

# An Amtrak Adventure Seventies Style

*by Neil Lang*

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The short Dallas section of the Lone Star stands at Dallas Union Station following the author's arrival at the end of his trip.

Amtrak issued a special timetable effective October 1, 1979, to reflect the changes in its route structure that went into effect on that day. This

on the cover of the timetable, as well as that the timetable would be in effect only until the end of the month.



# National Train Timetables

Effective Oct. 1—Oct. 27, 1979

## There've been some changes made...

This timetable reflects the changes to our route system as recommended by the U.S. Department of Transportation and subsequent Congressional action.

Amtrak's new route system will provide the best possible service to over 450 communities. In the weeks ahead additional changes will be introduced, including a new train, *The Desert Wind*, serving Ogden-Las Vegas-Los Angeles.

## Important notice!

Operation of certain trains shown in this timetable are subject to final Congressional action or agreement with the states involved (see map, pages 26-27). If your plans include



Forty-one years ago during the summer of 1979, the less-than-a-decade-old Amtrak was facing its most severe funding crisis. Amtrak had started with a skeleton route system on May 1, 1971, then expanded and contracted slightly during the 1970s. However, the federal subsidies that supported the fledgling national passenger railroad continued to grow, and by 1979 the Carter Administration had decided to reduce the subsidies. The Department of Transportation reviewed the route structure and recommended elimination of the following five long-distance trains:

- The Chicago–Seattle *North Coast Hiawatha*
- The Chicago–Dallas–Houston *Lone Star*
- The Chicago–Miami/Tampa *Floridian*
- The New York/Washington–Kansas City *National Limited*
- The Boston–New York–Washington–Catlettsburg *Hilltopper*

Typically, route and schedule changes occur in the spring and fall, concurrent

1, the official start of the 1980 Federal fiscal year. As a result, Amtrak issued a special timetable dated Oct. 1, 1979, effective for a mere 27 days until the 1979 fall timetable appeared.



Amtrak was still using the former Santa Fe 18th Street coach yard in Chicago during my visit and this view shows some of the passenger cars being serviced in this yard.

As someone who is particularly interested in Amtrak, I decided that I needed to ride several of these trains before they disappeared, and this article recounts

Adventure than just a couple of train rides. And that requires a bit of a back story.

I had moved to the San Francisco Bay area in the mid-1970s and immediately immersed myself into the local rail scene. That resulted in me hanging around the West Oakland Amtrak station on too many a Saturday morning, where I got to know the station agents.



Many of the newly built and just-delivered Superliner cars were staged in the former Santa Fe coach yard.

I was particularly interested in the passenger equipment on the three passenger trains (the *Starlight*, the *San Francisco Zephyr*, and the *San Joaquin*) that ran

“Rainbow Era,” I was still fascinated by the variety of passenger car heritage even though the cars were now in a common Amtrak livery.



A trio of veteran—and rather weathered—E-units rests outside the Amtrak locomotive shop located at the south end of the former Pennsylvania Railroad maintenance facility. Amtrak still maintains its locomotives in this location.

I had developed enough of a reputation as an Amtrak expert that I was drafted in 1978 by the late Harre Demoro to write the Amtrak column for *Pacific News*, at that time locally based in Burlingame, Calif. The big benefit of being an Amtrak columnist was that I was able to develop a long and productive relationship with the West Coast Amtrak Public Affairs office in San Francisco, then managed by the legendary Art Lloyd, formerly of Western Pacific.

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*Limited* and connecting to the *Lone Star* in Kansas City, I approached the

Public Affairs office that graciously arranged visits to Amtrak passenger yards in Chicago, Indianapolis, and Washington. These visits would allow me to inspect, and of course photograph, a much larger variety of Amtrak equipment.



Amtrak was close to completing the construction of a new passenger car shop and control center located in the middle of the coach yard.

My adventure began in Pittsburgh on the evening of Monday, September 3. I had spent the Labor Day weekend in the Steel City attending the annual gathering of a group of locomotive roster photographers—another one of my rail-oriented interests. I was dropped off at the Amtrak station where I awaited the late evening arrival of the *Broadway Limited* for the overnight ride to Chicago. This edition of the *Broadway* was a long train—four E-units



I boarded the train and occupied a roomette in car 2853-*Ocmulgee River*, a Southern Railway 10 roomette–6 double bedroom sleeper acquired when Amtrak took over Southern’s passenger operations earlier in 1979. I don’t recall much about the short trip to Chicago, except riding over extremely rough trackage in Indiana—so rough that on several occasions I was bounced up high enough that when I fell back down I compressed the mattress enough to feel the rivet heads on the underlying metal platform. Needless to say, I did not get a restful sleep that night.



A very long eastbound Broadway Limited is departing Chicago Union Station on time on Tuesday September 4, 1979, in this view from the Roosevelt Road overpass. The Chicago skyline in the background has changed considerably over the succeeding 40 years.

our first stop at the Chicago Amtrak Maintenance Facility was actually the former Santa Fe 18th Street coach yard that was still being used by Amtrak. The yard seemed to be used mostly for longer-term storage of out-of-service passenger cars. I noticed a small number of dome cars, the most interesting of which was 9201-*Starlight Dome*, a low-profile dome car built originally for C&O's proposed *Chessie* streamliner.



The Chicago coach yard was full of interesting and unusual steam-heated passenger cars from the legacy passenger railroads. This Slumbercoach, originally built for Chicago, Burlington & Quincy and appropriately named Silver Slumber, was one of the more interesting cars I was able to photograph.

This yard, however, was serving a more immediate purpose as a staging area for the first set of recently delivered Superliner cars. Amtrak was preparing to

consist later in the day in break-in service on one of the Chicago regional trains.

We next headed across the Chicago River to the Amtrak locomotive facility at the south end of the former Pennsylvania Railroad coach yards, where I photographed a variety of veteran E-units and newer F40PH diesels. However, my slides show no evidence of any SDP40Fs around the diesel shop.

We then headed north in the maintenance facility to view the new car shop and control center under construction. And located next to the new facility were the ready tracks with several trains waiting to be dispatched to Union Station for loading. I was able to walk along several of these trains and photograph a variety of steam-heated passenger equipment not typically seen out West including the Slumbercoach from the *Broadway* on which I had arrived that morning.

As I progressed north, I eventually reached Roosevelt Road where I climbed the steps to street level. Here I set up at the west end of the overpass to view the nearly continuous action at what many regard as Chicago's premier location for passenger train photography. In addition to frequent Burlington Northern commuter trains led by BN E-units, I also managed to capture the afternoon departure of the *Broadway*.



An Amtrak Turboliner, used in 1979 in Chicago–Milwaukee service, is heading into Union Station from Amtrak’s former Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Brighton Park Coach Yard, now used expressly for Turboliner servicing.



Amtrak's 1979 timetable showed a pair of Chicago–Gary–Valparaiso, Ind., commuter trains (with Amtrak train numbers), although these trains were operated with ex-Norfolk & Western coaches behind Conrail Geeps.

At the time of my visit there was a second overpass on Taylor Street, one (long) block north of Roosevelt Road, and this overpass provided a closer view of trains as they left Union Station and popped out from under the U.S. Post Office building. At this location I photographed a late-departing *Lone Star* and various commuter trains, including several led by new F40PH diesels in RTA paint. I also recorded a pair of rare consists—at least for this visitor from the West Coast: a spotless Amtrak Turboliner and one of the two former-PRR Valparaiso (Ind.) commuter trains still operating with former N&W *Pocahontas* and *Powhatan Arrow* coaches, albeit with Conrail Geeps.

By late afternoon, it was time to prepare to leave for Indianapolis where I was scheduled the next day to visit the nearby Amtrak facility at Beech Grove, Ind. At the time of my visit, Amtrak no longer offered service between Chicago and the Indiana capital. The *Floridian* headed down the former Monon main line west of Indianapolis while the *Cardinal* skirted north and east of Indy on the ex-Chesapeake & Ohio freight main line through Peru and Muncie, Ind. Interestingly, Amtrak proposed—once the *Floridian* was discontinued—to operate a train to Indianapolis using the northern end of the Monon and a portion of Conrail's Peoria & Eastern. However, it took another year before that service was actually launched. And so it was off to Chicago's O'Hare Airport for a short flight on Allegheny Airlines to Indianapolis. A side note here is that a month later Allegheny Airlines lost its regional identity when it

The Broadway Limited (9/3/79)

447		E8
439		E8
437		E8
418		E9
1217		Baggage
1076		Baggage
1000		Baggage
1531		Baggage dorm
2033	Loch Arkaig	Slumbercoach
2853	Ocmulgee River	Sleeper
2797	Middle River	Sleeper
8322		Coffee shop lounge
3405		Cafeteria lounge
6021		Coach
5650		Coach
6011		Coach
5258		Coach
4430		Coach
5657		Coach
8027		Diner
2553	Central Park	Sleeper
2550	Air Force Academy	Sleeper

I arrived early Wednesday morning at the Beech Grove Maintenance Facility located less than 10 miles southeast of downtown Indianapolis. Amtrak purchased this former Big Four (New York Central) back shops in 1975 and was in the process of upgrading the shops to maintain, repair, and upgrade almost all of Amtrak's passenger car and locomotive fleet. Much of the heavy maintenance work in Amtrak's first few years had been performed under contract by the former passenger railroads, and Amtrak needed to bring that work inside the company.



A simple, sign greets visitors to Amtrak's Beech Grove facility.

I was welcomed by the Manager of Administrative Services who then presented me with my own "personalized" hard hat. At the end of my visit it became a souvenir to take home with me. I have no idea how I lugged the hard hat around on the rest of my adventure, but I still have it in my collection.



Amtrak was in the process of modernizing the Beech Grove facility, which was built in the first decade of the 20th century. Here, an extension to the transfer table is under construction.

The shops and yards were full with a wide variety of passenger rolling stock, ranging from cars undergoing regular heavy maintenance, conversion to a different internal configuration, or awaiting rebuilding after suffering damage of one form or another. And among all these cars were many that were in the process of being retired. I saw and was able to photograph a wide variety of cars, most of which I did not see in service on the West Coast. Perhaps the most unusual car I encountered was Amtrak 3231-*Sun Ray*, one of only three former Seaboard Air Line Sun Room sleeper-lounge cars.





Amtrak used what must be its smallest locomotive—a GE 44-tonner—as the Beech Grove shop switcher.

Beech Grove was also responsible for converting steam-heated cars to head-end power (HEP). This very successful program allowed Amtrak to repurpose existing cars in lieu of procuring new equipment for many long-distance trains. I was able to photograph an immaculate, freshly outshopped HEP coach resplendent in the latest three-stripe livery, as well as a diner (Amtrak 8052) sitting on shop trucks awaiting conversion to HEP.

The Lone Star (9/16/79)

502		SDP40F (to Dallas)
504		SDP40F (to Houston)
1100		Baggage
2751	Palm Dome	Sleeper
****		Diner
9905		Coach
9955		Coach (to Houston)
9907		Coach (to Dallas)
3380	Picurus	Dormitory bar lounge
2371	Regal Vale	Sleeper
1205		Baggage

The National Limited (9/14/79)

311		F40PH (on at St Louis)
265		F40PH
1205		Baggage
1218		Baggage
2900	Pacific Bay	Sleeper
20210		Amdinette
21810		Amcoach
21820		Amcoach
21178		Amcoach (from Washington

Amtrak had yet to start major locomotive maintenance at Beech Grove, but there was a pair of very rare Amtrak locomotives in switcher service including Amtrak 7, a GE 44-tonner industrial switcher. I was able to get good roster and action photographs of what had to be Amtrak's smallest locomotive.



Coach 4603 has just been released from the HEP conversion program and sits here resplendent in Amtrak's new three-stripe livery.



One of the most unusual cars at Beech Grove was former SAL/SCL Sun Room sleeper lounge Sun Ray. This car is now privately owned and has reassumed its original name of Hollywood Beach.

In the late afternoon I headed downtown to the Amtrak station, an impressive, three-story Richardsonian Romanesque building. The train shed behind spanned at least six platforms and 12 tracks, most of which were out of service. The *National Limited* arrived in the early evening, and it was clear that this train was about as different as possible from the *Broadway* I had just ridden. It was very short train comprising four Amfleet coaches, an Amdinette, and a single converted HEP sleeper (no full diner or lounge car) led by a single F40 locomotive. While both the *National Limited* and the *Broadway* had New York and Washington sections, the Washington section on this train was a single coach that would be cut off at Philadelphia and added to a corridor train heading to the capital.



Washington Terminal used a small fleet of veteran MP-54 MU cars to shuttle employees between the station platform and the nearby Ivy City shops.

The trip east through Pennsylvania was pleasant and uneventful, and the scenic highlight was rounding Horseshoe Curve. Just east of Harrisburg was another spot of note: the four cooling towers of the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant which had suffered a major accident just a few months earlier.



Amtrak used former Penn Central GG-1s and newer E60 electric locomotives on its Northeast Corridor trains. Here one of each locomotive type sits at the servicing towers in the Ivy City shops.

However, our train was terminated in Baltimore because of a fire in the tunnel just west of the station. We were bused the remainder of the way to D.C. -- not the proper way to arrive at Washington Union Station.



Amtrak 4920, a GG1, in basic Penn Central black, rests in Ivy City (Washington, D.C.) prior to its next assignment.

I spent a week in Washington doing what most new visitors to the nation's capital typically do. In addition, I made several trips to Union Station to observe trains and to inspect the Ivy City Amtrak maintenance facilities. Union Station was in a sad state at that time. In the early 1970s, the main hall of Daniel Burnham's "monumental" Beaux Arts station was repurposed as the National Visitors Center and a large pit had been dug out of the main hall to install a slide/movie theater. This ill-advised project failed miserably and the

structure—described in the local press as a concrete block station—in the former concourse area.



A Washington Terminal RS-1 is switching cars of a long-distance train on one of the through tracks at the east end of Union Station.

The platforms remained in service pretty much as they had been for years, and I was able to spend quality time watching Amtrak operations. *Metroliner* service was still provided by the original (at that time 10 years old) self-propelled EMU cars. Other Northeast Corridor (NEC) trains were hauled by veteran GG1s or more modern E60 electric locomotives. The E60s with their three-axle trucks were heavy and slow and would be shortly replaced by the smaller, more agile AEM-7 locomotives. Most of the trains running south of D.C. still operated with steam-heated cars and were still hauled by E units.





The National Limited has stopped at the station in Effingham, Ill., on Saturday, September 15, 1979.

The station was switched by the Washington Terminal Company, which had a small fleet of Alco RS-1 switchers in blue livery. The Terminal Company also operated a veteran MP-54 car to shuttle employees between the station and the Ivy City coach and locomotive facilities about a mile outside the station. This car provided me the ideal way to get to Ivy City. There, I was able to photograph a variety of diesel and electric locomotives as well as both steam-heated and HEP passenger cars.



In 1979 Amtrak used a small modular structure as its station in St Louis. This station remained in service until the early 2000s.

After spending a week in the capital, I headed back to Union Station on Friday, September 14, to board the *National Limited* coach on the rear of the *Murray Hill* (Amtrak named all of its corridor trains in those days). I had not been able to procure a roomette on the *National Limited*, and I was not looking forward to spending the night in a coach. Upon boarding, I immediately noticed that the coach was not a long-distance Amfleet coach. The trainman to whom I reported this told me to mention it to the crew when we got to Philadelphia and I should get moved.

I approached the crew when our coach was switched to the *National Limited* and was told I would have to remain in the Washington coach as the space in

was a short-distance coach. So much for responding to customer concerns. Fortunately, the issue became moot shortly after that when the conductor announced that roomettes were available in the single sleeping car on the train. I was more than glad to pay the nominal upcharge.

A much more serious issue occurred the following morning. We were slowly entering Columbus, Ohio, when the train went into emergency. As we came to an immediate stop, I noticed that we had just passed a car and a man gesturing wildly. The crew indicated we had hit a car at a grade crossing. Most sadly, the driver was heading to hospital with a woman about to give birth. My lasting thought, even 40 years later, is that if they had only realized how short a train the *National Limited* was...

Once the train resumed moving, we proceeded more or less normally. We did stop long enough in Effingham, Ill., for me to get off the train, cross the tracks, and get a shot of the train in the station. We also had a long stop in St. Louis where I was able to inspect the trailer station in use at the time, and to observe a second F40 being added for some unknown reason to our train. We arrived in Kansas City close enough to schedule that I had no issue making the two-hour scheduled connection to the *Lone Star*.



The southbound Lone Star has arrived in Fort Worth where the lead locomotive has been uncoupled and moved over to a neighboring track. The front part of the remaining train will soon depart for Houston.

The *Lone Star* operated with coach and sleeping-car service to both Houston and Dallas, with the sections splitting at Fort Worth. At midnight, I boarded Amtrak 2371-*Regal Vale*—the sole sleeper to Dallas. *Regal Vale* was a 4 bedroom—4 compartment—2 drawing room sleeper, with the smaller bedrooms sold for single occupancy. My bedroom included a full-length sofa facing forward and a small counter with a sink along the side of the car next to the window. At some point I decided I needed a comfort stop and went looking for the toilet annex that was common to all sleeper bedrooms in which I had traveled. To my surprise, there was no toilet annex. Being the obstinate type, I opened everything I could in the room and eventually discovered a fold-out type toilet under the sink. And so went my introduction to one of the more unusual bedroom configurations.

The train again operated pretty much on schedule, with a stop in Oklahoma City and a long stop in Fort Worth where the train was split. The routine here involved the lead SDP40F cutting off and moving over to another track. The Houston section with a baggage car, sleeper, diner, and two high-level coaches pulled forward leaving behind the Dallas coach, lounge, and sleeper. The remaining locomotive then coupled back on to the Dallas cars. Interestingly, the schedule was such that we waited 10 or so minutes for the northbound section from Dallas to arrive before we departed east.

I don't recall much about the Dallas station, but I do remember very clearly it was quite close to Dealey Plaza and the Texas Schoolbook Depository, both of Kennedy assassination infamy. Next, I boarded a bus to Dallas/Fort Worth Airport for my flight home to the Bay Area, thus ending my excellent two weeks of exploring Amtrak. I was able to ride two of the doomed trains as well as visit three major maintenance facilities and return home with a score of

A postscript: I noticed that the last couple of slides I shot were overexposed but did not make anything of it at the time. The following weekend I shot a roll of local action, and found the roll completely overexposed. I then discovered that the diaphragm on my regular lens had seized and would not close when I adjusted the f-stop. I cannot express how relieved I was to find out the failure occurred on the end of my last roll from my adventure!