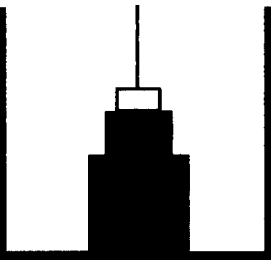
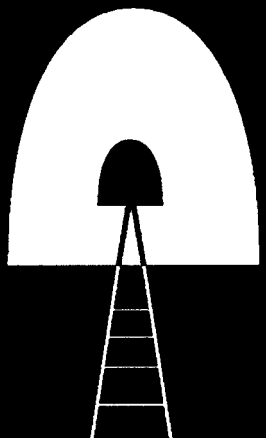


Intercity Rail Passenger Systems Update

Intercity Rail Passenger Systems Update is now published exclusively on the Internet. The table of contents offers links directly to each article, or you can scroll down to read the entire newsletter. Please keep your bookmark at http://www4.TRB.org/onlinepubs.nsf for upcoming editions.

The **Transportation Research Board** is a unit of the National Research Council, which serves as an independent advisor to the federal government on scientific and technical questions of national importance. The National Research Council, jointly administered by the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine, brings the resources of the entire scientific and technical community to bear on national problems through its volunteer advisory committees.



CURRENT RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN INTERCITY RAIL PASSENGER SYSTEMS

NUMBER 9 **SPRING 2003**

CONTENTS

TRB 83rd Annual Meeting, January 11–15, 2004
Washington, D.C.
http://www4.TRB.org/trb/annual.nsf

The Transportation Research Board's Committee on Intercity Rail Passenger Systems (A1E13) is concerned with research that will lead to better planning and implementation of intercity rail passenger systems, with particular emphasis on the full range of high-speed systems, including new technology. Research will include demand analysis, financial considerations, economic effects (including consideration of user and social benefits), and public-private partnerships and should address impacts on other rail operations and the environment, coordination with other modes, rail–highway interfaces, corridor versus system concerns, technology assessment, and implementation strategies.

Intercity Rail Passenger Systems Update is published intermittently by the Transportation Research Board to disseminate information about current research and development in intercity rail passenger systems. Albert C. Witzig, editor; John C. Tone, Chairman; and Nazih K. Haddad, Vice Chairman, TRB Committee on Intercity Rail Passenger Systems; Elaine King, TRB staff. Any findings and conclusions are those of the authors and not of TRB. Submit news items to *Intercity Rail Passenger Systems Update*, Transportation Research Board, 500 Fifth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001, telephone 202-334-3206, or e-mail eking@nas.edu. **www.TRB.org**

TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

Also in This Issue

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers:

The Spring 2003 Newsletter reports on so many diverse subjects in the field of intercity passenger rail that your editor is at a loss to pull them all together under a single meaningful rubric. So, rather than some tortured headline, let me propose that we take note of the diversity of time frames in the three contributions.

Aad Rühl reports on the opening of the newest "new stretch" of the European Intercity High-Speed Rail Network, which has been in planning and construction for many years. The new line's integration into an extensively revised EU rail timetable last December means shorter travel times between centers throughout the Western European rail network. We are reminded how every journey starts with a single step, and this major step forward has a long history of preparation.

Ross Capon reports on the present, which is where Amtrak is living most of its political and organizational life these days. This contribution gives a useful overview of efforts to bring Amtrak to a more secure institutional footing in the next months. This journey continues to be one step in front of the next for the USA's passenger rail system.

Linda Amato reports current progress on the future passenger needs in the Pacific Northwest. Her piece describes the planning and environmental actions of Washington State to accommodate upcoming mobility needs of both passenger and freight rail services, while sustaining a delicate and valuable environment. This involves all the preparatory steps before one gets to make the journey or to make it better for the future.

We hope you find these items of interest and value. Please note the details below of how you also can submit contributions to future issues of the Intercity Rail Passenger Systems Committee newsletter. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Al Witzig, Editor

Also in This Issue

EUROPEAN PASSENGER RAIL DEVELOPMENTS

New High-Speed Line Between Cologne and Frankfurt

The most important recent development in the European passenger rail network is no doubt the introduction of commercial service on the Köln-Frankfurt high-speed line in Germany. This new route has been built more or less according to the standards of the French high-speed network: maximum speed 300 km/h and maximum gradients of 4%, even more than the 3,5% on the Paris-south-east line. The line closely parallels an existing Autobahn.

From August 1, 2002, a shuttle service was operated between Köln Hauptbahnhof (main station) and Frankfurt Hauptbahnhof. From December 15, the date of introduction of the new European timetable, seven two-hourly services will be operating, linking Amsterdam, Dortmund and Münster via the new line with Basel and München (Munich) in the south. Of course, many intermediate stations will also be served.

Because of gradients and high frequency there could be no question of operating locomotive-hauled passenger trains or freight trains on the line. Even ICE1 and ICE2 HST-sets cannot be used. ICE3 sets have power distributed to axles throughout the train. As soon as more ICE3 sets are available, services will be expanded.

High-Speed Motor Car

Most European high-speed trains (all French TGVs and their derivatives, ICE1 and ICE2, Italian ETR500) consist of locomotives and separate passenger cars. Only the ICE3 has motive power and electrical equipment distributed throughout passenger vehicles.

Alstom has now developed an AGV (automoteur grande vitesse or high-speed motor car), which maintains the system of articulated train sets of the TGV but has motive power on passenger cars as well. Two new vehicles have been constructed, which run with a locomotive and a number of trailers from a TGV Réseau trainset that is temporarily out of service.

SNCF, however, has been sticking to the successful formula of double deck HST (TGV Duplex), both for economic reasons and in view of line capacity. There are now as many as 82 sets in service or on order.

Eurailpass

A new and more flexible formula for the Eurailpass will be introduced in 2003. Details appear on the European railways website: www.eurail.com. This site also provides links to the websites of European national railway companies.

—Aad Rühl
aad.ruhl@dgg.minvenw.nl

Also in This Issue

AMTRAK HANGS ON, LOOKS TO FUTURE IN 2003

Amtrak and the Federal Budget This Year

It took until February 13, but Congress finally completed work on funding the federal government for Fiscal Year 2003, which began October 1, 2002. The "omnibus appropriations" bill included $1.05 billion for Amtrak. This was very close to the $1.39 billion level used as the basis for funding Amtrak in the series of continuing resolutions that kept most of the government (except the Pentagon) going until President Bush signed House Joint Resolution 2, the omnibus appropriations bill, on February 20, 2003. More importantly, the $1.05 billion, combined with another omnibus provision—deferral of the $100 million loan Amtrak received last year, has Amtrak saying that Congress in effect came within $50 million of the requested $1.2 billion.

Amtrak, however, issued an appropriately cautious statement in response to the omnibus measure, noting it did fall short of Amtrak's request and "only reinforces that sustaining Amtrak operations will be an ongoing challenge. Though the budget will be extremely tight, this funding level should be sufficient to operate the national system for the remainder of the fiscal year."

New President David Gunn's Conversations with Congress

Some say that Amtrak's success in the funding process may have been due to President and CEO David L. Gunn's success in trying to restore the company's credibility on Capitol Hill. The letter to omnibus conference committee members signed by 33 House Republicans included the sentences: "Mr. Gunn has demonstrated his ability to reorganize the railroad, eliminate unnecessary positions and open Amtrak's financial records to the public. We believe he possesses the knowledge and discipline to reform the railroad." Although the Republican letter had far fewer signatures than its Democratic counterpart, the fact that 33 Republicans were willing to sign may have played a significant role in the final outcome, along with the continuing outspoken support for Amtrak from Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and the ranking member of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee, Patty Murray (D-WA).

Although Gunn may have enhanced Amtrak's credibility, he has also raised the stakes with a $1.8 billion request for FY 2004. This will be another "interesting" year, both because of the growing federal deficit, and because of the all-new cast at the subcommittee level in the House Appropriations Committee. Both the Senate and House appropriations subcommittees on transportation have been reorganized, with their responsibilities expanded, so that new subcommittees on homeland security could

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

be created without increasing the number of subcommittees. This means that House subcommittee chairman will be Eugene Istook (R-OK), who has been highly critical of Amtrak; the ranking Democrat is John Olver (R-MA), and staff are also new to the issue. The reorganization has not changed the key senators responsible for transportation appropriations—Richard Shelby (R-AL) and Patty Murray (D-WA).

Personnel Savings

Gunn announced closure December 31, 2003, of Amtrak's Chicago call center, the smallest of Amtrak's three centers. Amtrak says this will save $3 million a year, even if the number of empty agent desks filled at Riverside (California) and Philadelphia equals the roughly 250 agent positions to be eliminated in Chicago. In other words, the $3 million comes strictly from management, technology, and facility costs; the savings would be higher if there is a net reduction in agents. Amtrak took some flak from this action, notably from *The Chicago Tribune,* which ran an editorial urging Amtrak to keep the call center open but drop many of the national network trains that generate work for the agents!

Fixing the Fleet

Amtrak is cleaning up shop properties and tightening the equipment roster. Amtrak has sold 199 pieces of equipment for which it had no use, and inactivated many diesels and removed them from the GE service agreement (another cost-saving measure). Many of these locos are being stored so they will not be cannibalized and could be reactivated quickly. Following manufacturer guidelines, for example, they are stored with full fuel tanks. Meanwhile, Amtrak plans to retire some Heritage cars for which parts are hard to come by. These cars have been operating because previous management parked modern cars with very minor damage.

Acela Express reliability has improved dramatically—1 out of 150 trips missed vs. 1 out of 30 before the yaw damper problem that sidelined the trains so publicly last year.

Meanwhile, in News of Other States

The Missouri legislature came through with $800,000 in supplemental funding to insure that both St. Louis–Kansas City trains continue through June 30, 2003, the end of the state's fiscal year. To help close the budget gap (Amtrak had said it needed $1.2 million), staff were eliminated at the only intermediate stations that had them (Kirkwood and Jefferson City), and a $5-per-passenger ticket surcharge was added through September 30.

For FY 2004, after deciding not to charge states for depreciation and interest, Amtrak dropped its Missouri cost estimate from $8.9 million to $6.4 million. However, the state may appropriate only $5 million, setting up yet another choice between a midyear supplemental appropriation or elimination of one of the two trains.

Also in This Issue

Michigan had appropriated sufficient funding for its two lines, but applied a cap on how much of the funding could be used for operating support. This leaves the state $1.3 million short for FY 2003 (year ending September 30). It is unclear if the trains will operate beyond June 30, although the state appears headed towards appropriating sufficient funding to operate both trains for FY 2004 (which starts October 1). Ridership has been very impressive on the Grand Rapids line, for which the state provides a special marketing fund, with February, March, and April ridership up 12%, 70% and 44%, respectively.

Unfortunately, ridership on Michigan's other route, the Chicago-Toronto "International" (operated jointly by Amtrak and VIA Rail Canada) is hampered by a May 12–August 15 bus substitution between East Lansing and Sarnia. In fact, westbound travelers will have a four-seat ride instead of a single-seat ride: Toronto-train-Sarnia-bus-Port Huron-second bus-East Lansing-train-Chicago.

In Vermont, the state was able to appropriate the additional funding required to support service through June 30, 2003 (end of Vermont's fiscal year), and apparently has the resources for FY 2004, the subject of continuing negotiations.

—Ross Capon, Executive Director
National Association of Railroad Passengers
rcapon@narprail.org

Also in This Issue

AMTRAK *CASCADES:* WSDOT'S ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH

When implementing incremental intercity passenger rail service on freight rail tracks, the focus is often on operational analysis and design, partnerships with the railroads, and of course, the service itself. An often overlooked, and barely discussed, aspect of implementing new service is the environmental process. The various track improvements that are needed along an existing rail corridor to improve and increase passenger service are often required to conform to national (and state) environmental regulations.

The Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor's environmental process has been ongoing since the mid-1990s. After extensive community and agency outreach efforts, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Rail Office prepared a 20-year service plan coupled with a corridor-wide environmental overview. Following development of these documents, WSDOT, working closely with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), developed an environmental approach that would satisfy the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements, while at the same time fit within the rail program's incremental service approach. The result has been the preparation of project-level environmental impact statements (EIS) that discuss the physical and operational impacts of each specific project.

WSDOT is currently working on three projects that are in various stages of the environmental process, as follows.

Vancouver Rail Project

The purpose of the Vancouver Rail Project is to improve safety, reduce congestion, and, as a result, support more reliable Amtrak Cascades service. Vancouver, Washington, is located just north of the Columbia River and Portland, Oregon. It is at the southern end of Washington's passenger rail corridor.

The 4-mile project would construct a freight rail bypass in the Vancouver rail yard that would free up main line tracks for passenger trains. In addition, the project would eliminate the West 39th Street at-grade crossing. A Draft EIS was prepared and issued in February 2002. Currently, the Preliminary Final EIS is being reviewed by FHWA. The project team expects to release the Final EIS this summer. Construction could start as early as 2004, if funding is available.

Also in This Issue

Kelso–Martin's Bluff Rail Project

The Kelso–Martin's Bluff Rail Project is located about 20 miles north of Vancouver. It is a 19-mile project that would add a third main line to the existing two-track main line. The project would also add about 130,000 feet of siding and yard tracks and improve safety at five road-rail grade crossings. The project team is currently preparing the Preliminary Draft EIS for review by FHWA and FRA. The Draft EIS will be released this summer for public comment, with the goal of completing the environmental process by summer 2004. Construction could begin as early as 2005, if funding is made available.

This project will improve safety, reduce rail congestion, and, as a result, support more frequent and reliable Amtrak service. Implementation of this project would allow for the addition of one to two additional round trips per day, and decrease travel time between Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon, by up to 5 minutes.

Project to Bypass Point Defiance

This project is in the very early stages of conceptual engineering and environmental analysis. While the exact length of the project is still unclear, it could potentially extend over 25 miles. It would run through the densely urbanized area of Tacoma (about 30 miles south of Seattle). This project is exceptionally tricky because Sound Transit *Sounder* commuter trains would also share the freight rail tracks with the Amtrak *Cascades*.

Currently, Amtrak trains travel the scenic Point Defiance route along Puget Sound. Because of track alignment and single-track tunnels, this route substantially limits the number and speeds of passenger trains. By constructing a bypass around this area, Amtrak *Cascades* service could improve—both in terms of travel time and frequency.

Contingent upon funding, the project team hopes to begin pre-scoping (early agency coordination) this summer. The environmental process would then follow in the fall of 2003. Because of the magnitude of this project, the EIS is expected to take at least 3 to 4 years for completion.

—Linda Amato, President
The Resource Group Consultants, Inc.
lamato@theresourcegroup-inc.com

More information on Washington State DOT's rail program is available at http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/rail/default.cfm

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

ADDITIONAL RAIL LINKS

TRB Calendar
http://www4.TRB.org/trb/calendar.nsf

American Public Transportation Association
http://www.apta.com/

NEWSLETTER COMMENTS

Comments on this newsletter, and most assuredly, continued contributions by committee members, friends of the committee, and others can be sent to the editor:

Albert C. Witzig
AECOM Consult (DMJM+HARRIS)
3800 Kilroy Airport Way
Long Beach, CA 90806
albert.witzig@aecomconsult.com