NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

TRAINS: A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT

Frequently Asked Questions About the NARP Vision

Q: How did you pick the cities to be linked?
A: Cities were picked based on Bureau of Transportation Statistics documentation of American travel patterns and the current pattern of existing rail lines or rail right of ways that would be logical routes, at least initially.

Q: Is this logistically achievable?
A: The routes proposed already exist in the form of existing rail or rail right-of-way (though most will require upgrades).

Q: Will the rail lines be linked to existing systems?
A: The system NARP is proposing will utilize in-use rail lines, existing lines that are not in use, and land that has been zoned for tracks, which have been designed to link to existing systems including commuter rail.

Q: Does NARP's vision interfere with the movement of freight?
A: To the contrary – we believe this vision will help advance freight mobility by spurring capital investment that benefits both passenger and freight rail. Much of the construction aimed at passenger rail benefits freight including, for example, intercity investments in the states of Washington, California, and Maine.

Q: On-time-performance is already an issue; won't adding more tracks and trains worsen on-time-performance?
A: The proposal envisions upgrades that would add rails, improve speeds, upgrade switches, or otherwise expand capacity for both freight and passenger rail. By bringing on existing lines that are not in use and laying tracks in right-of-ways designed for rail, we can expand the capacity of the network, which should make it more efficient and result in fewer time delays.

Q: Won't more trains worsen pollution and contribute to global warming?
A: To the contrary, by removing passengers from high-polluting cars and airplanes, trains minimize transportation's environmental impacts. Trains are far more energy efficient than cars or planes. New data from Oak Ridge National Laboratory indicate that, in 2005, automobiles used 27.2% more energy (BTUs or British Thermal Units) per passenger-mile than Amtrak, and domestic airlines used 20.5% more energy than Amtrak. Amtrak consumed 2,709 BTUs per passenger-mile, compared with airlines' 3,264 and automobiles' 3,445. The highway showing would be even worse if light trucks (two-axle, four-tire), commonly used as personal vehicles, were included.

Q: Will the American people – used to convenience of flying or driving – even take trains?
A: Where Americans are given attractive rail service, they use it. For instance, in California where the state has invested billions of dollars following a voter-approved rail initiative, we now find 20 percent of all Amtrak riders. Remember, this is the auto capital of the planet. The current reliance on cars and airplanes is in great part due to lack of options, not lack of demand. In fact, recent Harris Polls have found that almost four in five adults would like to see more long travel by intercity and commuter rail, and almost two thirds of Americans surveyed in a 2004 study said their communities needed more transportation options.

Q: Is this financially achievable?
A: Had people understood today's costs of building and maintaining Interstates, airports, and air control systems at the time those systems were initially proposed, those systems probably never would have been built, or at least not to the extent they have been. But instead, policymakers understood popular demand, emerging travel trends, and future needs, and set policies in place that increased car and air travel. We believe that if policymakers adequately appreciate the public's support for and interest in passenger rail, policymakers will be able to identify and implement funding sources.

Q: How much will this cost, and where will the money come from?
A: Determining the cost of the necessary upgrades, as well as the funding source, will be part of the process that we are hoping to kick-start with this proposal. What we are articulating is a vision for transportation in America based on popular demand, increasing challenges (like gas prices, fuel supplies, and congestion), and existing infrastructure – not a plan that lays out the details of how to get from today to tomorrow. However, total estimated costs are only relative to an order of magnitude (as was the Interstate Highway initial cost estimate). More importantly is the required level of annual capital investment needed over the span of years of the problem in order to achieve it. Federal and state partnerships have already expanded rail service in Illinois, California, Maine, Oklahoma and North Carolina, just to name a few locations. NARP supports a dedicated funding source for passenger rail, which would allow for long-term planning to develop a nationwide passenger rail network in a coordinated and effective way, and which would insure a substantial federal match for state rail investments.