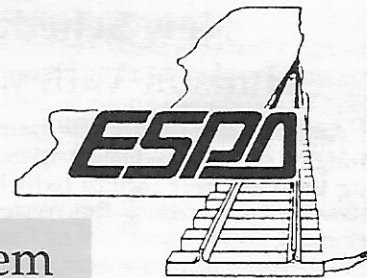


THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION



Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

Vol. 18, No. 6

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 97

Congress Authorizes Amtrak After Bitter Battle

The fighting went on right up to the end, but Congress has finally approved legislation which authorizes Amtrak for three years and makes \$2.3 billion available for capital projects. Unlike past years, this year's fight to save Amtrak has been especially difficult due to major battles among those who had previously pulled together. A strike threatened by the track workers was a major cause, but not the only cause of divisiveness. The strike has been averted—for now—but the proposed settlement contains the seeds of another bitter struggle next year.

Here is a review of some of the events:

Sept. 4: Arizona Railroad Passengers Association writes Sen. John McCain, (R., Ariz) opposing giving Amtrak any of the \$2.3 billion set aside in the Tax Fairness Act passed last summer at the insistence of Senator Roth (R., Del.). ARPA letter says long distance trains should be turned over to freight railroads which could make a profit if they added "a few passenger cars to their fast intermodal freight trains." It later turns out that the letter was written by Anthony Haswell, founder of the

National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), who is often credited with Amtrak's creation. Haswell has since become disenchanted with Amtrak. McCain, an outspoken Amtrak opponent, Chairs Senate Commerce Committee that must approve Amtrak legislation.

Sept. 22: Presidential Emergency Board recommends settlement to resolve dispute between Amtrak and Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWV), including annual 3.5% wage increase to bring Amtrak wages up to freight railroad level. PEB acknowledges that Amtrak cannot afford such a raise and says Congress should "make an honest judgment as to whether it wishes to continue Amtrak operations." PEB recommendation is not binding. If agreement is not reached within 30 days either party may take unilateral action (strike or rules change).

Oct. 7: Joe Vranich, author of popular book *Supertrains*, announces new book *Derailed*, which calls Amtrak a "colossal failure" and advocates its dissolution. He sends a letter to this

continued on page 5

Empire Corridor Task Force Meets in Syracuse

The third meeting of the Empire Corridor Task Force took place November 6th in the chambers of the Onondaga County Legislature. In attendance were the members of the Task Force (Legislative Chairs from counties across the upstate portion of the corridor), representatives of the state Assembly and Senate, CSX (including Vice President of Passenger Integration, Paul Reistrup), Wes Coates from Amtrak, Steve Salatti (President of ESPA) and others.

William E. Sanford, Chairman both of the Task Force and the Onondaga County Legislature, had called the meeting to advance the development of improved passenger and freight rail service and build on the efforts following the successful Central New York Rail Conference held in Syracuse in May of this year. The Task Force had the opportunity to listen and advance ideas with CSX, Amtrak and Shortline freight representatives. Topics addressed included identifying technical issues that need to be tackled to improve speeds and running times in the corridor, taxation of railroad infrastructure, sched-

uling, appropriate entity to implement higher speeds, the need for a statewide rail plan and a strategy to obtain an annual appropriation for rail in New York State.

Mr. Reistrup informed the Task Force of his role and the commitment to improve the handling of Amtrak trains in the Corridor. Mr. Reistrup also committed to Mr. Sanford his willingness to work with the group in the future. CSX responded to comments by Mr. Sanford that the Task Force realized the importance of a strong, viable freight network and viewed the approach to incremental improvements as a cooperative venture.

Mr. Sanford recognized the support of Assemblyman Sam Hoyt (D-Buffalo) in the activities of the Task Force. Representatives of the state Senate in attendance voiced support of the efforts of the Task Force.

A meeting with the Governor is anticipated later this year to present the findings of the Task Force and further action is expected early in 1998.

-Charles Poltensen

Empire Ridership Breaks the Million Mark!

Ridership growth has been driven by Hudson Valley service which increased 16 percent for the year. Albany, Hudson, Rhinecliff and Poughkeepsie all achieved double digit ridership increases for the year

"Summer in the City" weekend promotion for travel to NYC produced nearly 1,400 riders. The plan offered discounts to weekly business travelers.

Sports marketing also proved successful with Buffalo Bills charters and NY Mets/Boston Red sox charter train to Shea.

	<u>FY'97</u>	<u>FY'96</u>	
EMPIRE	1,057,163	978,930	+8.2 percent
ADIRONDACK	98,706	94,933	+10.1 percent
ETHAN ALLEN	29,472		
	<u>SEPT. FY'97</u>	<u>SEPT. FY'96</u>	
EMPIRE	85,235	74,650	+14.2 percent
ADIRONDACK	8,229	7,367	+11.7 percent

New Schedule Helps Hudson Valley, Hurts WNY

Amtrak has added a new train from Albany to New York, bringing the base frequency up to 10 trains each way, not counting the *Lake Shore Limited* (which no longer accepts Albany-New York passengers). But Western New York has lost all early morning service, and it is no longer possible to reach downtown Albany from the west before noon.

The new Hudson Valley train, No. 240, leaves Albany at 5:10AM, and arrives New York at 7:40AM. (Despite skipping stops at Poughkeepsie and Yonkers, it is allowed 5 minutes longer than trains making all stops). The new train was added at the request of an organized group of daily commuters who wanted to arrive in New York before 8AM. The northbound return leaves New York at 1:45PM, breaking up what had been a 3 hour gap between trains.

Western New York did not fare as well. The *Lake Shore Limited* has been moved back to a later slot, to reduce missed connections from Western trains. It now leaves Chicago at 8:15PM instead of 6PM, passing Depew at 7:32AM. But instead of returning to the early morning slot on the days it runs, (Monday, Friday and Saturday), the *Mohawk* now leaves Depew at 7:05AM, less than 30 minutes ahead of the *Lake Shore*.

In fact on these days, the new schedule lumps three eastbound trains into a two hour time slot, leaving only the *Maple Leaf* for the remaining 22 hours. ESPA believes this will cause the *Mohawk* and *Lake Shore* to compete for the same passengers rather than serving different market segments.

The loss of an early morning train not only discourages business travelers but also breaks the connection from Western New York to the *Crescent* (Atlanta, Birmingham and New Orleans) and the *Adirondack* to Montreal. ESPA has requested that the *Mohawk* leave Buffalo earlier—at either 5 or 6AM. This would restore connections with both trains at least on the days it runs and allow business travel on Monday and Friday.

ESPA will work to restore the *Mohawk* during the middle of the week. Between April and September 1994 this train averaged over 100 passengers daily on the days it does not now run.
-Frank Barry

Slow Order on High Speed Line

Shortly before the October time change, maximum speeds on Conrail's Chicago Line between CP 146 (West Albany) to CP 156 (Carman) were reduced from 110 mph to 60 mph. This increases a 19 minute trip between Albany-Rensselaer and Schenectady to about 23 minutes. Although Conrail owns the line, Amtrak, which runs the lion's share of the traffic, is responsible for track maintenance. Budget cutbacks had forced Amtrak to curtail a tie replacement program this summer that would have prevented the temporary speed restriction from being imposed. Hopefully, Amtrak will be able to perform the necessary maintenance next spring and restore this line to high speed running.
-Andy Kirk

Bombardier to Expand Plant

Bombardier is doubling the size of its Plattsburgh plant to handle Amtrak's order for American Flyer high speed trains and an order for 680 new subway cars for New York City.

ESPA Needs Webmaster

ESPA wants to start its own web page. We need a person to create it and operate it. If you are interested please write to ESPA president Steve Salatti, indicating your experience, skills and ideas for creating a web page. Steve's address is: RD-4 Box 220, Mexico, NY 13114.

Lawsuit Delays Turbo Rehab

Transportation and Transit Associates, the lone unsuccessful bidder for New York State's turboliner rebuilding project, has sued the State for awarding the contract to Super Steel. T&TA claims it has more experience than Super Steel, having rehabilitated 9 trains in 13 years. T&TA is based in Georgia, but claims to have plants in Hornell and Kanona in New York. DOT says both its own staff and Amtrak agreed that Super Steel had the superior proposal.



Photo: Andrew Cabal

Construction underway on the new Syracuse, NY intermodal station just east of the Carousel Mall.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

New York State has two existing passenger rail lines, New York to Buffalo and Niagara Falls, and New York to Montreal. For such a large, populated state, this is not acceptable.

Let's work on getting passenger service to Binghamton, Elmira, Corning, Hornell, and points west. A scenic railroad through the Adirondacks is nice, but we're talking commercial, money-making service through the southern tier corridor. Let's get the ball rolling!

Sincerely,
Tom Olmstead

To the Editor:

The attack on Metro-North, because of problems people have crossing the tracks to go to the Hudson River, by environmentalist spokespeople, is disturbing. ENVIRONMENTALISTS SHOULD SUPPORT passenger rail service.

Trains give off less pollution and take up less land, per passenger, than cars, vans, and busses. They neither get stuck in traffic nor add to traffic congestion. As late as the early 1980's, many major environmental voices included support of public transportation in general and passenger rail service in particular in their agenda.

Therefore, the best solution is for the parties involved - including those wanting access to the river and Metro-North - to work together, (not adversarially) on a joint project to build several pedestrian crossing points across the tracks to the river. Public access to the river is important. So is passenger rail service. Building the crossings can be in many places a community project.

Sincerely,
Jeanette Wolfberg

High Speed Executive Tours New York

Buffalo Assemblyman Sam Hoyt escorted Mark Dysart, President of the High Speed Ground Transportation Association on a tour of Empire Corridor cities last month. The trip was conceived and organized by ESPA member Rohit Aggarwala, formerly an assistant to Jolene Molitoris, who directs the Federal Railroad Administration. Aggarwala is now a graduate student at Columbia University. Hoyt is co-chairman of the Assembly High Speed Rail Task Force.

On October 6-7 the party met with key elected officials, planners and newspaper editorial boards, as well as ESPA officers in Buffalo, Syracuse and Albany. Several highly favorable editorials and articles resulted. Hoyt plans to introduce legislation next year to establish a high speed rail commission to promote the issue in Albany.

Dysart, who took over as head of the High Speed Ground Transportation Association last year, was impressed. "It's obvious that New Yorkers are serious proponents of high speed rail, and we need to be here on the state level as well as in Washington to help them succeed," he said. *-Frank Barry*

Adirondack Wins Award

Amtrak's relaunched *Adirondack* was awarded a first prize by the Travel Industry Association of America at the Association's awards banquet in Cleveland on October 6. The New York-Montreal train was named national winner in the Cultural Heritage category. The Washington based association represents the entire travel industry.

The award cited the financial and marketing partnership between Amtrak, New York State and local governments as keys to the train's success. Department of Transportation's Agnes Rapoli worked closely with Amtrak's Debbie Hughes and local organizations to develop marketing ideas. Ridership has grown by 10% since the relaunch last September.

The relaunch included refurbishing of large windowed Heritage cars for better viewing of scenery along the route, and specially commissioned local artwork for the cafe cars. Each car is named for a city or town served by the train. Personnel were given special training—all designed to make the traveler's vacation begin upon boarding the train, according to Amtrak.

ESPA Files Conrail Merger Brief

John Heffner, ESPA's Washington attorney, filed a brief before the Surface Transportation Board requesting that approval of the Conrail takeover be made contingent on a clear corporate commitment by CSX to provide on time Amtrak service. ESPA also requested that approval be contingent on CSX commitment to work with Amtrak, New York State and on line communities to provide improved and expanded service, including faster speeds, more trains and more stops. ESPA does not expect CSX to pay for improvements in passenger service but does expect it to work cooperatively.

Alstom Wins New Contract

GEC ALSTHOM has won an order to supply Amtrak with an Advanced Civil Speed Enforcement System between Boston and New Haven. The system will be patterned after the transponder-based train control system in use throughout Europe. GEC Alstom is the builder of the French TGV trains and has recently acquired the old Erie Railroad locomotive shop in Hornell, recently owned by Morrison-Knudson.

Is CSX Changing Its Attitude?

According to Paul Reistrup, CSX Vice President, Passenger Integration, (and former Amtrak President), CSX is placing greater importance on Amtrak on time performance. Reistrup told the National Association of Railroad Passengers that Amtrak performance is now reviewed in regular weekly meetings. In August, 85% of its Amtrak trains were on time, in September, 91%. An internal memo, dated August 20, pointed out that CSX can receive up to \$16 million in incentive payments when Amtrak runs on time. Conversely, "When our Amtrak performance is poor, we're leaving money on the table."

Congress Appropriation Cuts Amtrak - Again

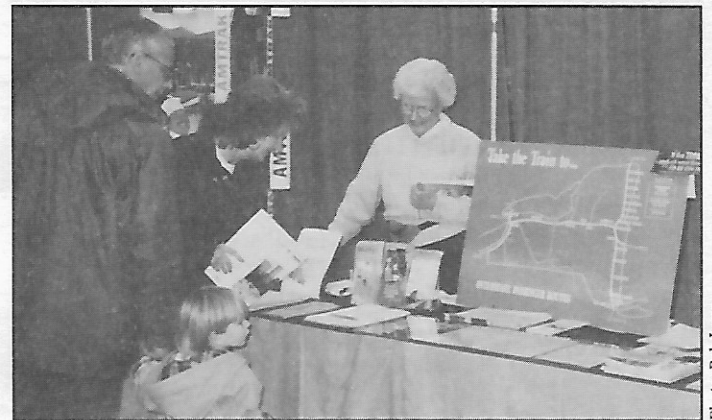
On October 9th Congress finally approved the 1998 transportation appropriation, cutting Amtrak funding by 6% from this year. The figures below do not include the \$2.3 billion in capital appropriated in Senator Roth's Tax Fairness Bill last summer. Amtrak will not receive this unless an authorization is passed with labor reforms. However if the Roth funds do become available, the \$449 million for Amtrak capital and Northeast Corridor improvements will be deducted from it.

Amtrak Appropriation (\$ millions)

	1995	1996	1997	1998
Operations	392	285	223	202
Capital	230	230	223	199
Excess Retirement	150	120	142	142
Northeast Corridor	222	115	255	250*
High Speed Rail	23	24	25	21
Total	1,017	774	867	814

*Includes \$12 million for the Farley Building.

The high speed rail appropriation includes \$2.5 million for New York State's turboliner rehabilitation project, in addition to the \$20 million already available from state and federal sources. In addition to the Amtrak appropriation, Senator D'Amato and Congresswoman Nita Lowey of Westchester County helped to secure \$7.375 million in intermodal funding for projects in Rensselaer, (\$1.875 mil.) Poughkeepsie (\$2 mil.), Yonkers (\$2 mil.) and New Rochelle (\$1.5 mil). The project in New Rochelle will include a 5 story parking garage and a facility for buses—intercity, airport connectors and local. The Yonkers facility will include a landing for a new ferry to Rockland County and Manhattan.



Mary Lou Michaels answers questions at the ESPA/NARP/Amtrak booth at the Syracuse, NY rail show Nov. 8 & 9.

Photo: Bob Lenz

Metroliner Sets Ridership Record

Metroliner service celebrated a banner year carrying 2,064,000 passengers in fiscal year 1997, breaking all prior annual ridership records. Metroliner service customers have come to depend on the train's over 90 percent on-time performance. Last year, the American Railroad Conference, in conjunction with Progress Railroad Magazine, honored Metroliner service with its top proaward for passenger service. Metroliner service revenues exceed expenses, allowing Metroliner to support other Amtrak services.

North America Rail Pass

Amtrak and VIA Rail will introduce the new North American Rail Pass beginning January 1, 1998. The pass will enable a traveler to discover over 28,000 miles of scenic railway in the U.S. and Canada, with unlimited stops to over 900 destinations and will be valid for 30 days.

If you're short on time, you'll want to try the Eastern North America Rail Pass which allows you to travel as far west as Chicago. The Pass is good for 15 days and unlimited stops.

The North America Rail pass is \$450 US or \$625 Canadian, valid for travel October 16, 1998 - May 31, 1999. For travel June 1, 1998 - October 15, 1998 the Pass is \$645 US/\$895 Canadian.

The Eastern North American Rail Pass is \$300 US and \$416 Canadian, valid for travel September 1, 1998 - June 30, 1999. For travel July 1, 1998 - August 31, 1998 the Pass is \$400 US/\$555 Canadian.

Contact the travel agents listed below for more details.

New Motorcoach Connections

Amtrak and the Pee Dee Regional Transportation Authority now offer connecting motorcoach service between the Amtrak Silver Palm in Florence, S.C., and the South Carolina communities of Myrtle Beach and Columbia, with intermediate stops in Camden and Conway, S.C.

Getaway Packages

* Adirondack and Overlook Management Group are offering a 3 day, 2 night package to Montreal to see a Montreal Canadiens hockey game. Further information: 518-743-1735.

* Amtrak Radio City Christmas Spectacular Package. Package starring The Rockettes includes round-trip coach train, orchestra seat, and savings at the Radio City Avenue store. Information: 1-800-437-3417 or your travel agent.

* Complete Niagara Falls Casino package includes round-trip tickets on the Maple Leaf, transfers, accommodations and casino admission. Information: 1 (888)-863-2557.

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

Albany, NY	Express Lansing Travel	(518) 438-4441	(800) 767-1840
Clarence, NY	Clarence Travel	(716) 759-7203	(800) 336-3890
Hamburg, NY	Scandia Tours & Travel	(716) 649-1445	
Ithaca, NY	Stone Travel/American Express	(607) 257-2515	(800) 631-6464
New York, NY	Bill Closs/R.G.C. Travel	(212) 677-9290	
Rochester, NY	Automobile Club of Rochester	(716) 461-5000	
Pittsford, NY	Town & Country Travel	(716) 381-2850	FAX(716) 381-1987
Tonawanda, NY	Courtesy Travel	(716) 695-3550	(800) 695-3750

Authorized Amtrak travel agents who wish to join ESPA, maintain current membership status, and be listed in this DIRECTORY, should send a \$35 check, made payable to ESPA, and mail to: Robert Lenz, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031.

Ski Packages

* New weekend packages offered to Hunter Mountain and Ski Windham in the Catskills via motor coach from the Hudson N.Y. Amtrak station. 1(888) AMTRAK1.

* Take the *Adirondack* train to the ski resorts of Whiteface in Lake Placid and Gore Mountain, N.Y., with an Amtrak Thruway Motorcoach Connection at Westport, N.Y. Packages include skiing, lodging and transportation. 1-(800)-888-8478.

* The *Ethan Allen* and the *Vermont* trains offer ski packages to Killington, Okemo, Sugarbush, Ascutney and Jay Peak. Rates start at \$299 per person, based on double occupancy. 1(888)AMTRAK1.

Twilight Shoreliner a Success

The new *Twilight Shoreliner* launched in July between Boston, New York, Washington and Virginia is off to a fast start, substantially outperforming its ridership and revenue projections.

Through August, the *Twilight Shoreliner* carried nearly 46,000 passengers - 9,100 more than expected - and was beating revenue projections by \$21,000 a day. These statistics are in comparison with an overnight train run the year before on the Northeast Corridor.

"Extending the train into Virginia, putting on modern Viewliner sleepers and offering new amenities have enabled the *Twilight Shoreliner* to establish a market," said George Warrington, president of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor.



Photo: Bob Lenz

Snowbound at LaJunta

On the Oct. 26 return trip from the NARP meeting in Santa Fe., NM, the *Southwest Chief* (both #3 and #4) were held at LaJunta because of high snow drifts. The cheerful car crew did an outstanding job keeping everyone well fed and in good spirits. Passengers enjoyed reading, making new friends or watching first-run movies or rail videos ("The *Adirondack*") in the observation car.

-Robert Lenz

Traveling?

Take along ESPA's Rail & Station Report Form. Through this ongoing project, ESPA hopes to better serve the train-riding public by being better prepared in documenting any needs for service improvements as well as to pay compliments for outstanding services rendered. For copies write:

ESPA, 10529 Main Street,
Clarence, NY 14031-1684

Bitter Battle *continued from page 1*

effect to every member of Congress. Vranich blames Amtrak's incremental approach for slowing US high speed movement. Vranich once worked for Amtrak and for a time was NARP's Executive Director. He directed the High Speed Ground Transportation Association until last year.

Oct. 9: Congress approves 1998 Transportation Appropriation with a 6% cut for Amtrak, increases for highway and aviation spending. (See Appropriations article).

Oct. 19: Three days before 30 day strike waiting period ends, Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater announces that Amtrak and BMW have agreed to extend it one week, to October 29.

Oct. 24: House considers HR-2247, Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bud Shuster's Amtrak reform bill to reauthorize Amtrak. Passage would make Amtrak eligible for \$2.3 billion from the Tax Fairness Act. Labor unions, which supported the bill when last submitted in 1995, attempt to dilute reforms through an amendment offered by Steven La Tourette (R., Oh.). Rules Committee Chairman Gerald Solomon (R., Glens Falls), establishes procedure to vote first on an amendment by Jack Quinn (R., Buffalo) to simply prevent Amtrak rules changes from affecting freight railroads. Other Shuster reforms are maintained. Solomon's rule states that if Quinn's amendment passes, it will supersede La Tourette's amendment.

On the day before the vote, dozens of labor lobbyists barrage House members, urging opposition to Quinn and Shuster. Quinn's amendment fails, 195-223. All but 5 Democrats (none from New York) oppose it. They are joined by 26 Republicans, including Sue Kelly (Katonah), Benjamin Gilman (Middletown), Rick Lazio and Peter King (both Long Island). Rather than allowing La Tourette's amendment to pass, Shuster pulls HR-2247 from the floor, saying "We find ourselves...without meaningful reforms" and the future of Amtrak is "now in jeopardy." J. M. Brunkenhoefer spokesman for the United Transportation Union retorted that "It appears...the Republicans have learned little from shutting down Government if they don't have their way. This time it appears that they just want to shut down Amtrak to punish labor."

Action moves to the Senate, where Sen. James Jeffords (R., Vt.), proposes a resolution to freeze Amtrak pay until a reauthorization is passed, hoping to give unions incentive to support it.

Oct. 24: On the same day, Slater announces an agreement between BMW, Amtrak and commuter authorities to allow non-Amtrak commuter trains to operate into New York and Philadelphia in event of a strike. Boston commuter trains (operated by Amtrak) would be halted, as would MARC trains operating on Amtrak's Baltimore-Washington line. This would markedly reduce the inconvenience of the strike, but also might weaken the incentive for Congress to intervene, according to the *Journal of Commerce*.

Oct. 25: Four of the nine Amtrak Board members take over negotiations with BMW, sidelining President Tom Downs. NARP's Ross Capon characterizes this as "amateurs represent(ing) Amtrak while pros continue to represent labor."

Oct. 27: Slater, participating in Amtrak-BMW negotiations, again persuades both sides to postpone strike date another week, to November 6, almost at the end of the Congressional session. This weakens impetus for Jeffords resolution, which is dropped.

Instead, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott expresses intent to develop combined legislation to end strike and reauthorize Amtrak. *Journal of Commerce* says a strike now could invite Congressional Republicans to "force far reaching union concessions." But extension of strike deadline to the day before Congress plans to adjourn could make it difficult for Congress to act to end a strike.

Oct. 31: *Wall Street Journal* says Amtrak board members offered BMW an annual 3% wage increase contingent on Congress allowing the \$200 million appropriated for capital to be used for "operating expenses including salaries," and release of the \$2.3 billion for capital expenses.

Senators Lott, McCain, Kay Bailey, Hutchison, (R., Tex.), and Jeffords immediately write Amtrak Board expressing "grave concerns", saying if article is true, Board has "overstepped its authority by promising wages based on future Congressional actions." *New York Times* later quotes NARP's Ross Capon as saying, "I cannot for the life of me understand what the Amtrak Board members are thinking."

Nov. 2: Slater announces pact to settle BMW dispute including productivity and work-rule changes which "should save Amtrak...\$13 million over the next three years." Slater claims settlement will have no impact on the current budget even though Amtrak had earlier estimated the union's demands would cost it \$25 million for the first year, and \$136 million if applied to all other unions. Further details are not to be released until ratification by union members.

Nov. 4: Details of agreement leak out and Senator Lott, one of Amtrak's strongest supporters, says it is a "total non-starter" if it depends on Congress providing more money for operating expenses and pay raises. Those close to negotiations say it would allow union to strike if Congress does not come up with additional money—despite Slater's assurance that it would not affect the budget.

Nov. 7: Senate approves revised S-738, authorizing Amtrak. This follows intense negotiations between Sens. Hutchison, who chairs the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation) John Kerry (D., Mass.), representing labor and John Breaux (D., La.), representing trial lawyers. The three most contentious issues, severance pay, contracting out, and liability are renegotiated. Severance pay is removed from the law and six months are allowed for negotiation. If negotiations fail, either party can act unilaterally. The ban on contracting out is removed from the statute but automatically included in all contracts until they are renegotiated. Liability is limited to \$200 million per occurrence. Amtrak is required to carry insurance up to \$200 million. Attention shifts back to House where Shuster appears ready to accept Senate bill but wants a new Amtrak Board of Directors appointed in consultation with House and Senate Republicans.

Amtrak President Tom Downs refers to a Gallup Poll showing that 69% of Americans believe the federal government should continue support for intercity passenger rail.

Nov. 12: House debates Amtrak bill. Shuster and Speaker Newt Gingrich are inundated with phone calls. Shuster says he has just received a letter from the Justice Department saying the Senate bill is unconstitutional because of the makeup of the Amtrak board. (The letter was actually written to Senator McCain on July 24th). Robert Wise, (D., W. Va.), Ranking Minority Member on the Rail Subcommittee, points out that the Senate bill does not change the existing board. Shuster says he will not bring up an Amtrak bill unless agreement can be worked out. James Oberstar, (D., Minn.), Wise, and Solomon argue for passage of the bill to keep Amtrak from going bankrupt. Oberstar and Wise urge that controversial issues be left for next year. Shuster holds out for new Amtrak Board, with majority appointed in consultation with House and Senate leaders, thus less responsive to labor than current board appointed entirely by the Clinton Administration. Slater sends letter to Gingrich warning that Shuster's changes would delay final passage with "grave implications for the future of Amtrak." Late in the day agreement is reached behind the scenes to reduce Amtrak Board from 9 to 7 members, all appointed by the President in consultation with both houses and confirmed by the Senate. All must be "experienced transportation professionals"—a new requirement.

Nov. 13: On their last day of business House and Senate pass bill, ending months of wrangling and suspense.

What's Behind the Events

This convoluted saga has many observers scratching their heads and wondering why it has been so difficult. Perhaps EPA's Washington representative John Boffa has the clearest answer: "What's really going on," Boffa says, "is that Amtrak inadvertently

continued on page 6

Bitter Battle *continued from page 5*

ently got caught up in a much larger struggle between organized labor and conservative Republicans who control Congress." A seasoned Democratic staffer went so far as to say that the areas for reform—labor protection payments and contracting out—were picked to "get" labor.

If so, those responsible may have underestimated labor's response. The willingness of Democrats, who have always supported Amtrak, to now do whatever labor asked was a surprise—especially when some BMW lobbyists said they would strike even if it meant closing down Amtrak. Curtis Gans, speaking on National Public Radio's Morning Edition, may have explained this by pointing out that since the Republicans took control of Congress many corporations have stopped giving money to Democrats. This has left labor unions as the only large source of contributions for Democrats.

The conflict has created considerable resentment: one Senate staffer said—"Choosing between the death of Amtrak or going against the people who run its trains—what kind of choice is that? It's a lose-lose situation." A highly placed Republican staffer said "When it comes to Amtrak, there are no good options."

Particularly disappointing has been President Clinton's role. Early on Clinton threatened to veto any bill containing Shuster's reforms, and he reportedly indirectly urged his appointees on Amtrak's Board to negotiate a settlement that went much more than half way toward BMW demands—all the while insisting, along with Congressional Republicans, that Amtrak become self sufficient. According to Luther Miller, writing in Railway Age, Clinton's real objective may be to help Vice President Al Gore curry favor with the unions—who are now much closer to Dick Gephart. Gephart is a likely Gore opponent in the presidential primaries, still 3 years away.

Clearly, it has been a game of high stakes brinkmanship—or, as several have said, "a game of chicken," with posturing and ultimatums. No one has mentioned that much of Amtrak's crisis stems from the deep cuts in its operating funds imposed by President Clinton and the Congress without allowing operating flexibility or adequate capital funding. While Amtrak can be criticized for not moving earlier to build up mail and express business to support its long distance routes, even this has generated strong opposition—from the Union Pacific Railroad, which is worried that Amtrak may take a tiny part of its freight business. UP's attitude seems rather grotesque since it is being sued by shippers for its inability to move the freight it already has. In the end, labor won on contracting out, but lost on severance pay and composition of the Amtrak Board.

More disturbing and harder to understand is the split among rail passenger advocates. Several of those advocating Amtrak's dissolution live in Arizona. Phoenix recently lost all Amtrak service as a result of a line abandonment by Southern Pacific. Some believe NARP and Amtrak devote too much attention to the Northeast Corridor and too little to long distance routes. This view is puzzling in the case of NARP, whose Board of Directors represent the entire country and spend much time, aided by staff, promoting trains outside the Northeast.

Some of the opposition to Amtrak and NARP comes from the United Rail Passengers Alliance (URPA), led by Austin Coates, and Andrew Selden. Selden, a Minneapolis lawyer, claims to have

proof that long distance trains are inherently profitable while the Northeast Corridor is a "black hole." Amtrak accountants and the Government Accounting Office disagree—although all agree that major investments are needed to modernize the electric catenary system between New York and Washington.

URPA and its associates are fed up with thin service and egregiously late trains outside the Northeast and some believe Amtrak's disappearance would clear the way for something better. One URPA scenario involves generous federal tax credits to freight railroads for operating or allowing passenger trains on their tracks. Most advocates believe this is wishful thinking given federal budgetary constraints, the hostility of freight railroads to passenger trains and the capacity problems that are becoming more and more common. They say that whatever Amtrak's faults may be, it would be foolish to give it up without assurance of something better.

-Frank Barry

**Thanks to everyone who called
or wrote letters--it worked!**

- **ESPA Downstate Regional Meeting** - Tuesday, Nov. 18, 1997; Dec. 16, 1997 - 7:00 PM at New York University, Waverly Building, 32 Waverly Place, 5th Floor, Conference Room 554, go left off the elevator to end of hall. All are welcome.

For latest **National Rail Passenger News**, call the N.A.R.P. Hotline - 900-988-RAIL.

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.

- Introductory membership (\$10.00 for one year)
- Renewal membership (\$15.00 per year)
- Renewal - Student or Senior Citizen (\$12.50 per year)
- Family membership (\$20.00)
- Sustaining membership (\$30.00)
- Patron membership (\$50.00)
- Corporate membership (\$100.00)

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

Please make checks and money orders payable to: ESPA, c/o John Ross, 4 Maplewood Court, Greenwich, NY 12834.

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 Jan.-Feb. issue is December 30th.**

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

Forward & Address Correction Requested

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

1882

01/1998

Bruce B. Becker
49 Algonquin Road
Clifton Park, NY 12065

