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MTA's "SUMMER OF HELL" AND REBUILDING PLAN

By Andrew Albert

The predicted "summer of hell" for Long Island Rail Road riders, as well as transit riders in New York City in the wake of Amtrak's Penn Station repairs, hasn't lived up to the hype, and thank goodness for that. By all accounts, the Long Island Rail Road has had minimal delays, incidents, but inconvenience for riders is still occurring, as track availability in the nation's busiest rail hub continues to be affected. Bus usage at the numerous park & ride lots that were established to help commuters deal with changes in Penn Station is low, and changes have occurred to some of those routes.

While the ferry from Glen Cove to New York is being utilized, the other ferry established for commuters who use the Hunterspoint Avenue LIRR terminal has not been, and is likely to be discontinued. Most LIRR commuters who have used the Hunterspoint Avenue terminal are connecting to the #7 subway line there, and getting to and from Manhattan that way. Many LIRR commuters are also utilizing the Atlantic Terminal station in Brooklyn, which has connections to 9 subway lines, for travel to & from Manhattan. And as of this writing, Amtrak says that their Penn Station work is slightly ahead of schedule, with the completion date of September

2 likely to occur. This will be great news for the hundreds of thousands of LIRR, NJ Transit, & PATH & subway commuters, whose routine is likely to return to normal following the Labor Day Weekend holiday.

That being said, what about the numerous breakdowns, derailments, delays, signal problems, etc. on the nation's busiest subway system? MTA Chair Joe Lhota has announced an \$836-million "action plan" to fix the numerous problems plaguing the subways. There are both short-term and long-term actions involved. Lhota has acknowledged that as of now, "we are failing our customers."

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Save the Date for RUN's Annual Meeting / Public Forum

Please join us at the Rail Users' Network's Annual Meeting / Public Forum, taking place next to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Headquarters in New York at 3 Stone St., on Saturday, Oct. 14, 2017. This event, which is free and open to the public, will provide an opportunity to learn more about RUN's history and current activities, the role that local Citizen Advisory Committees play at the MTA and New Jersey Transit, and the services that the local transit agencies and Amtrak provide and their plans for the future. In keeping with our shared vision and past precedents, time will be set aside so that attendees can share their ideas about how transit and passenger rail services can be improved.

The afternoon program will take place between 1:30 p.m. and 4:30 pm. It will include a brief RUN annual meeting and several invited speakers including: Bill Henderson, Executive Director, Permanent Citizen Advisory Committee to the MTA; Bill Hollister, Amtrak Senior Manager, Government Affairs, Northeast; Veronique "Ronnie" Hakim, the MTA's Managing Director; Patrick Nowakowski, LIRR President; and Robert Lavelle, Vice President/General Manager of Rail Operations at New Jersey Transit.

EXPANSION OF PASSENGER RAIL ALONG THE KNOWLEDGE CORRIDOR



The historic Union Station in Springfield, MA is undergoing renovations, which are nearly complete.

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

A lot has been happening on the "Knowledge Corridor" in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Vermont. Part of the corridor between New Haven, CT and Springfield, MA, which is owned by Amtrak, is currently being rebuilt: 27 miles of additional double track, two miles of new passing siding, five new interlockings, new signaling and control systems including Positive Train Control by Amtrak. New high-level platforms are being installed at existing rail stations and new stations are under construction in Berlin, Meriden, and Wallingford, CT. New stations are also planned for North Haven, Newington, West Hartford and Enfield, CT.

The new commuter rail service on the Hartford line from New Haven to Springfield is scheduled to begin in May 2018. Trains will be able to operate over the line at speeds up to 110 mph, cutting travel time between Springfield and New Haven to as little as 81 minutes. Passengers will be able to board trains approximately every 30 minutes during

the peak morning and evening rush hour and hourly during the rest of the day. The number of daily round-trips between New Haven and Hartford will go from the current six per day to 17, with 12 continuing to Springfield, MA.

Amtrak will continue to operate its present six-train shuttle service from New Haven to Springfield and maintain the rails, track signals, dispatching and right-of-way along the 62-mile route. TransitAmerica Services, a subsidiary of Herzog Transit Services and Alternate Concepts, has been awarded a five-year, \$45-million contract from CTDOT to operate the commuter line.

Both companies have extensive experience running mass transit systems elsewhere in the U.S. They plan to work as partners to operate the commuter trains, maintain the stations and parking areas, and handle a variety of customer service operations for the Hartford Line. TransitAmerica currently operates the Caltrain commuter rail service on the San Francisco peninsula and in the Silicon Valley. Alternate Concepts operates the Tren Urbano System, a

heavy rail transit line serving the San Juan metropolitan area in Puerto Rico, the Phoenix Light Rail System and three commuter rail lines with service between Denver Union Station and Denver International Airport, Wheat Ridge and Longmont, CO.

The \$95-million restoration of Springfield's historic Union Station is nearly complete. A black tie ceremony celebrating its rebirth was held on Saturday, July 24, followed by a grand opening celebration for the public on the following day. The station, originally built in 1926 to replace an earlier, outmoded station, saw a great deal of use until after WWII. At one point, more than 130 passenger trains passed through daily. The station was closed in 1973, except for a small area still used by Amtrak.

The current Amtrak station will continue to be used until a renovation is made to the new platform, which is too narrow to meet federal handicapped accessibility guidelines. In the meantime, the station's 377-space parking garage will open soon,

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ARROW PROJECT POINTS TOWARD BRIGHT FUTURE FOR PASSENGER RAIL IN SOCAL'S INLAND EMPIRE

By *Dana Gabbard*

Since the 1990s, transportation officials in San Bernardino County (east of Los Angeles) have pursued the construction of a passenger rail link between the cities of Redlands and San Bernardino. One motivating factor is that the San Bernardino Metrolink commuter rail line has consistently had the highest ridership of the entire system, which seems to indicate rail service further east has excellent prospects to draw riders.

As is common with rail projects, the process of building local consensus, securing funds and undertaking initial planning and budgeting has been a slow and painstaking one over an extended period. While initially conceived as a Metrolink extension, the lead agency (which until earlier this year was the San Bernardino Associated Governments aka SANBAG) a few years ago elected to have the extension instead operate independently using Diesel Multiple Unit equipment. This marks the fourth contemporary line in California to use DMUs, the others being the Sprinter in northern San Diego County, Sonoma–Marin Area Rail

Transit (SMART) and eBART in eastern Contra Costa County.

The project (dubbed the Arrow) will extend nine miles with five stations (San Bernardino Transit Center, Tippecanoe Avenue Station, New York Street Station, Downtown Redlands Station and University Station at the University of Redlands). The project website describes the anticipated hours of operation and service frequency as, “During morning and afternoon peak commute hours, trains will operate every 30 minutes. During non-commute or off-peak hours, trains will operate every 60 minutes. Weekday and weekend service is planned to start at 5 a.m. and run until 10 p.m.”

Justin Fornelli, PE Chief of Transit & Rail Programs at the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority, successor agency to the aforementioned SANBAG, kindly shared further details about the Arrow service, “We are anticipating having Metrolink provide one round trip from the Downtown Redlands Station to LA Union Station in the morning with a return in the evening. The Arrow service, with 25 round-trips between downtown San Bernardino and the University

of Redlands, will also allow for cross platform transfers to Metrolink San Bernardino and IEOC lines throughout the day. Service by the Arrow trains west past downtown San Bernardino is only being studied at this time. However, the flexibility the DMU type vehicle offers us provides exciting possibilities in expanding service on the Metrolink San Bernardino Line.”

The project is on schedule to open in mid-2020. Recently, the SBCTA awarded a \$31.4-million contract to Stadler US for three low-floor tier 4 compliant DMU vehicles, which will run on a clean diesel fuel with the ability to be converted to low or zero emission power as those become available.

Kudos to SBCTA for its perseverance in making possible this addition to the emerging Southern California rail network. For more details, see the project website: redlandsrailproject.org/

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

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

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REPORT FROM THE SOUTHWEST

By J.W. Madison

1) Trying To Get Past BRT:

The Albuquerque "ART" (BRT) project is moving along steadily. At least one station is roughed in, and actually looking pretty good. Of course, the whole schmeer would be a lot more attractive, more economical, and more sustainable (not to mention popular) if there were tracks running through the middle of it. Which brings me to my point:

Does your town have BRT? Rails Inc, and I daresay RUN, would greatly appreciate it if readers from cities with BRT transit (alone or in harness with urban rail) would contact us as to whether your local BRT is a successful service, a white elephant, or has reverted to being an expensive extra bus line.

Besides the usual redevelopment and revitalization (or lack of it), we're interested in the effect of your BRT on energy consumption, infrastructure and vehicle life, traffic flow, law enforcement, public popularity, and farebox return—the so-called Good Transportation benefits.

ALSO, in cities where your BRT is a disappointment, are there efforts underway to convert it to a light rail or modern streetcar line? And if so, how are these efforts progressing? In other words, how tough is it to stick some tracks and catenary lines on your local BRT line?

Since Rails Inc is from Albuquerque, you can well guess why I'm asking all this. Our e-mail is rails@nmrails.org.

2) A New Mexico Legislative Rail Caucus?

Rails Inc and two kindred-spirit state politicians are trying to start a Legislative Rail Caucus in New Mexico, inspired by the one in Washington State spoken of at the recent Seattle RUN Conference. Generally speaking,

with respect to the issues we train activists fight for, New Mexico has nowhere to go but Up. Our Rail Runner Express is still running (and well-run), and the *SW Chief* has not been killed or re-routed to the South. Yet. That's about it.

We hope to lay the first blocks of a legislative foundation for actually accomplishing something passenger-rail-related in our state, assuming we actually vote-in a state government worth the name in 2018. Being Rails Inc, we're going to push for big things—like public ownership of our major track segments (for now, state ownership) and working these tracks a lot harder than they are now being worked. These uses would include, besides Amtrak trains, the Rail Runner, and BNSF's over-size monster freights, the hosting of steam and the Tomorrow Train, and the establishment of small-to-medium-scale passenger, freight, and express services—the last three conceivably within the same consists. We believe that these and other desirable things are a lot closer to possible on publicly-owned fixed infrastructure (tracks).

The "Tomorrow Train" is a Rails Inc brain bomb from many years ago. Read about it here: <http://www.nmrails.org/the-tomorrow-train/>.

3) The Santa Fe Rail Yard Visitors Center:

As most readers know, the Santa Fe Railroad never actually went to Santa Fe. Its trains stopped at Lamy, about 15 miles out, on the main Chicago / L.A. line, where a Short Line brought people and goods into the city itself. This function was most recently performed by the Santa Fe Southern RR, a spunky little combined passenger / tourist / freight operation recently allowed to die under (to me) rather mysterious and ominous circumstances.

The terminus of the SFSR, now the Santa Fe terminus of our popular Rail Runner Express, is the Santa Fe Rail Yard, a former Downtown

commercial hub recently renovated into a park, some stores, and a public market, with some new residential development (TOD) nearby and along the Rail Runner right of way. At the end of track sits the old Santa Fe depot, more recently the SFSR station, now the Santa Fe Visitors Center.

This Center is a travesty of its potential self, and an embarrassment to the city and to the thousands who visit via the Rail Runner. Chunks of cement plaster are coming loose. Paint is peeling all over, although I believe most of this is later-model Latex paint rather than the original lead-based stuff. There is only one rest room, and it's often a pigpen. And I don't mean missing the wastebasket. There's one lonesome staffer, who just can't do everything. The cafe, at least on July 25, was closed during peak customer hours.

Although some I-25 and I-40 rest stops have suffered under our less-government-is-more regime, the Rail Yard Visitors Center makes them look halfway decent by comparison. The possible upside here is that on July 25 I saw and briefly spoke with a couple of guys who were looking the place over in the manner of contractors putting an estimate together. Let's hope so. Then my next article on this subject might be more positive.

4) A Little Bit Of Good News From Oklahoma:

(Courtesy of Evan Stair, *Passenger Rail Oklahoma*) www.PassengerRailOK.org

City of Lawton Surprises, Will Consider Passenger Rail Involvement.

This one surprises us. The City of Lawton will "...discuss participating in an interim study concerning passenger rail service on September 6th at the Oklahoma State Capitol." Is this the good work of Representatives Monroe Nichols and Forrest Bennett?

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CANADA REPORT, SUMMER/FALL 2017

By Ken Westcar

With Canadian media hungry for news and opinions during the dog days of summer, our two Ontario-based advocacy groups, Transport Action Ontario (TAO) and All Aboard St. Marys (AASM) have been targeting provincial rail policy “head scratchers” and the deteriorating time-keeping of the transcontinental Canadian. There’s also been media coverage of the Omnitrac Hudson’s Bay Railway washouts and consequent freight and passenger service suspensions between Winnipeg and Arctic tidewater at Churchill, Manitoba.

Timekeeping on the Canadian

A bristling and fact-laden op-ed on VIA’s Canadian timekeeping, jointly published by TAO and AASM was taken up by the print and radio media across Canada with requests from several regional newspapers for custom versions and interviews for their local audience. Public response has been positive.

VIA’s passive approach on this iconic train’s declining reputation is being driven by a failure to tackle CN, the host railway, and the federal government who are merely studying VIA’s request for new fleet funding and the questionable, freight-free route between Montreal and Toronto on CP’s long-abandoned, meandering and urban-encroached Havelock subdivision.

VIA’s response to the Canadian press release by TAO and AASM was modestly positive. Having advocates fight their battles with federal funders and an intransigent host railway is politically expedient for VIA. CN has responded with the usual unconvincing spin about customer service but more objective views were voiced by locomotive engineers aboard two Canadian trains who praised the op-ed while being parked for hours in sidings while CN prioritized freight traffic. It remains to be seen whether the federal Minister of Transport will awake from his summer slumber and act on what is now a growing national and international embarrassment.

GO Transit electrification

Electrification of much of the GO Transit rail network in the Greater Toronto/Hamilton Area (GTHA) has been officially launched by Metrolinx. A major consulting engineering group has been appointed to proceed on the first two stages of the project based on conventional electric locomotive-hauled consists running under 25-kv catenary. But, earlier this summer, the provincial Minister of Transport announced a study on the feasibility of hydrogen fuel-cell technology for commuter trains. Alstom of France and Canadian-based Hydrogenics, a leading fuel-cell builder, are testing this in Germany with prototype EMU stock. How the “conventional” and “futuristic” will play out in this major project remains to be seen.

An interesting sidebar to the GO electrification project is the dearth of suitable Canadian experience and engineering talent. Indications are that the project team will be international which means importing skills from offshore. As Canada and the USA launch major infrastructure programs, this will be a significant hurdle to overcome, particularly if federal immigration bureaucracy gets in the way. But, we are not alone. Britain’s HS2 project will involve massive international resources with local value-added possibly limited to digging ditches, pouring concrete, upholstering seats and making station signs. The organized labor-busting blows dealt to Britain’s rail industry in the 1970s still hurt. No doubt the Chinese are salivating and Brexit isn’t helping.

Ontario high-speed rail

Ontario’s provincial government has launched a C\$15m initial environmental assessment on the proposed Toronto-London-Windsor high-speed rail corridor. Seeing this as popular vote-getter in the upcoming 2018 provincial election, the two opposition parties have added this project to their war chest by supporting it, in principle. Municipalities along the route are also broadly supportive but only if it’s part of an integrated public transportation plan for southwestern Ontario. They correctly argue

that, as a stand-alone, pride project, it could be a financial boondoggle with no net regional economic or social benefits especially if VIA services along two existing, near-parallel routes are terminated and passengers are stranded.

TAO and AASM have taken a passive approach on this HSR project. They believe the yet unidentified (at least to the public) financial, engineering, political and social hurdles may eventually make the project aspirational rather than practical in anything other than the very long-term. An incremental approach, “Plan B,” on existing 80-mph routes through southwestern Ontario with new rolling stock, more intensive schedules and attractive fares remains their preferred option. At least, if HSR ultimately fails as “Plan A,” then “Plan B” will already be in place to continue serving the public need as a convenient and affordable service. Compared with HSR risks, this is very cheap insurance. A resolution, if there is one, to the route between Winnipeg and Churchill, Manitoba will be included in the next report.

Ken Westcar is a Board Member of Transport Action Ontario.

REPORT FROM THE SOUTHWEST *(Continued from page 4)*

Taking this initiative statewide makes sense. Lawton, OK is located on a southwest-to-northeast diagonal in the state. Three-quarters of the state population resides in a rough 20-mile swath between Altus-Lawton-Chickasha-Oklaoma City-Tulsa-Claremore. Altus Air Force Base, Will Rogers World Airport, the FAA, and Tulsa International Airport are located on this corridor. Those in New York State understand the importance of building corridors. Maybe Oklahoma is about to undergo a similar transformation?

The afore-mentioned Interim Study 17-107 will be held Sept. 6, beginning at 9 AM in Room 512A of the State Capitol. Due to capitol restoration activities, attendees should plan on arriving early.

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

MTA's "SUMMER OF HELL" AND REBUILDING PLAN

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The plethora of delays, track fires, aging infrastructure, severe crowding, and disinvestment have come to a head, and have put the problems of the subways on the front pages far too often this summer. The short-term goals are a) to improve reliability and capacity, b) make stations cleaner and safer, and c) to communicate with passengers more clearly. A dedicated team will be created to fix 1,300 signals that are most in the need of maintenance, hopefully by the end of 2018. Track & friction pads will be replaced, with special teams placed at high-volume stations to help address issues as they happen. A water-management initiative will be launched, with the goal of keeping water out of the system. On a non-rainy day, a tremendous amount of water enters the system (millions of gallons).

Keeping debris and litter off of the tracks is also a priority, with trackbed litter the cause of numerous track fires, not to mention attracting rodents. Station cleaning will also help prevent overflowing trashcans and newspapers from making their way onto the tracks. A campaign to remind the public not to litter will be put into effect, with possible fines for people who break this rule. Repairing cars more quickly is another priority in the plan, keeping the car repair shop open 24/7 if necessary, to get equipment back into service on a timely basis.

Another part of the plan is a bit more controversial: it involves a pilot of removing seats from some trains to increase the capacity on those lines. The two lines slated for the pilot are the L line & the 42nd Street shuttle. The cars with fewer seats will be "wrapped" so riders can identify them from a distance. Another part of the plan is to station Emergency Medical Technicians along a line, with the A/C/E 8th Avenue line being the first to get these. When a

passenger suffers a medical emergency, the EMT's will be close by, and can get them off the trains & to a hospital much more quickly, thus potentially saving lives, while delaying service less.

Additionally, better communications with riders is a hallmark of Chairman Lhota's new plan, telling customers exactly what is happening to their train, why it is delayed, and what to do in case of an emergency. If for some reason the public address system in the train is not working, conductors will be instructed to walk through the cars to tell riders what is happening, and to stay calm. In a recent breakdown, some riders who were not aware that another train was coming to help their stalled train, kicked out the windows of their car, and they exited the train into the tunnel, risking electrocution. Better communication should avoid that situation, but there is more. Signage that tells the public that either weekend or overnight service changes are occurring due to "track work," or other types of work, will now spell out what improvements are being made, which should make the service outages, while not endearing, more understandable. Finally, a public dashboard will be launched, which will measure customer satisfaction in such areas as reliability, safety, etc.

The cost of all this is in the area of \$836 million for the short-term measures. Phase 2 of this plan—which includes the new signaling systems, new subway cars, etc.—is part of the next MTA Capital Plan, and is estimated to cost \$8 billion. On the political side, Gov. Andrew Cuomo has committed to paying for half of the cost, so the MTA must work with the City to finance the other half, which Mayor Bill DeBlasio has not agreed to. That battle has pitted the Governor against the Mayor, and it is getting ugly. The Mayor has proposed a "millionaires tax," which would apply to persons making \$500,000 per year, or couples making a million dollars, and stands little chance of

being approved by the State Legislature. For his part, the Governor has now floated the idea—which has surfaced a few times—of a congestion-pricing plan. While the "Move NY" version of this plan has things in it that would reduce the wasting of fuel by travelling many extra miles to a "free bridge," it also reduces tolls on crossings that do not serve the central business district. It would, however, add tolls to four bridges that are currently free - the Ed Koch (59th St) Bridge and the Williamsburg, Manhattan, and Brooklyn Bridges, and would bring in an estimated \$1.4 billion each year, the majority of which would go toward maintaining and running the MTA system. The plan would also ease congestion in Long Island City, and downtown Brooklyn. Its fate is uncertain, but the Governor seems to be putting his muscle behind a plan that would help finance the MTA's needs, which are tremendous.

There are some notable changes at the top of the MTA, and they are as follows: Lhota has named Pat Foye, former Port Authority Executive Director, as President. Foye is quite familiar with the MTA, as he was a Board Member several years ago. In addition, Veronique "Ronnie" Hakim has been named Managing Director of the MTA. Hakim has been Acting Interim Executive Director, and has a history at MTA Capital Construction, as well as having been NJ Transit's Executive Director. Also included is Janno Lieber, Chief Development Officer. Foye, Hakim and Lieber will be part of the "Office of the Chairman." While Lhota is in reality a part-time Chairman, as he holds an executive position at NYU Langone Medical Center, it is extremely important that he have a team that will be in a position to attend to any situation that may arise, and this team is just that. Foye will be in charge of "innovation and modernization" of the MTA, while Hakim will manage the day-to-day operations of

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“SUMMER FROM HELL” NOT SO HELLISH IN NY, BUT ADVOCATES STILL KEEP WATCH

By *David Peter Alan*

It was supposed to be the “Summer from Hell” for commuters into Penn Station, New York; at least according to Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York. The reason for the anticipated difficulty was a large-scale track work effort by Amtrak at the 21-track station. Amtrak owns the station, even though the riders on New Jersey Transit (NJT) and the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) who use it greatly outnumber Amtrak’s.

Nobody disputed that the track work was necessary. Amtrak President Thomas W. “Wick” Moorman acknowledged it when he visited the station. Weather-related incidents, derailments, and a host of other problems plagued the station and its riders all spring and into the summer, beginning with a particularly rough March, which this writer called “March Madness on the Railroad.”

The madness continues, and the solution was to reduce train capacity at Penn Station by 25% to accommodate the work. As far as NJT was concerned, the solution was simple. Riders on the Morris & Essex (M&E) Line and its Gladstone Branch were sent to the historic Hoboken Terminal for 40 weekdays.

It resembled commuting as it was before 1996, when Midtown Direct service via the M&E to Penn Station began; except that the new riders that direct service to Penn Station had attracted now commuted to Hoboken, too. NJT ran four early-morning trains into Penn Station; all arriving before 7:00. For the rest of the day, all trains on the line went to Hoboken. For the entire day, all trains on the line left from Hoboken. Other lines kept their full access to Penn Station, a situation about which this writer (as Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, which represents M&E riders and communities) and other advocates complained. Weekend service was not affected.

NJT was willing to sweeten the deal for the displaced riders. Weekly and single-trip Hoboken fares for M&E or Gladstone Line stations were reduced by more than 50% for the duration. So were monthly fares, with the added bonus that July tickets were also valid to Penn Station before the track work and the service changes started on July 10. As an added bonus, the discounted Hoboken fares also included connecting transportation to New York City on PATH (Port Authority Trans Hudson) trains, or on ferries operated by NY Waterway. NJT Executive Director Steven Santoro acknowledged at

a legislative hearing on May 31 that NJT had originally planned to reduce Hoboken fares by only 25%, but Gov. Chris Christie (who leaves office at the beginning of next year) had ordered the more generous discount. NJT also provided extra bus service from selected stations into the Port Authority Bus Terminal in the morning. Most riders used PATH or the ferries and, as the summer progressed, some of the extra bus runs were eliminated.

Before the plan was implemented, advocates and elected leaders complained that they were not fully informed about it. This writer made that complaint at the May 31 hearing. So did the mayors of seven towns along the M&E Line, as well as several state legislators. Nonetheless, NJT maintained strict secrecy until the plan was actually implemented, an action that prompted this writer and other commentators to say that we expected a chaotic scene when the summer schedule went into effect.

It was not as bad as almost everybody had feared. Our expected ridership numbers called for PATH trains to be unable to handle the additional Hoboken commuters at the peak arrival time in the

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MTA’S “SUMMER OF HELL” AND REBUILDING PLAN

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the systems. Lieber, who comes to the MTA from Silverstein Properties, is very well-versed on public-private partnerships, and will likely bring some of those partnerships to fruition, as the MTA looks to additional sources of income from its many properties, including the possible naming rights to stations, or sections of stations. In addition to all this, Joe Giuletta has retired as President of Metro-North Railroad, and Katherine Rinaldi has been named Acting President of Metro-North.

As you can see, the MTA is going through many changes, both in leadership, and as the mechanical plant and the track & car infrastructure begins to show its age. Hardly a day goes by that the MTA doesn’t make the news in one way or another, and lately it has not been in a good way, with delays, cancellations, track fires, derailments, & necessary work. The good news is that because the MTA is in the news so much, everyone now sees the importance of keeping the entire system in a state of good repair, and giving the MTA a sustainable long-term funding solution so that we don’t continue to

lurch from crisis to crisis. The MTA is the economic engine that runs the City & its suburbs, which is the economic engine of the entire State, if not the entire region. If we’re serious about fixing this vast system and keeping it in a state of good repair, we better begin right now. Fortunately, it appears that Chairman Lhota and his team are ready to do just that. Let’s hope that he gets the resources to do the job properly.

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

“SUMMER FROM HELL” NOT SO HELLISH IN NY, BUT ADVOCATES STILL KEEP WATCH

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morning. While the PATH trains were very crowded, they managed to move all the regular Hoboken riders, along with the temporary ones. The ferries provided extra capacity, and many riders said they enjoyed the ferry ride as part of a “civilized” commute. Whether they will continue to enjoy it when the weather gets cold and they have to pay a fare is another question.

The four early-morning trains that still went to Penn Station experienced significant increases in ridership. Altogether, the transit that NJT and other carriers provided seemed to be enough to move everybody. Reporters and advocates noted that ridership seemed lower than usual for a summer; a season known for decreased ridership, because of vacations. Where did the riders go, if not through Hoboken? At this writing, nobody seems to know.

The consensus is that the summer could have been worse, but the Lackawanna Coalition maintains that it also could have been better, if NJT management had listened to suggestions from them and other advocates. Connections from PATH trains, especially in the evening, could have been better if NJT had adjusted Hoboken departure times for convenient connections. There appeared to be enough capacity at Penn Station to run mid-day and evening service there, and only require riders to go through Hoboken at peak-commuting hours. John Bobsin, who covers the railroad for the Coalition's website, www.lackawannacoalition.org, noted that short trains bound for Gladstone leave Hoboken earlier than longer

trains bound for Dover, which normally leave from Penn Station. He suggested making the Gladstone trains longer for the duration, to prevent overcrowding at certain specific stops.

Even though NJT's Morris & Essex Line was the most profoundly affected, there were residual effects that stretched to Long Island. Because several tracks at Penn Station were out of service, NJT and Amtrak needed to use some tracks normally reserved for the LIRR, which forced some Long Island commuters to go to Brooklyn, instead. New York's

There have been unofficial reports that there will be another service disruption next summer, too, as more track work will be needed.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which owns the LIRR, prepared for the changes, including offering free transfers to and from the subway at the Brooklyn station. According to RUN Vice-Chair Andrew Albert, who is also Chair of the NYC Transit Riders' Council, noted that a free ferry from the normally-lightly-used Hunterspoint Avenue terminal to (via bus connection) Manhattan saw very little ridership, in contrast to the Hoboken ferries. Albert said that riders preferred to stay on the #7 subway line, rather than incur an extra transfer.

Mark Epstein, a lawyer who commutes from Long Island to his Manhattan office, is the Chair of the Long Island Rail Road Commuters' Council. He sounded a cautionary note, telling this writer: “Our tracks, signals and switches haven't been worked on, so we expect the same commute in September that we had in May.” New Jersey riders also wonder if their commute will be any better after Labor Day, when the track work is completed, at least for this year. There have been unofficial reports that there will be another service disruption next summer, too, as more track work will be needed. Advocates hope that, if that happens, management will listen to them and take their suggestions seriously.

If anyone drew praise, it was the riders, who had to endure the service changes through much of July and all of August. Epstein said: “I give the tip of the hat to the riders” of Long Island. Albert praised them, too. Santoro praised NJ Transit's riders for being “very, very patient” during the summer. Advocates from the Lackawanna Coalition and the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP) agreed.

It was a difficult summer for riders, especially on the M&E Line. It could have been better for the riders if NJT had brought their advocates into the planning process, but the feared “Summer from Hell” did not materialize. Perhaps Dante would have placed it in Purgatory, instead.

David Peter Alan is a member of the Board of Directors of RUN and of the Conference Committee. When not riding transit or advocating for it, he lives and practices law in South Orange, NJ.

ALL ABOARD WASHINGTON HEARS FROM WA STATE TRANSPORTATION SECRETARY ROGER MILLAR

By *Lloyd H. Flem*

All Aboard Washington's annual Picnic Meeting, held on August 12 at Rainier Vista Park, a mile northwest of Olympia-Lacey's Centennial Rail Station, featured a presentation by Roger Millar, Secretary of Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Millar proved very supportive of the State Rail Program as well as other non-auto transportation modes: "We are a Department of Transportation, not just a Department of Highways." AAWA members present were very favorably impressed by Secretary Millar.

Another report was from Noah Westbay, a 2017 honors grad in Geography from Central Washington University (CWU) in Ellensburg. Westbay, under the direction of CWU Geography Department Chair Dr. John Bowen, has been hired by

AAWA to study the potential of restoring scheduled intercity rail passenger service over Stampede Pass in the form of a professional-quality survey. As of August 12, there had been 1,025 responses. Such communities as Auburn, Cle Elum, Ellensburg, Yakima, Toppenish, and Pasco hope for the restoration of trains that last ran in 1981 on what is the original Northern Pacific line to/from the Washington coast.

The CWU survey results will be one aspect of a Rail Summit hosted by AAWA on Sept. 16 at the TRAC Center in Pasco. Other presentations and views at the Summit will come from BNSF Railway, owner of the Stampede Pass rail line, Amtrak, WSDOT, key Washington State legislators, community officials, and business leaders from the proposed area to be served by restored train service.

AAWA knows that restoring an interrupted passenger train service, or adding stops or frequencies is not easy or inexpensive. AAWA believes BNSF is the best North American freight railroad in their cooperation with passenger rail interests, but they also have restrictions and required investments before any increases in passenger train service can occur on BNSF property.

In association with the Pasco Rail Summit, a separate breakfast on Sept. 16 will host members of the State Legislature who are members of the Rail Caucus, a fully bipartisan group from all parts of Washington who support freight as well as passenger trains in this, the US' most trade-dependent state.

Lloyd H. Flem is executive director of All Aboard Washington (AAWA) in Seattle.

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A TOURIST RAILROAD RUNS BETWEEN AMTRAK AND MAJESTIC SCENERY, AT LEAST FOR THE MOMENT



The Grand Canyon Railway began as a branch of the Santa Fe Railroad more than a century ago.

By David Peter Alan

Very few “tourist railroads” in the United States or Canada are accessible without an automobile. One that takes travelers to the Grand Canyon, one of the most-visited and most awe-inspiring places in the country. It is the Grand Canyon Railway, which began as a branch of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1901. The line itself is not scenic, but its final destination certainly is. It runs to the South Rim of the Canyon from Williams, AZ, about three miles from the current Williams Junction stop on Amtrak’s Southwest Chief, Trains #3 and #4 between Chicago and Los Angeles, on the historic Santa Fe main line.

For most of its length in New Mexico and Arizona, historic Route 66 runs along that line. Williams had the distinction of hosting the last segment of the historic highway still in use as the main vehicular road, before it was superseded by Interstate Highway 40.

Today, Williams joins many other towns along the old “Mother Road” in celebrating its Route 66 heritage. It is also the home of the former Frey Marcos Hotel, built by the Santa Fe and now the Grand Canyon Railway’s station. It is no longer a hotel, since the railroad built a new hotel next door. The railroad provides a shuttle van for Amtrak travelers, so they can connect between Amtrak and their station. At least, they do now. That service is scheduled to be discontinued on Jan. 1, 2018.

In the meantime, the experience is still available, and this writer thoroughly enjoyed it. Despite the convenience for connecting passengers, they ended up waiting in the hotel lobby for their trains, which could be an accommodation that the hotel no longer wishes to provide. Williams was an interesting town, with buildings from the Route 66 era and a number of local eateries, including the Pine Tree Cafe, which features about 30 flavors of homemade pies.

There is no scenery on the line to the Grand Canyon; it is all at the Canyon. It was fun to ride the train, though, because the management provided entertainment before departure and on the way. Before the train left, the railroad presented its version of a “Wild West Show” with some audience participation. On the trip, local entertainers passed from car to car, telling stories and singing songs. The railroad’s slogan is “The most entertaining way to do the Grand Canyon,” and the experience lives up to it.

Bruce Brossman, Arizona Regional Director, Sales and Marketing for Xanterra, the company that operates the railroad, said: “the Railway is more than just transportation. We provide entertainment and interpretive information in Williams and on the train, and assist all train passengers with information on how to maximize their time at the rim. So we feel strongly that we are providing a needed and fun alternative to arriving at Grand Canyon by car.”

(Continued on page 11)

A TOURIST RAILROAD RUNS BETWEEN AMTRAK AND MAJESTIC SCENERY

((Continued from page 10))

The Grand Canyon is not beautifully scenic, but it is one of the most impressive sights in the country. The river, formerly known as the Grand River (hence the name "Grand Canyon") and now as the Colorado River, is located one mile down from the overlooks in the park. At the park itself, the historic El Tovar Hotel and Bright Angel Lodge, along with the original train station from 1901 and other buildings, preserve the original style of the park. Famed Santa Fe Railroad architect and designer Mary Jane Coulter designed many of the park structures. Today Xanterra operates them, along with the railroad.

The train leaves Williams at 9:30 in the morning and arrives at the park at 11:45. The return trip leaves at 3:30 every day, with a second train at 4:30 on selected days. This writer took the second train, which allowed nearly five hours to explore the Canyon. It was enough time to see some museums and ride the park shuttle buses to some of the overlooks that provide a breathtaking view of the canyon below. There was also time for lunch at the El Tovar, the historic hotel built in 1905.

The railroad offers several classes of service, from luxury dome cars with snack and beverage service, to "Pullman" Class. In this case, "Pullman" Class is not luxurious. Instead the name refers to Pullman-Standard, the manufacturer of the 1920s-vintage Harriman-Stillwell cars that once ran on the Southern Pacific, Erie and other railroads. They have walkover seats and windows that open, and they provide some of the flavor of rail travel during a bygone era.

One of the most distinctive features of the Grand Canyon Railway is the shuttle van that takes customers the three miles between the Amtrak stop at Williams Junction and the Grand Canyon Railroad at Williams. Unfortunately, that service will be discontinued at the end of this year.

Brossman told this writer that, at least for visitors who can get to the train by automobile, the train adds to the overall experience. He said: "Obviously we believe that taking the train to Grand Canyon is a far better experience than arriving by car. The NPS [National Park Service] is spending considerable effort and money

"Obviously we believe that taking the train to Grand Canyon is a far better experience than arriving by car."

to create a shuttle system from Tusayan to the Visitor Center at Mather Pt. and is actively promoting this option." He added: "The Grand Canyon Railway was the original mass transportation solution when it started in 1901, and delivers visitors to the heart of the Historic District. The train option diverts thousands of cars per year from the crowded South Entrance gates, where lines can exceed an hour wait time during Spring Break, holidays and during summer. And, once inside the park a car is not needed. Grand Canyon Railway collects entrance fees on behalf of the NPS, which are then submitted to NPS."

The issue will now be access to the Grand Canyon train from Amtrak. At the present time, Arizona Shuttle, a private operator that runs van service

to airports and other locations in the state, offers a run between Flagstaff and Williams that allows a day trip to the Canyon from Amtrak at Flagstaff; at least, if the Amtrak train arrives on or near schedule from Los Angeles. At this writing, the fare is \$24 each way. For eight dollars more each way, the same van will go directly to the Canyon.

Will Canyon visitors decide that the train is worth the extra fare, since it also means less time at the Grand Canyon itself? Time will tell. In the meantime, the shuttle van between Amtrak and the Grand Canyon Railroad will still run for a few more months. It might be a good idea to see the magnificent Grand Canyon this fall, because part of the experience will no longer be available after this year.

The website for the Grand Canyon Railway is www.thetrain.com. The phone number is (800) 843-8724. The railroad also offers a number of packages, which are described on the website.

David Peter Alan is a member of the RUN Board and has ridden the entire Amtrak system, as well as most of the small number of tourist railroads that are accessible on Amtrak or local transit.

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EXPANSION OF PASSENGER RAIL ALONG THE KNOWLEDGE CORRIDOR



Congressman Richard Neal, D-Springfield, at podium, speaks at Union Station in Springfield during a media tour of the renovated train station.

(Continued from page 2)

and the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority, Springfield's intracity bus line, and Peter Pan's intercity bus line will move their operations over to the new 27-bay open-air bus terminal outside Union Station.

With the pending startup of the new Hartford line and the reopening of the historic Springfield railroad station, it is high time to consider expanding passenger rail between Boston and Springfield. The *Lakeshore Limited* is the only east-west train that currently travels daily between the two cities on its way back and forth to Chicago.

The MBTA currently provides seven Monday-Friday round-trips between Boston and Worcester, including an 8 a.m. departure which only stops at the

three stations in Boston (Yawkey, Back Bay, and South Station), shaving 27 minutes off the existing hour-and-a-half schedule.

The 55-mile rail line west of Worcester to Springfield, owned by CSX, would need to be doubled tracked as well as having additional signals and sidings put in place before higher speed rail passenger service could start up.

A proposal to study a high-speed rail link between the two cities was vetoed last year by Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker. He suggested instead that the legislature propose a new study that would also examine bus service and other potential ways to improve transit across the state. The state legislators, however, did not take up the measure again, either to override Baker's veto or adopt his changes.

A similar proposal was approved by the state senate this year but died "during secret talks" between negotiators from the House and Senate tasked with working out differences between competing state proposals. Peter Picknelly, the owner of the Peter Pan bus company, which offers 15 daily round trips between the two cities, lobbied against the proposed study last year and may have been behind the "special interest" that killed the bill this year as well.

The legislative sponsor of the bill, Sen. Eric Lesser of Longmeadow, believes the decision to not fund the study is "sketchy" since two other studies are moving forward. A million and a half dollars has been appropriated to study reconnecting North and South Stations. The State budget compromise also calls for MassDOT to pull together a working group by October 2017 to identify economic and cultural benefits of establishing a seasonal summer service from Pittsfield, MA to New York City which would be similar to the successful existing *Cape Flyer* weekend summer service from Boston to Hyannis on Cape Cod.

It should also be pointed out that MassDOT has also recently released its **Central Corridor Line Passenger Rail Feasibility Study**, which examined the implementation and operation of an intercity passenger rail service between Brattleboro, VT and New London, CT. Three different scenarios were developed to understand the full range of potential ridership utilizing one to three trainsets to provide two round-trips per day, peak hour and off peak service, or nearly hourly service, respectively.

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EXPANSION OF PASSENGER RAIL ALONG THE KNOWLEDGE CORRIDOR

(Continued from page 12)

Even though 10 different communities would be served, including notable locations that serve two state universities, 11 smaller colleges, and the Mohegan Sun Resort and Casino, it was estimated daily ridership on the CC in the year 2020 would be between 385 and 405 riders, depending on the level of service provided. Total capital costs for the CC were estimated to be \$376.5 million, including right-of-way upgrades, station construction and rehabilitation, and purchase of new trainsets.

While each of the above projects may be worth further consideration, the restoration of service between Boston and Springfield is a no-brainer. It should be viewed as the next step in restoring the inland route from Boston to New York via Springfield, which the New Haven Railroad operated years ago as well as Amtrak more recently (with its *Bay State* train).

The Inland Route Service Development Plan—which is part of the Northern

New England Intercity Rail Initiative that MassDOT and the Vermont Agency of Transportation, in coordination with CTDOT and the FRA, released last year—estimated it would cost (in 2014 dollars) between \$273 million and \$309 million to upgrade the line. The improvements would include restoration of double mainline tracks, construction

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of one section of new passing siding, restoration of undergrade bridges, signal improvements, building a second platform in Worcester, and the construction of a new station in Palmer, MA.

Rail advocates along the Knowledge Corridor are actively pushing for more

rail service. Tim Brennan, the Executive Director of the West Springfield- based Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, continues to play a leading role in the effort to expand passenger service along the east-west passenger rail corridor linking Boston-Worcester-Springfield-Hartford and New Haven via the Inland Route. The PVC is planning a special half-day conference, “Leveraging the Knowledge Corridor’s Transportation Assets and Investments to Drive Economic Progress” on Oct. 18.

Robert Puentes, President/CEO of the Eno Center for Transportation, will give the keynote address and CT Commissioner of Transportation James Redeker and his counterpart in the Bay State, Stephanie Pollack, Secretary/CEO of MassDOT, will also address the audience. Panelists include five members of Congress from the region.

Brennan and other passenger rail advocates are also pushing for more service on the northern end of the Knowledge Corridor.

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EXPANSION OF PASSENGER RAIL ALONG THE KNOWLEDGE CORRIDOR



*Amtrak ran a special inspection train in July for officials from the U.S. and Canada to review the route for possible extension of Amtrak's *Vermont* service to Montreal..*

(Continued from page 13)

Northampton, MA is the third busiest stop along Amtrak's *Vermont* route. More than 17,000 passengers got on last year, far exceeding expectations. Brennan believes this strong showing helps justify the push for more service—two more morning trains, and two more in the afternoon—which the state conditionally agreed to implement in fall 2019. The ridership numbers, he believes, bolster the case for doing it sooner than later.

In the meantime, the Massachusetts State Transportation Secretary announced that by next summer her department will complete a larger station platform which will allow for two pairs of passengers doors to be opened on the platform to speed up boarding. The current Amtrak station stop in Northampton is a

covered 46-foot long high-level boarding platform. It was originally constructed in late 2014 as part of the Knowledge Corridor–Restore *Vermont* Project.

A new organization called **Trains in the Valley** held its first public meeting last year. It also advocates for expanded and improved passenger and rail freight service along the Knowledge Corridor. The organization was founded by Ben Heckscher, who published a well-regarded blog about the Second Avenue Subway in New York City before moving to Hatfield, MA. The co-founder, Zane Lumelsky, is a marketing and advertising consultant who lives in Northampton.

Together, they have created an outstanding website called TrainsInTheValley.org, which provides easy access to public

information “on the past, present and potential future of rail service” in the area. Their hope is that the website “increases overall transparency on local and regional rail issues.” If you haven’t checked it out yet, please do; it is an outstanding model that other rail advocacy groups across North America may want to consider.

In other news regarding the *Vermont*, which runs over the Knowledge Corridor between New Haven and Brattleboro, VT, Amtrak operated a special trip in July for officials from the U.S. and Canada to inspect the train route on the New England Central and CN railroad from St. Albans, VT to Montreal for the possible extension of the *Vermont* to the city.

(Continued on page 15)

EXPANSION OF PASSENGER RAIL ALONG THE KNOWLEDGE CORRIDOR

(Continued from page 14)

There is a plan in place for preclearance at Montreal for riders traveling south on the *Vermont* and *Adirondack* to clear U.S. Customs and Immigration prior to boarding the train. In the reverse direction, passengers would clear Canadian Customs and Immigration upon arrival in Montreal.

The U.S. and Canada have an agreement for Land, Rail, Marine, and Air Preclearance. Congress in December 2016 passed a bill which will help facilitate the expansion of U.S. Customs and Border Protection pre-clearance facilities in Canada. The bill was signed by President Obama in December 2016.

However, before the preclearance facility can be built at Montreal's Central railroad station, legislation must still be passed by the Canadian Parliament. Evidently, the House of Commons of Canada has voted to

pass preclearance legislation. The Canadian Senate needs to act on this matter when it returns in session in September 2017.

Ken Westcar, a rail advocate in Canada who is also a RUN Board member, believes the Canadian government "is taking a measured and fact-based approach to trade relations with the USA." Consequently, barring any unpredictable move by President Trump, Westcar believes that Canada will move to pass this legislation during the next session.

He is unsure of the funding for the planned new joint customs and immigration facility which is to be built at Central Station in Montréal, Quebec for both the Canada Border Security Agency and U.S. Customs and Border Protection, but believes Canada will certainly request a "cost split." Most likely, it will be at the federal level, since VIA has no budget for this and there are doubts as well about whether Amtrak has one.

Although passenger rail and border security are federal matters on both sides of the border, Westcar believes provincial/state funding could be provided if their respective legislators see material, local benefit. He believes both the U.S. and Canada would like to repeat the proven Vancouver *Cascades* model for preclearance at Niagara, Detroit/Windsor and Quebec/Vermont, as it makes economic sense.

For more information:

<http://www.nhregister.com/business/article/Connecticut-DOT-picks-transit-team-to-operate-11729259.php>

<http://www.massdot.state.ma.us/Portals/17/docs/CentralCorridor/CentralCorridorRep.pdf>

<https://trainsinthevalley.org/>

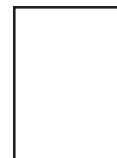
2017 Schedule of RUN Board Meetings:

Meetings for the remainder of 2016 are scheduled for 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.

FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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

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PLEASE BECOME A MEMBER OF RUN...

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

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

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

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