Columbia’s Metro system, the stolen from his driver’s driveway one night. Returned to the subway after the car was covering from testicular cancer in 1985, but use an MTA car and driver briefly while re-

ize the urban decay of New York City. He took the subway for almost all earned praise because he didn’t use a car in hugely important,” he explains. “The gra∞ti was only a minor part of it, gra∞ti that blanketed almost every sub-

lion rebuilding the entire system—but perhaps his best-known accomplishment was simply ridding it of the sprawling graffiti that blanketed almost every subway car running and had come to symbolize the urban decay of New York City. “The graffiti was only a minor part of it, but from a passenger perspective, it was hugely important,” he explains.

Practicing what he preached, Gunn also earned praise because he didn’t use a car in the city. He took the subway for almost all of his personal and business travel—even to pick up his mother at the airport. He did use an MTA car and driver briefly while recovering from testicular cancer in 1985, but returned to the subway after the car was stolen from his driver’s driveway one night.

When he left the MTA in 1990 to become general manager of the District of Columbia’s Metro system, the New York Times dubbed him “The Man Who Saved the Subways.” In Washington, he supervised the development of the last 13 miles of the system’s tunnels. “Eventually, it came in on time and under budget—which is pretty good for government work,” he says with a smile.

Critics and supporters alike say that Gunn does not suffer fools gladly. He left the Metro after assailing the board for continual interference in day-to-day decisions, saying it made his job almost “im-

possible.” In several cities, his direct approach earned him more than his share of labor problems, but even most of his critics concede that Gunn does make the trains run on time.

From Washington, Gunn moved to the Toronto Transit Commission. He retired in 1999, moved back to his ancestral home on Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, and had just fulfilled his lifelong dream of obtaining Canadian, in addition to American, citizenship when Amtrak’s “desperate” problems convinced him to return to the working world.

The difference Gunn has already made at Amtrak can be summed up by the fact that the trains are still running. Although the system has been weakened by the political need to run unprofitable trains through remote congressional districts, Gunn has focused on cleaning up internal problems first. Within weeks of taking the job, he announced that new accounting of the company’s finances showed its debts were $200 million higher than previously reported. His subsequent decision that the railroad would begin shutting down operations in early July unless the government produced a new loan touched off a crisis on Capitol Hill. “People said I threatened to shut down Amtrak. It wasn’t a threat. We were going to shut down,” he says. “About the third week in July, checks were literally going to bounce.” As the deadline for the shutdown neared, Amtrak’s foes criticized Gunn for “playing games,” while people who knew him better understood that the railroad veteran meant every word he said. “It’s typical Gunn...The first thing he did was go up to the Hill and tell them self-sufficiency was a loony idea,” Dukakis says. Amtrak got the loan and the trains continue to chug down the tracks—at least for now.

For his part, Gunn rails against the spending excesses and priorities of previous Amtrak administrators. Close to a hundred wreck-damaged cars languished in Indianapolis as part of a deferred maintenance plan—which meant that, after a July derailment in Maryland, Amtrak had too few cars to run its daily routes. Moreover, “They spent $12 million on a consultant. With that I could have rebuilt 30 or 40 desperately needed cars. Which do you