

## Will Maine Service Start This Summer?

Start-up of Amtrak's Boston-Portland service has been postponed from May 1 probably to sometime in the summer. The top speed on Guilford-owned track in New Hampshire and Maine will be 60 mph while the parties await the Surface Transportation Board's reaction to Guilford's latest attempt to prevent speeds above 60 mph.

In an October 22, 1999, decision, the STB ruled that "the installation of 115-pound, continuous welded rail on the Plaistow (NH)-Portland Line will be adequate for safe operation of trains at speeds up to 79 miles per hour, under the condition that the line is rehabilitated and maintained to a standard that produces track modulus (k) values of not less than 2,750 lb/in and that otherwise satisfies the FRA's track safety standards for rail passenger train operation up to such speeds."

However, Guilford argues in effect that no test could satisfy this decision. Any individual test would be "worthless because it would only measure track modulus at a moment in time. According to Guilford, the Board's decision requires that track modulus testing be conducted repeatedly along the entire line in order for Amtrak's trains to operate above 60 mph. Since such repeated testing is impossible, a fact that Guilford cheerfully acknowledges, Guilford's position is that the [STB's] Rail Weight/Speed Decision forever limits Amtrak's trains to a maximum speed of 60 mph" (Amtrak's March 12 petition).

In response to Guilford's position, Amtrak filed the above-quoted petition with the STB to gain access to Guilford tracks

### NEW FRA CHIEF NAMED

President Bush on April 3 named Allen Rutter the new Federal Railroad Administrator. Rutter has been transportation policy director to Texas governors since 1995. Previously he was deputy executive director of the Texas High-Speed Rail Authority.

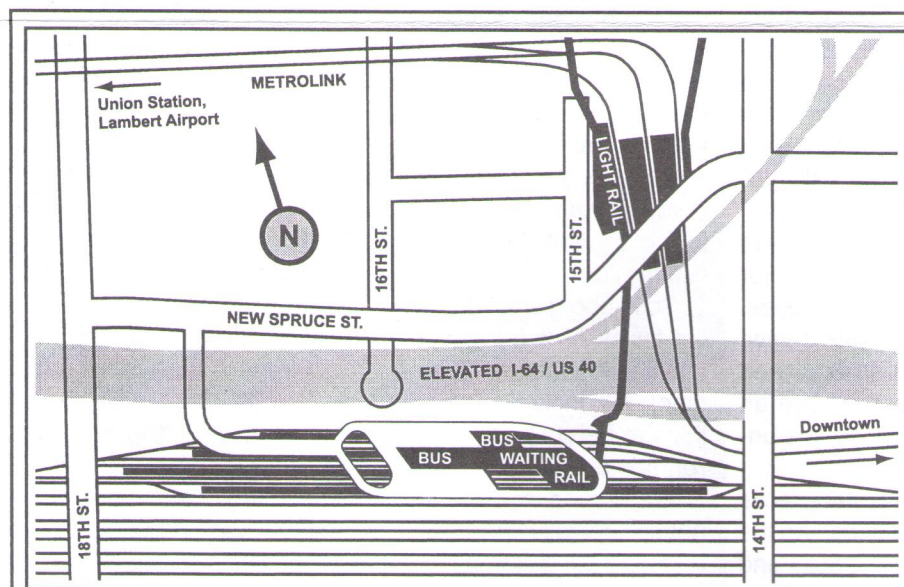
to conduct the tests. The petition also sought STB approval of the technical details of the proposed tests, and asked the STB to confirm that repeated testing is not required.

Amtrak asked for an expedited decision so that tests can occur in July. Guilford on March 19 asked for 45 days (from when STB publishes a schedule) to respond to Amtrak's petition. Amtrak on March 23 did not object to the 45 days but reiterated its request for "expedited consideration" and asked the Board to make its final ruling by June 30.

The STB identifies this proceeding as "Finance Docket No. 33697: National Railroad Passenger Corporation—Petition for Declaratory Order—Weight of Rail."

The postponement—and Guilford's reaction to the 1999 decision—became public in February, producing this *Portland Press Herald* lead headline (February 21): "Passenger rail service stalls again." David Fink, a Guilford executive, defended Guilford's position at a TrainRiders/Northeast news conference chaired by NARP Vice President Wayne Davis.

Since then, Guilford increased efforts to reach agreement on other outstanding issues. The state has decided to let the service begin with a 60 mph top speed so long as a process aimed at 79 mph is under way. The state's passenger-train progress reports are at <[www.thedowneaster.com](http://www.thedowneaster.com)>. ■



—Scott Leonard

### ST. LOUIS AGREEMENT REACHED

St. Louis Mayor Clarence Harmon announced March 2 that the city and Amtrak had agreed on a 20-year lease that will allow the proposed intermodal terminal to go forward. The \$29-million St. Louis Gateway Transportation Center will be funded by the Federal Transit Administration, Missouri DOT, the Bi-State Development Agency, and the city. The first work will be on a maintenance building, starting soon. Work on the new station—roughly on the present site—will begin within a year.

This would replace the "temporary" trailers Amtrak has inhabited since 1978, when it evacuated a seriously deteriorating Union Station. The new station, built over the Amtrak platforms, will include Bi-State local buses, Greyhound intercity buses, and taxis. A concourse will connect the terminal to a reconfigured MetroLink station (current Savvis Center—ex-Kiel Center—Station), providing light rail connections to downtown and Lambert Airport.

# Amtrak Reform Council Proposes Restructuring

*"The Council believes a secure, long-term source of funding is needed to fund an effectively-structured national rail passenger system. [There should be] separate funding mechanisms for intercity rail passenger operations (where it is essential they be subsidized), and for rail infrastructure improvements across the nationwide passenger-related rail system...The Council sees the prospect of a substantial increase in the demand for intercity rail passenger services. Road and air congestion have spurred transportation departments in at least 14 states to begin investing in rail to provide additional passenger transportation capacity in short- to medium-length intercity corridors."*

—Second Annual Report of the Amtrak Reform Council

*"At the centre of the [British] railway industry's problems is the division of track from trains which sets up an adversarial relationship between Railtrack [private track-owning corporation] and the train operating companies."*

—The Economist, March 17-23

When a group of people—most of whom appreciate what passenger rail could do for the US—produce a report calling for dramatic change, it is perhaps unfair to dismiss the proposal at first glance. The ARC hopes to start a productive debate. At this point in an unfolding debate, we do not preclude our ability to learn more and possibly change our views. But we strongly believe that any debate about structure should not "derail" efforts to increase the comparatively meager resources the federal government provides for passenger rail.

The ARC appreciates the need for expanded rail passenger service and public funding to support it. Their report has a useful, nine-page discussion of financing. But most of the report deals with options for structural change that appear to offer as many (or more) problems than they solve.

The report was signed by nine of the 11 ARC members. Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta abstained—the new Administration does not have a position yet—and the labor representative, Charles Money Penny, voted "no."

James E. Coston voted "yes" only on condition that his seven-page "exceptions, comments and observations" be published with it. Coston believes—regardless of who owns the Northeast Corridor (NEC)—"*Amtrak must retain its control over the NEC*" [italics his]. He criticizes the report's "unfortunate implication" that the long-distance trains "are essentially private-room luxury trains patronized largely by the wealthy." He correctly notes that "the vast majority of the passengers on these trains ride in coach." Indeed, average trip length for those coach passengers is longer than even he acknowledges.

The ARC thinks Amtrak does too much, and wants a new, separate infrastructure company to acquire all Amtrak-owned track and stations. The resulting company would have an even bigger Northeast bias than today's Amtrak, so it is unclear why Congress would find it easier to fund.

The idea of separate companies running trains and tracks is largely alien to the US, where most freight railroads and the biggest commuter railroads own and control both tracks and trains. The concept lately has gotten a bad name in Britain, where a clumsy privatization was rushed through.

Reasonable people can disagree about whether a more elegant separation might have produced better results in Britain, including with regard to safety. We are inclined to agree with Amtrak Board Members Michael Dukakis and John Robert Smith that the quality of Amtrak service in the NEC would decline if Amtrak loses control. Smith said, "We've got to run those [Acela] trains on time and it has to be a clean, crisp service. If we turn around and give away the infrastructure that was built for Acela to run more efficiently, and we have another agency to contract with or coordinate with in the running of those trains, we lose that bottom line impact" [*Meridian Star*, March 22].

As for the general issue of separation, the danger is that having trains and infrastructure controlled by separate

(continued on page 4)

## First '02 Funding Hearing

The House Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee held its hearing on fiscal 2002 Amtrak funding on March 21, presided over by the new chairman, Harold Rogers (R). His southeastern Kentucky district has no Amtrak service. Witnesses were Amtrak President George Warrington, DOT Inspector General Ken Mead, and Phyllis Scheinberg of the General Accounting Office.

The overall tone was rather negative. Many questions properly focused on Amtrak's ability to comply with the statutory operational self-sufficiency mandate—on which widespread doubt was expressed. Indeed, Warrington said "everything has to work right" this year for Amtrak to stay on target.

Rogers told Warrington, "Last year you planned to close your budget gap by \$114 million and did only \$5 million. How can you do \$100 million this year? Help us become a little less pessimistic." Warrington said Amtrak's business plan is clearly defined, with hundreds of revenue and cost management actions. "Historically, the easy way out was to hold out a couple of trains to be cut and hope Congress restored the funding. I won't do that. My focus is on attacking [modernizing] the business systems in the company."

There was general agreement that a "national debate" on the purpose and scope of passenger rail was needed, but some seemed to imply they viewed such a "debate" as a way to get fewer trains, not more.

Questions and comments from some subcommittee members (including the chair) and the GAO made much of the lack of profitability of trains (operating *and* capital), when that is not expected of government-owned highways or airports.

Scheinberg said the planned high-speed corridors "are looking for an 80% federal commitment. It's going to be a huge cost to Uncle Sam." Unmentioned was the cost of *not* developing rail, including heightened pressure to increase the billions to be spent on highways and aviation, often over environmental and quality-of-life-related objections.

Warrington made a sincere effort to provide some balance, noting the rail renaissance now underway. He said, "I can leverage our assets and other income to cross-subsidize critical passenger services that by nature won't cover all their costs, and so not need a federal operating grant overall." ■

## Louisville's Innovative Quiet Zone

July 1 is the earliest that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) can issue its final rule on grade-crossing "whistle bans" and "quiet zones." This is due to delaying language in the omnibus package bill passed by the 106th Congress just before adjourning December 15. Last-minute language by House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL), whose district includes communities that objected to the FRA rule last year, appeared to be an attempt to increase from two years to ten the amount of time communities would have to take safety-enhancing action to keep their existing quiet zones.

The Swift Rail Development Act of 1994 required the FRA rule (Feb. '00 News). This was in response to FRA studies showing that crossings with community-imposed whistle bans had far more motor vehicle-train collisions than similar crossings where locomotive horns were sounded—a 1995 FRA study showed 84% more collisions.

The rule that FRA proposed in 2000—which NARP supports—gave communities several low-tech options to keep their quiet zones. These included installation of "four-quadrant" gates (meaning all lanes of travel are blocked by gates



Goss Ave. crossing in Louisville, KY, looking east, before and after "quiet zone" improvements. Goss comes in one-way from right, crosses tracks and becomes two-way. Logan St. runs to the left. Earlier, there were two-quad gates on Goss (making it possible for cars to run around the gate) and eight-inch warning lights on the signposts. Now Goss has a 200-foot barrier (ending in traffic island visible below) separating traffic for Logan (not crossing tracks) and Goss (crossing tracks), a single gate for eastbound Goss and two gates for westbound Goss—plus 12-inch warning lights overhead and on the signposts.



—City of Louisville, both

in both directions), medians to keep vehicles in their proper lane, photo enforcement, etc. (Feb. '00 News, also June '00 News for tests of such technology in North Carolina).

In public outreach hearings last year, the FRA found generally that communities with existing whistle bans resisted new rules that would force them to make modest safety improvements. But communities without such bans saw the new rules as an opportunity to make the modest improvements in order to create new quiet zones.

One such forward-looking community is Louisville, KY. In September, 2000, the city dedicated a new, compliant quiet zone along a double-track CSX (freight-only) line in the Germantown neighborhood (near-east side). Planning began in 1993 (after a 1992 state law banning whistle bans, followed by a 1994 state law allowing quiet zones). Construction lasted four months. For a total of \$900,000—from city, railroad, state, and federal (Section 130 grade crossing program) funds—a half-mile area with 12 crossings was improved. Seven crossings (four of them alleys) were closed with turn-around cul-de-sacs provided; crosswalks remain where the three streets were closed. The remaining five crossings were improved with "two-quad" gates on one-way streets, full-quad gates on two-way streets, and medians on two streets.

The half-mile of improvements actually resulted in a three-mile-long quiet zone because of adjacent areas that were already free of grade crossings.

If the FRA issues a final rule this year, other communities will face a decision on such improvements. As passenger-rail corridors are improved—hopefully benefiting from passage of the High Speed Rail Investment Act—still more communities will debate the noise impact from more passenger trains sounding horns at crossings. (Such a debate is already underway on the east side of Madison, WI). The fine work already done in Louisville can be a positive example to these other communities. More about Louisville's effort is on that city's web site, <[www.louky.org/quietzone](http://www.louky.org/quietzone)>. ■

### LONGER TRIP TIMES GET AIR-COMPETITIVE

*From March International Railway Journal, in article about the projected June 10 opening of the TGV Meditteranee line from Valence to Nimes/Marseille:*

Even with the opening of the new line, some journey times [through-TGV's on connecting conventional lines] will still be relatively long, such as Paris-Perpignan [Spanish border] in 4h 45 min [now 6:07] and Paris-Nice in 5h 33min [now 6:31], and yet SNCF [French National Railways] will increase TGV frequencies on these routes as well

"We thought that three hours was the psychological limit for high-speed rail, but delays to air services have helped rail a lot," [SNCF Director General Guillaume] Pepy explained.

"On average one-third of airline services are delayed by more than 15 minutes, whereas globally 90% of TGV's arrive within five minutes of schedule. It will be a real challenge to maintain this in the future. The Paris-Lyon line is already full. We have reduced train headways from five to four minutes, and we are now aiming for three minutes."

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Texas Eagle**—The fourth weekly San Antonio-Los Angeles frequency last ran February 28, not April 4 as we reported earlier.

**Lake Country Limited**—Since March 24, this Chicago-Janesville train runs Saturdays only. This followed the March 16 180-day notification of total discontinuation (September 22). When it began in April 2000, the train was expected to carry significant amounts of express business. But this business did not materialize, in part because of Amtrak's inability to work out an agreement with Norfolk Southern to allow start-up of the Chicago-Philadelphia *Skyline Connection*.

**Empire schedules**—Track work in Metro North territory is forcing an Empire Corridor schedule change, April 1-June 8. New York-Albany trip times will be 10-15 minutes longer, trains 236 and 295 are cancelled (April 29-June 8 only), and the *Adirondack* will have a different weekend schedule in both directions.

**Fares**—Amtrak has announced a 25% discount on rail fares through June 15. It is for individual

passengers, unlike most "companion" discounts. It is not combinable with most other discounts; but can be used with Explore America fare. It is nonrefundable and blacked out around Easter and Memorial Day.

A note of caution regarding Amtrak's "1-2-Free" fare, mentioned here last issue. While Amtrak promotional materials mention the possibility of "weekend trips," the fare does not apply to peak "YOFC/YOSJ" fares. On Friday-Saturday-Sunday on Michigan services and Friday and Sunday peak times on Northeast Corridor, New York, and Vermont services, those peak fares generally apply and thus makes the "1-2-Free" fare invalid for most weekend travel in those areas.

**Acela Express**—Next service additions are April 29:

- Two new weekday Boston-New York trains (leaving 7:12 am, 3:12 pm).
- Two new weekday New York-Boston trains (leaving 7:03 am, 5:00 pm).
- First weekend services (also first to honor NARP discount), two Boston-Washington trips (leaving 8:00 am, 4:00 pm), one New York-Boston trip (leaving 8:03 am), one Washington-Boston trip (leaving 1:00 pm).

## Amtrak Reform Council

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organizations with different goals will require slow, consensus management—is not good for a railroad environment.

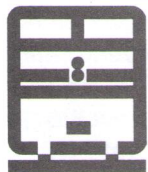
Separation seems to have worked well in Sweden, which is much more comfortable funding passenger rail than is the US government. The ARC admits that its schemes would raise costs (at least initially).

The ARC report got a cool reception at the March 21 House hearing. All witnesses (Amtrak, DOT Inspector General, GAO, see p. 2) agreed that the restructuring recommendations were premature, absent clearer direction (presumably from Congress) on the size of the nation's passenger rail network and the funding to be provided. ■

NARP's March 20 statement is at <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)>; we expect to post further comments. The ARC report is at <[www.amtrakreformcouncil.gov](http://www.amtrakreformcouncil.gov)>.

## HOUSE PASSES ASSISTANCE BILL

The House of Representatives reintroduced (February 12) and passed (February 14) a passenger rail bill it passed in 1999. H.R.554, the Rail Passenger Disaster Family Assistance Act, requires the National Transportation Safety Board to provide an assistance phone number for family members of passenger railroad accidents. It also requires passenger railroads to submit a plan for addressing the needs of such families, and bars solicitation of family members and injured parties by lawyers for 45 days after an accident. The lead sponsor of the bill is Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Don Young (R-AK). The bill was approved on a 404-4 vote and sent to the Senate Commerce Committee.



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