



New England Rail Struggles

Even as North America's first 150-mph trains are poised to enter Boston, all is not going smoothly for passenger rail and transit in the region, as shown by obstacles to Boston-Portland Amtrak service, the cross-Boston rail link, commuter service south of Boston, and bus projects in Boston that threaten more sensible rail transit ideas.

Maine—Waiting on the STB

Before the job of restoring Guilford-owned tracks between Portland and Haverhill goes too far, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) needs to decide whether it agrees with the Federal Railroad Administration's May 24 recommendation—and with Amtrak, Maine and NARP—that 79-mph operation on 115-pound rail is safe. (NARP filed a "petition for leave to intervene" and a verified statement April 2.)

A *Portland Press Herald* editorial expressed frustration at

"A regional transportation plan would preserve and enhance the livability of many of our city's neighborhoods. But it would also fuel greater economic growth without causing environmental harm. We need to start with a link between North and South stations..."

—John DeVillars, *New England administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency, June 23 Boston Globe op-ed column*

the STB's failure to act so far, noting that the FRA recommendation "was so long ago that most people assume the board already has made its decision, but sadly, that is not the case" (Aug. 5).

An August 4 AP report quotes Michael Murray, executive director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, saying the lack of a decision "hasn't hurt us yet, but if...this is drawn out, it could very well impact the completion date of this project. The first six miles of rail has been delivered, and as we speak it's being installed." The report said, "Murray hopes for a ruling by Labor Day." That would let passenger service begin late next year.

Amtrak on July 30 filed a "petition for expedited consideration" with the STB. The AP story said, "Joseph Dettmar, deputy director in the STB's office of proceedings, said a recommendation has been made to the three-member panel but there is no time frame for a final ruling."

Boston Rail Link—Many Planning Obstacles

Obstacles keep adding to the difficulty of building the crucial North Station-South Station Rail Link in Boston which would permit extension of the Northeast Corridor to Maine and New Hampshire, and finally unite the Boston region's divided commuter-rail network.

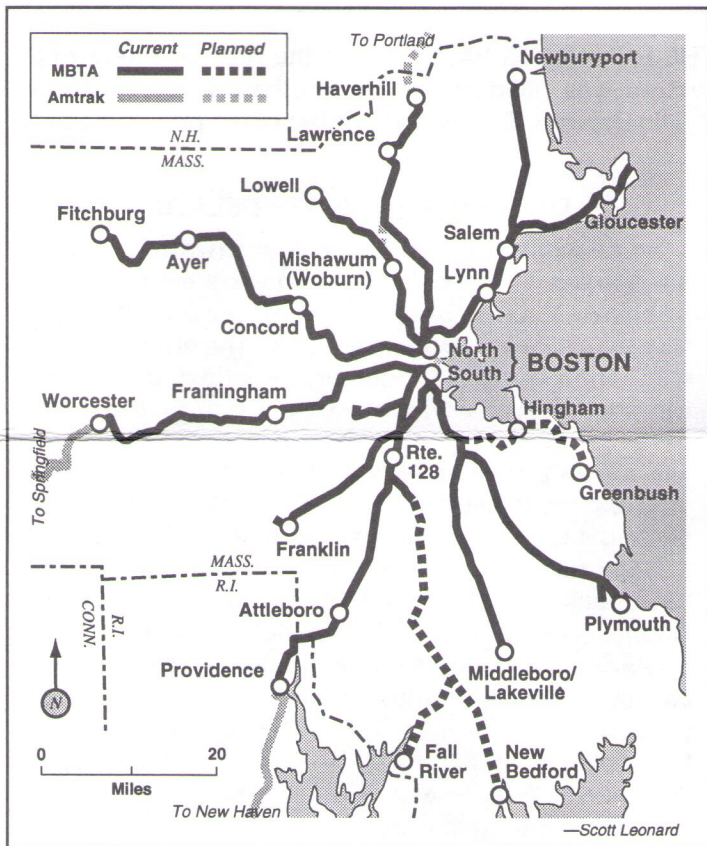
The engineering report for which Congress gave Amtrak \$4 million six years ago has not yet been released—even to a local Rail Link Citizens Advisory Committee. This failure makes it harder to protect needed right-of-way.

One notable example is a recent land-swap in which MBTA gave Guilford Transportation Industries land north of the Charles River. Some of this land is needed for the Link's north portal and construction staging. The secret deal—revealed in *The Boston Globe* July 31—has enraged Cambridge officials, who believe the development proposed for the land is too big for East Cambridge (*Globe*, Aug. 3). If the Rail Link report were out, it is likely that the media immediately would have reported the land swap's impact on the Rail Link.

Old Colony—NIMBY's Threaten Commuter Line

In Hingham, on Boston's South Shore, some people have been fighting to block restoration of Greenbush Line commuter trains—with which the community once nicely coexisted, until service ended in 1959.

(continued on page 2)



THE RAIL LINK IS STILL NEEDED!—The proposed Boston North Station-South Station Rail Link would unite the two separated halves of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority commuter rail system. In addition, it would unite Amtrak intercity operations in the entire region by allowing electric Acela Express and Regional services to run through Boston to Woburn in the northern suburbs, and connecting with the Boston-Portland Amtrak service that should begin next year.

Governor Paul Cellucci (R) has suggested that if these NIMBY's persuade the Massachusetts Historical Commission to require a \$200 million rail tunnel under Hingham Square, he will pull the plug on the project. That would seal the status of Weymouth-Hingham-Cohasset-Scituate as the only rail-deprived corridor in the immediate Boston area.

"Silver [Bus] Line"—Roxbury, Dorchester, Mattapan

The neighborhoods south of downtown Boston would seem to be a perfect place for a new branch of the historic light-rail transit (LRT) Green Line. It would run in a reservation along Washington St. in Roxbury and the South End, entering an out-of-service tunnel leading to the Green Line's Boylston St. station. This would give some of Boston's most transit-dependent neighborhoods a one-seat ride into and through the downtown Boston subway system (including North Station).

The new branch would be the "Replacement Service Project" promised when the Washington St. Elevated was torn down in 1987 (and the Orange Line relocated to the line Amtrak uses). As recently as 1982, an official "Interim Findings Report"—result of a lengthy and inclusive planning process—recommended further study of light rail transit (LRT).

Sadly, due to bad state and federal politics, LRT now is officially off the table. Auto-oriented state and city officials say a transit reservation on the soon-to-be-rebuilt, very-wide Washington St. would "impede" traffic flows, so these neighborhoods only have hollow promises of a future (now 2008) extension of the South Boston busway (see below) to Boylston station, with buses running to Roxbury and beyond in mixed traffic. This would mean a costly rebuilding of the old light rail tunnel (used as recently as the early 1960's) and creation of underground turn-around space at Boylston, where there would be a forced transfer with the Green Line LRT trains. A big investment to produce inferior service!

Columnist Jane Holtz Kay wrote of "a lumbering, second-rate bus, the so-called Silver Line, a misnomer designed to associate silver with high-tech slick" (*Boston Globe*, Aug. 16). Fortunately, the communities of color in Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan that would gain the most from a true replacement service still are fighting for LRT. The Washington Street Corridor Coalition has effective leadership and has been working on this for years (Contact: Executive Director Bob Terrell). Also, the state's Department of Environmental Protection yet may give LRT a new life here.

Forward-looking transit planners everywhere would regard the Boylston tunnel as a precious resource. But this is not the only part of the Silver Line with designs on the Boylston tunnel.

"Silver [Bus] Line"—South Boston Waterfront

A \$600 million, 1.5-mile South Station-Waterfront bus subway is being built. It is more effective at getting federal funding earmarks than ridership. To improve ridership, there are plans to extend it to Logan Airport at one end and Boylston at the other.

However, for "urban equity" reasons, state officials recently prioritized the Washington St. busway ahead of the South Station-Boylston busway. Too bad the concern about "urban equity" does not extend to respecting the affected community's desire for LRT. ■

OREGON RAIL PROGRAM SAVED

As some predicted, the Oregon legislature dealt with the rail program near the end of its session. Gov. John A. Kitzhaber (D) included \$14 million in his budget. His goal was to continue the existing Eugene-Portland train and—starting in July, 2000—add one more, plus several new Thruway bus connections.

The legislature approved \$10 million to carry the program through June 30, 2001. The \$4 million cut means the second Eugene-Portland train (third counting the *Coast Starlight*) may have second-hand rather than new equipment. Notwithstanding press reports references to "Metroliner" equipment, the state has not yet picked the equipment to be used.

Plans include a Chemult-Bend bus, probably tri-weekly, for *Coast Starlight* passengers from (and to) California; and a Boise (ID)-Burns-Bend-Salem run (Burns now has no public transportation).

Meanwhile, an 18-member task force headed by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) is looking at ways to restore train service to southern Idaho and eastern Oregon. A July 14 AP story quoted Amtrak West President Gil Mallery: "We are pleased to work with this task force to produce a cost-effective, practical plan for providing rail service to eastern Oregon and Idaho."

THE REMAINING VACANCY on the Amtrak Board of Directors was filled July 30 when the Senate confirmed Sylvia DeLeon. She was a member of the previous board.

ONE THEORY FOR STB DELAYS

Some explain the STB's slowness (with the Maine case, see p. 1) this way. Two members are new: Republican Wayne Burkes and Democrat William Clyburn, Jr., were sworn in March 1. The other—Chairman Linda Morgan, a Democrat—is busy on Capitol Hill, soothing ruffled, mostly-Democratic feathers due to labor anger at some of her decisions (when she was the only member) and the laws driving them. Her term expired December 31, 1998. To stay on the Board, she must be reconfirmed by December 31, 1999.

Hope for quick action grew when President Clinton—bucking objections from the AFL-CIO Executive Council—formally renominated Morgan on August 11. The Administration said she would be redesignated as chairman upon confirmation. She is strongly supported by Commerce Committee Chairman John McCain (R-AZ) and Ranking Democrat Ernest Hollings (SC), and by Association of American Railroads President Ed Hamberger.

However, "almost immediately" after renomination, "rail labor unions and the AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department assigned lobbyists to prevail upon labor-friendly senators to block the nomination from reaching the Senate floor for a vote" (*Traffic World*, Aug. 12).

NARP Presses for Adequate Fort Worth Facilities

Trinity Railway Express (TRE) Dallas-South Irving commuter-rail service next year will be extended to Fort Worth. For that extension, the Fort Worth Transportation Authority (the "T") plans a new intermodal station at 9th and Jones Streets—as close to downtown as possible without major rail line relocations, and about six blocks north of the old Santa Fe station Amtrak uses.

TRE trains will have two Fort Worth stops—they will terminate at the old Texas and Pacific depot on Lancaster Ave. As shown on the map, they will make a sharp turn between the two stops. They will run past the present Amtrak station without stopping. However, they will require a taking of part of the present Amtrak station tracks and platform.

The original 9th and Jones plan presented many major problems for Amtrak and its passengers. Therefore, beginning in March, 1999, NARP sought—and eventually was granted—the opportunity to intervene in the interest of rail passengers and to protect options for future expansion of Amtrak service. Our intervention culminated in a meeting between NARP President John R. Martin and four Amtrak officials in Fort Worth on July 29. Amtrak committed to press the T for solutions to these problems.

If the T agrees to Amtrak's requests, the following results will be a vast improvement over the original plan for the new intermodal terminal, in accordance with NARP's goals:

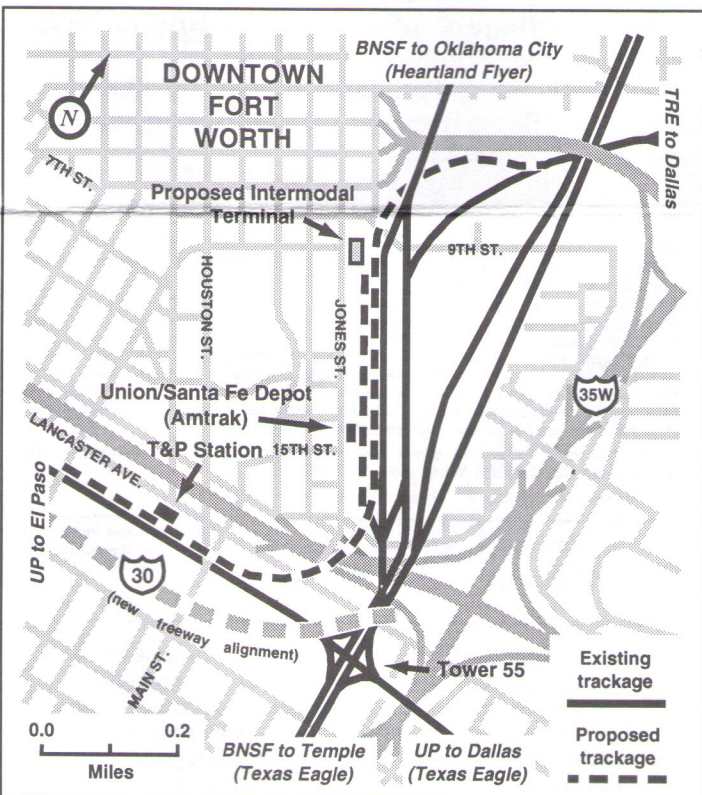
- Both existing trains would follow a route substantially the same as present. The *Heartland Flyer* would continue to enjoy direct moves—no time-consuming back-ups. The *Texas Eagle* would not have to remove express cars before arriving at the station and reconnect those cars after departure;



—Scott Leonard

Union (a.k.a. Santa Fe) Depot in Fort Worth has been in continual use as a passenger rail station for almost 100 years, but its future purpose is in doubt as the local transit agency plans to move Amtrak elsewhere.

- Train movements through highly congested, freight-rail-road-controlled Tower 55 would be minimized (and remain unnecessary for the *Heartland Flyer*);
- Passengers will not have to walk unreasonable distances between trains and the station; and
- There will be adequate station capacity and the potential for expansion will be provided. ■



—Scott Leonard

NARP—RENO STATION MUST STAY DOWNTOWN

To eliminate center-city grade crossings and permit more development, the City of Reno wants the Union Pacific mainline put below grade. The \$188-million project would be funded by various sources including Union Pacific, federal highway funds and some local taxes and bonds.

The depression was one of the "environmental mitigation conditions" the Surface Transportation Board (STB) imposed when it approved the UP/SP merger in 1996. In December, 1998, UP and the city reached an agreement on the 1996 conditions regarding Reno; the STB approved the agreement the same month.

Since the depression work area includes the Amtrak station, it *must* include platforms connected to an at-grade station. NARP said this in a January 7 letter to Mayor Jeff Griffin and all city council members, and again July 30 in comments to the Federal Highway Administration's Nevada Division and the Nevada DOT's Environmental Services Division. Those agencies are determining the scope of the impending environmental impact statement.

Our July statement said, in part, "One of the jewels in the Amtrak system is the downtown location at Reno, which lets people visit Reno without bringing a car. They can walk between the train and their hotel. We believe it is extremely important that this feature be retained as part of whatever option is chosen. In particular, if the Union Pacific mainline is put in a trench, the trench should include a station at approximately the same location as the present station."

We also pressed Amtrak to make its needs clear.

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Chicago-Northeast Delays—Since we wrote our last warning about delays to trains running on former Conrail tracks, things seem to have worsened. Delays now engulf also the New York-Philadelphia-Chicago *Three Rivers*, which we previously reported as having been largely spared. Serious delays also have affected long-distance and corridor trains using the Washington-Richmond line, including Auto Train.

New Cascade—Amtrak will start a new state-supported train between Bellingham (WA) and Seattle September 2. It will run mornings southbound and evenings northbound (opposite of current Seattle-Vancouver train), connecting with a Seattle-Portland train. Talks with British Columbia may lead to extending the train to Vancouver.

Acela Regional—Amtrak now plans to keep the all-reserved status of NortheastDirect trains serving Virginia. Thanks in part to strong traffic growth and lack of adequate equipment, initial plans to make all Acela Regional Coach class service unreserved have been scrapped. There is even some consideration of making all Acela Regional coach seats reserved at some future time, but Amtrak is aware that this hurt business when it was tried on the New York-Albany run.

Back Bay—Amtrak Shore Line trains will resume service to Back Bay—initially on weekdays only—August 30. (Likewise, MBTA commuter trains will return to near-normal weekday schedules at Back Bay.) Some Amtrak trains will have minor time changes at South Station and Route 128. Note especially that the 8:22 am from South Station (trains 93 and 99) will go at 8:16 instead on weekdays. Amtrak will reissue wallet card timetables and MBTA will reissue all of its affected schedules.

Vermont Service—The state-funded, Monday-Friday *Ethan Allen Connection* (July News) began August 16, operated by the Vermont Railway. Stops are Burlington, Middlebury, Rutland. Service will be suspended September 7-25 for track work, then run daily except

Sunday through October 31.

Hiawathas—Amtrak on August 16 began a trial self-serve coffee service on the first two weekday-morning Milwaukee-Chicago trains. Passengers can fill out related surveys during the 90-day trial. Amtrak ended lounge-car service on this route in 1981, and NARP has made many suggestions over the years to fix this. Attempts to have private-sector refreshment carts on the route were unfruitful.

Stations—Amtrak moved into a temporary facility in Salt Lake City on August 7, on the site of a future intermodal station (Mar. '97 News).

The vacant station at Emporia (KS) burned August 9; Amtrak used an adjacent shelter until 1997.

Thruways—The Chicago-Green Bay bus connection is extended to Marinette (WI), Escanaba, Rapid River, and Marquette (MI).

A free shuttle will connect Amtrak at Williams Jct. (AZ) with the Grand Canyon Railway at Williams, which is now acting as an Amtrak Thruway connection. Same-day trips are possible to/from west (but overnight stay required in Williams for trips to/from east; Fray Marcos Hotel in Williams is nearby).

Pacific Trails buses began accepting Amtrak Thruway tickets August 17 from Portland Union Station to Kelso (WA) Amtrak station and Astoria, Seaside, and Cannon Beach (OR). [Seattle-Astoria trips are possible with bus-rail connection at Kelso.] Another service began August 16 twice daily from Salem to Dallas, Grande Ronde, and Lincoln City (OR), one trip also running Salem-Woodburn-Wilsonville-Tualatin-Portland. On September 1, that Portland-Salem leg becomes a Portland-Salem-Albany-Eugene-Cottage Grove-Roseburg service (in addition to the existing Greyhound Portland-Cottage Grove-Roseburg-Grants Pass-Medford-Ashland Thruway services).

The remaining Philadelphia-Bethlehem-Allentown services end September 5 as the contracting bus company is ending that route.



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