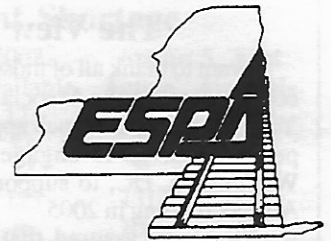


The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.trainweb.org/espa>



WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 28, No. 6

November/December 2004



Photo: Bob Lenz

Saratoga Station Ridership Up

Ridership at the New Saratoga station increased from 9,784 to 10,810 compared with the same May through August period last year. The station has a small coffee shop, newsstand and an art gallery, attracting visitors that don't even have a train to catch.

ESPA Responds to Dispute Between NYSDOT and Amtrak

ESPA issued a press release to media across the state on October 22, which included the following position statements on the current impasse over the High Speed Rail Program...

The recent collapse of negotiations between the New York State Department of Transportation (DOT) and AMTRAK concerning the much-touted 1998 Joint High Speed Rail Program is a major disappointment to the members of ESPA. Additionally, the subsequent decision by Commissioner Joseph Boardman of DOT to initiate a lawsuit against AMTRAK, followed by AMTRAK's action to transport the three Turboliner trainsets out-of-state, culminating in Commissioner Boardman's suggestion that the State might seek another intercity rail operator, have all raised serious concerns within our organization.

The members of ESPA have diligently worked for over two decades to promote and improve rail passenger service in New York and the nation. We support the following:

- The goals of the 1998 Joint New York State (DOT)/AMTRAK High Speed Rail Program remain important, and we urge that future efforts be focused on the completion of the rail infrastructure improvements originally outlined in such program. Enhancing operational reliability, increasing frequencies and
- reducing travel times can all be realized, if the most critical track, bridge and signal improvements are accomplished.

* If the State considers seeking an operator other than AMTRAK, we strongly advocate for the continuation, at a minimum, of the current level of intercity passenger rail services now provided by AMTRAK. We caution that there is no guarantee that another operator could provide such service levels without substantial state operating subsidies. (Cont'd on page 6)

Amtrak Schedules

Amtrak's new schedule breaks all same day connections to or from Florida trains from west of Albany. The Florida trains now depart NYC at 10:01am and 2:15pm and both then arrive Miami within an hour of each other. Likewise, both Florida trains depart Miami about two hours apart and that results in NYC arrivals in the afternoon and early evening eliminate guaranteed connections to any west of Albany train. (Cont'd on page 3)

Loss of New York City Connections

The following is a response to a letter to Amtrak regarding the inability to make connections in NYC to trains # 91, 97, & 19 from any point west of Albany NY.

Dear Mr. Lenz:

Thank you for your letter with respect to connectivity between points west of Albany and various destinations in the Amtrak network.

As you know, Amtrak adjusted all of the Silver Service schedules as a result of a decision made in August to exit the mail business. Because of the timing relative to timetable publication deadlines, we selected the latest available NEC slot from New York City for train 97. The resulting 2:15 departure is earlier than would have been our preference, and it resulted in the loss of connectivity from rail stations west of Schenectady.

We plan to further modify schedules both within New York State and departing New York City for points south in the Spring. The plan is not finalized, however I think you would agree that a schedule calling for train 284 to leave Albany earlier and for train 97 to leave an hour or so later would enable a good connection. We are also looking at whether a slightly later departure of train 49, coupled to some running time improvements made possible by elimination of mail, might not better serve a number of markets. One of those is the connection from train 98.

Your suggested connection to train 69 at Schenectady would also be reestablished if the first Buffalo departure is set to meet train 69 near the Albany station.

With respect to a connection to train 19, I cannot promise that. Market research has shown limited potential. We frankly would like to see train 19 scheduled into New Orleans earlier, as research has shown many passengers want to plan an evening out following arrival. That implies a slightly earlier departure from New York City than we have today.

Thank you for your interest and suggestions. We hope that the changes we are studying will assist with your future travel on Amtrak.

Sincerely,
Ralph von dem Hagen
Chief Operations Planning Officer

The View from the Cab

I want to thank all of those members who have made special contributions to the Association over the past several months. Your donations are much appreciated and have helped make it possible for us to engage John Boffa and Associates in Washington, DC, to support efforts on Capital Hill for full Amtrak funding in 2005.

Please be assured that the Association's Officers and Coordinators are committed to using our available funds in the most prudent and effective manner possible. But as I am sure is no surprise, the day-to-day costs of efficiently running *ESPA* continue to increase. In response, we are currently exploring several opportunities for increasing our membership base and thus dues revenues. In addition we have examined our current membership dues, which should be noted, have not increased in over **five** years. Thus, after a careful analysis and review of our future financial needs and knowing that we must continue to increase our efforts both in New York State and nationally, your Officers and Coordinators have approved a modest dues increase as noted below, effective January 1, 2005:

Membership	New Annual Dues
Introductory	\$10.00
Regular Members	\$24.00
Family Member	\$35.00
Student/Senior Member	\$12.50
Sustaining Member	\$50.00
Patron Member	\$75.00
Corporate Member	\$100.00
Life Member	\$300.00

When your dues reminder comes, I sincerely hope you will renew your membership at the highest level possible, knowing that your investment in *ESPA* is making a positive difference.

As always, I welcome your comments, critiques and suggestions, on how *ESPA* can better attain our goals of improved passenger rail service in New York State. Don't hesitate to contact me at anytime.

Bruce B. Becker, President

Technical Expertise Needed

ESPA is continuing to seek proposals from qualified graphic artists to provide professional expertise for the re-design of the Association's brochure. In addition, we are exploring options for the re-design and increased functionality of our web site, www.trainweb.org/espa, and welcome proposals from web-savvy individuals interested in undertaking such a project. Interested parties should submit a letter/proposal, including a summary of experience, examples of similar work and desired terms to: Bruce B. Becker, President; 8175 Old Post Road East; East Amherst, NY; 14051, or via e-mail bbecker@westwoodcc.cc by December 15, 2004.

State ARP's Meet to Plan Strategy Efforts

Representatives from the Rail Passenger Associations of New York (Bruce Becker and David Skoney from *ESPA*), New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Delaware Valley and Ohio met recently in Toledo to share current best association practices, discuss membership development efforts and to plan a strategy for establishing more effective multi-state advocacy efforts. David Johnson, NARP's Assistant Director, also attended and provided insight and support for these efforts. The meeting attendees agreed to hold another

planning/strategy meeting in Chicago next June, to be followed by a national 'ARP' Conference to be held in conjunction with the October 2005 Minneapolis NARP Board Meeting.

New Senate Chairs More Supportive?

Next year's Senate may be slightly easier to work with than this one, as Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain, (R., Ariz.) one of Amtrak's harshest critics, will be replaced by Senator Ted Stevens (R., Alaska). The Commerce Committee is responsible for the authorizing legislation that sets the terms under which Amtrak must operate. McCain has used his position to successfully block efforts to develop a permanent funding mechanism for Amtrak.

Sen. Stevens currently chairs the Appropriations Committee. Although his state is not served by Amtrak, he has used his post to insure funding for the Alaska Railroad, indicating at least some interest in rail.

Sen. Thad Cochran (R., Miss.), will succeed Stevens as Appropriations Committee Chairman. Amtrak's City of New Orleans serves Cochran's hometown of Jackson, and Cochran has worked very hard for various station improvements in Mississippi, according to the National Association of Railroad Passengers.

Both Stevens and Cochran co-sponsored S-104, Sen. Ernest Hollings' (D., SC) reauthorization bill introduced in January, 2003, which would have authorized over \$4 billion annually for Amtrak and High Speed Rail, plus a total of \$1.3 billion for security items. (A similar bill passed the Commerce Committee 20-3 when the Democrats controlled the Senate in 2002, but it failed to reach the floor of the full Senate for a vote). Only four other Republican Senators joined Stevens and Cochran as co-sponsors.

Cochran also signed a 2002 letter to Budget Committee Chair Kent Conrad (D., ND), requesting full funding for Amtrak. However he has not signed such letters to Senate Appropriators since the Senate returned to Republican control, possibly because he himself has been a senior member of the Appropriations Committee.

Incoming Minority Leader Harry Reid, of Nevada, should be at least as supportive as South Dakota's Tom Daschle, who he will replace. Reid co-signed five of six Senate letters requesting full funding for Amtrak since 1998, while Daschle signed only two. Daschle comes from one of the four states not served by Amtrak, so has no direct constituent interest in it; Reid's state is served by the California Zephyr. Paradoxically Daschle's wife Linda, played an important role in getting the \$15 billion bailout for airlines after September 11 in her position as a lobbyist for American Airlines according to the New York Times.

But the fight will still be difficult; an Associated Press article early in November indicated that President Bush will push again to privatize parts of Amtrak and to eliminate long distance trains.

Frank Barry

Amtrak Sets Ridership Growth

Amtrak set another ridership record for fiscal 2004. Over 25 million riders were carried on the nation's passenger rail system from October 2003 through September 2004. Overall, corridors were up 4.4% and National Network (long distance) trains were up 3.3%. These numbers are even more impressive given several long-term and high profile service disruptions this past year, the four hurricanes to strike Florida, the Republican and Democratic conventions, and two month long service disruption to the Silver Service due to CSX Transportation trackwork.

Amtrak Schedules (Cont'd from page 1)

This is a major inconvenience to Western and Central NY passengers, who wish to travel anywhere in the Carolinas and anywhere in Florida.

Amtrak's Empire Corridor has very few schedule changes with the November 1, 2004 Amtrak schedule change. Many trains changed by a few minutes, with more major changes impacting New York State travelers as follows: On Mondays, the southbound *Ethan Allen* will operate 4 hours later, as it already does on Saturdays. Its 12:25pm NYC arrival will now be on Tuesdays-Fridays. In general, Syracuse to Albany running times are reduced by 10 minutes, which removes some of the pad time added into the schedule for summer CSX track work. The *Lake Shore Limited* Boston section will operate only as a Boston to/from Albany train and passengers will then change trains in Albany. This will be an across the platform change. The Boston section will operate with a café and baggage car and baggage will be transferred at Albany to/from Train 48/49. The *Lake Shore Limited* will operate NYC to Chicago with a baggage car, diner, lounge, 3-5 coaches and 3 Viewliner sleeper cars. During January through April, it will operate with 2 Viewliner sleeper cars, as one will be temporarily added to the *Silver Meteor* to/from Florida. Train 49 will operate 13 minutes faster across New York State, with a 11:07pm arrival at Buffalo-Depew station.

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The Equipment Shortage

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Baggage Car	61	52	58	49
P42 Locomotive	198	170	186	157

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Amtrak's Beach Grove repair facility continues to turn out rebuilt cars – although not as rapidly as was hoped it would. As of June, Beach Grove did major work on 69 cars, of which 7 were wreck-damaged cars. The rest were overhauls.

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

New Baggage Rules

Amtrak began to enforce its carry-on baggage rules and has stated that boarding would be denied to passengers who attempt to bring any baggage over the stated rules. The rule is that each passenger is limited to two pieces of baggage, and each piece must be less than 50 pounds and may not be larger than 28" by 22" by 14". Purses, briefcases, laptops and items required for infants (strollers, diaper bags) are not counted as a piece of baggage. Passengers on the *Lake Shore Limited* would be allowed to check extra baggage, but no other train operating in New York State has a baggage car. Also, each and every item carried on-board (including briefcases and laptops) must be tagged with the name and address of the passenger.

Amtrak has also stated that about 10% of all passengers will randomly have their ID checked prior or during travel to verify that it matches the name on their Amtrak ticket. Gary Prophet

There's Always a Reason to Ride Amtrak

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Syracuse	www.visitSyracuse.org Kenny Rogers Dec. 8 LeAnn Rimes/Symphony Orchestra Dec. 10 Carousel Center – three blocks from station
Utica	www.oneidacountyvb.com Adirondack RR Polar Express Dec. 2-5, 9-12 F.X. Matt Brewing Co. Tours Daily Children's Museum (next to station) Daily x Mon
Albany	www.Albany.org Evita (at the Proctor - Schenectady) Dec. 27, 28 Disney on Ice Dec. 16-19 Judy Collins Dec. 17

150 Anniversary Bash on the SB&NY

The weekend of October 16 and 17, 2004 was the occasion of the 150th (sesquicentennial) anniversary of the Syracuse, Binghamton and New York Railroad. (SB&NY). To celebrate the event a gathering of 900 people 5 locomotives and 21 passenger cars were assembled and readied for two days of passenger operations on the 150 year old route. The Lackawanna Railroad last operated passenger trains between Syracuse and Binghamton in 1958.

The Saturday trip handled 600 people traveling up the SB&NY to Syracuse and return with speeches by local dignitaries and Railroad Brass. Senator Libous R- Binghamton spoke at the Binghamton ceremonies held at the former D&H freight house currently under restoration as a passenger station for the City. The train made station stops along the way at Marathon, Cortland and Tully. The stop in Cortland included the local high school band playing and a chicken barbecue meal for all those in attendance. Cortland Mayor Tom Gallagher spoke of the future of the line and a follow up story in the Cortland Standard on October 18 was some good positive local reaction.

On Sunday the 17th about 300 people rode the train southward from Syracuse and return. The smaller crowd was treated to two photo run bys at Tully and Whitney Point with Susquehanna steam locomotive #142 pleasing the crowd with its copious blasts of steam and the spectacle of steam railroading of some sixty years ago. Passenger and freight hauler Morristown and Erie passenger FP9's and NYS&W freight loco's were tucked in behind the steam engine to pull the massive 21 car train which included many heavy weight pieces of private varnish past the smiling crowds.

The NYS&W track rehab program was in full swing this season with a major crosstie replacement program for the SB&NY . Some 35,000 crossties with attendant track surfacing and ballast dumping were accomplished between Cortland and Chenango Forks and Tully and Homer. The track work is part of the joint NYS&W/ NYSDOT program to bring the line up to passenger standards. Readers may recall news stories about this project during 2002, which led many to believe passenger services, were imminent.

Unfortunately, the project received a negative portrayal regarding the 2002 statements made about this track rehab program. The Syracuse Post Standard on October 17, 2004 ran a story regarding New York's "slush fund" spending and chose to run the story the day after 600 people came up from Binghamton on a train to Syracuse. No mention was made of the 35,000 crossties replaced with the money and more importantly, the impact and possibilities of this corridor to the Syracuse economic development agenda.

A reality of passenger railroad improvement projects is the response to spending public money on passenger rail systems. This like many things will become the challenge of passenger railroad advocacy in the years ahead as funding options at both the State and Federal levels continue to tighten. On the 150th anniversary of The SB&NY we are reminded that in railroading you have to keep looking forward even when you get some cinders in your eyes.

Ben Gottfried

Warning to Snowmobile operators and cross-country skiers...stay off the tracks. It can take a train up to two miles to stop and they do not have the ability to swerve to avoid collisions.

ESPA Goes to China

Barbara and I have just returned from 2-1/2 weeks in China. Although we spent most of our time aboard a chartered train riding and photographing the last main line steam operation in the world, we also took the opportunity to ride and observe regular trains.

The highlight was our farewell trip from Beijing to Hong Kong. Our train, known simply as T97, took 22 hours and 14 minutes to cover 2296 kilometers—(1435 miles). The T indicates a 100MPH air-conditioned express.

We arrived at Beijing's West Station to find a bright red C+C electric locomotive, No. 0067 on the point, sporting a 2004 builders plate. Our cars gleamed in glossy white with red and blue trim—the red white and blue scheme was attractive, yet seemed oddly out of place! Windows were large and spotlessly clean, and young attendants in starched uniforms stood at attention by each car.

We had booked a soft sleeper—a compartment with 4 beds, which we had all to ourselves as not all the compartments were occupied. The cost was nearly \$100 apiece, which deterred most Chinese. I had read about terrible crowding on Chinese trains, but saw no evidence of it on this or any other train we could see. We were in the one soft sleeper, next to the diner with 8 "hard" sleepers behind us—where most of the passengers were. The hard sleepers weren't so very hard, but did lack privacy. They contained dorm-like crosswise bunks, three high, off a corridor down one side of the car, with no door. Mattresses and bedding were provided. The highest bunks were near the ceiling but everyone seemed to be accommodated in the middle or lower beds.

Ahead of the diner were 4 "hard" coaches. The seats were clean and well upholstered, though with straight backs facing each other. Spacing was 3-2—a problem for the corpulent perhaps, but they seemed a rare species in China. Again not all seats were full and no car seemed crowded.

We started to move at 12:47 on the dot and settled in. The schedule indicated only 3 stops—and 6 hours to go before the first. The ride was smooth by U.S. standards, despite jointed rail at first (later welded). Joints were opposite each other rather than staggered as in the U.S. The right of way was impeccably maintained and we saw frequent small bands of men working with shovels, gravel forks and other hand tools. All stations were staffed, and in every one, no matter how large or small, a staff member stood at attention on a small dais out on the platform, often under a tiny roof. They wore smart black uniforms with red trim, and held a red and a green flag, neither of which I saw used. I guessed they were China's answer to our automated hotbox detectors.

We were going fast. I was unable to read the kilometer posts because of our speed, so could not estimate our pace—in fact sometimes I couldn't even catch the names of the stations we whizzed through. Our schedule called for a 64MPH start to stop average for the entire trip—which compares favorably to 60 MPH for the fastest trains between New York and Albany. If one subtracted the 20 minutes allowed for T-97's three stops, our overall speed would be 65MPH. Even Amtrak's finest Acela Express between Boston and Washington averages only 69MPH over a much shorter distance (457 mi.)

Frank Barry

(ESPA goes to China to be continued in the next edition)

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ESPA Responds (Cont'd from page 1)

ESPA recognizes that AMTRAK has provided rail service in the New York City – Niagara Falls “Empire Corridor” for the past 33 years at a very minimal expense to State taxpayers, and we urge DOT to carefully weigh the long-term benefits and costs of considering alternative operators. In addition, we urge careful review of the legal issues associated with an alternative operator using the privately owned freight railroad lines in the State.

* It is important that a single operator be responsible for all intercity passenger rail services across the State. Dividing responsibility between operators could make the service less user-friendly, increase costs and may result in the loss of some or all service outside the New York City – Albany corridor.

* DOT and AMTRAK should work as quickly as possible to resolve their differences, including a mutually acceptable settlement of the current litigation. We urge DOT to make the best use of the remaining program funding originally committed by the State, and all amounts received from AMTRAK, to undertake the most critical infrastructure improvements.

The traveling public and residents of New York State deserve a modern and reliable intercity passenger rail system, and ESPA strongly urges that both DOT and AMTRAK put these needs first and foremost in all future actions. New Yorkers who support both AMTRAK and DOT through our fares and taxes deserve much more, and they should not be made to suffer because of institutional and bureaucratic disagreements between the parties.

We encourage you to write ‘Letters to the Editor’ in support of these positions and help put pressure on both NYSDOT and Amtrak to resolve this matter as quickly as possible.

Bruce Becker

Ed Note: This press release generated articles in both the Albany and Schenectady paper.



Need a gift for that special person?

Give a gift of travel with a Amtrak Gift Certificate.

Send news items and “Letters to the Editor” to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 716-759-2315. e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. Deadline for material for Jan/Feb issue is Dec. 30, 2004. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.

Amtrak Seeks ESPA’s Input

Amtrak’s Empire District Superintendent, Philip Larson, continues to want to hear of your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Phil welcomes our input, as he strives to provide the best possible service on the Empire Corridor. Please send your written trip reports and comments, including specific dates, train numbers and employee names as appropriate to: Philip Larson, District Superintendent, Empire District, Amtrak, 525 East Street Rensselaer, NY 12144

Please also send a copy to Bruce Becker, so we can track trip experiences and follow up as necessary. Thanks for your help...

2005 ESPA Meeting Dates

Saturday, January 8, 2005 The Parker Inn, Schenectady, NY
11:30am – 4:00pm
Saturday, March 12, 2005 ESPA – NARP Region Two Annual
Meeting - Schenectady, NY
Holiday Inn 12:00n – 5:00pm

If you are interested in becoming more involved in ESPA, these meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how you can make a difference. ALL ESPA members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Bruce Becker, 716-741-6384 or bbecker@westwoodcc.cc if you need more information or are planning on attending a meeting.

ESPA MEMBERSHIP - NEW OR RENEWAL

The Empire State Passengers Association is a volunteer network of people working to improve intercity rail, mass transit and bus service in New York State.

- 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/money orders payable to ESPA and mail to ESPA c/o Andrew Cabal, P.O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209.

THE ESPA EXPRESS

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