

Transport Central

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Interurban

METROLINER MUDDLE -- Those Penn Central high-speed "Metroliners" will be anything but fast in getting into service. The Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee (chaired by Colorado GOP Senator Gordon Allott) held hearings June 4th into delays on the Washington-New York segment of the Northeast Corridor Project, a joint venture between the Department of Transportation and the Penn Central, and witnesses included representatives of DOT, the Penn Central, the Budd Company (builders of the Metroliners) and various electrical suppliers including GE and Westinghouse. Under close questioning by Sen. Allott, and following prepared statements by most participants, James A. Miller, Vice-President and General Manager of the Budd Company admitted that "unless the railroad can accept the braking problems of the Westinghouse equipment, it is the estimate of the Westinghouse Electric Corporation that final resolution of the problem will take at least one year." This was later confirmed by a Westinghouse spokesman.

The braking was only one of several problems which have plagued the cars since initial testing began late last year. Also discussed at the hearing were difficulties with pantographs, ride quality and maintenance. The outlook for totally resolving all of the difficulties was less than encouraging. Just prior to the hearings a DOT task force, consisting of all of the principal parties which were represented at the probe, reported that if a crash program were continued by all parties to resolve the problems, service with the new equipment between New York and Washington could begin as early as the beginning of 1969. The statement at the hearings by Westinghouse made it clear that, in all probability, if service does begin the first of next year it will be with only 28 of the 50 Metroliners. Those would be 28 General Electric equipped cars. Penn Central Senior Vice President Robert Minor, who was the principal railroad spokesman at the hearings, said the Penn Central would only reluctantly begin service with less than 50 cars. Partial service, the railroad indicated, would consist of eight round trips between Washington and New York with six car trains. The new trains would consist of coach-snack bar cars and parlor coaches (no straight coaches would be involved in partial service, since all 20 coaches are Westinghouse equipped). Partial service would mean, according to the railroad, that additional trips contemplated between Philadelphia and New York with shorter trains would not be operated; such service could only begin when all 50 cars are delivered.

The Budd Company said that the last of the Metroliners should be assembled later this month, but emphasized that each car would have to be tested before delivery. It has been during the previous tests that the various problems have developed. The Director of the Office of High Speed Ground Transportation within DOT, Dr. Robert A. Nelson, testified that he was responsible for setting the October 29, 1967 date when the service was supposed to begin and for holding to it despite indications from the suppliers that the cars would not be ready for operation. He said that the main reason for the delays in service is that certain car components "worked well in a 'breadboard' situation in the shop but did not work when put on the cars, or at least did not work as well as they should have. I accept," said Nelson, "the responsibility for perhaps persistently adopting the assumption that what worked in the shop would work when it was put on the car. I confess having done that."

Senator Allott said he was concerned that all parties were experiencing such great difficulties with these cars when the Japanese have been operating the Tokaido trains for nearly four years. He said the suppliers should have the definite advantage of the experience of Japan as well as "what we are pleased to call the most sophisticated technological country in the world." Spokesmen for the Penn Central, the Budd Company, the suppliers and DOT all vigorously asserted that the Metroliner cars are far superior to the Tokaido trains. In all, several issues have yet to be resolved. Regarding the maintenance of what was described as the "most sophisticated piece of railway equipment in the world," the railroad and the Budd Company said they would do their best to insure that the cars would be adequately taken care of once they are in operation, but Dr. Nelson was less specific. "I am not guaranteeing any results, but we are going to make every effort possible," he said. In terms of the quality of the ride, Dr. Nelson conceded, "there have been differences between the Department (of Transportation) and the railroad in some cases as to achieving this exceptional ride. We have pushed hard to obtain it. I think we are probably going to fall somewhat short...but even if we do fall short, it is going to be far better than the ride on any equipment operating in passenger service in the United States with the exception of the TurboTrain."

For his part, Senator Allott has been asked by Committee Chairman John Stennis (D-Miss) to summarize the hearings and make recommendations for action to the full committee. He probably expressed the feelings of most of the committee members when he said, "for two years we have been seeing beautiful pictures of high speed trains...when these are painted in such glowing terms that they cause people to believe that tomorrow they can step on a high speed train and go from Washington to New York, I think you will understand our being disturbed by the delays..."

THE PASSENGER PROBLEM -- Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Warren Magnuson (D-Wash) has told Interstate Commerce Commission Chairman Paul J. Tierney to pay him a visit as soon as the Commission completes a preliminary analysis of intercity railroad passenger service with recommendations for action by the Congress. Presumably, at such a meeting Magnuson would decide either to hold hearings on the rail passenger problem (as the ICC has suggested) or request Senator Frank Lausche (D-Ohio), the Chairman of the Surface Transportation Subcommittee (of the Senate Commerce Committee), to hold another executive session to work on bills already before the subcommittee relating to passenger service. Such measures include moratorium approaches by Senators Moss of Utah and Allott of Colorado and ICC Act amendments by Senator Case (R-N. J.), and changes in the ICC itself proposed by Senator Magnuson. The last time Sen. Lausche scheduled an executive session of the Subcommittee he was the only member who showed up and the meeting was cancelled. There is a general feeling in committee circles that it might be a wiser move for the Subcommittee to act on the proposals

before it as opposed to spending more time to conduct hearings on a subject with which it is quite familiar. In the end, however, one additional day of hearings may be scheduled.

Although Penn Central officials deny it, the statement June 6th by Board Chairman Stuart Saunders proposing the creation of a National Railroad Passenger Council (delivered before the New York Chamber of Commerce) is seen as a clear response to the ICC's call for Congressional action on the rail passenger problem. Railroad spokesmen insist that Saunders had this idea for many months and had intended to talk about it at the Chamber meeting since he was booked in as a speaker weeks ago, but the timing of the Saunders proposal places it clearly in reaction to Tierney's earlier statement. Saunders wants the Passenger Council to include representatives of the public, the railroads and governmental transportation agencies. Some observers feel the rail industry is fearful of an over-reaction by the Congress to the rash of long-distance passenger train discontinuances, and hopes by means of such a council to prevent legislation requiring the continued operation of long-distance rail service. "Indeed," Saunders states, "with regard to our long-haul trains and virtually all the rest of our intercity trains, we have none of the redeeming features that are present in our commuter and New York-Washington service. There is little market potential, there is no predictable need, and there is no program of public support." Thus the passenger council would, according to Saunders, examine the requirements of federal participation in long-haul as well as commuter and intercity rail service.

Meanwhile, in other Congressional action, the Senate Commerce Committee will hold hearings through its Surface Transportation Subcommittee June 26th and 27th on the authorization bill to extend the funding of the Office of High Speed Ground Transportation. DOT is asking for a two year extension; betting is that a one year extension with a limited authorization in funds of \$16,200,000 will be finally adopted by both Houses. The Senate Transportation Appropriations Subcommittee has asked DOT to clearly state its intentions regarding a proposed test facility for high-speed vehicles. DOT is requesting nearly \$1 million in the FY-1969 budget for the facility, but thus far the Congress is not sure where it will be located or what kind of testing will be done at the site. For more than a year various site selection committees have been considering locations in Florida, Colorado, Idaho, California, Pennsylvania and other states, but there has been no indication yet as to which site will be selected or when; the Subcommittee wants to know. Apparently, DOT wants to test its linear electric motor in a conventional locomotive on a conventional track first, followed by tests of air cushion vehicles on a concrete test track. No one is sure just how serious DOT is about this facility; if the original timetable had been kept, construction would already have begun.

TWO FUNERALS -- The superb television coverage of last week's tragedy also clearly portrayed the funeral of another well-known national figure—the passenger train. If the continuing poor publicity engendered by the passenger train, i. e., wrecks, train-offs and attacks on the remaining runs has not deterred most people from riding trains, then the live coverage of Senator Robert F. Kennedy's funeral train should. The 21 ill-matched cars headed by GG-1's 4901 and 4903 left dingy and dark Penn Station late (as usual), met several well-reported operating and mechanical delays (as usual), forced slowdowns (usually attendant upon funeral trains and the crowds they draw), caused other accidents and service stoppages (not PC's fault), finally entering Washington's Union Station (which NBC's Ray Scherer found to be a hot, dingy and largely unused historical relic) over four hours late on a run originally scheduled to take four hours. Pro-rail Rhode Island Senator Claiborne Pell's wife told reporter Scherer that she wondered how anyone could take to the rails again after the day's events.

TRAINS AND TRADITIONS -- The L&N has made an agreement with the Order of Railway Conductors and Brakemen to run maximum 75 car freight trains with or without cabooses, manned by an engineer, conductor and brakeman only. ...Santa Fe wants to discontinue #14/15, Williams Jct.-Grand Canyon, under Section 13a(2) after the Arizona Corporation Commission told ATSF to run them "at least thru 1968"; otherwise Chico was allowed to institute new schedules on June 15 (T/C - 5/17/68)....June 30 is the planned date for rescheduling C&O #46, Detroit to Ashland (to leave Chicago at 1:20 PM instead of 6:30 PM so as to connect with C&O #2) and IC #3-4, Chicago-Memphis. Local stops are to be eliminated and the service is to be speeded up to attract riders from other "overloaded" services (barring ICC intervention)....PC #357, Ann Arbor to Chicago, must run until at least October 18, pending ICC hearings....California has granted a 5% fare increase on all intercity rail rates....N&W has discontinued #302/303, St. Louis-Detroit Limiteds with ICC permission....June 5 was the date for Chicago Great Western to merge with C&NW....JC has asked off for the Seminole south of Carbondale....United Aircraft's Turbo-Train hit 110 mph in tests on the PC main north of Washington Wednesday.

AIR HEADLINE HOPPING -- SAS has begun weekly direct flights from Chicago to Bergen, Norway....The Export-Import Bank has approved a \$16,000,000 loan to aid El Al Israel Airlines in buying two Boeing 707s and one 747.North Central has a CAB examiner's recommendation for nonstop service Minneapolis-St. Paul/Denver....NC and Western are sparring for Detroit/Milwaukee and Twin Cities/Milwaukee authority....Commuter has begun Chicago to Quad Cities nonstop service....The CAB has proposed a modified rate formula for subsidy payments to the 10 local service (regional/level II) airlines....The House has voted curbs on aircraft noise through DOT and the FAA.

Urban/Suburban

ONCE OVER QUICKLY -- HUD is providing 100% of the cost of the "scrip" plan on DC Transit. Drivers will not carry any change, and all riders not having exact change will be required to place the full amount tendered in the fare box, receiving scrip for the balance; no amount greater than \$1 will be accepted. T/C erred in reporting some of the details last week....Since yesterday, Baltimore Transit drivers have not been carrying their customary \$65 in change. Robberies and assaults have also plagued that city, and riders must now have a token o. 25¢ on boarding....The Chicago Transit Authority has been awarded a grant of \$13 million to help purchase 150 rapid transit cars from the Budd Company for use in the new J. F. Kennedy and Dan Ryan median strip lines.President Johnson, in a message to HUD, urged that the government begin "innovating" in providing new systems of transportation for the nation's commuters. He asked \$25 million to sustain HUD/UTA programs for 1969.Continental Air Transport has agreed to lower its fares between O'Hare and North Shore suburbs. CATCo upped the rates formerly charged by Waukegan-North Chicago Transit when it assumed that company's airport route three weeks ago....The Northeastern Illinois Planning Commission, acting as the area's agency responsible for approving transit proposals requiring Federal participation, has okayed the Southward Transit Area Coordination Committee's survey of existing services in four Chicagoland area Illinois and Indiana counties.