

DB Saves an Hour

(Continued from Front Page)

Pro Bahn has lauded the opening of the line, while criticizing fare increases, the addition of Montabaur and other details. For example, it is unclear how DB will improve its restrictive Fulda-Frankfurt-Mannheim route.

At the Köln inaugural ceremony, DB Board Chairman Hartmut Mehdorn said "this is a big day for German Rail. With this new connection, long-distance traffic takes a giant step forward within Germany and the European high-speed network. We are approaching our goal of becoming the fastest travel mode up to 500 kilometers." 700 VIPs accompanied DB's Mehdorn and Federal Transport Minister Kurt Bodewig on the opening trip.



The wife of the Federal Chancellor, Doris Schroeder cut the ribbon. Later, DB illustrated its ad slogan "gives you one hour" by hosting 3500 guests at a one hour concert by pop group Sasha, at Roncalli Plaza next to the cathedral. Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder congratulated DB's Mehdorn after the event.

August 1 also marked the beginning of the end for German dining cars. The ICE-3 equipment on the Köln-Frankfurt line have Bistros instead of the classic "Mitropa" dining car service. "We are re-equipping our trains to adapt to the market", says Koch, German Rail marketing manager. "If the customer doesn't come to the diner, we must come to the customer." Studies show that more than half of passengers eat on board, but only 15 per cent buy food on the train. Fewer than five per cent visit the diner and less than one percent eat a main course. DB says riders leave their seats reluctantly, and because they view prices on board as too high, food sales keep dwindling.

The railway wants to reverse this trend. With space at a premium on fully occupied trains, DB plans to bring meals on carts directly to riders' seats. By December timetable change, conversion of the ICE-3-Fleet is to be complete. Plans are to rebuild the last diner by 2005. Koch says the trains have to be redone anyway to create more space for second class travelers, who are outstripping available seating on ICE trains.

STATION HOST PROGRAM EXPANDS

by Alan C. Miller
TRAC Executive Director

The California Station Host program began its trial run in March 2001 at the Emeryville Station with the official blessing of Amtrak and concurrence of the Transportation Communication Union. Its expansion was subsequently authorized in Oakland, Martinez, San Francisco, and Sacramento.

Developed by TRAC member Doras Briggs and headed by TRAC member Ray Ahearn, the program is proving a success for Amtrak, for passengers, and for the Hosts.

What is a Station Host? A volunteer who likes people and who, after successfully completing a training program and donning the official cap and badges, spends his or her time helping waiting riders. "It's fine to like trains, but the emphasis must be on the people in the station. We need volunteers who enjoy talking with and helping rail travelers by answering peripheral questions for which the busy Amtrak staff have little or no time," said Briggs. "For a first time rider through the station, just knowing where to catch the bus to San Francisco or how to get to a BART station, or the location of an ATM machine, can be a great relief."

Hosts learn the schedules in their stations so they can help tell people which train to board or which train connects to which bus. They help Amtrak personnel but are specifically banned from performing employees' duties. Hosts never interfere with employee actions; they are there to assist.

Each station presents its own challenges and unique personality. The Oakland Station Host program hasn't yet attracted as many volunteers as Emeryville despite its attractive location adjacent to Jack London Square and the Estuary. (If you're lucky, Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, whose home is in the block across the street, may drop by). Doras hopes TRAC's publicity will encourage more people to volunteer for Oakland.

Martinez has always been a prime train watching spot for local railfans. A small subgroup of these fans has assisted confused passengers in need of directions or information for many years. Now, under the guidance of Assistant Scheduler Vern Spaulding, the Station Host program is proving a natural fit for this station. Those local fans who always enjoyed working with the public have completed the training course, donned the official cap, and now earn the appreciation of the station staff by helping out. The beautiful new station, just west of the old station, offers a pleasant atmosphere. An abundance of bus connections to local transit and other Amtrak locations makes those with a good head for details and rail oper-



(From left) President Ray Ahearn, Vern Spaulding, Doras Briggs, Mike Fearon, and Greig Pirie

ations invaluable partners at Martinez.

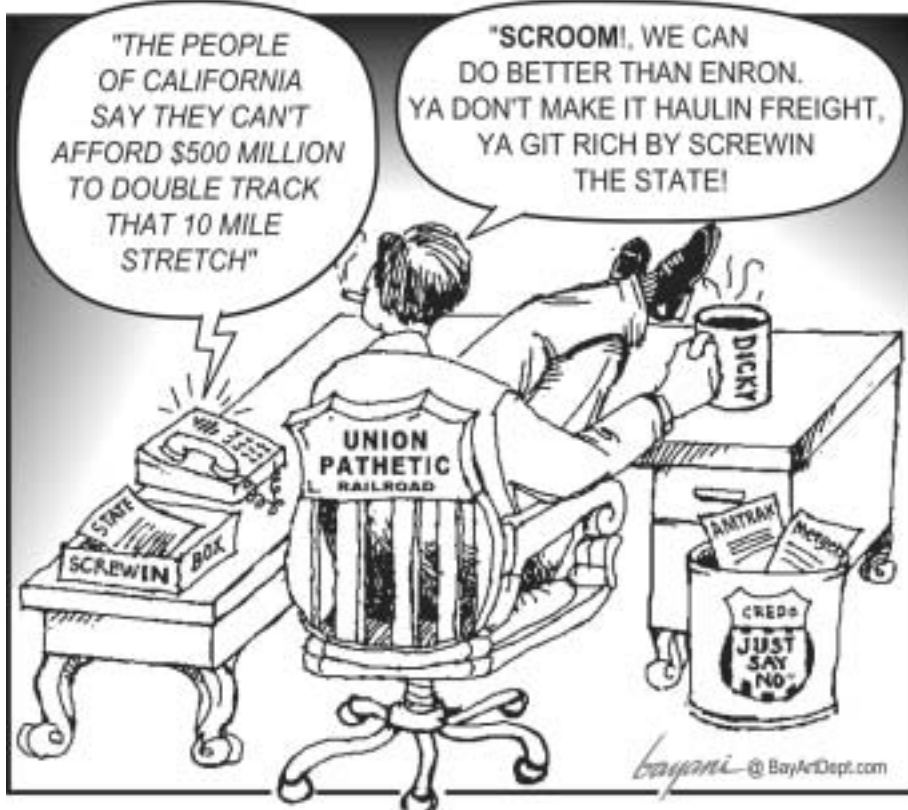
The Sacramento Station is a bit more of a challenge. The ongoing battle over the future of the property and Union Pacific's delays on interim improvements have left a situation wherein passengers may step off the train and wonder where the station is. The unwelcoming rear of the station unfortunately resembles the loading dock of an old warehouse. Cars may be parked in the bus stalls. Passengers don't know whether to use the tunnels or cross the tracks, and freight trains sometimes come rumbling through as passengers ignore loudspeaker instructions to use the tunnel. A herd of connecting buses, sometimes with incorrect destinations displayed, adds to the turmoil.

"It is one of the more confusing stations, and it will really help to have someone around to help people out," said Bob Koski, longtime TRAC member and new Assistant Scheduler recruited for Sacramento's Station Host operation. "I've seen people go down into the tunnel and come right back up on the other side with befuddled looks on their faces."

Assisting sister organizations like the Station Host Association of California is one of the ways TRAC helps the cause of improving passenger rail in the State. A recent email to Sacramento area TRAC members announcing the Station Host program brought a seed group of volunteers to the first training session. Doras and Ray have expressed great appreciation for TRAC's willingness to assist in recruiting Station Hosts as the program expands.

You don't have to be a TRAC member to become a Station Host, you just have to enjoy helping the traveling public. If you are interested in the Station Host program, pick up an application in your preferred station or email Ray Ahearn (ra555@sbcglobal.net) or Doras Briggs (rrdoras@aol.com).

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Richard Tolmach, TRAC President
Alan C. Miller TRAC Executive Director

926 J Street, Suite 612,
Sacramento, CA 95814
Telephone: 916-557-1667
Fax: 916-448-1789
e-mail: trac@omsoft.com
www.calrailnews.com

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