

SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S ANNUAL MEETING / RAIL SUMMIT

*By Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.
Chair, Rail Users' Network*

Please join us at the Rail Users' Network Annual Meeting and Rail Summit, which is being held on Oct. 8 in Lafayette, IN. The meeting, which is free and open to the general public, is taking place at the Amtrak railroad station at 200 North Street. Come and learn more about the nation's first public-private partnership in passenger rail, providing service in the Hoosier State. This event supports RUN's mission of working with local advocacy groups, and will give rail passengers and members of the general public an opportunity

to learn more about the exciting partnership between Amtrak and Iowa Pacific Holding Company and to share their concerns about this and other passenger rail services provided in the United States.

The *Hoosier State*, which is funded by the Indiana Department of Transportation and online communities, operates four times a week on days the Chicago-to-New York Cardinal does not operate. Amtrak provides the engineers, conductors, track access and sells and collects ticket revenue, and Iowa Pacific provides its own equipment, including locomotives, coaches and on-

board service crews. Hot meals are provided to business-class customers in the dome car and are available for purchase by coach passengers. Iowa Pacific took over the service last August and has already shown an increase in ridership over the previous year. While revenue is also up by 14%, the train is still a long way from profitability.

The day will begin at 9:00 A.M. with brief remarks from Richard Rudolph, Ph.D., Chair of the Rail Users' Network, who will also moderate the RUN Annual Meeting. This meeting is open to RUN members as well as the general public. The agenda will include a review of

STB REVISES ON-TIME-PERFORMANCE STANDARD FOR AMTRAK TRAINS

By David Peter Alan

The Surface Transportation Board (STB or "Board") set a new standard for determining on-time-performance (OTP) for Amtrak trains when they operate over a freight-carrying railroad, but the freight-carrying railroads are challenging it court. On July 28, the STB released its Final Rule on the subject (Docket No. EP-726), which sets a new standard for determining OTP for the purpose of triggering an STB investigation. The investigation could result in an award of damages from a host railroad to Amtrak. Congress

enacted a provision in Section 213 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA), which calls for such an investigation if OTP for a specific train falls below 80% for any two consecutive calendar quarters.

The new rule re-defines OTP for that purpose. A train is now considered "on time" if it arrives at or leaves from a station within 15 minutes of its scheduled arrival or departure time. In addition, OTP is now calculated for all stations, and not only at the endpoint where a train finishes its route.

In its decision, the Board noted that Congress has generally required host railroads to give Amtrak trains priority over freight movements since it passed the Amtrak Improvement Act of 1973. At that time, however, there was a complex and exclusive method for enforcing that standard. Only the Attorney General could enforce it by bringing a civil action for equitable relief while, for a contrary result, the Secretary of Transportation could relieve a host railroad from this obligation "if the Secretary found that Amtrak's preference materially

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STB REVISES ON-TIME-PERFORMANCE STANDARD FOR AMTRAK TRAINS

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lessened the quality of freight transportation offered to shippers.” Congress transferred the authority in both situations to the STB under PRIIA in 2008. Ironically, this marked the first time Congress gave the STB jurisdiction over issues concerning passenger trains since its predecessor, the Interstate Commerce Commission, lost the authority to regulate and discontinue them when the Rail Passenger Act of 1970 created Amtrak.

The STB issued a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on Dec. 28, 2015, which included a proposed rule that would have considered a train “on time” if it arrived at its final destination within five minutes of its scheduled arrival time for each 100 miles of route length, up to a maximum of 30 minutes later than scheduled arrival time at its final destination. The ICC had previously enforced that standard, under which only the arrival time at a train’s final destination counted.

Despite the ongoing legal controversy over Amtrak’s participation in rulemaking under §207 of PRIIA, the STB specifically asserted its authority to investigate substandard performance under §213 of the same statute. In a case involving the Illini and Saluki trains between Chicago and Carbondale, IL, the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and host railroad Canadian National (CN) argued that Congress had delegated authority only to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Amtrak under §207. The railroads challenged that grant of authority solely because of the authority it gave to Amtrak. So they claimed that the STB could not act. The STB rejected this argument, saying: “the invalidation of Section 207 of PRIIA leaves a gap that the Board has the delegated authority to fill by virtue of its authority to adjudicate complaints brought by Amtrak against host freight railroads for a violation of Amtrak’s statutory preference and to award damages where a preference violation is found. Any other result would gut the remedial scheme, a result that Congress clearly did not intend.”

Under the authority which it asserted, the STB changed the OTP standard from an “Endpoint OTP” standard as proposed in the original December, 2015 notice, to an “All-Stations OTP” standard. In doing so, the Board noted that “Except for the freight railroads, virtually all commenters” urged them to adopt the “All-Stations” standard and that Amtrak passengers “should have the same expectation of punctuality” regardless of where they board or exit the train. RUN was among the commenters who urged the STB to adopt the “All-Stations OTP” standard.

Some rider advocates have criticized Amtrak for lengthening scheduled running time from the next-to-last stop to the endpoint of a route, to make a train’s OTP look better, even on days when it runs behind schedule at essentially all intermediate stops. The STB’s decision implicitly disapproved of that practice. As the Board noted (at 6), the new rule “could require a reevaluation and potential reallocation of recovery time across the entire route.”

So Amtrak schedules for trains outside the Amtrak-owned Northeast Corridor, especially for long-distance trains, may look different next year. We can hope that they indicate realistically when a train is expected to stop at any given station. We can also hope that the STB would not tolerate efforts by the host railroads to lengthen Amtrak running times, so they can add slack to their own operations. Most importantly, we can hope that Amtrak’s passengers will be able to count on the accuracy of Amtrak schedules in the future. They want to arrive at their destinations at or shortly after the time advertised in the published schedule, not some indeterminate time that could come several hours later.

Before those hopes can become reality, the new STB standard must survive court challenges filed by the host railroads and their trade association, the AAR. The

AAR, along with CN, Norfolk Southern and CSX Transportation, filed appeals in the District of Columbia Circuit. This was the court that has held on two occasions that Amtrak had no right to participate in rulemaking concerning priority for Amtrak trains on freight-carrying railroads, on the grounds that Amtrak is a private corporation. The Supreme Court vacated that holding, held that Amtrak is a governmental body for this purpose, and remanded the case to the D.C. Circuit. It appears that the host railroads expect another ruling from the same court that is unfavorable to Amtrak. In the meantime, Union Pacific (UP) has appealed to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals instead. UP has its headquarters in Omaha, NE, which is within the territorial jurisdiction of the Eighth Circuit. If the Eighth Circuit and the D.C. Circuit disagree on whether or not the new STB standard was properly authorized by Congress, the case will make its way back to the Supreme Court more quickly.

In the meantime, another event at Amtrak could affect the outcome of the new OTP rules. Amtrak’s new President, Wick Moorman, came from the freight-railroad industry, and served as head of NS. He is familiar with the freight side of railroading and the people who manage it. Maybe the host railroads will be less adversarial toward Amtrak in the future than they have been until now. Maybe not. Only time will tell.

One thing is certain, though—all Amtrak passengers want their trains to run on time. It will take several months, and perhaps longer, before we know if the STB can help to make that hope a reality.

David Peter Alan is a member of the RUN Board and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition. He lives and practices law in South Orange, New Jersey. This article is presented for educational purposes only, and is not intended to be a “legal opinion” as given by an attorney to a client.

ASSORTED NOTES FROM NEW YORK

By *Andrew Albert*

Many things are happening on the New York transit scene, so a timely update is in order. Firstly, a decision has been made on which option NYC Transit will go with to repair the Canarsie Tube, which carries the L subway line under the East River, between Brooklyn & Manhattan, and carries an average daily load of 225,000 riders. The Canarsie Tube was damaged during Superstorm Sandy. The faster, 18-month option, which will completely close the tube, was selected, which was the option most riders preferred. The “get in/get it done/get out” option will also have an incentive for the contractor to get it done even more quickly, with bonuses for doing so. This work is scheduled to begin in 2019, with RFPs (requests for proposals) to go out later this year.

The closure of an under-river tube will have major implications for commuting between the communities of Williamsburg, Bushwick, East New York, Brownsville, and Canarsie. Among the options to get commuters to and from work are extra service on the J, M, and

G lines, as well as dedicated bus lanes on the Williamsburg Bridge, ferries from Williamsburg’s waterfront to East 20th Street in Manhattan, special bus lanes across 14th Street, and possibly some fanciful proposals, such as gondolas across the East River.

Before this work can be done, however, the Bushwick Viaduct, which carries the M line from Metropolitan Avenue in Middle Village through Ridgewood and Bushwick to the Broadway J, Z lines, must be repaired. The Transit Riders Council recently took a field trip to examine the damage to the viaduct, between the Myrtle Ave/Broadway and Central Avenue stations. We could easily see the spawling on the concrete supports just north of the Myrtle/Broadway station. In addition, a series of bus shuttles will be utilized to get riders between sections of the M line, depending on where the work is being done at that time. In addition to the essential repairs just north of the Myrtle Ave/Broadway station, work must also be done near the end of the line, between Metropolitan Avenue & Fresh Pond Road stations, where a bridge carries

the line over the tracks of the New York & Atlantic Railway, owned by the Long Island Rail Road. It seems some boxcars are grazing the bridge, so the bridge will be raised, and the tracks on the freight line will be lowered somewhat.

All of this work on the M line must be done prior to the closure of the Canarsie Tube, as the M line is one of the work-arounds to carry riders around the shutdown. Work on the Bushwick Viaduct is scheduled to begin in 2017.

It is still too early to know whether phase 1 of the 2nd Avenue subway will open by the end of 2016, as scheduled. The contractor is being paid extra to get the line going by December, with particular attention being paid to the 72nd Street station, where escalator problems could derail the timely opening of this important new transit line. In the meantime, W train service, which was curtailed in the disastrous service cuts of June, 2010, will be making a comeback, to serve the Astoria line, as Q service will be diverted to the new 2nd Avenue subway. So, N,W

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FROM THE SOUTHWEST AND NEARBY

By *J.W. Madison*

Transit In Albuquerque:

Concerning Albuquerque's latest effort to push back the tide of Rail-anchored transit common sense rolling across the West, here is a partial account of the antics related to our proposed BRT line, called Albuquerque Rapid Transit (ART):

A lawsuit seeking to block construction of ART was dismissed by a federal judge in late July, supposedly clearing the way for continued construction of the BRT line along Central Avenue (Old Route 66).

But on August 1, another judge says Stop That Bus. Then on August 2, the August 1 judge says, never mind, go ahead with the project, but only the "pre-construction" phase, till whatever ruling comes out next from wherever.

On August 8, the news broke that one Albuquerque City Councilor has introduced a bill calling for an election to decide the fate of ART, and another has introduced another calling for a halt to the project till the financial picture is better explained. On August 16, the City Council demanded that the Mayor clearly explain said finances within three weeks.

Now some "leaders" are calling for an election this November to decide whether to hold another election in the further future, to gauge public sentiment about ART. But this future election would be non-binding and too late to stop construction.

And there's some doubt as to whether the allocated \$75-million federal grant will even be awarded, and if so, how much of it. This one can't be laid on New Mexico; it's a Congress Thing.

I did not make up any of this, honest.

One reasonable school of thought holds forth that our Mayor Berry wants to be the next Governor, that he hasn't done much of anything as Mayor, and that he needs to show some concrete evidence that he was ever in office at all. The irony of course is that he's hitched his wagon (as it were) to a widely discredited transit half-measure, rather than push hard for what most other major cities in the West have already implemented with great success on many fronts—rail-anchored transit. The latter would of course make him a much more interesting gubernatorial candidate...

The Southwest Chief:

Concerning the struggle to save the *Chief* and keep it where it is, a proposal has been made to re-route the La Junta / Trinidad CO segment so as to pass through Pueblo and Walsenburg. Rails Inc supports this, for two reasons:

- 1) It would add almost 200,000 potential riders to the Chicago / LA route, and
- 2) It would bring our dream of Albuquerque-Denver Rail service about 85 miles closer to reality, by bringing passenger Rail almost within reach of future Front Range commuter rail. If they ever build a regional commuter service South from Denver, Pueblo is not all that much longer a reach than Colorado Springs.

Amtrak has offered to create a "stub-end" branch service between La Junta and Pueblo. This is an inferior alternative, but better than nothing if it can be extended later to Trinidad and Colorado Springs, as part of our fantasy "Rocky Mountain Flyer".

On August 3, (former) Amtrak Chair Joe Boardman declared the *Chief* saved and that it will continue to run on its present route. Since this sounded almost too

good to be true, I asked Evan Stair of Passenger Rail Oklahoma about it. His response:

"The *Southwest Chief* was saved when the Garden City TIGER Grant was awarded in 2014. The 2015 La Junta TIGER Grant award just improved its chances long term. Amtrak is attempting to get New Mexico to go after a final round but apparently were rejected for the 2016 TIGER program".

The August 19 "Breaking News" bulletin from Passenger Rail Oklahoma contains an excellent short summary of *SW Chief*-related news, below the announcement of Mr. Moorman's new job. Contact: EvanStair@PassengerRailOK.org.

In short, prospects are looking up, but some of the needed track rehab money has yet to be raised, in particular New Mexico's share. Wonder what Moorman will have to say about this?

The Heartland Flyer Extension:

The *Heartland Flyer* is an Amtrak train that operates between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City. Passenger Rail Oklahoma and others are promoting an extension of the *HF* to Wichita and Newton KS, where it would connect to the *SW Chief* and thence to Kansas City. This train, the Pueblo / Walsenburg re-route, and a proposed service from Tulsa to Kansas City would be significant steps toward re-establishing something resembling a rail network west of the Mississippi. They all deserve our wholehearted support.

J.W. Madison is a RUN Board Member and president of Rails Inc, based in Albuquerque, NM.

CANADA REPORT, FALL 2016

By Ken Westcar

National

Bob Johnston raised a few political eyebrows when his article on VIA Rail was published in the August edition of *Trains* magazine. His excellent account of VIA's history and possible future was impartial and very well researched but didn't obscure the fact that Canada's national passenger rail service remains in deep trouble. Until there's crystal clarity on fleet renewal and route upgrades, the recently announced federally-funded cosmetics program for station facilities and maintenance center upgrades is about as good as it's going to get for the next five years or so.

Atlantic Canada

Meanwhile, in a rather puzzling move, VIA recently filed a proposal to operate a commuter service between Windsor Junction and Halifax in the province of Nova Scotia. The Halifax region is beset with traffic snarls and, for at least a decade, there's been talk of fast commuter ferries and rail services but it seems the planners have finally figured that more roads beget more congestion. This VIA move is surprising because they have always sworn-off being a commuter railway but may have something to do with the fact that they have some very serviceable Budd RDCs to deploy and little else to do until the federal government decides its fate.

Also in Nova Scotia, the Cape Breton Railway between Halifax and Sydney remains under threat due to declining freight volumes handled by incumbent operator Genesee and Wyoming. This scenically superb line once hosted VIA's "Bras d'Or" passenger service that terminated about 15 years ago. The province apparently has no interest in acquiring the tracks but, in a stellar

display of climate change mitigation, is welcoming more intense air service on the route and continues to improve the adjacent highway. The line has tremendous potential for shore excursions by rail for the cruise ship companies visiting Atlantic Canada ports but interest in this is absent.

Ontario

During the last week of July, the Ontario Minister of Transport, Steven Del Duca, released the infrastructure upgrade plan and timeline for the introduction of an all-day GO Train service between Toronto and Niagara Falls ON. It largely silenced complaints that the province was deliberately postponing completion of the service for political and budget reasons.

"There is much work to be done to complete this work, and while all involved wish it were a simpler and quicker task, it is not. There will be:

- 9.8 km of new track between Desjardins Canal area and the new West Harbour GO Station to support increased GO train service within Hamilton (currently under construction);
- 3.9 km of new track between West Harbour GO Station and the future Confederation GO Station;
- 16.4 km of new track between Nelles Road, Grimsby, and Jordan Station, which is an existing single track section;
- 3.7 km of new track between Stanley Road, Niagara Falls, and the Niagara Falls station, an existing single track section;
- Pocket track at St. Catharines station;
- Signals for the new track;
- Extension of the centralized traffic control system from Stanley Road, Niagara Falls, to the Niagara Falls station;
- 12 new crossovers between the new Confederation station and Niagara Falls;
- Road crossing modifications at 17 locations (additional track, road and approach modifications, and crossing protection modifications);
- Culvert extensions as required, and
- The infrastructure required for Niagara service will add to the infrastructure required for

extending service from West Harbour station to the new Confederation station."

Most of the existing right-of-way is owned by Canadian National and hosts about five heavy-hauls daily. Although initially double-tracked between Hamilton and Niagara Falls, CN removed much of this several decades ago as the single track was deemed adequate. In addition to providing travelers to and from Niagara relief from an increasingly congested and sprawl-burdened QEW highway, the route upgrades could benefit Amtrak's "Maple Leaf" by eliminating many of the choke points that cause delays to and from the Canadian side of the frontier. The entire project is expected to be completed by 2023.

British Columbia

After voters nixed a sales tax increase in 2015 to pay for transit developments in the Vancouver area (this was primarily a veiled criticism of operator TransLink's management) the federal government and the province are now working on a funding formula for expansion of rail services. Although obscured in cautious wording it seems that the West Coast Express heavy-rail commuter operation will purchase additional train sets and the wildly successful Sky Train will see further substantial investment, both to increase system capacity.

Meanwhile restoration of VIA's "Malahat" RDC service between Victoria and Courtney on Vancouver Island was recently dealt a further blow when the City of Nanaimo tragically withdrew its support. Perhaps future Canadian generations in a carbon-constrained world will ask why this and the Cape Breton Railway were lost at a time when the rest of the world was doing precisely the opposite.

Ken Westcar is a Board Member of Transport Action Ontario.

SEPTA PASSENGERS SIDELINED BY DEFECTIVE CARS

By *Chuck Bode*

One hundred and twenty of SEPTA's regional rail cars were removed from service following discovery of a broken equalizer on July 1. There are four equalizers per car. They are under the springs and above the axles—transferring the entire weight of the car to the axles.

The cars involved are the Silverliner V cars delivered in 2010-2013 to SEPTA and the Delaware Department of Transportation. They represent about 30% of the regional rail fleet, the remainder consisting of 231 Silverliner IV cars from the 1970s and 52 somewhat more recent push-pull cars with eight locomotives.

Removal of a large portion of the fleet has left peak-period railroad passengers behind at the station. SEPTA implemented a schedule intended for reduced service during major storms, basically the Saturday schedule. In the morning, the trains fill up at the outer stations and thereafter do not stop at the inner stations. In the evening, passengers for all stations have an equal chance of boarding, but not all can get on.

After a few days SEPTA was able to obtain some cars from other agencies to supplement the fleet. There seems to be one train of NJ Transit cars making a round trip on the Trenton line, one train of Amtrak cars making two morning inbound and two afternoon outbound Bryn Mawr trips, and two sets of MARC cars with Amtrak engines. As these cars became available, SEPTA published updated schedules with additional service on July 11, July 18, and most recently, August 8 on its website.

Printed copies of those schedules were available at Center City stations when staff was on duty. Between those dates SEPTA's website described more recent schedule changes, but no current actual timetables were made available on the web or at

stations. The crowded trains prevent collecting fares. To rectify this situation, on August 1 SEPTA began the collection of afternoon outbound fares before passengers could get on the platforms in Center City.

The difficulty began during summer vacation season with its reduced ridership. Even so, the packed conditions on the trains slow passenger boarding and alighting, causing trains to become late. The passenger information system does not reflect this—trains are shown as having arrived at Trenton over 20 minutes before the train physically arrives at the station. Although there are far fewer trains operating, using 30% fewer cars, SEPTA does not seem to be putting sufficient crews on the trains to open all the doors, even reverse commute trains, further delaying the trains.

Other difficulties arise. The severe weather schedule was intended for use during conditions such as blizzards when the entire area would be off-schedule. Use of a Saturday schedule when Amtrak is on a weekday schedule in normal weather means that SEPTA trains are not in their weekday path. This causes additional delays. This may have been the only way to immediately address the issue, but after a month it is time for a schedule that puts the operating trains into available time slots to reduce delays for everyone.

Another unusual issue is the cancellation of many weekend trains. Passengers complain of 30 to 40 trains being cancelled, allegedly for a shortage of crews despite fewer weekday trains requiring crews.

As of August 5 the situation is expected to continue into November. Following discovery of the broken equalizer on one car, all of the Silverliner V cars were inspected. One hundred and fifteen of the 120 cars had cracked equalizers, a serious defect that keeps the cars out of service under FRA regulations. (The cracks are not easily seen unless the truck is disassembled.)

There was the expected “who is to blame” in the press. Were the cracks related to welding on the equalizers during assembly of the cars? Are the cars overweight? Was something overlooked during design? Hyundai-Rotem, the Korean manufacturer, of course said it is not their fault—they were required to build a factory in the US and use American workers. The union, of course, said the workers are not at fault. Hyundai-Rotem also points out that they were required to use equalizers made by an American company specified by SEPTA. This company may have been one of the top names “back in the day,” but now seems to be down to a few employees and in bankruptcy. Finally, on August 5 SEPTA stated that the cause was faulty welding.

There seem to be two kinds of alternate equalizers that should work. Hyundai-Rotem claimed to be buying supplies of both kinds so that repairs can be made once the cause is determined. Repairs will require removing all the cars from the trucks, disassembling the trucks, then reassembling the trucks with the replacement equalizers, and re trucking the cars, no doubt followed by testing. On August 5 SEPTA stated that the proposed equalizers would be fatigue tested and that repairs would begin in August, with about 10 cars repaired weekly. Work is expected to be finished in November.

This occurrence once again displays the inadequacy of American infrastructure. Before Amtrak and before the current Wall Street frenzy over immediate results, railroads were slow to dispose of old equipment. A major reason railroads were able to quickly rise to the occasion during World War II was that equipment had been rusting in the yards throughout the Depression. Into the 1960s, spare passenger cars were available to handle ridership above the normal level (such as holidays), not to mention accommodating special movements. (Now we read of Amtrak cancelling trains to make cars available for charters!)

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ASSORTED NOTES FROM NEW YORK

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trains will serve Astoria, with the W train travelling as far south as Whitehall Street, in Lower Manhattan. The Broadway line in Manhattan will have N,Q express service, as well as R,W local service, as it did before the 2010 service cuts.

Governor Cuomo has pushed for wireless/Wi-Fi service in all underground stations by the end of 2016, and Transit Wireless, the company that is building the network, is working apace to get this accomplished. Many new stations have wireless service now, and more are coming on line regularly. Most stations in Queens that are underground have wireless service, a good chunk of Manhattan stations have it, and some Bronx stations as well. Brooklyn is the next area to get the service. While it's great to be able to text and e-mail, as well as surf the web, many passengers will not like the constant chatter that is likely to take place when all stations are wired!

The Governor has also pushed the MTA to order more "open gangway" cars for the agency's R211 car order. Now, 750 of the approximately 1,000-car order will be the open gangway type, which will allow easier movement between cars, and should speed boarding, which has delayed trains on many occasions. Wider doors should also speed the boarding process—as

long as folks step away from the doors, which is suggested in frequent announcements, but not always followed. The R211 subway cars will replace the aging R46 fleet, which run on the A, E, and R lines.

The Governor has also pushed to speed up the conversion to the new fare payment system, which will replace the aging MetroCard with electronic fare payment. The Hudson Line of Metro-North, as well as the Port Washington branch of the LIRR, are experimenting with payment by smart phones, similar to what Amtrak uses. The aging MetroCard system requires frequent cleaning of turnstiles, and the electronic stripe can get damaged, resulting in frustrated riders being told to "swipe again" or "swipe again here." Moving to smartcard and electronic fare payment will not only speed fare payment, but can be utilized in new fare incentives, as well as moving more easily between commuter rail and subway/buses.

The East Side Access project, which will bring the LIRR into Grand Central Terminal is moving ahead, but perhaps not at the pace many would like to see. Amtrak is not providing enough access to their right of way in the Sunnyside Yard area, which may delay the project. Work must also be done in the East River Tunnels. When East Side Access is complete, this will free up slots in Penn Station to allow Metro-North's New Haven line to come into Penn Station, which will also see the

construction of four new Bronx stations, including CoOp City. CoOp City, a very large apartment complex in the Northeast Bronx (rivaling the population of many small cities), has a long commute into Midtown or Lower Manhattan. When Metro-North stops there, the trip to Penn Station will take 20 minutes or so, compared to the current average commute time of an hour and 20 minutes!

As you can see, many transit improvements are happening in the transit capital of North America. Some should have happened years ago, but for one reason or another—usually finding—were put off. Things are definitely happening now, and kudos to Governor Cuomo for pushing some long-delayed initiatives and recognizing the importance of transit to the New York City area and the entire State of New York. Now, let's hope that the funding that New York State has promised for these essential projects comes through. As New Yorkers like to say: "Show us the money!" Ridership is growing here in New York, and the transportation system must grow to accommodate this increased ridership. Jobs, mobility, clean air—the common denominator is a frequent, fast, and growing transit system.

Andrew Albert is Vice-Chairman of RUN, the Chair of the NYC Transit Riders Council, and Riders' Representative on the MTA Board.

SEPTA PASSENGERS SIDELINED BY DEFECTIVE CARS

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SEPTA's problem is not an isolated incident. Just a few years ago, Berlin subways suffered a similar problem. A couple of decades back, many agencies discovered they had buses with defective frames. A year ago SEPTA was rationing train capacity because the Pope was coming. SEPTA was unable to use buses because the agency currently lacks sufficient drivers to operate its scheduled bus service, although on August 5 the possibility of express bus routes was announced.

Is the time not past for establishment of a national pool of spare transit equipment: bus, rapid transit, and railroad? Along with that, a system of reserve workers should be developed. Perhaps retirees could keep their certifications for five years so that they could quickly return to service when needed.

In the meantime, former rail passengers seem to be driving. Although SEPTA's rail ridership is down, checking with an Uber driver along with bus and subway riders

failed to find any indication of an observable increase in riders. Once again we learn that people will ride the rails, otherwise they drive or stay home. College students ride the regional rail lines in droves. As late August comes and classes begin, more riders will be left behind.

Chuck Bode is RUN Membership Secretary and a member of the Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation.

AMTRAK AT AGE 45

By Bill Engel

It hardly seems possible that Amtrak has been in existence for 45 years! It was on May 1, 1971 that Amtrak began operations. Take a brief look at what has happened in the ensuing 45 years.

Amtrak began operating with locomotives and passenger cars that were the best of what the freight railroads had in 1971. Even so, much of the equipment was 15 to 20 years old. The GG-1 electric locomotives used on the Northeast corridor (NEC) were a 1930s design!

Compare the age of that fleet with the age of Amtrak's current fleet of cars and locomotives. The Amfleet 1 coaches and food service cars that form the backbone of equipment on the NEC were purchased

starting in 1975! Cars used for the long distance services from New York City to Chicago, Miami, and New Orleans are Amfleet II coaches from the early 1980s and Viewliner sleeping cars from the mid 1990s. The newest cars on these services are the baggage cars, just introduced in 2015. Incredibly, the dining cars on these services have never been replaced and are the oldest cars in Amtrak revenue service.

On long-distance trains from Chicago to New Orleans, Texas, and the West Coast, the backbone of the fleet are the Superliner I and II cars built in the late 1970s and early 1990s, respectively. These trains also feature the baggage cars introduced in 2015.

Looking at locomotives, the last of the order for 70 ACS-64 electric locomotives for the NEC entered service in July. The ACS-64

locos allowed retirement of the AEM-7 model of the 1970s and '80s. But no new diesel electric locomotives to replace the P40 and P42 units now in service are in sight. Any of the P40 units in use are at least 20 years old. Some of the state-operated corridor services in North Carolina and on the West Coast have newer units.

Technology, much of which did not exist in 1971, has led to Amtrak having a system wide ticketing/reservations system, and other passenger conveniences, such as Wi-Fi, which are great. In this writer's opinion, Amtrak has done much better keeping up with technology than it has in ensuring a modern fleet of rail equipment.

Bill Engel is a RUN Board Member based in Clinton, OH.

L.A. VOTERS TO DECIDE ON TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN

By Dana Gabbard

On Nov. 8, the voters of Los Angeles County will decide whether to adopt the Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan, designated as Measure M. The two key funding components of it are a new ongoing 1/2% sales tax for transportation purposes and extending the existing Measure R 1/2% sales tax, which currently will expire in 2039.

For rail advocates, passage of the measure is vital as it will facilitate construction of projects that will fulfill the long-held dream of having Los Angeles County served by a robust urban rail network. Projects that it would make possible include:

- A 20-mile light rail line between Downtown Los Angeles and Artesia using a Red Car right-of-way (the West Santa Ana branch)
- Extending the Gold Line light rail on both ends, on the Foothill end from Azusa to Claremont and from East L.A. two branches eastward, one
- Extending the Green Line light rail on both ends; on the east end having it continue to the Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs Metrolink station and on the west end to Torrance in the South Bay
- Accelerating the construction of the Purple Line heavy rail extension between Beverly Hills and Westwood, so it is completed in 2024 instead of 2035 as is currently scheduled due to existing financial constraints
- Extending the under-construction Crenshaw light rail line north to Hollywood via West Hollywood
- Converting the Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit line between Warner Center and North Hollywood to light rail
- A new rail line serving the 405 freeway corridor linking the San Fernando Valley, Westwood/UCLA and LAX

to Whittier along Washington Bl. and another to South El Monte along the 60 freeway

- A new 3.8-mile streetcar line in downtown Los Angeles

The measure also includes funding for operations of the Metrolink regional commuter rail system. In addition, Metro will be undertaking various capital improvements in Los Angeles County to enhance travel times, service reliability, and speed on Metrolink and Amtrak service

The great challenge is that such local tax measures in California require a 2/3 majority for passage. Four years ago, Measure J, a similar proposal, fell short by 0.56% of achieving passage. At that time most felt what was needed was to regroup and try again in 2016. In the intervening four years, an intense consultation process with local stakeholders was undertaken to build an impressive coalition through the leadership of Move L.A., so the new effort for transportation sales taxes would have broad support that hopefully will overcome the 2/3 hurdle this time.

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SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S ANNUAL MEETING / RAIL SUMMIT

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accomplishments of the past year and goal setting for the year to come. Nominated Board Members will be elected to the Board of Directors for a three-year term. Time will be allotted for members of the audience to share their concerns regarding rail passenger service.

The remainder of the day will include a number of speakers:

- Ed Ellis, CEO, Iowa Holding Company will provide an update regarding the status of the *Hoosier State* and what he hopes to accomplish over the next few years.

- Will Wingfield, Indiana DOT spokesperson (invited) will describe the proposed two year extension of service and INDOT's expectations.

- The Mayors of Lafayette, West Lafayette and Rensselaer, IN will describe the economic impact that passenger rail is having on their communities.

- Marc Magliari, Regional Media Relations Manager at Amtrak, will talk about Amtrak's role regarding the *Hoosier State* service and will answer questions members of the audience have concerning other Amtrak long-distance and state supported services.

- Steve Coxhead, the President of the Indiana Rail Passenger Alliance, and other members of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance will offer closing remarks regarding their goals for passenger rail service in Indiana.

We look forward to learning more about this exciting public/private partnership and the opportunity to hear your concerns regarding improving passenger rail service not only in Indiana, but in other parts of the country as well. Please see RUN's website for the latest information about this worthwhile event.

'HOOSIER STATE' TRAIN OFFERS TRAVELERS A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE THAN THE REST OF AMTRAK

By *David Peter Alan*

Until the early 1970s, American trains had their own personalities. Each railroad ran its own trains. The railroads took pride in their best trains, ran them with special equipment, and gave each train its own style. These trains featured comfortable cars and freshly prepared meals in the dining car.

Then Amtrak standardized the appearance of its trains and the food served in its dining cars, and became a homogenized system. Recently, Amtrak has reduced amenities on trains, to the point where more trains east of Chicago and New Orleans run without dining cars than with them. Still, one train stands out. It is the *Hoosier State*, which wends its way between Chicago and Indianapolis four days each week; the days when the *Cardinal* does not go to or from Washington, DC and New York.

The trip takes four hours, but this train is different from all other trains in the Amtrak timetable—a difference that is immediately apparent in Chicago. Instead of the standard Amtrak equipment, the train runs vintage equipment sporting the old orange and brown color scheme of the Illinois Central Railroad.

It now represents Iowa Pacific Holdings (IPH), owned by former Amtrak manager Ed Ellis.

On the *Hoosier State*, Amtrak supplies the train and engine crews, and sells tickets in the same manner as for all other Amtrak trains. IPH supplies the equipment and the on-board services. The 1950s-vintage coaches have newly-installed reclining seats, foot rests and more leg room than Amtrak offers on trains that run from New York to places like Chicago, Miami and New Orleans. The dining car is especially impressive. On the night this writer rode the train, it had a full-length dome where business-class passengers sat and ate. Their dinner was included in their fare. Coach passengers ate at tables on the lower level of the car, in a space that still looked like the luxury cars from the past.

The “dinner special” that evening was chicken piccata (chicken in a lemon sauce), served with rice and mushrooms, and fresh asparagus. There was only one dessert: a lemon pudding cake with blueberry sauce. With coffee, the price was \$19.00, plus a tip. Everything was served on genuine china, not the plastic plates that Amtrak

uses. A dinner like that has not been available on Amtrak since 2005. There is also a selection of drinks, including some interesting wines and beers. At the beginning of the trip, a waiter took drink orders from coach passengers and delivered the drinks (served in glasses, not in plastic cups) to those customers at their seats. Amtrak does not offer that service.

Today's *Hoosier State* is essentially a Public-Private Partnership (P3) between IPH, Amtrak and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT), which supervises its operation. The communities of Lafayette, Crawfordsville and Indianapolis support the train, as well. In a promotional video about the train, IPH head Ed Ellis said: “We think this is the kind of partnership that ought to be repeated all over the country.” The video is displayed on the train's website, www.hoosierstatetrain.com.

(The route is complicated, using the tracks of several railroads between Chicago and Dyer, the first stop. This requires several clearances on the way, and sometimes this causes major delays. On the evening this

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'HOOSIER STATE' TRAIN OFFERS TRAVELERS A DIFFERENT EXPERIENCE THAN THE REST OF AMTRAK

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writer rode the train, it sat for more than 90 minutes at Shelby Siding, between Dyer and the next stop of Rensselaer. Beyond Dyer, the train runs on the historic Monon route, which last hosted a passenger train to Indianapolis in 1954. Today, most riders go to Lafayette (the home of Purdue University), Crawfordsville (the home of Wabash College) or Indianapolis (the state capital).

Heather Hice, IPH's Marketing and Sales Manager for the train, says that support for the train is strong, both from the business community in the towns where it stops, and from the students who attend the colleges in those towns. "We are getting the message out to the right people," she said, and continued: "We have had great success pounding the pavement and talking to people." She noted that the communities were concerned last year when there was a threat to discontinue the train, and added that local journalists are now writing positive stories about it.

Hice called the four-day-a-week schedule "a challenge" but added that she and her colleagues can still promote the train. It runs in both directions on Fridays and Sundays, so part of the marketing strategy for the train is promoting week-end getaways to Chicago.

A round-trip to Indiana is not feasible with the current schedule, which consists of an early-morning departure from Indianapolis and a late-afternoon return from Chicago, when it runs. That schedule allows about six hours in the Windy City and provides connections with Amtrak long-distance trains. Advocates at the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) are calling for an additional train that would leave Chicago in the morning and return from

Indianapolis in the evening. They are also pushing for the Hoosier State to run every day, on a separate schedule from the tri-weekly *Cardinal*.

IPRA President Steve Coxhead says that recent ridership increases on the Hoosier State show that there is pent-up demand for a premium service, rather than a "bare-bones" travel experience. "You really can't fly in the state, and driving your own car is hardly luxurious," he

If the experiment succeeds and Indiana creates a true Hoosier Corridor, it could be a model for adding more trains to the nation's passenger rail network.

said. Coxhead and his colleagues are concentrating on convincing the business community that the train offers a pleasant and productive setting for business travelers. He believes that, if the business community supports the train, there will also be room in the coaches for budget-minded passengers to ride, as well.

Chicago advocate and RUN member F.K. Plous cautions about expecting too much from a train that runs so infrequently. Plous is Director of Corporate Communications for Corridor Capital, L.L.C., a firm that competed for the contract to equip the train, but did not get it. He says that a corridor is needed to draw riders away from other modes of transportation, and that one daily frequency or less is not enough. "You need speed, frequency, access, convenience and safety to get enough riders," he says. The Streamliners of 60 or 70 years ago had good food, but they also had the other

features." Plous cautions that it would require a large investment on the part of the state to establish the sort of corridor that would attract riders; an investment like Illinois is making and California has made.

It would be up to INDOT to implement such a recommendation. Coxhead told this writer that Indiana officials are more enthusiastic about the Hoosier State, because it is a public-private partnership (P3), than they would have been about a government-only project. Local advocates and managers are encouraged by current ridership and revenue numbers, but the frequency is still very limited. If the experiment succeeds and Indiana creates a true Hoosier Corridor, it could be a model for adding more trains to the nation's passenger rail network, or for re-branding trains to bring more riders on board.

For now, the train is providing a taste of the sort of rail travel that millions of passengers enjoyed half a century ago. Could it serve as a model for more private operators to run other Amtrak trains, especially new trains that do not run today? At this time, it is difficult to say.

Will Amtrak eventually warm to the idea of private operators like Ed Ellis and his IPH railroad participating in running Amtrak trains in the future? We may know more when Wick Moorman settles in as Amtrak's President. One thing is certain: the tiny Hoosier State with its comfortable cars and delicious food is currently putting the rest of Amtrak to shame, at least as far as service is concerned.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board Member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, based in Millburn, NJ.

ALASKA: 'THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME,' PART I



A train on the White Pass & Yukon Route railroad.

By Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.

The initial planning for the trip began when my brother and I, mere teenagers living in New Britain, CT, sent a letter to the Alaskan State Tourist Bureau for information about the Last Frontier. Our dream was to travel north to obtain free land to build a homestead in the Matanuska Valley north of Anchorage. However, our trip was postponed indefinitely—by work, college, graduate school, marriage, teaching, raising children and his early death. Planning again began in earnest several months ago when my wife and I, currently retired, gathered travel books from the local library. We set our sights on Alaska. I wanted to travel on trains; she wanted to set foot in the Yukon. We decided to take the White Pass and Yukon Railway to Fraser, the bus to Whitehorse in the Yukon and the Alaskan Railroad from Anchorage to Seward. From Seward, we would take the Denali Star to Denali National Park and Fairbanks and finally fly back to Seattle. From there we would ride Amtrak to Oregon and Colorado to see friends and family members as we made our way home.

We flew on Alaskan Airlines from Boston to Seattle and then to Juneau arriving in the early afternoon. We planned to stay a day

and a half to visit a museum featuring native Alaskan artifacts and cultures and to see the Mendenhall Glacier. (It is accessible by city bus if you are willing to walk the last mile and a half.) Viewing the receding glacier was worth the hike, though it was disturbing to see the effects of climate change on its present size as compared to earlier photos. Downtown Juneau was a surprise. It was overflowing with tourists who had disembarked from one of the five cruise ships anchored in the harbor. There was scarcely room to walk and all of the tourist businesses were booming.

To escape the Disneyland atmosphere, we checked out the public library located on the top of a four-story parking garage to peruse local newspapers. Later, as we walked through town in search of dinner, we heard drumming and chanting and stopped to peer in the window of the storefront it was emanating from. A woman beckoned us to go in. We discovered it was the local food kitchen and the drummers were there providing entertainment for those who had gathered for dinner. We sat a while listening and left feeling that we had had been privileged to be among these people. We were glad to leave town a day later, traveling on the hotel van driven by a transplanted New Yorker who provided many laughs with his endless comedy act as he drove

us with a friend out of town to catch the Alaskan State Ferry to Skagway.

Traveling to Skagway on a high-speed catamaran was scenic and relaxing. Although it was a bright, clear, warm day, passengers were confined to sitting in the cabin. We spent two hours looking out through windows that were sparkling clean and large enough to see the various sights along the way.

Skagway was also a surprise. The town is located at the northern tip of Alaska's inside passage—90 miles northeast of Juneau and 110 miles south of Whitehorse, Yukon. The first non-Native settler was Captain William Moore who is credited with the discovery of the White Pass route into interior Canada. But it wasn't until gold was discovered in the Klondike that the town really took off. According to a Northwest Mounted Police report, Skagway in October 1897 "had grown from a concourse of tents to a fair sized town with laid out streets and numerous frame buildings, stores, saloons, gambling houses, dance houses and a population of about 20,000." Today, most of the buildings in downtown Skagway dating back to the short-lived gold rush era are still standing. The boardwalks, however, are not filled with prospectors looking for gold, but cruise ship tourists looking to buy trinkets before leaving for another port. Given this scene, we quickly went off to find the White Pass and Yukon Route (WP&YR) Depot to pick up our tickets which had been purchased over the internet and to check our luggage. A chartered bus would take our luggage later to Fraser, where we picked it up and transferred to a second bus heading to Whitehorse in the Yukon.

The WP&YR is a Class II, 3-foot narrow gauge railroad which currently operates from early May to late September as a tourist railroad from Skagway to Fraser and on to Carcross in the Yukon. The railroad was built between 1898 and 1900 to provide a safer passage for the thousands of "gold crazed men and women" caught up in the incredible

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ALASKA: 'THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME,' PART I

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gold rush stampede. The overland route to the Klondike involved trekking over 600 miles of treacherous trails and dangerous waterways to reach the gold field. The railroad climbs from sea level in Skagway to almost 3,000 feet at the summit in just 20 miles and features steep grades of almost 3.9%. Building the 100 miles of track was a major challenge for construction required building two tunnels, numerous bridges and trestles. While the gold rush era was short lived, the WP&YR railroad carried thousands of pound of ore and concentrates to Skagway to be loaded upon ore ships. During WWII the railroad was the chief supplier for the US Army's Alaska highway construction project. The WP&YR suspended operations when world metal prices plummeted in 1982, but was reopened in 1988 as a narrow gauge tourist railroad between Skagway and White Pass Summit and was later extended to Carcross in 2007. WP&YR's rolling stock includes 20 diesel electric locomotives and 83 restored and replica coaches and two steam engines.

Our trip on the WP&YR began with a short bus ride from the downtown depot to the rail yard where we boarded the train heading to Fraser. The train passes the maintenance shops, then the Gold Rush Cemetery, the resting place for early Skagway residents who were Gold Rush gangsters, on its way over White Pass Summit at an elevation of 2,865

ft. Along the way, a narrator pointed out points of interest including Black Cross Rock where a blasting accident buried two railroad workers under a 100-ton granite rock; Bridal Veil Falls, a beautiful waterfall which cascades down 6,000 feet from glaciers on nearby mountains; and Dead Horse Gulch, where 3,000 pack animals fell victims of neglect by gold rush stampedeers on their way to the gold fields.

Our final stop in Fraser, B.C. was the transfer location for us and other passengers going on to Whitehorse via the South Klondike Highway. The on-board train staff were not only courteous and attentive to passenger needs, but also kept the restrooms neat and clean during the trip. No food or drinks were available other than a bottle of water which was supplied to those passengers wanting a drink. Passengers are encouraged to purchase food before boarding in Skagway.

We spent two nights in Whitehorse before retracing our steps to catch a flight from Juneau to Anchorage and onward to Seward via the Alaskan railroad, and then to Denali National Park and Fairbanks. Whitehorse is Yukon's capital and the largest city in Northern Canada with a population of 27,889 (2013). It occupies both shores of the Yukon River which originates in British Columbia and flows out to the Bering sea in Alaska. With the discovery of gold in the Klondike, Whitehorse

developed quickly from a jumble of tents to a sizable town. For the thousands of stampedeers traveling down the Yukon River to Dawson, the construction of the WP&YR to Whitehorse in 1900 would provide the most practical route, avoiding the treacherous Whitehorse Rapids on the Yukon River. For decades Whitehorse would continue its role providing a connecting rail service with riverboat traffic to Dawson. Today, it currently has no active railway service other than a summer trolley which runs over WP&YR's tracks along the banks of the Yukon river. It runs hourly, carrying mostly tourists from Rotary Peace Park in the southern end of the city to the north end of the city center at Spook Creek Station. Out of reach of cruise ships and not as touted as other sights in Alaska, the town was sprinkled with tourists but the streets seemed to be largely populated by the people who live there. There was a spaciousness and beauty in the landscape as it began to turn its warm fall colors. One of its main attractions is the S.S. Klondike, a restored sternwheeler that once plied the Yukon River carrying fortune seekers. It is a national historical site and is open to the public.

To be continued: Onward to Seward, Anchorage, Denali, and Fairbanks via the Alaskan Railroad and back home via Amtrak's *Cascade* service, the *Coast Star Light*, *California Zephyr* and the *Lakeshore Limited*.

L.A. VOTERS TO DECIDE ON TRAFFIC IMPROVEMENT PLAN

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So far the only real opposition has come from the Bus Riders Union, which is a shortsighted stance since the measure includes funding for Bus Rapid Transit in several key corridors augmenting the rail network. Most local transit advocates perceive the organization's "rail is racist" message as having lost its relevance in the face of booming rail ridership growth that includes all demographics, ethnic

backgrounds, etc. They may protest, but few will pay attention.

A vigorous campaign for the measure is being mounted and advocates are hopeful of this time succeeding. A boost to the prospect for passage is the fortuitous recent opening of two rail extensions funded by existing transportation sales taxes, the Gold Line from Pasadena to Azusa and the Expo Line from Culver City to Santa Monica, providing proof that tax measures

produce tangible results.

Even as this article is appearing, outreach is underway via all avenues of communication including social media, blogs, etc. Two key websites for details about the measure are theplan.metro.net and voteyesonm.org.

Dana Gabbard is a RUN Board member and executive secretary of Southern California Transit Advocates.

RIDING THE RAILS IN GERMANY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY: SOME LESSONS FOR NORTH AMERICA, PART 2

By *F.K. Plous*

(Editor's Note: Part 1 of this article appeared in the Spring 2016 edition of the RUN Newsletter.)

We spent a delightful afternoon and evening in Salzburg, climbing to the top of the rock outcropping that overlooks the city, then descending back to street level and crossing the Salzach River into the historic and noble older part of town to visit churches and shops and have dinner. I posed for a photo in front of Mozart's birthplace and enjoyed my first wiener schnitzel served inside Austria.

But first we stopped at the magnificent railroad station to arrange our tickets for the somewhat complicated series of rail journeys we had planned for the next day, a multi-train *Drang nach Osten* across the Austrian border into Hungary. Our objective was to reach the small (pop. 7,000) town of Kőszeg in far western Hungary where my daughter had spent a year teaching English in the public high school and doing lots of what she does best—making friends.

Kőszeg is situated in a tiny peninsula of Hungarian territory that protrudes into Austria, and it is reached from Vienna by a single-tracked rail line that passes from Austria into Hungary—and back out into Austria again! Remember, this is territory long ruled by the Hapsburg family under its pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian Empire, when national and ethnic boundaries didn't count as much as they did after the Versailles Treaty left both countries independent (with about a third of Hungary's territory going to Romania, a sellout for which many Hungarians still denounce the shade of Woodrow Wilson).

Stepping up to the Austrian Federal Railways ticket counter on the ground level of the elevated station, we

explained our itinerary to the young English-speaking lady behind the counter. She understood the agenda perfectly, and her printer quickly spat out three second-class tickets.

The first leg was a 200-mile, two-hour sprint to Vienna on one of the 24 daily Munich-Salzburg-Vienna Railjet trains of the type we had arrived on the same morning from Munich.

The second leg—a distance of about 30 miles—would take us on a lower-speed Austrian Federal route from Vienna to Sopron, a large railway junction just inside the narrow peninsula of western Hungary poking into Austria. The peninsula, in fact, is so narrow at this point—no more than eight miles—that after dropping us at Sopron the train would travel south another couple of miles and re-enter Austria, where it would terminate at a tiny town called Deutschkreuz.

The third and final segment was from Sopron to Szombately, a town of substantial size only about 10 miles from our destination, Kőszeg. This domestic route was the only segment owned and operated totally by the Hungarian railroad system, MAV. There is an additional 10-mile single-track segment between Szombately and Kőszeg served by hourly single-car DMUs, but Eliza's friends in Kőszeg said they would pick us up at the Szombately station with their car, so we never got to use this quaint rural line.

Our Railjet to Vienna was scheduled to leave Salzburg just after 9 a.m. We made sure to be inside the station a good 30 minutes ahead of time, not just to assure we would not miss our train but to make sure we had a chance to enjoy some of the excellent sweet rolls and coffee with which the Austrians start their day. The block-long concourse under the 11

station tracks is lined with shops of all kinds, including several offering hot espresso—which now seems to be the standard in that part of Europe—and a full array of sweet breakfast pastries. I grabbed a sweet roll decorated with cherry filling and sat down to enjoy it with my coffee, and both lived up to the Austrian reputation for “coffee and.”

But I did not devote full attention to these treats, for I kept staring at my ticket, which was unlike any railroad ticket I had ever purchased. It included not only the train number and the departure and arrival times, but the most precise boarding instructions I'd ever confronted. All of our tickets said the train would leave from track 11, and that we were to board the train at platform position C.

This level of Teutonic precision literally was foreign to me. The closest American analogue I could recall was the system used on the Illinois Central in the 1950s and '60s when I was a college student at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. The platform position was not printed on the ticket, but whenever an all-reserved-space train such as the *Panama Limited*, *City of Miami* or *City of New Orleans* was about to arrive, the public-address system would announce, “New Orleans passengers holding space in car 501, please wait at position B. Passengers holding space for Jackson in car 503, please stand at position D,” and so on.

A good 10 minutes before our train was to arrive, I marched our little party up the escalator serving tracks 10 and 11 and found position C just a few steps away. We stood our luggage on the concrete and stared north to the station throat. Sure enough, two minutes before our scheduled departure time the now familiar red-and-gray nose of a big Taurus electric engine loomed in the distance and quickly approached. We waited

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RIDING THE RAILS IN GERMANY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY: SOME LESSONS FOR NORTH AMERICA, PART 2

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for our coach to slide to a stop with Teutonic precision precisely where we were standing.

But alas! The train, quickly decelerating now, slid past us and came to rest with its hind-end cab car a good 100 feet south of us.

“Hah!” I barked to Eliza and Bob. “These Austrians are all bluster. They pretend they’re going to stop a train right where the passengers are, but they can’t follow through. C’mon.” Snatching up our luggage, we bolted down the platform, raced past the cab car, which was all business class and cafe, boarded the first coach ahead of it and quickly found seats. A couple of minutes later the powerful Taurus surged forward and within minutes we were cruising east at what the mid-car ceiling monitor said was 230 km/h—about 135 miles per hour.

The day was exquisite—bright sunshine with just enough puffy altocumulus to create a calendar effect. Unlike the stretch of line between Munich and Salzburg, the track east of Salzburg did not have as many of those ugly blast fences to keep railroad noise out of the passing villages. The train seemed to be flying—again that quiet track that left the coach interior silent—and the superbly engineered track allowed the train to bank almost imperceptibly whenever it entered a curve. Despite the curves, I do not remember any brake applications except on approach to stations. The track seemed to be calibrated to let trains travel through curves at the same speed as they used on the straightaways.

Somewhere east of Salzburg, it became clear that we had left the original main line and were traveling on a relatively new passenger-only bypass designed to avoid freight traffic, as well as to avoid the curves associated with the bank of the Danube, which was now approaching on our left. Not only was the track smoother and the line straighter, the catenary poles seemed to be of a newer design, and the many tunnels, one of them almost two miles long, were done in the latest all-concrete design, with none of the fancy brick or stonework encountered in earlier tunnels. And the station stops, including the old city of Linz, were not in the cities proper but on a ridge above them outside of town. I had been looking forward to seeing something of handsome old Linz, but we never saw it. Clearly, we were in new territory. But what was it?

Only after returning from our trip did I learn that we were on the new St. Pölten Cutoff, a line-straightening project that OBB had been proposing for many years but did not achieve until the 21st century. The first contracts for development of the bypass were concluded in 1990, but property acquisitions and engineering work took nine years, so that the first shovelful of earth was not turned until 1999, and full operational cutover to the new route did not come until December 2012. About 30 miles of new line and 21 miles of tunnels had to be constructed, but the 2.8-billion-euro cost was worth it, as Vienna-Salzburg passenger timetables were cut by 23 minutes to their current express schedule of two hours 22 minutes. Freight traffic is moving faster too, and there’s more of it.

As the train swept—seemingly effortlessly—through the new tunnels and along the ridges paralleling

the Danube—I decided to sample some of its amenities. Coffee was no problem: A young man comes down the aisle periodically towing a large cart from which he dispenses the espresso which now seems to have taken over *Mittleuropa*. Each serving is absolutely fresh. As the server pulls abreast of your seat and you order coffee, he reaches over to the space between the seat cushions and plugs his cart into an electrical outlet mounted on the seat frame. Then he pushes a button to start the espresso machine, and a minute later he hands you a steaming cup of hot coffee. Pop is available as well, including the world’s favorite, Coca-Cola, but for an American the experience can be disappointing because the Europeans do not supply ice.

After downing my coffee I decided to stroll to the hind end to inspect the business-class/cafe car. The cafe, decorated in the canonical Austrian red-and-black and dispensing food and beverages from a curved counter similar to the one on the Amtrak Cascades Talgo trains, is positioned against the coach end of the train. As on the Talgos, tables for two and four are mounted along the side walls. I peeked behind the curtain into the business-class section, and it looked very nice, but I did not enter as the steward was right next to me finishing up his breakfast.

And I had to get back to our coach. We were approaching the outskirts of Vienna now, and the Railjet was eating up the kilometers fast. When I reached our seats I found Eliza in a somewhat intense conversation with the conductor.

“Dad, he says we’re on the wrong train.”

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RIDING THE RAILS IN GERMANY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY: SOME LESSONS FOR NORTH AMERICA, PART 2

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“What?”

“Dis iss two trains,” the conductor explained patiently. “After you got on ze train at Salzburg another train was coupled on ze back of ziss one. Ze front train goes to West Station in Vienna. Ze back train goes to Meidling Station where you ketch your train to Hungary.”

“But where do the two trains separate?” I said, getting a little panicky. “Do we have time to switch to the other train?”

“Oh, yes,” he smiled. “You vill heff about fife minutes. Venn we stop at Wien-West you get off ziss train and get on ze second train. It will be uncoupled and will go straight to Meidling.”

Which is exactly what we did. We must have looked like something out of a silent-film farce as we dragged our luggage off the front train, raced down the platform to the first open coach door and hauled our gear aboard again. As we passed the joint connecting the two trains we found men busily working on the coupling, and as we settled into our seats the rear section began to move and kept going. I guess they don't do standing air tests in Austria.

The trip south to Meidling station took only about 15 minutes, part of it retracing the route over which we had arrived but most of it new—and interesting. The right of way consisted of four tracks—sometimes more—and it sliced through a variety of neighborhoods on Vienna's west side, most of them built in the classical Late Empire style that the Austrian emperors copped from Baron Haussman's makeover of Paris ordered by Napoleon III during the 1830s. The boulevards were broad and there were lots of them, and we crossed them on stout steel viaducts that appeared to date from the turn of the last century. The tracks were busy with both local and long-distance trains, all of them using late-model rolling stock. Only for a brief moment at West Station did I notice a siding filled with fast-fading classic postwar European sleeping cars. They appeared to have come from several different national systems, and all shared a common fate: They were retired.

After a trip of about 15 minutes we slid into Meidling Station, a seven-track elevated junction with its head house at ground level and Vienna's busiest subway station one level below that. We had about 30 minutes to kill before catching our local to Hungary, and we were getting hungry, so we dragged out luggage down to the head house and grabbed a lunch from several of the many

food kiosks facing out onto the waiting room. Note to travelers: Viennese pizza is excellent, but the sausage is even better.

Not until we got back up to the platform did I have a chance to ruminate on what had just happened. That admonition on the tickets advising us to wait for our train at position C-3 had been right after all. If we'd stood where we had been told and waited a few seconds, the train on which we were ticketed would have stopped precisely in front of us as it coupled to the train that had passed us.

Naturally, as an American and a railroader, I thought I knew better. When the first train slid past us and stopped 100 feet from where we were standing, I had a typical American-railroader reaction: The railroad screwed up.

But the railroads in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland do not screw up, and as I peered down the track looking for our local to Hungary I realized I was learning the first big lesson of my trip to Europe: Don't try to second-guess the Teutons—especially when they're running a railroad. When they hand you a timetable or a ticket, believe it.

E.K. Plous is director of communications for Corridor Capital LLC.

2016 Schedule of RUN Board Meetings:

Meetings for the remainder of 2016 are scheduled for Sept. 10, Oct. 8 (annual meeting, Lafayette, IN) and Dec. 3.

Board meetings take place at the MTA headquarters in New York City from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m., unless otherwise noted.

For more information, contact Richard Rudolph, Chair, at 207-776-4961.

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We invite you to become a member of the Rail Users' Network, which represents rail passengers' interests in North America. RUN is based on the successful British model, which has been serving passengers since 1948. RUN networks passengers, their advocacy organizations, and their advisory councils. RUN is working to help secure an interconnected system of rail services that passengers will use with pride. RUN forms a strong, unified voice for intercity, regional/commuter, and transit rail passenger interests. By joining together, sharing information, best practices, and resources through networking, passengers will have a better chance of a vocal and meaningful seat at the decision making table.

RUN members enjoy newsletters, international conferences, regional rail forums, and other meetings to share information while working to improve and expand rail passenger service.

Membership is open to passengers, official advisory councils, advocacy groups, public agencies, tourist and convention bureaus, carriers and other profit-making organizations.

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