



RETREAT TO 2008 SPENDING LEVELS?

Passenger Trains Could be Set Back

Early Sept. 30, the House approved and sent to the White House a continuing resolution to keep the federal government running through Dec. 3, generally at current funding levels.

For Amtrak, that means an annualized rate of about \$1.5 billion.

In December, Congress likely will pass either another continuing resolution good through early 2011 or an omnibus bill for the rest of the year. The election might determine which path is chosen.

In any event, there is strong pressure

from Republican leaders to roll spending back to 2008 levels. This would mean a devastating \$1.375 billion for Amtrak.

When legislators are pressed to give specific examples of programs they would cut, more than one has mentioned Amtrak and high-speed rail.

On *Fox News Sunday* (Sep. 26) and *NewsHour* (Oct. 6), Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) criticized subsidies for Amtrak's "First Class" passengers. NARP has responded to this many times, most recently in August *News*, p. 2. ■

Amtrak's Vision for a Growing Northeast

Amtrak President Joseph Boardman unveiled a vision for a new, double-track 220-mph Boston-New York-Washington railroad.

Flanked by Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell (D) and other VIPs, Boardman also used the Sept. 28 news conference at Philadelphia's 30th St. Station to announce appointment of Amtrak's first High-Speed Rail vice-president (p. 3).

A day earlier, Rep. John Mica (FL), the top House Republican on transportation, seemed to welcome Amtrak's initiative.

He told the first meeting of the NEC Advisory Commission, "I am pleased that the Obama Administration may...be recognizing the critical need for true high-speed rail in the NEC...I understand that Amtrak is now developing a new plan to deliver service with much higher speeds."

Amtrak envisions "an investment of \$4.7 billion annually over 25 years" to put New York within 96 minutes of Washington and 86 minutes of Boston, and says up to 30% of the investment could be pri-

(continued on p. 3)

Improvements Planned for Five Overnight Routes

Amtrak released to Congress and the public on Sep. 30, as the law requires, Performance Improvement Plans for five overnight trains. Similar plans for the remaining 10 routes are due—five next year, the remaining five in two years.

The tri-weekly New York-Cincinnati-Indianapolis-Chicago **Cardinal** should go daily in Nov., 2011, with more regional food selections, and checked baggage at all staffed stations, but no change in equipment for now. The plan is at www.bit.ly/trn5051.

Also in Nov., 2011, the New York-Pittsburgh **Pennsylvanian** should be extended to Chicago, combined with **Capitol Ltd.** west of Pittsburgh. Four single-level cars (sleeper, diner/cafe, two coaches) would run New York-Pittsburgh-Chicago, connected via transition sleeper to the Chicago-Washington bilevel Superliners. See www.bit.ly/trn2930.

The **California Zephyr** plan (www.bit.ly/5and6) focuses on improving maintenance and on-board service quality, and suggests consideration of more Emeryville-Reno and Chicago-Denver cars.

Adding legs to the **Zephyr** (Salt Lake City-Las Vegas-Los Angeles) and **Cardinal** (Indianapolis-St. Louis) will be subjects of further study.

Sunset Limited/Texas Eagle are discussed on pages two and four. ■

ARC Rail Tunnels Killed

Gov. Chris Christie (R-NJ) decreed "an expeditious and orderly shutdown" of the huge project to build two new Hudson River rail tunnels. He said federal calculations pointed to a final budget over \$11 billion "and could exceed as much as \$14 billion, compared to the...current budget of \$8.7 billion." He told his officials to work with Amtrak and other agencies on ways to expand track capacity. It is unclear how he will use state "tunnel" funds. ■



vate, primarily for stations.

High-speed service ridership upon "full build-out in 2040...would approach 18 million passengers with room" to handle "up to 80 million annually...in the years and decades that follow." A \$900 million annual operating surplus is projected for the new line.

Right-of-way would be 32% existing NEC, 18% new tunnels and bridges, and 44% new surface, some on other highway and rail alignments. Especially below New York, parts of the new line could enter service as they are completed, tied in to the existing NEC.

Today's NEC—even with the 20-year, \$52 million upgrade outlined in the NEC Infrastructure Master Plan—will max out at 22 million riders a year by 2030.

"Nothing gets financed without a vision," Boardman emphasized, saying that significant public investment would be needed at the outset. "This is real; it really can be done because we see it done in Japan and in Europe and we see it being done now in China."

Asked about the political feasibility of the new New England alignment, Boardman admitted that it will be "difficult," but said "there needs to be a different vision than the old highway vision."

As shown in Amtrak's map, the dedicated tracks would:

- use a new alignment New Rochelle-Hartford-Route 128 (near Boston);
- serve both the Penn Station and Grand Central areas in New York City;
- go to Philadelphia Center City and the airport; and
- serve Baltimore's Charles Center near the Inner Harbor.

However, Amtrak emphasizes that these are just concepts—not a final alignment.

Amtrak VP—Policy & Development Stephen Gardner told an audience at Amtrak headquarters Sept. 30 that the new plan addresses deficiencies in the Northeast Corridor Infrastructure Master Plan (May-June News) and is generating discussion about how to create much-needed new capacity.

Gardner said the Master Plan aims to "maximize capacity of the current [NEC] footprint." The plan envisions a 60% ridership and 40% train-mile increase by 2030, at which point they will "hit the ceiling" and be unable to add more trains.

He said it would be most efficient to

pursue the new line and Master Plan improvements at the same time, in which case the total annual cost would be \$5.4 billion 2011-2040.

Boardman told NARP that it fell to Amtrak to develop this vision; he could not ignore the absence of a plan for high-

speed rail in a region where 80% of the population lives within 40 miles of today's NEC. ■

Amtrak's Sept. 28 release is at www.bit.ly/atk00; the full concept plan is at www.bit.ly/nechsr.

Amtrak Appoints Engel High-Speed Rail VP

Al Engel, a 40-year veteran of advocacy for high-speed rail and rail in general, starts Oct. 18 as Amtrak's Vice President—High-Speed Rail. He "will lead initiatives to grow Amtrak's role as the premier operator of high-speed passenger rail service in the United States."

Engel is vice president and high-speed rail director at technical & management services firm AECOM and serves on the American Public Transportation Association Board of Directors.



Albrecht P. Engel

Previously, Engel was a Morgan Stanley financial advisor, and President and CEO of SYSTRA Consulting, which worked with France's national railway on developing high-speed service.

At Amtrak, Engel will pursue partnerships with states and other companies to develop high-speed rail corridors such as those being built in California and Florida. He will also work to develop 220-mph service on the Northeast Corridor.

More at www.bit.ly/alengel

North Dakota, Michigan, California Track Issues

Norfolk Southern has downgraded part of the **Chicago-Detroit** line from 79 to 60 mph. This will not change overall trip times in Amtrak's Nov. 8 timetable, as net impact is only four or five minutes. But there is concern that NS will continue to lower speeds, lengthening the schedule and offsetting speed increases planned on the Amtrak-owned segment in western Michigan. The State of Michigan is seeking federal funds to acquire the NS-owned segment.

Continued **Empire Builder** service to Rugby, Devils Lake and Grand Forks, ND, depends on how fast the water rises around a bridge which BNSF has already raised and which BNSF has said it will not pay to raise again.

In the event of bridge closure, Amtrak would have to reroute to the "Surrey Cut-off," a more direct Minot-Fargo route. The train would bypass those three stations, but a stop likely would be added at New Rockford.



- BNSF Railway

BNSF Bridge near Church Falls, ND, between Devils Lake and Rugby. Rising water levels eventually may force an *Empire Builder* reroute.

The Senate Appropriations Committee's FY 2011 bill instructs Amtrak not to reroute the train, but it remains to be seen what Mother Nature will do and what rebuilding the bridge would cost.

The counties that own the 63-mile San Diego-San Clemente line would like to sell it, but keep running their trains on it. What this might mean for Amtrak's **Pacific Surfliners** is not clear. ■



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

Larry Scott Welcomed to NARP Staff

Lawrence E. Scott of San Diego has become a part-time NARP staff member. He has worked as a consultant to NARP for about four years, providing guidance for the planning and implementing of NARP's 2008 restructuring.

He holds a doctorate in counseling and personnel administration from Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo) but most of his professional life has been devoted to raising funds for non-profits and universities, among them Northwestern University Medical School and Scripps Institutions of Medicine and Science (La Jolla, CA). He has worked closely with wealthy individuals, helping guide their philanthropy. He is a physical trainer, work that has put him in touch with people

who became clients for his philanthropic expertise.

He is "Special Assistant to the Chairman" and will report to Chairman Bob Stewart but will continue to work closely with our staff. Among his responsibilities: working on the long range business plan with a committee that Immediate Past Chair George Chilson is heading, helping us make our Council meetings as effective as possible, and helping with the marketing of NARP and soliciting funds. ■



International Train at Risk

Amtrak is not selling tickets for international travel on the "second" Seattle-Vancouver train, which goes south in the morning and north in the evening.

Effective November 1, this train may again run Seattle-Bellingham only. Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is imposing a \$550,000 "annual inspection" fee, which the State of Washington will not pay. CBSA does not charge for services at 120 road crossings of the border.

While the Province of British Columbia has provided some capital investment, Washington State pays the train's entire, ongoing operating grant.

Local tourism interests, state officials, and passenger train advocates on both sides of the border have been pushing to save the service. Canadians: please contact your Ministry of Transport and CBSA to protest the impending charge and resulting loss of service. ■

Next Step Towards National Rail Plan

Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood announced Sept. 28 release *Moving Forward: A Progress Report, updating DOT's efforts to develop the country's first National Rail Plan*. It is at www.bit.ly/railpln (PDF).

LaHood said, "Giving rail a greater role in our national transportation system will help us meet the 21st century challenges of population growth, increasing energy costs, reducing carbon emissions, and ensuring the nation remains competitive in the global economy."

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Amtrak Guest Rewards: Since Oct. 1, the AGR call center has been open daily 5 AM-midnight Eastern, staffed by Amtrak employees rather than those of a contractor.

Texas Eagle dining car crews provide full dinner service south and breakfast north in Texas, effective with departures of Oct. 18 (Chicago) and 20 (San Antonio). Crews ride Chicago-San Antonio, not just Chicago-Austin.

Chicago Union Station's Great Hall be air conditioned by summer 2011. By the end of 2012, the station's

coach passenger waiting area will be expanded and the first-class Metropolitan Lounge relocated. There will be more restrooms.

Southwest Chief to leave many stations earlier: From Oct. 18, train 3 departs Chicago-Lamar, CO, stations 30 minutes earlier. Train 4 departs Los Angeles 40 minutes earlier, most stations 30-35 minutes earlier, but slightly later Kansas City-Chicago. BNSF has lowered speed limits across western Kansas from 90 to 60 (a little 79) mph.