

TRAINRIDER

The Newsletter of TrainRiders/Northeast



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Submitted by Wayne Davis

It's here, at last! This is our first newsletter since the edition released at our annual meeting the end of April. The reason for the delay has been that we've been waiting to include *good news*, waiting to report to you that Amtrak and Guilford Transportation Industries have at last come to agreements acceptable to the Passenger Rail Authority.

Well, we're still waiting. And it's not as though we haven't been working on it. On August 14th, the executive committee and I travelled to Augusta for a meeting with Governor King to ask for his personal involvement in the negotiating process. Valarie Lamont, Andy Hyland, Bruce Sleeper, our attorney, and I participated in a lively discussion with the Governor and the Commissioner of Transportation. The meeting resulted in an agreement to set the end of September (1996) as a deadline for action to be taken at the October 8th meeting of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority.

Portland/Dover/Boston Update

As of today, we are expecting Amtrak trains that travel at 79 mph.

(continued on the next page)

An Open Letter to the Members of TrainRiders/Northeast

I would like to thank both Wayne Davis and you, the members of TrainRiders/Northeast, for this opportunity to share with you my thoughts on the course which the Maine Department of Transportation must set if Maine is to meet current and future mobility needs of its citizens, its industries and the millions of business and recreational travelers who visit this great State annually.



John G. Melrose, Commissioner
Maine Department of Transportation


While the men and women of this Department can rightly take pride in their past accomplishments in the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of a statewide highway-bridge system that has been recognized nationwide as one of the best in the United States, it has become abundantly clear that the classic facility and vehicle-based transportation system of yesterday cannot, alone, satisfy the mobility needs which environmentally minded travelers expect and demand today.

Accordingly the Department, in addition to working to preserve and enhance Maine's existing highway system, is in the process of developing a statewide "Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan" (Plan). This Plan, which is expected to be in draft form next year, is being conducted in close conformity with the intent and purpose of both the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act and Maine's Sensible Transportation Policy Act. The Plan will focus on alternative modes of transportation with particular emphasis being placed on the identification and promotion of transportation choices that will reduce dependency on the private automobile, conserve energy, and result in air quality improvements. The passenger rail transportation alternative has long been identified as being a modal choice which is safe, fuel efficient and environmentally *(continued on the next page)*

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT continued

Initially, some sections of the track will be slower due to "slow orders," many of which will be eliminated as part of the on-going program to improve the line to handle trains traveling over 100 mph. The running time will be a little over two hours until these slow orders are eliminated. The train will make stops at Saco, Wells, Dover, Exeter and Haverhill, then on to Boston. Once track work is completed, the trip, with five stops, should take approximately two hours. The train will enter North Station, where shuttle buses will carry ticketed passengers between North and South Stations until the Central Artery Rail Link is completed.

And What About Amtrak?

During these past five months I have made two trips to Washington. One of these trips resulted in a meeting with Amtrak President Tom Downs. Mr. Downs reaffirmed Amtrak's commitment to the Portland/Dover/Boston service during these difficult times. Amtrak not only struggles with our proposed service, but also does battle nationally as a result of the "ambush" this summer by Representative Wolfe of Virginia,  who chairs the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation. While basically freezing highway and public transit appropriations, Wolfe cut Amtrak 28%, "decimating capital spending."

Some Amtrak trains were discontinued last spring. However, recently proposed cuts received a six months'

An Open Letter to the Members of TrainRiders... continued

sensitive. When the benefits of rail service are coupled with the prudent investment Maine has made in the preservation of abandoned rail rights-of-way, it becomes increasingly clear that passenger rail must play a significant role in maximizing use of all of the state's transportation infrastructure.

I know that to conclude this letter without mentioning the Portland to Boston passenger rail initiative would not go unnoticed by TrainRiders and I had no intention to do so. In my opinion, an opinion which is strongly endorsed and supported by Governor King, the Portland-Boston service is essential to the implementation of the Strategic Passenger Transportation Plan discussed above — in fact, it's the cornerstone. While I indeed share the frustration which has been expressed by TrainRiders over the start-up delays which this initiative has experienced, I believe the end to these delays is near at hand. Please be assured that this Department, working in concert with the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, is very near setting a course which will ultimately resolve the remaining outstanding issues which have prevented Amtrak and Springfield Terminal Railway from bringing closure to the required Operating Agreement.

In closing I wish to personally thank Wayne and members of TrainRiders for your advocacy and continued support for the restoration of the passenger rail transportation alternative in Maine.

Respectfully,

John G. Melrose, Commissioner
[Maine Department of Transportation]

stay of execution from the Senate. Congress has reduced Amtrak's appropriations dramatically without reforming laws that prevent it from operating efficiently or providing a trust fund for capital investment

which other modes of transportation enjoy.

Meanwhile, there have been no similar cuts in appropriations for either highways or air service for years. Amtrak has been singled out for the largest cuts even though Amtrak appropriations account for the tiniest portion of the total transportation budget. This foolishness on the part of the House of

Representatives is inexcusable.

Public outreach meetings held all over the United States by the National Intermodal Commission, as well as the U.S. Department of Transportation and an even more focused series of programs conducted by key members of Congress and senior management officials at Amtrak resulted in the same message. "MORE trains, not less" was heard over and over again as well as, "Please, no more concrete." We need to raise our voice; apparently we are not loud enough. The highway lobby is strong and loud in Washington; we need to be *stronger and louder*.

(continued on the next page)

Most Candidates Support Amtrak Service to Portland

Following the recent primary elections, TrainRiders/Northeast sent a questionnaire to candidates for Governor, U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts and to candidates for State offices, including Executive Council, in New Hampshire. Of seventeen respondents, five were from Maine, seven from New Hampshire and five from Massachusetts.

Maine candidates' responses were unanimous in support of seven of nine questions, with only John Rensenbrink (Green Party) for Senate supporting use of one-half cent of the Federal fuel tax (now used to reduce the Federal deficit) going to support Amtrak. Joseph Brennan (D) for Senate and John Baldacci (D) for House, 2nd District, felt they needed more information and did not answer that question while Tom Allen (D) for House, 1st District, was opposed. Joseph Brennan also took no position on the reauthorization of ISTEA to allow states to fund passenger rail service using Federal funds formerly designated for highway use.

All New Hampshire candidates responding to the questionnaire supported bringing Amtrak passenger rail service to Seacoast New Hampshire, and upgrading the Boston/Dover/Portland service to 100 mph and higher. They also supported providing passenger rail service to Nashua, Manchester and Concord if studies are favorable, and designating the line to Portland as part of the "Northeast Corridor." While most favored bringing rail freight and

passenger more on a par with other modes of transportation, Bob Smith (R), U.S. Senate, incumbent, and John T. Dowd (R), for New Hampshire Senate, were undecided. Support for a stable funding source for Amtrak, comparable to the highway and aviation trust funds, was supported by all but Bob Smith, opposed, and John T. Dowd, who was undecided but indicated support for a funding source which was "railroad-related" or "pro-rated among the various transportation modes." On a related question, both Dick Swett (D), for U.S. Senate and Joe Keefe (D) for U.S. House, 1st District, supported use of one-half cent of the Federal fuel tax to fund Amtrak while Bob Smith and Arnie Arnesen (D), for U.S. House, 2nd District, were opposed and three candidates were undecided. Allowing states to use transportation funds for Amtrak under the ISTEA reauthorization was favored by all except Bob Smith, who was opposed. Support for construction of the North-South Station Rail Link in Boston was expressed by five candidates, with Bob Smith and John T. Dowd being undecided. Mr. Dowd expressed concern for the economics of the project.

A majority of Massachusetts candidates responding to the questionnaire were supportive of most of the questions, but only placing freight and passenger rail on a par with other modes was unanimously favored. Barney Frank (D), U.S. House, 4th District, incumbent, was the least supportive, being opposed to extending

Amtrak service to Portland, to upgrading the tracks for 100 mph operation or higher, to expanding rail passenger service beyond Boston to other parts of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont, to construction of the Rail Link in Boston, and to

designation of the Boston-Portland line as part of the "Northeast Corridor." Governor William F. Weld (R), for U.S. Senate, joined Barney Frank in opposing upgrading of the Boston-Portland service beyond 80 mph service. William F. Weld was the lone opponent of using one-half cent of the Federal fuel tax to support Amtrak (he favored repeal of the entire 4.3 cent deficit reduction tax on fuel), while John Tierney (D), for U.S. House, was undecided on the fuel tax and on creation of a stable funding source for Amtrak, while supporting all other questions. William F. Weld was the only candidate undecided regarding the ISTEA reauthorization, but indicated his support of added flexibility for states to use ISTEA, "to pursue a variety of transportation options to meet particular local needs."

Considering how supportive retiring Senator William S. Cohen (R) has been for passenger rail service, it is notable that two of four candidates vying for his seat, Susan Collins (R) and Bill Clarke (U.S. Taxpayers Party) failed to respond. First District Congressman James Longley, Jr., in whose district the Portland-Boston service will terminate, also failed to respond. The failure

of one of Representative Baldacci's two challengers in the 2nd Congressional District, Paul Young (R), to respond may reflect the fact that Amtrak service to northern Maine will not occur until the Boston-Portland service is established.

The response from New Hampshire candidates was gratifying, since that state has only one station, Claremont, served by Amtrak's Vermonter. Two stations immediately across the Connecticut River, Windsor and White River Jct., VT, are also served by the daily Vermonter. However, residents of southern New Hampshire have reasonably convenient access to MBTA commuter rail service to Boston and the state has purchased significant sections of rail line from Guilford Transportation Industries in recent years, some of which are now operating as freight lines and/or scenic railroads.

The response from candidates in Massachusetts, which will once again have passenger rail access to the north beyond the MBTA service area when the Boston-Portland trains begin, was generally supportive. However, Barney Frank, whose district is served by both Amtrak and MBTA rail service, was relatively hostile to concepts benefitting both services.

It appears that passenger rail service has broad, non-partisan support in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts. TrainRiders/Northeast members look forward to continuing to work with elected representatives in all three states toward creation of a more balanced transportation system serving central and northern New England.



Since the success of the Portland/Boston service depends on a healthy and complete Amtrak network, Amtrak must *evolve*, not *devolve*. It must improve, not cut services and should link together more cities, not drop them from the system. Amtrak needs time to make up for deferred capital improvements. It needs long-term capital funding such as the half-cent from the federal highway fuel tax, and it must have realistic operating budgets. Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts have made long-term commitments to the Amtrak service to Portland. We need long-term, not "crisis-to-crisis" funding for Amtrak.

We have just learned that, prior to adjournment, the Senate appropriated 22.5 million additional dollars for Amtrak operating funds. This will keep the threatened trains running and give us an opportunity to see that those cuts in service NEVER happen. An additional 60 million dollars for the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project was also appropriated. Thanks to Senators Lautenberg and Hatfield and all of you who contacted your Congressional delegations. Without your voices, those funds would not have been appropriated for Amtrak.

We need to reinvigorate our national passenger rail system. This latest action demonstrates that passenger rail advocates are successful and effective strategists in promoting the expansion of modern passenger rail service. —WD

Northeast Corridor Update

Improvements to Amtrak's Northeast Corridor will have the potential to increase ridership over the Portland-Boston route, even before it is connected directly with the Corridor via the North-South Station Rail Link, by providing better, faster rail service to points on the Corridor beyond Boston.

On July 3, 1996, ground was broken at Providence, RI, for the electrification of the line between New Haven, CT, and Boston, MA. Completion of this project, expected to take three years, will eliminate the engine change at New Haven, where diesel locomotives are exchanged for electric power for the remainder of the trip through New York City to Washington, DC. When track improvements are completed, trains can operate at speeds up to 150 mph, thereby shortening the 225

mile Boston-New York trip to less than three hours. In mid-September, your editor observed construction underway on the support poles for the overhead electric wires at Wickford Jct., RI.

Meanwhile, in Connecticut, where navigational channels heavily used by recreational boaters pass under five movable railroad bridges, the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection has approved Amtrak's electrification plan. Bridges will remain open except at train times and train service east of New Haven, initially planned for 52 daily trains (26 round trips), will be scaled back to 34 daily trains (17 round trips). This is still roughly double the present service and will provide more travel time choices to the public.

The Providence Journal-Bulletin,
July 4, 1996;
Railpace Newsmagazine, October 1996

Lake Shore Limited to Continue to Serve Boston

The Lake Shore Limited, Amtrak's only train between Boston and Chicago via Albany and Buffalo, New York, will be continued beyond its planned cutback on November 11, 1996. Letters by Wayne Davis and others protesting the proposed elimination of the Lake Shore were sent to the National Association of Rail

Passengers' directors in the areas served by the Lake Shore. Public reaction, particularly around Chicago, added to objections by Massachusetts's Congressional delegation and state politicians and officials rallied Congressional support resulting in sufficient funding to save the Lake Shore and the three other doomed trains.

**HELP!
HELP!
HELP!**

TrainRiders has seven years worth of newspaper clippings, newsletters and magazine articles that need to be organized and stored for easy access. We need proper materials (loose leaf binders, folders, etc.) to house them. Won't you make a small donation to our effort to catalog the history of your organization's efforts? We would appreciate any contributions.

—Joan Sullivan, Archivist

NEWS FLASH

"DESPITE INTERVENTION BY THE GOVERNOR IN RECENT WEEKS, POSITIONS TAKEN BY GUILFORD CONCERNING VARIOUS ISSUES WILL MAKE THE AUTHORITY PAY COSTS THAT ARE SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER THAN COSTS FOR COMPARABLE SERVICE ELSEWHERE IN THE COUNTRY AND THEREFORE WILL BRING THE AUTHORITY, AMTRAK AND GUILFORD TO A POINT OF IMPASSE. THEREFORE, THE AUTHORITY HAS HAS AGREED TO REQUEST THAT AMTRAK INITIATE PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BOARD."

—FROM THE RESOLUTION BY
THE NORTHERN NEW ENGLAND PASSENGER RAIL AUTHORITY
OCTOBER 8, 1996

TrainRiders/Northeast is an organization of current and potential train users, interested citizens, associations and businesses who are committed to bringing modern and efficient passenger trains back to Northern New England.

THE TRAINRIDER

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