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IT'S TIME TO REGISTER!

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

The Pacific Northwest Passenger Rail Summit is being held Saturday, May 6, 2017 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 pm. at the Columbia City Theater, 4916 Rainer Ave. S. Seattle, Washington. This regional conference, sponsored by the Rail Users' Network and All Aboard Washington (AAWA), will examine passenger rail and rail transit issues in the Pacific Northwest. The focus will be on recent success stories, projects which are moving forward, and those which are standing still

and need support. We will also highlight the strategies of rail advocates in other parts of the country to promote and expand passenger rail.

The day will begin with opening remarks given by Dr. Richard Rudolph, Chair of the Rail Users' Network and Lloyd Flem, the Executive Director of All Aboard Washington. The chairs of the State House / Senate Transportation Committees, who are members of the Legislature's Rail Caucus, will also be on hand to greet and talk with attendees.

Featured speakers include:

- Ron Pate, WSDOT, Rail, Freight, and Ports Division Director, who will describe the progress and improvements made resulting from Washington State's federal ARRA passenger rail funding
- Martin Young, Director of Sounder, Sound Transit who will talk about the current growth and bright future of rail transit in the Central Puget Sound Region
- Rob Eaton, Director of Government Affairs, Amtrak Northwest will shed light on Amtrak's efforts to improve and expand service.

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SECOND AVENUE SUBWAY FINALLY OPENS... & OTHER NYC NEWS

By Andrew Albert

On Jan. 1, 2017, New York finally got the subway it has been waiting for—for over 50 years! Phase 1 of the 2nd Avenue Subway opened, to quite a large number of curious New Yorkers—and some who actually needed to get someplace! Phase 1 of the line runs from 63rd St/Lexington Avenue station (where there is an across-the-platform transfer to the F line) north along 2nd Avenue, with stops at 72nd Street, 86th Street, and 96th Street. These are relatively deep stations, with very long escalators and elevators to take passengers up and down from the street. After being open only from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. for the first week, the full 24-hour service

began on Jan. 8, and riders flocked to the line, which is the Q service, running from 96th St/2nd Avenue all the way to Coney Island.

The new stations are marvels in themselves, with stunning artwork in the three new stations, including some real eye-opening portraits by artist Chuck Close in the 86th Street station. There was a celebratory New Year's Eve party at the 72nd Street station (by invitation only), where Governor Andrew Cuomo, MTA Chair Tom Prendergast (now, sadly retired), and other elected officials spoke about the importance of transit, and the economic and social boon to the Upper East Side the new line

would be. As an MTA Board Member, I was lucky enough to get an invitation to the party, and it was packed with high-powered New Yorkers, with snacks, entertainment, and the celebratory inaugural ride on the line, from 72nd Street up to 96th Street, and return to 72nd Street for the party.

The line was expected to relieve overcrowding on the jam-packed Lexington Avenue lines (4,5,6), and it appears to be doing just that, although the effects are most felt on the #6 local. If you're traveling to or from Midtown Manhattan, either line would be a good choice. The 4 and 5 are largely

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STREETCARS ALIVE AND WELL IN NEW ORLEANS, AS NEW LINE OPENS FOR SERVICE

By *David Peter Alan*

The Streetcar Revival is alive and well in the Crescent City, which saw the opening of a new streetcar line last October. It runs on North Rampart Street, along the boundary of the French Quarter, and then continues downriver on St. Claude Avenue toward Elysian Fields Avenue in the Bywater neighborhood. It is the North Rampart Street / St. Claude Avenue Streetcar, and it runs for a distance of 1.6 miles (2.5 km). The new line runs through a half grand union at Canal Street and onto Loyola Avenue, heading toward the Union Passenger Terminal, where Amtrak trains and long-distance buses serve the city. The Loyola portion of the line was built for the Super Bowl game four years ago.

Service on the new line runs every 20 minutes throughout the service day, from 6 a.m. (starting later on Sundays) until midnight. The cars are familiar; they are the red cars, which also run on Canal Street. There were also other service enhancements, which began when the new line opened. Cars now run more often on Canal Street and on the Riverfront Line, a line in the French Quarter that runs along the Mississippi River, than they did before service started on the new line.

According to an RTA news release, the city's Mayor was glad to see the streetcars come back to the neighborhood. "It's been almost 70 years since buses replaced streetcars along this corridor, and we have come full circle," said Mayor Mitchell J. Landrieu. "In New Orleans, we always knew that streetcars and light rail work well in urban areas and are more environmentally friendly than buses. We are happy that the rest of the country now knows that, and we are calling on our local transit leaders to learn from them." The release also quoted Landrieu as saying that quality transit brings economic development. He mentioned that other streetcar lines in the city did the same,

going back to the original St. Charles Avenue, and said that he expects more development along the new line. The headlines on the release were "Everything Old is New Again" and "Streetcars Back on Track along the North Rampart / St. Claude Corridor." The last time streetcars rolled along those streets was in 1949.

Patrice Bell-Mercadel, RTA Director of Marketing, said that the project was completed "on time and on budget and described it as "a very successful project for us." Justin T. Augustine III, head of RTA and Vice-President of Transdev, which operates the line, said: "A piece of history is coming back. The residents and the merchants along this corridor will see the economic benefit of this project." He added: "Access is critically important" and said that the RTA's streetcars and buses carry 20 million passengers per year. The agency has plans to build several more streetcar lines in the future, which Augustine said would provide "absolutely wonderful access and connectivity throughout the city."

Transit and environmental advocate Alan S. Drake, a RUN member who lives in Bywater, was the second revenue passenger on the line. He got up early to board the car at 6:00 in the morning. He enjoyed that ride and several others since then, and said that the line had some growing pains. Since then, Drake has seen an increase in ridership on the streetcar system. "More than half of all trips in New Orleans are either on streetcars, or on a streetcar with a transfer to or from a bus" he told this writer. With the recent increase in streetcar ridership, Drake suggested that RTA consider running a circulator route along three sides of the perimeter of the French Quarter. "It would make the Quarter much more accessible for both residents and tourists," he said. A segment of the Canal Street Line, the Riverfront Line, and the new line on North Rampart Street surround the French Quarter; only the side along Esplanade Avenue does not have track for streetcars.

Drake made a suggestion for funding a new streetcar line, wherever it may be built. His idea concerns the settlement reached in the case where Volkswagen was caught cheating on automobile emissions tests. The settlement provided for transit funding, which has been construed to mean buses, especially electric buses. Drake suggested that it should also be available for streetcars, since streetcars are also electrically powered. He further recommended that the funds be made available to expand existing streetcar systems, including the one in New Orleans.

"Building a single electrically-powered line is better than an all-diesel bus system," he told this writer, and continued: "Expanding an electric streetcar system like we have here in New Orleans produces a much greater benefit by expanding the reach of the system and giving people more places to go. The entire system gains riders, who also contribute more revenue."

There are further plans to expand the streetcar system in the Crescent City. There are several ideas under consideration, including an extension along St. Claude Avenue to Franklin Street. The RTA is taking suggestions on its website, www.norta.com. Whatever else may be said about the continuing enthusiasm for the "streetcar revolution" of a few years ago, it is definitely alive and well in New Orleans. At this writing, Drake reported seeing parties of mardi gras revelers partying on chartered streetcars. This is not only a use of transit unique to New Orleans, but everybody else can breathe a sigh of relief when the "party car" passes by because, no matter how much the revelers party, the operator will always be sober.

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

MTA SETS FARE PROPOSALS FOR 2017

(Continued from page 1)

loaded with riders from the Bronx, so the 86th Street station would be the only one where you had a choice between the new 2nd Ave line or the Lexington Line.

Many riders tell me that the new 2nd Avenue line has changed their travel patterns to and from work—and for the better. There is now a one-seat ride from the far Upper East Side to midtown West Side, thus relieving riders of time-consuming transfers to or from buses, or other subway lines. Along with the opening of the line, all of the traffic jamming construction materials on 2nd Avenue have been removed, so the stores and restaurants can resume life as usual, but with an important difference—they now have amazing mass transit right under their establishments!

With the Q now running up 2nd Avenue, the lines that will take you to Astoria are now the N (which has been running to Astoria for many years), and the W train (weekdays only). We will have to observe if the 6 minute headways on the 2nd Avenue subway will be sufficient for the growing crowds, or if service will have to be ramped up. As more

people opt for the new line (and switch from the Lexington Ave Line), my guess is that additional service will be warranted. But for now, New York has a brand spanking-new subway line, and we are loving it!

Fare Follies

In January, as is always the case every other year, the MTA Financial Plan involved votes on fare hikes for New York's subways, buses, commuter rail, and bridges/tunnels controlled by the MTA. This time, there were two options: option 1, which would have kept the base fare at \$2.75, but lowered the discount on the bonus MetroCard from 11% to 5%; or option 2, which would have raised the base fare from \$2.75 to \$3.00, but ramped up the bonus on the bonus MetroCard from 11% to 16%. Currently, on the bonus MetroCard, if you buy 10 rides, you get a free ride. On Option 1, you get a free ride after 20 rides! On Option 2, you get a free ride after just seven rides. Each of the options had a similar (under 4%) hike in weekly and monthly unlimited ride MetroCards, as well as similar raises in commuter rail fares. All signs pointed to the MTA recommending Option 2, which would have been the best deal for the MTA's most

frequent customers. (Almost no one buys the single-fare ride—unless you forgot your MetroCard.) But the Access-A-Ride fares are keyed to the base fare, and many folks did not want those fares to go up. When I spoke at the Board Meeting on the fare options, I said we should have dealt with Access-A-Ride separately, and taken care of that issue, without penalizing the majority of our riders. However, a letter-writing campaign by Access-A-Ride users to the Governor's office (and the Mayor's office) ensued, with the Governor telling the MTA they better opt for Option 1, and keep the base fare where it is.

Unfortunately, a great opportunity was missed, in my opinion, and while it's great that some folk's fares will not go up, the majority of riders will see their bonus card shrink to 5%, which, of course is a fare hike, any way you slice it. When riders begin loading their cards after March 19, the date the fare hike goes into effect, they will see they've been taken for a ride—courtesy of their Governor.

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

The Rail Users' Newsletter is published quarterly by the Rail Users' Network, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation.

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Andy Sharpe	Philadelphia, PA	SEPTA
Ken Westcar	Woodstock, ON	Transit Action Ontario

Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users' Network at: RUN; P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104 or email to rrudolph1022@gmail.com

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A DESIRE FOR STREETCARS: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PROPOSALS

By Dana Gabbard

Just as the San Diego Trolley sparked a nationwide urban light rail movement starting in the 1980s, in the new millennium the Portland Streetcar has ignited the return of streetcars to many American cities. Over the years I have heard of streetcar proposals in various Southern California cities and decided a survey of same would make a suitable topic for this newsletter. As I dug into the topic, I discovered that the number of proposals was almost twice as large as I had initially been aware of. Also, I discovered that beyond the obvious wordplay, having desire in the title proved apropos as I discerned a common theme of the fate of most proposals is the collision of aspiration and political realities. I hope our members enjoy this article as much as I enjoyed researching it.

Anaheim

In 2008, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) awarded the city of Anaheim a Go Local grant to study a transportation link between the Anaheim Amtrak/Metrolink station and the Disneyland Resort, surrounding tourist district and the Convention Center. After various options including an elevated monorail were considered in 2012, the City Council settled on a 3.2-mile streetcar project mostly along Katella Avenue, dubbed the Anaheim Rapid Connection, with a projected cost of \$300 million.

From the start, a vocal opponent was Mayor Tom Tait, who instead favored enhanced bus service for the area. The project was dogged by delays, including contention over routing, funding and its likely impact on traffic. By 2016, the lack of local consensus and continued questions about its viability led the OCTA Board to unanimously vote to cease supporting the project.

In an Aug. 31, 2016 Voice of OC article, "Anaheim Council Votes to Continue With Streetcar Despite Lack of Funding" by Thy Vo, Mayor Tait is described as zeroing in on a key question about the project: did it meet a need? Tait said he spoke with the executive director of the Anaheim Transportation Network, which coordinates the system of buses that currently serves the resort district. The buses pick up 24 to 40 people a day from the Metrolink station, Tait said. "The ridership isn't there, and we're going to spend all that transportation money that could be used for buses or all sorts of other things," said Tait.

The death blow to the project was delivered by the Nov. 2016 election, in which two new council members opposed to the project were elected. One of them is liberal Jose F. Moreno, who in a case of odd political bedfellows joined the libertarian Tait in opposing public subsidies for the tourism industry which both saw as exemplified by the streetcar. Now, with a solid majority of the council supporting him, Mayor Tait introduced a resolution of opposition to the project and to any streetcar project along Harbor Boulevard at the Jan. 10, 2017 council meeting, which passed 6-1. "The Anaheim Streetcar Project is Officially Dead," declared a headline on the Voice of OC website.

Fullerton

In 2011, the city was awarded an Urban Transit Planning Studies Grant by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Metropolitan Planning Organization for Southern California, to conduct a transit and planning analysis along the corridors between the Fullerton Amtrak/Metrolink station (a/k/a the Fullerton Transportation Center) and California State University, Fullerton. A consultant was hired and a steering committee of community stakeholders representing various constituencies appointed to oversee the study.

The study of the two-mile long streetcar line was prepared and presented to the City Council. At the Council's Oct. 21, 2014 meeting, a briefing on the study was received and filed, and city staff were directed to contact OCTA to investigate grant funding to study a shuttle option in lieu of a trolley.

Heather Allen, a Planning Consultant to the Fullerton Community Development Department, informs me, "The college connector remains in the City's capital improvement program for the next phase of study pending available funds."

The city has a page on its website devoted to the project: cityoffullerton.com/gov/departments/public_works/engineering/mobility_planning/college_connector_study.asp

Glendale

In 2004, the City Council directed that a Request for Proposals be issued for a feasibility study of a downtown streetcar loop. Karen Khukoyan, a Transit Assistant with the City of Glendale informs me of the fate of the RFP: "... due to financial constraints at the time the city council didn't direct the city staff to conduct the study. [A] streetcar system will be evaluated as part of the City Circulation Element update in [the] near future."

Regarding the status of this study Fred Zohrehvand, Senior Transportation Planner for the Glendale Community Development Department, informs me, "We have secured \$200K grant fund for the Streetcar Feasibility study. The work will start most likely in October 2017." The grant was awarded by the aforementioned SCAG in early February 2017.

The website of the city is www.glendaleca.gov

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REPORT FROM THE SOUTHWEST

By J.W. Madison

The Front Runner Crash In Utah

Concerning the recent Front Runner-Fed Ex crash in Utah (thanks for the info, Bill E). It's fortunate that the train hit the trailer instead of the tractor or some other truck. Especially in Push Mode.

Those trailers look big and tough, but they're built for lightness and maximum capacity. Many of them are like egg shells without the strength afforded by the ovoid construction of real egg shells. Which likely saved that train.

The Push-Pull operation of locomotive-driven regional and commuter trains avoids the need to turn a train around twice every round trip, or move the engine from one end of the train to another at each end of the line. We need Push-Pull. But there's a down side, namely the lack of any significant protection on the front of the cab car, which of course leads the train (and is where the engineer sits) in Push Mode.

During our Chicago board meeting a couple of years ago, I presented some material about the CarCatcher, which was the response of Rails Inc. to the 2005 Southern California commuter-SUV crash that killed 25.

We've published the CarCatcher material on the Rails Inc website, www.nmrails.org, click The Car Catcher. Feedback invited. Yes, the illustrations are amateur as hell. We're working on better ones.

Albuquerque "Rapid" Transit

Construction is still underway on our "ART" transit line. We recently became aware, to our horror, that a lot of people think ART is an Urban Rail line. IT IS NOT. It's BRT.

Spread the word. If it were an urban rail line, it would of course be a better deal. If they had routed the middle part of it to Lomas Blvd instead of Central, it would be the best deal.

As to future conversion of ART to Urban Rail, we are informed that depending on lane-width considerations, it should be feasible to do this with battery-powered EMUs, or even DMUs. More later on this. We're still digging.

Colorado News:

(Courtesy Rick Klein and Sal Pace)

As of Feb. 16, a bill is up for vote in the Colorado Senate to extend the mission of the Southwest Chief Commission to that of promoting progress toward Front Range Rail; in part by renaming the organization the "SW Chief and Front Range Rail Commission," to reflect both the retention of the *Chief* and the effort toward Front Range regional rail. Many people (certainly including Rails Inc) have long wished for and worked for the resurrection of the long-dead El Paso-Albuquerque-Denver route. Consult <http://www.nmrails.org>, click Rocky Mountain Flyer.

Absent our dream RMF, we would welcome: 1) Pueblo CO connected by Rail to the SW Chief, preferably by a La Junta-Pueblo-Trinidad re-route, but at least by a stub-end or Rail shuttle between La Junta and Pueblo, and 2) Regional Rail extended from Denver down to Pueblo.

Oklahoma News:

(Compiled by Evan Stair, Passenger Rail Oklahoma) www.PassengerRailOK.org

Heartland Flyer (Existing Oklahoma City-Fort Worth Service)

The 2017 Oklahoma legislative session began during the first week of February and will complete during the last week

of May. The outlook for continued Heartland Flyer service is cloudy based upon state budget cuts and an anticipated revenue failure declaration, its third in as many years. However, several initiatives are underway that provide more than an even chance for the service to continue and actually grow.

Passenger Rail Oklahoma has learned the Chickasaw Nation is working in conjunction with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Amtrak to begin a new service stop in Thackerville, OK. Thackerville is just across the Red River on Interstate 35 and on the BNSF Railway's Chicago-Kansas City-Oklahoma City-Fort Worth-Houston route, a portion of which hosts the *Heartland Flyer*. The WinStar Casino boasts the largest gaming floor in the world, while booking world famous musical and stand up comic talent. For example, Paul Simon and Jerry Seinfeld both performed at the casino last year. Passenger Rail Oklahoma hopes the Native American Nation can fill some of the state funding anticipated for FY-2018.

Passenger Rail Oklahoma has also learned the Texas and Oklahoma Departments of Transportation have put their collective foot down with regard to skyrocketing Amtrak PRIIA Section 209 costs. In 2009, the Heartland Flyer required a combined subsidy of \$3.9 million. The cost for Fiscal Year 2017 will finish at \$5.3 million, with Oklahoma paying \$2.9 million. Amtrak has requested more.

Still, the DOTs have delayed issuance of a Request for Proposal to blend existing Amtrak service with an alternative service provider. Amtrak is seeking ways to add an additional frequency at no cost to the states. It is possible Amtrak will create an Oklahoma City section of the Texas Eagle. *Heartland Flyer* service is very important to the *Texas Eagle* with some 30% of *Heartland Flyer* passengers traveling beyond Fort Worth.

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CANADA REPORT, FEBRUARY 2017

By Ken Westcar

Although this is traditionally a slow time for passenger rail advocacy work, we have been busy throughout the winter forging new links in our pursuit of improved services. A significant achievement has been elevating the whole issue to top municipal levels in both Southwestern and Northern Ontario.

Having civic leaders with a full understanding of the role passenger rail services can play in an age of carbon taxes, escalating highway congestion, changing demographics and the arrival of the 4th Industrial Revolution is also getting the attention of senior levels of government. Progress has come from emphasizing the “why” over the “how” or “what” as this makes their arguments much more powerful.

Although new carbon taxes in Ontario (average C\$0.05/litre on gas and diesel for 2017) are hurting many people in their wallets, they have also promoted the idea of alternatives including transit and intercity rail. There's also growing weariness of highway congestion, declining driving standards and, in rural areas, isolation. So, the travelling public is now more open-minded than ever on mobility options.

The panacea of electric vehicles is being sold, very hard, by the auto industry and

REPORT FROM THE SOUTHWEST

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Eastern Flyer (Proposed Tulsa-Oklahoma City Commuter Service)

The *Eastern Flyer* project remains stalled for various reasons. These include delays by the City of Oklahoma City, possible carrier financial issues, otherwise general enroute community apathy, and looming deadlines.

The City of Oklahoma City has not acted upon a resolution passed in September 2015 to review metro area track rehabilitation capital requirements. While the Stillwater Central Railroad has rehabilitated its 97.5-mile rail route between Midwest City and Sapulpa to FRA Class III Track Standards (60-mph passenger), access to Oklahoma City remains at issue.

government but their proliferation could see a steep decline in total fuel tax revenues. Replacing the money will require specific or universal road tolling. The average public subsidy for highways in Canada currently runs at about 30% of their construction and maintenance costs and this could easily increase to 40% - 50% as the contribution from gas and diesel taxes diminish. Given that recharging electric vehicles will add significantly to domestic electricity bills, there doesn't seem to be any chance of “getting out of jail free” when it comes to driving (although many people still think that recharging their electric car will be cheap, like their cell phones).

So, we expect more objectivity on the highway “investment” versus passenger rail “subsidy” argument. If highway subsidies creep towards 50% of total cost, it's getting very close to that of modern passenger rail so the highway lobby has less to work with. As advocates, we constantly demonstrate potential win-win situations that attract the attention of service providers, customers and various levels of government. But, as we now know, superb logic and best practice may still not win against political ideology and narrow-mindedness.

Rail advocates in northern Ontario have done some very searching studies on road closures, fatalities and supply chain interruptions and have responded, very

Iowa Pacific Holdings, selected as the passenger service provider for the railroad between Sapulpa and Oklahoma City, will exit from the blended Amtrak-*Hoosier State* train service March 1, 2017. This departure and early 2017 passenger staff layoffs have spawned rumors the startup passenger carrier is in deep financial trouble. This has left a vacuum of centralized leadership for the Eastern Flyer service. Other en route communities and Tulsa have yet to embrace the project to the extent energies are being expended for completion.

Deadlines have emerged. The Positive Train Control (PTC) mandate goes into full force Jan. 1, 2018. A state required six-month trial means service must start by June 30 of this year or Stillwater Central Railroad will be required to forfeit \$2.8

assertively, to uninformed statements from politicians. It's a Canadian version of the “alternative facts” but our elected leaders are getting very gun-shy when confronted with the loud “why” argument from those who actually feel the pain of limited and declining personal mobility options.

Targeted actions, such as the reinstatement of the “Northlander” passenger service between Toronto and Cochrane, where it would connect with the inaptly named “Polar Bear Express” to Arctic tidewater, is seen as a priority. Many communities previously served by this train have suffered because of largely ineffective bus substitution. New rolling stock and business models will be needed if the 452-mile service is to appeal to local travellers and tourists alike.

Many stars are coming into alignment on Canadian passenger rail issues. Our commitment to pricing carbon, focus on community sustainability and getting big money out of our democratic processes are internal examples. Externalities, including political events in the U.S.A. and U.K., are also influencing the thinking at all government levels in Canada in terms of how we shape our society for the future. Sensible options and community pressure will likely play a big part.

Ken Westcar is a Board Member of Transport Action Ontario.

million in liquidated damages for failing to comply with a 2014 sale contract.

Oklahoma City Breaks Ground on Streetcar System

On Feb. 8, Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett, members of the City Council, and other dignitaries were on hand to break ground on a modern streetcar project. The project will link various downtown entertainment districts and core residential districts to boost tourism revenues. The project is considered by experts the first step to new non-highway expansion in the state.

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

CENTRAL PUGET SOUND VOTERS APPROVE MASSIVE TRANSIT INVESTMENT

By *Lloyd Flem*

At the recent General Election, voters from the densely-populated, rapidly growing core of western Washington state, centered on Seattle, passed a \$54-billion transit package that will dramatically increase the role of rail in the next quarter century. Much of this transit expansion, known as Sound Transit 3, will be in the form of light rail north from Seattle to Everett, south to Tacoma, east across Lake Washington to booming Seattle suburbs, plus northwest and southwest to the Seattle neighborhoods of Ballard and West Seattle. Other expansion will include extension of the Sounder (regional/commuter trains) southwest from Tacoma, serving the large military bases, and bus rapid transit on Interstate 405, the main north-south route through the Eastside suburbs.

Support for ST3 was strongest in the city of Seattle, with a nearly 70 % affirmative vote. Voters from Tacoma also passed the measure, as did Snohomish County, containing Everett and the major suburban area north of Seattle. The measure failed in other

IT'S TIME TO REGISTER!

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The morning session will close with a panel discussion focusing on issues regarding the operation of passenger trains in the Pacific Northwest. Lloyd Flem, Executive Director of AAWA, will moderate. Panelists include Johan Hellman, Executive Director, State Gov't Affairs, BNSF Railway; Herb Krohn, Washington State Legislative Director, Transportation Division of the Sheet Metal, Air, and Rail Transportation Union; Mike Elliott, Legislative Affairs, Brotherhood of Engineers and Trainmen; and Antonio Perez, CEO / President, Talgo Inc. or Josh Coran, Director of Product Development & Compliance, Talgo Inc.

parts of the Sound Transit service area, but was insufficient to overcome Seattle's yes votes.

Traffic congestion has been bad and getting worse in the Central Puget Sound Region, as the region continues rapid population growth and economic boom. Proponents stressed the success of Sounder South (Seattle to Lakewood, southwest of Tacoma), and light rail from downtown Seattle north to the University of Washington, which was standing room only from the day it opened in 2015.

Public opposition came from some past supporters of Sound Transit concerned about the high costs and the many years before parts of the plan were to be completed. In addition, the usual anti-transit crowd complained that ST3 "wouldn't cure traffic congestion." They were essentially correct in that transportation investments, including particularly more highway lane miles, do not "cure traffic congestion" in prospering, growing urban areas.

The new light rail and Sounder services will certainly give Central Puget Sound residents an efficient, comfortable, safe,

and environmentally-sound means of travel, but highways will remain congested as whatever pavement becomes available inevitably fills. (Traffic congestion, albeit not just from motor vehicles, has been a constant in thriving cities since at least ancient Rome!)

All Aboard Washington supported ST3. We felt it very unfortunate, however, that an ex-BNSF branch line that ran parallel to I-405 that could have brought Sounder-type service to the East-of-Lake-Washington suburbs will be just another recreational trail. Opposition to using the Eastside Rail Corridor for rail, in association with a trail, at a per mile cost considerably less than some new rail routes with costly rights-of way acquisition, was from a mix of politically-influential NIMBYs, militant trail-only supporters, and King County officials, including those who supported ST3.

All Aboard Washington will welcome members of RUN next May. We will show you our thriving and picturesque corner of the country.

Lloyd Flem is executive director, All Aboard Washington in Seattle.

and ongoing efforts to expand BC and Canadian investments in the Cascadia Passenger Rail Corridor; and Professor John Bowen, Geography Department at Central Washington University, who will speak about the role of university research in expanding intercity rail passenger service.

The second panel features RUN Members who will share their strategies for achieving short and long-term goals to improve and expand passenger rail/transit rail services in the Southwest, Midwest, Middle Atlantic Area and New England. RUN's Chair, Dr. Rudolph, who is also a Director of the Maine Rail Group, will moderate.

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IT'S TIME TO REGISTER!



A Sounder commuter rail train, one of many transit options in Greater Seattle.

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Panelists include David Peter Alan, Esq., Chairman, Lackawanna Coalition; J.W. Madison, President, Rails Inc.; and Phil Streby, Treasurer, Indiana Rail Passenger Alliance.

The final panel of the day will be moderated by Andrew Albert, Chair, NYC Transit Riders Council. This panel will explore how advocates in the Pacific Northwest can work together for more effective rail advocacy. Invited panelists include Karen Keller, former President, AAWA, who will provide examples of AAWA's outreach to community groups and legislators; Dan McFarling, AORTA, Secretary, who will shed light on Portland's successes and Oregon's challenges in transit, regional, and intercity passenger rail funding and an invited spokesperson from Transportation Choices Coalition will describe this nonprofit organization's work to bring Washingtonians more and better transportation choices.

An optional tour on Friday, May 5 will give conference participants an opportunity to experience public transportation in the Greater Seattle area, which has one of North America's most varied transit

systems: Sounder commuter rail, Link light rail, modern streetcars, ferries and even a 1962-vintage monorail. In fact, some of the city's buses are electric "trolley buses" which were once ubiquitous, but now only run in a few cities.

Please join us as we ride these rail lines and the monorail, and tour the city's two great train stations. We will visit Oregon Station, once used by the Union Pacific Railroad, and now the home of Sound Transit's Link light rail as well as the newly restored King Street Station, home to Amtrak and Sounder trains. We will also take a stroll around Pioneer Square, the city's historic center, and visit other scenic highlights which make Seattle unique. In addition, we will board the Sounder to Tacoma, where we will ride the Tacoma Link light rail line, see the art of Dale Chihuly on his famous Bridge of Glass and take a further peek at downtown Tacoma. If time allows, we will embark on a sunset ferry ride. So plan to arrive Thursday or early Friday morning and come with us as we experience Seattle's transit prior to the Pacific Northwest Rail Summit on Saturday.

Who should attend:

- civic, business and non-profit leaders
- real estate developers, planners and environmentalists
- rail advocates; and intercity rail and rail transit riders interested in the efforts underway to expand passenger rail & rail transit in the Pacific Northwest, and strategies to give riders a greater voice in planning new services, and improving the quality and level of services currently provided.

The registration fee for the Pacific Northwest Rail Summit is \$55 before March 31; \$60 before May 1 and \$65 at the door. Registration includes morning refreshments, lunch, an afternoon refreshment break, and all conference materials/handouts.

The optional tour on Friday is free; however, participants are responsible for paying their own rail/transit fares. If you wish to stay in Seattle before or after the conference, we suggest that you look at Seattle's official tourism website, www.visitseattle.org.

The Columbia City Theater can be reached from downtown Seattle using Sound's Link Light Rail line. Participants coming into the King Street rail station should walk over to the International District/Chinatown station stop and take a southbound train to Columbia Station. The theater is in walking distance of the station—it is four short blocks away.

Please join us at what promises to be a very information and inspiring event. Participants can register on RUN's website, railusers.net, or via regular mail. Checks should be sent to RUN, Box 8015, Portland, Maine 04104. More details will be provided on the RUN website as final arrangements are made. We look forward to seeing you in Seattle!

RUN TO SEATTLE!

By David Peter Alan

That is what many of us from the Rail Users' Network will do at the beginning of May. For the first time, we will RUN to the Northwest for our annual conference, which will be presented in cooperation with All Aboard Washington, a statewide organization that advocates for better transit in Seattle, as well as for improved Amtrak service on the Empire Builder and the Cascades Corridor.

The conference will take place on Saturday, May 6, and our customary tour will occur one day earlier, on Friday, May 5. While you can learn a lot about Seattle and its transit in those two days, there is much more to see and do. With Seattle's expanding rail transit, it is easy to get around.

We suggest that you plan to spend several days in town, so you can really get the flavor of this unique city. If you have more time, take a side trip to Tacoma, Portland or Vancouver. There is a Vancouver in Washington State, along with the bigger and more famous one in British Columbia. These other cities have plenty of sights to see and transit to take you around, and there are trains to take you there. Our colleagues at All Aboard Washington suggest that you take an Amtrak train south of Seattle, because these trains will soon be re-routed, and some scenery along Puget Sound will no longer be visible from the train.

Seattle began as a rough-and-tumble town in the 1850s. There are two street-grid systems in the downtown area; the result of a dispute between the town's two founders. It is a good city for walking, although parts of it are hilly. There are some beautiful and historic buildings in downtown Seattle, and the city's two train stations are among the best of them. If you arrive from the east on the *Empire Builder* or from the south on the *Coast Starlight*, you can celebrate your arrival at King Street Station. The station, with its marble walls and brass light fixtures,

was recently restored to its original 1907 glory. The former Union Station is located across the street from King Street Station. Today it hosts Sound Transit's Link, a light-rail line that runs between the University of Washington and Angle Lake, just south of Sea-Tac Airport.

Seattle also has two "modern" streetcar lines: the South Lake Union Streetcar and the First Hill Streetcar. There are plans to connect the two and then extend the new line further, which would result in one long line. There are other plans in the works, too, now that voters have approved funding for a major transit improvement program with a 25-year planning frontier.

Seattle's transit mix is unique in the United States. When Seattle hosted the World's Fair in 1962, its "showcase" building was the Space Needle, complete with a monorail to demonstrate its futuristic credentials. The Space Needle is still standing, and the monorail is still operating. The King City has several bus routes that feature trolley buses (also called "trackless trolleys"). These unusual vehicles are only found in four other cities in the United States, plus Vancouver in Canada. They run on electric power supplied by a pair of overhead wires. They ride smoothly, and no "conventional" diesel bus can match their pickup.

Seattle's "signature" transit component is the Washington State Ferry system. The waterfront is a busy place, due to the abundance of attractions, and to the extensive network of boat lines. The boats go to other places along the coast of Elliott Bay and Puget Sound, as well as Victoria, B.C., although not to Alaska anymore. You need to catch the train to Bellingham and change for the Alaska ferry now.

Downtown Seattle is a busy place, and some of its most historic parts are well preserved. Pioneer Square, a few blocks from the train station and served by Link, was the heart of downtown Seattle over a

century ago. It had fallen into disrepair, but now it is beautifully restored and a center of activity once again. Take a walking tour of the area and don't miss the Klondike Gold Rush Museum, operated by the National Park Service. There are lots of eateries and shops in the area, too, and don't forget to browse at the Elliott Bay Bookstore. The Pike Place Market has been a favorite food location since 1907, and the "locals" fought to prevent a corporate takeover of their market in the 1970s. There is also a number of historic and famous commercial buildings downtown, including the Smith Tower and the Hoge Building, which competed fiercely to be the tallest building west of the Mississippi River.

Seattle's historic Chinatown is called the "International District" and it begins near the train station. Our conference will be held in Columbia City, an artsy neighborhood on the southeast side of town, within walking distance of the Link light rail. The Fremont neighborhood northwest of downtown (sometimes called the "People's Republic of Fremont") still has some of the hip style of the 1960s. Look for the statue titled "Waiting for the Interurban"; yes, there was once an interurban line there. Many of the residents of Ballard, further northwest, celebrate their Nordic heritage.

Seattle has plenty of interesting museums, including a number of specialized ones, such as the Museum of Flight (Boeing Aircraft is headquartered in Seattle, at least for the moment), the Seattle Art Museum downtown, and the Museum of History & Industry, near the University of Washington.

Seattle has a food scene, although there are not many "local specialties" like the ones found in cities like New York or New Orleans. Salmon is a local favorite, and this writer particularly enjoyed it at the Merchants' Cafe, a historic restaurant in Pioneer Square that has been in operation since 1890. Ivar's, which has been located

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RUN TO SEATTLE!

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on the waterfront since it opened in 1938, is perhaps the city's best-known seafood restaurant. There is a variety of ethnic restaurants in town, and the Asian influence is strong. There are also a lot of good things to drink in Seattle. Washington State has become famous for its wines and, with the proliferation of local microbreweries, it is easy to find good beer. The coffee in Seattle is good, too, and it's not just Starbucks, but it tends to be on the expensive side.

If you have time, we suggest that you take some side trips. There are the ferries, as well as a number of destinations you can reach by train. Tacoma is about one hour south of Seattle, and it is an interesting city in its own right. It has a historic downtown, with interesting commercial buildings and some hilly terrain. It also has Tacoma Link, a short light rail line with only five stops. Tacoma proudly showcases its artistic favorite son, Dale Chihuly. His interestingly-colored and shaped glass creations can be found in the Museum of Glass and the famous Bridge of Glass, where the walls on each side of the short bridge display some of his three-dimensional works in an outdoor setting. Tacoma is also home to the Washington State History Museum, which can keep a serious history buff busy all day.

There are other interesting places along the Cascade route to Portland. Olympia is the capital of Washington State. Centralia

is an historic town, and there is a tourist railroad in nearby Chehalis. Closer to Seattle, there is another tourist railroad in Snoqualmie and an antique streetcar that runs in suburban Issaquah. There are local buses that run between those towns and downtown Seattle.

Portland, OR is located four hours south of Seattle, just over the state line. It is similar to Seattle in some ways, but it has a more entrepreneurial style. It also has plenty of transit. At the present time, there are five light-rail lines in the Tri-Met "MAX" system, as well as the Portland Streetcar lines, which connect downtown with various nearby neighborhoods. During peak-commuting hours, the West Side Express (WES) trains run from a light rail stop outside the city to the town of Wilsonville, to the south. There is full fare integration on all of these systems, plus the Portland buses and the buses across the Columbia River in Vancouver, WA (also a town worth visiting). The schedule is tricky, but it is possible to connect at Wilsonville with a local bus to Salem, Oregon's capital. Some of Amtrak's *Cascade* trains run south of Portland to Eugene, and they stop at Salem, too.

Amtrak now runs two daily trains between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. Vancouver also has a walkable downtown, a number of historic neighborhoods, and one of the best Chinatowns in North America. It also has an interesting transit system that features the Sky Train, an automated rail system with three lines. Some of that

system is elevated, so it affords interesting views of the city and the surrounding area. There are West Coast Express commuter trains during peak-commuting hours only, and there is the Sea Bus, a ferry to North Vancouver.

If you take a day trip to Vancouver, you will have about five hours to catch the flavor of the city, allowing for time to go through cross-border security at the station. If that is all the time you have, check out the waterfront, Chinatown, historic Gastown and a bit of downtown Vancouver. They are all near each other, and you will probably have time for a short ride on the Sky Train, too.

So we hope you will join us as we RUN to Seattle in early May. If you are coming from east of the city on the *Empire Builder*, plan to arrive on Thursday morning (Tuesday departure from Chicago) and plan to leave on Sunday afternoon. We are sure you will enjoy the conference and the tour, but there is much more to do in Seattle and elsewhere in the region.

David Peter Alan is a member of the Board of Directors of RUN and of the Conference Committee. He has traveled extensively on Amtrak and VIA Rail, and has visited Seattle on several occasions in the past. Like other conference attendees from out of town, he is looking forward to riding the First Hill Streetcar and the new extension of the Link light-rail line for the first time. When not riding transit or advocating for it, he lives and practices law in South Orange, NJ.

2017 Schedule of RUN Board Meetings:

Meetings for the remainder of 2017 are scheduled for March 4, May 6 (Seattle, WA), June 10, August 26, Oct. 14 (Annual Meeting) and Dec. 2.

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.

A DESIRE FOR STREETCARS: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PROPOSALS

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Long Beach

In 2007, a streetcar feasibility study was commissioned by the city council. The chief proponent of the idea was then Second District City Councilwoman Suja Lowenthal, who during a trip to Portland Oregon had been impressed by its streetcar line.

The study was presented to the City Council. Sumire Gant, who then managed the transportation planning and programs division for the City and is currently Vice Chair of Long Beach Transit's Board of Directors, informs me regarding the fate of the feasibility study: "While it had some political support, the feasibility study was simply received and filed by Council and no motion was made to continue to the next step. I believe it's still a good project for Long Beach."

As this article was being prepared, I learned of a new grassroots proposal for a streetcar network in Long Beach that received some attention on the Urbanize LA website. The proposal by local resident Alex Barber involves emission-free hydrogen fueled equipment, "without the use of visually obtrusive overhead wires by utilizing new technology from the French rail firm Alstom, which recently developed hydrogen-powered light rail cars for use in Germany." Barber has laid out an ambitious vision of streetcar lines crisscrossing the city. It remains to be seen whether the proposal draws support or fades into obscurity.

The article ("Should Long Beach Build a Hydrogen Streetcar?") can be viewed at urbanize.la/post/should-long-beach-build-hydrogen-streetcar

Los Angeles (Angeleno Heights)

Yellow Car #1020 operated through the Angeleno Heights neighborhood north of downtown Los Angeles from 1920 to 1946. It was saved from the salvage yard by a railfan, and in 2004 ended up in the hands of Angeleno Heights activist Bruce Lash. Lash and several volunteers formed a nonprofit group, "Angeleno Heights Trolley Line, Inc." to advocate for a five-and-a-half-mile loop between their historic neighborhood and downtown L.A. using the original yellow car.

After much resistance and red tape for this grand vision, Lash turned over the car to original volunteer Chris Wabich in 2015. Wabich has launched a gofundme campaign to restore the car for display purposes and provide the liability insurance necessary for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority to store it in one of their facilities safe from the elements.

The fundraising site is gofundme.com/LATrolley

Los Angeles (Downtown)

The notion of bringing back streetcars to downtown Los Angeles has been actively pursued for nearly 20 years. But the saga of this effort has a large cast and a storyline with many twists and turns like a major blockbuster movie epic.

The story begins in the mid 1990s. George Eslinger, then the Director of the city of Los Angeles Bureau of Street Lighting, had become intrigued at the distinctive historic decorative street lights in portions of the city. He discovered they had been designed to also anchor the overhead electric lines of the streetcars that used to operate in Los Angeles (the Red and Yellow cars).

Upon retirement, Eslinger initially promoted some sort of public monument to commemorate Los Angeles' streetcar heritage. As described in the Nov. 29, 1998 *Los Angeles Times* article by Patt Morrison "Say a Prayer for the Red Car Revival," the idea quickly gathered support and soon expanded into bringing streetcars back to L.A. Dubbed the Los Angeles Streetcar Concept it even acquired a (since defunct) website.

Like anyone familiar with the political process, Eslinger, as a longtime bureaucrat, recognized the need to enlist some boosters with clout to make the idea viable. The map of proposed routes eventually looked like a plate of spaghetti reaching into various areas of the city that had expressed interest in the idea.

In this time period, I personally witnessed the enthusiasm the idea of bringing back streetcars evokes in the public. I have been involved with the community volunteer organization Southern California Transit Advocates since 1994. One task I devoted myself to for some years was lining up guest speakers for the monthly meetings we used to hold. One of the purposes was to draw members of the public in hopes they might be prospective members. Unfortunately, over time I discovered that rarely did speakers draw more than at most one or two members of the general public.

An exception to this was the two times we had Michael Dukakis, former Massachusetts Governor and Presidential candidate, speak about high speed rail to a healthy sized audience. The other notable exception was our Nov. 14, 1998 meeting where Mr. Eslinger spoke about his Red Car revival proposal. Attendees numbered around 40, half Transit Advocates members and half the general public. And midway through the presentation,

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A DESIRE FOR STREETCARS: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PROPOSALS

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a camera crew from a local TV station showed up, having heard of the event via the advance publicity I arranged. The meeting took a break while Eslinger was interviewed in the hallway and subsequently appeared on that evening's newscast. That didn't happen for other events we held, even for Michael Dukakis! Impressed by the response the concept provoked, I have kept track of its progress over the years.

Fairly quickly, the downtown route overshadowed the other proposed routings, which soon were dropped from further consideration. Eslinger also eventually faded from his initial leading role. Other entities and players took up the cause, including the Los Angeles Conservancy, Central City Association and the (now defunct) Los Angeles Redevelopment Agency (CRA). Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard in 2001 obtained \$100,000 in federal funding for a feasibility study, which was released in September 2006.

The final piece of the puzzle which Eslinger foresaw, the need for a heavy-hitter advocate to make the project viable, emerged in 2008 when Los Angeles City Councilman José Huizar embraced having a streetcar as a key component of his initiative to revitalize the downtown Broadway corridor, Bringing Back Broadway. Under his leadership, the streetcar concept began to gather momentum.

In 2009, the nonprofit Los Angeles Streetcar, Inc. (LASI) was formed and is described on its website as "... modeled after the successful public-private/non-profit partnerships in Portland and Seattle, which pioneered modern streetcar systems in the western. U.S. LASI was

founded by long-time Downtown Los Angeles stakeholders ... to lead the fundraising and development efforts of the streetcar project. Since that time, LASI's role has expanded to include assisting with planning, environmental review, engineering, and outreach."

Between 2008 and 2011, the CRA provided \$10 million in funding for studies and other activities to help facilitate the project. In 2011, the Los Angeles City Council voted to provide \$1 Million to the project from Local Return monies allocated to the city by Measure R, a ½% countywide transportation sales tax.

In late 2012, another milestone for the project occurred as residents living adjacent to the planned route approved —by a margin of 73%—to tax property owners along the route up to \$85 million. This was seen as a key component of project funding and an important signal of community consensus of the sort that is essential for the prospects of securing federal funds (in this case, project proponents hope to obtain \$100 million from the Federal Transit Administration's Small Starts grant program).

Until 2013, one of the big unanswered questions about the project was: once built, how would its operations be funded? In that year, the Los Angeles City Council approved \$295 million in operations funding from its Measure R Local Return fund to support the streetcar for 30 years. At our 2015 RUN Annual Conference held in Los Angeles on Southern California making the transition from roads to rail, I moderated a panel during the morning session on "Big Rail, Little Rail", highlighting rail expansion and the emerging regional and inter-regional rail network. Among the panelists was Jessica Wethington McLean, Executive Director of Bringing Back Broadway, who shared

with attendees the significant progress the project had achieved to that point.

Last year Measure M was passed, an additional ½% Los Angeles County transportation sales tax which includes \$200 million for the downtown Los Angeles streetcar project, which one would imagine solves the funding gap for the project. Except as noted by Eddie Kim in the Dec. 9, 2016 *Los Angeles Downtown News* article "Streetcar Backers Angle for Measure M Money," the project list for the measure has the streetcar, "...in the third of three tiers of funding priority. Its money would come in 2053, implying the project would open in 2057 ... It could only get early funding if Measure M's revenues outperform initial estimates, opening up fresh dollars for distribution, according to Metro." Huizar in the piece is optimistic as to the possibility of early funding, while also citing other funding prospects that might aid in closing the gap such as federal funds or a public-private partnership.

At this point, the estimated cost is \$266 million. An engineering design consultant is investigating ways to trim the budget to under \$250 million, which is important if the project is to have any hopes of securing federal funds. "Projects that cost more than \$250 million must compete for federal dollars alongside the nation's most expensive and sophisticated transit proposals, including subway lines," as Laura Nelson noted in the Sept. 2, 2014 *Los Angeles Times* article "Downtown L.A. streetcar line cost estimate is shaved by \$55 million." The project in 2010 and 2011 sought to secure federal TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) program grants, only to not make the cut. Even with a trim of its budget to below a quarter of a billion its prospects of getting federal funds are murky at best.

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A DESIRE FOR STREETCARS: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PROPOSALS

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The route selected is a 3.8-mile one-way loop that will start at 1st Street and run south along Broadway, west along 11th Street, north along Figueroa Street, east along 7th Street, and north along Hill back to 1st Street. This will serve key destinations and communities: South Park, Financial District, Historic Core, Grand Park, Civic Center, Fashion District, Convention Center, Staples Center and LA Live.

Recently, the environmental impact report was certified, while design work and preliminary engineering are currently underway. The proponents hope that if all the funding obstacles are surmounted in a timely manner, construction and vehicle procurement would allow revenue service to start in late 2020.

Not everyone is sold on the project. A well informed insider tells me the project is causing tension in City Hall, with various elected officials opposed to devoting so much scarce transportation funding to a project serving a relatively small area while there are needs throughout the city (for example, to expand bus-only lanes beyond the sole one at present on Wilshire Boulevard). Even some transit activists quietly question the wisdom of the project. Having it as a one-way loop also is criticized by noted Portland OR based consulting transit planner Jarrett Walker. In his July 7, 2009 blog post "On One-Way Loops," he states, "In a one-way loop, the way you go from A to B is completely different from the way you go from B to A. It's likely to be much longer or shorter. In fact, the more direct the service from A to B, the more circuitous it's likely to be if you want to come back."

The prospects of the project are hard to assess. It has come a long way from its start as a vague notion being floated nearly 20 years ago. But the funding is still problematic and also the political pushback

hints that there may be the sort of discord that is a problem if one aspires to consensus as a justification for securing funds from the state and federal governments. Also Councilman Huizar leaves office in 2019. If the project isn't being built by then will it wilt due to its chief advocate no longer holding office? Time will tell.

The website for the project is streetcar.la/

Los Angeles (San Pedro)

On July 19, 2003, the Port of Los Angeles began operation of the 1.5-mile Waterfront Red Car Line, consisting of two replica railcars patterned after Pacific Electric interurban Red Cars. A third railcar, an actual vintage PE car (#1058), was restored and operated on special occasions.

To facilitate a street realignment the streetcars ceased operation Sept. 27, 2015 with its future in doubt. In response to community outcry over the end of the service Councilman Joe Buscaino at the announcement in 2016 of plans to revitalize the Ports O'Call shopping/eatery complex (now to be known as the San Pedro Public Market) highlighted that an element of it will be using the streetcar equipment to provide visitors a link between the two ends of the massive development which in its first phase consists of 16 acres.

David Roberts, Director of Economic Development & Planning for Councilman Buscaino, informs me that regarding the timeline for the streetcars to begin operations, "The development recently hired an architectural design/engineering team for the project. I'd anticipate more definitive answers by mid Summer/Fall 2017."

The website for the Public Market project is jerico-development.com/san-pedro-public-market/

Pasadena

Fred Dock, Director of Transportation for the city of Pasadena, was kind enough to provide a summary of streetcar interest, "The City of Pasadena is not currently considering a streetcar. There have been two efforts to advance a streetcar project in the last 30 years – one that sought to develop a heritage line in/near Old Pasadena that ended about 20 years ago. A more recent effort in the 2010-2012 timeframe sought to develop a modern streetcar route that would connect the four business districts (Old Pasadena, Civic Center, Playhouse and South Lake) and potentially Pasadena City College. That effort is currently dormant, but not entirely defunct. The Downtown Pasadena Neighborhood Association has more recently advocated for a streetcar."

Riverside

Consideration of a streetcar project began in June 2014. Jay S. Eastman, Principal Planner of the Planning Division—Advanced Planning & Strategic Initiatives, city of Riverside Community & Economic Development Department, tells me, "The City's Economic & Community Development Department initiated a feasibility study to consider barriers and benefits of a fixed guideway system in the City (i.e., a streetcar or similar transit mode). The study was envisioned as an abbreviated 'Alternatives Analysis,' which is the study previously necessary for a fixed guideway program to be submitted into the federal government's New/Small Starts program. As such, the feasibility study was to look at routes, ridership, and comparative modes of transit. Additionally, the study considers the economic benefits associated with the transformative land uses often associated with a fixed guideway.

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A DESIRE FOR STREETCARS: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PROPOSALS

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“The study was initiated in 2014, and was nearly completed at the end of 2015; but an unfortunate circumstance with the project consultant caused a significant delay. Additionally, there were limiting factors with the consultant’s scope of work, specifically in that it is narrowly focused on federal methodologies/funding, and does not fully account for other options, such as California’s Cap-and-Trade and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP).

“The City’s Planning Division intends to complete the study from where the consultant left off, and we are also pursuing grants to help address the shortcomings with the original scope of work. Due to staff shortages, we were unable to complete the study in 2016.

“At present, we do not have a timeline for when the feasibility study will be finalized.”

The city has a page on its website devoted to the project: riversideca.gov/planning/riversidereconnects/

Santa Ana/Garden Grove

In 2006, the voters of Orange County approved the renewal of the ½% transportation sales tax, Measure M. A component of the renewed measure was the transit extensions to Metrolink program. Its goal is providing transportation options between stations of Metrolink, the regional commuter rail system, and key activity and employment centers. In 2008, the cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove were awarded funds to study options for a fixed guideway between the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center (an Amtrak/Metrolink station) and Garden Grove.

After extensive public outreach and a detailed alternative analysis of multiple routes and technologies, a streetcar was selected as the locally preferred alternative by the City Councils of the two cities in early 2015.

The project has navigated the lengthy process to obtain federal and state funding. The FTA on March 10, 2015 issued a Finding of No Significant Impact, completing the environmental process. By this point, the 4.15-mile 10 station project (with an estimated budget of \$297.9 million) had acquired a name, the OC Streetcar. The route travels through downtown Santa Ana and along Santa Ana Boulevard before entering a former Pacific Electric Red Car right-of-way to a transit hub in Santa Ana at the intersection of Harbor Blvd. and Westminster Avenue. In early 2016 President Obama included \$125 million for the project in his proposed budget, a good sign for its prospects to secure federal funds. August of the same year it was awarded \$28 million in cap and trade funds from the state of California.

Two additional milestones for the project occurred recently. First, OCTA in late 2016 released a Request for Proposals for the manufacture and delivery of eight streetcar vehicles. Then early this year the FTA issued a letter announcing its support for the project to officially enter the engineering phase. The next step is for OCTA to seek a full funding grant agreement from the FTA, which could fund up to half of the project budget. Construction is set to begin in 2018 with the start of testing and operations planned for 2020.

The OC Streetcar’s website is OCstreetcar.com

The Big Picture

To provide some perspectives on the streetcar movement, I reached out to proponents and critics who kindly provided helpful comments.

Julie Gustafson, Community Relations Manager of Portland Streetcar, Inc., kindly assisted in contacting two streetcar advocates.

The first advocates quote is from the Community Streetcar Coalition Chair, DJ Baxter:

“The Community Streetcar Coalition is thrilled to see the continued success of new systems opening across the country. Each new streetcar line or extension is helping to attract investment, retail activity, and amenities along its route, making our communities more vibrant, walkable, economically healthy, and environmentally sustainable.”

The Coalition’s website is www.streetcarcoalition.org/

The other quote is from Portland Streetcar, Inc. Executive Director Dan Bower:

“In 2001, Portland pioneered the country’s first modern streetcar system, bringing back a way to move easily around the city and a tool to build new neighborhoods. Since then, Portland has seen more than \$6.5 billion of new real estate construction value along the streetcar lines, and one new rider for each housing unit built. Streetcars are now a vital piece of American urban transportation, moving people to and from work, home, school, and errands.”

The Streetcar’s website is portlandstreetcar.org/

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A DESIRE FOR STREETCARS: A COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PROPOSALS

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Marc Scribner is a Senior Fellow at the Competitive Enterprise Institute (a well-known Libertarian think tank) who focuses on transportation, land use, and urban growth policy issues and has been quoted by numerous major media outlets. He was kind enough to answer some questions I submitted via e-mail after we had a brief phone conversation.

Q. Streetcar proponents extol how it revitalizes neighborhoods and draws investment. Do they?

A. A study funded by the Federal Transit Administration and conducted by the Transportation Research Board during the Obama administration found little evidence of positive effects on the built environment and no evidence of positive economic development. Streetcar boosters have little to show for their projects.

Q. When we spoke you referred to the streetcar renaissance as coming to an end. Why do you think that? What factors do you see as causing this?

A. Streetcars were all the rage several years ago, but the mood soured as systems across the country experienced long construction delays, large cost overruns, and disappointing ridership and revenue.

Q. My mother, when I was discussing the survey, expressed to me her feeling if streetcars draw people out of their cars and help reduce traffic, especially in downtowns, she saw that as a reason to support them. Have any traffic studies substantiated this possible benefit?

A. Mixed-traffic streetcars are not an efficient method of reducing traffic congestion and may well make it worse

relative to alternatives, such as buses. Streetcars can easily be blocked by parked cars and traffic accidents, obstacles buses are able to maneuver around.

Q. Is there an element of nostalgia behind the movement to bring back streetcars?

A. There is absolutely an element of nostalgia behind streetcar boosterism, but proponents forget that 20th century residents of U.S. cities cheered the demise of inefficient streetcars. The residents of Burlington, VT, went so far as to burn their last trolley car in the center of downtown in an "Abandonment Celebration" in 1928.

"Streetcar systems can generally be characterized as over-budget and under-performing, both in terms of ridership and revenue."

—Marc Scribner, Competitive Enterprise Institute

Q. As I researched the survey I saw a pattern of aspiration colliding with fiscal and other realities with most proposals eventually shelved. Is this also the case nationally?

A. Streetcar systems can generally be characterized as over-budget and under-performing, both in terms of ridership and revenue. Ridership peaks prior to the introduction of fares, but as Atlanta recently discovered, even adding a dollar fare can cause ridership to collapse. There simply is little demand for a transit mode that is barely faster than walking down the sidewalk.

The aforementioned transit planner Jarrett Walker has questioned the usefulness of streetcars. In a July 3, 2009 blog post, "Streetcars: An Inconvenient Truth," he states:

Streetcars that replace bus lines are not a mobility or access improvement. If you replace a bus with a streetcar on the same route, and make no other improvements, nobody will be able to get anywhere any faster than they could before. Likewise, if you build a streetcar instead of a good bus line, that money you spend above the cost of the bus line is not helping anyone get anywhere any faster.

Walker also shared with me one of his key thoughts regarding streetcars: "For someone who just wants to get somewhere, streetcars in traffic are inferior to buses in traffic, because a bus can go around an obstacle and a streetcar can't."

An invaluable resource I drew on in researching this piece was the website of the American Public Transit Association streetcar subcommittee, heritagetrolley.org, which includes links and details on streetcar systems across the country operating, proposed, suspended and no longer being considered.

My thanks to the following who assisted in the researching of this piece, including offering suggestions, corrections and updates: Heather Allen, Fred Dock, Jay Eastman, Sumire Gant, Julie Gustafson, Karen Khukoyan, Mike Lyster, Perias Pillay, Jane Reifer, David Anthony Roberts, Marc Scribner, Thy Vo, Chris Wabich, Jarrett Walker and Fred Zohrehvand.

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RIDING THE RAILS IN GERMANY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY:

By F.K. Plous

Take 4: Onward to Budapest— by highly conventional train

Kőszeg turned out to be a marvelous little town of 7,000 filled with charms rarely documented in the travel pages, including a real medieval fortress right in the center of town. From behind these walls, a mere 800 men under the Croatian general Nikola Jurisics turned back an army of 120,000 Turks in the autumn of 1532. History buffs love to talk about the Siege of Vienna, but not all of those battles took place at Vienna proper. At Kőszeg, a major contingent of the Turkish army was hurled back well before it got anywhere near its objective.

And on a rainy Saturday morning, Eliza, Bob and I got a personal guided tour of the fortress from Eliza's friend Zoltán Pocza, the town's cultural commissioner and manager of the castle/fortress complex. We also enjoyed an authentic Hungarian dinner the night before prepared by Zoly and his wife, Nori, in their cozy bungalow. Hungarian hospitality is justly famous, but you don't have to know a local family to enjoy it. The restaurants we visited knew exactly how to treat tourists, and the wine, beer, cuisine and service were never short of excellent.

But our three days in Kőszeg quickly expired, and on Sunday, Zoly showed up in his SUV to take us down to Szombately to board the train for Budapest (no, we never did get to ride that little single-track branch line connecting Kőszeg with Szombately). The sun was shining and the thermometer around 70 as we followed the two-lane blacktop into Hungary's tenth-largest city—pop. 79,000—and the oldest city in Hungary, to catch the 11:10 a.m. train for Budapest. With about 45 minutes to spare before train time, I had some time to examine the station before we left.

The tracks through Szombately run north-south, and the head house of the station is on the west side of the tracks facing into what looked to be the center of the city three or four blocks away. The building, with a two-story central pavilion flanked by identical single-story wings on the north and south sides, still showed some of the shabbiness it had accumulated during the Soviet years, but the essential handsomeness of the structure, with

its yellow-stucco exterior and white baroque window apertures, was very much evident. The interior was somewhat tired, and offerings from a machine dispensing pastries and cookies, had little appeal, but the busy central waiting room, the ticket office in the north wing and even the nearly deserted snack bar in the south wing provided plenty of that exciting station "feel" we used to have in American cities of the same size before they lost their passenger service and the depot became a parking lot. The central waiting room rose to the height of two stories, and the empty overhead space provided a sense of comfort and importance absent in the low-ceilinged modern stations that survive in the few American cities that still have passenger service.

The departure board said the 11:10 train would leave from Track 1, which was right next to the building, so we would have no need to tow our luggage down one of those steep-and-narrow narrow stainless-steel ramps and into the pedestrian tunnel accessing the outer tracks. Our train, which originated at Szombately, was already there.

Unlike the three trains we had ridden in Austria, however, the one we were about to board was not new. The engine, positioned at the north end of the consist, was one of those plain bread-and-cheese double-ended electrics that have been pulling European trains from Scandinavia to the Balkans and from Scandinavia to Spain for the last 40 years. Behind it stood four of those standard, barrel-roofed coaches once common all over Europe but now relegated largely to the Eastern European routes where high-speed lines have not yet been built. I felt like a character in some black-and-white subtitled movie as I heaved my suitcase up into the vestibule and hunted for a seat. The three of us found a set of facing fours on the left side of the train. Within minutes the coach was nearly filled. Right on time the train began smoothly to move out of the station and up to the interlocking—presided over by another of those six-story control towers—at the north of the track fan where three single-track lines converged, including the one pointed north over which we had arrived from Vienna, the rural branch to Kőszeg curving off to the northwest, and another curving northeast toward the Vienna-Budapest main line, which we would join just west of the city of Győr on the Danube.

As soon as we reached our branch line, I began hearing a sound we had not encountered anywhere else on the European rail system—jointed rail. But these were not the staggered joints of North America, with

their comforting "clickety-clack, clickety clack" and the gentle rolling that develops as the trucks find a low spot first on one rail, then on another. Instead, the front of the car would plunge into the trough created by opposed joints, a brusque "Ka-CHUNK" would issue from the trucks, followed by the same set of noises as the rear truck negotiated the joint a second later.

How long is this going to go on?—I asked myself as the annoying "ka-CHUNK, ka-CHUNK" routine continued. I opened my map of Hungary and measured the distance to Csorna, the junction where our train would join the Vienna-Budapest main line and, hopefully, its welded rail. About 35 miles apparently—perhaps half an hour at the rate we were traveling, which felt like no faster than 50 miles per hour. I sat back and tried to enjoy the scenery, if not the ride.

The prospect unfolding outside the huge window looked like Indiana—flat farm fields with an occasional swale before reverting to prairie again. Kőszeg, bordering on Austria, had flat fields too, but mountains rose off to the west. Here, perhaps 20 miles east, the mountains were gone and we were surrounded by the Alföld, the great Hungarian central plain famous for its fecundity and the (source of much of the bounty which has made Hungarian cuisine an international treasure. Corn, wheat, oats, barley, wine grapes, fat cattle and hogs, hens and geese and ducks, beans and every sort of vegetable seem to spring from the soil here. Unlike so much of Europe, Hungary was one place where even in the depths of World War II and the Soviet captivity, nobody starved. The land is simply too rich.

But amidst all the plenty, one prospect from the window depressed me. Perhaps a quarter mile from the railroad, earth-moving machines were building a giant interstate—or, because Hungary has no states, perhaps an "inter-county." This was probably the M 86 motorway intended to connect western Hungary to the Danube Valley and Budapest. What would happen to our train when it was finished? Would the branch-line trains disappear as they had in America? Would the main-line trains (which ours was about to become) follow them into obscurity? Would Hungary's newly discovered but still lagging prosperity allow every citizen to own a car, or perhaps two, rendering

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RIDING THE RAILS IN GERMANY, AUSTRIA AND HUNGARY

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the trains obsolete? Would the stations at Sopron and Szombately be cheated out of the funds they needed for updating, leaving passengers to tow their suitcases up and down those pathetic steel ramps along the stairs instead of getting new ramps with a shallow slope designed for wheeled luggage? Would the tired waiting rooms at Sopron and Szombately never get a makeover and continue their slide into irrelevance until all the passengers were driven away to their cars and the passenger trains were gone?

Not pleasant thoughts for the vacation of a lifetime. Fortunately, the “ka-CHUNK, ka-CHUNK” that had led me into these baleful musings was about to end. A rapid brake application signaled that changes were in store, and as we began a gradual curve to the right I looked out of my left-side window and saw that we were quickly converging with one of the two double-tracked Vienna-Budapest main lines at Csorna. A brief clattering over frogs and switch points, then blessed silence as the “ka-CHUNKS” disappeared, replaced by the gentle whir of welded rail. A few minutes later we slid to a stop in the junction town of Csorna and stood at the platform with a cut of covered-hopper cars blocking our view to the right and the depot building sitting across the platform to our left. Just as I was wondering why we were stopping so long at a tiny junction, I saw our locomotive moving toward us on the next track across the platform to our left. Then I saw another locomotive on another track pull three more coaches forward and out of sight, and moments later I felt the shove as the coaches were coupled to our original four. Our three-car train had grown to seven cars, and we had picked up a new locomotive.

A few minutes for formalities and we were off again. I went forward to examine the three new coaches and found that one of them was a first-class car. Nobody was in it, as Csorna is a very small town and few people had boarded there. So what was the reason for the additional cars?

The reason became apparent 20 minutes later as we pulled into the much larger city of Győr. A crowd of several hundred waited on the platform, and as they boarded it quickly became apparent they were young.

Eliza reminded me it was Sunday. “These kids are probably going to universities in Budapest,”

she said. “They’ve been home in Győr for the weekend, but now they’re going back.”

It reminded me of my days at the University of Illinois, when the Illinois Central used to store extra Harriman coaches at Champaign and attach them to train No. 8, the *Southern Express*, to carry students home to Chicago on Friday afternoons.

And once our train regained track speed the resemblance to the IC grew even stronger, because at Győr we had joined the straighter and busier of the two main lines connecting Vienna with Budapest, the one carrying the Railjets, and our speed increased to what felt like about 90 miles per hour, which would have been standard on the IC main line, especially between Gilman and Otto, where a short stretch of Automatic Train Stop allowed passenger trains to reach—and occasionally surpass—100 miles per hour.

The towns were flying by now—Nagyhegy, Acs, a brief stop at Komarom where we first saw the Danube—then flying down the river’s charming valley before curving away to the southwest through Almaspuszta, Tata and Tatabanya, always at high speed on superb track that made the ancient coaches ride far smoother than their 1950s look would suggest. At Obarok, a perfectly engineered 80-degree curve brought us from southeast to due east before a brief stop at Bicske, and then forward again. We were in the Budapest suburbs now, gradually descending and winding our way down into the valley of the Danube flowing almost due south between the soaring heights of Buda on the west bank and the low-lying flats of Pest on the east. At the bottom of the grade the tracks swerved sharply to the north, and we stopped briefly at the west-bank station known as Kelenfold before again turning east to the crossing of the Danube.

Had we continued north, we would have ended up in Deli station, a stub terminal of undistinguished ‘50s modern design just at the base of Buda Hill. Few long-distance trains call there, as the station is used mainly for commuters. Like most trains arriving from the west, ours turned east a mile short of Deli and trundled across the Danube into Pest so it could terminate at Keteli (West) Station, one of two stub terminals on the Pest side of the river. Despite its name, the tracks serving Keteli come in from the east, so that our train had to make a sweeping 180 through several Pest neighborhoods before the Keteli train shed loomed ahead. With an engine and four cars ahead of us I got a

spectacular view of more than half the train as it reflected the western sunlight from one angle after another until it slid to a stop with the head end in the train shed and half the cars outside (as I learned when visiting Pest’s other station, Nyugati (East), both of the terminals on the east bank of the Danube are relatively short—and also narrow. Only about four tracks fitted under the main train shed, with a couple more on each side terminating outside the shed.

We disembarked and went immediately outside onto Kerepesi Street to catch an electric bus to our accommodations—a small apartment normally occupied by Zoli and Nora’s college-student son, who providentially was in the U.S. at the time. As we stood at the bus stop I reviewed the station exterior. Like much of Budapest’s architecture, it is modeled on the Parisian 3rd Empire style, but Hungary’s economic problems have left it poorly maintained and somewhat shabby-looking.

Yet the grandeur is still there, just waiting to be unlocked by a rehab. Several days later a walk-through of Nyugati station revealed the same problems—and potential. Our walking tours of Budapest showed that private enterprise has restored some of the city’s most gorgeous buildings to their highest and best use, with glamorous hotels occupying restored insurance-company headquarters and some of the leading global businesses taking over and rehabbing downtown office buildings neglected under 45 years of Communist rule. The results have been spectacular.

Perhaps soon the Hungarian government will step forward and match the private sector’s initiative with a major restoration program for the nation’s railroad stations, including not only the two French temples of transportation in Budapest but that lovely little baroque palace in Szombately as well.

But don’t wait until the stations are restored. Hurry to Hungary now. It’s one of the last bastions of conventional European railroading left on a continent that continues its transition to high-speed rail. And like so much of Hungarian literature, drama and poetry, the Hungarian rail system teems with irony: Its conventional passenger trains are faster than the American trains that our media mistakenly call “high-speed.”

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

ALASKA: 'THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME,' PART 3

By *Richard Rudolph*
Chair, Rail Users' Network

The final segment of our Alaskan adventure began by boarding the Alaska Railroad and travelling to Fairbanks where we would spend two nights enjoying the midnight sun and visiting several notable sites. The *Denali Star*, which originates in Anchorage, departs from Denali Park at 4 p.m. daily from mid-May to early September. It takes four hours to travel the 122 miles to Fairbanks, which is considered the "Golden Heart of Alaska." Although it was not as scenic as our trip to Denali, our time was well spent relaxing and contemplating what we would do upon arrival. After checking in at our hotel, we set out on what we thought would be a short walk to a grocery store. We were in search of some fresh fruit and a good leg stretch. The short trip turned out to be a long one. The sky was light, it seemed like it was 5 p.m. It wasn't. We walked several miles to find a store that stayed open past 9:00 p.m. The trek, however, was well worth it. We not only experienced the "never-ending-day" but were rewarded with fresh fruit and vegetables, which we munched all the way back to the hotel.

The next morning as we headed out to get coffee and a paper, we noticed a crowd gathering along the river across from our hotel. We meandered over and found that the Golden Days River Regatta had just begun. We saw whimsical pirate ships and cleverly crafted rafts made from whatever can be taped, nailed or glued together floating down the Chena River. We learned that it's an annual event which had been postponed because of high water from a number of rainstorms. Later, we strolled along the Chena River Walk—a 3.5-mile path which connects the most scenic parks and plazas of historic downtown. Flowers were in full bloom and obviously thrived in the extended daylight. We spent the afternoon in the University of Alaska's Museum of the North. It is filled with

award winning galleries which present the full spectrum of Alaska art, from ancient Eskimo ivory carvings to contemporary paintings and sculpture, both Native and non-Native. Highlights include Alaska's largest gold display, extensive displays of Alaska Native art and artifacts, and the world's only restored Ice Age steppe bison mummy.

After dinner in a vegetarian restaurant in downtown Fairbanks, we happened upon McCafferty's, a coffee house that offers live music every Friday-Saturday night. The owners were the musicians and seemed to be enjoying singing oldies from the '50s and '60s to the patrons. The crowd was sparse so we stayed through the last set. The performers were friendly and welcoming and also seemed grateful to have an audience!

We left early the next morning with mixed feelings; we wished we had set aside more time to experience the northern interior of Alaska, but were also looking forward to the rest of our travels via Amtrak to see family in Oregon and Colorado. An early flight back to Seattle provided time to have lunch with long-time friends and make it to the renovated historic King Street railroad station to catch one of the newly refurbished Spanish Talgo trains that are part of Amtrak's Cascade fleet.

The King Street Station, which was built between 1904 and 1906 by the Great Northern Railway, served as the city's first elegant passenger depot. As train ridership seriously declined after the Second World War, the station fell into a state of disrepair. To make matters worse, "several ill-considered and poorly executed modernizations concealed or destroyed much of the station's ornate interior detail and elegant ambience." The City of Seattle purchased the property from the Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railroad for \$10 million in 2008 and invested five years and \$56 million to restore its stately elegance. While we are delighted that the station has been restored, we wondered whether riders

really get a chance to appreciate the ambience. We stood in a long line of passengers which snaked around the main waiting room several times. We were all waiting to pick up our seat assignments before boarding the train. It seemed more logical for passengers to get on board after an announcement had been made and tickets could be scanned by Amtrak personnel once the train leaves the station.

We took the 2:10 pm daily Cascades train, No. 507 which terminates in Eugene, OR. We had arranged to be picked up by my son who lives in Astoria, Oregon at the mouth of the Columbia River. He volunteered to pick us up at the Kelso-Longview, WA, station rather than staying on the train to Portland and then catching the 6:20 pm dedicated bus that travels from Portland's Union Station to Astoria twice a day. The State of Oregon owns a rail line between Astoria and Portland. It was last used to carry passengers during the 200th anniversary of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. The state purchased three used Budd cars from BC Rail of British Columbia and the Portland & Western Railroad operated the equipment between Linnton, OR (just west of Portland) over the 90 miles to Astoria. Originally, Amtrak planned to operate the train from Union Station in Portland and maintain the equipment under contract. At the last minute, however, it reneged. As a result, the train was operated out of Linnton and was operated and maintained by Portland & Western Railroad Crews. Amtrak provided ticket sales and bus service was provided from Union Station to Linnton. Although the excursion service ended in 2005 there is still hope that some day passengers might once again get a chance to ride on the Astoria line, at least between Astoria and Wauna, which is 20 miles away. Members of the Astoria Rail Preservation Association are busy at work restoring a steam engine that was built in 1925 by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. In the meantime, tourists are able to take the Astoria Riverfront Trolley which travels

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ALASKA: 'THE TRIP OF A LIFETIME,' PART 3

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over a 2.7-mile section of the former passenger rail / freight line. Volunteers from the non-profit Astoria Riverfront Trolley Association operate the service and maintain the streetcar and tracks. The service is quite popular for it parallels the Columbia River which can be seen most of the way. The round-trip ride takes 45 minutes and cost \$2.00.

After spending several days visiting my son and his family we returned to Kelso to catch the *Coast Starlight*, which was heading south to Emeryville, CA. As we had purchased tickets in advance departing from Portland, the conductor was quite accommodating and let us walk through several coaches to our sleeping car. The train stops in Portland for approximately half an hour before heading south. This allowed us to get off and walk a few blocks to purchase some wine, cheese and crackers for the trip south to Sacramento where we would catch the *California Zephyr* to Denver, Colorado. The current *Coast Starlight* pales in comparison to when Brian Rosenwald trained and supervised the on-board service crews who are assigned to this train. Our sleeping car attendant greeted us as we got back on board in Portland and helped make the beds that evening, but was never seen again. Never. There was no coffee made in the morning and when we stood ready to get off in Sacramento at 6:35 a. m. she evidently was still sleeping as we had to unlatch the door ourselves and hop off before pulling our luggage to the train station.

The City of Sacramento purchased the 88-year-old train station and the adjacent property from the Union Pacific Railroad in 2006. By 2013, the City finished the first phase: relocating UP's tracks 500 feet north. The new track alignment improved safety and efficiency of train operations. The second phase is well underway. When finished the renovated station will include new Amtrak offices, leasable office and retail space, and food vendors. Both the interior and exterior of the station will be restored

and modern amenities such as indoor and outdoor patio seating, a restaurant or food vendor, bike storage/rental and enlarged ticketing, baggage and lobby space on the ground floor will be added.

While we have headed east to Denver on the *California Zephyr* more than a dozen times, it is still exciting to travel over Donner Pass, view the high Sierras and the Lake Tahoe area, roll on to Reno, Nevada and then through Glenwood Springs Canyon before heading over the Rocky Mountains and through the Moffat Tunnel to Denver. Chris, our sleeping car attendant on this leg of the trip, was top notch in every way. We had several amicable conversations in the dining car while sharing a table with other passengers and the food was passable. We were appreciative that Amtrak is making an effort to provide more options for vegetarians. However, the Superliner sleeping car that we were assigned to was in desperate need of refurbishment. The upholstery was tattered and the bathrooms and shower facility needed to be upgraded.

We arrived at Denver's Union Station on time, but too late to catch the last bus that the Colorado Department of Transportation operates over its northern route to Fort Collins, CO. The relatively new bus service called Bustang is an amazing bargain. A single ticket is \$10, the senior fare is \$7.50. My daughter graciously picked us up instead and our stay with her was great. My wife, Muriel, however, returned to Seattle on the second day. She rendezvoused with a childhood friend from Yelm, WA to attend a surprise party at the Summit House restaurant in Mt. Rainer National Park. Their friend of 60 years was turning 70. She flew out and back from Denver's International Airport and then took the new RTD electric rail line to Union Station to meet up with me in time to catch the *California Zephyr* back to Chicago and then the *Lakeshore Limited* to Boston.

As our trip back from Denver was largely uneventful, I will close with several observations about the new Amtrak Metropolitan Lounge

in Chicago, the Diner Lite service on the *Lakeshore* and the bus trip back from Rensselaer to Beantown. The new lounge, which is located between the Concourse and the Great Hall, is a welcome improvement, for it is twice as large as the old one. It can accommodate up to 360 passengers who are traveling in sleeping cars or in Business Class, as well as Select Plus and Select Executive Amtrak Guest Rewards members. The two-story facility features new street access to the taxi stand on Canal Street, a new elevator, a glassy staircase that allows natural light into the lower level, and bathrooms with shower facilities. While these are certainly welcomed improvements, there is a major design flaw. The large cloakroom where passengers can store their bags is located to the right and behind where Amtrak customer representatives greet and check in passengers. Passengers wanting to leave the facility can store their bags in this room but at their own risk. Red Cap agents greet passengers who need help with their baggage as they walk to their train, but there is no one monitoring the cloakroom. Like many other passengers, we stored our luggage and headed downtown to a nearby restaurant for dinner wondering whether our belongings would still be there when we returned to begin the last leg of our trip, going home.

The diner lite service on the *Lakeshore* was a disappointment. The vegetarian omelet which this hungry passenger ordered was prefabbed and microwaved before serving. It was off-tasting and rubbery, and was left on the plastic plate to be thrown in the trash. Perhaps the arrival of new dining cars, on order for many years, and the "changing of the guard" in Washington, DC will make a difference. As Lady Luck would have it, it was the last day that the *Lakeshore* service was suspended due to track work east of Rensselaer, NY. So, we spent the last five hours of the trip on an Amtrak chartered bus heading back to Beantown. We were involuntarily subjected to heavy metal music blaring from the sound system the entire way. Despite this lackluster finish, our Alaskan adventure was indeed a trip of a lifetime.

