

NARP President Praises Gunn, Expresses Concern Over Amtrak Governance

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Contact NARP

Washington, D.C.—The following statement regarding David Gunn's departure from Amtrak is by George Chilson, President of the National Association of Railroad Passengers:

"David L. Gunn leaves a lasting legacy. In just over three years, he transformed Amtrak in positive ways that will shape its future long after his departure. He inherited an organization on the verge of collapse. He systematically created order from chaos. Faced with myriad problems, he focused on the most important issues and set priorities. He simplified the management structure, dropping 'vice-president' from the titles of many. He created organization charts that identified all authorized positions. He established performance goals and measures. He installed discipline in finance, planning and budgeting—discipline that was essential for effective management but missing when he arrived. He installed transparent and GAAP compliant accounting. His competence and plain spoken honesty brought credibility to a discredited organization. Without David Gunn, it is quite possible that Amtrak – and U.S. intercity passenger rail – would not exist today. David Gunn's leadership has put Amtrak on a solid footing where it can be poised for growth.

"The Amtrak board's decision to replace Mr. Gunn comes at an unfortunate time. Amtrak has overcome significant problems and begun to gain forward momentum. Changing the top leadership jeopardizes that progress. It remains to be seen whether the Board can find a new president who can accelerate Amtrak's transformation into a growing, relevant and cost efficient national passenger rail system.

"There is obvious concern that removal of Mr. Gunn is the first step in an effort to kill the rail passenger business. However, Amtrak Chairman David Laney, in a message to employees today, cited Amtrak's April strategic plan and budget request and wrote: 'The good news in this strategic plan is that we can improve Amtrak, upgrade service in the vital Northeast Corridor, expand rail services in densely populated and increasingly congested corridors across the country, and bring more economic discipline to Amtrak's long distance services.'

"We endorse those goals so long as 'economic discipline' does not mean route cuts, or making the trains unattractive to travelers.

"Attaining Laney's stated goals will require meeting big challenges: the management transition, the fact that the Amtrak Board is about to drop to just two members, and Bush Administration opposition to adequate passenger rail funding in spite of strong support for it on Capitol Hill."

[Notes:

- The law calls for a board with seven voting members; there are four today, two of which are recess appointments that expire when Congress adjourns for the year.
- The House Subcommittee on Railroads has scheduled a hearing on Amtrak Governance Issues for Tuesday, November 15, at 10 AM.
- Yesterday, on a non-binding voice vote, the House instructed its conferees to support the higher, Senate-passed Amtrak funding level of \$1.45 billion in the House-Senate conference on the Transportation/Treasury Fiscal 2006 appropriations bill.]