

NARP Issues Statement After September 11 Tragedy

The National Association of Railroad Passengers issued the following release on September 25:

In the wake of the terrible tragedy of September 11, it is important—in the words of Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta—that “we do not allow the enemy to win this war by restricting our freedom of mobility.” The U.S. desperately needs a more balanced transportation system in which rail plays a much bigger role.

Amtrak took on unusual importance right after the tragedy. During September 12-18, ridership was up nationwide and the increase on the long-distance trains was 35%. However, we believe that intercity rail must play a bigger role over the long term—particularly for discretionary trips of any length, and for shorter-length business trips. [The *Washington Post* September 24 editorial, “Keep the Trains Running,” included an endorsement of the long-distance trains; see box, p. 3.]

It has become more apparent than ever that our transportation system and economy would be far stronger and more resilient if we had a world class passenger rail system.

As the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* editorialized September 21, “The horrible events of September 11 should make clear to everyone, especially members of Congress, that the solution to national transportation problems isn’t simply safer planes, but better trains.”

It is critical that the High Speed Rail Investment Act (S.250, H.R.2329) be enacted this year. [That] would let states begin to invest in corridors that the DOT already has identified.

Finally, we support Amtrak’s \$3 billion short-term request

(continued on page 3)



—Mark Moorhusen

Crowd assembled at the official opening of the Redondo Junction Grade Separation in Los Angeles, August 21. Visible are an intermodal freight train with Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe locomotives (lower level), and on the bridge, a Metrolink commuter train (right) and Amtrak West Pacific Surfliner (left).

Rail Flyover at L.A. Junction Speeds Metrolink, Amtrak Trains

An elevated bypass of Redondo Jct. in Los Angeles entered service the weekend of July 7-8. Crucial projects like this are rare here, but common overseas. The bypass gives passenger trains a 45-mph, double-track bridge in place of a

15 mph crawl through a complex junction zone, where they were subject to delay from freight-train cross-traffic. Every passenger train saves at least three minutes.

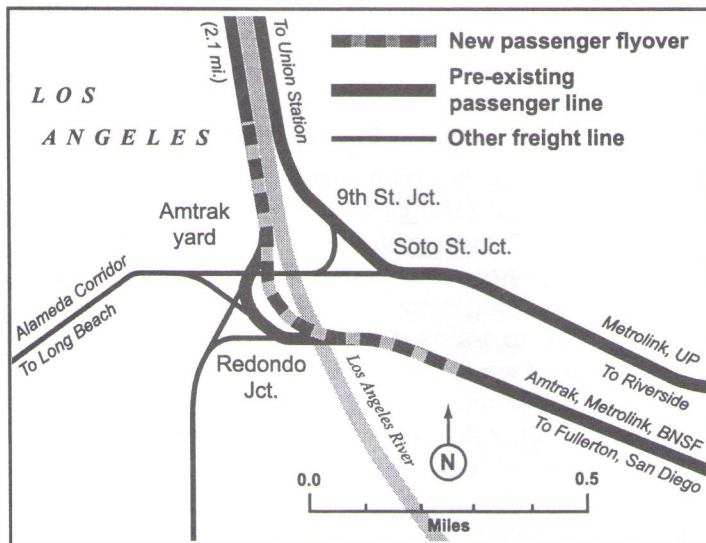
The passenger trains that benefit are Amtrak’s Pacific Surfliners to/from San Diego and *Southwest Chief* to/from Chicago, and Metrolink commuter trains to/from Oceanside.

Construction began in July 1999 on the near-half-mile-long bridge. The Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority built it for \$47 million. Once complete, ownership was turned over to the Southern California Regional Rail Authority, which operates the Metrolink trains and which contributed \$7 million.

The new bridge is part of the 20-mile, \$2.4 billion Alameda Corridor project, designed to streamline the movement of intermodal freight from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to transcontinental freight yards east of the Redondo Jct. area.

Rail lines are being consolidated, over 200 grade crossings being eliminated, and capacity enhancements put into place to allow more freight trains to reach the ports in less time. The entire project should be complete next April.

The official opening ceremony for the Redondo Jct. bridge was August 21 (see photo). Among the speakers was Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta.



—Scott Leonard

Young Submits "RIDE 21" Bill

House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Don Young (R-AK) introduced "The Rail Infrastructure Development and Expansion Act for the 21st Century" ("RIDE-21") on September 25.

The bill, H.R. 2950, "permits states to issue \$36 billion in federal tax-exempt bonds for eligible projects over 10 years." States can issue bonds now, but most states are at or near their federal "volume caps," and H.R. 2950 would exempt these high-speed bonds from such volume caps.

RIDE-21 also increases funding available under the Railroad Revitalization and Infrastructure Financing program "to \$35 billion, including \$7 billion for short lines. The money would be available for freight rail, Class 1, regional, short lines and passenger rail projects."

Finally, RIDE-21 "reauthorizes the Swift Act at \$35 million per year through 2009, but changes the allocation to \$25 million for corridor planning and \$10 million for technology development" (quotations from committee's news release).

Young performs a major service by introducing a big number (\$71 billion) into the railroad investment discussion. However, the bill has a very narrow definition of high speed rail, and may impose heavier responsibilities on the states than they are willing to accept. The bill reads, in part: "The Secretary may designate bonds under this section if...the bonds are for the purpose of financing projects to provide a major portion of the infrastructure required to complete a railroad passenger transportation corridor...designed for sustained cruising speeds of 125 mph or more...[and] the corridor design eliminates all existing railroad grade crossings..."

The Federal Railroad Administration, in its 1997 work, "High-Speed Ground Transportation for America," found that the increment from 110-mph running to 125-mph running yielded relatively little in terms of added ridership (and diversion from aviation), but often greatly increased costs. Some corridors have made great strides at lower speeds (and costs), and this trend is likely to intensify under the new, post-September 11 competitive environment.

State planning mostly has focused on speeds under 125 mph and on less-than-total elimination of grade crossings. An immense amount of high-payoff, lower-speed work must be done in terminal areas replacing crawls (e.g., 15 mph) with location-appropriate speeds (e.g., 45 mph, as on page one).

The legislative process is all about compromise, however, and it is possible that what emerges from Washington before Congress adjourns will, in Young's words, "gets the job done."

Railroads Subcommittee Chairman Jack Quinn (R-NY) co-sponsored the RIDE-21. (He is also a co-sponsor of the High Speed Rail Investment Act.) ■

NJ TRANSIT HALL OF FAME

New Jersey Transit inducted two longtime activists into its Hall of Fame in July. Honored were Art Ruben, who died in 1999 and for whom the Bridge-water station will be renamed, and Bill Wright, who represents the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers at NJT board meetings and writes many pro-passenger-rail letters and columns.

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

We at NARP hope that you and your loved ones are safe. We express our sorrow and sympathy if your lives have been touched directly by the tragedies, or if your livelihood has been jeopardized indirectly by the economic aftermath. We share the grief and sorrow of all of the victims of this tragedy and assert our patriotic support for the physical and spiritual rebuilding of our nation.

Wide Editorial Support for Rail

The last half of September arguably gave Amtrak the two most positive weeks of media coverage in its history. Below is a partial list of newspapers with editorials supporting an enhanced role for passenger rail in the post-September-11 world. Those marked with (*) also express support for Amtrak's security/capacity package.

- *Trenton Times*, September 17
- *Buffalo News*, September 20
- *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 21
- *Spokane Spokesman-Review*, September 21
- *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 24
- *Washington Post*, September 24
- *New York Times*, September 25
- *Dallas Morning News*, September 25
- *Baltimore Sun*, September 26*
- *Albany Times Union*, September 27*
- *Modesto (CA) Bee*, September 27*
- *Kalamazoo Gazette*, September 28
- *Providence Journal*, September 29
- *Eugene Register-Guard*, September 29
- *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, September 29
- *Toledo Blade*, September 30
- *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, October 1
- *Los Angeles Times*, October 1*
- *Portland (ME) Press-Herald*, October 1

There also were signed columns supporting passenger rail:

- *Denver Post*, September 24
- *Arizona Republic* (Phoenix), September 26
- *Newsday* (New York), September 27
- *Washington Post*, September 30 (see below) ■

GEORGE WILL AGAIN PLUGS HIGH-SPEED RAIL

After quoting his own pro-high-speed-rail comments of August 2 (*Aug. News*, p. 2), columnist George Will wrote, "Thinning air traffic in the Boston-New York-Washington air corridor has acquired new urgency...Shifting more travelers away from the busiest airports to trains would reduce the number of flights that have to be protected and the number of sensitive judgments that have to be made, on the spot, quickly, about individual travelers. Congress should not adjourn without funding the nine-state Midwest Regional Rail Initiative" (*Washington Post*, September 30, and other papers).

New Riders Flock to Amtrak

Amtrak ridership skyrocketed after the September 11 terrorist attacks. From September 12 to 17, Amtrak reported 70,000 riders a day, rather than the normal 60,000—a 17% increase nationwide (and does not include passengers using airline tickets honored by Amtrak). On some days, Northeast Corridor traffic doubled, and many trains sold out nationwide.

Amtrak said over 1,600 daily seats were added to long-distance trains, about 2,000 in the Northeast Corridor and 300 on the West Coast. The long-distance increase included sleeping cars, for which demand was particularly strong.

More significantly, ridership stayed up after the airlines resumed operations. (Airline traffic was totally shut down September 11. It gradually began again on September 13/14, but with reduced levels of service and usage.)

Based on bookings and ticket issuances, Amtrak on Sept. 27 said Acela Express ridership rose 40% after Sept. 11, with no sign of leveling off. "Nationally, train ridership has risen 15%, and even days-long cross-continental trains continue to sell out, said Michael S. Dukakis, the former Massachusetts governor who is now" Amtrak's acting chairman (*Boston Globe*, Sept. 28). Security costs, and mail revenues, also have risen.

Obviously, Amtrak's skeletal network could not accommodate much of the demand. Still, Amtrak provided—and continues to provide—a valuable service to a lot of people. Even in late September, NARP spent much time talking with reporters writing about how to use the long-distance trains.

On September 19, 16 Senators—Hutchison (R-TX), Hollings (D-SC), Specter (R-PA), Biden (D-DE), Schumer (D-NY), Kerry (D-MA), Jeffords (I-VT), Corzine (D-NJ), Carper (D-DE), Torricelli (D-NJ), Kennedy (D-MA), Clinton (D-NY), Sarbanes (D-MD), Mikulski (D-MD), Reid (D-NV), Chafee (R-RI)—wrote to Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta asking for emergency funds for Amtrak (see box).

In response to a request from these senators, Amtrak developed a \$3.2 billion package providing increased security, capacity (including repair of out-of-service cars and locomotives), and accelerated funding for "life-safety" improvements to Amtrak's New York tunnels that have been called for by DOT Inspector General Ken Mead and others, as well as to rehabilitate the Baltimore and Washington tunnels.

Sound public policy requires Congress to approve such a package and high speed rail legislation before adjourning. ■

QUINN: "DUTY" TO FUND HIGH-SPEED RAIL

"The events of September 11 have forever altered our transportation infrastructure. During the past two weeks, thousands of Americans have come to depend on passenger rail service as an essential component of our transportation network. While the traveling public slowly regains its confidence in aviation, passenger demand for rail service will reach an all-time high. It is our duty to provide the resources necessary to enhance this service—and in particular the development and deployment of high-speed rail corridors across the country."

—House Railroads Subcommittee Chairman Jack Quinn (R-NY), September 25 statement

POST SUPPORTS LONG-DISTANCE TRAINS

"...If anything, the lasting consequences of Sept. 11 include a need to maintain train service on longer, typically unprofitable routes. Such service may begin to attract more passengers and revenue; flights that took three hours or less—and that now may take four to five hours with security checks—become less attractive when trains can make the trips in roughly the same amount of time.

"But a national rail system should not be limited to profitable routes; public service must still be part of the Amtrak mandate. Federal subsidies for other transportation—by air or on the roads—have not been limited to the most heavily populated corridors, nor should they be. During the lifetime of Amtrak, the government has put nearly 70 times more money into highways and aviation than into the train system. If Congress is serious about maintaining or increasing railroad travel, lip service about the virtues of riding the rails won't do; more capital must be committed."

—Washington Post, editorial, September 24

NARP Release

(from page 1)

to meet safety, security and capacity needs, like repairing out-of-service equipment so nationwide capacity can be enhanced quickly, and speeding up the much-criticized timetable for completing fire and life safety work on the New York tunnels.

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon observed, "This important emergency package is no substitute for a long term commitment to a nationwide system. We note that Amtrak has clarified that—just as most of the repaired existing cars will run outside the Northeast—the ten new train sets in this package may also serve markets outside the Northeast."

People want and need meaningful travel choices—including modern train service. On the last day Congress was in session in 2000, Senators Lott and Daschle promised action this year on the High Speed Rail Investment Act. To this end, NARP strongly urges the Congress and President Bush to act now. The issue has become too important to become the subject of another call to "wait until next year." ■

The release included links to the Post's editorial (see box above) and to a positive New York Times editorial "Trains Need Help, Too," September 25. The release also noted that NARP's web site has maps of U.S. intercity passenger rail service back to 1962—go to <www.narprail.org>, click on "Resources," then on "Service-Related Resources."

16 SENATORS SEEK AMTRAK FUNDS

"For the past week, Amtrak has proven what we have long believed: that it is an essential component of our national transportation system...As you assemble a transportation and critical needs infrastructure package, we have asked Amtrak to provide us with a plan to accelerate investments in safety, security, and capacity throughout its passenger rail system. We plan to work with you, and Congressional leaders, to ensure that these emergency funds are approved and provided as expeditiously as possible."

—September 19 letter to Transportation Secretary Mineta

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Security measures—Amtrak has taken several actions, including increased police presence in stations. Also, individual passengers who are 18 or older may be asked to show valid photo identification when purchasing tickets or checking baggage. "Valid" identification includes state-issued driver's license with photo; other state-issued photo identification; state-issued identification that provides physical characteristics (if it includes no photo); passport; photo identification for federal, state, county employees; photo identification for university, college, or high school students.

Amtrak Northeast—The September 30 timetable change includes designation of all remaining Northeast-Direct service as Acela Regional.

Fares—For the second time, Amtrak has extended its 30th Anniversary Fare, now available for sale through November 16 and travel through December 14 (except November 20-27).

Acela Express offer—Amtrak is offering Guest Rewards members a discount through November 9; members booking two Acela Express round-trips (or four one-way tickets) get a third round-trip free.

First-class lounges—On October 1, Amtrak converted Metropolitan Lounges in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Washington into "ClubAcela." The space is open to any Amtrak passenger with a same-day first-class ticket (including sleeper). A plan to charge a membership fee for access to the lounges—published in Amtrak's recent on-board magazine—is on hold.

Amtrak web site—A revamping of the site occurred this summer, including for reservations. As before, a user profile should be set up before booking a ticket. But NARP members should use caution in one area—on the screen where you select a train, there is an inconspicuous "scroll" box below that says "Guest," with a default setting of "Adult." You must select "NARP" from that box before proceeding, or later screens won't quote you the proper (discounted) fare or accept your

NARP member number.

New station—The new Amtrak station in Martinez, CA, formally opened September 22, at 601 Marina Vista, near the former station. The intermodal facility serves two Amtrak corridors (San Joaquin and Capitol), two Amtrak long-distance routes (*California Zephyr* and *Coast Starlight*), Amtrak Thruway buses, and local buses (including connection to the North Concord/Martinez BART station).

Discontinued—Alderson, WV was dropped as an *Cardinal* stop September 28/30...The Chicago-Janesville *Lake Country Limited* (Saturday only since March) had its last trip September 22.

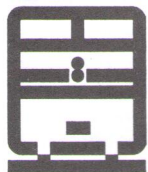
Thruways—A new Thruway bus connection began August 21 linking three Oregon towns—Grants Pass, Ashland, Medford—with the *Coast Starlight* to/from the south at Klamath Falls. However, there is a nearly three-hour layover southbound at Klamath Falls.

Transit—Portland (OR) Tri-Met MAX 5.5-mile Airport branch (designated Red Line) opened September 10, making Portland's airport the 11th in the U.S. to have direct rail transit access.

Dallas DART Blue Line light rail branch from Mockingbird to Northwest Hwy./White Rock Lake opened September 24.

Newark Airport—New intermodal station will open October 21. The airport's internal monorail system directly connects to a station on the Northeast Corridor (south of downtown Newark), served by New Jersey Transit commuter and some Amtrak trains. This should quickly become the most important air-rail interface in the U.S.

However, rail tickets will include a hefty monorail surcharge imposed by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the airport and monorail—\$5 for riders from New Jersey, \$7 for riders from New York. The *Newark Star-Ledger* (July 26), New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers, and NARP are concerned that the fee will prove too high for many.



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