

News from the

National Association of Railroad Passengers

June 1994

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Vol. 28

NARP Honors Governor Weld for Rail Link Work

State Rep. Businger Also Honored at Washington Ceremony

"I am very grateful to the National Association of Railroad Passengers for selecting me to receive the Golden Spike Award....I do believe that a north-south rail link in Boston is a necessary venture that will bring train travel along the Northeast Corridor into the 21st century...."

"We are not talking about a 23-mile tunnel under the English Channel. We're talking about a desperately needed rail link between two rail stations that are a stone's throw apart in distance, but which currently might just as well be separated by the Grand Canyon. We all aim to close that gap to ensure that passenger trains are whistling throughout New England for decades to come. I thank NARP for its support in this venture, and I hope to see you all one day, not too far away, passing through Boston with the pleasure of your rail travel unbroken."

—Gov. William F. Weld (R-MA),
at Washington Union Station's Columbus Club,
accepting NARP's George Falcon Golden Spike Award

For their bipartisan efforts towards making Boston's North Station-South Station Central Artery Rail Link a reality, NARP presented its George Falcon Golden Spike Award to Massachusetts Gov. William F. Weld and to State Rep. John A. Businger (D-Brookline), who chairs the Massachusetts Legislative Central Artery Rail Link Caucus. (Former NARP Director George Falcon donates the handsome plaques.)

The awards were presented at the NARP Board's annual Washington reception April 28. Weld's award was given "in appreciation of his visionary leadership and active support

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Governor William F. Weld receives his award from NARP President John R. Martin (r.) and Vice President Eugene K. Skoropowski (l.).

Downs: Reorganizing Amtrak for "the Customer"

Amtrak Chairman and President Thomas M. Downs addressed the NARP Board of Directors on April 29 after about five months on the job. When he came to Amtrak, he learned "that Amtrak's working capital value was minus \$240 million...that we had gone to the bank at the end of September to borrow \$20 million to make payroll because our cash position was minus some \$21 million."

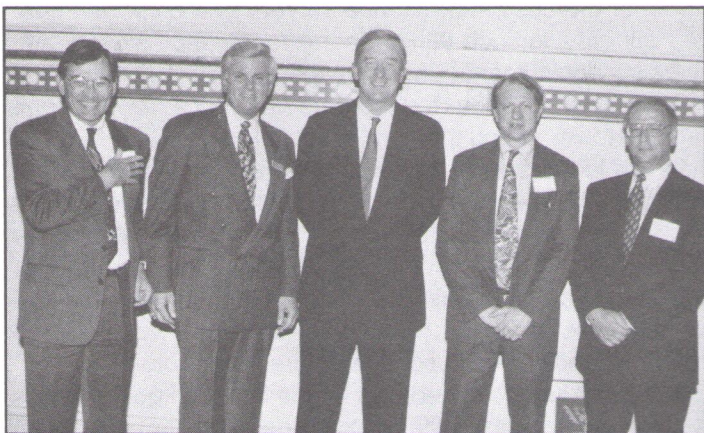
Since then, Amtrak has faced the aftermath of disruptive summer floods, bad national publicity about wrecks, a horrendous winter and continually intensifying airline price competition. [Ed.: The Smithfield, NC, wreck looked avoidable. Amtrak hit a passing freight train's dislocated trailer May 16. One engineer died; the other was seriously injured. Nine passengers were hospitalized; all were released by May 18.]

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"This [article] came out of the [Siemens magazine distributed on the ICE during its 1993 U.S. tour]. It had a piece by [NARP's] Ross [Capon]. It's what customers expect out of train service. I keep it on my desk, as a reminder, because it's pretty straight-forward. It says, 'Be on time...a rational fare structure...People want seats...edible food....Business travelers want room to work, they want transit information about connecting services, they want accessibility to parking and to rental cars.'

"This is a pretty nice reminder about staying focused on the customer. It's the customer, the customer, the customer, the customer."

—Thomas M. Downs addressing the NARP Board



(From left) Amtrak President Thomas M. Downs, Skoropowski, Weld, Businger and Martin after presentation of awards.

DOWNSON AMTRAK

• “[Former Amtrak President W. Graham Claytor Jr.] said to me: ‘Everybody heard [Claytor say Amtrak could reach] *economic self-sufficiency*. Nobody heard the beginning of the argument, which was—with the [gasoline-tax] penny—a fully recapitalized Amtrak can be self-sufficient. Everybody lost the full capitalization part of it, and only heard continuously the message about economic self-sufficiency....’

• “We are spending a huge amount of money on capital overhauls for aging equipment.... This year, [as a result, even with a \$195 million capital grant] we will probably spend [only] about \$96 million on real capital needs...replacement for depreciated plant. Our depreciation account will probably run about \$250 million. That means we’re still decapitalizing...to the tune of about \$150 million a year. Those costs turn into operating costs...loss of customers...higher maintenance costs, service interruptions.”

• On planning to move Amtrak *into* a majestic New York building and *out of* a majestic Los Angeles building: “Passengers expect to arrive in a train station, not somebody’s basement. I’ve asked [the Los Angeles developers] to come back to Washington and rethink” their plan.

TWO BOOKS TO TRAVEL WITH

AMTRAKing; A Guide to Enjoyable Train Travel is written by Mauris L. Emeka, an Amtrak train attendant. It is an easy-to-understand “how-to” guide for using Amtrak, explaining how to book a ticket, what to do at the station, what to bring on the train, etc. It is particularly useful for those using long-distance trains for the first time. Since Emeka works on western trains, descriptions of amenities and trains relate mostly to Superliner-equipped trains (all overnight trains west of—and including—Chicago-New Orleans, plus New Orleans-Florida). It is a 116-page paperback, with illustrations, serving as an expansion of an earlier work by Emeka (see Aug. ‘91 *News*). To order, send \$8.95 (plus \$3.00 postage/handling) to Apollo Publishing; P.O. Box 1937; Port Orchard, WA 98366; or call 800/308-5273.

Rail Ventures, a popular guide to train travel in North America, has gone into its sixth edition (the last was in 1992). This 450-page paperback is packed with information useful to the rail passenger—point-by-point descriptions and background on what you see out the window on every Amtrak and VIA Rail route, information on major stations, places to stay, travel tips, and a short section on Mexico. *Where else* would you learn that “Santa’s Super Rocket” is visible from the *Empire Builder* (at Wyocena, WI, between Columbus and Portage, p. 169)? To order, send \$14.95 (\$19.95 in Canada), plus \$2.00 for postage/handling to Rail Ventures Publishing; Box 1877; Ouray, CO 81427.

Downs

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Downs’ job, more than most, requires management savvy, creativity, grace and good humor in the face of adversity. He seems to have all of that; the Clinton Administration seems to have made a good choice.

Downs mentioned an on-board services (OBS) chief who kept passengers happy in a difficult situation by drawing on talents from an earlier career as a comedian. But Downs himself is “the real comedian,” said one observer, impressed with the extraordinary rapport Downs developed with a NARP Board dismayed at Amtrak’s problems and weary of past promises that things will improve. [He displays the same skills in his Hill testimony.]

Downs is working for a greater customer focus. Amtrak was “organized functionally. We have Transportation, Passenger Services, Mechanical, Maintenance-of-Way, Marketing. They all run from the top of the corporation to the bottom.... This is OK if you’re running a manufacturing process like an automobile plant, where all of the functions are integrated mechanically, [but] everybody who’s in the customer service business in the ‘90’s integrates their work at the customer level, so there is accountability.”

Downs illustrated the lack of accountability at Amtrak. On one long-distance train, the engineer and conductor both told him, “I am in charge of this train,” while the OBS chief said, “I’m supposed to tell you that I’m in charge. But I sure as hell am *not* in charge of this train.” Another OBS chief told Downs that the president of Amtrak is “the first common supervisor that the conductor and the OBS chief have.” [Ed.: No longer! May 1 saw Transportation and Passenger Services departments combined as Customer Services. Art McMahon, formerly VP—Passenger Services, is VP—Customer Services.]

Downs aims “to integrate all of the pieces of the corporation together at the lowest possible level, at the platform and on the train to produce accountability for the quality, timeliness and friendliness of the service and the quality of equipment. Somebody’s got to be in charge.” [To the greatest extent possible, real-time Amtrak communications systems will replace reliance on freight railroads for information.]

Also coming: “some functional, strategic business units” (SBUs), including a Northeast Corridor SBU, an “intercity” SBU (most of the rest of the system) and possibly a West Coast SBU. [SBUs are to control their own resources—what adds value for the customer; service centers and corporate centers will provide such things as the reservation system and overall financial management, respectively.]

Downs noted Amtrak’s desperate need for a new Chicago sanding tower to end the sanding of locomotives by hand by men “on ladders, with fifty-pound bags, some of which are frozen solid.” Asked why Amtrak did not address such basics before installing new audio-visual entertainment systems (May Travelers’ Advisory), Downs replied: “Because Amtrak does not have a comprehensive strategic planning process that weighs these decisions. [Ed.: A new sanding tower has been approved and will be in service before next winter.]...

“We can’t just be in people’s minds this train going across the high prairies past buffalo and gorgeous mountains, when you get on a train that doesn’t make it out of 30th Street Station. We’re going to deliver that product. End of story.” ■

Deputy DOT Secretary Downey Looks Ahead for NARP

President Clinton proposed "the first Administration-sponsored Amtrak authorization bill in more than a decade," Deputy Transportation Secretary Mortimer L. Downey told the NARP Board April 30. "For the last ten years, no Administration had asked Congress to reauthorize Amtrak...We are working with the Congress on what it will take to provide for Amtrak's long-term future."

Amtrak's Railroad and Labor Contracts

In response to questions, Downey said DOT has "limited" leverage on the freight railroads as to Amtrak's post-1996 contracts, but "they tend to look for support in one way or the other from the federal government," for example, on "tax code issues....I think we will [be able] to enter into the contract debate."



—photo by John A. Ross

Deputy Secretary of Transportation Mort Downey with NARP President Jack Martin, who is presenting him with a "thank-you" plate donated by NARP Director Ned S. Williams of Dandridge, TN, on April 30.

be looking at organization of on-board crews, shop functions and other areas...They'll really need to look at what their competitors are doing, both in terms of labor and management."

High Speed Rail

Downey said results of the first comprehensive study of the Boston-Washington corridor will be released soon. This will show what is needed for three-hour Boston-New York service "while at the same time allowing for and investing in increased commuter and freight service on that same line."

For high speed rail elsewhere, the Administration will move up the due date for the national high-speed rail policy and feasibility study from 1996 to 1995 "so we would have a solid blueprint for the next steps. We looked at high-speed rail as a truly viable transportation option, that should be in the same context as thinking about a new highway, or a new airport.

"We encourage the states to take the same kind of look, [which is] why we've focussed our [high-speed rail] legislation on states. Most of the services likely will be operated by Amtrak under arrangements similar to the so-called 403(b) state-assisted programs, perhaps with states providing rolling stock and other contributions."

National Transportation System

The current highway/transit law ("ISTEA") runs through 1997, but Downey said DOT already is thinking about rail's future as part of the National Transportation System (NTS)

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HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEES: LOW NUMBERS

Al Swift's (D-WA) authorizing subcomm. approved for FY '95/'96 \$390 million/\$370 mill. for Amtrak operations *including* 403(b); \$332 mill./\$353 mill. for capital. FY '95 figures reflect reassignment of Clinton's \$90 mill. for New York City station work—\$80 mill. to general capital, \$10 mill. to operations. Clinton's tough 403(b)-train state-support requirement was relaxed slightly, from 65% to 55% of long term costs.

For FY '95 appropriations, we hear Bob Carr's (D-MI) subcomm. approved \$376.7 mill., \$245 mill., and \$165 mill., respectively, for ops, capital, NE Corridor.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

The overnight New York-Toronto *Niagara Rainbow* is still expected to start June 17, but will run only once a week, originating in New York Friday nights, Toronto Sunday nights. Running times will not be precisely those shown in Amtrak's May 1 timetable.

Executive Sleeper (New York-Washington) was restored May 1.

On May 1, Virginia Railway Express commuter tickets became valid on certain Amtrak trains (86, 662, 663, 664, 667) at Washington, Alexandria, Quantico and Fredericksburg. These trains also stop at VRE's Woodbridge station, and accept VRE tickets. Amtrak trains 84, 93, 96 now stop at Woodbridge, but no VRE tickets are honored on them. This gives some VRE ticket holders more weekday trains to choose from, and access to weekend service for the first time.

Two Miami MetroMover extensions were opened May 25—north to Omni and south to Brickell Ave.

JOHN RILEY

John Riley, 47, died March 6. He had brain cancer. He was President Reagan's Federal Railroad Administrator. In 1984, Riley became the first FRA chief to address the NARP board, establishing a tradition observed by all of his successors.

His talk was strongly pro-Amtrak. He spoke of a "rail passenger renaissance" and of Amtrak's need for "a major investment in increasing its fleet size over the next decade. That's not a political position. It's an economic reality" (May '84 *News*).

Soon thereafter, then-Office of Management and Budget Director David Stockman tried to make Amtrak "the" symbol of wasteful federal spending. White House budgets for 1986-90 zeroed out Amtrak, but Riley skillfully presented his administration's views in a way that helped Amtrak's allies in Congress.

Before FRA, Riley worked for Sen. Dave Durenberger (R-MN). In 1991-92, Riley served Gov. Arne Carlson (R-MN) as transportation commissioner and, later, chief-of-staff. During 1993, Riley chaired the Regional Transit Board in the Twin Cities.

John's loss is all the more tragic because he was so young. We will miss him.

THE DR. GARY BURCH MEMORIAL SAFETY AWARD



for work to improve the safety of railroad passengers (May News) was presented at NARP's Washington reception Apr. 28.

At left are (l. to r.) Wayne Solomon, the first Burch Award winner; award sponsor Bette Burch; NARP Pres. John R. Martin. Below are (l.-r.) Michael Burch and Kathryn Burch Pettijohn (children of Dr. and Mrs. Burch), NARP Vice Pres. Eugene Skoropowski, Bette Burch, Deborah and Wayne Solomon, John R. Martin, Mark Van Cleave (VP—Coal and Commuter Operations, Chicago and North Western Transportation Co., where Wayne Solomon is employed as a locomotive engineer). Solomon also received a plaque from the North Western.



Rail Link Awards

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for construction of" the rail link, "thereby creating an Intermodal Transportation Project...which will become a model for the Nation's transportation policy in the 21st Century."

The governor formed the Rail Link Task Force headed by Guy Rosmarin. The task force's report confirmed the link's feasibility and value (July '93 News). At a North Station ceremony July 9, 1993, Weld and Lt. Gov. Paul Cellucci officially endorsed the rail link and committed \$1.5 million towards link-related Central Artery Project design modifications. This year, for the rail link, the governor's transportation bond bill included \$60 million, which the Joint Legislative Transportation Committee has approved.

Businger was honored "for his determined efforts" in the state legislature. He established the rail link caucus which includes 185 of the 198 House and Senate members.

In accepting the award, Businger said "I'm thinking of three people right now...my grandfather, who worked on B&O trains for 40 years and died [beneath one]. John Riley [Reagan's FRA chief; see page 3]...my last year in college. We were close friends. He was my campaign manager for student

government officer [at Boston College]....And Guy Rosmarin, who has spearheaded the rail link for so long, including as director of the task force the governor appointed wisely, back in the middle of February of last year."

Besides the awards, Weld and Businger each received a mounted map of the lines the rail link would connect, donated by NARP Vice President Eugene K. Skoropowski. ■

Downey

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which Secretary Federico Peña announced in December and "which would surround the National Highway System that was asked for by the Congress...and is now pending before [Congress]" (Dec. News).

The NTS would foster thinking about moving people and goods, "not just the construction of one type of facility," and "focus our efforts on key markets and infrastructure investment [because] we don't have the dollars to do everything."

DOT soon will announce an outreach process "to get the views from all of the transportation community on this issue and really bring something to Congress that we hope represents, as best we can, a consensus." ■



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