



Commission Group Pushes Passenger Rail Growth

The Passenger Rail Working Group (PRWG) released its report, *Vision for the Future: U.S. Intercity Passenger Rail Network Through 2050*, on December 6. It “recommends initial [federal] funding of \$5 billion annually for intercity passenger rail, including Amtrak funding and grants to states.” The *Vision* includes dramatic upgrades to existing corridors, implementation of plans with new rights-of-way such as envisioned by the California High Speed Rail Authority, and the addition of new short- and long-distance routes.

The PRWG was organized to provide advice to the federal National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission. Commissioner Frank Busalacchi (who also heads Wisconsin DOT) assembled the group and led the news conference at Washington Union Station where the report was released.

The Commission is to examine the condition and future needs of surface transportation and recommend how to fund those needs. The Commission received the PRWG report and evaluated it carefully during preparation of the Commission’s own report. That report,

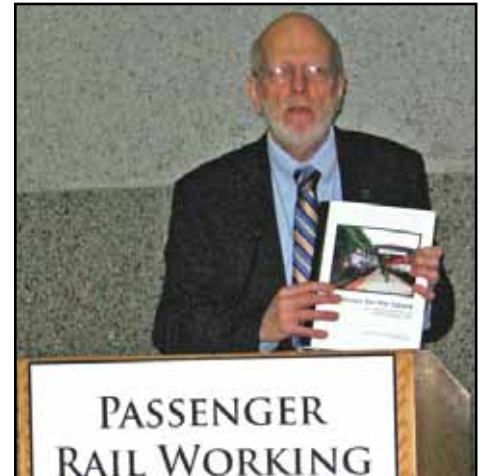
A Convert to Rail

“At the Commission’s first meeting, I was sitting next to [Commissioner] Paul Weyrich. One of my opening comments on transit and intercity passenger rail was that ‘transit and passenger trains don’t work in the West. We don’t zone for it and people won’t use it because we’d rather have our own horse and buggy.’

“Paul responded, ‘You don’t know what you’re talking about. People will use transit.’ Over the past 18 months, Paul and Frank [Busalacchi] have done a marvelous job of educating me and the rest of the commissioners about passenger rail and transit. I’m now an advocate and think rail is the future of transportation in the U.S. It has to be.”

—Commissioner Tom Skancke at
December 6 PRWG news conference

encompassing all surface transportation, will be unveiled at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington,



—Matthew Melzer

NARP Executive Director Ross B. Capon holds the Passenger Rail Working Group’s report at Dec. 6 news conference in Washington Union Station. Capon was a member of the Group that helped craft a vision of growth and expansion for passenger rail over the next 50 years.

January 15 at 10:00 am. House and Senate committees plan hearings on January 17 and 23, respectively.

Busalacchi said “our plan involves a vision that expands intercity passenger rail service substantially through the year 2050...a big and bold plan—on the scale of the construction of the Interstate Highway System...[The plan] came about because of testimony I heard before the Commission from state and local officials, businesses, advocacy groups and members of the traveling public asking for additional public investment in a national intercity passenger rail network.”

Busalacchi concluded, “We are further along on cost projections than you might expect. In total, we project \$357.2 billion by 2050 or \$8.1 billion per year. We

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—Matthew Melzer

Unveiling the Passenger Rail Working Group report. Commissioner and Wisconsin DOT Secretary Frank Busalacchi, who formed the Group, is at podium. Group members (l. to r.) David Ewing (States for Passenger Rail), Mehdi Morshed (California High Speed Rail Auth.), John Bennett (Amtrak), Gene Skoropowski (Managing Director, Capitol Corridor), Capon (NARP), and Patrick Simmons (North Carolina DOT). (“Organizations for Identification purposes only”)

Our annual “Wheels of Progress” feature reviewing the status of upcoming rail and transit projects and looking back at accomplishments in 2007 is on Page 2.

Wheels of Progress

January 13 (pending)—Oceanside-Escondido, CA Sprinter light DMU service (26 miles)

April—Salt Lake City Intermodal Terminal opens and two of the “tenants” begin service: FrontRunner commuter rail to Pleasant View via Ogden (44 mi); TRAX light-rail branch to Delta Center (4 blocks). Amtrak has been at this site since 1999.

Summer—Second Seattle-Vancouver, BC Cascades frequency (extension of trains that currently terminate in Bellingham).

September 12—Portland Tri-Met Washington County Commuter Rail “Westside Express Service” or “WES,” Beaverton Tri-Met MAX station to Wilsonville, 14.7 miles.

October—Austin (TX) Capital Metro commuter rail (light DMU), downtown to Leander, 32 miles.

Late—Calgary “CTrain” Northwest Line extension, Dalhousie to Crowfoot

December—Phoenix East Valley Light Rail, Monebello-Downtown-Airport-Mesa, 20.3 miles.

December—Rail Runner Albuquerque commuter rail extension, Bernalillo-Santa Fe on all-new right-of-way, 18 miles.

2009

Late Spring—Washington, DC Anacostia Circulator Streetcar, Pennsylvania Avenue SE-Anacostia Metrorail Station-Bolling Air Force Base, 2.5 miles.

Summer—Sound Transit (Seattle) Central Link Light Rail, Seattle-Tukwila (13.9 miles); December extension, Tukwila-SeaTac Airport (1.7 miles).

Late—Hudson Bergen Light Rail extension in Bayonne, 22nd Street to 8th Street, 1 mile.

Late—Edmonton South LRT phase II, Health Sciences to South Campus, 2.4 miles.

September—Portland Tri-Met MAX Green Line light rail extension to Clackamas Town Center (6.5 miles) and Portland Mall Light Rail, Union Station-Portland State University (21 blocks).

September—Dallas DART light rail green line extension, Downtown to MLK Station (2.7 mi).

November—Northstar Commuter Rail, Minneapolis (Target Center)-Big Lake, 40 miles, and Hiawatha Light Rail to Northstar station, 0.4 miles.

Sometime—TransLink “Canada Line”

Vancouver Airport (Richmond) – downtown Vancouver (11.8 miles), private/public DBOM consortium

Late—Los Angeles MTA Gold Line extension: Union Station-Little Tokyo-Boyle Heights-East Los Angeles (6 miles)

And Beyond Into the Future

2010—Tren Urbano light rail link between San Juan, Puerto Rico and suburban Caguas (10 mi.)

2010—Rail station on Northeast Corridor at T. F. Green Airport (in Warwick, RI, serving Providence). Moving sidewalk link with air terminal. Station will house all airport rental car agencies and serve an extension of MBTA commuter rail service from downtown Providence. Amtrak will not stop initially, and it is unclear when or if Amtrak will stop.

2010—Central Florida commuter rail phase one: Orlando to DeBary, 31 miles. State of Florida and CSX have signed agreement and state has purchased right of way, allowing construction to begin.

Early 2010—Keystone line station renovations at Lancaster completed.

Early 2010—Norfolk, VA “The Tide” light rail (Eastern Virginia Medical Center-Newtown Road, 7.4 miles).

Summer 2010—Los Angeles Exposition light rail line, Figueroa Street Blue Line station to Culver City, 8.6 miles. This is first segment of line to Santa Monica (under environmental impact review).

Late 2010—Metrolink (Los Angeles commuter rail) 91 Line extension, Riverside-Perris (18 mi.)

December 2010—Dallas DART light rail extensions open along the Northwest

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Accomplishments in 2007

February 14—Little Rock River Rail extension to Bill Clinton Presidential Library (0.5 mi).

April 7—San Francisco Muni light rail, San Francisco Caltrain Station-Visitation Valley (5.1 miles).

July 9—Automation of Brighton Park Junction on the south side of Chicago (on Chicago-St. Louis route) permitting 40 mph operation where trains formerly had to stop.

August 17—Portland Streetcar Lowell extension, S.W. Gibbs-S.W. Lowell, 0.6 mi.

October 31—MBTA Greenbus Commuter Rail, Braintree-Scituate-Greenbus, MA, 18 miles.

October 31—Monterrey, Mexico Metrorrey light rail extension, General Anaya to Sendero, 5.4 miles.

November 26—Milwaukee Amtrak station renovation complete. Station is now an intermodal terminal (photos below).

November 26—Charlotte, NC Lynx Blue Line light rail, Downtown to I-485/Pineville (9.6 miles).

December 12—Seattle South Lake Union Streetcar, South Lake Union-Westlake Center (1.3 miles).

December 16—Toronto GO Transit commuter rail extension, Bradford-Barrie, restoring service cut in 1993.

December 17—Calgary “CTrain” (Light Rail) Northeast Line extension, Whitehorn to Westwinds (1.8 miles).

Milwaukee Station Renovation Complete



—Margaret Ann Hughes

Milwaukee celebrated the long-awaited reopening of its newly renovated train station on November 26. The building structure is the same and on the same site, but heavily modernized. Next for the project will be updating of the platforms and train canopies. All stations along the *Hiawatha* route are now either brand new, or well-maintained older structures.

envision a federal/state partnership with 80% of the funding coming from the federal government, and 20% from the state.”

The Working Group recognized that it will take time to develop an \$8 billion a year program, hence the recommendation for \$5 billion in the early years.

Commissioner Tom Skancke (front page box), who is from Las Vegas, said that “38 million people visit Las Vegas annually. Nine million of them drive from southern California. We need to provide our visitors with multiple modes to get to and from Las Vegas safely. It is a real tragedy that we still have not given people an alternative to flying or driving here.”

Other December 6 speakers included Amtrak President and CEO Alex Kummant; Tom Bulger, Washington representative for Commissioner Steve Heminger (Heminger is executive director of the California Bay Area’s Metropolitan Transportation Commission); and five PRWG members (see front-page caption).

Kummant said, “The price of not acting

is significantly greater than the price tag we see today.” He cited another month of big growth—November Amtrak ridership up 8.7% from 2006 (state corridors up 7.4%; Northeast Corridor up 11.2%).

NARP Executive Director Ross Capon, who is also a member of the Working Group, said, “The report maps out a strategy of how we can begin to rebalance our transportation system by strengthening our nation’s passenger train network.”

A NARP release hailing the new report said, in part, “By fleshing out ideas and proposing both legislative and funding mechanisms, the Passenger Rail Working Group strengthens the initiative proposed by NARP last June” [July News].

The report has route maps “for illustrative purposes” for 2015, 2030 and 2050. The 2015 map includes:

- a Longview, TX-Meridian, MS link that would give Amtrak’s New York-New Orleans *Crescent* a Dallas section;
- These new short-distance routes: Cleveland-Cincinnati, Chicago-Rockford, Chicago-Quad Cities, Milwaukee-Madison and Minneapolis-Duluth;
- “Separate track” upgrades for the

Pacific Northwest corridor; Chicago-Twin Cities; and Washington-Charlotte (the latter including the planned restoration of the direct Raleigh, NC-Petersburg, VA segment); and

- Restoring the link between Montreal and St. Albans, VT.

Subsequent maps add more routes. The 2030 map has (among others): restoration of links from Salt Lake City to Las Vegas-Los Angeles and Portland; a continuous line from Cheyenne to El Paso; St. Louis-Tulsa-Oklahoma City; and Newton-Wichita-Oklahoma City.

US DOT Secretary Mary Peters did not comment on the Working Group’s report. A spokesman said, “The secretary will review this and all other reports submitted to the commission for consideration.” The Association of American Railroads issued a disappointingly negative statement, which seemed to reflect no understanding of the PRWG’s attention to freight concerns, including the need for expanding conventional track capacity and the identification of segments where passenger trains would use “separate track” or “new right-of-way.” ■

Senate Committee Hears from Prospective Amtrak Board Members

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on Dec. 18 approved three nominees for Amtrak’s Board: Republicans Nancy Naples and Denver Stutler, and Democrat Thomas Carper. Two testified at the confirmation hearing; Carper was with his wife who had a stroke while they were walking to the hearing; she has recovered now.

It is unclear when (perhaps even if) the Senate will confirm. Meanwhile, Amtrak’s board is down to three members with the Dec. 31, 2007, expiration of Floyd Hall’s recess appointment. Republican Donna McLean (chair), Democrat Hunter Biden and U.S. DOT are the current members.

At the hearing, Sen. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) urged nominees to focus on the benefits Amtrak provides, not just the costs. “Even as Amtrak makes progress, it’s obvious it isn’t kept up to current needs. You have to think carefully about what we mean by ‘reform.’ Stand up for the needed funding—don’t just support the [Bush] Administration position. Find the needs, understand what you’ve got.”

Naples served 1994-2005 as County Comptroller of Erie County which includes Buffalo. In 2006, she was New York’s Motor Vehicles Commissioner and Chairwoman of the Governor’s Traffic

Safety Committee under Gov. George Pataki (R).

She testified that she had loved trains ever since riding from Buffalo to New York City’s 1965 World’s Fair. She said her only recent use of Amtrak was for short trips but she planned to ride the *Empire Builder* early in 2008. She spoke enthusiastically about the need for passenger trains for short and long trips: “We need to make rail transportation a national priority. I’m personally committed to this. I’m not here just to look at the financial aspect of it.”

Stutler, an environmental engineer, is president of Stutler Strategies, Inc. In 2005, he was named Florida’s DOT Secretary by Gov. Jeb Bush, after having served as the Governor’s Chief of Staff and as Chief of Staff at Florida’s Department of Environmental Protection.

Sen. Mel Martinez (R-FL) who introduced Stutler and Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL), a committee member, strongly endorsed Stutler. Stutler said train travel “represents simplicity...Many times I have traveled between Washington and New York and it is just simple and friendly. However, I don’t think we have made it clear to people how easy it is to catch a

train.”

Thomas Carper is west central regional manager of the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. He was mayor of Macomb, Illinois, 1991-2003 and chairman of Amtrak’s national Mayors’ Advisory Council. Sen. Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) both hailed Carper’s nomination. He is not related to the Delaware senator and former Amtrak board member.

It is unclear when or if these nominees will be confirmed, as Bush nominees may get increasing “headwinds” during the President’s last year in office. ■

Amtrak '08 Appropriation

Fiscal 2008 spending for most federal agencies was lumped into one “omnibus” bill which Congress passed Dec. 20 and President Bush signed Dec. 26. There is \$1.325 billion for Amtrak (\$475 million operations, \$850 million capital and debt service) and \$30 million for to match state intercity passenger rail investments. (Amtrak got \$1.294 billion for 2007.)



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

Amtrak Labor Update

Presidential Emergency Board 242 sent its recommendations on the Amtrak labor disputes to the White House on December 30, which released them January 3. Barring enactment of a special law, a strike would become legal at 12:01 a.m. on Wednesday, January 30.

However, a strike seems unlikely because the recommendations closely track the nine unions' proposals, including no change in work rules, full back pay, new contracts that would become amendable again fairly soon—on December 31, 2009, and, "with only minor modifications," the national freight railroad agreements on health and welfare benefits.

The recommendations sided with Amtrak in applying back pay only to employees in service as of December 1, 2007, and in opposing restoration of cost-of-living adjustments after the new agreements become amendable.

It seems unlikely that Amtrak would dig in against the recommendations. However, it remains to be seen what the impact will be of Amtrak having to pay 60% of the back pay in Fiscal 2009. The impact of the 40% recommended for 2008 is much smaller, since it is close to that of the \$4,500 "signing bonus" Amtrak had proposed.

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and Southeast Corridor (Green Line). North extension opens in five segments on different dates, totaling 16.4 miles from American Airlines Center to Frankford Road. South extension is 7.4 miles, MLK Station to Buckner Station.

Late 2011—Miami-Dade Metrorail Earlington Heights-Miami Intermodal Center at Miami International Airport extension (2.6 miles).

2012—Sounder commuter rail trains extended from Tacoma to Lakewood, Wash. (8.2 mi.). Lakewood (2008) and

South Tacoma (2009) stations will open before line is built; dedicated buses will run to Tacoma Dome station.

Sometime in the future—Los Angeles Red Line subway extension Wilshire/Western-Santa Monica (13 mi., first phase to Wilshire/Fairfax, 3 mi). Federal legislative prohibition on subway construction repealed in the Fiscal 2008 federal omnibus appropriations law.

Sometime in the future—Los Angeles MTA Gold Line "Foothill Extension," Sierra Madra Villa station in Pasadena to Montclair Transportation Center, 24 mi. ■

TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

Amtrak Strike Jan. 30 seems unlikely at press time. For updates, see our weekly news hotline, posted Fridays by 6:00 pm at www.narprail.org

January 21 Timetable change—First stage of *California Zephyr* schedule tightening—depart Salt Lake City at 11:30 pm (five minutes earlier), arrive Emeryville 6:10 pm (75 minutes earlier). Northbound *Silver Meteor* departs Miami at 8:40 am (85 minutes later); *Star* departs at 11:50 am (three hours later). NARP has protested to Amtrak because the new *Star* schedule breaks almost all connections to other trains and produces a late New York arrival (7:10 pm; 7:30 on weekends). Minor changes on the Keystone Corridor. New Thruway bus service between the University of Oregon-Eugene and Portland begins.

Winter Fare discounts—Amtrak has several winter fare promotions.

When booking on Amtrak.com, discounted fare will show with availability. However, none of the promotions are combinable with any other discount. To get the lowest fare with these promotions, select "Adult" on Amtrak's website. NARP has complained to Amtrak that this is confusing to passengers and asked them to post some explanation on their website.

Norfolk Thruway stop location change—Stop shifts north on Bute Street to the entrance to the York Street Garage, providing secure parking for those who use the bus.

Changes in Amtrak Guest Rewards redemption for airline or hotel points—Since Jan. 1, only Select or Select Plus members or Amtrak Guest Rewards Credit Card holders have been able to redeem Amtrak Guest Rewards points for airline miles or hotel points.