

VICTORY!

Amtrak and State Agree to Preserve *Pennsylvanian*

Amtrak and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania have agreed on funding for the New York-Pittsburgh *Pennsylvanian*. This enables service to continue in Fiscal 2014. The state needed to begin sharing the train's costs under a 2008 federal law.

It appears existing *Keystone Service* also will continue.

Gov. Tom Corbett (R): "I applaud Amtrak for its willingness to work with my administration on a funding plan that ...maintains this passenger rail service that provides important connections for many towns in western Pennsylvania."

House Transportation & Infrastructure Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA) said, "I am pleased that Amtrak and the Commonwealth came together to preserve Amtrak's *Pennsylvanian* service...We reformed federal law in 2008 to ensure States had more authority...while mak-



Mark Spada, Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail

A crowd rallies to save the *Pennsylvanian* at Lewistown on March 21.

ing Amtrak more accountable. ..."

This culminates months of hard work by NARP members in Pennsylvania and by Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail, led by NARP Council Member Michael Alexander of Pittsburgh.

Because so many passengers transfer between the *Pennsylvanian* and the *Capitol Limited* at Pittsburgh, continued viability of both trains depends on continued operation of Amtrak's national network. ■

PTC Proceeds Slowly; NARP Files Comments

"Since I joined the board in 2004, the NTSB has investigated 22 other train accidents [besides the June, 2012, Oklahoma head-on freight collision that killed three crew members and injured one] that took 57 lives, injured more than 1,000, caused millions of dollars in damages, and that all could have been prevented or mitigated by positive train control [PTC]."

"PTC is not the next new thing...Yet...we're still hearing that 'PTC can't be done, that it's too costly and that it's too difficult, [that] it needs more time.'"

- National Transportation Safety Board Chairman Deborah Hersman, in opening statement at NTSB's Feb. 27 forum, "Positive Train Control: Is it on Track?"

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) put positive train control on its first most-wanted list in

1990, removed it from that list after enactment of the 2008 safety law mandating PTC installation over much of the nation's rail network by Dec. 31, 2015, and put PTC back on the list in 2012.

PTC "provides a safety redundancy by slowing or stopping a train that is not...operated in accordance with signal systems and operating rules" (NTSB).

The NTSB's all-day forum and a Mar. 6 PTC session at the 6th Annual Transportation & Infrastructure Convention, both events in Washington, DC, showed where things stand—and that much will remain to be done after 2015.

Amtrak is on track to meet the deadline, and merits praise for "interoperability" work with freight and commuter railroads using the Northeast Corridor.

BNSF Railway is the major railroad

Continued on page 5

Amtrak Seeks More Capital & Smaller Operating Grant for FY 2014

Amtrak seeks a federal grant of \$2.06 billion for capital and debt service, and \$373 million for operations in Fiscal 2014, which begins Oct. 1, 2013.

Key capital plan items include:

- \$356 million — new rolling stock;
- Installation of on-board WiFi on long-distance trains and some other trains that do not yet have it;
- \$75 million — improving station accessibility for those with disabilities;
- \$167 million — to advance the Gateway project to boost reliability and capacity between New York City and Newark, NJ;
- Northeast Corridor infrastructure projects; and
- \$212 million — debt service (down from \$271 million in FY 2012).

The reduced operations request re-

Continued on page 3

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- NARP backs Las Vegas-Southern California High Speed Rail Project 2
- All Aboard Florida seeks fed. loan 2
- Coscia elected chair of Amtrak Board 3
- Amtrak's 2013 funding, '14 prospects 3
- Boardman touts 88% cost recovery; warns of NEC deterioration 4
- Texas billboard campaign resumes 4
- Texas-Oklahoma rail study begins 4
- *Southwest Chief* update: NM legislature; NARP letter to Kansas 5
- New Niagara Falls station 6
- Bookings report with some great stats and a terrible recommendation 6

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NARP Backs Las Vegas-Southern CA HSR

Sen. Sessions, Rep. Ryan Criticize XpressWest; NARP Responds, Joining Allies in Urging US DOT to Approve a Loan to the Project

“This project is ready to go today, having already gained environmental clearance and secured the needed rights-of-way. Private investors have already assembled \$1.5 billion in funds to support the project. ... We believe this project has merits worthy of a RRIF loan.”

--March 20 letter to Secretary LaHood from NARP and allies

In a joint letter from NARP, Californians for High Speed Rail, Midwest High Speed Rail Association, and U.S. High Speed Rail Association, the organizations pushed back against criticism of plans by XpressWest (formerly DesertXpress) to use a federal loan to support construction of high speed rail between Victorville, CA, and Las Vegas.

Earlier, Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) and Rep. Paul Ryan (R-WI) wrote to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood asking him to reject the company's \$5.5 billion Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan application.

Supporters have offered two rebuttals to criticism of Victorville as a terminal.

- I-15 is congested; big back-ups happen in the middle of the desert, so it is not true that people “have it made” once they have driven from the Los Angeles Basin to Victorville.

- A highway linking Victorville with Palmdale (already served by Metrolink

Amtrak will join communities across the country to celebrate this year's National Train Day on Saturday, May 11. More than 200 events are expected, including larger events in Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia.

This year's events will celebrate the importance of trains as a vital transportation solution and an engine of economic development. Amtrak is placing additional emphasis on hosting more events across the country to celebrate this year's theme, “Trains Matter.”

Expect NARP to have a significant presence at most of these grassroots celebrations, offering our own special giveaways to people who sign up for

trains) is being designed to accommodate a high-speed rail alignment, potentially giving the Las Vegas trains a connection to California High Speed Rail and a single-seat, Los Angeles-Las Vegas ride.

RRIF is an underutilized program of loans to incentivize private-sector investments in building and upgrading rail lines.

Our March 20 letter urged the Secretary to consider these factors when reviewing XpressWest's loan application:

- Los Angeles-Las Vegas is the second busiest intercity travel market in the US, behind only Los Angeles-San Diego.

- XpressWest would be a convenient, energy-efficient alternative to congested and dangerous Interstate 15, which could divert more than two million annual automobile trips and save an estimated 440,000 barrels of oil a year.

- XpressWest would help speed up and enhance the CAHSR project, with which it would seamlessly integrate.

- It would expand the market for American HSR manufacturing and match the increasingly evident desire of Americans for good train travel.

“With leadership from the private sector, we can be confident the project will be delivered quickly and efficiently, and managed with strong business practices,” the four organizations wrote. “Because the nation's high-speed rail

National Train Day 2013

our email list.

More event information is at www.nationaltrainday.com. You also can

All Aboard Florida Seeks Federal Loan

All Aboard Florida (AAF) plans to start up a private-sector, Miami-Orlando passenger train service. Trains would take three hours and travel at speeds up to 125 mph.

AAF is a division of Florida East Coast Industries (FECI). AAF trains would use FECI tracks between downtown Miami and Cocoa Beach and then a new line to Orlando International Airport, primarily along State Highway

NARP News

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This has news through April 4.

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network will be created through public-private partnership, this project offers the ideal model starter project to help move the nation's new rail program forward.”

NARP's March 13 release notes that XpressWest has strong local government support, including Los Angeles & San Bernardino counties and five cities, plus California High-Speed Rail Authority and Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro). ■

contact NARP if you are interested in helping out at an event, whether or not a NARP table is planned there. ■

Coscia Elected Chair of Amtrak Board

The Amtrak Board elected as its next chairman Anthony R. Coscia, former Chairman of the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey Board of Commissioners.



Courtesy of Amtrak

Coscia

He joined the Amtrak board in 2010. Macomb, IL Mayor Thomas Carper had been chairman since 2008, but his Board term expired March 31.

Also on March 18, the Board elected Jeffrey Moreland as Vice Chairman. He joined the Board three years ago. He has been a Burlington Northern Santa Fe executive and served at the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Coscia said, "As chairman, I am committed to increasing ridership, strengthening Amtrak's operational performance and improving its financial position. ...I have come to recognize that passenger rail is vital to America's economic growth and to addressing our nation's growing need for mobility and connectivity."

Coscia said his priorities include improving rail corridors linking the nation's urban centers, connecting parts of the country underserved by other travel modes, and investing in infrastructure to handle more trains and carry more passengers at higher speeds. ■

Federal Funding This Year and Next

For FY 2013, Amtrak gets \$1.347 billion, down from \$1.418 billion in 2012. Amtrak may get an added \$30 million to cover part of the \$50 million operations hit from the Sandy superstorm.

Overall, much of transportation gets FY 2012 levels for the remainder of FY 2013 (which ends Sept. 30). The 5% across-the-board cuts (sequestration) that took effect March 1 (Oct-Nov 2012 *News*) did not affect "contract authority" spending, so most highway programs and some transit and aviation programs were spared.

The House's original continuing resolution would have funded transportation at lower levels, but the House accepted the Senate-passed bill on a 318-109 vote.

FY 2014: The House on March 21

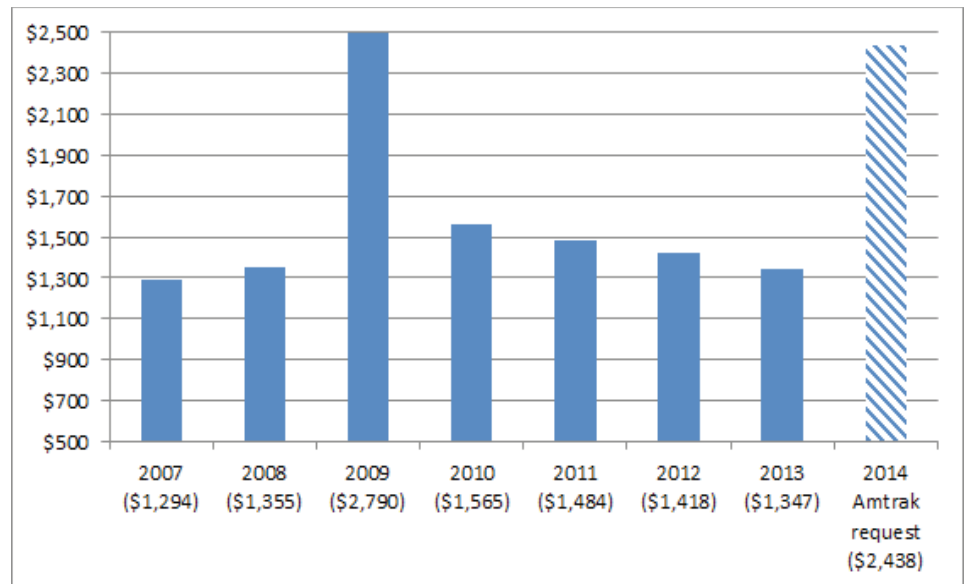
passed its budget resolution, sponsored by Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan (R-WI), on a 221-207 vote. The budget "supports removing Amtrak's subsidies that have been insulating Amtrak from making the needed structural reforms to start producing returns."

Also, "high-speed and other intercity rail projects should be pursued only if they can be established as self-supporting commercial services...The budget eliminates these projects." The same standard is not applied to highways.

The Senate passed its resolution 50-49 on March 23. Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA) now chairs the Budget Committee. Her budget resolution continues current funding levels and adds money for certain infrastructure repairs and an infrastructure bank. ■

Amtrak's Federal Grants Since 2007

By fiscal year (Oct. 1-Sept. 30); values are in millions of dollars



Note: Graph does not include capital grants to states (\$8 billion in 2009 Recovery Act; \$2.5 billion in the 2010 appropriations law). It does include Amtrak's \$1.3 billion in Recovery Act funds, which means the 2009 bar should be a bit taller!

2014 Amtrak Request

from page 1

flects the expected \$85 million increase in state payments "if current service levels are maintained." Federal law required that increase starting in Fiscal 2014 (Feb. *News*).

Amtrak CEO Joseph Boardman said in a company press release, "If we truly want to realize our vision of what rail can offer America, in terms of real mo-

bility improvements and rational modal choices, policy decisions must be made and funding provided to match them.

"These are big decisions, and will require bold thinking, but they will deliver value for the money."

Also from the release: "[Boardman] stressed that since the federal government established Amtrak as the foun-

dation of a national intercity passenger rail system, the modernizing and maintaining of that system is a significant federal responsibility, including the operation of long-distance routes." ■

Amtrak's FY 2014 Grant Request and Legislative Annual Report letter to Congress (12-page letter attached to 2-page news release) is at www.amtrak.com

T&I Railroads Subcommittee's Railroad Hearing

Boardman touts 88% cost recovery ratio; cites old rolling stock, deteriorating NEC tracks

Amtrak covered 88% of its fiscal 2012 operating costs through ticket sales and other revenue (including payments from states for state-supported trains), with the federal government paying for just 12% of its operating needs, President & CEO Joseph Boardman told the House Transportation & Infrastructure Railroads Subcommittee at its March 5 hearing, "Freight and Passenger Rail in America's Transportation System." The hearing was chaired by Rep. Jeff Denham (R-CA), new subcommittee chairman.

Much of the news Boardman delivered was not rosy, however. "Today the fleet is the oldest we've ever had," he declared, adding "we're beginning to eat our assets" in the Northeast Corridor (NEC), meaning that track conditions have slowly deteriorated since funding from the 2009 Recovery Act was fully spent. "Slow orders" on the NEC are more frequent and last longer, reducing the line's capacity, hurting performance and reliability as well as ride quality.

Boardman made clear the difference between operating and capital dollars, saying that when you consider the NEC's infrastructure costs, "there are no profits," although NEC trains more than cover their operating costs.

Texas By Train Billboard Campaign Resumes

Billboards proclaiming "You could have been on a train" have reappeared on freeway approaches to Austin area this spring, again timed to coincide with the state legislature's session.

The billboards are jointly financed by NARP, Texas Rail Advocates, the Texas Assoc. of Railroad Passengers, and the *Texas Eagle* Marketing and Performance Organization (TEMPO).

The slogan refers to the fact that Texas's metro areas lack intercity passenger train service, save for one train a day or less.

Despite a broadly-supported 2006 constitutional amendment that would have improved rail corridors and could have resulted in planning for passenger rail

Boardman echoed some of NARP's points about the national train network, calling long-distance trains the "backbone" of rural connectivity, particularly as "rural communities [are] being abandoned" by airlines and intercity bus companies. He showed the subcommittee a map that would result from discontinuing the six trains with the biggest operating losses. The map was empty between the Mississippi River and the west coast, except for Oklahoma City-Fort Worth, which probably wouldn't survive the *Texas Eagle*'s elimination.

The hearing was the start of the T&I Committee's work to prepare a passenger rail reauthorization bill this year. The authorizing portions of the 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act expire on Sept. 30. Bill Shuster (R-PA), full committee chairman, made clear he plans to put Amtrak under a microscope and cut costs where he deems it advisable.

"I really want to try to do something to reform Amtrak," Shuster said. "It may never make a profit but I want to make it move in that direction."

United Transportation Union National Legislative Director James Stem, representing Amtrak's conductors, testified that "Joe Boardman and his staff have

service today, no funding has been set aside for the past seven years.

Legislation to capitalize the Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund passed earlier, but the money was never appropriated after the State Comptroller and the Attorney General's office disagreed over the bill's wording.



Courtesy Texas Rail Advocates

Billboard seen along I-35 near Austin.

brought a new level of credibility and stability to Amtrak."

Association of American Railroads President Ed Hamberger testified at length on freight matters, also noting that his members' private-sector capital investments benefit passenger trains.

Sequester and current-year funding: Of sequestration that cuts Amtrak funding by 5% this year, Boardman saw no drama, at least short term. "As long as this doesn't go on for a long period of time, we are going to get through without any service cuts. Basically, it's taking everything around the company, except running the services on schedule, and slowing them down."

The real threat—that "long period of time"—is the absence of any indication that Congress and the White House will agree on ways to avoid deeper sequestration cuts in coming years. ■

Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Train Study Begins

The Texas Dept. of Transportation (TxDOT) is beginning a process to evaluate possible routes and infrastructure improvements necessary for enhanced passenger train service between Oklahoma City, Fort Worth/Dallas, Austin, San Antonio and South Texas points. The recommended enhancement projects that emerge from this initial study will undergo more thorough environmental review and engineering assessments.

The multiyear Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Rail Study will consider the 850-mile corridor paralleling congested Interstate 35 as a whole. The Study will engage the Oklahoma Dept. of Transportation, transit service providers, railroads, metropolitan planning organizations, cities and counties, and community members.

The public is invited to submit comments electronically through April 26 by going to www.surveymonkey.com/s/TOPRS or by writing to Mark Werner, TxDOT – RRD / 125 E. 11th St. / Austin, TX 78701-2409.

More information on the Study is at www.bit.ly/txokrail. ■

Positive Train Control *from page 1*

making the most progress. On March 6, VP—Government Affairs Amy Hawkins said BNSF installation will be complete by the deadline but a year of reliability testing still will be needed.

Chairman Hermsan said that, if the deadline is extended, “we need to be clear about what the deliverables are.”

NARP and NTSB have criticized failure to address rear-end and restricted-speed collisions. In answering a question from NARP’s Ross Capon about this on March 6, Hawkins said there is no timeline for addressing these issues and expressed concern that “the perfect not be the enemy of the good.”

In comments submitted Mar. 27 to the NTSB, Capon wrote, in part: “It would appear that a lack of ‘system integration’ expertise is a main cause of the delays. Metrolink said it hired Parsons Corporation as its system integrator in 2010, and they say they will meet the implementation deadline.

“As for the major railroads, Jeff Young [of UP] representing the Association of American Railroads said, ‘I guess you could say that we the railroads are the system integrators.’

“[NTSB] Member Weener then asked, ‘But who is making sure that all the railroad systems are interoperable. Who has the big picture regarding making all the components fit together?’

“Young: ‘That is not defined. Typically we do that level of governance at AAR, but lots of players aren’t members.’...”

Federal Railroad Administration Chief Safety Officer Jo Strang said on Mar. 6 that some railroads are studying implementing PTC as a “vital” system rather than overlaying it, but said this is “not proven yet; still in development.”

This would be significant, since a huge part of the cost of the industry’s approach to PTC is replacing or upgrading legacy signals that a ‘vital’ PTC system would render superfluous.

FRA can fine railroads \$100,000 a day beyond the deadline when PTC is not operational, but fining cash-strapped commuter railroads is pointless. ■

Capon’s comments are at www.bit.ly/narpptc. www.nts.gov (News & Events) has links to forum statements and webcast.

Chief Work: NM Legislature, NARP to Kansas

The New Mexico House Feb. 21, and the Senate March 15, adopted Memorials (non-binding resolutions) asking the state’s congressional delegation and governor “to support the continued viability of [Amtrak’s] *Southwest Chief*.” Track improvements are needed in western Kansas, southeast Colorado and northern New Mexico to save the daily Chicago-Los Angeles train.

The Memorial recognizes “the importance of Amtrak ... and its contribution to New Mexico’s economy...Many New Mexicans [depend on the *Chief*] as the only form of public transportation between Raton and Albuquerque.”

It also notes that the *Chief* draws tourists to the state and supports the Philmont Scout Ranch near Raton. (Last summer, 5,431 Scouts took the *Chief*.)

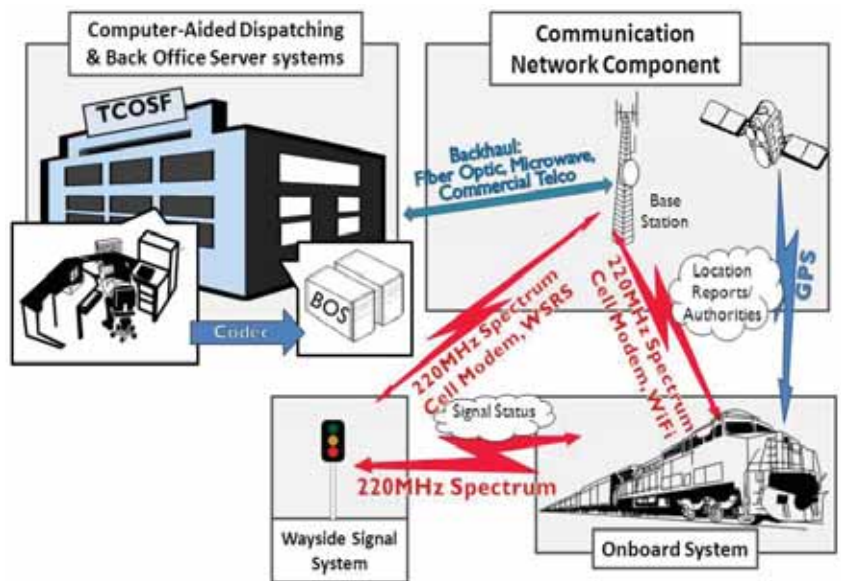
The Southwest Chief Coalition also got endorsements from nine local governments in the state and the New Mexico Municipal League.

NARP Pres. Ross Capon wrote March 13 to Rep. Richard Proehl, who chairs the Transportation Committee in the Kansas House, making the case “that a significant financial contribution from the State of Kansas towards the needed track investments along this route is critical in saving the service.” ■



Steve Wilson (“Loco Steve”) on Flickr.com

Amtrak’s *Southwest Chief* winds through fire-charred Raton Pass on July 5, 2011. Train advocates and local officials are working to save the service, which is jeopardized because freight traffic between Newton, KS, and Albuquerque is light or non-existent.



Courtesy Metrolink (Southern California Regional Rail Authority)

Diagram of a Positive Train Control system.

our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

Niagara Falls Council Advances New Station

Plans to build a new Amtrak station in Niagara Falls, NY that will house an expanded US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facility took a step forward March 18. After debate, the City Council unanimously adopted five measures needed for the \$44 million project to go out to bid.

Various federal and state grants plus a \$16.5 million Recovery Act grant (March 2011 *News*) will cover 90% of the project cost. The city will pay the remainder in periodic installments.

The expanded facility will speed

border processing of passengers on Amtrak's eastbound Toronto-New York City *Maple Leaf* and future cross-border trains. CBP officers will be able to interview multiple passengers off-train simultaneously, which isn't possible today.

"Even in tough times, you've got to try and move forward with projects that ensure the future of your children and grandkids," Mayor Paul Dyster (D) told Buffalo's *Your News Now*. Dyster has steadfastly supported the station project. He spoke about it March 13 to the NARP

Board at the end of the Board's retreat in Buffalo. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Boston-Cape Cod trains will run for the first time in 25 years this summer. "Cape Flyer" trains will run between Boston's South Station and Hyannis via Braintree (not Back Bay), Friday-Sunday, May 24-September 2. Details at www.cape-flyer.com (where visitors are told to check back as more trips could be added) or call 508-775-8504.

Brookings on Strong Amtrak Ridership Growth and a Long-Distance Miscue

The Brookings Institution released a report, *A New Alignment: Strengthening America's Commitment to Passenger Rail*. It has impressive statistics that demonstrate the booming demand for train service from FY 1997 to FY 2012. Key quotes:

- "Amtrak's total boardings and alightings jumped 55.1% ... [This] outstrips population growth (17.1%) more than threefold over the same period and exceeds the growth in real gross domestic product (37.2%)."
- "Amtrak more than doubled the growth in domestic aviation passengers (20.0 percent)."
- "Amtrak also far exceeded the growth in driving (measured by vehicle miles traveled per year; 16.5%) and transit trips (26.4%)."
- "All three modes do carry larger aggregate quantities of people, but these

growth trends serve as evidence of changing attitudes toward train travel."

- "[Calling for increased federal spending on trains] is probably justified especially over the long term for myriad reasons, including Washington's historically outsized support for other transportation modes."
- Brookings urges states to remove the roads-only exclusion on gas tax revenues, saying committing a portion to other modes "would increase [states'] ability to consider the entire transportation system, rather than isolated parts."

A March 1 NARP release highlighted the above but also sharply criticized the report's recommendation that Amtrak's long-distance trains become dependent on state funding. We wrote, "It is unrealistic to expect trains that cross so many state lines to gain the support of all the involved states, or to expect all

states on a route to agree on schedules, service amenities, and cost allocations among the states... In passing the 2008 authorization law, Congress recognized the long-distance trains as a logical, federal responsibility."

We took Brookings to task for failing to note that long-distance train ridership has been growing but that "growth has been greater on state-supported routes because capacity has been added on those routes....[In Fiscal 2012] long-distance trains accounted for 43% of all Amtrak passenger-miles and provided the only Amtrak service in 23 states and countless major cities including Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Miami, Minneapolis, Tampa and Denver." ■

See www.narprail.org for NARP's Mar. 1 release.

See www.brookings.edu/research/reports for Brookings' Mar. 1 paper.