



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

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RETURN REQUESTED

FRA Chief Addresses NARP Board

Riley is Upbeat on NARP, Amtrak, and New Intercity Rollingstock

"[Before Amtrak], the railroad industry knew it was going to get out of the passenger business, so they just stopped investing in it. The quality of the equipment deteriorated, the quality of the service became nonexistent.

"Conventional wisdom was that the iron horse was going to join the 'living' horse in the museum of our transportation history well before the 80's. But here we are, and the conventional wisdom was wrong. You were a very large part of the reason why it proved to be wrong."

—Federal Railroad Administrator John H. Riley,
addressing the NARP Board Apr. 28

"Frank Jones went up [to the Alaska Railroad] a few years ago as an FRA employee and really turned that thing around. Even in as sparsely populated a state as Alaska, he has the losses on their passenger service down to about \$500,000 a year, and he could get below that if he could get some more equipment. There's got to be a lesson in that for all of us."

—Federal Railroad Administrator John H. Riley,
addressing the NARP Board Apr. 28

Will Mobile-New Orleans Train Survive?



—photo by Barry Williams

Westward "Gulf Coast Ltd.," seen nearing Lake Ponchartrain, delivered to New Orleans an average 200 people/trip May 13-31, raising hopes it will last a bit beyond Sep. As for the long term, AL legislature overwhelmingly passed FY'85 funding; Gov. Wallace pocket-vetoed due to language problems—special session may save it. Dimmer prospects in LA/MS.

"COAST DAYLIGHT" PRINTS WHOLESALE

NARP members can buy color prints of Artist Tom Daniel's art deco painting of SP's steam-powered "Daylight" streamliner at these prices, which include postage: Print-Art Paper, 750 Signed & Numbered Edition, 19x28½", \$40; Poster, 19x28½", \$7.50; Mini Art Print, Regular Paper in White Envelope, 8½x11", \$2.50. Mail and make your check payable to Steam Art, PO Box 481, Elm Grove, WI 53122.

"Daylight" locomotive 4449, of the same class as shown in the painting, is making a Portland, OR-New Orleans round-trip this year to appear at the World's Fair June 2-9.

John H. Riley has become the first Federal Railroad Administrator—and thus the highest executive-branch official ever—to address the NARP Board of Directors. He spoke on Apr. 28 in Washington, DC.

Not coincidentally, Riley—introduced in *NARP News*, Mar. '84—is the first strong supporter of rail passenger service to become head of FRA. Reflecting his upbeat view of Amtrak's future, he reorganized FRA so that the person responsible for Amtrak matters would report directly to the administrator instead of being "three layers of responsibility removed."

The old system, which he found "amazing," since Amtrak "is our biggest budget item, . . . sent the wrong message" and "made it very difficult for the administrator to do any kind of 'hands on' work with Amtrak."

So Riley "took all of our freight service issues . . . and our passenger service issues, and put them in one division": FRA's first-ever division "responsible for one thing: service." And he picked Louis S. Thompson, who headed up the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project, to run that division. Thompson's title: Associate Administrator for Intercity Programs.

Riley emphasized management quality and capital investment—primarily in new rollingstock—as the major reasons for the dramatic improvements both in Amtrak's service quality and its image on Capitol Hill.

He then gave some of "my own concepts on where Amtrak needs to go over the next 4 or 5 years, . . . but I want to stress to you that I'm not speaking as FRA administrator . . . I'm just speak-

NEW CALIFORNIA RAIL GROUP

Introducing TRAC, the Train Riders' Association of California, 1730 13th St., Sacramento 95814; Richard Tolmach, president. The new group aims to influence legislative and administrative actions in the state government, and is particularly interested in such current issues as establishing an Oakland-Reno train and improving the "San Joaquins." Dues are \$15 and up.

ing as a Minnesotan who's interested in transportation."

Amtrak, according to this Minnesotan, should:

- be used by government "if Amtrak is in any way competitive with transportation alternatives. That means people, mail, courier service, and a lot of other things that could generate revenue

GSA VS. AMTRAK

"We send about 30,000 people in government up and down the Northeast Corridor (NEC) . . . every year and only a tiny percentage . . . moves by rail. Government could have saved way over \$100,000 if the bulk of those people had moved by rail. Amtrak could have saved millions. And it's good investment from the taxpayer's perspective, particularly in a corridor like New York-Washington . . . , to move people off alternative forms of transportation and onto Amtrak.

"We have an unbearable situation, in which [the U.S.] General Services Administration will not allow Amtrak to bid on the government contract for the NEC Their point of view is that . . . you get a better deal if you can sign a contract that covers 7 to 10 major cities, so we're not going to let Amtrak, which really can only bid, for government's purposes, on a couple of corridors, compete. And that's just foolish.

"If Amtrak can offer you a better price, and better service, how are you serving the taxpayers by not even letting them bid? I want to tell you, I'm going to take that one on"

—John H. Riley

for a government-subsidized railroad";

- invest in new rollingstock—"a core design that" can be used anywhere in the country. "I think the design and creation of a new type of Amtrak car, installing it on the system, so that we have enough cars to meet the demand [even in] peak periods . . . is the

"I think we all need to face the reality that Amtrak needs to make a major investment, a major investment, in increasing its fleet size over the course of the next decade. That's not a political position. It's an economic reality.

"We're already experiencing shortages of equipment, and it's going to get rapidly worse, because Amtrak's ridership is growing at a pace that was beyond anything that even the greatest optimists projected as we looked out over the next couple of years.

"The incremental cost of putting an extra sleeper or putting an extra car on a train is very small, but the incremental revenue gain is extremely large. And this is how I'm going to try to sell the concept that we've got to build these trains."

—John H. Riley

key to Amtrak maximizing its economic future";

- maximize its "non-rail income-producing potential," preferably moving to "where it can generate all of its capital spending needs from its own investments," since the capital program, with its low short-term visibility, is what suffers in budget squeezes;

- "build a professional infrastructure . . . at the middle-management level. You [have to] pay competitive salaries. . . . Amtrak [unlike Conrail] has salary limitations [some of which] were . . . to 'reward' the performance of early Amtrak administrators. . . . Public service is something you view as a sacrifice that you and your family give for a while for the good of everybody. But Amtrak is a career position. You ask someone to come into Amtrak at a sharply reduced level of salary from any competing railway, and you're asking them to make that sacrifice for their whole life. Thank God that some people are willing to do that. But [Amtrak] will never develop its own succession process internally, and develop a constant professional staffing level that is capable of filling sudden vacancies in positions. I hope we can move to the day when we can have a vacancy in the Amtrak presidency and fill it from within. . . .but, to get there, we're going to have to enable people to be paid competitive salaries"; and

TRAINS: RELIABLE AND RELAXING

"Better equipment has meant better service. Amtrak now can boast as good, or better, on-time performance than any airline. . . . It had the best on-time performance in [its] history last year: 81.5%. And the Northeast Corridor (NEC) is well up in the 90%. In the NEC, delay is the rule . . . if you try to fly the [Eastern] Shuttle. And the fact that Amtrak does run on-time has begun to give it the kind of advantage over the Shuttle that the airplanes used to have over the trains about 4 or 5 years ago, and it's dramatic and Amtrak is really hurting the Shuttle to New York. . . .

"Amtrak can run through rain, sleet, and fog, which planes can't. As airports have become more crowded and as Amtrak has become more professional in the way it handles its operations, that ability to operate in all weather conditions has been a bigger and bigger advantage.

"But . . . the key to the whole system—not just the corridors—is . . . the quality of the experience. [This], in the last analysis, is what brings people to railroad trains. It makes trains different from any other form of transportation—comfort, relaxation, civilized convenience.

"A person who sat in front of me on the [air] Shuttle a few weeks ago . . . turned around and described the Shuttle to me as 'man's inhumanity to man.' I think there's some truth in that.

"Where it leads us all is to recognize that there are a lot of reasons why Amtrak is going to succeed in the future: the enormous expense necessary to resurrect America's highways; the virtual impossibility of expanding airports anywhere to meet the need; and the rising cost of maintaining a personal automobile, which I can personally testify to as of the last day-and-a-half! . . .

"The thing that will enable railroad passenger transportation to gain a greater and greater share of the nation's transportation market over the next few years is the quality of the experience that we have to sell—the fact that trains turn the process of getting there from a necessary evil to an enjoyable experience. . . . That's the name of the game. The extent to which we can maximize that advantage is really going to determine the extent to which railroad passenger transportation does come back full circle over the course of the next few years."

—Federal Railroad Administrator John H. Riley

- "continue the process of negotiating modern, realistic labor agreements." Riley praised rail labor for agreements signed with Amtrak "in the last few years. Great progress is being made. That's why you've got Auto Train, and that's why you're going to have a couple of new services opened up this year. We need to continue to go in that direction. In the long run, it's going to mean a more efficient and a more competitive Amtrak. That means more riders, it means more routes, and it means more jobs."

Riley effusively praised the quality of service on Auto Train, and said "it is going to break service ground that will become common throughout the Amtrak system ultimately."

Finally, he said, "We need to have a dramatic improvement in the way we market passenger trains in this country. . . . I can commend the progress that Amtrak has made in area after area, but the area where I think that Amtrak continues to be exceedingly weak is in its marketing. . . . I'm pleased with some of the direction—I couldn't have said this a month ago—that I've seen just in the last 2 or 3 weeks. . . . the new Amtrak ads, I think, are persuasive. . . ."

He emphasized that "anything that Amtrak runs ought to be marketed. . . . We've got to go in and aggressively market the 403(b) [joint state/Amtrak funded] trains. They're part of the system! We need to target our advertising toward those trains."

This drew a round of applause from the NARP Board, many of whose members have been frustrated at Amtrak's failure to promote 403(b) trains, and at Amtrak's seemingly esoteric inter-

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NARP Demands Crossing Safety Measures

Following the March 15 "Empire Builder" derailment in Montana caused by a reckless truck driver, NARP issued a press statement calling upon state and local governments to "protect trains from highway vehicles—particularly trucks." The story was carried March 16 by one of the national wire services.

Specifically, NARP urged states and cities to:

- Strictly enforce grade crossing traffic laws. "Ignoring a crossing signal should be deemed as serious an offense as running a red traffic light. As many as *half* of annual U.S. grade crossing mishaps occur at crossings with signal protection."

- Eliminate non-essential crossings by closing them.

- "Seek federal highway funds from the 1982 Surface Transportation Assistance Act to build grade separations (overpasses/underpasses) to replace crossings having heavy traffic volumes."

- "Fund improved signal protection for those crossings not eliminated through closure or separation."

- "Ban commercial trucks from grade crossings wherever an alternate route with a grade separation is within a reasonable distance."

- "Participate in Operation Lifesaver, an educational program sponsored by the National Safety Council, the railroad industry, and various law enforcement agencies, aimed at teaching motorists and future motorists (i.e., children) to respect the dangers of grade crossings."

The Montana accident was one of five in the past year in which trucks sent Amtrak passengers to hospitals. *Fortunately, owing to the extraordinary safety characteristics of trains, no one aboard any of the trains was killed.* ■

Wisconsin Member Battling Crossings

One of the worst hazards in railroading, and motoring, is the rail-highway grade crossing. Last year in the U.S., 553 lives ended there. The U.S. has roughly 200,000 grade crossings—an average of more than one per route-mile of railroad—and only one-fourth have automated protection, e.g. lights, bells, gates. Automated protection isn't cheap to install—or maintain. In its Aug. 11, 1980, issue, *Railway Age* reported: "One rail consultant has estimated the annual cost of maintaining 52,000 existing automated crossings at \$169 million—equal to half the industry's earnings in 1978. 'A few years ago the question was who's going to pay for those devices,' says Joseph Walsh, associate administrator for safety at the Federal Railroad Administration. 'Now it's who's going to pay for maintenance of all those warning devices.'"

An increasingly attractive solution to the grade crossing problem is simply to close crossings which are not essential. Closure avoids the costs of signal installation/maintenance while enhancing public safety by reducing the opportunity for road-rail interaction.

In Wisconsin, NARP Member and ex-director David Schwengel has been working to close several crossings in Mauston on the Milwaukee Road route used by Amtrak's "Empire Builder."

Last year, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation petitioned the state's transportation commission to close one-third (4 of 12) of Mauston's crossings and improve the rest. Schwengel, representing NARP and Wisconsin ARP, testified in support of the plan, as did the railroad. As expected, some local residents opposed the plan, citing inconvenience. But Schwengel countered in an Oct. 1 letter to the commission: "Driving several blocks out of one's way to cross the tracks is a daily fact of life in the wide majority of this nation's cities. The expenditure of . . . funds to equip these . . . crossings with adequate protection



instead of closure would be a flagrant waste of tax dollars that could be better spent on [upgrading] dangerous crossings elsewhere." Proponents of the plan also told the commission that the closures would have the positive effect of eliminating through traffic on the residential streets, making them safer and quieter.

In January, Transportation Commissioner Joseph Sweda ordered that 2 crossings be closed and the remaining 10 be given improved protection over the next 21 months. The railroad might appeal to have the 3rd closed, and the 4th may be reconsidered for closure pending improvement of an adjacent crossing.

While we can't believe it's essential that this town of 3300 have 10 gated crossings, we are grateful to Dave, WDOT, and CMSP&P for making this nation safer by 2 crossings, and we hope that, in the interest of safety of motorists and rail crews and passengers, Sweda will look favorably upon future closure requests. ■

Tackling Speed Restrictions

In 1981, Congress set a goal for Amtrak to raise its systemwide average speed from 55 to 60 mph. To help Amtrak attain this important objective, NARP directors and members in various locations have gone to work to ease or eliminate municipal speed restrictions to the extent safety permits. NARP is especially well-suited for this task, as our grassroots membership is often effective in influencing municipal and state decision-making.

Recently, there have been some notable successes. NARP members were involved in a lengthy effort to eliminate an obscene Dallas speed ordinance which prohibited train speeds in excess of 20 mph and thus forced Amtrak's "Eagle" to spend an entire hour crawling through the city! On Jan. 11, 1984, the city council replaced the ordinance with a much more reasonable law which had the immediate effect of cutting ten minutes from Amtrak's schedule and promises to cut even more as still-higher speeds are gradually phased in.

In Michigan, members of NARP and MARP worked doggedly for over three years to raise speeds on the Detroit-Toledo route, in the face of opposition from several obstinate city governments. Victory finally came on Feb. 16 when Michigan Gov. James Blanchard signed legislation transferring passenger train speed regulation from the local to the state level. This action should lead over time to faster and more uniform passenger speeds.

NARP members have lent support to Amtrak in its quest for higher speeds in Florida, where the state government has regulated train speeds for some years. We are pleased that the state and Amtrak reached agreement on speed increases which resulted in a 10-minute schedule reduction on the Miami-Tampa route last month, and prospects appear good for additional time-savings on this, and other, Florida routes in the near future.

NARP members are presently tackling speed ordinances in other areas, including Indianapolis and Washington state.

Time is money on the railroad, and faster, more competitive Amtrak schedules mean higher revenues, lower costs, and better equipment utilization. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

All Aboard Fares have been extended for sale through Sep. 3, good for travel through Oct. 2: 1-zone remains \$175, but 2-zones rises to \$250 and 3-zones rises to \$325. Not good in sleepers July 1-Aug. 19. Passengers ticketed at old rates may "step up" to new fares for travel after June 30, provided trip is completed within original 30-day period.

Special Auto Train summer fares on sale through Sep. 5, good through Sep. 25: round-trip fares are \$178 adult, \$98 child, \$250 auto. Trip must be completed in 21 days.

Regular Amtrak fares will rise an average of 4% June 1. Effective June 17, new dining car menus will feature freshly prepared fish and chicken in addition to steak; also a children's dinner menu will be issued. And "First Class Service" will expand to sleepers nationwide, offering wine & cheese basket, evening sweets, and stationery (on top of morning coffee/tea/juice and newspaper). Only on "Silver Star" and "Silver Meteor" will meals also be included.

NARP SLIDE SHOW NOW READY!

To promote NARP membership and to make people aware of the value and pleasure of trains as part of the nation's transportation system and for vacation travel, consider showing NARP's new slide show to a group(s) in your community.

The show comes with instructions on its use, and a script. You may insert your own slides of particular local interest, if you like.

The show defines trains in their various forms; looks briefly at foreign trains and advances in high speed technology; examines trains as part of our past in developing this country; and covers a transcontinental trip, with information on where Amtrak goes, how to make reservations, on-board amenities, what you will see from the train and obvious stopovers—particularly national parks.

The show is available for loan from the NARP office. To make a reservation, specify when you need the material and send a check for \$5 (covers 2-way postage and handling) to the NARP office.

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pretation of a law which was enacted for the specific purpose of getting Amtrak to promote them.

Riley went on to say that the states should also help promote the 403(b) trains, and concluded, "but I often felt that if I were running the show at Amtrak, the first thing I would do would be to call on the National Association of Rail Passengers and say 'let's form a partnership and decide how to promote all these trains,' and recognize that the communities around this country have as much of a stake in the success of those trains as Amtrak does. While I think Amtrak has got to do more, the communities have got to get off their hands too and do a little bit if they want that kind of service.

"There's enough blame on this one to share, for all of us. But this is the direction we need to move in in marketing."

He also called for more group sales efforts to fill the trains during off-peak periods, and for intermodal cooperation.

The basic job for marketing and for all of us, said Riley, is to get the word out that today's Amtrak trains are vastly superior to the trains of the late 60s and early 70s, when many people last used the train.

He concluded with some advice for NARP itself: "NARP has got to become and stay a more united force. NARP has got to recognize that the Northeast Corridor is not Amtrak and the western routes are not Amtrak—Amtrak is one common system and if you break it up and fight with each other, what you're doing is making it easier to eliminate all of yourselves. And you need to work as a common spokesman for improved passenger transportation all over this country.

"Now I'm only one voice in a very large system of government. . . . you've also got OMB; Treasury; budget offices within the whole administration, within DOT; and a secretary of transportation. You've got 535 congressmen concerned about a federal budget deficit that has enormous consequences. You've also got a half-dozen other [Amtrak] Board members.

"But I just want you to know that I'm there; that I know your message. I've been part of sending it for a long time. Nice to be part of receiving it. . . . Don't ever forget that a lot of the battles that we fight on Amtrak are ones you never see, they get fought before you ever see those numbers.

"But I want you to know that I hear you, I enjoy working with you, and there's somebody down there who's listening, and I'll achieve what I can achieve." ■

MIAMI METRORAIL OPENING

The south leg of Miami's new heavy rail transit system opened May 20. The 11-mile segment between downtown Miami and south-suburban Kendall was built primarily on an abandoned Florida East Coast Ry. right-of-way. The system opened with 40 cars (of 136 ordered). The 10-mile north leg to Hialeah should be completed late this year. (Also Dec. 1983 News.)

RILEY: "A RAIL PASSENGER RENAISSANCE"

"We are really in the midst of a renaissance in rail passenger transportation. . . . [Amtrak is] having a tremendous year in ridership right now. . . . In 1983, Amtrak recorded the highest revenues in its history . . . they were 19% ahead of the previous year. So far this year, we have bested the record of last year by another 21%. . . . Those are remarkable numbers. . . .

"Now this renaissance hasn't come by accident. Amtrak's earned it. It's earned it with a dramatic increase in the quality of its management and a successful commitment to modern equipment and to better service. . . .

"If there is a single thing—other than the people in this room—that can claim credit for the change in Amtrak in the last few years, they are two remarkable individuals . . . each of whom brought something different to Amtrak. . . .

"The first was Alan Boyd [ed.: Amtrak's president from June 1978 through June 1982] . . . [who] came to Amtrak when the morale there was about as low as it had ever been. . . . What Alan brought Amtrak was vision [and] commitment; he brought a sense that the corporation had a future, had a vision of its future, and a direction in which to move—and it wasn't simply a museum of the past.

"Graham Claytor . . . came with a reputation that's almost bigger-than-life in the railroad industry. . . . And that in effect brought Amtrak some instant credibility. He's brought more than that. Amtrak under Claytor has been marked by professionalism, credibility, solid management and cost-control at just about every level. . . .

"There are three kinds of legislators who have to deal with Amtrak: there are people . . . who are committed to the system . . . and then you've got other people who are just ideologically opposed to it—like [Sen.] Bill Armstrong [R-CO]—who just don't believe in it and aren't going to vote for it.

"But you start out with those people as 'givens,' and the battle is over all of the others: the people that don't have a compelling interest to vote for you or against you. . . . Those people, during my first 3-4 years in the Senate, were hard to win because we were hurt by a fundamental perception that Amtrak was not a professional operation, that it really was a 'porkbarrel on wheels,' and there was no bigger factor that we had to overcome in the 'Amtrak wars' of the late 70s and early 80s.

"What's changed in the last couple of years is that Amtrak now has a solid lease on life in Congress, and that's because that middle group that we used to fight over has become convinced that Amtrak is a real railroad, that it's run like a real business, that it is a professional operation. And they may agree or disagree with its decisions. There's nobody who represents a state that can possibly agree with any decision that affects their service [negatively]. . . . But there is a general consensus that Amtrak is a professional operation, and that is what Graham Claytor has brought Amtrak.

"And the repercussion of that is that we don't have to fight these pernicious battles every other year to see if this company is still going to be in existence. That hurt our public image so much that no amount of investment in marketing could turn it around, and it sapped the time of everybody who wanted to work with Amtrak, it sapped the time of Amtrak management, it was the most destructive process I have ever seen any ongoing entity subjected to. . . .

"Now everyone accepts Amtrak as permanent . . . the issues are different. It's 'how do we chart its future?', 'what roles should it play?', 'how big or how small should it be?' We still have some serious threats. . . . You never see those battles, but I fight them every day. . . . But the bottom line is that . . . because Amtrak today is credible, it can look to the future and not simply have to worry about reaffirming its existence."

—Federal Railroad Administrator John H. Riley, addressing the NARP Board Apr. 28