



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS**

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RETURN REQUESTED

More Airports vs. Fast Trains

Bush Budget Would Copy Reagan's: Expand Air, Ignore Rail

Trains Could Cut Demand for Short Air Trips—For Every 3 Flying NY to Wash., 2 Now Ride Amtrak

President Reagan's Proposed FY 1990 Transportation Budget

Administration	NEW BUDGET AUTHORITY (Millions)		
	FY '90	FY '89*	Change
Federal Aviation	\$ 7,743	\$ 6,590	+ 17.5%
U.S. Coast Guard	3,459	2,964	+ 16.7%
Nat. Highway Traffic Safety	233	225	+ 3.6%
Federal Highway	13,957	14,365	- 2.8%
Urban Mass Transportation	1,565	3,265	- 52.1%
Federal Railroad	61	672	- 90.9%
Amtrak & N.E. Corridor	0	604**	-100.0%

*Enacted **Appropriation

President Bush did not submit a definitive budget. Instead, he noted 8 domestic spending increases which "could" be "paid for" by cutting transit and Amtrak to Reagan-proposed levels. The Bush budget shows no other way to fund the increases, and therefore appears to endorse Reagan's figures.

But, when Transportation Secretary Samuel K. Skinner appeared before the Senate Appropriations Transp. Subcomm. Feb. 23, he emphasized that the administration was willing to negotiate on Amtrak and transit. He urged, however, that any funds added for transit and Amtrak come from "someone else's pot," not from other transport items, since total transport spending has not kept pace with overall government spending in recent years.

During an exchange before the House Subcomm. the day before, Rep. Martin Olav Sabo (D-MN) urged Skinner to "be an advocate within the administration for Amtrak and transit." Otherwise, if the committee adds transit and Amtrak money, it may come at the expense of aviation and Coast Guard. Rep. Richard Durbin (D-IL) told Skinner that aviation funding rose

(continued on page 4)

" 'Our business is moving people,' consultant J. Lynn Helms, a former head of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), told a group of aviation experts recently. 'We must not let our personal desire [to fly] overshadow our responsibility to the traveling public. We must include high-speed rail transportation in our planning.' "

—Governing, November

"Given airport overcrowding, would it make sense to encourage trains rather than airplanes for trips between nearby cities? The department [U.S. DOT] is simply incapable of making such a choice among modes: The FAA wants to build more airports, regardless of whether the airplane is the most efficient way of getting from here to there."

—The Journal of Commerce, editorial, Nov. 9

"We cannot expand airports fast enough to stay ahead of the inefficiencies of hub-spoke operations. The congestion can be relieved by using ground transportation on shorter routes and bringing back long, non-stop flights. For oil conservation and travel efficiency between cities less than an hour apart, railroads . . . are better bets than airports [in] the East and West Coast corridors, St. Louis-Kansas City and others."

—Frederick C. Thayer, in USA Today, July 8

Many people ask *The Journal of Commerce's* above question. The case for more use of rail is strong: modern trains, on now-under-used rights-of-way, would have competitive trip times, more reliability and—in bad weather—safety, greater energy efficiency, and less environmental cost.

New airports use too much land (up to 30,000 acres each), worsen suburban gridlock by generating much auto-dependent development (as around Washington's Dulles Airport), take too long to plan and build (20 years for Dallas-Ft. Worth, our newest big airport, opened in 1974), and cost too much—\$3 billion each.

Pressure is growing for more restrictions on noise and

nighttime flights at airports nationwide. Students in schools near the Los Angeles airport reportedly have above-normal blood pressure. "Environmentalists across the country have brought new airport and runway construction to a halt," says American Airlines Chairman Robert L. Crandall (*J of C*, Nov. 22).

Meanwhile, Amtrak's Seattle-Portland and Chicago-based short-distance trains are too slow to be air-competitive. Last year Amtrak nearly rerouted Chicago-St. Louis trains, bypassing Bloomington and Springfield (the state capital), due to deteriorating tracks.

Rail dollars are scarce, but DOT has billions for aviation, thanks to the quaint U.S. practice of earmarking user funds (in this case, the airline ticket tax and fuel taxes paid by general

SKINNER'S 200 MPH THRESHOLD: TOO HIGH!

Secretary of Transportation Samuel K. Skinner said after his Feb. 6 confirmation that 200 mph trains would be an alternative to flying. But, even with a top speed of only 110 mph (Metroliners 125), Amtrak carries 2 people from New York to Washington for every 3 that fly (7 for every 3 that fly, if one includes intermediate points). Even overseas, top speeds are well under 200: 149 in Japan, 168 in France.

aviation) for reinvestment in the collecting mode of transport, even where another mode (i.e., rail) could do the job better.

What is the Problem?

To air advocates, the problem is simple: air travel more than doubled in the past decade; strong growth will continue; more and bigger airports are needed. Critics say the magnitude of recent growth is overstated (see "Air Travel Growth"). They say traffic projections *must* reflect some 'slowdown' factors aviation people ignore (see "Debating Points") and *should* reflect a new public commitment to rail.

The FAA is sponsoring a Transportation Research Board (TRB) study of *airport* needs. This epitomizes what's wrong with federal transport policy: the *transportation secretary* should have sponsored a TRB study of *intercity travel* needs.

TRB's preliminary report mentions rail only briefly. For air, the report says "demographic trend data indicate 2 to 3 times the 1986 traffic by 2050" but, due to "uncertainty . . . as projections extend into the future," says that, "for long-range airport planning and land reservation, it is safer to emphasize the upper range. . . . The working group therefore concluded that airport system planning for 2050 should [assume] 2 to 6 times the 1986 traffic."

The air lobby will say TRB's report "proves" we need many more airports. TRB, however, is only as good as its funding sources, none of which are connected with intercity passenger rail.

Aviation Advocates' Solution

Frustrated at resistance to new airports near big cities, air experts are touting "remote transfer airports" (a.k.a. "transfer-only airports," "wayports") far beyond the suburbs, serving primarily transferring passengers, but also perhaps connected to the nearest metro areas by "surface modes—highway or rail operating at a speed competitive with short-haul air travel" (TRB's words).

Today, aviation receives extensive, often-ignored subsidies from general funds ("Aviation Subsidies," this page; "Big Airline Subsidies," *NARP News*, Dec. '85).

But "wayports," with revenue only from connecting passengers, may need even more non-user subsidies. As TRB delicately put it, "The institutional and financial issues of ownership, capital investment, and operation would be

AIR TRAVEL GROWTH: UNDER HALF WHAT YOU THOUGHT

"Industry spokesmen consistently point out that passenger boardings have almost doubled since 1977. But they rarely mention this: The actual number of passengers has risen only about 40% over the same period, estimates the industry's own trade group, the Air Transport Assn. . . .

"At least 2 boardings are usually counted when one person takes a connecting flight. And airlines today—with their new 'hub' airports—have far more connecting flights than before. . . .

"Are airports being used by people who are flying more often—or by people who simply are taking more connections? 'You have to wonder whether some airport congestion could simply be relieved if airlines had more non-stop service,' says Harold Seligman, president of Management Alternatives, a travel consulting company in Stamford, CT."

—*The Wall Street Journal*, Sep. 15

paramount. To gain airline acceptance and patronage, the [wayport] would have to offer operational and competitive business advantages to compensate for the loss of originating passengers who now board flights at hub airports within metropolitan areas."

Some still hope for new hub airports, though the Denver fight (see "Debating Points") suggests even these will require more non-user subsidies. TRB says new big-city airports have often been rejected "because of cost, lack of suitable sites, environmental impacts, or adverse effects on surrounding communities. Nonetheless, as the pressure of demand in-

FEDERAL AVIATION SUBSIDIES: HIGH; MAY SKYROCKET

The FAA estimates "private-sector users are responsible for about 85%" of FAA spending and "have received a general fund subsidy of \$17 bill." since the trust fund's 1970 creation.

"Proposals by the Nixon Administration in 1971 to restrict capital spending from the trust fund, while fully funding FAA operations from it, led the Congress to restrict trust fund spending to only the capital costs of the aviation system. . . . These limits [though later modified] have restricted the trust fund to financing an average of only 27% of FAA operations since 1980. As a result, the general fund of the Treasury finances nearly half of total FAA spending for the aviation system."

Under present law, federal air taxes will be cut in half in Jan. 1990 if aviation capital spending does not reach certain levels. The levels are not likely to be reached and "the result would be a \$10.1 billion reduction in taxes for private-sector users of the aviation system."

One policy option would require private-sector users to pay their full costs, recognizing "that the accumulated surplus in the trust fund is the result of past general fund subsidies and is not in fact owed to private-sector users of the system. [Compared with present law,] this would increase aviation excise tax revenue by \$19.2 billion 1990-1994, thus reducing federal budget deficits by \$14.4 billion, and would divide aviation system financing more equitably between private-sector users and general taxpayers."

—*"The Status of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund,"*
A Special Study by the Congressional Budget Office, December

creases, the feasibility of building large new airports in metropolitan areas that serve as major traffic hubs will need to be reconsidered."

Indeed, TRB found 13 locations in major metro areas "to have high potential for either expanding the existing airport or developing a new secondary site by conversion of general aviation or military facilities."

The already-powerful air lobby last Apr. 12 launched a \$15 mill., 2-year nationwide p.r. campaign to persuade air passengers and Congress to support big increases in air-system spending. The campaign ignores aviation subsidies and focusses on the "outrageous" air trust fund surplus and the "need" to spend more money faster.

Another Solution

You can help rail get more attention by including information from this newsletter in communications with your public officials!

If the gasoline tax is raised for deficit-reduction purposes, some of the increase likely will go for highways, since many legislators oppose use of gasoline tax revenues for *non-transportation* purposes. Urge your legislators to see that Amtrak and mass transit together get 4 pennies of any such increase!

America may yet follow the recommendations of Carnegie-Mellon University's Richard A. Rice, who said the U.S. could almost double transport output in 20 years while *reducing* transport energy consumption! (Key departures from past policies: a 2,600% increase in intercity rail passenger-miles; no growth in short-distance air travel.) (*Technology Review*, Feb., 1974)

Pricing could ease airport congestion (see "Debating

ALTERNATIVES TO AIRPORTS

"It's clear that there is an airport capacity problem. . . . But it is not clear that the nation either needs or wants massive new investments in terminals and tarmac. Before it joins the growing lobby for a huge airport construction program, we hope the DOT will do some serious thinking about less expensive ways to deal with capacity constraints. . . ."

—*The Journal of Commerce*, editorial, Dec. 7, 1987

Points"). TRB—of all organizations!—treats this like a hot potato: "Economic measures, such as peak-hour pricing or differential pricing of access for certain airport users, can also be employed, although these measures are often controversial. In particular, commuter airlines, charter operators, and private business aircraft operators argue that increases in landing fees would effectively deny them access to the airports of choice."

Note the parallel between highway and airport gridlock: in both cases, developing rail alternatives and pricing today's congested facilities would benefit the public at large—minimizing environmental and community impacts; in both cases, the dominant forces ignore rail and pricing and rely mainly on the laying of more concrete!

Some Calls for Sanity

- If ideas of dramatically increased use of fast trains in the U.S. "seem visionary, it's not because they are, but because of the paucity of thinking done in this country by those—in government, in business, in academia—who, out of indifference or powerlessness or ties to entrenched economic interests, content themselves by chuckling at those nostalgic

Debating Points You Can Use. . .

. . . in letters-to-the-editor and in letters to and meetings with your legislators and other public officials:

- In Western Europe and Japan, rail dominates short-distance intercity travel thanks in part to good local rail connections at big-city terminals. Similarly, the growth of rail transit here (*NARP News*, Aug.) will strengthen the marketability of our intercity trains.

- European railways are to be improved still further, with a 186 mph network on which \$50 bill. could be spent by 1995. "The 12-nation European Community is enthusiastically backing the program, which was approved by Europe's transportation ministers in 1987" (*The New York Times*, Jan. 3).

- U.S. airlines' "hub-and-spoke" systems use industry-owned airplanes efficiently, publicly-owned airports inefficiently: hosts of planes arrive simultaneously, exchange passengers, and leave simultaneously. Less "hubbing" and more direct flights would mean more large planes, more efficient use of airports, and less pressure for new airports. So would landing-rights auctions. Non-exclusive airport gates also would make better use of existing facilities.

- Airports should be allowed to raise the cost of rush-hour operations, encouraging travelers to fly at other times. Pres. Reagan endorsed this in his 1988 economic report to Congress (*J of C*, Feb. 22, 1988).

- Airports should charge small aircraft more, large aircraft less, so present runways could handle more people. The Mass. Port Authority tried to base 63% of airport-use charges on aircraft weight instead of basing all charges on number of flights, arguing that one aircraft at

a time can use a runway, regardless of the plane's size. An FAA administrative law judge in Nov. ruled Massport's plan violated federal law. *The J of C* editorialized Nov. 15, "It is hard to understand how a program designed to ease congestion and reduce delays for the majority of travelers 'frustrates and impairs congressional intent,' " but DOT affirmed the judge's decision a month later.

- Recent air traffic growth won't last forever; Greyhound now cites rising airfares in explaining increased bus ridership. Airlines face rising costs from ever-tightening aircraft safety standards, an aging aircraft fleet, and the need to train more new pilots. "John Galipault, president of the Ohio-based Aviation Safety Institute. . . worries about the 74% turnover last year among regional airlines' pilots. 'There's a shortage of pilots and the regionals are having to compete with Delta and United for the best ones,' he says. 'As a result, some of the commuters have become pilot-training academies.' According to a study by the Future Aviation Professionals of America, 4,073 of the 5,500 commuter pilots now working in the U.S. were hired just last year" (*Travel & Leisure*, July).

- Real air travel growth is often overstated (see box).

- Denver's mayor tied his future to building a new airport, but 15 gates at the old one are unused; traffic dropped by over a million passengers from January to August last year. "Traffic projections for 1995 are down as well. . . . Until the city acts 'rationally,' [Continental VP—Properties Sam E. Ashmore] wrote, 'it is unrealistic for Denver to expect Continental or any other airline to invest in this project'" (*The Washington Post*, Sep. 10). ■

cranks who still believe the Iron Horse has a future.”—*The Sacramento Bee*, editorial, Jan. 15.

● “Railroads could again become the transportation choice for short trips. At Detroit’s Metropolitan Airport, for example, nearly 25% of daily flights connect with cities within 120 miles.”—David Morris of Knight-Ridder Newspapers, article in *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 27.

● “Between 13 and 50% of current air traffic at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport could be relieved if Amtrak’s midwest corridors were fully developed. . . . A recent street survey conducted by the *Chicago Sun-Times* showed that 3 of 4 respondents would prefer using improved Amtrak midwest corridor trains to flying. . . . 27% [of O’Hare] flights serve destinations within 200 miles of Chicago. . . . Fully 50% . . . goes to points within 400 miles of Chicago.”—Illinois ARP News Release, Dec., 1987.

● “Re your June 1, page-one article ‘At LaGuardia Airport, Passenger Surge Causes Delays and Congestion’: There is one solution to relieving the traffic congestion at LaGuardia. That is the expansion of rail passenger service in the Northeast.”—Richard P. Duffy of the Empire State Passengers Assn., letter in *The Wall St. Journal*, July 6.

● “Re ‘Aviation Experts Warn of Gridlock at U.S. Airports’ (front page, June 19): Before this country begins to pave over what’s left of the countryside, an alternative must be examined. In the last decade, faced with similar problems of overcrowded airports, Germany and Switzerland decided to integrate their intercity rail systems with major airports at Frankfurt, Geneva, and Zurich, using rail service to distribute passengers to smaller cities, thus reducing airport congestion caused by connecting flights. . . . The potential to reduce the number of planes using U.S. airports by this approach is enormous. . . . The cost of [developing rail service] would be a mere fraction of the \$57 bill. projected for expanding our airports. . . .”—Michigan ARP Chairman Alan J. Gebauer, letter in *The New York Times*, July 6. [New facilities at Orlando Airport include reservations of rights-of-way—including tunnels—intended for fast intercity and local trains.]

(Single copies of CBO special study, “*The Status of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund*,” available from CBO Publications, 202/226-2809, House Annex #2, Room 413, 2nd & D Sts., SW, Wash., DC 20515. “*Future Development of the U.S. Airport Network: Preliminary Report and Recommended Study Plan*” is \$5 prepaid—VISA and MasterCard accepted—from TRB, 202/334-3214, 2101 Constitution Ave., NW, Wash., DC 20418.) ■

BUSH BUDGET (continued from page 1)

125% from the last Carter budget to the recently-proposed Reagan budget; Coast Guard rose 69% and Federal Highway 28%; rail and transit were cut. House Appropriations Subcomm. Chairman William Lehman (D-FL) said he enjoyed being able to fly to Miami every 2 hours and New York every half hour, but “maybe we can’t afford this any more.”

During his confirmation hearing, Skinner talked repeatedly about the need to expand air capacity, seemingly oblivious to the points made in our lead story. He even implied that airfares for trips across South Dakota would go down if Chicago’s airport capacity were increased! Senate Commerce Chairman Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC), a critic of what he calls “hub disease,” closed the hearing by gently noting he doubted that reduction in flights between Washington, DC, and South Carolina was a result of inadequate airport capacity.

Skinner does deserve credit for his forthright response to a question from Rep. Lawrence Coughlin (R-PA) about the need for equitable tax treatment of parking and transit costs:



—Photo by Michigan City News-Dispatch

DUNE PARK station on the South Shore Line 10 miles west of Michigan City, IN, dedicated May 30, 1986. The station, within Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Park, is landscaped with prairie grasses and wildflowers and houses Northern Indiana Commuter Transp. District’s (NICTD) offices. A “stationkeeper” and his wife live here. South Shore has Interstate Commerce Commission approval to end the only surviving U.S. electric interurban passenger trains. Unless NICTD acts, the service (with 11,500 weekday riders—over twice the 1976 level and still rising), dies June 1.

“I do not understand why we should be subsidizing people to drive where there’s mass transit. I think there should be a level playing field.”

But Skinner’s justification for big federal transit funding cuts doesn’t hold water: “We’re not going to solve congestion in Washington; cities have to come up with solutions.” Federal funding already distorts local decision-making toward roads and airports and away from rail; the changes Skinner supports would dramatically increase that distortion. As Senate Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Frank R. Lautenberg (D-NJ) put it, “I’m concerned that, if we don’t encourage transit, we’ll encourage more highway use, more congestion, more pollution.”

In a Feb. 10 letter to Pres. Bush, NARP pointed out how his transport priorities clash with his previous statements:

● Bush has promised to defend the environment, yet his transport budget imposes big cuts on environmentally benign mass transit and Amtrak, while environmentally damaging modes get a huge increase (air) or the status quo (roads).

● Bush said he wants a “kinder, gentler” America, yet transit—which he wants to cut—is vital to many of the 14 million predominantly low-income carless households, and almost half of Amtrak’s long-distance passengers have family incomes of \$20,000 or less.

● During the campaign, Bush said: “We want to keep a strong passenger rail system—part of that equation is to continue to make Amtrak more efficient. . . . We will need to look to both public and private sectors for future financing.”

This looks like a rerun of previous budget fights except that the “kinder, gentler” administration won’t say it “definitely” favors killing Amtrak. That only makes things harder for Congress, which must develop a real budget that either sweeps the federal deficit under the rug or makes tough choices Pres. Bush implies aren’t needed.

Tell your legislators how you feel, to help insure that Washington doesn’t tiptoe around the powerful aviation and highway lobbies, kill Amtrak, decimate transit, and then announce these “tough choices” were necessary. ■

NARP REGIONAL MEETINGS

Region 9 (AR, KS, MO, OK, TX except El Paso):
Meets Apr. 22-23, not Mar. 18-19 (other details: Jan. NARP News, p. 4).

Region 10 (CO, IA, NE, SD, UT, WY): **Sat., Apr. 1, Ottumwa (IA), 11:30 AM, Parkview Hotel, 3 blocks from Amtrak sta. Speaker: R.L. Taylor, General Manager, Keokuk Jct. Ry. Details: Bruce Williams, 30 Amber Ln., Iowa City, IA 52240; 319/338-6573.**