



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

Vol. 17, No. 8 August, 1983

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Membership dues start at \$15/year (\$7.50 for those under 21 and over 65) of which \$4.00 is for the subscription to NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS NEWS, published monthly except in November, and GETTING THERE.

(No. 7 was mailed July 29)

RETURN REQUESTED

“Spirit” Expected to Die

Tragedy in California

Southern Pacific Railroad didn't want it—it did all it could to prevent it in the first place. California Governor George Deukmejian didn't want it either—he considered it “exotic” and impractical. Amtrak was indifferent to it, taking the attitude that it's California's responsibility. With sponsors like that, a train surely doesn't need any enemies! As one observer of American government once said, “Nobody wants it—except the People.”

And while the public is now riding the Los Angeles-Oakland-Sacramento “Spirit of California” in record numbers—July was the busiest month in the train's 21-month history—the train is expected to die Sep. 30, the result of Deukmejian's July 21 decision to veto further state matching funds for the 403(b) operation.

California-based Southern Pacific, whose \$10,000 corporate contribution to Deukmejian's 1982 campaign was one of the largest received (SP officers contributed individually as well), is undoubtedly pleased with the governor's (unprompted?) action.

Rail Travel News recently reported: “Insiders blame the Southern Pacific for the train's plight. At the time of Deukmejian's election, SP made large contributions to the Governor-elect, along with a letter outlining the cuts it wished made in the state's passenger rail program. The first of those cuts, the elimination of the Oxnard commuter trains, has already been made. The second, the destruction of the ‘Spirit of California,’ is about to take place.” In a more-perfect world, a train connecting the state capital with the two biggest population centers of the most-populous state in the Union would probably not be in such a fight for its life.

At this late hour, there appear to be only two avenues left for rescuing the “Spirit”—a legislative override of the governor's veto, or a decision by Amtrak to assume full responsibility for the train, perhaps as a Fri.-Sat.-Sun.-only operation. The latter seems unlikely—given Amtrak's sorry performance throughout this episode. Thus, the California Legislature appears to offer

(continued on page 3)

NEW LEASE ON LIFE



—Photo by Barry Williams

St. Louis Union Station, designed by Theodore Link and opened in 1894. Vacant since Amtrak's departure in Oct. 1978, the Romanesque Revival landmark is being redeveloped by The Rouse Company into a hotel-entertainment-retail center. The \$135 million project began in earnest July 21, when work started on a 550-room Omni Hotel (100 deluxe rooms in the main station building; the balance in a new structure to be built under the train shed). Rouse and Amtrak are presently negotiating on a site for a permanent Amtrak station, which will likely be a stub-end facility adjacent to the west side of Rouse's “St. Louis Station.”

MORE REAL TRAVEL FOR “REAL PEOPLE”

NBC-TV's “Real People” has taken another Amtrak trip, this time by special train May 22-25, Chicago-Dearborn, MI-Toledo-Cleveland-Niagara Falls-Boston-New York-Washington. The resulting shows will be a 90-minute season opener Sep. 14 and two 60-minute follow-ups to be broadcast Sep. 21 and 28.

AMFLEET II ORDER COMPLETED; LOOKING AHEAD

Amtrak took delivery of its 150th Amfleet II car June 20, thus completing the \$136.7 million car order placed with Budd in March 1980. The new cars—125 coaches and 25 cafe/lounges—are assigned to various eastern long-distance trains.

Thus, for the first time since it began ordering equipment, beginning with the SDP40 locomotive order in 1972, Amtrak has no new equipment on order. Of course, it continues to “acquire” Heritage equipment by rebuilding old rolling stock.

Looking to the future, Amtrak is planning a new generation of single-level long-distance equipment to replace the Heritage cars as they reach retirement. Amtrak is presently negotiating with prospective builders to construct car shells for 3 prototype cars—a diner and 2 sleepers. Amtrak hopes to receive the cars in 1985, put them through 2 years of testing and modification, and then place quantity orders about 1987. The orders would, in time, include sleepers, diners, lounges, coaches, and baggage cars.



Dallas Votes YES!

Alarmed by worsening highway congestion and the threat it poses to future growth, voters in Dallas and 13 suburbs approved a mass transit referendum on Aug. 13 which includes construction of a 160-mile regional light rail system—by far the largest light rail project in memory in the United States. America's love affair with the car—even in auto-oriented Texas—appears to have grown tired.

Light rail, in the form of trolleys, streetcars, and interurbans, once played a critical role in America's urban transportation earlier this century, but it was virtually exterminated during the '30s, '40s, and '50s due to public policies favoring autos, and to a criminal conspiracy perpetrated by auto, tire, and oil interests (July 1981 News). San Diego "reintroduced" light rail to Americans on a small scale when it opened a single, 16-mile trolley line in 1981, and several cities subsequently have adopted light rail for similar-sized applications.

But Dallas' plan, with its 14 rail lines and 160 route-miles, constitutes a full-scale comeback for light rail in America. It is likely to become a model for many other car-choked cities to copy.

The Aug. 13 referendum to create the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Authority involved 22 jurisdictions and was approved by voters in 14 of them, including the City of Dallas and all suburbs critical to the proposed rail network. The margin of passage was a respectable 58% to 42%. The jurisdictions voting in the affirmative represent 93% of regional taxing potential. The 3 major dissenters—Mesquite, Grand Prairie, and Duncanville—are at extremities of the planned rail lines, so planning will not be disrupted by their exclusion. There is a strong possibility that at least 2 of these will hold November referenda and join DART at that time.

The DART plan, which calls for major bus service expansion as well as construction of the rail system, will take 26 years and \$8.75 billion to complete, and will be funded primarily at the local level with a 1¢ sales tax to be levied in all DART jurisdictions.

The importance of the Dallas referendum was not lost on the highway lobby. Just days before the vote, the AAA-Southwest Motor Club bought large newspaper ads urging the defeat of DART. The ads contained mail-in coupons on which readers were asked to select responses indicating their views on DART—one response urged a new transit plan with "more buses of different sizes and expanded streets and highways." Evidently, most voters were unswayed by such 11th hour tactics.

The first visible results of the creation of DART will occur on Jan. 1, when the sales tax takes effect and bus fares drop from 70¢ to 50¢. (As was done to help sell MARTA to Atlanta, the Dallas transit plan called for a fare reduction.)

Expansion of Dallas-area bus service should begin next spring, and rail construction is likely to start in March 1985, following submission to the voters of a bond package. The entire rail system will be on the surface, including a downtown transit mall (an optional 3.4-mile subway may supplement the mall if funds permit), and lines will be built mostly along existing rail rights-of-way. One proposed "trolley" station will be located adjacent to the Dallas Amtrak station.

Dallas' decision to go with practical, low-cost light rail will result in rail service for the greatest number of people. Other cities would be wise to follow the Dallas example. ■

GETTING THERE

We appreciate your answers to our questions (May News), 71% said you would rather pay more than lose GT, but 89% said you would continue as members if GT died.

Please contact us if you can help us reach people likely to join because of GT (& Travelers' Advisory), who like train travel but not train politics—preferably in the form of mailing lists likely to respond to an appropriately oriented appeal. You may help save GT.

SAN DIEGO TROLLEY UPDATE

San Diego Trolley's 16-mile South Line (July 1981 News) is now all double-track, and its car fleet has grown from 14 to 24, with the recent completion of Phase 2. The \$35 million Phase 2 brings the original \$86 million light rail project to \$121 million—or \$7.5 million/mile.

San Diego's trolley service is costing less to operate than previous bus service—and more than a third of its riders have come from autos. According to *The Wall Street Journal* (Mar. 4), the line "is already recovering 82% of its operating costs from the fare box, and some months the figure has risen to 91%. . . . It uses an honor system for fare collection, and fare evasion has amounted to less than 1%. Portland, OR, plans to use the honor system, too."

Property is being acquired and engineering work started for the 17-mile East Line to El Cajon. Construction work could begin in a year.

AMTRAK'S 1984 FUNDING SET

On Aug. 15, President Reagan signed the FY 1984 Transportation Appropriations bill, which grants \$716.4 million to Amtrak—enough to run the existing system and to provide over \$60 million for capital needs.

Still needed: a reauthorization bill. Senate Commerce reported its version in April; House Commerce is expected to report its version and go to conference in late September.

New England Tragedy In The Making?

With 90% federal funding, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is proposing to build in downtown Boston an 8-lane, depressed freeway in place of the existing, narrower, elevated Central Artery. And although the alignment links Boston's two passenger train terminals, North Station and South Station, the plan, as proposed by Governor Michael Dukakis and Transportation Secretary Fred Salvucci, does not include the long-needed North-South Station rail connection, which could be an important public transport byproduct of a \$1-3 billion auto-oriented project that will take nearly a decade to build.

The governor also is proposing to build a third roadway tunnel under Boston Harbor, to provide better highway access to Logan International Airport.

The premature death of intercity rail passenger service in northern New England resulted largely from the absence of a direct rail link between North and South Stations. The need to change both trains and stations in Boston effectively cut New Hampshire and Maine trains off from a crucial share of their potential markets.

A rail connection would also benefit Boston's commuter rail system, increasing its relevance to the growing amount of intra-suburban travel. Philadelphia, which is scheduled to open in 1984 a \$400 million Reading Terminal-Penn Center Station tunnel built exclusively for commuter rail, provides an interesting contrast to Dukakis' plan which excludes a rail connection—a rail connection which would cost considerably less if built in conjunction with the depressed highway project.

Massachusetts must get federal law changed (via Surface Transp. Act Amendments bill or in Interstate cost estimate) in Sep. to get Interstate (90%) funding for these local roads—Stafford (R-VT) is the relevant Senate comm. chairman.

We think citizens should be outraged that 90% federal funding may be in prospect for a local-service freeway but not for a rail connection with major interstate value. We hope citizens who might otherwise be permanently deprived of passenger trains will lead the fight to include the rail connection. All members, especially those in NH, ME, and Boston suburbs: please call or write your legislators (U.S. House & Senate, Wash., DC 20515/20510) and to U.S. Transp. Secy. Elizabeth Dole (400 7th St., SW, Washington 20590).

Of equal importance, but possibly less likely to be resolved in our favor, is the decision to dig a new highway tunnel to the

airport instead of extending rail transit directly to the Logan terminals. NARP Director Roy G. Poulsen, a University of Rhode Island business professor, writes:

"The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the new tunnel envisages some '12,800 airport-oriented vehicle trips per day will be added to the highway network'—or in excess of 4,600,000 more trips per year. Since most of these trips will be business related (business travellers, air cargo, limos, taxis, car rentals, etc.), all tunnel fees, airport parking and other travel costs will be treated as a tax-deductible expense. The end result, thus, will mean that private citizens will end up paying for the new tunnel due to the fact that air and tunnel charges will be shifted forward via the prices charged for goods and services. . . . As one considers the whole grand plan for the air traveller it again becomes evident that rail passengers remain second (or third) class creatures as one compares the amenities for plane passengers at Logan and the access roads to Logan . . . with the complete lack of amenities for rail passengers at South Station. . ."

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY—NEW AUTO TRAIN

Amtrak's auto ferry—to be called Auto Train—begins Oct. 30, operating triweekly, with southbound departures from Lorton, VA, Sundays/Wednesdays/Fridays, and northbound departures from Sanford, FL, Tuesdays/Thursdays/Saturdays. Trains depart both terminals 4:30 PM and arrive destinations 9:30 AM. Daily operation should begin March 1, 1984.

Fares (one-way): \$200 for auto, \$130 coach (\$98 for children 2-11), extra \$100 for roomette or \$225 for bedroom.

Coach and first-class fares include buffet dinner and Continental breakfast, plus coffee & tea throughout trip. Full-length movies to be shown on tv monitors in diner after supper.

Train capacity: 497 passengers, 264 autos; consists to include coaches, sleepers, lounges, buffet cars, dome-coaches—and next year, full-length dome-lounges.

Auto Train is the first long-distance train added to Amtrak's system since "Desert Wind" in 1979, and the first rail/auto ferry in U.S. since Auto-Train Corp.'s last run May 1, 1981.

The Struggle For Atlantic City Trains

The prospect of competing rail passenger service into Atlantic City, New Jersey—now the nation's Number One travel destination—is apparently too hard to swallow for the intercity and charter bus companies which currently hold a monopoly on public transportation access there. While up to 1,000 buses per day clog Atlantic City's overcrowded streets and highways, the bus lobby has attacked the extension of Amtrak service from Philadelphia as unnecessary and subsidized competition to their "free enterprise" service.

The battle began in Washington when Rep. James J. Florio (D-NJ) attempted to provide \$30 million in federal funds to upgrade the ex-Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines between Philadelphia and the famous beach resort. The line has been without passenger service since 2 Lindenwold-Atlantic City New Jersey Transit commuter runs were suspended in June 1982 due to deteriorated track conditions. Florio's project encompasses track upgrading and restoration of a direct linkage to the Northeast Corridor at Frankford Jct., thus permitting through service from both New York City and Philadelphia. Amtrak would perform the track work and operate the trains.

After squabbles this spring in the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, and outright hostilities on the House floor later in the summer, opponents of the rail project succeeded in winning restrictions—including a \$20 million state matching requirement—aimed at killing it.

When it became apparent this summer that the State of New Jersey took the benefits of the project seriously enough to consider providing the \$20 million match, the bus industry shifted the anti-rail campaign to the state level with a two-pronged offensive. While bus lobbyists concentrated directly on Governor Thomas Kean (R) and key state legislators to discourage them from funding the project, an insidious propaganda campaign was started in

BUS LOBBY JUBILANT ON ATLANTIC CITY RESTRICTIONS

"In a major victory for the intercity bus industry, the House has put restrictions on the \$30 million authorized for rail service between Philadelphia and Atlantic City. New Jersey must provide a 40 percent match on the capital dollars . . . , not including any federal money the state may have available such as interstate transfer dollars; Amtrak must be able to pay from train revenues 80 percent of the short term avoidable costs of the first year of operation and 100 percent of such costs in succeeding years. It is generally agreed that these conditions, for which the ABA [American Bus Association] lobbied intensively, cannot be met. . . ."

—August 1983 Edition
Russell's Official Bus Guide

southern New Jersey, whipping up public hysteria and fear. Groups like RAGE—Residents Against Gamblers Express—and many local politicians demanded the rail plan be scuttled, questioning the safety risks, environmental impact, and even the morality of trains to the casino resort. "We would like to see you kill this," one on-line mayor told Gov. Kean publicly. "Let's put this \$30 million down as an ill-advised grant and give it back to the Federal Government." In seeking to prevent the mythical dangers and "spiritual evils" of Atlantic City trains, these citizens groups and local officials had become the unwitting pawns in a much larger struggle to keep passenger trains out of South Jersey.

Presently, the outcome of the Atlantic City struggle is still in doubt. The state must come up with its matching funds by early September to keep the project alive. At stake is South Jersey's transportation future. Without the Amtrak rehabilitation of the ex-PRSL, passenger trains may not return to the region for many years—if ever. While other proposals for all-new rail lines (e.g., bullet trains, PATCO rapid transit, etc.) have been put forward, they would cost hundreds of millions of dollars and require years to build. Only the Florio-Amtrak proposal offers the prospect of reasonable costs and acceptable construction time, as it employs an existing railroad.

We urge New Jersey NARP members to take a few minutes to write Gov. Kean at the State Capitol in Trenton, NJ 08625, to encourage him to provide the necessary state support for this project.

FRA OKAYS 120 MPH

On Apr. 5, Amtrak received Federal Railroad Administration approval to hike the maximum speed from 110 to 120 mph on parts of the Northeast Corridor between New York and Washington. The new speed applies on 51 track miles (about 26 of 224 routes miles), but Amtrak is likely to seek amendments later to upgrade additional segments. Amtrak Pres. Claytor envisions air-competitive 2½-hour NY-DC nonstop trains. At 120, the NEC is only 10 mph away from Japan's 130-mph-maximum Shinkansen bullet trains.

Tragedy in California (continued from page 1)

the only real hope.

The state Senate and Assembly each need a two-thirds majority to overrule the governor. Prospects look best in the Senate, where a vote is expected soon. If the Senate overrides by an impressive margin, chances will improve in the Assembly. Both houses are controlled by Democrats; Deukmejian is Republican.

Should the "Spirit" survive—and that's a big "if"—it will be because of the late-in-the-game ridership surge generated primarily by the improving economy and by local newspaper and radio promotion funded by the private citizens who make-up NARP and Citizens for Rail California (CRC).

When it became apparent earlier this year that the "Spirit's" financial sponsors, California DOT (Caltrans) and Amtrak, were simply going to sit around and watch the train expire, NARP and CRC launched a crash promotional effort to boost the train's ridership—and political constituency. Spearheading this campaign was Leif Lange of Davis, NARP Director and CRC Marketing Officer. Lange reports: "Funds for the Spirit marketing campaign, generated both from a nationwide NARP appeal and local Cali-

fornia sources, were initially used to place small newspaper advertisements in the various college newspapers along the Spirit route. These ads were specifically designed to promote the Spirit and contained fare, schedule, and destination information. Radio spots were purchased in June and July on stations in Santa Barbara, Oxnard, San Francisco and Chico. Two-week campaigns were run involving nine [radio] stations, including one Spanish-language station. Funds were also used for telegrams and letter-writing campaigns. While it is too early to tell what impact our efforts had, ridership on the Spirit in June increased 26% over June 1982, and July's ridership was the highest ever recorded in a single month on the train."

THANK YOU, MEMBERS!

Thank you, members, for your generous response to both our general fund drive early in the year and the special "Save the Spirit" appeal this summer. We wish we could thank each contributor personally—an impossibility with our small staff—but please know that your generosity is much appreciated.

Prior to undertaking the promotional campaign, NARP had urged Amtrak on several occasions to improve the "Spirit" to help the train attract additional riders and revenues. In letters of Jan. 28 and Feb 2, 1983, NARP President Jack Martin suggested various improvements to Amtrak President W. Graham Claytor Jr., including: replacement of Amfleet I coaches with more appropriate and comfortable Heritage coaches, addition of a slumbercoach econ-

"On the Spirit, the equipment picture is not bright. On the one hand, passengers can opt to sit up all night in an uncomfortable Amfleet I day coach, which was never intended to operate in overnight service. These Amfleet coaches are not particularly in a good state of repair; some seats still have unnecessary armrests, and others have been broken or missing leg rests and foot rests. On the other hand, passengers can choose to pay extremely high charges for conventional sleeping accommodations and expect only a mediocre level of service. . . ."

—Then-Caltrans Director Adriana Gianturco, in Nov. 22, 1982, letter to Graham Claytor

omy sleeper, institution of through-cars to/from San Diego, implementation of discounted one-way fares attractive to business travelers who must fly in one direction, and promotion of the train through advertising. Claytor rejected all of Martin's suggestions in a March 31 reply.

In replying to Martin's advertising suggestion, Claytor wrote: "Currently, Amtrak and the State have agreed to concentrate their advertising efforts separately on key targets. While Amtrak has agreed to concentrate its efforts on the San Diegans, the State has been advertising the Spirit of California and the San Joaquins locally to increase ridership. During FY82, Amtrak more than met its statutory obligation for the Spirit . . . by spending \$137,200 toward introductory and sustaining ads. This was more than [the statutory] 5 percent of the revenue generated over the same period. During the current fiscal year, we also intend to meet our statutory obligation, but at present the State has not submitted specific requests." [Ed.: Would one really expect a state to submit any such requests when its governor is so intent upon cancelling the train?]

"[The southbound 'Spirit'] arriving Los Angeles . . . Mar. 26th had run out of breakfast items with hot dogs and the last of the carrot cake being served as breakfast.

"With Easter holiday counts in the 200 passenger range, I wonder if an increased [food order] was placed on that train and why the employee in charge did not place an order for supplies to be loaded at Oakland?

"One of the three chair cars in this same consist was an 84-seat car while the 60-seat leg rest coaches were operating on the San Diegans."

—Travel agent and NARP Dir. Ed Von Nordeck, in Mar. 28 letter to Lynn Berberian, Amtrak LA Regional Director

NARP President Martin was clearly disappointed and frustrated in a June 9, 1983, letter to Claytor.

Dear Graham:

When Ross [Capon] and I met with you, [Amtrak VP—Transportation Marketing] Bob Gall and [VP—Passenger Service] Gene Eden on December 20, we expressed deep concern about the fate of the Spirit of California. Bob Gall responded that, in so many words, "The Spirit would be dealt with as a special case." As I noted in my February 2, 1983, letter to you we thought that was an attractive response to our concern but through February 2, we were unaware of any special action that had been taken in support of the Spirit.

In my February 2 . . . letter we set forth a number of suggestions that we felt would enhance the Spirit's chances for survival. These were in addition to suggestions that appeared in my January 28 . . . letter. Without exception, these suggestions were rejected by Amtrak in your March 31 . . . letter, although you did go to considerable trouble to explain Amtrak's position concerning a number of the suggestions. The one suggestion that was rejected by Amtrak but for which, in my opinion, no logical reason was given, was the suggestion that discounted one-way fares be offered. The reason given for rejecting the suggestion was "the risk of diluting revenue." As I stated in my January 28 letter, "any alleged revenue dilution would appear to be so miniscule as to be irrelevant." I have difficulty understanding how revenue can be diluted when a train is generating virtually no revenue because there are few passengers riding.

We suggested on January 28 that so far as we know, Amtrak has no valid experience-based reason to resist competitive discounted one-way fares and such a program "should be tried." Unfortunately benefits that may have been derived from such a program have escaped and with the coming of the summer travel season the train's ridership will most likely pick up even in the absence of such discounted fares. However, the continued months of low ridership and Amtrak's apparent refusal to take steps to remedy the situation now appear to be major reasons for the possible demise of the service.

At our Board meeting in Washington April 23, Bob Gall spoke at lunch. Near the end of his question and answer session he and I had the following exchange, reproduced from a tape of his speech and comments:

MARTIN: The group as a whole has addressed a lot of concerns about the Spirit of California. When Ross and I met with you and Graham and Gene Eden on December 20 someone said "We are going to treat the Spirit as a special case." . . . I have seen nothing as yet that would indicate that that special case treatment is being afforded. Specifically I have suggested to Graham, and I think it probably came to you, that . . . somebody give a look at one-way discounts. I don't understand how you can dilute revenue when nobody is on the train, but you might want to speak to whatever is in the works, if anything, on the Spirit.

GALL: Well, we are. We spoke about—on the Spirit of California—as recently as last Friday with some things to do and the Spirit is a problem because of the kinds of volume that it has. Now I think that the thing that I feel worst about is any time we have a situation or a train that's got some problems and that we do not do some things about it, but I don't want to disclose where we are at this particular stage—but we are looking at some things to do on the Spirit.

MARTIN: Will they be done in short order?

GALL: Yes, sir.

MARTIN: OK.

As of today, neither the December 20, 1982, commitment nor Mr. Gall's response to the second question I raised on April 23 have been fulfilled. Unfortunately we have watched Amtrak allow nearly six months to pass, six months in which the train's future has been increasingly jeopardized. Inactivity and unresponsiveness on the part of Amtrak seem clearly to our membership to be two of the primary reasons that the plight of the Spirit is as grave as it now appears.

You may recall that during 1982 NARP members contributed nearly \$15,000 that was used to do on-line advertising of the Cardinal. We have made a special appeal to our membership for support in an attempt to save the Spirit of California. While I may be taking slight literary license, it seems to me that our organization's commitment to the train's future exceeds that of Amtrak. Whether our concentrated activity will bring about positive results is unclear but if Amtrak continues on a policy of apparent indifference that certainly will not enhance the train's chances for survival.

Sincerely,
s/Jack
John R. Martin
President

POSTSCRIPT: In light of the current ridership surge and next summer's Olympic Games in Los Angeles and Democratic Convention in San Francisco, it's incomprehensible that the governor and Amtrak would let this train die now—a train which required 3 years of legal battling to obtain in the first place. ■