



## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

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417 New Jersey Avenue, S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003  
202-546-1550

**Orren Beaty, President**  
**Ross Capon, Executive Director**  
**Thomas G. Crikelair, Assistant Director**  
**Wendy Chick, Circulation Manager**

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# AMTRAK IN AGONY

Two man-made problems combined with the severe weather in late December and January to cripple Amtrak's operations. On January 19th, Amtrak canceled "indefinitely" eight daily round-trips, involving 9,514 daily train miles and effectively leaving 3,474 route miles with no service.

Almost all surviving long-distance trains are running late. Same-day connections in Chicago for transcontinental passengers have become impossible. After a period of spending two to three thousand dollars per day on hotel bills, Amtrak began stamping tickets "Connections not guaranteed".

One man-made problem is the lack of adequate maintenance in Chicago, which results from inadequate facilities and poor on-the-spot management. Another is the speed limits imposed on SDP-40 locomotives, which normally handle long-haul trains.

Inadequate maintenance facilities today result in part from the fact that, since Amtrak's inception, the desire to avoid discontinuances has been so great that the response to budget squeezes has been the dangerous but politically comfortable course of reducing the capital budget. For example, wheels must

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**FORD/COLEMAN DO IT AGAIN: LETTERS NEEDED TO CARTER AND ADAMS—Fiscal Year 1978 (starting Oct. 1, 1977) will see "a Ford budget with Carter amendments" in "critical areas", said Thomas B. Lance, President Carter's Budget Director. (Wall Street Journal, Jan. 18) The Journal stated: "The new congressional budget process requires (Carter budget officials) to make tough decisions within about six weeks of taking office."**

**NARP urgently requests you to write to President Carter and Secretary of Transportation Brock Adams (copies to your own legislators) reminding them that Amtrak is one of the "critical areas" and that it must be saved from the vicious hacking it received at the hands of Ford and Coleman.**

**The Ford budget provides \$77 million for Amtrak capital grants, only one-fourth of Amtrak's request, and a 7% cut from Fiscal '77. For operations, Amtrak was allotted \$490 million, \$44 million less than it had requested.**

# SENATE WARNS AMTRAK

On Nov. 12, 1976, Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Warren G. Magnuson wrote to Amtrak Board Chairman Donald Jacobs expressing his hope that the Amtrak Board will "vigorously utilize the Congressionally approved criteria and procedures for making route and service decisions in order to place passenger train services in those areas of the country where the most people will use them."

The "Criteria and Procedures for Making Route and Service Decisions," spelling out various economic, social, and environmental factors to be taken into consideration in decisions regarding existing and potential Amtrak services, went into effect

**"(I believe) that rail passenger service has an important role in the national transportation picture. As a statutory member of the Board of Directors of Amtrak I will exercise my duties in such a way as to encourage a proper level of service to the public. . . In the final analysis, ridership and the potential for ridership is the single most important factor in the route and service criteria, and I will make every effort to concentrate Amtrak resources where maximum ridership results can be achieved."**

**—Secy. of Transportation Brock Adams,  
in written response to Senate Commerce Committee  
questions in connection with the confirmation**

on March 19, 1976, placing responsibility for carrying out necessary changes, additions and/or discontinuances in the hands of the Amtrak Board. Since that time the Board has reportedly been using the criteria in studying the existing system. But the Board has not so far attempted to put the criteria to use taking any significant rescheduling or restructuring actions.

Magnuson's letter expresses the Committee's concern that Amtrak move beyond its current policy of holding to a static,

**"We will work as hard as possible in the next few weeks to evolve for our country a permanent long-range, comprehensive energy policy. We're the only developed nation in the world that doesn't have such a policy."**

**—President Carter**

unchanging system. The Senator evidently believes that some route eliminations will be necessary, for he writes: "I fully realize the sensitive nature of train discontinuances in any one portion of the country, and of the difficult decisions this will necessarily entail for the Board. It is extremely important, however, that the Board actively pursue this mandate."

In his letter, Magnuson reminds Jacobs of the role his Committee played in securing Amtrak authorizations for

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# NARP Views Future U.S. Transport Policy

By means of testimony before the Senate Commerce Committee and of a letter to the new Secretary of Transportation, the National Association of Railroad Passengers has sketched its view of advisable courses of action in the transportation field.

NARP's testimony for the Commerce Committee hearings on confirmation of the President Carter appointee to head DOT, strongly supported Brock Adams, the Washington State congressman who has now taken the reins from the uncertain hands of the Coleman-Barnum team.

Since the Department was created, NARP President Orren Beaty told the Committee, "there has been no one appointed to head it who was better qualified (than Adams) from the standpoint of intimate knowledge of the problems involved and the right temperament to deal with them. Certainly, from our view, his selection is a major improvement over recent holders of this office."

Beaty noted that both Adams, as a member of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, and Senator Warren Magnuson's Commerce Committee had been actively involved in supporting the national rail passenger policy which

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**NARP Member Ames W. Williams is the author of a new book, "The Chesapeake Beach Railway", on the history of that tourist line from Washington, D.C., the last remnant of which recently ceased to operate as a freight spur. The book can be ordered for \$10, postpaid, from the Meridian Sun Press, 6034 Fort Hunt Rd., Alexandria, Va. 22307.**

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led to establishment of Amtrak to run the nation's passenger trains. He recalled incidents in the past where Adams had helped develop and explain policies designed to overcome the nation's complex transportation problems.

"I have been impressed," Beaty said in the testimony, "with (Adams') ability to grasp all aspects of a complex problem and all the ramifications of a proposed solution, to suggest a workable course of action, and to be able to explain fully to laymen what is being done and why."

In the testimony, Beaty then listed NARP's views — as he had in the earlier letter to Secretary Adams — on a series of related policies — based on the theme that the United States needs all of its existing modes of transportation — "that a balanced transportation system is one which makes use of all modes as necessary and which considers such important factors as best use of energy and land resources, air pollution, noise, street and highway congestion, etc. Responsible officials should not put all emphasis on highways and trucks, buses and the private automobiles. All these have their place, but should not be favored unfairly over rail."

Major topics stressed were:

**Energy Policy**—We must plan our transportation system on the realistic basis that we will not be able always to rely on foreign oil production. Under such circumstances, railroads would be our most reliable nationwide freight-hauling system. . . The small taste we had of a fuel shortage at the time of the OPEC embargo should be evidence enough of the need for a reliable rail passenger system.

**Amtrak**—We support it and believe it should expand its services heavily into the high-population corridors as proposed by U.S. Railway Association, and that enough new routes should be added to provide a true nationwide system.

**Subsidies**—Those for the rail passenger system go to provide an essential service. While bus service also is needed, modern rail service, where it has been provided, has shown a superior ability to attract people out of their cars and, in some cases, from airplanes, neither of which is energy efficient.

**Information**—A study should be undertaken to determine the true cost of using each transportation mode. It would be helpful

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**Amtrak has inaugurated round-trip discounts for coach travel between many stations on the following routes: New York-Detroit via southern Ontario (except Fridays and Sundays); NY-Montreal via Albany; NY-Savannah on the daylight "Palmetto"; NY-Kansas City; Orlando-St. Petersburg/Miami. Through the end of May, discounts to Florida and on the West Coast are reestablished.**

**NARP applauds these actions, but believes strongly that one-way discounts should be made a standard part of these innovations, since Amtrak offers passengers little or no choice about the time of day at which they can travel.**

**We're also happy to report that Amtrak has "postponed indefinitely" the planned January 15th closing of the Dayton ticket office during the daylight hours. (Dec. News)**

**The Chicago — Texas and — Los Angeles trains via Kansas City will on Feb. 15 resume running as separate trains Chicago-Kansas City, on last summer's schedules, subject to "SDP-40 delays" (see lead article). Also, the NY-Newport News "Colonial" will originate at 1 PM southbound and 6:20 AM northbound. Correcting the box on p. 4, Amfleet-ing of the "Arrowhead" has been indefinitely postponed.**

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in formulating policy and in determining best use of federal money in support of transportation — highways, railways, airways and waterways. We believe it would show that each mode enjoys some subsidization, but that the nation as a whole benefits by having a reliable, varied transportation system. We think it would show that federal help to make up Amtrak's annual operating losses is not out of line, but that Amtrak should continue to become more efficient nonetheless.

**Safety**—DOT's safety program should be improved. Adequate track inspection might help avoid the recent rash of derailments, both freight and passenger, which have disrupted service. An investigation is needed of track and roadbed conditions and of the level and effectiveness of safety inspections.

**Board of Directors**—The negative interest of the previous administration in rail passenger service — as evidenced by its studied failure to fill vacancies on the Amtrak Board — needs to be reversed by quick appointment of open-minded and qualified citizens to bring the Board to full strength. (NARP's recommendations to the previous Administration were presented to Secretary Adams.)

**Federal aid to railroads for system improvements**—The delay of a year in putting funds to use which Congress voted to help the nation's railroads improve tracks and roadbeds and modernize signalling systems and other facilities should be ended and the money made available.

**Urban and suburban transit**—The need for ever more highways and streets can be reduced by making use of existing railroads, such as those linking the District of Columbia with the Virginia suburbs. Nationwide, more emphasis should be placed on use of electrified rail services for transit and commuter purposes, to make the best use of energy with least adverse effects on energy use, congestion, and pollution.



# AX THE ARMREST!

Amtrak has announced that almost half of its passengers are now riding in new trains. This is encouraging, particularly because ridership figures show that new equipment, even without badly needed speed improvements, can attract large numbers of additional riders. September ridership on the newly "Amfleeted" Los Angeles-San Diego line was up 68% over the same period last year, though the frequency was only raised from three to four daily round-trips.

But the new coaches have one serious problem, which is easily correctable: the immovable armrests between paired coach seats. These are found on all the new coaches — even, to our horror, in the mockups of the long-distance bilevels at the Pullman-Standard plant in Hammond, Indiana.

They may be appropriate on the Metroliners, where *maximum* trip length is usually three hours. But they have no place on other trains, not even in the Northeast Corridor. Remember that it's a nine-hour ride from Boston to Washington, and lots of "normal" people ride all the way! Having these armrests on overnight trains is ridiculous. (Better to have no such armrests, if having movable ones is an unjustified expense.)

The only half-plausible argument we have heard in favor of these armrests is that someone boarding a train midway on its journey would be prevented from sitting down because some uncooperative passenger sprawled over two seats would refuse to give up one of them.

Against that situation, which can usually be handled by competent on-board personnel or passengers, consider those who suffer by the armrest:

- a parent traveling with two small children, all of whom could comfortably fit into two seats absent the armrest;
- a parent traveling with one child who wants to lie across one seat and the parent's lap;
- two friends traveling together who don't want an armrest as a chaperone;
- one friend traveling alone on an uncrowded train who would like to lie across two seats.

Consider also the competition: the back seat of an automobile; any intercity bus; even an uncrowded night flight, where the stewardess will remove the armrests so that you can lie down.

This armrest has got to go. Let's design our trains to maximize comfort — and ridership!

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## Senate Warns Amtrak (cont'd. from page one)

fiscal years 1977 and 1978 and points out that he is himself a "strong supporter of rail passenger service." (Most NARP members know that the Senate Commerce Committee has long been a most reliable source of Amtrak support in the Congress.) Magnuson emphasizes, however, that "the Committee intends" for Amtrak to "take appropriate actions" to guarantee "the most efficient utilization of the resources available for rail passenger service." He states clearly that "Amtrak must not be in a position to ask for further funding without. . ." having taken some definitive steps to see to it that more is provided for the money now available.

In reporting on Amtrak's recently released "Five Year Plan," NARP pointed out that the plan "neither argues nor shows that the present system is adequate." (Oct. News) For those conservative-minded elements in Amtrak's management — those who feel that they either can or must keep routes and train miles just the way they are, relying passively on a guaranteed Congressional allowance — the Commerce Committee Chairman's letter should offer a needed awakening. The Committee does not want passive management, but forward-moving plans and actions.

What the Senator says is very different from the kind of anti-rail rhetoric that emanated from the Ford Administration. In his letter, Sen. Magnuson does *not* call for subsidy cutbacks. He does *not* call for reductions in total Amtrak services. He *does* say that *if the Board does not move to utilize the criteria*, he is afraid that

"ultimately. . . routes will have to be curtailed for lack of sufficient operating funds."

The main concern of the Committee is emphasized throughout the letter — that Amtrak take action to insure "the most efficient utilization of the resources available," to "maximize the utilization of funding currently available," to "maximize the transportation provided." All of these point in the same direction: The Committee is evidently willing to provide operating funds, if Amtrak makes every effort to see to it that it is moving the greatest possible number of people with that money. The crucial dollar figure is not just net loss, but more importantly loss per passenger mile, which, it should be pointed out, occupies a prominent place among the factors spelled out in the route and service criteria.

Given the tone of the Senator's letter, the prospect of losing one or more trains must be taken seriously. NARP is not encouraged by the prospect of route discontinuances — especially since many of the candidates that Amtrak will name have not been run properly in the past. And we know that even the most lightly used trains play an important transportation function in the areas they serve. But some things must be remembered: 1) Currently allocated resources are limited, 2) Despite firm commitments, Amtrak remains, in the eyes of many people in Washington, an "experimental" service, 3) A strong system is better than no system; strength for Amtrak can only come through growth.

Congressional (and constituency) pressures may be enough to overrule any proposed route cancellations. This would shift much of the burden and heat of the Magnuson letter back on to the Congress.

The Senator's letter, however, calls for more than just cuts. Route and scheduling adjustments will have to be made to pick up population centers and heavier traffic flows. Frequencies in high potential markets will have to be increased — even if this means a system increase in total train miles and in total costs, perhaps even in total operating deficits.

Suppose that one train handles 30 million revenue passenger miles (RPMs) per year with an annual direct loss of \$3 million, or 10¢ per RPM. If two trains could be operated over the same route at a direct loss of, say, \$2 million each, and each train handled 40 million RPMs, total losses would increase by \$1 million, but the loss per RPM would be 5¢ instead of 10¢. Even if each train handled only 23 million RPMs, the loss per RPM would still drop — to 8.7¢/RPM. The figures are rough — but the lesson is an important one.

The Chairman of the Committee has given fair warning: When hearings are called later in the year, the Committee will want to know just what Amtrak is doing to improve its passenger mile loss ratio. Fiscal conservatism is commendable, but not if it brings the whole show crumbling down as a result.

Mr. Jacobs, in his Dec. 15 response to Sen. Magnuson, does not appear to have read the Senator's letter the way we have, because his letter, like the "Five Year Plan," fails to see very far beyond the existing system. Mr. Jacobs indicates that some routes have been singled out for more detailed evaluation, emphasizing a healthy reluctance to conclude too rapidly that trains should be eliminated ("It is too early at this point to prejudge what the process is going to tell us."), and noting that the outcome of the evaluations "may range from recommendations for improved or even additional service to outright discontinuance." He cites five routes: 1) Washington/Norfolk-Chicago "J.W. Riley" and "Mountaineer"; 2) Chicago-Florida "Floridian"; 3) Oakland-Bakersfield "San Joaquin"; 4) the Seattle-Portland short-haul trains; and 5) Washington-Martinsburg "Blue Ridge."

But the Commerce Committee clearly wants more than just a list of poor economic performers. It wants some optimistic and constructive action. Amtrak will have to take some of its restructuring studies off the shelf and start adding the frequencies that have been often discussed. For it seems to us — and in this we are optimistic — that Senator Magnuson and his Committee do not seek discontinuances for discontinuances' sake, but rather a more productive nationwide system that moves more people more miles with the amount of tax dollars provided.



## Amtrak in Agony (cont'd. from page 1)

still be changed outside. During sub-zero weather, the normal daily output on such work in Chicago fell from 16 cars to two.

But Amtrak also needs to improve its ability to use the maintenance equipment it has. There are persistent reports of severe personnel problems, particularly at some of the Chicago maintenance facilities. The fate of the new General Electric P30 diesels is an example. Around January 19, only two out of eleven of these new engines based in Chicago were operational. Yet, even before the severe weather hit the Midwest, the P30s maintained in Washington, D.C. were reportedly more reliable than those in Chicago. Also, Amtrak's performance in Chicago looks poor in comparison with that of the suburban railroads. Even the financially strapped Rock Island Lines has managed to turn in a fair performance, with both its steam and electrically heated trains.

An Amtrak press release stated: "To maintain reliability on routes carrying the most passengers, Amtrak (suspended) service in the affected zones on trains which carry the fewest passengers." The canceled trains were: Chicago-Florida "Floridian"; Washington-Parkersburg-Cincinnati "Shenandoah"; Chicago-Dubuque "Black Hawk"; Chicago-Lynchburg-Norfolk "Mountaineer"; Chicago-Detroit "Saint Clair"; Chicago-Champaign "Illini"; and St.-Louis-Laredo "Inter-American", particularly sad because ridership was starting to build up after last fall's conversion of the portion north of Ft. Worth from tri-weekly to daily and institution of through service to Chicago. On the Chicago-St. Louis line, the southbound "Abraham Lincoln" and the northbound "State House" were canceled.

Also, the Chicago-New Orleans "Panama Ltd." and the Chicago-Cincinnati-Washington "J. W. Riley" were converted to Amfleet cars, without sleepers or conventional diners.

At presstime, Amtrak had begun to restore some of the suspended trains and hoped to restore all of them by mid-

**"Amtrak has recently informed us that beginning Feb. 15 there will be three major and important changes in 'Arrowhead' service. First, from that date forward, the 'Arrowhead' is to be equipped with the new Amfleet rolling stock; second, it will be running through to the new Amtrak station in Duluth (located within the lovely old depot complex there) [instead of running only to Superior]; and last, the train's schedule is to be 'flip-flopped' so that it will be departing the Twin Cities in the morning and returning from the Twin Ports in the evening. These are changes of great significance and for which we have been working for some time."**

—from the Minnesota Association  
of Railroad Passengers

February, though increasing problems with frozen Chicago watering facilities made this questionable. The Chicago-Norfolk "Mountaineer" was being considered for Amfleet cars and no sleepers — giving coach passengers the benefit of new cars, on a run where sleeper ridership averaged less than four per trip, even in the upbeat month of November.

SDP-40 locomotives have been limited to 40 mph on curves of 2 degrees or more, at least until additional tests have been completed. Amtrak has asked the railroads to propose new schedules for long-haul trains in light of the restriction, and is planning to issue new timetables route-by-route as schedules are decided. Meanwhile, Amtrak is attempting to minimize lateness on some key long-haul trains by powering them with older, non-restricted engines ("E" and "F" units).

The whole story destroys, for now, the image of rail passenger service as the all-weather reliable mode, and has led to much bad publicity for Amtrak. (Other modes had less severe problems, except during the last weekend in January, when all transportation at Chicago, Buffalo, and elsewhere, ground to a halt.) See our front-page box, "FORD/COLEMAN DO IT AGAIN," for what you can do to help.

## Exit Bill Coleman et al

William Coleman and John Barnum are gone, but their actions live on in a flurry of 11th hour decisions and press releases. Four major reports were completed: Sec. 902 (of 4R Act) on Federal aid to rail transportation (Sept. News, p. 4); final standards and designations (Sec. 503), though the due date had been pushed back by Congress until May; a massive DOT reorganization plan which "advocated consolidation of many programs under two new DOT divisions — one for interstate transportation and one for local transportation." (*Washington Post*, Jan. 31); and a 412-page "comprehensive report on the trends in America's transportation system and the major choices to be made during the next 25 years." We have not yet obtained or read these reports, and will comment on them in the future.

On Jan. 14, DOT submitted to Congress legislation to transfer control of the Washington Union Station/National Visitor Center from the Dept. of the Interior to DOT. The legislation provides for the completion of the replacement railroad station but also gives DOT the authority to return to transportation use portions of the original station, and Amtrak would "develop rail passenger facilities in the west wing and concourse of Union Station".

In other key January actions related to rails, Coleman:

— brought closer to reality the long-talked-about downtown Philadelphia commuter rail tunnel linking the former Penn Central and Reading Terminals;

— announced capital grants towards the procurement of new rollingstock and roadbed for the Shaker Heights-Cleveland transit line, and the extension of the Chicago Transit Authority's transit line to O'Hare International Airport;

— approved federal aid for an extension of I-66 between D.C. and the Beltway in suburban Virginia, use of the peak-direction/peak-hour lanes to be restricted to buses, carpools (4 or more persons), emergency vehicles and Dulles airport traffic;

— appointed a special task force to study ways to encourage the use of art, good design and architecture in the development of federally funded transportation projects; and

— issued a rash of anti-Amtrak statements, providing the

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inspiration for a number of anti-Amtrak editorials in various newspapers across the country. It seems that many newspapers respect and accept the views of high Administration officials just because those officials happen to be in charge. Unlike Coleman, the new Secretary has affirmed his belief in the importance of Amtrak. We hope that Sec. Adams will not be bashful in making this view known to the various news media.

Coleman also continued to talk:

To the National Transportation Policy Study Commission: "A lot of the things that I've said about railroads during the last year are 100% wrong."

And, to *Aviation Daily*: "To me, the passenger train, once you get out of the Northeast Corridor and a few other places, is very much like the outhouse. At one time it made a lot of sense but once you got plumbing there is no doubt you put out of business people who made outhouses."

No, the first quote does not apply to the second. Coleman's term did not last long enough for him to learn about the importance of a nationwide intercity rail passenger service. But he did, according to *Railway Age's* Jack Burke, learn that "perhaps the need for rail consolidation was not as great as he had thought, and that, particularly in the Midwest, there may not be as much excess capacity as his department had figured."

While Coleman was learning and talking, Amtrak President Paul Reistrup must have been taking some satisfaction not only from outlasting the anti-Amtrak Coleman, but also from sitting as a member of the Amtrak Board in spite of the efforts of Coleman and his aides to keep Reistrup off.