

USRA PROPOSES FAST CORRIDOR NETWORK

A network of fast corridor passenger services for the Northeast has been proposed by the United States Railway Association, which is planning the revised Northeast rail system.

The Association's "Preliminary Plan" calls for removal of through freight trains from Penn Central's Boston-Washington line, with passenger trains there running as fast as 150 mph.

Initially, passenger service elsewhere would be limited to 80 mph. This would permit service to be time-competitive with the automobile and should "provide a useful tool for analyzing public demand," USRA said. The 80 mph speed would also be economical, since the freight mainlines over which passenger trains will run are planned to be capable of supporting freight and passenger train speeds of 60 and 80 mph, respectively.

"Upgrading of all corridors in question will require at least five to ten years," although service could begin in three years, according to USRA. In view of the lead time required for implementation, Amtrak should "immediately begin planning service for the identified corridors. The alternative of waiting for a crisis similar to the 1973-74 energy crush and then attempting to establish quickly a patchwork of uncoordinated service must be avoided if the region is to have a rational, coordinated passenger service network."

NARP believes that the corridors named by USRA should be added to the Amtrak basic system and, in fact, should have been included in the initial 1971 system. (In the text of the Plan, USRA credited NARP as having suggested some of the corridors studied for the Plan.)

Operation of these routes should not be dependent upon state subsidies, since these routes are more vital than some routes totally funded by Amtrak, and state subsidies are uncertain. For example, the Ohio bond issue will not be on the June ballot as we reported last month, although some supporters hope the gov-



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ernor and legislature will agree to call a special election soon thereafter.

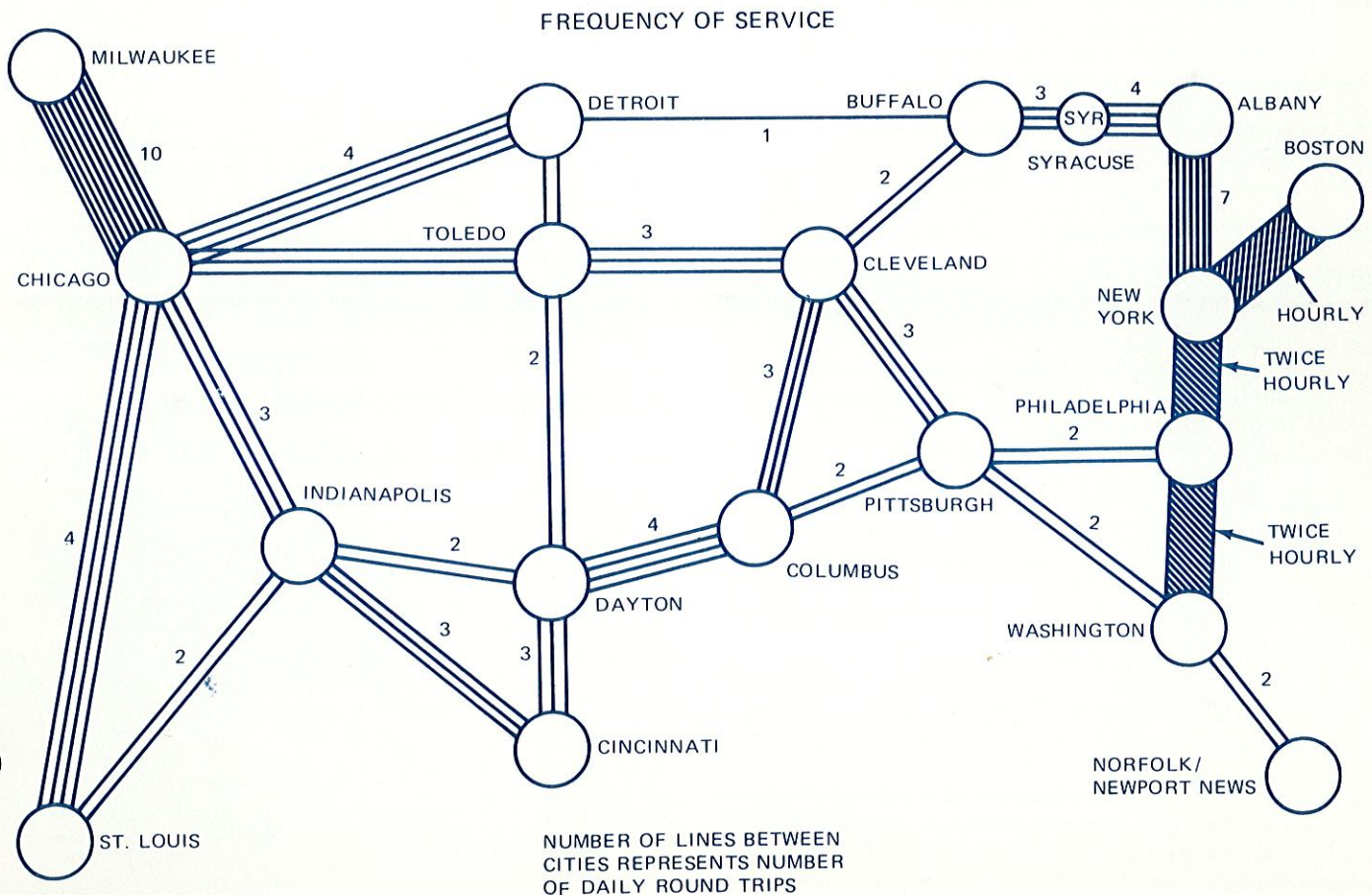
Public reaction to the USRA plan focused largely on proposed abandonments of lines with light freight traffic. Among such lines are several segments vital to present and future Amtrak operations, including substantial portions of the Chicago-Detroit and Indianapolis-Dayton lines.

NARP told a House subcommittee that Amtrak should be empowered to acquire and maintain all "passenger-only" lines needed to operate the basic system, including the USRA-proposed corridors, and to acquire other lines upon which passenger trains might reasonably be operated in the future.

USRA also recommended that Amtrak investigate the provision of Harrisburg-Chicago auto-ferry rail service, and suggested that Albany-Chicago-Denver services might also become viable.

The ICC's Rail Services Planning Office will hold hearings on the USRA plan in March throughout the Northeast. Testimony will be considered by USRA as it develops the Final System Plan, due to be published July 26.

USRA's passenger responsibilities are mostly advisory, so pressure on Amtrak and the Congress will be required to assure an adequate rail passenger network for the Northeast.



THE PUBLIC COMES LAST

By Anthony Haswell

Recently the United States Railway Association, the government agency charged with designing a new northeast region rail system to take over from the Penn Central and other bankrupts, issued its "Preliminary System Plan".

Currently the press is full of reports that the Rock Island Line may physically shut down operations for lack of funds.

The Preliminary System Plan, while excellent in many respects, falls short of what might be expected, and the Rock Island is on the brink of disaster, for the same reason — undue deference by government officials towards the special pleadings of other railroad corporations to the detriment of the public interest in better rail transportation.

In my view, the most desirable solution for the northeast would be to split the Penn Central into its former halves, the Pennsylvania and the New York Central, and then merge these halves into the Norfolk and Western and the Chessie System respectively. Among other things, such a plan would keep Con-Rail — almost certain to be a nationalized rail operation — from ever coming into existence. However, the N & W and the Chessie strongly object to such large scale takeovers, so apparently USRA didn't even consider it.

Granted, it is understandable that the solvent Eastern systems do not want to assume liability for rehabilitation of Penn Central's decrepit track and roadbed. But USRA had the answer to this problem right in its grasp — and then let it get away. That would be for a neutral public agency to acquire, rehabilitate, and

The new House Committee on the Budget. . . will give the Congress the means to take an overall look at Federal spending on transportation. It could develop a unified transportation budget which would give us an accurate picture of the results of the piecemeal decisions we have made over the years. . . both visible and hidden. I do not think that there is anything inherently wrong in subsidizing needed forms of transportation in this country. However, there has been inequity in the way federal funds have benefitted one mode and not another. Imbalance has resulted from the lack of rational, long-run transportation planning. The Budget Committee, I hope, will help us to set a sensible order of priorities.

—U.S. Congressman Brock Adams
Chairman, House Budget Committee

maintain the track and roadbed of the bankrupts. If this were done, N & W and Chessie upon takeover of the bankrupt's operations would be assured of well-maintained track available at a reasonable user charge.

While the PSP does contain a capsule discussion of the public track-roadbed concept for consideration by Congress and other interested parties, USRA declined to specifically include it in its recommendations for northeast restructuring. Why not? My information is that the primary reason was the adamant opposition of profitable railroads outside the northeast region, on the absurd and irrational ground that the concept is "socialistic". This position is akin to that of the old-time industrialist who swore he would burn down the factory before he ever recognized a labor union. Unless there is major federal involvement in rehabilitation of track and roadbed, private enterprise railroading in our country has had it — and not just in the northeast. In any event, as a government agency supported by public funds, USRA could rightly be expected to reject the ideologically motivated pleas of affluent railroads and uphold the public interest. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

The sad story of the Rock Island has an important parallel to the northeast mess. Well over ten years ago, the Union Pacific proposed to merge the Rock Island into UP's profitable system, and to rehabilitate and modernize it. However, the Interstate

Commerce Commission, largely because of the vociferous opposition of other railroads who feared loss of business, delayed until late 1974 in approving the merger. This unconscionable delay occurred in spite of the fact that the law requires mergers to be judged on the basis of the *public* interest as distinct from the interests of other railroads. Now the Rock Island is in such bad shape that the Union Pacific probably doesn't want it any more. Several members of the ICC should be impeached for their role in this disaster, and probably deserve to spend some time in prison.

Countless gallons of printers ink have been spilled in the last year or so about the public's disillusionment with politicians and government officials. My years in Washington working on railroad problems have convinced me that this attitude is well grounded, and that up to now public officials, including members of Congress, have gotten off very easy. Far more must be done in the areas of full disclosure of personal and campaign finances, of public accountability, and of electoral and appointment procedures if popular confidence in our institutions is to be restored.

SERVICE CHANGES

INTERCITY: First trip of the Cincinnati-Roanoke-Norfolk service departs Chicago Monday, March 24, with the first west-bound trip leaving Norfolk the next day. . . Amtrak and Minnesota officials are hoping to inaugurate Minneapolis-Superior service April 16. . . Chicago-Milwaukee improvements resulting from cooperation between Amtrak and the State of Wisconsin include a fare reduction from \$5.50 to 4.75 and provision of free parking at Milwaukee for Amtrak riders. . . Amtrak's Boston-Worcester-Springfield service ended February 28. . . Indianapolis is again without north-south service, and Louisville without any, as Chicago-Florida trains are temporarily rerouted north of Nashville. By-passed passengers must make their own arrangements.

COMMUTER: With the blessing of Maryland DOT, Chessie has filed 40% fare increases for its D.C. suburban trains. Maryland commuters are urging the ICC to investigate. . . 25 percent fare increases recently went into effect on PC's Baltimore-Washington trains, and are proposed by railroads serving New Jersey. . . The ICC recently ordered the reduction of fares on the Philadelphia-Lindenwold, N. J., high-speed line.

There can be no doubt that rail passenger service represents the best potential way of hauling large numbers of people between urban areas less than 300 miles or so distant from one another. Likewise, rail passenger service, if it is comfortable and convenient, can attract passengers for much longer trips where speed is not a prime need. There is good evidence now that a passenger train revival is virtually inevitable.

—Baltimore Sun

FRA Chief Hints Another Fare Increase Faces Amtrak Riders

Another fare increase for Amtrak passengers may be due in April.

Asaph Hall, acting administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration, mentioned the increase during testimony before a House Appropriations Committee subcommittee on March 5. The most recent increase went into effect last November.

NARP hopes that future Amtrak fare changes will reflect careful study of individual markets and will include off-peak reductions as B&O/C&O once did and the Canadian roads do now.

Recent and planned airfare reductions may increase the price-sensitivity of Amtrak's markets. Already, the Washington-Minneapolis excursion air fare is 50 cents less than Amtrak coach. And National has proposed third class rates which would undercut even the bus: \$61 NY-Miami, compared with \$63.05 by bus, and \$72 Amtrak coach.

New Amtrak President Testifies On Need For Supplemental Funds

Paul H. Reistrup, new president of Amtrak, testified recently on Amtrak's need for \$77.9 million in supplemental appropriations to carry it through June 30.

The biggest cause, Reistrup told a House Appropriations subcommittee, is a \$32.4 million increase in payments to the railroads which operate Amtrak's trains — incentive payments based largely on improved on-time performance.

ICC hearings in New York City on adequacy of service on passenger trains had started the day before, and some committee members had passenger complaints on their minds.

Reistrup conceded that there are problems. He said he had ridden to Washington from Chicago on the Broadway to assume his new position, and one of the cars on that train had been overheated, another had no heat, so he had direct personal experience to go on.

He told the subcommittee that some complaints about poor service or surly attitudes of on-train personnel result from employee frustration with mechanical defects they can do nothing about. He predicted that as Amtrak's new passenger cars are put into use later this year, improved reliability will lead to fewer conflicts between passengers and Amtrak personnel.

Reistrup offered some encouragement to those who have been concerned about rumors that Amtrak planned to reduce the level of service on long-haul trains: fewer lounge cars, standardized menus, reduced food service, etc.

Responding to a question, he said he would hate to see a deterioration of service below the levels he observed on the Broadway.

Amtrak Strengthens Position

Amtrak strengthened its relative position in the intercity passenger market in 1974, gaining with relation to bus and air transportation.

Amtrak's annual report reported these statistics:

- While the rail passenger service was increasing ridership by 10 percent over 1973 and revenues by 27 percent,
- Buses (nine largest Class I motor carriers of passengers) suffered a decline of 1.1 percent in ridership although revenue increased by 11.8 percent over the previous year, and
- Scheduled airlines increased ridership on domestic routes by 2.9 percent.

Philadelphia is planning a high speed rail transit link to its airport. It has received a \$30 million grant from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration for the purpose. The new line has been designated a Bicentennial Project.

Congress Authorizes Major Research On West Coast Transportation Modes

In a move with potential long-range consequences to the West Coast, the U.S. Congress recently passed legislation that authorizes an \$8 million study "of the most practical and energy-efficient method of ground transportation" in the corridor from Tijuana, Mexico, to Vancouver, Canada.

The law specifies that the research must center on a route via San Diego, Los Angeles, Fresno, San Francisco, Sacramento, Portland and Seattle. All forms of transportation, including rail passenger service and air-cushion vehicles, will be evaluated in the far-reaching study.

A preliminary report on the massive project will not be completed by the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) until Jan. 30, 1976. Consequently, no immediate results should be expected. Amtrak and several government agencies will cooperate with DOT officials undertaking the study.

SUPPORT NARP — Bring In A New Member

Yes, I want to aid the cause of better rail passenger service. I understand I will receive a membership card and a monthly newsletter to keep me informed of developments.

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NEW BOOKS

HISTORY OF RAILROADS IN AMERICA by *Oliver Jensen*, *American Heritage*, 111 Garden Street, Marion, Ohio, 43302, \$19.95.

This big, (9¼ by 12¼) beautifully illustrated *American Heritage* volume contains 320 pages of how the railroads changed America from a small-town agricultural nation to an all-powerful industrial empire, bound and braced by 254,000 miles of steel ribbons. It contains more than 300 illustrations, 48 in color. The book also has a deluxe edition for \$22.95 and a stereo LP record of "Songs and Sounds of the Great Days of Steam" for \$4.95.

ALL ABOARD WITH E.M. FRIMBO: World's Greatest Railroad Buff. *Rogers E.M. Whitaker & Anthony Hiss*. Grossman, \$8.95.

Three cheers for Ernest M. Frimbo, lexicographer, sports-writer, bon vivant and connoisseur of railroad travel. Frimbo, whose experience and sensitivity puts Lucius Beebe in the shade, is really Rogers Whitaker, a longtime editor at the *New Yorker*. With co-author Hiss he has added some unnecessary luster to an already shimmering character (Frimbo reports from time to time for the magazine). Traveling with the world's greatest railroad buff is memorable. It involves turkey hash on the early morning Metroliner, going on a private train to New Orleans, being a dining-car steward on the Caribou Express, taking a trip on the Trans-Siberian. Frimbo's account of getting to Ithaca, N.Y., by rail is a gem, and he is eloquent on the decline of passenger service.

TRAVEL BY TRAIN by *Edward J. Wojtas*, *Rand McNally*, *New York*; 112 pp.; illus.; \$1.95.

In recent years a travel writer was less than eager to spend time on American railroads, and the books written have been critical. So the appearance of a positive book about American railroads by a travel writer is good news indeed.

Wojtas set himself limited goals, and within them he was successful. He allocates a few pages for explaining railroad and Amtrak terminology and procedures, the Amtrak system and its history, and offers some tips for getting the most out of train service. Most of the book describes Amtrak routes, using thumbnail sketches of the towns and cities through which the trains pass. There are also short sections on non-Amtrak routes, tourist lines and the Mexican railroads.

For several years, NARP has made an annual plea to Congress to have the Federal Government acquire and maintain railroad roadbed and tracks. Private railroads — including Amtrak — would use them in return for a user fee just as truckers pay a weight tax, airlines pay landing fees, etc. The idea has merit, according to the United States Railway Association, which suggested formation of "ConFac" or Consolidated Facilities Corporation.

NARP Member: Here's Chance To 'Vote' On Amtrak Services

The staff of the National Association of Railroad Passengers would like your opinion as to the current issues which are most important for NARP to be working on at the present time. Please check up to *five* items and return to NARP, 417 New Jersey Ave. SE, Washington, D.C. Add comments and additional issues, below or on a separate sheet of paper. Thanks for your help.

- Improvement of track conditions _____
- Improving Amtrak's fare structure _____
- Expanding, changing Amtrak's route structure. How? _____
- Improving service levels (number of trains operated) on existing routes. Which ones? _____
- Fighting likely discontinuances of intercity trains. Which ones? _____
- Fighting likely discontinuances of commuter trains. Which ones? _____
- Increasing availability of Auto-train-type services. What routes? _____
- Changing present intercity coach reservations policies. Suggestions? _____
- Changing present intercity baggage checking polices. Suggestions? _____
- Pressing Amtrak to increase acquisition of new cars _____
- On-train services: changes, fighting proposed or recently instituted changes. Suggestions? _____
- Working for first-class (parlor car) service on Corridor trains _____
- Changing Federal laws (other than those implied above). Which ones and how? _____
- Improving promotion of intercity or commuter service. How? _____
- Providing more extensive budget sleeping accommodations _____
- Pressing responsible agencies for early implementation of Northeast Corridor project _____
- Promoting commuter rail or other (what?) solutions for urban area transportation problems. Where? _____
- Encouraging Amtrak to reduce its deficit quickly *OR*. _____
- Pressing Congress to remove the "for-profit" clause from the Amtrak law _____
- Making rail services more convenient for handicapped and elderly people. Suggestions? _____

COMMENTS: _____

**NEWS from
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