



## Zero Dollars = Zero Trains

For any trains to survive under the Bush "Reform Amtrak" plan, states—even those said to be fully funding "their" trains—would have to absorb massive cost increases. You'd never guess that from what Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta says, but its not unusual for official talk about a 'killer' policy to promote that policy as 'improvement.'

Initially, that happened with Amtrak 20 years ago. But then-Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole was forthright after seeing that the evidence did not support optimism (see box, page 2).

So far, Mineta has painted an ever-risier picture of "Amtrak reform". But

there are big credibility problems:

- The track-owning railroads oppose having multiple contract operators. "Safety requirements and the integrated nature of railroading necessitate that intercity passenger rail be provided by one entity—Amtrak. Further, Amtrak's right of access, preferential access rates, and operating priority should not be transferred or franchised" (Assn. of American Railroads' "Amtrak Restructuring Principles").

- It is doubtful that any reforms would cause the President's Office of Management and Budget to change its position on fiscal 2006 passenger rail funding.

- A key part of "reform" is an end to

federal operating support for intercity passenger rail, a certain death knell for routes crossing multiple state lines—like the national network trains and the Northeast Corridor—but also probable death for state-supported short-distance routes.

Even if all short-distance routes survived, only a balkanized network in four isolated pieces would be left. Prospects for any Congress funding this would be dim, but imagine a Republican Congress funding a network with no service in states President Bush won last fall, but service in every state that Sen. Kerry won (except Minnesota)!

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## America Wants Amtrak! Newspapers and Legislators Speak Out

"In giant and sparsely populated Montana, Republican Sen. Conrad Burns has said, 'With the distances we have to travel in our state, it is critical to keep as many options as possible for passengers and commerce in our rural area.' In the Deep South, the mayor of Meridian, Miss., John Robert Smith, a Republican who served in the 1990s on the Amtrak board, has said, 'We cannot have a Third World method of transportation.'"

—Salt Lake City *Desert News* and *Lakeland (FL) Ledger*, February 10



"Interstate 95 isn't generating enough direct revenue to cover the cost of maintaining it. I-95 must go. Interstate 40, too. Not to mention Fayetteville's city bus system, which can't afford to reach into neighborhoods where its service is needed. While we're at it, have someone

check the Ocracoke ferry to make sure it hasn't lost money due to last year's hurricanes. We might need to scuttle it.

"If that strikes you as a truly idiotic approach to transportation financing, you're not alone. But somebody please pass the word to Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, who is out to save Amtrak by killing it.

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—(l.) Jim Stevenson, (r.) NCDOT

Rep. Howard Coble (R-NC) addresses a crowd of about 250 at the February 22 official rededication of the beautifully renovated Southern Pines depot. Coble, who helped secure the funds, told the mayor, "I want to ride the train from Washington, DC, and I want you to meet me at this beautiful station." The station, served by Amtrak's *Silver Star*, was opened to Amtrak passengers in late 2004.

## Quotes

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"That was not hyperbole. Mineta, who has proposed zero funds for Amtrak in the pending budget, intends to bankrupt it, keeping only the popular northern corridor open. (That would be the same northern corridor that accounts for a billion fewer passenger miles than the rest of the system.)"

—*Fayetteville Observer* Editorial, March 2



"Even some of the administration's supporters in the region said killing Amtrak was unwise.

"These are unacceptable figures,' Sen. Arlen Specter (R., Pa.), said of the president's proposal. 'I intend to lead a coalition this year to provide funding for Amtrak. We have to have it.'

"Sen. Rick Santorum (R., Pa.) said that while he believes some reform at Amtrak is needed, he 'supports continued funding for the system.'"

—*Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 8



"Shutting down Amtrak, as President Bush is...proposing, isn't the best option.

"...Doesn't he see the connection of a strong Amtrak to energy conservation..."

"Threatening to shut down a vital rail system at a time when fuel costs are rising and highway congestion is worsening is hardly innovative.

"That's especially so when other rail companies aren't knocking down the door with bids to take over Amtrak service."

—*Rochester Democrat and Chronicle* Editorial, February 4



"Coming off the high of George W. Bush's visit to north central Montana this past week, we return to the reality that while the president is popular here, he also advocates some things that would be harmful to this region.

"On the very day of the visit, for example, came the news that his spending plan, which he'll submit to Congress Monday, contains nothing for Amtrak, the interstate passenger rail service. Not a penny.

"(The Amtrak grant is) a lot of money, to be sure, but before you're dazzled by all those zeroes, note that it's just one-twentieth of what the United States has spent this year alone so Iraqis could vote.

"Voting in Iraq isn't a bad thing, but neither is making sure public transporta-

## SEC. DOLE'S STRAIGHT TALK CAME QUICKLY

"I do believe that creative methods will be devised. I'm optimistic that the Northeast Corridor especially will survive."

—**Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole, February 21, 1985, before a Senate subcommittee, on the impact of a zero budget**



The possibility of a private takeover "was one of the things we wanted to look at early on and I think, in the time that has intervened, we have had a chance, really, to focus on that. I don't think realistically that is likely to happen. Now, the Auto Train aspect is one part that could produce some interest...but I don't want to overemphasize that aspect because I do not think, in looking at this in detail over the last few months, that is really likely to happen."

—**Secretary Dole, April 23, 1985, before a House subcommittee**

tion exists to carry the 130,993 passengers who used Amtrak across Montana last year."

—*Great Falls Tribune* Editorial, February 6



"Sen. Tom Carper, D-Del., called the move to strike Amtrak subsidies from the 2006 budget a "nonstarter in Congress."

"At a time when gas prices are going up and congestion is getting worse, it makes absolutely no sense to propose eliminating Amtrak as we know it,' Carper said. 'The economy in the Northeast relies heavily on Amtrak. The administration's approach will negatively affect businesses and travelers.'"

—*Wilmington News Journal*, February 3



"Rep. Marion Berry, D-Ark., said the Amtrak cuts were illogical.

"Infrastructure is the lifeblood of rural America,' Berry said. 'We cannot expect to eliminate transportation options for growing areas of this country and expect their economies to continue to expand.'"

—*"Will the Texas Eagle ride into the sunset under Bush budget?"* AP, February 7



"In a popular TV commercial, an annoying duck follows unsuspecting people around, quacking 'AFLAC!' to remind them of the benefits of a certain brand of health insurance.

"Now that I've seen President George W. Bush's proposed budget for next year, I think it advisable to hire the duck to waddle the streets of Washington, D.C. His job would be to quack 'Amtrak!' as loudly as possible, reminding people of the irreplaceability of our nationwide train system.

"The goal is to drive the train system into bankruptcy, from which it would theoretically emerge leaner and more efficient, or to force the states to take over interstate rail travel. The result would be disastrous.

"...The airlines and the highway systems are (said to be) self-supporting—the airlines through ticket taxes and the highways through gasoline taxes, while Amtrak is like the lazy brother on welfare. In fact, the airlines and highways are subsidized by billions of taxpayer dollars. And virtually every mass transportation system in the world, including every railroad system, requires some kind of government subsidy to survive.

"By all accounts, David Gunn, who took over the helm of Amtrak in 2002, has done a remarkable job of running the railroad with limited resources. Amtrak had 25 million riders last year, an all-time record, and ridership has soared not only on the northeast corridor, but on short distance routes in the west, on the *Pacific Surfliner* in southern California, in the Midwest, and on its long distance routes."

—Sheryl McCarthy, *Newsday* columnist, Op-Ed, February 10



"Somehow we have got to inspire our Government to add its support to our transcontinental network of rails, the best possible way for all of us, and foreign visitors, to see and appreciate this whole wonderful country; its land, its beauty, and its history. Everyone should have a chance!

—NARP member Frances W. Field, Age 90, Lebanon, NH (letter to NARP office)



"Illinois could lose 2,000 jobs, millions of dollars worth of business and a major transportation source if Congress goes along with President Bush's plan to cut federal subsidies to Amtrak, U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin said Monday.

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# New And Renovated Stations = Improved Service!

Train stations across the United States are either being constructed or renovated to serve the traveling public. These facilities are often the catalysts for com-

munity redevelopment and growth, especially in older downtown areas. Much of this progress would be erased if Amtrak is eliminated. Remind your elected offi-

cial about any station projects that may have taken place in his or her district and how that money would be for naught if Amtrak is eliminated. ■



—both photos, David R. Johnson

Amtrak and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation opened the Milwaukee Airport Rail Station on January 18, 2005. The station is the fourth air-intercity rail intermodal facility in the United States (after BWI Airport, Newark, and Burbank). The station features an enclosed waiting area, room for expansion, and landscaping (which will be complete in the Spring). The concourse signage at General Mitchell Airport (above right) has directions to the Amtrak station shuttle bus both as shown and at baggage claim.

In addition to Southern Pines (page 1), Hamlet's fully refurbished depot (below) was opened to Amtrak passengers in late 2004. Both depots have space for Amtrak passengers and other community uses. It is critical to note that both stations are along the route are served solely by Amtrak's *Silver Star*, one of the national network trains under fire from the Administration.



—Jim Stevenson



—Frank Hall

Princeton, IL has a newly refurbished depot (above) that it can be proud of. The facility was rededicated in September 2004. Highlights of the project included making the facility ADA accessible and restoring the brick platform. The station is served by the *Illinois Zephyr*, *Southwest Chief*, and *California Zephyr*. Fiscal 2004 ridership at this station was 16,648, up 12.6% from fiscal 2003.

## Zero = Zero

(from page 1)

### Short-distance Routes

States pay Amtrak only for direct operating losses, not overhead costs. Thus, for example, Missouri pays about \$6 million a year for St. Louis-Kansas City trains, but the federal government (through Amtrak) pays another \$3 million.

Thus Mineta is wrong to say that an end to federal operating grants would

have little negative impact.

His February 23 op ed column in the *New York Times* said between Portland and Vancouver, B.C., "Amtrak's role is reduced to running the trains under contract," i.e., not providing any funds. But the feds—through Amtrak—actually pay 50% of Seattle-Portland direct operating losses, and 100% of overhead costs for the entire route. Similarly, the federal government (through Amtrak) pays direct operating losses of other short-distance

routes: California's *Pacific Surfliners*—30%; Chicago-St. Louis—66%; Chicago-Detroit and New York Buffalo—100%.

### Long-distance Routes

Mineta says "no one" rides these trains, yet—on average—long-distance trains in fiscal 2004 handled 364 passengers per trip. Moreover, the average number of people on board at any one time (passenger-miles-per-train-mile) was 171 (vs. 134 on short-distance trains). ■

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Sunset Limited schedule change**—Westbound train arrives Los Angeles four hours later (no changes Orlando to Beaumont, Texas). Connection to *Coast Starlight* now requires three transfers (to bus, *San Joaquin*, *Starlight*). Effective with departure from Orlando on March 8.

Eastbound train departs eight hours earlier from Los Angeles (2:30 PM), four hours earlier arriving New Orleans (4:30 PM); no changes New Orleans-to-Orlando. Due to lost connections, connecting passengers from northern California (and from *Starlight* points beyond) must overnight in southern California. Effective with departure from L.A. on March 9.

NARP expressed concern to Amtrak about the lost connections, but Metrolink would not permit a Los Angeles departure closer to the PM rush. NARP's top priority—keeping *Texas Eagle* through cars—was achieved.

**CSX trackwork**—March 28-June 23: northbound *Silver Star* will skip Tampa and run two hours earlier Kissimmee-north **seven days a week**. *Palmetto* and *Carolinian* passengers will be bussed around trackwork area (Richmond-Rocky Mount), with some schedule changes **Monday-Thursday only**. No impact on other services.

## Quotes

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"Can you think of a worse idea than eliminating the only passenger rail service in America?" Durbin, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat, asked during a press conference in Chicago's Union Station, an Amtrak hub.

"Durbin said the state, already financially strapped, can't afford to take on more of the burden for Amtrak."

—*Chicago Tribune*, February 7



## Rail Travel Tips

**Tip #8—Take advantage of the Amtrak / Continental Airlines partnership at Newark International Airport for travel to and from Northeast Corridor points.**

When booking travel with Continental Airlines, you can connect with Amtrak at Newark's Liberty International Airport. Four cities provide through reservations services (pickup Amtrak tickets at Amtrak station). IATA (airline booking) codes for Amtrak/Continental stations:

- Wilmington, DE <ZWI>
- Philadelphia, PA <ZEV>
- New Haven, CT <ZVE>
- Stamford, CT <ZTF>

The AirTrain monorail also gets rail passengers to airport rental car outlets, and helps link air travelers with any northeast rail station.

## HOUSE REPUBLICAN AMTRAK LETTER

Twenty-one House Republicans led by Railroads Subcommittee Chairman Steve LaTourette (OH), Mike Castle (DE) and Sherwood Boehlert (NY), wrote March 2 to Budget Committee Chairman Jim Nussle (IA) urging him to "provide sufficient funding in the fiscal year 2006 budget resolution to sustain Amtrak's national network of passenger rail service. The company is headed in the right direction."

The letter noted that Amtrak's Board of Directors on June 10, 2004, approved a five-year strategic plan which "specifies that approximately \$1.8 billion will be required for fiscal year 2006."

LaTourette told NARP, "I oppose attempts to zero out funding for Amtrak and don't think it's sound policy. I'm going to do everything I can to be supportive of Amtrak."

The list of 21, available on our website, includes first time signers Dennis Rehberg (MT), Michael Fitzpatrick (PA), John Sweeney (NY). Jim Walsh (NY) did not sign last year but did in 2003.

**For the latest news, visit our website at <[www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)>. Our news hotline is posted Friday afternoon.**



## National Association of Railroad Passengers

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