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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-94](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

In the 1990s, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) undertook the Northeast High-Speed Rail Improvement Project to make infrastructure improvements that would enable Amtrak to meet a statutory goal of providing 3-hour intercity passenger rail service between Boston and New York City. Amtrak shared responsibility for implementing the project with commuter rail authorities and state governments, and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) developed a master plan for the project and provided federal funds to Amtrak. GAO reviewed (1) the status of the project, (2) Amtrak's management of the project, (3) FRA's oversight of the project, and (4) best practices for managing future large-scale rail infrastructure projects.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Amtrak apply best practices for managing large-scale infrastructure projects to future major intercity passenger rail projects and that FRA require these best practices and develop guidance for how to do this. GAO also recommends that FRA seek legislative authority to oversee such projects in the future. Amtrak did not comment directly on GAO's specific recommendations but said it was incorporating many of the best practices discussed in the report as part of its management restructuring. Amtrak also raised some issues concerning GAO's report findings. FRA agreed with our recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-94](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-94).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact JayEtta Z. Hecker at (202) 512-2834 or [heckerj@gao.gov](mailto:heckerj@gao.gov).

## INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL

# Amtrak's Management of Northeast Corridor Improvements Demonstrates Need for Applying Best Practices

## What GAO Found

Amtrak has not yet met the 3-hour trip-time goal established by the 1992 Amtrak Authorization and Development Act although electrified service between Boston and New York City was initiated in January 2000 and Amtrak began limited high-speed rail service in December 2000. Currently, this trip is scheduled to take 3 hours 24 minutes. Furthermore, 51 of 72 work elements that FRA identified in its 1994 master plan as necessary to reduce trip times (e.g., electrify tracks and acquire high-speed trains), enhance capacity (e.g., construct sidings), rebuild or extend the life of physical assets (e.g., replace bridges), or make other improvements are incomplete or their status is unknown. Fifteen of these work elements are on non-Amtrak owned sections of track and are important for achieving and maintaining 3-hour service as rail traffic increases over time. Through March 2003, Amtrak and others had spent about \$3.2 billion on the project.

Neither Amtrak nor FRA exercised effective management or oversight of the Northeast High-Speed Rail Improvement Project. Amtrak's management was not comprehensive, and it was focused primarily on the short term. Amtrak focused on managing the electrification and acquisition of new high-speed trains, and did not sufficiently address major infrastructure improvements needed to attain the trip-time goal. In addition, Amtrak did not fully integrate the interests of stakeholders (commuter rail authorities and state governments) into the project, even though work that involved them was critical to achieving 3-hour service. FRA served as a conduit for federal appropriations to the project but did not have the resources or the authority to oversee Amtrak's management of the project.

Best practices—including comprehensive planning, risk assessment and mitigation, comprehensive financial management, accountability and oversight, and incorporation of diverse stakeholders' interests—provide a framework for effectively managing future large-scale intercity passenger rail infrastructure projects. These best practices have proved effective in managing large-scale infrastructure projects and could assist in managing future projects like the Northeast High-Speed Rail Improvement Project.

### Best Practices for Managing Large-Scale Infrastructure Projects



Sources: GAO; Nova Development. PhotoDisc. and Corel (photos).