

TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF **TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST**



Chairman's Update

All members and friends of TNE—We are currently facing a severe budget crisis and are making this special appeal to you. In years past we've tried "Christmas Appeals" and "Special Appeals," but it's now time for something new—something that will give you not just our quarterly newsletter and special mailings (and we hope a feeling of camaraderie with your fellow members with whom you are doing something about building a more balanced transportation system), but an opportunity for you to receive something fun in return. One of our long-time members and supporters, Ellen Fogg, manager of AAA Travel here in Portland, has helped us put together a raffle which you will see described elsewhere in this newsletter (p. 8). It's innovative in that it is all conducted via the internet. Travel arrangements are by AAA on Carnival Cruise Lines and are all inclusive. Only 200 tickets @ \$50.00 will be sold. When the 200 are sold, and the drawing is held, we should realize a greater financial return than we generally receive with our old-fashioned holiday appeals. Remember, you help support us with the purchase of a \$50 ticket, but you also have an opportunity to receive something different in return—a 4-5 day cruise for two worth over \$3000 that you may schedule anytime before June 30, 2005. So, please check out our website for further details. —WD

UNDERFUNDED SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1971, AMTRAK IS CRUMBLING. Maintenance can't keep up with the needs of an aging fleet, and stretches of the system's crucial high-voltage wiring date to before the Great Depression. Two antique moveable-bridge spans in Connecticut are in danger of failure, threatening service between Boston and New York. In the summer of 2002, Amtrak was on the brink of shutdown when Congress saved it with a reluctant last-minute bailout.

The Bush administration has proposed to dodge responsibility for Amtrak by turning its management over to states and private entities. Only problem is, few states have the wherewithal to assume the financial burden, and fewer private companies have the desire—no passenger rail system in the world turns a profit without subsidies.

While the administration has recommended over \$29 billion in highway funding for 2004, it wants to offer no more than \$900 million a year for Amtrak unless the train system is dramatically restructured. (To run "safely and reliably," Amtrak president David Gunn says, the system needs twice that much.) Critics of the Bush restructuring plan, which would split Amtrak into three separate private and state-funded entities, predict that it would lead to fragmented service as well as cost-shar-

ing and scheduling headaches.

The Bush scheme would almost certainly mean the end of long-distance routes. According to the National Association of Railroad Passengers, the remaining system would serve no more than 21 states. That has earned Bush some unlikely opposition: Republican senators in states outside the busy Northeast corridor, areas that would be

hit hardest by cutbacks.

"If that's all they can come up with, they ought to be ashamed," said none other than Mississippi senator Trent Lott of the Bush administration plan. Lott has joined fellow Republicans Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, Conrad Burns of Montana, and Olympia Snowe of Maine to announce their own six-year plan for Amtrak.

In addition to providing \$2 billion in annual funding, their proposal calls for a one-time infusion of \$48 billion to fund maintenance and new construction. Although 70% of Americans support continued federal Amtrak funding, "Amtrak has been a stepchild in the national transportation system," says Hutchison. "The reason that Amtrak is always coming up short and running to the Congress to say, 'We need more money,' is because we have starved it to death."

—by Michael Madison, *Sierra Magazine*,
Sierra Club, Nov/Dec 2003



GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES IN GREAT BRITAIN HIGHER NOW THAT RAILROADS ARE (SUPPOSEDLY) PRIVATIZED

ANNUAL SUBSIDIES WERE THE EQUIVALENT OF WELL OVER \$400 MILLION HIGHER IN 2002-03 THAN NINE YEARS AGO, ONE YEAR BEFORE BRITISH RAIL WAS PRIVATIZED.

Most passengers have suffered as a result.

The government's 10 year plan, launched two years ago with a target of 50% growth in rail passenger traffic by 2011, is unlikely to be met. In two years numbers have risen by only 2%.

Just as a rising stock market makes most investors look smart, the much-touted growth in British rail traffic is more the result of increasing congestion on the roads, coupled with a freeze on road building for the past three years (now ended). Rail passenger usage was on an upward curve even before privatization.

The private companies have failed to respond to the increasing demand. In some cases they have reduced the number and halved the size of trains.

The infrastructure owner—Railtrack (also a private company)—has been criticized for letting its assets decline and for not paying attention to safety, and there have been two major train crashes since privatization. Long-awaited improvements like rail reopenings, electrification and cross-London links have been shelved.

THE ORIGINAL RATIONALE FOR PRIVATIZATION—REDUCING GOVERNMENT INVESTMENT—HAS BEEN COMPLETELY JETTISONED with the government's recently announced plan for huge new infrastructure investments that are needed if the railway is to play the increased role envisioned for it.

Even the Channel Tunnel high-speed rail link was given the go-ahead only after a vast transfer of public assets to private companies that promised to build it.

—adapted from *The Guardian*, September 2003

MEANWHILE, BACK AT THE RANCH . . .

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH has nominated former American Airlines chairman Robert Crandall to Amtrak's board of directors. Former K-Mart chairman Floyd Hall and former World Bank official and RAILROAD PRIVATIZATION EXPERT Louis Thompson also will be nominated to five-year terms.

The choices reflect the administration's drive to make Amtrak perform more like a business and eventually overhaul passenger rail, possibly privatizing some of its operations.

Other Amtrak board members include chairman David Laney, vice chairwoman Sylvia de Leon, and Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta. Amtrak officials had no immediate comment on the nominations.

—Reuters, September 2003

NEW YORK, NY: When President Bush stayed at the Waldorf Hotel in September, an escape train idled beneath the hotel for use in the event of a terrorist attack or other dangers. Used as a potential escape route in the past, when other American presidents and foreign dignitaries have stayed at the hotel, the train hummed next to a platform never meant for public use.

—Newsletter, 470 Railroad Club

AMTRAK'S BUDGETARY CRAPSHOOT

Washington lawmakers are haggling over next year's budget for passenger rail. They could force Amtrak to shut down, allow it to limp on while deferring important maintenance, or cover its needs. The right choice—covering its needs—is clear. But Amtrak is vulnerable because unlike all other intercity transportation, rail does not have a trust fund with a steady stream of public funds.

This is more than a little shortsighted. The development of high-speed trains along a few heavily traveled corridors is crucial in the long term to alleviating highway and airport congestion. But neither the Bush administration nor Congress has a realistic vision for pursuing this goal.

In theory, the administration wants to someday allow private train operators to take over certain Amtrak routes and have state governments help subsidize the service. In reality, however, it has proposed a paltry \$900 million subsidy for fiscal 2004 that would bring all trains to a halt within months, and force the dismantling of a system that could not easily be put back together again. The amount is not enough to cover operating deficit, debt service and other fixed expenses, yet House Republican leaders want to hold Amtrak to it.

The Senate has approved \$1.35 billion for Amtrak. That's \$350 million less than the railroad requested, but allows it to limp on by putting off less essential maintenance. Of course, "less essential" is a relative term for a railroad that along the heavily traveled Northeast Corridor relies on ancient infrastructure. The line's electric cables linking New York City to the rest of the country date back to the early 1930s. After the recent blackout, two of the three were out. A loss of the third cable would have interrupted not only Amtrak traffic, but also commuter rail traffic, possibly for months.

David Gunn, Amtrak's president, has an ambitious plan for repairing the railroad, which this year is seeing record passenger levels. Even those who want to privatize the system should realize that it must be fixed before it can be sold. Budget battles in Congress can seem abstract, and the budgetary tug of war here does not involve that much money within the broader context of all transportation spending. But refusing to invest enough in Amtrak's infrastructure now is to deny any plausible future for passenger rail in this country.

—New York Times editorial, Nov. 3, 2003



UNITED STATES AUTOMOBILE COMPANIES AND RELATED INDUSTRIES HAVE BEEN LIVING OFF WELFARE FOR MORE THAN 50 YEARS.

Their take totals \$460 billion annually, from the expense of taxpayer-funded road construction to the cost of Persian Gulf forces that protect America's access to its oil.

But roads may be the most insidious of these beneficiaries because they are promoted as vital for growth and jobs. Subsidizing them has led to sprawl, urban decay, and highways to nowhere.

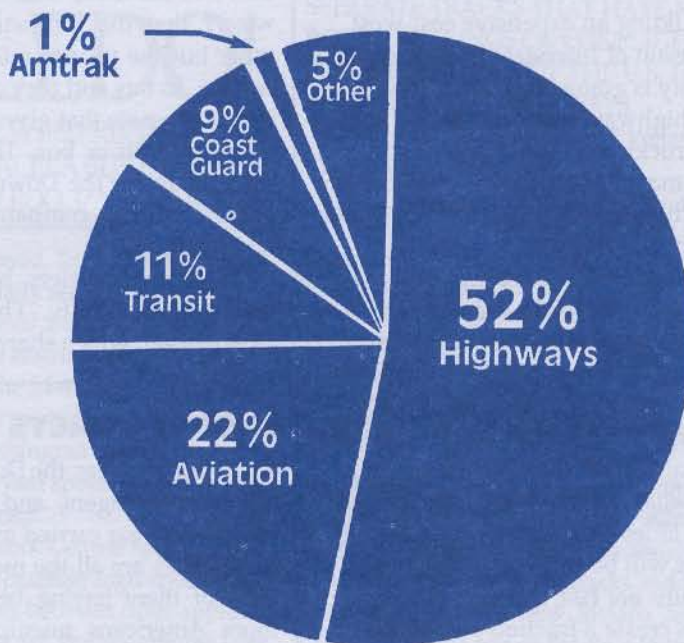
—adapted from *Natural Capitalism: Towards the Next Industrial Revolution*
by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, L. Hunter Lovins

IF ROADS CONTINUE TO BE OPERATED AS ONE OF THE LAST RELICS OF A SOVIET-STYLE COMMAND ECONOMY, then the consequence will

be worsening traffic jams and eventual Bangkok-style gridlock. If on the other hand, roads were priced like any other scarce commodity, better use would be made of existing space and the revenues raised would be used to improve public transport. The mere fact of making motorists pay their way would free capacity to such an extent that bus travel would become easier and faster, and subsidies could be reduced. —*The Economist*

FEDERAL UNDERINVESTMENT SHORTCHANGES PASSENGER RAIL

FY 2002 Transportation Funding



DID YOU KNOW? The U.S. spends \$1.2 billion each year to remove snow and ice from state highways . . . more than what the federal government spends annually on the national Amtrak system.

AMTRAK RIDERSHIP HIT ALL-TIME HIGH THIS YEAR

DESPITE CHRONIC UNDERFUNDING FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, more than 24 million passengers traveled on Amtrak passenger trains in the past year—a 2.7% increase over fiscal year 2002. That's the highest ridership tally in Amtrak's 32-year history. The national passenger rail service's fiscal year runs from October to September.

Amtrak officials attributed the positive results largely to its "back-to-basics" approach to winning over passengers. The approach includes a more straightforward fare structure, service enhancements and more marketing. The ridership record came despite a number of adverse conditions this year, including a lagging economy that has hurt the travel industry overall, the Iraq war, the Presidents' Day blizzard, the Northeast blackout, and Hurricane Isabel.

And it came while governments at all levels in the United States have spent much more heavily on competing modes of trans-

portation.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, public funding of roads and aviation has totaled \$1.89 trillion over the last 32 years. Amtrak received less than \$35 billion during the same time period.

FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF: Given the starvation diet the federal government has kept Amtrak on since 1971, we find it remarkable that people ride trains in this country at all.

Congress has kept intact a miserly program that keeps passenger rail functioning just this side of cardiac arrest. It is no surprise that rail travel in this beautiful land is, for the most part, not the exhilarating experience it is in other developed countries.

Accustomed to dregs, Amtrak is Cinderella when she was still sweeping cinders and being mocked by her two step-sisters who, now that we think about

it, were a bit like this country's highway and aviation industries. They felt entitled.

Though the step-sisters looked down their snoots at the poverty-stricken Cinderella, it seems to us they were secretly fearful of her beauty and grace.

The traveling public is the prince who persevered in his search for the foot that fit the glass slipper. He knew a good thing when he saw it.

Given the Amtrak figures for FY 2003, so does the public.

Many millions of people will choose the option of rail when Washington starts to give Amtrak funding that's on a par with that it lavishes on the two high-falutin step-sisters.

In the end, evermode will live happily ever after—though we can't help but toot Cinderella's horn. Of the three sisters, she is the one who became a princess. ■

**A LETTER TO THE EDITOR
IN THE BANGOR DAILY NEWS,
November 4, 2003**

Building an expensive east-west extension of Interstate 95 in Aroostook County is going backward. New four-lane highways represent failed policy. The trucking and road construction boys may want more I-95, but the fact is both freight and passengers should be moved by rail.

Across the nation people are realizing that more roads and more automobiles are damaging our environment, our health, our way of life. They belch unhealthy fumes, they trigger traffic jams and road rage. They maim and kill us. Yet our DOT forges on, still believing that if we only add more lanes and increase speed limits things will be better.

Trains are fast, safe and efficient. Trains create a fraction of the pollution generated by automobiles. Trains are a bargain compared to the cost of cars and roads. Let's put our highway taxes into a sensible transportation. Let's get serious about restoring a functional rail system throughout Maine.

— Steve Cartwright of Waldoboro, Maine

TRAINS AND BUSES MAKE IDEAL PARTNERS

MAINE'S CONCORD TRAILWAYS INTERCITY BUS SERVICE (Bangor-Portland/Boston) and Amtrak's Downeaster concluded wisely that the competition is not each other but the private internal combustion engine. To this end they now offer passengers a Flexpass that gives a choice of traveling by train or bus. The partnership is thumbs up for the Downeaster, the bus company, and the public.

It helps travelers by allowing flexibility. The Downeaster, which shares

the Portland transportation center with Concord Trailways, makes four trips a day. The buses make 12. But during New England's more thrilling winter blizzards, the train often operates when buses (cars and planes) cannot.

The arrangement encourages people to take public transportation and it provides hidden economic benefits such as reduced highway congestion, a reduction of ground and air pollution, and more stress-free citizens. ■



JUST THE FACTS

In the first year, the Downeaster carried 291,794 passengers, and during the first half of this year carried more than 182,000. The figures are all the more impressive in light of there having been three million more Americans unemployed this year than last, a war, and two Orange Alerts.

MONEY FOR MAINE

By the end of last year, Amtrak employed 35 Mainers at a wage of almost \$2 million and spent that much again for goods and services in Greater Portland.

JUST THE THOUGHT

Think how much the preceding figures will grow after the Downeaster expands service to Lewiston, Freeport, Brunswick and beyond.

BATH, MAINE

Rehab work should begin next spring on the old train station so that it may open brand-new doors by 2007. The MDOT has budgeted \$730,000 for planning and work on the building, which has been empty for many years. Preliminary plans call for landscaping, a platform and a boardwalk. —Newsletter, 470 Railroad Club

VERMONT VOICE— ENVIRO UPDATE

GOV JIM DOUGLAS TRIED TO SHARPEN HIS ENVIRONMENTAL CREDENTIALS THIS WEEK by issuing an executive order directing state government to set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 25% by 2012.

Jimmy D even trotted out VPIRG lobbyist Curt McCormack to stand in the camera shot. But when asked what the number-one cause of greenhouse gas emissions in Vermont was, the Gov started to blush and quickly called Environmental Commissioner Jeff Wennberg and his aide Dick Valentinetti to the front of the room to provide the answer.

We didn't think it was that tough a question. Honest.

Cars and trucks are the biggest source of

greenhouse, they said.

But when Jimmy D was asked if he supported higher fuel efficiency standards for cars, he declined to take a position. We asked the Gov if he knew what the second-largest source of greenhouse gases in Vermont was. He didn't know.

And when we asked Douglas if he knew the largest private contributor of greenhouse gases in Vermont is (maybe IBM?), Douglas stepped out of his normal cardboard character and blasted yours truly for even asking the question. That's right, Jim Douglas got testy. Obviously he reads this column.

ACCORDING TO THE GOVERNOR OF VERMONT, NEW HIGHWAYS REDUCE POLLUTION

The Gov said the real problem was our inability to accept the fact that a Republican

can support the environment.

He never did answer the question about greenhouse gases.

But the astonishing news was Jimmy D's characterization of the controversial Circ Highway Project.

Ready for this one?

Governor Douglas said the Circ Highway is actually an "environmental project." It will reduce idling time in traffic, he said, and thus reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Following this logic, we could build 10 more Circ highways around Vermont and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to zero!

P.S. When asked if he agreed with Jimmy D's assessment of the Circ, VPIRG's McCormack uttered a quiet "no," and instantly turned beet red.

—Peter Freyne, September, 2003

 **DESPITE THE ACELA'S 150 MPH SPEEDS, THE RECORD WAS SET ON A 30-MILE STRETCH OF TRACK IN OHIO IN 1966.**

An Ohio Historic Marker in the town of Byran now commemorates the test run made by New York Central's railcar M-497 on a long ago summer day. For the occasion, M-497 was temporarily equipped with twin jet engines on its roof.

The speed it reached was 183.85 mph.

According to the train's test engineer Don Wetzel, it actually went faster than that. "I had it up to 196," he said recently. Because the person sitting next to him said to slow down before he reached the official timing point, and because that person happened to be the president of the railroad, Alfred Perlman, Wetzel had to follow orders.

As a New York Central brakeman and relief engineer who had been a military aircraft mechanic during World War II, Wetzel was handpicked to oversee the M-497's conversion from an ordinary Budd Rail Diesel Car to a jet train 30 days before the test, then assigned to the controls.

Railroad police lined the tracks to protect the curious.

"I opened the throttles and hung on," said Wetzel. "They later gave me the whistle cord because I never let go of it. I was looking down the track, but there wasn't much I could have done if something was on it. We hit a piece of plywood some kids had left and turned it to splinters."

During a first test run under jet propulsion, the train reached 140 mph, the engineer recalled, and the decision was made to see what it could do during a second trip.

"We were supposed to go for the world record the next day," recalled the engineer, "but then they told us they had gotten two very sophisticated reports from the first day's tests and didn't need any more data, so it was cancelled."

"If I had known they were going to do that, I might have gone for the record (the first time) despite Mr. Perlman's instructions."

At the time, the world record was just

HOLY TOLEDO!

US RAIL SPEED RECORD
SET NOT BY ACELA BUT BY TRAIN
OUT OF TOLEDO 37 YEARS AGO

over 200 mph, he said. Today, French high-speed trains run daily service at 186 mph and the French tested a train at 300 mph.

But during the ensuing 37 years no U.S. train has topped the M-497. The Acela, which reached 169 mph in preservice tests on the Boston-Washington corridor, tops out at 150 but reaches that speed only on a few short sections of track.

In 1966, New York Central said its test was a first look at possible high-speed shuttle service on routes between cities approximately 200 miles apart. But six months later it applied for federal permission to cancel all longer-distance passenger trains, which no longer could compete with the highly subsidized highway and aviation systems.

After the test, the M-497's jet equipment and test monitoring devices were removed, its diesel engines were reconnected, and it returned to its routine of transporting commuters between New York City and Albany.

The car was retired 11 years later and is believed to have been scrapped.

Don Wetzel blamed abandonment of New York Central's high speed experiment on corporate in-fighting that arose two years later, after the company merged with the Pennsylvania Railroad to form Penn Central. But he conceded that many of the same factors that thwart high-speed rail today were in play four decades ago.

OFFICIALS NOTED IN 1966 THAT 180-MPH JET TRAINS WOULD HAVE TO SHARE TRACK WITH FREIGHT TRAINS RUNNING 50 MPH OR SLOWER, and many miles of extra track would have needed to be built to keep faster trains moving. THE PROBLEM PERSISTS TODAY, with passenger trains confined to 79 mph on most tracks outside the Northeast Corridor.

There was also the risk of collisions at grade-crossings. THE SUPER FAST TRAINS IN COUNTRIES SUCH AS FRANCE AND JAPAN RUN MAINLY ON SEPARATE TRACKS THAT HAVE NO ROAD CROSSINGS OR CONFLICTING FREIGHT TRAINS. BUT THE U.S. HAS NOT BUILT SUCH RAILWAYS.

"We have cheap gasoline," Wetzel said. "You just can't beat that..."

—from the *Toledo Blade* (David Patch),
November 14, 2003

(Many other Americans also claim you can't beat cheap gas, ditto the trucks and SUVs that drink it, but its insidious emissions will demand their due in form of the next generation's health and welfare. Paula Boyer Rougny, editor)

LEAVE NO COW BEHIND

One Ms Louann Lodwick claimed that Burlington Northern Santa Fe trains were bumping her cows—nay, even some horses (pun intentional)—off the tracks and leaving them dead all over New Mexico. She filed claims from one end of the state to the other saying her cows were on the railroad right-of-way when they were ruthlessly mowed down.

What happened next? The railroad wrote out almost 50 (FIFTY) checks for more than \$144,000 to the woman.

Louann pulled off the crime by starting slow: one dead horse in 2001. (She got \$1,600 for it.) Next it was three cows and a calf. In April of this year she said a train ran down an entire herd, killing six cows. Yet later in the spring she filed for \$11,000 worth of horses.

Louann and her husband Scot, who was the claims rep for the railroad and the guy who wrote her the checks are now in the cooler facing 43 embezzlement counts and conspiracy.

The reason they got away with the scam for as long as they did is because Mr. Right does not use the same name—he is Scot Waterman—and it took BNSF investigators a while to link the two of them. We don't know what her excuse is, but his is that he paid the claims without question because Lodwick was a Native American, and he had been trained to pay those claims quickly to keep up a good relationship with the reservation.

We suppose that's as good an alibi as any.
With thanks to the 470 Railroad Club

HE
OPENED
THE
THROTTLES
TO 196 MPH
AND
HUNG ON

TRANSPORTATION LAW TRIPPED BY BAD POLITICS

CONGRESS JUST STRUCK OUT ON THE BIGGEST JOBS/ENVIRONMENTAL/INFRASTRUCTURE BILL before it—the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21).

Instead of a full five-year reauthorization, committing \$375 billion to build and repair critical highway, bridge and public transit facilities, lawmakers came up with a lame five-month extension of the expiring 1998 statute. Next spring, in the heat of a presidential election year they are unlikely to do much better.

With 3 million jobs lost since winter 2001, the congressional paralysis seems puzzling. Why not create 90,000 new jobs short-term and 1.3 million long-term, putting people to work building and repairing infrastructure that undergirds a strong economy?

One reason is obvious: the Bush administration is viscerally opposed to an increase in the gas tax—up to 5 cents a gallon—that virtually every transportation expert says is necessary for an adequate national program.

Apparently it's OK to pour billions into Iraq, running up the national debt, but not to increase a user tax to pay for what we need here.

So could Congress develop a veto-proof majority for a new and appropriately funded TEA-21? Maybe, but here's where the plot thickens.

TEA-21 and its predecessor, the 1991 ISTEA, only made it through Congress because a new coalition of environmentalists and urban advocates, organized as the Surface Transportation Planning Project (STPP), coalesced to break asphalt-happy state highway departments' historic hamperlock on all transportation spending.

Metropolitan planning organizations, in touch with business and citizens, were given power to switch substantial highway monies to public transit. Funds were set aside for so-called transportation enhancements such as greenways and

bikeways. Bottom line: community welfare, not just the interests of autos and trucks, would be served.

But this year, the highway lobby and road construction contractors figured they could stiff the environmental camp.

HAVING SPENT \$41 MILLION OVER SIX YEARS TO INFLUENCE CONGRESSIONAL CAMPAIGNS, AND WITH AN IDEOLOGICALLY RIGID REPUBLICAN HOUSE LEADERSHIP, THE ROAD CREW FIGURED IT COULD GUT PROVISIONS IT DIDN'T LIKE.

Onto the chopping block went rules protecting historic properties from being demolished for transportation projects. Ditto Clean Air Act rules requiring that highway projects conform to clean air goals. Plus, TEA-21 reviews would be "streamlined" to stop environmental agencies from asking about the "purpose or need" of highway projects.

This summer the highway lobby tried an end-run, getting the Appropriations Committee to strip enhancements from fiscal year 2004 appropriations ("times are tough, we don't have money for bike trails and scenic byways," went the argument).

The move succeeded in committee, where the highway lobby's political contributions were targeted. But on the House floor, a motion to restore enhancement funds got a thumping 327-90 majority including every Democrat and a majority of Republicans.

"It was the easiest environmental vote of the session," says Rep. Earl Blumenauer (Dem.-Ore.), claiming an immense coalition now favors balanced transportation law. It ranges, he says, from public transit and "smart growth" groups to land trusts and Scenic America, cyclists and trail enthusiasts, chambers of commerce and Main Street groups, city and county organizations, historic preservationists,

significant chunks of organized labor, even sophisticated contractors who see opportunity in building bridges, putting down rail or constructing bike paths.

If the highway lobby used its noggin and made a deal with this coalition, it's possible a renewed TEA-21, including a 5-cent gas tax hike, could pass—even over a Bush veto.

But to make peace with the environmentalists, says David Burwell, former STPP president, the highway lobby has to recognize "the time's long past when it can hold the public treasury hostage by pointing to increased congestion and demanding more money to "build our way out."

THE HIGHWAY LOBBY FIGURED IT COULD STIFF THE ENVIRONMENTAL CAMP

One's reminded of how big transportation funding initiatives, heavily focused on roads and shortchanging transit, went down in flames in November of 2002 in Virginia and Washington State. Endorsed by road builders and local business coalitions, the measures were too pro-sprawl to avoid opposition.

There's a new national politics at work. It's not anti-highway—we're an auto-oriented land, and people recognize that repairing the roads and bridges we have, plus selected expansions, makes sense, and does cost money.

But they want some proof that congestion will actually be relieved. They oppose spending just to increase sprawl. They support alternatives, especially public transit. And they want to be confident that transportation law respects clean air standards, supports alternatives like walking and cycling, and undergirds our communities.

It's a straightforward deal. But it probably can't move into gear until the highway lobby and its political buddies agree to clear the road.

—Neal R Peirce column

Washington Post Writers Group, Oct. 5, 2001

FAST TRAINS ON SLOW TRACKS (ESPECIALLY IN MAINE)

THE BOTTLE OF CASTORO CELLARS MERLOT DID A PIROUETTE AFTER THE FIRST LUNCH before another sharp jerk sent it tumbling onto the white tablecloth. Fortunately, the dining car waiter had knowingly re-corked the bottle before the Capitol Limited hit the low spot in the tracks east of Elkhart, Indiana.

Bottles and glasses jarred by rough track have become unwelcome, if commonplace, surprises for dining car patrons.

Passenger trains require track tolerances that are more stringent than freights. But in a world where freight railroads don't claim ownership of passenger service, fixing rough patches of track where safety is not compromised has become much less of a priority.

Ride quality isn't quantified beyond FRA's section 213 safety rules, which prescribe maximum speeds depending on variations in gauge, alignment, curve elevation, ballast, surfacing, crosstie placement, rail anchor and switch frog clearances. When a section of track doesn't meet the prescribed tolerances, that segment is downgraded to the next lower class and speeds are reduced accordingly until the deviations are fixed.

With budgets stretched thin, slow orders from track deviations wreak havoc with passenger train schedules. Plus, freight railroads introduced a dizzying array of new speed restrictions during periods of extreme heat, snow, or anticipated flooding after last year's Auto Train and Capitol Limited derailments were attributed to track trouble.

LIKE QUESTIONING ANTI-TERRORIST MEASURES, CHALLENGING THE IMPOSITION AND INTERPRETATION OF SAFETY RULES IS TOUCHY. After all, each railroad must foot its own bill for maintenance, and is liable for damages if accidents occur.

The most publicized face-off is Guilford's refusal to allow Amtrak's Boston-Portland DOWNEASTER to run above 60 mph over 115-pound (per yard) rails laid to class 4 standards. The Surface Transportation Board approved operation at 79 mph, but Guilford has blocked the order in a federal court of appeals.

In Illinois, however, many new 110-mph segments of track on Union-Pacific's Chicago-St. Louis corridor use recently resurfaced 115-pound rail rolled in 1957. —by Bob Johnson

Excerpted from *Trains* magazine, Sep. 2003

SOMBER BUT STUNNING ALERT

IF EVER AN AD WAS DESIGNED TO PROMOTE SUICIDE, IT IS A NEW VIDEO CALLED "LONG BLACK TRAIN." Released on the Country Music Television (CMT) network, it features Josh Turner, a popular Gospel star with a devoted Christian following, singing "Long Black Train."

It starts as the artist walks down rail tracks into a tunnel, where the camera reveals people on the tracks in the headlights of an oncoming train. It ends with several desperate people (including a pregnant girl) being obliterated by the train.

Although it isn't clear from the video why a few people survive, apparently they have been "redeemed."

(Note that this is all allegorical. The train represents "evil" and the message of the song is to resist and pray to God to save yourself from the "long black train" of death and destruction.)

Operation Lifesaver's Vice-President of Communications, Marmie Edwards, tried to track down rumors of this video for a week, even talking with CMT's creative director, who assured her there was "nothing to be concerned about" regarding any video.

"You people really have too much time on your hands, don't you?" he said in an arrogant tone.

EPILOGUE: On the very evening that Operation Lifesaver official (and TrainRiders/Northeast member) Fred Hirsch sent the above report via e-mail urging various contacts in rail and safety organizations to protest the Josh Turner video to FRA, AAR, FTA and other agencies, a man in his thirties committed suicide in New Hampshire by stepping onto the tracks of the Downeaster

ANTI-TRANSIT ACTIVISTS NAMED TO CINCINNATI TRANSIT BOARD

The Ohio Corridor Campaigns protested the recent nomination of two anti-transit activists to the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority's board of trustees. Led by Hamilton County Commissioner John Dowlin, the commission appointed Stephan Louis of the Southwestern Ohio Regional Drivers Alliance and Daniel Peters of the Buckeye Policy Institute.

"Appointing these two people to a transit agency board is like putting the foxes in charge of the hen house," said Ken Pendergast, director of the Ohio Corridor Campaigns. "Nothing good can come from this move, which isn't just anti-transit, it's anti-downtown and anti-Cincinnati. Great cities

do not exist without good public transit."

Last year, Louis and his alliance led the only organized opposition to a Hamilton County sales tax levy for developing light rail, bus services and more transit centers. While the levy won support of the city of Cincinnati, it was defeated by suburban voters.

Peters is president of the ultra-conservative Buckeye Policy Institute which spreads misleading and inaccurate anti-transit information in espousing so-called "free-market" transportation solutions, while saying nothing about highways' dependence on government support. —Ohio Passenger Rail News, Oct. 27, 2003

WANTED-Administrative assistant-TrainRiders/Northeast. Make your own hours, come in when you please. Answer phones, help the multitudes, maintain semblance of order, be of good cheer. TNE is an equal opportunity non-wage-paying employer. Occasional free sandwich. Strong advocacy for passenger rail a must.

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TALL TALES FROM A NH BUS COMPANY

IT WAS NO SURPRISE TO READ IN AN OCTOBER ISSUE OF *FOSTER'S DAILY DEMOCRAT* that a family wishing to board the Downeaster at the Dover Transportation Center was misled by a C&J Trailways bus company clerk. (At this point, C&J employees are the only personnel who staff the center, although it was built with taxpayers' dollars—80% federal funds and 20% municipal.)

When the family asked if Downeaster tickets could be bought on board the train, the C&J clerk replied not only that she was forbidden from giving information about rail service but that Amtrak conductors themselves sometimes came into the station to advise C&J workers not to do so.

As the ticket-buyer wrote in a follow-up letter-to-the-editor of the newspaper, "I

looked around to make sure I was still standing in a train depot."

The family purchased tickets from the Quiktrak machine and, once on board the train streaming for Boston, questioned the host about the bizarre behavior on behalf of the C&J clerk. He replied that the family's bad encounter is not the first one he has heard about in regard to the Dover station.

Wayne Davis once witnessed two women being treated so indifferently by a C&J employee at the Dover station that they were about to leave the station in confusion rather than buy tickets from the Amtrak ticket machine. He introduced himself, restored good will, and saved the day.

On yet another occasion, a TNE board member and New Hampshire resident was returning home from a journey on a C&J bus when the driver announced they were approaching *the Dover Bus Terminal*.

The latest misstatement was made by a C&J employee at the Portsmouth bus station, which, by the way, is a taxpayer-built center that serves no other bus lines. A citizen who inquired was told, "Don't bother going to Dover to catch the train. It's sold out through Christmas."

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The Dover Transportation Center was built to serve the Downeaster. To integrate different modes of transportation it added the C&J, COAST, and Wild Cat bus systems. Taxis may also be called, and a parking lot serves private cars.

We urge C&J to extend the good manners and spirit of cooperation that exists at other intermodal stations along the line.

History proves that new passenger rail services do not economically threaten bus companies but, to the contrary, give rise to new and expanded bus services. (PBR)

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