

2008: THE YEAR IN RAIL ADVOCACY

A Review of An Historic Year for the National Association of Railroad Passengers

2008 was a **banner year of key accomplishments for NARP** and the cause of passenger train advocacy. Through the course of national economic turmoil, wild swings in the energy market, record train ridership, and a Presidential election, NARP and its members advanced the cause for more and better passenger trains in the halls of Congress, in the news media, with Amtrak and other agencies, and at ballot boxes.

In Congress: H.R. 2095, the combined Rail Safety Improvement Act and Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act was signed into law by President Bush on October 16, after a House voice vote and 74-24 Senate passage.

The new law authorizes \$13.586 billion for intercity passenger trains over five years (2009-2013), including **matching capital grants to states**, targeted congestion grants, and funding for high speed rail projects. It mandates installation of satellite-based Positive Train Control on major rail lines by the end of 2015.

The law would roughly double current funding levels **if the funds are appropriated**; with your help, we will push hard towards that end. Amtrak's board is expanded from seven members plus non-voting CEO to nine voting members including the CEO and the Secretary of Transportation. The law identifies **"users of passenger rail transportation"** as a possible membership qualification.

Transportation for Tomorrow, a report by the Congressionally-appointed National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, was released in January. It recommends \$9 billion a year for intercity passenger rail, which would be **the only mode-specific federal surface transportation program**, and includes maps with new short- and long-distance routes. NARP President Ross Capon was on the Commission's Passenger Rail Working Group.



Amtrak carried a record 28.8 million passengers in Fiscal Year 2008

In the News: NARP continues to be a key source for news media comment on passenger train issues. Capon was on **NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams** April 29, Sept. 14 and Sept. 15. In April, he said, "To get trains, it takes time, it takes money, and it takes political commitment." On the **CBS Evening News** on June 22, Capon said: "What we need is a sizeable uptick in federal funding for passenger trains...We cannot afford to keep our mobility reliant on airplanes and highways." On **Marketplace Morning Report** on Nov. 26, he said, "Ridership has been going through the roof. Too bad Amtrak doesn't have more cars, because they've had so many sold out trains."

Deputy Director David Johnson and Director of Communications Matthew Melzer guestblogged for *The Hill* newspaper, which is widely read on Capitol Hill. Melzer appeared twice on *Which Way, L.A.?* on Los Angeles' NPR affiliate. The two programs focused on California High-Speed Rail and rail safety.

With Passenger Carriers: We are working hard for a connection between the planned, new Hudson River rail tunnels and New York's Penn Station. Public officials—including the mayor of Harrisburg—have begun to join our opposition to the present form of New Jersey Transit's Access to the Region's Core (ARC) project.

We pressed Amtrak for early *Coast Starlight* service restoration after the January Oregon mudslide and for a better alternate service plan in New England while the new Thames River bridge was installed.

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NARP Participates in Inaugural National Train Day



NARP Communications Director Matthew Melzer and Vice Chair Jim Churchill staff at a NARP information table at National Train Day

Scores of volunteers across the country responded to help NARP spread its vision and advance local plans for passenger train expansion at events of the **first-ever National Train Day on May 10**.

NARP took what had started as an Amtrak marketing event in four of its largest cities and it turned into an **outpouring of grassroots enthusiasm** where volunteer-led events in dozens of cities attracted thousands of families to learn more about the importance of trains in their communities.

NARP Adopts Major Changes in Governance, Holds Another Successful Capitol Hill Event

Looking to the future, NARP's Board of Directors approved new by-laws at its October meeting in Portland, Oregon. The region-based, 80-member Board of Directors is expanded into a state-based Council of Representatives with up to 137 seats, allocated to each state based on a formula giving equal weight to each state's population and concentration of NARP members. The body will expand from 80 to as many as 137 members. The Executive Committee became the Board of Directors. The former President is now Chairman of the Board and the former Executive Director is now President and CEO.

NARP gave its first-ever "Tracks to the Future Leadership Award" to the City of Portland for its innovative rail transit and smart growth policies. We are grateful for our reception sponsors: America By Rail, United Streetcar, LTK Engineering, Talgo, the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates, and CH2M HILL. NARP Board members toured United Streetcar and the soon-to-open WES (Westside Express Service) Commuter Rail system, and took inspection rides on the Portland Trolley and MAX light rail system.

Our 2008 Legislative Day on Capitol Hill, in conjunction with the April Board Meeting, was a success. NARP Board members visited over 100 Capitol Hill offices. Later that day, we honored Sen. Gordon Smith (R-OR) and Rep. John Olver (D-MA) with George Falcon Golden Spike Awards. We thank our reception sponsors: Siemens, America By Rail, Bombardier, Wabtec, Talgo, the East Texas Corridor Council, Passenger Rail Today, Texas Rail Advocates, and several NARP Board & Council members.

We were honored to have House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Jim Oberstar (D-MN) and Ranking Member Rep. John Mica (R-FL) address our Board of Directors in April.



NARP Chairman George L. Chilson presents award to Portland Transportation Director Susan Keil

At Ballot Boxes: Election Day saw numerous victories for investment in rail transit and passenger trains, with passage of 74% of transit-related measures.

NARP aggressively supported California Proposition 1A. Staff, officers, and volunteers canvassed train stations and neighborhoods. California voters adopted this \$9.95 billion measure (52% approval) to help build the first phase of the California High-Speed Rail System and further invest in conventional trains.

Inside NARP: We are striving to be more responsive to members' needs. We migrated our database to a new system that is neater and easier to use. E-mails to NARP members now look more professional. Spam-related bouncebacks have been greatly reduced. Please be sure that we have your E-mail address!

Darryl Yates left NARP in June to join the staff of Rep. Elijah Cummings' (D-MD). Matthew Melzer will begin 2009 based in California as Executive Director of Silver Rails Resort in La Plata, MO. Melzer plans to remain active in passenger train advocacy.

NARP welcomed Sean Jeans-Gail on staff June 11. A Portland, OR native and former intern to Rep. Barney

Frank (D-MA), Jeans-Gail has experience in grass roots organizing. He provided local expertise for our Fall Board meeting. Thanks to his work, every mayor with Amtrak service and all 50 governors got a letter about passenger trains and NARP's work, and every Northeastern mayor received a warning about the faulty design of the ARC project.

Looking ahead to 2009, our work for the cause of expanded service will continue unabated. We will work to see that the funds authorized in H.R. 2095 are actually appropriated, that new equipment is ordered, and that passenger trains get substantial benefits from stimulus bills and the next general transportation authorization.

We also will be working hard to ensure that the promises and statements made about passenger train growth and expansion by President-Elect Barack Obama and his Administration come to fruition.

We thank all of you for your continued support and encouragement in the past year, and look forward to your continued support as we work to expand and improve train service in America.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George L. Chilson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

George L. Chilson, Chairman of the Board