

News from the

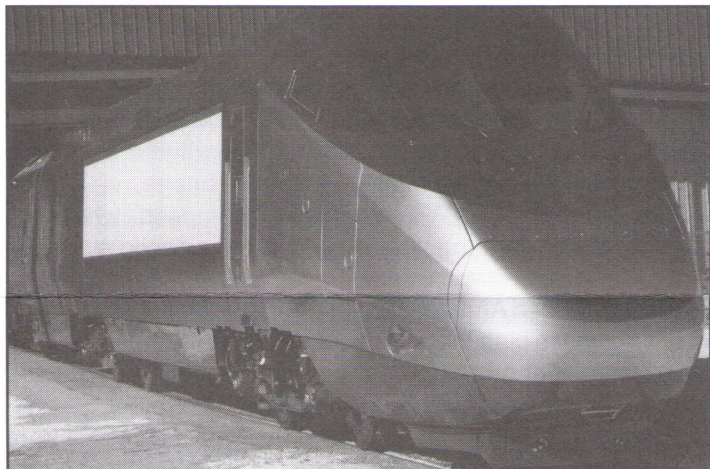
National Association of Railroad Passengers

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—Amtrak

The first Amtrak Acela high-speed train rolls out of the Bombardier plant in Barre, VT, in early March. It is now being tested at Pueblo, CO.

## Amtrak Funding Hearings Held

*"I'm impressed with what you [Amtrak] are doing. It's one thing to fund bad service; it's quite another to have quality service with friendly personnel... This subcommittee will do everything it can to provide Amtrak with the requested \$571 million."*

—Chairman Frank R. Wolf (R-VA) at his March 4 Amtrak hearing

*"Our overall assessment is that with strong leadership, intense management, and favorable economic conditions, it will be possible, albeit difficult, for Amtrak to become operationally self-sufficient by 2003. Nevertheless, even if Amtrak reaches operating self-sufficiency, it will require substantial and continuing capital funding to support the system as it currently exists."*

—Kenneth M. Mead, Inspector General, Department of Transportation, in March 4 and 10 testimony

Chairman Wolf played a key role in Amtrak's success in the appropriations process a year ago, and his comments this year were his most upbeat ever regarding Amtrak. He regularly rides Amtrak to visit his daughter in New York, and apparently has noticed an improvement in service quality.

Chairman Richard Shelby (R-AL), at his March 10 hearing, said, "I think I've been misunderstood on the subject of Amtrak." Referring to a widespread impression that "all I'm interested in is killing off the railroad," he said, "I want to set the record straight: I am not out to kill Amtrak. But what I see when I look at this railroad is a federal investment that is not paying off the way it could or should."

He argued Amtrak should devote more resources to

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## New Northeast Brand: Acela

Amtrak unveiled the new high-speed train set (on video) and new Northeast branding initiative at a special New York presentation for employees, reporters, and friends March 9. Under one Amtrak brand, "Acela" ("ah-cell-ah"), Northeast Corridor services will be restructured into three categories:

- **Acela Express**—Washington-Boston, with all-reserved first-class and business-class seats on 20 new high-speed train-sets, replacing Washington-New York Metroliners.

- **Acela Regional**—with reserved business-class and unreserved coach seats, using new or rebuilt locomotives and refurbished Amfleet cars, replacing today's NortheastDirect, Empire, and Keystone trains.

- **Acela Commuter**—with rebuilt locomotives and refurbished Amfleet coaches (unreserved seats), replacing New York-Philadelphia Clockers.

The name "Acela" may sound odd to many Amtrak supporters—the word "Amtrak" probably sounded funny in 1971. But Amtrak is convinced this branding program is needed to get non-train-users to try the train for the first time. For example, Amtrak's research shows that only 9% of Northeast Corridor travelers (all modes) have a strong awareness of the Metroliner. Clearly, there is room (and need) for growth.

The new services' success is vital to the survival of the entire network. Amtrak President George Warrington told Congressional appropriators this month that, "conservatively," high-speed rail will "bring in \$180 million in net incremental revenue annually by the end of 2002. This will be money that Amtrak uses to support the entire system."



Amtrak knows that first-time passengers won't come back if the service is not good. As part of the Acela effort, Amtrak says it will work in the following areas:

- **Equipment**—Besides 20 state-of-the-art, 150-mph train-sets for Acela Express, Amtrak has on order 15 high-horsepower electric locomotives, will rebuild AEM-7 locomotives, and will refurbish Amfleet cars (333 coaches, 52 cafe cars) for Acela Regional and Commuter. [NARP has asked Amtrak to look at deploying some new capacity outside the Northeast.] Amfleet cars will have at-seat electric outlets, more luggage space, redesigned restrooms, overhead message displays, and conference tables and phones in business class.

- **Reservations**—Amtrak promises faster telephone reservations. A test starts this summer with Amtrak agents offering concierge service—booking hotel rooms, rental cars, limousines. Since all Amtrak Regional trains will have

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# Appropriations Hearings

(from page 1)

"certain corridors, usually linking densely populated urban areas that are not more than 300 miles apart, where Amtrak can give the passenger car and the airlines a real run for their money...in terms of cost, travel time, frequency and quality of service, and reliability...Amtrak's current infrastructure is too widespread, and is not targeted to services that are economically justified."

Shelby clearly is skeptical about Amtrak's long-distance trains and used this metaphor: "If I manufactured bicycles, and I kept producing 'banana seat' bikes long after consumer preference had switched to mountain bikes and ten-speeds, I would not be making an economically justified business decision. I would lose money and perhaps my business."

[His analytical comments focused on loss-per-passenger-figures from a 1998 General Accounting Office report. As we noted in reviewing that report (June '98 News), such figures simply measure average trip length, not a route's economic performance. When routes are ranked by operating ratio—which reflect both costs and revenues—the Chicago-Los Angeles *Southwest Chief* is the 10th best route of all (4th best excluding state-supported trains).]

However, Shelby listened attentively to Amtrak's testimony—jointly presented by Chairman Tommy Thompson

(Governor of Wisconsin) and President/CEO George Warrington—and seemed impressed with the business decisions Amtrak has made to improve the bottom line (see "Five New Amtrak Deals," page 3).

Shelby also warned that, "if Chairman [Bud] Shuster's [R-PA] aviation bill becomes law, Federal Aviation Administration programs will be increased by \$5 billion and firewalled off from any appropriations adjustment. So there [wouldn't] be any room left under the discretionary budget caps in this transportation appropriations bill for Amtrak or the Coast Guard. Shelby was referring to Shuster's goal of taking aviation spending "off budget" while general funds continue to pay for 30% of air traffic-control system expenses. As we note in Budget Trouble (at left, below), problems are likely for non-highway, non-transit programs even without Shuster's aviation bill, which key senators strongly oppose.

Sen. Herb Kohl (D-WI) introduced Thompson, who said, "Our presence here together should stand as solid evidence that Amtrak is alive and well in the Midwest." Thompson vigorously defended Amtrak: "We're already \$11.2 million ahead of our business plan that will make us self-sufficient by 2003." He expressed strong disagreement with "doubting Thomases who think we're about to write Amtrak's last chapter."

Positive statements about Amtrak and rail also came from Senators Ben Nighthorse Campbell (R-CO), Kohl and Harry Reid (D-NV). Reid also said nice things about maglev.

Mead noted, "For a number of years, this railroad has been groveling for crumbs—that's one reason we haven't got a first-class service. They've been gradually disinvesting, [but] the Taxpayer Relief Act has been a big change." ■

## BUDGET TROUBLE

*"I hope we do not develop a budget that unreasonably gives priority to highways and transit over Amtrak, airports and the Coast Guard."*

—Sen. Herb Kohl (D-WI), during Secretary Slater's March 4 appearance before the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation

The early-March decision by Republican leaders to boost defense spending by about \$16 billion and to cut taxes—but not to lift the spending limits Congress approved in 1997—will make it hard to fund other programs, especially Amtrak, aviation and Coast Guard (the non-highway, non-transit transportation programs outside TEA-21's protective "firewalls").

TEA-21, enacted in 1998, provided big, "guaranteed" increases in highway and transit spending, but also reserved for highways gasoline-tax revenues in excess of levels assumed in the law. That "excess" now is expected to be \$1.5 billion a year. The Administration budget relies heavily on some of this excess to fund high-speed rail and to further increase transit spending (Feb. News).

There is strong, bipartisan support in Congress for leaving TEA-21 as is. However, it seems likely that one of two things must happen before we get a fiscal 2000 budget that does not decimate Amtrak, high-speed rail and many other programs: the caps will have to be lifted, or something like the Administration's excess-revenues plan adopted. To achieve this, the White House will need to hang tough with veto threats—perhaps actual vetoes—until reasonably balanced transportation funding is adopted.

## THANK YOU, SENATORS!

Forty-three Senators urged President Clinton to provide the full, authorized level of \$571 million for Amtrak in his fiscal 2000 budget, in a letter written January 13:

Alaska	Murkowski (R)	
Cal.	Feinstein (D)	Boxer (D)
Conn.	Dodd (D)	Lieberman (D)
Del.	Biden (D)	Roth (R)
Ga.	Cleland (D)	
Hawaii	Inouye (D)	
Ill.	Durbin (D)	
Ia.	Harkin (D)	
La.	Breaux (D)	Landrieu (D)
Me.	Collins (R)	Snowe (R)
Md.	Mikulski (D)	Sarbanes (D)
Mass.	Kennedy (D)	Kerry (D)
Mich.	Levin (D)	
Minn.	Wellstone (D)	
Mont.	Baucus (D)	
Nev.	Reid (D)	Bryan (D)
N.J.	Lautenberg (D)	Torricelli (D)
N.Y.	Moynihan (D)	Schumer (D)
N.Dak.	Conrad (D)	Dorgan (D)
Ohio	DeWine (R)	
Pa.	Specter (R)	Santorum (R)
R.I.	Chafee (R)	Reed (D)
S.C.	Hollings (D)	
Vt.	Jeffords (R)	Leahy (D)
Va.	Robb (D)	
Wash.	Murray (D)	
W.Va.	Rockefeller (D)	
Wis.	Feingold (D)	Kohl (D)

## Five New Amtrak Deals

Amtrak announced on January 20 five new business partnerships it says will generate over \$20 million in additional annual revenue initially, and \$28 million in long-term savings:

- **Commissaries**—Dobbs International Services, a leading airline caterer, will take over Amtrak's 11 commissaries in April. Amtrak expects better purchasing and management of food supplies, and savings of \$20 million over five years. Dobbs is a big-volume, lower cost buyer with a major presence in most large cities. Amtrak still will set menus and continue its on-board food preparation and serving practices (with Amtrak equipment and employees). Amtrak will provide alternate employment or compensation for displaced workers.

- **Parcel Service**—Amtrak will lease 40 RoadRailers and—in a partnership with Burlington Northern Santa Fe, United Parcel Service and four less-than-truckload carriers—provide Kansas City-Albuquerque shipment service on the *Southwest Chief*. Amtrak will get \$2.9 million in annual revenue.

- **Mail**—Amtrak's US Postal Service second-class mail business will rise \$15.2 million a year. Amtrak's RoadRailer mail fleet will rise to 166, with new routes from Springfield (MA) and Philadelphia to Los Angeles and Oakland.

- **Refrigerated Goods**—Amtrak has a new agreement with ExpressTrak, Inc., of Michigan, to refurbish eight refrigerated express cars for a pilot program. ExpressTrak will provide marketing, billing, car maintenance, and other services for markets that are expected to be Northeast/Florida-California.

- **Same-Day Packages**—This month, Amtrak was to start a commercial Premium Package Express service using "dressing rooms" on New York-Washington Metroliners. Dynamex will handle pick-up, delivery, sorting, and tracking. Pilot-program revenues are expected to be up to \$1 million in the rest of fiscal 1999.

Amtrak Board Chairman and Wisconsin Governor Tommy G. Thompson said, "Not only will these smart business decisions pay dividends toward Amtrak's bottom line this year, but each has the potential to expand significantly in the long term to help Amtrak achieve operating self-sufficiency." ■

## Acela Service

(from page 1)

reserved and unreserved space, confusion which Northeast-Direct trains are "reserved-only" will end.

- **Customer Service**—By mid-June, all 7,000 customer-contact employees nationwide are to have had 2-1/2 days of "service success" training in 35-person classes; all management employees in 100-person classes. Training for other employees will follow. The goal is service-quality consistency.

- **Stations**—Improvements are already underway at several major stations. New stations are under construction at Route 128 and planned at New London.

Specific fares and schedules were not announced, but Warrington told reporters that Acela Express New York-Washington fares would be about \$130-140, significantly below what he called the current \$200 air shuttle walk-up fare.

Amtrak also sees potential for spreading the expertise and knowledge it is getting from the Acela high-speed program as it works with states and other partners to improve corridors elsewhere in the U.S. ■

## NEW "ILLINOIS TERMINAL" IN CHAMPAIGN



—Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District

Amtrak moved into a new intermodal station in Champaign, IL, January 29. At 45 E. University Ave., it is across the street from the old Illinois Central station. It serves Amtrak's *Illini*, *City of New Orleans*, local buses (run by station owner Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District) and intercity buses (including the Indianapolis-Davenport Thruway bus, *Feb. News*). The Amtrak platform is in the right side of the photo, taken in mid-January. The station is called Illinois Terminal, recalling the former electric interurban railroad whose headquarters building is just to the west.

## GOVERNORS WANT TEA-21 FLEXIBILITY

On February 23, the National Governors Association approved a policy statement calling for flexibility for states to use some of their TEA-21 money on intercity passenger rail. Under present law, Vermont is the only state allowed to use federal gas-tax funding for intercity passenger rail. This lack of federal matching funds effectively penalizes states choosing to invest in rail. The governors also called on Congress to fully fund the \$35 million authorized for high-speed rail development (*Feb. News*, p. 2).

This timeline for Acela developments was released by Amtrak March 9:

**Early fall 1999**—Acela Express reservations and ticketing upgrades ready.

**Fall 1999**—New Haven-Boston electrification done; refurbishments at (current) New York Penn Station complete.

**Late 1999**—First new train-set begins phase-in of Acela Express service.

**January 2000**—New Route 128 (MA) station.

**Early 2000**—Providence station refurbishments complete.

**Summer 2000**—All Boston-Washington through service uses upgraded equipment; refurbishments done at Trenton, Baltimore, Wilmington.

**Early fall 2000**—All 20 new train-sets in service.

**October 2000**—Acela Express begins New York-Boston three-hour trip time.

**December 2000**—Reservations, ticketing upgrades complete.

**Late 2000**—New station at BWI, MD.

**Fall 2001**—All upgraded Acela Regional and Commuter equipment in place.

**Late 2002**—(tentative) New Penn Station at Farley Building, New York, complete.

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Three Rivers sleepers:** The coach-only (*ex-Broadway Limited*) gets one refurbished Heritage sleeper per train April 1. Fares will be about 30% less than other East Coast-Chicago trains and will include tray meals in the lounge car and access to Metropolitan Lounges.

**April 11 Schedule Changes:** To accommodate Metro-North track work, Amtrak's Empire Corridor schedules again will change early.

The track work will create a more reliable railroad, ultimately adding a third main track Beacon-Cold Spring—but there will be another season of slower New York-Albany times. There will be a 12th Albany train—leaving Albany 3:10 pm, New York 9:50 am (filling slot vacated by northbound *Adirondack*, which shifts to 7:50 am to reach Montreal in time for VIA connections). Maple Leaf leaves Toronto 45 minutes earlier (9:20 am), New York five minutes earlier.

The westbound *Lake Shore Limited* will run 2:05 earlier, leaving New York at 4:35 pm instead of 6:40 pm and Cleveland—unfortunately—at 5:04 am instead of 6:59 am. The main goal is to improve reliability of Chicago connections to Western trains and reduce the delays those trains experience waiting for a late *Lake Shore*. An existing corridor train moves from 4:40 pm to 4:30 pm, just ahead of the *Lake Shore*.

**Back Bay Bypass:** On Saturdays and Sundays, from May 16 at least through August, all Amtrak trains serving Providence and all MBTA Franklin and Attleboro trains will bypass Back Bay via the Dorchester Branch, to facilitate electrification work; alternate South Station-Back Bay service to be provided. MBTA trains add a stop at Fairmount. (Needham-line passengers transfer to Orange Line at Forest Hills.)

High-speed trains under current Amtrak plans will not serve Back Bay. Amtrak has agreed to review this decision at NARP's request.

## Improving Grade Crossings

According to the Federal Railroad Administration and Operation Lifesaver, highway-rail grade-crossing accidents fell 40% (5,715 to 3,446), and fatalities also fell 40% (698 to 422), 1990-98. Thousands of crossings have been closed. Still, the March 15 *City of New Orleans* tragedy at Bourbonnais, IL (just north of Kankakee), caused the first-ever Amtrak passenger fatalities (11) in a grade-crossing accident—and the first Amtrak passenger fatalities since 1993.

TEA-21 authorized (without guaranteeing) \$15 million a year in hazard-elimination work in designated high-speed corridors. Please cite this tragedy in urging legislators to approve \$30 million for fiscal 2000 (which includes the unspent 1999 money). This money might go toward improved devices like—

- **Median barriers**—Plastic or rubberized barriers to keep drivers from avoiding two-quadrant gates (gates over only one lane) are being tested between Charlotte and Greensboro, NC.

- **"Dragnets"**—Steel mesh nets suspended over the roadway and lowered when a train approaches, meant to block even trucks, are in use at three locations on the Chicago-St. Louis line. Illinois DOT plans a crash test in April or May (Sept. '95 News).

- **Sensors and signals**—Since July 1998, a crossing using four-quadrant gates, a camera, and sensors tied into the railroad's signal system's automatic train stop capabilities has been tested on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor in Connecticut (Dec. '98 News).

Certainly, barriers and cameras, for example, should become much more widespread very quickly.

To the news media's credit—and the public's benefit—much coverage acted as a massive public education campaign. It emphasized motorist caution and the fact that most trains take more than a mile to stop. NARP and Operation Lifesaver handled many media calls. (One can only imagine how much sharper the decline in grade-crossing accidents would be if Operation Lifesaver had the kind of budget that made Smokey the Bear famous.) NARP Executive Director Ross Capon was interviewed on CNN television March 16. ■



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