



House Votes 266-158 to Raise Amtrak Funding

LaTourette, Oberstar Do It Again; But Problem Language Remains

Amtrak scored another big House floor victory, thanks to more yeoman work by Railroads Subcommittee Chairman Steve LaTourette (R-OH) and James Oberstar (MN), top Democrat on the full Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. They picked up where they left off a year ago, when they also spearheaded a successful effort—in that case a voice vote—to improve on the funding provided by the House Appropriations Committee.

This year's June 13 vote added \$214 million to H.R. 5576, the transportation/treasury etc. funding bill, bringing Amtrak to \$1.114 billion for Fiscal 2007. This is 24% above the \$900 million requested by President Bush and approved in committee. A total of 71 Republicans voted for the added dollars.

If your representative voted to increase funding, he or she should hear your thanks, but also your concern for a final bill with more funding and no destructive language.

\$1.114 billion is \$180 million less than Amtrak's current funding level of \$1.294 billion, yet Amtrak needs an increase in

2007. Thus, much work remains for the Senate and the House-Senate conference committee. The Senate subcommittee may act July 18, full committee July 20.

Ironically, while increased Northeast Corridor capital investment drives the need for higher funding, Congressional attacks on Amtrak focus primarily on the long-distance trains.

Among the worst H.R. 5576 provisions:

- Within 120 days of enactment, Amtrak is to give the appropriations committees a plan to make "food and beverage service" and "first class service (including sleeping car service)...revenue neutral or better on a fully allocated cost basis no later than October 1, 2008."

- "Not later than October 1, 2008, Amtrak shall reduce its system overhead expenses by 10 percent from the level identified as existing on October 1, 2006, and in each subsequent fiscal year, reduce system overhead expenses by 10 percent of the level existing on October 1 of the immediate preceding year."

This all seems at odds with the con-

servative philosophy of less government interference, especially with Republicans controlling White House, Amtrak Board, House and Senate. Why not just hold Amtrak accountable for an improving bottom line? That's what the House did a year ago, when the Brown (D-FL) amendment stripped out objectionable language, although it returned in the Senate and in the final bill (now law).

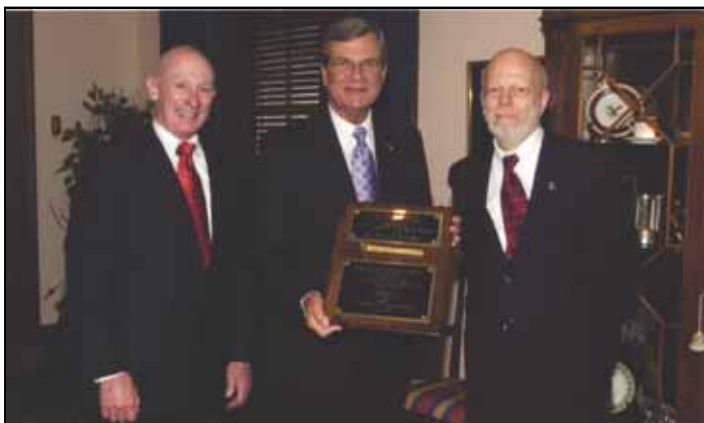
As for the new, worse House language:

- Railroads, airlines and ships worldwide consider provision of food a cost of doing business—necessary to generate ticket revenue, not a profit center. Amtrak "food losses" are not confined to long-distance trains. NARP believes sleeping cars are incrementally profitable, if some dining car costs are properly allocated to coach travelers. Also, Amtrak's long-distance trains without sleeping cars would not be viable and likely would quickly die.

- Ongoing 10% reductions in overhead seems absurd, especially since—*excluding* employees related to dropped commuter contracts—the employee head

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NARP Honors Senators Lott and Byrd with George Falcon Golden Spike Awards



Senator Trent Lott (R-MS, left photo) accepts award April 25 from NARP President George Chilson (left) and Executive Director Ross B. Capon. In right photo, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Capon hold award on May 10; NARP Assistant Director David Johnson is at left. Both senators were honored for their strong support of passenger rail; for more, see May News, p. 3. Byrd on June 12 became the longest serving senator, surpassing the 47 years and five months (17,326 days) record of the late Strom Thurmond (R-SC).

Illinois To Support More Amtrak Service

This article is condensed from Ken Prendergast's article for the Midwest High Speed Rail Association. MHSRA Executive Director Richard Harnish played a major role in originating and carrying out this project. MHSRA is at <<http://www.midwesthsr.org>>.

"In many of the communities served by Amtrak, passenger rail is the only option for public transportation. I'm proud that we were able to keep our commitment to maintaining passenger rail over the last three years. And now, this year, we were able to increase funding."

—Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich

The Illinois General Assembly and Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) in May doubled state funding for passenger trains. The state's budget for fiscal 2007, which begins July 1, 2006, has \$24.7 million, up from \$12.1 million in fiscal 2006.

These new, daily round-trips are planned to start October 30:

- Two Chicago-Springfield-St. Louis, bringing the total to five;
- One Chicago-Galesburg-Quincy, for a total of two [Chicago-Galesburg will have four (counting *California Zephyr* and *Southwest Chief*);
- One Chicago-Champaign-Carbon-dale, for a total of three [including *City of New Orleans*].

Amtrak will hire and train more than 30 employees, mainly locomotive engineers and train conductors. Amtrak officials also said they will have enough rolling stock to run the added trips.

Moreover, thanks to enactment of Illinois House Bill 5220, the state will be able to own or lease rolling stock—as California already does. This could be crucial to future expansion efforts.

The freight railroads are doing operational analyses to determine actual passenger train schedules within the flow of their busy freight traffic. At this stage, it appears that they can accommodate the new passenger trains.

Illinois' funding also includes its 25% share of the seven, daily Chicago-Milwaukee *Hiawatha Service* round trips. Wisconsin provides the remaining 75%. With the expanded rail service, Illinois will have nearly 22 daily, state-supported trains.

At nearly \$25 million, Illinois will be second only to California's \$73 million in terms of operating support for Amtrak services.

Joseph Szabo, the United Transportation Union's Illinois Legislative Director, whose organization also played a major role in the successful Illinois campaign, said, "California has a much larger roster of state-supported trains — 60 a day — but their system has grown steadily in

small increments. I don't believe they ever doubled it on a single day as Illinois will...in October. I believe it will be the first time a state has more than doubled its commitment to passenger trains at a single stroke."

A broad coalition emerged over the past two years to help push the additional funding. Besides MHSRA and the UTU, the coalition included the Environmental Law & Policy Center, over 300 Illinois municipalities, numerous universities, chambers of commerce and others.

But, says Harnish, the campaign isn't over. The next goal is to reduce travel times by eliminating rail traffic bottlenecks, modernizing traffic control systems, upgrading stations to reduce train dwell times and enhancing grade crossing safety. This also will benefit freight railroads by addressing traffic capacity constraints safely and efficiently. ■

NARP "Dumbfounded" on Mineta's Rail Silence

NARP Pres. George Chilson wrote June 13 to Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta, expressing surprise that Mineta's *National Strategy to Reduce Congestion* did not mention rail. The full letter is at our website; more in our next issue.

NARP to Capitol Hill: Support Amtrak, Use Bond Funding for Rail Generally

On April 14 and May 30, NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon filed statements with relevant appropriations subcommittees in the House and Senate, respectively.

NARP supported Amtrak's funding request. Our statement to the Senate urged "Congress to hold Amtrak accountable for the bottom line, but to be as restrained as possible with regard to specific directives as to how to get there. The history of Amtrak is replete with examples of 'good legislative intentions' which sometimes have resulted in higher costs rather than reform—including directives in the 1980s regarding food service. The more...specific directives about how to manage the company, the greater the danger that management focus would be distracted from doing what is best...and that responsibility for results would shift from management to the sources of the specific directives."

Under the heading, "Amtrak Efficiency Concerns," statements to both House and Senate said, "Amtrak invested in the mail business and still owns relevant infrastructure and a sizable number of cars with good life expectancy. I have written to Amtrak urging a careful review of opportunities to restart mail carriage where this would be incrementally profitable."

The statements also:

- Cited opportunities for improvement in the mechanical area, including adoption of "more sophisticated approaches to maintenance [used by the major freight railroads] to improve reliability and reduce costs."

- Said "reducing food losses is a reasonable goal; eliminating them is not."

- Said accusations that Amtrak is "buying market-share with low prices" stem from Amtrak's creative use of the internet, primarily for last-minute sale of "distressed inventory." Capon wrote, "If

Amtrak was not doing this sort of thing, others would criticize its fare-setting practices as out-of-date," but went on to praise state policies to support low fares, such as in California, saying such fares can "help America and its people deal more effectively with scarce oil."

- Citing the 55% of coach passengers on long-distance trains who travel at least 400 miles (25% at least 800 miles), Capon said "eliminating dining cars would hurt coach ridership. **Any analysis that assigns 100% of dining-car costs to sleeping car passengers is wrong.**"

Tax-Preferred Bond Funding

For the record in a March 16 House Ways and Means Committee hearing on this topic, Capon submitted a statement March 30 noting that rail capacity limitations contribute to the "well-documented [U.S.] transportation infrastructure crisis."

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Upbeat Acting Amtrak President/CEO David Hughes Addresses NARP Board

"The American people are intuitive about what rail means to this country."

—David Hughes

Amtrak Acting President & CEO David Hughes addressed the NARP Board at its annual Washington meeting April 28.

He praised NARP's work, saying that the "kind of effort and enthusiasm that you represent is the kind of enthusiasm that is going to foster the restoration of a healthy rail service in America."

States Leading the Way

Hughes thinks (as does NARP!) that the general public shares NARP's enthusiasm. He cited financial contributions from the states, noting that "operating payments have been going up gradually, capital investments...significantly faster. But if we had a federal matching program it would expand much more rapidly and these operations would certainly expand."

He is optimistic that continuing growth in state commitments eventually will drive development of "a passenger rail policy on the federal level."

Bullish on Long-Distance Trains

Hughes was upbeat about the long distance trains, saying, "I think we can significantly improve the financial performance without significantly cutting service. Our current goal is to get a couple hundred million [dollars] out without having to impact service."

Specifically on the new "simplified dining service," he said failure is not an option: "If it isn't good, we'll fix it." As for the next step—physical modification of dining and lounge cars—"we're building a prototype at Wilmington now."

Progress at Amtrak

His main thrust was to get the word out about progress Amtrak has made.

- Calling the worker injury rate "the best barometer of the overall health of a railroad," Hughes said Amtrak's improved 40%—from 4.5 per 200,000 hours worked in Fiscal 2004 to 2.7 in FY 2006.

- Ridership has risen steadily. FY 2005 was 24 million, up 11% from FY 2002 (both years restated to reflect NJ Transit's 2005 takeover of Clocker trains).

- Amtrak's is reducing total outstanding debt by \$400 million (from \$3.924 billion at the end of Fiscal 2002, to a projected \$3.524 billion on Sept. 30, 2006);

- "One of the things that we're all proud of is that in March and [April], the trains in the Northeast Corridor ran 90%

on time." This did not come at the expense of commuter train performance, which also improved.

- On-time performance where Amtrak uses freight railroads dropped more than 50% from 1999 to 2005. "We believe they owe us a better ride than we're getting."

Hughes also spoke positively about the Amtrak board's interest in competition, saying, "A monopoly isn't good for anybody. Exactly how diversity in supply rolls out we'll have to see over time, but I think it's a positive for everyone." ■

Amtrak Board's Mission Statement, Goals

Amtrak's Board has adopted a mission statement and mission goals. The Government Accountability Office and the DOT Inspector General had called for both.

The Amtrak Mission statement is, **"To provide America with safe and reliable intercity passenger rail**

service in an economically sound manner that exceeds customer expectations."

The summarized Mission Goals are **Customer satisfaction, Safety, Satisfaction with business partners, Employee commitment, and Fiscal responsibility.**

Mineola, Texas, Restores Its Station



—Bill Pollard

Amtrak's westbound *Texas Eagle* arrives at the newly restored Mineola, Texas, station, 80 miles east of Dallas, after a June 10 rededication. The station, now the Mineola Transportation Plaza, has a big waiting room, rail museum, conference room and space for a ticket office. Grants from Texas DOT, Mineola Development, Inc., and the Meredith Foundation were used to restore the building's original, 1906 look, undoing the Texas & Pacific's 1951 modernization. After Mineola became an Amtrak stop in 1996, local leaders gained national recognition for their outspoken support of the *Texas Eagle*.

Statements

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He said 2003 reports by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) show "a \$53 billion shortfall between the estimated investment needs of the rail freight industry over the next 20 years and the industry's ability to raise capital in the private sector. Those investment needs are just to maintain rail's current market share... AASHTO's... *Intercity Passenger Rail Transportation* said about \$17 billion needs to be invested in intercity passenger rail corridors over the next six years, and \$43 billion over the next two decades."

Capon noted the freight railroads' in-

terest in a 25% tax credit to encourage investments that expand capacity. Capon said "there should be an emphasis on capacity that also benefits...passenger trains or that improves the efficiency of publicly supported entities. Continued tax benefits should be tied to reliable operation of the passenger trains—at least 90% on-time performance. The magnitude of the benefits could be increased where the investment speeds up scheduled running times and/or permits more frequent passenger train operation." ■

NARP congressional statements are at <www.narprail.org>.

Dr. Lanny Wilson Wins Burch Safety Award

The Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Safety Award was presented to Lanny F. Wilson, M.D., of Hinsdale, IL for his voluntary service over 12 years as the first chairman of the DuPage Railroad Safety Council, which has worked since 1994 to help Illinois cut fatality rates at railroad crossings and passenger stations and along rights-of-way.

Dr. Wilson became involved after his son and daughter were involved in a 1994 railroad/highway grade crossing crash in Hinsdale, in which his daughter died.

He was nominated by Dennis Mogan, Metra's Chief Safety and Rules Officer, for providing "continuous leadership to the [DuPage Railroad Safety] Council. With dedicated, confident, and challenging inspiration, he has moved people and resources, and called attention to safety issues in a way that enhances the life-saving impacts of new laws, public aware-

ness campaigns and engineering changes." The Council has had statewide impact and is in contact with allied groups and individuals in other states.

In accepting the award, Dr. Wilson said, "It's much safer when someone decides to take the train. It's much better for the environment when someone decides to take the train...We partner with you in wanting to make a healthier, safer rail industry.

"We have to learn from the mistakes of the past and continue making the railroads safer...Thank you so much for this award. I really cherish it."

The Burch Award honors individuals who have significantly enhanced rail passenger safety. It is named after the victim of a 1991 passenger train derailment in South Carolina. The Burch family established the \$1,000 award in 1994 and has sponsored it ever since. ■



Bette Burch presents the Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Safety Award to Dr. Lanny Wilson, at NARP's April 28 Capitol Hill reception. The *Chicago Tribune* ran a story on Dr. Wilson and the award the next day.

House Funding

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count dropped 18% (4,300) from Sept., 2001, to Feb., 2006. The reduction came even though employees have been added to address post-9/11 security needs, Amtrak's new (in FY 2004) requirement to follow federal procurement procedures, and significantly increased reporting requirements (to Capitol Hill and DOT).

(The La Tourette amendment vote is at the members-only section at <www.narprail.org>. Anyone can go to <<http://clerk.house.gov/legisAct/votes.html>> and look for roll call #263 of the 109th Congress. For the bill, go to <<http://thomas.loc.gov>>, get text of H.R. 5576, click on the 42nd item, "Capital and Debt Service Grants to the National Railroad Passenger Corporation.") ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Fourth Cascades frequency—begins on July 1. Trains will depart Seattle for Portland at 7:30 a.m., 9:45 a.m. (*Coast Starlight*), 11:20 a.m. (new train), 2:20 p.m., and 5:25 p.m.

Trains will leave Portland for Seattle at 8:45 a.m., 12:15 p.m., 2:50 p.m. (new train), and 6:15 p.m. Due to unreliability, the northbound *Coast Starlight* makes "discharge only" stops from Eugene to Seattle.

Attention! Northbound Starlight has earlier schedule—From June 14, Los Angeles-Santa Barbara points 45 minutes earlier; San Luis Obispo-Seattle stations one hour earlier.

Checked baggage now may be sent ahead of traveler if origin and destination both handle checked bags but travel includes trains without checked baggage (i.e., Chicago-Wilmington, DE; New York-Pittsburgh). ■



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