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TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST



Chairman's Comments

Submitted by Wayne E. Davis

17 years ago, when TrainRiders/Northeast was just beginning, we relied on "telephone trees" (volunteers in a town agreed to make the calls within their local dialing area to our members) in order to get the word out when it was necessary to contact a legislator or member of Congress on a rail issue. Today, nearly everyone has email and it is time we took advantage of that. When we need help, we need an efficient way to contact you (and hundreds of other passenger rail supporters) quickly. If you are currently using email on a regular basis, please give us that address so that we may drop you a note when we need your help. We promise not to abuse the privilege and, of course, we would never give or sell it to any other parties. Please include your phone number and entire address so there is no confusion on our part when we add it to the record. Remember, we have no paid lobbyists—we shouldn't need any since we already have the most powerful volunteer lobbyists available to us—you and your friends! Please help to make our efforts in support of rail more efficient.

—WD

WHY WE LIKE TRAINS

IT'S NOT BECAUSE WE ARE NOSTALGIC FOR LIFE THE WAY IT USED TO BE.

IT IS BECAUSE WE HONOR THE SANCTITY OF THE LAND, and traveling by train provides us with a dialogue in time and space with the landscape.

IT IS BECAUSE WE LIKE TO TRAVEL CENTER CITY TO CENTER CITY as fast as possible.

WE ALSO LIKE TRAINS BECAUSE THEY ARE SPIRITED AND INTELLIGENT and they glide from state to state while weaving the esthetics of the countryside into the psychic and physical comfort of the passenger.

WE LIKE TRAINS BECAUSE THE RIDE IS SMOOTH AND LAID BACK AND INFINITELY CHARMING.

We may also like trains because in our country rail is the indisputable underdog of transportation options: Passenger rail receives \$1.2 billion of federal transportation funding (that does not read \$12 billion, dear reader, but \$1.2) while highways receive \$32 billion and aviation \$14 billion.

It is our passion to champion this underdog, the more so because we are aware that leaders in the rest of the developed world support our thinking. They assume high-speed passenger rail to be one of three major transportation modes and fund it accordingly.

If only, we muse, highway subsidies in the United States amounted to \$31 billion and aviation subsidies to \$13 billion—\$1 billion less per year for each—rail investment could rise to \$3.2 billion (be sure to put in the decimal point). Amtrak would still be the underdog but it could catch its breath. Right now, it can't. It's in considerable pain. It is being starved by the federal government.

Despite the deprivations that starving causes with such entities as rolling stock and on-time performance, more Americans than ever are choosing to travel by rail. Amtrak's

FY 2004 closed with an all-time high ridership record.

Despite its crippled condition people choose rail because it's an ideal way to travel and always has been.

If Amtrak could coax that extra \$2 billion out of the federal government, on-schedule trains would stop in your town every two or three hours all day long. But to make this happen the Congress would have to adjust highway and aviation subsidies downward by \$1 billion each per year.

Ask one of the DOWNEASTER regulars how much they appreciate on the option of rail. On second thought, maybe you shouldn't: those people who drive an hour from Augusta, Wiscasset or Fryeburg will tell you, as a sigh escapes their lips, that life will be better when the service extends beyond Portland.

For that matter, the most frequently asked question at the Amtrak counter in Portland is, "How much longer till the train goes to Freeport (Brunswick, Bath, Lewiston)?"

Our mind, which is a little starved like Amtrak, occasionally becomes giddy. At such moments we consider stewardship of the land and how increased passenger rail service would lead to less sprawl, less pollution, and more beauty if Amtrak were funded with major allocations the way airports, airlines, highways, buses, trucks and cars are—say with \$10 billion. (We *are* giddy today.)

Let's be serious. If rail transportation actually were funded with \$10 billion a year—still only a third of what highways receive—Americans could ride their own versions of trains like the Bullet and the TGV and the ICE that roar silently at 150 mph, and common ordinary trains that go 100.

As for the DOWNEASTER and future New England trains, they would operate between Boston and Portland, Lewiston (with connec-

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Traveling By Train? Leave The Anvil Home

LIGHTEN UP, TRAIN TRAVELERS. In November Amtrak began to enforce limits on carry-on luggage to the tune of no more than two carry-on bags that weigh less than 50 lbs. each. The ruling excludes personal items such as purses, briefcases, diaper bags and strollers.

It's mainly a matter of safety, Amtrak officials say, but also has to do with growing concerns about passenger comfort.

"On heavily traveled trains, people are bringing very large parcels—and large numbers of parcels," said Cliff Black, a national Amtrak spokesman in Washington, DC. "Some of them are extremely heavy. If passengers cannot lift them, they often request assistance from crew members, who occasionally injure themselves while helping." He added that other passengers also sometimes wind up hurting themselves hoisting bags for fellow travelers.

In addition to this concern, he said that when passengers pile aboard with excessive carry-ons the bags will spill out into the aisles and fill up seats needed for passengers.

At the Rensselaer, NY, Rail Station in late October, Amtrak officials tried to help passengers prepare for the crackdown. A scale identified bags that were too heavy, and a wooden box wouldn't accommodate those that were too large. Amtrak District Superintendent Phillip Larson said the scale and the box gave passengers a more realistic sense of the new limits than they would get by reading a poster.

While Amtrak has had baggage limits in place for several years, rail officials say the rules have not been rigorously enforced. Now, Amtrak is following suit with airlines that limit carry-ons.

For a few long-distance Amtrak travelers out of Rensselaer, such as those heading for Chicago or Boston on the Lake Shore Limited, the opportunity exists to check up to three bags of up to 50 lbs. each. But most trains that stop here do not offer baggage cars.

And who are the most prolific packers of luggage? College students who travel not only with several suitcases but major-sized duffel bags stuffed with laundry.

—With thanks to Cathy Woodruff
of the Times Union

GUNN: DEFERRAL STRATEGY FAILS AMTRAK

Washington — AMTRAK'S STRATEGY OF SCRAPING BY ON LIMITED BUDGETS by deferring crucial capital investments "is no longer workable," according to the inspector general of the Transportation Department, who said Congress should either give the railroad more money or tell it to cut back operations.

The inspector general, Kenneth M. Mead, said Amtrak was struggling with unsustainable operating losses, declining on-time performances and the possibility of a major failure of aging equipment, although "no one knows where or when such a failure may occur."

The railroad itself has cited worn-out movable bridges in Connecticut and wiring in NYC that dates from before the middle of the 20th century.

Mr. Mead said that when Amtrak's current president, David L. Gunn, took over in 2002, he focused on maintaining and rebuilding the existing system. "This may have appeared reasonable for a short period of time with the expectation that reauthorization would validate Amtrak's strategy."

But Congress has not provided the financing that this strategy would require, he said.

"The existing system is not sustainable at current funding levels," his report said. "The total funding Amtrak receives from all sources is not sufficient to maintain the system in a state of good repair."

Amtrak agreed with many of the report's findings. Mr. Gunn said in a letter to Mr. Mead in October that "deferred capital investment has reached critical levels and continued deferral brings Amtrak closer to a major failure somewhere in the system." His letter added, "We are playing Russian roulette."

Congress has consistently given Amtrak less than the railroad has said it needs for maintenance and capital investment.

This year Amtrak sought \$1.5 billion, but the Bush administration



proposed \$900 million, which the House approved. In November, however, House and Senate negotiations agreed to a \$1.2 billion subsidy. At that level, Amtrak will not be able to undertake the capital investments it had planned. Amtrak delayed the investments last year, too. For that year, it asked for \$1.9 billion but got about \$1.2 billion.

Amtrak has had no comment on the Transportation Department report beyond Mr. Gunn's letter.

Mr. Gunn rejected an idea proposed by Mr. Mead that Amtrak prepare budgets that called for a federal subsidy of \$1.2 billion. Mr. Gunn said the railroad management had a responsibility "to inform the board and others of the minimum federal funding required for a safe, reliable operation."

The inspector general's report said Amtrak had made progress "in controlling the growth in expenses," and noted that ridership had increased to record levels, reaching 24 million in 2003. But this was partly due to promotions, and ticket revenue was down. The railroad has not been able to increase revenues enough to reduce cash losses, Mr. Mead said, and despite a decline in total operating expenses, "it is clear that Amtrak cannot save its way to financial health." The report also noted that service is declining.

On-time performance was almost 72% through June of this year, down from 74% for 2003, the report said. In 2003, the performance of the Acela Express, Amtrak's premium service between Boston, NYC and Washington, was 70.8%, which it called "dismal." That was down 8.6% from the previous year. Service on the Acela through June 2004 was slightly better, with average delays of 54 minutes.

The goal was 94% on-time service. Ridership between Washington and Boston declined, partly because of the decreased reliability of trains, the report said.

—Excerpted from a Matthew Wald article
in *The New York Times*, November 22

ISTOOK'S APOLOGY NICE, BUT IT MAY BE TOO LATE

US REPRESENTATIVE ERNEST ISTOOK IS APOLOGIZING, BUT the Oklahoma congressman made a big mistake in his little game of pressure politics that may not be that easy to correct.

Istook, chairman of the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury and Independent Agencies, reduced or eliminated the transportation funding requests of 21 fellow Republican congressmen the end of last month because they did not agree with him on funding for Amtrak.

The 21 representatives signed a letter endorsing a bill earmarking \$1.8 billion for Amtrak, which Istook opposed. So Istook, who warned his colleagues last February in a letter he would take appropriations from those representatives' state projects to offset Amtrak funding, did just that—without any other warning than the February letter.

Istook's spokeswoman, Micah Lydorf, told *The Hill*, a Capitol newspaper which reported the story Nov. 24, "They can't say they weren't warned."

Istook certainly has the power to do what he did, but having the power is not always a wise reason—and usually the poorest reason—for doing something. Rather than respond rationally to lawmakers with a difference of opin-

ion, Istook chose to act rashly and with hostility.

Istook now says he wants to make things right and work to restore next year the funding requests he cut. But his fellow Republicans won't easily forget his brash act.

Being the chair of a committee doesn't endow a lawmaker with totalitarian powers, and a czarist attitude doesn't work in a democratic government.

Just because a representative from New York, Connecticut or New Jersey doesn't agree with a lawmaker from Oklahoma, the people in New York, Connecticut or New Jersey shouldn't be penalized.

And we wouldn't want Oklahomans punished either for the attitude or actions of one of our lawmakers.

Istook has apologized, and hopefully, he has done it out of sincerity and not just because Republicans will be selecting committee chairs this month for Congress' next session. However, saying I'm sorry doesn't always heal the wound, and Istook, a 12-year representative who should know better, may find himself simply a committee member, not a committee chairman.

But that's better than the lawmakers taking Istook's folly out on Oklahomans.

—8 December 2004, *Muskogee Phoenix* (OK)

WHEELCHAIR THEFT AT PORTLAND STATION

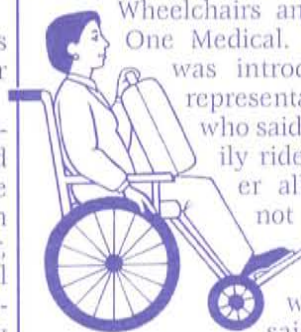
Two wheelchairs are kept at the transportation center, between the Amtrak ticket counter and the Quiktrak machine, and when people buy tix online or by phone they are told that, in the event they are handicapped, a wheelchair is available for boarding or getting off the train, if they request it in advance.

One of the wheelchairs disappeared in July of 2002, seven months into service, and the other disappeared two months later.

TrainRiders to the rescue. Wayne looked in the Yellow Pages under

Wheelchairs and found Alpha One Medical. On calling, he was introduced to sales representative Lou Basso, who said he and his family ride the Downeaster all the time. He not only offered to give the Amtrak counter a wheelchair but said he would drive it right over.

Wayne then called a contact at Mercy Hospital, which owns the building where the TNE office was originally



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BRIDGES ON LAST LEGS POSE PROBLEMS

PASSENGERS RIDING THE RAILS IN THE NORTHEAST hardly notice the three busy drawbridges they cross in southern Connecticut. But Amtrak engineers say the bridges are in such dire condition that they threaten to sever service between New York and Boston.

The tiny 291-foot drawbridge that has operated over the Niantic River for 97 years is the busiest of the three. Its steel supports have holes so large, a person can stick a finger in them. To the east, bolts supporting a four-million-pound counterweight keep failing on the 85-year-old bridge that runs over the Thames River. To the west, structural support pins are wearing out on the bridge that ferries trains over the Connecticut River, much as it has

for 97 years.

On the roughly 1,300 bridges that Amtrak owns, the three in southeastern Connecticut are among the most antiquated and least reliable in the system. "These bridges are worn out and have reached the end of their useful lives," said Jim Richter, Amtrak's deputy chief engineer for structures. "The time has come to replace them."

David J. Hughes, Amtrak's chief engineer, has spoken passionately about the need to shore up the bridges, which carry 40 trains a day.

"Structures talk to you if you know what to listen to," he said. "They yell and scream at you. Now the Thames is talking to us. Bolts broke in 1994 and then again in 1995 and we can't drill holes anymore, and the bolts keep breaking. What the bridge is start-

ing to tell you is here's too much accumulated fatigue and stress, and if you don't listen, shame on you."

Amtrak thought it could solve some of its operational and financial problems by electrifying the lines east of New Haven so it could run faster service with its new Acela trains. It did, but the electrification project also added weight and stress to the already overburdened bridges.

Six bridges in Connecticut are overdue for overhauls, according to Amtrak engineers. The three drawbridges pose the most immediate problems because of the wear and tear they each endure from having to open nearly 4,000 times a year to accommodate everything from commercial

The bridges open 4,000 times a year for fishing boats, pleasure boats, and submarines.

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... BRIDGES

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fishing boats to pleasure boats to submarines coming and going to their base in Groton, CT.

If Washington does not provide the money, an Amtrak official said, on-time performance will continue to suffer. They recalled the winter of 2001, when the drawbridge over the Connecticut River bridge got stuck in the open position for nine hours, stopping all train traffic. When mechanics finally lowered the bridge back into place, all traffic resumed. But the bridge then remained in the down position for days, preventing boats from reaching their destinations.

As part of its \$1.5 billion request before Congress, Amtrak proposes to use \$350 million to repair infrastructure like tracks, stations and bridges. In recent years, it has received an average of \$71 million a year toward such projects, according to Mr. Hughes. That money has to cover any repairs needed in a system that encompasses 1,100 miles of track, 1,300 bridges, 1,000 miles of power lines, 18 miles of tunnels, and Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan. Fixing the Thames bridge alone is expected to cost \$45 million, though the cost would be spread over a few years.

The Niantic bridge needs to be replaced entirely. "It's a tired, old bridge," said Mr. Richter. The engineers want to see a replacement bridge built alongside the current structure so service would not be disrupted during the construction phase. That plan has a price tag of \$60 million.

Excerpted from The New York Times

GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE DOWNEASTER

Wayne Davis, the chairman of TrainRiders/Northeast (TNE), wrote a letter to Maine's Governor John Baldacci in August that expressed our pleasure at the governor's personal efforts with Downeaster service.

It also addressed TNE's deep concern that Downeaster operations, along with our work of almost 16 years, is being brought down by poor management decisions.

Wayne asked the governor if the following steps might be taken to re-energize the Downeaster:

- (1) Restore the Downeaster to reserved-seat status;
- (2) Return the last departure out of Boston to its 11:15 PM time slot—and perhaps run "skip stops" to allow an earlier arrival in Portland;
- (3) Remove the bus schedule from the



printed Amtrak schedules and either correct the automated phone information system or remove the most recent additions that recommend buses over trains;

- (4) Arrange for the promised shuttle to carry ticketed passengers and their luggage between North and South Stations.

He stated in closing that TrainRiders/Northeast has an obligation to the 90,000 Maine citizens who signed petitions that required the state to support passenger trains in the same way that it supports highways and airports.

After further meetings between TNE and State officials, these mistakes (which resulted in lowered ridership and occurred without TrainRiders prior knowledge), with the exception of the North/South Station shuttle, were corrected.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DOWNEASTER, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU

On December 15, three years to the day that the Downeaster became the first passenger train to operate in Maine in 35 years, a party was held. It began when a very large cake provided by Hannaford Stores was seen boarding the 2 PM out of Portland. It took itself in all its red, white and blue frosting to the café car, and as the train began to roll passengers were invited to come have a piece.

The center top of the tray cake was a full-color edible photo of the Downeaster, and servers cut judicious slices around the edges in order to preserve the image for commuters on the 6:15 PM to also enjoy.

Meanwhile, the Bangor Taffy that was a fixture on Maine trains from the early 1900s through the 1950s—when a man with a basket walked through at every stop and sold it—was given to all passengers. The original creamy rich caramel recipe has never been altered. Len Libby Candies provided the taffy.

Who accompanied the cake to the café car? Who packaged the taffy? Volunteer members of TrainRiders/Northeast. (We do have fun in this organization.)

At Exeter, NH, school children met the Downeaster and sang Christmas carols.

They were rewarded with a glimpse of Santa Claus on the platform, and even a high school kid said, "Hey, he looks real." (We have learned that Mrs Claus made him a red velvet suit with real fur trim and that the beard is so real he dares small children to try to pull it off.)

Grown ups who boarded or got off at Exeter were given NH-made chocolate truffles, and children were given candy canes. The truffles, the candy canes and the caroling—'twas the New Hampshire contingent of TNE members.

At Dover, NH, train-shaped iced cookies were given to passengers, one of whom was heard to exclaim, "It's too beautiful to eat!" They were made at home by a TNE board member.

How long did the birthday cake survive? Last year's cake was polished off as the return party train sped north in the dark through Wells, Maine. This year it lasted only until Dover. The only party favors that made it all the way down to Boston and all the way back may be the balloons—and possibly some of the train-shaped cookies that were too beautiful.

See you next year, Downeaster riders: Same place, same time. ■

RAILROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT MAY BE SHOT DOWN BY NEW HAMPSHIRE COUNCIL

A PROJECT TO BOOST DOWNEASTER RIDERSHIP MAY BE REJECTED BY NH GOVERNOR'S EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) hopes to construct passing sidings and replace older rails in several NH locations to allow the addition of a fifth daily round-trip between Maine and Boston. The project, which may bring in an additional \$250,000 in annual revenue, is critical to the service.

NNEPRA and the Maine DOT have recently proposed New Hampshire provide \$960,000 out of its share in the federal highway congestion mitigation grant to help pay for the project. NNEPRA and Maine would fund the rest as a match for the grant.

The proposed use of the federal grant requires approval from the NH Governor's Executive Council and the NH DOT Commissioner Carol Murray. The DOT has already pledged its support. Area organizations such as Seacoast Metropolitan Planning Organization and the University of New Hampshire are also behind the project because providing a variety of transportation options is important for the fastest growing part of the state. The Dover Council has adopted a resolution to endorse the use of the grant for the undertaking.

However, some Executive Council members are resistant to the idea of using part of the federal grant earmarked for New Hampshire for rail improvements. In their opinion, the project will not help reduce highway congestion or air pollution, which is the purpose of the grant. Executive Councilor Peter Spaulding, R-Hopkinton, believes creating park-and-ride facilities along I-93 will make a more effective investment.

Councilor Ruth Griffin, R-Portsmouth, believes the Downeaster does not have enough ridership to deserve a \$1.2 million grant. According to Griffin, Dover, Durham and Portsmouth have C&J Trailways, which has good ridership among those who commute to Boston. She also wants to see the highway grant funded by gas tax benefit projects that would help regenerate the income.

(See p. 6, "NH Rail Foe May Be Compromised," for news about Councilor Griffin and C&J Trailways.)

Rockingham Planning Commission Executive Director Cliff Sinnott said the majority of the five-member elected body appeared to disfavor the project but decided to table it until January to hear from Maine DOT Commissioner David Cole, who initiated the funding request, and was not at the meeting.

Sinnott believes the councilors did not have sufficient information to make a fair judgment. Spaulding said he had the impression the Downeaster project would take up all the federal highway grant earmarked for NH. According to Christopher Morgan, administrator of the Bureau of Rail, that is not the case. Highway congestion mitigation grants, he said, are funded in two-year cycles, and the Downeaster project would not take money away from existing ones.

Sinnott said people who had opportunities to talk about the project at the Executive Council meeting included Jim Jalbert, owner of C&J Trailways, who expressed his concern about the lack of cooperation from the railroad authority to integrate bus and train service to avoid competition. C&J Trailways offers daily round-trip bus service to Logan Airport and Boston South Station from Dover, Durham, Portsmouth and Newburyport, MA. Since January 2003, the company has operated the Dover Transportation Station that the city constructed for more than \$1 million, about three-quarters of which was paid through a federal grant.

When the company began leasing the train station, it had an agreement with the railroad authority to arrange train and bus schedules to avoid simultaneous departure, according to Jalbert, who also proposed a policy to allow passengers who missed a train to hop a bus and vice versa with the same ticket. Almost two years later, NNEPRA hasn't made good on any of these agreements, he said.

John Englert, Executive Director of NNEPRA, pointed out that it's not so easy to accommodate C&J's needs while trying

to avoid a conflict with bus schedules elsewhere.

Jalbert claims the fifth daily round-trip to be added to the Downeaster's schedule would directly compete with his company's existing bus schedule. Jalbert said Downeaster ridership overall is declining.

Sinnott believes, however, that the addition of a round-trip would be a fiscally sound move for Downeaster operations. The rail authority originally projected larger revenues from long-distance ticket sales than from commuter trips. It turned out to be the opposite and NH commuters are the biggest customers.

"I think one trip could make a significant difference," he said, "because it would give commuters two shots rather than one in and out of Boston." There currently are two inbound trains in the morning and two outbound in the afternoon. A 2½ hour gap exists between the morning trains and four hours between afternoon trains.

Morgan agrees with Sinnott that the rail service addition will have a big impact on ridership. "People who commute need to have more than one train available."

According to NNEPRA, 250,028 trips were made on Downeaster trains between Oct. 1, 2003 and Sept. 30, 2004, 1.6% down from the same period a year before. Englert attributed the decline to the Democratic Convention in Boston having forced the Downeaster to cease service July 24-31. The following week the Kennebunk highway bridge collapsed, hindering service north of Wells, Maine, for five days.

He added that revenue during the one-year period decreased by 7.7% from \$3.74 million to \$3.45 million, reflecting these events and discontinued promotions.

While revenues from Boston-Portland trips dropped by 18.4% this year, ticket sales between New Hampshire and Massachusetts communities are rising swiftly. The number of trips made between Durham and Woburn, MA, rose by more

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... Railroad Improvement Project May Be Shot Down

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than 200% this year, causing revenue from the ticket sales to go up by 407%. Sales from Durham-Boston trips increased by 98%, Durham-Exeter by 130% and Durham-Saco by 119%. Sales between Dover and Boston declined by 8.5%, but Exeter-Boston increased by 10%.

Englert projects the proposed railroad improvements will result in a 20% increase in train service and save 3 to 5 minutes in travel time between Portland and Boston, and planning experts say the train will be a valuable asset to NH as urban sprawl escalates.

"Enhancing and improving Downeaster service will reduce congestion and improve air quality by mitigating single occupant vehicle use in the Spaulding Turnpike-Little Bay Bridge Corridor," Dover City Planner Bruce Woodruff wrote in a resolution the City Council adopted to support the Downeaster project. Woodruff said the federal congestion mitigation fund had already been used to construct the Dover train station and that the state should help improve train service to make the most of the investment. The grant involves no state tax dollars.

Stephen Pesci, project director of campus planning at UNH, said an increasing number of students who do not own a car rely on the trains as means of transportation. Even though C&J Trailways is available, it offers service only three days a week while the train provides daily access to a multiple number of locations in three states. Pesci believes students make up to 90% of the ridership out of Durham.

—Excerpted from a *Foster's Daily*

Democrat article by Kiroko Suto, November 20

RAILING OVER TRANSPORTATION FUNDING (OR, MORE INFO ON DOUBTFUL NEW HAMPSHIRE POLITICS)

JIM JALBERT SAYS HE'S LOOKING OUT FOR TAXPAYERS. Other transportation officials says he's looking out for number one. In the middle is \$1.2 million in federal congestion mitigation money, which will be on the table when new governor John Lynch and the Executive Council meet with NH DOT Commissioner Carol Murray in January.

While those funds represent less than 10% of the total Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) money to NH, for the purpose of improving air quality through alternate transportation, it's putting Jalbert, owner of the C&J Trailways bus line, against advocates for expanded train service to the Seacoast.

Jalbert has collected data about local Downeaster train service and made it his business to use it during public opposition to the allocation of that \$1.2 million for expansion of local train service. Running from Portland to Boston, he says, with stops in Dover, Durham and Exeter, that train costs too much per passenger ride.

Jalbert points to \$80 million in federal money spent to get the train rolling, and he holds it up to the 200,000 riders who've boarded. In comparison, he says the 11 million in tax dollars spent for park-and-ride lots, bus station amenities and actual

commuter buses has brought taxpayers 800,000 bus passenger rides. Said the owner of the bus line, "Downeaster operating subsidies keep increasing every year; that's the real issue with me."

Rail Advocates say the \$1.2 million in CMAQ funds would buy a fifth commuter trip between the Durham/Dover area and Boston; make hardware improvements to trains, allowing for passage of freight trains and increased speed; and add a stop in Plaistow.

But those improvements would also bring additional trains to an area Jalbert services with his buses, while the bus company owner denies his opposition is about competition.

"I DON'T WANT THE MONEY," HE SAID OF THE \$1.2 MILLION POT. "I want New Hampshire to put it into projects that will give the state the greatest return on its investment. I take issue with the fact that this thing is losing money and people continue to throw federal money at it."

Statistics from Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, Atlantic Rails and Ports, and UNH show train ridership increasing month over month. And Jalbert, owner of the private and for-profit bus line, appears to be outnumbered by rail supporters who challenge his data, motivation and expertise.

Bob Landman, a nine-year transportation planning commissioner from North Hampton, says the \$80 million in federal money spent on the Downeaster to date has purchased train tracks running through the Seacoast with a 100-year life expectancy, accommodating both freight and passengers.

And because the federal government and the state of Maine have paid for the service to date, while New Hampshire residents have proven to be the biggest users, he says it's time for NH to chip in the available federal money.



NEW HAMPSHIRE RAIL FOE MAY BE COMPROMISED

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE LEGISLATIVE ETHICS Committee said a full investigation should be done of donations given to Executive Councilor Ruth Griffin's Friends Committee she claims are for personal expenses. "I think the attorney general needs to look at it," said State Rep. Shawn Jasper. "My understanding is this is not the first time or only time this has happened with councilors."

Griffin has come under criticism for failing until recently to release a list of donors to the "Friends of Ruth Griffin." She has since compiled a list of about 144 donors who contributed a total of \$26,850

in 2004.

Councilor Griffin said the gifts are used for personal expenses such as clothing and travel as part of her duties. The council is a five-person body that approves state contracts and gubernatorial nominations.

House Speaker Gene Chandler has come under scrutiny for accepting \$64,000 in gifts over a four-year period without reporting them through a similar friends committee. Chandler has said he did not think he had to report the contributions.



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Some have called on the House speaker to resign.

Jasper said RSA 640:5 prohibits elected officials from accepting anything of value from people who have an interest pending before a body or agency on which the elected official serves. He added that most "friends" committees he is aware of are for campaign rather than personal expenses.

One of Griffin's greatest contributions was from Thomas Carney, a retired physician living in Del Ray Beach, FL, who gave \$1,000. Carney and his brother are principals in Seabrook Greyhound Park. The group also owns Rockingham Park and Belmont Raceway in the Lakes Region.

There have been efforts to bring video gambling or slot machines at the tracks. The state Senate has approved previous bills, only to see them fail in the House. Al Hart, president of Belmont Raceway, also gave \$500.

Joe Falzone, who is seeking to construct a housing development off Breakfast Hill Road in Greenland, gave Griffin \$1,000. He received a permit from the state Department of Environmental Services to fill about 42,350 square feet of wetlands after scaling down his plan from an original proposal of about 61,150. The next highest contributor was Virginia Busby, a contractor with Busby Company of Plaistow, who contributed \$750.

Alfred Arcidi of Rye Beach contributed \$500. He described his occupation as a retired dentist. However, he also serves as president of Whittier Health Network, which owns a chain of nursing homes in Massachusetts. Arcidi had tried unsuccessfully to open a nursing home at Pease in 1992.

David Mahoney Jr. of Granite State Minerals contributed \$250. Granite State Minerals has various contracts with the state Department of Transportation for road salt during the winter.

Other notable donors are **James Jalbert, president of C&J Trailways, who gave \$500**, William Schuler, president of Portsmouth Regional Hospital, \$200; and William Bartlett, a noted lobbyist in Concord and chairman of the board of Pease Development Authority, \$200.

Jasper said he did not have an issue with people inviting an elected official to a reception and paying for food and drinks. Also, he believed accepting a sports ticket would be fine, unless people were accepting thousands of dollars in sports tickets from "every lobby friend under the sun." However, every gift over \$50 should be reported, he said.

Griffin could not be reached for comment.

—Excerpted from a report by Michael Goot in *Foster's Daily Democrat*

THE BIG DIG SPOUTS BIG LEAKS

LEAKS IN THE BIG DIG UNDER BOSTON ARE MORE WIDESPREAD THAN STATE OFFICIALS HAVE ACKNOWLEDGED, although construction managers warned as far back as 1998 about problems that could cause failures in tunnel waterproofing.

Independent engineers hired by the state to investigate a huge September leak in the Interstate 93 tunnel said the \$14.6 billion Big Dig tunnels, which sit almost entirely within the salty water table underlying downtown Boston, were riddled with more than 400 leaks.

However, documents obtained by the *Boston Globe* showed there are nearly 700 leaks in a single 1,000-foot section of the I-93 tunnels beneath the South Station train terminal.

And records show that since early 2001 project managers have collectively signed off on at least \$10 million in cost overruns to repair leaks and water damage in the costliest highway project in U.S. history.

The Big Dig, alias the Central Artery/Third Harbor Tunnel Project, replaced the elevated Central Artery of I-93 with tunnels through downtown Boston. It also connected the Mass Turnpike to Logan Airport and added

the Ted Williams Tunnel beneath Boston Harbor. The final major leg opened about a year ago.

In September, an 8-inch leak flooded the northbound I-93 tunnel. Documents obtained by the *Boston Globe* show the MTA, which oversees the Big Dig, and the project's private manager, Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff, established a Leak Task Force early in 2001.

An internal memo circulated by managers within Bechtel/Parsons and obtained by the *Boston Herald* raised concerns in June 1998 that waterproofing in tunnel walls would fail unless leaks were repaired.

When a leak was discovered in 2001, Bechtel/Parsons managers allowed lead contractor Modern Continental to make repairs without removing the defective material that eventually caused the September leak, a state investigation showed.

Officials of Bechtel/Parsons did not respond to calls, but Doug Hanchett, a spokesman for the MTA, said the agency has made progress in controlling the leak problem, and is working to recoup costs from contractors.

—The Associated Press, November 17

WHY WE LIKE TRAINS

continued from page 1

tion to Montreal), Augusta Rockland, Belfast (connection), Skowhegan and Greenville (connection), Bangor, Orono, Eastport, and Houlton (another connection to Canada). There might be seven or eight runs a day, with some people living a 15-minute walk to the station and others a 15-minute drive.

IT CAN BE DONE. It can be done in Maine and all the other contiguous states. But it will take an additional \$2 billion—and permit us to dream of \$4 billion, \$5 billion, and, yes \$10 billion—in federal funding.

It is a given that the world likes to ride trains. In most developed countries and many undeveloped ones, citizens have the option of riding everything on rails from urban trolleys and undergrounds (Paris, London, Moscow, Mexico City) to

long-distance carriers like the TGV. They are used by hundreds of millions of people as one of several options for getting from Point A to Point B.

But in our beloved country, powerful vested interests are not going to let this happen.

WHAT WE DO NOT LIKE ABOUT TRAINS

Nothing.

Almost the only Americans who don't like trains are those who represent petroleum interests. They are powerful and they intend to keep the status quo.

Such people would rid our land entirely of rail transportation. They favor the sprawl that brings them riches but is indifferent to the integrity of the land and any desire to promote sensible, humane economic growth. ■

... RAILING OVER TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

continued from page 6

In addition, the area needs more transportation options as its roads grow increasingly congested with automobiles, say rail expansion advocates. Also in support of more rail is the Seacoast Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the NH CMAQ Committee, the Rockingham Planning Commission, the National Association of Railroad Passengers, the town of Exeter, city of Dover and UNH.

"Buses can never hope to haul as many people as rail," said Landman, chair of the seacoast MPO and Rockingham Planning Commission. "Buses can't move when traffic is stalled and they don't have the on-time performance of commuter rails. Just look at any other Northeast state but New Hampshire, and you see rail as a serious component of commuter transportation."

Buses are far more flexible as to where they can go, says Jalbert, adding his opinion that Downeaster numbers are up because "they're giving away the ride" by selling tickets under cost. "It's growing in Exeter and Durham because of artificially reduced fares," he said. "This thing was supposed to be paying for itself, but it's bleeding red ink."

That's why it's called public transportation, rail advocates say.

"I don't see why the council should be interested in Jim Jalbert's analysis of operating costs for the train," said UNH Special Projects Manager Steve Pesci. "When C&J Trailways wants to provide seven-day service with four round-trips to all station communities on a dedicated travel corridor and has to pay full costs for operations, insurance and property leases, then we should write articles comparing apples to apples." Pesci added that the Downeaster is "an incredible asset."

A Rockingham Planning Commission spokesman says diversity will best serve the area. "Jalbert's position is that bus would be a better alternative to rail," said Scott Bogle, a RPC transportation planner. "Our position is we need both."

"Without rail, C&J and other bus com-

panies can charge the public what they like," said Landman. "Businesses like C&J say that competition is good, then they seek to eliminate it."

WAYNE DAVIS IS CREDITED WITH BRINGING TRAIN SERVICE TO MAINE AND NEW HAMPSHIRE. He's president of TrainRiders/Northeast in Maine and vice president of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, a Washington, DC-based watchdog group for Amtrak.

So it's safe to say he's on board with those advocating the CMAQ \$1.2 million to fund local train expansion. And to promote it, he escorted some of the state's executive councilors, including Portsmouth's Ruth Griffin, on a May 24 train ride from Exeter to Boston and back.

Davis says the demonstration showcased the Downeaster's snack and beverage car, larger seats, fold-down lunch and laptop trays, in addition to enthusiastic commuters collected along the way.

"We got very good feedback," he said of the councilors' first-hand train experience. "I didn't

give it another thought all summer. So it was a surprise when the Executive Council tabled the funding at their meeting in October. It appeared that after testimony from C&J Trailways, no one wanted to give the money. All of a sudden questions were being raised."

The questions focused on ridership, with Griffin on record saying train ridership numbers don't support additional funding.

But according to UNH, October ridership is up 25 percent from the same month last year. The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority shows similar increases, citing overall Portland-to-Boston rider numbers up almost 2% for October. Amtrak shows Durham October ridership up 36.6%, Exeter up 34.3%, and Dover up 4.9%.

At the same October meeting, Executive Councilor Griffin advocated

for C&J Trailways, citing better ridership numbers, before a vote was tabled by the council, which is comprised of several members who have accepted political donations from C&J's owner.

Jalbert sent a \$500 check to Ruth Griffin's controversial Friends of Ruth Griffin Committee this year (see article on page 6) while registered lobbyist Edward Dupont also sent her a \$500 check. Dupont lists C&J Trailways as a client. Executive Councilor Dave Wheeler also accepted a \$250 political donation from Jalbert, as did Councilor Ray Burton.

Maine's DOT commissioner was unable to attend the October meeting, another reason cited for delaying the award of the \$1.2 million. Maine is interested in the funding since that state has paid the bulk of Downeaster costs, second only to federal dollars.

And because Maine ridership is down, while ridership at this end of the tracks is up, Maine is looking for NH to pony up some of its federal congestion mitigation money.

According to Bogle, Jalbert "spoke in opposition" to rail expansion funding at an Oct. 28 meeting of the Seacoast MPO. "That was the same meeting at which the MPO voted to support the train expansion project," Bogle said. "I don't know to what extent that affects the Executive Council."

Several members of the Council have accepted political donations from Jalbert

Meanwhile, Jalbert views train support as anti-bus. "They're supposed to be competing with the person who drives down the highway," he said. "They're competing with the bus."

From UNH, Pesci reiterates that transportation diversity is necessary to achieve the university's goal of reducing the number of vehicles parked on its campus.

Jalbert calls it "a state of Maine project, not a state of New Hampshire project."

HIGHWAYS SATURATED WITH TRAFFIC: Landman says a good reason for growing train lines is because highways will become saturated with auto traffic, if they aren't already, and widening can only go so far. "Ten to 20 years down the road, we are going to need this railroad to be ready to carry many more

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Buses can never haul as many people as rail. They can't move when traffic is stalled and they don't have the on-time performance of commuter rails.

... RAILING OVER TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

continued from page 8

passengers than it does now," he said. "It can do it if it is funded now. It is here and now, and it can do even better with this new funding."

Jalbert says the fact that 51% of Downeaster costs come from paying fares, with the balance paid by taxpayers, is reason enough not to fund it further. When tax-funded projects which benefited his bus business are mentioned, Jalbert makes a distinction between operating and capital costs.

C&J Trailways was awarded a five-year deal with the state for use of the park-and-ride lot and bus station facilities at Pease. Jalbert's customers park for free, while he pays to maintain the property.

Jalbert's contract for the lot expired Oct. 18, but he says renewal is in the works. Landman calls free parking for C&J customers "not free," but a "subsidy."

"I don't own the park-and-ride. I pay costs for the facility," Jalbert said. "And 39% of park-and-ride is under the heading of Other, so when those people go in and use the facilities, guess who pays for it?"

C&J also received \$5,327 in federal funding for park-and-ride upgrades and to install "user amenities," as well as a recent \$84,623 federal grant for facility security enhancements. Those grants were issued under the name of C&J, not the state of New Hampshire.

"Who paid for the train sets?" asked Jalbert. "Amtrak paid \$20 million. And who funds Amtrak? The federal government. It's a good service. The problem is it's with other people's money."

Rail advocates reminded him that road and other infrastructure improvements benefit bus service. "If you put

money in roads and airports, it's an investment," Davis said. "If you're talking about rail, it's a subsidy, with all the negative connotation that goes with that."

Expansion of the Amtrak commuter rail from Newburyport to Portsmouth is also being considered. Davis says MBTA passage into NH requires Massachusetts legislation. Beyond that, he says the only obstacle is bridging the Merrimack River, with cost estimates varying from "miniscule to multimillions."

Another option for providing rail service to Portsmouth is rail to Rockingham Junction, at the Newfields/Newmarket town line, connecting up to Portland and down to Boston and beyond.

Landman says trains should be part of the long view.

"We will spend upwards of \$100 million to fix the Newington/Dover bridges by 2014," Landman said. "But if you project out the traffic in 15 more years, we have a logjam on the very bridges that C&J depends on to provide service to Dover."

Davis says trains should be embraced because "automobiles and airplanes are killing us."

"More than 300,000 people who rode trains last year would be in an automobile."

Davis is urging riders to write letters of support, while the MPO prepares similar support. Pesci says GACIT didn't "get the full picture" in October, but is confident that when it does in January, the CMAQ money will go to rail.

Jalbert expects to be there.

—Excerpted from a story in the Portsmouth Herald/Seacoast Online
By Elizabeth Dinan, December 12, 2004



DOWNEASTER WORTHWHILE EVEN WITHOUT GRANITE STATE SUPPORT

The train service will take travelers off crowded roads if it's allowed to expand.

IT'S NOT NEWS THAT THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE DOWNEASTER AMTRAK SERVICE connecting Portland and Boston, and rail supporters may have to conceive a future for the line without the Granite State's financial participation.

The Downeaster came into service largely thanks to federal grants, and the feds pick up a big portion, 38%, of the service's \$7.4 million operating budget. Ticket sales account for a little more than half, while the state of Maine kicks in about 10% of the cost.

The federal subsidy is expected to wane in future years, and—if nothing changes—Maine will end by making up for most of the loss.

NH officials are so skeptical of the train service, in fact, they're thinking of redirecting a \$1.2 million federal grant for track improvements to other transportation needs. The improvements would allow the Downeaster service to expand with a fifth daily round-trip.

With NH ridership up in recent years—even as Maine ridership has declined somewhat—there's good reason for officials there to allow the federal grant to go through.

Arguments that competing bus service doesn't depend on subsidies and therefore should be favored ignore the huge public investments in roads and bridges that enable buses to run in the first place. Also, faster speeds and more frequent service will make the Downeaster a more attractive alternative to the crowded I-95 corridor between Portland and Boston.

New Hampshire may never be enthusiastic about the train, and it may be that passenger fares ought to be marginally adjusted to account for that. In any event, the Downeaster is a worthwhile enterprise that takes people off the roads. With or without NH's participation, it makes sense for Maine to continue to support a rail link between Portland and Boston.

—The Maine Sunday Telegram
December 5, 2004

LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE MAINE SUNDAY TELEGRAM

THE EDITORIAL IN THE MAINE SUNDAY TELEGRAM (5 December) REPEATS THE COMMON BUT ERRONEOUS BELIEF THAT BUS SERVICE TO BOSTON IS NOT DIRECTLY SUBSIDIZED. A call to the New Hampshire Department of Transportation confirmed that New Hampshire already subsidizes bus service, because it purchased seven buses which carry commuters from New Hampshire to Boston.

Moreover, the Granite State will soon

spend about \$8 million more subsidizing bus service along I-93 into Boston. Therefore, New Hampshire officials should not resent spending money to subsidize their citizens who ride the Downeaster.

—Chop Hardenbergh, editor *Atlantic Northeast Rails & Ports*, weekly newsletter on freight railroads and ports, covering New England, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, & eastern townships of Quebec. December 8

Ideas for Members of TrainRiders/Northeast and Everyone Who Advocates for Passenger Rail

When you write letters to the editor, or when you speak with any person who is indifferent to or doubts the cause of high-speed passenger rail, keep the following in mind:

When the government allocates "maintenance funding" to the interstate highway system, it is considered to be an annual operating expense to maintain the utility of the roads. This assumption is held by government and by citizens, each of whom has been mightily influenced by the vested interests of the automotive and highway construction industries for more than half a century.

No one calls it a subsidy. Indeed, highways represent "freedom." We Americans love our freedoms.

Let's look at passenger rail: Fares cover most of the cost of actually running trains, but they do not cover maintenance of tracks, rolling stock, charges paid to railroads for access, and so forth. You notice that the additional expense (it exists with every mode of transportation) is not called "maintenance funding" to the national passenger rail system. It is called subsidy.

We have been conditioned since the mid 20th century to equate "rail" with "subsidies" and highways, also aviation, with "maintenance funds."

Start thinking "maintenance funding." Think of it as nothing more than the normal, necessary, annual costs of passenger service.

Then remind the receiver of your communication of the service that trains provide, and the fact that \$300 million per year is classified as "debt service" simply because capital funding was not provided to renew the fleet when the old equipment collapsed.

The fastest way for Congress to get \$300 million in operating expenses out of the Amtrak budget is to appropriate a capital grant of sufficient size to pay off the debt on rolling stock. If the capital funds for equipment were provided in the first place, the debt service financing would never have been necessary.

It's a shell game, and Amtrak is always the loser. —EKS

Albany — From Billy Collins's book of poems, *Nine Horses*

As I sat on the sunny side of train #241
looking out the window at the Hudson River,
topped with a riot of ice,
it appeared to the untrained eye
that the train was whizzing north along the rails
that link New York City and Niagara Falls.
But as the winter light glared
off the white river and snowy fields,
I knew that I was as motionless as a man on a couch
and that the things I was gazing at—
with affection, I should add—
were really the ones that were doing the moving,
running as fast as they could
on their invisible legs
in the opposite direction of the train.
The rocky ledges and trees,
blue oil drums and duck blinds,
water towers and flashing puddles
were dashing forever from my view,
launching themselves from the twigs
of the moment into the open sky of the past.
How unfair of them, it struck me,
as they persisted in their flight—
evergreens and electrical towers,

the swing set, a slanted fence,
a tractor abandoned in a field—
how unkind of them to flee from me,
to forsake an admirer such as myself,
a devotee of things—
their biggest fan, you might say.
Had I not taken a hound's interest in this world,
tipped my hat to the first magpie,
shouted up to the passing geese?
Had I not stopped enough times along the way
to stare diligently
into the eye of a roadside flower?
Still, as I sat there between stations
on the absolutely stationary train
somewhere below Albany,
I was unable to hide my wonderment
at the uniformity of their purpose,
at the kangaroo-like sprightliness of their exits.
I pressed my face against the glass
as if I were leaning on the window
of a vast store devoted to the purveyance of speed.
The club car would open in fifteen minutes,
came the announcement
just as a trestle bridge went flying by. ■

...WHEELCHAIR THEFT

continued from page 3

located, and which as it gradually took over the building for its own use had to kick us out, and did so with every kindness, assisting us as we looked for a new office and in other ways helping the cause.

That contact—Doug Libby, the comptroller—came to our aid again by donating a second wheelchair and, though Wayne offered to pick it up, delivering it himself.

And that's the story of the two new wheelchairs, one each marked Courtesy of Alpha One Medical and courtesy of Mercy Hospital.

P.S. They are chained and locked. ■

...UNH STUDENTS FLOCK TO AMTRAK'S DOWNEASTER

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elect John Lynch, the Executive Council and state transportation commissioner Carol Murray are slated to discuss the request in January.

The rail service has served more than 790,000 passengers since December 15, 2001, Douglas said. She predicted the extra train and other improvements could increase the Downeaster's ridership by 18% in 2005.

—Thanks to AP and the *Bangor Daily News*, December 20, 2004



DON'T LET NEW HAMPSHIRE DERAIL THE DOWNEASTER!

The above headline blazed across a flyer that TNE and Downeaster Riders have been putting on every seat of prime time Downeaster departures from Portland and Boston. It continues as follows:



significant state fiscal support for rail line construction of Downeaster operations even though **NH accounts for one-third of the ridership** and has the same number of intermediate stops as Maine.

The New Hampshire Executive Council votes in early January on a bi-state DOT proposal to use \$1.2 million of **federal** transportation funds to improve the rail corridor in New Hampshire.

With federal and Maine funding and New Hampshire's contributions, we can ■ make improvements in safety and capacity in the NH portion of the corridor; ■ increase speeds to 80 mph on stretches where this is not now feasible, allowing a fifth daily roundtrip train with NH-Boston commuter scheduling;

■ assure Downeaster fiscal stability (without this funding, long-term operation cannot be assured). NH funding will also help promote the service in NH where host communities are already paying for maintenance and insurance. **WE URGENTLY NEED YOUR HELP TO CONVINCE THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL THAT NEW HAMPSHIRE SHOULD PAY ITS FAIR SHARE OF DOWNEASTER SUPPORT.**

■ New Hampshire hasn't provided any

■ New Hampshire communities provide the **majority of Boston destined commuter traffic**. The number of passengers who board at Durham, for example, has risen to as high as 4000 per month. And Exeter is the largest commuter station, accounting for 65% of monthly passes sold.

■ And if that's not enough, a recent Maine DOT study shows that in FY04, **Downeaster service contributed over \$8.5 million in annual business sales in NH alone and over \$3.6 million in wages to NH residents.**

The flyer then asks riders to contact their executive councilor to say that New Hampshire needs to support the Downeaster. It provides a list of the five councilors, the governor-elect and his team, and the NHDOT commissioner.

TrainRiders/Northeast and Downeaster Riders made up the flyers and distributed them on the train. The information about people to contact is also available on www.trainridersne.org. ■

BUS STOPPED FROM FALLING OFF BRIDGE

PASSENGERS KEPT A CHARTER BUS FROM plunging nearly 200 feet off a bridge after the driver collapsed, apparently from a heart attack. The bus, which was shuttling Amtrak travelers from Fort Myers to Tampa, was near the top of the Sunshine Skyway bridge when Thomas Grove, 61, fell out of his seat.

As the bus slammed into a 3-foot concrete wall that blocks vehicles from tumbling into Tampa Bay, three of the five passengers jumped out of their seats and ran toward the front.

"Grab the wheel!" 70-year-old Kenneth McAllister shouted to his wife, Mary, and another woman. The women held the steering wheel until he could slide into the driver's seat. He struggled to keep the bus in its lane and hit the brake. It stopped just before the highest part of the bridge. The passengers called 911 and Amtrak, and spent another 10 minutes in the bus because they didn't know how to open the door.

Two nurses driving by stopped to perform CPR on the driver, but he died within hours at a hospital. No one else was hurt.

"It happened so fast," McAllister said from his cell phone aboard an Amtrak train to New York City later in the week. "We all felt lucky to be alive."

—Associated Press, November 17

WOMAN SUES RAILROAD FOR NOT WARNING THAT TRAINS RUN ON TRACKS

A PENNSYLVANIA WOMAN WHO WAS injured after being struck by a train while walking along railroad tracks sued Norfolk Southern for failing to warn pedestrians that trains travel on tracks, according to a story on the *Pittsburgh Tribune Review* website.

Patricia M. Frankhouser is seeking an unspecified amount in excess of \$30,000 from the railroad for an incident in January that left her with a broken finger, cuts on her hand, and pain.

According to the suit, Frankhouser was walking along the tracks near Jeannette, PA. Her attorney argues that the railroad was negligent for failing to post signs warning "of the dangers of walking near train tracks and that the tracks were actively in use." It further states that the plaintiff believed she was safe in walking near the tracks.

The filing does not indicate why Frankhouser failed to hear the oncoming train and get out of its way. It also does not state the manner of her apparent trespassing, whether she was crossing the tracks or walking in between or along them. No hearing has been set. Jeannette is 30 miles east of Pittsburgh on the main line to Altoona and Harrisburg.

Her attorney was not available for comment. ■

WEST VIRGINIANS TURN OUT TO CHEER NEW OLD TRAIN SERVICE

AMTRAK SERVICE RETURNED TO ALDERSON, WV, AFTER A TWO-YEAR HIATUS. A group of residents showed their appreciation by displaying banners as they met the train on its first run.

The train will operate three times a week on a flagship status, meaning the train will only stop if a passenger is boarding or exiting specifically for Alderson.

"However, we will be stopping here for a few days each pass-through, to let people know that this route is open again," conductor Bob Peters said.

Hospitality House co-director Hillary Benish said Amtrak officials had cited a safety issue in previously ending stops in Alderson.

Shirley Lusk, 62, of Alderson, said the stop will help her visit her children in Maine. ■



REPORT FROM DOWNEAST RIDERS

From your editors: "Downeast Riders" refers to a grass roots organization of hardcore riders of our favorite train. They ride it so much, they buy monthly passes.

Here are some comments from their leader:

The monthly passriders on the Downeaster are a loyal cadre, and for most of them the service is not so much a matter of convenience as of necessity. As past victims of rush hour on I-95, they relish the pleasure of chatting with friends in the café car, eating a snack or meal en route home, or simply reading or relaxing in a comfortable coach seat.

New friends have been made, domestic and international politics discussed (sometimes heatedly), and books have been swapped along the Portland to Boston route. It's not uncommon for a book to go from passenger to conductor to engineer.

From time to time occasional passriders will try the bus. But they all return to the Downeaster. While the train's schedule is sparse, everyone has made it work, and the addition of a fifth run next year will be a great addition.

Meanwhile, recovering bus passengers have spoken of the unfriendly atmosphere on the buses: the uptight, territorial passengers, the tendency to report to the bus company unacceptable behavior (playing cards!), and the lack of a café that serves food and beverages.

We share a unique experience on board the Downeaster with fellow passengers, the hosts and the crew. It is an experience that makes us realize the days of 2005 are "the good old days."

—Bill Lord,
Cape Porpoise, Maine



UNH STUDENTS FLOCK TO AMTRAK'S DOWNEASTER

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE STUDENTS ARE BECOMING KEY CUSTOMERS FOR AMTRAK'S DOWNEASTER SERVICE.

UNH, in Durham, lies along the passenger train's route between Boston and Portland, Maine. "As students have gotten more accustomed to the train, they are using it," said Patricia Douglas, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority marketing director in Portland.

Durham-Boston travel rose from 9,144 to 21,241 riders in the latest fiscal year. Travel between Durham and Portland also grew, from 1,620 to 2,795, she said.

Douglas added that revenue is up, 98% for the Boston leg and 62% for the Portland, Maine, leg. She said that high demand prompted by the authority to start daily service from Durham in January of 2003, a change from weekend-only stops.

Round-trip tickets for riders heading in either direction cost about \$25 from Durham. Discounted passes also are available for regular riders. Students called the trains quick and inexpensive, praising them as easy ways to visit their homes or reach other cities for travel connections.

"It's really convenient for me," said sophomore Danielle Paquette of Haverhill, Massachusetts.

UNH special projects manager Steve Pesci called the train service a good student recruiting tool. He also said it reduces traffic congestion.

"We want the students, but we don't necessarily want their cars," he said.

He said the university has secured an \$800,000 federal grant to help fund a full-service train station in Durham. It would feature heating, air conditioning and other amenities, but Pesci said matching funds would be required.

Douglas said the authority hopes to get \$1.2 million from the state to help add a fifth commuter train from Boston. Governor-

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THE TRAINRIDER

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