

The Georgia Rail Report

GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION RAIL PROGRAMS / GEORGIA RAIL PASSENGER AUTHORITY

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DOT Board endorses rail to Lovejoy



In a 7-5 vote at its September 15th meeting, Georgia's State Transportation Board adopted a resolution offered by board member Dana Lemon of McDonough that authorizes GDOT Commissioner Harold Linnenkohl to enter into an agreement with Clayton County to establish the Atlanta-to-Lovejoy line.

The line's operations and maintenance costs are projected to be \$7 million per year and fares are expected to cover 40 percent of this amount.

Federal funds, matched with state toll credits, will provide the funding needed for the first three years of operation. After that, Clayton County, which hosts four of the six stations, has agreed to cover the difference between farebox income and operations costs.

In 1999, the Board established the Passenger Rail Program and in March, 2004, authorized the department to begin negotiations with the Norfolk Southern Railroad.

The Commissioner is now authorized to sign the Clayton agreement "following the successful execution of an agreement with Norfolk Southern Railway Company for access to the rail corridor." Those negotiations continue.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Federal Transportation Bill funds Southeast High Speed Rail Study

The "Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2005: A Legacy for Users" (SAFETEA - LU) was signed by President Bush on August 10th at a ceremony in Aurora, Illinois. The \$286.5 billion bill is the largest amount ever set aside for surface transportation projects. The legislation provides a record \$52.6 billion for public transportation projects over the next six years.

For the first time since the original ISTEA bill was passed in 1991, this bill includes what is called a "Rail Title" that sets out funding targets for passenger and freight rail projects, in addition to the funding targets for highways and transit projects.

For rail transportation in Georgia, the bill contains \$2 million to advance the Southeast High Speed Rail program (an effort to institute fast and frequent passenger service from Macon to Atlanta to Greenville, SC and on to Charlotte, NC). This provision will make available approximately \$400,000 each year to con-

tinue the studies needed to bring the project to fruition. These funds are in addition to the \$750,000 reported in the previous edition of the *Georgia Rail Report* that Senator Johnny Isakson (R-Georgia) had included in the Federal FY 2006 appropriation. Georgia DOT is working with the FRA, North Carolina DOT and South Carolina DOT to conduct this study.

Atlanta's Multimodal Passenger Terminal will receive \$1.67 million; and \$836,000 is set aside for MARTA "smart card" development (which Georgia's commuter rail system will use as well). There is \$300,000 for active monitoring

devices at a rail/highway intersection in the City of Acworth. The City of Smyrna will receive \$1 million to develop a quiet zone along the Western & Atlantic Railroad that is operated by CSX and \$1 million to construct a pedestrian bridge over the tracks.

The City of Albany will receive \$669,000 for the development of a multi-



SAFTEA-LU includes a "Small Starts" program. Funds will be available beginning in 2007 to help systems like Charlotte, N.C.'s downtown streetcar, or commuter rail lines like Georgia's.

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Railroads pick up pieces after monster storms



This house, deposited on CSX's main line in Pass Christian, MS by Hurricane Katrina's storm surge, is just one of the many challenges railroads are facing as they work to restore service to the Gulf Coast.

Railroads serving the hurricane-ravaged area along the Gulf Coast have substantially restored service to most of the areas that were hit by Hurricane Katrina.

Working around the clock, railroad crews cleared trees and other debris from hundreds of miles of track, repaired washed out line segments and repaired damaged bridges. Because of the extent of the destruction, some line segments remain out of service. Railroads continued to divert some freight through a number of other gateways, including Memphis, Nashville, Montgomery, St. Louis and Chicago.

Meanwhile, railroads continued their efforts to aid in the relief and reconstruction. Carloads of water and food from as far away as Maine and California have been delivered to the area. Four FEMA trains totaling 158 cars of temporary homes were delivered to Selma, AL. Other trains were carrying fuel, lumber and repair materials to aid in the reconstruction efforts. Amtrak has provided sleeping cars to house railroad and community workers.

CSX still working to restore service on Gulf Coast

CSX Transportation's line from Pascagoula, MS through Mobile, AL to

New Orleans, which hugs the Gulf Coast, was the most seriously damaged line in the region's rail network. That line remains out of service as workers restore track and repair a number of bridges. CSX's network between Mobile and Flomaton, AL and between Mobile and Pascagoula, MS was restored over the Labor Day weekend.

Service on these lines will resume once assessment of individual customers' track and equipment ensures that shipments can be moved safely.

At the same time it was rebuilding in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, CSX was making preparations for a second hurricane that was expected to come ashore in North Carolina on September 14. Operations on its lines in Wilmington, NC were suspended on the evening of Sept. 13 and equipment and ballast was staged outside the projected storm area to aid in cleanup of storm debris and track and signal restoration.

NS is open to New Orleans

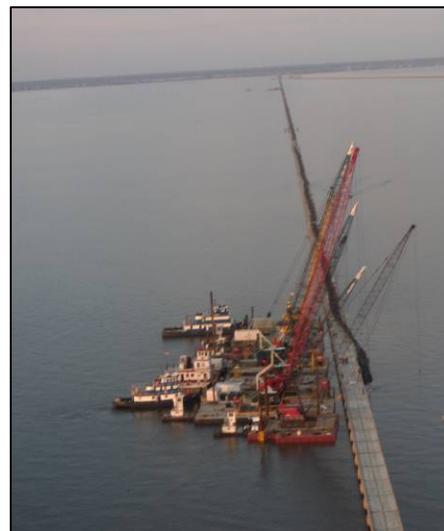
Norfolk Southern promised to have its Lake Ponchartrain Bridge restored for freight service ten days after the storm, and the railroad made that deadline, by marshalling a score of bargeborne cranes to lift the tracks back out of the shallow waters. NS has now restored service into New Orleans and reopened important interchange points with western rail carriers. NS began interchanging freight with BNSF and Union Pacific in New Orleans on Sept. 13.

Nearly five miles of track were washed from the top of the 5.8-mile long rail bridge and into the lake. Nine

cranes on barges were used to lift the track out of the water and back onto the bridge. Nine miles of track running through New Orleans required major repairs.

While repairs were being completed, freight that regularly traveled through New Orleans for connection to other carriers was rerouted through the railroad's other gateways.

"With the reopening of the Lake Pontchartrain Bridge, we are ready to assist in the transportation of supplies and materials in and out of the city," said Norfolk Southern President Wick Moorman. "We are committed to serv-



Cranes on barges lift 5 miles of track out of the waters of Lake Ponchartrain and set the rails back on the deck of the nearly 6-mile long bridge. NS restored service to the Crescent City in 10 days.

ing New Orleans over the long-term, and our rail line can serve as a vital link in the recovery process."

Amtrak service improving

The daily New York-to-New Orleans *Crescent* (trains 19&20) terminated in Atlanta for two weeks following the storm, and was then extended to Meridian, Mississippi. The *City of New Orleans* (trains 58 & 59) was terminating

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in Memphis and then in Hammond, Louisiana. The railroad plans to resume service to New Orleans on October 9th for both trains.

The picture is not as positive for the 3-days-a-week *Sunset Limited*, which ran from Los Angeles through New Orleans to Orlando, Florida. The *Sunset*, Amtrak's trains 1 & 2, are now operating only as far as San Antonio, Texas. Amtrak plans to extend the train to Houston and Beaumont, Texas soon, but the railroad reports that service into New Orleans will not start until next year at the earliest. Service to Orlando will take even longer to restore – much of CSX's track along the Gulf Coast simply vanished in the storm.

New Orleans – Baton Rouge commuter trains may be offered

The Kansas City Southern Railroad, along with FEMA, the Regional Transit Authority of New Orleans, Amtrak and the Capital Area Transit System are proposing that an 85-mile long commuter run be set up between the old KCS depot in Baton Rouge, and New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal in the Central Business District of New Orleans.

Officials are looking to FEMA to cover the \$25 million needed to operate the service for three years. Two trips in each direction would be offered.

A commuter train along this route will make it much easier for the approximately 200,000 New Orleans residents who have relocated to Baton Rouge to get in and out of New Orleans as rebuilding work begins. **I**



Indicative of the challenges faced by railroads, CSX's L&N bridge over Bay St. Louis was stripped of everything except the swing section and pylons. The railroad's line from New Orleans to Mobile was shattered and it will likely be several months before trains can use these routes again.

The Georgia Rail Report

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, CONTACT:
Office of Intermodal Programs at 404-651-9200

Rail dollars in Federal Bill

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-modal facility there and Moultrie will receive \$250,000 for an intermodal facility. The city of Jessup will receive \$890,000 to help convert their train depot into an intermodal center, and final design and construction is authorized for the Lovejoy to Griffin commuter rail line. Also, Atlanta will receive \$1.6 million to develop its Northside Drive into a "multimodal corridor," which could include light rail.

Elsewhere in the southeast, the rail route in South Carolina from Charleston and Myrtle Beach to Florence was designated as a high speed rail corridor.

Having the "Rail Title" in the bill is good news for freight and passenger rail development. \$100 million per year is authorized for high speed rail technology and corridor development. Corridor development is slated to get \$70 million a year (up from \$10 million a year in TEA-21) and technology development will be boosted to \$30 million a year.

Additionally, \$350 million a year is in the bill for rail line relocation projects. This program is meant primarily for freight railroads, but it can also assist in relocating rail lines to accommodate higher passenger train speeds. The local match required for these funds is 10%, the same as required for many highway projects. The popular Railroad Rehabilitation & Infrastructure Financing loan program (RRIF) from the previous two transportation bills was not in early drafts of the bill; however Congress kept the program and boosted funding to \$35 billion.

Also of interest to many communities in Georgia is the Small Starts Program. This program will help to fund projects that cost less than \$75 million. Funds for Small Starts will be available in 2007, after the FTA develops rules for the program. In addition SAFETEA-LU continues the tradition of covering 80% of the costs for new Starts Program projects, though it is understood that those sponsors who agree to cover much more than 20% of the local share of the costs will have a greater chance of obtaining approval.

While other states did receive more direct funding for freight, passenger, and transit rail projects, SAFETEA-LU still offers a great many opportunities for Georgia and her communities in the coming years to improve the flow of freight and passengers in and through the state and in our communities. **I**

INTERCITY UPDATE

Congress debates the future of intercity passenger rail

On September 21st, Amtrak Chairman David M. Laney testified before Congress that the temporary cessation of 150-mph Acela Express service in between Washington, New York and Boston in April had "no measurable impact on our ridership."

Amtrak had taken its high-speed *Acela Express* trains out of service in April when hairline cracks were found on many of the disc brakes on the cars and engines. A new, more robust disc was rushed into service. The *Acela* began running again in limited numbers in late July, however the railroad lost about \$1 million a week in revenue that the higher-priced trains had been bringing in. An Amtrak spokesman said that *Acela's* manufacturer will compensate the railroad for its loss. The ultimate amount is under negotiation.

While agreeing with many members of Congress that the railroad needs fundamental structural changes, he pointed out that Amtrak was making real progress in improving its financial position. The Chairman noted that the per-mile deficit for its trains had fallen from \$22 per-mile in 2000 to \$13 per-mile in 2004, that employment was down 2,000 to 19,500 over that period and still ridership had grown from 22.5 million to 25.1 million.

Some of the witnesses at the meeting of the Railroad Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, of which Georgia Congressman Lynn Westmoreland is vice-chairman, were not as supportive as Amtrak's Chairman.

Kenneth Mead, the US DOT's Inspector General, reported that Amtrak's losses for FY2004 were \$1.3 billion in FY2004, up from a low of \$797 million in 1997.

Mr. Meade claimed that the railroad was subsidizing its first-class passengers twice as much as its coach-class ones. He has recommended that Amtrak discontinue sleeping car and dining car service to save money, but rail supporters say that assumption



Motorists on I-85 at the Brookwood Interchange got a rare look at Atlanta's only passenger train, the *Crescent*, as it waited at Peachtree Station for her overnight run to New York. The train was turned in Atlanta for almost three weeks after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast; later it continued on to Meridian, Miss. and resumed service to its namesake city on October 9th.

is wrong. Tim Gillespie, Amtrak's former Vice President for Government Affairs, said "Legislating on food service costs was tried before, and it was a disaster. It hurt Amtrak's bottom line and we had to undo it."

The House has approved \$1.17 billion for Amtrak in the fiscal year that begins Oct. 1, roughly the same as 2005's amount, and the Senate Appropriations Committee has voted for \$1.45 billion. A "Continuing Resolution" is keeping Amtrak funded at last year's level until a new budget is approved. **I**

AROUND THE REGION

Greensboro, NC opens renovated depot

After 25 years, passenger train service has returned to downtown Greensboro, North Carolina. On October 1st at 12:30 a.m., passengers from Amtrak's *Crescent* became the first to patronize the depot since its doors were closed in 1979.

"With close and easy access to four colleges and universities as well as downtown businesses, museums, restaurants and shops, we know that Greensboro will become an even more popular destination for train passengers," said N.C. Transportation Secretary Lyndo Tippet.

Built in 1927, the renovated station replaces the suburban yard office that doubled as a passenger station for 26 years. "The renovation of the depot already has had a tremendous impact on development in downtown Greensboro," said Mayor Keith Holliday. "We're confident this station will continue to be a catalyst for activity and development in the downtown area."

The station also serves the *Carolinian* and the *Piedmont* passenger trains. **I**

