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(No. 6 was mailed July 15)

RETURN REQUESTED

AMTRAK MARKETING VS. MOBILE

Conservative Ridership Projections Threaten World's Fair Service

Thanks largely to questionable low ridership projections from Amtrak's Marketing Department, there's a growing possibility that Mobile-New Orleans rail passenger service will not start in time for the 1984 Louisiana World Exposition.

Amtrak says this route's usage would approximate that of the Portland-Eugene service jointly funded by Oregon and Amtrak from Aug. '80 through Dec. '81. The Eugene service's FY '81 average, 27.9 passenger-miles-per-trainmile (PMTM)—two daily round-trips sharing most markets with the LA-Seattle "Coast Starlight"—seems roughly equivalent to the 32 PMTM Amtrak has projected for two Mobile-New Orleans round-trips providing the only rail service on the route. Amtrak projects 42 PMTM for a single round-trip running to New Orleans in the morning and returning to Mobile in the evening.

Consider, however, the following advantages which the Mobile run would have over the Eugene line:

- **The Mobile line would be faster** (48.3 mph vs. about 36.5 mph in Oregon, based on Interstate highway mileages from the Rand McNally Road Atlas). Again using Rand McNally estimates, the Mobile train at 3:10-15 would be 25-30 minutes (11.4 to 13.6%) faster than driving whereas the Eugene trains were 40-45 minutes (25.9 to 29.6%) slower than driving.
- **The Mobile line would serve a larger population.** Using 1980 census figures, the population at outlying standard metropolitan statistical areas (SMSA's) is 228,000 (43.4%) greater than along

the Eugene route.

Miles to N.O.	SMSA	POP.	Miles to P'land	SMSA	POP.
145	Mobile	443,000	124	Eugene/	
105	Pascagoula/ Moss Point	118,000	53	Springfield Salem	275,000 250,000
85	Biloxi/				
72	Gulfport	192,000			

(The fact that the New Orleans SMSA is 4% smaller than Portland's is largely irrelevant in considering a single daily round-trip which carries people to N.O. in the AM and from N.O. in the PM. New Orleans is the nation's 34th largest SMSA; Portland is #33; both have 1.2 million people.)

• **The Mobile route is 16.9% longer (145 miles vs. 124 miles) and its population is concentrated at the far end of the route,** whereas 47.6% of the Oregon line population was served by a station only 53 miles from Portland. Since people are more likely to take the train if the subject trip is longer, the Mobile line has an important advantage. The Mobile SMSA alone constitutes 59% of the outlying SMSA population and its station is 145 miles from New Orleans. 100% of the SMSA population would be served by stations no closer than 72 miles (Gulfport) from New Orleans.

• **It would be easier for the public to get information about the Mobile trains** because Amtrak's telephone information and reservation system, close to paralysis during part of the Oregon experiment, works well now. Figures presented in Amtrak's June employee newsletter clearly illustrate how bad things were in 1981:

	% of calls lost
"The industry standard"	5%
Amtrak in Sep. 1980	6%
Amtrak in June 1981	23%
Amtrak in Oct. 1981	40%
Amtrak in Dec. 1981	16%
Amtrak in April 1982	5%

Similarly, a post-mortem on the Eugene service released early this year by its state oversight body, The Willamette Valley Rail Project, said "too much of the state's marketing dollar . . . was used apologizing for the inability of travelers to get through on Amtrak's toll-free information number" (*Eugene Register-Guard*, quoted in *Emerald Valley Shopper*, Feb. 8, 1983).

• **Amtrak would be more likely to charge reasonable fares on the Mobile run** since no basic-system train shares the route. The Eugene experiment for much of its life simply used the "Coast Starlight" fare structure which had been tailored to discourage short-distance travel so that Amtrak could sell a high proportion of "Starlight" space to higher-revenue interstate passengers. On Dec. 29, 1981, two days before the Eugene trains died, the *Eugene Register-Guard*, in an editorial headed "Noble, bungled, train experiment," stated: "Perhaps the biggest problem of all: The \$24 roundtrip fare, insisted on by inflexible Amtrak, was prohibitively high. . . . A cut-rate experiment more than doubled

(cont. on pg. 4)

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

"California Zephyr" Chicago and West Coast departures of July 15 inaugurated Amtrak service over the scenic Denver & Rio Grande Western. "Spirit of California" last trips will originate Sep. 30.

The Chicago-Indianapolis and Chicago-New Orleans routes are both in the eastern and central regions for All Aboard America Fares. Thus, for example, Indianapolis-Denver and Memphis-Boston would both qualify as one-zone (\$175) round-trips.

Amtrak now permits travel locally between Chicago and Hammond/Whiting on all Michigan trains (except Mondays through Fridays on the eastbound "Twilight Ltd."). As before, multi-ride commuter tickets are honored only on Valparaiso locals. Amtrak once again allows passengers to board southbound Metroliners at Baltimore but says trains may depart up to four minutes early.

Correction to Amtrak's June 13 tt: info on "San Joaquin" Van Nuys/Saugus bus service is 213/246-9681.

Amtrak Marketing VP Addresses NARP Board

Amtrak/Airline Combo Round-Trip Tickets Coming?

(Amtrak's Bob Gall was one of three major speakers at the NARP board's April meeting in Washington. See the June News for coverage of comments by Amtrak President W. Graham Claytor, Jr., and Rep. Lawrence Coughlin.)

Vice-President—Transportation Marketing Robert E. Gall said his research shows that, although Amtrak is well known among those who "look like rail travelers... by virtue of their background and makeup... they do not know... how good we are vs. their perceptions. The first thing you have to do in convincing somebody to take a train is... close that perception gap. That is important because where we are [age and cleanliness of the equipment] is considerably above where they think we are. That absolutely has to be done before you can start telling them about how much it costs or where the train goes or any of those things." The national ad "lays this foundation, we hope, of telling people who we are and how good we are." Reflecting what Amtrak sees as the higher quality of its current product, the slogan "All Aboard Amtrak" is "much more assertive and aggressive" than the previous "America's Getting Into Training."

The national message is then reinforced by other approaches to specialized markets and specific regions/routes. For example, "We're going back to the **international market** this year in a more pronounced way. We've had people in Europe making typical kinds of circuits among the key agents over there."

Amtrak is also making a big push among **travel agents** which, in terms of Amtrak's sales, "have grown from zero... up to 25-26% of total sales... On some long-distance trains, they're selling as much as 50 and 60% of the tickets." Travel agents sell two thirds of airline tickets and, "if you're going to be a force in the market, you've got to be well represented by the travel agents. We have 10% [commission] and we have an override for tickets over a certain level that bumps them as high as 15%."

Gall said 300 to 400 travel agents showed up for a special Apr. 21 reception and equipment display at Washington Union Station—"Virtually everyone we asked to come did come and brought

TRAIN THOSE AGENTS!

Amtrak has begun a country-wide program of travel agent sales seminars far more ambitious than anything Amtrak has attempted before. The goal, according to Mr. Gall, is to have each of Amtrak's some 9,200 appointed agents send one or more employees to one of the all-day seminars. The seminar will include a workshop on how most effectively to use the redesigned Official Railway Guide, which now includes complete tariffs, saving Amtrak the cost of publishing and distributing the tariff separately as before.

some additional ones."

"We launched what we call an ASTA [American Society of Travel Agents] School on Rails whereby several times [per year] we will put together tours, a group of travel agents with an ASTA trainer and an Amtrak trainer, and we take them for example from Washington to Montreal and say... this is how it works, this is how you sell it, this is how you use an Official Railway Guide, ... We estimate that we will educate a significant number of agents which now do not come in contact with us... We're going after the agents who are big sellers. ..."

Saying, "we've got to always try some different kinds of things," he reported that the next round of ads for the **Chicago hub markets and the Empire Corridor (NY-Niagara Falls)** will not appear in Chicago and New York. "We're going to buy all the band around Chicago and all the small markets that... we can afford to do... [about] 20 or 30 different newspapers and [other media]. but avoiding Chicago, we can be in there with the kind of frequency we want to have. That may be an entirely dumb idea; the data will tell us in time. ..."

NARP BOARD RESOLUTIONS

At its Apr. 23 meeting in Washington, the NARP board approved resolutions supporting restoration of Amtrak service to Oklahoma "at the earliest possible date"; urging Amtrak to establish a connection from the "Cardinal" to the "Southwest Ltd." "no later than Oct. 1983 and to investigate aggressively the possibility of using Cincinnati Union Terminal to reduce the 'Cardinal's' running time and to improve accessibility to Amtrak for Cincinnati passengers"; supporting daily operation of the "Sunset Ltd." and "Eagle" and "immediate extension" of the Kansas City-St. Louis "Mules" to connect with the "City of New Orleans" in Carbondale, IL, "with through coach and sleeping car equipment to New Orleans"; and supporting L.D. 1248 "to amend the Maine state constitution to permit Maine gas tax revenues to be used to support public transportation."

"We're doing a similar thing in the Empire Corridor. We are staying out of the expensive New York market... We have about four or five different ads that are going to run at multiple frequencies per week, smaller than the one we have typically used in the past... We used billboards on the LA-San Diego route. We had never used those before. Again... the data will tell us whether it's a good idea or not."

Gall also said:

- "We're gathering data to look at other" potential Metroliner markets. "The only other two which have the kind of frequency that [makes them] distinctive... in terms of the kind of people we get... are NY-Albany and LA-San Diego."

- "We've talked to four airlines" about offering a round-trip ticket one way rail and the other way air. "We're still in the negotiating stage," but he hopes it can be put out Jan. 1 when "almost everyone" announces their tours.

- He feels that the airlines are losing revenue as a result of their

AIRLINES HURT SELVES AND AMTRAK

"Last year, two out of every three passengers flying on U.S. carriers flew at prices less than airline costs of producing the service. The industry just can't continue to sustain that type of fare structure."

—W.R. Howard, Chairman, Piedmont Airlines
(quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*, June 27)

deep discounts and that deregulation may eventually produce "four or five or even less major air carriers. At that point, there won't be cheap prices."

- "The other [airlines] that give us [headaches] are the small, regional carriers and of those there's only one that, I think, has done the job well, that's People Express."

FIRST TO D.C. AIRPORTS, THEN TO PHILADELPHIA?

"The FAA's interest in a heliport at [Washington] Union Station stems from the growing importance of helicopters and our responsibilities to provide for our Nation's air transportation needs. Scheduled helicopter service from a downtown location to Dulles International and Baltimore Washington International Airports, as well as other outlying communities, would greatly enhance the area's air transportation system... Proponents of a heliport at Union Station foresee that it would have positive economic benefits. Revenues would be generated through a system of landing and parking fees. Studies of a downtown heliport location have shown Union Station to be a prime site, offering connections to other forms of transportation; minimum environmental impact with departures and arrivals over the rail yard to the north; and close proximity to key Government officials, business and community travelers, and congressional personnel. A formal study conducted by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board evaluated potential downtown heliport sites and concluded that the Union Station location offered minimal noise impact and effect on air-space restrictions."

—Federal Aviation Administrator J. Lynn Helms,
in Apr. 12 testimony to Sen. Appropriations Trans. Subc.



—Photo by John H. Kuehl

As of July 25, Amtrak had received 5 Heritage dome-coaches from its Beech Grove shop in suburban Indianapolis. What started last fall as a 7-car project has expanded to 15 cars: 12 dome-coaches and 3 full-length dome-lounges. Dome-coaches are now running on the "Capitol Ltd.," and others will go to the auto ferry and the "City of New Orleans." The ex-GN dome-lounges will also run on the auto ferry.

Legislative Update

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved the DOT FY '84 appropriations bill with \$718 million for Amtrak on July 14, two days after its Transportation Subcommittee approved an almost-identical bill with the same funding. (The House approved \$720 million. See June News.) But when the bill reached the Senate floor July 15, Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-WY) offered an amendment, which Subcommittee Chairman Mark Andrews (R-ND) accepted, cutting Amtrak funding by \$1.6 million—the same amount Amtrak said it would save by rerouting the "Zephyr" outside Wyoming—to \$716.4 million.

The committee used the same Atlantic City bill language as appeared in the House appropriations bill (June News). The committee's report says Atlantic City service, if undertaken, should be done "within available funds and the Committee expects that these funds will be used to increase and enhance commuter rail service in New Jersey." (Bus operators have been fighting development of Atlantic City rail service. The new language is a response to complaints from South Jersey people who said the Atlantic City trains would race through their towns and provide no benefits to them.)

Other committee report language:

- "directs Amtrak to proceed with the West Side Connection project [ed.: linking the Empire Corridor with the Northeast Corridor at New York City's Pennsylvania Station] within available funds. The Committee does not agree with House report language [ed.: see June News] regarding the potential for [Washington] Union Station funds to be diverted for the West Side Connection project."

- "urges Amtrak to cooperate with the State of Florida to implement senior citizen fares [ed.: on the state-subsidized Tampa-Miami "Silver Palm"] as proposed by the State particularly for off-peak periods and to provide additional advertising to take advantage of the strong market potential. . . . ["Silver Palm"] has surpassed ridership projections but still has a significant number of empty seats. . . . In May the train surpassed projected ridership by 19% yet almost half of the seats were empty. The State has proposed a two-for-one senior citizen fare and additional advertising and promotional work with American and foreign travel agents."

- "urges Amtrak to approve funding for [Mobile-New Orleans service] under the appropriate section of law in time to implement the service prior to the 1984 World's Fair in New Orleans. The Committee directs Amtrak to consider without prejudice sections 403(b) and 404(g) [ed.: joint Amtrak/state and 100% Amtrak funding, respectively] during its negotiations with the Tri-State Rapid Rail Transit Commission. . . ."

- "recommends that \$100 million be appropriated for the Northeast corridor improvement program for FY '84. . . . the same [amount] as that requested in the budget and that recommended

by the House" [ed.: the amount the Senate approved for Amtrak is \$3.6 million less than the House approved].

- said "the Committee believes that a downtown [Washington] heliport is worthy of serious consideration, and directs the Secretary to submit her findings and recommendations on this to Congress no later than Feb. 1, 1984. . . . The Committee does believe that further improvements in access to Dulles and BWI need to be made, and notes the . . . testimony submitted by the FAA [see box, p. 2]."

Meanwhile, the delay in bringing to the Senate floor the Amtrak authorization approved in committee Apr. 21 (May News) stems from Senate Budget Committee and Congressional Budget Office concerns about the debt retirement section and, we suspect, from the Office of Management and Budget's interest in preventing the Senate from passing the bill by unanimous consent. Such an event, which might already have happened absent the debt problem, would symbolize clearly the growing support Amtrak enjoys.

How Amtrak Wanted the Law Changed: Amtrak's wish list for the current session of Congress, as reflected in the Feb. 15, 1983 edition of the annual Amtrak Legislative Report, includes provisions to:

- "make it clear that state 'full crew laws' shall not be enforced with respect to any operations by or on behalf of Amtrak anywhere in the country" (A 1981 law already does this with respect to Amtrak, Conrail, and all railroads in the country's Northeast Region, but Amtrak says "Congress presumably intended" in 1981 to provide the nationwide exemption Amtrak now seeks.);

- repeal Sec. 306(g) of the Rail Passenger Service Act and thereby make the Freedom of Information Act inapplicable to Amtrak, since "the greatest number of requests [under FOIA] are for competitive information submitted to Amtrak by third parties on Amtrak contracts" and "Amtrak does not believe that Congress took the unusual step of subjecting Amtrak to FOIA in order to aid bidders and litigants or to inhibit Amtrak's ability to compete in the various markets it serves";

- continue deferral of the requirement that Amtrak pay interest (on guaranteed loans) to the Federal Financing Bank (FFB), or provide for a permanent solution which, Amtrak suggests, would "provide for issuance of additional preferred stock to DOT in amounts sufficient to retire Amtrak's debt to the FFB. . . . Without further legislative relief, Amtrak will need an additional \$200 million to pay the FFB on Oct. 1, 1983, and \$66 million for FY '84 interest payments";

- change labor protection provisions;

- eliminate requirements that Amtrak submit (a.) monthly reports to Congress on the fully allocated itemized revenues and expenses of each train operated; (b.) monthly reports on the average number of passengers per day on board each train operated; (c.) annual reports on the Northeast Corridor Improvement Project;

- reduce the required frequency of performance evaluation reports from twice to once a year;

- make four technical changes, one of which would eliminate the requirement, found unworkable, that Amtrak enter into an industry-wide agreement regarding the operation of charter and special trains.

Further regarding Amtrak reports on individual routes, Amtrak states: "If Congress desires a true measure of a route's performance, Amtrak recommends that Congress consider, in lieu of those measures required in Section 308(a), the measures used by management: an annual route-by-route performance report showing ridership, passenger miles per train mile, loss per passenger mile, and subsidy requirements for each route, to be made available by February 15 of the following year."

(The Senate Commerce bill —S. 1117—is silent on full crew laws and labor protection but would: modify FOIA so Amtrak could determine certain internally-generated data is proprietary; make the requested technical changes; eliminate the named reports and simply require an annual report on Feb. 15 with route-by-route ridership, short term avoidable profit(loss)/passenger-mile, revenue-to-cost ratio, revenue, federal and non-federal subsidies, on-time performance, and identification of significant operational problems and suggested solutions.) ■

Amtrak Marketing vs. Mobile (cont. from p. 1)
ridership and increased revenue by half, but Amtrak pigheadedly wouldn't let it continue."

● **New Orleans is a bigger tourist attraction than Portland and is more congested**, particularly during the evening rush hour when the eastbound train would leave the city. These factors should work to the advantage of moderate-speed Amtrak trains that tend to handle a high proportion of non-business travel. One indication that highway competition would be less formidable on the Mobile route than it was in Oregon is the fact that, between 1976 and 1981, Rand McNally lengthened its estimated Mobile-New Orleans driving time from 3:25 to 3:40.

● **New Orleans will have the World Exposition**, and it appears Amtrak cranked in a very conservative estimate for fair-related travel based on their 1974 Spokane experience. As we noted at the beginning of our lead story on New Orleans (News, July '82), the Seattle-Spokane "Expo '74" had "extraordinarily uncompetitive running times." It ran before the 55 mph federal speed limit took effect, but—even using Rand McNally time estimates reflecting that limit—the poor old "Expo" was 45.7% (2 hours and 40 minutes) slower than automobile (8½ hours vs. 5:50). In addition, the train was timed awkwardly for the primary market (departing Spokane at 8 AM but not departing Seattle until 12:30

THE U.S./IRAN PARALLEL

"Inevitably, news of [the French] TGV's financial success (the Tokaido shinkansen did at least as well) will put fresh impetus behind plans for high speed lines elsewhere in the world, notably in the USA where considerable momentum is building up behind projects for half-a-dozen corridors. Alas, when it comes to buying high speed hardware the Americans are floundering as helplessly as the Iranians did in the 1970s, surrounded by consultants and quite unable to form a judgment on their advice. The fact that public bodies can waste \$270,000 studying a 400 km/h (250 mph) maglev link between Los Angeles and Las Vegas is a measure of the gulf which exists between political ambition and technical realities."

—Railway Gazette International (UK), April, 1983

PM), apparently to pick up Portland and Vancouver connections in Seattle, even though Amtrak was even less competitive there (e.g. Portland-Spokane via Seattle 13¼ hours via rail vs. 7:50—less the speed limit differential—in the car). Finally, "Expo" was an all-reserved train and 1974 was before the establishment of Amtrak's nationwide toll-free reservation number.

Indeed, the sole advantage one can find for the Eugene service is the fact that its northbound morning train ran through to Seattle, connecting there with the "Empire Builder" to St. Paul-Chicago, and in Portland with "Pioneer" to Boise-Denver-Chicago. The southbound evening Eugene train connected in Portland with trains from Seattle and Chicago-Denver-Boise.

But the Mobile train would have connections as well: in both directions with the daily Chicago-Memphis-New Orleans run, and westbound with the tri-weekly N.O.-Houston-Phoenix-LA "Sunset." In addition, Amtrak has a joint terminal in New Orleans with Greyhound, making intercity bus connections more attractive than they were in Portland.

Amtrak has also contrasted the Mobile line unfavorably with the Chicago-Indianapolis "Hoosier State," which produced only 66.1 PMTM in FY '82 (95.7 PMTM in FY '81).

Amtrak Marketing, meet the Indiana Association of Railroad Passengers, which has some strong views about why "Hoosier State" ridership is not setting the world on fire: "Some of the 'Hoosier's' difficulties are . . . part . . . of Indiana's deep economic recession. However, . . . cities such as Crawfordsville, Lafayette, Rensselaer, and Dyer are not primarily composed of the hard-hit heavy industries that compose Northern and Eastern Indiana . . . the 'Hoosier State' has not had any advertising since FY 1981, save the Amtrak national ads . . . Fares have climbed rapidly . . . and round-trip fares have yet to be implemented for any travel on the line. The lack of even the normal round-trip price break makes even the hardy of wallet cringe at the current \$29.50

Indianapolis-Chicago tariff."

Indiana ARP also suggests Amtrak needlessly and inconsistently overprices intermediate-point markets (e.g. Crawfordsville-Lafayette, 27 miles, 33.3¢/mile vs. Chicago-Dyer, 29 miles, 17.9¢/mile) and notes the "frequently unwashed train exterior, and spottily cleaned interior" (*The Indiana Passenger Letter*, Jan. '83).

A look at the two nearest corridor runs out of Chicago suggests discrimination against the "Hoosier." For Chicago-Springfield, IL (185 miles) Amtrak charges 13.5¢/mile one-way (10.1¢/mile round-trip) and averages 55½ mph. For Chicago-Effingham, IL (201 miles) Amtrak charges 13.9¢/mile one-way.

	Rail Distance	Fare	Avg. Speed
	One-Way	(¢/mile)	
Chicago-Springfield	185 miles	13.5¢	55.5 mph
Round-Trip Fare		10.1¢	
Chicago-Effingham	201 miles	13.9¢	52.3 mph
Chicago-Indianapolis	191 miles	15.4¢	43.2 mph

Although the Indianapolis run is slower, has less frequent service, and would have to operate anyway since it ferries equipment to and from Amtrak's Beech Grove shops, passengers pay more to ride it.

Why no round-trip fare discounts? Marketing sees the train performing up to what Marketing projected!

It appears that the incredible conservatism of Amtrak's pricing practices wipes out the theoretical advantage Amtrak has enjoyed since its creation of being totally deregulated as to external control over its fares. Amtrak uses the lacklustre performance of past and present overpriced short-distance trains to discourage those who would institute new service, such as Mobile-New Orleans.

In light of the factors discussed above, 42 PMTM appears to be an extremely low estimate for what a one-train-a-day Mobile-New Orleans service would do. (In mid-April, Amtrak released an estimate of 34 PMTM for a single daily round-trip assuming a running time of 3:55. The 42 PMTM estimate released in early July is based on faster running times that assume communities will remove local speed restrictions. The assumed times are 3:15 westbound and 3:10 eastbound—Amtrak assumes the westbound train would back into New Orleans Terminal so the train wouldn't have to be switched during the day. Just before Amtrak's May '71 startup, L&N's eastbound coach-and-sleeper train, the "Pan American/Gulf Wind," was allowed 3:45 on this segment.)

We urge NARP members in the Mobile-N.O. region to use this article (extra copies available if you send a s.a.s.e. and tell us how many you want) to convince your state officials that Amtrak's estimate is not credible and that the train is worthy of state funding. Note also that the most effective lobbyists might be your local officials who are willing to help fund station facilities.

Although the state legislatures have gone home, the governors of Louisiana and Alabama do have discretionary funds; Mississippi has appropriated \$5 million to promote the World Exposition; and there is a possibility that the Economic Development Administration (federal) could fund the station improvements, bringing the total first-year state share to about \$1.5 million or \$503,000/state if they share the costs equally—less if ridership is higher than Amtrak projects. A further reduction would be possible if agreement could be reached that a new Mobile station would cost less than \$455,000. (Amtrak estimates short-term avoidable losses for a single round-trip at \$1,685,000, and the states collectively would have to pay 45% of those losses—an estimated \$758,250. Capital costs, which would not recur in subsequent years, are estimated at \$2.5 million and states would have to pay 50% or \$1.25 million. EDA participation conceivably could reduce the state share of capital costs by \$500,000.)

It appears that the Louisiana-Mississippi-Alabama Rapid Rail Transit Commission will persevere even if startup does not occur in 1984; a new convention center should help to maintain heavy New Orleans traffic in following years. But what a crime it would be if World Exposition travel is foregone because the necessary Amtrak funds required by Section 403(b) of the Amtrak law were not forthcoming because state officials gave more credence to Amtrak's pessimistic numbers than the evidence appears to warrant!