

TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF **TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST**



From the Chairman's Pen...

BY THE SKIN OF OUR TEETH!

Our work is far from done. We received a panic call late on Wednesday (June 11th) that the State of Maine's \$75 million Transportation Bond—proposed for the November Ballot—was in trouble. Key members of the legislature were suggesting eliminating the \$5 million slated for the Freeport/Brunswick/Auburn/Lewiston rehabilitation. Since there was obviously no time to organize our membership "telephone tree," we began contacting TNE Board members and Downeaster Train Hosts to make calls immediately to the Maine Senate and the House. Friday the 13th, on my way back from a TV session in Bangor (on extending Amtrak service to Bangor), I stopped at the Capitol in Augusta to check on the status of the bond. I was told that on Thursday (the 12th), the proposed \$5 million had been reduced to \$4 million, then \$3.5 million, then \$2.5 million with no end in sight. And then the phones of the senators and representatives began to ring. At the moment we're back to \$3.5 million and hoping for \$4 million to leverage the \$15.8 million in federal funds. We're not out of the woods yet! My point? Please make sure we have your correct phone number and email address. We promise not to ever sell the list or even show the list to others, and we would only use it to contact you when we truly need your help in a crisis. **Your input counts!** —WD

RECORD CROWD ATTENDS ANNUAL MEETING

Ross Capon, executive director of the National Association of Rail Passengers, and David Gunn, president and CEO of Amtrak, addressed a full house at Portland's Marriott Hotel for the 15th annual meeting of TrainRiders/Northeast.

As keynote speaker, Mr. Gunn noted that he had almost completed his first year at Amtrak. "As most of you know," he said, "what I found when I arrived was a company only a few weeks away from insolvency. All my time and effort during those early weeks was consumed by trying to get a loan so that we could keep going."

He now thinks Amtrak will make it through the year without running out of money. "My immediate goals were to maintain solvency, begin an incremental program of critical capital investment, create a lean organization with tight financial controls and build a zero-based budget. Overarching all of this was and is the need to rebuild our credibility, and I have taken steps to end the spin and happy talk press releases so that our actions speak for us. However, our biggest failure has been our inability to restore liquidity to the company."

"The problems we have appear to some to be overwhelming, but I think many of them can be overcome. There are no silver bullets that will fix the problems. The solutions require a consistent multi-year funding plan, patience and small steps."

Gunn said the only way to bring discipline to a large organization like Amtrak is through a tight organization, competent managers, and the budget process. His process for managing includes five basic tools: (1) an organization with minimum layers, individual accountability for specific functional areas, and a chain of command; (2) clear goals and objectives; (3) an operating budget based on monthly staffing levels; (4) a detailed multi-year capital budget; and (5) monthly financial and performance reporting for specific responsibility centers and projects.

He listed six myths about Amtrak that were first presented in his testimony before a Congressional committee the day before our annual meeting.

MYTH 1: AMTRAK CAN BE PROFITABLE. No national rail system in the world is profitable. Without public subsidy, there will be no passenger rail system in the United States.

MYTH 2: THE PRIVATE SECTOR IS DYING TO TAKE OVER OUR SERVICES. Remember why Amtrak was formed. It is what's left of a once privately run enterprise.

MYTH 3: LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS ARE THE PROBLEM. If you eliminate every long-distance train, your avoidable costs would decrease about \$70 million a year—after about a year of making labor protection costs. Focusing

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IT'S ABOUT TIME

THE DOWNEASTER HAS BEEN CLEARED TO travel at up to 79 mph. Held to a top speed of 59 mph since it began service in December of 2001 by objections from Guilford Rail System, the train that has won everybody's heart has now received a final decision from the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) that, "subject to the track safety requirements of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Guilford must allow the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) to operate over Guilford's line at speeds of up to 79 mph."

The decision is the most recent the STB has rendered in favor of the higher speed. Guilford objected by filing a petition on February 20 requesting that the board "clarify" the earlier decision.

The STB further declares, "Amtrak has completed the line rehabilitation according

to the terms set out in Weight of Rail I (decision issued October 22, 1999). Therefore, it has complied with our conditions, and our analysis of this matter is complete. Accordingly, subject to FRA's safety jurisdiction, Guilford must permit

Amtrak to operate over the line at issue at FRA Class 4 speeds.

"Finally, we stated that as with other rail matters, we would expect that FRA will maintain oversight to the extent safety issues are concerned. Accordingly, we see no need for clarification.

It is ordered: 1) Guilford's petition is denied. 2) This decision is effective on its date of service (March 24, 2003)."

Guilford has appealed this most recent STB decision, but the decision remains effective while that appeal is pending.

Subject to further negotiations, look for 79 mph speeds by July 15, and lots of cheering from the traveling public. ■

**We
could
see
79 mph
by
July 15**

PARTY, PARTY

THE DOWNEASTER'S DECEMBER 2001 inaugural party trip was only the first in its history. Another has now occurred—the first annual party to honor train hosts.

On May 15 an energetic group rolled out of Portland in a special coach on board the regularly scheduled 8:45 AM. Unlike the above trip, which had waiters working the aisles plying guests with platters of delicacies, the May breakfast was served buffet style, with graduates from different classes being urged to introduce themselves to their compatriots. They did and how.

Just before the train left Boston for the return trip, everyone posed for a group photo. The covered platform was dim, but the smiles of the hosts and the shining logo on the side of the engine—we tried not to stand in front of it—provided all the light anyone needed. (Your editor got to join the festivities for purposes of filing a report.)

Directors of Chambers and other spokespersons provided the lowdown on the delights of their respective territories, and we also learned about the Downeaster's top rating on Amtrak's Customer Service Index as well as word of mouth enthusiasm

about the host program.

We found out that on Mother's Day, host David Watkins bought six dozen carnations which he handed out to all the mothers and grandmothers who rode the train. We were shown the handsome LL Bean boat bag that, imprinted with "Train Host" in addition to the logo of the famous Maine emporium, hosts will henceforth carry. In the upbeat spirit of the day, many of the esteemed speakers played cabin attendant by passing out box lunches and making trash runs with plastic bags. Guests also helped, and a good time was had by all. ■

TRACK REHAB

MDOT COMMISSIONER DAVID COLE LISTED the following in his April 7 draft testimony: \$5 million in state bond funds will match \$15.8 million in federal funds and \$.4 million in local funds for rail r-o-w. This will permit rehabilitation of tracks and infrastructure to Brunswick, and expansion of rail passenger service from Portland west to Lewiston-Auburn and north to Freeport, Brunswick and Rockland. Service is scheduled to begin in 2006. ■

GUNN UNVEILS AMTRAK'S FIVE- YEAR PLAN

AMTRAK'S NEW FIVE-YEAR UPGRADE plan includes retaining most of the carrier's long-distance trains and keeps its high-speed service at existing levels.

Amtrak president David Gunn has already shut down two long-distance runs. He cut the Pittsburgh-Chicago segment of the *Pennsylvanian* and the *Kentucky Cardinal*.



Gunn wants to buy fourteen self-propelled diesel cars to run between New Haven, CT, and Springfield, MA, and on the Chicago-Milwaukee route. He also wants to replace 75 50-year-old cars that would cost more to overhaul than

the cost of new cars.

Currently, only 81% of Amtrak's passenger cars are serviceable. Rebuilding old cars will make 90% of them available in five years, Gunn said.

Amtrak also needs to install 162 miles of concrete ties and replace 270 miles of rail on the 1,900 miles of right of way it owns in the Northeast. Station platforms, roofs, and escalators need repair. And overhead electric catenary power wire, strung in the 1930s between Penn Station and New Rochelle, NY, needs replacement.

To do this and more, Gunn said Amtrak needs twice the \$900 million President Bush wants to spend in 2004 to keep the trains running. Gunn's plan calls for about \$2 billion annually from the government through at least 2008. Amtrak has averaged \$1.5 billion in government money in each of the past five years, including federal subsidies and new debt, he said.

A federal Transportation Department spokesman said Gunn's plan contains unrealistic cost estimates for buying new rolling stock and assumes that Acela's service troubles will go away.

—*Trains Magazine*, May 2, 2003

FLORIDA RAIL ADVOCATES DEFEAT GOVERNOR

A PLAN TO BUILD A EUROPEAN-STYLE BULLET TRAIN linking Miami to Tampa has survived in an unusual political defeat for Governor Jeb Bush, who had argued the train was costlier than voters realized when they approved it in 2000.

The vote in the state House means the first leg of the rail line could be built within five years.

Bush made the axing of the train, along with the repeal of a cap on public school class sizes approved by voters last year, a centerpiece of his State of the State speech, arguing that the two constitutional amendments are unreasonable in tough fiscal times. He hoped to send the measures back to the voters in a special election this year or in November 2004.

GOP strategists were confident, but with a 61-57 vote the train stayed on track.

"We're disappointed and had hoped the voters would have had a chance to readdress this costly amendment," said Bush spokeswoman Alia Faraj. "The costs of the class-size amendment and high-speed rail have a huge fiscal impact on our state."

The vote was surprising not just because it was a loss for a man widely viewed as the most powerful governor in Florida history, but also because of the margin. To put the issue on the 2004 ballot, Bush needed a three-fifths vote, or 72—a seemingly easy task, considering his Republican party's 81-seat majority out of 120 House members.

A broad coalition of Democrats and Republicans from the affected urban regions joined to save the fast train.

"You have a lot of members who took their oath of office to uphold the Constitution very seriously," said Republican state Senator Paula Dockery, the wife of C.C. "Doc" Dockery, a retired insurance executive who spent millions to put the train on the 2000 ballot and in the Constitution.

Bush has argued that the class-size cap and the bullet train, both of which would cost billions of dollars, are luxuries that the cash-strapped state cannot afford.

The train's first leg from Tampa to Orlando is scheduled to be constructed within the next five years at a cost as high as \$2.7 billion, with the potential for massive federal funding. Backers say the state's share of the costs would be a pittance compared with the price of building more roads. ■

THE GROUND WILL BE DUG to distraction. The bulldozers and backhoes will sift through the centuries. The budget, NOW A PALTRY BILLION DOLLARS, will soar. The downtown and Theater District businesses will be in an uproar, the new "Y" uprooted, the subsoil shaken, the Common's greenery unsettled.

Traffic? Don't even talk about the congestion in sight for the eight-year (so far) project. If visions of THE BIG DIG dance in your head, you will understand why folks are describing the newly launched MBTA boondoggle "THE LITTLE DIG."

Even as Boston dismantles the Erector Set landscape of the Central Artery project that has beset the city for what feels like a lifetime, the MBTA is launching a pricey, havoc-making project. Just as the Big Diggers boasted of an end in sight, the T put its first \$20 million down to dig a tunnel turnaround to connect the Silver Line bus and South Station underground.

The project will dig under, around, over, and in between the streets and sites of Downtown, from the tourist booth on the Common to the New England Medical Center. The T's announcement of the first \$20 million for this project in the midst of budget cuts and fare raises—along with municipal cutbacks on more solid transportation projects—is a sign of transportation and city planning run amok.

In theory, the "Little Dig" is the third stage of a project to connect the Washington Street Corridor busline to South Station by creating an underground turnaround for its 40-foot buses. To do so the T says it will require "civil, structural, mechanical, fire and life safety, signals, traction power and electrical engineering as well as environmental review and permitting" (are your calculators running?) not to mention traffic and parking planning, permitting, analysis, "temporary and permanent

ENDLESS
WAYS
TO
THROW
AWAY
MONEY
JANE HOLTZ KAY

land takings... as well as tenant location." Sound familiar?

But why clunky buses when the Green Line could do it better on slim rail lines and take a fraction of the space? It is better economically.

Why are we propping more routes for the Silver Line buses when they have already failed in their mandate to ease disinvestment and discrimination in Roxbury? With cars parked

in the buses' so-called speed lanes, the trip has slowed to carriage pace; with interior aisles too narrow for a baby carriage, passenger comfort is shorted; and with a 40-foot exterior too long for flexibility, compact mobility underground is denied.

The tunnel designed for this cumbersome bus turnaround would connect no one to no place and do it expensively. It would make a muck of city surfaces. Among its disturbances: a digout of Boston Common, excavations disrupting the Theater District, and a land grab that destroys the new \$16 million Chinatown YMCA.

All this while the state is scrimping on services, shorting other valid transportation choices, and heightening construction fatigue. This senseless project not only demonstrates a myopic T management but also one blind to the nature of the region it serves. Boston is a first-class rail city, a streetcar city shaped and sustained by rail. Urban rail is the cheapest, most efficient way to go.

Instead of promoting new city rail systems that cost less and attract more riders, T bosses send us to the back of the bus. Instead of joining Senator Edward Kennedy and Congressman Stephen Lynch in supporting a North-South Rail Link underground—allowing Bostonians to travel north to south, and from Maine to Florida—they ignore this better, cheaper underground rail with its potential to lure business backers and make a profit.

We have lived through a decade and a half in the heaps of an auto-age project. Let's not let this one bury us. ■

Adapted from an article in the *Boston Globe*, March 31. The author has also written two books: *Lost Boston and Asphalt Nation: How The Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Get It Back*.

THE AMERICAN JOURNAL*

*A weekly newspaper serving Westbrook, S. Portland, Gorham, Windham, Scarborough, Standish, and Cape Elizabeth, Maine

RIDING THE TRAIN (To Sebago Lake)

WHAT MIGHT HAVE SOUNDED LIKE A CRAZY idea a decade ago—revitalizing the train from Portland to Sebago Lake in Standish—has captured our attention.

A small group got together with the head of TrainRiders/Northeast, the folks who fought long and hard to bring back the train from Boston to Portland, to talk about the possibility.

A track record on that train, the Downeaster, has been nothing less than impressive since its debut. Ridership is beating all expectations, and the only problem is there aren't enough trips to satisfy demands for more flexible schedules.

Your editor will admit she was an early skeptic about the the financial feasibility of sustaining such a line. All mass transit requires subsidies, but so do the roads too many of us drive on each day. My support for the Downeaster was sealed when I took the train into Boston during a snow-storm this past winter that dumped no less than a foot of snow on the Hub. I got to my appointments with no delays save the unexpected time it took to negotiate the city's sidewalks.

A train from Portland to Standish on the old Mountain Division line, now owned by MDOT, would serve several purposes, the most obvious of which would be bringing tourists into the lake region in summer. Dream a little and you can envision trains carrying daily commuters year-round.

Crazy?

Not when you consider we've been talking about things like a Gorham bypass for decades and are still hung up on the cost of creating such a roadway. During that time, traffic has increased to the point of gridlock during rush hour, and the housing boom, despite the economy, continues to flourish.

The tracks on the Mountain Line already exist, and while it would cost a lot of money to bring them back into service, so would building new major highways. We haven't done the math, but common sense tells us that commuter rail could be part of the solution.

Bringing back the Mountain Line would take a lot of work—the Downeaster project was at least 10 years in the making—but it is a dream worth pursuing.

—Vicki Ogden, Editor

The American Journal, April 9, 2003

THERE WILL ALWAYS BE AN ENGLAND



WE HAD THE PLEASURE IN APRIL OF RIDING TRAINS ON A Britrail Family Pass that allows one child under 16 to travel free. With half of our number being 15 and the other half senior citizen (discounted fare), the ticket was a steal.

We road a series of three trains—London to Edinburgh to St. Austell, and Par to London. Each train cruised to a cool 100 mph. As usual we boarded with reading and writing materials only to stare out the window at a mind-blowing array of cathedrals, emerald grass, sheep, cows, horses, narrow canals, colorful barges, ancient oak trees, manor houses, collie dogs, hedgerows, and gorse in full bloom.

TNE member Sylvanus Doughty had forwarded a list of scenic treats along the first segment, and the print-out rode with us on the table—we sat facing each other across a table and, this being dreamy first class, enjoying complimentary tea and shortbread.

I followed Syl's suggestion to ride backwards on the right-hand side and, doing so, caught every morsel he mentioned—a remarkable cathedral at one point, a sweep of North Sea in Scotland at another, a beautiful gorge, and several antique glass rail station sheds that provided artful and light-filled cover. One station was located on a slow curve and the old glass shed curved right along with it.

We endured none of the difficulties that British rail companies have inflicted on travelers during the past few years, and I'm keeping my fingers crossed that era is gone. We rode one bus shuttle, and while it slowed us down by traveling on winding country lanes and stopping in several towns (more later on this), I had been advised at the time I bought the rail pass that tracks were worked every Sunday, and people who chose to travel on that day are switched to buses for portions of the trip.

We missed one train, a commuter that runs west from Plymouth into Cornwall, but it was our fault for not keeping our ears alert to train announcements (we trusted the info on the pass and on the itinerary). We got off the train at the wrong stop, which meant we missed the shuttle bus connection. Fortunately the wrong stop had its own shuttle to Plymouth, if not an express one, and we clambered gratefully aboard.

In Plymouth, we bought a take-out sandwich dinner and walked out into the nearly deserted, darkened shed. Our train, which was not due to depart for an hour and a half, awaited on the track with engine humming and all the lights on. The windows glowed luminously, and all the doors were open. As if directed by magic, we boarded.

We found a foursome of seats and broke out the picnic. No other passengers entered the coach, and no one walked past outside the windows. We never saw a train crew. But after a while the train moved forward out of the station, crossed high over the Tamar and began streaming across ridges and down into valleys. We saw nothing but lights in the distance as the train flew through darkness. No one came to check tickets, and neither of us knew what time it was. We did heed announcements—the only sign of assurance that anyone but us was on board. At length the train began slowing for a stop, and we went forward, rolled down the window, leaned out, unlocked the door handle, and stepped out.

We had begun our trip at King's Cross, the station where you catch the train to the Hogwarts School on track 9³/₄. We ended it at Paddington where, walking past the open door of the train cab, we noticed the engineer was a woman. I did not intone, "Now when I was young, women weren't allowed to drive trains," because the teenager was as pleased as I was.

Of course, two of the Downeaster engineers are also women.

—PBR

NEW HAMPSHIRE REPORT

THE BEAUTIFUL LITTLE VILLAGE OF Exeter gets all the attention this month, your editor having been inspired by hearing talk on it during the rolling party for the Downeaster's volunteer hosts (see *Party, Party* on page 2).

The story begins at the station itself, with its Quik Trak ticket machines, Jerry's Variety Store where you can buy a newspaper and a coffee while you wait for the train to take you north or south. (Current service may cover a short distance as rail lines go—Boston to Portland—but those who board in Exeter have adventuresome spirits, and they like to travel in both directions.)

But you have just stepped off the train, so you walk past the station three-fourths mile into the heart of Exeter, where you see the bandstand. The town, which was settled in 1738, hosts a fall festival, a winter carnival, and many other activities that are just what the doctor ordered for visitors who step off the Downeaster.

A loop takes you through the campus of Phillips Exeter Academy down to the waterfront, or if you like you may shop for antiques or browse in boutiques along the way. Enjoy lunch in one of the town's small, charming cafes, or buy take-out and head for one of the parks along the tidal Squamscott River.

You could visit the American Independence Museum, home of an original Broadside copy of the Declaration of Independence, or you may prefer a self-guided walking tour with a map available at the Chamber of Commerce.

The biggest festival of all is the July Revolutionary War celebration, which features battle reenactments, historic demonstrations, and music to commemorate the period when Exeter was the capital of New Hampshire.

For more information visit www.exeterarea.org or call the Exeter Area Chamber of Commerce at (603)772-2411.

—Bob Hall, Bill Hunt, Steve Piper

OUR LATEST GREATEST PROFILE

BETSEY BUCKLEY grew up with trains. She went to school on a train every day, and in summertime she went to Maine on a train.

"It was a natural way of transportation," she said. "When I was a child, we used to come up here for the summer and—it was so easy—the men would work all week and get on the train late Friday. They'd have a good dinner, a good night's sleep, and arrive in Maine early Saturday morning for a full two-day weekend. They'd get back on the train Sunday evening, eat dinner, sleep, and go to work Monday morning. It was so simple and comfy."

Betsey was born in New York City and lived near Gracie Mansion, the mayor's residence, where she used to play. I asked, "You played outside, in the gardens, right?"

"Well, yes, we played outside," she replied, "but we played inside too. In those days, Gracie Mansion was just a big old messy place. Kids went in all the time. We didn't think anything about it."

Her family soon moved to Philadelphia, and after spending teen years there she attended Garland College, married, moved to Connecticut and became the mother of six.

"The trains disappeared, one after another," she said, "and I used to drive to Maine with the six kids and two dogs," she added, with a glint of humor, "It really worked better when we used two cars."

The children now have children of their own, and though two live in Maine, others have settled in Colorado, South Africa and New Zealand. When she can't be with them, Betsey, who lives with her husband Jack in Scarborough, keeps track by e-mail and snail mail and sending packages.

She has visited the family in South Africa, and when she was there she rode a train. After word got around that she worked for the cause of rail in this country, she was invited into the cab and ended up spending a couple of hours "with the fireman beside me shoveling in coal, and the soot falling onto my head and clothes." The

scenery, she says, was some of the most beautiful she has ever seen.

Betsey became involved with TrainRiders after she noticed a dark brown streak across the sky on the other side of the Scarborough Marsh. The highway was over there, and she knew that the ominous dark line comprised emissions from cars and trucks.

She wrote a letter to the editor of the *Portland Press Herald* about the unhealthy condition, and after the letter was published she got a call from someone at the nascent TrainRiders organization. Would she like to sit in on meetings?

"So I did," she said. "I thought bringing passenger trains back to Maine was a good idea. You know, Maine is the tailpipe of the whole country."

Like all attenders of those early meetings, Betsey joined the board of directors and also became the membership chairman. She has been at it ever since, mailing applications and reminders, corresponding with people, and keeping track of a membership that is now 1,000 strong.

As a member of the first graduating class of TNE's host program, she is riding trains again, if standing and walking the length of the speeding Downeaster, serving as a goodwill ambassador for Amtrak and for all the stops along the way.

She rode as a passenger the day I spoke with her—not only a passenger but, with 50 other hosts, an honored guest in a special rail car. This was a celebration to honor their work, which has earned national attention for the Downeaster—passengers like having hosts on board and say so, and other rail services hope to copy the program. Just about the only host not at the party that day was the one who worked his usual shift.

Betsey noted the passing parade of green pastures and pink and lavender blossoms, the bubbling brooks and waterfalls. Hosts on duty, I realized, don't have



Betsey Buckley

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FRANCE

If you're going to France this year, your travel could be easier. Continental Airlines and the French National Railways have instituted a code-sharing agreement so you can book your train connections to cities like Avignon, Bordeaux or Lyon when you buy your plane ticket to Paris. There is a TGV rail station right at Charles de Gaulle Airport.

FLORIDA

A game of chicken has been instigated by the Walt Disney Company in Florida, where the Florida High-Speed Rail Authority hasn't yet decided the routing for its initial segment. Disney refuses to let the train stop at Disney World unless it takes a non-stop route between there and Orlando International Airport.

That would shut out equally-important destinations such as the convention center and hotels and other attractions that compete with Disney World. If the rail authority knuckles under to Disney's wishes, the company promises to use the train to bring four packages, and \$10 to \$12 million yearly, in rail revenue.

A voter referendum mandates the state begin construction on the rail system by next November.

CANADA

If you love the VIA Rail dome cars and sleeping berths, you'd better move fast. Starting in July, Canada's passenger railway is phasing out both features on its Halifax to Montreal run.

By the end of 2003 the classic stainless steel railcars will be replaced by a fleet of new Renaissance cars that have the following advantages: they're streamlined, bright, include wheelchair-accessible suites and offer more privacy for solo travelers, with double seats on one side of the aisles and single seats on the other. The lounge car as a stand-up bar, circular red sofas and small cafe tables.

The deluxe bedrooms have showers and hair dryers built into their private washrooms. Each sleeping car has a self-serve kitchen area with coffeemakers and pastries. "So in the morning, if you don't feel like going to the dining car, you can throw on your bathrobe and run down the hall and grab your coffee," said VIA spokesman Malcolm Andrews.

To replace the sleeping berths for travelers who seek comfort on a budget, VIA

continued on the next page

Long Distance Passenger Trains: Myth and Reality

This is the third and final 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 final installment:

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.

The fledgling company's proposed route was too skeletal to have any chance of reversing two decades of ridership decline. It was underfunded, and it was given a ludicrous mandate to be profitable in only two years with no federal investment.

Changing the name to Amtrak in 1971 did nothing to improve the passenger trains future—yet the Amtrak solution it was for better or worse. The number of trains was now down to 174.

That Amtrak and its trains survived and grew is both astonishing and a testament to the fact that, in spite of other and stupendously better funded modes, Americans like to travel by train.

THE MIRACLE

It is nothing short of a miracle that Amtrak made it to the year 2002. As a political football, it has had to beg for funding every year. It has been the target of hostile action by several presidential administrations. It suffered from a lack of capital to invest in its services as well as a lack of cooperation from most of the railroads over whose tracks it had to run its trains. Trying to survive and compete without the same level of federal support that each of its competitors enjoyed led to the most serious problem yet.

This is the siege mentality among Amtrak employees and management. While this internal attitude has been around to some extent since Amtrak's earliest days, it became

increasingly severe during the Reagan administration budget cuts that began in 1981.

It is ironic that in the 1970s and 1980s, Amtrak substantially increased ridership and revenues on its long distance trains while improving profits on every route. The accomplishment—written off a decade or so earlier—proved to all who would listen that those trains were anything but obsolete.

REFLECTIONS ON

LONG DISTANCE PASSENGER RAIL

The idea that long distance trains are "cruise trains" that appeal only to leisure passengers does not hold up. The majority of passengers use trains to get from point A to point B. Certainly, there are many riders who book first class sleeping car rooms to take upscale leisure trips, but even in peak travel season such passengers are in the minority.

The long distance passenger train is a bargain for the tax payer and the most cost-effective way for the government to provide dependable, all-weather transportation. This fact alone justifies the continuation of long distance service.

It is important to understand that each long distance route is actually a group of short and medium distance ones served by one through train that handles both short and long distance passengers. Most riders on a long distance train are not traveling end-point to end-point over the length of the route, which may include 2,000 miles. More than half the passengers on a long distance train are riding less than 1,000. The strength of any route is not the relatively few passengers who ride end-point to end-point but the many who board and detrain along the way.

Several studies have shown that Amtrak's greatest untapped growth potential is not in its corridor services but with the long distance trains, particularly those that operate west of Chicago and New Orleans.

Major reductions in rural air and bus service has resulted in a mobility crisis in many parts of America. Yet even in locations where discount air service and frequent bus service is available, many people prefer trains because they are safe, convenient, comfortable, fun and affordable. And they run no matter the weather. ■

is developing a new class of service to fill the gap between coach and private rooms. It will likely involve deeply reclining seats with pillows, blankets and dim lighting.

CALIFORNIA

Gene Skoropowski's **Capitol Corridor** reports that 24 trains a day now run between Oakland and Sacramento and that funds are available to add increased service to Roseville, Auburn and San Jose (these additions await completion of track work).

San Francisco Muni fares are slated to rise from \$1.00 to \$1.25 and cable car fares from \$2 to \$3. Senior, student and disabled fares will remain at 35 cents.

Plans in **Sacramento** to include a heritage streetcar operation along with the present modern LRT are moving ahead. One historic car is ready, and four others are being prepared.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Cascades ridership between Vancouver, BC, and Eugene, OR, posted modest gains in 2002, up 4.3% from 2001. Transportation writer Don Phillips has written that the Cascades service is a working model of what the Bush administration is pushing for as the Amtrak of the future—a reliable, high-volume regional service that, despite what state officials complain is a lack of federal funding commitment, manages to do well with the help of significant state support.

Another take on the **Cascades** comes from the *Eugene Register-Guard*, April 18, 2003:

Salem, OR—The twice-a-day Amtrak train between Eugene and Portland would be suspended under a budget proposal released Thursday.

With revenue plunging and voter rejection of an income tax increase fresh in their minds, lawmakers said they must make tough choices about spending priorities and increased taxes.

And one such choice is to end the twice-daily Amtrak Cascades runs, which would save \$9.3 million for the state. Should those two trains be eliminated, only the once-a-day Coast Starlight run would serve the Eugene train station.

Senator Steve Harper, vice-chairman of the Joint Ways & Means Committee and an author of the spending blueprint released Thursday, said the proposed elimination of funding for the Amtrak

continued this page

...Betsey Buckley Profile (continued from page 5)

time to sit and admire scenery.

One thing she told me is this: "Though I am for trains for many reasons, I'm not sure I would have stayed on the job all these years if it had not been for Wayne. I am always amazed at his dedication, determination, his positive outlook and perseverance." She added, "We have been through a lot of 'horrors' together, but because of his sense of humor we could always find a laugh somewhere."

Betsey lives with her husband Jack, dogs Fifi and Waldo, and a large Himalayan cat, Yummy, that flew in on his own from San Francisco 10 years ago. Bestsey says he is still recovering from the shock.

She is a shutterbug with 60 years' worth of boxes—total of about 70—to cull, she was a partner in an upscale gift shop for a dozen years, and she is a member of her church's building committee. Like working for the reintroduction of rail service into Maine, plans got underway 15 long years ago and only now are translating into construction work. "It has been a struggle," she says, "and an interesting experience—but we have a wonderful congregation, young and old." In the meantime, Betsey has been working at the Prebble Street Soup Kitchen in Portland. "Our church did it five or six times a year, and I have been there for 10 years."

Betsey and her husband built a new house a few years ago because the old one, a summer cottage, was cold in winter, "nothing between us and the elements but boards," she says. However, once the new house was ready, they didn't move into it. To the obvious question, she says, with a laugh and something of a grimace, "Oh, I don't know why. It's just us, I guess. But it works fine. We have water, electricity and heat, and I love it."

I asked what happened to the brand-new house. "The kids come, the grandchildren. Guests use it. But we live in the dog house."

Many years ago, when one of her children became obsessed with horses Betsey built a post and beam fence by herself to enclose an area around a small barn in the backyard. She learned how to tow, back up and park a van (also load horse on and off). Later, she was one of a group of people who founded Pegasus—riding for the handicapped.

Today, she works as a member of a trails committee that personally clears and cuts back growth along the coastal path in Scarborough, and she plays tennis and golf. She knits and does needlework.

Betsey is pleased to have passenger rail service back in Maine, expanding soon to Freeport, Brunswick, Lewiston-Auburn, and Rockland. She is pleased about another matter, too. This is something she is not certain about but attributes to better fuel standards: when she sits at her desk she can no longer see the dark line of carbon dioxide on the other side of the marsh.

Our take on the disappearance of the toxic pest is that her work for TNE has made a big contribution. ■

Cascades symbolized the entire budget dilemma for Oregon.

"That \$9 million will buy you about 10 or 12,000 kids health insurance," he said. "So we're going to ask 90 legislators to make a choice, and they're going to have three choices in front of them: kids' health insurance, the train to Eugene or raising taxes."

MIDWEST

Chicago-St. Louis—The Midwest's first rail showcase? With several daily passenger trains and a portion of the tracks already improved with Illinois funds to allow 110 MPH TRAIN SPEEDS, the Chicago-St. Louis corridor is on its way to becoming an example for other Midwest states to follow in developing fast, modern passenger rail services. But the route features sections of track with much slower train speeds and still needs more train arrivals and departures in order to attract travelers who seek an alternative to stressful highway and air travel.

More improvements are coming, according to the Environmental Law & Policy Center (ELPC) of Chicago. Although the state of Illinois is facing its largest budget shortfall in history, Governor Rod Blagojevich's proposed 2004 budget included \$37 million for rail passenger service. Of that total, \$25 million would be allocated to continue work on developing high-speed rail passenger service from Chicago to St. Louis. In addition, the proposed budget includes \$12 million to operate and assist Amtrak trains between Chicago and Carbondale, Quincy, St. Louis and Milwaukee.

"This is exceptionally good news," said Kevin Brubaker, high-speed rail director for ELPC. "In a budget climate where everything is being cut, this demonstrates that the governor has a strong commitment to high-speed rail and Amtrak in Illinois."

The Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers hopes the development of the Chicago-St. Louis rail corridor will signal a new era for the development of modern, fast passenger rail services in the Midwest. The completion of one rail corridor project in the Midwest should spur other states and their Congressional representatives to get on board before their regional economies get left behind at the station.

—Excerpted from the
Ohio Passenger Rail News,
May 5, 2003, Stu Nicholson

...TRAINRIDERS ANNUAL MEETING

(continued from the first page)

on this problem is not going to save Amtrak.

MYTH 4: AMTRAK IS A FEATHERBED FOR LABOR. Our wage rates are about 90% of the freight industry and even lower when compared to transit. Generating a higher level of productivity is the challenge. That is management's duty.

MYTH 5: THE NORTHEAST CORRIDOR (NEC) IS PROFITABLE. The NEC may cover most of its above-the-rail costs, but it is an extremely costly piece of railroad to maintain.

MYTH 6: THERE IS A QUICK FIX—REFORM. If the answer were quick and easy, we would have solved the problem long ago.

Gunn concluded by saying that he has a five-year plan (see page 2) to repair and improve Amtrak.

After listening to Gunn's presentation, TNE Secretary Bob Kahn was reminded of a story attributed to President Harry Truman. During a campaign stop when someone yelled, "Give 'em hell, Harry!" Truman turned and replied, "I just tell them the truth, and they think it's hell." ■

TOUGH TIME AHEAD FOR AIR SHUTTLES

FOR 10 YEARS THE POPULAR AIR SHUTTLES that connect Boston, New York and Washington have plied passengers with frequent-flier miles, express check-ins and other freebies. But both Delta and US airways have recently cut back their hourly schedules.

Some travelers now wait up to two hours, and while the airlines still keep planes on standby to handle overflow crowds, Delta has revamped its old guarantee of a free flight within 15 minutes to anyone who is bumped due to overflow. The promise is now for another flight within 30 minutes.

US Airways is quietly squeezing seats three inches closer together on some flights. (*Watch it! The guy in front of you is reclining his seat! CR-unch!*)

During the golden years, the shuttles accounted for some of their carriers' most profitable flights, but they now compete for travelers who do tele- and video-conferencing or who ride the Acela. Shuttle ridership at both airlines fell by 29 percent in January and February of this year compared to the same period in 2000.

Meanwhile, Amtrak has been advertising the Acela Express in major newspapers in a spread that includes a photo of the

slope-nosed train, a daily schedule (10 departures from NYC, 10 from Boston), the cost, and copy that informs potential travelers they can plug in their laptop or cell phone, spread out at a conference table, relax in the Quiet Car, or enjoy refreshments in the Cafe Car. "Call your travel agent, 1-800-USA-RAIL or visit www.amtrak.com."

Prices for the air shuttles and the Acela Express run neck and neck, each varied according to the class of service desired. From doorstep to doorstep the time is also on a par and depends on such factors as the shuttle customer's mode of travel to and from airports, that of the Acela passenger's to the rail stations, and the time of day and even the weather.

Speak of the weather: The Acela, the Downeaster, and all other Amtrak trains run in all conditions. They operated during last winter's east coast blizzard. The farther south the route—Washington, DC, got the big mama that closed down the city—the more delayed they became—but they ran. Planes, buses and cars did not. As for Maine's own Downeaster, it pulled into a few towns 10 to 15 minutes behind schedule because conductors were taking the time to help passengers negotiate snow-heaped station platforms. ■

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