

**A report on  
the findings of  
the Governor's  
Rail Task Force**

# TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST



## Chairman's Comments

Submitted by Wayne E. Davis

Sorry folks, it's my fault this winter newsletter is late in arriving. I had hoped to have an update and new information on the long overdue extension of the Downeaster to Freeport and Brunswick. The long talked about "Governor's Rail Task Force" first suggested in November of 2004 to address funding issues for our Downeaster did not hold its first meeting until January 27th of this year—and they have two more meetings scheduled between now and April. We did our part at the initial meeting as did Patricia Douglas, the Executive Director of the Rail Authority, providing a description of the history and the operation of the service. We'll continue to participate in the Task Force's ongoing deliberations and hope to devote the next newsletter to the task force's recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature. (Watch the papers too—stay tuned...)

The National Association of Railroad Passengers newsletter recently referred to America's Favorite Train as "...One of Amtrak's most successful services...". In January we also beat out all other Amtrak services with an on-time rating of 94.8%. Ridership continues to increase by leaps and bounds exceeding even the ridership count in the inaugural year. Close to 300,000 passengers rode the Downeaster during 2005. Thanks to all who made this hap-

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## DOWNEASTER OFFICIALS TOOT HORN — RIDERS ARE UP

Amtrak's Downeaster has bounced back from a drop in passengers last year with a 15% increase in ridership through November. THE SOLID PERFORMANCE, INCLUDING RIDERSHIP RECORDS SET IN SEPTEMBER, OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER, CAPS A YEAR IN WHICH THE TRAIN BECAME FASTER, MADE PLANS TO ADD A 5TH DAILY ROUND TRIP AND WON AMTRAK'S TOP HONOR FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE.

"We're coming into our own," said Patricia Douglas, executive director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority.

The rebound that began last spring is a far cry from last year's difficulties when the train failed to meet revenue projections and ridership plummeted.

Last year's problems mounted with a 10-day suspension of service during the Democratic National Convention in Boston in July, when trains were not allowed to operate in and out of North Station. A month later, a bridge collapsed onto the tracks in Kennebunk, adding further problems for the service.

Ridership began creeping upward again in May, and the number of passengers surged as gas prices spiked at more than \$3.50 a gallon over the summer.

SINCE THEN, GAS PRICES HAVE DROPPED BUT RIDERSHIP

HAS REMAINED HIGH.

With a month to go in 2005, the number of passengers already has surpassed last year's levels. From January to November, 267,958 people rode the Downeaster, compared with 248,571 for all of 2004. Revenues have eclipsed last year's levels at \$3.47 million.

"Despite the obstacles we had last year, we've been able to rebound not just to meet expectations but to exceed them," said Douglas.

The train, which celebrated its fourth anniversary December 15th, has matured to the point that it's no longer a novelty used simply for weekend

trips to Boston. The number of midweek commuters now rivals those on weekend trains, she said.

It's a common sight to see dozens of commuters gazing down into glowing laptop computer screens, conducting business on their cell phones and checking their schedules on Treos or Blackberries as the Downeaster hurtles toward Boston.

"To take the train, it just improves your whole state of mind and your physical presence," said Scarborough resident Charlie Summers, regional administrator of the Small Business Administration in

Boston. "You're able to work, you're able to think, you're

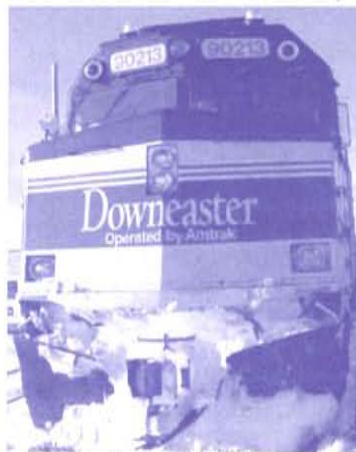


Photo by Mike Duprey

**By David Sharp**  
for The Associated Press  
(excerpted) December 12

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## ...DOWNEASTER OFFICIALS TOOT HORN

(continued from page 1)

able to relax. Having this train really gives Maine more options, which I think is critical."

**Having  
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gives  
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more  
options.  
It's  
everyone's  
dream.**

Bill Lord, who uses his laptop to review his students' work at Boston University, said the train helps him maintain both productivity and a quality of life. Each night he returns on the train to his Kennebunkport home. "You can live in Maine while bringing back Boston dollars," he said.

In November, New Hampshire announced it would spend \$1.6 million in federal money on a new side track, paving the way for a fifth daily run that will boost annual revenues by about 30%, Douglas said.

The train's success has fulfilled the vision of Wayne Davis, founder of TrainRiders Northeast, a group that pushed for the passenger rail service. When others talked of nostalgia, he steered the discussion toward utility.

"This is everyone's dream," said Davis. "A train that works is functional and not a novelty. It's reliable transportation."

Along the way, Downeaster riders have made new friends. After all, it's not all work and no play for commuters. Many now socialize and trade e-mails.

"The great thing is you can do your work," said Lord. "You can read. You can argue with your friends. I'll have my dinner on the train tonight from the café car. The Downeaster is a rolling social event." ■



## The Portland Press Herald, December 14 DOWNEASTER TRAIN SETTING PASSENGER, SERVICE RECORDS

IT'S TAKEN FOUR YEARS TO FIND ITS NICHE, BUT MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE DISCOVERING THE TRAIN. WITH ITS TICKET SALES RISING, AN AMTRAK CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD UNDER ITS BELT AND A FIFTH PORTLAND-TO-BOSTON DAILY RUN set to be added soon, the Downeaster passenger train service has a lot to toot its horn about.

The train, which got its start December 15, 2001, recorded its millionth passenger on September 9 of this year. Its customers recently rated it as having the best service of any Amtrak passenger line and it came in second in the system in 2005 for on-time service.

Ridership has been up, with nearly 268,000 tickets sold so far this year, compared to fewer than 249,000 at the same point last year. The route set ridership records in each of the past three months.

Rising gas prices likely account for some of the increase, but officials point out that the real difference has been commuters. While weekend trains have always been more crowded, the weekday count is nearly equal now, indicating the commuters are finding it a viable way to get to work and home again as compared to cars and buses.

The train still requires a public subsidy, and likely always will. There is no method of mass transportation that does not: cars and buses ride on tax-paid highways and planes land on tax-paid runways under the guidance of a federally run air control system.

With that in mind, moving people by rail much more efficiently (and with much less pollution) than by road is well worth the expense. Nothing is free, and taxpayers subsidize every single form of mass transit there is, as well as private automobiles.

What counts is that people use them—and by that measure the Downeaster is well on its way to realizing its full potential as a reliable, useful form of mass transportation. ■

## ADMINISTRATION FIRES AMTRAK'S TALENTED PRESIDENT

The Oregonian, November 12, 2005

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION HAS FIRED THE BEST LEADER AMTRAK HAS EVER HAD. PRESIDENT DAVID GUNN LOST HIS JOB BECAUSE HE WOULD NOT LIE DOWN ON THE TRACKS AND LET THE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO DISMANTLE THE NATION'S PASSENGER RAILROAD SYSTEM RUN OVER HIM.

It was nauseating to hear the administration's hand-picked Amtrak board of directors claim that it fired Gunn because the beleaguered national railroad needs "a leader with vision and experience."

That is exactly what Amtrak had in David Gunn. Before Gunn took over Amtrak in April 2002, he had a MBA from Harvard and nearly 40 years of experience managing railroads and sub-

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ways, including major systems in New York, Washington, DC, and Toronto. Gunn was everything that so many Bush appointees are not—experienced, talented and capable of inspiring the workers and leaders of the long-troubled railway.

Gunn turned Amtrak around. In 2004, the passenger railway served a remarkable 25 million passengers, an all-time record. Amtrak was still tormented by a budget crisis, equipment failures and a legacy of decades of disinvestment, but Gunn gave the country a glimpse of what Amtrak could be—a real national railroad system. He fought harder than any Amtrak leader ever has for the kind of public investment that any major pas-

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## THIS EDITOR'S OPINION

As France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Japan, China, and now Russia and Eastern Europe order high-speed trains, the United States remains on the sidelines, where it is vulnerable to losing out on new rail technologies.

So wrote John Tagliabue in one of the last, and to me most cruel, dispatches of 2005. His report, which bore the headline, OVERSEAS, THE TRAINS AND THE MARKET FOR THEM ACCELERATE, appeared in the *New York Times* December 30.

Among other tech breakthroughs that make trains lighter and allow them to go faster and brake and accelerate more easily while causing less wear on rails and wheels, the report describes motors built into the axles of every second rail car that essentially do the job of pulling the train.

Another development is eddy current brakes, which employ electromagnetic fields rather than brake disks for slowing and stopping.

The French manufacturer Alstom is now installing these and other technologies in the fourth generation of its TGV, while the German company Siemens is stepping up its output of trains from one rail car every one or two days to two per day to meet the most recent orders from China. Cruising speeds will range from 150 mph to 210 mph.

Our own beloved country is the only industrialized one in the world that does not have and does not plan to have a unified transportation system inclusive of high-speed trains. This is a tragedy that I lay at the same doorstep where I lay the blame for the disarray of our healthcare system and the ailing public school system. It is expenditure beyond human reason on a military machine.

Are we not the richest, strongest, most widely scattered military empire in the history of civilization? The whole world recognizes our military might and is pleased enough to call on us when they need the service of guns and those who use and die by them. (We also invade without request, but that's a story for another day.)

You can't have guns and butter at the same time. Integrated transportation, health care and education represent butter.

In November, according to Tagliabue's report, Siemens landed a \$804 million contract to supply 60 sleek-nosed high-speed trains to China. The order is one in a 15-year program to upgrade the country's rail network, including the introduction of 180 mph bullet trains.

Siemens has also signed a preliminary contract for high-speed trains to connect Moscow and St. Petersburg. In South Korea, Alstom, the inventor of the TGV, is supplying 185 mph trains for a five-year \$17 billion project that has connected Pusan and Seoul. Spain hopes to have a Madrid-Barcelona high-speed link by 2008, and France and Germany are upgrading train routes and speeds from Paris through Strasbourg and to Stuttgart and Frankfurt.

According to an economist with a British consultancy, cuts in travel time have stimulated demand for trains.

The *Times* story notes that American industry "is largely sitting this one out," adding that a few companies, like the electro-motive division of General Motors and the MotivePower Industries division of the Wabtec Corporation are doing business with Chinese rail operators, mainly in freight.

But in Europe the big three—Alstom, Siemens and Bombardier—compete to grab market share with ever snazzier and faster trains.

The thought of all this technological development dazzles me. The very look of the sleek trains dazzles me—and I have traveled only on what European rail experts consider old second or third generation models. Last spring I rode the TGV at 163 mph. It was cushy.

I live in a state that is famed for its rock-bound coast, clean, cold lakes, and other picture postcard attractions. But while Maine sees an influx of two million visitors yearly, rail service barely makes it

into the southern corner of the state. Tourists and residents alike travel uniquely by highway because no options are available.

The MDOT continues to widen existing roads, add connectors and draw up plans for new roads. The connectors relieve traffic volume on older, more traffic light studded roads until the connectors grow their own traffic lights and heavy volume. In moments of exasperation (I have just learned about another plan to "relieve" highway traffic by building a highway), my eyes

read MDOT but see MDOH.

**"When  
the skies  
and the roads  
are full,  
they will turn  
to trains."**

Am I angry that the Downeaster, which has proved itself an unqualified economic tool in the rejuvenation of town centers, has not expanded to other Maine towns? You bet I am. TrainRiders/Northeast fought 15 long years just to bring a train up from Boston

to New Hampshire and the tip of the Maine coast. We fought stone-walling, indifference, hostility and ridicule on behalf of state government officials, businessmen, pundits and others.

It is now more than four years since the inauguration of Downeaster service and the MDOT has done nothing to help extend it. It is not a matter of being broke. The money is there, waiting. The current governor, John Baldacci, will not even talk to us. His door is shut.

It comes all the sweeter, then, when we see a positive editorial such as the one on the previous page that appeared in the *Portland Press Herald* on December 14.

According to the Tagliabue report, European rail experts say that heavy population concentrations on our East and West Coasts and in the Midwest make high-speed trains a natural. Dietrich Möller, president of Siemens' trains division, said "When the skies and the roads are full, they will turn to trains."

Francois Lacôte, senior vice president

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# THE PUBLIC MUST CHECK ITS INTERESTS

By Tom Teepen, The Times Union, Albany, December 6, 2005

WHILE THE SHORT ATTENTION SPAN THEATER THAT IS AMERICAN POLITICS HAS SWUNG BACK TO IRAQ, THE ADMINISTRATION CONTINUES WITH ITS DOMESTIC AGENDA. TO SCANT PUBLIC NOTICE, IT IS BUSY GIVING AWAY THE STORE.

There goes the land you own in the West.

There goes Amtrak.

There goes public radio and television.

None of those ends has been achieved yet, but each is afoot, and there is every reason to suppose that they will occur, unless a disturbed public bestirs itself to its own interests.

All three moves are the work of a doctrinal politics that disdains federal enterprise and dismisses public, common purpose.

The U.S. House has passed a bill that would open 6 million acres in Western states to purchase by mineral companies and individuals, taking the land out of

play for hiking, fishing and other outdoor recreations. Even sections of some national forests and parks are at risk.

Speculators could buy tracts with commercial potential for as little as \$1,000 an acre and either develop and resell them to other developers.

Many in the West appreciate public lands as environmental assets. Other Westerners—well funded and commercially and politically aggressive—clamor that public land denies them a birthright that ought to be theirs for the taking.

Perhaps the Senate will hold out against the House.

Meantime, the Bush-loaded Amtrak Board has fired the rail system's CEO. The administration wants to sell off Amtrak, but David Gunn, a successful transit executive enticed out of retirement, has improved the system's financial management, its rolling stock and its ridership.

The board said Gunn had to be fired because he wasn't making progress fast enough. Yeah, right. He was fired because his success was creating the impolitic suggestion that the system might be made effective.

And with one partisan toady bounced from the leadership of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting—the inspector general found he had taken improper and even illegal steps to politicize the system—another, this time a major Republican fundraiser, has been put in

**GUNN WAS FIRED BECAUSE HE WASN'T MAKING PROGRESS. YEAH, RIGHT.**

charge.

Again, unless the public speaks, public broadcasting is headed for the same fate that a hyper-ventilating conservatism intends for activities that have for a rationale only public service and the enrichment of the commonweal.

—Tom Teepen's email address is [teepencolumn@coxnews.com](mailto:teepencolumn@coxnews.com)

## SENATE VOTES 93-6 FOR PASSENGER RAIL

The Senate voted 93-6 in favor of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, which was developed jointly by Sen. Trent Lott (R-MS) and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ).

"This vote sends a strong message that the time for study on passenger rail is past; the time to legislate is now," said Ross B. Capon of NARP.

Capon continued, "Today's Senate vote is consistent with strong ridership growth on Amtrak and mass transit, coupled with concerns about gasoline price and availability. The traveling public understands the connection between the need for a strong rail passenger network and the world energy situation."

—Press Release, National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), November 6, 2005—excerpted

*(Editor: The public understands the need, and the Congress understands it. Only the administration blinds itself to the truth.)*

## ... THIS EDITOR'S OPINION (continued from page 3)

in Alstom's transport division, said three conditions had to be filled for a country to turn to high-speed rail: the political will, large population concentrations, and a level of economic prosperity adequate to pay for a rail system. "In the United States, you have the second two," he said. "I am not sure that you have the first."

I don't know where our Catch-22 occurs. It is partly a matter of the overwhelming influence of vested petroleum interests in Washington, and it is partly the American love of private automobiles—our fear of losing our individuality, or our independence, or our restless I-want-to-go-where-I-want-when-I-want. It is the live free or die attitude. And make no mistake, our national characteristics are richly exploited by the vested interests.

It is partly that our rail lines are not ramrod straight like those in other countries, nor are they built so that they pass under and over roads. The United States may be unique in having grade level

crossings from coast to coast, and no fencing. Trains that cruise at 150 mph and faster are fenced. It is a magnificent system: thousands of miles of tall wire fencing that the passenger doesn't see for the tremendous speed of the train. He doesn't see the equally up-close utility poles, either. All he sees is scenery.

As any train passenger knows, countryside that is divorced from interstate highways is tonic for the eyes and the senses. It's that basic wellspring of contentment that train travel unleashes. And yes, the countryside is out there. It just hides from the motorists.

Back to the why of our country not having the choices in overland travel that other nations assume: it is all the above, and more. It is outdated infrastructure such as tunnels and bridges. It is awesome taxpayer subsidies to highways and airways, with profits to the same old vested interests.

But mostly it is a lack of political will.



## THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD

Op Ed by **Otis White** (excerpted) The New York Times, September 28, 2005

WE'VE LEARNED A LOT ABOUT EVACUATING CITIES IN RECENT DAYS, MUCH OF IT TROUBLING. But if the failures of New Orleans and the gridlock of Houston show anything, it's that we need a third way out of cities, something other than flying or driving. Fortunately, there is such a way: passenger rail.

If local and federal authorities had worked with Amtrak to make better use of its trains in New Orleans, thousands could have been evacuated before the worst of Katrina hit. And if Houston had gone ahead with earlier proposals to develop high-speed rail links, the same might have been true there.

For decades, two myths have stymied efforts to develop intercity rail systems outside the Northeast: that rail can't compete with cars and airplanes and that the only region where passenger rail has been successful, the Northeast, has unique characteristics. Both are wrong.

True, long-distance rail will never work as anything other than a tourist attraction. And this is what Amtrak delivers in most parts of the country: long, slow, nostalgic, ultimately useless train trips. (*Editor: Useless? since when? Most of our own travel is combined business and tourism, and it is never useless.*) But trains—and in particular high-speed services like Amtrak's Acela—work wonderfully for trips of 100 to 500 miles. These middle distances are too short for efficient air travel, where you spend more time in airports than in the air, and too long for comfortable auto travel. At these distances, rail passengers can travel downtown to downtown in about the time it takes to fly and catch a cab, and have a more comfortable, productive journey to boot.

But what about the Northeastern myth—that rail works there only because of the spacing of the cities? Are there other big cities 100 to 500 miles apart? There are dozens of them. To name one pair, Houston and Dallas are 246 miles apart, about the same as New York to Washington or New York to Boston. Or Chicago and Detroit (279 miles); Eugene, Ore., and Seattle (310 miles); or Miami and Orlando (264 miles).

The challenge with passenger rail has always been its financing and management. On the one hand, high-speed rail requires big upfront investments: you have to retrofit tracks for 125-mile-an-hour trains, build stations and buy locomotives and cars—investments that are seen as too great for private enterprise. On the other hand, the Amtrak experience shows that governments usually don't run good railroads. (*Editor: governments that adequately invest in their railroads run fantastic railroads indeed. Only in our country is rail starved in order that highways and airways be glorified.*) The answer, then, is a public-private partnership, with federal and state governments paying upfront costs and helping private companies buy the trains, and private companies running the routes and maintaining the equipment from that point forward.

Why hasn't this happened? Because, as with so many other things in government, it was hard to see the most tragic consequences of our inadequate and overwhelmed urban transportation systems until a crisis struck. Before August 29, when Hurricane Katrina came ashore, most people knew only the annoyances of delayed flights and crowded highways. Now, thanks to the people left in New Orleans and those stuck on the roads outside Houston, we understand the dangers as well.

If the federal government needed another reason to support the development of modern, high-speed passenger rail, then here it is. Not only can it reduce congestion, save energy and strengthen regional economies, in times of emergency it could be a critical third way out.

Otis White, a public policy consultant, is a columnist for *Governing* magazine.

### NARP Response to Otis White Op Ed

To the Editor of the New York Times:

Otis White is right to urge development of modern, high-speed passenger rail but wrong to call Amtrak's long-distance trains "useless." They serve four million people a year and provide basic transportation for many.

These are the only passenger trains in many large cities, including Houston, New Orleans and San Antonio. On September 22, two special trains took 738 Houston evacuees to San Antonio and Dallas, using Amtrak stations and personnel in all cities.

Before Katrina, regular Amtrak trains leaving New Orleans had above-normal loads, but Amtrak's offer to carry hundreds of evacuees to safety in a big, special train was rejected.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act could facilitate high speed rail development but needs Bush administration support.

Integrating passenger rail into emergency plans would eliminate the need to ad lib so many evacuation train decisions and allow efficient use of existing infrastructure and trains.

—Ross B. Capon,  
Executive Director  
National Association  
of Railroad Passengers  
Washington, DC 20002-3557



### ... ADMINISTRATION FIRES AMTRAK'S TALENTED PRESIDENT (continued from page 2)

senger rail system needs to succeed.

But Gunn was brought down by the political forces that have consistently underfunded and undermined Amtrak. The final clash was an Amtrak board vote in September to split off and possibly privatize Amtrak's successful Northeast corridor, an idea backed by the

Bush administration.

Gunn kept fighting to keep Amtrak's system together. Unlike the president who appointed him, Gunn believes that the United States, like every other major industrial nation, needs a financially strong, efficient and truly national railroad system. In the end, this belief cost David Gunn his job.



## OPINION



Following are three opinion pieces that express the folly of the four-man Amtrak board's firing of the competent David Gunn. All four men are Bush appointees, none had railroad experience, and one, Norman Mineta, has never attended a meeting.

Because the Amtrak board should be seven in number, the legality of the firing is questionable.

TrainRiders/Northeast received dozens of similar on-line editorials, op eds and columns from around the nation. They ran in city newspapers, railroad magazines, and other publications. All except one supported the extraordinary David Gunn. The holdout was the American Heritage Foundation, which agreed with President Bush that Gunn was not doing a good job.

**International Herald Tribune**, November 16, 2005, by Don Phillips

Paris—NOWHERE IN THE WORLD DO THE RAILROADERS WHO SUPERVISE AND RUN FREIGHT TRAINS AND THOSE WHO OPERATE PASSENGER TRAINS TRULY GET ALONG WELL. THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, ONE GROUP DOMINATES OPERATIONS AND THE OTHER GETS THE CRUMBS. ONE GROUP IS NERVOUS ABOUT LOSING DOMINANCE AND THE OTHER LUSTS FOR IT.

IN EUROPE, THE PASSENGER TRAIN IS KING OF THE HILL. Even the European Union is having difficulty getting European railroads to accept an EU policy pushing transfer of freight from road to rail. IN THE UNITED STATES, IT'S THE OPPOSITE. Freight is king. Outside the Washington-New York-Boston corridor, freight is actually more than king. Passenger trains out in the heartland of America survive only because freight railroads do not want the bad publicity that would come with the death of the passenger train. Freight railroads therefore have a policy of containment for passengers. If they could get away with it, the freight railroads would crush the passenger train tomorrow. Or so it seemed.

But a funny thing has happened. David Gunn, the president of Amtrak, was fired by a new Amtrak board of directors, all conservative Republican businessmen despite a requirement that there be a mix of Republicans and Democrats on the board. Not a single member of the board, recently appointed by President George W. Bush, had any railroad experience.

Oddly, Gunn was on his way to see the board chairman, David Laney, when he was fired. He came to see Laney with good

**Sacramento Bee**, November 15, 2005

### ANOTHER BLOW TO AMTRAK: CAPABLE LEADER GETS A PINK SLIP

DAVID GUNN, WHO WAS FIRED AS CEO AND PRESIDENT OF AMTRAK, HAD TWO OPTIONS WHEN HE TOOK OVER THE NATION'S TROUBLED PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE THREE YEARS AGO.

HE COULD COMPLY WITH THE WISHES OF THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND DISMEMBER THE SYSTEM OR HE COULD FIGHT TO STAVE OFF BUDGET CUTS AND KEEP LONG-DISTANCE PASSENGER TRAINS ROLLING ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

He chose to save the service and for that he's been fired.

That's a loss—not just for rail advocated, but also for those who want an efficient, balanced transportation system for the country.

In canning Gunn, the Amtrak board did the bidding of the Bush administration, which has made it clear it wants to dismantle Amtrak and sell off its assets. Last year, Bush's budget cut all funding for the national rail service.

A recent General Accountability Office audit predicted that Amtrak's current \$1 billion annual operating deficit would grow by 40% over the next four years. Despite the criticism, the GAO still acknowledged that anyone familiar with the history of Amtrak knows that Gunn has made tremendous improvements. Under his leadership Amtrak achieved its highest ridership in history. He cut service sensibly, trimmed the payroll and began to upgrade Amtrak's dilapidated

**The Boston Globe**, November 10, 2005

### AMTRAK DERAILED

THROUGH ALL THE FUNDING PROBLEMS THAT AMTRAK HAS HAD IN RECENT YEARS, IT WAS REASSURING THAT THE PERSON RUNNING THE SYSTEM, DAVID GUNN, is considered by Michael Dukakis to be "the best rail CEO in the country." Dukakis was on the board that hired Gunn three years ago. Yesterday, a board dominated by President Bush's appointees fired Gunn.

Gunn's supporters in Congress, including Republican Senator Trent Lott of Mississippi, rallied to his defense. Senator Tom Carper, a Delaware Democrat, called the decision "wrong, ill-advised, and further proof that the Bush administration doesn't want Amtrak to succeed."

In the past year Amtrak served a record number of passengers, 25.5 million, with a much reduced payroll. Admittedly, the system runs in the red each year and has a backlog of needed infrastructure improvements. But those problems could be solved if Congress decided to underpin its operations with a guaranteed revenue source, such as the gasoline tax that funds interstate highways.

The dismissal of Gunn, who has been in the leadership of transit systems from Washington to Boston to Toronto, follows closely upon another wrongheaded move by the board in September, approving a resolution authorizing the splitting off of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. The Bush administration has long envisioned turning the corridor over to a federal-state consortium. The corridor accounts for the greatest number of Amtrak pas-

*See International Herald Tribune, page 7*

*See Sacramento Bee, page 7*

*See The Boston Globe, page 7*



news, but he never got to deliver it: Amtrak was doing better than ever; ridership was up, and the deficit was declining.

Gunn actively opposed some of the policies being pushed by the board and by Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, the only Democrat in Bush's cabinet. Gunn was particularly opposed to splitting operation of the Washington-Boston corridor from the rest of Amtrak. Although Gunn is one of the most professional and effective presidents Amtrak has ever had, he is not a politician. He speaks his mind. His working life has been spent on railroads and transit systems. He is credited, among other things, with cleaning up the crime- and graffiti-ridden New York subway system.

Gunn's dismissal sparked an uproar in Congress. Hearings were held, and Republicans and Democrats alike deplored the move.

To the surprise of many, the dominant freight railroads also weighed in on the side of Gunn, a fellow professional.

Technically, there are several major shareholders in Amtrak, including the large freight railroads that once operated passenger trains. They have long since written the stock down to zero and all but forgotten about it. But suddenly they were using it for leverage.

"As a longstanding shareholder of Amtrak," said Richard Russack, a vice president for the Burlington Northern Santa Fe, the second-largest U.S. railroad after Union Pacific, "we would hope that the board would give us the opportunity to review their actions. We do have the right, as a common-stock shareholder, to vote on whatever action they're going to take."

In other words, who wants amateurs operating on their railroad?

There is no telling how this dispute will turn out. But clearly Mineta and the Amtrak board have made powerful enemies in Congress and among the freight railroads. Consumer groups have come down on them. State governments are weighing in. Even the railroad unions, who squabbled constantly with Gunn, have sharply criticized the Amtrak board and the Bush administration.

And even Mineta found himself being called names. The Democrat who once advocated tax increases for road construction was already under fire from many who felt he had become ineffective. Larry Kaufman, an influential columnist who has been a part of railroading for decades, including a stint as a railroad vice president, called for Mineta's resignation.

"With Norman Mineta's depth of experience and knowledge, he should be transportation's principal advocate—to the country and inside the government," Kaufman wrote in *Argus Rail Business*, a specialist magazine.

Perhaps Mineta has accomplished one thing: solid support for Amtrak everywhere but the White House.

Don Phillips can be reached at [freeflow@iht.com](mailto:freeflow@iht.com).

rolling stock.

Passenger rail is being asked to run a service without government support. It is ludicrous to hold passenger rail to such a standard when no other transportation sector in the country—not airlines, not highways, not seaports—is asked to operate without subsidies.

In an interview with the editor of *Railway Age* magazine after his dismissal, Gunn was characteristically blunt. The administration wanted him to implement their plan, he said, "which is destroying Amtrak. I stood in their way. That's why they fired me."

Congress has repeatedly sought to rescue Amtrak. As the Gunn dismissal proves, the Bush White House has not relented. If passenger rail is going to survive in this country, Congress must move quickly and forcefully to save it.

sengers and most of its revenues. Gunn supporters believe that the administration thinks moving ahead with the dismantling of Amtrak will be easier without Gunn as Amtrak's president.

The strongest critics of this proposal are officials in the Northeastern states, which have trouble enough subsidizing and managing their commuter rail systems and have no desire to take on Amtrak's need for improved track, bridges, and electrical equipment. In Congress, the fear is that splitting off the Northeast Corridor would be followed by attempts to sell off or drop Amtrak's long-distance lines. While these might be perennial money-losers, they bring service to much of the country and have considerable support in Congress.

The Senate recently approved by a 93-6 vote a six-year, \$12 billion authorization bill for Amtrak. Instead of jeopardizing Amtrak operations by firing a competent manager like Gunn, the administration should meet with members of Congress to devise a plan for the system that ensures reliable financing and a chance to bring high-quality, high-speed passenger rail service to all the nation's densely populated corridors.

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

pen. (You'd be surprised how much more work there is still to be done...)

### Wish List

- A new copy machine
- New members
- A new TrainRiders/Northeast display for use at trade shows and public events
- New members
- Someone to work with our volunteer editor as a possible replacement when Paula retires
- Someone to do graphics and design when another volunteer, David Strauch, retires after nearly 16 years of doing our bidding
- New members!



## DOWNEASTER 4TH ANNIVERSARY PARTY TRAIN DOES IT AGAIN

**F**OUR YEARS TO THE DATE THAT THE DOWNEASTER CRUISED UP FROM BOSTON ON ITS INAUGURAL RUN, DECEMBER 15, SANTA AND 40 KIDDIES BOARDED IN SACO. Each child carried a new toy to contribute to the US Marine Corps Toys for Tots program as soon as the train arrived in Portland at 12:15.

After listening to the Christmas music presented by D.J.s from local radio stations and eating munchies, the children hopped onto a school bus for the return to school.

The next passenger to arrive at the terminal was a major sized cake from Hannaford that featured an edible color photo of our fave train's engine on top. After being cut, pieces were passed out to bus and rail passengers and anyone else who happened to be in the terminal. The cake boarded the train for the 1:55 PM departure to Boston, and every passenger who hankered for a piece went right to the café car and got one.

Later that day, TNE's board of Directors boarded another train to Boston but rode only as far as Exeter, where the station was dropdead gorgeous with evergreens, red ribbons, and



Above: Happy passengers on board the festive Portland bound train #685 on December 15, 2005—the 4th Anniversary Passenger Appreciation trip. Left: Patricia Douglas, NNEPRA Executive Director, and Teri Diffin, call winning ticket for monthly pass.

Photos by Bill Lord

kissing balls arranged under each floodlit platform arch. The seasonal finery led from the station right into the business district, and board members followed on foot to a nearby restaurant for dinner. As always with our more light-hearted than business-as-usual meetings, each person paid his way. Then it was back to the station to board the 7:24 PM train to Portland.

WAS THAT TRAIN HAVING A PARTY? Ask any passenger. Called the Downeast Passenger Appreciation train and sponsored by the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), the end car was aglow with red and green lights, swags and ornaments and set up with a large

food counter for monthly commuters and other passengers.

It was magic to be zipping through snow-covered countryside at speeds up to 80 mph in the midst of so much genuine good cheer. The cake, which had begun to disappear at midday in the Portland terminal, was eaten all the way to Boston and made it back as far as Exeter, where by consensus of passengers the last piece was fed to our own Wayne Davis. ■

### THE TRAINRIDER

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