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AT LONG LAST, MTA PREPARES TO REPLACE THE METROCARD

By Andrew Albert

Introduced in the 1990s, New York's ubiquitous Metrocard—long the symbol of New York, and the butt of many jokes (so-and-so didn't know how to swipe, etc.)—will soon go the way of the token. Of course, “soon” depends on your definition, as the Metrocard will still be around during the introduction of the new contactless tap card, as yet unnamed.

It's about time. The Metrocard has outlived its usefulness in many ways. This is not to say it was without merit—it allowed for many useful and important fare options that the token did not—but it's also not to say there haven't been

problems. Many Metrocard users have encountered the “swipe again” or “swipe again here” message, thus causing frustration not only for the user, but those lined up at the turnstiles behind. Many transit users have also encountered “dirty” turnstile slots, which damage the delicate electronic stripe on the Metrocard, causing it to malfunction, or have to be replaced.

Then there's the issue of damaged cards, as well as what to do when your card is lost/stolen. If you've remembered to jot down the serial # of your card, then good. If you haven't—and paid with cash—you're out of luck. If it was a monthly card and you

paid by credit or debit card - you were good, if you didn't - you're out of luck. And of course, the Metrocard did you no good if you rode the commuter rails—Metro-North or the Long Island Rail Road. Sure, you could purchase a monthly pass on the railroads which had a Metrocard on the reverse side - but the subway user couldn't upgrade their Metrocard to allow use on the railroads. And the MTA had to pay employees to clean the turnstile slots that the Metrocards slid through, or damage to cards would occur. And—leave it to enterprising New Yorkers—some figured out that if you bent the card in a certain fashion, you could wrangle a couple of extra rides out of it!

(Continued on page 3)

AMTRAK CASCADES EXPANSION PENDING

By Lloyd H. Flem

On Dec. 18, the Seattle-Portland segment of the Talgo-built Amtrak Cascades trains will add two round trips, giving a total of six, all during daytime hours. The six, plus the Coast Starlight, mean that intercity rail passenger service between the two rapidly-growing, economically-prosperous metro areas in the American Pacific Northwest can be seen as constituting a viable rail corridor. With the increasingly unpleasant experience of I-5 traffic, major growth in train ridership in that corridor is

predicted, including larger numbers of business travelers. In addition to the two new round trips, considerable improvements on the BNSF Main north-south line within the state of Washington, which benefits freight as well as passenger service, have been completed.

A decrease in scheduled run time of 10 minutes will also occur on Dec. 18. All Aboard Washington (AAWA) feels the decrease is too modest, given the infrastructure improvements made. In addition, all passenger trains will be leaving the

picturesque water-level route skirting Puget Sound, replaced by a more direct, but far-less aesthetic inland run between Olympia and Tacoma. Also new environmentally-friendly Charger locomotives, built in Sacramento, will increase on-time reliability. Finally, Tacoma will have a new Amtrak station immediately adjacent to light and commuter rail, intercity bus and local transit bus. Much of the funding for these improvements and expansions came from President Obama's ARRA “High Speed Rail” (HSR) money.

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UNCERTAINTY RIDES THE RAILS AT NEW JERSEY TRANSIT

By David Peter Alan

New Jersey's rail riders face an uncertain future, along with their transportation provider, New Jersey Transit (NJT). They face a number of uncertainties on several fronts, from chronic funding shortages at NJT, to not being sure whether the train they want to take will run on any given day.

There was uncertainty on the Morris & Essex (M&E) Line at the beginning of the summer; as NJT announced that there would be no weekday trains on that line to or from Penn Station, New York (except for a few early-morning arrivals) for eight weeks. The trains were sent to the historic Hoboken Terminal instead. NJT cut Hoboken fares in half for the duration and threw in free connections to Manhattan on PATH (Port Authority Trans Hudson) trains or ferries. The riders suffered some inconvenience, but NJT planned and executed its plan well, so there was a general consensus that the summer could have been much worse. That uncertainty had been resolved.

When the M&E trains returned to Penn Station, other uncertainties remained, and they have not gone away. There is a shortage of engineers at NJT, which has caused some trains to be canceled. This writer and many other riders have had occasions when the trains we expected to catch did not run, so we had to wait for the next train. Outside peak-commuting hours, that meant an extra hour of waiting time. If an "inbound" train is canceled, the consequences could be much worse, like missing appointments. Labor and management are blaming each other, while the biggest losers are the riders.

In the long run, there is uncertainty about how NJT riders will get into New York's Penn Station in the future. The tunnels under the Hudson River flooded in 2012, when Hurricane Sandy struck. Amtrak, which owns the line, says that they must be taken out of service for repairs by 2034. Some advocates claim that the damage is not extensive and can be repaired at night and on weekends. NJT, Amtrak and the "transportation establishment" maintain that it will be necessary to take each tunnel out of service for months. The big

question is whether or not there will be new tunnels in service before the old ones must be shut down, if that is actually necessary.

Amtrak's plan is the Gateway Project, a mega-project first proposed in 2011. Gateway includes two new tunnels, two new bridges to replace the aging Portal Bridge over the Hackensack River, and improvements at Penn Station. It also includes a new stub-end terminal called "Penn South" for NJT trains, new infrastructure in Secaucus, NJ and a loop that would render the current Secaucus station (which opened for service in 2003 and cost \$600 million to build) obsolete. Amtrak claims that Gateway can be completed by 2030; only a few short years before it says the existing tunnels must be shut down for repairs. Some advocates believe this deadline to be too close for comfort.

Those advocates, including the Lackawanna Coalition, are concerned about the cost of Gateway, which is now estimated at close to \$30 billion. They do not believe that a fiscally-conservative Republican government will spend half of that amount, which is roughly half of the money available for transit projects around the country, for a project that will benefit a Democratic stronghold like the New York area. They also doubt that there is enough "local" money available to pay for the local funding match. They propose a "Plan B" that includes new tunnels, a single new bridge and the improvements at Penn Station, but not "Penn South" or the other infrastructure, which they deem unnecessary and possibly undesirable. These advocates say that their scaled-down plan is affordable, and will provide enough capacity into Penn Station. They criticize Gateway for not promising to provide such capacity until the all of it is completed, which might not happen before the existing tunnels are taken out of service. They are beginning to think about a "Plan C" to get commuters into Manhattan, even if a tunnel is taken out of service for repairs.

There is also the uncertainty about funding for NJT and for community transportation in the Garden State. The administration of outgoing Gov. Chris Christie once cut funding for the operating side of NJT so drastically that legislative

support for the agency had been reduced by 90% from 2007-08 levels in 2014-15. For this year, it is about one third of the level of a decade ago, but these funding cuts have translated into service cuts, which means less mobility. Continued uncertainty over funding means continued uncertainty over whether any particular train will be removed from the schedule.

There is also uncertainty about NJT's relationship with Amtrak. NJT has not paid its assessment to Amtrak for the use of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) between Trenton and Penn Station, New York. As a result, Amtrak has stopped work on projects along the line that would benefit NJT's riders. Mayor J. Christian Bollwage of Elizabeth complained that the dispute between the two railroads has halted construction of a new station in his city, which is located on the NEC, but where Amtrak trains do not stop. He also expressed the hope that the incoming administration in Trenton can resolve the situation.

Some of these uncertainties may be resolved next year, although some transit managers are facing a new uncertainty. New Jersey is getting a new governor, Democrat Phil Murphy. Both houses of the legislature have Democratic majorities, so Murphy should be able to implement policies easily. During the campaign, Murphy complained about the leadership at NJT, so advocates expect to see some new faces at the agency next year. Whether any such changes will be far-reaching, or merely cosmetic, is anyone's guess. That is a new uncertainty for riders, while some managers are uncertain about whether or not they will keep their jobs after the new administration takes office in January.

Riders and their advocates are also uncertain about whether there will be more funding for the operating side of NJT, now that the Democrats will be in power in Trenton. At least now they can hope that there will be more funding. If there is, they may at least be able to keep the reduced level of service that they now have.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member who is also Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, which advocates for better service on NJ Transit Rail and connecting transit lines.

AT LONG LAST, MTA PREPARES TO REPLACE THE METROCARD

(Continued from page 1)

For a variety of reasons, all this is about to change. This month, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority signed a \$573-million agreement with Cubic Transportation Systems to develop a new fare payment system that will, by 2023, completely replace the aging Metrocard system. New York will get the as-yet unnamed contactless tap card system that is in use in London, among other places.

Initially, electronic readers will be installed in 500 subway turnstiles and on 600 buses. This will happen by 2019. By 2020, there will be a complete rollout of this system in all subway turnstiles and buses. There will also be smartphone apps which will allow entry to the system, such as Apple Pay, Android Pay, and Samsung Pay. Initially, you will also be able to have a bank-issued credit or debit card with a special MTA chip inside.

Later, likely in 2021, there will also be a MTA-issued card, for those who don't have bank accounts or credit cards. A wide retail network will be established to sell the cards, which of course can be refilled online, and do not require

a trip to a station to refill them. By 2022, machines will be installed in subway stations and commuter rail stations which will vend the MTA-issued cards. The entire project will be complete by 2023, which will then completely remove the slots that accommodated the Metrocard, and it will be history.

The new fare card system will allow inventive ways to pay your fare—but also give the rider some new fare options, such as “capping,” which, after you've reached the threshold of the fare type you've paid for, would allow free rides over that. It will allow transfers to the commuter rail system, as well as discounts by time-of-day, and of course will allow for senior/disabled discounts. Perhaps the best part is the variety of ways you will be able to add fare - either by your smartphone, by computer, or by machine. Of course, there will be automatic refill, as there is now with the Metrocard if you're a senior or disabled customer. Speed will be another benefit, as the London system has proven. And if you've ever ridden a NY bus and waited as the farebox took your Metrocard, digested it, and then spit it back out to you—a four- or five-second sequence—you will really appreciate the speed of the tap card system. This system will also allow the use of all-door boarding

on articulated buses: you would tap as you entered through one of the rear doors, and it would verify you've paid your fare. All-door boarding speeds the bus boarding process—and gets buses on their way more quickly. A ride on any of New York's Select Bus System routes verifies that theory, big-time.

So, New York will finally move its transit system into the 21st Century with the introduction of the new fare payment system. It's a massive system, and will take years to wire and set up for this modern system, but it will definitely be worth it. If you've ridden the subway and been frustrated by the “swipe again” or “swipe again here” signs, or if you've been stuck behind another straphanger who's receiving that message, you'll appreciate the speed and usability of the tap card system. The fact that you won't have to go out of your way to buy, reload, or replace your card (Metrocards had a shelf life and expiration date, due to the delicate electronic stripe), you will want one of these new cards. I'm working on a catchy name for it, but I'm not ready to announce it just yet.

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

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FROM NEW MEXICO (AND ALSO THE UNITED STATES)

By J.W. Madison

Railroad Workers United

Unions still exist in America, albeit in a weakened and more subdued condition than was the case 4-5 decades ago.

Some readers will remember a time when the major unions were loud, pushy, and in the news all the time. They were also shot through with racism and sometimes cozier up a little too close to “organized crime” for the comfort of many. The picture is more complicated now, and certainly not all bad. Unions are gradually rising on behalf of formerly unrepresented workers, such as hotel cleaners and fast-food workers. And there is a small but slowly growing movement agitating for a minimum wage that a thrifty family can actually live on.

And then there's the Railroad Workers United (RWU), founded 2008. From their introductory material:

“We are a diverse group of railroad workers, family members, and retirees from throughout North America. We have members from all the rail crafts and all of the railroad unions. RWU also allows for “Solidarity Members” from different walks of life—mostly in rail related industries—who support our efforts. “

A few of the issues the RWU wades into are these:

- The Single Crew Member controversy. No one-person crews for them—especially on hazmat trains—and they make a solid, unambiguous case for their position.
- The current court trials of the train crew members accused of causing the Lac Megantic disaster. They consider said trials to be a brazen attempt to place the blame

on the workers instead of on inadequate corporate safety rules and lax government oversight policies.

- Widespread corporate practices like deferred maintenance, skimpy safety procedures, aggressive cost-cutting—and too few crew members—and their role in the many train fires and derailments of the last few years;

- Alleged wrongdoing and sweetheart deals between the major rail unions and their supposed management opponents;

In today's Besieged America, a loud, brash, no-nonsense organization unmistakably representing the rank and file (the people that run and maintain the trains) almost seems like an anachronism or a throwback to a previous time. RWU would appear to fit that bill, but they're the real thing. RWU is what could once with greater semantic comfort be called an “insurgent” or “dissident” union. They are not afraid to take on anybody, management, government, or other unions, if they see unsafe work rules, conflict of interest, dirty deals, or other threats to rail workers or the general public.

In short, RWU is just plain refreshing.

RWU's website is: <http://www.railroadworkersunited.org> . Contact: Ron Kaminkow, general secretary
OR JP Wright, organizer;
railroadworkersunited@gmail.com OR
202-798-3327

Another Round Lobbed At The Rail Runner

Once again, or I should say Still, New Mexico's starter commuter Rail line is under attack. The usual scary stuff in the *Albuquerque Journal* and other outlets:

The Rail Runner (NMRX) is drowning in Red Ink! Is it worth the huge expense? Maybe it should be mothballed or retired?

According to our Honest Inside Source, the big fuss is over “debt service,” which has been around from the beginning of the Rail Runner, as it is around any other large transportation or infrastructure project.

And when you consider that the NMDOT routinely carries this “debt service” on many road and highway projects, has done so for years, and continues to do so without batting an eye, this latest anti-rail spasm is more of the same old biased and basically unfair abuse, with a New Mexico twist:

In New Mexico, we still fight battles in transportation, energy, land use, and related topics that have long since been won or partially won just about everywhere else, even the Inland West. Reminds me of staging a battle re-enactment with live ammo.

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

Like the newsletter? Care to make it better?

Why not send us an article, so we can possibly include it in the next edition!

Send your article to
rrudolph1022@gmail.com,
and get published!

CANADA REPORT, WINTER 2018

By Ken Westcar

Churchill Saved! Perhaps

As mentioned in the last Canadian Report, the washed-out route between Winnipeg and Churchill in Manitoba has been a scene of intense saber-rattling between owner Omnitrac and the Canadian federal government. After a threat of legal action by Canada, Omnitrac agreed to restore the line for "light-duty use" which, to the man on the street, implies a patch job.

Despite Churchill residents' threat to impound the VIA Rail train, marooned by weather and climate-related track damage, it was released before the Omnitrac deal was struck and barged back to Montreal. Churchill was in danger of becoming a ghost town inhabited solely by polar bears as the cost of flying in supplies is punitive. There has been discussion on closing the railway and replacing it with a road, the logic being that roads are "investments" as opposed to railways that need a "subsidy." Heard that before?

There's no word on when the route will finally reopen but it needs to be soon to avoid winter weather conditions. VIA's position on passenger service reinstatement remains unclear and this could seriously discourage

bookings by international rail touring groups for the 2018 season. VIA continues to struggle in this marketplace because of very poor punctuality of the Toronto-Vancouver *Canadian* that substantially raises operating costs and generates many very disgruntled passengers.

Ontario High-Speed Rail

The province recently announced two steps forward on this project. The first is a C\$15-million preliminary environmental assessment due out in early 2018.

Followers of this will be looking for the consideration of alternatives, such as doing absolutely nothing and keeping fingers crossed that autonomous vehicles are potential salvation to Highway 401 congestion and closure woes. The second, favored by pragmatists rather than political trophy-hunters, are major improvements to VIA's "Corridor" services in southwestern Ontario.

The second step is the establishment of a High-Speed Rail Planning Board to consider stakeholder input on route choices and required train frequencies. If this follows the usual provincial government strategy of avoiding acknowledgement of best-practice in other high-speed operating countries

and excluding people who know anything about passenger railways, it's likely to come under fire very quickly. There are a prolific number of tigers in the grass with legitimate questions over cost, timeline, industrial benefits and community concerns over property expropriation and noise.

It's been interesting to watch mayors in Toronto, Guelph, Kitchener and London shilling for high-speed rail without any real understanding of what it actually entails. The route will need to pass through urban areas for nearly half its length and tunneling is unlikely to be an option due to cost. Consequently, it's going to be fun watching mayors twisting themselves into pretzels when they tell their constituents where the demolition balls will be swinging.

In my next report I'll cover the Transport Futures conference in Toronto on Nov. 27. The agenda and speaker listing look very interesting. It should be indicative of the way big players in the industry intend to tackle the current "they who are able to externalize costs to the taxpayer and environment win" transportation policy at the provincial and federal level.

Ken Westcar is a Board Member of Transport Action Ontario.

Your help is needed as we continue to grow organizationally!

The Rail Users' Network has established two new committees to expand our membership and to respond to issues that arise before the STB, FRA, and Congress which have an impact on passenger rail and transit rail issues. These new committees will be chaired by RUN board members and will be open to anyone who belongs to the organization. Most of the work can be accomplished via conference calling. Please let us know if you are interested in serving on either of these two committees. We are also creating a new RUN brochure which will be placed in racks at train stations where we have permission to do so. We need help distributing these new brochures. Thanks in advance. Please call 207-776-4961 or send an email to rrudolph1022@gmail.com.

DELAYS PLAGUE NEW STARTS, BUT SEVERAL NEW LINES OPEN IN 2017, ANYWAY

By David Peter Alan

2017 was not a great year for new transit starts. Several planned for the year have been delayed until next year. Others eventually opened, even though they were slated to begin service earlier. There were not many new service starts, but they represented several regions and Canada. Amtrak also extended service on a line in Virginia, restoring a train that had not run there since 1979.

Probably the most-awaited and most-delayed new transit service opened at noon on New Year's Day. It was the first segment of New York City's Second Avenue Subway. The first plans for a subway under Second Avenue were drawn a century ago, when there was an elevated line, but the "El" was torn down in 1942 in anticipation of a new subway line to replace it. The new segment branches off from the historic BMT line at 57th Street and Seventh Avenue, stops at 63rd Street (and Lexington Avenue) and then makes three stops under Second Avenue: 72nd, 86th and 96th Streets. It has been criticized for its cost and dubbed the "Second Avenue Stubway" but there are plans to extend it northward to 125th Street in a few years. There are also plans to extend it all the way downtown, but it will be many years before that happens.

Eleven days later, Houston Metro Transit completed its light-rail system by opening the last two stops on its Green Line and the new Magnolia Park Transit Center, a four-minute ride eastward along Harrisburg Blvd. in the East End. The other seven stations on the Green Line opened on May 23, 2015.

The next new line opened on Feb. 24 in Denver. It is the "R" Line, a light rail line on the east side of the city that connects the newly-opened "A" Line between Union Station and the airport, through the University of Colorado, with the "H" Line light rail along Interstate Highway 225. There are five new stations on the line,

which mostly lie along the highway. The line comes within walking distance of the municipal complex in Aurora, but not near its historic downtown, which is two miles away and is served by the Colfax Avenue bus. At this time, there is little development along the new line. The "R" Line is part of the Regional Transit District's Fastracks initiative, which has already resulted in two new commuter-rail-style lines and two new light rail lines. There are five more projects under construction or development, including eventual service to Boulder and Longmont.

The first of two starts in the San Francisco Bay area began service on March 25. It is the extension of the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) line to Warm Springs Station in South Fremont, a park-and-ride station with more than 2000 parking spaces, as well as connections to local buses on AC Transit. The new segment of the line is 5.4 miles from the former Fremont terminal, where trains still terminate on Sundays and after 6:00 on other days. A BART press release said that ridership was "1,577 exits" on the first day of service. The next segment will be an extension to Berryessa/North San José, scheduled for next year as part of a plan to go to downtown San José eventually.

Streetcars returned to Detroit for the first time since 1956 on May 12. That was the first day of service on the new Q-Line, also known as M-1 Rail. It took several years of effort to get the line built and going, both advocating for the line itself and procuring the necessary funding. The new line runs for 3.1 miles on Woodward Avenue, the city's main street, from the Fisher Building (near the Amtrak station) south to the city's downtown core. It runs on the street in mixed traffic, and its operation is separate from the local buses operated by the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT). The line was financed largely by private investment, mostly from Quicken Loans (hence the name Q-Line) and little investment from the automobile industry. There is a reminder of

the private character of the line at every stop; an automated public-address system delivers a commercial sponsorship announcement. Despite this element of discomfort for riders, the line's proponents expect that it will help accelerate the current revival of downtown Detroit and lead to the construction of other streetcar lines in the city.

The other entirely-new start opened for service in the Bay Area on August 25. It is SMART Rail (Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit), in the North Bay area of the San Francisco suburbs. The line is 43 miles long and currently runs on a limited schedule between San Rafael and Santa Rosa Airport, north of the town by the same name and through downtown Santa Rosa and Petaluma. The line runs frequently during peak-commuting hours, with limited mid-day and no evening service. There are five round trips on weekends. Currently, there is a shuttle bus between San Rafael and Larkspur, where riders can connect with ferries to and from the historic Ferry Building at the foot of San Francisco's Market Street. There are plans to extend the line to Larkspur next year, and eventually north to Cloverdale.

Historically, the line was the southern part of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad, a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific. Film buffs may recognize the town of Santa Rosa as the setting for Alfred Hitchcock's 1943 thriller *Shadow of a Doubt*. Some of the buildings seen in that picture are still standing, but the trains that run today are different from the one where the climax of the picture was set. The new trains are diesel-multiple-unit (DMU) trains built by Nippon-Sharyo. The opening of the line was originally planned for 2014, but was delayed until last August. There were free "preview" rides operated during late June and July, before the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) approved the Positive Train Control (PTC) required for revenue service. An estimated 2,700 daily riders used the trains during the first week of regular service.

(Continued on page 12)

PASSENGER RAIL ADVOCACY CHANGING; INCREMENTAL PROJECTS BEST UNDERSTOOD

By *Phil Streby*

Passenger rail advocacy is changing, said Joe McHugh, Amtrak vice president for state-supported services. "It's very difficult to explain the case for improved service to a public which doesn't understand the reasoning," he explained to a luncheon gathering at the Michigan Rail Conference last August.

At one time everyone had a friend or family member working for a railroad. The railroad was where nearly every engineering student strove to work. Now it's more difficult to attract the talent. Most people don't know how this business works, McHugh continued.

Over are the days of large infrastructure projects without federal revenue and incentives. Large-scale projects such as the electrification of the Northeast Corridor were completed because of the long-range planning done then compared with current thinking along the lines of

next quarter's profits, he said.

"While transportation is one area so far not affected, there are too many issues taking on political aspects that make decisions deadly to political careers which makes it very difficult to gain that needed support," he said.

Rally regional groups to work on a project at the state level, which can lead to funding solutions. For instance, build or refurbish train stations and turn them into models of commerce and economic development for the community, McHugh explained. He urged advocates to involve the local community early in passenger rail projects.

In the 1990s, McHugh met with a group of knowledgeable, local mayors who were concerned with maintaining Amtrak service between Atlanta and New Orleans. The mayors found a solution which preserved daily *Crescent* service on the corridor. That initial meeting was followed up with personal "get

acquainted" visits with the mayors, who ultimately acted as "portals" to Congress. Today, incremental passenger rail improvements are far better understood and approved than the "great leaps forward" type of projects, he stressed.

Midwest states were commended for increasing speeds along their corridors, rebuilding their rail stations, and bringing on new equipment. "The Midwest rail passenger infrastructure is becoming a gem of the system," McHugh said.

Advocates must look back upon their successes as they look forward toward even better service. With improved, well-used service, the detractors of passenger rail service will be quieted, he added.

(This article first appeared in All Aboard Indiana, the newsletter of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance.)

Phil Streby is a RUN Board member and a board member of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance.

AMTRAK CASCADES EXPANSION PENDING

(Continued from page 1)

A feature article in the October 2017 *Trains* magazine explained why Washington State DOT received a greater level of funding from the HSR portion of ARRA than any state save California and Illinois. Excellent planning, a successful publicly supported state rail program, and cooperative relations with partners, including host rail road BNSF helped ensure Washington received what AAWA considers our "justly-earned share." AAWA had lobbied our Washington Congressional delegation, pushing the idea that our state had earned significant AARA funding more than states who had just discovered they "needed" big chunks of HSR money. AAWA was pleased that merit seemed to rule in distributing the

money, rather than just, say, the number of electoral votes a state might have!

A pre-inaugural run on the new inland route for "Dignitaries" and media will be held on Dec. 15. (This writer was invited and I promised WSDOT I would attempt to remain dignified!) A celebration at the new Tacoma Amtrak station is scheduled for the afternoon of Dec. 15, to which the public has been invited.

AAWA is now planning for the upcoming Legislative Session, starting in mid-January in Olympia. We will continue to praise what has been accomplished and tactfully push for continued incremental improvements in the existing rail program. In addition, we are continuing what we realize will be a long process in restoring intercity passenger

train service, which last ran in 1981, across Stampede Pass on the original NP line, through the Yakima Valley.

Another major task on which we'll continue is to encourage, even have mandated if needed, all providers of public transportation which receive tax dollars to mutually cooperate more fully, at least on providing information about complementary modes.

We're now deep into November in western Washington, with our famous clouds, rains, and storms rolling in from the Pacific Ocean. But everything is lush and green. Riding our trains is good in November; as it is in the other 11 months. Come visit us anytime!

Lloyd H Flem is Executive Director, All Aboard Washington.

FRA DESIGNATES “RAIL SAFETY WEEK,” SEPT. 24-30, 2017



An Operation Clear Track checkpoint on Sept. 26, 2017. (Photo courtesy of Amtrak Police)

By Bill Engel

The year 2017 marks the 45th year of Operation Lifesaver, now an international effort to increase public awareness of the need to be alert when driving or walking near train tracks. As part of this effort, the FRA, along with other interested parties, declared Sept. 24-30 as “Rail Safety Week,” the first nationwide effort of its kind.

Current statistics show that about every three hours a person or vehicle is hit by a train somewhere in the USA. The need to be alert near train tracks should be obvious, but the statistics show that the public is not. Even so, in the 45 years of

Operation Lifesaver’s existence, the number of incidents has been reduced by over 80%. While the reduction in crashes is commendable, the frequency of such incidents indicates more work needs to be done to get the public to be more alert near train tracks, thus the events during Rail Safety Week.

The freight railroads, Amtrak, and commuter train operators all planned special events during Rail Safety Week. One example of the special events planned was Operation Clear Track. For three hours on Tuesday, Sept. 26, railroad police, cooperating with police agencies at all levels of government, concentrated on grade crossings with

high rates of crashes. Drivers failing to stop for flashing lights or lowered gates at such crossings were stopped and issued citations. As well, railroad safety cards were given out to motorists and pedestrians at the crossings.

In California, a special event took place prior to the San Diego Padres home game on September 24. Volunteers staffed a booth where baseball fans could talk with rail safety experts about being safe around railroad property. California was particularly concerned because the state leads the nation in trespassing incidents on railroad tracks. It is second in the nation in grade crossing incidents. To find out where your state stands in the national rankings, visit www.oli.org.

Sadly, my home state of Ohio is in the top ten nationally in both train/vehicle crashes and trespassing incidents. For whatever reason, there were more trespassing incidents than train/vehicle crashes. It may be that the Ohio Rail Development Commission has been active in dispensing federal and State of Ohio funds to upgrade the protection at crossings and/or eliminate them.

Please remember these three slogans whenever you are near train tracks: First, *Look, Listen, and Live*. Second, *Stay Off, Stay Away, Stay Alive*. Third, *See Tracks? Think Train*.

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

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MINNESOTA'S PASSENGER-TRAIN WISH LIST

SLOWLY RIPENING TO REALITY

By F.K. Plous

If you've ever ridden a passenger train in Minnesota it's very likely you've ridden only one: Amtrak's *Empire Builder*. Since 1985, when the state ended its funding for the St. Paul-Duluth *North Star*, the *Builder* has been the only passenger train serving the state.

And that's a problem—not only because Nos. 7/8 provide only one daily train in each direction, but because those trains serve only one route, and on a schedule that's not convenient for many travelers originating or terminating in Minnesota.

Look at the map. Despite an itinerary that includes 380 miles inside Minnesota, the *Builder* is not really Minnesota's train. It's a 2,200-mile long-distance overnigher timed for travelers between Chicago and the train's two Pacific Northwest termini, Seattle and Portland. The *Builder* is part of Amtrak's so-called "National System" and receives no funding from the State of Minnesota. It serves six cities in Minnesota—Winona, Red Wing, St. Paul, St. Cloud, Staples and Detroit Lakes--and technically serves a seventh, Moorhead, which is not a stop but sits directly across the Red River from Fargo, ND, which is. But the *Builder* comes and goes at times that are not always convenient for Minnesota travelers, stopping at Fargo in both directions between 2 and 3:30 in the morning.

Nor does the *Builder* in either direction connect with a train to Minnesota's second-largest metro area, Duluth, 150 miles northeast of the Twin Cities at the western end of Lake Superior.

Fortunately, the Minnesota Department of Transportation now is actively seeking to establish new train services that fill both of these serious mobility gaps.

On the *Builder's* route, MNDOT so far is planning only a partial solution—a second daily frequency over the 418-mile route between St. Paul and Chicago. Any additional service to points west of the Twin Cities will have to come later.

More convenient schedule for local passengers--MNDOT planner Praveena Pidaparathi, who is collaborating with counterparts at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation on what would be a jointly funded train, says the second Chicago train is likely to run on a "partially flipped" schedule from the *Builder's*. A truly flipped schedule would have the new train leaving Chicago at 2:15 a.m. and arriving back in the city at 3:55 a.m. So a new train would leave Chicago around 9 a.m. with arrival in St. Paul around 4 p.m. A second consist would leave St. Paul approximately on the same timetable, so that the two trains would meet-and-pass somewhere between Tomah and Wisconsin Dells, WI.

The trains would use the former Milwaukee Road *Hiawatha* route, currently owned by Canadian Pacific Railway between St. Paul and Rondout, Ill. Metra, the Chicago regional commuter-rail agency, owns the last 32.3 miles between Rondout and Chicago Union Station. Both landlord railroads are willing to handle the second trains as long as the necessary infrastructure improvements—mostly sidings and signals—are provided. The cost of those upgrades is estimated at around \$95 million, much of which would qualify for federal funding.

But who will provide the rolling stock?--Meanwhile, estimates for rolling stock and operating costs have been performed by Amtrak. Operating costs are expected to run about \$6.5 million per year, but the Amtrak report concluded

with a note that Amtrak does not have, and is not planning to acquire, any locomotives or rolling stock for the second train(s), so that the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin will have to acquire their own equipment.

Using current costs for new bi-level coaches and Tier IV diesel-electric locomotives, Amtrak estimated the startup fleet costs at \$43 million, a figure which would be very hard (read: "impossible") to justify to the respective state legislators required to fund the initiative.

Full disclosure: The author's employer, Chicago-based Corridor Capital LLC, has recommended an alternative plan using former commuter-train locomotives, which are widely available in the aftermarket, and former Santa Fe Railway Hi-Level coaches, which Corridor Capital owns or has optioned. Both would be totally redesigned and rebuilt for the new service at a cost to the states of about \$15 million.

Additional savings would come from a more rigorous operating plan under which Corridor proposed only one consist instead of the two suggested by Amtrak. The bi-directional 4-car train equipped with locomotives at each end would leave Chicago at 7 a.m., arrive St. Paul at 2:15 p.m. and undergo a "blitz" cleaning/servicing/restocking at the platform under St. Paul Union Depot. The train would leave for Chicago at 4 p.m. and arrive back in Chicago just after 11 p.m. in time for passengers to connect with the last Metra commuter trains to the suburbs.

Corridor Capital's plan represents "a more realistic and businesslike approach" that makes the new train service affordable, said the company's chairman, James E. Coston.

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MINNESOTA'S PASSENGER-TRAIN WISH LIST

SLOWLY RIPENING TO REALITY

(Continued from page 9)

"Going from two consists to one saves a huge amount of money," Coston said. "Under the two-consist scenario, each train works only 7 ½ hours out of every 24. That's a rate of utilization that would never be tolerated in the airline, intercity-bus or transit industry. A single train working 14 hours a day is easier to justify. And there's no need for brand-new cars and locomotives when existing rolling stock can be gutted and remanufactured to the current state of the art at half the cost. Why would you need an expensive new 125-mph locomotive on a railroad configured for no more than 79 mph?"

Coston said Corridor's plan also differs from Amtrak's in having a locomotive at each end of the consist rather than a locomotive at one end and a cab car at the other.

"It's because of the grade-crossing problem," he said. "Even if it has Crash Energy Management, a passenger car should not be the first vehicle in the train to strike a ready-mix truck or a fuel tanker stuck on a crossing at 79 mph. Sooner or later every train experiences a grade-crossing event. There are more than 300 road crossings between Chicago and the Twin Cities. We believe the passengers should be protected from any impact by a heavy locomotive and the engineer should be protected by a big steel nose."

Corridor Capital also has suggested inclusion of business-class accommodations, an option not in the Amtrak proposal. The company's holdings include Hi-Level cars capable of conversion to business/cafe configuration, with about 40 seats in the business section and about 20 in the cafe.

MNDOT and WisDOT have been briefed on the Capital Corridor plan, but

neither agency currently has disclosed a preference for any equipment strategy. A further complication is a Minnesota statute that forbids state-owned property from being used out of state. Unless the statute is repealed, Minnesota and Wisconsin probably would have to form some sort of joint operating authority which then would lease the necessary train or trains.

Twin Cities to Twin Ports--That proviso also would affect ownership of the two or three consists that will be needed to equip the proposed *Northern Lights Express* connecting Duluth and Minneapolis. Although both end points are inside Minnesota, the trains must pass through a tiny northwestern corner of the state of Wisconsin and stop at Duluth's twin city, Superior, WI, before crossing the St. Louis River to re-enter Minnesota and reach the city of Duluth.

The *Northern Light Express* project is a big deal in Minnesota. MNDOT is planning not one but four daily shuttle frequencies over the 150-mile Minneapolis-Duluth route, a busy travel corridor plagued not only by growing traffic congestion on Interstate 35 but by the region's notorious snowstorms, which not only can block highways with impassable drifts but also generate dangerous whiteouts that blind motorists to their surroundings. A fleet of 90-mph passenger trains governed by Positive Train Control would give travelers a fast, safe, restful solution to both problems.

As described by Frank Loetterle, the MNDOT planner in charge of the *Northern Lights Express*, the initial plan calls for four round trips per day between the Twin Cities and the Twin Ports, with intermediate stops at Coon Rapids-Foley, Cambridge, Hinckley, Sandstone, and Superior. End-to-end running times would be about 2 ½ hours at top speeds of 90 mph. Depending

on how the trains are scheduled, the first train and last trains of the day may even serve a commuter function at the Twin Cities end.

But this capability will require \$500-\$600 million in capital investment in BNSF Railway's mostly single-track, freight-heavy main line, about 80% of it from the federal government. Passing sidings would have to be installed, as would Positive Train Control, re-timing of grade-crossing circuits and platform construction at the intermediate stations. BNSF is O.K. with plans to run fast passenger trains, but only if government pays for the necessary infrastructure improvements. The project is now in Tier 2 of the Environmental Review process.

The curious case of the two stations—

In addition to bringing a fresh dose of new mobility to Minnesota, the second Twin Cities-Chicago train and the North Star Express promise to bring an end to a problem that has plagued Minnesota passenger-train planning for decades: the historic rivalry between St. Paul and Minneapolis.

When President Jimmy Carter's economy drive forced Amtrak into a radical pruning of its long-distance train network in 1979, the only active railroad station serving the Twin Cities was the old Great Northern Station in Minneapolis, served by the daily *Empire Builder* and the thrice-weekly *North Coast Hiawatha*. But once Carter had killed off the *North Coast Hiawatha*, Burlington Northern Chairman Lou Menk announced the railroad no longer could afford to keep its aging 12-track station open for one train a day and would demolish the building and sell the property to a developer. With the 21-track St. Paul Union Depot (SPUD) empty and used by the adjacent U.S. Post Office for truck storage, Amtrak built its own station in St. Paul's Midway area to handle the *Builder*.

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MINNESOTA'S PASSENGER-TRAIN WISH LIST SLOWLY RIPENING TO REALITY

((Continued from page 10))

But in 2009, when Minneapolis started up its modest North Star commuter-rail service to suburban Big Lake, the city contrived to carve out a little 2-track, 1-platform depot alongside a freight alignment used by Union Pacific and BNSF, passing right under the Target Field stadium just west of downtown Minneapolis. Target Field Station is a queer little place—no head house, just an escalator from the platform up to the Target Field sidewalk, and a very tight configuration hemmed in by office buildings that drastically limits expansion. Even worse, the station has a stub configuration, so any train routed beyond Minneapolis must either back in or back out on a wye about a mile north of the site. The trackage serving the Great Northern's old through station has been ripped out and the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis now occupies the depot's footprint, leaving no way for passenger trains to operate through downtown Minneapolis—only “in-and-out.”

During the same period, the Ramsey County Railroad Commission embarked on an ambitious, \$200-million project to renovate, rehabilitate and historically restore SPUD. In May 2014, Amtrak

closed Midway Station and began stopping the *Empire Builder* at the restored SPUD. The huge limestone Neoclassical head house and vaulted Italianate concourse now stand as the only intercity passenger-rail station in the Twin Cities.

So when planning for the two new train services began, it was ordained that the Twin Cities-Chicago train would originate and terminate at St. Paul Union Depot while the proposed *Northern Lights Express* would use Target Field. The intercity rivalry would be appeased by giving each city its “own” train. The two depots are about 10 miles apart via the BNSF main line, but they are connected by the new Green Line light-rail line, so planners explained Minneapolitans headed for Chicago could take the streetcar to SPUD while St. Paulians traveling to Duluth-Superior could ride the same streetcar line in the other direction to connect with the *Northern Lights Express* at Target Field.

But MNDOT Rail Office Director Dan Krom said this awkward situation will not prevail permanently. He said the little Target Field station is capable of being upgraded and expanded to provide both additional

train movements as well as passenger amenities, such as a head house with seating, rest rooms, ticket office and other amenities it currently lacks, plus a parking lot and perhaps car-rental capability.

“Eventually, when the money is there, all trains will serve both stations in the Twin Cities,” he said.

Krom is patiently confident that all the obstacles currently hindering the startups can be overcome.

“We are in the process of funding the environmental study for the *Northern Lights Express*, and when the funds become available we will move,” he said. “On the Chicago project we are a little farther behind. We’re just starting to engage on the capital and operating-cost issues.

“Fortunately, both the CP and the BNSF have been extremely cooperative,” he said. “We’re just beginning the dialogue with CP about using their railroad to reach Chicago. Our talks with BNSF are more advanced. Both carriers have been good partners with us.”

EK. Plous is director of communications for Corridor Capital LLC.

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DELAYS PLAGUE NEW STARTS, BUT SEVERAL NEW LINES OPEN IN 2017, ANYWAY

(Continued from page 6)

Amtrak also restored service to Roanoke, VA, a place that had not hosted a scheduled passenger train since 1979. Until Oct. 31, there had been a morning train from Lynchburg to New York through Charlottesville and the Northeast Corridor (NEC). The southbound train left New York in the early afternoon. The route has now been extended to serve a new station in downtown Roanoke, with one daily train in each direction and separate weekday and week-end schedules. The southbound schedules differ only slightly, but the northbound train leaves Roanoke at 6:19 on weekday mornings and at 8:40 on weekends. This new service was also delayed, having been studied since 1996. Roanoke's Valley Metro ran a bus to Lynchburg that connected with the train, to demonstrate that there was demand for service from Roanoke and Bedford. That bus served its purpose and was discontinued when the train was extended to Roanoke. Bedford has lost this bus service and is currently not a stop on the train, but Roanoke has a passenger train for the first time in 38 years.

There was also new service that started in Canada, specifically in the Toronto area. On GO Transit, the city's commuter-rail operation, the line going north to Richmond Hill was extended one stop to Gormley. The line runs during peak-commuting hours only (as do several other GO Transit lines), and there are no buses scheduled to arrive in Gormley in time to take the train back to Toronto, or late enough to return from Gormley to Toronto after taking a northbound commuter train.

At this writing, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) plans to extend the Yonge-University Subway northwest, to the municipality of York by the end of this year. The new extension will run from the current terminal at Sheppard West to the Vaughan Metropolitan Centre (sic) in York, with six new stops. The extension will run underground for its 6.4-km (four-mile) length, most of it in a deep-bore tunnel dug by a machine called "Torkie." The stations were built using cut-and-cover construction. The TTC will probably meet that deadline. It has been named the "system of the year" for 2017 by

the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), and many advocates agree with that designation.

There were other openings scheduled for this year, including BART to Berryessa, the extension of the Blue Line light rail in Charlotte, and the new St. Louis Loop Trolley, a heritage-style streetcar. It is expected that these lines will open next year, along with more Fastracks lines in Denver, Ion light rail in Waterloo and Kitchener, Ontario, and others. Local service between New Haven, CT and Springfield, MA is expected to start next year, too. This is not new mileage, but the start of the trains sponsored by the Connecticut D.O.T. will mark a significant increase in service on the line.

Of course, like all new projects, these service openings may be delayed, too. Keep checking with RUN, through this newsletter and our website, www.railusers.net, to stay informed.

The author is a RUN Board member from New Jersey who has ridden the new lines in New York, Detroit and Denver (and from Roanoke in 1970), and expects to ride the rest of them next year.

TRANSIT AGENCY A LEADER IN FUEL-CELL POWERED BUSES

By Bill Engel

The transit agency servicing Stark County, Ohio, SARTA, operates a number of hydrogen fuel cell powered buses. The County seat of Stark County is the City of Canton, which many readers will recognize as the home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

During the first week of November 2017, an international conference was held in Canton to discuss the outlook for the use

of such buses. The advantage of hydrogen fuel cells is that they emit only water and heat from the chemical reaction which creates electricity. A hydrogen fuel cell bus has an electric motor that is powered by the electricity the fuel cell generates.

Stark State College, which started as a technical school, has a campus near Canton. It has a fuel cell prototyping center to help companies develop fuel cell powered equipment.

As a non-technical person, this writer cannot help but wonder if fuel cells could be developed to power commuter train locomotives, or at least DMU type vehicles that are now powered by diesel engines.

For more information, go to www.sartaonline or www.starkstate.edu.

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

CAPEFLYER SPARKS RENEWED INTEREST IN RESTORING SEASONAL PASSENGER SERVICE ELSEWHERE IN NEW ENGLAND

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

MBTA's seasonal service from Boston to Hyannis first launched in 2013. It continues to be a success and has generated renewed interest in restoring seasonal service to the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts and to Mid-Coast Maine. The *CapeFLYER* offers "no traffic worries train service" Friday evenings, Saturdays and Sundays from Memorial Day to Labor Day from South Station with stops in Braintree, Brockton, Middleborough/Lakeville, Wareham Village and Buzzards Bay.

The service provides a relaxing two-hour-and-20-minute ride and offers free WI-FI, on-board concessions, wheelchair accessibility and you can bring your pet and bike for free. Reservations are never required—just show up and buy a ticket. Kids under 11 are free if accompanied by an adult and seniors and persons with disabilities can ride half price if they have a Senior CharlieCard or Transportation Access Pass. The *CapeFLYER*'s schedule is coordinated with ferry services to provide convenient connections to and from Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard and local bus service is available to take you to other destinations in Hyannis.

The startup of this service was a no-brainer, given the huge traffic backups which are notorious on the two bridges for getting onto the Cape. It was made possible by a partnership with the Cape Cod Regional Transportation Authority, which pledged \$1.1 million against any shortfall. Fortunately, the funds didn't need to be used, for the service is self-sustainable.

Restoring seasonal rail service between Pittsfield, MA and New York City isn't a new idea. Wealthy New Yorkers used to travel by train to the Berkshires to attend concerts at Tanglewood or to ski in the winter and Western Massachusetts residents traveled by train south to shop, visit art museums or catch a Broadway show in New York City until the service was discontinued in 1971.

The Housatonic Railroad, which operates freight service through Connecticut to the Berkshires, first expressed interest in

A study commissioned by the Housatonic Railroad showed that passenger rail service to and from New York City could increase economic output by \$344 million in the Berkshires during its first 10 years of construction and operation.

restoring daily service in 2010 and projected fare revenues of \$2 million if daily, year-round passenger service was restored. A study commissioned by this same railroad showed that passenger rail service to and from New York City could increase economic output by \$344 million in the Berkshires during its first 10 years of construction and operation. The Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, which also studied the idea of restoring service, received a \$240,000 U.S. Department of Transportation grant in 2012 for a comprehensive planning study to identify six possible train stations located between Sheffield and Pittsfield, MA.

Over the past five years, Karen Christensen, CEO of the Berkshires Publishing Group and also founder of the Berkshires Train Campaign, has worked tirelessly to establish passenger rail service from Pittsfield to Grand Central Terminal in New York. Her group organized an online petition called the Train Campaign: Bring Back the Trains. In all, 4,631 supporters responded and the petition was delivered to 22 state representatives in Western Massachusetts. The proposed service would run over the Housatonic Railroad from Pittsfield to New Milford, CT, Danbury and then to South Norwalk with an option to continue on the line west of Danbury to Metro-North's Harlem Line Southeast station. Some trains would continue on this line directly into Grand Central.

Thanks to these efforts, Massachusetts Gov. Duvall Patrick included a request for funds for this project in his \$13-billion proposed transportation overhaul in 2013. As a result, Massachusetts has bought 37 miles of rail from the Housatonic Railroad, from Pittsfield to the Connecticut state line, for \$12.1 million, and committed \$35 million in a first phase for upgrades, with a five-year plan for \$15 million to fix old infrastructure. The state had plans to spend \$113 million for its part of this passenger rail project.

Unfortunately, the project has since stalled. Connecticut Gov. Dannel Malloy insists that Massachusetts pay the lion's share of the restoration costs needed in Connecticut, since the Bay State would derive far more benefit from the restoration of passenger service than Connecticut. Under Malloy's leadership, Connecticut has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade the CT Hartford line with startup service scheduled to begin in March 2018.

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CAPEFLYER SPARKS RENEWED INTEREST IN RESTORING SEASONAL PASSENGER SERVICE ELSEWHERE IN NEW ENGLAND



In this historic photo, passengers disembark from the train in Pittsfield, MA on their way to the Bousquet ski resort.

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While it appears that service over the Housatonic Railroad to NYC is dead, a new working group is studying whether service could be established over the CSX route from Pittsfield to Chatham and then south from what used to be the northern terminus of the Harlem line to Penn Station, New York. Senator Adam Hinds of Pittsfield, a first-term senator who is chair of the legislature's Joint Committee on Tourism, Arts and Cultural Development, earlier this year received approval from lawmakers to establish a working group to look into the feasibility of "establishing direct seasonal weekend passenger rail service" from New York to Pittsfield between Memorial Day and Columbus Day weekends.

Senator Hinds believes weekend service linking the two cities will be an economic boost to the region, for it will bring more out-of-state tourists to Tanglewood and other cultural attractions in the Berkshires and Western Massachusetts. The working group has been formed and has already held two meetings this fall regarding the possibility of starting the *Berkshire Flyer*, so named after the *CapeFLYER* passenger rail service between Boston and Hyannis.

There is good news to report regarding restoring seasonal passenger rail service to Rockland, ME. The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) recently announced at its annual meeting that it is actively exploring the possibility of establishing a pilot program to extend the *Downeaster* rail service from Boston up the coast

from its current northern terminus in Brunswick, ME adding new stops in Bath, Wiscasset and Newcastle and Rockland. The "*Downeaster* Coastal Connection" pilot program would simply be an extension of NNEPRA's existing passenger rail service schedule and equipment.

The construction of a new four-mile passing siding at Royal Junction, which is scheduled to be completed next year, will enable NNEPRA to originate all *Downeaster* service from Brunswick. This change will provide the flexibility needed to extend service to Rockland during what would be layover time in Brunswick with minimal additional operating or capital costs.

The Maine Central Railroad ran passenger service over the Rockland branch until 1959. The state purchased the abandoned line in 1988 and first leased the line to the Maine Coast Railroad which operated an excursion service from Wiscasset to Warren until its lease was up. The state then spent \$22.6 million to upgrade the line to FRA Class 3 service to handle passenger trains. That work was completed in 2002, and passenger excursion trains resumed running on the Rockland line in 2004.

The Maine Eastern Railroad offered seasonal passenger service over the 57-mile rail line from Brunswick to Rockland from 2004 through 2015, but it ended when the state decided not to renew its contract. Since then, the Central Maine and Quebec Railroad, a subsidiary of Fortress America, has provided freight service primarily carrying Dragon Cement over the line from Thomaston to its dock on Rockland's South End waterfront, where a barge is filled and the cement is shipped to the Boston market.

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CAPEFLYER SPARKS RENEWED INTEREST IN RESTORING SEASONAL PASSENGER SERVICE ELSEWHERE IN NEW ENGLAND

(Continued from page 14)

The proposal to extend the *Downeaster* to Rockland comes as a nice surprise for rail advocates who have long advocated for the restoration of passenger service on the line. Patricia Quinn, the executive director of NNEPRA deserves much of the credit for the continuing outstanding performance of the *Downeaster* service. NNEPRA reported ridership of 511,422 for fiscal year 2017, which ended on June 30, 2017. That tally exceeded

FY 2016 ridership and the FY 2017 goals by 8.8%.

John Melrose, the current chairman of NNEPRA's board, also deserves a lot of credit, for he led the state's effort to initiate the startup of the *Downeaster* service when he served as Transportation Commissioner under Gov. Angus King. During the initial years, he served on the board in an ex-officio capacity and then as an appointed member. After a 13-year hiatus, he was again appointed to the Board in 2016.

The restoration of service to Rockland was part of his grand plan, first proposed back in the 1990s, to establish rail service from Boston to Rockland and on to Bar Harbor and Acadia National Park via passenger ferries. While there is still much that needs to be done before the start-up of the new service—such as holding public meetings, checking out the boarding facilities at the proposed stops, and planning for the last mile—there is hope that the service could possibly begin this coming summer.

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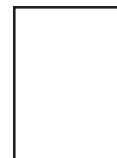
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Many thanks,

Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.

Chairman, Rail Users Network

FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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