



# Phillips: Transport Underinvestment Crisis

"You're never going to get your [passenger] trains on time until the two of you [freight and passenger rail] get together. Congress is going to listen to you before it will listen to the freight railroads. Freight doesn't vote, people do...There is a major, major problem with the movement of freight in this country. It's a foolish thing not to raise gas taxes, it's a stupid thing not to do it now, but it won't happen."

— Freelance Reporter and Trains Magazine Columnist Don Phillips, addressing the NARP Board of Directors

Don Phillips, one of the world's most knowledgeable railroad and aviation reporters, a veteran of UPI, *The Washington Post* and *International Herald-Tribune*, told the NARP board that "U.S. transportation is in bad shape and getting worse" thanks to underinvestment. He spoke in Washington May 2.

Phillips said the European Union has been spending billions on rail and high-way freight movements—proportionately

more than the US—yet Europeans fear their investments will fall short of the need. The US should be even more concerned, since our investment levels have been lower, but, he said, few in the Bush



Administration understand this problem: "We are in big trouble."

[*The Wall Street Journal* said June 6 that European governments are making

a huge investment in rail freight capacity because that's one of the few things they can do to address their transport crisis. A June 11 *Financial Times* interview with Ron Widdows, chief executive of container shipping line APL, said, "The flow of goods from Asia to the US could start suffering serious delays by 2010 unless urgent action is taken to increase the capacity of America's railroads and ports."]

Phillips believes "railroading is the future in this country because the government has failed to address the congestion problem on the roads. The highways are a disaster."

He tied Amtrak's long-distance trains to the rail freight capacity problem. "Federal money is going to be necessary to make the long distance trains work. Now you may laugh because federal money has been coming in for a long time. That's not what I'm talking about. The freight railroads are [on the] chopping block right

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## Amtrak Employee Wins Burch Safety Award

J. Wes Wilkins of Wilmington, Delaware, was honored this year with the Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Safety Award. The award recognizes the railroad employee judged to have done the most to improve safety for railroad passengers. The award was presented at NARP's Congressional Reception on May 2 (*May News*).

Wilkins was chosen for his commitment to and promotion of rail safety. In his role as Amtrak's Safety Liaison with the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees (BMWE), he has influenced the work practices of almost 500 employees in Amtrak's engineering department. During Wilkins' tenure, his unit has seen a 63% reduction in employee injuries while increasing the quality and quantity of work performed.

Wilkins is also credited with helping to implement the Switch Exchange System (SES) that constructs and installs high-tech, high-speed panel switches in

new interlockings throughout the Northeast Corridor, enabling safe and efficient high speed service throughout the Corridor. This process has served as a model

for other types of trackwork. Indeed, commuter railroads now contract with Amtrak for this service, specifically requesting

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Amtrak employee J. Wes Wilkins (r.), with his wife, Sheila, accepts the Dr. Gary Burch Memorial Safety Award from Bette Burch (center). NARP President George Chilson (l.) and NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon also congratulated Wilkins.

## Celebrating 40 years of High Speed Rail

Many milestones in the development of high speed rail in the United States have occurred along a stretch of the Northeast Corridor between Trenton and New Brunswick, NJ. Specifically, the 23 mile segment between what is now known as Ham and County interlockings featured demonstration runs and testing of new equipment. This segment was chosen in the mid 1960's because of the straight and level roadbed and, save for one station at Princeton Junction, the area was quite rural.

On June 14th, a plaque was dedicated at the Princeton Junction station marking the 40th anniversary of American high speed rail. The plaque states:

"Here, at Princeton Junction, N.J., three significant railway speed records were established in the late 1960s in preparation for the Northeast Corridor Demonstration Project, a joint venture of the United States Department of Transportation and the Pennsylvania Railroad. This program marked the entry of the U.S. into the era of modern, high-speed rail

passenger transportation."

The plaque notes the three speed records achieved: the DOT T-13 car reached 155.2 mph April 2, 1967; the United Aircraft Turbo Train attained 170.8 mph December 20, 1967; and in 1968-69 each of the 61 original Metroliner cars exceeded 160 mph during delivery testing.

The plaque is dedicated "in recognition, honor and memory of all those who worked in the industry to upgrade the track, improve the signal system, enhance the electric traction system; design and manufacture the vehicles; and conceive, plan and operate the service that resulted from those historic events."

Al Buchan, President of the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society, spearheaded the plaque project, aided by Robert Watson, an active Society member. Other sponsors: New Jersey Transit, Penn Central Railroad Historical Society, LTK Engineering Services and "Bombardier Transportation, successor to Budd, Westinghouse and Pullman Standard." ■



—Kenneth A. Briers

Robert Watson (l.), who was a coordinator for the Northeast Corridor Demonstration Project, and Alan Buchan (r.), an NCDP Training Administrator, pose in front of the plaque with Watson's daughter, Stewart. The plaque is in the eastbound (towards New York) waiting room at Princeton Jct.

## House Committee Hearing on Amtrak's Strategic Plan

June 12 saw the first of four Amtrak hearings planned by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials, chaired by Rep. Corinne Brown (D-FL). She expressed displeasure that Amtrak's board has not yet approved its FY 2008 Strategic Plan.

Chairman David Laney took responsibility, noting Amtrak's "virtually new management team and three of five relatively new board members."

Brown asked Laney how President and CEO Alex Kummant was doing. Laney gave Kummant "an 'A' for performance," praising him as a fast learner and for "assembling a superb senior management staff."

Kummant said "the Northeast Corridor is in the best condition it has been in decades," and Amtrak will continue to invest in it, even as more attention is afforded to growing state corridors. Asked by Chairman James Oberstar (D-MN) and Ranking Member John Mica (R-FL) about raising the NEC's top speed, Kummant said he did not expect such an increase, but cited major opportunities to shorten trips by eliminating slow segments, such as 20-25 mph in the Baltimore tunnels.

Brown pressed Kummant on restoring service east of New Orleans: "My office has been full of people talking about it." Kummant said that he "would like to eliminate the *Sunset Ltd* as a lightning rod (for criticism of Amtrak) and focus on corridors along" the New Orleans-Jacksonville route. He added, "We also have different approaches to" the *Sunset Ltd*. west of New Orleans." ■

### Vermont to Buy DMU's

The State of Vermont will re-equip the *Vermont* with diesel multiple unit cars (DMUs) and add a second frequency as far north as White River Junction. The added service is expected to help offset the requirement that through passengers must change trains at New Haven.

The state legislature approved funding for the cars, which are part of an FRA and Amtrak pilot project. Bus interests tried but failed to attach killer restrictions to the funding legislation. NARP and many of our Vermont members worked actively to support the state's plans. Assuming the timely conclusion of various agreements, construction of the DMUs could begin this year.

### Rail Travel Tips

#### Tip #15—Get the most out of Amtrak Guest Rewards!

You can redeem Amtrak Guest Rewards points *and* start the trip the same day—if you call on a weekday when the Amtrak Guest Rewards member service center is open and you can get the tickets from a Quik-Trak machine or an Amtrak ticket agent. The member service center answers phones Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 8 PM Eastern Time.

If you don't enter your member number before buying a ticket, visit [www.AmtrakGuestRewards.com](http://www.AmtrakGuestRewards.com) Follow the instructions in the Contact Us section to get your points credited. Or fax the ticket stub to 800-456-9354 or mail it or a copy to Amtrak Guest Rewards Member Service Center, PO Box 1762, Minneapolis, MN 55440-1762

Remember to review the list of Amtrak Guest Rewards business partners—other companies where you can earn, and in most cases also redeem, your Amtrak Guest Rewards points.

## Lloyd Flem Wins Jack Martin Award

NARP's third John R. Martin Passenger Rail Advocacy Award went to Lloyd Flem of Olympia, WA, on May 1 at the NARP Board Meeting in Washington, DC.

Flem was nominated collectively by the Region 8 NARP Directors (Bob Krebs, Art Poole, Bob Lawrence, Stephanie Weber and Jim Hamre). To quote their nomination submission, "Lloyd has been the executive director/government affairs director for All Aboard Washington (formerly the Washington Assoc. of Rail Passengers) for 21 years now. In his position for All Aboard Washington, he has been a leader in influencing the legislature, the state DOT and many local political leaders throughout the state."

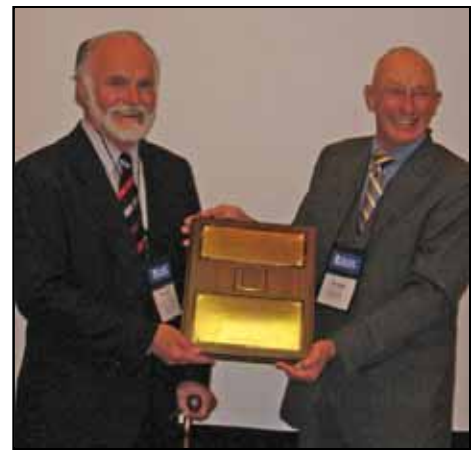
NARP Vice President-West Art Poole said, "Lloyd's gentle reminder to rail advocates is to 'praise and push' whenever we communicate with elected officials and community leaders concerning our wishes for rail passenger service in Washington state and beyond. This philosophy is consistent with the approach followed by Jack Martin. Mr. Martin did not like to criticize individuals in the pages of the NARP newsletter. He preferred to confine criticisms mostly to private communications with public officials, railway executives, etc. Lloyd, like Jack, knew how to keep doors open for positive outcomes."

"This 'praise and push' strategy to advocacy is not always appreciated by colleagues who prefer a more aggressive or confrontational approach. However, Lloyd's 20 plus years of advocacy has won long-term support and credibility for rail passenger organizations that follow the 'praise and push' model."

In their nomination, the Region 8 directors submitted a lengthy list of Flem's accomplishments. A few highlights:

- Getting a rail commission approved by the state legislature,
- Facilitating the first ever meeting between Amtrak officials and WSDOT and key legislators,
- Restored service to Vancouver, BC, added Seattle-Portland service and a second train north to Bellingham,
- New or renovated station facilities in almost every Amtrak city in the state, including persistent efforts to get the project at Seattle's King Street Station moving,
- Supporting the creation of a regional transit agency (now Sound Transit) to build and operate light rail, commuter rail and express buses.

The award is named after the late NARP President, who served from April 1979 until his death in September 2000. Previous winners are Leif Erik Lange (*News*, May 2001) and Ed Von Nordeck (*News*, Dec. 2005). ■



—Ross B. Capon

**George Chilson (r.) presents the John R. Martin Passenger Rail Advocacy Award to a surprised Lloyd Flem at the NARP Board Meeting in Washington, D.C. on May 1. Flem was honored for his work to improve passenger rail service in the Pacific Northwest.**

### Capon to Testify

The House Railroads Subcommittee's hearing on "Benefits of Intercity Passenger Rail" will be June 26. NARP's Ross Capon is among the witnesses; his written statement will be available on-line that day, or send NARP an s.a.s.e with request for a copy.

## Burch Award

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Wilkins' expertise.

"We are delighted to be able to bestow it this year on a railroad employee who has shown diligence, enthusiasm, and innovation," said Bette Burch, Dr. Burch's widow.

The Burch Award 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. A list of previous winners can be found on the NARP website.

There was special interest in the Burch Award this year by a Japanese television crew, which filmed the award presentation and separately interviewed NARP's Ross Capon, Bette Burch and her son Michael Burch.

The interest stems from an April 25,

2005, accident in western Japan—near Amagasaki west of Osaka—in which a speeding commuter train jumped the tracks and crashed into an apartment building. The engineer and 106 passengers died and 555 were injured—all on the train—in Japan's worst railway accident in 42 years and worst since Japan Railway was privatized in 1987.

Early reports blamed the accident on speeding: the train was 45 seconds late and the engineer wanted to make up time to avoid being disciplined.

One point of media interest is the fact that Japan's nominally independent Aircraft and Railway Accidents Investigation Commission lacks the true independence of our National Transportation Safety Board.

Kansai TV expects to broadcast the piece in Osaka when an accident report is released, likely on June 28. ■

## Amtrak's Growing Share of Key Northeast Air-Rail Markets

New York-DC is very positive. New York-Boston is strengthening—up to 38% for the first quarter of fiscal 2007, due to better Acela reliability, an Acela trip added one month into the quarter (on Oct. 30, 2006), and continuing Regionals strength. Overall Acela ridership is up 24% for seven months of Fiscal 2007 (October-April).

	WAS-NYC	NYC-BOS
Fiscal 2001	45%	27%
Fiscal 2002	56%	41%
Fiscal 2003	50%	35%
Fiscal 2004	50%	39%
Fiscal 2005	51%	38%
Fiscal 2006	55%	36%





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OUR MISSION: A MODERN, CUSTOMER-FOCUSED NATIONAL PASSENGER TRAIN NETWORK THAT PROVIDES A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT.

## Phillips

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now. They are in bad shape," meaning they lack capacity to meet current demand, much less future demand. He noted that Matt Rose (head of BNSF) "wants to do triple track from Chicago to L.A., even four [tracks] in some places, but there is trouble at Abo Canyon" [in New Mexico, where a landowner's refusal to move is delaying double-tracking].

Getting the necessary funding will be tough. He said "newspapers don't know [much] about railroads anymore" and lamented how tough it is "to get members of Congress, editors, and reporters interested in rail at all, other than (saying things like) 'the trains are on time...I like Acela, stuff like that.'" He said "the only way to reach editors and reporters is to sit down in a methodical way, don't make

yourself sound like a rail fan; make sure you point out that rail is coming back because of congestion on our highways. If you look at the highway density map, especially in the east, a lot of the highways—both urban and rural—are operating at or above 100% capacity. Freight railroads will have to play a major role in addressing this problem."

Phillips thinks rail passenger advocates working in tandem with the rail freight industry just might be able to achieve the increase in public investment—"the big, big government money"—needed to produce desperately needed additional track capacity.

Phillips ridiculed talk about making passenger trains profitable. "One of the dumbest mistakes anyone ever made talking about the passenger train battle in this country was in 1970 and 1971,

that passenger trains would make money. You still get that [argument] don't you? There are only three passenger lines worldwide that make money, all in Japan, but the Japanese passenger trains as a whole lose money."

Other Phillips points of interest:

- "We must not let the Transportation Security Administration get hold of passenger rail," because TSA would inflict costly but meaningless procedures that would hurt the system. "You don't fly trains into buildings."

- "Acela [Amtrak's high speed trainsets] is wearing out. It's very popular, [but] it's a piece of junk."

- Phillips shares our frustration over Bush Administration implementation of ADA on station platforms [*NARP News*, March, April and Aug., 2006].

- There is a crisis between the unions and Amtrak and between the unions and the freight railroads. [Note: The House Railroads Subcommittee has scheduled an "Amtrak Labor Negotiations" hearing for July 26. Amtrak President Alex Kummant testified on June 12 that one union agreement is out for a ratification vote, another is "near a handshake," and a third union has agreed to come in for high-level discussions.]

- U.S. aviation is also in crisis. The International Air Transport Association is responsible for carrying out worldwide safety audits for various countries and their airline industries. The Federal Aviation Administration is about to have a safety audit, and there is a lot of talk saying that the IATA will be appalled at what's been happening at the FAA." ■

## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**Update on California Zephyr trips to bypass Rockies**—New dates for detours via Wyoming (May News). For Emeryville and Chicago departures on July 9-10, July 14-17, July 21-24, July 28-July 31, August 4-7 (train runs non-stop across Wyoming the next day).

**More Roomettes to Sell**—Amtrak will sell roomettes in Superliner dorm cars on more trains, up to eight rooms per dorm. Same room design and service as in regular sleepers.

**Railfones removed from trains**—Effective June 1, Railfone

service is eliminated. Phones are being physically removed as trains are cycled in for maintenance. Proliferation of personal cell phones have sharply reduced Railfone usage; ironically, it was the mobile telephone technology on the original Metroliners (Page 2) that led to the development of what we now know as cell phone technology.

**Food service cars no longer accept checks**—Amtrak on June 1 stopped accepting checks on board for food service payment. Cash, credit, and Travelers Checks are accepted.