

# Cape Train Service Could Be Restarted?

While you may never catch the 4:10 local from Provincetown for a leisurely glide through knob and kettle countryside and across teeming salt marshes, within a few years you just might be able to hop a train at Hyannis and spend the time to Boston or New York in the club car.

A \$15 million rail bond issue to fund the

abandonment by the U.S. Railway Association—among them the remaining Cape Cod trackage.

State Representative Richard Kendall (Falmouth), a committee member and strong backer of railroad legislation, said Tuesday a "realistic" timetable for passenger service resumption would be 1977-78. Interviewed Tuesday by telephone, Rep. Kendall said Governor Dukakis was "enthusiastic," but it will be "a difficult trip" through the House and Senate for the \$15 million rail bond. If the money is approved, it can be pretty sure of attracting federal rail aid at a 3-to-7 (state-to-federal) ratio, Rep. Kendall said.

Included in the rail package, beside the Cape route, is an inland New York-Boston run via Springfield. The inter-city run is expected to precede the New York to Cape Cod and Boston-Cape service, according to Kendall.

Kendall pictured a daily round trip to a major terminal at Hyannis with shuttle bus service to the Lower Cape. Freight tracks still run from Sandwich to South Dennis and from Buzzards Bay to Falmouth. The state monies would be used to upgrade tracks, and not to cover operating costs. The \$1 million subsidy, on the other hand, was to bolster the freight operations. Rep. Kendall said the move would protect jobs in rail-dependent Cape industry.

The passenger route is not seen as a commuter run, Rep. Kendall said, nor as a threat to existing bus service. Rather, he pointed to tourist industry involvement, and the possible reduction of automobile congestion. And he said he saw the "long distance rider" more attracted to the rail service than those on a "short haul."

Of the \$15 million, \$10 million would go to the Boston-Cape service. Speaking to the transportation committee, Frederick Salvucci, Massachusetts Transportation Secretary, called resumption of the service the alternative to spending \$50 million to widen Route 3 from Weymouth to the Cape Cod Canal to handle a growing traffic load.

Under the bond proposal, Cape service from New York would be via Attleboro. Rep. Kendall said the proposal required legislative approval of actual rail plans before the money can be released.

resumption of Cape Cod passenger rail service with a Hyannis terminus was recommended for approval last week by the Massachusetts legislature's transportation committee.

The committee earlier approved a \$1 million subsidy fund to help 10 rail lines around the state recommended for

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# Railroad goes way

The plan to reinstitute passenger rail service to Hyannis, while welcomed by many, has its critics too.

Provincetown Selectman George Bryant said he would rather see the federal government appropriate money to improve the Provincetown Airport.

"I don't understand it," he said, noting Amtrack has been operating in the red the past 10 years.

"They can't make train service pay anywhere else. I can well imagine better ways to spend the millions they're talking about spending on trains."

Americans "are pretty much committed to autos, especially those who come here," he said, although he acknowledged that many city dwellers don't have autos.

"I'd say the money would be essentially wasted on improving the rail transportation," Bryant continued. "It could be more intelligently spent improving the regional airport here. If they'd just give us a small part of the millions they'll presumably spend on this train project, for the improvement of the airport navigation lanes, that would benefit everyone who uses the airport. The same sort of people who would come to Hyannis on the train from Washington or New York would otherwise fly here," he said.

Before the age of air travel, Provincetown was heavily dependent on trains for transportation.

The last section of the Old Colony railroad, connecting Provincetown to Wellfleet, where the tracks ended, was built in 1873. The construction began only after the town subscribed \$98,300 in stocks and received 727 shares in the Old Colony Railroad Co.

President Ulysses S. Grant rode the train to Provincetown to celebrate the track completion shortly afterwards.

The town's train station stood where Duarte Motors now stands. It was a two-room station, with a baggage room, ticket office, settees, restrooms and a potbellied stove.

Up until the railroad came to Provincetown, the only means of access to the town was by fishing vessel and packet, or by stagecoach on a ride that took passengers over narrow, rutted and sandy roads.

As many as four trains a day served Provincetown in those days, but passenger service was discontinued in the 1930s, and freight service ended in the 1950s.

In the old days, the railroad crossed Bradford and Commercial Street, going to the end of Railroad Wharf, which was located about where McMillan Wharf is today.

At the end of the wharf, it would pick up passengers from the Boston boat, along with boxes and barrels of iced fish for delivery to the Boston and New York markets.

"The railroad brought consistently reliable transportation to the Cape, especially to Provincetown, which had been dependent on sailing packets and steamers," Bryant said.

"Almost everything that came to Provincetown prior to the railroad came by vessel," he said.

At Railroad Wharf, Bryant said, the trains not only picked up fresh fish to deliver to Boston and New York, but they also loaded up on coal that boats brought to Provincetown from southern ports.

The coal was used to fuel the locomotives.

The railroad had a big water tank, which was behind where the Sunset Inn at 142 Bradford St. now stands.

# back here

"When I was a child," said Bryant, who was born in 1937, "the watertank was used to provide steam water for the locomotives."

But years before, the townspeople used the railroad water for drinking purposes, purchasing it from the railroad, Bryant said.

"People used to buy water from the big tank and fishing vessels used to fill their water barrels there and take them on their voyages, using it for drinking water."

But in 1880, the crew of one vessel was stricken by a mysterious illness that left one man dead, and the others paralyzed from the waist down.

"The question arose whether it was the water or the barrels" that caused the outbreak, Bryant said, noting the barrels used to carry water had originally been used to transport molasses from the West Indies.

"They never figured it out, whether it was the water or the barrel, but the people were not so keen to use railroad water after that."

The result of this disaster was that Provincetown, 10 to 15 years later, established its own water system.

"We had one of the first, if not the first, water systems on the Cape," Bryant said.

The railroad, indirectly, was responsible for Provincetown acquiring a wharf and for its recent efforts to assess fees for the use of it.

The Old Colony Railroad decided to abandon Railroad Wharf in the late 1920s, for lack of a profit, and approached the town about purchasing it.

"They were quite anxious to dispose of the wharf, which had become increasingly unprofitable," Bryant said.

At that time, a freight depot was located at Lopes Square, where the anchor now stands, and the tracks continued down the wharf.

"Attorneys and lobbyists for the railroad proceeded to frame a bill for the legislature to pass," clearing the way for the town to acquire Railroad Wharf, Bryant said.

The railroad representatives "did everything possible to make sure that bill passed, and it did, very quickly, and the town bought the Railroad Wharf in 1929 and that's how Provincetown got into the pier business. The town hadn't previously owned any piers," he said.

The legislative bill enabled Provincetown to derive income from the pier, "and on that basis, we were able to charge for dockage and for any use of the facility," he said.

Dockage fees were charged for about a 10 year period during the Depression, but then were discontinued until last year, when fee proposals for McMillan Wharf were proposed for the first time since then.