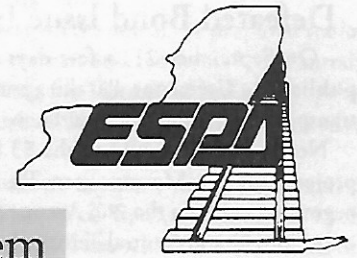


THE ESP A EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION
<http://www.trainweb.com/espa>



Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

Vol. 23, No. 6

November/December 2000

High-Speed Rail Investment Act Status

At this writing, with the outcome of the presidential election still uncertain, White House and Congressional leaders agreed to postpone any further work on unfinished legislation until after the Thanksgiving holiday.

Congressional leaders had scheduled a resumption of negotiations on November 13, when they expected to know the results of the election. But when they reconvened on November 13, with the election results still unknown and President Clinton scheduled to leave on a weeklong trip to Southeast Asia, leaders decided to postpone the lame duck session. White House officials signed off on an interim resolution that would keep government agencies operating through December 5.

What does all this delay mean for efforts to pass the High Speed Rail Investment Act?

- The bill still has potential and must not be lost in all the confusion of recent weeks.
- Continue to ask your Senators to support bill S. 1900, and Representatives to support bill H.R.3700.
- This critical bill, The High-Speed Rail Investment Act, would allow Amtrak (or other operators) to sell \$10 billion in bonds between 2001 and 2010. Bondholders would get federal tax credits in lieu of interest payments. With participating states contributing a match of 20%, Amtrak would use the funds mainly to develop new high-speed rail corridors.
- The bill also would rehabilitate the southern portion of the Northeast Corridor. Non-high-speed services would benefit because up to 10% of the bill's funding would be dedicated to them, and because many long-distance trains use corridor-segments that would receive substantial investment.
- The following are the important phone numbers to call: White House: (202) 456-1414; Senate Majority Leader's Office: (202) 224-3135; Office of the Speaker of the House: (202) 225-0600.

The White House and Congress must continue to hear from passenger rail advocates so this important bill does not become lost in the confusion of a highly unusual election year

John Boffa, ESPA Washington Representative.

Travel Advisory

A new Northeast timetable will be in effect Dec. 11 with the introduction of the new Acela Express.

Amtrak and Hertz now have 51 locations where Amtrak customers have a quick and easy way to rent a car. (for locations see page 21 of the National Timetable).

The 2001 Amtrak Travel Planner will soon be available at Amtrak stations or by calling 1 800 USA RAIL (a great planning aid to accompany an Amtrak Gift Certificate)



Work progress on the new Albany NY intermodal station and parking garage due to open in the spring 2001.

"Acela Express Arrives New York"

The inaugural Acela Express arrived in New York Penn Station at precisely 12:21 pm November 16, two minutes ahead of schedule. It had departed Washington at 9:55 am for its 2 hour 26 minute nonstop trip. Amtrak's celebration of the inaugural run of the new Acela Express was held in Penn Station with a light, sound, and dance show. The MTV-like party was full of vibrant speeches by Governor Pataki, New Jersey Senator Frank Lautenberg, and Amtrak Board Chairman (and Wisconsin Governor) Tommy Thompson. Actor Henry Winkler hosted the show, which started just after noon. He provided an exciting speech about airline congestion and the advantages of high-speed rail, amid flashing lights and huge screens which showed the Acela Express screaming past various points along the Northeast Corridor. Then, at 12:20 pm, the large screens showed a live picture of the Acela Express arriving at Penn Station, with Winkler continuing about the great moment in history we were all experiencing. The Amtrak Board of Directors and many politicians entered Penn Station from the train to the applause of the crowd and flashing lights with live music, provided by a 6 piece band.

Tommy Thompson spoke about what a perfect opportunity there is for rail, with increasingly congested highways (gridlock) throughout the Northeast and "wing-lock", which he defined as airport runway congestion. He also stated that soon New York will have Acela Regional Turboliner trains providing high-speed rail across the state of New York. Governor Pataki, who was present at the event but did not arrive on the train, stated, "What a great state we have with the fastest electrified rail passenger service in the country at 150 mph and soon with the fastest non-electrified rail passenger service in the country at 125 mph from New York to Albany to Buffalo

(cont'd on page 4)

Defeated Bond Issue Included Rail Projects

On September 21, a few days after our last ESPA Express was published, Governor Pataki announced rail projects which the transportation bond act would have funded if voters had approved it.

Nearly half (\$1.6 bil.) of the \$3.8 billion total would have funded projects for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, including beginning work on the 2nd Avenue Subway, and bringing Long Island trains into Grand Central Terminal. Of \$90 million allocated for other railroads, \$25 million was earmarked for the following passenger projects:

(\$ Millions)

- 10 Rensselaer Train Station, for final phase
- 5 Schenectady Intermodal Center
- 5 Southern Tier service, Binghamton-Port Jervis, track upgrade
- 1.35 Buffalo, Exchange St. including relocation
- 1 Utica, rehabilitate Railway Express wing
- 1 Rochester, rehabilitate station, track
- 1 Rome, parking and wiring upgrade
- 0.65 Niagara Falls intermodal facility

An additional \$17.6 million would have funded rail projects under the heading of non-MTA transit (which received \$125 million total).

(\$ Millions)

- 12.1 Saratoga commuter service, track improvement, stations
- 2.5 New Rochelle intermodal passenger center
- 3 Rome, new elevator, lighting, platform shelter, waterproofing tunnel
- 1 Connecting buses for LIRR trains in Nassau County

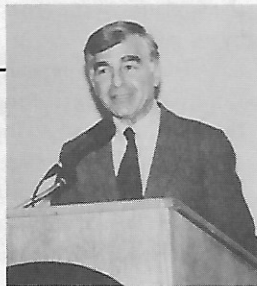
Beyond this, \$65 million would have funded rail freight projects, including \$10 mil. for a new bridge in Buffalo, and \$2 mil. to upgrade an Adirondack RR bridge over Cayuta Lake. The Buffalo bridge would relieve congestion at CP Draw where CSX and Norfolk Southern must share a drawbridge also used by Amtrak's Lake Shore Limited. The Adirondack RR Cayuta bridge would allow heavier freight trains to serve a quarry near Forestport; it would have also been used by passenger trains to Utica.

Although ESPA worked hard to get rail projects included in the bond issue, most ESPA officers felt the proposed projects did not do enough to advance high speed rail. The total of the projects listed above represents only about 1% of the Bond Issue total. The editorial in our last issue generated several calls from state officials expressing anger and disappointment at ESPA's position. Jack Guinan, Assistant Commissioner of the Department of Transportation wrote to ESPA pointing out that the State has pledged \$250 million to "improve existing service and advance high speed passenger service statewide." Given the necessity to work within priorities of freight railroads' capital programs, "the available level of investment is likely the maximum amount that could be implemented over the next five years within these constraints." The governor and legislative leaders will now have to reconvene to redo the state's five year transportation budget.

Frank Barry

Quote of the month:

"We're in the best position in my lifetime to move Congress toward a large investment in rail no matter who wins in November. There are just too many flights of under 300 miles. High speed rail is our only hope for unscrambling our airport situation." Michael Dukakis, Vice Chairman, Amtrak Board of Directors, speaking to the National Association of Railroad Passengers at its board meeting in Pittsfield, October 21.



Improved Border Procedures Coming

After years of negotiation and planning by Amtrak and federal agencies, procedures for passengers crossing the Canadian border will change, beginning December 1st. As of that date international passengers will be required to provide their citizenship and birth date when purchasing their ticket. They must also fill out baggage tags to make identification of luggage faster for Customs inspectors. Finally, Amtrak, Customs and the Immigration and Naturalization Service are discussing procedures to allow trains to leave behind travelers with problems serious enough to delay the train and everyone else on board.

While these procedures should reduce delays significantly, ESPA believes the ultimate solution is to either process passengers in motion (as in Europe), or at the Canadian end point, as on the Seattle-Vancouver train. Unfortunately an application for federal funds for a border processing facility in the Montreal terminal was denied last year. Hopefully funds will be found soon; it is hard to imagine any other project that could take so much time out of the schedule so cheaply.

Frank Barry

Turboliner may help with Holidays

Neither Amtrak nor the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) can say just when the first rebuilt turboliner will enter service on a regular basis. But both are hoping it may be ready in time to help with the holidays—possibly as early as Thanksgiving. (Amtrak plans to run extra sections between New York and Albany on November 22 and 26).

If it does go into service during the holidays, the train will likely return to the shop for further adjustments in January. DOT officials say none of the problems encountered so far are serious, but some will take time to work out.

Even though it is not yet fully operational, New York's turboliner is already showing off outside the state. It visited the Southeast High Speed Rail Conference in Richmond, Virginia November 8-10 to promote New York State railroad manufacturers, and reportedly drew positive responses from Virginians hoping for high speed rail service.

New York Builders Respond to Amtrak RFP

Bombardier and Alstom are among the four equipment builders which have responded to Amtrak's request for proposals to build high speed trains for the Midwest. Both builders have plants in New York State. Amtrak wants to place an initial order for thirteen 110MPH diesel powered trainsets for the first three spokes—from Chicago to Milwaukee and Madison, Detroit, and St. Louis. The order would include options for additional sets as the Midwest high speed network expands.

The builder would be required to finance construction and equipment maintenance. A third party would own the trains, claim accelerated depreciation tax benefits and lease the trains back to Amtrak and the states they operate in.

In selecting the winning bid, Amtrak wants to rely on proven technology, the capability of the builder, cost, and the delivery schedule. However this may work against Bombardier and Alstom, which Amtrak blames for the delays to Acela trainsets. Alstom, the prime manufacturer for France's TGV trains, is a subcontractor for the Amtrak's Acela trains; Bombardier is the prime contractor.

Bombardier says Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration must share the blame, as they stretched out the testing longer than necessary. Frank Barry — from *Trains Magazine*, (12/2000), *the Washington Post* (9/17) and other sources.

Amtrak sets Ridership Record

Amtrak ridership in fiscal 2000 (which ended in December) exceeded 22.5 million trips—the highest annual figure in at least 25 years. Ticket revenue was up 10% over last year, reaching \$1.1 billion. Amtrak credits the increases in part to its service guarantee.

These rosy figures followed a pessimistic report, issued September 21 by U.S. Department of Transportation Inspector-General Kenneth Mead, which expressed grave concern about Amtrak's financial prospects. Although revenues have increased, the report said, costs have risen as well, and by almost as much—7.3% vs. 7.5% for revenues. This leaves Amtrak with a dangerous deficit. According to the report, "Amtrak must identify actions that will close the gap in its plan within the next year, or operating self-sufficiency will not be achievable in 2003."

At their meeting in Pittsfield last month, Amtrak Reform Council Vice Chairman Paul Weyrich told National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) Board members he is recommending that Amtrak's self sufficiency deadline be extended to 2004. "It's not fair to ask them to reach a target when the equipment they need to reach it isn't available," he said.

Michael Dukakis, Vice Chairman of Amtrak's Board of Directors, told the NARP Directors "If we don't get HR-3700, (the High Speed Rail Investment Bill) we'll be out of business. We'll see deterioration." Arlene Friner, Amtrak's Chief Financial Officer, agreed. She told the NARP Board substantial new investment will be required "just to maintain the status quo." Friner said Amtrak's total revenue increase for the fiscal year was 9%, and results from the first all electric Acela Regional trains to Boston "exceeded our projections by 40%."

Frank Barry

Amtrak Broadway Show Packages in New York City include: Round-trip rail travel in coach from anywhere in New York State to New York City and your Broadway Theatre tickets. If you are traveling from west or north of Albany, the package also includes one night stay at the Hotel Pennsylvania (with hotel tax), located next to Penn Station. Note that for the convenience of Rhinecliff, Hudson, and Albany passengers, Amtrak has a Mon-Thur New York departure at 10:50pm and Fri-Sun departure at 11:50pm from New York City. For more information or reservations call 1-800-250-4989 or your travel agent today.

Amtrak to Radio City Christmas Spectacular:

Climb aboard Amtrak and head to New York City to see New York's favorite holiday tradition, starring the Rockettes. Amtrak has wrapped up the perfect holiday package that includes roundtrip train travel and an orchestra seats, specifically reserved for Amtrak passengers. Prices are valid for select peak and off-peak shows between November 4 and January 7 and must be purchased by December 31. 7-day advance purchase is required and tickets to the shows and Amtrak trains will sell out quickly this holiday season. As an example, the package price from Albany ranges from \$120-175 per person. Call 1-800-USA-RAIL for details.

Gary Prophet

First of 85 New Locomotives

In its continuing efforts to modernize the nation's passenger rail system, Amtrak recently took delivery of the first of 85 new diesel locomotive engines built by GE. The remaining 84 units will be received over the next 12 months in an order worth approximately \$200 million. The new locomotives incorporate the latest innovations in technology and fuel-efficiency, with electronic fuel injection, cab signaling, segmented fuel tanks and automatic parking brakes.

Southern Tier Study Delayed

Delays to the Scranton Major Investment Study (MIS) have prevented completion of New York's Southern Tier passenger service restoration study. The Southern Tier study, requested by Senator Thomas Libous, (R., Binghamton), will examine both the existing rail route through Port Jervis and the route through Scranton, which is 30 miles shorter, but lacks 30 miles of track in New Jersey. The federal TEA-21 legislation authorizes \$160 million to restore this track for passenger service from Hoboken to Scranton. The MIS now underway is headed by Frank Reilly, Transportation Planner for Morris County, N.J.

According to Reilly, the Federal Transit Agency, (FTA) which disburses the funds, is requiring an additional land use study for land around proposed stations as well as a New Jersey-Pennsylvania cost sharing agreement, before approving the MIS. The consortium has acquired \$100,000 for the added work and has already begun negotiating the sharing of costs between the two states. Reilly hopes to meet FTA requirements by next May and says, "We're still sticking with the end of 2003 for service startup." New Jersey has \$1 million for engineering, Riley said, and "We should be able to begin engineering work in early Spring," even before FTA gives its final approval.

However since New York's Department of Transportation does not want to duplicate New Jersey's efforts, it is waiting for that state's MIS in order to assess the viability of the Scranton route for its study.

Around the Nation

California -The state legislature has approved a \$700 million funding request by Gov. Gray Davis to improve passenger rail. Amtrak and the state are completing plans for a five-year high-speed rail program.

Cascades Corridor - Washington region, Amtrak and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad are engaged in a multi-year program to reduce travel times and increase service along the Eugene-Portland-Seattle-Vancouver line. Pacific Northwest service includes Talgo trains.

Richard P. Duffy: 1931-2000

It is with great sorrow that ESPA must report the death of Richard Duffy, our Westchester Coordinator. He passed away at the age of 68 on August 9 at Saint Francis Hospital in Poughkeepsie due to a losing battle with cancer. He is survived by his wife Sandy, 6 children, 3 grandchildren and 2 sisters.

Dick had a varied and interesting background. After a career in television as a cameraman and film editor, he went on to a long and rewarding career with Equitable Life Insurance. He had also proudly served in the United States Marine Corps. For the past 15 years Dick was an active proponent of mass transit and became quite involved in local transportation policy issues, with a significant emphasis on the I-287 congestion issue. He was a strong advocate for the utilization of light rail on the Tappan Zee Bridge to facilitate the flow of commuters from Rockland to Westchester Counties. In addition, he was in strong support for the extension of Metro-North's Upper Harlem Line to Millerton. On an ongoing basis, Dick provided a great deal of insight into the many local transportation issues, which he followed and advocated.

His contributions to this organization will be sorely missed and ESPA extends its condolences to the entire Duffy family.

Give a Train Trip to Someone You Love



You may purchase gift certificates from Amtrak ticket offices and Amtrak travel centers. Available in amounts from \$25 through \$1,000. Great gift to family, friends, co-workers, employees, or any one who loves trains.

LIRR access to Grand Central Terminal.

With the defeat of the transportation bond Issue the Committee for Better Transit has once again urged MTA to take a closer look at a less costly plan for LIRR access to Grand Central Terminal. The current plan, which is now undergoing environmental review, requires the LIRR to steer clear of Metro-North trackage, tunneling far below Grand Central's 46 existing platform tracks. This plan is outrageously expensive and is inconvenient, to build an entirely new level of tracks and platforms for passengers. CBT has proposed that the 1.6 mile 63rd Street tunnel, built some 30 years ago, be connected directly to the five westernmost tracks of the upper level of Grand Central Terminal. These tracks lead to the upper level loop. LIRR trains could then move into the terminal, discharge and receive passengers, and exit back to Long Island. Using existing tracks and platforms on the upper level saves a pile of money, gets travelers closer to their destinations and permits lower level trackage to be extended to Penn Station or Lower Manhattan. MTA must ask its two independent operating units, Metro-North and the LIRR, to work together cooperatively on a plan that uses existing trackage in the terminal.

The connection at the Long Island City end of the tunnel is also needlessly complex, requiring five separate bores through unstable soil. A simpler two-track connection would greatly reduce cost. The streamlined plan for Grand Central would cut MTA's projected cost from \$3.3 billion to only \$865 million — making the project affordable.

Without the bond issue, transit capital funds become even more dependent on fare-backed revenue bonds. Asking residents of New York City and the Hudson Valley to pay higher fares to pay for a costly boondoggle that largely benefit riders from the state's wealthiest county - Nassau County - is clearly unfair. The Committee for Better Transit urges all transit advocates to contact their elected representatives and ask that a simpler, less costly design for LIRR access to Grand Central be advanced.

For more information contact George Haikalis at 212-475-3394 or by e-mail at geohaikalis@juno.com

George Haikalis - Transportation Consultant Committee for Better Transit

Metro North Hudson Line Extension Dead

Dutchess County Executive William Steinhaus has recently announced that Metro North Railroad will abandon plans to extend the Hudson Line beyond Poughkeepsie into Northern Dutchess County. Continuation of the \$3 million study, begun in 1999, has been removed from the MTA's capital projects plan.

Metro North had proposed to extend rail service approximately 25 miles north to the Village of Tivoli. Three Dutchess towns and two villages passed resolutions against the plan. These municipalities, as well as Scenic Hudson, called for a comprehensive land use/transportation plan before consideration of an extension.

In recent years, the Hudson Line has experienced tremendous growth in ridership. Population in towns south of Poughkeepsie also skyrocketed.

While generally favoring increased transit, Scenic Hudson urged caution, citing a likely influx of development into the largely rural northern portion of the county. Further, the needed railroad yard along the Hudson would have created unacceptable visual and environmental impacts.

*Mobilizing the Region, Tri-State Transportation Campaign
Issue 294, November 13, 2000*

Metro-North

Effective with the October 29, 2000 Schedule Changes for Metro-North, there are 4 express trains each Saturday and Sunday from north of Croton. These trains serve stations north of Croton, including Poughkeepsie and Beacon, and then proceed nonstop between Croton and Manhattan, saving passengers about 10 minutes of travel time. These trains connect with local trains at Croton that make station stops between Croton and Manhattan. The 4 express trains on weekends are as follows: Depart Poughkeepsie 8:23 am and 9:35 am with arrival at Grand Central Terminal at 10:07 am and 11:15 am, respectively; and Depart Grand Central at 5:04 pm and 6:04 pm with arrival in Poughkeepsie at 6:46 pm and 7:46 pm, respectively.

Parking rules will be changed at the Croton-Harmon station on November 13, restricting further the number of parking spaces for Amtrak passengers, since areas are being expanded to serve residents of Croton who commute every day, while other areas of parking are reduced. Now, no parking remains available at the Croton-Harmon station between 8 am and 5 pm on weekdays. It is anticipated that the new rules will move that time earlier, to about 7:30 am, thus affecting passengers who park at Croton for Amtrak's Train 63. When the parking lot is full, security personnel directs people to the Cordlandt station, which is about 4 miles north. This is fine for Metro-North passengers, but does little good for Amtrak passengers.

Place to store packages or bags for the day in Manhattan:

The Parcel Room in Grand Central Terminal is once again open for business. The new Parcel Room is located on the Lower Level of Grand Central Terminal, next to the Police Station, and is monitored by a 24-hour-a-day security system. It's open Monday-Friday, 7 am-11 pm and Saturday and Sunday, 10 am-11 pm. The cost is only \$3 per package per calendar day, up to 90 days. Also, for your security, you'll need to show a photo ID before storing your belongings and when picking them up. No food, nor plants, nor furniture may be stored and all articles must be closed, secured and are subject to inspection.

Gary Prophet

Acela Express Arrives (cont'd from page 1)

Frank Lautenberg noted, "I have worked and continue to work diligently, despite the fact that I did not seek re-election, for high speed rail in the Northeast. Now, we must still pass the High Speed Rail Investment Act next month to bring this service to 10 corridors throughout this county, which will serve areas that have 150 million Americans." Other speakers included Jon Tisch (CEO of Lowes Hotels), and Mitchell Modell (CEO of Modell's Sporting Goods), and Keith Hernandex (New York Mets first baseman), all of whom spoke highly of the comfort and speed of the Acela Express and compared it to the problems and frustrations of driving or flying. The speeches concluded at about 1:10 pm, then 3 dancers from the Broadway hit "Fosse" provided live entertainment on stage. The Amtrak Board of Directors and many politicians began to board the train at 1:35 pm, with a last call at 1:45 pm. The Acela Express then pulled out at 1:50 pm, precisely on schedule for its nonstop trip to Boston, where it was scheduled to arrive at 5:05 pm for more celebration, including a fireworks display in Boston.

The first Acela Express daily service for the public will begin on December 11. It will depart Washington at 5 am and arrive Boston at 11:31 am. It will then depart Boston at 5:12 pm and arrive Washington at 11:43 pm every weekday. Reservations will be taken starting on November 29. The cost one-way will be \$143 Washington to New York, \$162 Washington to Boston, and \$120 New York to Boston. Fares will be about 20% less on weekends. Each Acela Express will also have 44 first class seats, with 2 x 1 seating and at-seat meals served on china and unlimited drinks. First class will cost about 50% more than business class on the Acela Express.

Gary Prophet

Station Updates

Utica

Utica has gotten conceptual approval from CSX to build a new platform across the CSX mainline from the station so two Amtrak trains can stop at once. Besides Amtrak, the new platform will serve the Adirondack Railroad, which must now board passengers a quarter of a mile west of the city's elegant Union Station.

The new platform will require a pedestrian bridge with both elevators and stairs to get passengers across the two CSX main tracks. The overpass will start in the station building as an upper level of the current enclosed passageway to the existing platform.

The job has been contracted to Hubbard Construction at a cost of \$2.7 million. Work should take place next summer and hopefully be completed by Fall.

"The Train Station" a Tex-Mex style, full service restaurant plans on opening soon at the station.

Rome

Rome has awarded a \$1.4 million contract to refurbish the pedestrian tunnel and stairs to the platform, refurbish the platform and its shelter, and build a new entrance to let passengers bypass the station building. This work should be finished next summer. Improvements to the building itself will come later.

Both Rome and Utica officials have encountered difficulty in awarding contracts because "everybody's busy building schools" as a result of major new funding for that purpose, according to Michael Gapin, Oneida County's Planner. The low bid in Utica was higher than the county's estimate, and Rome received only one bid—also higher than anticipated. Robert Colmis, Rome's Director of Public Works, said many contractors are having difficulty finding skilled workers to complete their jobs.

Syracuse

CENTRO has given back state funds so it will not have to build the bridge across Park Street to allow the OnTrack shuttle into its Transportation Center. The State is expected to reallocate the funds to the Susquehanna Railroad, which operates OnTrack and does not have the same worries about liability that kept CENTRO from completing the project. If all goes well the work should be completed next summer.

Niagara Falls

While Amtrak proceeds to build a base for customs and immigration personnel in its present station, the city is taking steps to move Amtrak's stop to a historic building next to the Niagara River. Amtrak wants the base for border personnel so they can process passengers at the Amtrak station instead of the border. This will allow the train to be serviced in the station while the border inspections take place, eliminating the need for a separate stop at the border.

But the city, mindful of the isolated location of the present station, wants to move the Amtrak stop to a historic 1863 stone structure known as the Customs House near the edge of the Niagara Gorge. It hopes this will help revive a rundown area and bring passengers closer to its tourist attractions. Efforts to move the train station began nearly 20 years ago and the city has now secured \$200,000—enough to buy the Customs House and begin restoration. State Senator George Maziarz has supported the effort. But rehabilitating the building, which has been vacant for a number of years, will require a lot more money, and more years are likely to pass before anyone has to move.

Lyons

On October 23rd Senator Michael Nozzolio convened a press conference to announce an award of \$750,000 in new money from the state multi-modal fund for a station in Lyons. Adding this to the \$250,000 already appropriated will bring the state appropriation to \$1 million. Other invited speakers included Wayne County legislature chair Marvin Decker, County Planner Sharon Lilla, town supervisor James

Fabino and this writer, ESPA's Frank Barry.

The ceremony was well underway on the site of the proposed station when a mellow horn sounded to the east and moments later Amtrak's Maple Leaf came into view, heading for Toronto at full tilt. A speech was interrupted as guests and speakers waved and cheered as the silver cars raced by.

But the enthusiasm was tempered two days later when representatives of CSX, Amtrak and the Department of Transportation and Lyons officials met to talk nuts and bolts. CSX has said no more stations can be built unless both tracks are served by platforms. And Amtrak's John Bennett reportedly said the high speed service being proposed for this route will require high level platforms. High level platforms would be extremely expensive as freight trains cannot safely pass them at speed. This means separate tracks would be required to service the platforms, creating a four track railroad within the station.

Lyons has been snared on the horns of a dilemma. For years Conrail kept the project from advancing by requiring an expensive bridge over the secondary track to Geneva. At the time there was simply no money available for such a structure. Today more money is available and Conrail is gone. But the combination of increasing freight traffic and potential high speed operation may still conspire to put the project out of reach. As one DOT official put it, "I don't see how they can get the ridership to justify it." Clearly Lyons by itself could not justify it. Hopes rest on a strong regional effort to promote its use through connecting transit and coordinated planning. And the effort has strong political support not only from Senator Nozzolio but from U.S. Senator Charles Schumer. Ironically, building a station would not be a problem if Lyons were located on a less pretentious single track line like the Adirondack route or the Southern Tier line.

At a minimum it appears that any construction will have to await the study being planned in the Rail Passenger Council to determine how high speed rail can best be implemented west of Schenectady. This will likely determine how the track will be configured, and construction before that would be futile. However people in Lyons cannot be blamed for asking why the bar is being raised so high for them when other localities along the line are going ahead with low level platform projects.

Erie Pa.

Amtrak has hired a contractor and given the go-ahead to begin 41.5 million in improvements to the historic Erie station. Improvements include two new elevators along with waterproofing and repainting the canopies over the boarding platform.

Frank Barry

Trains Running to Lake Placid

Nearly 200 people boarded the inaugural Adirondack train at Lake Placid for the 11 mile run to Saranac Lake on September 20th, a warm, clear day. Many more cheered it off, according to the Lake Placid News. Regular service began three days later and was projected to end on October 29. Three trips per day were planned, four days per week.

Quote from Postwar Promise, an article in *Classic Trains* by Michael Vega, on delays in building streamliners after World War II:

"Things were so bad at Pullman-Standard that its president, Champ Carry, refused to speculate on delivery dates. Beset with tens of complicated special orders, Carry blamed material and labor shortages and even considered importing skilled labor from Scotland's Clyde works. As an example, PRR had placed its order in January '46; Pullman promised a year's delivery time, but the new Broadway didn't turn a wheel until April, 1949...the delays played havoc with advertising schedules..." (p. 85, *Classic Trains*, Winter, 2000). Sound familiar?

Acela Speeds in Perspective

Acela's top speeds will be 135MPH between Washington and New York (vs. 125MPH for Metroliners) and 150MPH for an 18-mile stretch between New Haven and Boston. The initial schedule will cover the distance from Washington to New York in 2 hrs, 44 minutes—15 minutes faster than current schedules. But this will not set a record, as a morning Metroliner covered this distance in 2-1/2 hours flat in 1991—although it made only one intermediate stop. (Five minutes were added to this schedule with the next timetable change, however). But the Acela's projected 3:23 running time from New York to Boston will set an unquestioned all time record—the United Aircraft Turbo Train took 21 minutes longer in 1971 (Amtrak's first year of operation). The 6-1/2 hour Acela running time from Washington to Boston (70.3MPH average) will be roughly half an hour shorter than in 1972.

Much work remains to be done on Metro-North's section of the run in Connecticut, where top speed will be limited to 90MPH. Speeds will increase when it is completed—but it may take several years to reach Amtrak's promised 3 hour running time.

In the meantime, Amtrak will add Acela high speed runs in the coming months as the new trainsets are accepted, and schedules will be updated accordingly. All 20 trainsets are expected to be in service by next Fall, at which time Metroliners will cease to exist.

Frank Barry

BNSF Scales Down Expansion Plans

In reaction to government policy and the stock market, BNSF is dropping plans for double tracking and a new locomotive shop, according to Washington Post writer Don Phillips (Wash. Post, 10/11/00). Instead, Chairman Robert Krebs said, BNSF will use the money to buy back its own stock. This is now "a better investment than investing in the railroad," Krebs told Phillips.

Krebs is still smarting from the Surface Transportation Board's (STB) moratorium on rail mergers earlier this year, which blocked BNSF plans to merge with the Canadian National to form a true transcontinental railroad. Krebs told Phillips the merger would have brought a 12% return on investment instead of the current 9%, and investors "don't even want to look at you" without double digit returns.

In his article Phillips noted that government pressure on railroads is increasing as shippers push Congress to force railroads to allow other railroads to serve shippers served by only one company's track. Such situations are increasing as the number of railroads dwindles. This, plus new regulations from the STB that will make mergers more difficult, and the stock market's pressure for increased earnings each quarter, are lessening the attractiveness of investing in plant and capacity. These pressures could lead to a return of freight to the highways, according to Krebs.

Now that capacity has become a prime issue for all forms of transportation, the case for expanding capacity of the rail mode is

becoming stronger, but it is not clear whether government is getting the message.

Frank Barry

ESPA Meetings

Annual Meeting - February 24 - Albany, NY. Details will be in the January/February ESPA Express.

Downstate - December 19, 2000. 6-8pm a joint meeting with Auto-Free New York featuring Governor James J. Florio - "The Case for Public Investment in Intercity Rail Passenger Service" Location: 104 Washington St. near Rector St., Lower Manhattan, use Rector St. or Wall St. subway stations.

At its November 28 meeting, Auto-Free New York will feature "Health, Auto-Centered Transport Systems and Space" by Peter Freund, Professor of Sociology, Montclair State University. Same location - 104 Washington St.

Officers and Coordinators Meeting - December 9, 2000 Schenectady, NY at a new location: The Mohawk Club, 1 North Church St

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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 (\$20.00 per year)
- Renewal - Student or Senior Citizen (\$12.50 per year)
- Family membership (\$25.00)
- Sustaining membership (\$50.00)
- Patron membership (\$75.00)
- Corporate membership (\$100.00)
- Lifetime membership (\$300.00)

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 January/February issue is Jan. 1.**

6

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