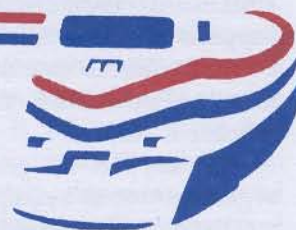


# TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF **TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST**



## From the Chairman's Pen...

IT'S ANNUAL MEETING TIME—THE 15th Annual Meeting to be exact! I would like to ask everyone who possibly can to register to attend this most special of meetings. We will have Amtrak's President and CEO David L. Gunn as our featured speaker. An exceptional speaker, Mr. Gunn has been described by some in Washington as "Amtrak's Last Chance." He has done remarkable things for Amtrak in a very short time, and is gradually gaining the kind of support in Congress that has not existed since Amtrak was formed.

This year's meeting will be held in the brand new addition to the Ballroom at the Marriott Hotel at Sable Oaks in South Portland. (See the notice on the last page). We'll have the Downeaster crew members, engineers, conductors, assistant conductors and food service attendants as our guests. They, after all, are a big part of the reason that the Downeaster is so popular. (One travel writer referred to our train as "...the train with a soul...") We will also be inviting the volunteer train hosts to join us for the evening.

You have been wonderfully supportive during these past 15 years, and it would be great to have a full house for this event. A large turnout would certainly make us all feel that the 15-year struggle has been worth the effort.

—WD

## **FORTY-SEVEN ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST, SIGN AGREEMENT TO PROMOTE INVESTMENT IN NATIONAL PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM**

IN JANUARY, A TOTAL OF 47 ORGANIZATIONS FROM ACROSS THE country signed the American Passenger Rail Agreement that advocates development and preservation of a national passenger rail system and calls on Congress and the Bush Administration to provide passenger rail with funding, policy development and oversight comparable to that given to highway, civil aviation, transit and waterway programs.

"The American people need diverse transportation choices," states the Agreement. "Passenger rail is a critical component of a modern, multi-modal transportation system and needs to have financial support, unified policy development and oversight similar to that afforded to our air, highway and mass-transit modes."

According to one of the signees, "We are committed to educating Congress and the Administration on the importance of passenger rail to our national transportation system, and to seeing an efficient, modern passenger rail system realized."

All transportation in the US, with the exception of intercity passenger rail, has available to it long-term programs of federal infrastructure development.

The agreement was signed by, among many others, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the civil engineering firm Parsons-Brinckerhoff, the States for Passenger Rail Coalition (representing 22 state DOTs) and groups ranging from the Boston-based National Corridors Initiative to the Washington Association of Railroad Passengers.

"Federal funding is the key," said Rick Harnish, president of the Midwest High Speed Rail Coalition. "All of the nation's transportation programs struggled for decades until they won long-term funding—highways in 1916, inland waterways in 1919, airports in 1946, and mass transit in 1975. Designing and building infrastructure is a long-term process that requires steady, predictable funding over a multi-year time frame. Annual congressional appropriations are too unpredictable to fund improvements we need

*continued on page 5*



## NARP SUPPORTS AMTRAK'S FY 2004 REQUEST

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS strongly supports Amtrak President and CEO David L. Gunn's request for \$1.8 billion in Fiscal 2004, which begins October 1, 2003.

"We support his goal of getting Amtrak's equipment and facilities back to a state of good repair," said Executive Director

Ross B. Capon. "And, because states have identified many improvements that go beyond simply fixing today's Amtrak, we also agree with Gunn that a program to provide federal matching funds to states for passenger rail projects is badly needed."

Amtrak said that, as of last June, one in 15 passenger cars was either wrecked or damaged and out of service. Gunn said that eight such cars were returned to service by the end of February 2003. He hopes to repair 20 such cars per year.

Amtrak's FY04 budget request includes \$45 million for acquisition of new diesel multiple unit trains (and shop improvements for those trains) that Gunn said would let Amtrak dramatically improve efficiency on lines such as Chicago-Milwaukee and New Haven-Springfield.

Amtrak released figures showing that, thanks primarily to lower costs

(including an \$11 million cost reduction for the Texas Eagle), almost all national network routes improved financial results in FY 2002. System-wide, 29 of 44 routes showed financial improvement from FY01 to FY02,



despite a huge drop in intercity travel in the first months after 9/11, and bad publicity for Amtrak from:

- (a) A couple of derailments (which sidelined cars and reduced capacity).
- (b) The cash crisis that nearly closed Amtrak in early July.
- (c) Problems with Acela Express starting August 12.

Gunn noted that the work force has been reduced by 600 since he arrived last May. Referring to the recently passed omnibus funding bill for the current fiscal year, he said surviving Fiscal 2003 should be doable but will leave Amtrak no cash reserves at the end of the fiscal year.

Capon concluded, "We understand that the present fiscal climate forces Amtrak to focus its energies on the existing system, but we continue to believe that expansion of quality service is what the American people want, as reflected in many polls, and we look forward to building on the solid foundation that Gunn is laying."

## GUNN SAYS AMTRAK WON'T EVER SUPPORT ITSELF

*Yale University, Feb. 4*— Amtrak won't ever earn enough money to support itself and needs a budget larger than what President Bush is proposing, David L. Gunn told a crowd. Amtrak's president and CEO said the company will never make a profit, mainly because of the high cost of maintaining railroad ties, bridges and other infrastructure.

Gunn spoke as part of a lecture series organized by Yale's Industrial Environmental Management Program.

According to Gunn, Amtrak needs \$1.2 billion to operate this year. "If they (members of Congress) ever pass a number like \$800 million, it's all over."

Bush's budget for the 2004 fiscal year includes \$900 million for Amtrak. Gunn said he isn't looking that far ahead. "Before I start arguing for '04, I want him (Bush) to tell me what I have for '03," Gunn said.

He also said Congress is unrealistic to insist that Amtrak become self-sustaining. "Maybe we are sustainable, because they tried to kill us for 30 years and we're still here," Gunn said. "We operate in a very hostile environment."

Amtrak came close to going under in July of last year. But a \$100 million loan from the federal DOT and a \$205 million Congressional appropriation bailed it out.

*(The editors would like to point out that Congress helped the airline industry, which was in trouble well before the attacks of September 11, with a \$15 BILLION bailout.)*

## SENATE VOTES \$1.2 BILLION FOR AMTRAK

*February 2* — THE US SENATE VOTED TO pass an amendment to a \$390 billion spending bill that would restore \$1.2 billion for Amtrak.

According to the Associated Press, "In one crack in their solidarity with Bush, Republicans joined Democrats in a voice vote to push subsidies for Amtrak to \$1.2 billion, \$374 million more than the bill had included."

Even Amtrak foe Senator John McCain reluctantly agreed to the measure.

*Washington, January 31* — The Surface Transportation Board authorized maximum train speeds of up to 79 mph for the Downeaster.

The panel issued a decision that orders Guilford Rail System to let Amtrak operate the train at that speed on Guilford-owned track. The Downeaster has been running at 60 mph since service began in Dec. 2001, but Amtrak argued it should be able to run at faster speeds.

The faster speed will allow the train to take seven to 15 minutes off the full run, which now takes two hours and 45 min-

### FED DECISION ALLOWS 79 MPH SPEEDS FOR DOWNEASTER

utes. Officials said the Downeaster could be running at 79 mph within two months.

Amtrak has contended that faster speeds are safe, but Guilford has maintained that 60 mph is the fastest that trains can travel on Guilford's 78 miles of track between Portland and Plaistow, NH.

The faster speed is important for the future success of the Downeaster, which exceeded passenger and revenue projections in its first year of operation.

—Associated Press



## MISSING RAIL LINK

*The following letter-to-the-editor was published in the Boston Globe. We applaud its wisdom.*

AS THE BIG DIG NEARS COMPLETION, NOW is the time to make completing the North-South rail link a priority.

Currently, any unsuspecting person attempting to take a train through Boston must collect his or her bags at one station, take two subway lines, and reboard a train on the opposite side of downtown. The North-South link would run beneath the Central Artery and include new stations below North and South stations and the Aquarium. Environmental assessments have begun, but the link seems perpetually delayed.

No other project, road or rail, would do as much to relieve traffic congestion. The link would facilitate travel throughout the region. Taking tens of thousands of cars off the road would ease congestion on freeways and in downtown, improving air quality. Crowding and commute time on the T would be reduced, and commuter trains would run more efficiently. The new Aquarium T stop could be a gateway to parks replacing the Central Artery.

—Julia Aukland,  
Mission Hill

## NORTH/SOUTH BIG DIG CONNECTION SUPPORTED BY CONGRESSMAN

US CONGRESSMAN STEPHEN LYNCH (Boston District 9) endorsed the importance of the North/South Rail Link Project at the January ceremony for the Big Dig tunnel connecting the Mass Pike to Logan.

After referring to the hard work done by Congressmen O'Neill and Moakley to get us to this point, he said the project to connect the north and south rail segments is the next one that needs federal funding. He indicated he will work with Senators Kennedy and Kerry and Congressman Markey to accomplish this. ■

## RIDE BUT DO NOT WATCH

"RAILFANS" ARE DRAWING POLICE attention these days. On a balmy afternoon in November, Richard Whitenight did what he often does on his days off: he went to a busy railroad junction in Fort Worth to watch trains roll by. But as he sat making notes about passing freight trains, two police cruisers approached.

Over the next five hours, Whitenight—who works for the police department—identified himself to the officers, the officers' supervisor, a detective from a terrorism task force, and the FBI. Finally he signed a form agreeing never to return to Tower 55.

Thousands, perhaps millions, of people around the world spend time observing and photographing railroad operations out of a love for trains. In general, railroads have encouraged these "railfans" as long as they do not trespass or interfere with operations. Railroads even hold contests to use railfan photos on calendars, and the Association of American Railroads has started a web site to encourage the hobby. But after the FBI announced it had credible reports that al Qaeda might be targeting railroads, a growing minority of railfans have been questioned and sometimes searched. A handful have even been threatened with arrest for pursuing a hobby they have embraced for years.

Law enforcement officers and train crews have been told to be on the lookout for suspicious characters asking detailed questions, taking notes and taking pictures. It appears the descriptions of "terrorist" and "railfan" are the same.

"Railfanning, by its very nature, is suspicious," said John Bromley, head of public relations at Union Pacific. "It in-

volves loitering, taking pictures and taking notes." Some railfans are railroaders themselves, some museum curators, professors and others with a link to railroading. Even though "train crews sort of know a railfan when they see one," as Bromley put it, Union Pacific has ordered them to report all activity that might be remotely suspicious. Railroad police or local police are then dispatched to check out the situation.

Norfolk Southern has taken similar steps, and Amtrak and other companies say they are not specifically targeting photographers but have asked crews to report suspicious activity.

Federal Railroad Administrator Alan Rutter says the railfan network could be a real value in spotting truly suspicious activity, noting that the government is already taking advantage of the intelligence-gathering abilities of railfans.

An internet web page, [Trainorders.com](http://Trainorders.com), suggests wearing a shirt with a locomotive on it or carrying railfan magazines to show police officers. "As crazy as it sounds, you need to educate the cops about our strange hobby," advised webmaster Todd Clark. He said that railroad police are familiar with the hobby but local police "think it bizarre that grown men would be out there taking pictures of trains." He suggested railfans be mellow when approached by police. At the same time, he said the FRA now understands that it must help law enforcement agencies understand railfans.

"We'll try to do what we can to let people know that railfans are out there," said Rutter.

—Don Phillips, *The Washington Post*

## ...DOWNEASTER AS COST-SHARING MODEL (continued from the last page)

proposing to have states pick up the operating loss on trains like the Downeaster that travel fewer than 500 miles.

In the end, taxpayers will pick up part of the tab because passenger trains cannot operate without subsidies.

Capon noted that taxpayers subsidize air travel by paying for airports and the FAA and they subsidize highway travel by building roads and paying for law enforcement — and Amtrak is no different. ■



FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT\* EDITORIAL

\*Foster's Daily Democrat serves Dover, Durham, and Exeter, New Hampshire.

# GOOD START UP, BUT MAINTAIN CAUTION

THE DOWNEASTER IS ENJOYING A FINANCIAL SUCCESS WE NEVER EXPECTED. The Portland to Boston passenger service has caught the imagination of travelers throughout the region.

So far, we have been wrong on the success of the Downeaster, but there is still the long term.

The Northern New England Rail Authority is proposing a new fare system—rate hikes on the popular routes and rate reductions on the less used routes, as well as a seasonal change in rates.

It sounds reasonable. The authority should do all it can to maximize income as it relates to costs.

The only thing we find a bit disconcerting is that the plan is modeled on that of the airlines. Most airlines are facing business nightmares. Unless the authority is looking at Southwest Airlines as a business model, we urge caution.

Just the same—good work in bringing the Downeaster this far so quickly.

(For more on Southwest Airlines and passenger rail, see FROM THE LAND OF OZ BACK TO KANSAS in our Around the States section.)

# PEOPLE OUT THERE WHO THINK ...

(SHHHHHH!!!)

The following is a mysterious e-mail message that came into your editors' hands through intelligence-gathering—one of those "railfans" up to old tricks? (See RIDE BUT DO NOT WATCH on page 3)

Question (from Sloan): "Amtrak is rebuked for not breaking even, while the airlines, which were in big trouble before 9/11, get treated with respect. Why the disconnect?"

Answer (from Gene): "Airlines contribute some very substantial funds to their favorite political candidates, something Amtrak does NOT do. Others have previously speculated that Congress members often get 'preferential treatment' from the airlines they fly as well.

"I don't know if that means they get a good seat, or if they get a preferential rate, or 'complimentary.' It might be interesting to see a report on which airlines gave how much to which members of Congress.

"Nothing illegal, but it IS influential."

MAINE, LIKE MOST STATES, IS IN BAD fiscal times. Unlike many states, its prospects for recovery are hampered by a creaking economy that never really booms but that goes bust like crazy.

Governor Baldacci and many legislators have expressed the belief that as the budget crisis is addressed, opportunities are created to make the tough but necessary changes that will make "Maine is on the Move" more than a nice alliteration. Where to begin?

As good a place might be the final report by the Task Force on Rail Transportation. Created by the last Legislature, the group was charged with assessing the state of rail and with recommending policies that emphasize rail's role in economic development.

The task force found all three modes of freight transportation deficient (highway, deficient, but rail especially so.) Despite assertions by transportation officials that a modern rail system can reduce traffic congestion, pollution emissions, highway maintenance and the cost of doing business, "funding and staff resources at the MDOT have been dwarfed by expenditures and resources dedicated to highway projects

# GOING FROM RAILS TO TRAILS TO, MAYBE, BACK TO RAILS

Excerpt of the Bangor Daily News  
Op Ed column  
by Bruce Kyle,  
Assistant Editorial Page Editor

and highway-related projects."

The task force makes 17 recommendations. The first three are of particular interest as broad public policy:

- (1) Maine has 1,100 miles of track; the state owns 300 of it. MDOT should continue to acquire abandoned railbeds to preserve the corridors.
- (2) On any state-owned railbed, MDOT should leave rails in place unless it can be determined that rail can be removed without negative impact — now or in the future — on the region's economic opportunities; final approval for track removal must be given by the Legislature's Transportation Committee.

(3) MDOT should prioritize maintenance and rehab of state-owned track based on economic potential.

WHY THEY ARE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST is that under the previous administration

(1) MDOT preserved railbeds mostly so they could be converted to hike and bike trails (the department has an entire office, with dedicated staff that works exclusively on bike transportation—no one works exclusively on freight rail).

(Here we must intervene to say that no one works on that other tool of economic development, passenger rail, either.)

(2) Maine has more than 450 miles of railbed converted to trail use, more than all but seven states—an indulgent use of valuable resources in a poor state and a substantial statewide public-policy decision made without any substantial public discussion.

(3) MDOT has a double standard on economic potential—it's considered when needed as a selling point for bond referendums, yet many specific projects proposed for some of the state's most depressed regions are evaluated only for

continued on page 5



## NEW HAMPSHIRE REPORT

EXETER REMAINS THE THIRD busiest stop on the Downeaster's run, with Boston being the first and Portland second. The Dover Transportation Center is now open daily Monday through Friday from 4:30 AM to 8:30 PM, and Saturdays and Sundays 7:30 AM to 8:30 PM. Travelers on both Amtrak and C&J Trailways buses are able to wait in comfort.

At both the Exeter and Dover stations Downeaster tickets can be purchased through the Quik Trak machine. In February, the Exeter Quik Trac sold 1032 tickets, the Dover 651. Total Quik Trac sales at both stations of \$78,382 for the month broke all records.

This month, three new Quik Trak machines will be operational at the following stops: Anderson (RTC) in Woburn, Massachusetts; Durham, New Hampshire (University of New Hampshire); and Wells, Maine. The Durham machine temporarily will be housed in the Whittemore Center at the university. ■

### ...FORTY-SEVEN ORGANIZATIONS IN AGREEMENT...

*continued from page 1*

to make passenger train service fast, frequent and reliable."

The agreement urges the FRA or a similar agency within the US DOT to "develop, fund and oversee" a new federal railroad-development policy, much as the Federal Aviation Administration plans and funds airport and air-traffic control improvements and the Federal Highway Administration develops the Interstate system.

The final statement calls upon Congress to provide full funding for Amtrak while a more advanced passenger rail system is being designed. ■

## NEW DOT COMMISSIONER FOR MAINE

GOVERNOR JOHN BALDACCI HAS NAMED DAVID COLE, a longtime advocate for regional business development, to head the state Department of Transportation. Former president and CEO of the Eastern Maine Development Corporation (EMDC) in Bangor, Cole will oversee the DOT's \$500 million annual budget.

"As president of EMDC, David has proven technical, managerial and leadership skills, and his experience in forging coalitions and partnerships will be essential in maintaining a safe, efficient and economical transportation system that also protects our environment," said the governor. He also said that Cole's experience in working with communities throughout Maine will be essential in reaching the goal of building a balanced transportation system.

Cole has spent most of his professional life with EMDC, joining as an economic development specialist in 1979, the same year he received a master's degree in public administration from the University of Maine.

In 1995 he was named president of the nonprofit organiza-



David Cole

tion, which is dedicated to business expansion and retention and has a \$7 million annual budget. As president, he has attracted out-of-state investments in the region, including international investments from companies in Germany, Switzerland and Japan. He has also served on the state Task Force of Rail Transportation, the Maine Port Authority, and the state DOT Regional Transportation Advisory Committee.

Cole said the cabinet post will provide opportunity to serve at the highest levels of government and guide transportation policy in a manner that will generate the greatest benefit for the entire state. He said the improvement of the state's economy is irrevocably linked with enhanced transportation options, particularly those linking the state with the Great Lakes corridor and the maritime provinces.

The new commissioner is the second Bangor-area resident to be named to Baldacci's cabinet. The other is Robert Murray of Bangor, the commissioner of the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation.

—A. J. Higgins,  
*Bangor Daily News*

### ...GOING FROM RAILS TO TRAILS... (continued from page 4)

their impact on existing businesses, with no consideration given to efficient transportation's potential to promote growth.

Restoring the Calais Branch all the way to Brewer would give the Port of Eastport a direct rail connection to the entire continent and perhaps give other natural-resource industries in the region a chance to grow. MDOT, however, wants to turn the middle 24-mile section into a bike path, which means that freight would have to cross into New Brunswick, go north to near Vanceboro and re-enter Maine.

MDOT has several other rail-to-trail projects in the works, and maybe that's why the task force specifically states that MDOT should suspend its plan to cut up the Calais Branch.

Hike and bike trails are nice; given the obvious need for healthier living to control health care costs, they may even be important. Some abandoned railbeds in Maine, such as the Eastern Railroad from Portland to Kittery, are well-suited for this conversion. The law behind this rail-to-trail movement—the 1983 National Trails System Act, enthusiastically supported by President Reagan—was well-intentioned. A highway-mad nation had let its rail corridors fall into disuse and railroads were going bankrupt.

The specific question asked by the task force, and that the Legislature must answer, is **whether these rails will ever be put back into the economy.**

John F. Kennedy once said, "When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity." A clever way to restate it is as follows: **From bad times better times can come.** ■



# MIDWEST PROGRESS

An incremental approach to high-speed rail began to take shape when a test train TOPPED 109 MPH ON A 16-MILE STRETCH IN DOWNSTATE ILLINOIS. This is the first section of track with the necessary signaling and grade crossing improvements for high-speed service. Eventually 123 miles of the Chicago-St. Louis corridor will be upgraded, with completion hoped for by next year.

# THE OK CORRAL, CONTINUED

After the infamous 1881 Gunfight at the OK Corral, Wyatt Earp and his injured brother scrambled aboard a train in near-by Benson. But before the train reached Tucson they learned one of the Tombstone gang members, Frank Stilwell, was waiting for them with bad thoughts. The Earps found him first and, before continuing on to California and Immortality, cancelled his last ticket.

In the 1990s the City of Tucson took ownership of the Southern Pacific station, which was built in 1907, 26 years after the Earp brothers passed through. Located in the center of town, walking distance to just about everything (though summer temps might stop a person from walking), it will become southern Arizona's first intermodal center. It will host Amtrak trains, commuter trains, intercity buses, and is across the street from the popular one-block-square Ronstadt city bus center, also a small hotel where John Dillinger and his gang once stayed.

# FROM THE LAND OF OZ BACK TO KANSAS

Some people make a big deal out of how low-cost low-fare airlines have survived the economic doldrums without federal bailouts. But the other side of the story (the unknown one) is that some airlines are being directly subsidized by local governments that want them in their cities in order to drive down fares of their competitors.

Local governments are sales reps for the airlines, twisting the arms of local businesses to commit to buying tickets on the new-entrant airline and guarantee the revenue regardless of what the airline's competitors do.

It is now routine for cities to offer deals that guarantee whatever subsidy is necessary to make sure the airline being wooed

*continued on the next page*

# Long Distance Passenger Trains: Myth and Reality

*This is the second installment of a report adapted from one written in 2002 by Daniel E. Kuhn for the Standing Committee on Rail Transportation (SCORT) of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials. The report is being reprinted in three installments. The first appeared in the Autumn 2002 issue of the TrainRider. The second installment:*

Did improved airline and highway infrastructure divert passengers (from trains)? YES. The once-lucrative business travel market disappeared from trains after the introduction of the Boeing 707 and the Douglas DC-8 in the late 1950s. And the Boeing 727 and the Douglas DC-9 brought jetliner service to smaller airports beginning in 1964, further eroding rail patronage.

An even bigger impact to long distance rail was the erosion of the end-point riders—those who rode a train for the full run. Improvements in air travel did not have as much impact on shorter distance ridership from one community to another within the long distance corridor.

# THE GREATEST HARM OF ALL WAS CAUSED BY THE FEDERALLY FUNDED INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM.

The family car fueled with cheap gasoline (about a dollar to fill up in 1950) replaced the Vista-Dome as a way to see the wonders of the west.

Who was still riding long distance trains in the late 1960s? The answer most often given is : 1) the elderly; 2) those with a fear of flying; 3) train buffs.

A closer look reveals that railroads were serving a cross section of travelers even as the number of trains and the quality of service declined dramatically. During the summer and over holidays, every long distance train was at or near capacity through the 1960s. Today, trains are filled on winter days when flights are canceled and highways labeled dangerous.

In 1929 there were 25,000 passenger

trains in the United States. By 1968, after the mail was removed, trains were reduced to just over 600. A year later the number stood at 450. Most government and rail industry experts projected that, aside from the Northeast Corridor, intercity passenger trains would cease to exist by 1975.

It is important to remember that while other modes did take many passengers off trains in the 1960s, the anti-passenger policies of most railroads drove an equal number away. Passenger complaints to the Interstate Commerce Commission (predecessor to today's Surface Transportation Board) and state regulatory agencies came in by the thousands.

In the end, the railroads abandoned passengers as much as passengers abandoned the railroads. Although the market for long distance and other intercity trains changed during the 1960s, it was a market that existed.

# RAILPAX/AMTRAK

In 1969 the Association of American Railroads began lobbying Congress to do something about the problem. The 1970 bankruptcy of the largest railroad and biggest passenger train operator, Penn Central, gave added urgency to calls for government support.

Many in Congress favored leaving trains in the hands of the individual railroads and reimbursing them for financial losses. But the Nixon administration as well as the railroads feared nationalization.

A separate entity, a quasi-governmental corporation dubbed Railpax, was put forth as the best solution to save trains. Unknown to most in Washington was the fact that Railpax was intended to be nothing more than a way for the government to remove money-losing trains from the private railroads in preparation for their total elimination. Railpax was never intended to survive for more than two or three years.

*— To be continued in the spring issue —*



## ... AROUND THE STATES

*continued from the preceding page*

makes a profit from serving that city. Add tax exemptions, free weather reports, Pentagon-funded research for aviation tech, and other hidden subsidies.

Wichita has paid AirTran Airways (formerly ValueJet) \$5.1 million to come to their airport. Southwest Airlines, whose chairman has boasted of eliminating potential competition from high-speed rail in Texas and decried federal funding of Amtrak, routinely expects payment in one form or another when his company serves a new city.

Local subsidies also magnify the picture of huge federal subsidies to the major airlines. Carriers that receive local funds can undercut the fares of other airlines, and those companies have to match the lower fares. That reduces their revenue, increases their losses, and ultimately increases the amount taxpayers have to pay to keep the major airlines afloat.

### SLEEPLESS IN SEATTLE

They're still trying to figure out what happened. Initiative 776, the "Right to Vote on Higher Vehicle Taxes Act" passed. The measure requires motor vehicle license tab fees to be \$30 a year and it also repeals provisions of state law that allows local governments to impose their own transportation taxes.

This means the future light rail project in Seattle may not be built. What is perplexing and will be tested in the courts is the provision that prohibits local governments from passing their own tax measures. Highways as well as rail and transit programs have taken a hit, and now the state legislature will use the results to justify cutting funds from all kinds of popular rail and highway projects.

But then, voters defeated Referendum 51, which would have raised the gas tax by 9 cents per gallon. Though mostly a gigantic highway construction bill, it included \$200 million for intercity rail, \$450 million for "public transportation," and \$84 million for passenger ferries. Washington is back to the drawing board.

A project that may pass was for \$1.75 billion to build the nation's first long-distance monorail. Supporters sold it with a core message that the city of Seattle is too narrow for more freeways or surface rail.

*continued this page*

## HIGH-SPEED RAIL PROponents LOOK TO NEW HAMPSHIRE FOR SUPPORT

Concord, NH— HIGH-SPEED RAIL BETWEEN Boston and Montreal once seemed like an extravagance. But promoters say increased traffic congestion in southern New Hampshire—and the highway widening designed to relieve it—make the rail program look more realistic.

The line would create 100 mph connections from Boston to Montreal through New Hampshire and Vermont, and rail advocates say it would relieve the area's growing traffic congestion and boost the economy along the entire route. Freight trains would also use the corridor.

According to NH Transportation Commissioner Carol Murray, it remains to be seen if local municipalities will support the idea. "High-speed rail works, and it's been demonstrated in other parts of the country that it works," she said. "The question is, do people want it coming through their community?"

A recent study found that commuters would rather drive if the train operates at 60 mph but take the train if it runs at 90 mph or more. They are willing to pay approximately 20 cents per mile, which would make a Concord/Boston round trip cost about \$24. Funding for the second phase of the study, to determine what improvements need to be made and establish a cost for them, remains uncertain.

On the federal level, the Senate has included about \$500,000 for the study to continue, the House has not included funding in its version. New Hampshire would have to match the federal funding with \$165,000, which might be difficult given the state's deficit, said Kelly Ayotte, a spokesperson for Governor Craig Benson.

"The governor loves rail, and he certainly supports the establishment of the Boston to Montreal railroad," said Ayotte. "He's dedicated to finding the money, but at this point he can't guarantee it because of the current budget crunch."

Nearly all the track along the 325 mile distance must be rebuilt with new rails, ties, drainage, ballast and signal systems. ■

## ... AROUND THE STATES

tunnels are too expensive, and they should build "over" the streets. When built, the monorail would connect Ballard, Interbay, Seattle Center, downtown, the sports stadiums and West Seattle by 2009, with funding coming from an annual tax on motor vehicles of \$140 per \$10,000 value.

What's next? Maglev?

(Your editor's advice: Go for it, Seattle—go!)

### SOUTHEAST HIGH-SPEED RAIL CORRIDOR ONE STEP CLOSER

The North Carolina DOT and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation have received federal approval on the designated Washington, DC, to Charlotte high-speed rail route. They also received the green light to proceed to the second round, which will mean more detailed environmental and engineering studies.

In addition, each state will continue to work on infrastructure improvements to benefit high-speed rail and improve existing passenger and freight rail services. They will also begin planning for train station development and new equipment.

### NEW PENN STATION

New York City's plan to recreate its once grand Pennsylvania Station as the "the stairs to heaven" got back on track when the US Postal Service agreed to a \$230 million pricetag for its magnificent post office across the street. The building, with imposing Corinthian columns, is a landmark known for the inscription on its facade, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night..."

"In the old times, you arrived at Pennsylvania Station... and went up the stairs to heaven. Make that Manhattan. And we shall have it again," said former US Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who is head of the agency overseeing the transformation of the former post office. He will direct the \$800 million project to replace the current terminal, which has long been derided as cramped and ugly. The original Penn Station, which was destroyed in 1963, was viewed by architects as a jewel from the golden age. Its waiting room was 150 feet high and sheathed in marble. ■



## AMTRAK DOWNEASTER COULD SERVE AS COST-SHARING MODEL

IT RACED PAST REVENUE PROJECTIONS AND STREAKED TO SECOND PLACE ON TIME PERFORMANCE, Amtrak's Downeaster not only has proven to be a success in its first year but could serve as a national model as Amtrak seeks to have states share the cost of passenger train service on shorter runs.

The Boston-to-Portland train operates without funding from Amtrak. Instead, Maine is subsidizing the train with a combination of state taxpayer dollars and a federal grant that ends after three years.

"The Downeaster is a service that operates with financial assistance from the state of Maine," said Dan Stessel, an Amtrak spokesman. "We are proposing that to be a model for state corridor services nationwide."

The Downeaster's success came during a difficult year for Amtrak, which is facing funding shortfalls and equipment shortages, in addition to which overall travel was down after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Against this backdrop, the Downeaster came within 1 percent of its first-year rider-

ship projections and ranked second among trains for being on time. More importantly, it exceeded revenue projections by roughly 44 percent because so many people chose to ride the train for its entire length.

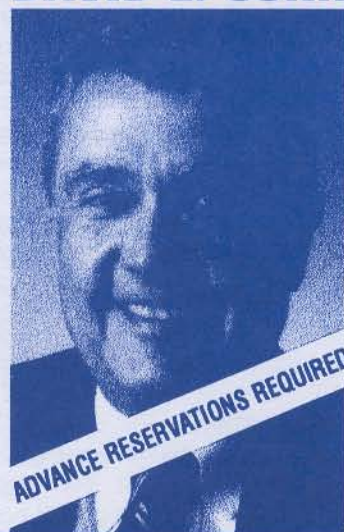
"There were know-it-alls up there, including a member of the Amtrak Reform Council, who predicted it would fail," said Ross Capon, executive director of the National Association of Rail Passengers. He added that the Downeaster surpassed expectations even though it started up with an authorized maximum speed of only 59 mph. Despite the low speed, people continued to ride the train even after the initial euphoria wore off.

The first year success doesn't mean the train is self-sustaining. It has received \$400,000 from the state and another \$1.6 million in federal money obtained by the state. Together, the \$2 million accounts for 38 percent of the original budget projection for the first year of operation.

After three years, the state will renegotiate its contract with Amtrak, which is

—continued on page 3

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