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THE COMMONWEALTH RAIL SUMMIT: NEXT STEPS FOR EXPANDING PASSENGER RAIL IN VIRGINIA

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

This year's conference is taking place Friday, May 17, from 9:00 am to 5:00 p.m. at the offices of Virginians for High Speed Rail, 5101 Monument Ave., Richmond, Virginia. The conference, which is sponsored by the Rail Users' Network and Virginians for High Speed Rail, will examine what's happening in the Commonwealth regarding passenger rail issues.

The focus will be on recent success stories, which projects are moving forward and which are standing still and could use more help. Time will also be set aside to hear from the grassroots rail advocates who are working at the state and local level to expand passenger rail.

The day will begin with opening remarks given by Danny Plaugher, Executive Director, Virginians for High Speed Rail and Richard Rudolph, RUN Chair.

The morning invited featured speakers include: the Honorable A. Donald McEachin, Congressman who serves on the new Congressional Climate Change Commission and represents the 4th district in Virginia. He will talk about the climate impact of transportation and benefits of rail.

Jay McArthur, Principal Officer, State Partnerships, at Amtrak, will talk about opportunities regarding state supported services, the Northeast Corridor and the national network. (Invited)

Michael R. McClellan, VP of Strategic Planning at Norfolk Southern, will talk about some of

the challenges that NS is currently facing and what would be needed to further expand passenger rail in Virginia.

Meredith Richards, President, Virginia Rail Policy Institute will review the present state of rail in Virginia and the need to change the paradigm in the relationship between the public and private sectors if we are to protect the interests of both freight and passenger rail in the future.

The morning session will close with a panel presentation focused on best practice. It will be moderated by Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair, Rail Users Network and Chair, New York Transit Riders Council. The panel will focus on best practices used by rail advocates in Virginia.

Panelists include Danny Plaugher, Executive Director, Virginians for
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GOV. CUOMO PUSHES CONGESTION PRICING, THREATENS TO "BLOW UP" THE MTA

By Andrew Albert

As the deadline for passage of the State Budget draws closer, Governor Andrew Cuomo has ratcheted up the rhetoric to bring in much-needed revenue for New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which is struggling to provide service and maintenance for its sprawling system of subways, buses, and commuter rail, serving over 11 million riders each and every day.

Mayor Bill de Blasio, who has had

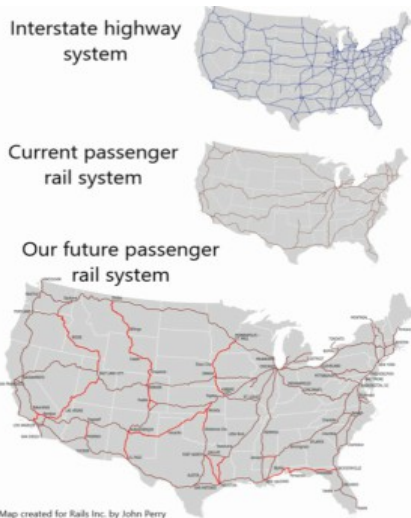
something of an ongoing feud with Governor Cuomo over a variety of issues—including financial support for the MTA—has finally found something he and the Governor can agree on: a system of congestion pricing for Manhattan south of 61st Street, which would bring in an estimated \$15 billion per year. Other possible revenue streams would be a tax on cannabis, if legalization goes through, as well as an internet sales tax. Those two sources could allow the MTA to issue revenue bonds worth \$7

billion per year. With NYC Transit President Andy Byford's Fast Forward plan expected to cost something in the area of \$40 billion, these sources of revenue are a good start—but nowhere near enough to get the job done the way most New Yorkers would like to see.

Additionally, Gov. Cuomo has begun to regularly trash-talk the MTA's leadership, including its Board, and has come up with several ways to "neuter"

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REPORT FROM NEW MEXICO



By JW Madison

Albuquerque "Transit" Again:

Here are a few relevant items from the minutes of the most recent Albuquerque Transit Advisory Board meeting, complete with author's comments. Around here, "Transit" means "Buses."

** Ridership for January 2019 was 716,000; an 8% decline compared to January 2018.

** Revenue on fixed routes is down 2.77%. Don't ask me how this compares with the above 8%.

** Our bus drivers just received a \$3.00 / hr. pay raise. This partially closes a \$4.00 / hr. pay gap between the bus drivers and the garbage truck drivers (in the latter's favor).

** Sun Van (handicapped) ridership is presently flat, but has grown 1.2% this past fiscal year.

** The City will implement signing bonuses in order to recruit the several dozen drivers needed to bring "ABQRide" up to some sufficient staffing level. Gotta compete with the inducements of the Solid Waste Dept.

** The fancy new ART buses *have not passed* the durability tests required for FTA funding. Big surprise. However, several kinds of regular 40' buses *have passed*. Choices include electric, "clean diesel," hybrid diesel, and CNG.

And, the most joyous item of all—

** "Is there a possibility that streetcars will be used?" **"No. Streetcars are out of the equation."**

Good grief.

Rails Inc and the NM Legislature:

Rails Inc (and by extension RUN and the RWU) have been haunting the Round House (our state Capitol) with a table full of literature and our beaming well-scrubbed selves. We have talked with a lot of people, many friendly, and moved a lot of material from all 3 of these fine organizations. Most of the RUN material you all sent me for these occasions has disappeared into the hands of hopefully friendly supporters with a few extra bucks choking up their accounts.

We have a Memorial in the works in the state Senate. The sponsoring Senator is supportive, but he's working on "big" stuff like legalization of marijuana. Last time I spoke with him, he wanted to know if our effort duplicates a recently-passed Memorial (SM 18) supporting Amtrak and the SW Chief. SM 18 is nice and all, but it passed unanimously, which to us means Not Enough Teeth.

Our item seeks to urge our new Governor to revive the process of buying the Anthony-Belen and the Lamy-Raton (all NM) segments from the BNSF, a process begun by Gov. Richardson and killed by Gov. Martinez. We consider our Memorial complementary to the one already passed. As I write this, it's not clear whether my Senator friend will feel the same way. He might feel that we're doing

great to get any damn passenger rail piece through the Senate. He might well be right, but I'm still yanking on his sleeve. As I write this, I have not heard from him.

High Speed "vs." Regular Rail:

Some years ago, in *Rail* magazine, I published an article I called **"High Speed Rail Network? How About Any Rail Network?"** The sentiment still applies.

The "difficulties" related to the California High Speed Rail initiative can not all be laid at the feet of our opposition. I wish the Texas effort all the best, especially since the taxpayer is not on the hook for it, BUT— in a country —

- 1) whose complete passenger Rail network no longer exists,
- 2) in which what's left is under unrelenting deadly threat, and
- 3) where most Americans want more and better ordinary rail and rail transit;

— a taxpayer-funded scattering of Hi Speed fragments just is **not** the way to go.

Remember the cliché about walking before running? The Rails Inc graphic attached to this article pretty much explains it all. Keep in the front of your minds that just about every portion of our larger third map still exists, as track segments or at least as intact right of way.

My Own \$1.98 Visionary Material:

I'm hankering for some feedback about my *Commentary* piece in the last Newsletter. Love it, hate it, or in between, I'd sure like to hear from my more erudite and "professional" readers.

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

AMTRAK SEEKS NEW CARS

By Bill Engel

This author first boarded an Amtrak Amfleet 1 coach Labor Day Weekend of 1976 from a platform at Philadelphia's 30th Street Station. Come Labor Day 2019, that will be 43 years ago! Amazingly, those cars are still the backbone of the car fleet in daily service on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) as well as other Northeastern services. They have outlived both the GG-1 and AEM-7 electric locomotives that once hauled them under wires as well as F40PH and other diesel electric locomotive models in non-electrified territory. So I was excited to see Amtrak's Jan. 18 news release announcing requests for proposals to replace them, not only on the NEC but on state-supported services in the region and elsewhere in the country.

The release did not include any detailed specifications, except to mention large picture windows, improved seating, ADA compliance, and weather tight vestibules. To anyone who has ridden Amfleet I or II coaches in upstate New York in winter, this has to be welcome news.

Obviously, they will have to fit clearances at New York City's Pennsylvania Station as well as the Baltimore Tunnels. My opinion is that they will need to fit the clearances at New York City's Grand Central Terminal as well, for operational flexibility. Nor were car types mentioned.

The original Amfleet cars included coach cars as well as food service cars with a

The Amfleet 1 coaches that this author rode in 1976 are still the backbone of the car fleet on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor.

center-of-car service area. It will be interesting to see what companies respond to Amtrak's RFP. Siemens built coach cars for Florida's Brightline. The Spanish company CAF has built street cars for several US cities. Their order for baggage cars, dining cars, and sleeping

cars from Amtrak is not yet fully delivered (and way behind schedule) so one has to wonder if they will even make a response.

No mention was made in the news of the RFP of cars for long-distance trains. The Superliner I cars currently in use on those trains are nearly as old as the Amfleet I cars. Given the age of the long distance cars in the Amtrak fleet, action will be needed soon for replacements.

Another issue about cars is the age of the single-level fleet in use between Chicago and New York City, as well as between New York City and Miami and between New York City, Atlanta, and New Orleans. The Amfleet II coaches on those trains entered service in the early 1980s.

I urge *RUN Newsletter* readers to check the Amtrak website often for news releases about Amtrak equipment plans.

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

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

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

Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny

NJ RIDERS DON'T GET ANY RESPECT, OR EVEN KNOW WHEN THEY WILL GET THEIR TRAINS BACK

By David Peter Alan

The beleaguered rail riders of the Garden State just can't seem to get anywhere with or on New Jersey Transit (NJT); sometimes literally. During the past year, NJT suspended all service on two lines, inflicted sharp cuts on others, and eliminated a number of trains on still others. Some of the cuts appeared to be random, but so many trains were annulled that rail service has never been less reliable.

To make matters worse, nobody knows when full service on any of these lines will come back, if it ever does, because NJT management has not said. On top of that, politics in the Garden State has dealt more blows to transit riders, with a new statute that purports to "reform" the agency without actually doing so, and an "audit" that Gov. Philip Murphy ordered shortly after he took office, which also leaves transit riders out in the cold.

The big question in New Jersey these days is: "When are we getting our trains back?" and riders all over the state want to know. Since Labor Day last year, there has been no service on the Atlantic City Rail Line (between that city and Philadelphia) or on the Dinky, a short shuttle train between Princeton Junction on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor (NEC) and a location closer to downtown Princeton. While NJT is providing substitute bus service, former rail riders want their trains back, and some are concerned that they will be gone forever.

The Gladstone Branch, which splits off from the Morris & Essex (M&E) line at Summit, has no trains on weekends, only substitute buses. There are no "one-seat-ride" trains to Penn Station, New York on the Raritan Line, and other lines have lost selected trains.

There are no buses to fill the gaps on those services, with one exception. NJT has contracted with Lakeland Bus Co., a private carrier, to run a bus from Dover to Summit at 11:30 on weeknights to substitute for

the last inbound train of the evening, which was eliminated last year. It was this writer's advocacy, through the Lackawanna Coalition and on behalf of the riders, that got the substitute bus running. As a result, late-night riders will be able to get home, instead of being stranded.

For its part, NJT blames Positive Train Control (PTC) for the current lack of service. PTC has also become the "excuse of choice" for "equipment availability" issues that NJT uses as a reason to annul trains, often randomly and with little or no advance notice. The annulments can happen at any time, from peak-commuting hours to weekends. PTC itself is no longer an excuse, since NJT completed enough of the installation by the end of last year to satisfy the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), at least for now. The entire installation must be completed by the end of 2020.

Management has generally received high marks lately for its progress on PTC after years of delay, but the agency continues to face a shortage of engineers. There are several classes of new engineers being trained, but management will not say how many of these new hires will be available to drive the trains, and when they will become available. Instead, the date for any service restoration keeps being pushed back, and management offers no useful information to its embattled and frustrated riders.

Originally, all trains purportedly eliminated from the schedule to accommodate PTC installation would be back by the first of the year. Then it was the end of January. In mid-December, the date was moved forward to mid-March. Finally, on Jan. 25, NJT announced that service would be restored "during the second quarter" of 2019. That could theoretically mean as soon as April 1, but everyone is now looking at June 30, and many find even that date difficult to believe.

NJT had instituted a 25% reduction in fares on the buses that substitute for Atlantic

City trains, and riders there still have that discount. Elsewhere, management gave riders a 10% reduction until the end of January (and had honored those tickets through February). The discount was revoked on schedule, even though not a single train has been restored, and annulments continue to eat away at the schedule that is left. Riders and their advocates, including the Lackawanna Coalition, are upset and they are complaining but, at this writing, management has refused to provide any pertinent information, saying only "we're doing the best we can."

Riders from South Jersey, their advocates, and their elected officials have taken long bus rides to Newark to ask the NJT Board and senior management when they will get their trains back. So have their counterparts from elsewhere in the state who have lost only some, and not all, of their trains. The answer from the "powers that be" is the same for everybody: no promises or useful information.

In the meantime, the New Jersey Legislature has passed a bill that purports to bring "reform" to NJT but, in reality, does not. There will be some so-called "rider representative" positions on the Board, but they will be named by the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the Assembly, if not by the Governor, so high-level political connections will still be required. "Transportation professionals" nominated by "establishment" groups will be eligible, but there is no reason to believe that such eligibility will extend to more "grassroots" organizations like the Lackawanna Coalition or the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP).

On behalf of the Lackawanna Coalition, this writer campaigned vigorously for the requirement that at least one transit-dependent person be a member of the NJT Board. That initiative got nowhere, so only motorists will govern transit in New Jersey, at least for the foreseeable future.

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PASSENGER TRAINS IN WASHINGTON STATE: TWO NEW CHALLENGES, SOME GOOD NEWS

By Lloyd H. Flem

Washington State's rail passenger future faces a couple of issues beyond that of the still-pending recovery from the Dec. 18, 2017 fatal Amtrak 501 disaster southwest of Tacoma that took three lives, including two most vital members of All Aboard Washington. A full moving-on from that tragedy awaits the publication of final findings of the National Transportation Safety board, which rail advocates hope will occur in the next few months.

Washington is prominent among the Western states in which direct democracy, in the form of the initiative, can result in rather decided changes in state law. One of the more famous (some might say infamous) was the successful initiative to legalize recreational as well as medical marijuana. Washington and Colorado were the first states to so act. The most important impacts in the Evergreen State were very significant tax monies from the tightly controlled and heavily taxed Weed.

A pending initiative with much more impact on passenger rail advocates is I-976, which would dramatically cut back motor vehicle taxes and fees, thus eliminating funds which help pay for transit and for some of the operation and capital fund for the Amtrak *Cascades* trains. State agencies, including WSDOT, by law must remain neutral on initiatives. All Aboard Washington, though a 501C3 non-profit, may take public positions on issues, but not as an organization supporting individual candidates. We have opposed I-976, including a few of us with our own demonstration at the Capitol the day the proponents of "only \$30 vehicle fees" brought boxes of signed petitions to the Secretary of State's office.

Washington, though noted for being socially progressive, can also be quite economically conservative ("Legalize pot but don't raise my taxes!") Voters' "instinctive" support for I-976 may be tempered in that, if passed, it

can override local jurisdictions' ability to help fund local transit or even road improvements. Some who generally like lower taxes and fees may balk at granting a bigger government control (the State) over local choice.

Probably more important is that the author of I-976 literally makes his living by writing and pushing initiatives, often dealing with cutting taxes or fees, especially those that benefit transportation. But his reputation of being an eccentric public scold may assist opponents of I-976, as some voters may vote "no" because Mr. Tim Eyman authored it!

The crash of much of California's highly publicized high-speed rail adventure arrived at an interesting time in our Washington. Gov. Jay Inslee, a strong proponent of environmental causes, was just in the process of publicizing the state funds for a comprehensive study of ultra-high-speed rail to be considered between Seattle to Vancouver, BC and to Portland OR, when the California news hit.

Passenger rail advocates here were pleased the governor is showing interest in passenger rail, albeit that which would be incredibly costly, completed decades from now, and may not be really needed for the relatively short distances between the three big Cascadian cities. When asked, I praise Governor Inslee's new-found interest in passenger trains, but push for the tried and true incremental growth of passenger rail service here in the Pacific Northwest.

Although Inslee has support among those of the wealthy techie community around Seattle and Vancouver, his announcement that he too will likely be running for U.S. President may cloud the business of his UHSR push. Whereas our first challenge is aiding in the defeat of I-976, our second is helping to keep the focus on doable and affordable incremental growth and improvement of our current conventional intercity rail system.

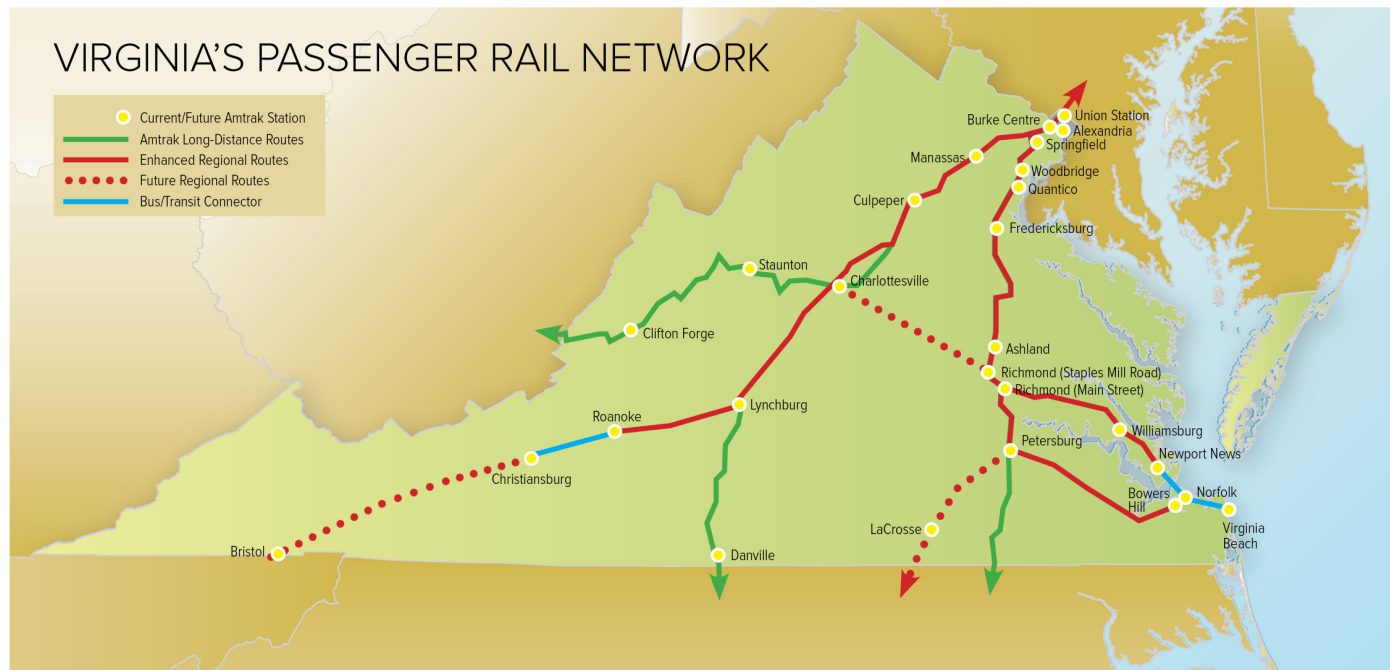
The good news is the renaissance of Washington State's Legislative Rail Caucus. The LRC had faltered when its primary founder, former Rep. Luis Moscoso, was no longer in the Legislature beginning with the 2017 session. (Luis is All Aboard Washington's Legislative Affairs Director, assuming much of AAWA's heavy lifting for me, who after 33 years, is retiring as Executive Director. At age 80, probably about my time!)

Now adding much interest, knowledge, commitment and energy to the LRC is Rep. Andrew Barkis, whom, it could be said, is more than a rail advocate. AB is a railfan! Rep. Barkis is a Republican, as are a number of legislators, many from politically conservative Eastern Washington, who support passenger rail and want service expanded to their 60% of the state.

AAWA has been working to restore passenger rail service in the Stampede Pass (original NP) route through the Yakima Valley. (This old geography prof asks you non-Northwesterners to consult an actual map!) On Tuesday, March 5, AAWA leaders met with the Rail Caucus at a downtown Olympia pub to discuss, among other things, moving forward with the restoration of Yakima valley service.

It is recognized that in Congress and in many states, Democrats are better supporters of passenger rail than Republicans. Here, Republican legislators are at least as affirmative as Democrats concerning intercity rail, though not so with Seattle-centric rail transit. We see, however, that as of early March, the future for intercity rail, freight and passenger, has solid state government support thanks to the again-vital LRC. We are delighted to work with them.

Lloyd H. Flem is Executive Director, All Aboard Washington.



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High Speed Rail; Meredith Richards, Founder of Cville Rail & the Piedmont Rail Coalition and President, Virginia Rail Policy Institute; and possibly others.

During lunch, participants will have an opportunity to share information and experiences regarding their efforts and those of their organizations to promote passenger rail and rail transit in their local areas.

The afternoon session will begin with Michael McLaughlin, Chief of Rail Transportation in the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. He will talk about the state's rail plan and the department's priority projects, including adding capacity to the Long Bridge over the Potomac River, which is a major chokepoint, implementing additional capacity improvements to the corridor in Northern Virginia, and efforts to establish a second frequency to Lynchburg and Roanoke, as well as efforts to extend passenger rail to Southwestern Virginia.

The rest of the afternoon will be devoted to two panel presentations and an audience forum. The first will be moderated by Richard Rudolph, Ph.D., who is also a Director of the Maine Rail

Group. It will focus on Expanding Passenger Rail in Virginia and Beyond.

Panelists include: Trip Pollard, Esq., Southern Environmental Law Center, who will talk about what has happened with the proposed second frequency to Lynchburg and Roanoke; Ellen Tolton, CDBG Coordinator/EZ Administrator, who will focus her remarks on the new economic impact study which has just been released regarding restoring passenger service to Bristol; Ed Lawhorn, President, NRV Market Executive, Union Bank & Trust, who will talk about the work of the New River Valley Rail Coalition 2020; and Ken Anderson, President, Virginians for High Speed Rail, will shed light on the work of the organization to bring high speed rail to Virginia.

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It means your dues are past due!

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THE COMMONWEALTH'S RECORD OF SUCCESS

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

*Reprinted from Passenger Train Journal,
2019-1, Issue 278.*

This is the sixth in a series of articles that highlights what rail advocates are doing to improve and expand passenger rail and transit services in North America.

The Southern Environmental Law Center, in partnership with Virginians for High Speed Rail (VHSR), the Hampton Road Chamber, and the New River Valley Rail 2020 organization, recently issued a report called "Virginia's Passenger Trains, Building on Success", which outlines a vision for improving passenger rail service in the Commonwealth. Goals include tripling the amount of passenger rail service in the state, reducing trip times up to 35%, increasing on-time reliability to more than 90%, and expanding service to reach 85% of Virginians. While these goals may seem wildly optimistic given the lack of progress in many other states, Virginia has an outstanding record of success in promoting and expanding passenger rail during the past 15 years.

Even before Virginia launched its first state supported intercity train to Lynchburg in 2009, rail advocates were at work trying to convince the state legislature to provide an annual \$50-million funding source for rail freight and passenger rail projects. In 2004, Amtrak's NEC service in Virginia comprised 184 miles, with station stops at Alexandria, Franconia/Springfield, Woodbridge, Quantico, Fredericksburg, Ashland, Richmond, Williamsburg, and Newport News. A total of 27 train trips were made each week southbound, and 28 trips northbound. Six other trains traveled through Virginia as part of Amtrak's national network, as well the Carolinian service, which traversed through Virginia on its way to Charlotte, NC.

At the urging of VHSR, Governor Mark Warner in 2004 appointed a commission which recommended the creation of a Rail Enhancement Fund (REF). This fund,

subsequently authorized by the General Assembly, has typically been utilized by Class I railroads (CSX and Norfolk Southern), the Port of Virginia, and Virginia Railway Express, for major capital investments. It has occasionally been tapped as a resource for Virginia's state-supported Amtrak service, including 100% of the capital funding to extend the Washington to Richmond Northeast Regional to Norfolk in 2012. The statutory requirement for a 30% match and the restriction against using federal matching funds have severely limited the use of REF funds for intercity passenger rail.

In 2009, the Commonwealth of Virginia partnered with Amtrak to form Amtrak Virginia. This led to three new service expansions between Virginia and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. These trains are extensions of Amtrak's Northeast Regional service and include trains that previously terminated in Washington, DC.

Virginia's first state-supported intercity train to Lynchburg began in 2009 after Charlottesville area residents organized a campaign to bring passenger rail service to the US29 corridor. The group Cville Rail spent two years issuing press releases and holding public events before establishing the Piedmont Coalition to broaden its reach to other communities along the corridor. In 2009, the Coalition succeeded in raising public and political support for a state-funded demonstration intercity passenger service linking Lynchburg to Washington, DC, New York and Boston. The state projected 51,000 passengers per year, but three years later the Northeast Regional from Lynchburg was carrying 174,000 passengers annually. Customer fares covered costs of operations.

A second state-supported regional train was launched in 2010 between Richmond, VA's Staple Mills Station and Washington, DC, with continuing service to New York and Boston. In preparation for the start-up of Amtrak's new service to Norfolk which began in December 2012, the state invested \$100 million from REF to upgrade CXS and Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) rail lines to facilitate the new service.

The key to the Commonwealth's continuing success is the creation of the Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital Fund (IPROC), which first provided short-term funding starting in 2011, but with the adoption of a transportation tax package in 2013, it provides funding for operations costs, equipment upgrades and capital improvements for intercity passenger rail in the state. The transportation funding package made Virginia the first state to sustainably fund intercity and high speed passenger rail. It dedicated 0.05% of the state's sales and use tax to IPROC.

Since FY 2013, Virginia has invested \$467 million to sustain and improve its passenger rail network, including the recent return of passenger rail to Roanoke. The Department of Rail and Public Transport (DRPT) has provided \$77.5 million in IPROC funds and \$24 million from the REF (2015 dollars) to construct track capacity improvements between Lynchburg and Roanoke and to build an overnight facility for Amtrak's crew, a service area for engines, and a boarding platform in downtown Roanoke. Passenger rail service returned to the city for the first time in 38 years on Oct. 31, 2017.

Although ridership on the Washington, DC to Roanoke line increased by more than 8%, the DRPT plans to monitor Roanoke ridership figures for two years before considering further changes to the route. Meanwhile, this agency plans to assess other potential destinations west of Roanoke, including Bristol and the more heavily populated New River Valley. It has \$350,000 in its six-year plan to do a study with NS and Amtrak to determine whether to extend passenger rail service out to the New River Valley and to Bristol. The state is also working with an organization recently formed call the New River Valley 2020 (NRV), a bipartisan regional group of political and business leaders dedicated to getting passenger rail service extended to the New River Valley. The group has identified several spots throughout the valley where a station could be built. The lead candidate is town-owned land in Christiansburg. Ray Smooth, the chair of NRV, believes the concentration of students at Virginia Tech and Radford University make it a good choice.

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THE COMMONWEALTH'S RECORD OF SUCCESS

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Meanwhile, Bristol officials have worked with the Washington, DC Community Transportation Association to develop a request for an economic impact study for the Twin City area and the region of Southwest Virginia and Northeast Tennessee. The consultants (AECOM) have focused their work on how rail passenger service could reduce vehicular traffic, especially on Interstate 81, and evaluated the potential impact on economic development.

Details of the study indicate there would be between 75,400 and 99,300 additional "on-and-off riders" per year if Amtrak extended passenger service from its current stop in Roanoke to Bristol. The study predicted the numbers would be even greater if investments in track improvements were made for faster travel times and extending the track to Knoxville or Chattanooga, TN. Track improvements would cost between \$45.2 million and \$48 million, while annual operating costs for the Bristol portion of the route would likely be between \$5 million and \$7.9 million. The study also indicates that the Bristol area is promising because of a thriving downtown with lodging, dining and entertainment options, and other recreational opportunities.

The Mayor of Bristol, TN, Margaret Feierabend, who is also the chair of the Bristol TN-VA Rail Coalition, a group of more than 20 organizations in Tennessee, is encouraged by the study results as the "numbers are very optimistic, and the loss (of revenue) would be minimal." What will happen next is unclear. The DRPT has announced that it is postponing its \$350,000 study because NS has halted its involvement.

According to Michael McLaughlin, DRPT's Chief of Rail Transportation, NS is reluctant to talk about extending passenger rail due to problems in their freight network, especially south of Virginia. Evidently, NS wants time to fix those problems before having a discussion about adding passenger service. The

stalling of the study doesn't necessarily derail plans to bring Amtrak to the New River Valley, but the study is a crucial part of that process.

According to Meredith Richards, president of the Virginia Rail Policy Institute and the chair of Cville Rail and the Piedmont Rail Coalition, CSX and NS have little interest in expanding capacity, since both are reducing their capital expenditures, service frequencies and track mileage. Multi-million dollar public grants for capacity-increasing projects have currently lost their incentive value.

The impact is being felt in the failure of DRPT to launch the promised second frequency from Washington, DC to

The study indicates there would be between 75,400 and 99,300 additional "on-and-off riders" per year if Amtrak extended passenger service from its current stop in Roanoke to Bristol.

Lynchburg. The state has been unable to offer sufficient capital incentives to NS to advance an additional train on the corridor.

Richards believes the state needs to undertake a thorough review of the present state of rail in Virginia in order to suggest steps that could be taken to protect the interests of both freight and passenger rail in the future. The freight railroads want "to operate the longest trains possible as infrequently as possible on reduced infrastructure." The state wants more frequent, on-time, passenger trains serving more routes and more regions.

This conflict of interest, she believes, could be reconciled by the state purchasing slots on freight lines for passenger trains at competitive market rates, which would include performance standards. Or the state could negotiate

the purchase of rail corridors that are critical to the public interest, granting the seller perpetual operating rights to use these corridors to benefit both freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail.

While it is too soon to know what will happen going forward, the DRPT has other projects to focus on. It is committed to the Atlantic Gateway project, a \$1.4-billion package of rail and highway projects to address some of the worst freight and passenger transportation bottlenecks in Northern Virginia.

This initiative contains five distinct rail capacity and engineering projects: construction of six miles of fourth mainline track from the north bank of the Potomac River in Arlington to an interlocking in Alexandria, eight miles of third mainline track from the Franconia-Springfield Rail Express station to a location just north of the Occoquan River, two new crossovers south of Fredericksburg to improve operational flexibility and network fluidity, and funds to support a long-term multi-agency initiative to increase rail capacity across the Potomac River through the expansion or replacement of the Long Bridge.

DRPT also plans to develop a mechanism to allow for the transfer of the S-line from CSX to public ownership. This is an abandoned rail line that runs from North Carolina to the Petersburg area. The line is a critical component of the Southeast High Speed Rail corridor's proposed route between Richmond and Raleigh, North Carolina, which could enable the operation of higher speed passenger trains on a dedicated passenger rail line in the foreseeable future.

Virginia's rail advocates are proud of what has already been accomplished, but recognize that there is more to be accomplished. A twice-daily "TransDominion Express," for example, from Bristol to Richmond and Washington could provide much-needed mobility for currently unserved cities in southwestern Virginia. With cooperation from the state of Tennessee, this route could restore intercity train service to Knoxville, Chattanooga, and perhaps Nashville, connecting them to Virginia and the Northeast.

GOV. CUOMO PUSHES CONGESTION PRICING

Continued from page 1

the Board, bringing on a six-member “panel of experts” to give the leadership their opinion on a variety of issues—from the Capital Program to new signal systems—bypassing the Board, which would ordinarily be the body that would provide this oversight.

In addition, the Governor has proposed a “Regional Transit Committee” that would do much of the same things, so at this point it’s not clear if both the Expert Panel and the Regional Transit Committee are in the mix, or just one of those.

As a Board Member since 2002, I can absolutely say this is a very dispiriting time to be an MTA Board Member. And let’s remember, the Governor has also gone around the Board (and former and current MTA leadership) in changing the plan for the L-train and keeping the Canarsie Tube open during the reconstruction plans—causing great concern among Board Members, as well as many transit professionals, and members of the L-train rider community, who had planned long and hard for the complete 15-month shutdown. Some folks even changed jobs or moved to avoid the craziness that was expected during the Canarsie Tube Superstorm Sandy work—which everyone agrees is badly needed.

An extensive system of alternate service plans had been drawn up to give L train riders additional service on other lines, exclusive bus lanes, HOV lanes on the Williamsburg Bridge, and lots more. But the new plan—which keeps weekday service intact but nights and weekends would see 20-minute headways—is unclear at this time.

You will read elsewhere in this issue that the Governor has shown leadership in ordering a new way of looking at the rebuilding of the Canarsie Tube. But there are already glitches in the weekend shutdowns leading up to the “new” project. Dust has covered riders (we can only hope it isn’t silica dust), and service has begun later on Monday morning than was planned. I believe relying on transit professionals, rather than making splashy headlines, is usually the best course of action. A new series of community workshops is planned to explain the revised L-train

reconstruction plan in the next few weeks.

To sum up: the Governor and Mayor have proposed a 10 point plan to “transform and fund the MTA.” The 10 points are:

1. The MTA will develop a reorganization plan to make the agency more efficient and effective. The various parts of the MTA—such as NYC Transit, the Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad, MTA Bus, Staten Island Railway—currently operate as separate entities. The idea would be to consolidate functions that can be, including IT, HR, construction management, legal, engineering, advertising, etc. This would be completed by June of 2019!
2. The plan would include a congestion pricing financing model. Electronic tolling devices would be installed just south of 61st Street in Manhattan. The FDR Drive would not be included, as it is a separated highway. Tolls would be variable, providing discounts for off-peak travel. Emergency vehicles would be exempt from the tolls. Exemptions or discounts would be provided to vehicles transporting people with disabilities. All revenues from congestion pricing would be placed in a “lockbox,” and usable only for the MTA.
3. MTA fares for travel on the system must be contained in future years through cost containment actions and improved management. This would hold future fare increases to the rate of inflation, or 2% per year.
4. All MTA Board appointments will be modified so that all terms end with the appointing official’s tenure. As the labor and rider members of the Board are appointed by their various organizations, it is unclear how those appointments would be handled.
5. There must be a partnership between the City of New York and State of New York to combat fare evasion, which has risen to an unacceptable rate recently. It is estimated that fare evasion is costing the transit system upwards of \$215 million per year.
6. The MTA will undergo an independent audit to determine their actual assets and liabilities. This audit should be completed no later than January of 2020.
7. The Capital Plan shall be reviewed by a committee of transportation, engineering,

and government “experts” who have no existing financial relationship with the MTA. (The “Regional Transit Committee.”) The committee will be appointed by the Governor, Mayor, State Assembly and State Senate, and organizations representing subway riders and driving commuters. Interestingly, commuters on Metro-North and the LIRR are NOT mentioned.

8. The MTA will have all major construction projects and planned projects pursued as “design build.” All projects will be reviewed by construction and engineering experts who are not affiliated with the MTA or its consultants. The construction review team will be headed by the Deans of Cornell School of Engineering and the Columbia School of Engineering. (The same team that decided to scrap the original Canarsie Tube shutdown plan in favor of a partial shutdown.) This group will also review plans for the signal system upgrade, and specifically will compare the CBTC signal system (used throughout the world) with Ultra Wide-Band technology, currently being tested in a number of cities, including New York.

9. The MTA will expedite the completion of the Subway Action Plan, which includes signal repair, water management, station enhancements, installation of continuous welded rail, friction pad installation, and other improvements.

10. The Governor and Mayor will work closely with the State Legislature to effectuate the provisions in this plan.

So, to sum it up, it appears that the Governor has little confidence in current MTA management, much of which he appointed in his first two terms. All of the provisions must be approved by the legislature, some of whom have expressed reservations at various aspects of the plan. But one thing is clear: the MTA must have multiple, sustainable sources of revenue to rebuild, repair, make accessible, and continue the progress made under Byford. The economy of the entire region depends on it, and New Yorkers expect and are entitled to a world-class transportation system for their world-class city. Stay tuned.

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

CUOMO DOES SOMETHING RIGHT FOR L-TRAIN RIDERS, AND IT COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE ELSEWHERE, TOO!

Commentary by David Peter Alan

After more than eight years of lackluster leadership in Albany, including on transit issues, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has committed a potentially-revolutionary act that could end up saving governments billions of dollars and giving riders and taxpayers much more transit than they had previously expected to get for their money.

They had called it “L-mageddon” and the “L-pocalypse” and even “L-Hell.” It was the impending 15-month total shutdown of the L-train under 14th Street in Manhattan and through the Canarsie Tunnels into Brooklyn. It was to begin on April 26, and everybody was dreading it. The L-line from 14th Street to Canarsie was such a poor performer in the 1980s that it was almost abandoned, but today it serves some of the trendiest neighborhoods in Brooklyn and has just had a capacity enhancement through the installation of Communications-Based Train Control (CBTC). Apparently, the line needs that extra capacity today, so the proposed shutdown would have been a disaster.

Then came the news on January 3 that the shutdown itself would be shut down. Cuomo announced that a new engineering study revealed that the Canarsie Tunnels could be repaired for a much lower price and with far less disruption of service than had previously been anticipated. There will be service cuts at night and on week-ends, but the total shutdown had been averted, and it would now be politically untenable to implement a complete shutdown under Manhattan and into Brooklyn.

A headline in the *Daily News* proclaimed “L-YEAH” with the “L” depicted as the line's logo, a white letter “L” in a gray circle. Even jaded New Yorkers breathed a sigh of relief, combined with disbelief. They also had plenty of questions about why big-time engineers said that the line had to be shut down completely, but now such a drastic move would not be necessary.

The battle is still raging, and nobody seems to know when the political turmoil will subside. RUN Vice-Chair Andrew Albert, who is also Chair of the MTA Transit Riders' Council,

reported on the situation and presented his views elsewhere in this issue of the *RUN Newsletter*. Certainly Cuomo's decision is controversial, and it could rock the MTA and its governance structure to the core. Nobody seems to know what will happen next, and everybody in the city is watching the show.

So what did Cuomo do that was so revolutionary? He did what many of us do when we get a report from a doctor that we do not like. We get a second opinion, and he got a “second opinion” from other engineers. These engineers were not part of the big engineering and consulting cartel that rules the civil engineering profession through firms like WSP Global, successor to Parsons Brinkerhoff (“PB”), whose founder, William Barclay Parsons, had supervised the construction of the original IRT Subway, which opened for service in 1904. Instead, Cuomo consulted the deans and senior faculty of the engineering schools at Columbia and Cornell Universities.

The Canarsie Tunnels had been flooded by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, and the Columbia and Cornell engineers proposed a comparatively easy and inexpensive solution. Instead of removing and replacing the bench walls and the cables inside them for the entire length of both tunnels, they would keep the parts of the bench walls that are structurally sound, build walkways where the bench walls could not be saved, use state-of-the-art materials to seal and waterproof the bench walls and walkways, and hang new cables along the inside of the tunnel walls to replace the original cables that had been located inside the bench walls, which would be abandoned and replaced. It seemed like a cost-effective and easier solution. Certainly the large firms of the “Infrastructure Industrial Complex” would not have suggested it, because they would not have made as much money from it. The engineers from places like Columbia and Cornell could suggest a less-expensive project; they have tenure (lifetime job security) and owe their loyalty to their universities, rather than to large firms or to the sufferance or whims of mayors or governors.

So what could happen if other transit leaders or elected officials were to get a “second opinion” as Cuomo did? It could mean less-expensive projects, a better deal

for taxpayers, more projects that could be built with the same overall capital budget, more infrastructure for transit riders to use, and a better and more-cost-effective transit system generally. If the Hudson Tunnels between New Jersey and Penn Station, New York can be repaired as quickly and inexpensively as the Canarsie Tunnels, they could be repaired without taking them out of service for an extended period of time. They were flooded in Hurricane Sandy as the Canarsie Tunnels were, and the damage appears to have been about as extensive. If that is true, which engineers who do not work for the large firms could determine, the tunnels could be repaired on weekends, when Amtrak always shuts one of them down, anyway.

With that scenario, there could be two rebuilt tunnels available for service within a few years, and without additional service disruptions. There would be no time pressure to build two new tunnels before repairing the existing ones. While new tunnels that may or may not actually be necessary to provide sufficient capacity into Penn Station for the foreseeable future, repairing the existing tunnels first would enable planners to evaluate their options thoroughly. If one or two more tunnels are needed eventually, they can be constructed without undue worry about the existing tunnels and how long they could last. There would be time to make and implement rational plans, without undue pressure. Riders would have the tunnels they need, and taxpayers would get a better deal than the big consulting firms would give them. A less-expensive repair would also make money available for other needed projects.

So, the next time a doctor gives you news that you do not like, be sure to get a second opinion. Gov. Cuomo did that in an engineering situation, and the mobility “health” of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers will be improving as a result.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey. For more detailed coverage of this issue, see his article on the subject in Railway Age.

SYNOPSIS OF THE TRANSPORTATION PACKAGE

By Phil Streby

(Note: This summary has been edited to focus on provisions that relate to the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak and the Federal Transit Administration.)

FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION SAFETY AND OPERATIONS

The bill provides \$221,698,000 for safety and operations of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

The following priorities are funded:

FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION SAFETY AND OPERATIONS

The bill provides \$221,698,000 for safety and operations of the Federal Railroad Administration.

The following priorities are funded:

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------|
| Safe transportation of energy products | \$2M |
| Automated track inspection program and data analysis | \$16.5M |
| Railroad safety information system and front end interface | \$4.8M |
| Positive train control (PTC) support program | \$10M |
| Confidential close call program | \$3M |
| Trespasser prevention strategy and risk model | \$500K |
| National bridge system inventory update and model modification | \$600K |

FRA is required to submit the information detailed in the Senate report on railroad PTC status, enforcement plans, and effects on rail service 30 days after enactment of this Act.

The bill provides \$40,600,000 for railroad research and development. This amount includes \$2,500,000 to improve safety practices and training for class II and Class III freight railroads; \$2,000,000 for tank car research related to the safe transportation of energy products in partnership with other Federal agencies; and up to \$5,000,000 for partnerships with qualified universities for research on rail system safety, capacity and efficiency, of which \$1,000,000 is for research with universities on intelligent railroad systems.

FEDERAL-STATE PARTNERSHIP FOR STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

The bill provides \$400,000,000 to replace or rehabilitate qualified railroad assets to help protect existing rail infrastructure and fund investments and maintenance to avoid costly repairs in the future.

The bill provides \$255,000,000 for rail infrastructure and safety improvements grants, and directs the Department to prioritize funds for railroads that are most at risk of not meeting the PTC deadline.

THE NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION (AMTRAK)

The bill provides a total of \$1,941,600,000 for the National Railroad Passenger Corporation. Amtrak is directed to provide discounted passenger fares to veterans (as defined in section 101 of title 38, United States Code) consistent with the discounted passenger fares currently provided to active duty military personnel, and to submit with its fiscal year 2020 congressional justification a report that addresses items enumerated in the House and Senate reports on charter, special, and private trains. Amtrak is also directed to evaluate options to address the weekday Northeast Regional Trains between Washington and Boston and to submit a report within 90 days of enactment of this Act.

Amtrak is directed to provide a station agent in each Amtrak station that had a ticket agent in fiscal year 2018. Station agents, which include Amtrak ticket agents or caretakers, assist passengers with their intercity rail travel, provide customer service during all hours that a station is open, and perform building maintenance duties. Amtrak is directed to improve communication and collaboration with local partners and take into consideration the unique needs of each community, including impacts to local jobs, when making decisions related to the staffing of Amtrak stations, and to work with stakeholders to maximize the efficiency of these station agents.

NORTHEAST CORRIDOR GRANTS TO THE NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION

The bill provides \$650,000,000 for the Secretary to make grants for activities associated with the Northeast Corridor (NEC), defined as the main line between

Boston, MA, and the District of Columbia, and the facilities and services used to operate and maintain that line. The Secretary is allowed to retain up to one-half of 1% of the total provided to Amtrak for project management and oversight costs and require not less than \$50,000,000 to bring Amtrak-served facilities and stations into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The bill allows up to \$5,000,000 of the NEC grants to fund the NEC Commission expenses.

NATIONAL NETWORK GRANTS TO THE NATIONAL RAILROAD PASSENGER CORPORATION

The bill provides \$1,291,600,000 for the Secretary to make grants for activities associated with the National Network. National Network Grants provide operating and capital funding for expenses on Amtrak's entire network, including long-distance routes that operate on the NEC.

Of this amount, the bill allows the Secretary to retain up to \$2,000,000 to fund expenses associated with the state-supported route committee, and not less than \$50,000,000 shall be for railroad safety technologies on state-supported routes on which PTC systems are not required. No less than \$50,000,000 shall be for capital expenses that enable continued passenger rail operation on long-distance routes where Amtrak is the sole operator and PTC systems are not required.

The bill provides \$23,274,000 for the National Railroad Passenger Corporation Office of the Inspector General, and direct the Inspector General to update a 2008 DOT OIG report titled "Effects of Amtrak's Poor on-time Performance" no later than 240 days after enactment of this Act. The Amtrak OIG is required to submit an on-time performance report.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISIONS-FEDERAL RAILROAD ADMINISTRATION

Section 151 expresses the sense of Congress that long distance passenger rail routes should be retained to ensure connectivity throughout the National Network.

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CANADA REPORT MARCH 2019

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Aficionados of Canada's long-distance trains likely know that the Winnipeg to Churchill VIA service is again operational. The fun or tragedy, whichever way one views it, is now in the Toronto region.

The past six months or so have witnessed increasing media coverage on mobility issues as urbanization and a predicted 30% growth in population between 2017 and 2041 are going to need focus if the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is to prosper. Many televised panel discussions and conferences on this issue turn into gong shows as the more sober and realistic views of true subject-matter experts are eclipsed by local politicians, business groups and evangelistic consultants claiming to have simplistic, potted solutions.

Three fundamentals are seldom mentioned or downplayed in such discussions:

1. The problem has been in the making for over half a century and the region has adopted car-centric, low density housing (and continues to do so) with little or no provision for public, mass-transportation infrastructure.
2. No stable and predictable source of funding is currently available for fully integrated heavy rail, light rail and bus transit projects.
3. Logical plans for public transportation projects are too frequently sacrificed at the altar of political populism, the low-tax mantra and ending "the war on the car."

SUMMARY OF THE TRANSPORTATION PACKAGE

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FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

The bill provides \$700,000,000 in transit infrastructure grants.

The bill provides \$5,000,000 for research activities; another \$9,000,000 is provided under the heading "Transit Formula Grants", and no less than \$5,000,000 shall be available for

Toronto Transit Commission's 10-year maintenance and capital needs are reckoned at around C\$32 billion and have yet to be funded. This is before any system optimization and expansion. Dangerous overcrowding at peak hours gets worse.

In the writer's estimation, the cost of bringing the GTA's public transportation system up to an acceptable standard is at least C\$150bn – C\$200bn. Ontario Premier (Governor) Doug Ford waxes lyrical about subways but doesn't understand that twin-bore tunnel construction costs are around C\$600m/mile plus stations and a have a ten-year minimum project time-line.

Simultaneously, other regions in the province including Niagara, Southwestern and Northern Ontario are pushing hard for better train and bus services to provide relief from highway congestion, relative remoteness and climate vagaries. Add another C\$50bn or so. One therefore needs to ask if provincial election cycles of just four years will allow any political party to commit to an eye-wateringly expensive, very necessary, long-term fix.

Of course, many people think that autonomous vehicles are a better solution and espouse their perceived ability to head-off the looming mobility crisis. Canada's Blackberry, one of the leaders in vehicle automation, recently predicted that fully self-driving cars are unlikely to be

technical assistance and training to increase mobility for people with disabilities and older adults.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT GRANTS

The bill provides \$2,552,687,000 for fixed-guideway projects. Of the funds provided, \$1,265,670,000 is available for new starts projects, \$635,000,000 is available for core capacity projects, \$526,500,000 is available for small starts projects, \$100,000,000 is available for the expedited project delivery pilot program.

Section 190 authorizes the Secretary to carry out a program that establishes uniform standards for developing and

commercially available before between 2035 and 2041. Other vendors may be more optimistic, but the purveyors of pessimism are usually right.

A further problem facing the GTA is the absence of space to build more highways. Seizing adjacent properties, under eminent domain, to demolish and replace with highway lanes would create such unified ire that local politicians would be applying, en-masse, to Elon Musk's SpaceX for one-way trips to Mars.

The GTA, in common with many other North American cities, has found itself painted by historical willful blindness into a very high-walled corner. While politicians and their acolytes twist themselves into pretzels looking for solutions to commuter and business agony, they forget the big picture. Without a truly massive and ongoing infusion of taxpayer money and a robust transportation strategy, free of political and corporate meddling, the mobility deficit will only increase – and rapidly.

Largely absent from the discussion is the social and economic cost of inaction. Any mention of this causes most politicians to stick their fingers in their ears and hum loudly. As goes climate change, so goes public transportation.

Ken Westcar is co-coordinator of InterCityRail.

supporting agency transit pass and transit benefits, including distribution of transit benefits.

Section 410 prohibits funds from being used by an entity unless the expenditure is in compliance with the Buy American Act.

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

A SURVEY OF LONG DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.– PART FIVE: UNDER CONSTRUCTION

By Dana Gabbard

To keep this survey at a manageable length, it is being divided into multiple parts. This part deals with the under-construction California high speed rail project, while future installments will be on proposed new high speed and conventional rail projects, plus efforts to revive discontinued Amtrak routes.

Please see the introduction to part one in the Spring 2018 issue regarding the purpose and certain other underlying aspects.

Aspirations for high speed rail in the United States comparable to what operates in Asia and Europe first manifested itself with passage of the federal [High Speed Ground Transportation Act of 1965](#). It bore fruit with the inauguration in 1969 of the electrified Metroliner service along the northeast corridor between [New York City](#) and [Washington, D.C.](#) Beginning Dec. 2000 Metroliner was gradually supplanted by the current Acela Express (extended north to serve Boston).

The '90s saw a rebirth of interest at the federal level, with Section 1010 of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 designating 5 high speed rail corridors. This was expanded to 11 in 1998 by Section 1103(c) of Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century.

Subsequent to these legislative initiatives there has been progress in expanding high speed rail in the Northeast (the Keystone corridor in Pennsylvania) and Midwest (in Michigan and Illinois). Projects were proposed in Texas and Florida in the '90s and early part of the new millennium respectively but were killed by the objections of entrenched interests and ideological/fiscal concerns of elected officials.

In the early '80s, an American-Japanese private partnership proposed a high speed line between Los Angeles and San Diego along the coast using proven Shinkansen equipment. It eventually was shelved,

undone by a trio of intractable obstacles: mid-corridor NIMBYs, environmental issues regarding fragile lagoons and insufficient financing. *More about the project can be found in [The California Bullet Train, Then and Now](#)* by [Richard Trainor](#) (posted online on the [counterpunch.org](#) website) and "High-Speed Rail in California: The Dream, the Process, and the Reality" by George C. Smith and Earl Shirley (summary posted at <https://trid.trb.org/view/282890> with link to full report).

The California Legislature in 1993 created the Intercity High-Speed Rail Commission to evaluate the feasibility of such a system. Its Final Report in 1996 stated that indeed it was feasible. Shortly thereafter Senate Bill 1420, co-sponsored by state Senators Quentin Kopp and Jim Costa, was introduced, passed and signed by then-Gov. Pete Wilson establishing a California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) to plan and construct a network linking the major cities of the state.

After some initial planning, the first tangible step toward realizing the project was passage by the voters in 2008 of Proposition 1A, a \$9.95-billion bond measure to finance the system and connecting services. Fortunately, the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 included funds for high speed rail projects across the country, including California. The Obama administration in the FY 2010 budget secured additional HSR funds. CHSRA has in total received \$3.3 billion of federal funding to build the middle segment in the Central Valley. An additional revenue stream from the carbon credit trading fund (known colloquially as cap & trade) has been secured (supplying \$1.7 billion as of Dec. 2017) while the Authority continues exploring funding options such as additional federal grants and private sector partnerships.

On Jan. 5, 2015, a groundbreaking was held in Fresno, CA and shortly thereafter construction commenced on the Central Valley segment. Funds have also been dispersed to projects at the northern and the southern ends of the state that will facilitate the next segments and provide

improvements to existing passenger rail services. This includes run-through tracks at Los Angeles Union Station and the electrification of the Caltrain commuter train system between San Francisco and San Jose.

The project has gone through many twists and turns as to planning, funding and construction. Andy Kunz, President & CEO of the **US High Speed Rail Association** ([ushsr.com](#)) **notes**, "These projects are very difficult to get built anywhere due to the high costs, and the long timelines."

Originally the Central Valley was the major source of support while Los Angeles and San Francisco treated it with barely concealed disinterest. One aspect of mega projects is the benefit is dispersed while impact is immediate. Another is in their early stages projects are very conceptual. As planning progresses, it becomes more tangible as to impact (e.g. where land will need to be taken by eminent domain). The technology causes political stress as it requires wide spacing between stations (approximately 30 miles) so communities are often subject to disruption without receiving the benefit of a station (and the concomitant development around same). These factors led to the Valley reversing to being a major source of opposition. But as the project's construction has produced economic benefits, support has rebounded among many local officials. The Obama funding has poisoned the project among ideological conservatives, even long after the change in administration. Plus the right has an emphatic opposition to rail which has resulted in continual attempts to stop the project, even by officials whose constituents ironically are benefiting from the jobs it creates.

The project has recently suffered two blows, neither fatal but both serious and consequential. First in November 2018 the State Auditor ([auditor.ca.gov](#)) issued a damning report whose conclusions are summed up in its subtitle: **Its Flawed Decision-Making and Poor Contract Management Have Contributed to Billions in Cost Overruns and Delays in the System's Construction.**

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LONG DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE

Continued from page 13

Shortly thereafter, Governor-elect Gavin Newsom visited Fresno and stated the project needed a fresh start. This in contrast to his predecessor Jerry Brown, who was a continual booster even in the face of difficulties.

Still, at the start of this year the project remained the object of much hope among rail advocates and others as Kunz noted in pointing out, "Engineering Inc. magazine has high speed rail as their [Jan./Feb.] cover story ... and in the article they say that HSR has come of age in 2018, going from a pipe dream to the latest must-have thing!"

On Feb. 12 the second blow fell, as now-Governor Newsom in his first state of the state address to the legislature outlined the fresh start as being a narrowing of the focus to the under-construction segments (121 miles from Merced and Bakersfield) while environmental work is to continue on the northern extension to the Bay Area and the southern to Los Angeles. He also announced a change in leadership by appointing a new Chair of the Authority's Board and implementation of the audit's recommendations.

Many in the press, especially Fox News et al., pronounced the project dead and/or cancelled. President Trump tweeted such and then stated the feds wanted their money back.

Following through on the implied threat, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) sent a notice to the Authority announcing plans to terminate a grant, demanding the nearly \$1 billion be returned and further that the FRA is, "... actively exploring every legal option to seek the return from California of \$2.5 billion in Federal funds FRA previously granted for this now-defunct project." One has to think this was done under direct orders from the White House. Now-defunct? Really?

The Authority has stated in re the FRA, "We

are preparing a comprehensive response by their requested deadline of [March 5](#). We remain committed to delivering high-speed rail and its many economic, environmental, and mobility benefits to Californians."

Opponents generally offer no alternative, or even try to imply the need is unnecessary because any long-distance travel in the state can be accomplished with a car or plane. This ignores that after air system demand dipped in the wake of 9/11, it has since resumed climbing and as the Commission report in the '90s noted, airport expansion is unlikely and the smart move is dedicate air space to travel out of the state with high speed rail providing long distance travel within the state and linking residents to airports.

In this vein, Mike Dukakis, former Governor of Massachusetts, Presidential candidate

Despite the comments in 1999 of then-Gov. Gray Davis that it was "Buck Rogers Technology," high speed rail has an established and formidable track record of success.

and major rail supporter, notes "California's population is now close to 40 million, and before long it will be heading for 50 million. Anybody who thinks the state can handle that many people without a first class, modern high speed rail system must be dreaming. And the time to begin is now."

The late Kevin Starr, noted historian and California State Librarian, in an interview stated a benefit of the project is it would link the north and south ends of the state, which to this day often feud politically.

One has the impression many opponents fear not the project's possible failure but its potential success, contrary to near-religious adherence to their political orthodoxy.

Perceptions are the final obstacle. Many years ago a *Los Angeles Times* business reporter told me, "I just can't see it."

Despite the comments in 1999 of then-Gov. Gray Davis that it was "Buck Rogers Technology," high speed rail has an established and formidable track record of success. As a longtime observer of the project, I had long been aware its completion was a matter of will and money

as long as the need was real.

The recently adopted California Rail Plan, funded by a gasoline tax (SB 1) that withstood an effort to repeal it, is aimed at incremental improvement and expansion of passenger rail in the state with high speed rail as the backbone.

In the 1990s, the subway extension under Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles was shelved due to finances and other issues. Fellow advocates lamented to me it was dead. I responded it was merely sleeping and the underlying logic and need would inevitably reassert itself. It took long years for this to happen but even as you read this, construction of the extension is taking place. I see the high speed rail as a generational project, and perhaps like Disneyland, will never be completed (with ongoing extensions to all ends of this huge state).

One advantage New York had when federal infrastructure funding became available to stimulate the economy during the Depression was that master builder Robert Moses had on the shelf shovel-ready projects capable of producing quick results. As Wall Street continues plotting a repeat of 2008 (predictable to any viewer of the documentary *Boom Bust Boom* by Monty Python member Terry Jones) how long before a new stimulus will be necessary to again save the Western economy? Do the math. California is preparing for tomorrow, and will have the last laugh at all the naysayers.

The U.S. High Speed Rail Association is holding its West Coast Conference in Los Angeles April 30-May 2. These events are natural spawning grounds for a national coalition as supporters of the projects in various portions of the country (Northwest, Southwest, Midwest, Southeast) network and begin the process to prepare for the political consequences of the generational shift on the horizon. A new dawn is coming and high speed rail will shine bright as a component of the emerging national multi-modal transportation network. As the song says, a change is gonna come.

The project's website is hsr.ca.gov

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

NJ RIDERS DON'T GET ANY RESPECT, OR EVEN KNOW WHEN THEY WILL GET THEIR TRAINS BACK

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This writer noted the political significance of the new statute in the Lackawanna Coalition's newsletter, the *Railgram*: "we still note that the effect will be to give Democrats some patronage seats even when the Governor is a Republican, as occurred during most of the Christie administration. This is a net gain for some politicians, but not for the beleaguered riders." The article continued: "There are currently no regular transit riders on the Board, and that will continue." and added: "We riders are still left out in the cold, and we will be for many more years."

One of Gov. Murphy's campaign promises was to order an "audit" of NJ Transit,

prepared by a management consulting firm. That audit appeared last fall, and made no mention of riders as "stakeholders" or recommend any enhanced participation for riders or their advocates in decision-making at NJT.

Lackawanna Coalition Communications Director Sally Jane Gellert commented in the *Railgram*: "The report does not recommend the genuine reform that NJ Transit and its riders need. We are treated only as 'consumers' without mention of any genuine participation in making decisions that concern our mobility. This is no different from the Legislature's actions, but it is still unfortunate."

The situation has gotten palpably worse for New Jersey's transit riders in the past year. While transit managers and Democrats generally have blamed the former Christie administration for the plight of today's embattled riders, advocates of all political stripes remember that they were not

plagued with annulments during the Christie era, as they have been under Murphy's rule. Some advocates, including Democrats, are beginning to realize that transit has gotten worse in the past year with fewer trains running than during the unlamented Christie era, and nobody seems to know when it will get better.

Management is not helping, either. The agency has reduced transparency when dealing with the public, so both riders and reporters are hampered in their efforts to learn the truth about their transit. Will the situation ever improve? Nobody knows. New Jersey will not have a new governor for almost three more years, and maybe for almost seven. Even then, it is anybody's guess what any governor and any aggregation of motorists on the agency's Board might do to the riders in the future.

David Peter Alan is Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition and a RUN Board member.

THE COMMONWEALTH RAIL SUMMIT: NEXT STEPS FOR EXPANDING PASSENGER RAIL IN VIRGINIA

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The second panel will be moderated by David Peter Alan, Esq. It will focus on what's happening to Amtrak's national network. (i.e. cutbacks in service at railroad stations, elimination of traditional food service for both sleeping car passengers as well as riders in coaches and other issues related to potential cuts in long distance service.

Panelists include J.W. Madison, President, Rails Inc., Albuquerque, N.M.; Phil Streby, a RUN Board member who also serves on the board of the Rail Passengers Association and is Treasurer of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance; and Donald M. Boyd, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 43, which represents the dining car workers on Amtrak. He has worked with Amtrak in various crafts for 38 years and has been active with the union for 30 years.

After a short break, an Audience Forum will be held, enabling conference participants to share their ideas about how passenger rail and rail transit services can be expanded and improved in Virginia and elsewhere in the nation. Participants attending the conference will also have an opportunity to take an optional tour with Danny Plaugher on Saturday morning to see the historic downtown Passenger Rail Station located in Shockhoe Bottom. The Renaissance Revival style station opened in 1901 to serve the Seaboard Air Line and C&O railroads. Its ornate, domed clock tower is a city landmark. Amtrak currently uses the station for trains going to or coming from Newport News, VA.

We hope to attract not only rail advocates, but also civic leaders, business people, environmentalists, planners, real estate developers and members of the general public who want to know more about the issues that will be discussed.

The early registration fee until April 15 is \$35, \$40 from April 16 – May 12, May 13 on and at the door- \$45. It includes morning refreshments, lunch and an

afternoon refreshment break, and all conference materials/handouts. If you wish to stay in Richmond before or after the conference, we suggest that you look at the official tourism website for Richmond.

The Virginians for High Speed Rail Office is located in the Willow Lawn & Wythe Building, 5101 Monument Avenue. in Richmond. The office can be reached from downtown by taking the BRT line to Broad & Staples Mill. It is a short 12-minute walk to the conference site.

Please join us at what promises to be an exciting, thought-provoking event. Participants can register and make payment on RUN's website, railusers.net, or via regular mail. Checks should be sent to RUN, Box 8015, Portland, Maine 04104. Further details concerning the conference will be announced as arrangements are made on our website.

For more information, you can also call Richard Rudolph, Chair, Rail Users' Network. He can best be reached at 207-776-4961, or call Danny Plaugher, Executive Director, Virginians for High Speed Rail, at 804-864-5173.

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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.

We hope you will join — vital decisions and legislation affecting the North American rail transportation system are being made daily. Don't be left behind at the station!

Please register me / us as a member of RUN today

Advocacy or Advisory Group or Agency Name (affiliation if appropriate)

Name of individual Applicant (or group, Agency, or Company Contact Person's Name)

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Phone Number Fax Number E-Mail

Enclosed are dues of:

- _____ \$40 (individual/family)
- _____ \$100 (Advocacy or Advisory Group)
- _____ \$250 (Public Agency or Bureau)
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