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NORTHEAST CORRIDOR GEARS UP FOR CHANGES

December 11, 2000, marked the revenue service launch of Amtrak's *Acela Express* trains—the first U.S. HSR passenger service attaining speeds of up to 150 mph, which the train reached on its Washington–New York–Boston run. Twenty sets of *Acela Express* trains with only premier first class and business class will be placed in service over the next few months. Older *Metroliner* and *Northeast Direct* Amfleet equipment is being refurbished and recast as *Acela Regional* trains, as will the seven Turboliner trains operating in the New York–Albany–Buffalo corridor. A third level of service, *Acela Commuter*, will replace the current Philadelphia–New York Clocker trains. New onboard service enhancements and station refurbishing and upgrades are part of Amtrak's *Acela* program. Several *Acela Regional* trains are now in service, replacing former *Northeast Direct* services. Initial consumer reaction to both *Acela Express* and *Acela Regional* service has been extremely favorable. The range of *Acela* services marks a new configuration of train service in the Northeast Corridor. Amtrak and rail industry outsiders see the recast Northeast Corridor service as the true test of HSR and sensitivity to a variety of short- and medium-distance travel markets. Now that rehabilitation work is nearing completion north of New York, Amtrak's Northeast Corridor capital infrastructure program will shift attention to the New York–Washington segment and replacement of Penn Station with a new facility in the adjacent Farley Building in New York.

Amtrak and the state of Virginia are undertaking a southward expansion of the Northeast Corridor rail passenger service beyond Washington, D.C., to Richmond, Virginia. State funds are being used to increase track capacity by the addition of a third main track, to increase high-speed turnouts, and to make station improvements, including those to Main Street Station in Richmond. Increased service levels are anticipated to begin in 2002.

Extension of rail passenger service north of Boston to New Hampshire and Maine is moving ahead. The Surface Transportation Board (STB) approved the installation of 115-pound rail and its use for passenger service speeds of up to 79 mph, removing the last obstacle to upgrading Guilford Industries track for Amtrak service between Boston (North Station) and Portland, Maine. (See "[The Train to Maine](#).")