

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

December 1994

11  
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## Big Changes on Capitol Hill

New challenges and opportunities face supporters of passenger trains and balanced transportation. Republicans will control both the House and Senate for the first time in Amtrak's history—indeed, the first time since 1948, well before the 1956 enactment of the interstate highway program. Republicans also gained control of 11 more governors' offices and 15 more legislative chambers in 14 states in the November 8 election.

In the House, Newt Gingrich (R-GA) may become the most powerful Speaker in decades, in part because of the plan to eliminate proxy voting in committee (long a source of the chair's power).

### Committees

Republicans will chair all committees and subcommittees; ranking members will be Democrats. The Republicans-to-Democrats ratios on committees and subcommittees will be changed to favor Republicans, as will staff composition. Committee staff may be reduced overall. As usual, lists of the members of committees relevant to Amtrak and mass transit will be sent to NARP members when assignments are final.

- **House Appropriations.** Bob Livingston (R-LA) will chair, replacing David R. Obey (D-WI), who stays as ranking minority member. In the Transportation Subcommittee, Frank Wolf (R-VA) takes over from Bob Carr (D-MI), who lost his Senate bid. Wolf favors changing Amtrak labor protection provisions to eliminate some routes, creating what he views as an af-

*"Ross Capon, executive director of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, said he hopes the Amtrak board will do nothing 'precipitous or dramatic,' and that Congress will work with Amtrak to 'squeeze more out of the dollars instead of taking away the dollars.'"*

*—Don Phillips in Washington Post article on Amtrak, November 27.*

fordable Amtrak system. There is no designated subcommittee ranking member yet.

- **Senate Appropriations.** Mark Hatfield (R-OR) will chair; Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) will be ranking member. Hatfield is on record in favor of developing the Northwest Corridor. The transportation subcommittee chairman is unknown; ranking member will be Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), who strongly supports Amtrak and the Northeast Corridor.

- **House Transportation and Infrastructure (formerly Public Works and Transportation)** gains authorization jurisdiction over railroads from Energy and Commerce. Bud Shuster (R-PA) will be chairman; Norman Mineta (D-CA) ranking member. Surface Transportation subcommittee chairman will be Thomas E. Petri (R-WI); ranking member Nick J. Rahall (D-WV). This subcommittee already has jurisdiction over highways and transit (aviation is in another subcommittee). There is likely to be a new, separate subcommittee for railroads, possibly chaired by Susan Molinari (R-NY) or William Zeliff

*(continued on page 3)*

### NEW DIESELS HAVE BEGUN SERVICE ON BUSY CALIFORNIA CORRIDORS



The first new California Locomotive was dedicated at Los Angeles Union Station September 15. The F59PH is one of nine being built by General Motors Locomotive Group for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). The rest will be delivered by the end of 1994. The \$20.8 million order was funded by Proposition 108 money approved in 1990. The F59's meet tougher noise and air quality standards than current models. Each weighs 134 tons and can run 110 mph with 3200 horsepower (same as Amtrak F40's, but below 4000-hp AMD-103's). The F59's will be used on the three Amtrak corridors in California. New California Cars are also on the way.

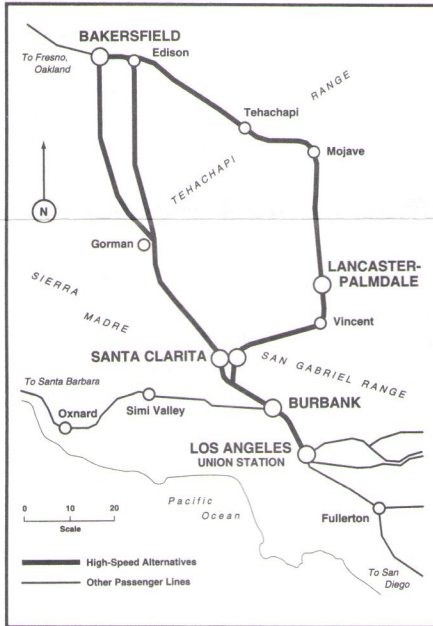
*—General Motors Locomotive Group*



## Two California Studies Published

The huge Los Angeles-Bay Area market is an obvious target for high speed rail. Thus Proposition 116, approved by California voters in 1990, funded a California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) study of an all-new rail alignment over the Tehachapi range between Los Angeles and Bakersfield. The study, prepared by Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, was released in draft form in October.

Currently, the only route is the circuitous Southern Pacific route via Lancaster and Mojave. This route, completed in 1876, extends 169 miles through rugged mountain terrain.



The last through passenger service, in 1971, required nearly five hours to cover that distance, at an average speed of less than 35 mph.

Travel times might be a bit faster now, due to this year's track-work for Metrolink's earthquake-inspired commuter rail extension to Lancaster.

But the Los Angeles-Bakersfield road distance (I-5) is only 112 miles. In 1922, the Santa Fe surveyed a 128-mile route and bought

some land—but never built a rail line. A few years later, the state built old US 99 on that route.

The Caltrans study looked at both routes (direct and via Lancaster). Both parallel the SP line from Los Angeles to near Santa Clarita. Further, the study compared three types of technology—rail at 125-150 mph, rail at 180-220 mph, and maglev at (theoretically) 200-310 mph. Various grade standards and tunneling requirements were considered.

Construction costs for the I-5 corridor ranged from \$4.3-5.3 billion for conventional rail with "very aggressive" grading

### NARP PUSHES SUNSET THROUGH-SERVICE

Though Amtrak extended the Los Angeles-New Orleans *Sunset Limited* through to Miami in April 1993, a serious quality-of-service gap existed longer. The train was sitting in New Orleans about three hours, with on-board food service suspended for four hours—right at dinner time eastbound and lunch time westbound. Passengers who left the train to search for a meal were not readmitted until departure time. Though noting New Orleans is a total-crew-change point, NARP asked Amtrak to do something about it.

Amtrak responded this August by keeping the lounge car open all but 30 minutes (for restocking and inventory), by showing movies in the lounge during layover, by keeping the diner open, and by allowing passengers to reboard when they wish.

to \$7.2-8.0 billion for maglev (with more for the longer Lancaster route). Travel times ranged from about 60 minutes for conventional rail to about 30 for maglev (again, longer via Lancaster).

The longer Lancaster route was retained as an option because of the possibility that the Antelope Valley's growing population and market potential would offset the greater construction costs and trip times.

### The Coast Route...

...was covered by Schiermeyer Consulting Services (with Jacki Bacharach & Associates and Wilbur Smith Associates). Its main point was that 110-mph service examined by previous studies will not happen soon on the *Coast Starlight* route, but that significant improvements could be made sooner for less money. A two-phase approach was examined.

Phase I would bring consistent 79-mph speeds to the line by 1998, using tilt trains, improved signals, and minor curve realignments. For about \$200 million, up to three hours could be cut from the current ten-hour Los Angeles-San Jose schedule. Tilt equipment alone could cut two hours.

Phase II, beyond 1998, would upgrade the line more, with cab signals for 110-mph operation, for about \$1 billion more. Total trip length would be down to five-and-one-half hours, with extensive corridor development at the two ends.

The report was triggered by the Coast Rail Coordinating Council, made up of local governments along the line. It hopes to get a Caltrans grant for further engineering work. ■

## FREIGHT-RAILROAD ON-TIME RECORD BETTER

Amtrak cited improvements in the July-September quarter in an October 26 release. It singled out Burlington Northern, where the *Empire Builder* was 80% on-time (vs. 15% January-March); and Conrail, where the *Lake Shore Limited* was 75% (up from 58%).

In response to NARP's July article "Downs Presses for On-Time Trains," David Solow, Deputy Executive Director of Metrolink in Los Angeles, wrote:

"...[We own and] dispatch a portion of Amtrak's second largest corridor, from Fullerton to San Diego...In the comparable period to your chart...this segment of the San Diego line operated Amtrak trains 90.6 percent on-time within the 10 minute tolerance and 97.1 percent if typical 'relievable' delays were included. Prior to our dispatching take-over in December 1993, on-time performance on this line averaged in the 70 percent range.

"[We] are dedicated to ensure all our commuter, intercity and freight customers receive quality performance everyday. While we may not be one of the largest contracting railroads, we hope they can match our performance in the future."

For the record, Amtrak keeps tabs on 15 railroads: the nine discussed in July plus Metrolink, Metro North, Central Vermont, Grand Trunk Western, Canadian National, and CP-Delaware & Hudson.



# High-Speed Law Enacted

In the rush to get out of Washington before the fall election, Congress left some matters unaddressed (such as S 2002/HR 4111, Amtrak reauthorization). One pro-rail bill that made it through was the High-Speed Rail Development Act of 1994 (HR 4867). The final version was approved by the House October 6 and by the Senate October 8, and signed by President Clinton November 2 (PL 103-440). It has three titles:

- **High-Speed Rail.** This is the scaled-back version of the 1993 high-speed rail bills (S 839/HR 1919; see Dec. '93, Sept. '94 *News*), which got bogged down by freight railroad concerns over liability issues. This title authorizes \$184 million for three fiscal years (1995-97). For 1995, \$29 million is authorized (of which \$25 million has been appropriated).

Money may be spent in two areas—corridor planning and technology improvements. The former allows for a federal match for environmental assessments, feasibility studies, economic analyses, preliminary engineering, other pre-construction efforts and (most importantly) right-of-way acquisition. Unfortunately, federal matches from the 1993 bills for actual construction or other physical improvements were dropped.

## New Congress

(from page 1)

(R-NH). Transportation jurisdiction spread out over multiple committees was an obstacle to allowing states to spend ISTEA highway money on Amtrak (Jan. '92 *News*).

- **Senate Commerce.** Larry Pressler (R-SD) will be chairman; Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC) ranking member. Surface Transportation subcommittee chair could be Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX), who favored changing Amtrak labor protection; ranking member J. James Exon (D-NE).

- **House Budget.** Chairman will be John R. Kasich (R-OH); ranking member Martin Olav Sabo (D-MN).

- **Senate Budget.** Chairman will be Pete Domenici (R-NM); ranking member not yet designated.

- **House Ways and Means.** Chairman will be Bill Archer (R-TX); ranking member Sam Gibbons (D-FL).

- **Senate Finance.** Chairman will be Bob Packwood (R-OR); ranking member Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY).

### Prospects for Amtrak

Clearly, all federal spending will come under close scrutiny. Representatives Gingrich and Molinari were two of the ten House Republicans who, after twice voting against Amtrak in 1993, switched and voted pro-Amtrak in 1994, helping to defeat a proposal to reduce Amtrak funding 10% (see July *News*, lead story). Also—and perhaps not coincidentally—state governments are more involved in and supportive of passenger rail than they were in the 1980's.

Finally, Amtrak's major suppliers just formed the American Passenger Rail Coalition, which is working to make legislators aware of Amtrak-dependent private-sector jobs in their districts and states.

It would be nice to avoid a rerun of the 1980's debate over whether one can end the federal grant and still have intercity passenger trains. There is no private-sector intercity rail passenger *system* in the world. Foreign "privatized" railways still benefit from large capital grants from the government—just like highways and aviation. ■

Technology improvements are on a grant basis, and would apply to "the improvement, adaptation, and integration of proven technologies for commercial application in high-speed rail service in the United States."

- **Rail Safety.** For on-going Federal Railroad Administration safety programs, \$317 million was authorized for 1995-98. Also, the Secretary of Transportation must report to Congress by mid-1996 on "action that has been taken...on railroad bridge displacement detection systems." This would address cases like the 1993 *Sunset Limited* accident, when a barge knocked a bridge out of line enough to cause the train to derail—but not enough to break the rail and cause the signals to go red. (Note—a weak electric current flowing through the rails tells the signal system where trains are.)

For fiscal years 1996-2000, \$1 million a year is authorized for an "Institute for Railroad Safety." This would be established by the Department "in conjunction with a university or college having expertise in transportation safety" to "research, develop, fund, and test measures for reducing the number of fatalities and injuries relevant to railroad operations."

The DOT must review "enhanced railroad car visibility," including making trains more visible to highway traffic at crossings. The Secretary must report to Congress on progress on positive train control development by December 31, 1995.

The Secretary is directed to establish minimum standards for passenger car safety by late 1999 (initial regulations by late 1997). These are to include crashworthiness of cars, interior features (including luggage restraints, seat belts, exposed surfaces), and emergency response. In the wake of accidents going back many years, Amtrak has addressed luggage restraints, exposed surfaces (and locking devices for swivel-seats). Seat belts have not been identified in past

**THE FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION will hold public meetings in January and February around the U.S. on its high-speed rail commercial feasibility study. Send NARP your name and address if you wish to be notified directly of these meetings.**

National Transportation Safety Board analyses as an issue. Emergency response needs more work—Amtrak is in the process of installing floor-lighting strips and providing laminated emergency procedure cards to passengers. Much progress was made in the late 1980's on removable windows. The Secretary may exempt historic and tourist railroads.

Operation Lifesaver is authorized \$300,000 in 1995, \$500,000 in 1996, and \$750,000 in 1997 for its work on grade crossing accident prevention and education.

- **Grade Crossing Safety.** This includes some elements of other bills (July *News*). It creates a pilot program for an 800 number for citizens to report grade crossing problems, with the number and instructions posted at the crossings.

The Secretary is to require locomotives to blow horns when approaching a crossing, but may make exceptions for some crossings, including those with full-width gates. Some communities have complained about noise and banned blowing horns at crossings, thereby presenting a huge risk to the public. The title encourages experiments with horn-blowing. ■



## TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

The NARP Hotline (see masthead below) will report any service reductions Amtrak may announce in the wake of its special December 12-13 board meeting.

Amtrak's reserved *New England Express* service was expanded October 30 from two to four-and-one-half daily New York-Boston round trips. Two daily round trips were extended to Washington. Changes include (from Boston) a new 12:42 pm weekend train, a new 3:02 pm train (except Saturday); and (from New York) a new 6:40 am weekday train.

**Caution:** *San Diegan* #783 leaves San Diego at 4:30 pm, 0:20 earlier than in timetable (due to track work); also leaving other stations (through Fullerton) earlier.

Amtrak has expanded first-class amenities on the *Capitol Limited*, including a separate section in the diner car and all-day complementary (soft) beverages.

**Thruway Buses:** Service to Winston-Salem, NC, connecting with Amtrak's *Carolinian* to/from the north at Greensboro, began in August.

Service to Jackson, MS connecting with Amtrak's *Crescent* to/from New York and Atlanta at Meridian, began October 30. Since the bus arrives at Jackson at 5:10 pm, it should be possible to connect at 6:22 pm to the Chicago/Memphis-bound *City of New Orleans*—but it does not work in the other direction.

The Ogden-Salt Lake City bus (connecting from eastbound *Pioneer*) runs about five minutes later than October timetable shows; the Borie-Cheyenne bus (from westbound *Pioneer*) runs about 30 minutes later.

**California:** Camarillo (30 Lewis Rd.) was added as a *San Diegan* stop (Santa Barbara line). Ontario (200 E. Emporia) was added December 4 (*Sunset Limited*). Westbound Las Vegas-Barstow-Bakersfield bus now starts at 12:05 pm and connects with *San Joaquin* train 705. Porterville-Hanford buses connecting with trains 710-711 were dropped. Leggett was added to the Brookings-Martinez line. A new Reno-Eureka interline bus connects with *California Zephyr* (but not guaranteed westbound), also stopping at Portola, Quincy, Paradise, Chico, Red Bluff, Redding, Weaverville,

Salyer, Arcata (connects at Eureka for Brookings). Metrolink's toll-free number is now good nationwide: 800/371-5465.

**Fare items:** Lower off-peak sleeping car charges for *Coast Starlight* began October 30. The round-trip fare structure on the Seattle-Portland line (single fare plus \$1 or \$2) has been extended to the new Eugene train and Thruway bus extensions.

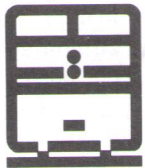
*Syracuse* public-private commuter shuttle, *On Track*, on four miles of the New York, Susquehanna & Western, began September 24. Rail Diesel Cars connect Carousel Center mall (future intermodal terminal site, ample parking), downtown, Syracuse University.

### TALGO IN NEW ENGLAND



—Ross Capon

Crowds turn out at Exeter, NH to watch the Talgo train on October 27, which was en route to Portland, ME while on a cross-country tour. Amtrak service on the Boston-Portland line should start in 1995. Local voters pledged \$135,000 toward this station's renovation in 1993. The Talgo train has returned to Seattle-Portland (OR) service through June 30, 1995.



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