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SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S ANNUAL MEETING/PUBLIC FORUM IN SPRINGFIELD, MA

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

Please join us at the Rail Users' Network's Annual Meeting / Public Forum taking place at the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission Offices at 60 Congress St. in downtown Springfield, MA. This free, exciting event, co-sponsored by the PVPC, is taking place on Saturday, Oct. 13 from noon to 5 pm. It will highlight the efforts underway which have already led to the expansion of passenger rail service between New Haven and Springfield, MA, as well as the proposed pilot program to offer

additional service along the northern end of the Knowledge Corridor from Springfield to Holyoke, Northampton and Greenfield, MA, starting in 2019. The program will also focus on the ongoing effort to establish seasonal rail service called the Berkshire Flyer from Pittsfield, MA to New York City, and the East-West Passenger Rail study that is currently underway.

The program will begin at high noon with a brief RUN business meeting to elect board members, with opening remarks given by the organization's chair, Richard Rudolph, who will talk about

some of the challenges that rail advocates are currently facing across North America.

The public forum will start with U.S. Congressman Richard Neal (invited) and Massachusetts State Senator Eric Lessor, who will be on hand to greet attendees as well as give welcoming remarks. John Bernick, Assistant Rail Administrator for Rail Design, Construction and Maintenance of Way at CT DOT, will provide an overview of the new CT Hartford Line. He is responsible for managing engineering and construction activities on Connecticut's entire rail

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MTA, NYC DOT DRAW UP PLANS FOR L TRAIN SHUTDOWN

By Andrew Albert

It's certainly been in the news frequently, especially as community meetings to inform the public about the L-train shutdown, which is happening in April of 2019, continue to take place. Plans continue to be drawn up, as this important link between Brooklyn & Manhattan, and especially the Superstorm Sandy-damaged Canarsie Tube under the East River, prepare for preliminary work, prior to the actual closure. There will actually be many

weekends prior to the April, 2019 shutdown when the L line will not operate, and these are actually greater closures than the actual shutdown, as these close the line from Broadway Junction to 8th Avenue, whereas the major shutdown will be between Bedford Avenue in Williamsburg and 8th Avenue.

Many of the alternatives that will be offered in the large 15-month shutdown will not be ready for the weekend closures, which will largely begin in October of 2018.

Out-of-system transfers, such as the Livonia Ave/Junius Street transfer between the #3 & L lines will not be ready yet, the Hewes St/BroadwayJ/M/Z/G transfer will not be ready, nor will the 21st St G/Hunterspoint Ave 7 transfer be ready.

So what's the plan to move 300,000 people between Brooklyn & Manhattan while the Canarsie Tube is closed for repairs? It involves multiple modes of travel, including other subway lines, buses, ferries, and

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AN AMTRAK TRIP REPORT AND A CALL FOR “NO CONFIDENCE” IN AMTRAK MANAGEMENT

Commentary *By David Peter Alan*

Despite my having ridden more than 750,000 miles on Amtrak since 1995, events during my summer itinerary (Reservation No. 00102A) have demonstrated reckless disregard by Amtrak for the mobility and contractual rights of its customers to an extent unseen during any other Amtrak travel in which I have engaged previously. If Amtrak is to survive as a mode of transportation of national scope, it is imperative that drastic changes in Amtrak policies, and perhaps in senior management at Amtrak, take place without delay.

My itinerary was a USA Rail Pass, with segments originally scheduled in several regions of the country. They included a segment on Train #7 (the *Empire Builder*) from St. Paul, MN to Portland, OR on Saturday, June 8, to be followed by trips to various destinations in California on Trains #11 and #14 (the *Coast Starlight*) and a return to the East through Seattle. While in St. Paul, I received from Amtrak the news that there was a service disruption in Northern California that would prevent Trains #11 and #14 from operating. Presumably, the other passengers received it, too.

For a few days, affected passengers were sent around the disrupted area by bus, which proved that Amtrak was capable of providing alternate transportation to get their customers to their destinations. As of Tuesday, June 12, Amtrak suddenly and inexplicably withdrew the bus bridge. It was no longer possible for me to get to California as scheduled, so I had to cancel appointments in California and stay in the *Empire Builder's* service area.

An incident on Monday, July 2 was even worse. I was booked on Train #6, the *California Zephyr*, which left Emeryville, CA on Saturday morning, June 30. The train was delayed, apparently because

of mechanical problems. It appears that much of the time was lost because of difficulties with a locomotive on the westbound trip, which was not properly repaired in California. To make matters worse, the dining car lost refrigeration and air conditioning on the westbound trip, which was also not repaired in California. This writer and other passengers boarded in Denver after midnight, more than five hours behind schedule.

We continued to lose time steadily on Monday. I was booked to connect with Train #448 to Boston (with a connection to New York), scheduled to leave Chicago at 9:30 pm; and was one of at least 18 coach passengers booked to make that connection, along with more riders in the sleeping cars. Amtrak was fully aware that it had a number of passengers who expected to make the connection at Chicago. Amtrak was also aware that Train #6 was running significantly behind schedule, so there was time to arrange for us to make our advertised connection at Chicago. Instead, Amtrak ignored its responsibility to get us to our destinations and did nothing. This willful inaction ended up costing Amtrak thousands of dollars and causing dozens of its customers to miss their Fourth of July holiday.

The events of July 2 have demonstrated, at least to me, that Amtrak's attitude toward its customers has become one of disdain, if not outright contempt. Despite several attempts to contact a manager with line authority to help us get to our destinations, Amtrak enforced a strict policy that customers are NEVER permitted to talk to any managers with authority. Neither “regular” call-center agents, “customer service” personnel or “customer relations” agents were willing to even find a manager who had the authority to ensure that customers going east of Chicago could make their connection, even though it was

feasible to do so. All they offered were excuses that managers were competent and had looked into every option; assertions that I, as an experienced rider and advocate, strongly dispute.

Those excuses were clearly false. I attempted to convince anyone at Amtrak who would listen that Amtrak could charter a bus in Chicago that would meet Train #6 in Naperville, IL and take us to South Bend, IN, which was the first stop on Train #448. Given the actual arrival time at Naperville, there would have been enough time for a bus to go directly to South Bend on highways that bypass Chicago by running south of the city. That would have enabled us to make the connection and enjoy our holiday at home, as we had planned.

Amtrak chartered a bus, but not to allow its customers to proceed to their destinations. Instead, it took the stranded passengers just to a hotel elsewhere in downtown Chicago, where we were to spend 24 hours and waste the Fourth of July traveling, rather than being where we had planned to be. In the process, Amtrak purchased hotel accommodations (at the Swiss Hotel on East Wacker Drive) that sold at retail for at least \$159 per room. With the number of passengers who mis-connected, that retail cost would have amounted to several thousand dollars, which was compounded by lost revenue from seats or rooms that were not occupied on Monday night and had to be given to stranded passengers who were forced to stay in Chicago until Tuesday evening. Under the circumstances, I could not wait and had to travel to New York by air on Tuesday morning. It was necessary to spend extra money for the trip, resulting in actual cash damages that Amtrak could clearly have foreseen and that would not have been necessary if Amtrak had cared enough to charter a bus that would take us to our connecting train. That had been customary at Amtrak until recently, but apparently Amtrak does not do that anymore.

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SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN's ANNUAL MEETING/PUBLIC FORUM

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infrastructure and has direct oversight of the expansion of the regional rail service on the Hartford Line between New Haven and Springfield. Jim Redeker, Connecticut's DOT Commissioner (invited) will focus his remarks on transit oriented development, which is already taking place along the line in Wallingford, Windsor and Windsor Locks. He expects more economic development will follow as people discover the high-speed train service and developers will respond with housing and other projects near stations. Tim Brennan, Executive Director, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission will talk about the new pilot program which will begin in 2019 to expand rail passenger service along the Northern End of the Knowledge Corridor to serve residents and visitors in Holyoke, Northampton and Greenfield, MA.

After a short refreshment break, Thomas Matuszko, AICP, Executive Director of the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, will describe plans underway for the start-up of a new seasonal weekend service called

the Berkshire Flyer which will operate from Pittsfield, MA to Albany / Rennesseler and then to New York City. Jennifer Slesinger, Project Manager, MassDOT, will provide an update on the East-West Passenger Rail Study - Boston to Pittsfield, MA, which is currently underway. Karen Christensen, President, The Train Campaign and Ben Heckscher, Co-Founder, Trains in The Valley, will also be on hand to talk about passenger rail advocacy in the Berkshires and in the Connecticut River Valley.

In keeping with our shared vision and past precedents, time will also be set aside so that attendees can share their ideas about how passenger rail services can be improved. Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair of RUN and Chair of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, will give closing remarks.

We look forward to seeing you in Springfield, MA—the urban, economic, and cultural capital of Massachusetts' Connecticut River Valley. For those coming by train, there are a couple of options to take a CT Train or Amtrak shuttle that will get you to Springfield in the morning

in time to have a late breakfast or early lunch. It's a short 10-minute walk from the rail station to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission office at 60 Congress Street. Tickets can be purchased at the CT vending machines in the station—the one-way fare is \$12.75, and Amtrak accepts CT rail Hartford Line tickets onboard all Amtrak's Regional and Shuttle trains except the *Vermont*. Customers may also purchase CT Rail Hartford Line tickets from Metro-North Ticket Vending Machines (TVMs) as a connecting service to/from New Haven Line trains. On the Metro-North TVM, select your New Haven Line destination station (New Haven) and then add the UniTicket (Connecting Services) option to select your Hartford Line destination station.

For those planning to drive, there is parking available outside the PVPC office. Questions can be answered via email sent to rrudolph1022@gmail.com.

For your free registration, please go to: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/rail-users-network-annual-meeting-public-forum-tickets-49527626464>

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

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CAN THE SW CHIEF STAY ON TRACK?

By Dana Gabbard

One longtime challenge facing Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* has been that its middle portion (between Garden City, KS and Albuquerque, NM) is owned by BNSF but only used by Amtrak. In the early part of this decade, the freight railroad indicated an unwillingness to maintain the trackage beyond minimal status. Slower speed because of track degradation would have greatly lengthened the *Chief's* trip time.

BNSF offered to reroute the *Chief* between Newton, KS and Belen, NM via Wichita, KS, Woodward, OK, Amarillo, TX, and Clovis NM. over tracks it regularly uses which would entail only minimal cost for Amtrak to run on it, abandoning service to cities in rural Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico. The affected areas created the *Southwest Chief* Rural Rail Partnership in response.

Through tenacious effort the Partnership organized and secured funding towards a match of federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants. Following two successful grant applications in March a third grant for \$16 million was announced, a seeming victory for supporters of the *Chief* staying on its current route.

On April 19, 2018, Amtrak President/CEO Richard Anderson made a keynote speech at the annual California Passenger Rail Summit. It included critical comments about the long distance routes and extolled placing more emphasis on corridors. He did concede "experience travel" had a place among the services Amtrak offers, but provided no details about what this meant for the current routes.

Then in early May, Amtrak's office of Government Affairs in a position statement e-mailed to Senators dictated that additional requirements had to be met before Amtrak would provide the \$3 million it previously pledged toward the local match for the latest TIGER

grant. It criticized the performance of the *Chief*, alleged it suffers steadily decreasing ridership and, "Critical capital investments on the line require more than \$50 million in the coming years." In response the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) quickly sent key Congressional Committee Chairs a letter with a point by point rebuttal ("RPA Letter in Response to Amtrak's *SW Chief* Announcement"). It noted the insinuation that positive train control (PTC) installation and implementation is among the costs the corridor faces is unjustified. "... with only a single Amtrak train operating in each direction once a day, there are other, less expensive solutions that achieve the same safety objectives for less cost, including Automatic Train Stop (ATS) or Solar Powered Switch Position Indicators."

Former Amtrak President Joseph Boardman wrote, "The Southwest Chief issue is the battleground whose outcome will determine the fate of American's national interconnected rail passenger network."

Another blow to the national network occurred at this time as Amtrak began discontinuing station agents in cities whose use fell below a threshold. For the *Chief* this affected Topeka, KS, Garden City, KS, Lamy, NM and Ft. Madison, IA. Also La Junta, CO had agents on weekends discontinued.

Joseph Boardman, former Amtrak President and CEO, in an open letter ("Amtrak: Where is the public input? Where is the transparency?" *Railway Age*, posted online May 10, 2018) rebuked the current Amtrak management for being deliberately unforthcoming and often making inaccurate pronouncements. He ended by starkly stating, "The *Southwest Chief* issue is the battleground whose

outcome will determine the fate of American's national interconnected rail passenger network."

In a strongly worded letter to Anderson dated May 31, 11 Senators along the *Chief's* mid-section denounced as "Incredibly fiscally irresponsible" the potential withholding of the \$3 million and dubbed troubling the lack of transparency of Amtrak management about its changing position on the *Chief*.

The State of Colorado *Southwest Chief* & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission in a June 4, 2018 letter to Amtrak decried a lack of understanding and communication between Amtrak and the Commission. It pointedly noted contrary to the position statement that a plan existed. "If it needs to be changed and updated, then Amtrak needs to join and lead the dialogue with our Commission and other stakeholders to put a more acceptable plan in place to ensure the train's operation can be sustained for the long term." I have posted this: <https://www.scribd.com/document/385981898/Amtrak-Letter-signed-06-04-18-w-Corrections>

Seeking clarity, a group of Senators along the mid-section of the *Chief* met with Anderson on June 19th. Much to their surprise he rebuffed their concerns and made a high handed Power Point presentation as if his presumptions are inviolate and implementation a foregone matter. He raised the specter of a possible discontinuance of service in the mid-section, replacing it with a bus between Dodge City or La Junta and Albuquerque. As Bob Johnston in the Sept. issue of *Trains Magazine* ("Battle Lines Drawn Over Chief Proposal") notes, the presentation included very selective statistics, no mention of projected ridership for the proposed truncated service and no transparency about the cost allocation of overhead that many advocates claim create a deceptive impression of the financial performance of the long distance routes.

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MTA, NYC DOT DRAW UP PLANS FOR L TRAIN SHUTDOWN

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bikes. There will be additional trains on the M line, which serves many neighborhoods parallel to the L line, as well as more cars added to the G line, a major north-south route in Brooklyn, which connects to the L line at Lorimer Street/Metropolitan Avenue. C trains will be lengthened, some of which has already occurred, with the addition of R46 cars. Service on the E line between Queens & Manhattan will be increased as well. Long-closed entrances on the J,M,Z line along Broadway in Brooklyn will be re-opened, as this line will likely have a great number of additional riders.

Additionally, the out-of-system transfers between intersecting subway lines I mentioned earlier **WILL** be in place during the 15-month shutdown of the Canarsie Tube, allowing riders to use additional lines to reach their destinations at no additional expense. For instance, if you're an L train rider whose destination was in Lower Manhattan, you could use the G line to Hoyt/Schermerhorn Street in Downtown Brooklyn, and with an across-the-platform transfer to the A or C line, reach your destination in Lower Manhattan with two trains.

Likewise, if you were a Brooklyn L train commuter destined for Midtown Manhattan, you could take the G line north to Court Square in Long Island City, and transfer to either a E, M, or #7 train to Midtown. Interestingly, the very-crowded #7 line, which runs between Flushing & Midtown Manhattan, will be getting a boost in capacity by the end of 2018, prior to the April 2019 L train closure, as CBTC is turned on, allowing for an additional three trains per hour.

There will also be a series of Select Bus Routes initiated during the L train closure, taking some pressure off of already-overcrowded subway lines. Route 1.1 will take riders from Grand Street in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn to 1st Ave/15th Street in Manhattan. Route 1.2 will take riders between Grand Street/Brooklyn and SoHo, in Manhattan. Route 1.3 will operate between Bedford Avenue, in Williamsburg, and SoHo. while Route 1.4 will operate between Bedford Ave, Brooklyn, and 1st Ave/15th Street in Manhattan. Dedicated busways will be installed by NYC Dept. of Transportation along 14th Street in Manhattan, to replace the L train, which serves hundreds of thousands of riders just along 14th Street. The dedicated busway will be in effect from 5 AM to 10 PM every day.

A new ferry will operate between Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and Stuyvesant Cove, Manhattan (19th St & the East River). The new 14th Street Select Buses will operate between this new ferry landing and the west end of 14th Street, as well as serving existing 14th Street bus destinations, such as the Lower East Side. Bike lanes will be installed on 12th & 13th Street to accommodate an expected increase in cycling during the shutdown. A dedicated HOV lane will be installed on the Williamsburg Bridge to accommodate the new buses that will utilize the bridge to accommodate displaced L train riders.

Also, taking advantage of the L train closure to increase accessibility is a benefit not lost on the mobility-impaired riders on the L line. Three new stations will be made accessible with elevators during the shutdown: Bedford Ave in Brooklyn, 1st Ave in Manhattan, and Sixth Avenue, also in Manhattan.

So, will all of this even begin to make up for the loss of a very important link between Brooklyn and Manhattan? Time will tell, and all of the plans are subject to change, but one thing is quite clear: commuters will need to allow extra travel time between their homes and their destinations, whether they are using two or more subway lines, a bus and subway, two buses, a bus, ferry, and bus, etc. There is really nothing that can match the people-moving ability of trains, and I would expect many displaced L train riders will utilize other trains, even if it means transfers, rather than a bus, ferry, another bus, and a train. A two-seat ride beats a four- or five-seat ride every time.

New Yorkers are smart, and very adaptable, and will likely find a good route to their destinations. And while 15 months is no walk in the park, it was originally expected to take two years, but the MTA Board balked at that timeline, as did MTA officials, elected officials, and other groups. And to make sure it actually **WILL** take just 15 months, there are heavy liquidated damages to the contractor for each day that exceeds the 15-month timeline.

Superstorm Sandy was devastating to New York and its delicate infrastructure. Many under-river tunnels were flooded by Sandy, and while operational, they absolutely needed repairs and future-proofing. Most of the tunnels have already received this treatment, and now only two are left: the Canarsie Tube, scheduled for April of 2019, and the Rutgers Tube, which carries F line trains between Brooklyn & Manhattan, which will undergo repairs some time after the completion of the Canarsie Tube. Stay tuned.

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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It means your dues are past due! Please remit **immediately** to continue receiving the RUN Newsletter!

SOUTHEASTERN RAIL NEWS

By Bill Engel

This author lived in Charlotte, NC for a year and a half in 1979-1980. Since I rarely see any mention of news from the Southeastern region of our country in the *RUN Newsletter*, I thought I would contribute some for this issue...

- Charlotte's CityLynx light rail is developing phase 2 of the CityLynx Gold line. To provide service, six new Siemens S70 street cars have been ordered. These will be equipped with hybrid technology to allow off-wire running on a short stretch of the route. The first of the new vehicles is expected to arrive in Charlotte by 2019.

- Locomotives and cars used on the *Piedmont* service are at present serviced at a facility next to the Norfolk Southern

Charlotte yard. But construction on a new facility that will be closer to the new Charlotte Gateway Station has been started.

- The last item of North Carolina news is that the new Raleigh Union Station is now in use. The station is served by the four round-trip *Piedmont* service trains between Raleigh and Charlotte, the New York-Charlotte *Carolinian*, and the New York-Miami *Silver Star*.

- Besides North Carolina, another hotbed of passenger rail activity is southeast Florida. The new privately funded passenger rail service called Brightline began service to their new MiamiCentral station on the weekend of May 19. Phase 1 of their operation, West Palm Beach to Miami, is now complete. Phase 2, service beyond West Palm Beach to Orlando

International Airport, will not start until more rail is constructed, although a terminal at the airport is ready. Extension beyond Orlando to Tampa, possibly in the median of I-4, is being considered.

- Also in Florida, extension of Orlando-area Sunrail commuter train service to Kissimmee has happened! Their website announces that service from Sand Lake Road in southern Orlando to Poinciana (just toward Tampa beyond Kissimmee) is scheduled to begin on July 30. The schedule, available at www.sunrail.com, shows 20 trips a day between Poinciana and DeBary. There is no weekend or holiday service. The service has three common stops with Amtrak at Winter Park, Orlando, and Kissimmee.

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

CAN THE SW CHIEF STAY ON TRACK?

(Continued from page 4)

As a repudiation of Anderson, in August the Senate passed an amendment to a funding bill. Per a press release from the office of co-sponsor Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS), "This amendment would provide resources [\$50 million] for maintenance and safety improvements along the Southwest Chief route and would compel Amtrak to fulfill its promise of matching funding for the successful TIGER IX discretionary grant ... In addition, this amendment would effectively reverse Amtrak's decision to substitute rail service with bus service over large segments of the route through FY2019." The bill passed the Senate and is now before the House of Representatives for consideration.

As this issue went to press an internal memorandum to employees was leaked to stakeholders. Digging in his heels, Anderson in the memo makes

arguments and assertions that have already been debunked, plus now claims \$100 million (not the previous \$50 million) will be necessary in the coming years to bring the mid-section to a state of good repair.

Evan Stair of Rail Kansas, one of the major advocates in the corridor, has announced a Kansas - Oklahoma Passenger Rail Summit to be held Friday, October 12, 2018 from 9 am to Noon in Topeka at the Great Overland Station (701 N Kansas Ave). Those interested in attending can RSVP Stair at EvanStair@PassengerRailOK.org. A \$15 donation is suggested at the door.

Besides RUN, other advocates fighting on behalf of the *Chief* include RPA, Colorado Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission, Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada, Kansas Rail, Rails, Inc., Colorado Rail Passenger Association,

All Aboard Arizona and Southwest Passenger Rail Association, Railroad Workers United plus electeds at the federal, state and local levels. The recent doubling down by Anderson is seen as his throwing down the gauntlet revealing an unwillingness to compromise; the response has been a widespread call to arms by advocates and officials, not only on behalf of the *Chief* but also to hasten an end to Anderson's tenure before it causes any further damage to the national network, along with ensuring the next President/CEO has solid credentials and an understanding of Amtrak's needs going forward. Look for RUN to be in the thick of this battle.

My thanks to J.W. Madison, President of Rails, Inc. and RUN Board member, for helpful input and corrections to this piece.

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

REPORT FROM THE SOUTHWEST

By JW Madison

Yet another Amtrak disaster avoided?

You've heard the great news. The US Senate did the Right Thing this month.

A lot of people deserve credit for this, notably Sen. Udall (NM), Sen. Moran (KS), most of the US Senate, and the various activists, advocates, and citizen sympathizers who, like Olive Oyl, finally declared, "Too much is enough!"

Of course, this bill and amendment still has the House and—Trump to get past, but there's at least something here we can relish for the moment. See more on this elsewhere in this issue.

For our small part, Rails Inc has been spreading the word in our usual ways and thanking our KS, CO, and NM Senators for doing it right.

New Mexico includes towns and cities, and major-league attractions (like the Philmont Scout Ranch and the NRA's gun range), that would suffer considerably without the *Chief*. The Harvey House in Las Vegas (NM) is finally getting fixed up. And for hundreds of miles through our state, those tracks are the only land alternative to our "freeways," especially in wintertime.

Related to this, we reaffirm our belief in the proposed re-route of the *SW Chief's* La Junta CO / Trinidad CO segment to La Junta / Pueblo CO / Walsenburg CO / Trinidad, so as to pick up almost 180,000 potential new riders (including babies), and to close by about 85 miles the passenger rail gap between Albuquerque, Denver, and points north and south.

Go to <http://www.nmrails.org> and click on "The *SW Chief* and its Tracks" and "*Rocky Mountain Flyer*" left headers.

Dieselization?

Following on the heels of his Bus Bridge proposal, Mr. Richardson has come up with the notion of "dieselizing" the NE Corridor.

To freely paraphrase Dr. King, the arc of transportation history is long but it bends toward full electrification of our major track segments, and the installation of renewable energy facilities (solar, wind, maybe even fusion someday) along the rights of way. This may not happen till the 22nd Century, but who the hell knows? Sometimes in history even good things happen relatively suddenly.

More Albuquerque transit news; A review and lamentation:

Readers are by now likely familiar with the outrageous state of our "ART" (BRT) project, as least from my short Newsletter reports. "ART" has descended from merely a poor choice of Bus Over Rail and a less than ideal route plan, to the level of incompetence and possible corruption.

— Parts of our new (electric) buses have sideswiped parts of at least one station stop.

— During trial runs last Christmas season, the buses had to be jump-started like old trucks with bad batteries on a cold morning.

— A snarl of allegations has surfaced about irregularities in the inspection and approval of the new buses related to mechanical and electrical issues, and to the percentage of bus parts made in America, as per federal law. At least one inspector has been pressured to sign off on procedures that he never got a chance to get familiar with firsthand. Allegedly.

I recently attended a meeting of the Transit Advisory Board (TAB), which is all about buses, buses, and buses. This is reasonable enough, since that's all we have for transit around here. I was hoping to learn what the new head of "ABQRide" might be doing to shovel out this muck.

My repeated requests for a meeting with this person, Bernie Toon, and with the Mayor, have gone unanswered. Not even an Automatic Reply. Nonetheless, I'm trying to keep my little ego out of this. These may be the guys who clean up this _____ (Pick a polite word).

What I did get out of that TAB meeting is that some of the originally ordered 20 "ART" buses might be in revenue service this Fall, they're training the drivers right now, and that they're refusing delivery of five of these buses, from the Chinese manufacturer, "Build Your Dreams."

Go to <http://www.cabq.gov/transit> for the City's perspective.

The NM Rail Runner Express (NMRX):

Some still say nobody rides it. I recently took a round trip from Albuquerque to Santa Fe for business errands. The 9:30 a.m. Northbound and the 1:10 p.m. Southbound were both at least 80% full. Despite cheap gas.

This just in: DPA and others have been raising concerns about the NMRX and PTC. This, very briefly, is what I've learned from an official at Rio Metro, which operates the NMRX for our Council Of Governments:

— The NMRX is not exempt from implementing PTC, and, not being a Class I "tenant" railroad, has to put it in on its own.

— Rio Metro is applying to the FRA for an exemption (till 2020), for which they're putting together what amounts to a detailed safety plan and explanation of safety procedures already in place (I'm here to tell you, they are considerable).

— Rio Metro is pulling out all the stops to raise the \$55 million required for PTC. They've scored the majority of this already, and are in negotiation with XO, an arm of Herzog, to put the system in when the money is in hand.

This is just a teaser. I'll expand on this for Short Runs and the next *Newsletter*.

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

LACKAWANNA COALITION FIGHTS FOR NJ TRANSIT RIDERS AS THEY EXPERIENCE THE “SUMMER FROM HELL”

By David Peter Alan

The summer of 2017 was supposed to be the “Summer from Hell” for rail riders on New Jersey Transit (NJT), particularly on the Morris & Essex Line (M&E). Everybody had to put up with delays at New York’s Penn Station, while on-time performance suffered, but almost all M&E trains were diverted from New York and sent to the historic Hoboken Terminal for eight weeks. Riders had the old-style commute that was in effect until 1996, but NJT offered a reduced fare and threw in ferry or PATH (Port Authority Trans-Hudson) train connections to New York City at no extra cost. The operation ran smoothly, and riders took it all in stride. Some complained bitterly, but many said that it was merely the “summer from heck.”

This past summer was really the “summer from hell,” far worse than last year, and there is no end in sight to the woes suffered by commuters and occasional riders alike. Trains have been annulled in epidemic proportions, and riders normally do not know until the last minute whether or not their train will run. Commuters run the risk of having to wait for the next train, which is crowded with a double load of passengers, and they often arrive at their offices late and must take the consequences.

Riders on “off-peak” trains have it even worse. When a train is annulled outside peak-commuting hours, their wait is extended by 60 minutes or more. On weekends, they are often subjected to gaps of two, three, or even four hours. As this writer said at a statement to the NJT Board on August 8: “This interferes with our lives. This is intolerable.” On Friday, August 10, a record 30 trains were annulled, although a severe thunderstorm added to that total. The following Sunday evening, though, NJT gave advance notice about some trains that would be annulled the following morning. Maybe that stemmed from the public outcry five days earlier.

For its part, management blames the policies in effect when Chris Christie was governor. Current Gov. Phil Murphy, who took office at the beginning of this year, has promised more money for the agency,

mostly to hire more employees, but nobody has promised any specific improvements. So riders must wait it out, perhaps for the rest of this year and much of next year. Management’s favorite target has been the employees who run the trains. Many of the annulments have resulted from a shortage of engineers, and management has blamed them for “playing hooky” and going to the beach instead of doing their jobs.

Management has also blamed the requirement that NJT install Positive Train Control (PTC) for a shortage of equipment. The agency is behind schedule for installing the system, although it has been ten years since Congress first required it. By the end of the year, the beleaguered riders will know how much remains to be completed, because NJT must file a completion plan and a request for an extension of time from the Federal Railroad Administration, and most of the work must be completed this year.

Many of NJT’s problems stem from its structure and governance, which are directly related to New Jersey politics. While NJT’s enabling legislation created it as a quasi-independent organization, every governor who held the office since 1982 has meddled directly in its management and controlled every appointment to its Board. Murphy is no exception. Before he took office, his chief of staff for the transition ordered a purge of managers and secretaries, most of whom lost their jobs. The agency’s performance is worse now than when the victims were still working there. The Board does not exercise independent governance, but approves everything unanimously, with a span of more than twelve years (2003-2015) without a single dissenting vote. The Board rejected management proposals only twice in the agency’s 38-year history; in 1995 and again in 1996.

There are no regular transit riders on the Board. Coalition member Joseph M. Clift asked the Board members at their August meeting how many of them had arrived on transit. Nobody raised their hands. This writer asked the same question 10 years ago, with the same result. This writer has remarked repeatedly that having no regular transit riders, and especially no persons who depend on transit, on a

transit board makes as much sense as having a highway board with no motorists on it.

The Coalition is continuing its efforts to campaign for reform, including at the New Jersey legislature. That campaign includes a call for more independence for NJT from direct control by the governor, and for genuine rider-representatives on the board. They would be chosen by a non-political process, and at least some would be transit-dependent. The current bills before the legislature only call for an expanded board, with the new members chosen by legislative leaders. That would give Democrats, who have controlled both houses for many years, a number of patronage appointments even when the governor is a Republican. There would still be no non-political members or a requirement that any board members depend on transit, so the Lackawanna Coalition opposes the current bills.

So the riders continue to suffer, and there is no end in sight. At this writing, NJT has announced that the trains between Philadelphia and Atlantic City will be suspended, beginning after Labor Day. Rail riders will be forced to take a local bus and a PATCO (Port Authority Transit Corp.) subway-style train into Philadelphia; the current express bus between the two endpoints will require a higher fare. Mid-day and evening trains on the Raritan Valley Line that go to New York will be cut back to Newark, as they were until 2014. NJT has announced that these service eliminations are temporary but has not announced a date when the trains will be restored, and some advocates fear that they will never come back. The suspensions will last for four or five months, at least.

Since both of those services were initiated because advocates fought for them, their “suspension” may be permanent. NJT may also have violated statute that requires a round of hearings before a service can be eliminated, since the provision in question does not distinguish between permanent and temporary elimination of a service.

(Continued on page 9)

CANADA REPORT FALL 2018

By Ken Westcar

Hudson's Bay Railway

A glimmer of hope that a First Nations group with Canadian private capital support would take over OmniTRAX's responsibilities for the line was dashed earlier this year when a deal could not be reached. Meanwhile the federal government remains at an impasse with OmniTRAX over who will foot the bill for the repairs to the line.

Residents of the Arctic port town of Churchill who have historically relied on the line to provide employment, reasonable consumable goods pricing and a steady stream of tourists, courtesy of VIA Rail, have all but given up hope. Unless there's a prompt resolution, the town will continue to lose population and its iconic polar bear population will have fewer paying voyeurs.

Had this been a road, rather than a rail line, it would have been lavishly repaired by now with politicians crowding themselves out seeking photo-ops and self-aggrandisement. The fact that the rail line substitutes for a road is lost on them as is the social and economic cost of an abandoned, strategic community on Arctic tidewater.

It's difficult to see who will win in a court battle between the Canadian federal government and OmniTRAX. Of course, the best outcome would be a compromise, but it would need a very brave judge to impose one. Canada needs to put the welfare of people and its Arctic resource interests above a relatively petty squabble like this. But, their priorities seem elsewhere.

Ontario high-speed rail

The future of the high-speed rail (HSR) project between Toronto, London, and eventually Windsor, appears to have lost some momentum under the recently elected Progressive Conservative provincial government. The new transport minister is unlikely to look at the file until late September and is then expected to announce whether the single focus environmental assessment will proceed, be expanded to include other options or cancelled outright.

Advocacy group InterCityRail recently published the results of a Freedom of Information request on their website and it's available under the "Freedom of Information" tab at www.intercityrail.org. The provincial Ministry of Transportation was very cooperative on providing the requested documentation and it was only redacted on matters of privacy.

To say that the rationale behind the HSR is below investment-grade is a gross understatement. It points very much to the fact that the previous Liberal provincial government's promotion of the project was based on political optics rather than sound economic and social benefits. In fact, the documents received by InterCityRail from ministry sources indicated little understanding of HSR within the bureaucracy and incomplete or misleading information provided by external counsel.

Of course, it has not stopped municipal politicians in Kitchener, London and Windsor touting HSR as an economic and social game-changer. This is based on an underappreciation of the hard facts on

financial and collateral cost, disruption, consumer demand and the small problem of lack of capacity at Toronto's Union Station.

Once the provincial Transportation Minister has made the decision on the future of the current HSR environmental assessment, several advocacy groups and municipalities in southwestern Ontario will be pushing hard for a very different passenger rail operating model. This includes both improved VIA Rail long-distance services between Toronto and Windsor and a nippy regional service from Sarnia through London to Kitchener that will offer cross-platform, synchronised connections with Metrolinx GO train, all-day/two-way express services between Kitchener and Toronto, expected in 2023-2025.

"Northlander" reinstatement?

The Progressive Conservative election platform included reinstatement of this Toronto to Cochrane passenger rail service, cancelled under the previous Liberal government in 2012. This will be challenging as it will require a completely new rolling-stock fleet and difficult negotiations with Canadian National on track access south of North Bay.

Ontario Northland, a provincial crown corporation, increased its highway bus fleet after losing the "Northlander" to political myopia. But highway traffic congestion in the Toronto area, vagaries of Canadian winters and looming driver shortages have shown that even fairly luxurious buses are not the best solution for price-sensitive, gruelling, long-distance travel.

Ken Westcar is co-coordinator of InterCityRail.

LACKAWANNA COALITION FIGHTS FOR NJ TRANSIT RIDERS

(Continued from page 8)

At a legislative hearing on August 16, this writer called for structural reform at NJT, blaming politics for an agency that does not respond well to the needs of its riders. Democrats in the legislature complained bitterly when Republican Chris Christie was governor. Now that Democrat Phil Murphy has succeeded him, it is the Republicans who are complaining about the same issues. This writer and others called for varying degrees of reform at the hearing, but the

bills currently before the legislature contain only minor changes that would make essentially no difference for the riders.

The service on NJT has never been worse, and especially, it has never been less-reliable. Commuters are delayed on the way to and from their offices. "Off-peak" riders must deal with long gaps between trains. To make matters worse, major projects to repair highways leading to the Lincoln Tunnel, which many buses use to get to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City,

have just begun and will last for 2½ years. NJT says that riders on 18 bus lines will experience severe traffic delays for that period.

So, whether they ride a bus to New York or a train anywhere in New Jersey, the Garden State's transit riders can't win. The Lackawanna Coalition and other advocates are doing the best they can, but nothing is easy in the rough-and-tumble world of New Jersey politics.

David Peter Alan is Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, based in Millburn, NJ.

AN AMTRAK TRIP REPORT AND A CALL FOR “NO CONFIDENCE” IN AMTRAK MANAGEMENT

(Continued from page 2)

It appears that Amtrak believes that its customers lack the knowledge of transportation operations or the mental capacity to deserve any opportunity to present suggestions to managers that would improve conditions for customers and save money for Amtrak at the same time. The opposite is true—even if the suggestions were worthless, Amtrak's willingness to listen would at the very least be good customer relations. In contrast, it appears that Amtrak management is either incompetent, contemptuous of its revenue customers, or reckless in its disregard for carrying out its contract with its customers to transport them to their destinations on the advertised schedule (or at least on the advertised day). Although circumstances beyond Amtrak's control sometimes prevent Amtrak from delivering its services, the difficulties that I suffered on this summer's itinerary were all within Amtrak's control, and Amtrak could have prevented them by the simple expedient of chartering a bus in Chicago or a few buses in northern California or southern Oregon. In the case of Chicago, Amtrak did charter a bus, but refused to use it in a manner that would have resulted in the most benefit for its customers.

Some of Amtrak's new stated policies also produce unfavorable results for its customers. Later in the month, on Wednesday, July 18, this writer took Train #63 from New York's Grand Central Terminal (which all Empire Service trains used until 1991) to Rochester, with plans to stop over and continue to Chicago on Train #449 from Boston. That train was due to leave Rochester at 11:09 pm, but broke down near Springfield, Massachusetts. After a less-than-comfortable night in the Rochester station without Amtrak providing any food or drink, the train finally left at 4:57 the next morning. It did not arrive in Chicago until after 5:00 on Tuesday afternoon, so anyone booked on a western train missed their connection.

There was just enough time for this writer to board Train #50 for Cincinnati, where there is no longer a station agent. The temporary downturn in ridership at that station, due to renovations to the Union Terminal building,

have forced Amtrak into a different location. This was enough of an excuse for Amtrak to eliminate the agent, claiming diminished ridership. As a result, there is now only a caretaker there, and that person goes off duty at 4:00 in the morning. The area near the station is considered dangerous, and there is no way to get anywhere else in town safely, without paying a taxi fare. In short, Amtrak abandons its customers in a dangerous neighborhood in the middle of the night, with no safe place to wait until buses start running two or three hours later. This writer survived the experience and took several buses to get to Roanoke, VA, to ride the mileage between Roanoke and Lynchburg for the first time in 48 years.

Overall, the current Amtrak situation is absolutely intolerable. Amtrak must change its policies without delay to ensure a best effort to get passengers to their destinations, and passengers must be allowed to make suggestions to managers with line authority. If incumbent management endorses these anti-customer policies now in effect, they should be required to change those policies, or be terminated from their jobs. Amtrak's very survival is at stake, and there is no room for managers or policies that fail to deliver the transportation that its customers have purchased.

It has become clear to this writer and other advocates that it is impossible for Amtrak to improve under its current top leadership. Amtrak had gotten steadily worse under Joseph Boardman's leadership, but it has hit unprecedented lows since Richard Anderson took charge. Executive Vice-President Stephen Gardner has not helped efforts to keep the network intact or to make life better for Amtrak's customers, either.

Now, Anderson plans to split the *Southwest Chief* and replace the middle of it with a bus route. The Senate has almost unanimously passed a resolution that expressed its objection to the plan, but Amtrak is standing firm in its desire to implement it. Essentially all advocates know that such a change would kill the route within a short time, and some see this as the test case that would allow Anderson, Gardner and other Amtrak brass to eliminate the

entire long-distance network, one train at a time. That would leave the state-supported corridors and trains, as well as the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and its branches as isolated short passenger railroads. It would then be easy for surviving Amtrak management to give the state-supported trains directly to the states, to run or discontinue as they see fit. J.P. Morgan Bank is promoting a plan for a privately-financed infrastructure management organization (IMO), which would take over the NEC and certain other Amtrak assets. If that deal goes through, there would be no more role for Amtrak, and it could die before reaching its 50th birthday.

Therefore, this writer is calling for advocates around the nation to vote “no confidence” in Amtrak management as personified by Richard Anderson and Stephen Gardner. They could then send a signal to Washington that current Amtrak policies and plans are absolutely unacceptable. Unfortunately, we cannot expect Congress and the Trump administration to listen, unless there is a groundswell of reaction from the riding public, and the public at large, stating clearly and without compromise that we all want our trains.

It is unfortunate that, more than 47 years after Amtrak was founded, our passenger train network remains tiny, and Amtrak has done little to expand it; often the contrary. This country should have a robust passenger train network, as RUN and other advocacy groups have been promoting for decades. Still, that cannot happen unless we pull together to save the few trains we have. Once they are gone, they almost assuredly will never come back. Only if we save them can we someday expand our passenger rail network. We need to save our trains now, whether Amtrak management likes it or not.

David Peter Alan has ridden the entire Amtrak network and rides an average of 25,000 to 30,000 miles per year on Amtrak. He is a member of the RUN Board of Directors and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, a New Jersey advocacy organization. He lives and practices law in South Orange, NJ. The opinions expressed are those of the author, and do not necessarily represent those of RUN or of any other organization.

AMTRAK LOSES SIGHT OF SERVICE MANDATE, REMAINS LARGELY INVISIBLE TO PUBLIC

By Phil Strebby

This started as a response to the issues of the day. Those issues were: cuts to manned stations, cuts to on-board service staff, threatened route abandonment, and the overlying issue of what appears to be an openly hostile attitude toward long distance service. These are my thoughts, and I provide no factual basis for backup.

Amtrak seemingly fails to understand that customer service is most of what they have to offer. Yes, Amtrak is in the transportation business, and, contrary to public opinion, they do transport a lot of people. The transportation side is time consuming and somewhat expensive when compared to the free highways and fast airlines. Service is what draws many travelers to the rails. Cutting those employees providing that service also cuts into the draw of passenger rail. (As an aside, keep in mind that every Amtrak employee cut is one less person paying into the Railroad Retirement system. Salaries, taxes, medical benefits, etc constitutes a savings for Amtrak, but also means one or more fewer employed people living and spending in a community.)

Some of those services might be deemed essential, especially if one is infirm, elderly or an underage minor traveling alone, needing assistance with baggage or tickets or information or direction. A ticket agent is more than a ticket salesman and may change hats often with the same customer.

On board the train, the same is true. Porters, waiters, chefs, and stewards (why is only the chef's title unchanged?) each provide specific services as well as services not specific to their crafts, as do conductors, trainmen, and baggage men (more titles replaced with more generic names lending them more easily eliminated.). Amtrak, in its efforts to streamline titles and services, has nearly streamlined itself out of its own

title, namely a service industry. It is also very nearly invisible, which leads me to my next point.

Amtrak has two major deficiencies:

- 1) Severe lack of equipment which limits the ability to add space to existing trains, and, consequently, the ability to add trains to existing routes let alone add new routes; and
- 2) LACK OF ADVERTISING! Too many people don't even know of the existence of passenger rail, and so don't look to it as a travel option.

Many in our community of rail passenger advocates dream of the day when all trains are daily trains; more, when every route has multiple frequencies each day; and even more, when the national system is about four times its current size with trains traveling at higher speeds truly connecting communities, states, regions, and the entire country. It once was this way, and on other continents it still is or is coming back. We need to shift our focus on which mode or modes of public transportation can most effectively supplement or complement the private auto or air travel.

A passenger train may not be the best solution, but needs to be given a fair trial before being ruled out. The Rail Passenger Association's suggested route map (found on the RPA website) is a good start.

For now, we need to understand that Amtrak hasn't added to or replaced their equipment in years, so making routes daily or adding new routes is not a viable option for the next few years. Even with this year's appropriation, the time needed to produce new equipment is the limiting factor. If Amtrak were to replace everything they had for the current long-distance (LD) operation, I estimate it would take 312 cars based on a six-car train or 520 cars for 10-car trains. Note I did not specify the type of cars on each train. Factoring in regional or short-haul trains, I conservatively estimate nearly

800 cars would be needed system-wide. For comparison, the Japanese operate over 10,000 cars in a country about the size of California.

Amtrak is very nearly invisible outside of the Northeast Corridor. Trains operating to and from Chicago, the current Midwest hub, pass in the early morning or late evening as they travel to or from the Eastern cities, and since there are only one per day per route, they are barely noticed if at all. When coupled with the severe loss of railway routes in the East and Midwest which further limit the public's exposure to trains of any type, Amtrak isn't even a thought for most.

The following ideas supplemented with your own could improve this situation, and make passenger rail a consideration for travel. I believe our organizations, local, state, and national, should be clamoring for:

- 1) funding equal to or exceeding what we got this year.
- 2) demanding stepped-up manufacture of new long-distance equipment a la Heritage with coach space separated from outside doors and spotlights overhead.
- 3) slumber-coach style sleepers to augment redesigned (can you say 10-6) sleepers for true comfort.
- 4) proper staffing with, perhaps, on-board crew changes en-route to prevent employee burnout.
- 5) State DOT (perhaps federally funded) emplaced signage along major highways to mark locations of stations (Large brown or blue signs similar to national parks signs. After all, this is a federal rail passenger program!)
- 6) We have the materials to point out the true cost of passenger rail when compared to other programs. We should also be pointing out the true monetary benefits associated with the SERVICE provided by the train other than ticket revenue.

(Continued on page 16)

VIEW FROM CASCADIA; TWO GOOD BOOKS

By Lloyd H. Flem

While rail advocates on the Northwest Corridor are generally concerned about some of the decisions made by Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson (the cancelling of the Marine Corps Reserve's Toys for Tots trains seems almost designed to alienate allies and the general public), the impacts of the Dec. 18, 2017 derailment SW of Tacoma continue to have a greater impact on those who provide and operate our Amtrak Cascades trains than the sometimes inexplicable policies of the Anderson Amtrak administration.

Securing a replacement train for that destroyed on Dec. 18, completing the coordination of PTC among the several entities involved, ironing out legal and administrative details all must occur before the two new Seattle-Portland round trips (that were to have started on December 18) on the new, efficient but less scenic inland route between Olympia and Tacoma can be reinstated. WSDOT's Rail Division hesitates to announce a specific start date. May not be until 2019.

While All Aboard Washington continues to advocate for the proven incremental approach to more and faster intercity rail service, headlines are made by the dream of ultra-high-speed rail put forth by WA Governor Jay Inslee, Microsoft's Bill Gates and friends, and political forces in British Columbia, which are adding some dollars to a study of 250 MPH+ trains between Seattle and Vancouver BC.

After drops in ridership in the two months following December 18, numbers of passengers picked up and several months exceeded the same months in 2017. Passenger satisfaction on Amtrak Cascades trains remains high, the exception being concerns with still shaky on-time performances, particularly on trains which originate in British Columbia or south of Portland.

While the trauma of Dec. 18, where two close friends who were also officers

of All Aboard Washington were among the three fatalities, the passenger rail community in Cascadia is moving forward. Please send some best wishes our way in our collective recovery.

While neither of the books here reviewed are new, the information and insights given are still quite valid when considering the government policies that have brought us to a situation where intercity passenger rail remains a poor stepchild compared to road and air, uniquely so in the US (and Canada) in contrast to the rest of the industrialized world.

Full disclosure: Since I was interviewed by both authors, I'll concede to a bit of bias in their behalf.

The first is *Getting There: The Epic Struggle Between Road and Rail in the American Century*. Though published in 1994, this very readable history of transportation policy in most of the 20th century is as vital now as 24 years ago. We are still adversely impacted by the biases in behalf of private motor vehicles and the publicly-funded infrastructure that supports them. Plus the negative policies that damaged freight railroads and nearly eliminated passenger train service by the 1970s.

Reviews of *Getting There* are very positive. It reads like a good novel while sources are many with a comprehensive index which yields academic legitimacy.

Intercity passenger trains, almost entirely owned and operated by private companies, were virtually the only mode of intercity transportation of commercial value in 1900. (OK, some inland waterways.) The movement of freight as well as passengers became the lifeblood of the North American economy. Often the railroad companies then took such advantage of their customers that a general public sought policies at all levels of government to tax and regulate

railroads while subsidizing highway and, later, air modes. These government policies sought to control, even punish railroads and robber baron owners of what were the US' first "big businesses".

From the vantage point of the 21st Century, one can understand the sentiment against some railroads through much of the 20th Century. But the impacts of the taxes, regulations, "punishments" of Big Rail, which have extended in time far beyond the robber baron era, are in 1994 and today truly detrimental to the people, economy, and physical environment of our country. In essence the US (and Canada as well) are still paying for the sins of the rail bosses a century ago and should not be, as the dominance of private motor vehicles, car and trucks is but one negative result. The author pleads for policies which would allow passenger rail assume a more rightful place in the intercity movement of people.

Getting There is authored by Stephen B. Goddard. Publisher is Basic Books, a division of Harper-Collins, 10 E. 53rd St., New York 10022-5299.

Waiting on a Train: The Embattled Future of Passenger Rail Service. The author spent the better part of 2006 riding Amtrak trains all over the USA. This book also has an easy and fascinating story line consisting of very perceptive and salient comments on the trains taken. On one level *Waiting on a Train* is an enjoyable travelogue, where public policies are implied. But following all those Amtrak train trips, the author makes some recommendations that are sometimes explicit. The most explicit was the epilogue's final paragraph:

"America is a Third-World county when it comes to passenger railroads. I know this: If the country wants a robust well-functioning (passenger) train system, it will have to pay for it. There is no way around that."

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UPDATE ON VERMONT RAIL



By **Larry Lewack**

Vermont Rail Systems/Green Mountain Railways has done quite well with the first season of its weekend dinner excursion trains running thru the beginning of September. The trains offer elegant meals served round-trip aboard a Burlington to Middlebury train. \$85-110 per person, depending on the desire for a private lounge car or not--very good food all cooked on board to order and served to tables. For foliage season, this service moves to Chester in southern Vermont and will operate to "Summit", the high point on the old Rutland RR Rutland-Bellows Falls (Boston) route. For more info, see: <https://trainridesvt.com/>

We are awaiting response to VTrans' CRISSI FRA grant application for rock-slide mitigation work, which would remove some permanent NECR slow orders in effect on the Vermonter route since the October 2015 derailment near Roxbury. This is a ledge stabilization project, with installation of rockslide restraints and remote sensing devices. NECR would provide the non-federal match at about half the total project cost.

Work is continuing this summer on VTrans Middlebury Rail Tunnel project. Once completed in 2020, this tunnel will allow VTRS to run double-stack freight along the Western Corridor (north/south line that parallels US Hwy 7), and permit the extension of Amtrak's Ethan Allen Express north to Burlington. (Train stations also need to be built or upgraded in Middlebury & Vergennes as well for this extension.) For a close-up look at the rail tunnel project, see: <http://vtrans.vermont.gov/projects/middlebury>

Progress also continues on the planned extension of the Vermonter north to Montreal. The Canadian Parliament recently approved allowing US Customs & Border Patrol to set up a pre-clearance facility in Montreal's Central Station, eliminating the need for lengthy stops at the US/Canada border to clear every passenger individually. Both Amtrak trains are 'on track' to begin serving these extended runs in 2021. We are also waiting on Amtrak's Safety Management Study (SMS) report on what they will recommend to satisfy their non-PTC concerns in dark (unsignaled) territory north of White River Jct., VT. Congress

appropriated \$50 million in their FY 2018 minibuss spending bill specifically to help with installing safety upgrades in rural areas, some of which could be available to fund projects in Vermont. But absent the SMS study, we don't know what Amtrak wants us to do. Federal RFPs for this program have not yet been announced.

On Aug. 1, the city of Montpelier applied for a \$250,000 grant to study launching a light rail service in central Vermont. The grant application is a partnership with the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission to "identify opportunities and obstacles" for a passenger rail corridor on the existing Washington County Rail (WACR) line, a short freight line linking Barre City, Berlin and Montpelier in central Vermont. Note: All Earth Rail purchased a set of vintage DMU cars from the Dallas-Forth Worth, TX light rail system in 2017, and is exploring the idea of using this equipment in a regional/commuter rail service in northern Vermont. See: www.allearthrail.com/about

The Vermont Rail Action Network is launching its first-ever membership campaign this summer. We invite rail enthusiasts & advocates from around the US to show their support for our rail advocacy and promotion efforts by joining us (or making a contribution) at our website, www.railvermont.org. Members get discounted tickets for VRAN's gala Annual Dinner (to be held Nov. 8 in Montpelier), an 'I'd rather be on the Train' bumper sticker, and qualify for travel discounts, if you add RPA membership at a members-only discount. Please join us & help spread the word!

Larry Lewack is Executive Director, Vermont Rail Action Network.

VIEW FROM CASCADIA; TWO GOOD BOOKS

(Continued from page 12)

Ironically, the book celebrates Amtrak's National Network (NN - long distance) as well as regional and corridor trains. Ironical, just following the US Senate's granting more money for Amtrak than ever before, Amtrak top management is instituting policies and making decisions bound to alienate long-time allies and, it appears, beginning the process of ending support for the NN trains.

Of great interest to me is that I know quite a number of those interviewed in preparation to the writing of this book. And, exhibiting a bit of Pacific Northwest regional pride. I was pleased that the Amtrak *Cascades* were seen as among the best in the Amtrak system. The author was a relatively good sport about the equipment and operational shortcomings that plagued some of his trips. He even made some relative

hardships and negative experiences valuable..

Waiting on a Train is written by James McCommons. Publisher is Chelsea Green publishing, White River Junction, VT. 802-295-6300. {Chelseagreen.com}.

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

A SURVEY OF LONG-DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.

Part Three: Existing (Continued)



By Dana Gabbard

To keep this survey at a manageable length, it is being divided into multiple parts. This part deals with existing state-supported passenger train services in Southern California and profiles Los Angeles Union Station. Part four in the Winter issue will cover long-distance routes there, with subsequent installments to cover proposals, efforts to revive discontinued Amtrak routes and projects under construction in the West.

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

Los Angeles Union Station

Union Station opened in 1939. It is served by four Amtrak lines (*Coast Starlight*, *Pacific Surfliner*, *Southwest Chief* and *Sunset Limited*) and is a multimodal hub served by heavy rail (Red/Purple line), light rail (Gold line), commuter rail (Metrolink), municipal buses, Bolt Bus, Mega Bus and FlyAway bus service to LAX.

It is the fifth busiest Amtrak Station in the United States and the busiest on the West Coast with 1,716,392 boardings/alightings (per Amtrak Fact Sheet, Fiscal Year 2017, State of California posted on the Amtrak website). In 2011, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) purchased Union Station. Just before Metro purchased it, a Starbucks, Subway Sandwich and convenience store had opened in the station, expanding meal and snack options.

Additional options oriented toward people on the go more recently setting up shop include Café Crepe, Oto Oto Express, Barista Society, Ben & Jerry's, Green Bowl 2 Go, Trimana mini market and T & Y bakery. And there is great anticipation at the impending debut (after extensive restoration) of a gastropub in the space occupied by the historic long shuttered Fred Harvey Restaurant, from local trendy restaurateurs Cedd Moses and Eric Needleman. Also Metro has authorized nearly \$8 million for the renovation of existing public restroom facilities and for building brand new restrooms.

Another improvement for the benefit of Amtrak passengers came in 2013 with the opening of a Metropolitan Lounge for sleeping car passengers, Pacific Surfliner business class passengers with same-day tickets and Amtrak Guest Rewards members (Select Plus and Select Executive levels).

I spoke with Ken Pratt, Deputy Executive Officer for Real Estate at Metro who handles property management for Union Station and he enthusiastically spoke of further plans that may even involve the historic ticketing hall. And outlined the investment made by Metro since purchasing the station to bring the complex up to a state of good repair, installing modern air conditioning, etc. Metro is undertaking other initiatives to upgrade Union Station. Chief among these is Link Union Station (Link US), designed to meet long-term regional rail needs by allowing the station to function more efficiently and providing a better overall passenger experience.

Link US is made up of several key components, including:

- New run-through tracks over the US-101 freeway to provide one-seat rides to major destinations in Southern California and improve train capacity by 63%
- Reconfiguration of the "throat" (station entry tracks) and "rail yard" (station arrival and boarding area)
- A new passenger concourse with retail, food services, passenger waiting areas, and other amenities
- Accommodation of future transportation options, including the West Santa Ana Branch Light Rail Transit Corridor project and California High-Speed Rail (HSR)

The project is undergoing environmental clearance, with a Record of Decision (ROD)/Environmental Impact Report (EIR) Certification anticipated by the fourth

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A SURVEY OF LONG-DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.

Part Three: Existing (Continued)

(Continued from page 14)

quarter of 2018. Project partners include the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the California High-Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA), the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA, also known as Metrolink), Amtrak, Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor Agency, Caltrans, and the City of Los Angeles.

The source of funding for the final design and construction phase has not been determined or secured. The project website is www.metro.net/projects/link-us/

Website for the facility is www.unionstationla.com/

Other West Coast stations that have had significant upgrades in the new millennium include Seattle King Station (restored to its original splendor) and Sacramento (now served by light rail and recently renovated).

Pacific Surfliner

During the era of private passenger rail service, the Santa Fe railroad operated its *San Diegan* between Los Angeles and San Diego. When Amtrak began operations on May 1, 1971, it continued the service, initially via two daily round-trips with additional service between L.A. and San Diego offered by the train now known as the *Coast Starlight*. In April 1972, the *Coast Starlight* was truncated at Los Angeles and a third *San Diegan* round-trip begun. Over the years, the number of round-trips increased. In 1988, the service was extended north to Santa Barbara and then in 1995 to San Luis Obispo. The name was changed to *Pacific Surfliner* in 2000 to reflect its expansion beyond just serving the Los Angeles-San Diego corridor.

Currently, 12 round-trips operate daily between Los Angeles and San Diego, five continue to Santa Barbara and two further on to San Luis Obispo. It is the second highest ridership Amtrak service with 2,990,000 riders (all ridership figures are for FY 2017, taken from the Monthly Performance Report for Sept. 2017 (Preliminary and Unaudited) dated Dec. 27, 2017 posted on the Amtrak website). The full route (San Diego to San Luis Obispo) is 351 miles long. It serves 29 stations. Besides Los Angeles, San Diego, Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo, major stops include Solana Beach (Del Mar racetrack), San Juan Capistrano, Irvine and Anaheim. The most recent enhancement of service was adding the 12th daily round-trip between Los Angeles and San Diego in Nov. 2016, the first service increase in more than a decade.

In 2015, the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor Agency assumed management of the Pacific Surfliner. It contracts with the Orange County Transportation Authority to provide day-to-day management of the service.

On Jan. 8 and 9, 2018, torrential rains caused mudslides blocking US-101 south of Santa Barbara and the tracks used by Amtrak services (the *Surfliner* and *Coast Starlight*). While the tracks were able to be cleared by Jan. 11, the freeway was closed until Jan. 21. In the interim, Amtrak services had heavy ridership with crowded conditions and in some cases people left on platforms unable to board. As I explained in my article “Rail Commuting Between Ventura County and Santa Barbara an Impending Reality Thanks to Stalwart Activists and Officials” in the Spring 2016 issue, US-101 is the only road directly linking the Santa Barbara area with Southern California. With it closed, the automobile option involved a long roundabout trip taking four hours each way. Understandably, the faster access the *Surfliner* provided was a much more appealing option to many.

To accommodate the increased demand, the California State Transportation Agency requested Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority (CCJPA) which manages The Capitol Corridor, temporarily transfer some equipment from the Northern California Fleet. This consisted of eight railcars and three locomotives, which added about 2,000 seats to the five daily round-trips serving Santa Barbara. In response to the resulting crowding of Capitol Corridor service, David B. Kutrosky, CCJPA Managing Director in a statement to passengers apologized for the inconvenience, then noted “... the CCJPA and our service partners in Northern California did not hesitate to authorize this humanitarian assistance. We are confident that each and every Capitol Corridor passenger would agree with our decision. It is in times like this when communities must come together and help each other out. I am proud that the CCJPA is able to put our mission into action and help bridge the transportation need in Southern California during this challenging time.”

Other measures taken included the *Coast Starlight* making stops at all *Surfliner* stations between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara and an additional round-trip between those points added the weekend of Jan. 20-21 just before US 101 re-opened.

As of Oct. 9, 2017, the *Surfliner* discontinued serving the Carlsbad Poinsettia and Encinitas stations of the Coaster commuter service in Northern San Diego county. On the same day, the number of *Surfliners* stopping at Old Towne San Diego was increased.

Re-timing *Surfliner* service to accommodate commuting between Ventura County and Santa Barbara that was the subject of the aforementioned 2016 article began in April, with trains arriving in Santa Barbara at 6:45 a.m. (Train 759) and departing at 4:40 p.m. (Train 792). A LOSSAN Agency Spokesperson informs me, “Through July 2018, Train 759 (the retired [morning] train) is averaging about 130 boardings per day.”

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A SURVEY OF LONG-DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.

(Continued from page 15)

After extensive public outreach, an updated fare structure went into effect on March 1.

At Van Nuys station, work is underway on a new center platform, including a pedestrian underpass tunnel to access it. Heretofore the station has had only a single platform on the south side of the tracks. The new center platform will also have new metal canopies and a mini high ramp to service passengers. It is anticipated to be ready in about a year.

On Feb. 5, a new bridge over the San Diego River opened. The old rail bridge, in use for decades, will be demolished to make way for a parallel bridge that will complete the double-tracking over the San Diego River. Once the parallel bridge is constructed and operational, the result will be a continuous seven-mile double track segment from Garnet Avenue/Balboa Avenue to the Santa Fe Depot. This is part of a corridor improvement program by the San Diego Association of Governments known as

Keep San Diego Moving, whose website is KeepSanDiegoMoving.com. There is also underway a study identifying and evaluating potential locations for a new maintenance and layover facility in San Diego.

Grover Beach (south of San Luis Obispo) has secured \$3 million for renovations/improvements for its station including 42 additional parking spaces and the relocation of the bus stop to be more convenient to the depot.

One corridor improvement that is in limbo is the Van Nuys-Chatsworth Double Tracking project (officially known as Raymond/Bernson) in the San Fernando Valley northwest of downtown Los Angeles. The process to plan the project ground to a halt in 2015 as NIMBYs in a residential area along a 1.5-mile segment of the project reacted with hysteria. Their website [nodoubletrack.com] currently raises the specter of oil train derailments and extols monorail. Sadly, several local politicians have pandered to this uninformed response. The environmental clearance process is to restart next year per remarks by Richard Clarke of Metro

at the 2018 California Passenger Rail Summit, with an imperative to go forward driven by grant deadlines.

LOSSAN hopes in Fiscal Year 2018-19 to implement a 13th round-trip between Los Angeles and San Diego, extending North to Santa Barbara (sixth roundtrip) and San Luis Obispo (third roundtrip). To alleviate overcrowding in the interim the Spokesperson tells me they, "... have received six additional leased Superliner cars from Amtrak which will be refurbished and placed into service in the *Pacific Surfliner* in the coming months." These will facilitate longer consists. Also, the likely deployment to the Northern California state-supported routes of the new single level passenger railcars currently being manufactured by Siemens in Sacramento, which I referred to in previous installments, would free up bi-level equipment for the *Surfliner* in the coming year or so.

The website for the service is www.pacificsurfliner.com

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

AMTRAK LOSES SIGHT OF SERVICE MANDATE

(Continued from page 11)

7) and, speaking of revenue, why are the trains NOT carrying mail and express? My sources say that was a huge revenue producer. I would suggest that Amtrak contract with the freight railroads to recapture that LCL (less than carload) business that the freights don't want to bother with but would be willing to accommodate if the price was right! Freight equipment currently in storage and re-equipped with higher speed trucks (wheels, etc for you non -railroaders) could service that niche and provide a reason for freight roads to give priority to Amtrak while providing profit to both.

8) Putting mail and express, both traditionally assigned to fast and frequent passenger trains, would pay for the on-board and station job assignments. More jobs, better service. We may not be able to sway Amtrak policy, but also should not be the only ones coming up with ideas for growth.

We don't set policy for Amtrak, but Congress still wants to reduce the subsidy. We need to keep hammering the nail of investment as a means to reduce that subsidy by investing in the growth, health, and success of passenger rail. Congress could assist in this by using the threat of re-regulating rail to provide for that joint venture of fast scheduled trains to haul

priority shipments of freight! Amtrak needs proper and steady funding to accomplish its mission, and current management needs understand that mission which is peculiar to passenger rail. Current perception is that they do not, and perception is reality.

One really has to want to ride a train to put up with the nonsense that has become the bastard step-child of the US transportation industry. I believe the heyday of Amtrak came and went with Graham Claytor who took pride in and fought for his product, and we need to get it back.

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

EXPANDING PASSENGER RAIL IN MICHIGAN

(Reprinted from Passenger Train Journal, Vol. 22, No. 3 (2018-3), issue 276)

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

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

Over the past decade, rail advocates have been actively promoting the expansion of passenger rail service in Michigan. They are optimistic about the role that passenger rail can play in the state's future: there have been many improvements and more are on the horizon. A major track rehabilitation program has been completed and within the next 12-18 months Amtrak will have new, more fuel efficient Charger locomotives pulling the coaches.

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) sponsors three intercity passenger routes serving twenty-two communities with Amtrak operating the service. The current service provides three daily roundtrips from Chicago to Detroit and Pontiac, Michigan; one roundtrip between Chicago and Port Huron, and one roundtrip from Chicago to Grand Rapids.

An important part of Michigan's passenger rail services is the improvement of the federally designated high-speed rail corridor between Chicago, Detroit and Pontiac. Governors in Wisconsin, Ohio and Florida sent back hundreds of millions of dollars in stimulus funding but Michigan's Republican Governor Rick Snyder viewed higher speed rail as a wise investment. Enhancements completed on the Amtrak-owned section between Porter, Indiana and Kalamazoo have enabled speeds of up to 110 mph. MDOT's current focus is on the segment of track between Kalamazoo and Dearborn.

The state invested nearly \$400 million in federal grant dollars to purchase the 135 mile corridor from Norfolk Southern in

2012. Adjustments have been made to the 2019 schedule to reflect faster running times east of Kalamazoo on the improved right-of-way, but the 110 mph system "is waiting for an interoperability component to be added and tested with the new Charger engines on the trackage between Kalamazoo and Dearborn."

The Michigan Environmental Council (MEC) and the Michigan Association of Rail Passengers (MARP) have played a key role co-founding Michigan by Rail – an informal coalition of advocates who work together to improve and expand passenger rail in the state. It was originally involved in hosting public meetings across the state to collect feedback for MDOT's first state rail plan completed in 2011. Current members include the original founders, Friends of Wally, Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, and the Michigan High Speed Rail Association. The group is working to build support for multiple rail expansion projects in the state.

The North-South Commuter Rail project (formerly known as Wally) was first proposed in 2006. The initial plan was to establish a 27-mile commuter rail service on existing state-owned tracks leased to the Great Lakes Central RR. The project received a great deal of support from MDOT, communities along the right of way, corridor property owners, the University of Michigan, the Ann Arbor Downtown Alliance and other municipal agencies and the State's Environmental Protection Agency.

The Ann Arbor Transportation Authority (AATA) agreed to become the designated authority to accept federal grant money that might become available. A portion of passenger rail fares were to be covered for three years, and \$250,000 was pledged each year for a three year period to cover operating expenses.

A feasibility study completed by R.L. Banks & Associates in 2008 concluded that the proposed service was feasible and

estimated capital startup costs at \$32.4 million. Initial ridership was projected at 1,600 daily riders.

Between 2009 - 2011, MDOT invested in track improvements, making higher train speeds possible and new sidings were built, potentially available for train storage. The agency also rehabilitated 24 former METRA rail coaches which could be used for the Wally service or the proposed Ann Arbor to Detroit commuter rail service. MDOT and the AATA also updated the initial cost estimates and a more detailed Downtown Ann Arbor N-S Rail Station Study was completed in 2014.

A change in ownership of the Ann Arbor Railroad helped stimulate renewed interest in the project. Watco purchased the line in 2013 and expressed a willingness to consider passenger service on its rail line through the city. AATA officials have since received a \$650,000 federal grant and a 20% match was collected from local contributors to conduct a second feasibility study. The study initiated in 2015 included major public involvement spanning both Washtenaw and Livingston counties. It analyzed capital and operating costs for two different types of service. A two train shuttle service from Ann Arbor to Whitmore Lake would cost \$7 million a year, plus \$65.2 million in capital improvements. Projected ridership was set at 1,670 daily riders.

A more elaborate option would utilize the existing rail line with stops in Howell, Genoa Township, Hamburg Township, Whitmore Lake and up to three stops in Ann Arbor. It would cost an estimated \$13.2 million a year to operate plus \$122.3 million in capital improvements, and would attract 1,840 daily riders. The study estimated that up to 50% of the construction cost could qualify for federal funding and the rest could be covered through a new property tax of 0.34 mills to 0.84 mills. These new findings produced sticker shock and generated doubts about whether the commuter rail line would ever be built, but Wally supporters haven't given up.

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EXPANDING PASSENGER RAIL IN MICHIGAN

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Currently, they are helping the Livingston County Transportation Coalition build public support to create a countywide transportation authority to lead the development and implementation of a "Comprehensive Transportation Plan for the County." The essential elements would include commuter rail service to Ann Arbor, bus service at both ends, and expanded paratransit service. The County Commissioners have approved a \$150,000 contract with AECOM Great Lakes Inc. to examine current public transit options in the county and to determine whether additional fixed-route bus service is needed, as well as the potential for commuter rail service from Livingston County to Ann Arbor.

Another group is hoping to establish intercity rail service from Ann Arbor to Traverse City and Petoskey in northwest Michigan. The Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities (GCRC) launched what it is calling the A2TC project back in February 2015. Jim Bruckbauer, the Deputy Director of GCRC, believes there is widespread interest in establishing passenger rail service to northwest Michigan. He believes it is a unique opportunity, for the state owns the tracks and it will provide transportation options for travelers and the 90,000 college / university students along the line. It was number one on the list of priorities resulting from the 2011 statewide MDOT rail planning process.

The proposed A2TC Traverse to Ann Arbor route would include stops in Cadillac, Mount Pleasant, Alma, Owosso and Howell with a possible option of continuing to Detroit. The last 26 miles are part of the Wally route, which could lead to resource sharing if both projects became a reality.

The GCTC has raised \$100,000 to pay for a feasibility study from a federal grant, along with matching funds from MDOT, community organizations

and municipalities along the route. The Maryland based consultant firm, Transportation Economics and Management Systems (TEMS), hired to do a six month study, hopes to wrap up soon. It is focused on a public-private partnership or a nonprofit model which wouldn't require large operating subsidies. The study will consider ridership projections, tracks conditions and the potential cost for needed upgrades.

Preliminary results show that the A2TC would attract widespread ridership. Tourism in Traverse City and surrounding areas is expected to double from six million visitors a year to 13 million by 2045. However, there is a fair amount of skepticism about the proposed project. So far, the consultants have not released cost estimates, which will probably require both state and federal investments, and funds from the communities that would be served to build train stations. MDOT officials have not taken a position yet and are waiting to see the outcome of the study. Track work could run into hundreds of millions of dollars, and there are other considerations as well, such as positive train control that may be required.

Despite these issues, Bruckbauer is optimistic. Some of the track, he maintains, could be used for special events to bring people to the various festivals and other events. Since the track is owned by the state, he believes MDOT and the FRA would support this type of private service. In the meantime, an analysis will be conducted to look at the economic potential for cities along the line and to determine station locations. MARP supports the project and would like to see several trains a day run from Ann Arbor to Traverse City and Petoskey. The large number of tourists who visit Traverse City and nearby winter and summer sport venues and casinos along the route, it believes, would justify the investment.

A third study – Coast to Coast Rail, undertaken in 2015 to consider restoring rail passenger from Holland, Grand Rapids and Detroit – is the product of nearly five years of work by the Michigan By Rail Coalition. The MEC, in collaboration with MARP, AATA, MDOT and metropolitan planning organizations along the proposed route, completed a "Rail Ridership and Cost Estimate Study." It was funded by a federal grant and contributions from organizations along the corridor. The MEC managed the \$100,000 study prepared by TEMS and in conjunction with MARP, it held 16 public meetings all across the corridor in 2015.

The study, completed in early 2016, looked at ridership potential and costs associated with operating passenger rail service on three different routes that would include stops in Holland, Grand Rapids and Lansing, but differed regarding how passenger trains would run from Lansing to Detroit. Based on the study, the cost-benefit was strongest for route two, which would run from Lansing to Howell to Ann Arbor, Wayne and Detroit. It would have strong ridership, lower capital costs and provide the greatest return on investment.

The study also compared cost for 79-mph service versus 110-mph service. The lower speed service on the 186-mile route would require an annual subsidy of approximately \$3 million and upfront capital investment of \$130.9 million. The 110-mph service would require a greater capital investment of \$436 million but would generate higher ridership enabling the service to recover its operating expenses and generate more than \$12 million in annual profits based on eight daily round trips.

While the report recommended a number of next steps, rail advocates are now working to build support for a

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EXPANDING PASSENGER RAIL IN MICHIGAN

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collaborative effort to establish an eight-frequency 110-mph rail passenger service from coast to coast. They hope to identify champions along the line who would be willing to put up a third of the \$900 million needed to establish the proposed service. This support would create a better chance to get state and federal money needed to underwrite the project.

Establishing commuter rail service over the 38-mile rail line between Ann Arbor and Detroit has been discussed over the past decade, but still lacks a funding source. Both MDOT and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments have discussed and studied the route. The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) of Southeast Michigan which oversees transit planning and funding for Washtenaw, Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties has also conducted the "Michigan Ave Corridor Study Locally Preferred Alternative Report". This report released in May 2016 provided the basis for the RTA to put

a 1.2 mill tax proposal on the ballot in the four counties in November 2016 that would have funded a 20-year, \$4.6 billion regional transit plan, including the introduction of commuter rail service between Ann Arbor and Detroit. Unfortunately, the RTA plan was narrowly defeated, receiving 56% support in Washtenaw, 53% support in Wayne, 50% in Oakland and 40% in Macomb county. Since June 2017, leaders from the four counties and Detroit have been meeting to "pick up the pieces" and the Kresge Foundation has given money to update the plan.

The RTA has recently unveiled a new proposal calling for a 1.5 mill tax that would fund a 20-year, \$5.4 billion regional transit plan, which includes commuter rail service between Ann Arbor and Detroit. The proposed service would run eight trips per day, with stops in Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Wayne, Dearborn and Detroit. It also includes funding for express bus service between Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti and Detroit's Metro Airport. This proposal may be on the ballot in the

four-county area this coming fall. For that to happen, however, the plan needs majority approval of the nine-member RTA Board of Directors, which has two representatives from each of the four counties, as well as one member from the governor's office and the City of Detroit. There has also been some discussion about a two-county plan – a Wayne-Washtenaw transit plan if the 4-county plan lacks support.

In closing, one could conclude that passenger rail in Michigan has been "studied to death over the past decade." Undoubtedly, some advocates would agree, but each study is different regarding the level of service offered, the type of agency involved in building and running the service, as well as opportunities for private investment. The key is to network both public and business support. The proponents of these various projects are not ready to give up but are continuing their efforts to build greater legislative support for their endeavors. Hopefully, one or more of these projects will become a reality within the next decade.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, ***write to:***
RUN, P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104

or contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at
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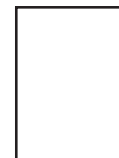
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