

TIME TO RUN SAN JOAQUIN ALL THE WAY TO LOS ANGELES

by George Gaekle
TRAC Vice President Emeritus

One of the original goals of the Train Riders Association of California ever since its formation in 1984 has been extension of San Joaquin service from Bakersfield to Los Angeles. We have tried in the past to get Amtrak and Caltrans to actively press for this long-overdue service, but each time have been told that the railroad (first SP and now Union Pacific) was opposed because of freight congestion, or that it would be too expensive, or both.

On December 15, Amtrak began four daily round trips a day between Boston and Portland, Maine, the first passenger train service since 1965! This service did not come easily. It took 14 years of valiant effort on the part of the Train Riders Northeast organization to persuade Amtrak and the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts to achieve the goal of restoring service on this route—at all times with the “Over My Dead Body” opposition of the railroad involved.

Union Pacific apparently takes the position it does not have room for just one more train each way overnight on the Tehachapi Route. Do you suppose that UP would not find room for just one more freight train each way? TRAC President Emeritus Arthur Lloyd can tell you that during World War II when the railroads were busier than at any time in our history and at a time when communications were primitive compared with what exists now, there were at least six passenger trains run daily by the SP and Santa Fe over Tehachapi.

I strongly urge that TRAC members take some actions now to mount an offensive for this needed service. Not for all five San Joaquins. Just for 718 and 711 so that customers do not have to arrive Los Angeles by bus at the absurd hour of 2:35am or leave at the equally absurd hour of 1:35am. True it might take between three and four hours longer by train than by bus. In 1959, SP's overnight train, the West Coast, was scheduled for 5 hours 15 minutes southbound and 5 hours 40 minutes northbound between Los Angeles and Bakersfield with one stop at Glendale.

With additional stops to serve important places like Mojave, Lancaster and Palmdale allowing for trains to take sidings for important freights, a southbound arrival in Los Angeles arrival at 7:00 or 7:30 am and a northbound departure at Los Angeles between 10 and 11 pm are far more decent times for customers than is the case with present buses.

I realize this service will not be an easy thing to accomplish. Money and the railroad are the two biggest problems. But it is time to act on this longstanding public need and we should begin the task **now**. The tragedy of September 11 is fresh in people's minds, and the public wants an alternative to flying and dealing with airport problems.

We should lobby our local, state, and federal government administrations and representatives and Amtrak. We should meet with newspaper editorial boards and hold press conferences. We should petition Amtrak to take our case before the Surface Transportation Board in Washington if necessary.

If people in the Northeast could win their fight for Boston-Portland service for four daily round trips, why can't we win this one? For just one train—not four. Surely we are as capable as they are.

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The *California Rail News* encourages letters, comments, and reports on local issues. Please submit your material to California Rail News, 926 J Street, Suite 612, Sacramento, CA 95814. Sorry, we do not guarantee return of photos or articles submitted. Deadline for material to be included in the next issue of the *California Rail News* is February 15, 2002.

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Coast Observations

MAINE FINALLY GOT ITS TRAIN Dec. 15 when four daily Downeaster round trips on the Portland-Boston corridor began. Guilford Industries, owners of the track, tried for years to block the service, even after losing a Surface Transportation Board appeal. One thing the new trains have going for them is fresh cafe food that puts California Cafe fare to shame. Epicurean Feast, a private contractor, serves Rosemary shrimp over Caesar salad, grilled marinated Portabella mushroom sandwiches on foccacia bread, award-winning clam chowder and fresh-baked hot apple crisp. No plastic Sara Lee food for Maine... **NOW EVEN TEXAS HAS AN EXPRESS**, as an intensive Dallas-Fort Worth commuter rail service began service December 2. The Trinity Railway Express, a 34 mile combined service of the Fort Worth T and DART, mixes four new bilevel trains with slick DART rebuilds of Canadian RDC cars. Bargain fares top out at \$2 and 25 trains daily run to CentrePort station (near DFW airport), 12 continuing to Fort Worth. In Dallas, TRE trains share renovated Union Station with DART light rail trains and Amtrak. Tracks were bought from the former Rock Island (CRI&P) 18 years ago for \$1 million per mile... **IN A REMARKABLE 11/24/01 N.Y. TIMES OPINION PIECE, ROBERT F. KENNEDY JR.** called auto energy inefficiency the cause of U.S. dependence upon Persian Gulf oil, and called for closing the SUV/small truck loophole in “CAFE” standards. He cited President Jimmy Carter's success in getting standards that cut imports from the Persian Gulf by 87 percent, and pointed out that the Reagan rollback of CAFE in 1986 to help Texas oil industry buddies doubled oil imports by the very first year... **A SEARING LETTER FROM SENATOR JIM COSTA** to Union Pacific CEO Dick Davidson complaining about the years of delays to the 2nd San Joaquin-Sacramento run has reportedly moved UP lobbying staff into action trying to spread blame for the delays. Speculation is that UP was going to try to miss a Spring 2002 start entirely, based on the company policy that “additional service cannot be started until” every crosstie and every piece of ballast paid for by Caltrans is in place, regardless of the fact that the delays were caused by the railroad. UP's recalcitrance has also led others to talk about alternatives to rail improvement projects ... **SURFLINER RIDERSHIP ROSE** in the last quarter of 2001 while San Joaquins were static and Capitols slid. New Surfliner cars took the Southland route to its highest point since 1993, but ironically even two new round trips couldn't stop the Capitol's downward trend. Rides per train in October were 179 on the Surfliners, and 162 on both the San Joaquins and Capitols. Revenue per passenger was \$22.63 on the San Joaquins, \$15.22 on the Surfliners, and \$8.83 on the Capitols... **IT'S A GREAT TIME TO FAX OR E-MAIL** Congress concerning the need to retain funding for Amtrak service. E-mailing a letter to Congress is much more accepted, since regular mail became scary for staffers this fall. **www.capitoladvantage.com** allows you to send a message to both your senators and member of congress with a single click. We hope to soon add their e-mail button at **www.calrailnews.com**