

INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

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EAST AND WEST, AMTRAK IS FALLING APART, LEAVING RIDERS AND THEIR ADVOCATES FRUSTRATED

Commentary by David Peter Alan

It happened 15 years ago, and it's happening again. Amtrak is fighting for its life. The Trump Administration and some members of the Republican-dominated Congress are calling for an end to federal funding for Amtrak, especially for the system's few long-distance trains that continue to survive and serve communities far from the nation's big cities. Amtrak survived in 2002, and a number of RUN members who were on the front lines then are back on the front lines now.

In terms of its infrastructure status, preparedness and attitude toward its customers, Amtrak's

behavior does not appear to suit an organization that is fighting for its life. Rather, Amtrak appears unconcerned with its primary mission of getting its customers to their destinations, or even keeping its most heavily used infrastructure in a state of good repair.

Since the 1970s, Amtrak has been caught in a strange tug-of-war between the region served by the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and the rest of the country. Amtrak provides frequent service along the NEC, where there is also a strong network of connecting local transit. Because Amtrak fares in the region are high, lower-cost bus operations have sprung up there, siphoning off

price-sensitive customers from Amtrak's ridership base. Amtrak knows that support from outside the region is needed to keep "America's Railroad" going, so it does what it can to get enough Republicans to join most Democrats in voting for enough funding to keep the long-distance trains from being taken off the rails.

As this political drama is played out this year, Amtrak is facing its greatest set of difficulties in recent memory, and is not responding well. This writer has been caught up in Amtrak's indifference on both coasts, both at home in New Jersey and on the way to the recent RUN conference in Seattle.

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE "PACIFIC NORTHWEST PASSENGER RAIL SUMMIT"

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

The Pacific Northwest Passenger Rail Summit sponsored by the Rail Users' Network and All Aboard Washington was held in Seattle on May 6. The focus was on recent success stories, projects that are currently moving forward as well as projects planned for the future. The roster of featured speakers included members of the Washington State Legislature's

Rail Caucus, managers from the Washington DOT Rail Planning Division, Sound Transit, and Amtrak. All provided invaluable insights regarding current services, as well as efforts underway to expand passenger rail and rail transit in the Pacific Northwest. The restored Columbia City Theater in South Seattle was filled to capacity and included participants from Alaska, British Columbia, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma,

Oregon, and Washington State. The conference opened with remarks by RUN's Chair, Richard Rudolph, who briefly reviewed the history of the organization. RUN was based on the British Passenger Focus model, the official passenger rail watchdog organization created by the British Parliament in 1947. RUN is a 501(c)(3) organization committed to assisting transit advisory committees, rail advocacy groups and rail advocates to be more effective in carrying out their efforts to expand and improve

MTA ANNOUNCES NEW COMPREHENSIVE SUBWAY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

By Andrew Albert

Due to a rapidly escalating series of power failures, coupled with ever-increasing delays and lengthened and unpredictable trip times, as well as damning news coverage and pressure from New York State's Governor, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has announced a new six-point plan to fix New York's aging rapid transit system.

As the on-time monthly reports, as well as the mean-distance-between-failure (MDBF) statistics have shown, the system's performance has deteriorated, and the six-million-plus daily riders have been expressing their displeasure on the nightly news. Signal failures, overcrowding, track failures, sick customers, various police actions, power outages (largely Con Ed issues), breakdowns, etc. have all combined to create a situation that everyone agrees MUST be taken care of sooner, rather than later. The new six-point plan is not a panacea, but many of the measures should make a difference—the only issue is how long it will take for riders to see a difference.

#1 will address the frequent delays, sick passengers, police activity, overcrowding, subway car breakdowns, and bottlenecks at merge points that affect the 8th Avenue line from 125th Street to Fulton Street. This stretch of the A,B,C,D lines has seen breakdowns of equipment on average 25 times per month, with each incident lasting 19 minutes or longer, delaying hundreds of thousands of riders on average. To ease these problems, several issues will be addressed.

#2 is expedited delivery of new R179 subway cars, with many arriving this fall. Accelerated delivery of R211 subway cars will also take place, replacing the aging R46 fleet, which is the mainstay of the A line. There will also be a top to bottom revamp of car maintenance procedures, including direct involvement

of the original manufacturers, added car inspectors to insure every car receives pre-service inspection before leaving the yard, replacing key components proactively on a regular schedule, and replacement of the components most likely to fail, including heating/air conditioning units.

#3: Preventive maintenance will be undertaken, including ultrasonic testing for track, signals, and stations. This initiative will begin immediately. There will also be an accelerated schedule of installing continuous welded rail, which causes less wear on subway cars. 3,000 feet of new track, virtually the entire 125th Street to Fulton Street corridor, will be laid.

Decreasing response time when there is a problem by deploying additional personnel near the busiest stations to address track & signal issues will also be a part of this plan. Utilizing new portable vacuum units will help eliminate litter, the predominant cause of track fires.

#4 includes new EMT (emergency medical technicians) that will be hired and placed along the 8th Avenue line at 125th Street, 59th St/Columbus Circle, 14th Street, West 4th Street, and Fulton Street. This will reduce the time it takes to identify sick passengers, and remove them from trains.

Another important initiative will be to reduce passenger loading and unloading delays. #5 will include improved wayfinding on platforms, more platform controllers to help move passengers up and down platforms to reduce crowding, as well as reducing dwell times at stations. Improved communication during disruptions is also a major part of this component. Closer partnerships with the NYPD during incidents should also help reduce delays.

The frequent merge points that exist in the New York subway system, while an

amazing feat of construction and which help riders to get around problems, also cause delays. Special attention will be paid to these merge points, such as south of 59th St/Columbus Circle, and south of West 4th Street station, to help move trains more rapidly through these strategic bottlenecks.

#6: While not directly related to these initiatives, it has also been announced that the leadership of the MTA will be split, separating the job of the Chairman and CEO. It is not exactly clear how this will help reduce the breakdowns and delays which are plaguing the transit system. The jobs of Chair and CEO have been split before, under former Chair Peter Kalikow and former Chair Dale Hemmerdinger.

The attention that will be paid to issues along the 8th Avenue line, if implemented properly and if successful, will be applied to other lines. The attention to track and signal issues, more rapid delivery of new car equipment, ultrasonic testing of track and signals, will be done system-wide.

To be honest, some of these initiatives have been tried before—in 2015. It is not entirely clear what is different this time, with the exception of the urgency due to the frequency of delays. Several times per week, there are unflattering television reports showing trains taken out of service, delayed customers, and power and/or signal failures. Now that the Governor is fully involved, it is expected that these issues will be addressed more quickly and with a more satisfactory outcome. At least, that is what New York's six million daily subway riders are hoping.

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

SUPPORT FOR AMTRAK'S CARDINAL

By *Bill Engel*

Amtrak trains #50 & #51, the *Cardinal*, connect New York City and Chicago on a leisurely 28-hour and 20-minute schedule (westbound) leaving New York on Sunday, Wednesday, and Friday. Eastbound departures from Chicago are on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. The route of the *Cardinal* is one of only two Amtrak long-distance routes that operate less than daily. Along the way, passengers who start their journey at New York's Pennsylvania Station get to experience scenery varying from the congested Northeast Corridor to the wilderness of the New River Gorge in West Virginia to the flatlands of Indiana.

This service, which was once a daily train, was cut back to three days a week many years ago. For a while it featured Superliner equipment and operated only between Washington, DC and Chicago. But then it was extended again to New York and necessarily changed to single-level cars in order to access Pennsylvania Station

Along parts of the route, the *Cardinal* has grassroots support from potential riders. In Ohio the city of Oxford, home of Miami

University, is one of the supporters. At present Oxford is not a stop. But the city has pledged \$350,000 toward construction of a platform and waiting area, which has been matched by Miami U. So there is \$700,000 available to create a facility to allow the *Cardinal* to stop in Oxford. Although it would be a "middle of the night" stop, college towns are usually a good source of riders for Amtrak.

All Aboard Ohio also supports not only an Oxford stop, but expansion of the *Cardinal* to daily service as well. Although at present Cincinnati is the only point in Ohio directly served by the *Cardinal*, the train makes several stops in Kentucky that are just across the Ohio River from Ohio cities. A study several years ago found daily service would increase revenue, but would also increase costs. That was a sticking point, and the train has remained a thrice weekly operation.

Support for the *Cardinal* also comes from The Friends of the *Cardinal* in West Virginia. Billing themselves as a local community action group they strive to improve train service in West Virginia. One of their main goals is also to make the *Cardinal* a daily service. They claim their

urging got checked baggage service added to the *Cardinal* in 2010.

A recent and somewhat unusual source of support for daily service of the *Cardinal* comes from the Boy Scouts of America! Their National Jamboree in 2017 will be held at the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve. The reserve is located on 10,600 acres of property adjacent to the New River Gorge National River area. For years, Boy Scouts from all over the US have travelled to the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico by rail, detraining from Santa Fe or Amtrak trains at Raton, NM. The hope is a daily *Cardinal* would make travel by rail to this West Virginia facility easier and more attractive. This year's National Jamboree dates are July 19 to July 28. In 2019 a World Jamboree will be hosted at the facility.

To follow All Aboard Ohio's support for the *Cardinal*, their newsletter archive is allaboarohio.org. Google Friends of the *Cardinal* or contact Chuck Riecks at jcriecks@suddenlink.net. Boy Scout info is available at www.scouting.org

Bill Engel is a RUN Board member based in Canal Fulton, OH.

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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

Layout/design editor: Paul Bubny

EAST AND WEST, AMTRAK IS FALLING APART, LEAVING RIDERS AND THEIR ADVOCATES FRUSTRATED

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This writer had not planned to go directly to the Seattle conference, but instead to visit the Los Angeles area, ride the Grand Canyon Railway and stop over in Northern California on the way north. On Tuesday, April 25, on the way to Chicago, this writer received an automatic phone message from Amtrak saying that there was a service disruption on the *Coast Starlight* route that would last for at least two weeks, and that there would be “no alternate transportation provided.” An automatically generated e-mail message said the same thing. A more honest message might have said: “Screw you; you are not getting there, even if you did pay for transportation.” The result would have been the same.

Nobody at Amtrak took any responsibility for getting anyone affected by this disruption to their destinations, even though Amtrak was willing to provide a bus bridge between Sacramento and Klamath Falls, OR for a day or two, thus proving that they could have done it until regular service resumed. This writer never made it to Los Angeles; only as far as Riverside, CA for a ride on the new Metrolink line to Perris, with visits to the Orange Empire Railway Museum and the local town museum. It was necessary to change the date for the ride on the Grand Canyon Railway (a fun-filled experience that will be the subject of a future article) and then go back to Chicago. There was no other way to get to the westbound *Empire Builder* by Tuesday afternoon, in order to get to Seattle on Thursday for the conference. Amtrak offered no accommodation in Chicago. A manager told this writer: “You chose an itinerary that mis-connects.” In fact, that was untrue, because Amtrak had refused to provide transportation that it had sold, and also appeared completely indifferent to that fact.

There were problems on other trains during that time, as well. The *Southwest Chief* was severely delayed due to a late-season blizzard

in Kansas, which provided a frustrating experience for many riders on that train. Despite bad delays, it does not appear that any trains were completely canceled. There were also problems on the *Texas Eagle* and *Empire Builder* routes that required detours at least once on each line, but this writer did not get to ride any “rare mileage” on that trip.

The problems on Amtrak's long-distance trains may have been acute, but its problems at New York's Penn Station have become chronic since the middle of March. At that time, a blizzard dealt a dose of reality to area residents who had enjoyed a hitherto-mild winter. The area's transit did not recover well, but that was only the beginning. New Jersey Transit's riders were upset, as Lackawanna Coalition Communications Director R. Donald Winship described in his article “Day After Snowstorm, Irate Riders Launch a Blizzard of Tweets” in the Coalition's newsletter, the *Railgram* (available on the Coalition's website, www.lackawannacoalition.org). There were derailments at Penn Station on March 25 and April 3, and it took several days for Amtrak and local transit operations to recover normal service. On April 14, Good Friday and the first night of Passover, mid-afternoon commuters waiting to get home from Penn Station heard a sound that they thought was a gunshot. It turned out that police had used a stun gun on a suspect at the station, and the resulting panic and stampede toward station exits resulted in 13 injuries.

This writer referred to the events of the period as “A Month of Madness on the Railroad” in the same issue of the *Railgram*, but there was more to come. Throughout the succeeding month, it appeared that there were more commuting days with severe service disruptions than without them. There were delays and service disruptions on weekends, too. The Lackawanna Coalition's chief online contributor, John Bobsin, has chronicled subsequent service disruptions

and the reactions by Amtrak and NJ Transit managers, as well as politicians, to those disruptions on the same website.

There is more coming, too. Amtrak plans to take up to five tracks at New York Penn Station out of service for repairs between July 7 and 25, and again from August 4 through 28. While the station could handle its normal service load outside peak-commuting hours, many peak-hour trains will be canceled or re-routed. “Midtown Direct” trains on the Morris & Essex, Montclair and Gladstone lines will lose their “directness” when they are sent to Hoboken Terminal, the historic terminal that all these trains used until 1996. Lack of space at Penn Station for Amtrak and NJ Transit trains may force some of these operations onto higher-numbered tracks normally used by the Long Island Rail Road. That could lead to the cancellation of several peak-hour trains to Long Island, or re-routing them to terminals in Brooklyn or Queens. There has even been some talk of temporarily returning some Empire Service trains to the recently restored Grand Central Terminal, where they went until 1991. Reporter Eric Anderson said in the May 12 edition of the *Albany Times-Union*: “This summer some lucky Empire Corridor Amtrak passengers may once again feel like they're arriving somewhere grand.”

Politicians, many of whom seldom or never ride transit, are complaining, too. Amtrak took a number of them on special tours, after which they expressed shock at the condition of the station. In a rare show of political unity, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, a Democrat, joined with Gov. Chris Christie, a Republican, and called on Amtrak to take steps to resolve the situation, or to privatize Penn Station. For his part, Amtrak President Charles “Wick” Moorman said that he would consider privatizing the “concourse” at Penn Station, but has said nothing about the rail infrastructure below, which is the part of the station that is not in a state of good repair. (Continued on page 5)

EAST AND WEST, AMTRAK IS FALLING APART

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Christie, who leaves office at the beginning of next year, continues to draw criticism for under-funding transit in the Garden State; the legislative appropriation for the state's transit agency was cut by 90% from FY 2008 levels as of FY 2016, but has recently rebounded to about one-third of the level of a decade ago. Democrats who control both houses of the state legislature have also drawn fire for not fighting for more money for transit.

Advocates have criticized New Jersey Transit for not spending enough of its own money to help keep Penn Station in a state of good repair. They note that most of the riders into and out of Penn Station use NJ Transit, and not Amtrak. They also say that NJ Transit should take the lead in making sure that new tunnels are built and the station kept in good condition, in a manner that suits the needs of New Jersey's commuters and other riders. Some riders have claimed that the dead-end deep-cavern terminal proposed in 2007 and killed in 2010 would have added capacity into Penn Station. The allegation is not factually correct, and the project was widely unpopular with advocates in several parts of the nation at the time. RUN is one of the national organizations that opposed it.

In the meantime, advocates continue to push for two new tunnels into Penn Station, although they are divided about the best way to build them. The New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP) has endorsed Amtrak's

Gateway Project, which would include a new stub-end station ("Penn South") south of the existing Penn Station for NJ Transit. Even assuming that sufficient funding could be secured soon, Gateway would probably not be completed until 2030 at the earliest, while Amtrak has warned that the existing tunnels must be taken out of service for major repairs no later than 2034, due to water damage from Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The Lackawanna Coalition is not convinced that all of Gateway is needed, or that riders should be forced to wait until it is completed before they can enjoy additional train capacity in Penn Station. They are calling for "Useful Tunnels Now" on a former Access to the Region's Core (ARC) alignment that would bring them directly into Penn Station. They have also expressed concern that Gateway might not be built, because of an expected emphasis on privately owned infrastructure by the Trump Administration and Congress.

So as managers insulate themselves from the riding public, riders wonder what will happen to their trains this summer and beyond, and politicians express shock while doing little else to help the plight of the transit riders in the New York area, Amtrak continues to dither and plods forward with short-term plans. Amtrak also continues to provide service in the Northeast and elsewhere, when it can conveniently do so. It also cancels trains from time to time,

in the Northeast Region and elsewhere, essentially throwing up its hands and telling its riders that we are on our own.

Maybe Amtrak can weather the current political storm without having to accommodate the riders, whose support has contributed greatly to Amtrak's survival in the past. That will not be easy for Amtrak, whose credibility and managerial ability have been called into question more lately than at any time since 2002. The Northeast Region will always have trains, whether Amtrak or somebody else operates them, because there is not enough room to build enough highways to replace the railroad. Maybe RIMRail, the private infrastructure management organization (IMO) proposed by J.P. Morgan Bank, will gain enough traction to be allowed to take over Amtrak's infrastructure assets in the NEC and elsewhere. That would keep the NEC going, but in a different direction. It is likely that the trains running in corridors in California, Illinois and Washington State will keep going. The same cannot be said for Amtrak's other state-supported trains or long-distance trains. This writer's advice remains the same as it has been in the past: Ride as much as you can on Amtrak, while you know you still can.

David Peter Alan is a member of the RUN Board and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition. He has ridden approximately 750,000 miles on Amtrak during the past 20 years. The opinions expressed here are his own, and do not necessarily reflect those

2017 Schedule of RUN Board Meetings:

Meetings for the remainder of 2017 are scheduled for June 3, 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.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE “PACIFIC NORTHWEST PASSENGER RAIL SUMMIT”

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passenger rail and rail transit services in North America. Lloyd Flem, who has served as the Executive Director of All Aboard Washington for over 31 years, also welcomed conference participants. He pointed out how AAWA has “praised and pushed” over the years to help Washington State develop one of the most successful state-level intercity passenger rail programs in the nation.

The first featured speaker was Ron Pate, WA DOT’s Director, Rail, Freight, and Ports Division who is responsible for the development and management of the Amtrak *Cascades* Passenger Rail Program, in cooperation with the State legislature, Amtrak, BNSF Railway and other public and private entities. He described how Washington State has used nearly \$800 million in federal grants to fund 20 different rail construction projects to upgrade passenger rail stations, enhance rail safety and relieve rail congestion. Sixteen of these projects have been completed and the final four are expected to be complete by the end of this fiscal year. The list of projects include a 19-mile bypass route south of Tacoma to relieve congestion, a new rail station in Tacoma which will serve 12 daily Amtrak *Cascades* trains and the *Coast Starlight*, King Street station improvements and landslide mitigation efforts to catch debris before it hits the tracks. The funds were also used to purchase eight new Siemens Charger locomotives, which will go into service this fall with the start of expanded service and the opening of the new Tacoma station.

The second featured speaker, Martin Young, Director of Sounder, Sound Transit, talked about the current growth and bright future of rail transit in the Central Puget Sound Region. Currently, Sound Transit has several projects under construction, including the Tacoma Trestle Track and Signal Project. This will replace



All Aboard Washington’s Lloyd Flem welcomed conference participants.

an aging, wooden single-track trestle with a new concrete double-track bridge to increase rail capacity for additional Sounder and Amtrak trains, and a new extended rail platform to accommodate longer trainsets.

Sound’s South line extends 47 miles from Seattle to Lakewood with 22 weekday trips. The North line extends 35 miles from Seattle to Everett with eight weekday trips. Annual ridership growth has dramatically increased over the past 15 years. In 2001, approximately 100,000 riders used the service. By 2016, annual ridership had grown to over four million riders per year. With the passage of Sound’s ST3 \$54-billion referendum question last November, Sound Transit is ready to kickoff one of the most ambitious rail infrastructure investment projects in the United States. It plans to create a 116-mile light rail system by extending service north to Everett; south to Tacoma; east to Redmond, Issaquah, and south Kirkland; and west to Ballard and West Seattle. Daily boardings are projected to increase to 561,000 – 695,000 by 2040.

The third speaker, Robert Eaton, Director of Government Affairs, Amtrak Northwest, provided an update on Amtrak. He pointed out that Fast Act Funding authorizations are scheduled to increase from \$1.45 billion

in 2016 to \$1.8 billion in 2020. This authorizing legislation, however, only sets maximum funding levels, so Congress has to act annually to appropriate the funds. Despite this fact, Eaton is quite optimistic about Amtrak. It is a company on the move, improving efficiency, building a world-class safety culture, growing ridership and revenue, and strengthening operational efficiency and project delivery. Amtrak is modernizing the customer experience: new equipment enabling the company to provide new service offerings such as the new equipment bicycle program, pets on trains, new intermodal connections and the start-up of the *Winter Park Express* from Denver.

The morning session also featured two different panel presentations. The first panel included past and present members of the Washington State Legislative Rail Caucus. It is described in greater detail in another article in this issue of the *RUN Newsletter*.

The second panel, “Operating Our Passenger Trains,” was also a unique feature of our conference this year. Lloyd Flem, Executive Director, AAWA, served as moderator. The panelists included

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE “PACIFIC NORTHWEST PASSENGER RAIL SUMMIT”

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Joshua Coran, PE, Director of Product Development and Compliance, Talgo, Inc., Seattle; Mike Elliott, Government Affairs, WA State Legislative Affairs, Brotherhood of Engineers and Trainmen; Andrew Johnson, Asst. Vice President, Community Affairs, BNSF Railway; and Herb Krohn, Washington State Legislative Director, Transportation Division of the Sheet Metal, Air, and Rail Transportation Union.

Joshua Coran led off with a brief history of Talgo in America. The first Talgo for Revenue Service was built by American Car and Foundry in 1949. Five 96-seat coaches were put into service on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad in 1957 and on the Boston and Maine Railroad the following year. According to Coran, the Talgo trains of the 1950s were less than successful for two reasons: reliability and ride quality. At least two lessons were learned: maintenance is key, especially in a fixed-consist train; these low slung trains proved they could safely round curves faster than conventional trains but not comfortably. The answer is to tilt the cars in curves. Coran pointed out the need for new rolling stock and passenger-only high-speed infrastructure but believes it will only be funded when many more voters are on board. The trials and tribulations of HSR projects in California and Texas prove we are not there yet. In the meantime, “Making the best use of what we have is exactly what Talgo does.”

Mike Elliott is a 16-year veteran locomotive engineer for BNSF. He currently serves as chairman of the Washington State Legislative Board of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), which represents roughly 750 union workers at

BNSF, Union Pacific and Amtrak. His talk focused on the important issue of worker safety. Krohn also talked about railroad worker safety. SMART represents thousands of Washington state railroad workers who transport products that we all use every day, Krohn said. SMART members are very concerned about safety and productivity; they deliver the fiber supply for mills that keep jobs in our working forests and support rural communities, and members are dedicated to the conservation of the environment, while considering the economic stability of the workforce and the surrounding communities.

The final panelist, Andrew Johnson, talked about how BNSF is preserving, maintaining its Pacific Northwest Infrastructure. He provided an overview of the rail industry and BNSF, rail trends and performance and future opportunities and challenges. He also talked about the value proposition of freight rail. Freight railroads reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 75% and reduce highway gridlock—40% of all freight is carried by railroads, and shippers pay less shipping via rail than other forms of surface transportation.

At BNSF there is a culture of safety—the vision is to operate free of accidents and injuries. Johnson also pointed out the direct connection between rail and the economy. In 2016, BNSF total volumes were off by 5%, due mostly to a decline in coal and industrial product shipments.

Despite this news, BNSF plans to make \$3.4 billion in capital investments this year. Johnson also described what is needed to keep people and freight moving. The list included a healthy economy that includes international trade, a fair and predictable permitting process for freight, preserving the passenger/freight rail partnership, investments that optimize the multimodal system, a collaborative, fair shake among government jurisdictions; and land use protections to avoid incompatible development and land use conflicts, along with protection against upland construction and poor maintenance.

The afternoon session featured three different panels on rail advocacy. The first focused on the status of passenger rail advocacy in the Pacific Northwest and efforts underway to expand passenger rail in Washington State and Vancouver, BC. Harvey Bowen,

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AAWA's Harvey Bowen moderated a discussion on passenger rail advocacy in the Northwest.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE “PACIFIC NORTHWEST PASSENGER RAIL SUMMIT”



RUN Chairman Richard Rudolph led a panel on rail advocacy in different regions of the US.

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President, AAWA moderated. Bruce Agnew discussed his years of working with the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) as their transportation chair, and has been instrumental in cross-border issues and in working with Canadians, encouraging them on their investment in the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor.

Professor John Bowen, Geography Department at Central Washington University, talked about the role of university research in expanding intercity rail passenger service. Students enrolled in one of his university classes have recently conducted an online and face-to-face survey to determine whether there is interest in restoring scheduled passenger rail service on the Stampede Pass Corridor from Pasco to Auburn, WA. Service formerly was provided by Amtrak's North Coast Hiawatha from 1971 to 1981. Altogether, 464 people participated in the survey, ranging in age from 18 to 76 and older. The two age groups between

31-45 and 46-60 predicted that they would travel at least 15 times a year to Seattle if passenger service were restored on the route.

The third panelist, Grant Meyer, a White Rock, B.C. City Councillor, described efforts underway to change the rail alignment from the U.S./B.C. border to Mud Bay. The cities of Surrey and White Rock have been working with Transport Canada, railway companies, port authorities and relevant stakeholders to relocate BNSF tracks from the waterfront. The city councils believe it would be a win-win for all.

The railroad would benefit, for it would reduce travel times, reduce operating costs, improve service reliability, and reduce concerns regarding the transportation of dangerous goods and increasing service frequencies. A new inland alignment would remove the spillage risk away from the shoreline and sensitive estuaries, and would mitigate against long term sea level rise and flooding. There would also be greater public acceptance of higher service frequencies and transportation

of dangerous goods away from highly populated areas. Next steps include working with federal and provincial authorities to obtain funds to pay for technical studies to develop and evaluate potential realignment options, impacts and costs.

RUN's Chairman, Richard Rudolph, moderated the second panel, which provided RUN participants an opportunity to share their ideas and experiences regarding rail advocacy in their respective bailiwicks. JW Madison, the President of Rails, Inc. based in New Mexico, provided a brief history of the organization, emphasizing "their status as outsiders; skilled workers, secretaries, professors, performing artists, and the like." He described who they have been successful with, and who "they couldn't faze with a bulldozer." They helped to bring about the Rail Runner Express, their biggest victory. He also provided a short history of transit development in Albuquerque, stating it was their biggest defeat despite their emphasis on urban rail benefits applicable to the general public rather than just developers.

David Peter Alan, a practicing attorney and a RUN Board member, shared his experience in a talk titled "A Professional Advocate Views Advocacy for Riders." He mentioned several of his successes negotiating with managers at Amtrak and New Jersey Transit, the latter as Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition. He described the relationship between riders and transit management as "adversarial, but not personal" and gave some guidelines regarding how advocates should approach managers. He highlighted the need for advocates to have allies, both within and outside the rider-advocacy movement and stated that advocates must be "persistent, tenacious and willing to take risks."

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HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE “PACIFIC NORTHWEST PASSENGER RAIL SUMMIT”

(Continued from page 8)

The third panelist, Phil Streby, who is the Treasurer of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA), opened with a story about his attempts to secure last-minute funding for the Three Rivers (#40/41) by calling state representatives from Illinois to Pennsylvania. When challenged by an Illinois rep who stated there wasn't enough population density outside of Chicago to sustain long-distance trains, Streby responded by describing the 900-mile-long by 100-mile-wide corridor between Chicago and New York, and asked the legislator to explain why so few people lived there. The legislator changed his tune very quickly when confronted by that picture. Streby believes advocates need to counter false notions wherever we come across them. We need to be technically proficient regarding passenger rail and quickly respond with factual information. He concluded his remarks by speaking about alliances with other state groups.

IPRA is working with Ohio and Michigan, and to some extent with Illinois, to promote rail service in the region to link these states economically while providing improved intercity travel options.

In closing, Chairman Rudolph also gave a brief overview regarding rail advocacy in the “Pine Tree State,” which is described in much greater detail in a separate article in this issue of our newsletter.

Andrew Albert, RUN Vice-Chair and Chairman, New York City Transit Riders Council, moderated the third panel on “Best Practices.” The panel consisted of Karen Keller, former President of All Aboard Washington, Dan McFarling, Secretary, Association of Oregon Rail & Transit Advocates (AORTA), and Abigail Doerr, Advocacy Director, Transportation Choices Coalition. The panel discussed how their advocacy helped bring more train service to Washington State, how organizing diverse groups led to the

passage of Sound Transit Proposition 3, and how AORTA is fighting for better rail service in Oregon, with better connections to existing services. While each panelist brought a different perspective to the fight for more and better rail service, there was one common denominator—advocacy can make the difference between the status quo and better rail service for everyone.

Overall, the conference was a success. Based on comments at the conclusion of the day, attendees enjoyed the experience and found it interesting and educational. Events such as this help us fulfill RUN's mission of networking passengers, their advocacy organizations, and their advisory councils. By joining together, sharing information, best practice, and resources through networking, advocates have a better chance of occupying a vocal and meaningful seat at the decision making table that ultimately determines the quality of passenger rail and rail transit service.

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WASHINGTON STATE'S LEGISLATIVE RAIL CAUCUS

By Lloyd H. Flem and Luis Moscoso

Since the late 1980s, the Washington State Legislature has acknowledged and acted upon the important role of rail in moving goods and people in this rapidly growing and most trade-dependent state. From a staff of one deep in the Public Transportation Division, rail is now the dominant part of the WSDOT's Rail, Freight, and Ports Division, with a permanent rail staff of over a dozen.

The Legislature incrementally has helped fund the very successful Amtrak *Cascades* intercity passenger trains that serve the densely populated and economically booming north-south corridor between Vancouver BC and Portland Oregon (Oregon helps fund the *Cascades* trains between Portland and Eugene Oregon). In addition, the Legislature granted financial assistance to shortline freights, which are particularly important to rural areas, mostly in the more sparsely populated Central and Eastern Washington.

The good work of the WSDOT rail people was such that, in 2009, Washington received the largest portion of President Obama's AARA "High-Speed Rail" funding, excepting only California and Illinois. WSDOT has been a national example of well-done on-cost, on-time investments of those funds, which aids the Amtrak *Cascades* program as well as the freight railroads which own the tracks.

With encouragement from longtime Secretary of State Ralph Munro, Transportation Chair of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) Bruce Agnew, and All Aboard Washington's Executive Director Lloyd H Flem, in 2012 a small number of legislators gathered an informal group of mostly-House members calling themselves the Legislative Rail Caucus (LRC). The

LRC had and has no formal membership, but consists of legislators who support a strong and growing position for rail in Washington State.

The original leaders of the LRC were Rep. Luis Moscoso, Democrat of a rapidly growing and prosperous suburban area northeast of Seattle, and Rep. Matt Manweller, Republican of Ellensburg, in the center of the state. Moscoso has worked closely with the PNWER, speaking at conferences and representing the LRC on several excursions to British Columbia, Alaska, Idaho, and Montana.

From the beginning and continuing to the present, the LRC has included House and Senate members from both parties and from all over this physically, economically and politically varied state. While having widely differing views on many issues, those associated with the LRC work together and cooperate well when it comes to rail. I represented the LRC on several excursions to BC, AK, ID, and MT.

Many members of the LRC are also members of the House or Senate Transportation Committees, some are not, but still support an increased attention to rail by state government. Lacking direct funds from the Legislature itself, the LRC has to date relied to a considerable degree on donated staff time of Rep. Manweller's staff assistants and PNWER's Bruce Agnew.

The LRC has participated in House Transportation Committee tours of rail infrastructure concerns across the state. They have also worked with local Port Associations, Freight Shippers and agricultural processors and farmers to visit locations in Central and Eastern WA to learn about the challenges of agricultural production and shipping. The LRC's critical understanding of the decline of Short Line rail corridors plus the increased

costs and decreasing capacity on Class 1 rail lines because of long Unit Trains carrying coal or oil has given the Rail Caucus new incentives to promote a more serious discussion of rail issues in Olympia.

Beginning in February of 2014, All Aboard Washington has hosted members of the LRC plus others interested parties (BNSF Railway, UPRR, Talgo, rail labor, shortlines, Ports Assn, etc.) at an annual luncheon reception at the State Capitol in Olympia. Besides an eat, meet, and mix, the theme has been also to emphasize the need for both legislators and other rail interests to work cooperatively for the good of the rail mode and for the benefit of the state of Washington.

LRC Co-Chairs who attended the RUN Conference in Seattle demonstrated their knowledge and concern for the need to fund inter-city passenger rail in the NW. Recently legislative support for a Governor initiated study of "ultra high speed rail," along with other legislative requests to review land use issues to increase rail capacity, as well as to fund studies about "greening" rail corridors present the LRC with even more opportunities to finally set the stage for serious discussion and legislative action to provide new options to improve passenger rail service in corridors solely owned by Class 1 railroads.

The Legislative Rail Caucus looks to come into its own as it recognizes this perfect storm of opportunity to build the economic case for elevating passenger service expansion as a 21st Century necessity to move people and goods.

Lloyd H. Flem is Executive Director and Luis Moscoso is Vice President, All Aboard Washington (AAWA).

CONFERENCE ATTENDEES DISCOVER SEATTLE'S TRANSIT WITH ALL ABOARD WASHINGTON



Sound Transit's Sounder commuter trains run only on weekdays.

By David Peter Alan

Every RUN conference features a tour of the local transit, where advocates from around the country learn about our host city's transit and its best practices. Our Seattle conference, presented in cooperation with All Aboard Washington (AAWA), was no exception. We departed from tradition, holding the tour on Friday and the conference session on Saturday, which gave us an opportunity to ride a "commuter" train that runs only on weekdays.

Seattle has a unique variety of transit modes, and we rode most of them. Harvey Bowen, President of AAWA, was our tour leader. Bowen also gives presentations on the *Empire Builder* train on its way east from Seattle and back, and will soon be leading walking tours of historic Pioneer Square under the auspices of the National Park Service and its Klondike Gold Rush Museum.

During the morning we rode Sound Transit's LINK light rail line for its entire

length, from the University of Washington to Angle Lake, a station south of Sea-Tac Airport. There are plans to extend the line to Tacoma someday. We also rode two streetcar lines in town, the newly opened First Hill Streetcar and the South Lake Union Streetcar, which are operated by a separate streetcar authority. There are

currently plans to connect the two lines and then extend it further, and a funding measure approved by the voters last year makes these extensions likely. There is strong fare integration between modes, and riders are expected to "tap in" and "tap out" when entering or leaving fare controls for each mode, so revenue for monthly or day-pass riders can be allocated between different operating agencies.

After a walk through the recently restored 1911-vintage "Union Station" that hosted long-distance trains on the Union Pacific Railroad until 1971 and is now owned by Sound Transit, the group had a glimpse of the city's historic Pioneer Square neighborhood and lunch at McCrory's Ale House. As expected in a place like Seattle, the beer was good.

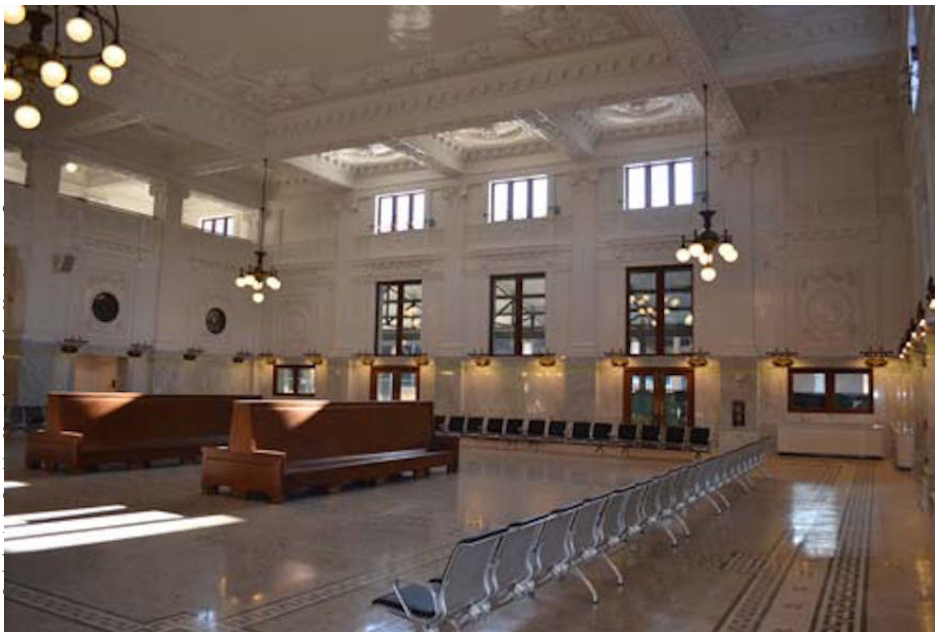
We kicked off the afternoon with a look at King Street Station, which serves Amtrak and Sounder trains, and has been restored to its original glory from 1906. (See article on page 12 for an interior view of the restoration.) We took the *Sounder*

(Continued on page 13)



The recently restored King Street Station, which dates from 1906.

CONFERENCE ATTENDEES TOUR THE KING STREET STATION RENOVATION



In April 2013, WSDOT and the city of Seattle transformed the busy and historic King Street Station to meet current and future needs of expanding passenger rail service. In the 1960s, windows were boarded up, decorative plaster walls were covered up and false ceilings were installed. The station has been restored to its original stature from 1906.

By Phil Streby

On Friday, May 5, a group of Rail Users' Network (RUN) attendees visiting Seattle for the Pacific Northwest Rail Summit sponsored by RUN and All Aboard Washington were treated to a tour of Seattle's recently restored King Street Station. Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the City of Seattle restored and transformed the busy and historic King Street Station to meet current and future needs of expanding passenger rail service.

King Street Station in downtown Seattle is the busiest train station in the Pacific Northwest, serving more than a half-million Amtrak passengers in 2012. This restoration and the accompanying improvements were necessary to enhance the visibility of a major gateway to the city by making King Street Station a more modern facility

while protecting its historic character. This was a key step toward improving and expanding passenger rail service between Portland, OR and Vancouver, B.C., a heavily traveled corridor. The improvements have reduced travel times while increasing train frequency (schedules) and improving reliability.



Huge steel beams were installed throughout King Street Station to make the building and its clock tower better withstand earthquakes.

Enhancements to prolong the life of the building and improve safety included strengthening the building's walls and clock tower to better withstand earthquakes. Improvements included building systems (electric, plumbing, heating, etc) upgrades as well as enhanced safety and security systems to better accommodate station visitors and employees. Original plasterworks were meticulously copied and used to replace those damaged in decades of use and abuse when ceiling were lowered and walls covered. The station is again bright with natural and electric light, and enjoyed by hundreds of commuter and long-distance travelers daily.

The restoration was a multi-phased effort between WSDOT, FRA, Amtrak, Federal Transit Administration (FTA), a number of local agencies and the City of Seattle. This project was funded through the following sources: FTA; Sound Transit; Surface Transportation Program Enhancement; Amtrak; state and local appropriations, including Washington State Transportation Improvement Board, South Downtown Foundation, City of Seattle Department of Transportation, and 4Culture Services Agency; and the Federal Railroad Administration's High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail Program Grant. Total funding from all sources: \$47.27 million. *Photos and information courtesy of WSDOT.*

Phil Streby is a Run Board member and Treasurer of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance.

CONFERENCE ATTENDEES DISCOVER SEATTLE'S TRANSIT WITH ALL ABOARD WASHINGTON



Local transit options include streetcars, like this one branded for Seattle University's 125th anniversary.

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commuter train (which runs on weekdays only) to Tacoma and connected with Tacoma Link, a short streetcar line in downtown Tacoma.

Then we headed back to Seattle on *Sounder*, walked from the station to the dock, and rode the Water Taxi ferry to West Seattle. We had dinner at Salty's on Alki Beach, a famous waterside restaurant, and then took the ferry

back to downtown Seattle and a short night's sleep.

There was no time to ride the 1962-vintage monorail to the Space Needle, artifacts of the World's Fair that year, which have been preserved as tourist attractions. Some attendees also rode Washington State Ferries to Bremerton and other locations. Altogether, the transit mix in Seattle was unique, due in large part to the strong presence of the ferries, and it is growing.

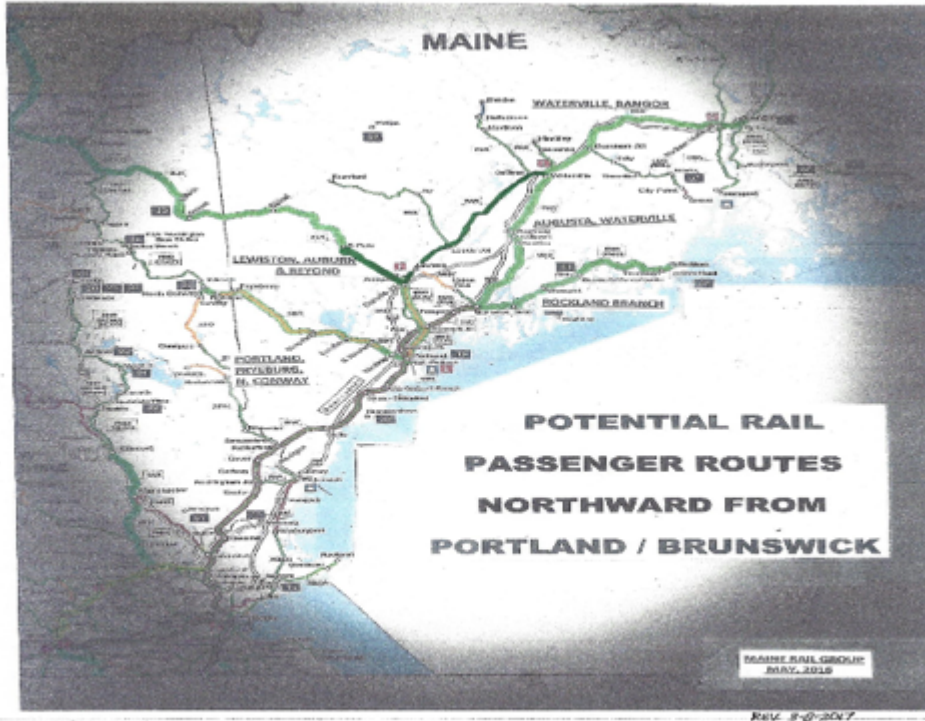
Most tour attendees were RUN members from outside the Seattle area. Other states represented were Maine, New York, New Jersey, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Oregon. Transit is popular in the Seattle area, and the Link light rail was often crowded. The voters want more transit, and it will be interesting to go back in a few years and discover what improvements they get.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and chair of the Lackawanna Coalition. He lives and practices law in South Orange, NJ.

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THE FIGHT TO EXPAND PASSENGER RAIL IN THE PINE TREE STATE



The Maine Rail Group is working to promote the return of passenger service from Brunswick to the state capital of Augusta and onto Waterville and Bangor.

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

The *Downeaster* service that began in 2001 continues to have one of the highest customer satisfaction ratings in the entire Amtrak network and continues to increase its ridership. More than a half million passengers are using the service annually. Five trains make the daily round trip from Portland, Maine to Boston and three continue on to Brunswick each day. A new late morning southbound departure and new evening arrival time have been added.

Given this success, it is not surprising that advocates are pushing for additional service to the western and central parts of the state. TrainRiders Northeast, the citizen group which deserves most of the credit for the startup of the *Downeaster*,

is currently working to restore passenger rail service from Maine to New York City via Worcester. The Maine Rail Transit Coalition, in conjunction with the Maine Chapter of the Sierra Club, is spearheading an effort to restore passenger rail service to the twin cities of Lewiston – Auburn (L/A). A third organization, the Maine Rail Group (MRG), is working to promote the return of passenger service from Brunswick to the state capital of Augusta and onto Waterville and Bangor.

The effort to restore passenger service from Portland to L/A is the furthest along. Advocates believe linking the two largest cities could be the first step towards returning service to Bethel, ME and Montreal. It could also lead to the restoration of passenger service to Bangor using Pan Am Railway's (PAR)

main freight line from Lewiston to Waterville and then onto Bangor. The Maine Legislature in 2015 appropriated \$400,000 with the understanding that the twin-cities would each provide \$50,000 to help underwrite the cost of conducting a study and plan for the return of passenger service. Both cities have agreed. The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), which manages the current *Downeaster* service, has posted a Request for Qualifications for a consultant team to complete a Service Implementation Plan for the development of passenger rail service to L/A.

The firm chosen will review existing reports and use available information to identify track conditions within the corridor to determine project capital improvement needs and cost estimates. The firm will analyze market demand for the service and potential economic benefits. The Service Development Plan will include frequency and schedule of service, station locations, platform requirements, equipment types, marketing, management and operator plans and host railroad agreements required. The plan will also include an estimate of annual operating revenue and expenditures and capital needed for infrastructure improvements.

MRG, Inc. is working to develop support for the return of passenger rail on the "Lower Road," the state owned line from Brunswick to Augusta, crossing the Kennebec River Bridge to East Augusta and using PAR's lightly used freight line north to Waterville and then onto Bangor.

With MRG support, Augusta and Waterville City Councils have passed resolutions calling for a study to restore passenger rail services to those cities. The City of Augusta is

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THE FIGHT TO EXPAND PASSENGER RAIL IN THE PINE TREE STATE

(Continued from page 14)

interested in the concept of touch-and-go passenger train stops in the central city, with the main station and regional parking on its 30-acre Kennebec Locke site in East Augusta.

MRG also held a visioning session with civic officials and business leaders last year to build support for the project. The result was the creation of a Central Maine Passenger Rail Stakeholders Group, which meets monthly to strategize. While both the MRG and the stakeholders group welcome the initiative to return passenger rail to L/A, they believe each of the corridors emanating from Portland and Brunswick should be studied because critical synergies exist between the methods and parameters to study, justify and prioritize service for each route.

The two groups have drafted a bill which was recently reviewed by the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee. The bill would have broadened the investigation envisioned for L/A by considering other existing rail corridors. The feasibility study would have identified routes, locations served, and connections with existing passenger rail services, modes for seamless public transportation and recommend administrative and operating entities and relationships with existing railroads. It would also have identified ridership, related economic development and first approximation of capital and operating costs and revenues and proposed sources of funding. Priorities for implementation would have been justified by the expected benefits. The research would have been directed by NNEPRA in coordination with MaineDOT. The findings would be incorporated into future revisions of the State Rail Plan and NNEPRA's long range development



Artistic vision of the Kennebec Locke site with railroad station and passenger train (Courtesy City of Augusta)

plans. State funding of \$300,000 was requested with added fund, if needed, to be sought from municipal sources and grants.

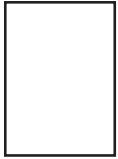
Unfortunately, the proposed bill didn't make it out of committee during this legislative session. The advocates, however, are not ready to give up. They recognize that there is a need to build much more business and public support for the project. Convincing city council members to pass a resolution calling for a study was relatively easy since there were

no funds involved—the greater challenge will be to convince them to vote to expend funds to help pay for it.

While MRG and Stakeholders members suspect there may be greater ridership and economic development potential on what is called the Lower Road from Brunswick, they and fellow advocates in the state also recognize that these studies are only the first step in what could be a decade-long effort to obtain the capital needed to upgrade any of these routes and to obtain funds needed to operate the service.

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