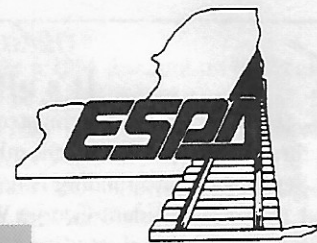


THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

HTTP://www.trainweb.com/espa



Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

Vol. 24, No. 2

March/April 2002

Amtrak Battle Intensifies -

Will Passenger Rail Survive?

Several key issues are emerging as the struggle over the future of U.S. rail passenger service intensifies. First, will the U.S. retain a national network, with long distance trains linking large cities and shorter corridors, or will it focus only on high-speed corridors isolated from each other? Second, who or what will run it - Amtrak or something else? Third, will rail be allowed to live up to its potential, or must it continue to barely scrape by with a minimal presence? And finally, who will pay for whatever survives?

The debate sharpened dramatically on February 1st when Amtrak President George Warrington said Amtrak could not continue its present level of service next year unless Congress appropriates \$1.2 billion—more than twice its current \$521 million level. He said Amtrak would post discontinuance notices for all long distance trains on March 29th, to take effect September 30th, the end of the current fiscal year. This would allow compliance with the 6 months notice requirement before a route can be closed if Congress does not come through.

Warrington also announced immediate cost reductions to get through the current year. These include laying off 1,000 management and union employees, reducing station hours at low revenue stations (none in New York) and deferring car maintenance and capital expenditures. Furloughs will affect roughly 400 workers who maintain the rail cars, 140 station agents and about 300 managers. While deferring maintenance may get the corporation through the current year it will cause major problems for passengers, and destaffing stations will also reduce ridership and revenue.

Action Alert

Please contact President Bush immediately! Urge him to keep all our trains running - we need a connected national system, not isolated corridors!

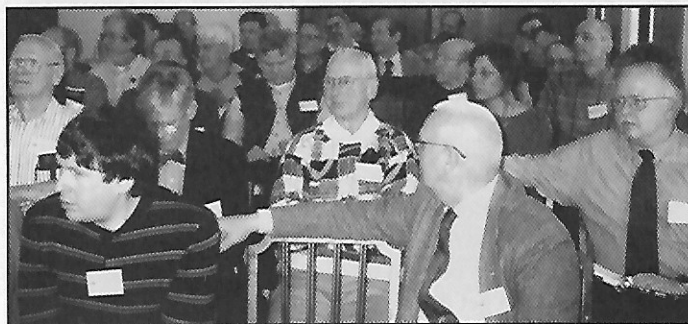
Pres. George Bush The White House Washington, DC 20500

President@whitehouse.gov Opinion line 202-456-1111

Also write or call your Congressperson 202-224-3121

President Bush proposes just \$521 million for Amtrak, but budget language indicates this is only a "placeholder" until the Administration decides what to do about Amtrak. However Transportation Secretary Mineta has openly questioned the national system concept and the need for long distance trains. Senator Richard Shelby, the ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations Transportation Subcommittee, said at a February 7th hearing that even \$521 million is too much for Amtrak—he advocated spending more on highways instead. (Had Vermont Senator James Jeffords not defected from the Republican Party last year, Shelby would now be preparing Amtrak's appropriation). Patty Murray, (D., Wash.) who replaced Shelby, has treated the Bush \$521 Amtrak figure with appropriate skepticism.

Since 1980 Congress has tripled funding for (cont'd on page 3)



Jim Repass



Norman Snyder



Phil Larson

Photo credit: Jack Ross

Good News and Bad at Annual Meeting

About 80 people attended the 2002 ESPA-NARP annual meeting on March 2nd at the Mohawk Club in Schenectady. Main speakers were Jim Repass, President, National Corridors Initiative, Phil Larson, General Manager, Amtrak Empire Corridor, and Norman Snyder, Director of the Department of Transportation Freight and Economic Development Division.

Repass, who has organized high-speed rail conferences around the country, said his organization strongly supports the long distance trains now under attack in Washington. "They provide vital service to rural areas and especially to older people. We see corridors as a way to build strong infrastructure and as you build stronger corridors, the gaps between them get smaller. Corridors will help long distance trains."

"We're at war now," Repass said; "for years Amtrak has been an ideological whipping boy. Congress has never provided enough money to do the job right." Repass was skeptical of the Amtrak Reform Council, calling it "a vestige of the Gingrich libertarian right."

"Amtrak has made a lot of people mad," he said, "but execution is not the cure. Separating operations from infrastructure is crazy. Right now there's a big fight within the Bush Administration between ideologues who hate Amtrak and practical people who want to see Republicans win the next election. The main protagonists appear to be Health and Human Services Secretary (and former Amtrak Board Chairman) Tommy Thompson, a strong Amtrak supporter, and Office of Management and Budget Director Mitch Daniels who is not. Repass urged ESPA members to contact the White House immediately, preferably by Fax, to urge support for long distance trains.

(cont'd on page 4)

Guest Editorial

It's all up to us

By now, I am sure most of you have heard that Amtrak is threatening to discontinue all of its long-distance service on Sept. 30 if more funding is not forthcoming.

Amtrak President George Warrington has drawn a line in the sand: support rail passenger service or be prepared to see all trains dropped. This is a bold gamble and, like any gamble, it runs the risk that Congress might not come through with the necessary funding. This is where we come in.

I want to tell each and every one of you that this is your fight. We can't win without you. You must write your U.S. representative and both U.S. senators. Emphatically make your point that you expect more from Congress than we have had over the last 30 years.

This includes a succession of starvation budgets that might have kept Amtrak alive, but resulted in lousy service and yearly funding battles. Rail passenger service must be a part of a national transportation policy that treats all modes equally.

As this is being written, we are making plans for a series of press conferences to be held throughout the state and are taking other measures to get our message out.

But more needs to be done. What else can we do? Talk to your friends and family members to get them to write. Talk to local chambers of commerce, local business people and others, especially if you live in a place where Amtrak stops. Leave no stone unturned.

This is a high-stakes gamble and that means we have to do our utmost to win. Let's be a real team! *Bill Hutchison - President of the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers*

Sanford Wins Assembly Seat

In a special February 12th election, Onondaga County Legislature Chairman Bill Sanford won the Syracuse area New York State Assembly seat vacated by Michael Bragman who resigned from the state Assembly last year. Mr. Sanford has sponsored two well-attended regional conferences on railroads for local government representatives in central New York, in 1997 and again last year. He used the first conference to launch the Empire Corridor Rail Task Force, which now includes the legislative chairpersons of all the counties along the corridor west of the Capital District. The task force works for better rail service, both passenger and freight. As a result of Sanford's leadership and interest in rail, State Transportation Commissioner Joseph Boardman appointed him to serve on the Rail Passenger Council when it was formed in 1999. Sanford has chaired the Rail Task Force since its founding.

Mr. Sanford, a Republican, told ESPA he hopes to use his new position to build a bi-partisan coalition of state legislators in both chambers to work with Governor Pataki to bring high-speed rail service to New York State. Sanford is well qualified to work across party lines; Onondaga County legislators chose him as chairman after the last county elections left their legislature tied 50-50.

Frank Barry

Downstate ESPA continues to meet monthly, with rail advocates from the Committee for Better Transit and New Jersey Assoc. of Rail Passengers, as a working group to develop a plan to convert the NY-NJ-CT region's commuter rail lines into a regional rail network, with frequent service and integrated fares. Meeting is Wednesdays 6-8 pm. March 27, April 24, May 22, and June 26. For information call George Haikalis, Manhattan Coordinator 212-475-3394 or e-mail at geohaikalis@juno.com

The View from the Cab

As I enter my second year as ESPA President, I think it's time to reflect...

As described elsewhere in this issue, there are many positive things happening in New York State. The new Albany-Rensselaer Station, the finest passenger station built in this country in years, will open in June. Significant improvements to the classic New York Central buildings in Utica and Rome will also be completed this spring. Plans for new or improved facilities are underway in Rochester, Buffalo, Niagara Falls, Dunkirk, Lyons and Saratoga Springs.

But let's not kid ourselves... all is NOT rosy! The future of Amtrak as we know it has never been more in question and our nation's long-distance intercity train service has never been in more peril. Here in New York State, the promise of true high-speed service is still unfilled with the rebuilt Turboliners months away from introduction and the dark cloud of unreasonable property taxes continues to stifle infrastructure improvements. On top of all this, the combined effects of the nationwide economic turndown, competition from low fare air carrier, Jet Blue and the tragic events of 9/11, have all caused ridership to drop significantly, after years of steady growth.

Having been spurred on by these great challenges, I am pleased to report that ESPA has accomplished much in 2001. The engagement of Joe Landry as our state government representative has been highly successful in opening the right doors and getting our message to the decisions makers in Albany. Our 'Fun One Day Trip' flyers are widely circulated across upstate cities and have introduced many first time riders to the pleasures of rail travel. And in part through our efforts, property tax reform will hopefully be acted upon on this legislative year.

Finally, ESPA has continued to gain respect as THE voice of rail passengers in New York State. I can safely say that our relationship with Amtrak, the freight railroads and the Department of Transportation has never been better.

I have been absolutely stunned by your very positive response to my December letter, requesting special contributions towards our efforts in 2002. To date, over \$6,700 has been raised! As the Amtrak debate moves forward in the months to come, you can be assured that ESPA's voice will be heard loud and clear, as a result of your generous donations.

My thanks go to the Association's Officers and Statewide Coordinators who spend countless volunteer hours advancing our cause, and to each of you, the over 1,400 members of ESPA, who make our Association the finest state rail advocacy group in the country.

While many challenges and opportunities lie ahead for us in 2002, I am hopeful that this time next year I will be able to reflect back on a year of even greater accomplishment and progress. As always, I welcome your comments, critiques and suggestions, on how ESPA can better attain our goals of improved passenger rail service in New York State. Don't hesitate to contact me at anytime.

Bruce B. Becker, President

ESPA'S Rail Show Schedule

Come and talk trains to the public at these upcoming rail shows. Help with three ESPA goals: Promote rail travel, encourage the public to write their elected officials for passenger rail funding, and add ESPA members. Kingston March 23, Batavia April 7, Ithaca April 27 & 28, Lockport April 27 & 28.

For more information contact Robert Lenz 1-800-841-2340

Metro-North Updates

In the year 2001, Metro-North Railroad carried 71.4 million riders, which despite a sharp drop-off in the weeks immediately following 9/11, was over a million riders higher than the prior year. Also, for 2001, the on-time percentage for Metro-North trains was an impressive 96.6%. Of Metro-North lines, the largest increase in the number of passengers was a 2.5% increase on the Hudson line, which operates to Poughkeepsie. In fact, the ridership on the upper portion of the Hudson line (north of Croton-Harmon) was up 4.9%.

Metro-North also has impressive on-time statistics for January 2002. Their system-wide on-time average was 98.3% and on the Hudson line was 98.5%.

On April 7, 2002, Metro-North will be adding more trains to its already busy Hudson line. The most notable is a new 8:23pm weekday train from Grand Central to Poughkeepsie, which will split the difference between the 7:54pm and 9:02pm trains and result in trains about every half hour from 4pm through 9pm departing Grand Central to Poughkeepsie. Also, a new 2:12pm weekday train to Poughkeepsie will operate non-stop to Croton-Harmon and replace the current 1:53pm train, which will make many stops, then terminate at Croton-Harmon. *Gary Prophet*

Amtrak Battle (*cont'd from page 1*) aviation, doubled funding for highways, but cut funds for Amtrak by more than half. Although there is a growing public demand for train service, the recession and President Bush's tax cut last year have reduced federal revenues, and the September 11th response has increased demands for spending on defense and security. All this makes a deficit likely next year, so the battle to preserve, let alone expand, rail service will be extremely tough.

On February 14, Rep. Jack Quinn, (R., Buffalo), who chairs the House Transportation and Infrastructure Railroad Sub-Committee, opened a hearing on the Amtrak Reform Council (ARC) recommendations by affirming that "The federal government must make a commitment to develop and invest in passenger rail service. If Congress continues to turn a blind eye to Amtrak, we face disintegration of passenger rail service in this country," he continued. "I will not stand by and watch that train leave the station." Jerry Nadler (D., N.Y.) and several other committee democrats expressed strong support for a national system and questioned ARC's plan to break Amtrak up. They also challenged the wisdom of the 1997 self-sufficiency mandate. But two high-ranking Republicans, John Mica (Fla.) and Spencer Bacchus (Ala.) urged dropping long distance trains.

The following day Senator John McCain submitted a bill (S-1958) that builds on ARC's recommendation to divide Amtrak into different entities and move toward privatization. S-1958 would turn Northeast Corridor properties over to the U.S. Department of Transportation and divide the rest of Amtrak into three separate entities for operations, maintenance and reservations. Each would become a for profit organization during a four year transition period. In the interim a temporary Amtrak Control Board would approve all major actions of Amtrak's present board. No route could be operated if revenues did not match avoidable costs unless a state or local government covered the shortfall, and states could use federal highway trust funds for this if they wished. (This provision would be a major breakthrough if it passes.) S-1958 would authorize \$400 million for operations in 2003, but this amount would decline by \$100 million each year during the transition. However \$400 million would be authorized for capital expenses in each of the next four years, plus \$500 million a year for Northeast Corridor improvements. McCain has no co-sponsors for this bill.

A week later 25 Senators, including both New York's Schumer and Clinton, co-signed a letter with Sen. Ernest Hollings urging the Senate Budget Committee to include Amtrak's full \$1.2 billion request in its 2003 budget resolution. Thanks again to Jeffords,

Hollings (D., S.C.) has replaced McCain as head of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee, which will develop the Senate's legislation on Amtrak's future.

While many newspapers have supported the concept of a national system, traditional enemies Joseph Vranich and the Cato Institute are writing op ed pieces urging concentration on short corridors and dropping long distance trains. Both the New York Times and the Newark Star Ledger have now editorialized against long distance trains, even though seven of them originate in New York and six pass through Newark.

On February 27th the House Appropriations Transportation Sub-Committee held a hearing on Amtrak funding. Committee members present seemed to recognize that the self sufficiency mandate was impractical, but expressed frustration that neither the Bush Administration nor Quinn's authorizing committee have come up with an alternative plan or goal. Warrington said the growth in costs was due mainly to increases in depreciation and interest, both attributable to lack of capital.

Sub-Chairman Harold Rogers (R., Ky), asked why Amtrak had not used its freedom to discontinue money-losing trains provided in the 1997 Amtrak Reform Act. Warrington said he saw that as a last resort. He felt the federal government, not Amtrak, should determine the route structure. Rogers accepted that, and then proposed the base closure commission model as a method for deciding which trains to drop.

Department of Transportation Inspector General Kenneth Meade, who has followed Amtrak's accounting for several years, said the focus on the operating subsidy is a distraction from the real issue, which is the need for capital. The entire operating subsidy for the national system is only one third of what the Northeast Corridor needs for capital, he said. "The shortfall for trains outside the corridor is chump change." The lack of capital has forced Amtrak to borrow, and its debt has now grown from \$1.7 billion in 1997 to \$4.4 billion last year. The payments on such a debt would overwhelm a \$521 appropriation, leaving little for operations, Meade said.

Federal Railroad Administrator Allan Rutter presented a lengthy analysis, which concludes that long distance trains are too sparse, too slow, too unreliable and too costly to be competitive. Yet his analysis also showed that these trains carry more passengers per train-mile and produce more passenger miles for Amtrak than the shorter routes and corridors. Rutter concluded that the present system is unsustainable and must be changed. He stated that his Department is listening to many stakeholders in order to develop a new national intercity rail passenger policy with "the broadest possible base of support."

It's too early to tell what will happen. The National Association of Railroad Passengers argues that reorganizing Amtrak's structure will not solve the severe problems created by the discrepancy in funding for rail vs. highways and aviation. Money is the issue. But powerful voices in Congress are insisting on some kind of reorganization—including McCain's vision of a watchdog board to look over the Amtrak Board's shoulder. But even then Congress may not provide enough money for a viable operation. Interestingly, not even Amtrak's harshest critics are questioning the value of passenger trains per se this time around—they challenge only those running long distances through rural areas, like the Lake Shore Limited.

Governor Pataki, Transportation Commissioner Joe Boardman and both New York Senators have expressed support for a national system. It is vital for New Yorkers represented by James Walsh and John Sweeney, who hold key positions on the Appropriations committee, to hear support for at least the full \$1.2 billion to ensure continuation of the national system.

And the President needs to hear from us!

Frank Barry

Good News and Bad (cont'd from page 1)

Phil Larson replaced Wesley Coates as Director of Amtrak's Empire Corridor last November. He began railroading as a brakeman on the Nickel Plate Road, became a management trainee on the Pennsylvania, worked for the Penn Central and later became General Manager of the Central Vermont. He came to Amtrak 2-1/2 years ago and worked as Assistant Route Manager for the California Zephyr before coming to Albany.

Larson gave a surprisingly upbeat report on the Empire Corridor, despite the storm clouds hanging over Amtrak. The *Maple Leaf* will finally get a baggage car; "We have more problems with baggage on this train than any other," Larson said. This will provide opportunity to haul packages, and he asked ESPA members to help identify potential shippers.

The Lake Shore Limited will be rescheduled and reconsisted to improve reliability. It will run two hours earlier westbound and 35 minutes later eastbound to give more servicing time in Chicago and more time for western connections in both directions. The Boston section will be moved to the front instead of the rear of the train, and both road engines will run through to Boston to shorten switching time in Albany. "We'll get it out in 40 minutes," he promised (it now takes over an hour).

Vermont is expected to initiate weekend service from New York to North Bennington and Manchester by the end of the year, via Albany and Schenectady with 60MPH speeds on the old Rutland Railroad line, Larson continued.

Larson reported that the new Rensselaer Station trackwork is 85% done and the station is set to open June 1st. The new overpass and second platform in Utica will open in May, in time to serve the Adirondack Railroad's summer trains to Thendara. The new platform in Rome will be the most modern in the corridor with heating pipes for snow—an important consideration for an unstaffed station. New Saratoga station construction will start after the races this summer and take a year; passengers will use a trailer during this time, due to discovery of asbestos in the existing building.

Larson expressed considerable concern over what is happening to Amtrak. The 1,000 people being laid off include 400 shop workers at Beech Grove and Bear, Del., as well as 300 managers. He said Amtrak's marketing group was hit especially hard. He described a phenomenon many in ESPA have already discovered: "Everyone knows the Amtrak name, but no one knows where it goes." He said he was amazed to find people at the Canalfest in Tonawanda who did not know Amtrak had a station in Niagara Falls. "I plan to spend a lot of time marketing," he said. "We're going to work the State Fair. Syracuse has great potential—the new mall will be the largest in the U.S.—and it's just 3 blocks from our station."

NYSDOT Reorganizes for Action

Norman Snyder was just beginning his present assignment as head the Freight and Economic Development Division at the State Department of Transportation when he attended ESPA's annual meeting last March. He has held various positions in state government over the last 35 years, but never before done rail related work.

During this time he has gained a reputation as a man who gets things done. "When I started here I soon realized that after many years with little money for new initiatives in the late 1980's and early '90's, this Division simply wasn't organized to handle a lot of capital projects." He reorganized the staff, more than doubling those assigned to capital projects. "We now have a Rail Service Planning Unit, headed by John Reed, and a group for high speed and Class I capital projects, as well as another for branchline and shortline freight and port projects.

The turboliner has been a "very frustrating program," Snyder said. "It started with just New York State and the Federal Railroad Administration. Amtrak later became a 'reluctant partner.' Amtrak is committed now, but when the turboliner was almost completed they asked for a number of changes which should have been done in the beginning." Snyder said he hopes the first set will go into service this summer.

He admitted that little has been done on track and infrastructure improvement. The holdup has not only been the failure of the State to reform the rail property tax but it has also taken a long time to work out detailed funding agreements for specific projects. However agreement has now been reached that the new second track will extend from Schenectady all the way into the new Rensselaer station, for a total cost of \$28.7 million. The Hudson River bridge at Livingston Avenue will be repaired and upgraded for \$15 million. Ten million will be spent to upgrade the Rensselaer shop. And CDTA asked for help in reaching an agreement for track and signaling work for the new Rensselaer Station. "We finally got agreement with the railroads late on a Friday night," Snyder said. DOT helped by kicking in \$1.7 million.

The second phase of the High Speed program, upgrading track on the Hudson line, is awaiting approval by the Federal Railroad Administration and the results of a joint user study of all four railroads that use the line (Amtrak, Metro-North, CSX and CP). The study will determine what each user hopes to accomplish in order to decide what needs to be done. Responsibility for contracting for the study lies with Metro North, which has not yet issued the Request for Proposals. "Once we do that, we will start a similar study with Amtrak and CSX for the line west of Schenectady," Snyder said.

Snyder also told the group that DOT is participating in the Buffalo Municipal Planning Study of expanding rail passenger service to Cleveland and Toronto as well as new service to Buffalo's South Towns and the ski areas around Ellicottville. And finally, "We are helping to fund an Ohio study of rail passenger service between Cleveland, Buffalo and Toronto."

ESPA Accomplishments

ESPA President Bruce Becker and Executive Director Joe Landry reported on ESPA's main accomplishments during the year. These included the successful joint effort with CSX to add funding for rail property tax reform to the Governor's budget after it was initially excluded. Meaningful ESPA involvement at this stage would have been impossible without Joe Landry's knowledge of the budget process.

ESPA arranged a meeting between Phil Larson, and New York State Fair Director Peter Cappuccilli, Jr., to explore the possibility of stopping Empire Corridor trains at the fairgrounds west of Syracuse, as was done years ago. They got an enthusiastic response; state fair attendance has been falling as most fairgoers come from central New York where the population is declining. The opportunity to bring people in comfort from greater distances was very appealing. Larson said he will now explore this possibility with CSX.

Bruce and Joe also met with Director of the I Love New York Campaign Mary Ellen Walsh and got an encouraging reaction to our request to include rail on New York State's official tourism map. Finally, Joe helped to get Rouses Point track upgrades into DOT's planning process.

Al Papp of the NARP Board of Directors described his work on drafting a NARP statement regarding the Amtrak Reform Council recommendations.

Frank Barry

January Loss of One Albany/NY Roundtrip

Several emails to the ESPA website indicate that some passengers will be lost, due to the demise of Train 236, as they must work 7am-3pm in Manhattan (Train 236 arrived New York at 6:30am) The emails also stated that since Amtrak will no longer be part of their commute, they also would no longer take the 3:45pm New York departure back home. I replied asking how they will get to work. One stated he will drive an hour and take Metro-North from Poughkeepsie and the other said he will drive 2 hours to Croton and take Metro-North from there.

Ironically, Train 295 was canceled just as the state legislature was back in session from its long holiday recess. Train 295's ridership was much higher when the politicians, lobbyists, and others travel to the Albany state capital for business/government, since the train had a convenient 8:40am Albany arrival. Also, a small number of people were using Train 295 to commute to Albany from Rhinecliff. Last year, Train 295 was sold out with several hundred passengers on a couple of days, but other days would only carry about 40 passengers. Train 63 may now have a much higher number of Albany bound passengers when the legislature is in session, which will create severe, unexpected crowding on Train 63, as reservations are not required for passengers traveling New York to Albany. Losing the first roundtrip of the day in each direction between Albany on New York is a critical loss, as many of the passengers will not just take another Amtrak train. Also, some passengers were using Train 236 to travel to New York, then boarding the 7am Acela Express with a Washington DC arrival at 9:44am. This upper Hudson Valley to Washington connection allowed for a same day roundtrip along with a full day in Washington, and this opportunity to serve passengers in this market, will now be lost to Amtrak.

Gary Prophet

Mistakes in Printed Empire Schedules

The January 28 printed Amtrak schedules, contain mistakes. The schedule shows Train 299 departing Albany at 8:50am. This is not correct, as the train will depart Albany at 9:50am and will connect with passengers from Train 63. Also, the schedule shows Train 250, which is the 9:00am Albany departure, as operating on Sundays, which it does not. Train 248, the 7:55am Albany departure, will operate on Sundays, but is not shown in the schedule as a Sunday train.

Gary Prophet

Amtrak Planned Changes in April

Amtrak's New York schedules will change on April 7. Changes include the addition of 5 minutes for nearly all Empire trains south of Albany, to compensate for expected track work. Also, each Empire Corridor train will have one coach marked as a "Quiet Car", which means no laptops and no Cel Phones. The northbound *Adirondack* will depart New York City at 8:15am, 90 minutes earlier than today and arrive in Montreal 90 minutes earlier than today. This will better serve passengers by allowing for the full evening in Montreal. The 50-year-old Heritage coaches currently used on the *Adirondack* will be gradually replaced by *Metroliner* cars.

Also in April, the westbound *Lake Shore Limited* (Train 49) will operate almost 2 hours earlier than today and the eastbound (Train 48) will operate about 30 minutes later.

Gary Prophet

Late Flash

On March 6th, Senator Fritz Hollings (D.,S.C.) submitted a bill to keep Amtrak intact for the next five years and to authorize \$4.6 billion annually for capital and operating expenses.

Amtrak News

"Miles of Smiles" Amtrak will offer a 30% discount on the "best available regular adult rail fares" to be called "Miles of Smiles". It can be booked from February 28 to May 19, for travel from March 7 to June 15 (except 3/28-4/2 and 5/24-5/28).

New York Unlimited, the program that allowed unrestricted stopovers to any destination along the Adirondack route will be expanded upstate to include the Finger Lakes and Niagara Falls. The Name will also be changed to the "I Love New York Fare", with Amtrak and the New York State's I Love New York program working together. More details in the next issue.

Amtrak and NY Lotto team up. In celebration of the New York Lottery's 25th anniversary, Lotto will offer a new scratch card beginning March 18th. Non-winning tickets will have a chance in a May 3rd drawing to win one of 290 Fun Filled Getaway packages, with Amtrak being the official transportation provider.

Amtrak and Continental announce code share. Travelers will be able to transfer easily at Newark between planes and Amtrak's northeast rail service to four major cities - Philadelphia, Wilmington, Stamford, and New Haven. The code share will allow travelers to make on-line reservations for both air and rail services by simply calling Continental Airlines or logging on to continental.com. Tickets may also be purchased through a travel agent but may not be purchased through Amtrak reservations.

Amtrak Trains pick up speed in Michigan Amtrak trains are now traveling at speeds of 90 miles an hour over a 45-mile stretch of Amtrak-owned track in southwest Michigan. This is the first significant increase in passenger rail speed above 80 miles per hour outside the Northeast in 20 years. The new technology provides high-speed automatic and continuous train protection through radio communications and global positioning satellite technology. A joint effort among Amtrak, FRA, Michigan DOT, and General Electric, this is considered a pilot program that could be used for high-speed rail across the country.

There's Always a Reason to Ride Amtrak

Buffalo	www.buffalocvb.org	
	Pan American Exhibit 1-800-Buffalo	to June
	Beauty and the Beast - Shea's	April 17-21
Rochester	www.visitrochester.com	
	Fiddler on the Roof	March 19-24
	Strong Museum 716-263-2700	Daily
Syracuse	www.visitSyracuse.org	
	Carousel Center - two blocks from station	
	Doo Wop Spectacular	April 13
	Ragtime by Famous Artists	May 1
Utica	www.oneidacountycvb.com	
	F.X. Matt Brewing Co. Tours	Daily
	The Canadian Brass	April 13
	Children's Museum	Daily x Mon
Albany	"http://www.Albany.org"	
	Stars on Ice	April 5
	Chicago City Limits	April 6
Schenectady	www.Albany.org	
	Grigovich Ballet	April 5
	Bob Newhart	April 9
Saratoga Springs	www.Albany.org	
	County Folk art Show	April 5-7
	Comedy of Errors	April 12-14, 18-21
New York City	www.nycvisit.com	
	Ringling/Barnum/Baily Circus	March 21-Apr.7
	Metropolitan Opera Season	to May 11
	Sheep Shearing Weekend	April 21-22

2002 ESPA Officers & Coordinators

President:	Bruce Becker, 49 Algonquin Rd., Clifton Park, NY 12065 518-383-5985 (H), 518-765-2851 (W)bbecker@albanycc.ccFax: 518-765-3176
Vice President:	Gary Prophet, 86 Cedar Lane, Ossining, NY 10562212-510-3962 (W)garyp@ilx.com
Dir. Legislative Affairs:	Frank Barry, * 219 E. Lansing Rd., Groton, NY 13073607-533-7563 (H), 607-255-7456 (W)FB12@cornell.edu
Newsletter Editor:	Robert Lenz, * 10531 Main St., Clarence, NY 14716-759-2442 (H), 716-759-2315 (W)rwlenz@aol.comFax: 716-7592791
Secretary:	Thom Coates, 63 Severson Hill Rd, Voorheesville, NY 12186515-765-4559TJCoates@aol.com
Treasurer:	John Ross, * 4 Maplewood Court, Greenwich, NY 12834518-692-2044
Membership Services:	Stuart Greenberg, 12 Burgoyne, Goram, NY 11727631-473-8095
REGIONAL COORDINATORS:	
Chautauqua:	Roy A. Davis, 2912 East Lake Dr., Dunkirk, NY 14048716-934-7946davrr@netsync.net
Western NY:	David C. Skoney, 24 Hillside Ave., Cheektowaga, NY 14225716-835-4188
Rochester Area:	Karl Greenhagle, 297 Hidden Valley Rd., Rochester, NY 14624-2303585-247-2426karl@frontiernet.netFax: 716-247-4048
Central New York:	Andrew Cabal, 313 Walberta Rd., Syracuse, NY 13219315-487-2887ajcabal@aol.com
Adirondack:	Dr. Margarette McCurry, 178 Sunnyside Rd., Glens Falls, NY 12804518-793-0793
Mohawk Valley:	Jerry Koller, 49 Lincoln Ave., Amsterdam, NY 12010518-843-3104
Utica:	Gary Gianotti, 1813 1/2 Girard St., Utica, NY 13501-2717315-734-1521
Capitol District:	Thom Coates, 63 Severson Hill Rd., Voorheesville, NY 12186518-765-4559tjcoates@aol.com
Mid-Hudson:	Richard Kulla, * 5 Summit Ave., Pawling, NY 12564845-855-9102rkulla@aol.com
Catskill:	Francis MacDowell, P.O. Box 171, White Lake, NY 12786-0171845-583-4638franmac1924@aol.com
Southern Tier:	Rob Picuch, 418 Highland Ave., Horseheads, NY 14845607-739-5127chemungvalleyrhrs
Manhattan:	George Haikalis, 1 Washington Square Village #50, NY, NY 10012-6635212-475-3394geohaikalis@juno.com
Brooklyn, Bronx,	
Queens, Staten Island:	George Armeit, * 176-12 76th Ave., Flushing, NY 11366718-969-7577 (W)
Long Island:	Chris Nadelbach, 118-18 Union Turnpike, Apt. 6F, Kew Gardens, NY 11415 ...718-544-7185CN1LN1@aol.com
Westchester:	Vacant
Rockland/Orange:	Orrin J. Getz, 5 Carlisle Court, New City, NY 10956 ...914-683-4494 (H), 212-803-3150 (W)
International Coordinator	George Tait, 14 Rock Island St., Gouverneur, NY 13642-111315-287-1422

*Also on the Board of Directors, National Association of Railroad Passengers

The Economist Goes off Track with Amtrak?

Beating up on Amtrak has long been good sport in certain sectors of the news media. One of the latest examples of that regrettable tendency occurred recently in the respected Economist magazine.

Winding up a fairly pessimistic 956-word story on the railroad's prospects in the Jan. 12 issue, the writer said, "But there is unlikely to be a pot of gold in transporting people from Salt Lake City to Albuquerque, even if you reduce the time from Amtrak's current 61 hours."

That's a terribly misleading way to end a story, as a letter published in the Economist's Feb. 2 issue pointed out. Here's what the letter writer, one Richard Purser of Calgary, Canada, said in his missive to the magazine:

"There is not and never has been a railway line between the two cities. The 61-hour journey time you report involves traveling east from Salt Lake City almost to Chicago and then switching to another train to backtrack west to Albuquerque, 2,616 miles altogether"

It's entirely appropriate for a magazine to present an unfavorable portrait of Amtrak based on the facts, but it's irresponsible to hold the railroad up to unjustified ridicule as the final sentence in the Economist article does.

ESPA member John Henry is a freelance writer on transportation based in New York.

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 1-800-841-2340, Fax: 716-759-2791. e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. Deadline for material for the May/June issue is May 1st.

ESPA Meeting Dates 2002

Sunday, April 28, 2002 Penn Station NY, Saturday, June 15, 2002 Rensselaer, August 3, 2002 Utica, October 5, 2002 Schenectady, November 23, 2002 Schenectady, January 11, 2003 Schenectady, March 1, 2003 Annual Meeting - Schenectady

If you are interested in becoming more involved in ESPA, these meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how you can make a difference. Members Welcome. Please contact President Bruce Becker at 518-383-5985 or via e-mail, bbecker@albanycc.cc (Please advise if planning on attending)

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