working Group established by the Commission on Transportation required by Congress, and Ross is now frequently quoted in the media.

NARP itself is expanding, Johnson said. Membership is now nearly 24,000, double what it was a few years ago. "We have expanded our offices and taken on a new staff member, Matthew Melzer, who is responsible for organizing route support teams following the TEMPO example. (TEMPO has successfully advocated and promoted the *Texas Eagle*, greatly strengthening its ridership). Five or six new teams are being organized, including one for the *Cardinal*."

NARP itself plans to restructure, designating its Executive Committee as its board of directors while the current 80 member Board becomes a Council of Delegates without the legal and management responsibility a board assumes.

Johnson was asked which Democratic candidate is best on Amtrak. NARP is a 501c3 non profit organization and cannot endorse any candidate, but Johnson did say that "both Obama and Clinton have always voted for Amtrak. Obama has offered more specific ideas while Clinton has recommended more money." (He did not mention what nearly everyone knew, that John McCain has been one of Amtrak's most vocal opponents). Johnson said it's still important to contact Congressional representatives about Amtrak funding, even if they are already favorable. The best way is to fax a short message with a clear "ask." (U.S. mail is still screened for Anthrax).

Frank Barry

**Late Flash!**

NYSDOT has sent a 5 year \$26 bil. transportation plan to the legislature proposing \$80 million for the L.I.R.R. third track and \$71 million for Empire Corridor improvements south of Albany.

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### 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.

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