

# TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF **TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST**



## Chairman's Update

We hope that everyone realizes the importance of keeping their dues current. Your dues are what make it possible for us to continue our initiatives for passenger rail expansion. None of us are paid for our time, but we do have what seems an endless list of fixed annual or semi-annual expenses. We have telephones, rent, insurance, licenses, and of course, office supplies and computer supplies that consume more of our limited resources than we ever thought possible. Through it all our editor and volunteers continue to create our fine quarterly newsletter. Please help us cut down on wasted mailings by helping to keep our membership list current. We appreciate the loyalty of our members, many of whom have been with us since our beginnings over 15 years ago, and we look forward to your continued membership in TrainRiders/Northeast in support of our efforts. —WD

EARLY IN THE 21ST CENTURY, and before that, in the late 20th, the Angus King administration provided strong support for the concept of, and finally the inauguration of, passenger rail service to Maine.

Under Commissioner John Melrose, the MDOT designed a plan for an integrated transportation system that, where applicable, would see under-roof transfer of passengers between modes such as trains, intercity buses, ferries, and planes. Called the "grand plan," it would provide a better balance to the way we get around in this state.

Such a transfer point is now in daily use at Portland's Transportation Center, where Amtrak's Downeaster and Concord-Trailways' buses share an airy, attractive space. The airport is five minutes away in one direction and center city five in the other, and both are accessible via local buses that pull up to the station every 15 minutes and taxis that are lined up outside the door.

Ridership and revenue for the Downeaster have surpassed original projections, of which there were three, each independent of the other. In October, November and December of last year and January of this, ridership increased almost nine percent over figures of a year earlier. February realized an increase of 18 percent.

The Downeaster has the best on-time record (97%) in the Amtrak system and has operated, and arrived on time, even during winter storms when buses and planes were rendered useless.

So much for success. One of the most frequently asked questions of our onboard train hosts is, "When is this train going to go to Freeport-Brunswick?" (Or they cite Waterville, Rockland, Port Clyde, Levant, Wayne, Steuben, and so on...) The passenger then says he loves taking the train but not driving 30 or 90 miles to get to it.

*Travel & Leisure* magazine recently called the Downeaster "the most charming train on the conti-

## HAS THE MAINE DOT GONE WOBBLY ON PASSENGER RAIL?

nent." We'd rather it be named the fastest (100 mph) or the snazziest (internet connections at every seat, conference rooms), but we're willing to wait for the future on that one.

What we and the State of Maine cannot afford to wait for is immediate extension of the line from Portland to the next planned locations—Lewiston-Auburn (connect to Montreal) and Brunswick (connect to Augusta, Bangor, Acadia National Park).

Passenger trains are economic tools. Maine needs all the economic tools it can get. And it is a fact that tourism has surpassed fishing and papermaking as the largest industry in Maine. In every town in New Hampshire and Maine where the Downeaster stops it has proven itself a magnet for development. Every town now wants more than just four daily trains and some of them want longer trains.

Durham ridership went from 268 passengers in December 2001 (service began only on December 15) to 1,199 passengers in November 2002 to 3,431 in November 2003. Portland saw 31,198 passengers in January 2004, an increase of nearly nine percent over figures of January 2003. Travelers comprise a mix of commuters and tourists. The latter, both Americans and foreigners, have read about the Downeaster in a variety of publications or learned about it, and the virtues of the territory it travels through, from travel agents and web sites.

Let's talk about the speed issue. Three times the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) has ruled that the Downeaster may travel at speeds up to 80 mph. (It is now tethered to no more than 59 mph.) Each time the ruling was handed down, Guilford Transportation Company requested further clarification from the STB. It has now appealed the most recent STB

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**JIM DUFFY, editor of Mass Transit Magazine:** When you threatened to shut down Amtrak in 2002...

**DAVID GUNN, Amtrak president and CEO:** I didn't threaten. That's classic Washington. What I told them was, "We're going to run out of cash." And we were. We were going to miss our payroll in July 2002. I suppose I could have just sat there and let us run out of cash and not tell them. But all I did was tell them what was going to happen. They they accused me of a Washington Monument strategy. I didn't know what they were talking about.

**DUFFY:** How are you dealing with the political side of your job?

**GUNN:** My reputation is politically, I'm a total incompetent. Which is fine. I mean, I'm not rude to people. And I try to be responsive. But maybe there are times when just being sort of factual is, in fact, doing the politically correct thing. And if it isn't, in this point in my life it doesn't matter.

**DUFFY:** Does anybody on Capitol Hill find your tell-it-like-it-is point of view refreshing?

**GUNN:** I think some of them appreciate it. But they'll probably get tired of it. You know, eventually you become the problem. I mean, in this business, the general manager position is likened to a hydrant in the middle of a pack of dogs.

What's happened now in this business, and I think it's unfortunate, but for a lot of general managers, the biggest problems they face are political ones. Whether it's on the Hill or at the local councils. People are selected for their political acumen and their ability to get along with the board and...the politicians. That is important. But unfortunately, you have to know how to manage a railroad, too.

**DUFFY:** Have you managed to gain credibility for Amtrak on Capitol Hill?

**GUNN:** Well, the proof of the pudding is whether we get our funding, I guess. The year before I got here, the company was still putting out press releases that said Amtrak was on the glide path to self-sufficiency. The numbers clearly showed we were not.

**DUFFY:** Was anybody on Capitol Hill looking at the numbers?

**GUNN:** The definition of what was operating and what was capital kept changing to try to make the income statements look better. It got to the point where reporting became

## David Gunn Talks About Washington Politics, Amtrak Credibility, and the Myth of Self-Sufficiency

erratic. If they put out regular reports, monthly, that compared performance to budget, year-to-date and forecast, it became obvious that the company was failing.

One of the first things we did was begin to put out monthly reports. Then we started to be very public about our finances. We returned to absolutely basic GAP (general accounting procedures) accounting, because the accounting got all screwed up. So what we have been able to do is demystify the place.



**DUFFY:** Were Amtrak's numbers misty?

**GUNN:** The organization had gotten itself into such a jam in the past with this self-sufficiency thing. The definition of operating and capital was different. GAP was different. DOT was different from what Congress put into the legislation. So all these numbers were floating around that nobody could reconcile.

In a sense, Acela is a product of this self-sufficiency goal and underfunding and the idea that this was going to be a profit-making venture. That was all done with borrowed money.

**DUFFY:** Was the Acela project a good idea?

**GUNN:** I can be real critical of the people who made the decision to go forward with Acela and yet I know why they did it. They were under this ridiculous edict to hit self-sufficiency. And they knew that if they could get those trains into service, it would help the economics. At least they thought it would on paper.

**DUFFY:** Did Acela help the economics at Amtrak?

**GUNN:** We're in real trouble with those trains. Those trains could take themselves out of service, I mean, like, in the near future. We purchased 20 Acela trains. We're trying to schedule 14 into service. We have no spares. The problem is, there is an enormous amount of engineering left to be done on them.

**DUFFY:** Passengers seem to love the trains.

**GUNN:** The passengers love the trains but its performance has been woefully inadequate compared to the specifications in terms of failure rate. And none of them met specifications. We're having premature traction motor failures. We're having main suspension springs break. We're having dog bones on the tilt mechanism fracture and break. Leaky seals on the traction motors. We're having all kinds of problems.

**DUFFY:** Why did Amtrak select this particular train?

**GUNN:** If you talk to the operating folks, I think it was unanimous that the X-2000 was the train to buy. It was reliable, simple, proven. What we got is a modified TGV. The reason we got into this mess is because the Canadian government is great at providing financing. Their import/export bank provides financing for these deals. There weren't many people who were going to loan Amtrak \$700 million. But Bombardier came with the financing.

**DUFFY:** Was Acela politically driven?

**GUNN:** Yes. Given the fact that we, and most transit properties, are in a very political environment, for people flying around 30,000 feet making decisions based upon the financibility of the train, this kind of stuff, just assuming the train will take care of itself. Not true.

In this business, if we don't have the guys who actually know how to make the thing work, who know how to fix it or repair it, and who are in from the ground floor, we will end up in trouble.

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## GO HAS RESPONSIBILITY TO INVEST IN LIGHT RAIL

IT SHOULD BE OBVIOUS TO ALL THAT FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS exist at all levels of government. Dr. Gorgon Chong, Chair of GO Transit, is recommending new highways be built for the exclusive use of buses as a strategy to build transit ridership until a heavy rail subway system can be justified.

However, this strategy is highly wasteful of limited resources. First, the operating costs of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) are much higher while start-up costs of Light Rail Transit (LRT) and BRT are only marginally different. Vehicles and road surfaces for bus transit are much shorter-lived, resulting in more costly upkeep. Each bus requires a driver and carries fewer passengers.

Second, buses are not particularly attractive to motorists. LRTs operate at speed and in comfort. This is why Ottawa plans to develop LRT in preference to its, I expect, almost embarrassing BRT venue. Light rail transit does attract riders, as demonstrated by new LRT systems all across the United States.

Subways are extremely costly to construct. Why build a new highway system just for buses only to be later dismantled and replaced with a subway? Do it once, and do it right. Light rail would do the whole job of attracting riders and increasing frequency of service could handle traffic demands into the future.

Where an existing lane of road can be dedicated to improve bus service, by all means use it. But Bus Rapid Transit must not be considered for a whole new area-wide approach. Bus service is more costly and attracts fewer riders than Light Rail. Chong has a responsibility to invest in LRT.

—Ross Snetsinger, Chair, Rail Ways to the Future,  
Toronto (published in the *Toronto Star*, Dec. 26, 2003)

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## CNN SHOULD CHECK OUT SHOPPING MALLS, NOT TRAINS

Dec. 25, 2003—CNN JUST RAN A PIECE WHICH WAS CRITICAL OF SECURITY ON TRAINS IN GENERAL AND AMTRAK in particular. Much of the segment was filmed aboard an Acela Express. Points were made that no baggage was screened, and the reporter and her cameraman exchanged tickets before passing through the gate and were not challenged.

September 11 proved you could turn an airliner into a gigantic bomb that could kill thousands of people not even on the airliner.

That's generally not the case with a train.

True, you might bring a bomb on a train and possibly kill up to a couple hundred people, but you could kill many more people bringing a bomb into a crowded shopping mall.

I have heard no one suggest that police should check the identification of everyone who enters a shopping mall.

—Jim Dexter, Atlanta

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## AMTRAK IS ALWAYS THE CABOOSE

WHILE THE WHITE HOUSE AND CONGRESS ARGUED THIS WEEK about whether to lavish as much as \$378 billion on transportation projects in a bloated highway bill, both sides seemed prepared to make Amtrak tootle along with far less money than last year.

That's simply not good enough for a nationwide transportation system that will be used by an estimated 25 million people this year.

Amtrak President David Gunn asked for \$1.8 billion for fiscal 2005, including about \$800 million for long-overdue maintenance projects such as replacing rails and ties, repairing bridges and refurbishing sleeper cars.

The Bush administration proposed giving Amtrak \$900 million—half what the national passenger railway says it needs.

Gunn calls the president's budget proposal a "shutdown number" for Amtrak. Congress won't let Amtrak come to a complete halt—passenger rail is too popular with the public for that. However, lawmakers have shown before they are perfectly willing to starve the rail system to the point where it can do little more than limp along.

Several train supporters in the Senate scrambled this week to get some intercity rail money tucked into the huge highway bill before Congress. However, that bill is headed straight for a presidential veto, and it's likely that when lawmakers cut it down to size, the rail money will be the first to go.

Leaders in Congress and the White House still are unwilling to make the same commitment to rail infrastructure as they do to highways and airport runways.

Meanwhile, there never has been a stronger case for Amtrak. The rail system is setting records for ridership. New financial controls put in place by Gunn last year have left the railroad with \$148 million in the bank. Gunn has cut Amtrak's workforce by 3,500.

Now Amtrak needs a major federal investment that would allow it to make long-overdue capital improvements and expand service in key intercity corridors. For example, Oregon and Washington and Amtrak have agreed on a much needed plan to improve rail service between Portland and Seattle. Everyone agrees the rail service would help reduce the terrible congestion on Interstate 5 between the two cities. All that's needed now is a commitment of money from the federal government.

Congress and the White House are debating spending between \$258 billion and \$378 billion in a budget-busting highway bill that might go far beyond available gas-tax revenues. Yet they seem to begrudge every dollar spent on passenger rail.

Amtrak must be more than an afterthought in the debate about investments in the nation's transportation system. For millions of Americans, passenger rail is an essential service.

—from OregonLive.com (everything Oregon), February 15, 2004

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## \$3 MILLION VIOLIN LEFT ON TRAIN

In January, Gidon Kremer left his \$3 million violin on an Amtrak train, but a quick-acting baggage handler retrieved the instrument and it was returned to its grateful owner. As a musician who was performing as a guest artist with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Kremer took the train from New York to Baltimore. ■



## BOSTON'S LIGHT RAIL LINK TO NORTH STATION TO GET UPGRADE

BEGINNING IN MARCH, THE MBTA is closing a segment of the Green Line that connects North Station, where the Downeaster terminates. The project, which is slated to take a year, will see the demolition of the elevated track that is a familiar sight to Downeaster riders who come and go from North Station. In the interim, shuttle buses will provide transportation between the station and Lechmere. A new superstation, to include both lines, will replace the old elevated tracks for the Green Line and the underground station for the Orange Line at North Station.

## FROM SCOTLAND TO AFRICA BY RAIL

SPAIN AND MOROCCO HAVE agreed to build a 24-mile rail tunnel beneath the Mediterranean, according to BBC news. The Spanish Development Ministry said two adjacent tunnels will run under the Straits of Gibraltar to Morocco. Work is expected to begin early this year. A comparison with the Channel Tunnel that links England and France raises the possibility of a continuous train ride from the Scottish Highlands to the Cape of Good Hope.

—With thanks to The 470  
Railroad Club newsletter

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## CONGRESS NEEDS TO GET ABOARD AMTRAK

MORE AND MORE PEOPLE CLIMB ABOARD a train in this country to get from Point A to Point B. Some are frustrated with the hassles of air travel; some want to avoid busy highways; others simply appreciate the convenience. Whatever their reasons, travelers are driving up use of the nation's primary passenger line.

In the past year some 600,000 new travelers pushed Amtrak's ridership up 3% over the previous year. The Empire Builder, which passes across northern Montana, saw a 13% jump in riders.

That's great news for Amtrak and a credit to David Gunn, who took over as CEO of the rail system nearly two years ago.

Increased passenger support, however, has yet to translate into increased political support.

The Bush administration proposes spending \$900 million for Amtrak in the next budget year. That's down \$400 million from this year's subsidy.

Bush's plan won't cover both the shortfall in operating expenses and the maintenance and infrastructure work that's already been delayed. But with the tremendous deficit the free-spending Bush and Congress already have amassed, it's unlikely Amtrak will see much more money this year.

Given the trillions in red ink, we're hard-pressed to push for even more spending. But

that doesn't mean we agree with Amtrak critics who say the railroad should be self-supporting. Yes, it must be run efficiently. But most passenger trains in the world receive government subsidies.

Taxpayers fund highway construction, airports and port facilities, which subsidize trucking, flying and shipping. Heck, taxpayers even pay the governments to "manage" Missouri River dam releases to benefit a tiny barge shipping industry.

If this country wants long-distance passenger rail service, Congress must come up with a better long-term plan for paying for it.

In the meantime, Gunn deserves credit for his efforts to improve Amtrak. He streamlined railroad management, got out of the unprofitable freight business and put cost controls in place. He hammers away at the need for better service, efficiency and reliability.

And he's seeing results. November was the railroad's busiest month in its 32-year history, up 11.7% over the same month last year. The Empire Builder posted a remarkable 41% increase over the same period last year.

Every day, more riders see the value of government-subsidized passenger rail service.

We hope it's not too long before Congress recognizes the value of that service and comes up with a plan to preserve it.

—Great Falls Tribune, February 6, 2004

## LIGHT RAIL UPDATE: VIRTUALLY EVERY NORTH AMERICAN CITY WITH LIGHT RAIL IS EITHER PLANNING OR BUILDING NEW EXTENSIONS

DECADES OF DECLINE THROUGH THE MID 20TH CENTURY BROUGHT THE EXTINCTION OF STREETCARS and interurban railways in almost all cities, and it looked as if the future of transit would be limited to buses on public streets and a limited selection of commuter rail in a handful of large metro areas.

But in 1975 a new term, *light rail*, was introduced. Evolved from older streetcar systems in Europe, it described a contemporary, mostly-surface electric railway that offered a good intermediate fit between the modes of buses and heavy rail.

In the 28 years since, every old "survivor" trolley system has been renovated,

with new light rail vehicles (LRVs) introduced on most. New starts have been opened at the rate of one additional city every two years, which demonstrates this mode's ability to operate on combinations of exclusive, semi-exclusive and shared alignments.

Edmonton and Calgary started the parade in 1978 and 1981, respectively. San Diego became the first U.S. new start, also in 1981, at the low initial cost of \$5.5 million per mile. Buffalo's 1985 completion began the next round of new starts, with Portland (Oregon) following in 1986. Sacramento and San Jose initiated revenue service in 1987. Nearly every one of these

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## ...LIGHT RAIL UPDATE

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systems has been expanded in the years since.

Another round of new starts began in 1990 when Los Angeles opened—more accurately, re-opened—the Blue Line to Long Beach, since joined by the cross-county Green Line and, in 2003, the Pasadena Gold Line. Other 1990s new starts included Baltimore, St. Louis, Denver, Dallas, and Salt Lake City.

In addition to the above regional systems, short urban lines that offer blends of Light Rail Transit, modern streetcar, and vintage trolley have been constructed. Portland, in addition to its regional lines, has added modern streetcars that operate entirely in mixed traffic. Tampa's Ybor City line, opened in 2002, uses replica vintage cars on a line located mostly in reserved street lanes. In 2003, Tacoma opened a city circulator that combines contemporary streetcars running on tracks in reserved street lanes.

Taken together, these systems highlight the flexibility inherent in LRT technology and operation, offering a variety of solutions for cities and regions that seek to add a rail component but cannot afford, and do not need, the capacity of a heavy rail system.

This combo of locational flexibility, affordability and ability to attract more riders continues to fuel interest in LRT.

With LRT already running in 24 of the 30 North American metro areas presently served by one or more rail modes, the time can be envisioned when every metro area with 1 million or more people will enjoy the benefits of rail transit. Electric light rail transit has proven itself, and it represents a system for our future. ■

*Adapted from an article written by John Schumann, senior transportation consultant at LTK Engineering Services, Portland, OR, based on the author's paper, "LRT in North America 2003 Update."*

## UNION PACIFIC, STOPPED IN ITS TRACKS

A RASH OF EARLY RETIREMENTS HAS LEFT Union Pacific Railroad with too few locomotive engineers and conductors to keep pace with brisk business, disrupting rail traffic and commerce from Washington to California.

The worst problems have occurred in the Willamette Valley, where Union Pacific freight trains have sat dead on the tracks for hours at a time awaiting replacement crews. Railroad workers call them "dead trains," and they've slowed freight deliveries and caused headaches for passenger trains and motorists. The fallout:

The average wait time for a freight railcar at Union Pacific's main transfer yard in Hinkle jumped from 29 hours in January 2003 to more than 40 hours last month, according to the Association of American Railroads.

Amtrak, which pays to run passenger trains on Union Pacific's tracks, saw its on-time performance between Eugene and Vancouver plunge from 74% in January 2003 to 51% in January 2004. Twice since January 24, Amtrak trains have become stuck in and around Portland for five hours behind a Union Pacific freight train, say Oregon and Washington transportation officials.

Due to motorists complaints, the ODOT says it is preparing to fine the railroad for violating a law that prohibits blocking public crossings for more than 10 minutes during the day.

Union Pacific, the state's largest track owner, has gone on a hiring spree to fix the problems. "If anybody ever wanted to become a railroader, this is a golden opportunity," said John Bromley, a spokesman for the Omaha-based company. Meanwhile, Amtrak officials say they are losing patience with the delays.

Many of the problems stem from Union Pacific's failure to foresee the number of early retirements among its engineers and conductors—and an increase in shipping demand. A change in federal law in 2001 allowed railroad workers with 30 years on the job to retire at age 60, launching a rash of retirements in Portland (Oregon) and elsewhere across the country, Bromley said.

The railroad could not say how many workers had retired in Oregon. Nationwide, the number of applications received from all railroads jumped from 6,165 in 2001 to 11,942 in 2002 and about 8,000 last year. Meanwhile,

Union Pacific's business volume, in gross ton miles, rose 5% between 2002 and 2003, Bromley said. Truck trailers and container traffic was up 13%. Industrial product volumes were up 9%.

The labor shortage is not unique to Union Pacific. Railroads nationwide expect to hire thousands of workers in the next five years as a result of retirements and increased demand. Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, which has a heavy presence in Washington, plans to hire 1,500 conductors a year for the next five years, spokesman Gus Melonas said, including 25 this year in Vancouver and 35 in Seattle.

So far, only Union Pacific appears to be struggling to manage the labor shortage, state officials say. To deal with its labor shortage, the company has brought managers in from out of state to recruit and train new conductors. Systemwide, according to Bromley, it expects to hire 3,000 workers this year, 600 more than last year.

Union Pacific conductors start at \$40,000 a year, can make \$79,000 within two years and have a good chance at a quick promotion to engineer.

Right now, the company's staffing problems are so severe that its two-person crews often have no replacements when they get to the end of their shifts. Federal law prohibits railroad crews from working longer than 12-hour shifts. "If there isn't a replacement crew, the train just stays there," Bennett said. "You tie your train down wherever that happens to be." He said he left such "dead trains" on about one-third of his runs last month.

With a lot of single-track corridors throughout the Willamette Valley, dead trains slow the entire system, occupying sidetracks normally used to let Amtrak trains pass slower freight trains.

As a result, "Amtrak gets frogged," Bennett said. Amtrak Cascades trains have experienced long delays between Portland and Eugene as recently as January 29, state officials say. The delays have also slowed Amtrak's Coast Starlight run between Seattle and Los Angeles.

"It's terrible, especially on weekends," said Arlene Lentz, who lives and operates a mill along a Union Pacific-owned rail line. "We can be stopped (in a car) from 45 minutes to two hours. It's been going on for months now."

—Excerpted from the *Oregonian*, Feb. 8, 2004



## ...David Gunn *(continued from page 2)*

Amtrak never should have accepted the trains until they met spec. Amtrak made a big mistake and so we ended up where every train was different. An Acela train rests at Boston's South Station. On-time performance in the Northeast Corridor is erratic, at best, thanks in part to track rebuilding along portions of some routes.

**DUFFY:** Where were Amtrak's technical guys when the decisions were being made?

**GUNN:** Amtrak contracted with the supplier to provide all the engineering and technical expertise. It was a design/build/maintain project. We were going to have these cars come in and it would all just be magic.

The problem was, Amtrak didn't have the right people running the program. If you look at the structure they had (*flips open an old reporting chart*), do you see any director of projects and equipment? These guys were electricians. This guy was a lawyer. I don't know what in the heck this guy was. Where were the mechanical guys?

This is what happens when you have people who don't understand the business actually running it. You should never give up control of maintenance, or separate the operations from maintenance, like these guys (*points toward Capitol Hill*) want to do to the corridor.

**DUFFY:** Do you have a plan to improve on-time performance?

**GUNN:** That's not just an Acela issue. We have an enormous problem off the corridor, and we have a big problem on the corridor. We control that to some extent. We control dispatching from New Rochelle to Washington, DC, and from New Haven to Boston. We don't control Metro North, which is rebuilding the New Haven line. They have two tracks out of service from New Haven to Stamford. It's a nightmare. During the day, we can't run around the local. It really croaks us. If you look at on-time performance, some trains are on-time all the time. Some trains are late all the time. If you look at the late ones on the corridor, it tends to be this congestion that goes around rebuilding.

On the long-distance trains, we have the freight railroads, which are basically dying. Physically, they are in real trouble. The con-

dition of their plant and equipment is not getting any better. It's inadequate to handle the volume. They have had enormous growth in volume. Unfortunately, they don't get paid a lot for it. So they don't make enough money to provide adequate sidings, yard capacity. If you look at our morning report, like the Sunset Limited, it's just a nightmare what's going on with that railroad. It's not just our trains.

**DUFFY:** Is Amtrak's on-time performance specific to freight railroads?

**GUNN:** It's very specific to railroads. Like CSX, which is critical to us. They ended up with all the old Conrail stuff, plus everything south of here (DC). They use a calendar instead of a watch. Dispatching is awful. Last night, going home, we had a red signal leaving the portal. We were there for 10 bloody minutes. The conductor is trying to call the guy on the phone. The engineer is trying to call the command center. Finally they called Jacksonville and they called Trenton. I mean, I don't know if the guy was asleep or yakking with someone. In the old days, someone would have been keel-hauled for that. There was no reason for the red signal.

The U.P., they'll have days when they have trains outlawed all over the place. That's when an engineer is on duty for more than 12 hours, then his train has to stop wherever it is. One of my guys was out riding between Kansas City and St. Louis recently. There were seven trains outlawed within 100 miles. Every siding was plugged. It took four hours to go 125 miles. The track conditions were awful.

**DUFFY:** Why did you walk away from the MBTA contract?

**GUNN:** Oh, I can answer that one quickly. The RFP they put out was absolutely outrageous. It required us to assume all liability for passengers. That made it impossible to get insurance. The bid from the Massachusetts Bay Commuter Rail operation came in at \$1 billion-plus for five years. I think the other bidder came in at \$2 billion. Well, the difference is the liability. We knew that. When they actually cut the deal, somehow the winning bidder was exempted from the liability.

**DUFFY:** Were there any nice surprises when you came here?

**GUNN:** There were some, actually. The nice surprise was that the workforce, employees generally, whether management or hourly, knew better than most that the thing was in real trouble. And so, what we have done here has been really painful. And yet they have been, I'd say, fairly enthusiastic about it.

Ridership is another nice surprise. (More than 24 million passengers in FY03, the highest annual ridership ever recorded in Amtrak's 32-year history.) There's a feeling here that people are really trying to make the thing work. We receive a lot of commendations from customers. I think that is a symptom or sign that our people are really trying hard.

**DUFFY:** Why did you come out of a comfortable retirement in Nova Scotia to run Amtrak?

**GUNN:** My first reaction was, no, I'm retired, I think I'll stay away from this opportunity. I knew the thing was a mess. But they conned me into coming to Washington and meeting with them.

In one sense they were desperate. I mean, the thing was nearly insolvent. I didn't know quite how close it was. But within a couple weeks I realized we were going to miss payroll.

What I bring to it is that I have been through it before. It's not that I'm the best manager in the world, or the smartest person in the world. In this kind of environment, where the thing is starting to crumble, I mean, it's like it was in New York City, when I was at the transit authority there in 1984. That was horrendous. We were 500 cars short for rush hour when I arrived there. We had derailments and fires and graffiti.

I almost felt guilty as I was arguing with myself because I knew Amtrak had only a short time to live if we didn't get the things straightened out. I also knew who else was applying for the job because I was told that. The other people were good people, but they hadn't actually managed a railroad. They were sort of policy-type people. This thing needed immediate attention in terms of basics. So I felt that if I didn't do it, it would be on my conscience, that I might have been able to make a difference.

—Mass Transit magazine, Dec. 03/Jan 04



## ...Has The Maine DOT Gone Wobbly on Passenger Rail...?

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decision to the federal Court of Appeals. Hearings have been held and we are expecting a decision at any time. Assuming that the appeals court, like the STB, rules in Amtrak's favor and the train is set free to do 80 mph on many sections of track, ridership will increase even more rapidly than it has since service began at the end of 2001. We are confident that ridership will increase because more than one commuter has let us know he or she rides the Downeaster occasionally but would do so daily if trip time were reduced.

Equally important as speed is the extension of service northward. Lately, TrainRiders has heard rumors of continuing delays in the proposed extension to Freeport and Brunswick. Despite there being only one building season necessary for the extension, this project has been in the works for nearly five years without a single tie, rail or signal being upgraded. One of the most serious lapses in this issue is that until this year, extension of service beyond Portland to Freeport and Brunswick, originally scheduled for 2005, was moved back to 2006. That was a major disappointment. However, rumors now inform us that state officials have been heard to say train service could arrive in Brunswick "as early as" 2007!

Not only are we disturbed at the rumored delays, we are also concerned that we hear about them "on the street" from third parties, and not from MDOT itself. We all worked together to get the train that the whole country is talking about to Maine in the first place. TrainRiders cannot do this job alone, and we miss the teamwork that we previously enjoyed. We look forward to renewal of the close relationship that we have always had with the State, as well as the beginning of construction on the northward expansion of the Downeaster. ■

## MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNOR SPENDS LAVISHLY ON BOSTON AT THE EXPENSE OF NEEDY SISTER CITIES

BACK IN THE 1960s AND '70s, MASSACHUSETTS ENGAGED IN A GREAT DEBATE OVER THE FUTURE OF STATE TRANSPORTATION and, ultimately, the future of the Commonwealth itself.

Those were the days when state transportation planners were insisting we spend billions on the so-called Master Highway Plan for metropolitan Boston that would have paved Boston over with eight lane expressways.

In the meantime, the rest of the state's highway system was barely half-finished. Route 495 stopped in Mansfield. Even after it was completed, you couldn't take it directly to the Cape because it stopped in Wareham. There was no north-south highway through the central part of the state. All the attention—and all the money—were focused on Boston.

Fortunately, a broad-based citizen's movement killed the Master Highway Plan and shifted the focus of the Commonwealth's transportation policy to transit and rail in metropolitan Boston and the long overdue completion of the state's highway network outside the metropolitan area.

Today, Boston has the finest public transportation system in the nation; the Big Dig is finally on the way to completion, and Boston itself is one of the nation's great urban success stories.

Now, Massachusetts must decide what it will do to continue to build a first-rate transportation system that combines Boston's success with a smart growth policy for the rest of the Commonwealth. Cities like New Bedford, Fall River, Worcester, Springfield, Fitchburg, Lawrence and Lynn are hurting. They need strong rail links with the capital city and the Northeast region in general.

Such links could also play a key role in helping to solve what is a serious housing crisis in metropolitan Boston. As we have already seen in Brockton, connecting older urban communities with Boston by rail can open up affordable housing opportunities to thousands of Massachusetts families who have been priced out of the Boston market.

The state's current transportation policies offer these cities little, if anything, and that is particularly true in southeastern Massachusetts. Instead, the Romney administration seems to be concentrating on two new Boston

megaprojects that will cost billions and are of marginal value.

One of them is the half-mile Silver Line bus tunnel under Boston that will cost nearly a billion dollars. The second is the so-called Urban Ring, which carries a price tag currently estimated to be in excess of \$3 billion.

How can we possibly justify more billions for Boston and turn a cold shoulder to the real needs of New Bedford and Fall River and their sister cities outside Boston? In fact, the cost of the Silver Line tunnel itself would more than pay for commuter rail to New Bedford and Fall River and major improvements throughout the commuter rail system.

And the cost of the Urban Ring would go a long way toward paying for the one Boston project that should be built and would knit the entire regional rail system together with enormous transportation and environmental benefits for everybody—the North-South rail link.

Why are the governor and his key advisors turning a cold shoulder to New Bedford and its sister cities? I don't understand it. Of course, we had another state administration (under Gov. Edward King) that once referred to New Bedford as the "end of the universe." But how can you possibly look at this state's future and advocate a smart growth policy while pouring billions more into Boston and ignoring the critical needs of the rest of the state?

Perhaps we should put them all in the governor's limousine and send them south on Route 24 at five in the afternoon. Then they might understand. Unfortunately, they seem to be digging in. That means that the legislators, mayors and business leaders of the state's older urban communities now must do precisely what those of us who opposed the Master Highway Plan did in the '60s and '70s.

Organize themselves, make their case loud and clear, and convince a majority of the state Legislature, if not the governor, that it's time for a change in transportation priorities.

You'll have plenty of company from those of us who live in and around Boston, are thrilled at the quality and level of public transportation we now get, and want you to have first-rate rail access to Boston and the entire region.

—Michael S. Dukakis,  
writing in *The Standard-Times*, January 11, 2004





## BRITISH CONSERVATIVES ADMIT RAILROAD DEREGULATION FAILED

THE WAY THE RAILROADS WERE PRIVATISED BY the Conservatives was a mistake, David Willetts, the party's policy chief admits.

"The decision taken by John Major's government to separate responsibility for the trains from the management of the track was ideologically driven and wrong," he added. "Rail privatisation was a classic example of taking a model (gas and electricity) that had worked for one industry and wrongly applying it to different circumstances."

—Excerpted from the *London Daily Telegraph*, Dec. 14, 2003

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## HERE'S LLOYD FLEM OF THE WASHINGTON RAIL NEWS

*We always read the newsy column written by the executive director of the Washington Association of Rail Passengers (WashARP). He tells us things we like to hear, or don't like to hear, about rail in the state that is as far northwest as Maine is northeast. But whether the news is good or bad, we like his style. Here is an excerpt from the February/March issue of WashARP's newsletter:*

Members of WashARP are of one mind on our support for more and better passenger rail service. I cannot imagine anyone paying dues while not supporting passenger trains. But there are some public issues, at the local, state and federal levels, which may be not quite as direct in their impact on passenger rail policy that could still be of interest to us. As part of my job is to study these issues and offer judgments as to their effects on our existing and potential future passenger train service, we will jump in here, granting that not all rail advocates need agree with all the conclusions reached. But here goes.

First, here's where we'll nearly all agree: Two excellent, forward-looking proposals for long-term funding of intercity passenger rail have emerged from the US Senate. One (S1961) is from

a bi-partisan group of mostly east coast senators, led by Ernest Hollings (D-SC). The second (S1505) is captained by Texan Kay Bailey Hutchison.

Now these two good bills are being combined, with excellent cooperation among the senators and their staffs, to get serious commitment to intercity trains. Important is that all proponents favor a national network of passenger trains, not just a few isolated corridors, as some Amtrak critics have suggested. And both bills would utilize tax credit bonding as a means of financing rail infrastructure, whether for passenger or freight trains.

The century-old pattern of rail infrastructure being financed by the private sector, while other modes—air, highways, waterways, even urban transit—are seen as a public responsibility makes no political or economic sense. (Ironically, some in the rail freight industry, with stubborn turn-of-the-last-century mentality, are still opposing public participation in rail infrastructure funding.) When this "combined" rail investment bill gets honed a bit more, we need to urge our senators, and importantly, our House delegation, to support this needed investment in our country's future. ■

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