



Historic Advance for Passenger Trains

President touts trains; California, Florida, Illinois biggest winners — among many

President Obama mentioned high speed rail in his Jan. 27 State of the Union address (see box below). Do you know the last time a “State” address mentioned transportation?

On Jan. 28, Obama and Vice-President Biden were at a town hall in Tampa

announcing passenger train grants for 13 corridors affecting 31 states, while other federal officials stumped elsewhere.



The President and Vice President wave from the rear of the inaugural special from Philadelphia to DC (PorHomme.com)

“Tomorrow, I’ll visit Tampa, Florida, where workers will soon break ground on a new high-speed railroad funded by the Recovery Act. [Applause] There are projects like that all across this country that will create jobs and help move our nation’s goods, services, and information.”

— President Obama, State of the Union Address

This heralded a new era of federal investment in the growth and development of intercity passenger trains. The announcements covered most of the \$8 billion in high speed rail funds in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).

The President said: “Why don’t we have [high-speed trains]? Part of it is that we’re a very big country ... But let’s face it, we just

love our cars...[But] we need to invest in infrastructure like

high-speed rail that will allow us to choose the option of taking the train.”

Biden: “Today’s awards provide only initial funding. More will come in the future as progress is made. It’s a down

payment on a national program that will change the way we travel, the way we work and live, and the way communities are connected.”

NARP’s two releases hailed the Administration’s strategy of funding many worthwhile projects.

Administration officials know this program must be well executed if it is to lead to continued federal investment. Before the dollars

(continued on p. 2)

More Online

NARP’s release praising the grants in general (Jan. 27): www.bit.ly/narparra

Our comments on each grant (Jan. 28): www.bit.ly/narpcomments

White House summary table: www.bit.ly/grantsheet [PDF]

Federal Railroad Admin. interactive map linking to PDF fact sheets on funded projects by region: www.bit.ly/grantdetails

LaHood: “Change Has Come to DOT”

In a move strongly advocated by transit and rail advocates, DOT Secretary Ray LaHood rescinded a 2005 rule (www.bit.ly/bushrule) that elevated “cost-effectiveness”—anticipated riders per dollar spent—above all other criteria used to determine whether a new local bus, metro, streetcar or light rail line can receive federal funds. Now, DOT will give serious consideration to congestion relief, environmental benefits, promotion of smart growth and economic development, and other quality-of-life measures.

Transit agencies should have a better chance of obtaining federal funds for major improvement projects, as they will no longer be held hostage by the amount of travel time reduced (compared to driving) per federal dollar spent.



Secy. LaHood at D.O.T. headquarters, Aug. 2009 (Getty Images)

LaHood made the announcement during his Jan. 13 speech before the annual Washington meeting of the the National Academies’ Transportation Research Board.

He promised to “free transit from long-standing [onerous] criteria. ... In short,

we will take livability into account.

“Everywhere I go, people want more and better transportation ... to leave their cars behind [and] enjoy clean, green neighborhoods.”

The revamped criteria will most benefit new streetcar and light-rail lines and extensions of existing ones, as well as bus service enhancements. This will further boost the nascent domestic manufacturing industry for rail transit equipment. Among cities that will now qualify for federal help are Seattle, Cincinnati, Fort Lauderdale and Boise.

Available federal dollars, of course, still fall far short of transit investment needs. The President’s 2011 budget requests \$10.8 billion for transit, up from \$10.7 billion in 2010. The new “Livable Communities” program is partly drawn from existing transit funds. ■

can flow, projects must pass muster with FRA. All projects will be subject to negotiations on scope, schedule and budget—tied to quantifiable public benefits. FRA must approve agreements with host railroads and with Amtrak. Where added funds are needed to produce a useful project, FRA must be satisfied of the reasonable prospect of procuring those funds.



The Administration will work aggressively with states to complete the proposed projects, only reallocating funds if there are insurmountable problems.

Amtrak “entered into 12 agreements in principle with states and provided 23 letters of support for...projects...and Service Planning Activity grant applications. We entered into 14 Agreements in Principle in support of High-Speed Rail/Intercity Passenger Rail Service Development Program applications and provided three letters of support” (Amtrak budget request cover letter, see page 4).

Some grant details follow. Numbers do not add to \$8 billion as some money will be held for the next round, along with the \$2.5 billion in 2010 appropriations; for those, grant invitations are expected to be out in the spring, with awards late this year.

California

California High-Speed Rail: \$2.25 bil-

lion. The most developed and previously capitalized program for building a new super-fast line in the U.S. wins the largest share of the \$8 billion. The initial line is set to open by 2020.

California Conventional Corridors: \$94 million. The *Capitol* corridor will see completion of a Sacramento track relocation project, a new crossover east of Davis, and four new tracks in San Jose Diridon Station. *San Joaquin* train sets will be upgraded, including more storage space for bicycles and an overhaul of the trains’ emissions control equipment. *Pacific Surfliners* get new track and crossovers south of Los Angeles to improve reliability.

Pacific Northwest

Cascades track improvements: \$598 million. Two more daily Seattle-Portland round trips, for a total of six; a 5% cut in travel time and 62-88% increases in on-time performance. New bypass tracks, and multiple upgrades to existing track and signal systems. Grade separations, positive train control, and seismic retrofits to Seattle’s historic King Street Station. Portland Union Station gets a facelift.

Midwest

110-mph Chicago-St. Louis trains: \$1.1 billion. The biggest grant to upgrade
(continued on p. 3)

PTC Final Rule Issued

Positive Train Control, a system to protect against train-to-train collisions, overspeed derailments, and similar mishaps, must be installed by Dec. 31, 2015, where passenger trains and toxic-by-inhalation (TIH) materials are carried (*NARP News*, Oct-Nov 2008).

On Jan. 12, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued the final rule on implementation (www.bit.ly/ptcrule, 475 page PDF). Concern that passenger service on some secondary lines would be threatened was eased as the rule permits exceptions on lines with annual freight traffic below 15 million gross ton miles (up from five million in the draft).

Exceptions can also be granted where passenger operations do not exceed 12 trains a day (four in unsignalled territory; four on a Class One railroad), in passenger terminals, and where there is “temporal” passenger/freight separation.

Tourist and excursion lines 20 miles or shorter can get exceptions.

But “FRA will review each requested exception and may require mitigations.”

FRA kept 2008 as the baseline for traffic calculations; railroads argued against this, saying traffic patterns change.

Also, by the end of March, a new federal rule for railroad cab cars and electric and diesel multiple unit railroad cars will codify existing APTA standards for cab end strength, which include stronger corner posts. The rule requires that the end structure pass tests that measure the energy absorbed as the structure is bending before failure, and is based on extensive research and testing.

The rule aims to prevent the collapse or telescoping of railcars in collisions. The final rule’s estimated price is \$4.1 million over 20 years, mostly for testing and engineering costs. ■

Most Reactions to the Grants: “Yes”

NARP President Ross Capon appeared twice in a positive *NBC Nightly News* piece Jan. 30. He said, in part, “This is a historic moment, both in terms of the amount of money that we’re finally putting into passenger trains, and the intelligence that was applied to how the money was distributed. So it’s a matter of federal leadership at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue and the willingness to keep the dollars flowing.”

The topic was considered at length earlier that day on C-SPAN’s *Washington Journal* and Feb. 2 on NPR’s *On Point*.

Secretary LaHood’s Fast Lane blog on Feb. 1 had a round-up of positive statements from governors, advocates and editorials.

The posting, “America shouts a collective ‘Yes’ for high-speed rail,” noted that the *Dallas Morning News* said “yes” even though Texas got only a small grant.

LaHood: “But there was one surprisingly ill-informed ‘No.’ I was disappointed to see the *Washington Post*’s editorial [Jan. 31], which pointed to a low-value project that did NOT receive ANY funding! And also to a project they like—the Northeast Corridor—that they claim was given short-shrift...No single segment has claimed a greater share of our limited passenger rail investment in the last 30 years than the Northeast Corridor...In 2009 alone, [we] provided over \$1 billion...[for] long overdue” NEC capital work.” ■

Count me in! I want to become a NARP member.

\$35 Individual \$45 Family* \$50 Donor* \$75 Sponsor*

\$125 Sustaining* \$20 Student \$25 Senior Other \$ _____

My check is enclosed, payable to NARP.

Charge my credit card: VISA MasterCard Discover AmEx

Acct. No: _____ Exp. Date: ____/____ Security code: _____

Name: _____ * 2nd Member Name _____

Address: _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: _____ E-mail _____

Mail to: N.A.R.P, 505 Capitol Ct. NE, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20002-7706
Or join online at www.narprail.org / Send NARP News by Email Post

conventional service. Targeted Chicago-St. Louis run time: four hours.

St. Louis-Kansas City bridge and crossover expansion: \$31 million. The *Missouri River Runner* should build on recent on-time performance and ridership gains. Projects include expanding existing railroad bridges, adding universal crossovers, and improving grade crossings.

Wisconsin service enhancements: \$822 million. Milwaukee-Madison service will get a jumpstart through station refurbishments, track upgrades, and positive train control implementation. The Madison station will be at the airport. Service from there to the Twin Cities will be studied over three possible routings.

Ohio: \$400 million sets the stage for the first phase of Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati service—three daily conventional-speed round-trips. Track upgrades, grade crossings, new stations, maintenance facilities and planning for equipment purchases are funded.

Detroit-Chicago modernization: \$244 million. The Amtrak-owned third of this line already sees 95 mph speeds. The work here includes a new flyover to support construction of three new tracks

for trains operating east of Lake Michigan—part of the CREATE project to smooth the flow of rail traffic through Chicago. Troy and Battle Creek, MI, get station renovations and Dearborn gets a new station



A flyover near Kansas City, akin to those to be built around Chicago as part of CREATE (Courtesy *The Viewliner Limited* blog)

adjacent to the Henry Ford Museum.

A major investment will be made on the congested Porter, IN-Chicago segment, reportedly reducing delays by 24% and increasing speeds by 7%.

BNSF's Ottumwa (IA) Subdivision: \$17 million. Four new crossovers will ease congestion and improve reliability of the *California Zephyr*. The existing crossovers are hand-thrown.

Southeast

Florida High-Speed Rail: \$1.25 billion. The first phase will be a new, Tampa-Orlando line, largely in the median of Interstate 4. Speeds should reach 168 mph with 16 daily round trips. Tampa-Orlando

trip time will be less than one hour vs. about 90 minutes by car. As currently planned, the high-speed service will share only one station with commuter rail and Amtrak—on a future leg of the system, at Miami. NARP will push for more connections.

For a good discussion about a change in Amtrak's liability exposure due to the SunRail commuter project, and its possible impact, see the *Orlando Sentinel's* Jan. 26 editorial: www.bit.ly/sunrail.

A faster Raleigh-Charlotte corridor: \$520 million. The number of daily round-trips will increase to four, with a 90-mph top speed, thanks to 30 inter-related projects, including track upgrades and new equipment purchases. North Carolina's strong record of passenger-train investment finally gets a matching federal commitment.

Rail congestion mitigation, Washington-NC: \$100 million. Three sidings will be added between Selma, NC and the Virginia state line, and a third track on a stretch north of Richmond, reducing bottlenecks.

This will improve reliability on all Amtrak trains linking New York and NC, Charleston, Savannah and Florida.

A faster, more reliable Heartland Flyer: \$4 million. Grade crossing signal timing improvements between Fort Worth and the Oklahoma border will permit 79 mph running.

Northeast

Better rides in New York State: \$151 million. New tracks, signals, and grade crossing safety enhancements will produce a higher-quality *Empire Service*, while Rochester and Buffalo-Depew stations will get needed facelifts. Three miles of new track will improve running

times on the New York-Montreal *Adirondack*.

Northeast Corridor enhancements: \$112 million.



The Vermonter in its "home" state (Courtesy New England Central R.R.)

Completion of engineering and environmental work for a new tunnel west of Baltimore Penn Station, and a new BWI Airport station. Final design for replacement of Portal Bridge in NJ. Track work in Rhode Island.

Keystone Corridor grade crossing elimination: \$27 million. This removes the three remaining highway grade crossings from the 110-mph, electrified Philadelphia-Harrisburg line, improving safety and security. There is also planning money for extending frequent service to Pittsburgh.

New Haven-Hartford-Springfield double-tracking: \$40 million. This will improve reliability and speed for travelers on *Regionals* and the *Vermont*, while facilitating establishment of commuter service on the line.

Downeaster extension to Brunswick, Maine: \$35 million. The goal is to reduce travel time between Boston and Portland by 17%, increase frequency to seven daily round trips, and extend this popular service farther east.

Restoration of direct Vermont-Springfield route and track enhancements: \$120 million. This will save 90 minutes' trip time between Vermont and Springfield, MA-Washington points. Northampton would regain service; Amherst would lose it.

Planning studies

At least \$6 million was granted for 11 states to do planning for future service. These include extending *Keystone* service from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh and fully double-tracking Chicago to St. Louis. Some planning money went to states that currently lack rail programs: Alabama, Georgia, Kansas and West Virginia. Alabama's grant will be used to study Mobile-Montgomery-Birmingham service, West Virginia will complete its rail plan and a high-speed rail study. ■



George Chilson, Chairman; James Churchill, John DeLora, Albert L. Papp, Jr., Arthur Poole, David Randall, Robert J. Stewart, Vice Chairs; Nicholas Noe, Secretary; Kenneth T. Clifford, Treasurer

Ross B. Capon, President & CEO; Sean Jeans-Gail, Communications Director; Tiffanie H. Childs, Coordinator of Resource Development; Malcolm M. Kenton, Transportation Assistant

National Association of Railroad Passengers NARP News (ISSN 0739-3490), published monthly (except Nov.) by NARP; 505 Capitol Ct. NE, Suite 300; Washington, DC 20002-7706; 202/408-8362, fax 202/408-8287, <narp@narprail.org>, <www.narprail.org>. ©2009 National Assoc. of Railroad Passengers. All rights reserved. Membership dues \$35/year (\$20/under 21, \$25/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; 505 Capitol Ct. NE, Suite 300; Washington, DC 20002-7706.

(This has news through February 3. Vol. 43, No.10 was mailed December 11.)

our mission: a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice americans want.

Funding Passenger Trains

Fiscal 2011 Budget: The White House released its budget Feb. 1; Amtrak's 2011 Grant and Legislative Request (www.bit.ly/amtkreq) was issued the same day and is consistent with the PRIIA authorization enacted in October, 2008.

As the table shows, the President seeks \$563 million for Amtrak operations—the 2010 level—but Amtrak seeks \$592 million, partly because the bigger capital program drives up operating costs in a way that it did not a decade ago, when Amtrak capitalized many more things. (Former Pres. David Gunn ended this practice after his 2002 arrival.)

As shown in the "possible" columns (table above), the ADA mandate and the Administration's request could decimate Amtrak's general capital budget.

The cover letter from President & CEO Joseph Boardman says Amtrak "requires a minimum of about \$700 million in annual capital funding for the assets it owns on the Northeast Corridor...on average, about \$330 million for the normalized replacement of assets...and \$370 million annually through 2023 to eliminate a backlog of deferred investment..."

Amtrak also desperately needs new rolling stock for replacement and expansion. Amtrak still has 87 Heritage cars in revenue service—cars that Amtrak inherited when it started running in 1971.

The President requested \$1 billion for further high-speed rail (HSR) grants to states. There is also \$12 million for technology research, planning and analysis for next-generation HSR.

NARP's statement on the President's budget said, in part: "For new grants to states for intercity passenger train development including cars and locomotives, we will be pushing to increase the FY 2011 appropriation to \$4 billion. This compares with \$1 billion in the President's 2011 budget request and \$2.5 billion in the regular FY 2010 appropriation. In this regard, we are partners with the organizers of the fourbillion.com coalition."

"Jobs Bill": H.R. 2847, the Jobs for Main Street Act, passed the House Dec. 16 with \$800 million for Amtrak fleet modernization, including rehabbing existing stock. Sens. Specter & Casey and Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper (all D-PA) hailed this.

Dahlkemper said, "Funding for Amtrak fleet modernization is critical to job cre-

ation and retention in Western Pennsylvania. With this funding, Amtrak will help create demand for fuel efficient locomotives, which could be produced in Erie and Grove City by GE Transportation. Not only can this funding support our local manufacturers, it can also improve intercity passenger rail service and help create a more fuel efficient rail system nationwide."

With Senate action uncertain, senators need to hear your support for the \$800 million—and for adding high speed rail money to the package. If Senate is able to act, which is not certain, a House-Senate conference would follow.

Highway Trust Fund (HTF) remains in limbo. At a Feb. 3 hearing before a House appropriations subcommittee, an aide to Secretary LaHood said the HTF will need an infusion of \$9 billion in general funds to remain solvent through FY 2011 (\$8 billion highways, \$1 billion transit). NARP and the OneRail Coalition continue to argue that, to the extent that the HTF is funded from general funds, states should have the right to spend HTF funds on railroad projects.

Boardman's Report: In a Jan. 11 conference call with reporters, Boardman explained planned infrastructure investments, among them tracks and switches at Chicago Union Station, new maintenance buildings in Los Angeles and Hialeah (Miami) FL, expansion of the Sanford Auto Train station, replacing the 102-year-old bridge at Niantic, CT, and the start of work to implement Positive Train Control on all Amtrak-owned lines by 2012. Amtrak's fleet plan was to be posted at www.amtrak.com on Feb. 4. ■

Table with 7 columns: FY 2011 Budget & Amtrak Request Details, 2010 Enacted, 2011 Amtrak Request, 2011 Obama Request, Obama vs. Amtrak, 2011 Possible*, Obama vs. Possible*. Rows include Operations, General Capital, ADA Compliance, Debt Service, and TOTAL.

* These numbers would result if Amtrak is forced to fully fund its program to bring all of its facilities into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act by 2015.