

Transit Growth Beats Auto Growth!

Transit ridership is rising faster than auto use. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) says ridership rose 4.5% in 1999, to nine billion trips, while motor vehicle travel rose 2%. Over the last three years, transit ridership rose 15%, while driving rose 8%. [Nonetheless, highway spending is growing faster than transit spending.]

The lead story in the April 20 *Washington Post*, "Mass Transit Popularity Surges in U.S.," included these statistics:

- "Public transit use peaked in 1946, when Americans took 23.4 billion trips on trains, buses and trolleys, said Donna Aggazio, spokeswoman for APTA...In 1972, transit ridership hit rock bottom at 6.6 billion trips. Since then, it seesawed until 1995, when it began steadily climbing. Transit operators and analysts say increases in mass transit ridership are driven by several factors, including heavy public spending on transit, a strong economy, stable fares, innovation among transit

systems and growing congestion on roads and highways."

- In 1999, "Transit gains have been visible from Bowling Green, Ky., where bus ridership increased 31%, to New York City, where ridership on buses, commuter trains and the nation's largest subway system jumped 7%...Daily trips [on the Metropolitan Transit Authority, which includes subways, buses, Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Commuter Railroad] number 7.2 million today, compared with 5.1 million three years ago, said [Chris Boylan, MTA spokesman]."

- Washington's Metro had 13 of its top 20 ridership days in March and April, including all nine days when ridership was not boosted by a special event.

- "The Virginia Railway Express is drawing enough new

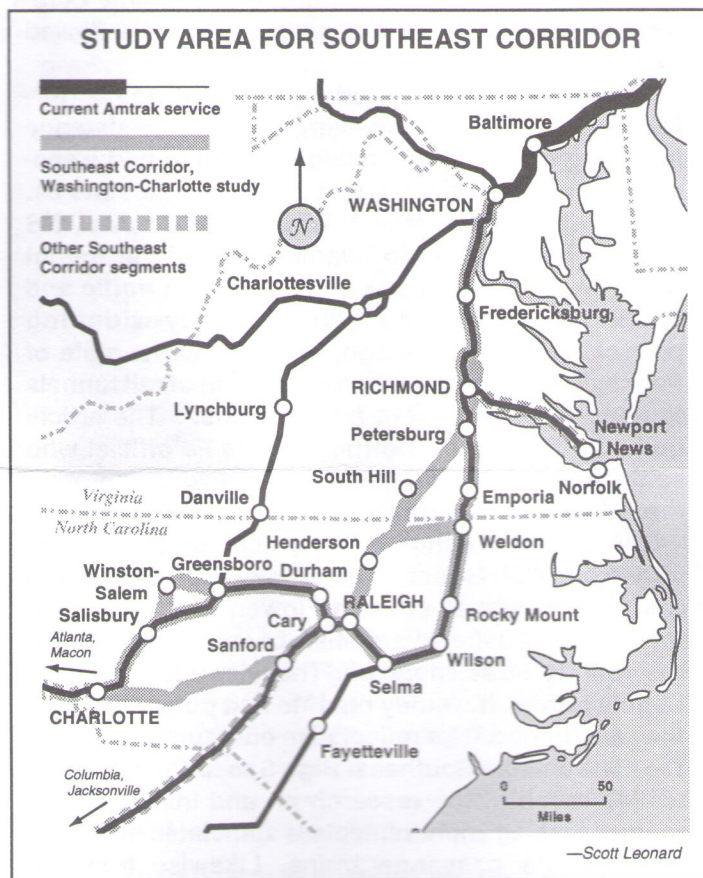
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Southeast Corridor First Steps

The Southeast High Speed Rail Corridor was one of five corridors to get federal designation from the Department of Transportation (DOT) in 1992. Section 1010 of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA) authorized these corridor designations as part of a Highway Trust Fund program to reduce grade-crossing hazards where rail "speeds of 90 mph are occurring or are expected to occur in the future and where substantial rail passenger service is provided" (Jan. '92, Dec. '92 News).

The initial, 1992 designation for the Southeast Corridor extended from the south end of the Northeast Corridor in Washington, DC, to Richmond, VA, Raleigh, NC, and Charlotte, NC. The Richmond-Newport News line was designated as a branch of the Corridor in 1996. In 1998, the DOT designated an extension to the Corridor from Charlotte to Spartanburg, SC, Greenville, SC, Atlanta, GA, and Macon, GA, and another branch from Raleigh to Columbia, SC, Savannah, GA, and Jacksonville, FL.

While the several states are involved in early planning stages for all parts of the Southeast Corridor, the Washington-Charlotte segment—by virtue of being designated soonest—is furthest along in the process. The North Carolina Department of Transportation Rail Division—in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation—began an environmental study (Tier I Environmental Impact Statement) in 1999. This "EIS" is still underway and is examining the need for improving the corridor, as well as major route alternatives (see map) and regional effects of the project on the natural and human environments. The EIS



was the focus of public meetings organized by the Rail Division in both states from mid-April through June, 2000.

If the Tier I EIS is favorable, Tier II studies would begin. They include determining a specific alignment for the new service. The ultimate goal is to have a Washington-Charlotte

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NEW MEMBERS FOR REFORM COUNCIL

James E. Coston was appointed to the Amtrak Reform Council in April. Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-SD) appointed him to replace Donald Sweitzer. Coston is managing partner of Chicago law firm Coston & Lichtman, specializing in equipment financing. He is on the American Bar Association's Equipment Leasing Subcommittee. He co-founded Chicago's Twentieth Century Railroad Club, and has had op-ed columns published in major daily papers.

President Clinton on June 14 appointed Charles F. Money Penny, South Boston, MA, to replace Clarence Monin. Money Penny is International and Legislative Representative of the 120,000-member Transport Workers Union of America, with primary responsibility in collective bargaining and government affairs.

VIA RAIL TO GET MUCH NEEDED BOOST

Canadian Transport Minister David Collenette on April 12 said that, over five years, the federal government would invest C\$402 million (US\$270 million) in capital funding in VIA Rail Canada, Amtrak's Canadian "counterpart." This is in addition to annual operating support, which the government committed to maintain at the 1999 level of C\$170 million (US\$115 million) for ten years. VIA has already submitted plans for the new money, including fleet renewal, improving stations, improving track it owns between Montreal and Ottawa, and selected capacity-related improvements to Canadian National lines used by VIA (for example, passing sidings and signals on the busy Quebec City-Windsor corridor).

Transit Growth

(from page 1)

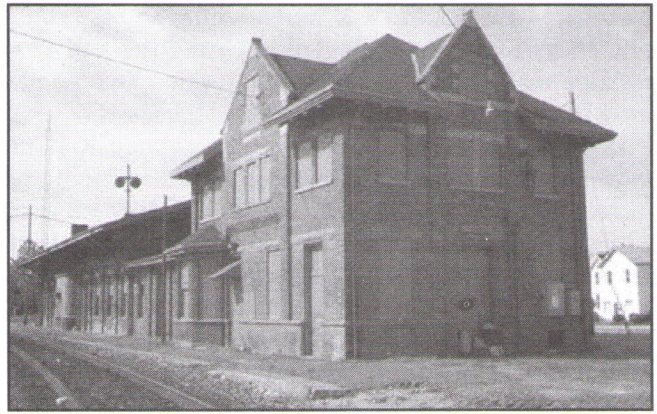
passengers each month to fill an additional train car. VRE is the second fastest-growing commuter railroad in the nation after the one in Dallas."

- "Many say the transit agencies have attracted riders by becoming more flexible and creative...[VRE] has...cafe cars and an e-mail service that alerts riders of service problems or changes. VRE reimburses riders for day-care fees if their trains are late and issues a free ticket to any commuter whose train is delayed at least 30 minutes."

- "State College, Pa., bus ridership shot up 250% last year after Pennsylvania State University gave \$1 million to the local transit agency to get rid of 40-cent fares and offer unlimited, free travel on routes connecting the campus with downtown, said Hugh Mose, general manager of the Centre Area Transportation Authority."

The *Post* concluded by quoting Washington Metro (WMATA) General Manager Richard A. White on a planned national image campaign: "Transit still has a negative image in many circles. Many people believe that transit is for people who can't afford an automobile. But a number of people—a third of the nation—are in the middle and don't have a strong opinion. We need to reach people in their living rooms and show them that transit is a good choice." ■

GRANTS GIVEN TO 13 STATIONS



—Great American Station Foundation

The former B&O station at Hamilton, OH (above), is served by Amtrak's *Cardinal* (though the vandalized waiting room closed in 1993). The older portion of the station dates from about 1860, with the taller addition in the foreground dating from about 1888.

The Great American Station Foundation on June 5 announced the recipients of its 2000 grant awards, which totalled \$250,000. Individual grants ranged from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

John Robert Smith, Mayor of Meridian, MS, and member of the Foundation's board (and of Amtrak's board), said, "Station revitalization can provide the spark that brings downtown back to life. Our station project in Meridian has sparked over \$10 million in investment in our downtown at the same time that it made our station a center of community life."

Of the 13 grant winners, 11 are served by Amtrak:

Burlington, IA	<i>California Zephyr</i>
Elizabethtown, PA	<i>Keystone Corridor</i>
Fremont, CA	<i>Capitol Corridor</i>
Hamilton, OH	<i>Cardinal</i>
Hamlet, NC	<i>Silver Star</i>
Hastings, NE	<i>California Zephyr</i>
Jesup, GA	<i>Silver Meteor</i>
Raton, NM	<i>Southwest Chief</i>
Rome, NY	<i>Empire Corridor</i>
Sanderson, TX	<i>Sunset Ltd./Texas Eagle</i>
Waterbury, VT	<i>Vermont</i>

The 12th project, Macon, GA, is planned to be linked to Atlanta with passenger trains in 2004. The remaining project is related to a transit village project centered on the BART Fruitvale Station in Oakland, CA.

In April, the Foundation awarded \$10,000 to Ardmore, OK, and \$25,000 to Gainesville, TX, both served by Amtrak's *Heartland Flyer*.

TRANSIT MODE COST EFFECTIVENESS

Thirty largest transit agencies in aggregate

Source: Federal Transit Administration

Operating Expense per Passenger-Mile, 1998

Heavy Rail (metro/subway)	Light Rail	Commuter Rail	Bus
\$0.29	\$0.48	\$0.27	\$0.61

service in place by 2010 that has a top speed of 110 mph.

Project planners note that the need for an efficient transportation alternative is growing. In the last 40 years, Southeastern population growth rates generally have been higher than along the Northeast Corridor—Virginia has grown 76%, North Carolina 71%, South Carolina 62%, and Georgia 100% (i.e., doubled). Meanwhile, interstate highways designed and built 40 years ago have been reaching capacity—I-95's traffic grew 40% from 1986 to 1996, and I-85's grew 68%. East coast airports linking Northeast and Southeast are expected to generate 20,000 annual hours of flight delays.

Improved passenger rail can and should have an important role in the Southeast's transportation future. The Federal Railroad Administration's high-speed-rail commercial-feasibility study ("High-Speed Ground Transportation for America," Sept. '96, Jan. '98 *News*), mandated by ISTEA and released in 1997, included an examination of the Washington-Charlotte segment of the Southeast Corridor. Because of the potential to benefit from through-business to and from

FREIGHT ROADS MORE OPEN TO PUBLIC FUNDS

Passenger *and* freight rail service would be more competitive had railroads spent more of the 20th century fighting for public funding and less time complaining about the bountiful public support that flowed to the competition.

Freight railroads are starting to get the point. Norfolk Southern (NS) is seeking financial assistance from Virginia for a \$900 million project to add a second track to the rail line that parallels Interstate 81. As reported in the May 1 *Wall Street Journal*, NS "would then be able to handle much of the freight that now travels by truck on I-81, easing traffic and putting off an expensive highway-widening project...Several years ago, Conrail and the state of Pennsylvania jointly funded expansion of rail tunnels to handle more efficient freight trains." The article quoted a Burlington Northern Santa Fe official who said BNSF has become more "receptive to exploring these types of possibilities."

This attitude change is partly in response to pressure from Wall Street. The article quoted Salomon Smith Barney analyst Scott Flower, "The returns in the railroad business are still not enough to sustain the country's track network. The railroads must thoroughly rethink how they operate and potentially how they are funded." As reflected in our reports on North Carolina and the Southeast High Speed Corridor (this issue), much of the research on and investment in grade-crossing improvements is stimulated by the desire for faster passenger trains. Likewise, track capacity added for passenger trains benefits freight operations during the many hours when passenger trains are not using the tracks. Freight railroads stand to gain much from enactment of the High Speed Rail Investment Act (S.1900/H.R. 3700). It remains to be seen how helpful they will be in getting it passed.

the Northeast Corridor, the FRA noted that average trip lengths and revenues involving the Southeast Corridor would be higher than those on other corridors nationally. The FRA study determined that 110-mph service in 2020 would require a \$1.05 billion initial investment, result in a 5:42 trip time between Washington and Charlotte (today's *Carolinian* is ten hours), carry 5.7 million passengers, and have a ratio of total benefits to total costs of 2.4. ■

NORTH CAROLINA ADVANCES CROSSING SAFETY

The federal DOT has recommended improvements be made to highway grade crossings along designated high-speed corridors, including the Southeast Corridor. All public and private crossings where train speeds will be between 80 and 110 mph should be closed, grade-separated (with a bridge), or equipped with special protection devices.

The North Carolina DOT Rail Division and Norfolk Southern (NS) began testing such devices in 1994. An initial test crossing was Sugar Creek Rd. (about two miles northeast of the Amtrak station), where four separate, 20-week tests were conducted.

First was an observation period of the existing crossing (gates in two quadrants, i.e., as each direction of traffic enters the crossing but not as each direction exits). Then came tests with median barriers only (which discourage drivers from driving into the oncoming lane to avoid a lowered gate), with four-quadrant gates (gates in each lane's entrance and exit to the crossing), and with four-quadrant gates *and* median barriers. For each respective test period, reductions in crossing violations by motorists compared to the baseline period were 77%, 86%, and 98%. [A later test with "long-arm" gates (one gate covering two quadrants) showed an 84% reduction.]

Encouraged by these good results, the Rail Division and NS began Phase I of a Charlotte-Greensboro "Sealed Corridor" program, which is still underway and will include 19 crossings with four-quadrant gates (11 are now in place). Two other four-quadrant crossings are in place along the Greensboro-Cary Phase II segment and the Cary-Raleigh (with participation of CSX) Phase III segment. The crossings use four-quadrant gates, two long-arm gates, and/or median barriers, depending on the crossing configuration. A video enforcement system was set up at Henderson St. in Salisbury in 1998, using cameras that photograph vehicles committing crossing violations, with a 76% reduction in violations there.

From 1995 through 2000, \$11.5 million has been set aside for the program from state funds, crossing improvement funds in ISTEA and TEA-21, and the Federal Railroad Administration's Next Generation High-Speed Rail program. The ultimate goal of the program is to evaluate all corridor crossings for improvement (including possible closure and grade separation) and implement the improvements, thus creating a rail corridor that is "sealed" from motorist violation of crossings.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

On-Board Smoking—Effective with the May timetable, the *Texas Eagle* (west of San Antonio) and *Sunset Limited* became non-smoking trains. This apparently is due to a shortage of smoking cars.

Wisconsin—Due to trackwork projects, the Chicago-Milwaukee *Hiawathas* generally have 15 minutes added to their schedules through mid-July. Departure times are the same from both terminals...With the May 21 timetable, checked baggage service is moved earlier, to the 10:30 am Chicago departure, meaning checked baggage from late Eastern trains is less likely to reach Milwaukee as early as passengers (more likely on *Empire Builder*)...Zenda (south of Lake Geneva) was added as a *Lake Country* stop June 15 (not Walworth, as shown in May 21 timetable).

Silver Extension—NARP asked Amtrak to put plans to extend *Silver Star* to Boston via Springfield on hold, noting bad Boston times and schedule changes harmful to the overall New York-Florida pattern. Amtrak agreed that these points are valid.

FEDERAL DOLLARS FOR PASSENGER RAIL

NARP wrote President Clinton June 7 expressing disappointment that his 2001 budget had "a funding mechanism for high speed rail that everyone on Capitol Hill knew was dead on arrival. In the abstract, [proposing] Highway Trust Fund dollars [for rail] is sound public policy. In reality, however, its main impact—predictably—was to upset key people in Congress and thus to produce no perceptible progress towards additional funding for intercity passenger rail." NARP urged Clinton to support S.1900/H.R.3700 (High Speed Rail Investment Act).

The Senate on June 15 approved a fiscal 2001 appropriations bill with \$521 million for Amtrak. This followed a 52-46 procedural vote stating that an amendment by George V. Voinovich (R-OH) to add passenger rail funding flexibility for states (from S.1144) was not germane.

TEXAS EAGLE FLIES DAILY AGAIN



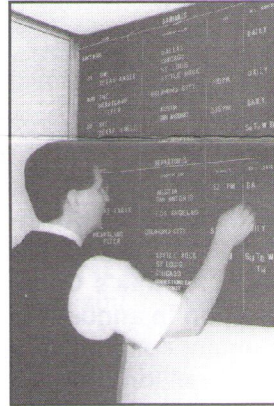
—John C. Smith

Festivities at several Texas stations May 21 marked Amtrak's restoration of daily *Texas Eagle* service, Chicago-San Antonio.

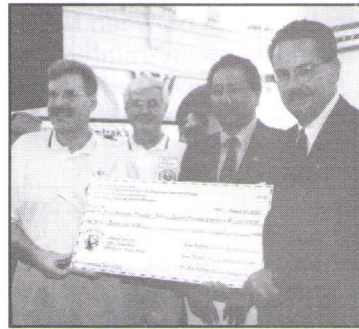
Above (at center), Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) joins crowd at Austin greeting a ceremonial train. At left, an Amtrak agent at Fort Worth adds "daily" to the train status board.

Below, members of TEMPO (Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization) present Amtrak President George Warrington a symbolic check representing the \$1 million that the group's efforts will have contributed to the train's bottom line by summer's end. TEMPO was formed in 1997 to promote *Eagle* service and enhance marketing efforts.

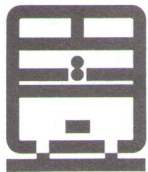
It includes representatives of on-line cities, advocacy groups (Texas and Arkansas) and Amtrak management and agreement employees. From left are Griff Hubbard, Amtrak agent, Longview, TX; Bill Pollard, Arkansas Association of Railroad Passengers (and NARP Region 9 director), Conway, AR; Jesse Padilla, *Eagle* product line agent, Austin; and Warrington.



—Gene Poon



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