

# AMTRAK CHUGS IN WITH FEW ABOARD

Little Confusion or Fanfare  
and Usual Low Patronage  
Mark New Day on Rails

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

The National Railroad Passenger Corporation, known as Amtrak, took over the remnants of the nation's long-neglected, deficit-ridden intercity passenger railroads yesterday with little evident confusion, customarily low patronage and a number of whistle-stop ceremonies.

The semi-nationalization of the passenger rails, achieved after months of debate and challenges in Congress and the Federal courts, was ushered in without fanfare or trouble in most cities.

For thousands of railroad workers, the transition will mean a loss of jobs in months ahead. While the new system will run 182 trains touching more than 300 cities, a total of 178 passenger trains, many of them famed names of Americana, were dropped.

Many of these trains made

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**HOPEFUL:** John A. Volpe, right, Transportation Secretary; Roger Lewis, center, president of Amtrak, and David Margulies, designer, in new car of Metroliner at Penn Station.

**The New York Times**

Published: May 2, 1971

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# Amtrak Chugs In With Few Aboard

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their last runs yesterday, some in the glory of nostalgic champagne farewells, others in the ignominy of defeat. The Manhattan Limited broke down on its final run from Chicago to New York, and a New England train hit a truck.

Many riders on final runs were people who had not been aboard a train for years, or children whose parents did not want them to miss a ride on one of the fading relics of America's railroading past.

Amid the backward looks, however, there were expressions of hope. In New York, Secretary of Transportation John A. Volpe led an inaugural ceremony by declaring that Amtrak would begin "a new era in intercity railroad passenger service."

At a news conference in Penn Station, where he stepped off a shiny new Metroliner from Washington, Mr. Volpe predicted that the nation's passenger lines would "compete directly and aggressively" with airlines, buses and automobiles, and indicated how this might be done.

"The traveling public is entitled to clean passenger cars, to on-time schedules, to appetizing meals and prompt service and to long-neglected practices of service and civility," he said. "All of these amenities can and in time will be restored to rail operations."

Mr. Volpe said that Amtrak, a corporation created by Congress last October with a \$40-million grant and loan pledges of up to \$300-million, would begin to break even financially in about three years.

He said the public should not expect a "sudden and miraculous" transformation, and asked for patience while Amtrak "restores, rebuilds and revitalizes" the passenger lines. Commuter service will not be affected by the plan.

Roger Lewis, president of Amtrak, said the corporation would be "innovative and promotional, selling hard and doing everything we can to attract passengers."

Mr. Volpe and Mr. Lewis repeated their messages in Metroliner stops at Newark, Trenton, Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore on their way back to Washington.

In Chicago, Mayor Richard J. Daley dispatched Amtrak's first train out of Union Station, the "Empire Builder," to Seattle—on time.

In many cities, most notably in Cleveland, passenger service was abandoned altogether. The last train pulled out of Cleveland's Union Terminal at 1:15 P.M. and the Penn Central closed its ticket office.

## Meeting of Directors

The Amtrak directors are to meet Tuesday to consider a plan to run one train a day through Cleveland, on a New York-to-Chicago run. Five states—Ohio, Illinois, New York, Pennsylvania and Michigan—have pledged to pool resources to cover two-thirds of any losses incurred by the service.

In some areas, particularly along the heavily traveled Northeast Corridor between Washington and Boston, Amtrak plans an early expansion of service.

Two additional Metroliners were added yesterday to the seven runs between New York and Washington. As a sign of things to come, the train that carried the Amtrak dignitaries and newsmen featured stewardesses in red blazers and blue slacks, passenger representatives, carpeting and comfortable seats.

Amtrak officials are developing plans to improve the railroads' reservation systems, ticketing procedures, baggage handling, food service, advertising and marketing, and accommodations. Eventually, there may be live entertainment, movies, beauty parlors and barber shops, lounges and offices for businessmen aboard the trains.

Critics of Amtrak contend that it will not be able to attract patronage from the major competitors — speedy airlines over long distances and economic, convenient automobiles over shorter routes.

In addition, critics note that the corporation will be saddled with the same union work rules and pay scales that have forced the private carriers into mounting deficits over the years.

But Amtrak officials and

their supporters insist that the growing congestion of highways and airways will turn more riders to trains, especially if they are made faster and more attractive and reliable.

Supporters note, too, that for the first time in decades the

passenger railroads are being run by an organization committed to improvements and public service.

"Success will depend on the American people and how they respond," Mr. Volpe said. "They will be our boss."