

## Federal Funding for Amtrak Stagnates as Ridership Continues to Rise

Congress cleared a \$1.1 trillion omnibus appropriations bill last month, which President Obama signed into law on January 17—almost four months into Fiscal Year 2014.

Congress' focus remains whittling away at discretionary spending. Amtrak is treated like many other programs—just enough money to survive, but not enough to expand service or even to maintain the current level of repair of aging infrastructure and rolling stock.

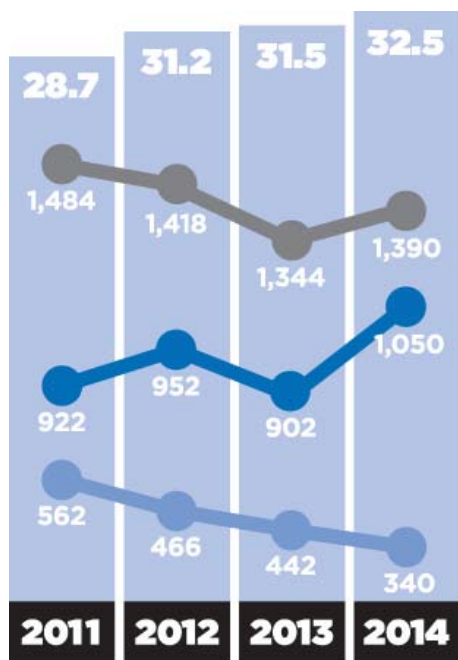
That said, Amtrak's new fleet of single-level, long-distance cars should begin to enter service this year. The first of 70 new electric locomotives entered service Feb. 7. For short-distance trains in California and the Midwest, manufacturing has begun on 130 cars and should start soon on about 35 locos.

Amtrak's 2014 funding is a mixed bag: the railroad saw increases to capital numbers but cuts to its operating grant.

Amtrak faces a \$102 million reduction in its operating grant – \$340 million vs. last year's \$442 million. Up to \$40 million of capital funding can be used for operations if necessary, so the reduction in operating funds could be as little as \$62 million.

But that would come at the expense of an already-meager capital grant. General capital funds of \$781 million (or as little as \$741 million if all of that \$40 million is transferred to operations) is up from \$566 million last year, but far below the \$1.3 billion Amtrak requested for this year.

Onlookers, including some on Capitol Hill, see the "Section 209" switch of funding burden from Amtrak to many states as a key offset, but that only accounts for a roughly \$69 million reduction in Amtrak's operating grant needs.



■ Total Amtrak Funding  
■ Passengers, in Millions (2014 projected at 3% growth)  
■ Capital, in Millions  
■ Operating, in Millions

Amtrak has set ridership records in 10 of the past 11 years. With surging passenger demand for trains, NARP has been a strong advocate for increasing funding to help accommodate this explosive growth—particularly through acquisition of new rolling stock to supplement Amtrak's fleet that is too small and too old.

The overall Amtrak total is \$1.39 billion, up from \$1.344 billion last year (see table). These totals do not include Department of Homeland Security funds for Amtrak (\$10 million in 2014) and funding of the Amtrak Inspector General (\$23.5 million this year, compared to last year's post-sequestration number of \$19.4 million).

High speed rail funding was zeroed out, apparently the price paid to elimi-

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## Empire Builder Woes: Short and Long-term Fixes

*Empire Builder* on-time performance remains terrible (lead story, Jan. *News*). Chicago and Seattle arrivals during Feb. 1-9 ranged from 96 minutes to over 13 hours late, with only three of 18 arrivals under three hours and 54 minutes late.

Amtrak has stopped selling most same-day connections from the *Builder* except to the *Lake Shore Ltd.*

In a widely reported January 28 letter to DOT Secretary Anthony Foxx, NARP said *Builder* delays were "inflicting extreme inconvenience—often at considerable personal expense—to literally thousands of Amtrak passengers and their families....NARP recognizes the key role that America's freight railroads play in fueling economic activity in the U.S. However, Amtrak and host railroad BNSF Railway Company must come together to ensure that the *Empire Builder's* passengers have contin-

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## California Authority: Richard's DC Testimony; Court Case Expedited

The California High Speed Rail Authority on Jan. 24 petitioned the state's supreme court to reverse lower court rulings that have blocked progress (Dec. 2013 *News*, p. 1). A Nov., 2013, decision denied validation to authorize \$8.6 billion in bonds for high-speed rail. A second decision (Aug. and Nov., 2003), known as the Tos case, directed the Authority to rescind its first funding plan.

California's Dept. of Finance (DOF) sought fast action, adding the Authority as a petitioner. The DOF is concerned that the trial court's decisions "will threaten the State's ability to finance other voter-approved projects." The California Supreme Court on Feb. 7 directed the Court of Appeals to consider the case in an expedited fashion.

Authority Chair Dan Richard testified in Washington Jan. 15, arguing that the

130-mile initial segment [Madera (above Fresno) to north of Bakersfield] is "usable." It will be used initially by Amtrak and ACE trains.

The lower court had said Prop 1A "required the Authority to address funding for the entire Initial Operating Segment (IOS)," Madera-Sylmar, about 240 miles.

This would be about \$31 billion and require much environmental work.

Prop 1A requires a "usable segment" but does not mention "IOS," a term the Authority coined. Starting construction this year is crucial. Recovery Act funds



Photo Courtesy of California High Speed Rail Authority

**Proposed stations like this one (the ARTIC Anaheim) provide a glimpse into the passenger experience on high speed rail. must be used by September, 2017.**

The Authority released its 2014 draft business plan on Feb. 7. It shows slight reductions in costs and revenues, and increased ridership. Go to [hsr.ca.gov](http://hsr.ca.gov).

### Federal Funding for Amtrak

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nate harsh, anti-California High Speed Rail language authored by House Republicans. The High-Speed & Intercity Passenger Rail Program has been a boon for passenger rail systems nationwide. It has provided funds for everything from California's statewide high speed rail line, to multi-state purchases of modern equipment for Amtrak services, to incremental improvements to conventional services like the *Vermont-er*. The absence of funds will be a particular disappointment for California, which plans to begin construction later this year on its 220 mph system.

There are a few silver linings in the omnibus.

- Amtrak finally gets access to \$80 million in fiscal 2013 capital funds initially enacted with unworkable conditions in the Hurricane Sandy appropriations law (May 2013 *News*, page 5).

- Although the Senate's \$100 million for high speed rail was eliminated, the competitive-grant Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) program, in which railroad and transit projects have competed

well, was increased from \$474 million to \$600 million.

- States which have used CMAQ funding in FY 2012 for intercity passenger trains can continue to do so in the future. This applies to Maine (*Downeaster*) and North Carolina (*Piedmont*). CMAQ is the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program funded in the big highway, transit law. The Maine/North Carolina provision is a "better-than-nothing" response to efforts by NARP—including a November 5, 2012 letter to Secretary LaHood—and the states to expand their ability to fund passenger trains with CMAQ money.

Public transit got \$10.7 billion, a \$100 million reduction from the 2013 level. Transit systems serve as vital connectors, not only for people traveling from home to work, but for passengers looking to make the final connection on their intercity journeys. While many states have increased local spending on transit systems, NARP is working hard to ensure that the federal government lives up to its responsibilities. ■

### NARP News

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This has news through February 6, 2014. Vol. 48, No. 2 was mailed February 12.



## NARP Remembers Dedicated Members

**Neil Bjornsen** of Pasadena, CA, 68, was a life member of NARP and an active and respected transit professional. He died Jan. 22. Of Neil's involvement with the Citizens' Advisory Council of Los Angeles Metro (CAC), with which Neil was associated since 1977, Metro's Richard Morello wrote, "Neil gave invaluable leadership and direction in forming the CAC into an important group providing community feedback on Metro's transportation services. Neil and the CAC helped update the agency's maintenance computers and with the switchover to Compressed Natural Gas and fueling stations, and also conducted field surveys while riding the routes and tabulating boarding counts. ..."

"Neil convened meetings twice a month to keep abreast of the agency's transit activities and welcome the public to offer suggestions and feedback. Often Neil would take other CAC members on tours and visits of the bus divisions to observe practices and offer suggestions on how Metro can improve

procedures. ..."

"Neil worked in maintenance at the Southern California Rapid Transit District and was a general manager of a transit system in Shreveport, LA. He retired from the LA County Public Works...."

NARP Council Member Matt Melzer wrote that Neil's "affable, thoughtful style of advocacy on behalf of train and transit passengers was informed by a wealth of technical knowledge and invaluable historical perspective. Neil was a steady champion for our cause, and a supremely kind, decent person whose life and legacy we in the NARP family will always remember."

**Lewis Hoppe** of New York City died on October 10, 2013. Lew was an affable, pleasant human being, and a generous supporter of NARP—dating back to when he joined in 1983. He was a Co-Executive Director of the New York State Legislative Task Force on Demographic Research and Reapportionment.

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### Upcoming Events

**Mar. 1 Schenectady**, 11am-4pm. Empire State Passengers Assn. / NARP/New York Membership Meeting. Key Hall at Proctors Theater, State St. Register now.

**Mar. 22 Washington, DC**, 11am-3pm. NARP Southern Mid-Atlantic Membership Meeting, Union Station. Register now or day-of.

**March 22 Boston**, 11am-4pm, New England NARP Membership Meeting, Boston Common Hotel & Conference Center.

**April 5 Portland, OR** NARP Northwest Division Luncheon at Embassy Suites Hotel Portland Downtown.

**April 12 Chicago** Spring Meeting of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association at Crowne Plaza Chicago Metro Downtown. Register now.

*NARP Chair Robert Stewart will speak at Portland, OR, and Boston; also at Portland: Dr. Anthony Perl (Nov., 2013, News, p. 1). NARP Pres. Ross Capon will speak at Schenectady and Washington.*

*Visit our events calendar online [narprail.org/calendar](http://narprail.org/calendar) for more details.*

### Plan to Attend:

#### **NARP's Spring Council of Representatives Meeting**

The meeting will be **April 28-30 at DoubleTree Hotel in Silver Spring, MD.** Details at [www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org). Speakers include Amtrak's Mark Murphy and Joseph McHugh. Tues., Apr. 29 is NARP's Day on Capitol Hill; NARP members are welcome to participate at no cost if you tell us by April 7. **Hotel:** Group rate available for overnight accommodations if you book by March 25. Follow this specific link: <http://bit.ly/1gaSUPI> to make reservations and see additional information. See you there!

## Make a Big Impact with Your Unwanted Car

During a recent visit to the West Coast, I met with the wonderful people at CARS. This dedicated group of individuals gives you the means to give the ultimate symbolic gift to support passenger rail: your unneeded vehicle.

Through CARS, NARP members can make an impact that is huge but virtually effortless. What's more, you'll get a tax-deductible receipt with your car donation and CARS will tow your unwanted vehicle (car, truck, boat, motorcycle, or motor home) for free.

If you have a vehicle that no longer serves its purpose or just isn't worth the ex-

pense and trouble to maintain, consider donating it to a cause that will benefit your mission to create a modern, customer-focused national passenger train network that provides a travel choice Americans want. After all, one fewer car on the road and one more passenger on a train is a good thing.

*-- Logan McLeod*



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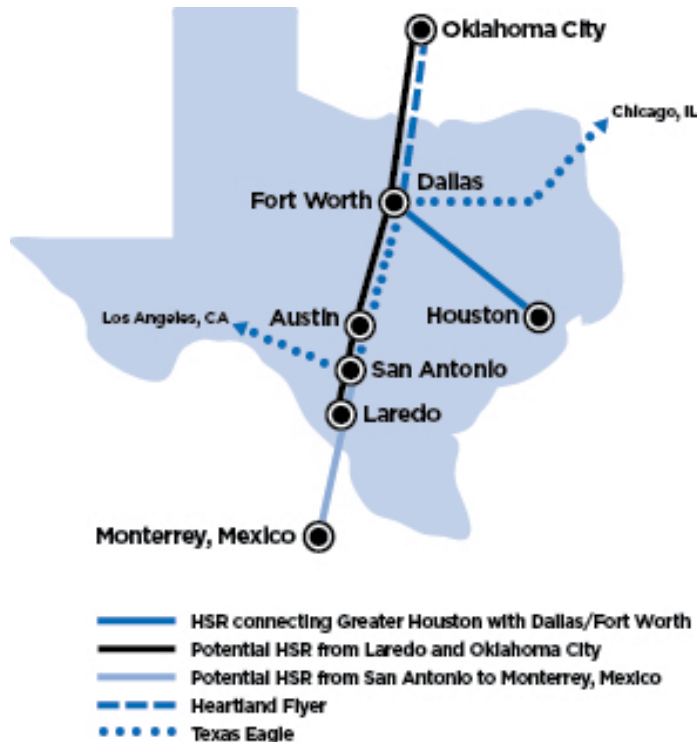
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## Texas—and Monterrey—Passenger Train Prospects Brighten

As California grabs attention nationwide, Texas is quietly making strides towards its own high speed rail service and other new options for rail passengers. Significant planning is underway for three projects that could transform how people get around the Lone Star State -- and beyond.

**TxDOT's Texas-Oklahoma study:** Environmental work is not complete, but early indications are that upgraded conventional rail ("emerging rail" in FRA parlance) is most appropriate for Dallas-Fort Worth-Oklahoma City-Edmond, and that Fort Worth-Dallas-Waco-Austin Airport-San Antonio could see high speed rail.

**Texas Central High Speed Railway (TCR)** contemplates a mostly-privately-funded line connecting Greater Houston with the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. Utilizing technology by JR Central Railways of Japan, this bullet train could make the run in 90 minutes at 205 miles per hour. The Texas Transportation Commission recently formed a High Speed Rail Commission to advance development of the project in the DFW region. TCR is expected to announce a desired route this April and break ground as early as 2016. Service could start in 2021. State legislators



have been reluctant to use public funds, so Texas has been working with JR Central as a potential funder.

**Modern Monterrey-San Antonio service may be on the way!** Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-TX) and Texas Transportation Commissioner Jeff Austin joined high-level Nuevo León officials Jan. 16 in presenting a plan to DOT Secretary

Anthony Foxx. Travel time would be as little as two hours, including U.S. Customs pre-clearance. Studies find strong demand, as so many Mexicans live in south Texas. The proposed service involves about 135 miles of new right-of-way. The line would run west of Laredo. A new international rail bridge would be adjacent to the Colombia Solidarity Bridge, with a station on the U.S. side. TxDOT seeks \$400,000 in federal funds to extend the TX-OK study south. Mexico reportedly will fund needed work in Mexico, though this route was not mentioned when Mexican President Peña Nieto first unveiled his passenger train ambitions (August 2013 *News*, p.1). *Routes shown on map are approximate.* ■

### NARP Member Spotlight: Peter LeCody



A longtime NARP member and Texas Council Representative, Peter LeCody also leads the Texas Rail Advocates, a robust grassroots nonprofit which just held its tenth annual Southwestern Rail Conference on January 23-24 in Dallas, TX.

This year's event, "Texas and the Southwest: A Hot Spot for Rail Growth," featured speakers from the

Texas Department of Transportation, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, and Dallas Area Rapid Transit, as well as presentations by Texas' big three: Union Pacific, BNSF and Kansas City Southern.

The event attracted about 225 guests and was sold out days in advance. NARP Chair Bob Stewart was one of the speakers.

According to LeCody, the highlight of the conference was bringing the public and private sector together to learn about rail development, passenger and freight. The conference exemplifies one of TRA's overall goals: to be an educational and informational resource for the public and private sectors.

Beyond being President of TRA,

LeCody serves on the TxDOT Rail Division Steering Committee, the I-35 Corridor Advisory Committee, and Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization (TEMPO). When asked about the future of passenger rail in Texas, he said, "It's exciting. It's going to happen. The public shows overwhelming support for intercity rail, commuter rail, light rail... Officials have to figure out how to make it happen. But there is overwhelming public support."

To watch videos of the Southwestern Rail Conference, go to [www.texasrailadvocates.org/conference](http://www.texasrailadvocates.org/conference), and visit <http://www.texasrailadvocates.org> for more information on the Texas Rail Advocates. ■

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ued access to adequate, reliable public transportation. Toward that end, we are asking you use the full power of the Department of Transportation to convene the concerned parties and ensure that an equitable solution is reached.”

Our January 29 release on the letter was headlined, “Empire Builder Passengers Are Being Left Out in the Cold.”

In mid-January, NARP suggested to Amtrak that, if reliable operation of the current schedule is impossible, it would be best to run a slower schedule reliably. We suggested a possible schedule. Amtrak and BNSF are working on some type of slower schedule, which should be announced soon.

BNSF historically has provided good on-time performance for Amtrak, but the Northern Corridor has been overwhelmed by unprecedented freight demand, track construction work to improve capacity, and extreme weather. The Corridor last year saw record intermodal traffic, unusually big agricultural volume and continued energy business growth.

Freight and passengers have been severely delayed. U.S. DOT told NARP of complaints from propane shippers, a “life-saving issue.”

In an attempt to improve performance, BNSF temporarily is running westbound trains including Amtrak on a line bypassing Devils Lake/Grand Forks/Rugby. Those stops are getting buses, which BNSF is funding.

BNSF’s February 4 release on its \$5 billion capital program states, “Much of the capacity expansion in the 2014 capital plan is for infrastructure investment on BNSF’s Northern Corridor to put the company in position to meet all customer service expectations, **including Amtrak**....More than \$900 million of the capital plan is for expansion and maintenance in the Northern Corridor.”

BNSF this year expects to add 45 miles of double-track east of Glasgow, MT, plus grading for 45 more miles. ■

**Transit Parity: Congress Needs Pro-Transit Voices**

Once again, a year—this time 2014—began with a sharp decrease in the monthly tax-free transit benefit employers can offer. It dropped from \$245 to \$130 even as the companion benefit for employer-provided parking—permanent and indexed to inflation—rose from \$245 to \$250.

It makes no sense to increase the incentive to drive while sharply reducing the transit “carrot.”

**Please tell your legislators to restore transit parity now.** A tax ex-



Photo Courtesy of Politico

tender bill under consideration on Capitol Hill is the logical vehicle. A permanent fix would be best.

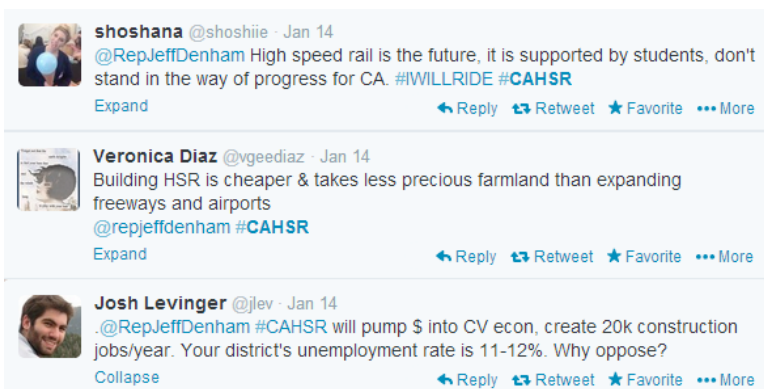
Pro-transit economic incentives are good for the economy and the environment. ■

**Twitter Townhall Meeting Shows Strong Support for California High Speed Rail**

In preparation for the California High Speed Rail hearing on Jan. 15, Rep. Jeff Denham (R-CA) held a “Twitter Townhall Meeting” the day before to gather constituents’ opinions on the issue. Instead of having an in-person meeting, participants were invited to join a live online conversation by tweeting @repjeffdenham using the hashtag #CAHSR.

Twitter users blasted Denham’s opposition to California High Speed Rail. They tweeted myriad reasons explaining why they support the project. TRAINS magazine reported that about 90% of the tweets favored the project. The result was a huge show of public support for California High Speed Rail. ■

*Follow @narprail on Twitter to be part of the movement for more trains!*



A sample of real tweets from Denham’s Twitter Townhall Meeting on January 14.

**NARP Remembers Dedicated Members**

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**John (Jack) Ross** of Greenwich, NY, died in early November, 2013. Jack was a longtime member of NARP and the Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA). ESPA President and NARP Board Member Bruce Becker wrote, “Jack served as ESPA’s Treasur-

er for many years, always working tirelessly to advance our cause and goals. Jack loved train travel and after his retirement from education, he enjoyed being a tour guide for many rail groups all across North America. He will be sincerely missed.” ■



OUR MISSION: A MODERN, CUSTOMER-FOCUSED NATIONAL PASSENGER TRAIN NETWORK THAT PROVIDES A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT.

### FROM NARP HEADQUARTERS

## Thank You, Malcolm

Malcolm Kenton joined the NARP staff as an intern in May, 2009. He was Director of Outreach and Engagement when he left at the end of 2013.

By writing first drafts of countless articles, he played a key role in facilitating the expansion of our newsletter from four to six pages.

His knowledge of Amtrak policies and procedures was of special value to the many NARP members and others who had questions about them. He

worked well with Amtrak's Office of Customer Relations.

He also played a key role in the logistics associated with the process by which NARP members become candidates for—and members of—the Council of Representatives.

His virtually round-the-clock online availability to answer my questions will be missed. We wish him good luck in his future endeavors.

--Ross Capon



Amtrak will join communities across the country to celebrate this year's National Train Day on Saturday, May 10. Ask any of our past participants -- it is a fun day for everyone involved.

NARP hopes to have a significant presence at many of these grassroots celebrations, educating people about train travel and celebrating the importance of trains in our lives.

If you plan to participate, please let us know and we'll supply you with NARP materials to distribute at the event, along with tools to promote the event beforehand.

Please call us **by March 15** (202-408-8362) to get your National Train Day supplies, and visit [nationaltrain-day.com](http://nationaltrain-day.com) for more event information! ■

### TRAVELERS' ADVISORY

**On-time performance problems** have not been confined to the *Empire Builder*. Amtrak's *Cardinal* has been several hours late many times in recent months. For example, the train reached New York City 8 hours 34 minutes late (6:30 AM Sat., Feb. 8 instead of 9:56 PM Fri). For very late east-bound trips, Amtrak has provided on-time motor coach service for Staunton, VA-East travel only.

Amtrak is working on a schedule change (later Chicago departure) designed to sharply reduce crew-related delays.

Amtrak also is seeking a simpler *Cardinal* routing within Illinois, which likely involves some capital investment.

In early February, many long-distance trains serving Chicago saw severe delays.

**Some Empire Service trains got faster schedules starting Jan. 13; many departure times are earlier.** Train 284 now leaves Niagara Falls 6:50a, not 7:05a, and is 45 minutes faster. The two westbound Niagara Falls trains are 30 and 25 minutes faster. Full schedules at [amtrak.com/service-alerts-and-notice](http://amtrak.com/service-alerts-and-notice).

**Since Feb. 1, multi-Ride eTickets have been honored for select Amtrak trips.** See [amtrak.com/service-alerts-and-notice](http://amtrak.com/service-alerts-and-notice) for list of select trips.

**Black History Month Trivia:** A. Philip Randolph, Head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (the Pullman Porter Union) and leading activist in the Civil Rights Movement, was a member of NARP's first Advisory Board.