

# **Amtrak Mail and Express**

## **2001 Tranny Entry Blueprint**

### **Category 1**

**Integrated Communications Program**

### **Entry Title**

**2000 Regional & Shortline Railroad Partnership  
Campaign**



## **2001 Tranny Competition Category 1: Integrated Communications Program**

### 1. Statement of Need / Opportunity

Amtrak's Mail and Express service (a business unit of Amtrak) generates a vitally important element of Amtrak's overall revenues. The contribution of Mail and Express to Amtrak's bottom line is expected to increase and become more critical as the railroad moves toward congressionally-mandated self-sufficiency by fiscal year 2003.

Mail and Express service is particularly well-suited for the expedited movement of perishable and time-sensitive goods because it handles Express Cars and RoadRailers at the rear of fast, scheduled Amtrak passenger trains. The business unit's ultimate success, however, relies not only on Amtrak moving goods quickly, but on the professionalism, experience, and logistical understanding of its railroad partners:

PRIMARY—the Regional and Short-Line Railroads (who often pick-up or deliver the products on 'the final mile'); and

SECONDARY—the Class I railroads (over whose tracks Amtrak trains run).

Amtrak Mail and Express has reached out to both groups of business partners to acknowledge their importance in making this service feasible. This Tranny entry focuses on the communication and relationship-building efforts of the Partnership Campaign to the regional and short-line railroads in 2000.

## 2. Goals / Objectives

The objectives of the integrated Partnership Campaign were to:

- Create awareness of the appreciation Amtrak Mail and Express has for the vital service its regional and short-line railroad partners provide.
- Build enthusiasm within the primary target audience to encourage proactive service-improving suggestions and solutions.
- Develop business relationships and with at least two new regional or short-line partners during 2000.
- Gain a high-level of credibility and audience recognition with a modest budget.

### 3. Target Audience

**Owners and key executives of the short-line and regional railroad partners of Amtrak Mail and Express formed the target audience of the Partnership Campaign. This audience is characterized by their common interest in and dedication to the railroad industry; knowledge of the railroad industry at large; and loyalty and camaraderie within their peer group.**

#### 4. Solutions / Project Summary

The stature of the target audience (presidents, executives, and often owners of the regional and short-line railroads) and the personal relationships common in this well-defined industry demanded an individualized, 'handshake' approach:

- ❶ An ongoing series of personal visits and phone calls between Amtrak Mail and Express executives and railroad executives that further extended the concept of cooperation and appreciation between the partners.
- ❷ A four-color ad unit built around the messages of partnership and teamwork that was used for select, carefully targeted support of this program.
- ❸ A roundtable event hosted by Amtrak and moderated by Bill Vantuono, senior editor of *Railway Age* magazine. A feature-length article reporting on the roundtable appeared in the September issue of the magazine, which was distributed at the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association's (ASLRA) annual meeting.
  - Reprints of the feature-length article were distributed to the target audience.
  - Framed full-color wall plaques, featuring a reprint of the feature-length article and a personalized note of appreciation from Amtrak Mail and Express Executive Vice President Ed Ellis, were presented to roundtable participants.
- ❹ A seminar for Amtrak short-line and regional railroad partners during the weekend of ASLRA's annual meeting in October.
  - A dinner train excursion for the short-line and regional railroad partners on the weekend of ASLRA's annual meeting.
- ❺ The publication of a Customer Service Guide, which was developed in part as a resource for the short-line and regional railroad partners.

## 5. Limitations and Challenges

The objective of this campaign was to establish and reinforce a positive perception of the relationship between Amtrak Mail and Express and the short-line and regional railroads. Accomplishing this improves cooperation in the area of customer service improvement, which is, in part, dependent on the willingness of those regional and short-line railroad partners to proactively identify, develop, and implement methods for improving services on the 'final mile.'

The challenges were:

- Conveying Amtrak's sincerity to enhance partner relationships without appearing overwhelmingly commercial.
- Repositioning Amtrak Mail and Express executives as knowledgeable railroad insiders and not merely 'salespeople'.
- Creating the feeling that Amtrak was doing something unique to benefit the railroad industry at large. Amtrak wished to impress upon the short-line and regional partners that they are part of an important evolution in commercial railroading, making them 'partners in an historic endeavor' and thereby taking their service levels to new heights to ensure the evolution's success.
- Walking Amtrak Mail and Express' Partnership Campaign communications through sensitive political lines. This challenge meant reviewing every communications effort from a myriad of complicated perspectives to ensure that sensitivities we're honored.

## 6. Measuring / Evaluating Success

The objectives of the Partnership Campaign were predominantly intangible and involved creating an atmosphere of camaraderie, goodwill, and partnership, which in turn will lead to better working relationships and ultimately, better customer service for Mail and Express customers. With this as a guideline, Partnership Campaign has been very successful.

Two aspects of the campaign were measured, however, and the results are more than satisfactory. First, Amtrak Mail and Express was able to establish partnerships with three new short-line/regional railroads during 2000, which represents a result 50% better than originally anticipated.

Second, the short-line and regional railroad partners have proactively begun developing methods and solutions for customer service improvement. As of the date of the submission of this Tranny Entry, several of the solutions were under evaluation at Amtrak for potential test-runs and possible full roll-outs.

# Teamwork on Tracks.



## United We Run.

**Amtrak<sup>®</sup>**



**Mail & Express**

For Perishable and Time-Definite Goods.

Strength through partnership: Thanks to our host rail carriers for getting us to the finish line on time.



# Just say when

Some tips on tapping the time-value market.

By William C. Vantuono, Editor

Paper shipments are one commodity with time-value implications. Wisconsin Central serves several major paper-processing plants.

STEVE GLETSCHER/WISCONSIN CENTRAL



**T**o paraphrase John F. Kennedy, a rising market lifts all railroads," says Amtrak Vice President-Mail & Express Ed Ellis. Time-value shipments—a railroad market with the ability to rise but whose potential the industry isn't tapping—was the subject of the second annual *Railway Age*/Amtrak Mail & Express

Time-Value Roundtable, moderated by Editor William C. Vantuono. The participants: Ellis, *Railway Age* Contributing Editor Roy Blanchard, Wisconsin Central Ltd. President and CEO Reilly McCarren, RailAmerica Vice President-Business Development Al Sauer, Wisconsin & Southern President and CEO Bill Gardner, Minnesota Commercial Railway Co. President and Chairman John Gohmann, Amtrak M&E Assistant Vice President Ken Asztalos, and two shippers: R.R. Donnelley Logistics Services Supply Chain Manager Jim Gibling and The Swiss Colony Director-Corporate Transportation Roz Cooke.

The roundtable took place between Chicago and Minneapolis aboard W&S dome/observation car *Northern View*, part of a 29-car Amtrak *Empire Builder* consist which also included 11

Superliners, W&S sleeper *Northern Nights*, and no fewer than 16 Amtrak Mail & Express boxcars and RoadRailers.

*Railway Age*: How do you define "time-value"?

**Roy Blanchard**: The value that you receive from moving a shipment to when you want it. If you have a railroad providing a cheap freight rate, but it shows up erratically, that's a low time-



**"One thing I think railroads could do to improve things would be to give us a tracing system similar to what LTL carriers have."**

— Roz Cooke,  
The Swiss Colony

A seminar for Amtrak Mail and Express short-line and regional railroad partners, followed by a dinner train excursion, was held during the weekend of ASLRA's annual meeting in October, 2000.



**CUSTOMER SERVICE GUIDE**



**TERMINALS  
&  
SCHEDULES**

**Fall 2000**