



Amtrak Reauthorization Passes House!

The House of Representatives passed H.R. 6003, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act, on June 11 by a vote of 311-104, a veto-proof margin. This is a strong, bi-partisan rebuke of a threatened veto by President Bush.

The debate on the House floor was overall very positive with few negative remarks. House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James L. Oberstar (D-MN, see below) began debate by looking back at the past several years of struggles in funding Amtrak. "A combination of Republicans and Democrats looking to the future...have been able to just keep Amtrak's nose above water during these intervening years. Today, we change that model."

Rep. John Mica (R-FL, see page 2), the top Republican on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, echoed Oberstar's enthusiasm, saying, "This is really evolutionary because we have taken in a bipartisan fashion some of the desires, some of the ideas from

H.R. 6003 Roll Call Votes

- Sessions (R-TX) Amendment (Kill *Sunset Limited*). **Failed: 150-297**
- Tom Davis (R-VA) Amendment (Washington Metro funding). **Passed 295-127**
- Geoff Davis (R-KY) Motion to Re-commit (partisan stall tactic). **Failed: 194-230**

Overall passage of H.R. 6003

	<u>Yea</u>	<u>Nay</u>
Dem.	224	0
Repub.	87	104
Total	311	104

the Democrat side, we have combined it with some of the ideas and initiatives proposed by the Republican side, and melded it into a piece of legislation."

Several members of both parties

spoke in favor of the bill and there were amendments offered as well. The only negative amendment was by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX). It sought to prohibit funds "from being used for the long distance Amtrak route with the highest cost per seat/mile..." Without mentioning it by name, this amendment was an attack on the *Sunset Limited*.

Rep. Corrine Brown (D-FL) rose to forcefully speak against the amendment. "This amendment will have a negative effect on (eight) major states—California, Arizona, New Mexico, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Texas, Texas, Texas," emphasizing Sessions' home state that would lose service.

The bill will now head to a conference committee to be reconciled with the Senate version of the bill, S. 294. ■

You can read more details in our June 13 news hotline at www.narprail.org. See how your legislator voted on votes listed in the box above; click on "Members-Only Resources", also on the NARP website.

House T&I Chairman James Oberstar Addresses NARP Board

House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman James L. Oberstar (D-MN) addressed the NARP Board of Directors during its recent Washington, DC meeting. (Ranking Member John Mica, R-FL, also addressed the board; see article on page 2.)

In an upbeat luncheon presentation on April 29, just over a week before he and Mica announced their agreement on the new passenger train authorization bill, Oberstar proclaimed, "we are about to see a new era for Amtrak. After six years of a starvation diet, we have a bill to provide substantial investment in Amtrak."

Oberstar's view of passenger rail's potential is heavily influenced by his observations of how Paris-Brussels train service has improved since he was a student in Belgium in the late 1950's. Since then, the running time has improved from six hours to 80 minutes and air service has been eliminated. During the same time,



Chairman Oberstar accepts a glass plaque as a token of NARP's appreciation from NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon

he said Paris-Lyons service improved from 4-1/2 hours to two hours, with rail now carrying five million passengers a year compared to the one million on the airlines.

He also discussed U.S. transporta-

tion history, ridiculing the circuitous road routes that mail was forced to travel in rural Minnesota after "the Post Office, in cahoots with the railroads, took the mail off the passenger trains" back in 1967.

Oberstar issued a call to re-prioritize rail in the American transportation network, expressing disappointment over Congress' reluctance to provide the necessary funding to bring the Northeast Corridor up to a state-of-good-repair. This work would cost roughly the equivalent of the recently approved Intercounty Connector, a single four lane highway to be built in suburban Washington, DC. The chairman argued that, taking into account that Amtrak already "removes eight million cars from the road each year," this heavily road-focused investment is careless and short-sighted.

He derided the double-standard which

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Mica: “I Criticize Amtrak Because I Think We Can Do Better”

Representative John Mica, the ranking Republican on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, addressed the NARP Board on April 30, presenting his vision for a future high speed rail network in the United States.

Mica stated “I am excited about the untapped potential of the Northeast Corridor. I criticize Amtrak because I think we can do better—with innovation, with public-private partnerships, and with a vision.

“They’ve [Amtrak] probably done the best they can with the cards dealt them, but it’s not a very optimistic vision of the future.” Mica emphasized that public-private partnerships would not adversely affect current Amtrak employees, who would still be protected by law and existing collective bargaining agreements.

Mica has consistently argued that the private sector is the solution to American passenger trains’ unfulfilled potential, a failing he sees as a product of government control. He noted that Amtrak’s own president has “said under oath that they don’t have the capability of taking on a project that would give us true high speed rail. The Acela is not true high speed service, with an average speed of 83 mph in service from Washington to New York.” He compared this to high speed trains in other nations, which travel on dedicated

tracks at speeds up to and exceeding 200 mph.

Provisions in Mica’s bill (H.R. 5644, now incorporated into H.R. 6003) would direct the Secretary of Transportation to solicit proposals from the private sector for a two-hour express service between New York and Washington. “I don’t know if this will work or not [but] I’m tired of seeing the federal government and Amtrak sit on its assets.”

To get to the speed that would permit two hour express service, he believes there will have to be a separation of the traffic—freight, commuter and conventional intercity passenger which currently share the rails—a project Mica estimates will cost between \$20 and \$40 billion.

To fund this upgrade, he proposes a public-private partnership, citing Virgin CEO Richard Branson’s purchase of the operating rights for the West Coast mainline in the United Kingdom. Virgin subsequently invested \$10 billion in new equipment, which Mica said “paid a dividend the last five years, dramatically reduced the federal subsidization of the service, and dramatically increased the number of passengers. I believe we can do the same thing here in the next few years... I don’t think we can break even, but I think the opportunity to drastically reduce subsidies is there.”



NARP President George Chilson (r.) presents Rep. John Mica with a glass plaque as a token of appreciation for addressing the NARP Board of Directors.

Other observations Mica made:

- To make Stewart Airport a success as New York City’s fourth airport, it must have passenger train service.
- In most instances, American cities do not have Greyhound coming into intermodal terminals; that has to change.
- *Auto Train* could be run more efficiently. Private operators could do it with the same employees, guaranteeing their benefits, salaries and positions. “We still have a dump in my district [Amtrak’s Sanford Auto Train station], but we have a nice station at Lorton [Virginia]. The private sector does a much better job of maintaining buildings.” ■

BNSF CEO Concerned about Capacity, Present and Future Congestion

On April 30, Matt Rose, the highly regarded President, Chairman, and CEO of BNSF Railway, became the first CEO of a major private railroad to address the NARP Board. Rose also served on the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, whose passenger train policies have been reported here favorably (March News).

He outlined the nation’s transportation capacity problems:

1980 to 2005	Route Miles	Growth
Railroad	-39%	+65% (gross ton miles)
Highway	+7%	+96% vehicle miles traveled
Ports	n/a	+400% (20 foot equivalent units)

This situation contrasts sharply with the previous decade when all modes had considerable excess capacity. Rose said that the railroad network hit equilibrium in

2002. He placed the current cost of highway congestion at \$60-70 billion a year, and said it may rise to \$200 billion.

Logistics costs as a share of gross domestic product (a measure of transportation worker productivity) has come down to 7% but is now rising due to increased congestion. “China gets it” on transportation investment, and their logistics costs as a share of GDP are moving in a healthy direction, albeit down from 19%.

Conclusion: “We need some action here. We’ve gotta’ do something.”

On passenger service, he admitted BNSF would be happier if the trains didn’t exist, but emphasized the railroad’s commitment to providing excellent service. “We don’t feel like we cover our variable costs [on Amtrak service]. But when our [Amtrak] on-time performance goes up, so do our incentive payments; we expect to earn about \$14 million in incentives this year.

“I think it’s not my role to say what rail passenger service should be. Person-

ally, I think there’s a compelling vision for short corridors, but it’s not my job as CEO to talk about the future of the long-distance trains. But it’s perfectly appropriate for me to go to Capitol Hill and support funding to remedy bottlenecks and help improve Amtrak’s performance.” ■



BNSF Railway’s Matthew K. Rose

NARP In The News

One of the most important functions performed by NARP is speaking with the media and getting “the good news” out there and refuting negative or inaccurate statements about passenger trains. It’s been a busy couple of months for us.

- NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon was interviewed by *NBC Nightly News* for a piece that aired on April 28. The segment was part of a series about infrastructure challenges in America and focused specifically on Amtrak and its growing ridership and needs for further investment. It also included a cab ride in an Acela train between Boston and New Haven. The story was born out of a blog post that *Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams did on Amtrak and its struggles to keep up with demand for rail service while being starved for funding.

- The introduction of H.R. 6003 on May 8—and subsequent committee and floor action—prompted a flurry of media calls. NARP was quoted by many press outlets, including Reuters, *Congressional Quarterly*, and Cox News Service.

- NARP’s participation in National Train

Day provided the Association with media exposure, and many new members.

- One year ago, NARP released its “Grow Trains Campaign” pushing to double the route miles of America’s passenger train network in the next forty years. The *Tampa Tribune* published an article on June 3 entitled “A New Train of Thought” that focused almost entirely on our efforts. The article also pointed out that NARP correctly predicted the future when, in June of 2007, we said, “With the average price of gas expected to top \$4 per gallon in the near future...”

- Also on June 3, the ever rising price of oil and crisis state of the airline industry and U.S. automobile manufacturers prompted NARP to release a statement urging more focus on passenger rail. It said, in part, “we need a rapid and long-overdue ramping up of investment in Amtrak and transit to give people jobs when other parts of the transportation industry are retrenching and to let Americans leave their cars at home when they want to—which they increasingly do. The time to invest in trains is now.” ■

Seattle’s Eastside Rail Line Prospects Brighten

Rail advocates in Washington State have made a great deal of progress in preserving a lightly-used freight rail line for future passenger train service.

The Eastside Rail Line (BNSF Railway’s Woodinville Subdivision) from Tukwila to Snohomish via Bellevue faced an uncertain future. According to *Washington Rail News*, the newsletter of All Aboard Washington, “King County Executive Ron Sims publicly announced a deal to build the ‘Granddaddy of All Trails’ on the ‘soon to be torn up tracks’ on BNSF’s rail corridor. Maybe, thirty or forty years from now, Sims said, this strategic transportation corridor could revert back to rails, notwithstanding there is virtually no historic precedent of trails going back to rails in this country once the tracks are removed. The simple fact is, once the rails are gone, they are gone forever!”

All Aboard Washington (AAWA) rallied its troops and pressed the Port of Seattle to purchase the line and preserve it for passenger trains. AAWA retained the services of Dr. Alfred Runte, a well-known Pacific Northwest rail advocate and author to lead their fight. Runte and other AAWA officials testified at countless hearings, and organized a bus tour of the rail corridor to show stakeholders just how

key the line would be for the future.

This tour was well publicized in the local media and very well may have been the key turning point in the battle. On May 12, 2008, the Port purchased the line. Public hearings on the line’s future will begin soon.

The fight to bring passenger rail back to the Eastside Rail Line is far from over—the line is safe from destruction but how the line will be used in the future is still not certain, pending the aforementioned public hearings. But thanks to the efforts of All Aboard Washington, that debate can actually take place! ■

NARP Database: Changing to Meet Our Growing Needs

NARP is upgrading its membership database to better serve our members. Improvements include the elimination of dual logins for the website, e-mail confirmations of transactions, automatic membership renewals (at your option), and a streamlined process for making special contributions to NARP.

The old database is offline and not available to members. If you would like to renew your membership or change your contact information, please phone, e-mail or write to the NARP office, and we will be glad to assist you. There may be a delay in confirming your address updates until the new system is operational.

We do have an interim service, available on our website, to enroll new NARP members and to accept contributions from existing members. At www.narprail.org follow the appropriate links on the left hand menu to be transferred to a website hosted by Wild Apricot, a fully secured website (128-bit encryption).

One immediate benefit of the interim site is that NARP now accepts Discover and American Express (in addition to Visa and Mastercard), all four of which will also be accepted in the permanent system.

Thank you for your continued patience and support of NARP during this transition.

King Street Station Renovation to Move Forward

After years of delays, the renovation of Seattle’s King Street Station will begin in earnest this summer.

While platform work was completed in 2001 (when Sounder commuter rail service was inaugurated), the station itself has languished in an interim state. The primary hangup was a disagreement between BNSF Railway and Washington DOT on terms related to liability and indemnification.

Following two plus years of

negotiation, BNSF and the City of Seattle reached an agreement and the transfer was signed in March 2008.

Washington DOT did several projects in the interim period, including complete replacement of the rest rooms and a full restoration of the “Compass Room”, both of which were completed in time for the station’s 100th anniversary in 2006.

More info: <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/kingstreet.htm>



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

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

New Pacific Northwest Thruways—A Eugene-Portland bus connects to/from trains 513 and 516 and a Bellingham-Seattle connects to/from trains 500 and 509 (the latter is Washington DOT's first Thruway bus).

Bus Service East of Yosemite—New operation connects with existing Merced-Yosemite *San Joaquin* Thruway. Serves more points within the park and continues east to Tuolumme Meadows, Lee Vining, June Lakes, and Mammoth Lakes. From May 31 to June 29, and Sept. 6 to 28, the service operates Saturday and Sunday only. From July 1 until August 31 the bus will operate on a daily basis.

City of New Orleans Memphis de-tour continues (June *News*). Shuttle service from Memphis Central Station to temporary boarding site now set up as a Thruway bus (no charge). Bus for northbound train #58 departs at 9:15pm (1 hour 25 minutes earlier than timetable), bus for southbound train #59 departs at 6:30am (20 minutes earlier than timetable).

Midwest floods—As of press time, the *Empire Builder*, *California Zephyr*, and *Southwest Chief* are experiencing disruptions due to Mississippi and Des Moines River flooding and Missouri *Mules* may be next. Check with Amtrak before traveling.

New Discount for NARP Members!

Effective immediately, NARP members are eligible for discounts on the Grand Canyon Railway. Members can receive 20% off coach fare on the train, or 10% off a Grand Canyon Railway vacation package.

The Grand Canyon Railway is a 65 mile railroad running between Williams Junction, AZ (where it connects with Amtrak's *Southwest Chief*) and the South Rim of the Canyon. The rail line was completed in 1901 and re-opened in its current tourist form in 1989.

Visit them on the web at www.thetrain.com. To book with the NARP discount, you must call the Railway directly at 1-800-THE-TRAIN (843-8724) and ask for discount code "NARP".

Oberstar

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exists, rubber-stamping additional highway construction as inevitable while requiring a burdensome benefit-cost analysis for all rail projects.

He also highlighted the DOT Inspector General's report indicating that Amtrak could reduce its operating grant requirement by \$137 million a year if on-time performance outside the Northeast Corridor could be improved to 85%.

The Chairman also spoke about the "enormous benefits for quality-of-life, for air quality, for movement of people and goods, for taking cars off the roadway" which rail transport provides. He acknowledged that the onus is on rail advocates to prove this, but suggested we face a golden opportunity to mobilize the

political will of a public facing unsustainable energy costs.

"For six years," the chairman emphasized, "we've had a drumbeat of negativism [on Amtrak] from the White House. But help is on the way from Paul Weyrich," a leading conservative who also has championed transit and passenger trains. Oberstar said "Weyrich makes arguments I hadn't thought of."

Oberstar challenged all levels of government to close the international gap and create the kind of rail system which America—as the world's foremost economic power—deserves, quipping that it's possible to take a train 820 miles from Beijing to Shanghai (the distance from Boston to Richmond) in four hours "but you can't get from downtown Washington to Dulles Airport in that time." ■

Attention: Spring Cleaners

Do you (or your spouse on your behalf!) have railfan or railroad memorabilia that you want to get rid of? Donate it to the Federal Railroad Administration's Annual Christmas Auction. The event is held every December here in Washington, DC and benefits local charities. You can send items for the auction to NARP Headquarters (address at top of page) and we will deliver them to the FRA.