

## IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The latest on schedule changes, speed restrictions and improvements to the Downeaster.

What will it take to extend rail service to Yarmouth, Auburn/Lewiston, Freeport and Brunswick? Why has momentum diminished? Where did the support go?

# TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST



## Chairman's Comments

Submitted by Wayne E. Davis

Dear Loyal TrainRider—

All in all the summer has been good for us and for our ongoing efforts. The most exciting news was the announcement by our Congressional Delegation that the recently expired federal CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation Air Quality) funding assistance for our Downeaster would be reinstated and extended to 2009. This would never have happened without the constant efforts of both of our senators, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, and both of our representatives, Tom Allen and Mike Michaud. Each of these people worked hard to provide the continuing assistance to a train that has become one of America's favorite trains both in on-time performance and passenger satisfaction. They understand the growing importance of the service and the ever developing role that the Downeaster plays in creating a balanced transportation system. *It would be most appropriate for you to contact all of them by either phone or email to say how much you appreciate their efforts.* (phone numbers are at the end of this column)

Continuing the good news, the Downeaster carried its millionth passenger in September. That news was especially heartening to me because I remember being told years before we had actual service that it "...would probably take about 5 years before the train carried a million passengers..." We did it in three and a half years. We have every right to be proud!

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## ONE MILLIONTH DOWNEASTER PASSENGER EARLIER THAN EXPECTED

WE ALL KNEW IT WOULD HAPPEN SOONER OR later. Back in December of 2001, when the first Downeaster train ran between Portland and Boston, naysayers predicted it wouldn't carry the 1,000,000th passenger for five or six years. They were wrong. It took only three-and-a-half years.

Still, such a significant milestone always comes as a surprise. Especially to the lucky person who boarded the Downeaster expecting a pleasant and uneventful ride only to learn that she was no ordinary person on this day.

Ethel Hubert had ridden the Downeaster several times before, and on September 9th was enjoying a day trip to Portland from her home in Salem, New Hampshire. She boarded the afternoon #668 train at the Portland Transportation Center on her way home when she was greeted with the announcement: "Ethel Hubert, you are the one millionth passenger to board the Downeaster."



Ethel Hubert is Number One Million

You would expect that the one millionth passenger would be showered with gifts, and that's what happened. Ms Hubert received a pass on the Downeaster good for one year, a \$100 L.L. Bean gift certificate, a tote bag, and a "Thanks a Million" T-shirt.

Other passengers also received T-shirts and entered a drawing for overnight packages in Boston and Portland and a half-day kayak tour. Drawings took place October 1st.

It's a fact that good things happen to people who ride the Downeaster, which is a magic train. Of course, it's not every day that the one millionth passenger boards. And the way ridership has been growing recently, it won't be long before we'll be meeting the two millionth passenger.

Next time you take the Downeaster look for Ethel Hubert. She'll be riding it a lot more often now. And she'll be smiling. ■

—Photo by Bill Lord

## AMTRAK'S DIRECTOR OF MAINE PASSENGER SERVICE RECEIVES EXCELLENCE AWARD

VICTOR SALEMME, AMTRAK'S TOP MAN IN MAINE, HAS BEEN NAMED recipient of the Amtrak President's Service and Safety Award for Sustained Excellence. Since 1998, Salemme was in charge of the start-up and operation of the Downeaster. The service is rated #2 in the



Amtrak system for customer service and satisfaction and on-time performance. Amtrak President David Gunn will present the award at a ceremony this month.

Responsible for 28 crew members and a maintenance crew of 14, he works closely with the Northern

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## SENATE COMMITTEE OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVES RAIL PASSENGER BILL

THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION VOTED TO REPORT FAVORABLY THE Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2005. Chairman Ted Stevens (R-AK) praised the innovative nature of the bill, which Ranking Member Daniel Inouye (D-HI) called "the most comprehensive bill on Amtrak we've ever had."

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon said the 18-4 vote for the bipartisan bill "clearly signals that legislators are hearing, and responding positively to, the public's call for more and better rail passenger service."

Trent Lott (R-MS), chairman of the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine, said Conrad Burns (R-MT) and John Rockefeller (D-WV) had joined as co-sponsors. Other sponsors are Stevens, Lott, Inouye, Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX).

Lott said the bill aimed to reform Amtrak but also to "financially support Amtrak so it can do its job." Referring to a provision that makes the Amtrak president a voting member of the board, Lott said: "I like David Gunn and I think if we give him more power he will be able to get more accomplished."

Lautenberg, who worked closely with Lott on developing the bill, noted Amtrak's national security value, which he said was vividly demonstrated after 9/11 when only Amtrak kept running. He called Amtrak "an essential part of our lives," and reminded critics of federal aid that airlines get.

Barbara Boxer (D-CA), saying Amtrak and the Northeast are usually mentioned in the same breath, emphasized Amtrak's importance in California, where she said Amtrak's ridership is the second highest in the nation. "We rely on Amtrak; without it we'd have much worse gridlock."

Conrad Burns (R-MT) lamented that U.S. DOT has always treated Amtrak like a "step-child," which he said hurts the morale of Amtrak management and employees alike.

The committee defeated 7-15 a McCain amendment to delete "placeholder" language allowing bond funding, which would depend on action by the Senate Finance Committee. Before that vote, McCain said, "Amtrak has never paid back a single penny of any money that has been loaned to them."

In reference to the McCain remark, Amtrak has serviced its debt reliably for many years. Standard & Poor's had a 'stable' rating on that debt until March of

*continued on page 3*

## FAILING AIRWAYS CONTINUE ON LIFE SUPPORT

NORMAN MINETA CALLED FOR A ZERO AMTRAK BUDGET for 2006 and quibbled with Amtrak President David Gunn about the availability of \$60 million in reserve funds to keep the nation's railroad operating until October 1.

But it's the airline industry that's doing the meltdown. High oil prices have vaporized any profit hopes for global aviation, which lost more than \$35 billion between 2001 and 2004. "The fifth horseman of the apocalypse, the extraordinary price of fuel, is destroying our profitability," said Giovanni Bisignani, CEO of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). "In 2004 alone airlines lost \$4.8 billion and we expect to lose another \$6 billion in 2005."

He added that figures for U.S. carriers are even more discouraging, since Asian, African, Middle Eastern and European carriers made profit. In 2004, domestic airlines lost an extraordinary \$9 billion due to low demand, high labor costs and fare wars.

This year, airlines worldwide must pay \$83 billion for fuel compared with last year's \$63 billion. Industry observers estimate that U.S. carriers may end up more than \$10 billion in the red.

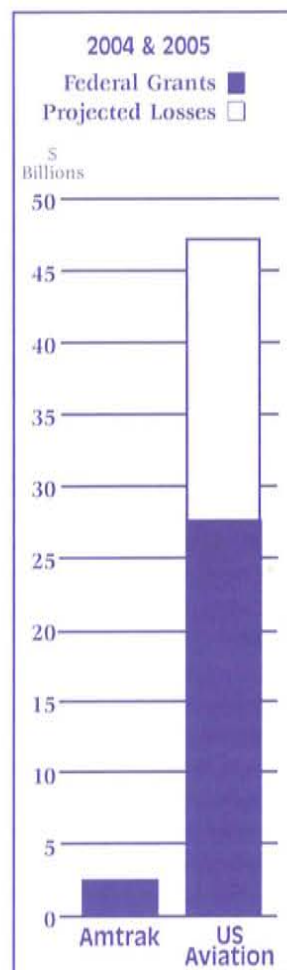
Even before recent fuel-price problems, U.S. airline losses exceeded all industry profit since 1960. "The fiction of a profitable air industry has collapsed. Individual carriers like Southwest, within the framework of a heavily subsidized industry, are profitable, but the industry itself is unsustainable," said Executive Director of Train Riders Association of California Alan Miller. "Our government has lost all sense of balance in supporting the different modes of transportation," he said. "Congress has ignored huge aviation subsidies while continuing to squeeze Amtrak. Gunn gave Congress major reforms as it requested, but Congress seems to have ignored Amtrak's very real progress."

Aviation sucked up federal subsidies of \$13.9 billion in 2004 and \$14 billion in 2005 plus \$9 to \$10 billion in investors' funds each year.

Some industry observers have suggested that Mr. Mineta mounted the Amtrak attack specifically to divert attention from the catastrophic financial failure of America's civil aviation industry on his watch. "When you compare the current economics of Amtrak, you really have to question the validity of Mr. Mineta's rhetoric on the subject," said Miller.

The Mineta attacks can be seen as a last-ditch effort to prevent a new direction from emerging in national transportation policy, at a time when rising fuel costs are hurting SUV sales, Ford and GM truckers, highway construction, highway maintenance, landscape sprawl, and other interests that depend heavily on petroleum.

—With many thanks to *California Rail News*, Sacramento, CA, trac@omsoft.com





# AFTER KATRINA: TRUCKERS, TRAINS WILL REBOUND, BUT AIRLINES?

TRAINS AND TRUCKS WILL BE FINE. AIRLINES WON'T.

That was the assessment after Hurricane Katrina battered New Orleans, a transportation epicenter, and pushed fuel prices—already a millstone around the neck of several passenger airlines on the brink of bankruptcy—to record levels.

Even before Katrina hit, some Wall Street analysts anticipated possible bankruptcy filings by Delta, the world's second-largest airline, and by Northwest Airlines and Independence Air. Sky-high fuel costs have roiled the airline industry, where cutthroat competition has hindered the ability to raise ticket prices.

That scenario got worse when fuel prices surged to a record for a second day. Crude oil for October delivery rose to \$69.81 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

Unlike low-cost carrier Southwest Airlines, many airlines didn't or don't have the financial wherewithal to hedge a substantial amount of their future fuel costs.

Jet fuel prices are crushing the industry, said John Heimlich, chief economist at the Air Transport Association. The airlines consume 19 billion gallons a year, which means they are paying \$16 billion in increased fuel prices this year, the industry group said. That means every penny increase in the price of a gallon of jet fuel adds \$190 million to the industry's annual fuel tab.

All of this pressure from soaring fuel expenses comes as Delta and Northwest seek pension funding relief from

Congress and further concessions from workers.

Meanwhile, things are not so dire for North America's five big railroads, which all send trains through New Orleans.

A.G. Edwards transportation analyst Donald Broughton said the big five—Union Pacific, CSX Corp., Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Norfolk Southern and Canadian National Railway—probably will see their profits hurt in the current quarter because of Katrina's damage. But in the fourth quarter and beyond, he expects an upswing in business for railroads as they participate in the recovery and reconstruction of damaged areas, transporting bricks, concrete and mortar.

"Railroad track is extremely durable," Broughton said. "Once the water recedes, it will be repaired, and in most cases, rather quickly. Is it bad? Yes, but it's also what railroads do."

He said the trucking industry also will be in position to participate in reconstruction efforts, because the companies pulled their assets out of harm's way before the hurricane hit.

Broughton said New Orleans is similar to St. Louis, because it is one of the few cities that serve as a site of origin and destination for the big railroads, trucking and barges.

"It's rare to find the five largest railroads in North America going to the same city," he said. "Usually, only a couple serve a particular city."

Amtrak, which uses the tracks of freight railroads, said in a bulletin that it had suspended New Orleans passenger service, terminating trains instead in Atlanta, San Antonio and Memphis.

—Excerpted from a report by Tim McLaughlin in the *St. Louis Dispatch*, August 30



## ...SENATE COMMITTEE OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVES RAIL PASSENGER BILL

(continued from page 2)

this year, when the Bush administration's zero budget request led to a 'negative' rating. Uncertainty over funding caused S&P in early May to put Amtrak's debt rating on "Credit Watch with negative implications." Also, Amtrak is repaying its newest loan—\$100 million from U.S. DOT in 2002—in five equal, annual installments starting this year.

Regarding the bonding, Lott said, "I think we're going to have to go that route eventually not just for passenger but also for freight rail." Stevens saw the need for bonding also in aviation, "where traffic is going to double."

—NARP PRESS RELEASE, July 28,  
with thanks to Ross Capon

## ... Chairman's Comments *continued from page 1*

September also saw our Director of Maine Passenger Service, Victor Salemme, designated to receive Amtrak's President's Award for Service and Safety. As we all know, it's Victor who keeps the Downeaster running during foul and fair weather and supervises probably the finest Amtrak crews in the entire Amtrak system. Ask anyone—rail advocates, passengers and anyone familiar with rail transportation—we're fortunate to have Victor up here working in cooperation with the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority.

As usual, we exist on your generosity—paid up dues, new members and special gifts are the only things that keep our lights burning and our ancient copy machine still cranking and our computers computing. Enlist your friends and neighbors!

Senator Susan Collins: Portland—780-3575; Washington DC— 1-202-224-2523

Senator Olympia Snowe: Bangor—945-0432; Washington DC— 1-202-224-5344

Representative Thomas H. Allen: Portland— 774-5019; Washington DC—1-202-225-6116

Representative Michael Michaud: Bangor— 942-6935; Washington, DC— 1-202-225-6303



## MORE PEOPLE RIDING THE DOWNEASTER

RIDERSHIP IS UP ON THE DOWNEASTER, and rail officials attribute the rise to faster travel times and rising gasoline prices.

The number of riders was up 8% in May over the same month in 2004, up 12% in June, up 9% in July and up 19.6% in August. Income for August 2005 was up 15.4% over that of August 2004.

The number of passengers jumped after travel time from Portland-Boston was reduced in April to two hours and 30 minutes, a savings of up to 15 minutes. The trip takes less time because of faster train speeds (up to 80 mph), track improvements and shorter stops at stations.

More good news came from Washington last month when Congress approved a transportation bill that assures the federal government will continue to fund the service until 2009.

Like other forms of public transportation, including private cars, trucks and buses on public highways, passenger rail does not pay for itself. But according to the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, which operates the popular train, more passengers mean fewer tax dollars, and the increased ridership figures show that the service is a viable transportation alternative. ■



## EXETER, NH, BACKS FIFTH DAILY DOWNEASTER TRIP

A FIFTH ROUND TRIP TO BOSTON IS ONE STEP CLOSER AFTER THE EXETER Board of Selectmen agreed to support the state allocating \$1.2 million of federal funding.

Earlier this year, however, the Governor's Executive Council tabled a vote to allocate the funds from the federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) grant. Patricia Douglas, executive director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) has stated that in order for a fifth round-trip to be introduced, the authority needs to upgrade the railway by adding passing tracks for passenger and freight trains. The tracks are owned by Guilford Transportation Industries.

The cost of such upgrades is about \$6 million, of which \$4.6 million would be spent on the railway in Maine. Douglas said that the cost for upgrades to Maine's portion of the track will be funded by the Maine Department of Transportation and CMAQ funds.

Upgrades to NH's railway are expected to cost about \$1.6 million. Douglas explained that CMAQ pays for 80% of a project. She said that if NH applies for \$1.2 million in CMAQ funds, Maine has offered to match the remaining \$400,000.

In March, New Hampshire's executive council tabled a vote due to questions over collaborative efforts between the Downeaster and bus operations in NH. Bus providers and NH and Maine rail officials, said Douglas, are working to coordinate a transportation network. A proposal should be before the executive council in October, along with the request for CMAQ funds.

"We're looking to coordinate schedules of trains and buses," she said. "People are busy, and if they want to take public transportation, they want options. We want to provide them with a good system."

Exeter is the busiest Amtrak station in NH, with some 25,000 passengers having boarded between July 2004 and June 2005. Durham and Dover follow with 16,000 and 13,000, respectively. Douglas says that many passengers in Exeter are commuters to Boston. With New Hampshire proving to be a growing market for the Downeaster, NNEPRA is eager to add a fifth round trip.

If the executive council approves the funds in October, then Downeaster officials will set up a construction schedule with Guilford Transportation. If all goes as planned, a fifth round-trip should begin in spring 2006.

—Excerpted from *The Exeter News*, August 5, by Adam Dolge



PHOTO BY MIKE DUPREY

## ...VICTOR SALEMME

(continued from page 1)

New England Passenger Rail Authority and reports to the Boston office of Amtrak.

Each year of its operation, the Downeaster has performed extremely well compared to other trains in the Amtrak system. This is largely attributable to Salemme's skillful management style. A qualified engineer, he knows his equipment and the conditions, weather and otherwise that his crews face on a daily basis. A natural leader, he is respected by his crews and others he works with in managing the service.

We congratulate Victor for maintaining the high standards that have distinguished our Downeaster. ■

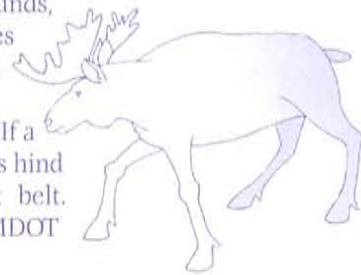
## Visiting Maine Anytime Soon? Some Facts on Moose Crashes

About 700 moose-vehicle crashes occur each year in Maine. With moose up to ten feet tall and weighing 1,500 pounds, a collision can crush a car. Moose crashes happen everywhere, and 75% of them occur at night.

SLOW DOWN and scan the roadsides. If a collision is imminent, aim for the moose's hind quarters. And always wear your seat belt. Check out the moose brochure on the MDOT website for more information:

<http://mainegov-images.informc.org>

Our thank yous to Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS)





## AMTRAK, FEDERAL HIGHWAYS AND THE COLD WAR

President Bush wants to end federal subsidies to Amtrak.

THE ADMINISTRATION ARGUES THAT THE SYSTEM HAS WASTED NEARLY A BILLION DOLLARS A YEAR OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS. It is time to impose market disciplines. The administration conveniently forgets the historical context of Amtrak's troubles. Passenger rail service in this country died in large measure because federal policy chose to subsidize the automobile and the interstate highway system.

Over Christmas vacation nearly 50 years ago my family and I took a train trip from Detroit to Bangor, where we rented car for a trip to our summer home in Southwest Harbor. It is one of my fondest memories, though even then the rail cars were showing signs of wear. Little did I realize that a mere two years before our trip, President Eisenhower had signed the death warrant for U.S. passenger rail.

We think of Dwight Eisenhower as a fiscal conservative, but the Interstate Highway Act (1956) was the largest public works project in history and no other public works project has done more to transform this nation.

The '50s were the height of the Cold War. Cold War thinking shaped the debate on and contours of even such seemingly "domestic" matters as urban and inter-city transportation. Eisenhower defended the vast public works project as a war preparedness initiative that would allow transport of munitions and other vital items in a wartime emergency.

The auto was also connected to the Cold War at a deeper cultural level. The Cold War was an effort not merely to protect the physical boundaries of the nation against foreign incursion but also to define an American identity. The private auto was synonymous with individual consumption, and freedom was increasingly defined as the right to choose among an expanding cornucopia of consumer goods. And with growing dependence on the auto came the rise of suburbia and an economy where every suburban homeowner would have his or her own lawnmower and snow blower.

However much we may like to view such consumerism as an outgrowth of and response to market freedoms, government played a considerable role in fostering this vision of the good life. Both state and federal governments have continued to subsidize the auto through both highway funds and support for police and ambulance services. Mortgage insurance, urban renewal and tax subsidies all worked with the highway system to push suburbanization.

At the cultural level government intervened heavily as well. History tells us that the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act required the removal of "Communists" from the American labor movement. Yet the implications of that act were far broader. Taft-Hartley, followed by Truman-era loyalty oaths and the early days of McCarthyism, led to a purge not merely of violent extremists but of all those radical elements who questioned the culture's single-minded focus on material growth. American labor had a long and indigenous radical tradition that had campaigned for shorter working hours along with more egalitarian organization of the workplace itself.

As Vice President Nixon's famous 1959 kitchen cabinet debate with Nikita Khrushchev illustrated, by the late '50s American freedom had been defined as the sweeping auto with tail fins and the bounteous kitchen. Yet that free-

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## AIRLINES ARE SUBSIDIZED, WHY NOT AMTRAK?

I WAS COMFORTABLY ENSCONCED IN MY TRAIN BEDROOM HEADING EAST ON AMTRAK'S CALIFORNIA Zephyr for a meeting in Philadelphia when the conductor came by to tell me he had instructions to take me off at the next station and send me home on the next train. I was flabbergasted, but you'll understand when I tell you the date—September 11, 2001. When I heard what had happened, of course, I understood. My meeting had been cancelled, but thanks to Amtrak I was well cared for. They put me up overnight in a motel and took me on board the west-bound Zephyr the next day.

The trip home was unforgettable. There were no planes flying, and rental cars were already fully booked, so thousands of people were left stranded. Our train was jammed with business people—a fairly upscale crowd. They could have afforded sleeping accommodations, but none were available.

Normally, these people would have made the usual reservations so the staff would have been able to judge how much food to load on the train, but in this case they had no warning. People poured into the diner. Several members of the dining car crew worked from 4 A.M. to 11 P.M. to meet the needs of their hungry diners.

I walked the train, talking to many of these unexpected riders. Most were surprised at the comfort of the coach accommodations and the care they were given. They loved the scenery, the meals, being able to relax while traveling, and the camaraderie and comfort of meeting other passengers during a very stressful time. This unplanned trip turned out to be an eye-opener for them, and almost everyone I talked to agreed that our country needs Amtrak's trains as a transportation choice.

What followed was a huge bailout of the airlines, hit hard by the terrorist tragedy and in need of remedies to protect their passengers. I never cease to wonder where our priorities are when highways and airlines can be subsidized repeatedly, while trains limp by with the bare minimum despite a growing ridership and increasing passenger satisfaction.

If we thought of trains as just as much a pillar of our transportation system as cars and planes, I feel certain we would come up with solutions to the budget and infrastructure issues plaguing Amtrak just as quickly as that bailout of the airlines was approved back in late 2001.

I'm determined to keep fighting for the survival of this country's trains—won't you join me?

—Doras M. Briggs, Emeryville, California

Excerpted from a letter to the editor in the *Tomah*, WI, *Tomah Journal*, July 25



## DAVID GUNN'S STATEMENT FOLLOWING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE AMTRAK AUTHORIZATION BILL

I want to offer my sincere and great appreciation to Senators Stevens, Inouye, Lott and Lautenberg for the introduction of Amtrak authorization legislation today.

It is heartening to see a truly inclusive and bipartisan approach to chart the future of passenger rail service in this country.

We look forward to working with these legislators, as well as with policymakers in the Administration, the states and elsewhere as the process gets underway with renewed urgency and seriousness.

Amtrak has operated without a federal authorization since October 2002. The time to chart the future is long overdue as the present model is not sustainable. Amtrak's responsibility must be to inform this process with expertise and in good faith, and we will do so. While I realize that the process is at the beginning, I think this is a very positive first step.

Amtrak has made considerable progress in the past three years to operate more efficiently and, with increased federal support, invest in maintenance and capital projects too long deferred. However, neither this progress nor the reforms we announced earlier this year can substitute for the clear direction of federal policy and resources to match it, and, as such, we commend the bipartisan introduction of this legislation. ■

I've always felt like we needed a national passenger rail system. How many lanes and airports can we build? I think trains have to be a part of the mix.

Some folks say, "We don't need it, we can't afford it, shut it down." Back in 1997 when I was also chairman of this subcommittee, I said if they couldn't make it pay, I would not support continuing it. Senator McCain has asked me how I want to eat those words, with or without salt. I said I'll eat them anyway he wants; I've continued to study the matter and I believe we need nationwide passenger rail.

—Senator Trent Lott, at the July 27 news conference that announced the Amtrak Authorization bill

## NATION NEEDS A PASSENGER RAIL SYSTEM

AMONG AMERICA'S LONG LIST OF MISPLACED PRIORITIES, NEGLECT OF OUR INTERCITY RAIL SYSTEM IS A DOOZY. Although it looks like a bipartisan coalition in Congress will turn back the Bush administration's effort to kill Amtrak (*editor: it did turn it back*), most politicians in both parties are AWOL in this critical issue.

The nation's dangerous dependence on airlines was displayed on September 11, 2001, and a few commentators called for urgent steps to build bullet trains and other rail options. Not only was nothing done, but the White House wants to hand Amtrak funding to the states, which means it will die. States are already overwhelmed by the mandates devolving on them by a deficit-strapped federal government.

Amtrak should indeed be fixed, perhaps even fundamentally altered. But any ideas to do so require investment and are lost in the battle to merely save the services we have. Sadly, Arizona Senator John McCain has been among the forefront of rail enemies.

Yet the need for a high-quality passenger rail system will only grow in the future. Congestion is increasing, and experience shows that new highways create new congestion. Choked and unpleasant air service makes rail competitive and appealing between many large cities.

Meanwhile, the likelihood of sustained high oil prices and the certainty of climate change caused by our ubiquitous burning of fossil fuels only make the rail option more essential.

No transportation system in an industrial nation "pays for itself," so the issue of Amtrak subsidies is a red herring. One key problem is decades of under-investment, creating a cycle of failure. The federal government is spending \$38 billion on highways this year and an additional \$13.8 billion on aviation. Amtrak is receiving \$1.2 billion.

Cities around the nation realize they can't pave their way out of congestion, and that provides a more hopeful story. Commuter rail service is working in several car-crazy places: Seattle, San Diego, Dallas, northern Virginia and Miami. It's being built in Atlanta, Minneapolis, Charlotte, NC, Salt Lake City and Albuquerque, among other cities.

Greater Phoenix is coming off a bruising fight for Proposition 400, a freeway-heavy transportation investment that will for the first time provide some funds for transit, including extending the region's 20-mile light-rail-system. It's barely a start. The next need is "heavy rail," commuter trains that will run from transit and employment centers to the suburbs.

Right of way for freight rail already exists from central Phoenix to Gilbert, Chandler, Glendale, Peoria, Surprise, Goodyear, Avondale, Tolleson and Buckeye. Public-private partnerships can work with the freight railroads to add capacity for commuter trains. Rail will also be essential to handle growth in Pinal County while the link between Phoenix and Tucson is ripe for a high-speed line.

This is not an idea for some far-off future. Arizona and America need urgent action now.

—by Jon Talton, the *Arizona Republic*, August 4

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## THE BOUTIQUE ALASKA RAILROAD: MINETA GETS IT WRONG AGAIN

TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY NORMAN MINETA, WHO HAS BEEN MAKING WAVES BLASTING AMTRAK, was in the Great North recently touting the virtues of the Alaska Railroad.

"The Alaska Railroad," Mineta said in a speech at the snappy depot at Anchorage airport, "has developed an innovative service that has made it the only passenger railroad in the nation that doesn't require operating subsidies."

But Amtrak, he said, was a "disservice to riders and to taxpayers nationwide" that every year just "gets in line for another subsidy."

It was Ronald Reagan's Welfare Queen meets the Iron Rail.

"Operating" is the operative word.

The boutique Alaska Railroad, all 600 miles of it, does indeed get subsidies—more than \$100 million in the past five years and more than \$372 million since 1996. It is just that the money is for infrastructure, not for operations.

Amtrak—which, unlike Alaska Railroad, carries only passengers, not more lucrative freight—gets a whopping \$1.2 billion in subsidies, a Transportation Department spokesman said. Much of that goes for operating expenses. Of course, the chronically ailing Amtrak travels over 22,000 miles of track in 46 states, with 300 passenger trains a day carrying about 25 million passengers a year.

That's slightly larger than the half-million who ride the Alaska Railroad, and two-thirds of them, *Anchorage Daily News* columnist Beth Bragg wrote, "rode on cruise (ship) company rail cars." Bragg bashed Mineta for using the Anchorage depot—built with 28 million in federal dollars—as a backdrop.

The airport-to-Seward train schedule is set by the cruise industry, noted Bragg, and the train makes three round trips a week during the 16-week summer season. Then it is basically empty for eight months.

The Anchorage depot was picked "as a convenient meeting place" during Mineta's trip to Alaska, spokesman Robert Johnson said. And despite the substantial differences, "what Alaska Railroad shows is one model for how a reformed system with federal money can meet intercity passenger needs in a state or region."

Maybe next time Mineta could stand in front of a picture of a deserted Midwest depot?

—Al Kamen, *The Washington Post*, July 17

## US REP FIGHTS FOR AMTRAK FUNDING PLAN

AMTRAK IS A VALUABLE MODE OF TRANSPORTATION and the government needs to fund it, says U.S. Rep. Joe Schwartz, R-MI.

At a meeting of the Battle Creek chapter of the National Conference of Firemen and Oilers, the union that represents Amtrak employees, Schwartz said he and other members of Congress from states where Amtrak provides service are working to ensure federal funding for the passenger rail service in both the short- and long-term. They are willing to fight the Bush administration, which doesn't consider passenger railways a high priority, he said.

"It is a legitimate function of government," he said, in reference to subsidized passenger rail service. "We need a long-term plan. That's what we are going to try to do." President Bush included no aid for passenger rail in his budget for the fiscal year that begins October 1.

One bill would continue funding levels for Amtrak in fiscal year 2006 at the same level as this fiscal year, but that's just a short-term approach, Schwartz said.

"We're buying ourselves some time and my hope is that by buying that time we can come up with a comprehensive plan for rail passenger travel in the United States," he said. "It's absurd to think, first, that passenger travel in any industrial country can support itself. It can't."

He noted that none of the countries in Europe that offer advanced rail passenger services—nor Japan—have self-supporting services. Those countries, he said, look at subsidizing rail passenger travel as a legitimate function of government.

The meeting, which took place in August, was scheduled to publicly thank Congressman Schwartz for his support of railroads and his role involving Amtrak funding.

Schwartz recently helped Congress reject a proposed cut in Amtrak funding that would have led to cutbacks in rail service.

The restoration of \$650 million to Amtrak's budget helped save passenger service in Michigan: the Wolverine Line along the Detroit-Chicago corridor, the Blue Water line to Port Huron and the Pere Marquette to Holland.

From 2003 to 2004, Battle Creek saw a 3.6 percent ridership increase, and Albion's stop had a 13.9 percent ridership increase.

—Christine Elliot for the *Enquirer*, Battle Creek, MI, August 17 (excerpted)

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## AND D IS FOR...

THE JULY ISSUE OF DOWN EAST MAGAZINE, IN ITS TRAVEL GUIDE, "MAINE FROM A TO Z," USED OUR FAVORITE TRAIN FOR THE LETTER D.

Here is what they wrote:

**D** is for Downeaster. The idea of linking Portland and Boston by passenger rail had its naysayers when the topic came up in the 1980s. Rail service died between the two cities in the fifties, and many people thought that with cars and buses, train travel didn't make much sense and wouldn't attract riders.

Boy, did the Amtrak Downeaster shut them up when it made



its debut in December of 2001. It was soon hauling 25,000 passengers a month, and it's never looked back. The train now makes four round trip journeys every day, beginning at 6:20 in the morning and calling it a night at 1:30 AM. The comfortable jaunt takes two and a half hours, and it stops at Old Orchard Beach, Saco, and Wells before exiting the state.

The appeals of traveling to Boston by train are many. Number one is that you don't have to drive in Boston. Number two, you don't have to park in Boston. Number three, you don't have to worry about people talking on cellphones and writing down messages while driving their SUVs at 80 mph.

The \$21 trip couldn't be any easier—the schedule is simple to find at: [www.thedowneaster.com](http://www.thedowneaster.com), and parking at the Portland Transportation Center is readily available and costs all of \$2 a day. You can read or work on your way down, and you arrive at North Station with all of the city of Boston available to you.

Check the web or call the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority at 207-780-1000 or Amtrak at 800-USA-RAIL.

(Editor: you may also check [www.trainridersne.org](http://www.trainridersne.org).)

## ...AMTRAK, FEDERAL HIGHWAYS AND THE COLD WAR (continued from page 5)

dom entailed losses. Americans in most cities could no longer choose public transit and even found it harder to walk to work or to shop in their immediate neighborhoods.

Our Cold War-era transportation system paradoxically leaves us increasingly vulnerable to international disruptions. Lacking the rail systems even of the '50s, trips from Bangor to Boston, Washington, D.C., or New York City by car or air are extremely costly. Every world supply disruption leaves us ever more vulnerable. How Amtrak's demise would effect the Portland-to-Boston train remains unclear, but in a broad sense it is time to rethink the old arguments about subsidies.

Having ever more cars on the road is a recipe not only for smog but also for time-consuming gridlock as well. What kind of freedom is it that ties up ever larger chunks of our days in commuter traffic? And looked at from the vantage point of my home town, Maine tourist communities could accommodate many more people, but not more cars. Maine's long-term future as a tourist economy has a major stake in the current Amtrak debate.

The economics of public transit subsidies work in exactly the opposite direction from the economics of the private auto. More runs between Portland and Boston make that train more attractive and expand demand.

Adding Bangor would in turn further increase the demand for and utility of the system. An east-west rail connection to Quebec also makes more sense than another federal highway. Transportation is vital to any modern economy and all governments subsidize their transportation systems. It is time to make choices that meet the full range of contemporary concerns.

—The Bangor Daily News, June 28, 2005.

Written by John Buell, a political economist who lives in Southwest Harbor. He may be contacted at [jbuell@acadia.ne](mailto:jbuell@acadia.ne)

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