

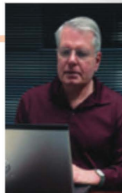
NORTH AMERICAN INTERCITY



BELOW A coach sporting the original Amtrak rolling stock paint scheme. MIKE SCHAFER

MEET Amtrak's first in-house national timetable, November 14, 1971. The previous two timetables were outsourced. Author and PTJ founder Kevin McKinney was heavily involved in the production of this timetable, including the introduction of new train names.

KEVIN MCKINNEY



United Aircraft TurboTrain began operation between New York and Boston on a schedule under four hours.

Other events in the mid-to-late 1960s provided hope for the future. A flashy but ultimately inconsequential event occurred on July 23, 1966, when pre-PC New York Central mounted a jet engine on Rail Diesel Car M-497, an RDC-3, and reached 183.68 mph on a stretch of main line in Ohio. A more significant event happened at the same time as a national airline strike starting July 8 lasted 43 days and sent passengers in search of their local train stations. Although the decline of the rail passenger network was already underway, most railroads responded as best they could by putting every available car into service. That event at least helped prove that passenger trains could still provide a mobility option for the traveling public.

However, another three years would go by and many more passenger trains would disappear before Congressional action was initiated. That any action was taken at all can be largely credited to the lobbying efforts of the National Association of Railroad Passengers (now Rail Passengers Association), founded by Anthony Haswell in 1967. Haswell, initially based in Chicago, and Woody Price, his Washington lobbyist, worked tirelessly to advance the cause of the passenger train, while attacking train-off petitions and reductions in service quality, such as Southern Pacific's removal of dining cars on the *Sunset Limited* and other trains. (In early 1968, Tony helped get *PASSENGER TRAIN JOURNAL* off the ground by mailing promotional information about *PTJ* to the NARP membership. I also had the great experience of working with him that summer in the Chicago office, thus becoming one of NARP's earliest employees.)

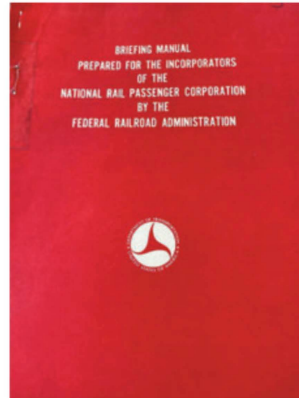
Sen. Vance Hartke (D-Ind.) introduced S.2750, a bill that would provide subsidies for passenger trains, in August 1969, the year Washington officially began to address "the passenger train problem." Between that date and the following April, several other bills were advanced in the House and Senate designed to assist the passenger train and the railroad industry that was still required to operate them.

Over at the DOT/FRA, the concept of a new quasi-public company to own, operate, and market passenger trains was taking shape. Known as Railpax, "pax" being transportation industry shorthand for "passenger" (and "peace" in Latin), the structure was somewhat similar to that of Comsat, an organization set up in 1962 for communication satellites. Word that Railpax was moving forward appeared in the January 19, 1970, *New York Times*, but the next day a White House spokesman stated that various proposals were being considered and a "corporation" structure like Railpax was the least likely choice.

Ten days later, a *Washington Post* editorial suggested the Railpax plan had a "great many merits" and deserved better than the White



ABOVE A Penn Central Metroliner flashes by the tower at Bowie, Md., in the summer of 1970. The Metroliners proved successful and were a precursor to today's Amtrak Acela operations. DALE JACOBSON



LEFT AND ABOVE The FRA provided this guidebook for the Incorporators chosen to establish Amtrak, including this simple map that basically only established endpoints. Specific routes between those endpoints were another matter, requiring considerable study. KEVIN MCKINNEY COLLECTION



Twenty-five years is not a long period of time unless one is young, in which case it is an eternity. As we approach Amtrak's 50th anniversary, the thought that 25 years before Amtrak's first day was 1946 puts into perspective how rapid and how far was the fall of the American passenger train. In that year, the first full year of peace after World War II, America still traveled by train, although some not by choice. Rationing and the war effort had halted automobile production and limited such items as tires and gasoline. In 1946, things were beginning to return to normal and the more than 12 million who served in the military at war's end the previous year were returning to civilian life, and that return often involved a passenger train or troop train.

After helping win the war by carrying nearly all military and civilian passengers, plus the majority of freight, railroads felt optimistic about their ability to thrive in the post-World War II transportation marketplace. Little did they know their government had other ideas. The highway building that started after the first world war began anew, this time elevated to the largest infrastructure project in the nation's history with the creation of the interstate system, much of which was in place by 1971, just 15 years after the 1956 passage of the act.

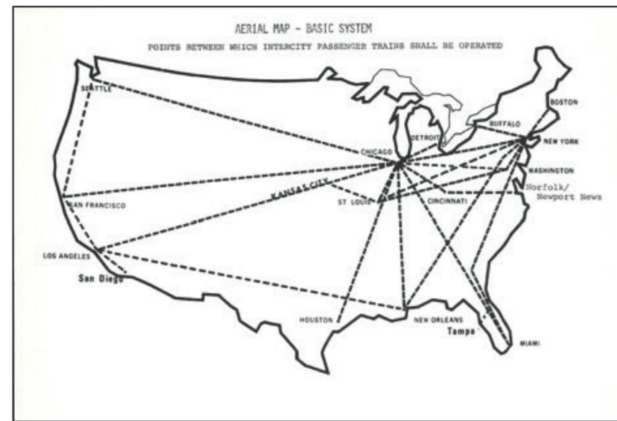
The number of airline passengers grew steadily in the postwar years, despite numerous crashes every year, first overtaking Pullman travel and by 1956 exceeding Pullman and coach ridership for the first time, a mere decade after the war.

The swift decline in rail passengers in the 1950s and 1960s was also felt on the freight

side as trucks siphoned off business, especially in the shorter-haul markets of the East and Midwest. The brief "golden era" had rapidly deteriorated into "the railroad problem," the inevitable result of government policy which, it was now feared, might require nationalization of railroads. Diminishing profits from freight could no longer cover losses from extensive commuter and intercity passenger services, as evidenced by the bankruptcy of New Haven as early as 1961, and the ill-fated merger of Pennsylvania and New York Central in 1968. Railroads in the West and South were still relatively prosperous, but the cancer was obviously spreading to several railroads in the Midwest.

How to preserve essential freight service and avoid nationalization? Relieving the passenger burden was one solution and at the same time saving the passenger train from extinction would be a side benefit. Before a "big picture" solution was conceived, a seed for a brighter future was planted in 1965. At the urging of Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) the High Speed Ground Transportation Act was passed creating an office located in the Department of Commerce, later transferred to the newly created Department of Transportation in 1967.

With cooperation and investment from Pennsylvania Railroad the *Metroliner* service was established between Washington and New York on January 16, 1969, and proceeded to prove that new equipment and faster schedules (just under three hours) would indeed attract passengers, even diverting them from the airlines. Three months later, on April 8, a three-car



House treatment it was receiving. Meanwhile, the Interstate Commerce Commission prepared a confidential 16-page report blasting DOT's proposal, stating the ICC had "serious reservations as to the merit and feasibility" of Railpax and calling the funding "woefully inadequate," the latter an accurate assessment of a condition that would forever hobble passenger train progress. As so often happens in Washington, the confidential report was leaked, and to no less a recipient than Jack Anderson, a popular columnist who loved exposing Washington intrigue, corruption, and stupidity.

DOT Secretary John Volpe, the feisty former governor of Massachusetts, believed in Railpax and wanted Nixon's endorsement now and wanted it in person. One of the president's infamous aides, John Ehrlichman, refused but Volpe reportedly had strong words with the presidential advisor and got the audience he sought, and only received the endorsement after allegedly threatening he would resign if Nixon did not endorse the plan.

The following month Penn Central added to the urgency of the moment by seeking ICC permission to end all passenger service west of Harrisburg and Buffalo. (Service between New York, Albany, and Buffalo was the route of the successful Empire Service experiment started by New York Central in December 1967, two months before the Penn Central merger, featuring memory schedules between New York, Albany, and Buffalo.)

On May 6, 1970, S.3706 passed the Senate 78-3 and legislation began to move forward. Fortunately, the following month immediately after graduation from college, I was able to join the small team working on the Railpax project. However, a bad omen greeted me on Monday, June 22, my first day of employment, as news broke that Penn Central had filed for bankruptcy the day before. The following week, cars filled with Tropicana orange juice traveling from Florida to New Jersey derailed across from the DOT building in southwest Washington where I now worked.

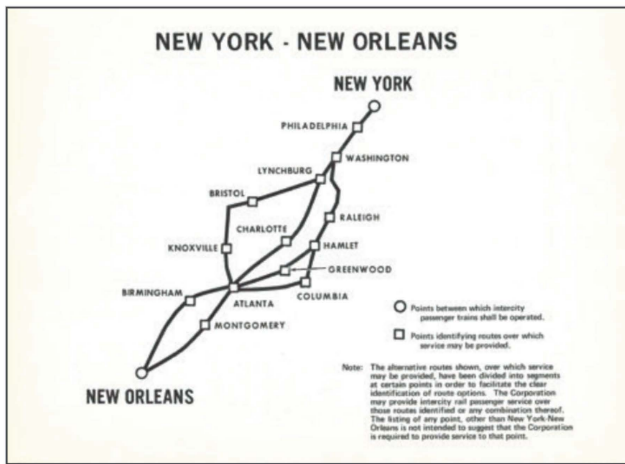
Welcome to the railroad crisis.

What I discovered at my interview two months earlier was that my boss would be James W. McClellan, and he was a reader of *PASSENGER TRAIN JOURNAL*. As I soon learned, Jim was one of the smartest people around and not afraid to admit being a railfan, unlike many others at the time who hid their interest, fearful of railroad management retribution.

The small Railpax group I joined at FRA included people from the Policy office, headed by James McAnany, a former B&O official, and Bill Loftus. Jim McClellan was the team leader, ably assisted by Brit Richards. From other FRA and DOT offices in the building we drew upon the expertise and support of Steve Ditmeyer, Bob Gallamore, Dave DeBoer, Ed Edel, Lou Thompson, Bill Edson, George Meredith, John Williams, and Arrigo Mongini.

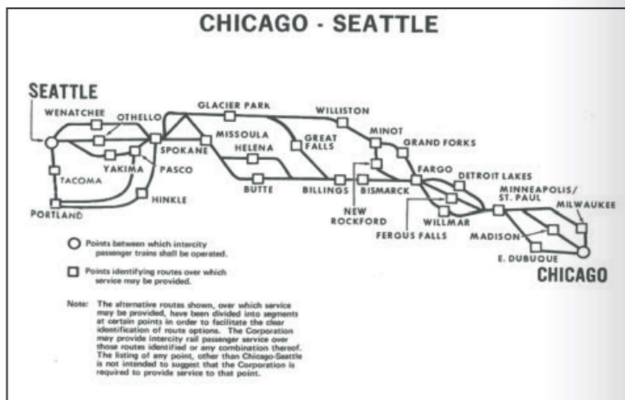
Railroads that still operated passenger trains complied with FRA's request to furnish volumes of ridership, financial, and other data, which we reviewed and analyzed. It was exciting to be part of the mission, but for some time it was not clear whether the mission would make it off the launch pad. Fortunately, Secretary Volpe guided the fledgling Railpax through a barrage of opposition.

I had great respect for Volpe, a businessman who had become governor of Massachusetts before his appointment as DOT Secretary. He was pro-transit and he was full of energy, a great combination for getting Railpax over the goal line. Plus, he had a mind that quickly absorbed information. I was chosen to brief him on how the team was coming along with qualifying the potential route structure, and was concerned he would not grasp the many complex details for a same-day press conference. Yet two hours later he spoke firmly and convincingly to the media, discussing details and answering questions as if he had been working daily on the project, a performance we all felt was most impressive.



On October 14, everyone's hard work was rewarded. One of the DOT attorneys popped into Jim's office and said there was going to be a vote on the Railpass legislation, the House version being H.R. 17849. Jim invited me and the three of us grabbed a cab to Capitol Hill. The legislation passed in the House on a voice vote, depriving us of the drama of hearing speeches and the tension of a person-by-person vote. Nevertheless, the passage of the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 was a great moment (later that day it passed in the Senate by unanimous consent) and left just one more hurdle.

President Nixon had seemed inclined to sign the legislation, not wanting the collapse and possible nationalization of part of the railroad industry on his watch. Some say he even had a love of trains as a boy. However, the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) had been a thorn in the side throughout the development of Railpass development and viewed the legislation negatively, as did some of Nixon's advisors who were urging a pocket veto. Nixon meanwhile had flown out to the "California White House" at San Clemente for a few days. We re-



LEFT AND BELOW Choosing the specific routing between endpoints established by the Rail Passenger Act of 1970 involved determining such things as population, track conditions, and station facilities. What's interesting about the New York-New Orleans corridor is that, initially, Amtrak initially did not operate a New York-New Orleans train as Southern Railway opted out of joining Amtrak and was required to maintain its pre-Amtrak service for ten years. As for the Chicago-Seattle service, there were several routing combinations, including the Chicago-Twin Cities segment wherein The Milwaukee Road's route was chosen because of it having the highest population base. Interestingly, the route via Butte, Mont., was an early addition with the launching of what became the North Coast Hiawatha. KEVIN MCKINNEY COLLECTION

BOTTOM LEFT Amtrak's North Coast Hiawatha, shown skirting the Jefferson River in Montana in May 1972, is often cited as one of its more popular experimental routes and lasted nearly ten years before the severe budget cuts under the Jimmy Carter administration. Proponents of the route continue to this day to seek a revival. MIKE SCHAFER



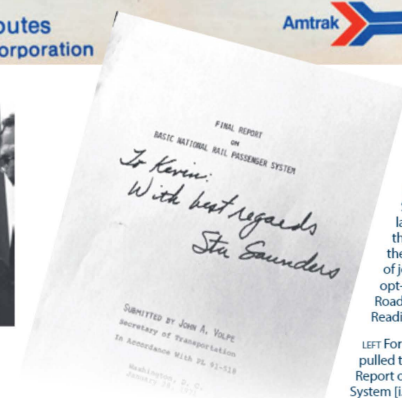
ABOVE Amtrak's first president, Roger Lewis, and DOT Secretary John Volpe at the release of Amtrak's first in-house national timetable. BILL ANDERSON

ual which was provided to the newly named incorporators in December. The meaty volume included a summary of critical issues; a summary of the Act; a copy of a development flow chart; a sample of ridership statistics; an overview of data we had requested from the railroads; a list of stations and an essay on station costs; a sample operating agreement; a list of available equipment; and the "Northeast Corridor Experience," a write-up of the initial effort to rejuvenate the NEC with the *Metroliner* and TurboTrain.

In addition, the Manual offered a proposed organizational structure; a projection of start-up costs; and some operational and mechanical information. The Appendix offered some route maps with an illustration of daily average ridership; an "Equipment Prospectus" featuring numerous black & white photos; a rail pas-

senger demand model; a long-haul cost model; Northeast Corridor statistics; an air-rail-bus Fare Comparison; airline O/D (origin/destination) data; a list of all current passenger train route-miles (42,709); and, lastly, a small-print summary of published rail technology papers.

For our team, much of early 1971 was spent walking back and forth the two blocks between the FRA office and the new office of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (NRPC) at L'Enfant Plaza to assist the incorporators and the McKinsey consultants they had hired. The most important objective was determining the specific routes that would be utilized between the designated endpoints identified by DOT in its Final Report of January 28. (A Preliminary System Plan had left out several key Western routes which due to public response were added to the system in the Final Report. We



ABOVE By the time the November 14, 1971, Amtrak timetable was released, the carrier had already added an "experimental route" with the North Coast Hiawatha and Washington-Parkersburg Potomac Turbo as well as a new 403(b) state-supported service with the Lake Shore (not to be confused with the later Lake Shore Limited). Interestingly, this first Lake Shore was bombed. Note also the principal carriers that had the option of joining Amtrak, but didn't. Not all opt-outs are shown; e.g., Long Island Rail Road, Chicago South Shore & South Bend, Reading Company.

LEFT For real? Someone in McKinney's office pulled this office prank, showing the Final Report on Basic National Rail Passenger System [i.e., "Railpass" and eventually Amtrak] "signed" by Stuart Saunders, former Pennsylvania Railroad President and, subsequently, Chairman of the Board of the ill-fated Penn Central system that ultimately prompted the formation of Amtrak. KEVIN MCKINNEY COLLECTION

suspected influence from Southern Pacific, as most of the routes that originally had been left out involved the SP.)

Some route selections in the Final Report, such as New York-Buffalo, were easy as there were no choices. The only realistic route was Penn Central's ex-New York Central via Albany, favored due to existing service, population, and potential speed.

Other route selections were more complex. New York-New Orleans service, the DOT suggested, could be offered as far as Atlanta via



ceived some questions from OMB that had to be answered by Friday, October 30, in order to brief the president. In the days before fax machines and e-mail, a hard-copy reply was required. I was chosen to deliver the package containing the reply to the Executive Office Building next to the White House, a memorable moment for a young staffer. An honor yes, but in reality it might have been because it was on the way to my apartment. So on a dismal, cold, rainy Friday afternoon I dropped off the envelope and headed for my spartan accommodations, apprehensively not knowing if victory or the abrupt end of all our efforts lay ahead.

On Monday we discovered Nixon had signed the bill. We were now on a fast track toward the creation of Railpass. In short order, eight incorporators had to be selected, a briefing manual had to be prepared for them, and many decisions had to be made before May 1, 1971, just six months away.

Our team created a 260-page Briefing Man-



LEFT Some Amtrak routes combined two separate trains into one, as exemplified by Amtrak's National Limited, shown pausing at the Kirkwood station in suburban St. Louis on January 2, 1972. It was essentially the combining of the erstwhile New York-Pittsburgh-St. Louis "Spirit of St. Louis" (formerly a PRR train) and MP's St. Louis-Kansas City Missouri River Eagle, though the latter was significantly rescheduled. As another now-gone Amtrak train that's often cited for revival, the original Amtrak National Limited was a through train out of both New York and Washington—the Washington cars joining with the New York section at Harrisburg—that connected to and from the Super Chief/EI Capitan at Kansas City. JIM HEUER

Charlotte or via Bristol and Knoxville or via Raleigh. There was another option between Hamlet and Atlanta, either via Greenwood or Columbia, and Atlanta-New Orleans could be achieved via Birmingham or Montgomery. The incorporators chose the Charlotte and Birmingham options. The most complex route was Chicago-Seattle (see diagram) which had so many options it appeared that every available piece of track in the northern tier had a chance of being chosen. Running the train via populous Milwaukee seemed a near-certainty, however, and it was.

Another task was determining the name of the new company. It would officially remain NRPC and many liked the idea of retaining Railpax as the name. Others, including the incorporators, did not. They hired Lippincott & Margulies to come up with ideas for a new name and one I recall was "Span," which may have been too close for comfort to "Spam." The name Amtrak was eventually chosen. We later heard a rumor that the L&M firm had offered the Amtrak name the previous year to Burlington, Great Northern, Northern Pacific, and Spokane, Portland & Seattle for their merger, which became Burlington Northern instead.

A May 1 timetable was quickly put together working with the National Railway Publication Co., better known as The Official Guide people. The Northeast Corridor took up much of the thin book. The rest of the country was contained in 11 pages, a testimony to the serious reduction in service that occurred with the birth of Amtrak. As the timetable was being printed, two things changed to render it immediately outdated. Southern Railway

led by Graham Claytor (later to be Amtrak's fourth president), chose to stay out of Amtrak, continuing to run not only the New York-New Orleans Crescent (which Amtrak had planned to retain), but also the Piedmont, a nameless Washington-Lynchburg train, and the Asheville Special, more service than Amtrak would have offered. Rio Grande also chose to stay out, forcing a last-minute reroute of Chicago-California service to Union Pacific from Denver to Ogden via Wyoming. It did, however, result in D&RGW's Rio Grande Zephyr, a spectacular alternative.

The start-up of Amtrak on May 1 was a low-key event. Hope for the future was mixed with sorrow over the loss of two-thirds of the remaining passenger network the day before (and our inability to ride some of the last runs because we were too busy). A small crowd gathered at Washington Union Station for speeches that sunny Saturday morning. Roger Lewis, an unemployed former aerospace executive with political connections, was chosen just days before to head the new company and told the assembled crowd he was pleased to be president of "Amtrak." A special nonstop Metroliner then whisked us to New York, where another ceremony was held before returning to Washington.

By May, several of us, including Jim, had joined the Amtrak payroll. My experience over the years is that the most fun, and the most progress, occurs in the early stages of any new venture. After a time, the bureaucracy begins to take over while office politics increase and progress becomes sluggish at best. This was certainly the case at Amtrak before long.

Jim McClellan was a Director under Vice President Harold Graham, who had joined from Pan Am (as did several others—Pan Am was undergoing a downsizing at the time), and I was Manager of Scheduling & Timetables, a part of Jim's unit, which also included Dirk Partridge from Pan Am and later Jim Deitz, a young man from B&O.

In our department, a major task headed by Dirk included combining all the various railroad tariffs into one, while simplifying rules and processes. To stimulate ridership on the former New Haven Railroad's Shore Line, devastated by air shuttle competition and downgrading by Penn Central, McClellan suggested a low \$990 New York-Boston rate. Graham agreed and it was implemented and almost immediately began stimulating traffic.

Amtrak started out as a contracting agency and many have argued over the years that it

might have been better had it remained that way. But before long, Amtrak was assuming various functions, first on-board services, later train and engine crews, and ultimately running its own railroad after the Northeast Corridor was foisted on it in 1976 in order to help the newly formed Conrail survive.

Initially though, we told the railroads what we wanted and for the most part they complied as cooperatively as railroads can do. Each railroad had a National Railroad Passenger Corporation officer, the point person between the contracting railroad and Amtrak.

We decided schedules needed improving and traditional barriers between trains such as in New York and Chicago had to be minimized. In the NEC, more Metroliner service was extended beyond New York to New Haven with a stop at Rye, N.Y. This not only made the Metroliner service more convenient to the beyond-New York market, it enabled Roger Lewis and Hal Graham to reach their homes in Rye on the weekends. (There was a brief push to get Amtrak headquarters relocated to New York, but that was quickly quashed by Washington politics.)

Not only was New York a traditional barrier—only four trains operated through between Washington and Boston pre-Amtrak—Sunnyside Yard in New York was a disaster, featuring slow turn-arounds, poor quality, and high costs. Moving much of the servicing to the endpoints, or at least New Haven, would provide better results and broaden the travel market. McClellan worked on redesigning NEC schedules for through operation and featuring memory schedules.

We had already managed to create some breakthroughs with some of the endpoints designated by DOT/FRA before Amtrak came into being, such as New York-St. Louis-Kansas City (which became the National Limited) and Seattle-Oakland-Los Angeles-San Diego (which became the Coast Starlight). Now it was time to focus on the Midwest, where I decided to start with a Milwaukee-Chicago-St. Louis run-through, which was quickly accomplished in time for the November 14, 1971, timetable. A Milwaukee-Chicago-Detroit schedule was contemplated but never implemented, as was an extension to Kirkwood or some location west of St. Louis to tap that suburban market.

The Milwaukee-Chicago-St. Louis run-through train arrangement was not all that difficult to implement. Our small marketing group worked with our equally small operations group, who in turn worked with the operating people at The Milwaukee Road and Gulf, Mobile & Ohio. Mike Weinman, from New York Central by way of Penn Central, was a key person in our operations, as was Dean Folsom, who joined us from Boston & Maine.

Another innovation, in time for the 1971-1972 winter season, was restoration of the Florida Special, this time on its fastest schedule ever, just under 24 hours between New York and Miami. Seaboard Coast Line was cooperative, as was its nature, actually advocating the train's return. Penn Central, also true to its nature, was less so. This from a railroad that not long before Amtrak had wanted SCL to terminate its popular streamliners at Washington, forcing passengers to transfer to PC's aging coaches.

Another innovation we brainstormed never made the light of day. Amtrak had chosen not to include the overnight Boston-New York-Washington train on May 1, which we thought was a mistake. We envisioned an appealing night train, to be called the East Coast Executive, which would include sleepers, set-off sleepers at New York, and a lounge car providing cocktails (perhaps even a piano bar), snacks and breakfast. (Later, a more modest Night Owl would fill the overnight gap and years later a more fashionable Twilight Shoreliner.)

Several routes were added to the network in short order. The first was the New York-Chicago Lake Shore on the former New York Central, the first train sponsored by states under the 403(b) provision of the Amtrak legislation.

and now it worked over a slow, mountainous railroad.

Another big project for year one was creation of the first true Amtrak timetable, not just a quick, modest version compiled by the Official Guide, as were the May 1 and July 12 editions. The result was the November 14 timetable, which I personally distributed between Washington, Springfield, and Boston riding in the baggage car of the "Inland route" train, another early addition to the network 17 days after start-up.

A great number of things were accomplished in the first year or so by the small number of people working at L'Enfant Plaza. (An early company telephone directory took just one-and-a-half typewritten pages.) Chicago operations were consolidated at Union Station with the end of service at Central Station in January 1972. Mainstream credit cards were accepted. A consolidated reservation system was put into place. Better equipment, primarily from Western Amtrak member railroads, was shifted around the system, creating the colorful "rainbow" trains in Amtrak's early years. Canadian service was restored to Vancouver and Montreal. A second Chicago-Los Angeles train, the Chief, was operated during the summer of 1972, the first and only time in Amtrak's history that two daily trains operated between Chicago and Los Angeles.

Not everything went perfectly. Errors in the November timetable were corrected in the January 1972 edition. Better cars, with a wide variety of parts and systems, were scattered from their "home" railroads to improve service around the nation but often did not have the right parts available to fix them, or personnel trained to do so.

By 1972, it was evident that things were already changing and not for the better. Roger Lewis seemed indifferent, even hostile, to progress. Following his hiring of ex-Pennsylvania F.S. "Pat" King from Penn Central, a purge of good people began, especially anyone who had been previously connected with NYC. Jim McClellan, who today many refer to as "the father of Amtrak," was eventually one of them. I was not purged but decided to return to FRA, where I became involved in freight-related projects and tracking Amtrak ridership.

Our optimism and our hope for a better future sustained us before and after the creation. As Amtrak struggled to "make the trains worth traveling again" (an early advertising slogan), there were many in the public and private sector who thought, or even hoped, Amtrak would fail. Despite the odds against it, Amtrak survived, became a well-known name, and succeeded—not to the extent we desired then and still wish for now, but ridership has continued to climb over the years. Had it not been for the pandemic, Amtrak would have achieved an operating profit in its 49th and 50th years. Now, with a positive political environment, and a management willing to make improvements and implement a vision for growth—nationwide and not just in corridors—we may see Amtrak reach a quality and quantity of service its founders and ardent supporters wished for in 1971 and have advocated for over five decades of struggle. 🚂



ABOVE A landmark issue of PTJ, the Spring 1971 issue of the three-year-old magazine introduces Amtrak. On its cover from left to right, receptionist Barbara Morris, secretary Holly Kinsner, an unknown visitor, and PTJ founder/Amtrak manager Kevin McKinney. Now, 50 years later, we celebrate the carrier's victory survival. KEVIN MCKINNEY COLLECTION

RIGHT At the time of this photo at San Luis Obispo in May 1972, Amtrak's Seattle-San Diego train operated on a tri-weekly schedule and was named Coast Starlight for the overnight part of the trip and Coast Daylight for daytime service. Eventually, the train's southern terminus was cut back to Los Angeles as Los Angeles-San Diego regional service boomed. Eventually, the train simply became known as the Coast Starlight. It remains one of Amtrak's most endeared and popular long-distance trains. MIKE SCHAFER

