

NARP, Amtrak Defend Rail Investment before House Transportation Committee

Chairman Mica Criticizes Amtrak as it Keeps Setting Ridership Records



- Sean Jeans-Gail

NARP Pres. Ross Capon testifies at the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Sep. 20. Members' opening statements took about an hour; committee attendance thereafter was light. From left, Joyce Rose, Railroads Subcommittee Majority Staff Dir.; Chairman John Mica (R-FL); Jennifer Homendy, Democratic Staff Dir.; Rep. Tim Walz (D-MN); Capon; Cato Institute Sr. Fellow Randal O'Toole (stenographer left foreground; most of the Republican side of the room not visible). *Story on page 3.*

The Fiscal Cliff and Amtrak: See Page 4

Federal Grants Ease VA, NC Bottlenecks

Added Main Tracks Another Step Towards Higher Speed Rail

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) recently announced grants to Virginia and North Carolina for projects that will enable more fluid movement of Amtrak and Virginia Railway Express (VRE) trains, and support a badly-needed new transportation hub in Raleigh, NC (page 4).

Virginia was awarded \$74.8 million Sept. 19 to continue enhancement of the Richmond-Washington, DC, corridor, with a view to future higher-speed train



-Stephen Little on Flickr.com

Amtrak *Northeast Regional* heading to Richmond behind P42 locomotive in "Phase II" paint scheme passes Amtrak's Lorton, VA, Auto Train terminal (out of sight to left) on Apr. 18, 2011.

service and possible electrification. The project includes building a third track on 11 miles of the CSX line—Arkendale to Powell's Creek—a segment that sees 10 Amtrak, 14 VRE, and 40 to 50

(continued on p. 3)

The Value of Long Distance Trains

NARP, MHSRA Unveil White Paper



Long Distance Trains: Multipurpose Mobility Machines

Long distance trains move fast—the backbone of the national passenger train service. They receive regular ridership from a cross-section of commuters, office travel and bring economic development to rural areas and small towns. Many of which are increasing their reliance on long distance rail service for regional and interstate passenger service.

Their operation is a strategic investment in passenger rail service that supports economic development.

The new rail line to transform the national passenger train service is a strategic investment in a national and federal backbone for:

1. Filling gaps in the national network to create a gold coast gateway system
2. Increasing responsiveness to state legislative service in all markets
3. Encouraging high performance industry standards for overnight and longer distance high speed rail
4. Meeting state requirements that increase reliability and increase by three.



As Amtrak's network of 15 overnight trains comes under increased scrutiny, NARP and the Midwest High-Speed Rail Association (MHSRA) are moving the conversation in a more positive direction with the release of *Long Distance Trains: Multipurpose Mobility Machines* (available at www.narprail.org/ldtrains).

The paper points to several examples of ways that long distance trains serve multiple travel markets—connecting large cities to small towns and rural areas—more efficiently than air service can, and offer a safe and affordable alternative to driving that is often faster

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President's Corner

by Ross Capon

R. I.: Step Forward in Connectivity

One of the NARP Board's four top priorities is to "increase connectivity between passenger rail and all other forms of transportation."

A major weakness in the U.S. compared with Europe is the lack of connectivity between intercity trains and (a) airlines and (b) rental cars.

Too often, rail travelers must rent a car at an airport—paying airport taxes—because the downtown rental car facility is inconvenient or closed when needed.

Thus, InterLink—the garage/rental-car center/train station that opened in 2010 at T. F. Green International Airport south of Providence—is a welcome step (*NARP News*, Groundbreaking: July, 2006; Opening: October, 2010).

Part of its purpose was to consolidate rental car companies in one place, improving passenger convenience and eliminating a lot of area traffic including rental car courtesy vans.

Moreover, since the consolidated facility is in the new garage atop the rail station, rental cars actually are more convenient to train passengers than to



-All photos this page: Ross Capon. Sept. 14, 2012

InterLink, the parking structure atop Amtrak's Northeast Corridor at T. F. Green Airport in Warwick near Providence houses car rental companies. Platform serves only MBTA trains. Amtrak station, so far unfunded, eventually could replace grassy area at right.

airline passengers!

But it is still a huge improvement for air travelers. A climate-controlled moving skywalk links the airport with the new building.

MBTA runs 10 weekday trains in each direction between a new development at Wickford Junction, TF Green Airport, Providence and—for most runs—Boston. InterLink parking is for daily commuters, not airport/overnight parking.

There is no Amtrak service, or the ability for Amtrak to begin service in the near term. The only platform track is not electrified. The existing siding could be electrified for Amtrak's purposes, but would not allow electrified MBTA trains without additional construction.

Amtrak says *Northeast Regional* (not

NARP News

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This has news through October 9.

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Acela) trains will stop here if Rhode Island funds additional passing tracks and a new eastbound platform.

Funding has not been identified. This is a big job. The existing, west-side platform track was designed for tall freight cars and electrifying it involves resolving difficult freight-train overhead clearance issues.

Also needed: new switches on the westbound side and a new approximately two-mile-long platform track with switches for eastbound trains, which would require modifying the road bridge to the north.. ■



MBTA train from Boston leaves TF Green for Wickford Junction.



Enclosed skywalk, looking towards station from airport.

Amtrak, NARP Defend the Federal Rail Investment

We have strongly supported the Federal government's investment in Amtrak. We think the investment has...brought important benefits to the nation, including both to passengers and others. We think it looks smarter today than it did 20 years ago, and will probably look smarter still 20 years hence...

We believe that the mode-specific trust fund [approach to funding U.S. transportation]...constitutes a huge subsidy, because it directs investment into modes based on their current dominance, rather than on their usefulness in solving problems our children and grandchildren will face.

In most other countries, fuel taxes are higher and go into the general fund.

—NARP Pres. Capon, testifying at the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee

Chairman John Mica's (R-FL) third recent hearing on Amtrak operations and management was not so subtly named "Examining 41 Years of Taxpayer Subsidies."

There was a single panel of witnesses which included Capon, Amtrak CEO Joseph Boardman, American Bus Association Pres. Peter Pantuso and Cato Institute Senior Fellow Randal O'Toole.

Boardman focused on Amtrak's growing ridership, which continues to set monthly records, and on comparing federal highway and aviation funding to what his company receives.

Boardman: "...In the past four years the Federal government has appropriated \$53.3 billion from the General Fund ...to bail out the Highway Trust Fund. That's almost 30% more than the total Federal expenditure on Amtrak since 1971 [\$39.3 billion]. Federal expenditures on Amtrak during the past 41 years pale next to what virtually every one of our European and Asian competitors has spent on passenger rail."

Boardman said Amtrak's revenues now cover 85% of its *operating* costs.

Pantuso took a cooperative tone, emphasizing that the intercity bus industry sees itself as a partner with other modes. Capon's testimony also noted the many ways in which Amtrak helps intercity bus operators.

Three converging, critical legislative deadlines ("Fiscal Cliff," p. 4) create a unique window for you to tell legislators the budget should have more resources for passenger trains. Capitol Hill switchboard: 202-224-3121.

O'Toole continued his opposition to almost all federal transportation funding. On subsidizing rural transportation services: "We certainly don't have bus service [in my rural community]. I don't think the government should subsidize my bus service." Mica said that, unlike O'Toole, "most people in this room" do not want to eliminate Amtrak entirely.

Some points Capon made:

- Energy Department figures show that, in 2010, Amtrak was 41% more energy efficient per passenger-mile than personal trucks, 34% than automobiles and 17% than domestic commercial air.
- Federal policy encourages states to make huge grants to highways from sources other than gas taxes by offering generous matching funds for highway investments but no match (with few exceptions) for intercity passenger rail.
- Some factors behind Amtrak's growing ridership: rising gasoline prices; "young people...more interested in being connected than they are in driving"; a growing senior population that is more vulnerable to the hazards and—in many cases—to growing costs of driving.
- "One of the most frequently expressed frustrations of our members, and of some academics, is the propensity of critics to call federal grants to Amtrak 'subsidies'—even those devoted to infrastructure—while calling grants to other modes 'investments.'"

Mica said he planned three more hearings on intercity passenger rail in Congress's lameduck session, the last one on high speed rail.

He closed the hearing with a warning: "If you think I'm tough on Amtrak, there's another group coming [post-election] and you ain't seen nothing yet." ■

Witnesses' prepared statements: transportation.house.gov

Japanese Companies to Make New Midwest, California Train Cars in Illinois

Nippon Sharyo—the maker of Japan's Shinkansen high-speed trains—received a Notice of Intent to be selected as the winning bidder for a \$352 million contract to build 130 bi-level passenger coaches for Amtrak state-supported corridor service in the Midwest and California. A final announcement is expected Oct. 26.

Nippon Sharyo and Sumitomo Corporation of America will build the cars at the Rochelle, IL facility of the former's US subsidiary. In compliance with the federal Recovery Act's Buy America requirements, all the cars' components will be made in the US.

The states of Illinois, Michigan, Missouri and California are teaming up on the order and contributing state funds.

The cars will meet the standards set by the Next Generation Passenger Rail Equipment Pool Committee, which was mandated by the 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (Sept. 2010 and Aug. 2011 *News*). The first cars from this order are scheduled for delivery in 2015. ■

VA, NC Upgrades *from page 1*

CSX freight trains daily. The grant also includes design improvements for the Quantico station, near one of the largest US Marine Corps bases.

North Carolina received \$26.5 million on Sept. 21 for track enhancements on CSX between Rocky Mount, NC and Petersburg, VA that will benefit Amtrak's New York-Savannah-Florida trains and Auto Train, and Amtrak's state-supported New York-Charlotte *Carolinian*.

This grant includes new track and ties, crossovers, and signals to allow passenger and freight traffic to move more fluidly. This segment long has been a source of delays, particularly to the *Carolinian* and *Palmetto*. Eventually, 110 mph operations may be possible on the N.C. section of the future Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor. ■

Fiscal 2013 Federal Funding and the Fiscal Cliff

The Not-So-Magical Mystery Tour

A “fiscal cliff” looms at the start of January if a correcting law is not enacted before then.

The tax increases total \$536 billion according to an estimate released Oct. 1 by the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution’s Tax Policy Center, which says this means “a typical middle-income household would see its taxes go up roughly \$2,000.”

The President’s Office of Management Budget (OMB) estimates **federal spending cuts at slightly over \$100 billion**. There would be knock-on effects such as lower spending by families of laid-off federal workers.

But such sharp policy changes could have consequences bigger than these estimates suggest.

The most conspicuous of many elements to the fiscal cliff are:

- sequestration (automatic budget cuts) mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011, which OMB currently estimates would force an 8.2% cut below 2012 levels;

- expiration of tax cuts enacted in 2001-2003; and
- expiration of payroll tax cuts enacted last year, causing a 2% tax increase for workers.

Amtrak’s federal grants could change twice during fiscal 2013, which began Oct. 1, 2012.

- The year started with a six-month continuing resolution that included a slight, across-the-board increase of 0.612% above fiscal 2012 funding levels.

- Sequestration in early January could cut the operating grant 8.2% below the 2012 level.

- A new appropriations bill needed to fund the government from April to September could force another change.

For Amtrak’s operating grant, which was \$466 million in FY 2012, one plausible estimate—which assumes that sequestration happens—shows Amtrak ending up with \$392 million in fiscal 2013. That would be 16% or \$75 million less than the 2012 level.

There are some important caveats which make managing the company difficult:

- Because of how sequestration works, Amtrak’s capital grant could take a bigger hit, possibly even bringing into question Amtrak’s ability to handle the year’s increased payment for the new, single-level cars on order.

- Certainty over what the final numbers will be may not come until halfway through the fiscal year.

- The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office predicts that, if the nation goes over the fiscal cliff, this would drive unemployment up above 9% by the end of 2013 and create economic conditions “that will probably be considered a recession.” Amtrak revenues have been strong, but the fiscal cliff might cause those revenues to go south, putting even more pressure on the company’s operating budget.

If sequestration does happen, percentage sequestration cuts will continue to apply after March, unless the new appropriations law represents a cut. In other words, any reduction in the appropriations bill below the FY 2012 level would count towards the required sequestration cut. ■

Vermont Work Done

The first, federally-funded, major rail corridor project to be completed is the upgrades to Amtrak’s state-supported *Vermont* route from the Mass. state line to St. Albans (Dec. 2010 *News*). A Brattleboro, VT, ceremony was set for Oct. 5.

The entire line in Vermont has continuous welded rail; also, grade crossings were improved. This work will shave 27 minutes off the *Vermont*’s schedule north of Brattleboro, which will be reflected in Amtrak’s January timetable.

In Massachusetts, work has started on restoring the direct Springfield-Brattleboro line. The *Vermont*’s running time will be reduced by another 30 minutes when it is rerouted via Holyoke in 2014. ■

Raleigh To Get New Station



In Raleigh, passengers board mid-day Charlotte-bound Amtrak *Piedmont* at Amtrak’s ex-Southern Railway station Sept. 11, 2011.

On Sept. 21, Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Szabo traveled to Raleigh to join state and city officials in unveiling a \$15 million grant to help build a new \$60 million Union Station just west of downtown.

This will replace the current Amtrak station, a 1950s-era facility whose

building and parking lot is much too small for current needs. A 1 million riders used the Raleigh station last year.

The planned Union Station also received a \$21 million TI-

GER IV grant in June.

The new hub will put Amtrak under the same roof with intercity, regional Triangle Transit and local Capital Area Transit buses. Triangle Transit is providing the land. Construction will begin next year. Completion is anticipated in January 2017. ■

Merced-Fresno High-Speed Rail Segment Gets Federal Go-Ahead

The first piece of the Initial Operating Segment (IOS) of California's first-in-the-nation world-class high-speed rail project, extending from Merced to Fresno, gained formal Federal Railroad Administration approval on Sept. 19.

FRA's Record of Decision allows construction to proceed on the first in a series of segments that will eventually form a continuous high-speed rail link from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

Mayors along the route, business groups and labor unions have strongly backed the project, whose IOS is projected to create 100,000 job-years (one person working a full-time job for one year).

"[FRA's action] is both an historic step forward for the high-speed rail project and great news for local businesses and workers," Fresno Mayor Ashley Swearengin said. "The start of

the Fresno to Merced segment will provide a much-needed economic boost for our area through the high-paying construction jobs that will be created."

The White House Office of Management and Budget assisted FRA in shortening the time it took to complete the permitting and review process for the segment as part of President Obama's "We Can't Wait" initiative to speed critical infrastructure projects.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority continues to gather public comment on environmental documents for the Fresno-Bakersfield section of the IOS. Read the EIS documents at www.bit.ly/cacomnt. To submit a comment, email fresno_bakersfield@hsr.ca.gov or write to Fresno to Bakersfield Revised Draft EIR/Supplemental Draft EIS Comment / 770 L St, Ste. 800 / Sacramento, CA 95814. ■

Amtrak Tests 160-mph Trains on 4 NEC Segments

Amtrak tested the operation of *Acela* trainsets at 160-165 mph on four segments of the Northeast Corridor on late evenings during the week of Sept. 24, in preparation for the introduction of revenue *Acela* service at top speeds of 160 mph on these segments sometime in 2014. The tests did not affect normal operations or schedules of Amtrak or commuter trains.

The four sections are: Perryville, MD to Wilmington, DE (21.3 miles); Trenton to New Brunswick, NJ (29.2 miles); Westerly to Cranston, RI (29.2 miles); and South Attleboro to Readville, MA (27.8 miles). On the latter two, *Acelas* currently top out at 150 mph in revenue service. On the former two, their top speed is 135 mph.

On the New Jersey segment, Amtrak is working on design, engineering and other pre-construction activities for a \$450 million project being funded by the federal High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail grant program, with money redirected from Florida after Gov. Rick Scott turned down money for a Tampa-Orlando high-speed line (June 2011 *News*).



"gribley" on Flickr.com

Acela at Boston Back Bay, Mar. 27, 2009

The project involves improving the track and replacing the catenary wire, as well as fully installing the Advanced Civil Speed Enforcement System (ACSES) train control system. Along with higher *Acela* speeds, this work will produce improved reliability for Amtrak and New Jersey Transit service. ■

Long Distance Trains *from page 1*

because it allows people to eat and sleep while in motion.

Using the Chicago-Los Angeles *Southwest Chief* corridor and the New York-Chicago *Lake Shore Limited* corridor as examples, NARP and MHSRA demonstrate that long distance trains provide high travel utility because one seat typically carries 2 to 4 different people on each run by serving intermediate points, and provide important connections with other passenger train, bus and transit services.

The paper emphasizes how the long-distance trains—which represent the only Amtrak service to the majority of its stations—enhance the economic development of on-line communities.

"Long distance train routes form the foundation of the national passenger train network," it states. "Their unique capabilities allow them to connect congested urban areas and bring economically viable mobility to rural areas and small towns, many of which are becoming more isolated from major cities as regional airline and intercity bus service disappears."

NARP and MHSRA conclude with recommendations for making the long distance network even more cost-effective by filling gaps in the current network, increasing frequencies, procuring more modern trainsets, and improving track infrastructure for faster and more reliable service.

NARP members are encouraged to share the paper widely and use its figures and arguments when talking with elected officials or unconvinced friends and family. ■

160 FRA-FUNDED PASSENGER RAIL PROJECTS SINCE 2009 LISTED ON WEB

The Federal Railroad Administration's website has a complete list of the passenger train improvement projects funded under the High-Speed and Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) grant program, created in 2008.

The total obligated so far comes to \$9.9 billion. 28 states, the District

of Columbia and Amtrak have all received HSIPR funds since 2009. Illinois, New York, California, Missouri, Wisconsin, Oregon and Washington are among the states with the most projects funded so far.

The full list: www.bit.ly/fraproj

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our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

NARP at AARP



-Both photos: Robert Stewart
Top: NARP Resource Development Coordinator Luis Olmo-Rivera (left behind table) and Larry Scott, Special Asst. to the Chair, with a visiting couple, represent NARP at the AARP's Life@50+ National Event & Expo in New Orleans. NARP also was at the 2011 event in Los Angeles (NARP News, Dec., 2011).

Left: Olmo-Rivera signs up a new NARP member on his laptop.

\$121 Million for New Haven-Springfield

State and federal officials on Oct. 1 unveiled a \$121 million federal grant to boost top speeds on Amtrak's New Haven, CT-Springfield, MA line to 110 mph and provide trains every 30 minutes at peak times and every hour at other times, with 17 daily round-trips, up from the current 6. 1.26 million annual riders are projected on the "Knowledge Corridor" by 2030.

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) said Congress must figure out a way to exempt high(er)-speed rail funding from forced spending cuts (see pg. 4) because the rail system promotes economic development.

"There's no question that federal spending has to be restrained but this project ... is a wise use of federal funding to support a critical transportation system that benefits the entire New England region. It deserves priority," Blumenthal said. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Amtrak is now accepting Brunswick/Freeport Downeaster reservations; service starts Nov. 1.

Washington Union Station (garage first level) now houses Greyhound and Peter Pan buses, whose separate station has closed.

ETicketing bug: If you ride a train, then get an email saying you were a "no-show" and have been given an eVoucher, call 800-USA-RAIL to get this fixed.