

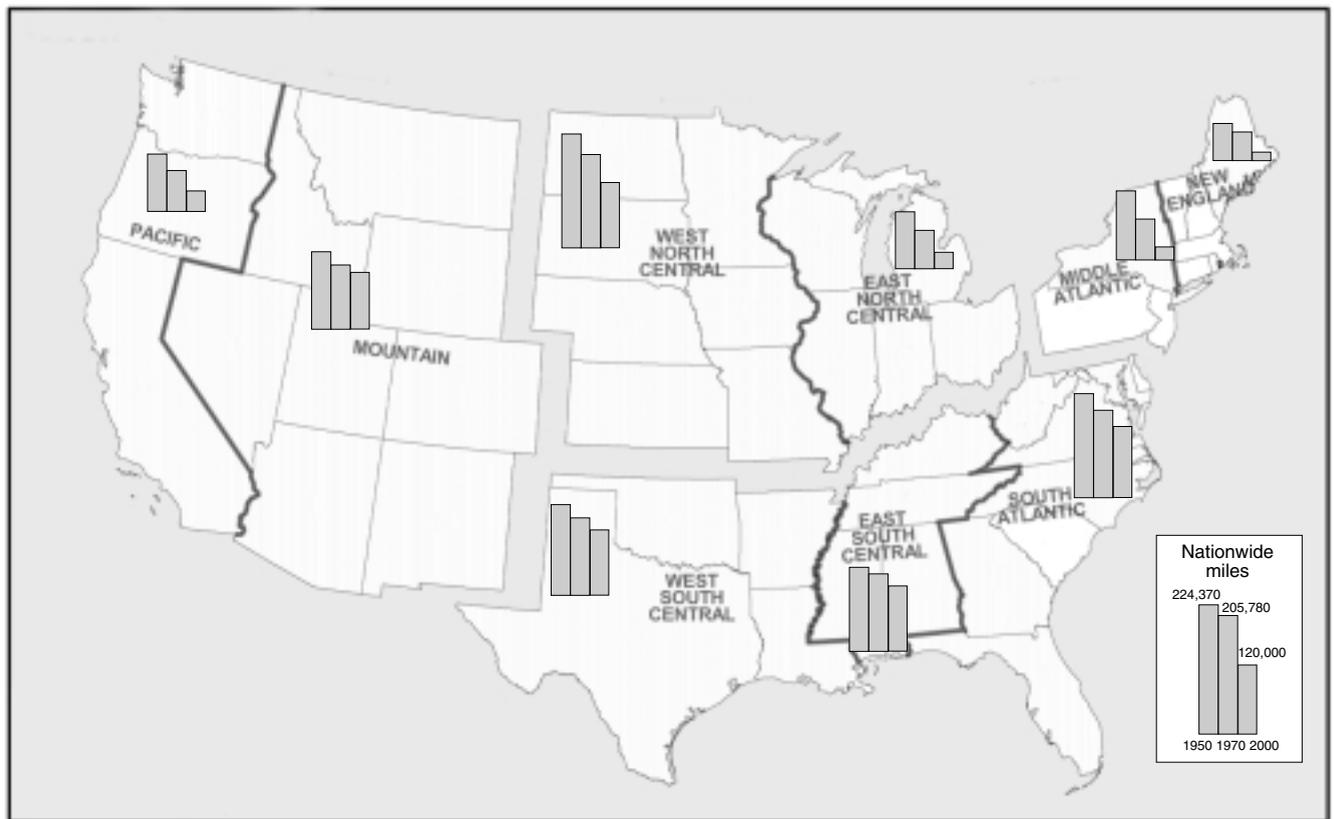
Cheney/Bush Break Amtrak and Freight Rail, Air Transport Sinks Again

by Marcia Merry Baker and Paul Gallagher

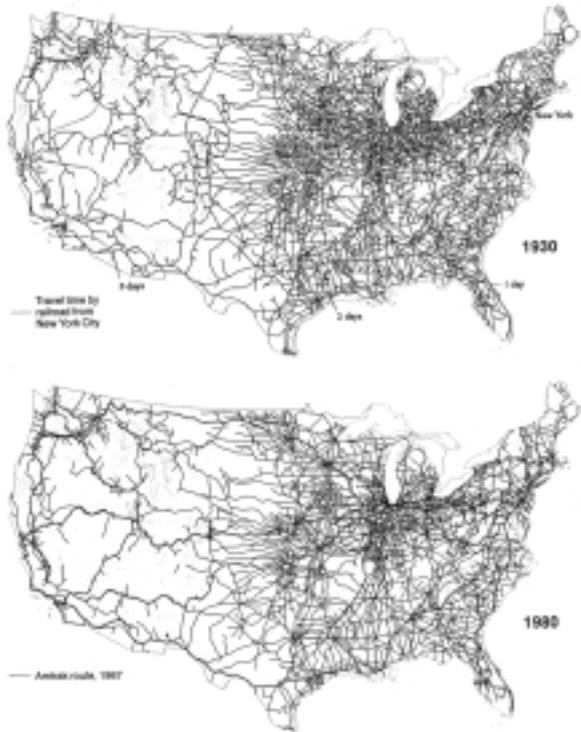
Both the passenger and freight rail systems of the United States are in crisis. For the fourth year in a row, the Bush-Cheney Administration has proposed a FY2005 budget outlay for Amtrak—some \$900 millions—which is barely half of the minimum amount Amtrak needs to keep passenger service

going, without capital improvements. Amtrak spokesman Clint Black said in mid-September, that unless Congress overrides the Bush-Cheney action, wholesale shutdown of national passenger train service will start in February. Amtrak President David L. Gunn had warned that the Administra-

FIGURE 1
Decline in Railroad-Track Mileage, 1950, 1970 and 2000, by Region
(Miles of Track)



Source: U.S. Department of Transportation



Travel by numbers

Only a three-day train trip separated New York City from Los Angeles in 1930—but airlines flew the distance in just 30 hours. Though the country was crisscrossed by tracks, the family car was already taking Americans five times farther than trains. Even air-conditioned Pullman cars could not reverse the trend.

Cutting losses

A losing proposition since the mid-1950s, passenger service was reorganized in 1971. Amtrak ran on 24,000 route miles (orange) in 1987. Much consolidated since 1916, freight lines (black) by 1980 were doing more than twice the work on two-thirds the trackage. In 1986 U. S. trackage composed a respectable 29 percent of the world's total railroad mileage.

tion's budget "is a shutdown number."

Cuts are already being made in Amtrak service and routes, adding to other eliminations made in the late 1990s, due to the cumulative effect of three years of Bush-Cheney underfunding, on top of the impact of the Newt Gingrichite 1997 "Reform Amtrak" law. To pare down operations—even in hope of adequate funding in FY2005—Amtrak is closing down routes and stops in Florida, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. On Nov. 1, the Palmetto will cease running to Tampa, eliminating service to four cities in between; and a train from New York City to Chicago will cease, along the Three Rivers route through Pittsburgh. By next March, three stops in Ohio and one in Indiana will be eliminated. In 2003, passenger rail service to Louisville, Kentucky was ended.

Topping this off, is the crisis in commercial aviation. US Airways, Delta, United, Alaska Airlines, and other carriers are currently in impossible financial situations, soluble only through Federal re-regulation of transportation, debt reorganization, and infrastructure development. The Bush-Cheney do-nothing policy amounts to, "watch-'em-crash." It satisfies international financiers backing discount, low-ball airlines, and many other varieties of quick-buck schemes.

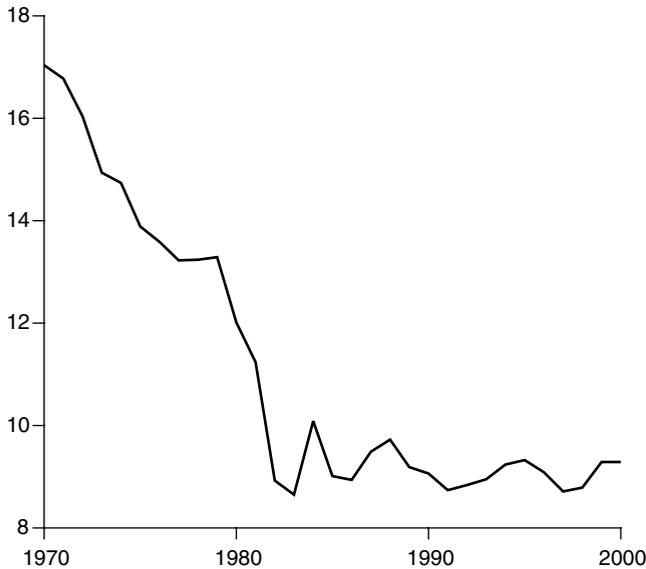
A 1988 mapping study by National Geographic in its Bicentennial Historical Atlas showed the loss of rail lines in the United States rail grid between 1930 and 1980. The loss has worsened since.

Fight on the Hill

Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.) said on Sept. 15, "This appropriations bill continues the conscious, deliberate underfunding of Amtrak." An open fight is now under way on Capitol Hill over the future of Amtrak, with Bush-Cheney ideologues in the House of Representatives using neo-con ideology to flaunt their readiness to shut down national rail passenger service altogether. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) is ranting that "reform" of Amtrak is needed prior to funding. Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-Colo.) calls it "Scamtrak," and interceded to get *all* funding for the railroad temporarily stricken from the budget bill. Strongly opposing this view are many Democrats, and also some Republicans, whose constituents are furious about threats to eliminate national passenger rail.

The central principle that national interest demands a national rail service, is being voiced in the Senate by Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.). On Sept. 9, he engineered passage by the Senate Appropriations Committee, of more than \$1.2 billion—still completely inadequate to operation and investment—for Amtrak. Working with Byrd is Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.) on the Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Transportation. The full Senate will soon take up the expanded Amtrak funding. Byrd said Sept. 9, "National passenger rail service should be truly national. It should include big cities and small communities. For many rural communities, Amtrak is the primary transportation link to the rest of the nation."

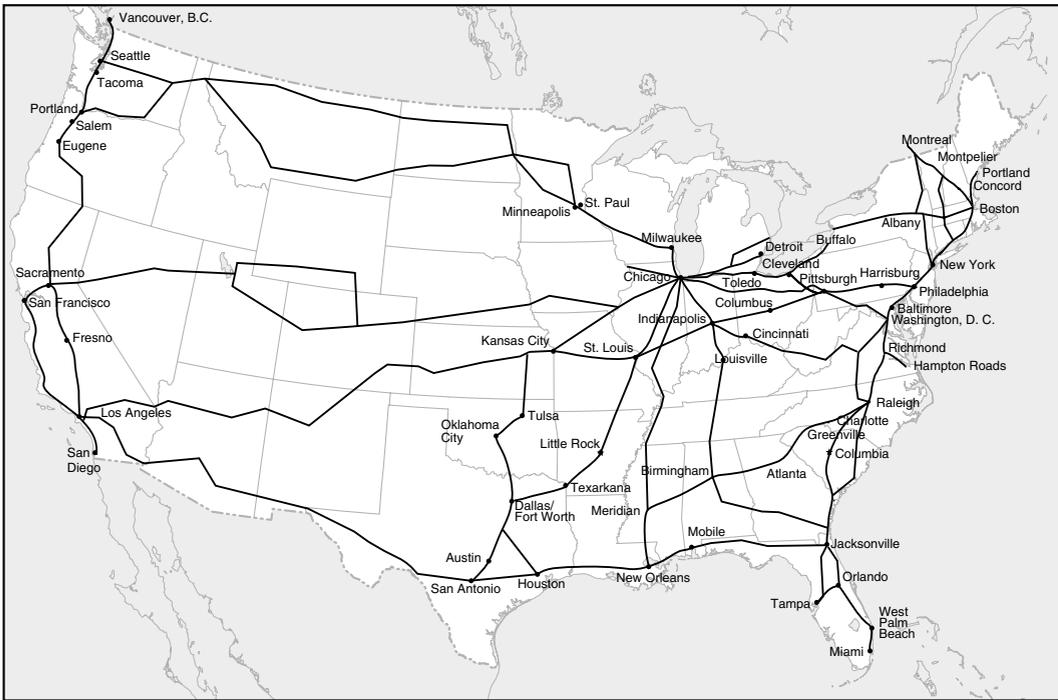
Rail Industry's Shipping of Tons of Goods Other Than Coal, Per Household



Source: Association of American Railroads; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census.

The remaining national rail grid has become good for little but hauling coal to power plants, adding gross inefficiency to the entire U.S. physical economy.

FIGURE 2
1971—AMTRAK Founding—Major Routes



Source: Amtrak.

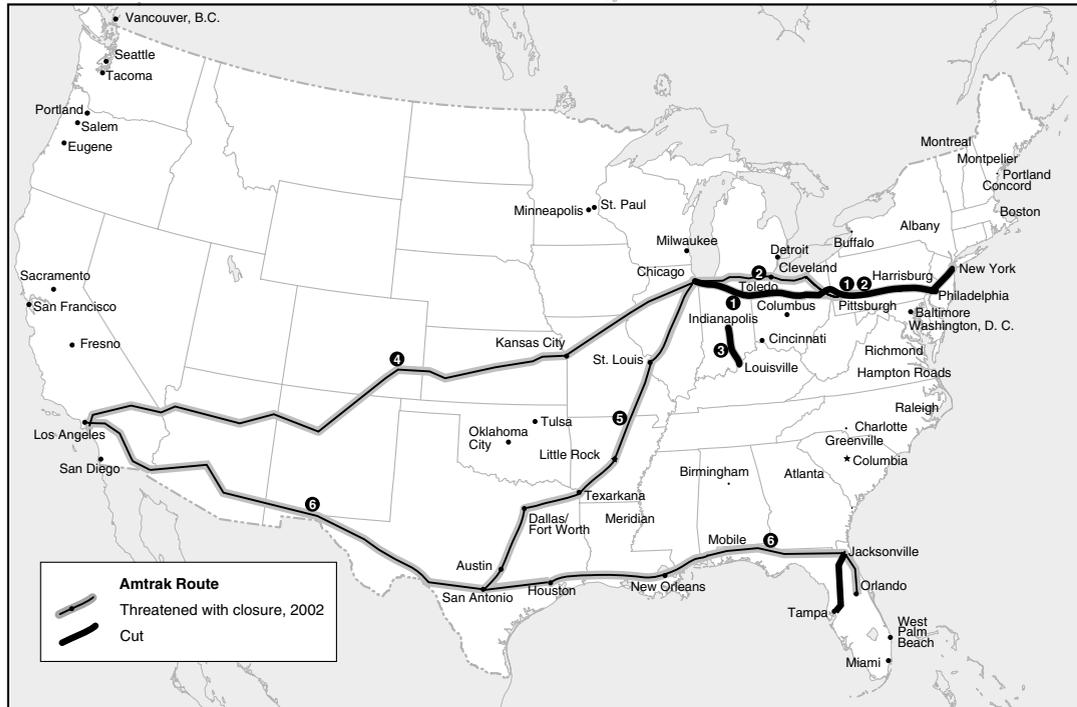
FIGURE 3
2002—AMTRAK Routes Lost Since 1971



Source: Amtrak (1971, 2002); EIR.

FIGURE 4

Amtrak 2002-2005: Additional Lines Lost and Threatened by Cheney-Bush Budget Cuts



Source: Amtrak (1971, 2002); *EIR*.

As of September 2002, the numbered lines showed the routes threatened with shutdown due to funding cuts: (1) *Three Rivers*—Chicago and New York City; (2) *Pennsylvanian*—Chicago and Philadelphia; (3) *Kentucky Cardinal*—Chicago and Louisville; (4) *Southwest Chief*—Chicago and Los Angeles; (5) *Texas Eagle*—Chicago and San Antonio; (6) *Sunset Limited*—Los Angeles and Florida.

As of 2003, Amtrak service to Louisville was eliminated (3). On Nov. 1, 2004, service will be cut between Jacksonville and Tampa, Florida when the *New York-to-Miami Palmetto* train is cancelled. Also Nov. 1, a train will be eliminated on the *Three Rivers* route (1). On March 5, 2005, service will be cut on the *Pittsburgh-to-Chicago* route, ending service to Youngstown, Akron, and Fostoria, Ohio, and Nappanee, Indiana.

Worsening the Rail Grid's Shrinkage

Lyndon LaRouche, as a Democratic Presidential candidate during the 2002 mid-term elections, released a national emergency infrastructure program, as the airlines crisis was worsening and the White House drastically underfunding Amtrak. LaRouche said on Sept. 11, 2002, "What we need *immediately*—and I want President Bush to do it right now, right now!—I want him to go to the Congress, and get that collection of people of various qualities, and get them to sign on, to a re-regulation of the U.S. railway and airway system." LaRouche commissioned a mass circulation pamphlet—since then reprinted to over a million copies—on rebuilding vital infrastructure.

Figure 1 shows the decline in of rail track mileage from 1950, to 1970, to 2000, by region of the country. Since 1970, the nation has lost 35%—some 77,400 miles—of Class I

track miles (which counts multiple main tracks, sidings, railyard lines, etc.). The 1970-2000 decline accelerated a trend already under way over decades earlier. The peak of rail density was in 1926. After that, losses were the rule. In 1988, the National Geographic Society analyzed this process in a Bicentennial edition of its *Historical Atlas of the United States*, mapping rail density in 1930 and 1980, showing the latter obviously far more sparse.

Amtrak itself was first created in 1971, after the bankruptcy of the Pennsylvania Railroad and other passenger carriers, and began with some 27,000 track miles. Its major routes in 1971 are shown in **Figure 2**. But as of 2000, its track miles had dropped by nearly 20%, and today stand at 22,000. **Figure 3** shows what significant sections had been lost over the decades from 1971-2002. For example, service was eliminated between Denver; Cheyenne, Wyoming; and

FIGURE 5

East North Central Region: Rail Lines in 1970, Abandoned by 2000



John Sigerson / EIRNS 2002

Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Bush-Cheney systematic underfunding has guaranteed more cuts, mapped in **Figure 4**. In Summer 2002, Amtrak President Gunn listed the routes in jeopardy—shown in shaded, numbered lines. These cuts are now occurring. The Louisville to Indianapolis line (3) has been terminated. One of the Three Rivers (1) trains will be eliminated in November, between New York City and Chicago; and as of March, service will be terminated to Youngstown, Akron, and Fostoria, Ohio; and to Nappanee, Indiana. Also this November, the Jacksonville to Tampa route will be gone.

Gunn, Amtrak’s president since 2002, has saved costs by firing dozens of the neo-con drones in Amtrak management, who were given lucrative offices after the 1997 Amtrak “Reform” Act was passed! Gunn said he could not even find what some of these top officeholders did. Focussing on eliminating the management overhang and returning Amtrak to a traditional railroad organizational structure, Gunn re-

duced total employees from 23,393 in May 2002 down to 19,976 at the end of 2003. But more, not fewer operations workers are urgently needed to keep the system running.

In 2003, Gunn launched a five-year, \$4.5 billion capital plan, based on state and other monies as well as Federal funds. This is far below what a full-scale upgrade of passenger rail—including introducing high-speed rail—would cost. But now, the whole system is at stake. Senator Byrd decried the Amtrak takedown process on Sept. 9: “For too long, Congress and presidential administrations have set unrealistically high standards for Amtrak while providing terrible, low funding. Amtrak is showing the wear and tear of its more than three decades of operation and is suffering the effects of a beleaguered national economy.”

Blame Cheney

Figure 5 shows the rail density lost in the North Central states between 1970 and 1996, as mapped by the U.S. Geological Survey. Shown in **Figure 5** are all lines *lost* since 1970.

Vice President Dick Cheney has personal involvement in the rail takedown. During the later 1990s, he was a director of Union Pacific,

now the largest railroad in America, during its 1997 takeover of the Southern Pacific Railroad. Cheney emphatically backed his buddy, UP President Dick Davidson, in carrying out ferocious cost-cutting to pay for the merger. This meant shutting down rolling stock, laying off workers, consolidating operations; the merged railroad was cut to the bone. As a result, the very next year, the merged Union Pacific-Southern Pacific was *unable to function*—the Fall 1998 grain harvest piled up on the ground all over the farm states; coal couldn’t move, while hundreds of railcars backed up in Texas.

The Cheney-Davidson legacy continues. This year, the Union Pacific, which carries one-third of all U.S. rail freight volume, is in crisis condition. Delivery of cargo is running weeks and months late. The Union Pacific now has announced an official policy of turning away freight customers, which it can’t handle. The average speed of its trains, which was a pathetic 25 miles per hour in January 2003, is down to 21 mph now.