

Amtrak

Remarks by Congressman Les AuCoin
in the House of Representatives
Aug. 2, 1979

● Mr. AuCOIN. Mr. Speaker, Americans are rediscovering an old love: the train.

The gas crunch is forcing all of us to change our daily habits, from planning shopping excursions to charting cross-country trips with the unpleasant specter of an empty tank in mind.

But it's also reminding us of the pleasant alternatives mass transportation can offer.

This article from The Bulletin, published in Bend, a central Oregon paper, drives home a simple truth: Americans, when they commit themselves to change, have no problem passing up the gas lines for a comfortable seat in an Amtrak coach.

Families such as the one from Bend, mentioned in this article, clearly care more about seeing their country than they do about maintaining their mythical "self reliance" for travel. This is the evidence which justifies the millions of dollars in Amtrak subsidy the House approved last week.

While it's now the Senate's task to uphold this decision and give people the train service they want, I hope other citizens will speak out, too -- through dollar votes at the Amtrak ticket window -- so our national rail system will continue to serve all communities of the country.

From The Bulletin,
Bend, Oregon

"More Drivers Now Opting for Train Trips"

By Ila Grant Hopper
Bulletin Staff Writer

For most people, the gasoline crunch may be anything from an annoyance to a disaster. But it's the best thing that's ever happened to public transportation.

Bus companies, railroads and airlines report significant increases in business. Many people who have been in the habit of driving their own cars now are leaving the driving to someone else.

Jerry Fallowfield and family, who live in downtown Bend, are planning to spend their vacation with relatives in Harbor City, California. They will travel most of the distance by train.

Jerry, Dawn and their two children -- 10 year-old Chris and

14-month-old Regina -- will make the round trip on Amtrak for a total fare of \$186. Friends will accompany them to Klamath Falls to board the train, and will pick them up there in two weeks.

"I figure it would cost around \$25 to \$35 more to drive the car the whole distance (nearly 1,000 miles)," Jerry said. "We usually drive right through, but with the baby, probably we'd have to make longer and more frequent stops."

Dawn said she is excited about the trip because of the convenience factor. "We can walk around whenever we want to, and in daylight, we can enjoy the scenery. For another \$50 we could have had a compartment -- but we thought we'd economize and make do with the reclining seats."

Dawn plans to pack a basket of baby food and snacks, but she's looking forward to meals in the train's dining room. It will be her first train trip since she was an infant.

"One nice thing about it," she noted, "you can have a drink in the lounge car and not have to worry. We wouldn't take a chance on drinking and driving -- it's too dangerous."

Amtrak's "Starlight," which goes to Davis and other central California points, then down the coast to Los Angeles, is becoming so popular that reservations well in advance are a necessity, according to Barbara McCaige at Cascades Travel Service.

"It's the first time this has happened," McCaige said, "People are re-discovering the train, and loving it. It's a bit of nostalgia."

In Oregon, the train may be boarded at Portland, Salem, Eugene and Klamath Falls.

Bus travel also is increasing in popularity, especially for charter tours, according to Marion Grant at Travelplace Inc.

"We're seeing a new breed of bus travelers -- lots of people who used to insist on driving their cars," Grant said. "They're discovering they can relax and have a good time and not have to worry about gasoline. It's no fun to be stranded in your car late at night or on weekends, because the gas stations aren't open."

Lots of first-timers are also opting for plane travel, according to Carmen Cappell of Tour Time.

"The excursion fares and discount coupons that the airlines are offering are very attractive," Cappell said. "We're seeing lots of families making cross-continental vacation trips."

The reduced rates for children in family groups make air travel comparatively economical, Cappell said. Half-rate fares apply for children ages 2-12, and infants under age 2 ride free. As on other public conveyances, however, babies must be held unless unclaimed seats are available.

"We advise booking at least a month in advance for excursions to New York, the Midwest or the Caribbean," Cappell said. "We're already making reservations for next spring vacation. And if you haven't already made arrangements for Christmas vacation flights -- you aren't going anywhere!"