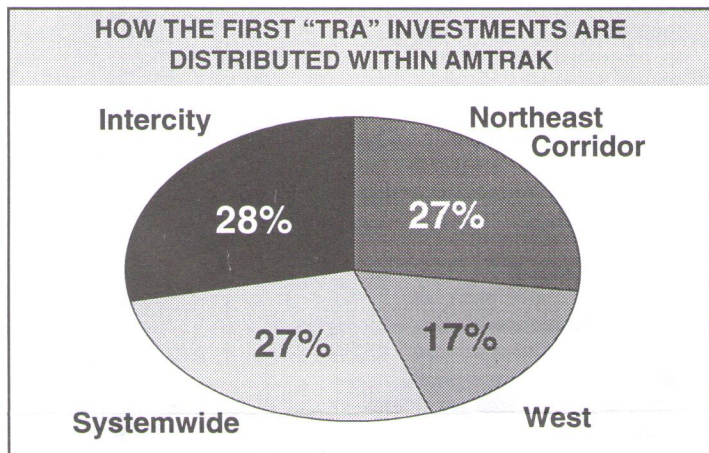


First "TRA" Amtrak Capital Funds Dedicated

Amtrak announced its first group of investment projects using the capital funding from the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 (TRA). A total of \$360 million in projects were announced, about one-sixth of the total Amtrak funds in the TRA.

The money is distributed fairly evenly across Amtrak business units (see chart). In its February 12 statement, Amtrak said, "The investment of these resources is predicated on strategic investment in high-rate-of-return projects that will yield long-term operating improvements and reduce the railroad's reliance on federal operating support. [It] is made up of projects that must be initiated swiftly for Amtrak to begin to see improvements to its bottom line."

By stressing the need for quick action, the statement likely sought to address possible Congressional concerns that the outgoing board not make too many decisions that should be left to the new, incoming board.



Here are examples of projects selected:

Projects bringing "high financial returns"—

- **Further High-Speed Improvements**, like parking, station and dispatching upgrades (Northeast Corridor).
- **Improvements to the Los Angeles-Las Vegas line** to accommodate daily Talgo service expected to begin next year "in partnership with Nevada hotel and tourism businesses" (West, \$9 million).
- **Establishing mail facilities** to allow mail revenue expansion "to support passenger service" (Systemwide).
- **Completing a new terminal** in Lorton, VA, "to improve product and service quality, reduce costs and improve on-time performance of *Auto Train*" (Intercity, \$8 million).

Projects expected to leverage state and local funds—

- **Replacing or rebuilding maintenance facilities** at Seattle, Oakland and Los Angeles (West/Intercity).

NEW SAN DIEGAN CAR ORDER ANNOUNCED



—trainweb.com

Amtrak West on February 18 announced an order for eight new *San Diegan* train-sets of five cars each. This occurred on a special train trip, where (above) Anaheim Councilmember Shirley McCracken (right) welcomes Amtrak West Government and Public Affairs Officer Eileen McNally and President Gil Mallory.

The \$100-million order is the largest investment ever by Amtrak in California. It went to GEC Alsthom, a French company involved in the Florida (FOX) high-speed project and supplier of propulsion systems for Amtrak's American Flyers. The cars will be built at the former Morrison-Knudsen plant in Hornell, NY, with at least 75% US-content (including materials and labor), creating 140 new jobs.

The new bi-level train-sets start service in 2000. Each will have a Custom Class car, a coach-cafe, two coaches, and a cab car (with coach and baggage sections), pulled by an F59 locomotive.

The cars will be financed, but Amtrak is avoiding interest costs during construction by temporarily using TRA funds. California has invested almost \$1 billion of its own money since 1990 alone on intercity passenger train service. *San Diegan* ridership is up 13% in the last three years, and will increase further with new, attractive equipment.

- **Renovating stations** at Seattle, Centralia (WA), Salem (OR) and Sacramento (West/Intercity).

[Note: the pie chart credits the above facilities and stations to Amtrak West, but Intercity trains also use them.]

"Basic infrastructure and tactical projects"—

- **Increasing the number of Superliner, Horizon and Metroliner cars** to be upgraded and modernized this year. These cars will get new decor and seats and will look like new. Metroliner cars will get laptop outlets and improved lighting. In addition, Intercity will restore 31 passenger cars to service (10 more than originally planned) over the next 13 months "to provide additional capacity on existing and future trains." (Intercity, Northeast)
- **Re-engineer reservations system** to reduce waiting times and provide access to more travel services (like

(continued on page 3)

Lawsuit Brings Changes For Travelers with Disabilities

Amtrak has taken several steps to be more "user-friendly" to passengers with mobility impairments, as a result of the recent settlement of a US District Court class-action lawsuit under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

- **Companion Fares:** Beginning sometime in June, the existing 15% rail discount for persons with disabilities will apply also to their travel companions.

- **Accessible Bedroom Charges:** The charge for these sleeping-car rooms will be lowered. Standard bedrooms now are cheaper than accessible bedrooms. However, for the next three years, the price of the latter will be 30% *below* the standard-bedroom price, then be allowed to rise to a level no higher than standard bedroom. Up to 14 days before departure, only passengers with mobility impairments will be able to reserve accessible rooms. After that, those rooms will be available to others only when the deluxe bedrooms and family rooms on the same train are sold out.

- **Self-Certification:** Upon boarding, Amtrak will require anyone paying the lower rate to sign a statement affirming that they have a mobility impairment requiring use of the room.

- **Amtrak will provide more advance information** about their services to passengers with disabilities.

- **Training:** Recognizing the need, a year *before* the settlement (which requires training), Amtrak, cooperating with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), got federal funds through Project Action of the National Easter Seal Society to create ADA training materials. This includes pilot training sessions for management and union employees at seven crew bases. People with disabilities and Amtrak staff did the training.

PVA told NARP that Amtrak did a great job developing the program and getting the people together for it. The training was an education for trainers *and* trainees, and was so well received that there are requests for more from within Amtrak and from other passenger railroads.

The lawsuit arose from a 1995 Los Angeles-New Orleans round trip made by a passenger with a disability and her husband. They got the higher-priced accessible bedroom going, but on the return had to take a smaller standard bedroom, sleeping with the door open because a wheelchair and respirator would not fit inside. Later, they learned that Amtrak had held the accessible rooms for a tour group some months before, when standard bedrooms were still available.

In a January 13 statement, Amtrak Vice President of Mar-

keting and Sales Rick Donnelly said, "We've believed all along that trains are the most accessible way to travel between cities in the United States, and we're always glad to be shown how to make trains more user friendly." Linda D. Kilb of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund of Berkeley, CA, which filed the suit, said, "We are pleased Amtrak saw this case as an opportunity to improve their services. The new reservation policies and low fares demonstrate Amtrak's commitment to welcome passengers with disabilities." ADA requires only equal treatment for passengers with disabilities. However, PVA was impressed with the extent to which Amtrak employees go beyond what the law and good customer service require, for example, giving personal assistance to individuals who are traveling alone even when they need the assistance of a traveling companion.

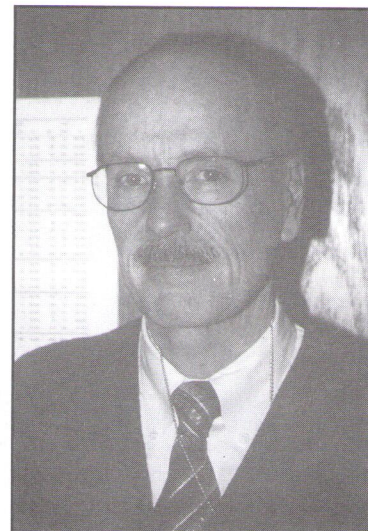
ADA does *not* require delaying a train if a passenger with impaired mobility gets to the station at the last minute, but a Red Cap may face an unhappy customer if the train isn't held.

PVA said Amtrak had a good training program before this pilot training, but it was given only to new hires. ■

LEE BULLOCK was appointed president of Amtrak Intercity in early December. He had been acting president since Mark Cane's departure in September.

Bullock's Amtrak career began in 1973, when he was an on-board service employee. He went on to a variety of positions, including at headquarters in Washington. He became operating superintendent in 1986 and helped in Amtrak's takeover of Boston-area MBTA commuter operations. In 1989, he went to Los Angeles as General Superintendent—Western Division. He helped set up Amtrak West and was its first vice president—customer service. In late 1995, he went to Chicago, taking the same position at Intercity.

Before joining Amtrak, Bullock was a Union Pacific track worker. He also worked in the food service industry for Marriott Corporation in Salt Lake City. He is a graduate of Brigham Young University, did graduate work at the University of Utah, and has completed the University of Virginia's Executive Development Program.



—Bob Johnston

NEW CHAIRMAN—Bob Franks (R-NJ) was appointed chairman of the Railroads Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on March 11. The post had been vacant since Susan Molinari's (R-NY) resignation last summer. Also, Jerry Moran (R-KS) was appointed to the subcommittee.

FUNDING UPDATE—Amtrak management initially planned a "normal" 1999 request, with operating and capital grants totaling \$705 million (Feb. News table showed \$711 million). However, the Amtrak board requested either the \$621 million in capital proposed by the Administration, or "adequate" (but unspecified) operating and capital grants. Either way, Amtrak seeks the same flexibility to use capital funds for maintenance of equipment and facilities as the transit industry enjoys.

TRAINS—MORE MOBILITY FOR SENIORS

"Ronald Greenspan, an attorney from Beechwood [OH], said he liked the potential benefits [of commuter rail] for senior citizens who might be unable or reluctant to drive a car.

"A car makes sense if you can drive. But as we all get older, we have to look at other ways to get around," Greenspan said."

—*"Early Hearing Shows Support for Commuter Rail,"* Cleveland Plain Dealer, February 5, reporting on area hearings on a proposed commuter rail system for northeastern Ohio

Most of "ARC" Now In Place

Nine members (of 11) of the Amtrak Reform Council (Dec. '97 *News*) have been named. Senate Majority Leader Lott (R-MS) named **Gilbert E. Carmichael** (Federal Railroad Administrator 1989-93); **Paul M. Weyrich** (on Amtrak board 1987-93, noted conservative champion of rail transit); and **Joseph Vranich**, who worked for NARP and Amtrak in the 1970's and later for Grumman Corporation. Vranich worked for the High Speed Rail Association (now High Speed Ground Transportation Association), 1991-95. His recent writings strongly attack Amtrak.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) named **Bruce Chapman** (president of the Discovery Institute, a conservative Seattle-based think-tank); **Chris Gleason** (member of Shuster "blue ribbon panel," Apr., July '97 *News*); and **Gov. Christine Todd Whitman** (R-NJ).

Senate Minority Leader Daschle (D-SD) named **Donald R. Sweitzer**, president of an Alexandria (VA) public relations firm and a former Democratic Party and rail labor official. House Minority Leader Gephardt (D-MO) named **S. Lee Kling**, chairman of the Missouri Transportation Commission, Amtrak board member 1979-81.

Secretary Slater serves ex-officio. The council will be complete when President Clinton names his two nominees.

The council—whose members do not require Senate confirmation—should not be confused with the soon-to-be-appointed-and-confirmed (we hope!) new Amtrak board. The proposed definition of capital (Feb. *News*) may render irrelevant the council's mandate to report anytime after December 2, 1999, if it finds that Amtrak would require operating grants after 2002. ■

TRA Investments

(from page 1)

car rentals), "provide improved workplace conditions, better market data, reduced costs." (Systemwide)

- **Improve the 96-mile, Amtrak-owned portion of the 279-mile Chicago-Detroit line**, including upgrading a swing bridge at Michigan City to reduce mechanical delays, new cross-ties in Indiana, and new communications facilities in Niles and Michigan City to avoid replacing 90 miles of outdated, buried copper signal cable, as part of the positive train separation program (Sept. '96 *News*). (Intercity, \$3.3 million)
- **Replace key components** on Amtrak's drawbridge over the South Branch of the Chicago River. The bridge is many Amtrak trains and some Metra commuter and freight trains. (Intercity, \$717,000)
- **Move Lancaster (PA) Communications and Signals repair shop** out of the station, freeing space for passenger, intermodal, commercial use (Northeast, \$2.5 million).
- **Expand parking at Providence** to help handle higher Amtrak and MBTA commuter ridership (Northeast).

The approximately \$2.2 billion in TRA money is only part of what will be needed to secure Amtrak's future. Amtrak says it needs over \$4 billion in federal capital grants over the next five years (including the TRA money) and hopes to get the balance through the appropriations process. ■

UK PRIVATIZATION—BAD SERVICE, HIGH COSTS

"Train passengers have experienced worse services since privatisation, a report by the Office of Passenger Rail Franchising has shown. Reliability and punctuality have both declined, says the report being published [January 15]..."

"Overall, the study found performance improved while the industry was being privatised. A few operators have continued to improve reliability. But after April 1997, when the last franchise was sold, it has deteriorated markedly across the industry..."

"Virgin's West Coast service has the worst record for the entire rail network...The company has recently paid around £250,000 [\$412,000] in compensation for bad service to passengers..."

"The Chairman of the British Railways Board, John Welsby [said], 'For the privatised railway, the honeymoon is very close to being over'...He said privatisation had not resulted in a drop in Government cash being injected into the industry..."

—BBC News bulletin, January 14

"Rail companies across Britain have announced that they are increasing their fares next week, prompting calls for government action to protect passengers...Some ticket prices are to go up by as much as 10%. Many others are going up by twice the rate of inflation, this is despite agreements which are intended to peg them to the cost of living."

"The agreements—drawn up in the wake of rail privatisation 18 months ago—allowed for a performance element that would allow companies achieving high quality service to put up fares by more than inflation. However, this cannot be claimed by companies such as Connex South Central which is hiking its London to Croydon fares by 10%—although it has a record of poor reliability and service cuts..."

—BBC News bulletin, January 3

"[Watchdog group] Central Rail Users' Consultative Committee said the nationwide increase [in passenger rail complaints] of 96% [in July-September 1997] over the same period last year was evidence of just how wide the gulf was becoming between passengers' expectations and operators' performances. Information at stations and from national telephone inquiry bureaux topped the list of complaints, followed by reliability, overcrowding, on-train cleanliness, suitability of service, and punctuality..."

—BBC News bulletin, December 8

Virgin Group PLC—worried that "continued consumer gripes about [its rail services] could tarnish" the "chic, quality image" of the entire Virgin empire—will buy new trains worth \$3.05 billion (*Wall Street Journal*, March 4). Such private investment is possible because of the billions Britain has invested in track. (Federal investment in Northeast Corridor track likewise enabled Amtrak to finance its new train-sets.)

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Pacific Northwest—The Federal Railroad Administration has approved use of Talgo-train tilt capability, allowing Amtrak West to increase train service and speeds through curves, May 17. Corridor trains south of Seattle will be all-Talgo, while the Vancouver train's Talgo will be replaced by Superliners (until more Talgos are delivered later this year). Seattle-Portland trips will be cut by 20-25 minutes. Seattle-Portland round-trips will grow from three to four (counting the *Coast Starlight*).

Wisconsin—Amtrak Intercity, the State, and Canadian Pacific have agreed to extend two *Hiawatha* Chicago-Milwaukee round-trips to Wauwatosa, Brookfield, Pewaukee, Oconomowoc and Watertown April 13-July 11, during an I-94 repaving project. They are trains 330, 332, 337, 339 (early morning eastbound, evening westbound). Also, two other Milwaukee-Watertown round trips will run to position equipment.

Stations—The Catlettsburg, KY, stop for Amtrak's *Cardinal* shifted to downtown Ashland March 11, to the former C&O freight house (now an intermodal station with Greyhound and local buses). Amtrak vacated the old passenger station (now a bank) in 1975.

NEW AMTRAK VIDEO GAME PROMOTION

Amtrak and Broderbund Software have developed a CD-ROM game called "Where in America is Carmen Sandiego," based on the children's TV show. The interactive educational game includes an animated Amtrak opening sequence, Amtrak employee characters, and information on Amtrak routes and services. An animated Amtrak train takes players across the US in search of clues to solve a mystery. It costs \$9.95 and is available only by mail; order blanks can be found in Amtrak stations and on web site <www.amtrak.com>.

WHO RIDES AMTRAK?—WHOOPI GOLDBERG!

An appearance on NBC-TV's *Tonight Show* by entertainer Whoopi Goldberg in October, 1997, showed she uses and likes Amtrak's long-distance trains. Below, "J" is program host Jay Leno and "W" is Goldberg:

J: [after an earlier crude joke about an Amtrak train plunging off a bridge] ... You just came out from New York, right?

W: Yes—by Amtrak, Jay [very pointedly].

J: I still can't believe you came [to Los Angeles] by train.

W: I know that you do not enjoy the train.

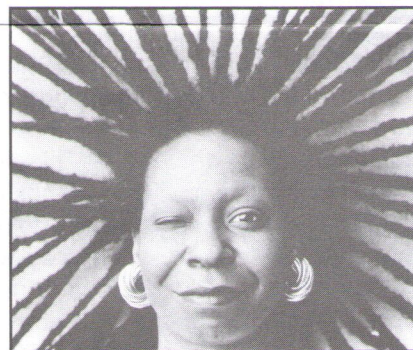
J: No, the train, I mean, to me when you get here in four hours, why take eight days and fall off a track?...[making steam noises] Pshht—Hooperville!—pshht—Zooperville!—pshht—Pineville!—pshht...

W: Now see, honey—Pineville, Zooperville, Hopieville—those are all the "villes" that watch YOU!...Those are my people, honey!...You know, the Amtrak folks, they take a lot of hits from you...They say, "What's wrong with Jay? Why don't Jay like us?"

I said, "Because Jay doesn't understand. See, Jay has that 'fly' car. Jay likes to drive" [does steering wheel turns, smiles].

J: That's right... This is America—you drive!

W: You drive AND you take the train...!



—Rob Weisbach Books

ISTEA—The Senate passed S 1173, ISTEA renewal, March 12. It has flexibility for states to use some federal transportation funds on intercity passenger rail (House bill HR 2400 does not). Adopted amendments include: Nickles (R-OK) to let states with no Amtrak service use federal transit funds to get such service, and Moseley-Braun (D-IL) increasing annual high-speed corridor grade-crossing funding from \$5 million to \$20 million. S 1173 raises road spending \$26 billion over six years (budget offsets unclear), transit by \$5 billion (from scarce general funds).



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