



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

NEWS

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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION JOHN A. VOLPE AT A NEWS
CONFERENCE, THURSDAY, JANUARY 28, 1971, WASHINGTON, D.C.

I have invited you here today not only as members of the news media but also as witnesses to the discharging of my responsibility under the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 -- that of designating a basic system of cities between which intercity passenger service will be provided by the National Rail Passenger Corporation when it takes over operation of the system on May 1.

I can honestly say that I consider the action I am about to take truly of historic significance, for I think it lays the foundation for what in my opinion is destined to become the all time "comeback" in the history of American transportation.

The system I shall designate is a truly National system with the capability of serving all major regions of the Nation.

It is my hope that all points designated in the Basic System will provide the basis for a financially viable intercity rail passenger system.

By providing improved service, clean and reliable equipment and more efficient utilization of facilities, the Corporation has the opportunity to reverse the long-term decline in rail ridership.

If, in fact, the traveling public does not respond to the Corporation's efforts by increasing ridership, the Corporation then has the option of dropping unprofitable routes in the interest of preserving the viability of the total passenger system.

Since announcing the preliminary designation of the basic system on November 30, I have been one of the most communicated with -- or at -- men in the country. And I freely admit that all of my mail has not been fan mail.

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We have received in the last sixty days more than 3,000 written communications on the National Rail Passenger System. There have been countless phone calls on the subject. The procession of visiting dignitaries bent on discussing the System has seemed almost endless.

Many of these representations were in behalf of large associations of people -- some were petitions reflecting the opinion of entire communities. Many were significant for their detailed reasoning. In that category were the comments received from the Interstate Commerce Commission, the representatives of railroad, labor and the States.

Because of the thousands of thoughtful comments submitted since November 30, the Basic System designated at that time has been subjected to intense reappraisal with the result that my final designation significantly increases the number of cities between which service will be provided by the Corporation.

The designation of points between which intercity passenger trains will be operated by the Corporation is the result of painstaking analysis of anticipated costs, ridership patterns and the relationship of rail transportation to other modes, as well as a complete review of all the comments received.

For the superior accomplishment of this major project I am grateful to, among others, Carl Lyon, Acting Federal Railroad Administrator and Deputy Under Secretary John Olsson and their staffs.

The analysis was carefully developed to meet the statutory criteria established by Congress.

It is my responsibility to specify those points between which intercity passenger trains shall be operated. In this matter, the Corporation has no discretion.

It also is my responsibility to identify all routes over which the service may be provided. The final choice of specific routes I leave to the discretion of the Corporation in accordance with the intent of the Act.

Such latitude for the Corporation is essential if it is to carry out its responsibility to make the best possible operating decisions.

The designation by me of specific routes to be served is neither required nor intended by the Act. It is of the utmost importance that the Corporation have the flexibility to react to market demands, to use the best available rail facilities and to select the least costly service alternatives if it is to improve existing service and to operate a National system.

That same latitude also is needed by the Corporation if it is to meet the criteria established in the statute by Congress of:

-- innovating operating concepts to fully develop the potential of modern rail service in meeting the Nation's intercity passenger transportation requirements.

-- affording opportunities for provision of faster service, more convenient service, service to more centers of population and service at lower cost.

Sixteen city pairs were designated in my preliminary report.

Today, I am announcing the addition of five city pairs. They are Washington to Chicago, New York to Kansas City, San Diego to Seattle, Los Angeles to New Orleans and Norfolk/Newport News to Cincinnati.

The previous sixteen city pairs were Boston to New York, New York to Washington, New York to Buffalo, New York to Chicago, New York to Miami, New York to New Orleans, Washington to St. Louis, Detroit to Chicago, Chicago to Cincinnati, Chicago to St. Louis, Chicago to Miami, Chicago to New Orleans, Chicago to Houston, Chicago to Seattle, Chicago to San Francisco and Chicago to Los Angeles.

Additionally, it was the intent of the initial report that the two routes serving Miami also serves Tampa/St. Petersburg; the report now makes this clear.

This is truly a National system. No region of the Nation will be unserved. We have addressed the major criticisms leveled at our preliminary designation.

While I look upon this basic system as meeting current National rail passenger needs, I also look upon it as a beginning -- as a base from which the Corporation can expand as demand for fast, clean, safe and efficient service between metropolitan centers increases.

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