

IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

REPORTS ON
THE REALLY BIG
CHALLENGES—

1. SUPPORT FOR THE
DOWNEASTER FROM
NEW HAMPSHIRE
2. SUPPORT FOR THE
DOWNEASTER FROM MAINE
3. SUPPORT FOR AMTRAK
FROM CONGRESS

TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST



Chairman's Comments

Submitted by Wayne E. Davis

It seems that lately I've spent most of my time driving back and forth between Portland and Augusta for legislative hearings and workshops on rail issues—some bills would enhance or expand Downeaster service, while others just seemed to "appear"! Samples of the recent offerings:

An Act to Require Trains in the State of Maine to Operate with a Minimum of 5 Employees. We believe that passenger trains will be exempted—current Downeaster trains carry only 3 crew members: a conductor, an assistant conductor, and an engineer.

An Act relating to the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority. Considered a "housekeeping bill" by the Maine DOT.

An Act Concerning Dismantling of Railroad Track. Unfortunately too little too late, the track between Portland and Westbrook—the entire southern end of the so-called Mountain Division is currently being removed by its owner the Guilford Corporation for its scrap value. We had always hoped to see passenger service restored between Portland and North Conway, and Vermont points—not much hope now.

An Act to Extend Passenger Rail Service to Midcoast Maine. This bill drew an "ought not to pass" vote from the transportation committee since part of the following bill also dealt with the same issue.

An Act to Reorganize the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority. This bill proposed to enlarge the Authority by making the Maine Commissioner of Transportation and a member of a rail advocacy group members of the Authority board. It also proposes to transfer administrative functions of the Rail Authority to the Maine DOT on an "as needed" basis.

We'll report on the status of these bills in the next issue of the *TrainRider*. —WD

AMTRAK, THE ORPHAN

OPINION OPPONENTS OF SUBSIDIES TO AMTRAK, operator of the national passenger rail corporation, have never quite been able to figuratively cut its throat, but they have used another tactic quite effectively: starve it to death.

A report by the inspector general of the Transportation Department says that the policy of letting the national rail system scrape by on limited budgets by deferring capital investments "is no longer workable." He says Congress should either give the railroad more money or tell it to cut back operations. He cites recurring operating losses, declining on-time performance, and the possibility of equipment breakdowns that could interrupt operations.

Congress consistently underfunds maintenance budgets on the rail system. Rail bridges require repair, and 125 rail cars and 43 locomotives are laid up because of lack of funds to repair them. There is a White House bullet waiting for Amtrak, often couched in the cynical offer to give every would-be Amtrak rider a plane ticket for his long-distance journey. Needless to say, that would never happen.

Critics target long-range trains that cost more per passenger to operate but do not require as large an outlay for capital investment as commuter lines whose utility in heavily urbanized areas is seldom questioned.

Ironically, if the Amtrak-haters had their way and ended government subsidies of long-distance passenger service, it would strike the

hardest blow at the Midwest and Great Plains, which have faithfully given strong majorities to the GOP in presidential voting.

Their communities do not have the options open to people in larger urban areas. Bus service also is disappearing in many parts of the country, and that leaves the private automobile as the sole mode of transportation for millions of Americans.

A rational system would take into consideration all available forms of travel. Airlines and automobiles are subsidized by federal and state governments, despite which the airline industry is in trouble and several carriers have gone into or are flirting with bankruptcy.

As the nation's private automobile fleet continues to expand, state and federal governments cannot keep up with the demands made upon them to repair and upgrade highways. No other major industrial country thinks it can get along without subsidizing fast and efficient rail service, including the Scandinavian countries which serve large areas of relatively sparse population.

In another few decades the cost of oil will force the United States to provide new transportation options for its population. Congress spends enough money on pork barrel projects—\$15.8 billion in the \$388 billion catch-all spending bill on which Congress was working last weekend.

Some of that pork could be diverted to Amtrak, which at least serves much larger geographical areas of the country and has a purpose that is national in scope.

—The Toledo Blade, December 2, 2004

RAIL PASSENGERS OUTRAGED ABOUT ZERO AMTRAK FUNDING REPORT



THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS is outraged at Reuters and *New York Times* reports that President Bush will propose zero funding for Amtrak for fiscal 2006, which starts October 1, 2005. We understand that the \$360 million that has been characterized as being for Northeast Corridor capital improvements is actually for continuation of commuter rail operations on the Northeast Corridor.

Any zero budget request would end intercity passenger rail for Americans, notwithstanding Administration claims to the contrary. It would also be a tired reminder of similar, failed efforts by past administrations, which proposed Amtrak zeroes for FY 1986 through FY 1991.

The Administration talks a lot about "Amtrak reform." However, Amtrak under President and CEO David L. Gunn has experienced more reform in the past two-and-a-half years than probably in the previous thirty. Headcount has dropped by 3,900 (not counting the transfer of Boston area

commuter rail to another operator). Meanwhile, the number of daily trains has risen from 265 in 2002 to 300 today. Amtrak has taken on no new debt since June 2002, although costs of servicing previously incurred debt continues to be significant.

Americans want and use the travel choice that Amtrak offers. One indication of this is Amtrak's 4.3% ridership growth in FY 2004, which Gunn said was "across all our services—corridor trains as well as long-distance trains... The ridership increases are noteworthy because they came during efforts to restore the fleet and bring Amtrak facilities back to a state of good repair." Record ridership in FY 2004—at 25.1 million—was up more than one million from the previous record—24.0 million in FY 2003.

For fiscal 2005, President Bush requested \$900 million. Congress, recognizing that this would force a shut-down, wisely increased that to \$1.2 billion. Amtrak's initial request was \$1.8

billion, later revised to \$1.5 billion.

Amtrak has said that \$1.2 billion for FY 2006 would be unworkable. This is due to deferrals in capital investment and maintenance that would result for both rolling stock and infrastructure.

The highest profile issues have been three elderly river bridges in Connecticut. There are concerns that the two bridges which are movable might have to be locked either open (for marine traffic) or closed (for trains). The Thames River Bridge at New London was locked closed recently for several days.

Even if Congress ultimately trashes this zero proposal as it has previous ones, the proposal would harm employee morale and perhaps decrease ridership because of public concern about the elimination of Amtrak service. The Administration is out of touch with the public on this issue; we believe Congress ultimately should and will enable intercity passenger rail to continue. —NARP, February 2, 2005

**DAVID GUNN'S
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NARP'S RESPONSE TO THE ADMINISTRATION'S PROPOSAL

FEBRUARY 7, 2005—THE ADMINISTRATION'S FISCAL 2006 DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION BUDGET PROPOSAL eliminates all funding for Amtrak. The National Association of Railroad Passengers condemns this proposal as radical and irresponsible.

It would end virtually all intercity rail passenger service in the nation, including through service on the Northeast Corridor between Boston, New York and Washington, DC. This places the burden of funding intercity passenger rail entirely on states that do not have the financial resources to assume such an unfunded mandate.

States with limited resources would place first priority on saving the commuter operations within their borders. The \$360 million the Administration proposes to make available directly to states may not be sufficient to maintain even these operations much less through trains that cross state lines. Past experience demonstrates that any expectation of the states cooperating to fund such service is unwarranted and unrealistic.

Administration claims that an Amtrak bankruptcy would eliminate "inefficient operations" and lead to the emergence of a "more rational" passenger rail system that served routes where there is "real ridership demand" and "support from local governments—such as the Northeast Corridor" are false.

Clearly they are targeting Amtrak's long distance services and misrepresenting crucial facts.

- Far from lacking demand, the long distance routes handle more travel volume each year than the Northeast Corridor (NEC)—nearly 30% more than the conventional trains and five times more than Acela Express and Metroliner.

- Far from being inefficient, the long distance network costs less per passenger mile to operate than either of the NEC services. It is a common misconception that the long distance trains are "money losers" while the NEC trains are "profitable." None of them is, including the new high speed Acela Express.

- The amount of operating support

needed to operate the long distance network is not significantly greater than it is for the NEC.

The Bush Administration misleads the public when it states that a "restructuring" based on zero federal support "should lead to the development of short-corridor routes between major population centers." On the contrary, the existing system has provided the framework and infrastructure for the significant corridor development we have seen on the West Coast, the Midwest, and in upstate New York.

Eliminating Amtrak would put in jeopardy many of the improvements we are seeing, and would preclude the possibility of improvements elsewhere. It completely disregards the nation's growing need for the rail travel alternative.

NARP is a non-partisan organization funded by dues and contributions from approximately 16,000 individual members. We have worked since 1967 to support improvement and expansion of passenger rail, particularly intercity passenger rail.

SMALL VICTORY: ANTI-AMTRAK CONGRESSMAN GETS HIS

Representative Ernest Istook (R-OK) took it on the chin when he was removed from his position as chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee on Transportation. Istook infuriated members of his own party when he abused his power as Chairman to punish 21 moderate GOP House representatives for signing a letter supporting more funding for Amtrak in 2004. In an effort to intimidate the 21 lawmakers who backed Amtrak Istook retaliated by stripping an appropriations bill of highway projects that would have benefitted their districts.

Istook recently ranked number two on the Friends of Amtrak "Enemies List" for his outrageous stunt. The list, which includes five of the most ardent opponents of Amtrak is as follows:

1. President George W. Bush
2. Representative Ernest Istook (R-OK)
3. Wendell Cox, a prominent anti-rail, anti-transit critic
4. Senator John McCain (R-AZ)
5. Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL)

Others considered for ranking on this list have included Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, Columnist Robert Samuelson who is perpetually raving about how Amtrak is at the top of the Washington pork pile, Guilford Transportation whose decade long battle to halt Amtrak service is legendary, the state of New Hampshire for its intransigence in offering support for New England rail service subsidized by surrounding states and Kenneth Mead, Inspector General DOT who likes to set the table for the Bush administration's ideologically driven attacks.

The list was compiled in conjunction with the Railroad Passengers Association of Alabama with input from some members of the All-Aboard internet listserve and others who have been actively involved in the Friends of Amtrak effort. If you have any candidates for this list please don't hesitate to write and explain your reasons for inclusion.

—Excerpted from *Friends of Amtrak*,
February 3, 2005

OVERHEARD IN FOGGY BOTTOM

(Notice the official whose idiot-comment about aviation and highways not being subsidized declined to be identified).

"I'd like to hear what he's (President Bush) doing about Amtrak this year, whether he's going to...try to cut it, or whether he's going to fund it like he ought to."

—Senator Joe Biden (D-DE)

"For four years they have played budget games and fought congressional efforts to keep Amtrak afloat... Now, despite the fact that Amtrak has gone to great lengths to get their costs under control and run more efficiently, the president is again offering a budget that sets the rail service on a course to bankruptcy."

—Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)

"Amtrak should be treated like...and funded like any other form of transportation. The other forms don't get operating subsidies."

—An unidentified Senior (Bush) Administration official quoted by Reuters

"We need to either commit to a national railroad or abandon the pretense of one. National or nothing. Today's budget represents an inadequate middle ground."

—Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX)

AN APPEAL FROM MONTANA PRESIDENTS BUDGET ELIMINATES FUNDING

President Bush is expected to announce a budget that cuts all for Amtrak.

It may seem like déjà vu for national and local passenger rail proponents as they prepare their annual "Save Amtrak" campaigns, but the nuance is different this time around, said Ross Capon, executive director of the National Association of Rail Passengers.

"The president's budget will have zero for Amtrak," he said. "The president's request is not the end of the ballgame, but this time, it shouldn't be possible to claim anything other than they want to kill Amtrak."

After last year's Congressional tug of war, Amtrak ended up with \$1.2 billion, somewhat less than the \$1.49 billion the rail service wanted.

"The outcome can be viewed as a victory when one considers that the House committee approved only \$900 million and that Amtrak was one of the last issues to be resolved," Capon said.

The Department of Transportation Office of the Inspector General painted a bleak picture of Amtrak's performance in its mandated annual report. It urged Amtrak to focus on "viable" passenger operations, which Capon said is code language for eliminating most of Amtrak's national network trains.

"Trains like the Empire Builder are in the gunsights," he said.

The Whitefish Chamber of Commerce and Stumptown Historical Society have already begun a campaign to urge people to contact their congressmen over the potential plight of Amtrak.

The Chicago-to-Seattle Empire Builder that passes through Whitefish has the highest ridership of all Amtrak long-distance trains, carrying nearly 440,000 passengers last year, chamber director Sheila Bowen and historical society administrator Jill Evans noted in an opinion piece submitted to area newspapers.

"Long-distance trains are essential connectors that hold the national

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... MONTANA APPEAL

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Amtrak system together," they said. "They are the basis for development of improved passenger rail service along more densely populated rail corridors. If these trains were eliminated, as some in Congress have proposed, the impacts would cascade through the Amtrak network as travelers find themselves unable to make connections from one train to another and unable to reach the places they need to go."

The transportation report focused on Amtrak's increasing cash loss, although the loss was reduced from \$644 million in fiscal 2003 to \$635 million the following year.

It further criticized the passenger service for "dismal" on-time performance. However, Capon said, the report failed to discuss the reasons for the performance problems, such as infrastructure improvement work and capacity issues on private freight rail lines.

Capon expects a repeat battle against legislation that would force Amtrak to privatize by developing a procedure for competitive bidding by Amtrak and non-Amtrak operators for state-supported routes. Past efforts have repeatedly come up against the issue of freight railroad access.

—The Daily Inter Lake
(Kalispell, near Whitefish), by
Lynnette Hintze, Feb 4, 2005

Senator Susan Collins

**&
Gordon Fuller**

(Maine Eastern RR)

will speak at the 2005 Annual Meeting of TrainRiders/Northeast in the ballroom of the Eastland Park Hotel, Portland, May 5, 2005

—Mark Your Calendar—

DOWNEASTER RIDERS SPEAK UP

Your editors could not help but beam and say a silent "Thank you" to two persons who responded to a particularly vitriolic letter to the editor that was published in the *Portland Press Herald* in January. Written by an unknown person who lives in Orrington, which is a good two-hour drive north of the Downeaster's northernmost terminal, he seemed to bear an odd grudge toward our favorite train.

The good news is the two letters written by similarly unknown persons who not only didn't let the nay-saying pass but wrote eloquent replies:

To the editor;

Why should we give up now on the Downeaster? It's up and running fine. It's fun, too.

When riding the train to Boston you're free to move around, meet and visit with all kinds of nice people, get something to eat, maybe watch the sun rise or set, and rest up for your day in Boston.

Riding the train, you save a lot, with gas almost \$2 a gallon. You save on gas, you don't need to pay tolls, you don't have someone snoring in your ear or an elbow in your side, there's no high parking fee, no wear on your car.

So letter writer Paul Tormey should relax. Getting there faster isn't always better.

Take time out of your rushed day, smell the coffee and enjoy the sights. See ya' on the Downeaster, everyone.

—Timothy F. Halpin,
Hallowell, Maine



To the editor;

This is in response to a letter on Jan 21 about the Downeaster.

Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, including Paul Tormey, but he or she should be more informed before stating it publicly.

No rail service in the world is profitable, let alone "to just approach profitability," as he stated. As for ridership estimates, those experts were hired by the feds, and their projections have not been very far off.

There was no "scam." New Hampshire ridership is way up. Durham, NH, boardings alone have gone from about 250 a month to almost 4,000 a month this past month. Yet, New Hampshire is not contributing its share to this service to its residents.

Mr. Tormey should know that \$1 invested in highways brings only \$2.50 in return, when that same dollar invested in rail service will bring a return of \$6 to \$11. There's a lot of data on federal government web sites about highway costs, verifying these facts.

It took 16 years to get the Downeaster up and running, and the early cheerleaders seem to have all disappeared, including this paper.

Finally, why doesn't Mr. Tormey take a relaxing ride on the Downeaster, have a generous serving of chowder, enjoy a cup of fresh-brewed coffee and chat with the friendly crew members?

Can you do that in your car or on a bus? The train is leaving the station. All aboard!

—Ken Carle, South Portland, Maine

The two above letters were published by the Portland Press Herald February 9, 2005

OPERATION LIFESAVER BLITZES MAINE'S FT. FAIRFIELD

More than eight miles of long abandoned track was put back into service in late 2004 and Maine Operation Lifesaver responded before the reactivation with a rail safety education blitz. Primarily handled by Montreal, Maine & Atlantic Railway employees and O/L presenters Norma Griffiths and Ken Strout, hundreds of Fort Fairfield residents learned to identify the hazards inherent at railroad crossings and along right of way.

Among those receiving presentations were public works and utility workers, ele-

mentary and middle school children, fire, police and EMS responders, school bus drivers, and members of the business community.

Educational material was sent to driver education schools serving the town, and local media also spread the word about safety near rails.

—From the Maine Operation Lifesaver Annual Report



OUR LATEST, GREATEST PROFILE

"It's not a project," says Captain Jeffrey Monroe, Master Mariner, about the beautiful new pier where the QE II, among other large ships, will dock. "It's about an *entire transportation system*."

Monroe, who is Director of the Department of Ports and Transportation for the City of Portland, had just been asked about Ocean Gateway, which will soon rise on waterfront property once occupied by a Bath Iron Works dry dock.

His way of thinking hits home with TrainRiders, which has worked for 17 years toward the goal of a balanced system for moving people in which every decision is not based on the internal combustion machine's need for subsidized asphalt.

Though Monroe looks more like the colorful, self-assured ship's captain he was for 20 years than the transportation bureaucrat he is today, his delivery is dead on. "The role of government is to insure that private enterprise benefits the public," he says. "The government needs to look after the customer, which means we have to think systematically rather than in modes." He pauses, and adds, "Transportation is a set of gears that mesh."

Sitting in an airy office that overlooks Casco Bay, Monroe cites a figure of 5.7 million people who used transportation in the Portland area, inclusive of 350,000 who live between Kittery and Brunswick (65,000 of them in Portland), in 2004. The airlines boarded the most passengers (1,365,078), followed by METRO—the Greater Portland Transit District, and CBITD-Casco Bay Island Transit District. The umbrella also covers the Concord Trailways and Vermont Transit bus companies, Custom Coach and Limousine, VIP Tour and Charter Bus, the Downeaster (Amtrak), the Scotia Prince, cruise ships, the Portland Explorer, and a host of other regional transportation companies.

"And we've got it all under one roof," he says, adding that Boston, for example, has different "self-centered agencies" such as the MBTA, the seaport, the airport, and Mass Transportation.

He states that the country as a whole does not have a good national transporta-

tion policy. "There's a problem with aviation—congestion in major cities, too many flights, too many air shuttles." Amtrak's Acela, he says, has managed to eliminate some air shuttle slots. "The Acela does well because it competes. There aren't long taxi lines, it runs every two hours. It's got food, laptops, phone calls. But Amtrak is still battling because it's a government agency."



Mentioning that Amtrak President David Gunn has tried, so far unsuccessfully, to get through-ticketing with the Scotia Prince, the ferry that operates between Portland and Nova Scotia and, under the auspices of a good national system, would see passengers transfer from trains, trolleys, and buses right on the pier, he said that it's hard for Amtrak to deal with the small issues when it has so many big ones.

As for Amtrak's big issues, Monroe cites the threat to its life. "It's a ludicrous idea to break up the system, and the fault is the government's. The last administration to have a transportation *policy* was the Truman administration. In '55, '56, they took apart the trolley system and the rail system."

As we passenger rail advocates are well aware, the Interstate Highway Act was created in 1956 with 90% federal government subsidies.

"Before the gas shortages in the 1970s, gas cost 33 cents a gallon," says Monroe. "But after that we allowed our lawmakers to let it rise to \$1.50 a gallon, \$1.90..." His voice trails off. "The general public advocates power at the polls."

As if to atone for the rush into gridlock and what some critics call the facelessness of interstate highways, Monroe recently met in Washington, DC, with David Gunn of Amtrak. Asked the purpose of the visit, he said, "I told him how valuable the train system is, and how much we support a national system."

As a boy, Monroe wanted nothing but

to go to sea. After graduating from the Maine Maritime Academy, he joined the Merchant Marine and "went to see the world." He still has an active captain's license, and he concedes he'd rather be on a ship at sea in the worst storm than in the air on the fairest day.

No surprise that he came from a transportation family or, as he puts it, "a bloodline of railroad types." His grandfather worked for the railroad, as did both parents. His mother, who came from Mexico and had a job within two weeks despite not speaking English, worked as a maintenance woman for the Erie Lackawanna for 35 years. Most women, he noted with some pride, didn't do maintenance work.

As a result of her job and his father's, although the latter was with the Pennsylvania Railroad for only five years, the family rode trains on free passes. As a high school student, the teenage Jeff worked in an apprentice program for the "Erie Lack," and during those years and later he had the great experience of riding in and even helping to drive some of the famous old locomotives. But it was the sea that beckoned.

After 25 years on board ship, the captain began to teach the next generation, at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy and at the Center for Simulated Marine Operations at the State University of New York. He earned a Master's Degree in transportation management, became Deputy Port Director for the Massachusetts Port Authority and, he says, "worked my way home to Maine."

His office displays an array of plaques, awards, photographs, framed letters (not the collector's variety but letters to Monroe from interesting and celebrated living persons). There is a model plane, a train, a sea gull, and a large glass vase of silk poppies, cattails and ferns arranged in hundreds of tightly packed little seashells.

But it is the windows that offer the awesome reward. Casco Bay sweeps past outside in a superb wide-angle view, and a glistening tugboat in colors of black, red, white and gold is tied up so close you could leap out onto it. Almost. While it is

continued on the next page

... Profile *continued from page 5*

doubtful that the tug belongs to the Director of Ports and Transportation, it would come as no surprise to learn that he drove it to work every morning and home every evening. (He lives in a village that begins with "Cape.")

The day after the interview, the Associated Press ran a story stating that Portland has retained its status as the nation's No. 1 port when measured by tonnage of foreign goods continuing to other destinations. Imports and exports, it reported, increased from 29.1 million tons in 2003 to 33.8 million tons in 2004. In reference to the growth of tonnage despite "recent declines in the city's cargo and cruise ship industries," the AP quoted Monroe as follows: "There are bound to be some burps to contend with. That's the nature of the business. Our greatest strength is our diversity. It's why we continue to thrive."

He ends the interview with this word for passenger rail advocates: "We can make sure everything works in Portland, and try to help the state. The city system has got to work effectively so the state system can work." He adds, "Our piece is to make sure it works here."

It works—beautifully—and as advocates of high-speed passenger rail know, it is not every day that we encounter a government agency, whether national, state or regional, that is sufficiently bold and savvy to champion the idea of transportation as a set of gears that mesh. ■

... Pedestrian Safety

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According to the American Heart Association, The Mean Streets 2004 report clearly shows that federal, state and local governments can do more to ensure pedestrians and cyclists a safer experience. "By encouraging physical activity in the community, we are addressing a major risk factor for the nation's leading killers—heart disease, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases," said Canby.

Our thanks to TRANSFER, a publication of the Surface Transportation Policy Project

NO WAY TO RUN A RAILROAD: MINETA SAYS BANKRUPTCY IS THE ONLY SOLUTION FOR AMTRAK

GIVE NORMAN MINETA THE 2005 GEORGE ORWELL PRIZE FOR DOUBLESPEAK. The federal transportation secretary wants us to believe that the best way to keep America choo-chooing across America is to starve it to death.

Mineta wants to slash Amtrak's annual federal operating subsidy from a relatively measly \$1 billion to zero. He terms the budget proposal he concocted with President Bush a "call to action." In doublespeak that means "bring the rails to a screeching halt." He describes his idea as "the solution" for Amtrak. Doublespeak translation: "dissolution." And he insists we're not trying "to kill Amtrak." That means "rest in peace Amtrak."

Here's Mineta's theory: Cut off funding to Amtrak to force it into insolvency. That would "lead to the elimination of inefficient operations and the reorganization of the railroad through bankruptcy," according to the Transportation Department.

So the salvation of our rail system will be...Chapter 11. That means a judge overseeing the sale of much of Amtrak's assets to pay back \$3.8 billion to its many creditors. Since most of the tracks and stations are in the Northeast—think Penn Station—that's what will get sold.

Once the fire sale is complete, the states, along with Washington, would fund track maintenance while Amtrak would focus solely on running the trains. What if a state refuses to pay for a route? Then Amtrak will "run through that state without opening the door or stopping," said Mineta.

That's not a rail system that knits America together. That's a checkerboard. Imagine the conductor declaring as you

pull out of Manhattan, "Ladies and gentlemen, since New Jersey skipped its annual payment, we're skipping Newark and Trenton. Next stop, Philadelphia."

The absurdities pile up. Wasn't there a call to end our dependence on oil? Well, trains are by far the most fuel-efficient means of transportation. Don't the Bushies see that Amtrak helps grease the skids of capitalism, efficiently moving millions of workers from one city to the next so they can hold meetings, sell goods and close deals?

Amtrak is an investment. And a pretty good one. Mineta often notes that Washington has spent \$29 billion on Amtrak since 1971. He conveniently forgets to add that in the same period Uncle Sam stuffed \$1.9 trillion into the nation's highway and aviation systems.

But it's not even clear that Mineta believes his own rhetoric. In 1990, Bush 41 proposed similar slashes to transportation, insisting states cover the shortfall. Mineta, then a Democratic congressman, derisively called that "the shift and the shaft." Today, the man sings a different tune.

Now take a look at Mineta's request under the "Office of the Secretary." That includes planners, computers and Mineta's personal staff. Last year it was a hefty \$163 million, but is set to balloon next year to \$336 million—about a third of what Amtrak should be getting. Nearly half of that goes toward a new DOT headquarters.

For that one give the secretary the Leona Helmsly prize in chutzpah.

—Richard Schwartz

New York Daily News columnist

February 25, 2005

Mineta has said he will work to win congressional approval for a plan to reduce federal spending on Amtrak by shifting a greater burden to states served by the passenger carrier on the east and west coasts.

Ross Capon, executive director of NARP, says states already shoulder a significant portion of Amtrak's capital expenditures. Mineta's plan would merely "take the bill for existing railroad service and dump a greater share on the states" when states need more generous federal support "to take railroad service to the next level," Capon said.

Of the \$417 million Amtrak invested in capital improvements in fiscal 2003, the federal government provided \$268 million, leaving the remaining \$149 million to be financed by states, localities, and borrowing.

"The rhetoric the administration is using just doesn't match up to the reality," Capon said. "This plan would be the death knell for expansion of railroad service."

AMTRAK'S VITAL ROLE

It is time for Congress to face facts about Amtrak, the National Passenger Rail Corporation. More than 30 years of experience make it clear that intercity passenger rail service cannot operate without a large public subsidy. Congress should find the money, because the alternatives would be worse.

In a new report, the Inspector General says that, despite strong management reforms, even a subsidized Amtrak cannot survive the failure to provide adequate public financial support.

"Unsustainably large operating losses, poor on-time performance, and increasing levels of deferred infrastructure and fleet investment are a clarion call to the need for significant changes in Amtrak's strategy," the report says. More to the point, it calls on Congress to give clear and practical direction to Amtrak, something that has been lacking in the public debate.

Amtrak makes money in the Northeast Corridor but loses money on long-distance trains that serve sparsely settled regions of the nation. It also suffers losses caused by its ownership of the tracks, bridges, tunnels and most stations in the Northeast. Among the ideas recently put forward for resolving the Amtrak dilemma are proposals to cut service and shift Northeast infrastructure costs from the federal government to the states.

Service cuts would fall on long-distance trains and close stations in many sparsely settled regions of the country. Congress has long resisted such abandonment, but it has also resisted funding the services it mandates. Shifting costs to unwilling states is simply another effort to dodge reality.

The continuing travails of Amtrak are testimony to the failure of Congress and presidents of both parties to think clearly about the public role in transportation as a whole—something the Transportation Department was originally established to do. All major forms of transportation rely on federal funding to one degree or another, usually for basic infrastructure.

The federal government picks up the lion's share of interstate highway construction costs. It runs the air traffic control system. It and regional government bodies build, own and operate airports. Passenger rail is the odd man out in this system. Amtrak needs adequate operating income so it can pay rent for the private rails it uses and maintain existing infrastructure.

But it also must be able to compete with its airline and bus line rivals when they cut fares. Although rail passenger ridership was up last year, fare revenues declined because of such competitive pressure.

Congress should face up to the true costs of the system it set up in 1970 and recognize the necessity for continued funding support. Instead of insisting that Amtrak stand on it own it should focus on the tradeoffs between different kinds of federal transportation spending.

As intercity travel increases, improving rail's share of passenger miles by making train travel faster, more reliable and more competitive reduces the need for costly highway construction and airport expansion. True economy lies in making such tradeoffs intelligently, and saving the intercity passenger rail system.

—The Charleston Post and Courier, Dec. 2004

The following is a letter-to-the-editor of the *New York Times* in response to an article on the

DANGERS OF RAIL CROSSINGS:

Rail traffic must be grade-separated from highway traffic.

No one in his right mind would suggest that we allow, say, a gasoline tanker truck to cut across the end of a runway while a 747 is taking off. Yet at thousands of grade crossings across America, every day, that is precisely what happens.

The news is not that we have so many deadly grade crossing accidents. The news is that we have so few.

On June 15, the National Corridors Initiative and its allies will rally on Capitol Hill to demand that America start financing rail infrastructure in the same way it finances highways and airlines: with tax dollars. Modal grade separation is just one of the many important infrastructure projects America must finance, if we are to have a safe, competitive and world-class transportation system.

—Jim RePass, President and Chief Executive, National Corridors Initiative, Boston, Jan. 2, 2005

THE FLORIDA GOV ON PASSENGER RAIL

Now that Gov. Jeb Bush has succeeded in getting voters to repeal the high-speed rail project they approved in 2000, he wants the panel overseeing the venture to close up shop, according to a story from the Associated Press published in the *Miami Herald*.

Bush made the request in a letter faxed to C.C. Dockery, the Lakeland, FL, businessman who got the high-speed train measure on the ballot four years ago. Dockery is a member of the Florida High Speed Rail Authority that lawmakers created in 2001 to oversee the train project.

"Passage of constitutional Amendment 6 on November 2 removed the mandate for developing and operating a high-speed rail system," Bush wrote. "Therefore, I ask the Authority to conclude its work and execute agreements to transfer remaining activities to the Department of Transportation."

Not so fast, Dockery said in his response, noting that passage of the repeal measure doesn't impact the state law that created the authority. "In my humble opinion, it would be a violation of Florida law for us to attempt to comply with your request," he wrote.

When the authority met in November, a week after nearly 64% of voters supported the repeal measure, authority members said the vote had not killed the project. Instead, they said, the vote was a cue for freer thinking.

In addition, a key lawmaker, state Sen. Jim Sebesta, a St. Petersburg Republican who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee, said he wants the work to continue. Since the project's initial approval in 2000, no construction had begun, but an initial route—Orlando to Tampa—and a contractor—a consortium of Fluor and Bombardier—had been selected.

DOUBLE TRACKS

An article in the *Wall Street Journal* noted the ongoing race between Burlington Northern Santa Fe and Union Pacific to complete the double tracking of their lines between Chicago and Los Angeles to accommodate the growing volume of cross-country freight and improve schedules. According to the newspaper, BNSF has already double tracked 90% of the 2,100 mile route while UP, starting from behind, has completed 30%. The soonest either company can finish will be 2008.

Meanwhile, BNSF has spent \$656 million since 1996 to add 278 miles of second track to the route. The work detail numbers more than 200, whereas in the 1860s the original line employed 10,000.

With thanks to the newsletter of the 470 Railroad Club

DAVID GUNN'S RESPONSE TO AMTRAK EMPLOYEES TO THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S ZERO BUDGET PROPOSAL

Dear Amtrak Co-workers:

Earlier today, President Bush sent to Congress his proposed budget for FY '06. It provides no funding for Amtrak. In contrast, this year we are spending \$1.4 billion, of which \$1.2 billion is from federal appropriation to support our operations and capital programs across the country.

The President's proposal does provide \$360 million to the Surface Transportation Board for continued commuter and freight operations on the NEC only after forcing an Amtrak bankruptcy. It also isn't accompanied by any kind of plan for how Amtrak could continue operations. In a word, they have no plan for Amtrak other than bankruptcy.

Obviously, the proposal is irresponsible and a surprising disappointment. It doesn't acknowledge all the hard work you've done over the past two years to run a tighter and better ship. Our costs are more under control than ever before—that's quite an accomplishment.

It is critical that reforms and improvements must continue, however, Amtrak's management is engaged with its board, the Department of Transportation and others for this purpose. That work continues. We are committed to an

efficient and productive rail passenger system. The plan to force us into bankruptcy would be counterproductive to this goal.

The President's proposal is only the start of a long legislative process, and we are taking it very seriously. This process has a lot of twists and turns, and it always takes six to nine months to sort out. It won't have any impact through '05 fiscal year, but there's going to be very little cash left at the end of this year. Rest assured that after all we have been through, I am committed to do everything I can to secure adequate funding for '06. We have strong support in Congress and a lot of support across the country.



The best thing that all employees can do is to do their jobs professionally, delivering the highest quality passenger service we know how. If we really care about our passengers, others will care about us. As I travel in the Midwest this week, you can bet that I'm going to be looking at service standards. Stay safe out there, and keep your heads up.

Sincerely, David L. Gunn

Thanks to Craig O'Connell of Friends of Amtrak

PEDESTRIAN SAFETY IN METROPOLITAN AREAS

In releasing "Mean Streets 2004," Surface Transportation Policy Project leaders have joined with a broad array of partner organizations to call attention to challenges in making walking safer.

The report provides a yardstick for elected officials and transportation leaders "to measure progress, or lack thereof, in making pedestrians and their communities safer," said STPP President Anne Canby. "Nearly 52,000 pedestrian deaths over the last ten years demands that we do much more to make walking a safer travel option."

The STPP study was released in conjunction with AARP, Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety, American Planning Association, American Public Health Association (APHA), American Society of Landscape Architects, prominent local and state leaders and numerous state and local transportation reform advocates.

The Orlando metropolitan area led the largest metropolitan areas with the meanest streets and also topped all these areas in growing more dangerous for pedestrians, according to the study's pedestrian danger index (PDI).

Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson described the actions taken in his city and region to make pedestrians and their safety a higher priority, with the report finding that the Salt Lake region led all others in making its pedestrians safer.

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