



NARP Testifies on Value of Amtrak “State of Good Repair”

Quinn: “Firm Commitment to a National System”

“Do not underestimate the significance of Gunn getting Amtrak to a ‘state of good repair.’ Amtrak has never been there before, which is why I do not say ‘getting Amtrak back to’ that state.”

That was the central message when National Association of Railroad Passengers Executive Director Ross B. Capon testified April 30 before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, chaired by Jack Quinn (R.-N.Y.).

Capon was referring to the five-year plan Amtrak unveiled April 25. He said

the combination of achieving ‘good repair’ and the many capital investments states and Amtrak have made in recent years means that the service Amtrak would provide under the plan would be far greater—and ridership far higher—than anything seen before.

“Just ask Illinois DOT—fresh from major track work on the Chicago-St. Louis line—what ridership would be like if Amtrak reliably dispatched trains, on schedules taking full advantage of the state’s recent track upgrade work. Or ask Michigan the same question about

Chicago-Detroit service, where one-third of the route already has a top speed of 90 mph, with 110 mph in the near future.”

Capon noted the need to develop a funding source that would supplement what passenger rail gets through the normal appropriations process. He said such supplemental funding could support further high speed rail development as well as capital projects in Amtrak’s plan.

In that regard, he urged adoption of RIDE-21 or a variation described briefly below and with greater detail in his written statement. RIDE-21 is the high speed

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Golden Spike for Sen. Patty Murray

One informed observer recently called it a “miracle” that Amtrak’s fiscal 2003 federal grant wound up at \$1.05 billion.

A big share of the credit goes to Sen. Patty Murray (D.-Wash.) She has fought the good fight to keep passenger rail alive, as chair and then ranking member on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation (now the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury and General Government).

She thus was a natural candidate to receive one of the two George Falcon

Golden Spike Awards that NARP usually presents in the spring.

The award says Murray “worked hard and successfully last summer to prevent a shutdown of Amtrak or of its individual routes and to provide a reasonable funding level for the current fiscal year. Thanks to her perseverance in a difficult situation, and also to her strong support for mass transit, Americans have transportation choices that are more important than ever and the foundation for the truly balanced transportation system” that so many want.

In accepting the award, Murray said, “It is a real honor to receive the...Award along with Chairman Bill Young.” [Young, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, was unable to be present; his award presentation will be covered in a future newsletter.]

Referring to some of the early winners of the award, she joked that, as a recipient, “I can finally say I have something in common with Debbie Reynolds, Walt Disney and Johnny Cash. My kids will be really impressed.”

Murray also credited another award winner (1992), former Rep. Al Swift (D.-Wash.), “a long-time champion for Amtrak

and for passenger rail. Without his getting into the fray many years ago, I wouldn’t have learned the proper lessons...”

“Last year...we nearly faced a shutdown of [Amtrak] in June, but through the very hard work of all of you, and the work of many others including Chairman Young, we were able to avoid that shutdown. When I was chair of the transportation appropriations subcommittee, I was proud that we were able to provide Amtrak with their full request of \$1.2 billion, and that even with the change in leadership on the committee, Amtrak was able to secure [\$1.05 billion] in the 2003 appropriations bill.

“This year...is going to be no easier than last year. Amtrak will be competing with a lot of other programs for scarce discretionary dollars, so I look forward to working with all of you at the National Association of Railroad Passengers, with David Gunn and his great team at Amtrak, with the states that rely on intercity passenger rail, and my colleagues in the Senate and House that have been there for us every time, to make sure that we have a safe, efficient and viable passenger rail system in this country.” ■



Sen. Patty Murray accepts the George Falcon Golden Spike Award from NARP President Alan M. Yorker, at May 1 Washington reception of the NARP Board of Directors.

REBUILDING ELECTRIC LOCOMOTIVES



—Amtrak

Amtrak's Bear, Del., shops have begun rebuilding the successful AEM7 electric locomotives "in kind"—that is, with the same capabilities, just with renewed components.

An earlier program to convert the units to direct-current traction motors has been dropped. Locomotive 915 (left) was the second overhaul of fiscal 2003.

RACE TO BONDS?

President Bush opposes a gas tax increase, so all transportation modes—not just passenger rail—are considering tax-credit bonds.

This is reflected in S.1109, the Build America Bonds Act, which Senators Jim Talent (R.-Mo.) and Ron Wyden (D.-Ore.) introduced May 22. It would provide \$50 billion for "roads, rail, transit, aviation, and water."

Testimony

(from page 1)

rail bill introduced last year by House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Don Young (R.-Alaska) and Ranking Democrat James Oberstar (Minn.). Labor-related issues prevented the bill from advancing last year.

The Railway Supply Institute proposes that Congress create a private, non-profit, federally chartered corporation that could issue up to \$50 billion in tax-credit bonds over a six-year period for all rail-related infrastructure not generally eligible for transportation trust fund expenditures. Eligible investments would include higher-speed passenger rail, Amtrak, freight, short lines, intermodal terminals, rail access to ports, an railroad relocation

projects. States would be required to provide a 20% to 30% non-federal contribution deposited into a sinking fund that over time would repay the principal of the bonds upon maturity.

Capon said eliminating all long-distance trains would leave a three-part balkanized "system" serving only 21 states. [This calculation assumes Texas and Oklahoma would lose service because the "short-distance" Oklahoma City-Fort Worth *Heartland Flyer* could not survive if the *Texas Eagle* were dropped.]

Capon promised that NARP would review any detailed Administration plan carefully when it arrives. The plan, however, is already described as ending federal operating grants after six years, while providing only 50% federal funding for capi-

tal investments. Capon said that sounded like a formula for eliminating all long-distance and most short-distance trains.

Several legislators noted the dire condition of their states' finances.

Quinn, in his opening statement, said, "I stand firm in my commitment to a national system. Simply eliminating the unprofitable long-distance trains will not fix all." Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D.-Ore.) said, "I don't think it solves anything."

There was near-unanimous support, among committee members who spoke, for federal funding for intercity passenger rail, but John Mica (R.-Fla.)—who specifically expressed support for nationwide service—joined the Bush Administration in criticizing the present organizational structure for delivering that service.

Rep. Howard Coble (R.-N.C.) commented, "Airports are rapidly becoming my least favorite place to be." The comments by Mica and Coble were notable as they are perhaps the subcommittee's two most vocal critics of Amtrak. ■

Capon's written testimony is at <www.narprail.org> (click on Resources, Legislative-Related Resources, Congressional testimony) and—along with other witnesses' statements—at <<http://www.house.gov/transportation/>> (on lower left side, under Site Map, and Subcommittees, click on "Railroads".)

Gunn's Plan and New Rolling Stock

"Now David Gunn...has issued a meticulous five-year plan with an \$8 billion price tag...Congress must make that commitment, with the understanding that it is only a start..."

"Though the administration has sought to shortchange Amtrak in the past, it claims to believe strongly in the long-term importance of intercity rail...The administration must own up to the fact that paying for the long-term rail agenda it claims as its own will cost a lot more money than it currently takes to subsidize Amtrak."

—*"Honesty About Amtrak,"*
New York Times editorial, May 28

A relatively small part of the plan involves rolling stock purchases, but the entire fleet would be remanufactured or overhauled. As Gunn explained in his May 23 talk at the National Press Club's Transportation Table (number of units from the plan itself), he proposes to:

- Replace 50-year-old switch engines.

"We don't need new switch engines; I'll settle for used ones under 25 years old." The plan envisions retiring 147 locomotives including 78 switchers (and units in work train service), and purchasing "25 switchers/work engines."

- Replace 50-year-old Heritage cars: "We could rebuild [them], but new purchases would be more economical."

Under the plan, 97 long-distance passenger cars (plus 36 baggage cars) would be retired and 75 new cars purchased.

- Retire all 64 Auto Train auto carrying cars and purchase 80. Gunn emphasized the importance of this.

• 14 new diesel multiple unit cars would permit more economical operations on lines such as Chicago-Milwaukee and New Haven-Springfield; a total of 46 corridor passenger cars would be retired.

- 786 corridor and 787 long-distance cars would be remanufactured or overhauled. (Overall, 811 would be remanufactured and 762 overhauled.) ■

ILLINOIS FUNDS PROPOSED

Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D.) on April 9 released a fiscal 2004 budget proposal with \$37 million for passenger rail. Of that, \$12 million is for operating support for current Amtrak services that get state support (Chicago to Carbondale, St. Louis, Quincy, Milwaukee), and \$25 million for further high-speed improvements on the Chicago-St. Louis line.

Travelers Take to the Rails

In the face of a very difficult economy, recent Amtrak ridership has been encouraging. Systemwide ridership was up 2.5% in April and 2.3% in March (over those months in 2002).

All three California corridors had record ridership in April, for the eighth

straight month (see table). The *Capitols* got a 12th weekday round-trip April 28. Long-distance rail travel also rose, though revenues are still down, somewhat.

The *Texas Eagle* has posted dramatic ridership increases (see table). Just as important are positive revenue trends, with

SELECTED RIDERSHIP CHANGES (March, April 2003 over same in 2002)

	March	April
Pacific Surfliner (San Diego-Los Angeles-Santa Barbara-San Luis Obispo)	+ 35.3%	+ 25.4%
San Joaquin (Bakersfield-Fresno-Oakland/Sacramento)	+ 20.8%	+ 12.3%
Capitols (Auburn-Sacramento-Oakland-San Jose)	+ 6.8%	+ 1.7%
Texas Eagle (Chicago-St. Louis-Dallas-San Antonio)	+ 39.4%	+ 37.2%
All Amtrak long-distance	+ 11.0%	+ 18.9%
Amtrak total	+ 2.3%	+ 2.5%
Airlines (domestic services) (enplanements)	- 5.5%	- 5.8%

—Amtrak, Air Transport Association

April revenues even with last year. The *Eagle* may be outperforming the rest of the long-distance network (except for Auto Train) due to better timekeeping and ongoing local awareness efforts. The Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization (TEMPO), for example, maintains a unique web site at <http://www.texaseagle.com>.

Springfield-New Haven: In late April, Amtrak increased overall frequency (while slightly reducing the number of trains with single-seat rides past New Haven; Apr. News).

Amtrak President David Gunn on May 16 told the National Press Club's Transportation Table this was done without extra crews and with just one added train set. He said that, in the third week of the new service, weekly revenues were up \$50,000, local ridership was up 1,000, and longer trips (to/from New York, Washington, etc.) also were up significantly.

The latter was particularly important because longer-trip fares had not been cut. Amtrak lowered fares for travel local to the New Haven-Springfield segment because those fares had risen high enough to drive off most business—even though the number of stops should make the train attractive for short trips. (For several years, Amtrak had raised fares by dollar rather than percentage increments, resulting in exorbitant increases for the shortest trips.) ■

Gordon Bowe Wins Burch Award

A Union Pacific conductor in Chicago commuter service won the tenth annual Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Safety Award. The Award, sponsored by the Burch family, goes to the individual judged to have done the most to enhance rail passenger safety. The award honors the memory of a victim of a 1991 passenger train derailment in South Carolina.

Bowe has done extensive volunteer work for Operation Lifesaver, the education and awareness program “dedicated to ending tragic collisions, fatalities and injuries at highway-rail grade crossings and on railroad rights of way.”

He has made over 600 presentations since 1996 to a wide variety of citizen and school audiences about safety on and around railroad property. That includes over 100 “station blitzes,” aimed at promoting passenger safety at Metra stations where commuters regularly were observed crossing tracks unsafely. Bowe is also a safety trainer for new Union Pacific commuter employees. He has worked in railroad jobs for over 25 years.

Bowe is the third Burch Award winner from this particular operation. Union



Union Pacific Conductor Gordon Bowe holds Burch Safety Award, with Michael Burch and his mother, Bette Burch, at NARP's Washington reception, May 1.

Pacific Locomotive Engineer Patrick Corcoran won in 1998, and the first award, in 1994, went to Wayne Solomon, then a Chicago and North Western engineer (before it was merged into UP).

Solomon now is Manager, Operating Practices for Union Pacific Commuter Operations, and accompanied Bowe to Washington for NARP's May 1 event. Bowe also was accompanied by his wife, Linda, and by David Grewe, Director of Transportation for Union Pacific Commuter Operations. ■

MORE ON THE TEXAS EAGLE

Amtrak finally has begun making full use of Superliner II transition cars. Until June 8, they were used only as crew cars, even though some were designed to have eight Standard Bedrooms available to the public. They are now being sold to passengers.

This decision aims to moderate a cost-driven capacity reduction on the *Texas Eagle*. If successful, the practice could expand to other routes, leading to meaningful sleeper capacity expansion systemwide.

The *Eagle* capacity reduction is partly related to a plan to lower costs significantly by running it with one locomotive instead of two. NARP has expressed concern to Amtrak about this in terms of locomotive reliability and urged that crews be especially well trained to restart units.

SAFETEA—Unsafe for Trains, Transit, Local Control?

Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta unveiled a six-year highway/transit bill May 14—SAFETEA (Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act). He noted the high annual costs of road crashes—nearly 43,000 deaths and an “economic impact of...\$230.6 billion.”

But SAFETEA hurts transit and does little for passenger rail. NARP's May 14 release said an aging population and more congestion means “the need for alternatives to driving will grow. A...policy giving highways a continuing strong edge...will not meet that...need [or] help reduce...highway accidents.

“The bill would not allow states to spend Highway Trust Fund money on intercity passenger rail projects if they so desire [“flexibility,” see box, below]...

“The bill sets 50% as the top federal share for new rail starts [so]...state and local officials will get far bigger federal matches when they build more roads than when they invest in new rail transit...

ON STATE “FLEXIBILITY”

The Senate three times has voted to let states spend gasoline-tax funds on intercity passenger rail—in 1991, 1995, and 1998. House leaders knocked it out during conference negotiations. In 1999 and 2000, one senator blocked a related bill, S.1144, from floor consideration.

“Moreover, mass transit ‘guaranteed’ funding—that is, trust fund money not dependent on the annual appropriations process—nominally rises just 3.3% (falling behind inflation), from \$36 billion under TEA-21 (fiscal 1998-2003) to \$37.2 billion under SAFETEA (fiscal 2004-2009).

“Also, the trust-funded (guaranteed) portion of the ‘New Starts’ program that is crucial for rail transit, drops from 80% to 18%, even as the definition of New Starts is watered down to include ‘Bus Rapid Transit.’”

[The lower levels of guaranteed funding mean transit's share of federal highway/transit funding could drop below the now-traditional 20%.]

Swift Act high speed state rail planning money drops to \$25 million a year.

SAFETEA authorizes a total \$247 billion (with \$239 billion guaranteed). Key House and Senate figures support \$375 billion and \$311 billion, respectively, so Congress might do a one- or two-year bill, perhaps spending at a high rate to force an early Highway Trust Fund crisis. ■

NARP's release is at <www.narprail.org> or send us an s.a.s.e. The Surface Transportation Policy Project has more on SAFETEA at <<http://www.transact.org/>>.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

International—Canadian National track work will cause suspension of service between East Lansing and Port Huron on all weekdays through August 15. Amtrak will run a bus bridge between the two points.

However, with legislation (HB4343; see Apr. News) bottled up in the state House Appropriations Committee, it's unclear that the *International* or *Pere Marquette* will run at all after June 30—despite the fact that adequate funding was approved for the next fiscal year (starting October 1).

The Transportation Committee approved the bill March 27, but rather than being considered by the full House, it was referred on April 2 to the Appropriations Committee—even

though no new funding is involved.

Checked baggage—Service was restored to Little Rock, Ark., May 23.

Amtrak Guest Rewards—Amtrak recently reduced from three to two weeks the advance-purchase requirement for redeeming Amtrak Guest Rewards points for Amtrak travel. This came after an inquiry from NARP. Longer advance requirements still apply when using points for purchases from other companies participating in the Guest Rewards program.

Thruways—Weekends through December 31, buses connect certain *Downeaster* trains at Portland with Freeport, Me. (major shopping area).

Transit—Miami Metrorail opened an extension from Okeechobee to Palmetto (1.4 mi.), May 30.



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