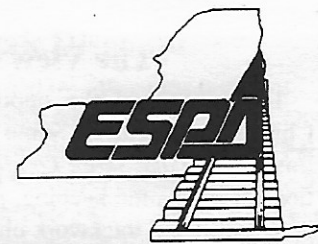


# THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

HTTP://www.trainweb.ORG/espa



## Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

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November/December 2002

### Amtrak Funding Policy Challenges New York

On September 19th Amtrak President David Gunn presented Amtrak's Board with a budget based on a \$1.2 billion federal appropriation that he hopes will garner support from both the Bush Administration and Congress. It's a compromise midway between what Amtrak's supporters and its enemies want but with serious implications for New York. Under Gunn's proposal, Amtrak will continue all long distance routes, including the *Sunset Limited*, *Southwest Chief*, and others, which would have been discontinued under legislation initially proposed by House Appropriations Transportation Sub-committee Chairman Harold Rogers (R., KY). But it would halt efforts to develop new routes, such as restoration of Florida East Coast and Las Vegas services. Northeast Corridor trackwork would be put off, but cars that have been waiting for repairs for years would finally get fixed. And most Express service will be dropped; after months of uncertainty, Amtrak has concluded that Express lost \$7 million last year in addition to delaying passenger trains and angering freight railroads, according to Gunn.

The budget would cover all operating costs for long distance trains with federal funds but states would be required to cover all deficits of regional services including New York's Empire Corridor. Capital improvement, whether for tracks or rolling stock, would be shared on an 80% federal, 20% state ratio similar to that for highway and transit projects. Amtrak's overhead and administrative costs would be covered by the federal government.

(Cont'd on pg 4)

### Congress puts off Budget Decisions

In terms of appropriating funds; the record of the outgoing Congress has been dismal. Most of the work has been put off until after the election and may not even happen until the newly elected Congress takes over in January.

Two separate and very different versions of the transportation appropriation have been developed but have yet to pass in either chamber. The Senate bill approved by the Appropriations Committee last July would allocate the full \$1.2 billion Amtrak President David Gunn regards as an absolute minimum to continue operations. But the House bill, passed by the Appropriation Committee on October 1st, contained only \$762 million, which would likely bring Amtrak to another crisis early in 2003. It would limit funding for long distance trains to \$150 million, about half their actual cost. This limit was adopted after defeat of an initial plan to drop any train with an average per passenger subsidy exceeding \$200 unless states make up the difference. That would have targeted the *Three Rivers*, *Pennsylvanian*, *Kentucky Cardinal*, *Sunset Limited*, and *Texas Eagle*, effectively depriving the entire Southwest of rail

(Cont'd on page 6)

### New Schedule Effects The State

The *Lake Shore Limited* (Train 49) to Chicago will be moved 3 hours 45 minutes earlier. It will depart New York daily at 12:45pm, Albany at 3:55pm, Syracuse at 6:41pm, Buffalo at 9:08pm and it will arrive Chicago at 7:00am the following morning. (The section from Boston will depart Boston at 9:50am and be combined at Albany.) This greatly enhances the rail service from Western New York to Chicago, with its evening departures across upstate New York and early morning arrival in Chicago. The eastbound *Lake Shore Limited* (Train 48) continues with its Chicago departure at 7:45pm and 6:56am Buffalo arrival, and splitting in Albany with service to both Boston and New York.

(Cont'd on page 4)

### Rensselaer Station Opens

The beautiful new Rensselaer Rail Station opened for service on September 22. In sharp contrast to the old station next door, passengers and well wishers were greeted to the sounds of piano music from the attractive cafe, a generous display of periodicals and sundries in the large newsstand and perhaps best of all, wonderful views of the Albany skyline and arriving trains.

Amtrak operations at the new station have run smoothly, with passengers and crews alike praising the high-level boarding platforms and large, spacious waiting areas. Use of the attached parking garage has risen significantly since the opening, particularly on bad weather days, as travelers can now be undercover directly from their cars to their train seats. In addition, the top deck of the garage provides vastly enlarged and improved space for short-term parking; drop-off and pick-ups and taxi services. The current open parking lots north of the station continue to offer free parking. A dedicated CDTA bus service to and from downtown points connects with most weekday, mid-day trains. Still to open at the station in the coming months is the re-located Rensselaer Post Office, a complete business/conference facility and a car rental agency.

Bruce Becker

### Travel Advisory

The NEC, Keystone, Empire Corridor schedules effective October 27, 2002 will be printed on cards only, not in booklet form. These schedules will likely change again in early January 2003.

The Empire Corridor card incorrectly shows Train 283 as not requiring reservations. Train 283 does require reservations for all stations west of Albany. There is no baggage handled on the *Ethan Allen*. The baggage symbols for Train 291, 294, and 296 are erroneous.

The new National timetable has incorrect times for Train 448, the eastbound *Lake Shore Limited*, for several stations in Massachusetts. The correct times are Worcester at 5:15pm; Framingham at 5:45pm; Boston Back Bay at 6:27pm; and Boston South Station at 6:35pm.

## The View from the Cab

I recently had the opportunity to travel on Amtrak to Chicago for business. Some interesting observations from my travel. The *Lake Shore Limited* lived up to its notorious reputation for poor time keeping, primarily caused by freight traffic congestion and trackwork on both CSX and Norfolk Southern. Amtrak also contributed with delays in switching its express cars at Chicago. Of note however, I didn't encounter any passengers who seemed bothered by the tardiness. In fact, most said they enjoy traveling by train, in spite of *expecting* to be delayed! Imagine if the trains actually ran on time???

Food and service in the Dining Cars was good. While many may lament the new standard nationwide menu offerings, a meal in the diner can still be a highlight of a long distance trip. The Viewliner Sleepers are showing their age, with the constant daily use and lack of general overalls contributing. In spite of the high sleeper fares charged, the cars were full, but how long will this continue if the seats are frayed, carpets are dirty and window shades torn? I applaud David Gunn for making equipment maintenance and rehabilitation a top priority.

On the return trip, I met a mother and daughter, en route from Cleveland to Albany to attend a concert. In spite of having boarded the two-hour late train in the middle of the night, they were having a great time! They obviously weren't frequent rail travelers and I asked them why they had chosen Amtrak. They replied that to drive or fly would have been so stressful, while the train provided an opportunity to relax and unwind. They went on to say that they couldn't imagine how the government could let Amtrak stop running. For all of us who advocate for passenger rail, encounters like this make what we do so worthwhile.

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*

## Essential Air Service Funds Increase

An August 30 Government Accounting Office report on Essential Air Services (EAS) found that appropriations to that program increased from \$37 million to \$113 million between 1995 and 2002; and that the average payment at the 79 airports involved in the lower 48 states rose from \$424,000 to \$828,000. But during this period passenger traffic to all the airports involved fell 20%, to about three passengers per flight. The number of airports served is expected to increase as airlines plan to discontinue unprofitable flights. Fares to such airports are generally high, and the report notes that one factor depressing use of EAS flights is that "people may choose to drive or take rail service" as a more economical alternative.

In New York State, Utica lost all scheduled air service after the Essential Air Service subsidy was discontinued last summer. Ridership had dropped 90% since 1995, and in 2001 only 1138 passengers used the four daily flights—at a subsidy of \$938 per passenger. (Essential Air Service legislation bars subsidizing service when the per passenger subsidy exceeds \$200 per passenger).

*From National Association of Railroad Passengers website  
newline 10/4, and Associated Press, 7/1*

## State to Buy Farley Building

Governor George Pataki announced on October 8th that the Post Office has agreed to sell the Farley Post Office Building for \$230 million for use as an Amtrak terminal connected to Penn Station. The Port Authority has agreed to put up \$145 million, which will be supplemented by funds from MTA, state bonds, Amtrak and other sources. The building will be transferred to the Penn Station Redevelopment Corporation. Construction is expected to take 5 years.

Completion will give Amtrak passengers an imposing terminal with grandeur comparable to the original Pennsylvania Station, but it will lengthen the walk for those connecting with commuter trains and most subways.

## ESPA Endorses Penn Station Hub Plan

The ESPA Officer and Coordinators at their October meeting endorsed the 'Penn Station Metro-Hub' Action Plan, developed by the Regional Rail Working Group, chaired by ESPA Manhattan Coordinator, George Haikalis.

The group's plan seeks to improve overall regional mobility and to address the current capacity concerns at New York's Penn Station, with two bold initiatives: 1. Make Penn Station a true 'through terminal', with commuter trains from all directions operating through Manhattan to other points. Such a move could increase Penn Station's current capacity by 50% or more. 2. Merge all New York metropolitan area commuter rail lines into a Regional Rail Network with frequent service and integrated fares.

The plan envisions a unified network of electrified and non-electrified routes throughout the tri-state area, using current equipment and additional dual-mode locomotives. The concept of passengers enjoying a one-seat ride from Long Island to New Jersey, while currently technologically possible, represents a quantum leap in cooperation between the transportation interests of the metropolitan region. Also integral to the plan is the development of a region-wide fare acceptance program and the creation of an 'Urban Fare Zone' representing a roughly 15-mile radius area from Penn Station. Such an 'Urban Fare Zone' would include the region's three airports and principal transfer points on Long Island and in New Jersey.

With ESPA's endorsement of the Metro-Hub Plan secured, the Regional Rail Working Group will soon present the completed plan to rail transport representatives across the region. ESPA members interested in more information can contact George Haikalis at [geohaikalis@juno.com](mailto:geohaikalis@juno.com) or view the entire plan at <http://www.auto-free.org/regionrr.html>.

*Bruce Becker*

## Revenue Service with Refurbished Turboliner...Not Yet!

As of press time, the first refurbished RTG III Turboliner, delivered by Supersteel in early August, has yet to be accepted by Amtrak for revenue service. Reportedly, the results of test runs made over the past two months are being carefully analyzed by Amtrak and Supersteel, which are seeking to insure maximum reliability when the train does finally enter service.

Representatives from NYSDOT and Amtrak continue to express confidence that a date for the start of revenue service will be announced soon. With the limited supply of available Amtrak equipment and the busy Thanksgiving and Holiday season rapidly approaching, ESPA will continue to push all parties to introduce the first trainset as soon as possible.

*Bruce Becker*

## CP/D&H Improvements Announced

A comprehensive program of improvements to the route of Amtrak's *Adirondack* and *Ethan Allen Express*, along the CP/D&H line north of Schenectady, has been announced by the Governor's Office and NYSDOT. This short term program, funded jointly by CP/D&H, New York State and the Federal government, will encompass the following projects:

- General track improvement work, including new rails, ties and ballast.
- Fiber-Optic signal system upgrades and elimination of 10 temporary speed restrictions.
- Upgrade of connection to CSX at Schenectady station, permitting higher passenger train speeds.
- Rerouting of the CP/D&H Main Track around the Saratoga Yard, providing for reduced passenger and freight train conflicts and delays.
- Increase clearances to allow for double-stack and tri-level auto freight cars.
- Government purchase and rehabilitation of the CP/D&H line between Saratoga and Corinth, providing for future excursion passenger service to North Creek and Gore Mountain ski areas.
- Rehabilitation of the Saratoga Passenger Station, to benefit Amtrak and the future scenic trains to North Creek.

Work on these projects is expected during 2003, with completion scheduled within 12 months of commencement. While this improvement program does not address the extremely slow speed branch currently used by the *Adirondack* between Rouses Point and the Canadian National line in Quebec, NYSDOT officials have informed ESPA that they are actively reviewing options for improvements in this area also.

*Bruce Becker*

## Bombardier Introduces new Turbine Engine

On October 15th Bombardier Transportation unveiled the first 150MPH non electric locomotive designed for high speed service in North America. In fact, according to the National Association of Railroad Passengers, it may be the fastest fuel powered locomotive in the world. Called "JetTrain", it uses a turbine derived from a Pratt & Whitney jet airplane engine. This power unit weighs only 1200 pounds—a tiny fraction of the weight of the 16 cylinder motors used in Amtrak's Genesis I diesel locomotives.

According to Bombardier press releases, the 100 ton locomotive exerts 5000 horsepower—more than Amtrak's newest 4200 HP diesels—yet it weighs 19 tons less than a regular diesel engine. Consequently it has the highest power to weight ratio for fuel powered locomotives in North America. According to the press release, this gives it double the acceleration of conventional diesels.

As a locomotive unit only, it will not suffer the limitations of New York's turboliners which will be limited to a fixed 5 car consists that cannot accommodate demand on the most popular timeslots. Cars can be coupled to or uncoupled from the Jet train as easily as from existing Amtrak locomotives, so train lengths can be varied according to demand. However JetTrain lacks a component critical for service in New York—the ability to utilize lineside electric power, from either a third rail or overhead wire, to enter Penn Station—where internal combustion operation is banned.

Development of JetTrain began in 1998 with an agreement between the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Bombardier to share development costs equally. These costs are estimated at \$25 million. The locomotive has been tested extensively at the Pueblo test site, where it reached 156 MPH, and it conforms to all FRA structural requirements despite its relatively low weight, according to Bombardier. Bombardier also claims its greenhouse gas emissions will be 30% less than those of a diesel, and that it will consume 26% less fuel.

The JetTrain prototype locomotive was built at Bombardier's shops in Plattsburgh and La Pocatière in Quebec.

*Frank Barry*

## Adirondack Railroad

Ridership is up 20% on the Utica to Old Forge route through the southern Adirondack mountains. Spectacular scenery and vintage Canadian National rolling stock make this tourist railroad popular with nature and travel enthusiasts alike. The railroad consists of the former New York Central Adirondack division between Utica, N.Y. and Lake Placid, N.Y., and at one time trains ventured all the way to Montreal Canada on this route. The unique volunteer effort is complimented by State ownership of the line between Snow Junction (Remsen) and Lake Placid for a total of 120 miles in public ownership. The segment between Utica and Remsen is owned by the freight hauling Mohawk Adirondack and Northern Railroad. According to DOT region II rail coordinator Bob Rice, the State of New York is very interested in seeing the entire corridor opened for passenger traffic. The railroad between Carter Station and Clear Lake Junction (eighty miles), while serviceable, requires approximately \$20 million in trackwork to allow for realistic train speeds for passenger service.

Adirondack Scenic Railroad is run entirely by volunteers according to its enthusiastic president Gene Falvo of Utica. Mr. Falvo does not have a railroad background and considers the railroad a tour business which needs his creative skills as a businessman.

The success of the railroad depends on building a coalition of interested groups working together to market, develop and fund this transportation system. To this end, Mr. Falvo tells ESPA, passengers can expect enhanced lounge car service on the Utica run and special fund raising events and promotions to stimulate the travel market. The transition of this tourist operation to a corridor serving a common carrier need is something all involved hope to develop in the future. The outstanding Utica station offers travelers a connection with mainline travel options; in fact, Amtrak passengers have used the scenic railroad as a connecting service on their own.

During the winter months, the right of way serves as a very different transportation link, a snowmobile north country thruway which is a great benefit to the tourism industry which caters to snowmobilers. Mr. Falvo is optimistic that future year round rail service and this unique snowmobile thruway can coexist along the same right of way.

The continuing development of this corridor north of Utica and ongoing efforts by railroaders and political leaders, are making Utica a rail travel hub. Ongoing track improvements on the Susquehanna line from Utica to Binghamton are also part of the Utica passenger development scene.

*Ben Gottfried*

## Amtrak Funding Policy (Cont'd from page 1)

The Bush Administration has said states should pay all operating deficits for trains crossing their territory, whether corridor or long distance. States want the federal government to pick up more of these costs. Rogers (who has no trains in his district), John Mica, (R., Fla.) who chairs the House Appropriations Aviations Subcommittee, and other detractors in Congress, want Amtrak to eliminate some long distance trains. Senator Ernest Hollings (D., S.C.) and other supporters want more routes. Gunn's proposed route status quo cuts a middle course.

One of Gunn's objective is "equity among states," according to a presentation to the National Association of Railroad Passengers Board Meeting in late October. While this sounds reasonable enough, its effect on New York State will be unusually severe since New York currently pays nothing toward the operating cost of its major corridor. Yet the 13 train frequency between New York and Albany is higher than that on any other regional route outside the Northeast Corridor mainline.

Amtrak aims to implement this policy by fiscal year 2004, which begins next October 1st—meaning that the cost would have to be included in the budget now being prepared by Governor Pataki's staff.

It is difficult at this point to predict the exact cost to New York. An Amtrak Reform Council report pegged the Empire Corridor's deficit at \$36.5 million for FY 2001, but the final figure may be less after overhead costs are deducted.

The equity issue gained prominence last summer when Senate Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee Chair Patty Murray (D., Wash.) announced she was sick of having her state pay for train service while northeastern states got a free ride. "I don't intend to play by those rules," she warned.

While New York pays operating expenses only for the *Adirondack*, it has paid substantial amounts to upgrade the tracks between New York and Poughkeepsie, as well as for new and rehabilitated stations and the turboliners. If the state cannot come up with the funding Amtrak requires, upstate cities that have invested heavily in passenger stations could end up with only the *Lake Shore Limited* and perhaps the *Maple Leaf*.

Obviously this is not a good year for New York to face such an increase, since the state is still reeling from the effects of 9/11, and tax receipts have fallen sharply. Much may depend on whether a mutually satisfactory arrangement can be worked out. Amtrak needs New York's support to get its plan accepted in Congress, especially if the House remains in Republican hands. Jack Quinn (R., Buffalo) will presumably continue to chair the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Railroad Subcommittee. Quinn has worked closely with Assemblyman Sam Hoyt to get funding for a new station in downtown Buffalo and will not want to see it served by just one or two trains—or possibly none at all. But Patty Murray has to be satisfied too.

There just might be a golden lining however, since Amtrak's proposal goes beyond simply asking more money from States. In return Amtrak would cede some control—states would get major say in setting fares and schedules, as well as choosing equipment and amenities such as food service. Of course if they make unwise business decisions, states would be liable for the financial consequences.

But giving states this sort of ownership could be just what's needed for them to buy in. Amtrak has frequently been criticized for centralized decision making with little understanding of local

travel needs and preferences. A state role in managing and financing the service could provide an opportunity for the kind of creative management that has appeared in both Maine and California. In both cases commissions have emerged comprised of stakeholders well connected with local institutions and knowledgeable about regional travel needs and dedicated to seeing Amtrak service meet them

New York has yet to harness this sort of energy and expertise. Unlike California, New York does little to advertise its rail service. A state initiative to encourage its own employees to use the train for travel from Western New York to Albany could significantly increase ridership. And the successful experience with the State Fair last summer suggests that business is there if various entities work together to promote it. This would require fares attractive to families. It would also require coordination of multiple state and local departments and organizations. One positive development: the 2002 New York State Tourist Guide map does now include intercity rail routes—a good step forward.

Frank Barry

## New Schedules (Cont'd from page 1)

In conjunction with the earlier schedule for Train 49, Train 283 (operates from New York City to Niagara Falls), has been moved from 1:45pm to 3:45pm. Train 283 will operate daily and will arrive Syracuse at 8:55pm and Buffalo at 11:00pm. In conjunction with Train 283 operating later in the afternoon, the late afternoon Friday only Train 289 will no longer operate to Syracuse. This train will now terminate in Albany.

Train 63 and 65 have an additional 30 minutes added to their schedules for time at the border for customs. These trains will incur an unprecedented 1 hour 45 minutes for customs, when entering Canada. Built-in time for Train 64 entering the United States remains at a lengthy 1 hour 40 minutes.

Train 293 will operate Fridays-only to Schenectady, Saratoga Springs and Rutland, Vermont with a New York departure at 5:30pm. It will arrive Saratoga Springs at 8:57pm and Rutland at 10:40pm. On the other days of the week, the train to Rutland continues with its current 2:45pm New York departure. Except on Fridays, the 5:30pm New York departure will terminate in Albany, as it does every day currently.

Train 294 will operate daily, except Sundays, about 4 hours earlier than today and it will depart Rutland at 9:10am, Saratoga Springs at 10:50am and arrive NYP at 2:25pm. On Sundays only, it will depart Rutland at 5:00pm, Saratoga Springs at 6:52pm and arrive New York at 10:45pm.

Train 246, which operates Mondays-Fridays (weekdays), will no longer start from Schenectady at 6:25am. Instead, this train will start from Albany and continue with its current 6:55am departure. ESPA is very much against this change in Train 246 and we are pushing for its reinstatement from Schenectady.

The full schedules for all trains on all Amtrak routes nationwide are available at [www.amtrak.com/plan/timetables.html](http://www.amtrak.com/plan/timetables.html)

Gary Prophet

## ESPA Meeting Dates 2002

January 11, 2003 Schenectady

March 1, 2003 Annual Meeting - Schenectady

**If you are interested in becoming more involved in ESPA, these meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how you can make a difference.**

Please contact President Bruce Becker at 518-383-5985 or via e-mail, [bbecker@albanycc.cc](mailto:bbecker@albanycc.cc) (Please advise if planning on attending)

## MTA Proposes LIRR - M-N Merger

On October 9th the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) presented a plan to merge its two commuter rail subsidiaries, Metro-North and the Long Island Railroad. It would also merge the Staten Island Rapid Transit line with the New York City subway. Currently all systems operate separately, although Long Island trains may someday enter Grand Central Terminal and Metro-North trains could theoretically enter Penn Station.

The plan would be implemented in January, 2004 if the state legislature approves it. MTA believes the merger would save millions of dollars without affecting service

## NJT Improves Penn Station Service

On September 23rd New Jersey Transit opened its new concourse at the east end of Penn Station, bordering 7th Avenue, just across the entry way from the Long Island RR main concourse. The NJT concourse, midway between the upper and lower levels, contains ticket booths, information and a waiting area with art displays. The 50,000 foot area, which cost \$125 million, will serve 117,000 commuters every day, according to the 9/23 TRAINS Magazine website newslines.

One week later NJT opened its new connection between the old Lackawanna electrified stub-end Montclair branch and the ex-Erie Boonton Line which operates through Montclair to the north. Montclair trains now start in Montclair Heights, on the Boonton Line, and some run directly into Penn Station, for the first time ever. The connection cost \$63 million to build.

## LIRR Engines being Rebuilt

Over 40 Long Island R.R. diesels are getting extensive repairs after being in service barely three years. About half the engines are dual mode units, equipped to run into Penn Station on electric power from the third rail. The others are powered by diesel only and haul trains from Jamaica east. Both types pull LIRR's new bi-level cars.

The engines are being taken out of service three at a time for replacement of skids which anchor the diesel motor to the carbody, as well, plus various smaller items. The 46 locomotives cost \$151 million to build. The repair work has been contracted to the Norfolk-Southern shop in Altoona, which once built steam locomotives used on the Long Island Rail Road.

The cost will be covered by a General Motors Electro-Motive Division warranty. The units were assembled at the Super Steel plant near Schenectady. *From National Corridor Initiatives "Destination Freedom" Newsletter, 10/21/02*

## New Cars for Long Island

The first of 858 new electric M-7 multiple unit cars went into service on the Long Island Rail Road on October 30th. The new cars, which cost roughly \$2 million each, will be split between Metro-North and the Long Island R.R.

*From New York Times, 10/31/02*

## Write a Letter to the Editor.

Letters to the editor are probably the most effective free advertising we can get. Studies show that they are widely read by the public. If you have local community papers that are popular write them in addition to the major papers. Guidelines for Letters to the Editor: To get published, keep it short. Include your phone number and address. If you do not get published the first time keep trying.

## New Amtrak Discount

Amtrak has just announced a new 30% fare discount. This offer will be available for sale from Nov 4, 2002 through Dec 13, 2002 and will be valid for travel from Nov 7 through Feb 28, 2003. Discount cannot be used for travel on Nov 26 - Dec 2, nor Dec 19, 2002 - Jan 5, 2003, nor Feb 14-17, 2003. Reservations are required at least 3 days prior to travel and fare is non-refundable once purchased and tickets must be purchased at least 3 days in advance for travel on any unreserved portion of your travels. You must reference Promotion Code H223 when calling Amtrak or when reserving on the Amtrak web site. The fare cannot be used on *Acela Express* nor *Metroliner* trains and cannot be used on Fri/Sun between 11am and 11pm for travel along the NEC. Fare is valid throughout the Empire Corridor, on the *Ethan Allen*, on the *Vermont*, and on the *Lake Shore Limited*.

## National and International Rail News

### Buffalo Intermodal Center

An updated schedule for construction of Buffalo's Intermodal Transportation Center at the Memorial Auditorium site on lower Main Street calls for groundbreaking in the summer of 2003.

It would be centered in an expanded auditorium lobby with an underground passage leading to a boarding platform for Amtrak at an existing railroad tunnel. Intermodal connections can be made with the city's light rail route on the east side of the auditorium, and a Metro bus stop and shelter on the northwest side.

*Greater Buffalo-Niagara Regional Transportation Council*

### Downeaster Set New Records

The *Downeaster* set new records for ridership and revenues in July and August. With 30,714 people riding the train in August, The highest monthly total yet, the total ridership for the 8 1/2 months the *Downeaster* has been operating now exceed 225,000 passengers. Revenues have been boosted by the popularity of business class seating, which costs an extra \$8.00 for a one-way trip.

*TrainRiders/Northeast*

### Illinois test Reaches 109 mph

Illinois officials anticipate introducing 110-mile Amtrak service by late 2003 or early 2004. A 120-mile stretch has already received new track, crossing gates and signals as part of a multi-million-dollar project on Amtrak's Chicago to St. Louis route.

The Downstate tests focused on how well elements of the 'positive train control' system were working. Enlisting satellites, the system is critical to high-speed service because it can help pinpoint a train's location, helping to trigger crossing gates, avoid collisions and adhere to appropriate speeds.

*Midwest High-Speed Rail Coalition*

### International Highlights

French Rail's high-speed long-distance traffic has increased by over a third in the last five years. The original Paris-Lyon TGV high-speed line opened in 1981 is now operating at full capacity. Various options to expand traffic are being studied, including four-tracking the route or building a separate two-track line serving other mid-point stations.

Germany has begun an upgrade of the 180-mile Hamburg-Berlin line to permit 145-mph operation. The entire line should be ready for higher speeds by the end of 2004.

Holland's first high-speed line, the HSL-Zuid, is fully under construction. The 62-mile 186-mph line will run from Amsterdam to the Belgian border, linking with the Belgian and French high-speed routes and the Channel Tunnel.

## Congress puts off Budget (Cont'd from page 1)

passenger service unless states kicked in. The idea was dropped after furious reaction, especially from Texas, according to the Washington Post (9/25).

The National Association of Railroad Passengers points out that loss per passenger depends more on the average length of the trip than the overall economics of the train. This is particularly true for the Southwest Chief, a strong performer by other measures. Because it is the fastest train to the West Coast, it has many Illinois/California riders, paying high fares as a result. But the \$150 million cap would be even more devastating—it would simply force Amtrak to make the cuts. Yet discontinuing routes would not save much, because current labor agreements require laid off employees to be paid full salary for up to five years. Consequently route discontinuances would likely trigger another crisis by eliminating the revenue but not the costs.

The proposals to eliminate long distance trains suggest that the Appropriations Committee may not have grasped the significance of the DOT Inspector General's conclusion that "the annual net operating subsidy required to continue Amtrak's most unprofitable trains is less than one-third of the annual capital subsidy that is required to operate the most profitable trains in the Northeast Corridor." Amtrak's biggest cost is not long distance trains but maintenance of the high speed, multiple track Northeast Corridor mainline which is used for freight and passenger service by at least 7 other railroads.

Transportation Subcommittee Ranking Democrat Martin Olav Sabo, (Minn.) offered an amendment to raise Amtrak's appropriation to \$1.2 billion. But this was defeated by a 35-25 party line vote in which two normally supportive New York Republicans, James Walsh (Syracuse) and John Sweeney (Saratoga Springs), voted no.

Asked for an explanation, one Appropriations staff member told ESPA that if this amendment had passed the total would have exceeded the \$4 billion available for transportation and the bill would have been declared out of order. The hope, he said, was that the low amount would push the states to contribute more. (It was not clear whether he clearly understood the implications for New York State.)

Another staffer was more blunt. "If we don't cut Amtrak, they won't make tough choices," he said; "just throwing money at it is not the answer. Asking for the appropriation to be doubled is like asking for the moon." When this writer explained that Amtrak's new president is already making very difficult choices and reorganizing Amtrak's structure and practices, the response softened. "If Gunn is making reforms and dealing with problems, we may

be able to be more flexible. This is not the end of the road—it's only the initial position."

A Walsh staff member said Mr. Walsh had complained to the leadership that there is not enough discretionary money in the budget for the Appropriations Committee to do its job increased funding for Amtrak and highways (which would be cut too, under the Republican bill), we'd have to take it from somewhere else. If Mr. Walsh supported this he would be pressured to take it from the committee he chairs, which oversees the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)."

Congress has now gone home for the election, leaving Amtrak's and other appropriations unresolved. Government operations and Amtrak are operating under a continuing resolution, which funds them at current levels. Fortunately Amtrak's current level has been set at \$1.04 billion by including various additional amounts received during the 2001 fiscal year besides the inadequate \$521 million 2001 appropriation.

The continuing resolution runs until November 22; Congress will have to come back to Washington and either do its job or pass a much longer continuing resolution to push the whole issue off to the newly elected Congress in January. *Frank Barry*

### ACTION ALERT

Please ask your representative in the House to push for \$1.2 billion for Amtrak. Let them know that anything less will bring another shutdown crisis!

### 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)
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