



Senate Committees Support Amtrak

Commerce Committee Votes 17-4 to Approve Passenger Rail Reform Bill

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on July 28 approved S. 1516, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2005 (PRIIA). The bill:

- provides for "Amtrak reform and operational improvements,"
- authorizes Amtrak for Fiscal 2006-2011, during which operating grants declines by 40% and capital funding rises,
- creates a new state capital grant program for intercity passenger rail projects with an 80% federal match, and
- has Amtrak/passenger rail security and tunnel safety provisions from the Senate-passed Rail Security Act of 2004.

Chairman Trent Lott (R-MS) of the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine was the driving force

structuring—and a possible takeover—of Amtrak's debt, and making the Amtrak president a voting member of the board.

Lott and Lautenberg praised Amtrak President & CEO David L. Gunn at the news conference and the July 28 session. Lott said July 28, "I like David Gunn and I think if we give him more power he will be able to get more accomplished." Lautenberg, July 27: "We have a wonderful leader, I think, in David Gunn."

The bill has "placeholder" language for tax credit bonds for rail capital grants. Such bonds would require Finance Committee action. S. 1516 authorizes \$1.6-\$2 billion a year, but there is general agreement that the bonds would be needed

to achieve such levels.

The only votes against the bill were cast by Jim DeMint (R-SC), John Ensign (R-NV), John McCain (R-AZ), and John Sununu (R-NH).

More details are in the committee's July 28 release, available at their website: <<http://commerce.senate.gov>>.

Gunn called the PRIIA a "very positive first step." Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta said he was "concerned that this bill does not provide the fundamental changes Amtrak needs if it is to survive." ■

See also NARP releases from July 27 and 28 at <www.narprail.org> or send us a s.a.s.e.

Appropriations Committee Approves \$1.45 Billion

The Senate Appropriations Committee, chaired by Thad Cochran (R-MS), approved \$1.45 billion for Amtrak on July 21, which was \$50 million more than its subcommittee approved July 19. As Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), ranking member of the subcommittee observed, \$1.45 billion is in the middle of the \$1.4-1.5 billion range DOT Inspector General Kenneth Mead testified Amtrak needs to maintain current services.

The committee's ranking member is Robert Byrd (D-WV). Christopher Bond (R-MO) chairs the Subcommittee on Transportation, Treasury, the Judiciary, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies.

The committee's \$1.45 billion is \$274 million more than the House-passed \$1.176 billion (July lead story). Both the House and the Senate committee, of course, have made clear their rejection of the Administration's zero budget request and definition of Amtrak "reform."

Although both the House and Senate numbers beat the expectations of many, hard work remains. While \$1.45 billion is impressive when compared with the Bush

budget, it merely lets Amtrak "stay in place." Also, it is not a done deal. House-Senate negotiations remain. The House figure is \$324 million short of Mead's higher estimate; even the Senate number is \$50 million shy of that level. Moreover, Amtrak in FY 2006 will begin some of its bigger, long-overdue, multi-year capital projects.

Also, the Senate bill says, starting six months after enactment, "Amtrak shall provide food and beverage [F&B] service on its trains only if revenues from [such] service...equal or exceed the cost of providing said service." This is impossible, except perhaps by subjectively relabeling as F&B revenues the percentage of ticket revenues judged to result from the existence of F&B service.

The *Washington Times*, reporting July 27 on the day-earlier official release of the DOT Inspector General's report on F&B and sleepers, quoted NARP's Ross Capon as follows: "You take away the food service and you have made it impossible for the majority of revenues to stay with you. This is just a backdoor way of wrecking a \$3 billion corporation."

(continued on page 4)



Senator Trent Lott (R-MS)

behind development of the bill, along with Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). Ted Stevens (R-AK), full committee chairman, joined them to announce the bill at a July 27 news conference, where they said Daniel Inouye (D-HI), co-chairman of the full committee, also supported the bill. The next day, Inouye called it "the most comprehensive bill on Amtrak we've ever had."

The Amtrak reforms include financial accounting improvements, directing the Treasury Secretary to negotiate the re-

Montanans Rally for *Empire Builder*

Montana residents rallied June 1 and 2 in support of the *Empire Builder* and Amtrak's national network. Glasgow, Havre and Whitefish saw town hall meetings and rallies; there was a news conference and rally at Shelby, an *Empire Builder* crew base.

Empire Builder ridership last year was up 5% from fiscal 2003 and 19% from fiscal 2002. Through June (nine months), fiscal 2005 ridership was 9% above the 2004 level. Like other national network trains, the *Empire Builder* serves many functions, trips of differing lengths, and people with differing incomes.

The rallies and events were the brainchild of Montana Gov. Brian Schweitzer (D) and Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger (R). Political and community leaders spoke at each event.

Local residents testified about why they wanted the service to survive. Several were small business owners dependent on the train to supply goods and services. Many were seniors who do not drive long distances and are medically restricted from flying. Others use the *Empire Builder* for medical appointments, to get children to and from college, or to follow their favorite football teams—primarily the Minnesota Vikings and Seattle Seahawks.

The governor urged Montanans to take action: "It doesn't start and it doesn't stop here. We can't talk amongst ourselves. Write letters to your congressional delegation, send e-mails, and make phone calls. If they get 25 letters, calls and e-mails on a specific issue, that's an avalanche. If they can then take that onto the House or Senate floor and say, 'This is important to Montana,' that's critical."

KSEN radio of Shelby did a live, on-board interview with the governor (*right photo*). Schweitzer said, "These people in Washington don't get it. Mineta said 3½ percent of Montana is served by the train. He got that by looking at a map. What he doesn't understand is that when you come to the parking lots at Havre, Shelby and Malta you see license plates from all over the state. This is the jumping off point for the state."

Bohlinger touched on the national importance of the current fight. "We are developing a message that will be carried from Glasgow to Whitefish and will travel across America and be delivered to President Bush's desk. The message is simple. Amtrak and the *Empire Builder* provide essential transportation services to the



—all photos, David R. Johnson

A large, boisterous crowd greets the *Empire Builder* as it arrives in Havre, MT June 1. Similar rallies were held across Montana at Glasgow, Shelby, and Whitefish, accompanied by town hall meetings. Speakers included national, state and local leaders, regular citizens, Amtrak Chairman David Laney (at Whitefish), NARP President George Chilson and Assistant Director David Johnson.

people of America. The notion that this service serves a low population base and that it doesn't pay its way and thus it must be eliminated is riddled with false conclusions.

"[The big highway-transit bill] provides tremendous subsidies to the highway industry and to the petroleum industry. We need good roads, but I would also suggest that we look at rail...over 71% of the American people want more money invested in Amtrak. Rail service is the mode of transportation for the future."

State Senator Jerry Black (R) of Shelby emphasized the role Amtrak long distance trains play in national transportation.



KSEN Program Director Jim Sargent (r.) interviews Montana Gov. Schweitzer live on west-bound *Builder*, west of Havre, June 1.

Speaking in Havre, Black said that, on his ride over from Shelby earlier that day, "we had (lunch) with a woman from Illinois and one from New Jersey that traveled Amtrak the whole way. They were absolutely delighted with the service. She had read that story about (Mineta) wanting to make the states pay 50-50 and she said, 'What can I do to change this?' (The train) exposed them to Montana; they were thrilled with traveling through Glacier National Park. As a result of that, I got the impression that they would be back to Montana."

Black has been appointed to the National Council of State Legislators and its transportation committee. "You can bet that the word I'm going to take (to the committee meetings) is the value and importance of keeping Amtrak service and that it must be federally supported and funded."

Speaking in Whitefish, Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT) said, "I've been taken to the woodshed by the Administration on this issue. But I try to explain it to them that we're different than the east coast cities. Government subsidies built the west: rural electrification programs, essential air service, the west is the breadbasket of America. Let's have an acknowledgment from the administration that (Amtrak) is an essential service. It's not just for leisure, it's important for the people of the nation for us to have the same access to quality transportation that the rest of the country has."

NARP President George L. Chilson spoke at Havre and Whitefish; Assistant Director David R. Johnson spoke at



A news conference was held in Havre during the *Empire Builder's* brief layover. Speaking were (l to r), U.S. Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer (D), Montana Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger (R), Amtrak Board of Directors Chairman David Laney, and Havre Mayor Bob Rice

Glasgow and was present at Whitefish. (The Shelby event was brief, and the governor was the only speaker there.)

Chilson drew an analogy between the battles for transportation equity to a Wendy's commercial from the mid-1980's during the Havre town hall meeting. "We have been trying for 30 years to save Amtrak and we have only been given the bun. Its time to start asking, 'Where's the beef?' We want to start expanding trains so that there are more options for more Americans to travel to more places...The rail services we have are needed and used."

Johnson spoke at the Glasgow town hall: "You are not alone. There are many other 'Glasgows' in America such as Hutchinson, Kansas; Williams Junction, Arizona; Alpine, Texas and Trinidad, Colorado. All these cities rely on Amtrak as their sole method of public transportation. Eliminating Amtrak service will throw these communities into isolation."

On May 31, Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta conducted a telephone media briefing—from Washington, DC—for Montana reporters. He said the *Empire Builder's* route "was built in the late 1880's and hasn't changed much since." He did not mention the millions in private funds that the line's owner, BNSF Railway, has invested to improve the line.

The rallies, however, overshadowed the Secretary's comments. Hundreds greeted the *Empire Builder* as it reached the event cities. Even in Malta, where no event was scheduled, over 100 people turned out holding "Amtrak: Yes!" signs, honking car horns and waving.

Two days of town hall meetings and

rallies brought people from all over the state: old and young, Republican and Democrat, high-ranking officials to the unemployed looking for work. Through the efforts of the Lieutenant Governor's office, Montana highlighted the crucial role that the *Empire Builder* plays in their state. This role—and the train's economics—will improve with Amtrak's August 2 launch of the revitalized *Empire Builder*, featuring refurbished equipment, improved amenities for passengers, with corresponding first-class and (moderate) coach fare increases.

Sen. Byron Dorgan and Rep. Earl Pomery (both D-ND) rode and did media events in North Dakota. Although Sen. Conrad Burns (R-MT) was not on this trip, his staff was. Burns played a key role in the funding effort by riding the *Builder* with Sen. Christopher Bond (R-MO), the appropriations subcommittee chairman, on May 21 (June News, page 4). ■



NARP President George L. Chilson (l.) thanks Montana Department of Transportation Secretary Jim Lynch (r.) after the Whitefish Town Hall Meeting for his department's efforts to show the benefit and value of the *Empire Builder* to Montana and America.

Thank you!

Here are the Montana officials that participated in the June 1-2 *Empire Builder* events. NARP salutes them for their work to preserve and improve Americans' rail travel choice.

Montana State Government

Gov. Brian Schweitzer; Lt. Gov. John Bohlinger; Jim Lynch (Dept. of Transportation); Tony Preite (Dept. of Commerce); Will Hamerquist, Lt. Gov. Bohlinger's Policy Advisor

United States Congress

Sen. Max Baucus (D-MT), Rep. Denny Rehberg (R-MT), Denise Smith (office of Sen. Burns, R-MT)

Montana State Senate

Jerry Black, Sam Kitzenberg, Frank Smith, Dan Weinberg

Local Leaders

Willie Zeller, Mayor of Glasgow
Larry Mires, Two Rivers Growth (Glasgow)

Bob Rice, Mayor of Havre

Byron Ereaux, Mayor of Malta
Lesley Robinson, Phillips County Commissioner (Malta)

Anne Booth, PhillCo Economic Growth Council (Malta)

Larry Bonderud, Mayor of Shelby

Andy Fuery, Mayor of Whitefish

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Silver Service Schedule Adjustments—Effective Aug. 1: Due to single locomotive operation, *Silver Star* and *Meteor* are slower—southbound *Star* by 29 minutes (and leaves New York one hour later); *Meteor* 40 minutes south, 43 minutes north. Northbound trains run *much* earlier—*Meteor* leaves Miami 6:50 AM, *Star* 8:50 AM. Connections restored at Washington (*Capitol Ltd.-Star*), New York (northbound *Meteor* to westbound *Lake Shore Ltd.*), Jacksonville (northbound *Meteor* to westbound *Sunset Ltd.*).

Also, the regular (not Auto Train) Sanford, FL station lost service due to building condition (damaged in last year's hurricanes) and lack of cooperation from the City of Sanford. (Amtrak shortly will begin a \$1.5 million renovation at Sanford Auto Train.)

New Auto Train Vehicle Carriers will permit many more mini-vans and SUVs to be carried on each train. Inventory has been increased in Amtrak's computer system. These replace original carriers over 30 years old that Amtrak acquired from the private Auto-Train Corporation.

More Acelas return—As of August 1, eight sets are back in operation, including first Boston-New York trips. Some schedules adjusted as *Acelas* are returned: trains 140, 141, 143, 148 resume through operation to/from Springfield (vs. changing at New

Haven). Check with Amtrak for further progress.

More Greyhound changes—June 28 saw addition of Thruway service at Frisco and Vail, CO, via Glenwood Springs (*Zephyr* points west) and Denver (east). On Aug. 16, Greyhound drops Dulles Airport and Warrenton, VA, so the Washington-Charlottesville Thruway buses will become non-stop.

Greyhound no longer serves Pittsburgh/Amtrak. (The Greyhound terminal temporarily has moved about 1-1/2 miles away from Amtrak's depot.) Amtrak passengers using Greyhound Pittsburgh-Columbus are on their own for transfers and ticketing.

California Zephyr Detour—Trains originating in Chicago and Emeryville Aug. 31-Sep. 7, Sep. 15-22, Sep. 30-Oct. 7, Oct. 15-22, and Oct. 31-Nov. 3 will detour Denver-Salt Lake City via Wyoming (Grand Jct.-Granby). For those trips, the only service at missed, regular-route points will be motorcoaches linking Glenwood Springs and Grand Junction, CO, with Denver, for *Zephyr* travel to/from the east.

NARP's New Website—Please visit our redesigned website, <<http://www.narprail.org>>. It has many new features and a members-only section where members who have registered can, among other things, read *NARP News* before it arrives in your mailbox!

Rail Travel Tips

Tip #11—If you own a cell phone, be sure to give that number in addition to a home or work number to Amtrak when making a reservation.

It is important that Amtrak be able to contact you not only at your destination (for a round trip), but potentially enroute as well. If your Amtrak reservation has only a home or work number in the record, you cannot be contacted in case of a service disruption or very late train.

When either the Amtrak website or an Amtrak agent asks for your phone number, provide a cell number, even if they specifically request your home phone number.

Appropriations (from page 1)

The F&B and sleeper language must be removed, or the entire national network could be at risk.

The bill also requires Amtrak to spend at least \$5 million "for the development and implementation of a managerial cost accounting system, which includes average and marginal unit cost capability," and includes a procedure which could lead to higher payments to Amtrak by commuter rail authorities using the Northeast Corridor. ■

Our news releases—F&B: July 14, 26; funding: July 19, 21—are on our website.



National Association of Railroad Passengers

NARP News

Vol. 39, No. 7

August 2005

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

George Chilson, President; **Wayne Davis**, **Arthur Poole**, **David Randall**, **Robert J. Stewart**, Vice Presidents; **Albert L. Papp, Jr.**, Secretary; **Robert W. Glover**, Treasurer;

Ross B. Capon, Executive Director; **David R. Johnson**, Assistant Director; **Douglas Kidd**, Director of Finance and Administration, **Tiffanie H. Childs**, Office Manager

National Association of Railroad Passengers *NARP News* (ISSN 0739-3490), published monthly (except Nov.) by NARP; 900 Second St., NE, Suite 308; Washington, DC 20002-3557; 202/408-8362, fax 202/408-8287, <narp@narprail.org>, <www.narprail.org>. ©2005 National Association of Railroad Passengers. All rights reserved. Membership dues \$30/year (\$16 under 21/over 65), of which \$5 is a subscription to *NARP News*. Periodicals Postage Paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to National Association of Railroad Passengers *NARP News*; 900 Second St., NE, Suite 308; Washington, DC 20002-3557.

(This has news through August 1. Vol. 39, No. 6 was mailed second-class July 28.)