Second Class Postage Paid
At Washington, D.C.

NEWS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

Vol. 16, No. 8 August, 1982

417 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003
202/546-1550
News Hotline (except during business hours), 202/546-1551

OFFICERS: John R. Martin, *President;* **John H. Kirkwood,** *Vice-President;* **George Tyson,** *Secretary;* **Joseph F. Horning, Jr.,** *Treasurer;* **STAFF: Ross Capon,** *Executive Director;* **Barry Williams,** *Assistant Director;* **Kay Stortz,** *Membership Director.*

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(No. 7 was mailed July 28)

RETURN REQUESTED

THAT CBO REPORT

The Congressional Budget Office issued a 90-page study, "Federal Subsidies for Rail Passenger Service: An Assessment of Amtrak," on July 14. It carries the usual CBO disclaimer, "In keeping with CBO's mandate to provide objective analysis, this paper offers no recommendations."

But CBO's usual anti-long-distance-train recommendations were visible between the lines of the text, though not supported by many of the accompanying tables, and were swallowed whole by editorial writers at several newspapers. And the Aug. 17 *New York Times'* prominent op ed column, "Amtrak Needs Reform," included explicit recommendations along with an executive summary of the study. The column was written by Allen Kraus, who "monitored Amtrak for three years" as a CBO staffer and, according to the study's preface, provided "helpful comments and contributions" which "the author gratefully acknowledges."

The study's author was Sally A. Ferris, special assistant to CBO Director Alice M. Rivlin, and the writing was "under the supervision of David Bodde and Damian Kulash of CBO's Natural Resources and Commerce Division."

Major Flaws of the Study

Much of the study's analysis centers on this fallacy: "The last ten years have seen major improvements in Amtrak service. . . ." Actually, on the long-distance trains, service quality generally declined throughout the 1970's and picked up only as new and rebuilt equipment was widely distributed during 1980. (The last steamheated trainset was only retired in Mar. '82.)

But the study, comparing 1972 and 1980 data, obscures the dramatic improvements Amtrak achieved between 1979 and the present. Similarly, heavy reliance on 1980 figures precludes full consideration of substantial 1981 improvements, and leaves the impression this was written during the 1981 budget fight, with more recent information added randomly later.

The report ignores these key concepts:

- economies of scale;
- integrated transport network facilitating intermodal trips; and
- passenger safety.

This is particularly frustrating to NARP, indicating CBO paid no attention to our critique of their May '79 "staff draft analysis" on Amtrak and energy, some of which is repeated in the new study. (To receive NARP's 22-page critique, send us $3.)

Economies of Scale

CBO states: "Amtrak's high costs per passenger mile are generally attributed to . . . three elements: low load factors, high labor costs, and high capital intensiveness."

As NARP has repeatedly noted, however, the key to reducing Amtrak's passenger-mile costs lies in permitting Amtrak to enjoy just a fraction of the economies-of-scale benefits which the fly-drive system enjoys. **According to DOT's May '78 Amtrak route structure report, the subsidy per passenger-mile of a short-distance-only system would be almost twice that of the largest nationwide system DOT studied.** (.189 vs. .096).

It is not economic to maintain terminals in Dallas, Houston, Phoenix, and Cincinnati just for three round-trips per week; nor is it economic to maintain one-round-trip-per-day terminals in Atlanta, Cleveland, Denver, and Indianapolis.

Solving that problem would help solve the three symptoms CBO cites. With more trains feeding each other, load factors would improve. Not that they are so bad to begin with: CBO

BALTIMORE EVENING SUN ATTACKS CBO

"Shooting at passenger trains is a criminal offense unless you're the Congressional Budget Office, which does it with bursts of official language . . . .

"CBO complains at the cost of labor and rolling stock, despite recent Amtrak progress in both regards. With masterly negative logic, CBO foresees schedule reductions and then predicts lower revenues.

"When Baltimore repudiates such an attitude, it isn't self-interest—the Northeast Corridor's statistics still enjoy DOT and CBO blessings. From a Baltimore vantage point, what the Washington nickel nurses are doing is undermining that basic national asset, the rail network. . . ."

—*The Evening Sun,* **Baltimore, in July 15 editorial, "Amtrak's federal enemies"**

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Until Oct. 30, Amtrak is offering a special "Anywhere Fare," permitting one-way or roundtrip travel between any two Amtrak points for $225 ($112.50 for children under 12) in coach, Custom Class, and—with normal room charge—sleepers. (Not valid on Metroliners.) Stopovers only where required to change trains to/from ticketted destination. Any routing combination is allowed if no segment is traveled more than twice. Make reservations and get tickets before departure, but reservations may be changed during the trip. If you wish to stopover en route, you may still gain with this fare. For example, if ticketted for a Chicago-LA roundtrip, you could stopover at Flagstaff and then "rejoin" the roundtrip ticket by purchasing an additional Flagstaff-LA one-way ticket.

The Duluth-St. Paul 403(b) "North Star" will make its final run Sept. 6. There is hope the train will be revived next year on a summer seasonal basis.

(continued on page 3)

claims the Amtrak and intercity bus average load factors in FY '80 were both 48% while airlines were 58%. Load factor is a less meaningful measure for Amtrak than for buses and planes, since the marginal cost of adding a passenger car is much less than for running a second bus or plane; in some cases adding a car to a train requires no extra staff.

Chances for dramatically improved labor agreements would brighten if labor could see that serious efforts were underway to solve the economies-of-scale problem. Or, as *Modern Railways* (U.K.), said in discussing the future of London's transit system, "the support of the workforce for changes in practices and agreements is much easier to achieve in an atmosphere of expansion, rather than of cuts."

Finally, more frequent service would enable Amtrak to make more efficient use of its capital investments. Once-daily "corridor" trains whose equipment is idle much of the day and tri-weekly long-hauls which have equipment turnarounds over 24 hours exacerbate Amtrak's capital intensiveness. Amtrak has seven of the former and three of the latter.

SO RUN MORE SUNBELT TRAINS!!

"Population growth over the next five to ten years will likely be concentrated in the southwestern part of the country—the Sunbelt. For the most part, Amtrak services are concentrated in the upper Midwest and Northeast—the very parts of the country that are likely to experience population losses and slowest income growth. Thus, the increases in intercity passenger travel that population growth brings will occur where Amtrak's services are most limited."

—Congressional Budget Office

CBO deals indirectly with "economies of scale" in a single sentence: "Furthermore, any future expansion would have to be attained within the constraints of Amtrak's relatively small route network; no expansion of Amtrak's route system is contemplated."

Most NARP members might agree that Amtrak doesn't look good if judged as a final product. But it isn't a final product! We regularly report on the tireless efforts of our members and others to expand service. NARP's survival as a strictly private enterprise, and the good news we're often privileged to report, reflect the strong public support for efforts to expand Amtrak and enable it to enjoy "economies of scale."

The April '81 words of *Passenger Train Journal* Publisher Kevin McKinney bear repeating here again: **"What we have today is a nationwide Amtrak store, built, staffed and ready to do business. No one, however, seems willing to give the store enough inventory (i.e., trains) to generate enough revenues to cover the costs of doing business. Instead, the strategy is to provide less inventory."**

Passenger Safety

The passenger train is the safest transport mode, but the biggest contrast is between the automobile and all other modes. Prof. George Hilton, a prominent Amtrak critic, has cited these figures [passenger fatalities per 10 billion passenger-miles 1974-76]: Amtrak 1; inter-city bus 3; airlines 6; automobiles 140.

Rail is the only safe intercity mode with the potential to attract a dramatically increased share of travel from the auto, thereby significantly improving the overall safety record of the U.S. transport network. The CBO report doesn't mention safety.

An Integrated Transport Network

CBO's Amtrak work evidences no understanding of the network concept, so we'll define it first. In an integrated transport network, people can transfer conveniently from one mode to another, encouraged by good information availability. While the auto is part of the picture, and public transport terminals should have parking available, "integration" serves largely to strengthen the competitive position of public transport. Flexibility is the key to the auto's attractiveness, and integration enables public transport to come as close as possible to matching the auto's flexibility.

Integration is a key to the success of public transport in Europe, and to the relative success of our Northeast Corridor (NEC). A significant percentage of actual origins and destinations are not adjacent to terminals directly connected by a single transit vehicle. **The ability of passengers to transfer conveniently between intercity and local rail and bus services vastly increases the usefulness—and the use—of the services involved.**

A growing number of people are willing, *if encouraged,* to use a bus connecting to or from the train, but rely on fly-drive in the train's absence. Amtrak did a sterling job of showing connecting bus schedules, but gave up after a plethora of errors in last October's timetables. Now, schedules are shown for "dedicated" connections; bus company phone numbers for others.

SOME INTERMODAL PROSPECTS

Greyhound expects to open its new Washington terminal adjacent to Union Station in about two years, and recently has indicated willingness to build a new Portland, OR, terminal across the street from Amtrak if public funding will support related necessary improvements, including the closing of part of a street. In 1985, the first total transportation center in a major city is to open in Boston—South Station will include Amtrak, Greyhound, Trailways, commuter trains, the subway, and commuter buses.

Intermodal travel will continue to grow, strengthened in part by terminal improvements.

CBO's contempt for integrated transport is reflected in the study's sole reference to intermodal travel—the observation that someone traveling between Maryland and Long Island may "elect another mode" because "he cannot make the full trip by Amtrak only."

CBO does not analyze a network, only an isolated, mythical Amtrak that relates to buses strictly as competitor. To estimate the impact of Amtrak's energy-consumption, CBO simply plugs in the percentages which Amtrak got in Feb. '79 when asking rail passengers how they'd go if the train died. (Outside the NEC, the answers were 46% auto; 25% bus; 24% plane; 6% wouldn't make the trip.)

This methodology doesn't reflect the riders which intercity bus and local transit would *lose* and which the energy-intensive fly-drive system would gain. [Use of the term "fly-drive" simply reflects our dismay at the overdevelopment of short-distance air and intercity auto traffic which in most industrial countries would be on rails.] Nor does it reflect the long-term adjustment that many of the prospective bus riders would make. A 1979 General Accounting Office report stated: "Survey responses . . . may not reflect actual long-run adjustment. (For example, a former Amtrak rider may eventually purchase an automobile or travel less frequently but take the airplane rather than take trips by intercity buses.)"

Survey response to hypothetical questions may vastly overstate even the alleged short-term bus benefits of train service cuts. In May '78, U.S. DOT reported no "measurable increase in total intercity bus passenger miles in 1971, an increase that might have been expected to materialize when the private railroads ceased operations and intercity rail traffic fell off by approximately two billion passenger-miles."

As far as we know, *every* attempt to substitute buses for trains *throughout the world* ultimately has resulted in reduced availability and useage of public transport and increased dependence on the private auto. Tell us if you find an exception!

Fairness to Low-Income People

According to CBO, "subsidies to Amtrak generally aid higher-income groups as do subsidies for the air and auto modes. . . . the goal of ensuring that transportation services be available to low-income people could be more efficiently addressed if aid went directly to individuals rather than to transportation modes, which would facilitate individuals' choices between modes."

On Amtrak's long-distance trains, the vast majority of riders sit up overnight in coach, something the affluent don't usually do. When CBO discusses energy, it segregates NEC and non-NEC numbers. But when "travel by low-income people" is the issue, we get a table lumping all rail travel together, though it's clear that cutting Amtrak back to a mostly-NEC operation would significantly increase the average income of Amtrak's ridership and make Amtrak vulnerable to a credible attack as a "subsidy-for-the-haves."

Also, CBO doesn't explain that its table, based on numbers of trips, understates the percentage of Amtrak's *transportation* (passenger-miles) which is provided to the poor, since their trips are longer.

Even without the above caveats, however, the table hardly constitutes an effective indictment of Amtrak as "subsidy-to-the-rich." Based on the 1977 National Travel Survey (trips over 100 miles one-way), it shows that 20% of rail person-trips were made by people whose family income was under $10,000, compared with 19% of auto-trips and 19% of trips by all modes. Furthermore, a higher percentage of train than of auto trips were made by those in the lowest income category (under $5,000): 7% vs. 6%.

CBO does not report surveys of passengers on individual long-distance trains. Comparison of percentages below with those above underlines the fact that CBO is aiming its guns at those segments of Amtrak which benefit the poor the most. After each train are shown, first, percentage of respondents with family income under $5,000; second, under $10,000 (cumulative):

Dec. 19, '80, Eb'd "Builder" E of Havre, MT: 14%, 29%.

Oct. 8, '81, Sb'd "Coast Starlight" Albany-Eugene, OR: 8.1%, 21.1%.

Oct. 11, Nb'd "Coast Starlight" Chemult-Eugene: 8.7%, 21.7%.

Oct. 17, Eb'd "SF Zephyr" Evanston-Rock Springs, WY: 8.8%, 21.7%.

Oct. 18, Wb'd "SF Zephyr" Laramie-Rawlins, WY: 6.7%, 16.3%.

Surveys of passengers on the Chicago-New Orleans "City of New Orleans" and the four Carolinas trains probably would make our point even more clearly. Due to historical migration patterns, large numbers of lower-income people along these lines have relatives elsewhere on the same line. "City" and Carolinas ridership has been exceptionally strong during the early summer of 1982 when many of the nation's economic indicators were sagging badly. It appears that many lower-income people who have visited relatives by car in recent years have returned to the trains on these routes.

The best way to preserve travel options for lower-income people is to continue building a coordinated rail-bus network. This benefits even the many lower-income people who travel only by bus, since bus economics improve when attractive intermodal terminals, with a better image than all-bus terminals, and other intermodal travel incentives lead more middle-class people to use intercity buses. (See network discussion above.)

CBO is not helping low-income people with its blueprint for forcing the "haves" into fly-drive, and the "have-nots" into an all-bus system whose future under private enterprise would be debatable.

Of course, there's nothing new about using concern for poor people as a basis for attacking a program which actually helps them. Mass transit subsidies have been attacked because a high proportion of transit riders are not poor. When the subsidies go down and the fares go up, however, many who can afford the auto start using it, the percentage of mass transit riders who are poor goes up, and the quality/quantity of service they can use goes down.

Similarly, when school lunch subsidies are cut, sales decline because the poor can't afford the lunches and the affluent start bringing their own lunches. As the total volume of the program declines, pressures develop to further increase lunch prices or to eliminate the program from the school entirely.

The Kraus Recommendations

The above-mentioned op ed column states: "Service should be pared back to areas where ridership is strongest and financial and social returns are greatest—in the NEC, around Chicago and along part of the West Coast. . . . America needs an objective, enforceable standard to use in reducing service immediately. . . . Cost recovery—requiring Amtrak to cover 50% of its total operating costs with passenger revenues or state subsidies—is the simplest, most equitable standard."

Similarly, the study says: "Cost recovery is probably the best yardstick for comparing the performance of different Amtrak services."

The Kraus 50% criterion sounds like—and is similar to—existing law. But he and CBO cite cost recovery (revenue: cost ratio) figures including depreciation which Congress has directed Amtrak to exclude from its calculations. Inclusion of depreciation puts attainment of 50% just out of reach!

In addition, Kraus apparently wants each route always to meet the standard, whereas Congress—seeking to give management the freedom Kraus only talks about—applies the standard to the overall system. (Other statutory criteria relating to ridership *and* cost prevent Amtrak from running very weak trains protected by a system average.) Applying the 50% standard at the system level gives a measure of stability: certain routes can fall below 50% in one year while others are above 50%; due to economic conditions varying at different times in different parts of the U.S., the pattern might be reversed in a subsequent year.

Earlier DOT and Amtrak research has shown that an all-corridor system would have a much higher subsidy per passenger-mile, doubtless encouraging Kraus to return and unequivocally call for an end to Amtrak. Furthermore, CBO's list of the 17 routes with the lowest FY '81 cost recovery includes only four long-distance routes (whose data didn't reflect complete equipment

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY *(continued from page 1)*

Through Nov. 1, the "Illinois Zephyr" will stop in Quincy, IL, as well as at the main station across the Mississippi in W. Quincy, MO. The Quincy stop was added due to reconstruction of the U.S. 24 bridge, which has hampered auto access between the two cities. The temporary stop is at the Sears Roebuck warehouse on N. 24th Street (IL Rte. 96).

Amtrak's new $2.1 million Hammond, IN, station is scheduled to open Sep. 12, and will be served by 9 trains, including the "Cardinal." The staffed station, which will offer checked baggage service, is expected to attract 36,500 new passengers and $997,000 in revenues annually to the Amtrak system.

Effective Oct. 31, Amtrak speeds up NY-Washington Metroliners: expresses now 2:59 will be 2:49; others now 3:08 to 3:23 will be 2:59. "Empire Builder" will run 35 minutes later, leaving St. Paul at a more civilized 7:25 AM; to maintain spacing of trains at Spokane, the westbound "Builder" will run 20 minutes later (dpt. Chicago 2:50 PM). Amtrak hopes to begin stopping "Palmetto" at Selma/Smithfield, NC (if not Oct. 31, then in April).

The Oklahoma Passenger Rail Assn. has persuaded Amtrak to open its Newton, KS, station earlier—at 10 PM rather than at 11:30—so that Oklahomans taking a Trailways bus to Newton to reach the "Southwest Ltd." will not have to wait outdoors so long. The bus arrives at 9:05 PM, after the bus station has closed for the night.

Be advised: a ring of luggage thieves has been operating in New York City's Penn Station this summer. They offer to help women and/or children check heavy bags, take the bags to a locker with the victim, palm the key and give another key—to an empty locker—to the victim. By the time the victim returns to the empty locker, the thief has stolen the luggage from the full locker.

The earliest possible date of a strike which could affect much of Amtrak (see July Advisory) has been moved back to Sat. night, Sep. 18, at midnight.

FROM A UNION JOURNAL

"A tentative agreement reached April 22, 1982, between [Amtrak] and our Brotherhood was ratified by the BMWE's some 3,400 Amtrak employees by a narrow margin late last month. . . .The changes in work rules (as set forth in side agreements), [Grand Lodge President O.M.] Berge advised, are necessary to meet a mandate by the U.S. Congress to reduce Amtrak's operating costs. Failure to comply with the Congressional mandate, Brother Berge said, could terminate future federal monetary assistance for Amtrak . . .Amtrak management employees will take wage deferrals in the same proportion which will be monitored by a special council consisting of labor and management representatives."

—Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees, *Railway Journal*, June, 1982 modernization and dining staff reductions) but includes three NEC segments, three non-NEC corridors, two non-NEC commuter lines, and five routes cut last year.

CBO also presents a table which indicates that overall cost recovery for long-distance routes rose 8.8% from FY '80 to '81, while the NEC and other corridors dropped 15.1% and, 1.6%, respectively.

What is a Subsidy?

Using the narrowest possible definition—current spending less user charges collected—CBO calculates FY '80 federal "off-track" subsidies at $1.28 billion for autos, $1.07 billion for aviation ($730 million for general; $340 million for commercial), and $30 million for inter-city buses.

But the public interest requires a view of public spending integrated as to funding methods and levels of government.

Funding methods: With road and air trust funds, government provides free revenue collection and banking services to those modes. The system reads your gasoline and air ticket purchases as votes for more fly-drive investments, even though you may be using fly-drive only because public policies helped remove the rail service you would have preferred. In only a few states do rails benefit from a similar "self-perpetuating" mechanism.

There's also an important intra-highway cross-subsidy issue. A large portion of gas tax money collected from users of crumbling urban arterials and rural secondary roads is invested not in badly needed maintenance for those roads but in new Interstate construction which competes with Amtrak.

State and Local Subsidies . . . to fly-drive are massive and contrast with very little for Amtrak. This reflects federal incentives (i.e. 90% federal dollars for Interstate highway construction) but also shapes future demands for federal dollars: continued massive road-building means increased pressures for road maintenance support in the future.

What's CBO Doing?

Congress, perceiving strong public support for trains and positive results from recent management efforts to improve cost-effectiveness, seems ready at last to accept Amtrak as is, with no more cuts and most further expansion to be initiated by the states. Most legislators also know that all the "dog" routes are gone, so that any new route structure fight would be even more painful, threatening only well-used trains. Even DOT seems to have reached an impressive degree of harmony with the national system, provoking *Business Week* (June 21, p. 99) to observe that "Amtrak is speeding along smoothly for the first time in its troubled 11-year history."

Now comes CBO with a study laying the groundwork for a new Amtrak debate. Furthermore, the study is unsponsored—not requested by a member or committee—at a time when CBO, burdened with specific work requests from Congress, rarely issues on its own initiative major reports on individual programs. The timing is also puzzling—much of the data is already out-of-date and will be even more so in early 1983, when an Amtrak budget fight might occur.

CBO says that the report was issued to make available to all members of Congress in a concise form the work which CBO did in 1981 in response to many individual requests from members for specific pieces of information about Amtrak.

FY '83 AMTRAK APPROPRIATIONS

On July 28, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation (Adam Benjamin, D-IN, chairman) reported out a $788 million appropriation for Amtrak, the maximum amount possible under last year's authorization. On Aug. 19, the full House Approps. Committee (Jamie Whitten, D-MS, chairman) approved the subcommittee bill. The House is expected to vote on the measure in mid-September, after the Labor Day recess. Following House action, the Senate Approps. Subcommittee on Transportation (Mark Andrews, R-ND, chairman) will report its bill, which may be less generous. Next are the full Senate committee (Mark Hatfield, R-OR, chairman), the Senate, and a House-Senate conference.

NORTH DAKOTA GROUP FORMED

NARP now boasts a North Dakota affiliate, the new Dakota Rail Passengers Association (DARPA), whose president is Jim Larson, a university professor. Membership is $5 annually to DARPA, P.O. Box 91, Grand Forks, ND 58201.

SOUTH DAKOTA SUPPORTS AMTRAK!

"Although South Dakota has no Amtrak service, we are pleased to see the progress being made elsewhere. It is important to the nation that rail passenger service be maintained. Uncertain political conditions in the Middle East could bring another oil crisis at any time. . . . Many major air carriers also are in precarious financial condition. This makes it still more important that modern, rapid rail service be available."

—*Aberdeen American News,* June 8 editorial

The nation would be better served if CBO and its recently departed staff would focus their research and publicity efforts on some fundamental problems where a national consensus might be attainable. The intra-highway cross-subsidy noted above might be one area. Another would be the federal policy which permits employers to give free or reduced-rate parking but not transit passes to employees tax-free. Availability of free or cheap parking is a key factor that encourages many people to commute by car even where good mass transit is available.

Regarding mass transit, Kraus expresses the hope that, as federal budget cuts continue, Amtrak and transit advocates will go at each others' throats, with transit winning. Fortunately, there's a big overlap between the two sets of advocates, Amtrak itself carries many daily commuters, and Amtrak's existence in many cities has helped or will aid development of needed commuter rail services.

A Word to the Wise

Notwithstanding the vulnerability of CBO's analysis to criticism, rail passenger advocates should note well several editorial writers' uncritical acceptance of CBO's "recommendations," and Amtrak's weak showing when measured by traditional anti-rail transport accountants—who have much in common with the Americans who recommended Japan not build its Shinkansen and the World Bank "experts" who forced Tanzania to turn to China for its rail connection to Zambia/southern Africa.

The unkindest cut in CBO's report is its belittling of Amtrak's new labor agreements: "Amtrak recently announced wage settlements with six unions, which Amtrak estimates could save about $132 million over the next three years, or roughly 6 to 7% of Amtrak's total labor costs."

AEM-7 ORDER COMPLETED

Amtrak took delivery of it 47th and final AEM-7 Swedish-designed electric locomotive on Aug. 5. The dependable, fast-accelerating locos, capable of speeds to 125 mph, operate between New York City and Washington.

We're not told that Amtrak has yet to sign with its two most powerful unions—Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and United Transportation Union. We are told that "Amtrak does not pay unusually high costs per labor year. . . . In 1980, Amtrak's average annual costs per worker was $27,000" (vs. $24,000 for buses and $33,000 for airlines). "What drives Amtrak's labor cost up are the labor intensity and restrictive work rules that have characterized rail passenger operations."

Bus and rail interests both need to worry about the impact of continuing stable gasoline prices and increasing labor costs. The nature of Amtrak's forthcoming BLE and UTU agreements may tell much about how significant the CBO report will be in Congress's next consideration of Amtrak.

So will the makeup of Congress. Legislators who went through the 1981 route fight are less likely to be on the front lines attacking Amtrak next year; Amtrak's most enthusiastic enemies may be those newly elected this fall with no interest in public transport. Do your best to see that such people are not elected! ■