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40th Anniversary
Things Were Not the Same after May 1, 1971

by George E. Kanary

D-Day for Amtrak

In mid April, 1971, I was returning from Seattle, Washington on my favorite train to the Pacific Northwest, the NORTH COAST LIMITED. For nearly 70 years, the flagship train of the Northern Pacific RR, one of the oldest named trains in the country, had closely followed the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804, and was definitely the super scenic way to Seattle and Portland. My first association with the North Coast Limited dated to 1948, when I took my first long distance train ride alone at age 10, to and from the State of Washington. The train still had some heavyweight sleepers, but the streamlined observation car, where I spent a lot of time, was making only its second round trip. You could still smell the fresh paint.

Sitting in my room and watching the Mississippi rolling along outside my window, sorrow came over me like a dark cloud as I realized that this train, running over this magnificent piece of high speed railroad, would no longer exist in two weeks.

The senior crews that held down the glamour runs like the NORTH COAST and the EMPIRE BUILDER, by then combined east of the Twin Cities, would go back into freight service or retire. The friendly stewardess-nurses would find other employment. The locomotives and cars would go into the AMTRAK fleet and be dispersed country wide, some even winding up running on the other side of the river on the Milwaukee Road to the Twin Cities.

That was only one example of the services that would be lost with the advent of AMTRAK on May 1, 1971. Chicago would be hit hard with the cutback of train services. No longer would the ladies of Danville, Illinois be able to ride the train to Chicago for a day of shopping and return home by early evening. Nor would the folks from Clinton, Iowa have a similar service any longer. Indeed, there would be no passenger service anywhere on the Chicago & Northwestern RR, including, amazingly, Green Bay, Wisconsin. There would be no Madison trains on the Milwaukee Road route. All of the Union Pacific trains whose routes took them out of Chicago over the west line of the Milwaukee Road would be terminated. These were just a few of the trains lost in what I considered to be an inauspicious beginning to the new service. Even the new name, AMTRAK, was a disappointment to me, since I preferred the classier sounding RAILPAK, which was eliminated at nearly the last moment.

In addition, wasn’t AMTRAK really being brought into existence to eliminate the passenger train in America? Didn’t President Richard M. Nixon only sign the authorization bill because it was attached to something else he badly wanted? Wasn’t Roger Lewis, the new CEO and president of the new corporation an oil industry man with no railway experience? Weren’t the new locomotives that were anticipated to be ordered, freight engines that would be sold to the freight railroads when passenger service ended? There were a lot of questions unanswered.

The railroads that went into Amtrak did so by turning over their locomotives and cars, servicing facilities and some depots in lieu of cash, based on a formula that determined the amount of their alleged passenger train losses. While the equipment of

— We certainly did not see Turboliners in regular service in Chicago before Amtrak. This train is headed for St. Louis in August 1977. — All photos by the author except as noted.
the western roads was considered to be in relatively good to excellent condition, the equipment of the eastern lines, with the exception of the Southern, which did not immediately join AMTRAK, was mostly realized to be borderline junk. Even the Budd built cars of those lines, considered as built to last forever, were in severely deteriorated condition. Nonetheless, these cars had to be used and western route passengers, long used to traveling in high style, were occasionally treated to the spectacle of riding in an under maintained, worn out car that came from the Penn Central. The folks at the Santa Fe who had never faltered in the flawless operation of their passenger trains must have cringed when they first heard the new AMTRAK slogan, “We’re making the trains worth riding again”. Soon it was announced that John Reed, CEO of that road, had revoked the use of the copyrighted name, SUPER CHIEF, because, among other indignities, it was learned that the lounge cars and diners were serving Manhattans in Martini glasses! What would Mr. Reed think of today’s airline style plastic?

Nearly two generations have come of age since AMTRAK was founded and for many people it is the only passenger trains they have ever known. All thoughts of elimination of the service ended when the gasoline shortages of the early 1970s arrived. A terrible inconvenience for motorists, the shortages, whether real or contrived, were providential for the fledgling new passenger railroad. People descended on the train stations across the country, and when they did, they discovered that many of the archaic practices of the past had been eliminated. No longer did the traveler have to pay a hefty first class fare in addition to a charge for a sleeping car space, and reservations were now uniform, nationwide. The short haul trains had been modernized with Amfleet cars and new locomotives were arriving. Despite the entire amazing acceptance of the new American passenger train and its ever increasing passenger loadings, Amtrak continues to be a political punching bag. The present administration is the first to acknowledge that it deserves proper funding and must continue, though there are many friends of the railroad on both sides of the aisles in Washington.

While many of the famous names of the passenger trains have been maintained and some new ones added, AMTRAK has become a generic name denoting passenger service across the nation. On a recent outing to the beautiful Chicago Botanic Gardens near Glencoe, Illinois, I spent a few minutes watching the operation of the Garden Railroad, a big treat for the young and old, as it winds its way through the scenes created from natural materials, over high trestles and low waterways. A train that was a model of the German high speed Intercity Express, the ICE train, was operating but it was painted in the AMTRAK color scheme. A group of young boys carefully watched for it to appear and when it did, several of them dutifully called out, "HERE COMES AMTRAK"! AMTRAK had definitely arrived.

Chicago, long known as the railroad capitol of North America and still today, the heart of the Amtrak system, lost many of it’s passenger trains on Amtrak Day, May 1, 1971. In time all intercity trains were consolidated at Union Station, fulfilling a long time dream of Chicago city planners. But for a period of just under a year some trains continued to operate out of Central Station, the Lakefront home of the Illinois Central trains as well as trains of the New York Central bound for Detroit and Cincinnati.
### Amtrak Chronology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-14-69</td>
<td>Association of American Railroads announces that its board has voted to ask for Federal subsidies for passenger trains and a Federal passenger car pool.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-11-69</td>
<td>Twenty eight senators sign a resolution asking for a study of subsidies or government operation.</td>
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<td>9-29-69</td>
<td>Senate Transportation Committee begins hearings.</td>
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<td>1-18-70</td>
<td>Department of Transportation announces its “RAILPAX” plan, involving formation of a National Railroad Passenger Corporation. The proposal is opposed by the Office of Management and Budget.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-6-70</td>
<td>Railpax bill is passed by Senate, 78-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-14-70</td>
<td>House passes its own RAILPAX bill, which is accepted by Senate on a voice vote.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-30-70</td>
<td>President Nixon signs the RAILPAX bill.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-30-70</td>
<td>Transportation Secretary Volpe announces end points for preliminary route system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-28-71</td>
<td>End points for final route system are announced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-22-71</td>
<td>Exact routes and stops are announced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-19-71</td>
<td>It is announced that NRPC will operate under the name AMTRAK rather than RAILPAX.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-1-71</td>
<td>Amtrak assumes responsibility for intercity passenger train operation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-10-71</td>
<td>Add LAKE SHORE LIMITED, Chicago-Cleveland-Buffalo-New York.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-20-71</td>
<td>Add one train, Philadelphia-New York-New Haven-Springfield-Boston. (Inland route)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-6-71</td>
<td>Add NORTH COAST HIAWATHA, Chicago-Minneapolis-Fargo-Bismarck-Butte-Sandpoint-Spokane-Seattle.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-10-71</td>
<td>CITY OF NEW ORLEANS wreck kills 10 passengers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-1-71</td>
<td>JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY, (Chicago-Cincinnati) and GEORGE WASHINGTON, (Cincinnati-Washington-Newport News), through-routed.</td>
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Information was compiled by John Swider
Amtrak Followup

Change came quickly to the passenger train scene on May 1, 1971. My friend, Robert ‘Bob’ Campbell, now and for some time, the senior Amtrak engineer in zone 8, the Midwest region, was a Burlington Northern fireman on that day. Having had April 30th off, he deadheaded west on the evening of the 30th to Galesburg, Illinois to work number 20 into Chicago, which departed Galesburg eastbound at 2:40 am, only to find that it had been annulled. The American Royal Zephyr no longer existed.

It didn’t take long for the folks along the route of the American Royal and the Kansas City Zephyr to complain loudly to anyone in the Statehouse or Washington who would listen to their complaints about being left with no passenger service. While the service had been seriously eroded under the regime of CEO Louis Menk, at least something survived and now Amtrak had taken it away. The 403b provision of the Amtrak enabling bill which required the states serviced by local trains to pay for that service was implemented and the result was the institution of the ‘Illinois Zephyr’, a local daytime train serving all stops between Chicago and Quincy, Illinois.

The equipment first used on this train was the former Chicago & Northwestern ‘Bi-Level Streamliner’ coaches including the ‘Sip and Snack’ lounge cars and an EMD F-7 locomotive.

The cars were acceptable enough, but the locomotive was apparently pure junk, and it and the entire train were seen on many occasions being dragged in behind a Burlington Northern freight engine. It was, however, a preview of the future for Amtrak in that all the utilities on the train were powered by electricity, the 480 Volts AC being generated on the locomotive for light, heat and air conditioning, the use of steam, propane powered air conditioning drives and axle driven lighting generators and batteries being a thing of the past.

From the first day, the on board service crews, the dining and lounge car staff and the sleeping car attendants became Amtrak employees. The operating department people, the conductors, brakemen and engineers continued for many years as employees of the host railroads which contracted with Amtrak for service and billed it on a monthly basis. Rumors about abuses of the system by the railroads abounded, for example, the Burlington Northern allegedly billed Amtrak for all of its...
switching and hosting, including all of its suburban trains.

The corporation began to employ the train crews directly beginning with the Northeast Corridor in 1982 and by the early 1990s the conversion was complete.

As a railfan, engineer, trainmaster and road foreman of engineers, Bob Campbell watched with interest as the Amfleet cars arrived, first hauled by steam boiler equipped EMD E-8s and E-9s, utilizing former US Army baggage cars converted to head end power cars. Soon the big EMD SDP40Fs arrived in 1973, steam boiler equipped, the plan being to slide out the boiler package and replace it with a head end power unit but as it more widely appeared, a series of locomotives that could easily be sold to the freight railroads when Amtrak was shut down. They were followed by the P30CH engines from General Electric in 1976, a design based on the U30CG locomotives built for the Santa Fe.

With their sixteen point throttles and high riding trucks, they were much disliked by engineers but still survived in service until 1992. They were the first locomotives that Amtrak ordered that were delivered with head end power alternators. Despite their faults, they were typical GE locomotives in that they could ‘Dig in and haul’, and were regulars on the long Amtrak Auto Train, which commonly handled up to 48 cars.

The SDP40Fs were plagued with derailment problems including a number of high speed wrecks attributed to the design of the draft gear on the rear of the locomotive as well as the rigidity of the trucks. They didn’t last long, being taken out of service by the late 1970s and replaced with the EMD F40, at first considered to be the locomotive for short haul trains. The first 30 of the F40s were delivered in 1976, all equipped with head end power, while a number of the second order were delivered as rebuilt SDP40Fs, the rebuilding being only items like the control stands, prime mover, and traction motors. They were based on the successful design of the GP40-2, having the same trouble-free electronics and along with subsequent orders with large fuel tanks, became the workhorse of the Amtrak fleet, 216 of them operating around the country. Even though there were varieties of locomotives purchased, some of them second hand when the corporation found itself in a motive power pinch, they held sway until they began to be replaced by the smooth riding streamlined GE P40s and the powerful P42s. Amtrak today has 351 diesel and 74 electric locomotives from many builders as well as a few former electric MU cars and has had over the years exotics like the Turbo Trains. The rail car fleet standardized on the Double deck ‘Superliners’ while utilizing Phase 2 Amfleet cars and the newly designed ‘Viewliners’ on most of the eastern routes and Phase 1 Amfleet and Horizon cars on the short haul trains.

Today, with 42 years of railroading behind him, 23 of them as an engineer of Amtrak trains, especially, the prestigious Southwest Chief, and a long time serving as the local chairman and treasurer of his BLE division, Bob Campbell is looking forward to retirement, to build the ‘O’ scale model railroad that has eluded him for many years. Such is the life of an engineer working six days a week, with half of one’s life spent away from home.

One would suppose that he has seen it all, yet Amtrak is on the cusp of a new age, the beginning of the high speed era. The service continues to expand despite the economy with another train now running on the 403B route that began it all, the Chicago-Quincy ‘Carl Sandberg’ as well as the original Illinois Zephyr. Two generations have come of age in the 40 years since the Amtrak D Day. Amtrak has likewise come of age, routinely and effectively going about its business of carrying ever increasing millions of passengers. On its 40th anniversary we wish it continued success and look forward to the new age of rail passenger transportation.
Looking north from Taylor Street in May 1977, the Southwest Limited is pacing a Burlington Northern suburban train. Seconds later a Detroit train followed. When Amtrak assumed the Chicago-Los Angeles train the traditional name, Super Chief - El Capitan, was retained. El Capitan was dropped in 1973. John Shedd Reed, Santa Fe’s president, withdrew permission to use the name Super Chief in 1974 when he believed Amtrak’s service did not live up to the traditions of “his railroad’s” Super Chief. The train was then named the Southwest Limited. After Amtrak equipment and service was upgraded, the train became known as the Southwest Chief beginning with the October 28, 1984, timetable. The 500-series locomotives were adapted from a freight design. Both the Santa Fe and BN restricted the operating speeds of these locomotives due to suspected damage to the track structures. The locomotives were designed for lower speed heavy-haul freight service rather than high-speed freight service. Their replacements, also built by the Electro-Motive Division, were the 200-series. With their four-wheel trucks, they were more suitable for high-speed passenger service as well as commuter train service.
Amtrak’s desire to consolidate all of its operations at Chicago Union Station resulted in the closing of Illinois Central’s Central Station. Trains operating on the IC, such as The Illini, had to back in and out of Union Station and traverse the St. Charles Air Line. This outbound train is about to cross Canal Street at 16th Street.

E-units did not survive the arrival of the 200-series locomotives. Near the end of its service life on Amtrak, the 417 is leading the Abraham Lincoln, southbound through Lemont, Illinois in July 1978. This train will be stopping at Joliet in a few minutes.
Trains maintained or rerouted on Amtrak startup day, May 1, 1971.

All trains from Union Station except as noted:

Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe: #15,16, Texas Chief, #17,18, Super Chief-El Capitan

Burlington Northern: #1,2, Denver Zephyr, #17,18, carried as part of Denver Zephyr, tri weekly beyond Denver to Oakland, CA, via Union Pacific and Southern Pacific RR

Illinois Central: #1,2, City of New Orleans, #9,10, Shawnee, from Central Station.

Gulf Mobile & Ohio: #1,2, Abraham Lincoln, #3,4, The Limited.

Penn Central: PRR #48,49, Broadway Limited, NYC #14,17, Chicago-Detroit. NYC #303,304, Chicago-Cincinnati, #90-93, The South Wind, from Central Station.

Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul & Pacific: #9,23,27,12,24,46, daily, Milwaukee express trains, #31,32, daily, Empire Builder. Rerouted from Burlington Northern to Milwaukee Road.

All information for this list was compiled by John Swider, a timetable collector since 1939 and a member of the National Association of Timetable Collectors. John provided the author with all the timetables and information pertinent to April 30 and May 1, 1971.

Chicago trains not associated with Amtrak:

Chicago Rock Island & Pacific: #11,12, daily, Peorian, #5-9, 6-8, daily, Quad Cities, intercity service. Chicago-Blue Island-Joliet suburban train service, from LaSalle Street station

Burlington Northern: Chicago-Elgin suburban train service

Chicago & North Western: Chicago-Kenosha-Harvard-Genoa suburban train service, from Northwestern Station

Milwaukee Road: Chicago-Fox Lake-Elgin suburban train service

Illinois Central: Chicago-Richton Park-Blue Island, South Shore District Electric suburban train service, from Randolph Street station

Penn Central: Chicago-Valparaiso suburban train service, later operated by Amtrak

Gulf Mobile & Ohio: Chicago-Joliet suburban train service

Norfolk & Western: Chicago-Orland Park suburban train service, from new platform adjacent to Dearborn Station

Chicago South Shore & South Bend: Chicago-Michigan City suburban train service, Chicago-South Bend intercity service from Randolph Street station
Things Were Not the Same after May 1, 1971
Chicago Trains Discontinued at Amtrak Startup:
Norfolk & Western, former Wabash: #121,124, City of Decatur.
Atchison Topeka & Santa Fe: #1,2 San Francisco Chief, #23,24, former Grand Canyon.
Louisville & Nashville, former C&EI: #3,4, City of Danville.
Baltimore & Ohio: #5,6, Capitol Limited. From C&NW Station
Chesapeake & Ohio, Pere Marquette district: #8,9, Pere Marquette. From C&NW Station
Burlington Northern, former CB&Q: #5,6, former Kansas City Zephyr, #7,10 Morning Zephyr, #8,9, Afternoon Zephyr, #19,20, former American Royal Zephyr, #25,26, North Coast Limited, #31,32, Empire Builder, #11,12, former Nebraska Zephyr, off before Amtrak.
Chicago & North Western: #121, 149, 153, 209, 152, 160, 206, 216, Milwaukee, Green Bay, Menominee, Ashland, WI, #1,2 Clinton, Iowa. Former Kate Shelly 400
Illinois Central: #3,4, Mid American, #5,6, Panama Limited, #7,8, Illini, #11,12, Hawkeye, #21,22, Governor's Special, #52,53, every other day, City of Miami.
Gulf, Mobile & Ohio: #5,6, Midnight Special.
Penn Central former Pennsylvania and New York Central railroads:
PRR #22,23, Manhattan Limited, #50, The Admiral, #54,55, Pennsylvania Limited, every other day #90,93, South Wind, NYC #27,28, 51,52, 61,62, 63,64,
Chicago Milwaukee St. Paul & Pacific: MILW #5,6, Morning Hiawatha, #11,22, The Sioux, #117,118, The Varsity, #56, The Fast Mail. MILW-UP #101,102, daily, City of San Francisco. #103,104 daily, City of Los Angeles-Challenger, #105,106, daily, City of Portland, #111,112, daily, City of Denver. All above combined in one train, lead numbers, 103-111, 112-104, nicknamed, “City of Everywhere”.

Information was compiled by John Swider

The route of the California Zephyr is shown as running over the D&RGW whereas this did not take place. The train ran over the Union Pacific through Wyoming west from Denver to Salt Lake.