

“Unless PTC is implemented soon, I’m very concerned that we’re going to be back in this room again, hearing investigators detail how technology that we have recommended for more than 45 years could have prevented yet another fatal rail accident.”

NTSB CHAIRMAN CHRISTOPHER HART

Passenger Rail Moving Forward In Congress

May was an eventful month for passenger rail in Congress, with the U.S. Senate and House pushing forward different Transportation, Housing & Urban Development (THUD) funding bills. In a sign of broad, bipartisan support of FAST Act, the news was far more positive than in years past -- demonstrating the power of grassroots advocates to move the needle!

Senate Action

In the Senate, Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) offered an amendment (SA#3927) that would increase Amtrak’s funding to \$1.834 billion (up from the \$1.42 billion). Unfortunately, with no funding offset, the amendment would have caused the bill to exceed the budget ceiling so it was ruled out of order.

Additionally, Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) offered an amendment (SA #3923) that offers a compromise solution for the puzzling restrictions that Senate appropriators placed

on the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant. As NARP reported, Senate leadership had eliminated eligibility for station and capacity improvements, restricting the grant program entirely to safety. Senator Booker helped restore the broader focus for \$25 million, or half the \$50 million in funding available. There is some uncertainty about how the FRA will interpret the grant program, but Senator Booker’s amendment—which was accepted -- helps us achieve the goals we have been advocating for.

House Action

Meanwhile, the House Appropriations transportation subcommittee unanimously approved a \$58.2 billion transportation-housing spending bill. It funds passenger rail at \$1.72 billion, \$42 million more than FY 2016, but about \$82 million less than authorized.

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NARP’s Intern Travels 10,000 Miles During Summer by Rail

Close your eyes and imagine your ideal summer internship as a college student. It might include travelling to new places, meeting lots of interesting people, and spending your days doing something you truly enjoy while helping advance a cause you care about.

Sound too good to be true? Not so-- this dream is in fact a reality for NARP intern Elena Studier as she embarks on a new project called “Summer By Rail.”

Starting May 15th, Elena began a 38-day, 10,000 mile journey across the country, using only public transportation,

mostly in the form of Amtrak and her bike, affectionately known as Stevie. Elena and Stevie began their adventure with a day of biking in New York City before a train ride to Chicago. She’ll continue on to the Pacific Northwest before traveling down the west coast, across the south and back up into the mid-Atlantic.

The trip is about more than having fun, however.

Elena’s purpose on the journey is to observe and share the ways multi-modal travel using public transportation can be

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Elena boards an Amtrak train with her bike in Chicago

States Look To Private Funding To Support High Speed Rail Development

California's current efforts to install a high-speed rail corridor between Los Angeles and San Francisco, which would be the first of its kind in the United States, have garnered significant attention, some positive and some negative. Many have praised the project's potential to increase labor mobility, reduce carbon emissions, and provide an economic boost for communities along the route. However, others have criticized the project for going over-budget and missing deadlines. Just recently, on May 18, it was announced that the project's timeline had been extended another four years from 2018 to 2022.

Given these issues, the future of high-speed rail in the U.S. seems murky. Other regions looking to follow California's example could very well be discouraged by the lack of progress.

However, groups in Minnesota, Nevada and Texas all believe they can bring high-speed rail to their respective regions without repeating any of California's mistakes.

A fundamental characteristic of the California project is that it is publicly

funded, with contributions from the federal government and the state. This has led to lengthy legal and bureaucratic battles over the use of funds, often split across party lines. But what if that weren't the case? That's what planners in the other three regions are considering.

In Minnesota, the North American High Speed Rail Group is looking to partner with Chinese investors to fund the \$4.2 billion project. In Nevada, the project is spearheaded by XpressWest, a private Las Vegas-based company backed by hotel and casino developer Marnell Companies. Finally, in Texas, Texas Central Partners has teamed up with Central Japan Railway Co. to construct a high-speed line that will feature the same rail technology currently used in Japan.

As these three potential projects show, private funding remains a viable option for high-speed rail in our country. Although each does require a certain amount of support from local and federal government, the use of private funding should help alleviate some of the bureaucratic problems that have plagued high-speed rail in California.

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House appropriators did provide \$25 million for the CRISI grant program, and though it's half as much as the Senate provided, it comes with none of the Senate's restrictions; \$25 million for Federal State Partnership for State of Good Repair grant program, or \$5 million more than the Senate; but no money for the Rail Restoration and Enhancement grant program, or \$15 million less than in the Senate bill. The House also funded TIGER at \$450 million, \$75 million above the Senate levels.

Looming Crisis?

While funding for transit and rail has been incrementally increasing, CEOs of the leading transit system gathered in Washington, D.C. to warn that deferred maintenance and replacement needs are outpacing current levels of funding

As Congress moved transportation legislation forward, APTA members gathered in DC for Infrastructure Week, and stated that it will take \$43 billion ever year over the next six years, across all levels of government, just to meet current national public transportation demand. Currently, the U.S. only invests \$17.7 billion per year in transit.

"As public transportation has experienced tremendous growth over the last two decades, public transit systems are struggling to maintain aging and outdated infrastructure while at the same time being challenged to expand capacity," said APTA Acting President and CEO Richard White. "While Congress's passage of the federal FAST Act was a step in the right direction, the job is still not done because we are woefully behind in investing in our infrastructure." ■

Our vision at NARP is for a fully developed national rail network supported by the federal government. We firmly believe that more public funds can and should be made available for improving rail infrastructure across the country.

That said, the current reality is that private funding might be the difference between a project stalling or succeeding. Clearly, these partnerships are valuable and should continue to be explored. We'll be watching carefully to see what happens in Minnesota, Nevada, Texas and elsewhere- the implications for the future of high-speed rail could be extensive. ■



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NTSB Conclusion On Amtrak Train 188

One year after the tragic derailment of Amtrak Train 188 outside of Philadelphia, the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) announced its conclusions in the post-crash investigation. The agency stated that heavy radio traffic led to loss of situational awareness by the locomotive engineer, who then prematurely accelerated heading into a curve and caused the train to derail, killing eight passengers and injuring almost 200.

The results of the investigation state that the Amtrak engineer was most likely distracted by radio discussions regarding an emergency situation on a different train that was stuck by rocks. Due to that emergency radio traffic, the engineer lost track of where he was and did not realize the train was heading into a curve with reduced speed limits. Train 188 derailed through the turn, traveling 106 MPH. NTSB investigators also highlighted the fact that the section of track did not have Positive Train Control (PTC) installed - a technology that would have been able to stop the train automatically and prevented it from derailing.

The NTSB's findings "confirmed what we already suspected: that the Amtrak Train 188 derailment would have been avoided

had Positive Train Control technology been in place," stated NARP President Jim Mathews in a public statement following the hearing.

"That means if the U.S. had a rational infrastructure investment policy – like every expert and transportation official recommends – the eight passengers killed in the incident would still be alive today, and 125 passengers would have avoided significant pain and injury."

"While Amtrak has fully-implemented PTC along the Northeast Corridor, host railroads that Amtrak relies on, along with commuter rail systems across the country, are still operating without this critical safety technology,"

Mathews continued.

"Congress extended the deadline for PTC installation three years to 2018 – a move we accepted on the condition that Congress provide adequate funding to accelerate installation.

So far, Congress has failed to live up to their side of the bargain. The American Public Transit Association has stated there are more than \$3 billion in unfunded PTC capital costs. In light of the findings, it is time for Congress to act." ■



Photo Courtesy NTSB

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seamless and easy. Along the way, she'll also share stories from the communities she visits on how they use and view public transportation options in their respective areas. For example, Elena did a two-day stint in Minneapolis and St. Paul during Bike Week, where she met with regional rail officials, biking advocates, and local political leaders to discuss her project and get a better understanding of transit and biking options in the Twin Cities.

"Summer by Rail' is my effort to share with people the ever-changing lifestyles that we have in this country, and show the relationship people have with transportation services like rail, subways, buses, and bikes," Elena said before the trip. "Millions

of people in the U.S. think that public transportation is only for major metropolitan areas, but these services can connect people from coast to coast, to the sights and attractions of cities, and to national parks like the Grand Canyon."

By the end of the 38 days, Elena will have stopped in more than 20 cities before concluding the trip in Washington, D.C. You are invited to follow along by visiting her blog, www.summerbyrail.com, as well as her social media channels – @RailPassengers on Instagram and Twitter, [Facebook.com/narprail](https://www.facebook.com/narprail), [YouTube.com/narprail](https://www.youtube.com/narprail), and with the hashtags #SummerByRail, #ElenaAndStevie, and #BikesonBoard.

Check in often to see what Elena and Stevie are up to! ■

• • • STATES NEWS • • •

City planners for Washington, D.C.'s Department of Transportation proposed options for the extension of the city's streetcar from H Street to Georgetown. The options included providing the streetcar with dedicated lanes, which experts agree would provide value to the city's streetcar. If plans are to move forward, the current budget provides funding for construction starting in 2022, with a line opening at the earliest in the early- to mid-2020s.

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) received a grant from the federal government, which will allow the agency to extend the completion of the Central Valley segment from 2018 to 2022. The grant is part of the 2012 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which originally required completion of a segment of rail structures from Madera to Shafter by 2017. Though many view this change as a delay of the project, CHSRA stated the modification was largely a technical fix necessary to accommodate recent changes to its business plan.

The Gateway Tunnel project is a critical rail infrastructure project that will help double the number of passenger trains running under the Hudson River. Gateway was deemed essential after Amtrak officials announced in October 2015 that flood damage from Hurricane Sandy would

force the 106-year old tunnels to be closed for one year each for major repair. But red tape and environmental studies could delay the project, and force the closure of existing tunnels for repairs, causing major congestion for all commuters in the region whether they ride the train or not.

In North Carolina, the Durham-Chapel Hill light rail project has received a boost in development after House lawmakers said they want to remove a funding cap. Under the cap of \$500,000, concerns were raised by urban legislators that eventually canceled the state's commitment of \$138 million in funding for the project. The removal of the cap will help the \$1.5 billion light rail project move forward with support from state officials. The line will run 17 miles, and it would be anchored by UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill, and in Durham by the Duke and VA medical centers and the downtown core.

Railroads in Pennsylvania will receive new funding after the state's transportation agency approved \$36 million for 31 rail projects. The increase in funding is critical for the state, as Governor Tom Wolf noted Pennsylvania has the most railroads in the country, and are a vital part of the state's economy and transportation. Projects include the construction of new bridges and tracks, repairs and updates to current rail infrastructure throughout the state. ■

Federal Appeals Court Ruling Has Disastrous Implications

In late April of 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit ruled that Amtrak cannot, as an economically interested party, establish federal On Time Performance (OTP) metrics and standards.

Passengers are right to question this logic. Taxpayers have invested every year in Amtrak since the beginning. This truth factored into the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling declaring Amtrak a public entity rather than a private company, an insight that NARP helped impart on the high court given our amicus brief submitted on that very case.

The potential impacts of this ruling can't be dismissed; when the provision was last struck down in 2014, ridership and revenue system-wide took a painful fifteen percent hit, almost certainly in response to an astonishing forty percent drop in OTP.

The Capitol Limited, normally reliable enough to entice business traffic on its route from Washington D.C. to Chicago, suffered an absurd OTP rate of barely more than one percent.

Signed into law along with the Passenger Rail Investment

and Improvement Act of 2008, it has been suggested that the District Court's objections could be pacified by placing the responsibility for regulating metrics and standards for OTP solely in the hands of the Department of Transportation.

However, Congress has indicated that it won't move a legislative fix while the matter is still being litigated, and the Department of Transportation hasn't made clear whether or not they plan to appeal.

What is already clear is that this case is about certain host railroads trying to renege on the original deal they struck with the U.S. government when taxpayers helped them get out of the passenger business in 1971. In return, the railroads promised passenger priority dispatching, and they need to live up to that agreement.

While some railroads have shown a willingness to live up to their side of the bargain, others appear to want to treat people like crude oil, coal or wheat.

NARP is going to need your help to subvert this destructive impulse. To learn more, and for updates about this important issue, visit www.narprail.org/otp. ■

NARP Member Benefits

■ Travelers United and NARP have now teamed up to provide select benefits for the members of both organizations. The mission of Travelers United (TU) is to identify and promote ways to improve and enhance travel for consumers across all modes of travel - airlines, rental cars, cruise lines, rail and bus transportation and accommodations. The TU vision is that the voice of everyday travelers be heard by lawmakers, regulators and travel companies when policy is being shaped, resulting in a better overall experience for the travel consumer. NARP members can now sign-up at no cost to become TU Advocate members; to receive the TU newsletter and to participate in TU-conducted polls & surveys on consumer-related travel issues. Visit the benefits page on the narprail website, or www.narprail.org/tu for more information.

■ Starting June 1, 2016 **Amtrak Vacations** offers NARP members a 10% discount on the rail fare portion of the hundreds of wonderful tour packages they offer. Visit the NARP member benefits webpage for more information or contact Amtrak Vacations directly at 1-800-268-7252 to reserve a tour package and for more details.

■ We all do it, and now shopping online with Amazon can directly benefit NARP thanks to an exciting new agreement; visit www.narprail.org/get-involved/donate

■ **VSP Vision Care Insurance** now offers specially-discounted individual and family vision insurance plans exclusively for NARP members that will typically save you hundreds of dollars on your exams, glasses and contacts. And as a VSP member, you or any family member can also enjoy savings of up to \$1200 per hearing aid through TruHearing®. When you sign up for a VSP plan, you not only help yourself and your family, you help support NARP as well! Enroll today at <http://www.vspdirect.com/narp/get-a-quote>. ■

Important Membership Reminder

■ Please do NOT use any old envelopes you may have saved from previous NARP mailings for your membership dues renewals or other donation payments. The PO Box address on these old envelopes is no longer in use and your checks will NOT reach NARP. Please only use the new envelopes you receive with our current mailings, which are addressed to: NARP, PO Box 17082, Baltimore, MD 21298-9485. If in any doubt, you may always send checks and other payments directly to our office at: NARP, 505 Capitol Ct, NE, Suite 300, Washington, D.C. , 20002-7706.

■ There are still vacancies for state representative positions on the Council of Representatives. Of particular note are the multiple openings for California, Ohio and Texas seats. If you are interested in becoming more involved with NARP and advancing our goal of 'A Connected America', please visit our website, www.narprail.org for more information and for a complete list of the positions available.

■ Save the dates of Friday, October 14 - Sunday, October 16 and make plans to attend the **NARP Fall Membership & Council Meeting** being held in beautiful Denver, CO. Meeting highlights will include a tour of the newly-expanded Denver Regional Transit District rail lines on Friday; a welcome reception at Denver Union Station on Friday evening; a full day of exciting and motivating speakers and panels on Saturday and a keynote presentation on Sunday. The Embassy Suites Downtown at the Convention Center is our host location and discounted NARP group-rate room reservations are now available via a link on the Fall Meeting event page on the website. ■





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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NARP Traveler's Advisory

- ❖ To accommodate a long-term track work project, several Springfield Shuttle trains will be canceled and bus service. Monday through Friday service changes, effective through July 29, 2016: Springfield Shuttle Trains 470, 490, 493 and 495 will be cancelled on Monday through Friday until July 29, 2016. Passengers will be provided bus service between New Haven, Wallingford, Meriden, Berlin, Hartford, Windsor, Windsor Locks and Springfield. All southbound weekday buses will depart all stations 30 minutes earlier than the respective trains.
- ❖ From April 24 through July 13, CSX Transportation will perform extensive track work between Albany-Rensselaer and Niagara Falls, NY. To accommodate this work, Empire Service and Maple Leaf schedules will be adjusted. Trip times between Albany-Rensselaer and Niagara Falls will increase by up to 25 minutes. On Sunday through Wednesday, Trains 284 and 281 will not run. Some train numbers will change, however, frequencies between Albany-Rensselaer and New York will not be affected. Some trains will depart earlier.
- ❖ Amtrak and the Michigan Department of Transportation have modified Wolverine Service schedules from April 25 through September 23 to accommodate track and signal work to result in improved reliability, a smoother ride and an expansion of the Midwest's first 110 mph Amtrak service. While all Wolverine trains will operate on adjusted schedules, the largest change affects the schedule of Trains 352 and 353, which will operate across the full Pontiac-Chicago route on Sundays only. There will be two Wolverine round-trips Monday-through-Saturday between Battle Creek and Pontiac during this period. Normal service levels of three Wolverine round-trips between Battle Creek and Chicago are maintained. There are no significant changes to the Port Huron-East Lansing-Chicago Blue Water (which also serves Battle Creek and Kalamazoo) or the Grand Rapids-Chicago Pere Marquette schedules. ■