

## Senators Tout High Speed Rail Investment Act

Senators Joseph R. Biden Jr. (D-DE) and Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) held a news conference in the Capitol to announce that 51 senators have agreed to co-sponsor a new \$12 billion, 10-year High Speed Rail Investment Act (HSRIA).

The 51 compares with 22 original co-sponsors when the \$10 billion S.1900 was introduced in late 1999. Moreover, Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS) and Democratic Leader Tom Daschle (SD) are among the 51, and 12 senators flanked

Biden and Hutchison at the January 31 news conference.

The \$2 billion increase, plus retention of the \$3 billion-per-corridor cap, is intended to give all corridors a reasonable shot at meaningful improvements. Put another way, the increase reduces the *share* of funds that could go to individual corridors, like the Northeast or California, without reducing the dollar *amounts* those places could get.

The 20% state match, and contracts with freight railroads, must be in place before bonds can be sold for a particular project. Bondholders would get federal tax credits rather than interest payments. One billion dollars would go to lines other than the Northeast Corridor and DOT-designated high-speed rail corridors (see page 2).

HSRIA makes those designations become much more meaningful. HSRIA—whose introduction was expected the week of February 5—is the best chance for the federal government to provide an incentive for state investment (as highways and transit enjoy) and for serious development of inter-city passenger rail nationwide.

Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) called it “a tremendous day. I think we’re within reach, we’re going to achieve a healthy rail passenger system. If [Amtrak] can do the capital improvements, they’ll attract tremendous ridership.”

North Little Rock Mayor Patrick Henry Hays also was on hand, to affirm support of the U.S. Conference of Mayors (see

*(continued on page 4)*

### RETURN TO LOUISVILLE THIS YEAR?



—David Johnson

Louisville, KY, Mayor Dave Armstrong told the *Courier-Journal* January 26 that Amtrak’s *Kentucky Cardinal* could be extended from Jeffersonville, IN, across the Ohio River into downtown Louisville by October 2001. Armstrong hoped to have revised engineering plans drawn up by the city approved by Amtrak soon.

The city’s chosen station site is the historic Union Station (above), now mostly occupied by the Transit Authority of River City (TARC). TARC has indicated it could relocate some bus activities behind the station to accommodate the rebuilding of a short rail spur needed for Amtrak to reach the station. The station, built in 1891, was last used by Amtrak in 1976, when Amtrak moved its *Floridian* to the Auto Train station south of the city. *Floridian* service ended in 1979; *Kentucky Cardinal* service from Chicago to Jeffersonville began in December 1999.

**“We owe it to the country...because our transportation system is already stretched to the breaking point...High speed rail has to be part of our long-term environmental policy, part of urban planning, part of our nation’s future.”**

—Sen. Joseph Biden (D-DE), opening January 31 news conference on HSRIA

**“We want to make Amtrak a truly national rail system. I think George Warrington is really committed to that, and I think he can do that if we give him the tools...Some of my colleagues think this is another subsidy for Amtrak. There isn’t a transportation system that isn’t subsidized...Rail is the least subsidized to the point of ridiculousness...Air traffic congestion is at an all-time high...It will get worse over the next 10 years...Highway expansion is very expensive and sometimes environmentally untenable. We’ve got to have an intermodal transportation system that includes rail.”**

—Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), at news conference

## More Corridor Designations

The two major federal surface transportation acts of the last decade—ISTEA in 1991 and TEA-21 in 1998—authorized (and in some cases designated) a total of 11 high-speed rail corridors. In some cases, the acts authorized the Secretary of Transportation to make the actual designations.

Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater made some additional designations on October 11. Two new corridors were designated, bringing the number of designations to 10:

- Northern New England (Boston-Portland, Boston-Vermont-Montreal).
- South Central (San Antonio-Dallas/Fort Worth-Tulsa/Little Rock).

Six extensions to earlier corridors were designated:

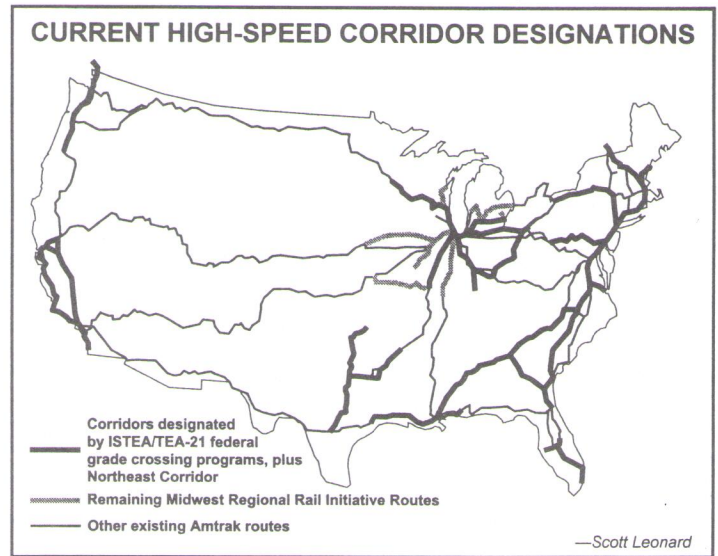
- Midwest (Chicago-Toledo-Cleveland).
- Midwest (Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati).
- Midwest (Indianapolis-Louisville).
- Southeast (Macon-Jesup link between Atlanta-Macon and Savannah/Jacksonville).

- Gulf Coast (Birmingham-Atlanta).
- Keystone (Harrisburg-Pittsburgh).

(It appears that Slater agreed with comments which NARP submitted urging extensions as a way to maximize the number of cities that the potential 11 corridors could serve.)

Slater clarified that the 1992 designation of a California corridor is not limited to a specific (San Joaquin Valley) route, but could include the coast route and links to Sacramento.

Designations generally refer to regions rather than to specific rail lines; in some cases, route location and engineering



economy studies—including review of all realistic alternatives—will be needed before final alignments are chosen.

Under ISTEA and TEA-21, such corridors were to have high-speed potential, with reasonable expectation of running speeds of at least 90 mph in the reasonable future. Corridors that were designated were eligible for federal funding to be used for improving or eliminating highway grade crossings (Sec. 1010 under ISTEA). In recent years, a miserly \$5 million a year under this provision has been authorized for the entire United States. However, the High Speed Rail Investment Act would provide more relevance to these designations (see lead story). ■

## Mayors' Rail Summit: Pro-rail Poll Results; Lott's Pro-rail Talk

Each year, the U.S. Conference of Mayors begins its annual meeting with a day-long program devoted to a single, important topic. This year, the Mayors' Summit, held at Washington Union Station, was "A National Rail Policy for the 21st Century." Mayor Marc H. Morial of New Orleans, Vice-President of the Conference, picked the topic. Fortuitously, the organization had its best attendance ever (over 300).

Mayor Morial opened the summit this way at 9:30 am: "Our purpose today is not just to have a conference, but to start a movement." Noting major federal investments in highways and aviation, Morial continued, "We must admit as we gather...that there is one thing we didn't invest in—rail. To keep pace with other nations, [we must]. The mayors have come together to launch a movement to change that."

Around 1:15 pm, the summit concluded as the mayors took a special Acela Express Washington-Baltimore round-trip.

Early on the agenda, Boise Mayor Brent Coles, the organization's president, introduced Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-MS), thanking Lott for his support of high speed rail. Coles, a Republican, said, "Whether you're Republican or Democrat, there is energy in this issue...I've given talks all over the nation, and whenever I talk about a national rail policy, I'm greeted with applause, with glee."

Lott then reiterated his support for the High Speed Rail Investment Act. "I think we need a national rail passenger system [applause]. Will it be cheap? No, but we can do this. The High Speed Rail Investment Act is part of making it work. It is

not fair to Amtrak to say 'make it work' and not give them the help they need." (Significantly, Lott made similar, pro-rail comments before the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, January 24.)

Lott agreed with Mayor Matthew Dean of Campbell, CA, who expressed frustration that highways are not profitable but rails are expected to be. Said Lott, "I think you're right. But we should...be fiscally responsible. [Rail] is just like our water and sewer systems—important for the economy and for quality of life."

The Mayors released a national survey, *Traffic Congestion and Rail Investment*. The summary notes that "a majority of those surveyed [in ten metropolitan areas] favor the idea of building commuter and light rail to ease the burden of commuting, and high-speed rail to allow them to travel more efficiently around the region and the entire country" (available at [www.usmayors.org/69thwintermeeting/railpoll.htm](http://www.usmayors.org/69thwintermeeting/railpoll.htm)).

The summit viewed a video that highlighted *all* forms of passenger trains, and included this remarkably precise statement about rail by one mayor: "We're not solving congestion, we're providing a choice over congestion."

Ken Livingstone, London's first elected mayor, told his U.S. colleagues: "I am planning a congestion charge to drive into central London starting in 2003; revenues will go to transportation. If I am so lucky as to get reelected after doing this, I predict many of you will do the same thing." He also lamented big, post-privatization track maintenance cuts on Britain's railways, noting this was fatal for some passengers. ■

## November 7 Ballot Initiatives

Several jurisdictions had rail-related ballot initiatives in the November 7, 2000, general election. A list of some follows. In general, initiatives fared better in places that already have good rail transit service (like California's Bay Area and Salt Lake City), and worse in areas without it (like Austin and Kansas City). As NARP Member Paul M. Weyrich, the prominent, conservative passenger rail advocate notes, it is easier for opponents of rail to mislead a public that has no experience with rail.

**California (Santa Clara County)**—Measure A providing a 30-year, half-cent sales tax for transit was approved on a 70-30 margin. Raises \$6 billion in revenues going toward:

- Extending BART from Fremont to San Jose,
- Building two additional light-rail lines,
- Electrifying the Caltrain commuter line.

**California (Alameda County)**—Measure B (approved on an 81-19 margin) provides a half-cent sales tax generating \$1.4 billion for:

- Highways,
- Bicycle/pedestrian needs,
- Transit (including county share of San Jose BART project).

**Florida (statewide)**—A constitutional amendment requiring the state to build a high-speed rail system was approved on a 53-47 margin. This citizens initiative was financed by C.C. "Doc" Dockery of Lakeland. If it survives expected legal challenges, the amendment would require:

- A system linking the five largest urban areas,
- Start of construction by November, 2003,
- Service capable of at least 120 mph,
- Service can be high-speed rail, maglev, or monorail.

Already, opponents are trying to persuade the public that it did not mean what it said, and that the plan should depend exclusively on private investors. Jim Sebesta (R-St. Petersburg), who chairs the state's Senate Transportation Committee, says that if investors don't go into action, the legislature will go back to the public next year and tell them that a rail network will require higher taxes. It is unrealistic to the point of absurdity to expect private investors to start from scratch in competing with government-owned and government-maintained highway and aviation infrastructure.

However, another committee member, John Laurent (R-Bartow), agrees with Dockery that the state should create an independent authority that could issue bonds. "He thinks the state should not refuse to spend money on the project. 'I don't think you're showing good faith,' Laurent said, adding that he thinks voters passed the high-speed train amendment knowing it would 'cost somebody something'" (Associated Press, January 24).

**Missouri (Kansas City)**—Question 1 was rejected on a 61-39 margin. It would have provided a 0.5-cent sales tax for 20 years for the local funding match for a cross-shaped, two-line light-rail system. However, planning for another proposal backed by city government and civic leaders is proceeding.

**New Jersey (statewide)**—Public Question 1 was approved, amending the state constitution to put about \$400 million of petroleum and auto sales taxes into the transportation trust fund over the next four years, to benefit highways and transit.

**New York (statewide)**—An initiative to issue \$3.8 billion in

transportation bonds was defeated on a 53-47 margin. Inter-city passenger rail would have gotten just over 1% (about \$40 million), but it would have been the first state bond issue in nearly 20 years with any intercity passenger rail money.

**Texas (Austin area)**—Voters rejected by a 50.4-49.6 margin (just 1,851 votes) a plan by Capital Metro for a \$919-million light-rail system. Metro can reformulate the plan and return to voters in a year, but there are concerns that highway interests will see the defeat as an opportunity to divert some existing sales tax revenues from transit to roads.

**Utah (Davis, Salt Lake and Weber counties)**—An additional quarter-cent-per-dollar sales tax for transit expansion was approved on a 55-45 margin. The revenues will support plans that include:

- Ogden-Salt Lake City commuter rail,
- Light-rail extensions south to Draper; west to the airport,
- More service on existing rail and bus lines.

**Washington (statewide)**—Initiative 745 to divert 90% of the sales tax revenue now dedicated to local transit systems to highways was defeated on a 58-42 margin. This "roads only" initiative could have crippled local transit agencies and the Pacific Northwest High Speed Rail Corridor.

**Washington (King County)**—Proposition 1 to raise sales taxes was approved by a 53-47 margin. This was necessary to make up for lost transit revenues after last year's Initiative 695 reduced the motor vehicle excise tax that provided much transit and rail funding. Though I-695 was ruled unconstitutional earlier this fall, the state legislature voted to keep I-695's \$30 registration fee cap.

Finally, Arizona voters soundly rejected anti-desert-sprawl Proposition 202, which would have required cities over 2,500 to adopt their own growth management plans limiting development to "infill" areas. ■

### CELL PHONES A GROWING CONCERN



—Ross B. Capon

Amtrak's first "quiet car" was the first car on NortheastDirect train 151 (leaving Philadelphia weekdays 6:05 am for Washington). On one trip, your editor saw someone begin talking; his neighbor explained the policy and he quickly left the car. Quiet cars are well established in Switzerland. Responding to requests from passengers tired of hearing cell-phone conversations, Amtrak on February 1 began quiet cars on the 9:00 am Metroliners from both New York and Washington; more trains may get them in March.

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Eagle Confusion To End**—Union Pacific and Amtrak agreed to restore *Texas Eagle* service in both directions to Longview and Marshall, TX, in early March. A disruptive reroute caused the westbound *Eagle* to bypass these cities when the train went daily last May.

**Eagle Reduction**—The fourth weekly San Antonio-Tucson-Los Angeles frequency will end April 4 (last departures March 28 from Los Angeles and Chicago; March 30 west from San Antonio). This will end Wednesday evening departures from Los Angeles and Friday morning departures west from San Antonio (Wednesdays from Chicago). The service being dropped is the one Chicago-Texas-Los Angeles *Texas Eagle* run that does not combine with the *Sunset Limited*.

Daily Chicago-San Antonio *Eagle* service will continue, carrying Chicago-Tucson-Los Angeles cars on days the tri-weekly *Sunset Limited* runs.

The "fourth" *Eagle* began in February 1998 when the *Eagle* and *Sunset* were tri-weekly trains, and provided the most service west of San Antonio since Southern Pacific cut the *Sunset Limited* to tri-weekly in 1970.

**Amtrak/Michigan Contract**—Continued operation of the Chicago-Grand Rapids *Pere Marquette* and Chicago-East Lansing-Toronto *International*—at least through September 30—was assured when the Michigan State Transportation Commission on January 17 approved a

\$5.7-million operating contract with Amtrak. The contract includes an agreement for the DOT and Amtrak to meet quarterly with freight railroads with the aim of improving on-time performance.

**Midwest service resumes with fare incentive**—Crippled by record low average temperatures in much of the Midwest in December, Amtrak canceled two of three Chicago-Detroit trains and the Chicago-Janesville train for most of January. NARP welcomes comments from knowledgeable individuals about how Amtrak might better have met the weather challenge. Trains were restored during the week ending February 2, except the afternoon Detroit-Pontiac round-trip. Michigan trains will offer a two-for-one fare for purchase and use February 1-March 10.

**To the slopes**—Amtrak overhauled its marketing program for skiers this year, with more advertising in ski magazines and web sites, a direct mail campaign, new posters and brochures, a separate toll-free number (866-SKI-AMTRAK), and a ski-oriented section of the Amtrak web site <[www.amtrak.com/promotions/ski](http://www.amtrak.com/promotions/ski)>.

There is a 20% discount to/from Amtrak ski destinations through April 30 (except around President's Day and Easter). Shuttle and car rental connections to some areas are being improved. Amtrak hopes this will make some off-peak seats more attractive, and plans to renew the program next year.

## New HSRIA

(from page 1)

page 2) for the bill.

Max Cleland (D-GA) said, "I'm here to liberate Amtrak from the Northeast Corridor," and noted that Atlanta Hartsfield is "the busiest airport in the world" and that Atlanta's highway congestion is the nation's worst.

Hillary Clinton (D-NY) called the bill "one of the most significant pieces of legislation that will come before the 107th Congress...I look forward to its early passage."

Also present were Senators Carper (D-DE), Chafee (R-RI), Corzine (D-NJ), Kennedy and Kerry (D-MA), Mikulski (D-MD), Schumer (D-NY), and former Sen. Lautenberg (D-NJ).

Some senators criticized Amtrak's operational self-sufficiency target, or said lack of capital abrogated the deal. ■

**ACELA EXPRESS SPEEDS:** In tests, Acela Express reached 169.2 mph (not its top speed) near Princeton Jct., NJ; the 168 we cited (Dec. '00) was the top speed reached on the new electrification (in Rhode Island).



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