

**REMEMBER
TO VOTE
IN NOVEMBER
AND THINK
RAIL**

TRAINRIDER

THE NEWSLETTER OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST



WE NEED YOUR VOICE NOW! Federal support for Downeaster operations runs out in 2008 and must be replaced. Maine lawmakers must now vote for the same permanent funding they accord to highways and aviation. The 90,000 Maine voters whose signatures in 1990-91 led to a return of passenger rail service in Maine after an absence of 35 years are needed again **if Amtrak's Downeaster Service is to survive beyond 2007.**

It is *absolutely essential* that every Mainer who cares about the future of Passenger Rail call his or her state legislators and convince them to vote for permanent funding for Amtrak's Downeaster service.



To find out how to contact your Maine legislators, call the State of Maine's citizen's assistance line: (207) 624-9494. Tell them where you live, and ask for the names, phone numbers and e-

ALERT!

TEN YEARS FROM NOW, WILL MAINE HAVE THIS?

- Passenger train service six to eight times daily Boston-Portland-Freeport-Brunswick-Bath-Wiscasset-Damariscotta-Rockland, in addition to
- Brunswick-Augusta-Waterville-Bangor-Orono-Ellsworth (connect to Mt. Desert), in addition to
- Portland-Lewiston-Auburn (connect to Vermont, Montreal and the Canadian provinces)

OR WILL IT HAVE THIS?

- More highways and no passenger trains at all—not even Downeaster service into Portland. This status will again make Maine one of only two states in the country that offer no rail service.

mail addresses of your district's state senator and representative—or go online to janus.state.me.us/legis/, then click on "Contact Us" to reveal phone and e-mail listings for the Maine Senate and the Maine House of Representatives.

You should also call and e-mail the co-chairs of the Transportation Committee, Senator Dennis S. Damon and Representative Boyd P. Marley and the members of their committee, as well as Governor John Baldacci at (207) 287-3531.

REMINDE THEM that the Downeaster's increase in ridership, now averaging an absolutely-more-than-fantastic 30% monthly, is the highest of any train in the nation. This increase is attributable to tourists from around the country and the world, student and worker commuters, school and other organized groups, bicycle riders who take the train one way and the bike the other, the handicapped and others who are unable

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DOWNEASTER SEES SPIKE IN RIDERSHIP

PORTLAND—With gas prices surging upward again, ticket sales are hot for the Portland-to-Boston Downeaster passenger train.

Winter is usually a slow season for the Downeaster, but this year has been an exception, with ridership for the quarter up 35% over last year's figure. Many of the trains are now sold out days in advance.

To accommodate all of the riders, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority added a car to one of its trains during school vacation week. The rail authority says it is now talking to Amtrak

about getting an extra car for this tourism season.

"We're looking into the summer with Amtrak to see what they might have available, because we may need to have that extra car during the summer," the authority's Lou Ensor told WCSH-TV.

Rail service officials say the gain in ridership is because of the high price of gas, shortened trips to Boston, and the Downeaster becoming recognized as a dependable way to travel. It rates near the top of Amtrak trains for on-time service.

The Downeaster is no longer consid-

ered a novelty and is used regularly by commuters. Transportation officials are looking into extending its Maine runs to Brunswick.

Worries of high gasoline prices this summer were heightened as oil prices hit a record high of \$72.49 a barrel after a drop in US gasoline stocks. That has prompted concern that refiners lack an adequate inventory cushion ahead of the peak summer driving season, which could translate into higher prices at the pump.

—Via Associated Press, in the Portland Press Herald, April 21

FROM THE EDITOR

NEVER IN THE 17-YEAR HISTORY OF TRAINRIDERS/NORTHEAST have so many newspaper opinion pieces and letters-to-the-editor called for a return to passenger rail service. They flow into my mailbox from all over America.

As one writer put it, this is not about nostalgia. It is about transportation. It is about the environment and how we choose to live.

This country needs a national transportation system inclusive of the high-speed rail that is commonplace on the European and Asian continents. (In addition to the bullet trains in Japan and South Korea, trains that can cruise at 210 mph are now being built for the Chinese by French and German train-manufacturers.)

But the White House sits out the global ascendancy towards high-speed rail technology while it fights a first-strike war for which every household contributes \$4,430 per year.*

The Times Union (Albany) suggests that the cost of a few weeks in Iraq would fund Amtrak for years—"just the \$9 billion of Iraq redevelopment money that 'disappeared' would do nicely," reads its editorial of June 2.

The Daily Astorian (Oregon) reports that Oregon's Senator Gordon Smith acknowledges in private conversation that Amtrak needs to be brought up to international standards but is largely silent on the topic in front of his colleagues.

Returning to Maine, Portland's Director of Ports and Transportation Jeff Monroe will tell you that this country has not had a transportation system since the Truman administration. Monroe has done an excellent job of giving Portland a system, and he's not through yet. Nor are other mid-sized cities (see article about trolleys on page 6).

What is a national transportation system? It is a network that connects trains, planes, cars, buses, and ferry boats so that no person, no matter how young or old or otherwise handicapped, is relegated to living as a shut-in because he or she cannot drive.

As a Bangor resident, I support the service that Concord Trailways offers (see

AP story on page 4). In fact I cannot imagine being without it. Like many people in this region of Maine, I ride their sleek coaches to and from Logan Airport in what is an effective, reliable roadway/airway transportation system.

On the other hand, Bangor, Portland and Boston are the only cities the Interstate route serves. Now, I particularly like going to Augusta and Hallowell, and behind the wheel of my Jeep this takes an hour and a half doing 75 mph on the highway followed by stop and start at a mess of traffic lights in Augusta.

True, Concord Trailways' coastal route stops at almost every small town from Searsport to Freeport. But with only four departures daily, a day trip just doesn't come out in the wash. Anyway, I like to drive the coast of Maine. Who doesn't? But I dislike the interstate more every time I drive it. Augusta and Hallowell are fading into the mists.

Some day Maine will have half-a-dozen or more bus and train arrivals/departures throughout the state and into Canada, i.e.; a transportation system that connects locally, regionally, and nationally.

Meanwhile, the electrical failure on the Northeast Corridor in May marks the beginning of what may be more mishaps—infrastructure breakdowns, harm to passengers—willfully caused by the White House and the US Congress because they continue to subsidize highways with 50 cents on the dollar, airways with 30 cents, and railways with one cent.

Despite the upbeat commuter rail story out of California (see story on page 7) and Maine's own wild success with the Downeaster, short runs in scattered locations do not a national system make.

Americans cannot hope to see a humane, petroleum-saving, land-saving system in their own country until Washington makes the decision to spend as much funds on railways as it does on highways and airways.

* American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), from a 2005 census projection and inclusive of a projected three-year military occupation.

WIN-WIN AT THE GARDEN

Frankly we never understood how or why the MBTA thought a train station that serves some 50,000 passengers a day could exist with—what, maybe half a dozen benches?

It didn't much matter that the "new" North Station was brighter and cleaner than the grungy old wreck it replaced—not when passengers waiting for delayed trains on a snowy day could hardly find room to stand, let alone a place to sit down. And then, heaven forbid someone walks in front of those automated doors, hitting already inconvenienced passengers with blasts of frigid air.

But before next winter arrives, promises MBTA General Manager Dan Grabauskas, things will get better. And here's the really good news. The 20,000 square foot expansion, which will more than double the size of the existing waiting area, will be funded entirely by Delaware North Companies-Boston, owners of the adjacent TD Banknorth Garden. Now Delaware North isn't doing this out of the goodness of their hearts. They will split revenue from vendor leases with the T and the T will give up an easement on the old Garden site.

It's a win-win all around, but most of all for commuters who have suffered for a decade with a totally inadequate facility.

—By Boston Herald editorial staff, April 27

Editor: We are more aware of the inconvenience to Downeaster passengers who, frequently burdened by luggage or a lack of English language skills or with

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AMTRAK NEEDS MORE FEDERAL BACKING, NOT PRIVATIZATION

— BY MICHAEL S. DUKAKIS —

To the editors: RE: Plane Pain, op-ed, May 10 (excerpted)

Emily Ingram tells us that the answer to inadequate rail passenger service in the United States is to privatize Amtrak just the way the British privatized their national rail system.

But Ingram didn't do her homework. If she had, she would have discovered that British rail privatization has been a disaster, that, in fact, the British system has been substantially "deprived" after dozens of passengers were killed or maimed on the system, and that today, **BRITAIN IS SPENDING A LOT MORE PUBLIC MONEY ON ITS NATIONAL RAIL PASSENGER SYSTEM THAN IT DID PRIOR TO PRIVATIZATION.**

Moreover, Ingram doesn't seem to understand that the American rail passenger system was privatized and went bankrupt. That's why the Nixon administration created Amtrak. And the private freight railroads, which are doing well these days, want no part of a return to passenger service. They couldn't make money on it when they ran it, and they would require massive public subsidies to return to the passenger business.

There is nothing wrong with Amtrak that a modest but consistent amount of capital investment can't cure. Virtually every region of the country has detailed plans for major improvements in the Amtrak system if the Bush administration would wake up and understand that we desperately need a first-class rail passenger system.

Finally, Ingram should check her facts. The French railroads are run by the government, and they are excellent, as anybody knows who has ridden the TGV.

Amtrak doesn't need a repeat of the British disaster. It already has strong bipartisan support in Congress. What it needs is a president who understands how critical a first-class national rail passenger system is to the future of the country. Unfortunately, we will have to wait until 2008 to finally achieve that goal.

—The Harvard Crimson, May 17

The writer, a former vice chair of the Amtrak Board of Directors, is a former governor of Massachusetts and a former Democratic presidential nominee.

DOWNEASTER AND AMTRAK FACTS



In 2005, Amtrak spent \$62,918,063 for goods and services in **Maine** and employed 25 residents, paying them \$4,485,158 since startup.

In New Hampshire, Amtrak spent \$133,248 for goods and services, and paid 49 residents \$2,589,208 during 2005.

In Massachusetts, Amtrak spent \$9,254,897 for goods and services and paid 915 employees \$47,124,259 in 2005.

RAILROADING AMTRAK

OPINION

New York Times
May 28

When the trains are speeding along and a blurred landscape is flickering past the windows, it is hard to imagine how quickly everything can go wrong. But about 50,000 commuters and Amtrak riders learned the hard way May 25th. When the electricity suddenly went out along Amtrak lines from New York City to Maryland, riders were stuck for hours, some stranded in steamy passenger cars, some stalled in "creepy" underground tunnels. For most of these travelers, it was an infuriating and frustrating experience. But if their reaction is to shake a fist angrily at Amtrak, there is a far bigger culprit in the nation's capital.

Although it's not clear exactly what went wrong with the system, the underpinnings of the nation's railroad system are primed for disaster. The White House and Congress have tried to squeeze every dollar out of Amtrak's meager budget. To survive, the nation's passenger railroad has cut service and raised ticket prices. But what really frightens the rail experts is how little federal money has been available to update the railroad's aging infrastructure. One inspector general for the Department of Transportation warned that the budget for basic maintenance and improvements was so low that Congress and the White House were playing "Russian roulette" with the welfare of millions of riders across the country.

Amtrak would need at least \$2 billion a year to bring the system to a state of good repair, according to the department's analysis. For the Northeast Corridor, where some parts go back to the 1930's, it would take a total of about \$4 billion. So far, Congress and the White House have agreed to hand over a scant \$600 million a year for all capital programs on passenger rails from coast to coast.

Washington power brokers like to say that Amtrak is mismanaged, but calling for a better management of a system where the wires and steel are eroding is simply dodging the question. It is time to drop the old bromides and recognize that for the United States to be an advanced nation with a mobile workforce, the American government needs to maintain a clean, efficient national railroad. Amtrak does not need to make a profit, but it does need to work. The government directs billions of dollars to roads and bridges. Airports get plenty of help, but somehow very little trickles down to the rails.

Amtrak, which at one point was to have realized zero federal funds after 2002, has been offered \$900 million by the administration for next year. That amount is so low it should be an insult. But Amtrak officials have timidly stayed within the ballpark and asked for a modest \$1.6 billion. Even that is just enough money to allow Amtrak to fail more slowly.

If President Bush really wants transportation alternatives, it is time for a strategic look at how the railroads can serve as an even more important escape valve for the nation's overloaded transportation system.

BUS AND TRAIN SERVICE THRIVE IN MAINE

When rail advocates were lobbying for an Amtrak train from Portland to Boston a decade ago, SKEPTICS ASKED IF BUS SERVICE WOULD KILL THE TRAIN OR IF TRAINS WOULD KILL THE BUS.

Now, 4-1/2 years after the Downeaster Amtrak train began service, demand for both the train and Concord Trailways buses are surging. So many people are using the trains and buses that the parking lot at the Portland Transportation Center is filled to its 750-vehicle capacity on most days.

Ridership on Concord Trailways in Maine is expected to reach 400,000 passengers this year, a 54% increase since 2003. Train ridership rose to more than 293,000 passengers last year, up from 248,000 in 2004.

Not long ago, critics warned that motorists would resist giving up the freedom of the open highway for the fixed schedules of public transportation.

Harry Blunt, who owns Concord Trailways, said he has seen a cultural

shift. Public transportation between Boston and Portland, he said, has become acceptable to the public. "It's become a common practice," he said. "Between us and the train, there are 600,000 people who are using public transportation. That wasn't there a decade ago."

When Concord Trailways first came to Portland in 1992, it had four trips a day to Boston. Now it has 21, nine to Logan Airport and 12 to South Station. Blunt's business plan is to attract middle-class suburban residents who own cars.

The Portland terminal, which Concord Trailways shares with Amtrak, is clean, filled with light, and safe—like a small airport terminal. Bus riders are given pretzels, bottled water and headsets for listening to music or the movies that play on video monitors.

Blunt tells his employees that the business and stations must pass a "mother-daughter test." "Are you comfortable," he asks his workers, "having your mother or your daughter use that service or use the

facilities?"

A decade ago, few would have predicted that both train and bus service would prosper, said Charles Colgan, a University of Southern Maine economist who has studied transportation issues. But the region has experienced enough growth to support both modes of transportation, he said. "Nobody would have predicted that the bus and rail would both survive and thrive," he said.

—The Associated Press, May 16

Editor: TrainRiders is one of the few that did predict that both train and bus would prosper. Rail service traditionally gives rise to expanded bus service, and we predict right now that as soon as the Downeaster expands beyond Portland into the rest of Maine, Concord Trailways and other bus service will see even more increased ridership. It is our hope that new bus lines, if and when they appear, will provide the same excellent service and fine equipment that Concord Trailways does. It's a great company to share a terminal with.

AS GAS PRICES RISE, RAIL ATTRACTS NEW PASSENGERS (AND THERE WILL ALWAYS BE A CALIFORNIA)

Long-distance commuters with big SUVs are no doubt hating life right now. Even those in the smaller Toyotas and Hondas are wincing at the pumps.

Not factored into the dollar costs are the effects on your molars as you clench your jaws creeping along Interstate 10, the spike in blood pressure and the guilt of missing yet another Little League game.

There is one growing group of happy commuters who fly past the bumper-to-bumper stretches of I-10 and Highway 91 as they chat with friends, scan the newspaper, or catch a nap.

Rancho Cucamonga resident Rodger Silva is one of those, even though he rides in a vehicle that weighs 150 times more than a Ford Expedition.

Ever since gas prices began their rise to record levels, Silva and his friends have noticed fewer and fewer seats available in the Metrolink car they sit in every morning.

Besides the benefit of not fighting Los Angeles traffic and saving wear and tear

on a car, Metrolink commuter rail actually saves its riders money. Gas money.

A commuter in a Toyota Camry who schleps from San Bernardino in Los Angeles pays nearly \$300 a month just in gas—\$75 a month more compared to a year ago.

If you're in a Ford Expedition, it's costing \$536 a month in gas. Not to mention parking that runs from \$200 to \$300 per month.

The cost of a monthly Metrolink pass from San Bernardino to Los Angeles? \$257.75. And it buys you access to the subways and buses that run all over Los Angeles.

Jeff Tennis, 41, of Riverside figures he saves \$20 a day riding Metrolink to and from Los Angeles. "I have one of those big trucks, and it costs a lot to fill up," he said. A rider for 10 years, Tennis picks up the train in San Bernardino, using the hour-plus to rest or prepare for work.

Juan Swarez, 27, also uses Metrolink in order to save gas money. "My boss pays for the (Metrolink) pass, and I don't have to

pay for gas," Swarez said.

Metrolink ridership had been about 39,000 per weekday in March but leapt as high as 43,000 per day by late April.

Perhaps the most difficult thing to do in San Bernardino is to find a parking spot at the Santa Fe Depot after about 7 AM, despite the recent addition of a new parking lot.

Ysidro "Sid" Bustamante, 42, of San Bernardino was forced onto the train after his car broke down. Now he wouldn't go back. Plus, money savings isn't the only benefit he enjoys.

With his yellow mountain bike lashed against the inside wall of the rail car, he not only saves money, he gets a workout when he gets off at the Pomona station and pedals about 15 minutes to work.

Each car can hold two bikes, and recently there were four on board. "People had to hold on to (their bikes)," he said.

Metrolink riders typically speak of the

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OPINION

Washington Post
op ed, May 22
By Sebastian
Mallaby

AL GORE'S UNLIKELY HELPERS

Liberals famously love John McCain, but that's not the weirdest political coupling. The oil industry and its Republican allies are rooting for Al Gore, albeit unintentionally.

Gore stars in a movie that opens this week in New York and Los Angeles. The film features the once and maybe future presidential candidate lecturing about climate change: There are charts, bullet points and diagrams; there are maps of ocean currents and endless iceberg pictures. It's hard to say which menaces the nation more: movie stars who go into politics or politicians who go into movies.

Ordinarily this film would never have been made, let alone scheduled for release in hundreds of theaters. But President Bush and the congressional Republicans have created a Ross Perot moment: a hunger for a leader with diagrams and charts, for a nerd who lays out basic facts ignored by blinkered government. By their contempt for expert opinion on everything from Iraqi reconstruction to the cost of their tax cuts, Republicans have turned Diagram Gore into a hero. By their serial dishonesty, Republicans have created a market for "An Inconvenient Truth"—the title of Gore's movie.

Republican dishonesty reaches its extreme on the issue of global warming. Yes, climate science is complex, and nobody can forecast the earth's temperature with complete confidence. But the fact that scientists don't know everything isn't a license to ignore what they do know: that the earth is warming, glaciers are melting and sea levels are rising at an accelerating pace — and that these changes are driven at least partly by fossil-fuel consumption.

The U.S. National Academies have confirmed this; their foreign counterparts have confirmed this; and so has the world's top authority on the subject, the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change. None of this is controversial.

Except among Republicans. Candidate Bush acknowledged that climate change was a problem; once elected he denied it; then he denied the denial but refused to let his administration do anything about climate. Lately he has talked about ridding the nation of its oil addiction, but that's because oil finances Arab extremism. Bush has been silent on the link between oil and global warming.

Meanwhile, others have been vocal. James Inhofe, the Republican who ironically chairs the Senate environmental committee, has described global warming as the "greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people." He avoids scientists who might put him right: His star witness at a hearing last year was Michael Crichton, a science-fiction novelist.

Then there is Conrad Burns, a Republican senator from Montana. "You remember the ice age?" he asked Environment and Energy Daily this month. "It's been warming ever since, and there ain't anything we can do to stop it."

Every quote like this plays into Gore's hands, turning his statements of scientific conventional wisdom into heroic actions. But the Republicans and their allies don't see what their doing. In anticipation of Gore's movie launch, conservatives unleashed two TV ads on what they called "the alleged global warming crisis."

The ads are the work of the Compet-

itive Enterprise Institute (CEI), a group backed by the oil industry that supplies the anti-scientific crowd with arguments. "Carbon dioxide: They call it pollution. We call it life," both scripts conclude, as the camera homes in on a girl with a dandelion. The ads' main scientific contention is that the talk of melting ice caps is all wrong: "Greenland's glaciers are growing, not melting."

Well, the most authoritative and up-to-date statement on climate science is contained in a new report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that is circulating in draft form. According to scientists who have seen it, Chapter Four says: "Taken together, the ice sheets in

Greenland and Antarctica are shrinking." As to the possibility that the melting of some ice caps is offset by the growth of others, the draft also says: "Thickening in central regions of Greenland

is more than offset by increased melting near the coast."

In other words, the ads are nonsense. So are some of the assertions on the CEI web site. The group suggests, for example, that polar bears have nothing to fear from the melting of their habitat. But the Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, a top-notch peer-reviewed source on this subject, has something different to say: "the reduction in sea ice is very likely to have devastating consequences for polar bears."

Six years ago, Bush narrowly defeated Gore, apparently because voters thought he'd be a nicer guy to have beer with. But after years of willful indifference to truth, the national mood seems to be changing. Voters have seen that nice guys can screw up. And technocrats with diagrams and charts have never seemed so interesting. ■

STRAIGHT THINKING: "RAILROADING AMERICA"

(continued from page 8)

tain our railroads and particularly their passenger capability?

The need for this was highlighted by

the shutdown of the air traffic system after 9/11 and by the problems evacuating New Orleans as Hurricane Katrina bore down.

At the very least, railroads should receive the same level of subsidy that the Interstate highways and air travel systems receive.

Electrified lines like the Northeast Corridor can run on virtually any fuel from sunlight to coal to nuclear. In the current world climate, this is not simply a matter of nostalgia for train travel; it is a matter of national security.

—Daniel J. Abrams, Bronx, May 28

IS RAIL TRANSIT ONLY FOR BIG CITIES, OR CAN LITTLE BROTHER PLAY, TOO? SOME SMALLER TOWNS PLAN TO FIND OUT

There is no question that rail-based transit is making a major comeback. According to the American Public Transportation Association, more than 5,000 miles of rail transit lines have been restored or constructed since 1984. Commuter rail, light rail and streetcar projects abound in metropolitan regions from coast to coast. But the phenomenon does not stop there. Many towns are jumping on the streetcar, bringing up the question: Can rail transit work outside of major cities?

If Little Rock is any example—with a metropolitan population of 360,000—the answer may be “yes.” In 1995, Little Rock, North Little Rock, and Pulaski County proposed building a streetcar system to link the two cities. “As the proposal developed, it evolved from a shuttle across the Arkansas River into a genuine streetcar,” said Keith Jones, executive director of the Central Arkansas Transit Authority, or CAT.

CAT’s streetcar opened in November 2004 and cost \$20 million, 80% of which was covered by matching funds from the FTA’s New Starts program. The result? “We exceeded 200,000 riders in our first 12 months of operation,” said Jones, adding that Little Rock has seen \$140 million in new development near the tracks. “We’re realistic; we’re not the sole reason for that. But the question, ‘How far are we from the streetcar?’ is on every developer’s checklist.”

A system’s size and route are key to

keeping ridership viable. CAT’s line is only 2.5 miles long, but it serves three museums, five hotels, and three concert venues. A mile-long extension to the Clinton Presidential Library—and its 350,000 annual visitors—is slated to open in late 2006.

Capital funding, however, is difficult to obtain. Just ask planners in Salem, OR. “The streetcar was a grassroots proposal; business people in Salem were interested in it from a development and revitalization perspective,” said Glen Hadley, a senior planner for Salem-Keizer Transit. The system, which would have been between 2.7 and 4.1 miles long, would have linked downtown with major employers, government offices, the Capitol building, a university, and the Amtrak Cascades corridor.

The proposal fell apart, though, when cost estimates came in: the cheapest option, 2.5 miles, would cost \$51.1 million. “There were political implications of budgeting that much money for a streetcar,” said Hadley. “Without a champion from the private sector who would step up and support the proposal, the price tag was just too much.”

And what about federal funding? The FTA, which had been so generous in Little Rock, had started taking a more conservative approach, preferring to fund rail transit only where ridership already existed on other modes. “But in our case, we didn’t have any,” said Jones of Little Rock. “Our bus system was small, with a total budget of less than \$11 million per year. We creat-

No real reason that the public likes rail over rubber tires, but they do, and developers do, and it's a fact of life

ALERT

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to drive, and people who just take the train to go shopping or to the airport, or to connect with a local bus service.

Remind our elected officials of the cost of gas, the enormous cost of taxpayers’ money to subsidize highways, the cost of sprawl and illnesses induced by carbon monoxide poisoning, the financial cost of lost hours due to highway congestion, and the financial benefits that the Downeaster has brought to Maine.

But the most important thing is that you call or e-mail them. WE THE PEOPLE have put them in office and it is our responsibility as citizens to express our needs to them.

A follow-up call after an e-mail is the most effective way of applying the oil to the squeaky wheel. This wheel needs an oiling to last it through the rest of this century.

—Wayne E. Davis, Chairman

ed ridership where none existed before.”

Proposals keep popping up across the nation. Light-rail and streetcar projects are being talked about in Norfolk, VA (pop. 234,000); Spokane (195,000); Dayton (166,179); Boulder (95,000); and Ogden, Utah (77,226). “There’s no real reason that the public should like rail over rubber tires, but they do, and developers do, and it’s a fact of life,” said Jones. “If we can build this in Little Rock, we can build this anywhere.”

—By Alexander B. Craghead for *Trains* magazine, June 2006 (excerpted for reasons of space)

... AS GAS PRICES RISE, RAIL ATTRACTS ...

(continued from page 4)

service like it’s an old friend, a heroic friend who rescued them from the soul-crushing drudgery of commuting alone.

Jonni Chambers of Mira Loma casually applied make-up as she described adopting the commuter rail service as soon as it began in 1992. “I’m glad I’m on the train. Gas is crazy,” she said.

Her seatmate, Debora Biggers talked

about the friendships that flourish on the laid-back daily rides. “We knit; we talk; we go to sleep; we put on make-up,” she said.

“By the time we talk, it takes the whole trip,” Chambers laughed.

Each stop brings a new round of “Hey, home girl!” or “Where you been?”

Another veteran since Metrolink started operating, 61-year-old Rancho Cucamonga

resident Gloria Bermudez said she’s commuting to Los Angeles for more than 15 years and tried driving alone, van pools and buses.

She described how draining the commute can be and how much better she feels being able to relax on the train. “It’s really comfortable. It’s clean. And it has a bathroom,” she said.

—Andrew Silva, Staff Writer, San Bernardino County Sun, May 18. Staff Writer Bonnie Boyd contributed to this story.

RUNNING HOOVER'S RAILROAD

Anybody who has lived in an old house with wiring from the Depression era knows something about Amtrak's troubles. Plug in the iron and the TV and, zap, suddenly there is an eerie pre-industrial silence, signaling that the electricity has gone out.

Similarly, May's sudden blackout in the Northeast Corridor focused the attention of thousands of commuters on how decrepit some of the Amtrak rail system really is. While Amtrak has yet to determine the precise reason that thousands of commuters were stalled on May 25, with hundreds stuck for hours in tunnels, it has acknowledged that some of its infrastructure was new when Herbert Hoover was president.

Officials have promised that they will have emergency cars ready to rescue people from tunnels a little sooner in the future. That's nice, but the passengers would prefer not to need rescuing in the first place. For a modern, reliable system, Transportation officials have estimated they need several billion dollars extra each year to upgrade infrastructure alone.

At this point, Congress is just starting to figure out how much money to give Amtrak next year, and the news is not comforting. The House of Representatives approved a paltry \$1.1 billion, just a shred over the lowball amount requested by the president. The Senate is expected to come in with a little more, just enough for Amtrak to squeak along for another year.

Amtrak officials seem to be working hard to patch up the older parts of the system. But recent delays serve as only the latest reminder that Amtrak's problems are not bad management so much as stingy government. With gas prices up and airplanes overloaded, the nation's leaders should be trying to figure out why this advanced nation does not have a more advanced passenger rail system. ■

AN EXCERPT FROM "CALIFORNIA RAIL NEWS"

Automobile and truck travelers don't come close to paying the full public costs of their driving. On the contrary American roadway users are the single most lavishly subsidized large group in the world.

According to the American Petroleum Institute, in 2004 gasoline taxes in this country averaged 44 cents a gallon, compared to \$3 to \$4 a gallon in Europe and Japan.

Why so large a difference? Our gasoline taxes are unreasonably low because they don't begin to cover the total public costs of driving. The amounts collected in this country are so low that they are more than eaten up by the cost of building and maintaining roadways.

Beyond highway maintenance, the gas taxes we pay do not begin to cover the costs of air pollution, roadway accidents, lost time, congestion, environmental and other costs of auto-induced sprawl, the social costs of neighborhoods ripped by freeways and, most of all, the huge geopolitical costs in blood and money by having to acquire our fossil fuel energy from hostile parts of the world.

By failing to charge enough in gasoline taxes our government encourages more gasoline consumption and thereby increases the outflow of American dollars to hostile countries and international corporations who control the flow of oil.

Billions of dollars a year that could be going into the US Treasury instead go overseas and into the coffers of outsiders, some of whom would cheerfully blow our country off the planet if they had the chance. ■

...WIN-WIN (continued from page 2)

small children in tow, have been seen sitting on the floor at North Station. This includes Senior Citizens.

For Americans and foreigners who travel long distances to visit Maine and for who the ride on the Downeaster is part of the pleasure, this is not a good introduction. Before Downeaster service began, TrainRiders urged the MBTA many times to supply more benches for the waiting area, and at one point they did add two or three. We

have also urged expansion of the terminal which, as many of us know, has nothing on the other side of the end wall but an empty lot surrounded by a construction fence. It has been a space waiting patiently for the terminal to expand and fill it.

On behalf of everyone—commuter, tourist, day tripper—who rides the Downeaster, we say thank you to the organizations responsible for bringing this venue to North Station. ■

Won't you join us in the good fight?

Yes, I'd like to join TrainRiders/Northeast:

Name _____

Street or P.O. # _____

City or town _____

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Please choose a membership category (membership per year)

- ☐ \$25.00 Individual Member
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- ☐ Other \$ _____

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DEALING WITH THE HIGH PRICE OF GAS

Re: "How Not to Cure an Addiction"
(editorial, April 26):

In fact, Americans' addiction to oil is largely tied to our addictive love of personal vehicles, which clog our cities and highways, pollute our environment, and consume a lion's share of imported oil.

One immediate way that President Bush and other elected officials can help us kick our oil addiction is to support all forms of public transportation, from Amtrak and regional rail and bus systems, to innovative auto-rental and sharing plans and new ways to use taxi fleets to allow greater use by multiple clients.

As crazy as it sounds, while gasoline prices are already having a negative effect on our economy, public transportation systems are starved for money and have cut back services and routes, cutbacks that simply push more personal cars, SUV's and trucks onto roadways and drive up gasoline consumption.

—William D. Kisman
Philadelphia, April 26

A treatment program for addiction—drug, alcohol, nicotine or whatever—generally includes weaning the addict from the addicting substance.

Does not parity of reasoning at least suggest that we consider gas rationing as among the antidotes to America's petroleum addiction?

It worked during World War II.

—Richard Boyce
San Francisco, April 26

Re: "4th Airport Idea is Back, but Cab Could be Costly" (front page, April 29):

If we are formulating creative solutions to the overcrowding of the (New York City) region's airports, improved trains should play a part.

Stewart International Airport in New Windsor, NY, is indeed far from Manhattan by conventional standards, but direct high-speed rail service would make it accessible and obviate expensive cab fares. Too little attention is given to modern rail. A new airport would be unnecessary if we would invest appropriately in long-distance bullet trains—a concept our first-world peers have long embraced.

—Alexander D'Amato
Princeton, NJ, April 29

"RAILROADING AMERICA"

IN THE NEW YORK TIMES

Just returning from a visit to Italy and the Netherlands, where I marveled at the speed, convenience and efficiency of their trains, I was reminded again, by the report of the electrical failure of the Amtrak system, of the pitiful state of our railroads.

The fault lies in the stubborn, shortsighted refusal of the United States government to acknowledge that a "clean, efficient national railroad," as your editorial put it, is vital to the health of this country.

This administration's deliberate starvation of our railroads is a foolish policy choice that stands in sharp contrast to its financing of highways, bridges and, to a lesser degree, airports.

Your editorial should be required reading for those in high places who spout pieties about the need to be independent for our fuel supply yet are blind to the most obvious transportation alternative, our railroads.

—Betty Mazur
Amagansett, NY, May 28

To the editor:

Isn't it about time for a national defense railroad law to allocate enough funds to main-

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THE TRAINRIDER

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