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## SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR OCT.10, 2020 VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE:

***"The Road to Recovery - how a healthy mass transit & intercity rail system can aid the nation's economic recovery"***

Please join us at the Rail Users' Network's Virtual Mini-Conference which is taking place on Saturday, Oct. 10, 2020 from 1 p.m. - 5 p.m. This free, exciting event will highlight the ongoing efforts of rail transit agencies and intercity rail to provide service during the current pandemic and how a healthy mass transit & intercity rail system can aid the nation's economic recovery. It will also highlight several efforts underway to improve and expand passenger rail / rail transit in the U.S.

The program will begin with a brief RUN business meeting to elect board members with opening remarks given by RUN's

Chair, Richard Rudolph, who will briefly talk about RUN's history and some of the challenges that rail advocates are currently facing across North America.

The roster of speakers includes: Art Guzzetti, Vice President of Policy, American Public Transportation Association will provide an overview regarding how Mass Transit Agencies have been faring during the pandemic, what has been done to insure transit riders' safety and APTA's efforts to convince Congress to provide at least \$32 billion in emergency funding as U.S. transit agencies struggle to stay afloat and support more than 400,000 industry employees.

Mark Dowd, Chief Innovation Officer, Metropolitan Transportation Authority will provide an overview of the new technologies and approaches that are being used to fight the coronavirus in order to reduce the risk to riders and workers who utilize the nation's largest transit system.

David Peter Alan, Esq., contributing editor to *Railway Age*, who is also the Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition and RUN Board Member, will provide a legislative update regarding federal legislation and administrative regulations which determine funding for Amtrak  
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## DOOMSDAY AROUND THE CORNER?

**By Andrew Albert**

The special August 26 MTA Board Meeting was an eye-opener, if nothing else. I was prepared for bad news, given how COVID has affected ridership on our subways, buses, and commuter railroads, not to mention our bridges and tunnels. I was prepared—but even my worst fears were blown away by the proposals enumerated by MTA Chair Pat Foye, and Chief Financial Officer Bob Foran's presentations. After hearing them, and commenting on them, and listening to other Board Members' shock and outrage, I realized that the entire New York way of life was on the line here.

Overkill? Not even close. Without federal financial support of \$12 billion, the MTA is prepared to make massive service cuts, massive fare increases, massive layoffs, and shut down the impressive MTA Capital Program, which would have given us new track, signals, CBTC on lines that don't yet have it, make over 70 more stations accessible, extended the new 2nd Avenue subway up to 125th Street in Harlem, built four new Bronx stations on Metro-North's New Haven line, which would have gone directly into Penn Station, brought electrification to the Long Island Rail Road's Central Branch between Hicksville and Babylon, and so much more.

What else is on the table? Subway and bus cuts of 40%, meaning a minimum of eight minutes between subway trains, 15 minutes between buses, and either an hour or two hours between commuter trains on the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad! And if that weren't enough, entire branches of some of the commuter rails could be abandoned! Specifically mentioned were the west of Hudson lines, such as the Port Jervis line, and Pascack Valley lines! Those lines serve Rockland and Orange Counties, and it's hard to see how/why those counties would continue to stay part of the MTA service area and  
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# TRANSIT RECOVERS SLOWLY AND TENTATIVELY, BUT THERE ARE HARD TIMES AHEAD

By David Peter Alan

These are dark days for riders on any sort of public transportation. Because of the COVID-19 virus, many cities and states are essentially shut down. Many schools and colleges are offering only "remote" learning, theaters and other amusement venues are closed, restaurants are limited to outdoor dining or to take-out and delivery only, and most former office workers now work "remotely" as well; often from home. There are not many places for people to go, so they are traveling much less than they did prior to last March. In response, there is little non-automobile transportation to take people anywhere. Airlines have slashed service, while Amtrak plans to eliminate more than half the runs on its skeletal long-distance network, reducing service to only three days per week. Its corridors have fewer trains. Many intercity bus routes have been eliminated or reduced, and local transit in most places has been hit hard.

Most of the drastic transit cuts came in mid-to-late March, so it has now been almost six months since that happened. Transit's recovery from those cuts has been a mixed bag. In some places, service has returned to prior levels. In other places, rail lines are still shut down entirely. In most metropolitan areas, service lies somewhere between those extremes. The standard seems to be weekend service (typically Saturday level, rather than Sunday level) on most local subway/elevated, streetcar and light rail lines. For the most part, regional-rail carriers are running reduced schedules, especially during peak-commuting hours. There are not nearly as many commuters as there were before the virus hit.

At this writing, there is almost as much service in the New York area as there had been in pre-COVID times. New Jersey Transit is back to full service, while Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road are running close to former levels of service. Both systems estimate

ridership at about 25% of pre-COVID levels. The New York subway system never cut service severely, even though the trains no longer run all night, for the first time since the original IRT subway opened in 1904.

Some other "legacy" rail systems are recovering more slowly. The MBTA in Boston ("the T") is now running weekday service on local rail transit (subway and light-rail) lines and "modified" (reduced) service on regional rail ("commuter") lines. The agency's website still carries the ominous warning that passengers coming from Rhode Island must quarantine for 14 days upon entering Massachusetts. The "T" runs service to Providence and some trains further southwest to Wickford Junction. On SEPTA in Philadelphia, the Chestnut Hill West and Cynwyd lines are still suspended, there are no longer any trains running past Wilmington to Newark, Delaware, and service now ends an hour or two earlier in the evening. Weekend service, which previously ran hourly on most lines, now runs only every two hours; similar to schedules in the Boston and Chicago areas. On local rail lines, service is essentially week-end level, with enhanced service during peak-commuting hours. Metra in Chicago has cut its peak-hour schedule, slashing service on lines that run only during peak-commuting hours, and also cutting off-peak schedules severely. Since June 7, trains have run only every two hours on most lines, both on weekends and outside peak-commuting hours on weekdays. Service to and from Chicago now ends two hours earlier on weeknights, too; the last trains now leaving Chicago between 10:00 and 11:00. The Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) is running service close to pre-COVID levels, although local transit in many cities is not running such strong levels of service.

The same holds for cities with newer or smaller regional-rail systems. It is truly a mixed bag, and local conditions often prevail. In the Nation's Capital, Metrorail closes earlier than before. Commuter rail from Maryland on MARC has recovered to prior level on some lines, but Virginia

Railway Express (VRE) is still running half of its previous schedule at commuting-hours only. Metrolink in the Los Angeles area has slashed weekday service, although lines with weekend trains (which always had only limited service) still have them at pre-COVID week-end service levels. Metro Rail continues to run reduced service, essentially at weekend levels, while some bus service was restored on June 21. Sound Transit's Link light-rail in Seattle is running only every 20 minutes during the morning and afternoon and every 30 minutes in the evening, seven days a week. Sounder commuter trains are running only slightly-reduced schedules. In New Orleans, the streetcars have returned almost to their pre-COVID frequencies, although the collapse of a building under construction on Loyola Avenue last October has kept service on the Loyola-Rampart-St. Claude streetcar line suspended. We can't provide an exhaustive survey here, but these levels of service are typical today.

Other rail transit lines that shut down in light of the virus are still out of service. The El Paso Streetcar is one of them. New Mexico Rail Runner was one, but Saturday service (four trains between Belen and Santa Fe, with a fifth train between Belen and Albuquerque) now runs on weekdays and Saturdays. There are three trains on Sundays. That line's long-term survival is in doubt because of an unrelated issue: it is not doing well with its installation of the Positive Train Control (PTC) system required by Congress and the FRA, and may not make the year-end deadline for completion.

Perhaps more than any other metropolitan area, the San Francisco Bay region has suffered the most severe service cuts. The Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system between San Francisco and the East Bay has reduced service to every 30 minutes, although there are plans to add trains as ridership increases (the agency reported in late July that ridership was 89% below baseline.

*Continued on page 3*

## TRANSIT RECOVERS SLOWLY AND TENTATIVELY

### *Continued from page 2*

Service ends at 9:00 every evening, while the last trains used to leave their points of origin at 12:00 midnight. SMART (Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit) has slashed weekday service to 40% of its pre-COVID level and eliminated weekday trains entirely. The San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency (Muni) has been cut to possibly its lowest level of service in history; perhaps even worse than in 1906, when an earthquake and resulting fire destroyed much of the city. At this writing, the agency is not running any rail transit: light rail, historic streetcars, or the unique cable cars. Some light-rail lines came back on August 22, but there were technical and operational problems, so on Tuesday, August 25, the shutdown was extended for eight more weeks. Bus lines were slashed from the pre-COVID system with 89 routes, to 17. There are now 23, with ten providing "owl service" from 10:00 pm until 5:00 am. The Caltrain regional rail line from San Francisco to San José has recovered somewhat, at least as far as the schedule is concerned. Weekday service

was increased from a low of 42 trains to 70 on June 15. Service runs essentially hourly, with a few "limited" trains running skip-stop during peak-commuting hours. On week-ends, trains run every 90 minutes, with two express trains in each direction and less service on Sundays.

Despite the improved schedule, the line faces severe funding problems and is caught up in local politics; a situation that could doom it completely in the near future. Ridership on Caltrain is still far below pre-COVID levels, while many "tech companies" are encouraging employees to work "remotely" from home, rather than using transit to commute to the office. The San Francisco Bay Area has one of the nation's largest concentrations of persons who depend on transit, including some who chose the urban lifestyle, which includes transit use. So the severe cuts in that metropolitan area could foreshadow a nationwide transit catastrophe.

Ridership is down sharply everywhere, ranging from 10% to 25% of pre-COVID levels on most systems. That means far less revenue from the farebox. To make matters worse, transit is in the public

sector, which has been hit hard. Unemployment levels in some states rival those of the Great Depression of the 1930s, and more employees working "remotely" means fewer commuters. People are spending less, so sales tax revenue is down. People are earning less, so income tax revenue is down. All of this is causing an existential crisis for transit. To what extent will elected officials consider transit to be a "public utility" worthy of receiving scarce dollars, when every agency and governmental function is suffering, and essentially all of those decision-makers are motorists who do not need transit to get around. The proverbial Chinese curse of "living in interesting times" certainly applies to transit these days, and time will tell how much transit service will come back in the future.

*David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member, and has ridden on every rail transit line in the United States. He is also a Contributing Editor at Railway Age, and his reports and commentaries can be found at [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com). He was a member of the team that documented the decline of trains and rail transit around the world for Railway Age and its sibling publications.*

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

Name	Location	Affiliation
Richard Rudolph, Chair	Portland, ME	NARP / TrainRiders Northeast, Maine Rail Group
Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair	New York, NY	New York City Transit Riders Council
Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary	Philadelphia, PA	Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation
David Peter Alan, Esq.	South Orange, NJ	Lackawanna Coalition
Mela Bush-Miles	Boston, MA	Greater 4 Corners Action Coalition (MBTA)
James E. Coston, Esq.	Chicago, IL	Corridor Capital LLC
Bill Engel	Canal Fulton, OH	Ohio Rail Tourism Association
Dana Gabbard	Los Angeles, CA	Southern California Transit Advocates
Steve Hastalis	Chicago, IL	National Federation for the Blind
Dennis Kirkpatrick	Boston, MA	Rail Users' Network
J.W. Madison	Albuquerque, NM	Rails Inc.
Andy Sharpe	Philadelphia, PA	SEPTA
Phil Streby	Peru, IN	Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance

**Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users' Network at: RUN; P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104 or email to [rrudolph1022@gmail.com](mailto:rrudolph1022@gmail.com)**

*Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny*

# REPORT FROM NEW MEXICO

By JW Madison

## The Basics of Our Struggle

In the midst of all our struggles (chronic and acute) as modern-passenger rail advocates, let's step back for a moment and remember the basic reasons we've been doing this for so many years. Our concise introductory document is aimed at members of the un-trained general public. Pun intended, as always.

### Roll Call

(Rails Inc. 2009)

Clean air

Clean water

Fuel economy

Energy economy

Renewable energy

Personal health and safety

Public health and safety

National safety

Wise use of land

Wise use of materials

Low infrastructure maintenance

Poverty reduction

Deficit reduction (federal, state, local, personal)

Sustainable economic development

Land use reform

Biking

Walking

Neighborhood transit

Traffic congestion reduction

Historic preservation

Business and worker productivity

Climate change control

Reduction of Everyday Stress

Security and law enforcement

**Question:** What do all these issues have in common?

**Answer:** Every last one is positively affected by modern passenger Rail.

## The NM Rail Runner Express (NMRX)

Our regional commuter train is still in mothballs despite the partial reawakening of mass transit (especially regional and Urban rail) in our surrounding states. Here's a hopeful update from Rio Metro, the operating authority of the *Rail Runner*:



The MMRX has been behind on PTC implementation (along with NJ Transit and a few others). Our train has been well and reliably run by Herzog since its inception, but nobody really expected a \$60 million de facto "balloon payment." However—Rio Metro has been working closely with the FRA, even including a personal meeting on the Santa Fe station platform. Rio Metro is catching up fast from a late start. They're running "field integration testing" as I write this, and will soon be moving to the "revenue demonstration testing" phase.

In the photo above (courtesy Rails Inc), the nearest consist at the far right is moving, part of the PTC implementation tests herein noted. Nothing else is moving yet. The big Rail Yard complex is a few hundred yards to the Southwest, served by many tracks, and abandoned except for a seasonal outdoor market.

That big red carport-looking thing?

That's the NMRX maintenance shed. Nothing but the finest for our commuter rail workers.

As to resumption of service, Rio Metro is working up a plan featuring enhanced cleaning, plexiglass seatback separators (optimistically removable), cashless ticketing, and reestablishing intermodal bus connections. They're crossing their fingers in hopes of a mid-September re-opening at 25% capacity. It's up to our Gov.

To learn more: Contact spokesperson Augusta Meyers of Rio Metro at: ameyers@mrcog-nm.gov .

*Albuquerque's Bus Rapid Transit ("ART") ART is running again, and based on a drive-by look at the platforms, ridership is not too much lower than before the COVID shutdown.*

## Pulling People of all Income Levels Back onto our Long-Distance Trains

*Besides of course retaining and increasing frequency of service, and following the various other excellent proposals displayed elsewhere in these pages, there's one neglected improvement in long distance service and marketing we need to revisit: instituting one or more fare classes in between the bargain of Coach Class and the expensive desirability (even despite Amtrak's travesty of meal service) of the Sleeper Classes. There's a 300% plus difference between these options. We need to close this percentage gap.*

*I refer readers to my letter, "Coach Plus Could Open New Market for Amtrak", RUN Newsletter, 2009, Vol. 6, No. 1. I say, please read this proposal and promote this or better possibilities.*

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



# MIDWEST RAIL CONFERENCE: “SUSTAINING MIDWEST RAIL”

**By Ken Westcar**

*Conference organizer:* Michigan State University Railway Research and Education.

*Sponsors:* Class 1 freight railways, passenger rail advocacy groups, consultants, federal and state government entities.

*Location/medium:* Zoom.

*Attendees:* 270 (approx. 4 Canadian, no apparent provincial or federal attendees).

*Transport Action Ontario attendees:* Peter Miasek and Ken Westcar

*TAO objectives:*

- Quantify and qualify rail developments in the U.S. Midwest and their implications for Ontario.
- Identify key stakeholders in U.S. Midwest rail developments and their value to Canadian advocacy efforts.
- Understand best practice in advocacy/government cooperation in increasing the share of rail in the passenger and freight transportation matrix.
- Evaluate Midwest community involvement.
- Evaluate U.S. Midwest interest in cross-border passenger rail.

*Implications for Ontario.*

The U.S. Midwest values Canada and particularly Ontario as one of its largest markets for consumer durables, capital equipment, automotive and other products. Similarly, Ontario enjoys considerable reciprocal trade in both goods and services. Both are engaged in the value-added process of manufacturing, distribution and knowledge. Capital generally flows easily and reciprocally across the border and there is much optimism that this will continue, provided facilitating policies and investments are made. The November 2020 presidential election could be a determining factor.

The U.S. Midwest is being much more proactive in developing passenger services to the international border, sustaining short line railways and facilitating the modal shift of freight from highways to rails. Michigan, Wisconsin and Illinois are pre-eminent and visionary. Minnesota and Indiana also have a presence. Currently Ontario does not emulate this and is therefore prone to declining symbiosis and participation. It puts southwestern Ontario at a long-term disadvantage where the status quo on available transportation modes seems entrenched. Attention to modal equity whereby hard and externalized costs are fully accounted for in each mode is sparse.

This could be resolved with a more aggressive implementation of “Connecting the Southwest – a draft transportation plan for southwestern Ontario” announced by the provincial Minister of Transport in January 2020. This corroborates other plans developed by municipalities and Chambers of Commerce and requires further recognition of cross-border fluidity of passengers facilitated by astute public investment.

*Key stakeholders in U.S. Midwest rail developments.*

The Midwest State Passenger Railroad Commission provided a global view of policies, initiatives and results while the states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota reviewed ongoing activities on passenger rail expansion, connectivity, bus feeder, customer service quality and convenience.

These initiatives combine cooperation between municipal, state and the federal government on regulatory and funding issues. Where access to Class 1 railroad trackage is required, the dialog has generally been open and constructive on feasibility and cost sharing. It is recognized that Class 1 railways are not philanthropic organizations and that requests to

accommodate passenger traffic must not negatively impact their progressive business model.

The short-line railroad industry in the U.S. Midwest is recognized as a critical element in the region’s transportation matrix and receives support through state and federal grants and tax measures. Communities and local industry increasingly recognize the importance of short lines to sustainability and economic advantage and growth. Their umbrella organization is the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association.

In a question on how Class 1 railways will compete with electric highway trucks, the Norfolk and Southern delegate noted that the demise of their industry would involve 1.75 million additional heavy trucks on U.S. highways based on current freight volumes.

*Best practice.*

This comes from forward-thinking and the presentation of compelling evidence.

Communities in the U.S. Midwest have generally supported passenger rail service improvements when dialog is inclusive and open. All three senior levels of government are prepared to move forward when local economic and social benefits are logical and clearly stated. The primary inhibitors of project funding are partisan dysfunction in U.S. Congress and special interest lobbyists.

*Community involvement.*

Where passenger rail is either improved or newly introduced, community support is evident by the increased willingness to use the service, with ridership often exceeding original estimates, and assist as trained volunteers in station passenger operations. An excellent example is East Lansing, MI.

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## CALTRAIN'S FUTURE HINGES ON FATE OF SALES TAX MEASURE ON NOVEMBER BALLOT

*By Dana Gabbard*

Caltrain is the commuter rail service linking San Francisco and San Jose. Uniquely for the West Coast, it is a legacy commuter rail line whose history reaches back to the era when the private railroads operated passenger service as it began Oct. 18, 1863 (under the name Peninsula Commute). Initially owned and operated by the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad Company, in 1870 it was acquired by the firm that was consolidated eventually into the Southern Pacific Railway. S.P. double-tracked the line in 1904, and operated passenger service in the corridor successfully until after World War II.

Declining ridership in the age of the automobile compelled S.P. to petition the California Public Utilities Commission to allow it to abandon passenger service in 1977. In order to preserve it, the three counties the service connects (San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara) began to partially subsidize tickets, which helped revive ridership.

In 1980, the California Dept. of Transportation (Caltrans) began to sponsor the service, contracting with S.P. to operate it and dubbing the line CalTrain. This was an interim measure. In 1987, the three aforementioned counties formed the Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board. In December 1991, the JPB purchased the rail right of way from San Francisco to San Jose. The JPB also secured trackage rights south to Gilroy for an additional \$4 million, with an option to acquire half the right of way in the future. S.P.'s successor, Union Pacific, retains rights to operate freight service in the corridor.

The JPB agreed to assume management of Caltrain from Caltrans effective July 1, 1992. At this time, peak-hour weekday service to Gilroy commenced. To replace S.P. as the operator, the JPB sought competitive bids with the contract being awarded to Amtrak. It was the operator through May 25, 2012. Since then, Transit America Services, Inc. has operated the service.

Since July 1997, the official name has been Caltrain (lower case t). The line is 77.4 miles long between San Francisco and Gilroy, with

32 stations plus a few stations only used for special events. In June 2004, after extensive investment in bypass tracks, limited stop service between San Francisco and San Jose (known as "the Baby Bullets") began and proved very popular.

Average weekday ridership in the past decade underwent a steady increase until 2015 when it flattened in the mid 60,000s. For comparison in 2010 it was 34,120 (numbers from Figure 1, Caltrain 2019 Annual Passenger Count Key Findings, p.5 posted on the Caltrain website). The future last year looked bright. As I noted in the previous issue electrification of the main trackage is underway, scheduled to be operational by 2022, Extensions into downtown San Francisco (via a 1.3-mile tunnel), south to Salinas and along the Dumbarton Rail Corridor were in various stages of study.

Then COVID-19 occurred. Ridership initially plummeted 97% and service was reduced accordingly. The picture improved a bit by late June: "... estimates show that its ridership has more than doubled from its lowest point of 1,500 riders per day to 3,200 riders per day." (press release "Caltrain Ridership Increases as Bay Area Returns to Work" June 29, 2020). Encouragingly surveys and studies show, "Fifty-five percent of riders plan on riding the same or more after the pandemic, while a third of riders expect to ride less and a mere 1% say they won't return to the system." (press release "Caltrain Surveys Show Riders Plan to Return" July 27, 2020).

The great danger to Caltrain's future is its finances. They're heavily dependent on the farebox, and federal emergency funds, while welcome, do not fully fill the breach. As a consequence, there has been discussion of a possible temporary shutdown.

Lack of dedicated funding has long been a concern, and in 2017 state Senator Jerry Hill introduced SB797 to allow a local vote on a dedicated 1/8% sales tax in the three

counties to fund Caltrain. It passed the legislature and was signed by the Governor. Originally it was touted as

facilitating more service, especially after

the electrification was completed, and making possible improvements like the tunnel into downtown San Francisco. After the pandemic struck, it was recast as a lifeline to keep the service afloat.

Inter-regional tensions almost scuttled placing the sales tax measure on the November ballot before agreement was reached to address concerns regarding Caltrain governance. Some progressive activists have grumbled about the mechanism being a regressive sales tax. The Caltrain Board has adopted new policies regarding connectivity and affordability to address these concerns. Also, there is widespread recognition that even a temporary Caltrain shutdown would have unacceptable consequences.

Friends of Caltrain ([www.greenaltrain.com](http://www.greenaltrain.com)) reported on its blog in late June, "Despite the pandemic recession, poll results were very close to the results from a year ago, with nearly two thirds ready to approve a measure. The poll shows wide swings based on messaging, with 70% in support after positive messaging, and much lower support after negative messaging. So the outcome will depend heavily on an effective campaign." ("Surprisingly strong poll results for Caltrain ballot measure; wide margin depends on campaign" June 25, 2020).

With only about nine weeks remaining until the election, activists and business interests, such as the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, are scrambling to pull together an effective coalition and campaign on behalf of the tax, slated to appear on the Nov. 3, 2020 ballot as Measure RR. To pass it must receive a 2/3 yes vote. One hopeful sign is thus far there is no organized opposition.

The official website of Caltrain is [www.caltrain.com](http://www.caltrain.com)

My thanks to Adina Levin of Friends of Caltrain for sharing an informative Fact Sheet on Measure RR.

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

# CORONAVIRUS: IMPACT ON RAIL PASSENGERS IN BRITAIN

By Anthony Smith

"From this evening, I must give the British people a very simple instruction—you must stay at home."

This was the instruction from the British Prime Minister in a televised [announcement](#) on 23 March. This instruction included the "very limited purposes: for which people were allowed to leave their homes, such as shopping for necessities, one form of exercise a day or travelling to work if they could not work from home, and banned gatherings of more than two people from different households in public. Non-essential shops and businesses were told to close, and social events including weddings were stopped.

The initial announcement included guidance for people to avoid using public transport unless your journey was essential and consider other means of travel where possible (walking, cycling, car).

Following the announcement there was a significant fall in passenger numbers travelling by rail (down by more than 90%) as people followed government advice to avoid non-essential travel. However, there was increased demand for rail freight services to transport household essentials, medicine and supply power stations.

As a consequence of the fall in demand timetables and services were reduced based on latest public health advice and balancing the need to ensure key workers were able to travel and freeing up capacity for additional freight services.

As revenue generated from fares fell off a cliff, the government put in place Emergency Measure Agreements with privately owned franchised train operating companies to mitigate the financial impacts resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The agreements were signed in March, and took effect from April. For the

majority of operators, the agreement applies until 20 September 2020 and operates as a temporary amendment to the underlying franchise agreement, which remains in place.

Under these agreements, the government receives revenue collected and pays most costs incurred by operators through a regular franchise payment. It is expected that this will continue after this initial period, as passenger demand for rail services has not yet recovered.

## COVID-19 travel guidance

Since the initial lockdown in March, restrictions have been gradually eased, services have been increased and Covid-19 travel guidance has been put in place. The guidance includes:



Don't travel if you don't feel well. If you have symptoms do not go to a station or board a train. Stay at home.



Avoid these main commuting times. Trains are busier during the peak hours - 07:00 - 09:00 and 17:00 - 18:30 and you should avoid making journeys at these times. Travel at quieter times during the day if you can.



Don't board if you think it's not safe. Where possible maintain physical distancing (at least one metre). We can't guarantee physical distancing during your journey. To help with this you should not board the train if you think it is not safe to do so.



Wear a face covering and maintain physical distancing where possible. This will help to protect you and other people.



Be patient, most seats need to be empty. Be patient with our staff who are there to help you and be patient with your fellow passengers also making essential journeys.

## The user view

Transport Focus has conducted a weekly travel during COVID-19 tracking survey. As part of this we speak to over 2000 people each week about their current travel behaviour and attitudes to travel in future during the coronavirus outbreak. We have also established a Transport User Community covering peoples' thoughts on returning to rail travel.

Our survey indicates a gap between experience and perception of public transport emerging as significant trend.

Car use has continued its upward trend in our survey, both in terms of the numbers driving and in how busy traffic levels are. Use of public transport has remained lower, though we are now beginning to see an increase – there is a clear trend emerging.

Since restrictions were lifted, we've seen a steady increase in people travelling to visit friends or relatives or for leisure (eating out, visiting attractions and so on). We've not seen a similar increase in commuting – it's been steady for the last couple of months. So it seems that any resurgence in travel is largely leisure based.

This has implications for public transport because leisure use has traditionally been discretionary. If you didn't like the experience or even if you thought you wouldn't like it, you might not travel. With commuting there was often a sense of feeling trapped – you had to keep travelling even if you didn't like it, though this too seems to be shifting as we develop a more mixed approach to home and office working.

All of which makes the gap between experience and perception one of the more significant trends picked up by our survey. Safety seems to be at the heart of this. We asked people

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## NEW JERSEY TRANSIT RUNS FULL SERVICE, AS RIDERS TRICKLE BACK AND SPENDING CONTINUES UNABATED

By David Peter Alan

If you look at the schedules for New Jersey Transit's (NJT's) train, bus and light-rail schedules, you would think that the COVID-19 virus never hit the Garden State. Every line on NJT is running at the level of service offered back in mid-March before the COVID-19 virus hit, the riders deserted transit everywhere, and transit throughout the nation suffered severe cutbacks. Despite such robust service, NJT ridership is climbing only slowly, but that cannot be said for the agency's spending. A proposed capital program, worth billions of dollars in expenditures, was approved recently. With the state borrowing more billions to keep other services going, it does not seem feasible that either the state or NJT could find the money to purchase all those projects.

At this writing, most transit properties are still running a reduced level of service (*Transit Recovers Slowly and Tentatively* by this writer, elsewhere in this issue). Transit on the New York side of the Hudson River is also robust, with the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North close to their former levels of weekday service. The same is true for the subways, except that they no longer run through the night; an event that never happened before in the system's history, dating back to 1904. But NJT restored the full schedules from last fall on July 6, after running slightly-enhanced weekend service for 15 weeks. This writer was skeptical and commented this way in the July-August issue of the *Railgram*, the newsletter of the Lackawanna Coalition: "The service cuts that came in the wake of the COVID-19 virus are over. NJ Transit reduced rail service on March 23 and restored it to the pre-COVID weekday service level on July 6. Did they jump the gun by running unnecessary service when there are not enough riders to support it fully? Did they eliminate useful features in the 'temporary' schedules that actually improved service, and which riders could have used to advantage when more businesses and facilities re-open?"

For the most part, NJ Transit Rail did well during the period of reduced service. There were some schedule improvements during those 15 weeks that are gone now. Peak-hour trains on the Morris & Essex and Montclair-Boonton Lines stopped at the Secaucus Station that was designed to improve connections, even though those lines were always left out of whatever benefit that stopping at Secaucus could have delivered. Severe "reverse-peak" gaps in service on the Gladstone and other lines, which were four hours long or more, were filled. The last trains of the night left New York Penn Station or Hoboken at a later hour than they had in years. The Newark Light Rail line between the city's two train stations made better connections by running every 20 minutes on weekdays, rather than only every 30 outside peak-commuter hours. Now all of these improvements are gone.

Are the riders coming back to the trains in the anticipated droves? Ridership is picking up, but the answer is NO. Rail ridership had rebounded to about 20% when full weekday service came back, according to Gov. Phil Murphy. A few more riders are commuting to offices, but not many. There is still plenty of room for riders to spread out, but there is still a large percentage of empty seats on every train. That is not true on NJT's buses. At first, Murphy had decreed that buses could only run at 50% of capacity, but many "essential workers" who depend on transit still had to take the bus, and it would have been impossible for NJT to keep enough buses and drivers in reserve to mitigate the crowding.

In the meantime, the NJT Board approved a multi-billion-dollar capital program, including many projects that local advocates consider unnecessary. Nobody knows how the State could pay for even a small portion of such an ambitious program. Restaurants and places of amusement are still shut down at this writing (except for some outdoor dining, which will last as long as the weather is warm), and many office

workers continue to work "remotely"; often from home. That is, the ones who still have jobs to do. Unemployment in New Jersey remains at levels not seen since the 1930s, so income tax revenue is down. People are reducing their purchases, so sales tax revenue is down. Murphy and other officials are keeping the state going with massive borrowing; a method which the New Jersey Supreme Court approved, but with the admonition that it is unwise, even though it is permitted.

So where does that leave the capital program? Except for some projects to keep the railroad in a state of good repair, it appears unlikely that they will be built. Installation and testing of the Positive Train Control (PTC) system is continuing, and the agency hopes to complete the process by the statutory deadline of Dec. 31. They might make it, but the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has warned NJT that time is short. Other projects, like the super-expensive Gateway Program, now appear out of the question. That seems particularly true for the proposed Portal North Bridge, a two-track bridge high above the water that would replace another two-track bridge lying closer to the water. NJT has applied for a Core Capacity Grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) using misleading ridership numbers, and got an approval for now. NJT's funding picture for the project looks better now but, even if the FTA offers a Full-Funding Grant Agreement (FFGA) for the project, New Jersey and NJT would still be on the hook to pay for any cost overruns. At this juncture, it seems difficult to believe that New Jersey or NJT could find the money to pay for them. It appears that one of the reasons why NJT restored the entire weekday schedule so early was to offer enough capacity to bring back every pre-COVID commuter, if they all kept their jobs and returned to their former peak-hour commutes. With high unemployment and many of the still employed working "remotely" from

*Continued on page 12*



## SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR OCT. 10 VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

*Continued from page 1*

and transit. He will also talk about what might happen next year, depending on the results of the November elections.

Andrew Albert, Chair, NYC Transit Riders Council, Chair Permanent Citizen's Advisory Committee to the MTA, and MTA Board Member, and Vice Chair, Rail Users' Network, will talk about the impact that the COVID-19 virus is having on the MTA and the need for federal financial support, otherwise the MTA will need to make "massive service cuts, massive fare increases, massive layoffs and shut down the impressive MTA Capital Program."

J. W. Madison, President, Rails Inc., will talk about how the U.S. passenger rail operating model is upside down in comparison to those of all our other modes of transportation. He believes this lies behind our chronic lack of progress in nationwide passenger rail, and that we need look no further away than our own country for a solution to this impasse.

After a short break, a panel presentation will be held from 3:15 pm - 4:15 pm to highlight some of the current efforts underway to expand passenger rail and rail transit in the U.S. The moderator, Richard Rudolph, will provide a brief overview of what is happening in New England. The invited panelists include:

Scott Rogers, Chair, West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition, will talk about the on-going efforts to restore passenger rail service from Eau Claire, WI to St. Paul, MN.

Dave Strohmaier, Missoula County Commissioner, will talk about the creation of the Big Sky Rail Authority and the efforts to restore passenger service to southern Montana.

Michael Noland, President / General Manager, Northern Indiana Commuter Transit District (invited) will talk about the West Lake Corridor Project.

The afternoon session will close with an audience forum to provide an

opportunity for members of the audience to share their ideas and concerns regarding passenger rail / rail transit in the United States.

The forum is designed not only for rail advocates, but also civic and business leaders, environmentalists, planners, real estate developers and members of the general public who are interested in knowing more about passenger rail and rail transit in the U.S.

Please note this is a free event, but registration is required. Be sure to register no later than October 8 so that we can send along the info needed to attend RUN's virtual mini-conference. To register, please go to our website [railusers.net](http://railusers.net), and click on the "to register" link.

We look forward to your participation. In the meantime, stay well and be safe.

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

## Keep RUN Running

For almost 20 years, RUN and its members have worked for more and better rail service. For the entire time, mail has been the primary means of communication.

Once in a while there was an issue, usually a newsletter returned as undeliverable. We have a few email addresses and phone numbers. When we were able to contact the member by alternate means, a correct address was quickly obtained and the problem solved. Otherwise, we usually lost a member.

Unfortunately, we have only a few email addresses and phone numbers. However, we need to prepare to fight for rail service while facing the potential of unreliable mail. Amtrak and the post office seem to be in a race to see who can close up shop first.

Thus, we are appealing to our members to send us your email address if you have one. We plan to continue mail as the primary communication. We know most members prefer a real newsletter. However, in case of issues with the mail we could also email a backup copy of the newsletter. In addition, we could email urgent calls for action. Our Communications Director, Andy Sharpe, also sends monthly Short Runs of current news to our members with email addresses.

Please send an email with your current email address, and phone number if you are willing, to our membership secretary, Chuck Bode, at [lucia.e.esther@gmail.com](mailto:lucia.e.esther@gmail.com). If your name is not obvious in your email address, please indicate your name so we can match the email address to the proper member. Thank you.

## DOOMSDAY AROUND THE CORNER?

*Continued from page 1*

pay taxes for that privilege, when they wouldn't be receiving any more service! Also mentioned for abandonment were some Long Island Rail Road lines. When asked by a reporter which lines they might be, the reporter mentioned the lines with the lowest ridership—specifically, the West Hempstead, Oyster Bay, and Greenport branches. The Chairman did not deny that those were possibilities.

Clearly, this was not grandstanding, and the MTA's fiscal tsunami is very real. The \$12 billion the MTA says it needs would get us through the end of 2021, and includes \$1 billion that we would have received from Congestion Pricing, if only the US Dept. of Transportation had given the MTA an answer on what type of environmental impact statement (EIS) was needed for the program to proceed. They have not given any answer for over six months, guaranteeing that the program could not begin until late 2021, at the earliest. New York's transportation system is hardly alone in suffering massive losses from the pandemic, nor is it limited to "blue states." There is no doubt that the Cleveland RTA, Marta in Atlanta, DART in Dallas, the Houston Metrorail, Miami Metrorail, and lots of other transit systems in "red states" are all suffering from the same deadly combination of circumstances: massive drops in ridership, loss of dedicated taxes, and loss of tolls that support mass transit.

Some in Congress have said this is a "blue state" issue, as they are mismanaged, and don't know how to allocate spending. This isn't a red or blue state issue—this is a PEOPLE ISSUE! The COVID relief bills circulating in the House address some (but not all) of these needs, however the Senate is far from understanding the importance of mass transportation systems' roles in keeping the economy moving, getting people to their jobs, entertainment, visiting friends/relatives,

sporting events, museums, concerts, bars/restaurants, etc. Our mass transit systems are the economic engines that fuel the regions where they operate. Not everyone can drive, ride a bicycle, or an electric skateboard to their destinations. Transit is a necessity—and MUST be a federal priority, or we are in big, big trouble! (Which we clearly are.)

When would these cuts take place? At the November MTA Board Meeting, proposals would be brought to the table, for a possible vote. The next year's budget is voted on at the December Board Meeting, but either way, these cuts could be coming as soon as the end of 2020. A fare hike is already scheduled for March of 2021, but that was a 4% hike, which is normally what occurs every other year. This one could be much different.

It behooves each and every one of us to contact our elected officials—both in the House and Senate—and tell them federal funding of mass transit systems is an absolute necessity, and we will hold each of them accountable if they don't do the right thing and pass a COVID relief bill that supports keeping our mass transit systems on an economically stable footing, which means that the nation has a chance to fully recover from the pandemic, and its devastating economic effects on each and every region. If they don't—and at this moment in time, it doesn't look hopeful—the future of the nation is in doubt. No region can sustain everyone driving to work/leisure/entertainment. There would be massive gridlock, dangerous air quality, and the disenfranchisement of millions of Americans who either don't own a car, have health issues that prevent them from obtaining a driver's license, or have other issues preventing them from operating a motor vehicle.

Here in New York, our way of life is in mortal danger. We expect to be able to stroll out of our homes, walk to a bus or subway, and within minutes, get a bus or train to our destinations. If this is no longer possible, who would want to be here? You may as well be in a suburban or exurban location. Businesses would no

longer need to be here. Real estate values would disintegrate. Wall Street? They wouldn't have to be here. The list goes on. And if you think this would only affect the New York region, fuhgeddaboutit! (As we say in NY) New York is the economic engine that powers the Northeast. The Northeast is the economic engine that powers the nation, with 10% of the nation's GDP produced here. So, as New York goes.....

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

## MIDWEST RAIL CONFERENCE

*Continued from page 5*

*Cross border passenger rail.*

The Amtrak speaker made mention of improving passenger rail connectivity through the Niagara Frontier and there were similar positive comments from other presenters. However, significant improvements of state-supported Amtrak services to Detroit and Port Huron suggest that constructive dialog between key stakeholders on both sides of the border could result in the resumption of international passenger traffic between Toronto, Chicago and Minneapolis. Both sides of the border are focused on high-performance rail (max 160kph) and compatibility would therefore not be an issue.

Such an arrangement would help ensure Ontario's inclusion in the shared prosperity potential of a cross-border trading and economic area rather than growing exclusion due to limited and outdated mobility. Midwest state governors, recognizing Ontario's importance to their economies, would likely support cross-border passenger services. They are certainly supporting their own.

Michigan State University will be posting the conference recording on: <https://rail-learning.mtu.edu/> by the end of August.

*Ken Westcar is co-coordinator of InterCityRail.*

## FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE MASSACHUSETTS EAST-WEST PROJECT

By Joshua D. Coran

Subsequent to publication of my article on this subject in the summer edition of the RUN *Newsletter* I came across a partial explanation why the Mass DOT cost estimates were so far above mine. The article also generated an interesting question. I'll address both matters here.

### Cost Estimates

The previous article argued that the Mass DOT cost estimates were much higher than seemed possible to justify. Those estimates were as follows:

Alt.	Between	Using	Cost (M)	
1	Springfield - Worcester	CSX track	1,988.5	
2	Springfield - Boston		2,122.1	
3	Pittsfield - Boston		3,213.3	
4	Pittsfield - Boston	CSX ROW	4,130.5	
5	Springfield - Boston	new track	5,181.3	
6	Pittsfield - Boston	New ROW	24,942.4	

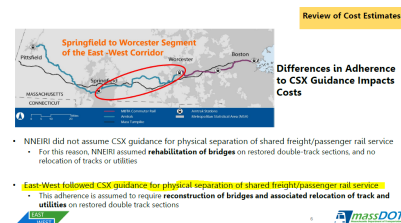
By contrast, I had calculated that excellent results, as shown here, could

### Predicted Schedule Times (minutes)

Alt.	Boston - Springfield	Boston - Pittsfield
Proposal	105	166
1	N/A (Worcester - Springfield only)	
2	134	N.A (Bus)
3	115	188
4	107	179
5	94	N.A (Bus)
6	79	138

be obtained for less than \$538 million, a mere fraction of the estimated cost for the least expensive alternative (#1 at almost \$2 billion). The table shows that this relatively small expenditure should produce results that are much better than Alternative #3 (estimated to cost over \$3.2 billion) and nearly a match for #4 (at over \$4.1 billion).

Why the huge difference? On June 10, at Advisory Committee Meeting #5, the consultants provided a slide that shed some light on this question.



The slide was in answer to an Advisory Board question of why their cost estimates were so much higher than those of similar projects. The slide said that the consultants "followed CSX guidance for physical separation of shared freight/passenger rail service" and that "[t]his adherence is assumed to require **reconstruction of bridges and associated relocation of track and utilities** on restored double track sections" (emphasis in the original). Do the consultants believe CSX requires passenger trains to have their own dedicated track on CSX right of way? If so, it might explain why their costs are about **seven times** what seems reasonable, but it is difficult to believe they are not aware that CSX freight track is shared by New York's *Empire Service* trains everywhere except between New York City and just north of Poughkeepsie (and at 110 mph on a 30-mile stretch between Roessleville and Amsterdam), let alone that Amtrak 448 and 449 (the Boston sections of the *Lake Shore Limited*) twice daily share the very CSX track involved here.

### Schedule Times

The question the article generated came from RUN Board Member David Peter Alan. He noted that the impressive predicted schedule times I reported (as shown in the table at the bottom of the first column) depended on the use of new, lightweight, tilting Talgo train sets. Noting that Connecticut DOT had recently requested proposals for equipment to replace that now in

*Shoreline East* service, he thought availability of that old equipment might present an opportunity to considerably reduce equipment cost. His question was what impact use of these old conventional cars instead of new Talgo equipment would have on those projected schedule times.

It was a reasonable question, so I set about to answer it. I assumed a consist of SLE cars with a capacity and amenities similar to the proposed Talgo. (That capacity and amenities were based on pre-pandemic *Down Easter* consists.) I used the same simulation method and assumptions (including a maximum speed of 79 mph, not the erroneously stated 80) that produced the results I reported in the earlier article. I also used the same locomotive, so the heavier SLE consist does lose some time due to slower acceleration. It loses more time because it cannot take many of the curves at the speeds that will be allowed for the tilting Talgo consist. On the other hand one characteristic of the conventional consist actually saves some time: because it is shorter, it spends less time in speed restrictions. The overall result, displayed in the following table, is, however, longer schedule times.

### Predicted Schedule Times (minutes) Shoreline East Consist

Alt.	Boston - Springfield	Boston - Pittsfield
Proposal	112	179
1	N/A (Worcester - Springfield only)	
2	134	N.A (Bus)
3	115	188
4	107	179
5	94	N.A (Bus)
6	79	138

Schedule time between Boston and Springfield has increased by seven minutes, and between Boston and Pittsfield the penalty is 13 minutes. The result remains between Alternatives #3

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## NEW JERSEY TRANSIT RUNS FULL SERVICE AS RIDERS TRICKLE BACK

*Continued from page 10*

home (at least on some days), that does not seem possible. It now seems difficult to fathom that there will ever be enough commuters during the historic peak hour (the busiest 60 minutes of the morning for arrivals) to justify the cost of the bridge.

NJT released a 10-year planning document ("NJ 2030: A 10-Year Strategic Plan"; found at [https://njtplans.com/downloads/strategic-plan/NJT\\_2030-A\\_10-YearStrategicPlan.pdf](https://njtplans.com/downloads/strategic-plan/NJT_2030-A_10-YearStrategicPlan.pdf)), but it no longer appears relevant. One issue it addressed was eliminating the "preventable cancellations" that have vexed riders with unreliable rail service for the past two years. The agency acknowledged (at 21) that it hopes to eliminate them five years from now!

So where do New Jersey's riders stand? For the short run, the CARES Act has given NJT \$1.75 billion; enough money to make up the revenue shortfall for about a year. The agency started collecting fares again earlier this summer. The New York City system did not do as well, and is facing more-severe financial difficulties. Still, NJT is in trouble. It has over-emphasized commuters, at the expense of non-commuters and occasional riders, who former Executive Director George Warrington described as "incidental" in 2006. Warrington died the following year, but his attitude still lives at NJT. There is also a lack of fare integration, making it inconvenient for riders who must pay a separate fare for each segment of a linked trip. In this era of the virus and the renewed emphasis on using automobiles and shunning transit, providers must implement the sort of cleaning practices and customer service that could lure the riders back to the trains and other modes. NJT is no exception. Can they succeed in doing that? Time will tell, but changes in policy often require changes in attitude.

Sadly, NJT's buses are crowded, even though the trains are not. Privately-owned bus companies in the Garden State have slashed service severely, and some have eliminated it entirely. It may be time for a full re-alignment of local transit, but NJT deserves credit for one thing specifically. Everybody on the trains and buses wear masks. Bus drivers and train crews are strict about it, and essentially all riders whom this writer has observed comply. On one occasion, this writer was on a train where a rider refused to wear his mask, despite orders from a crew member to do so. The crew put him off the train.

With the reports from elsewhere in the country about large gatherings with nobody wearing masks, places like New York and New Jersey are doing well. New Jersey is requiring 14 days of quarantine for everybody arriving in the Garden State for about 35 other states, unless they are traveling for an essential job or were only in a "hot" state for 24 hours or less. So New Jersey may relax some of the restrictions soon, even though not many have been relaxed at this writing. Will many former riders come back to NJ Transit? We can be sure that some will, but not enough to bring the numbers of commuters back to the pre-COVID level. What will NJ Transit do to reinvent itself for the "new normal" that will come after the current viral emergency ends? Only time will tell.

*The author is a RUN Board member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey.*

## FURTHER THOUGHTS ON THE MASSACHUSETTS EAST-WEST PROJECT

*Continued from page 11*

and #4 (albeit now closer to the former), but the cost differential will now be even greater.

Once that potential savings in initial equipment cost can be established, a discussion can be held as to whether that

additional cost savings will compensate sufficiently for this increased trip time. Ridership surveys may provide the information needed. At this point, it is interesting to note that Washington State DOT found an expenditure of \$800 million reasonable for a savings of ten minutes for a comparable route between Seattle and Portland, a distance 24% longer and a schedule time 17% greater than Boston-Springfield.

In summary, even using conventional equipment, the MassDOT findings are far more negative than makes sense. While the use of conventional equipment increases Boston-Pittsfield time by 13 minutes, it would still be as at least as fast as any of MassDOT's alternatives except the \$25 billion #6.

*Joshua D. Coran is a member of the board of Texas Rail Advocates. He is Director of Product Development and Compliance for Talgo, Inc., of Seattle, the US subsidiary of Patentes Talgo of Spain. Mr. Coran received his first railroad paycheck in June of 1966 from the New York Central Railroad. He holds a BS in mechanical engineering from MIT, an MBA from the University of Pittsburgh and was a registered Professional Engineer in Illinois for 32 years.*

RUN is looking for individuals who would like to get more involved with the organization, from areas of the country where we do not currently have a member of our Board, specifically for individuals who are active in rail or transit advocacy, and who can write articles for our award-winning newsletter, as well as speak to their issues publicly. If you think this may apply to you, why not send us an email, so our nominating committee can get in touch with you.



## CALL TO ACTION: LOBBY YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES TO FUND AMTRAK LONG-DISTANCE, MASS TRANSIT

Dear RUN members and friends:

First, let me first thank those of you who have already contacted your elected Congressional Representatives and U.S. Senators. Despite our efforts as well as the work of other rail advocacy organizations, Amtrak is still planning to reduce long-distance passenger rail service to three days a week starting October 1, 2020. While the U.S. House of Representatives passed its consolidated appropriations bill for 2021 (H.R. 7616 & 7617) on July 31 which included additional funding for the National Passenger Rail Corporation, Amtrak is still planning to cut long-distance service. On August 11, it announced that several criteria would be used for restoring long-distance service next year, as well as sufficient federal assistance estimated to be any least \$3.5 billion for fiscal 2021.

This threat to our national train network is the greatest the nation has faced in Amtrak's history. Merely cutting the days that the trains operate from seven days a week to three will almost certainly lead to the complete elimination of those trains.

So what can you do? There is still time for action, and it may be our last chance to save this part of our nation's mobility. As both the House and Senate is currently in recess and unlikely to pass a fiscal year budget for 2021 in a timely manner, we must insist that they include specific language in the continuing budget resolution to require Amtrak to keep running long-distance trains every day. The funds provided for the National Network of the National Railroad Passenger Corp. (Amtrak) should be expressed conditionally on Amtrak continuing to operate all trains of the National Network daily; seven days per week, except for the two trains that operated three times per week during the Fiscal Year 2020. We also urge you to spread the word in your local media, both traditional and on social media.

When writing to your Congressional member or Senator or talking with their staff, please also remind them that it is vitally important to include nationwide mass transit operating assistance in any new COVID-related budget bills. Our mass transit systems are the economic engines that move regions. Without vibrant mass transit systems, people will not be able to return to work after COVID. There is no way everyone can switch to an automobile - both for congestion reasons, as well as air quality. In New York, for example, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is the economic engine that moves the city and the region, and is also an economic engine of the entire nation, as 10% of the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is produced there. The loss of fares, tolls, and dedicated taxes has given the MTA and other transit systems a tremendous budget gap, and the MTA and other transit agencies have said if they don't receive federal assistance, everything is on the table, including mass layoffs, service cuts, fare hikes, and delays in the capital projects, which would improve service, safety, and accessibility.

For more information regarding Amtrak Long-Distance Trains and Transit in Crisis, see the attached document on the Rail Users' Network website.

Thank you very much. Be well and stay safe.

Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.  
Chairman, Rail Users' Network  
[rrudolph1022@gmail.com](mailto:rrudolph1022@gmail.com)

### Like the newsletter? Care to make it better?

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

Send your article to [rrudolph1022@gmail.com](mailto:rrudolph1022@gmail.com), and get published!

## THE ONGOING SAGA: RESTORING PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE TO THE QUAD CITIES AND BEYOND TO IOWA

**By Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.**  
**Chair, Rail Users' Network**  
*Reprinted from Passenger Train Journal, 2020-3, issue 284*

*This is the twelfth in a series of articles highlighting what rail advocates are doing to improve and expand passenger rail and rail transit in America.*

The saga of restoring passenger service from Chicago to the Quad Cities and Iowa began in 1996. Nine Midwestern states created the Midwest Rail Initiative calling for the development of 3,000 miles of high-speed rail in the region, using Chicago as the system's hub. The regional system envisioned would use existing rail rights-of-way shared with freight and commuter rail to connect nine Midwest states.

While restoring passenger service from Council Bluffs through Des Moines, Iowa City to Chicago was identified for 79-mph hour service, the idea didn't take off until the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) contracted Amtrak in 2006 to conduct a feasibility study for the possible return of passenger service, a morning and evening train in each direction between Chicago and the Quad Cities (Davenport, Moline, Rock Island and Bettendorf). The Rock Island Railroad had provided passenger service from Council Bluffs through Iowa to Chicago until 1970. The train was then cut back to a Chicago-Rock Island run within Illinois and renamed the *Quad Cities Rocket*, which operated until December 31, 1978.

The Amtrak feasibility study concluded the Quad Cities, located along the Mississippi River, were a major draw for folks living in Illinois and Iowa, as there were dozens of miles of scenic riverfront, river boating, casinos, and thousands of acres of expansive public spaces. It also pointed out that many towns and cities had experienced double-digit growth since 2000, and that strong growth was pressuring highway infrastructure and schools.

The study identified two different routes to the Quad Cities, with the western-most segment between Wyanet, IL and Quad Cities being common to both alternatives. The recommended route would use the tracks of three carriers: Amtrak's from Chicago Union Station to the BNSF on its route heading toward Aurora, and on Iowa Interstate Railroad (IAIS) from Wyanet to Moline. As the BNSF line crosses over the IAIS at Wyanet, a new track between the two railroads would need to be built. The BNSF line was a busy route with mostly double and triple track, signalized and operated under central traffic control from BNSF's dispatching center in Fort Worth, TX. The BNSF portion of the route was well-maintained and would not require any rehabilitation work. The IAIS route between Wyanet and the Quad Cities was dark, non-signalized, and employed a track warrant system for control of train operations. Freight traffic consisted of one through-train each way daily. The proposed design, which included a crossover with powered switches between the two BNSF main tracks just east of the proposed turnout and for the 4,000 feet connection, was estimated to cost approximately \$5.6 million in 2007 dollars. Capital costs were estimated at \$13.8 million for 50-mph service and \$22.1 million for 79-mph service.

Soon after IDOT decided to have Amtrak conduct the Quad Cities feasibility study, the Iowa Department of Transportation (IA DOT) requested the study be extended to Iowa City and later to Des Moines. The report on extending service to Iowa City was "simply an addendum to the Quad Cities report," and covered such topics as the "additional capital infrastructure improvements that would be required in Iowa, impacts on operating expenses, revised ridership and revenue projections." The Democratic governor of Iowa, elected in 2006, championed the return of service to Iowa City, and hoped the project would eventually expand across Iowa to Omaha, with

seven round-trips per day and speeds up to 110 mph. It was estimated that there would be 1.3 million annual riders by 2040. By 2009, IA DOT had completed initial environmental studies for an Iowa City to Chicago service. Governor Chet Culver saw it as a way to promote Iowa as a renewable energy state.

"Everything from biodiesel to paperless tickets to bio-based lubricants on the tracks. We could have solar stations along the way. Our dream, our goal, was to make this a 100% renewable operation."

In Illinois, Paul Rumler, Executive Vice President, Quad Cities Chamber, also recognized the economic potential of restoring train service to Chicago as a way to tie into the global economy. In 2007, the Chamber helped form the Quad Cities Passenger Rail Coalition, which advocated for funding, and built regional support necessary to convince the federal government, as well as Illinois and Iowa to bring passenger rail service to the region with the Quad Cities as a stop between Chicago and Iowa City. At one point, over 150 organizations and over 10,000 members were involved in advocating to secure funding and build political support for the project.

The prospect for expanded passenger rail service to the Quad Cities and beyond to Iowa was further fueled by the \$8 billion for passenger rail included in the \$787 billion federal economic stimulus package that Congress passed and signed into law by President Obama in February 2009. In 2010, Illinois and Iowa filed a joint application for \$248 million in federal funding to restore passenger service to the Quad Cities and Iowa City. A short time later, U.S. Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Tom Harkin (D-IA) announced that the U.S. DOT awarded a \$230 million grant to both states, to be matched with 20% state and local funds. The proposed service would include two roundtrips to the Quad Cities and Iowa City at 79 mph.

*Continued on page 15*



Map of the proposed Quad Cities to Chicago route. Courtesy of Illinois Rail.org

## THE ONGOING SAGA: RESTORING PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE TO THE QUAD CITIES AND BEYOND TO IOWA

*Continued from page 14*

Iowa DOT estimated 1.3 million annual riders by 2040. Illinois Governor Pat Quinn's budget for fiscal year 2011 included an additional \$45 million in state capital funds to match Illinois' share of the federal grant. The city of Moline also won a Tiger II grant to transform a brownfield warehouse building into a LEED-certified station to host the new passenger rail service.

Iowa's part in the project hit a road block after the election in November 2010. Culver was ousted and Terry Branstad, governor from 1983 to 1998, was reelected. After the new governor and the Republican-controlled Iowa Legislature failed to provide its portion of the grant money, both states asked the FRA to split the grant into two phases. The FRA agreed to a phased approach, permitting Illinois to move forward with implementing service from Chicago to Moline, while Iowa's funding was put on hold pending completion of a Chicago to Omaha Regional Passenger Rail System Planning Study, which IA DOT hoped to undertake. IA DOT

applied and received a million dollars in federal funding to develop a Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a Service Development Plan (SDP) for new passenger rail service from Chicago to Council Bluffs. The EIS contemplated a further increase of passenger rail service in the corridor, consisting of an extension from Council

*While advocates in Illinois are also pleased that that there is additional money for the Quad Cities project, some remain skeptical given the project's history.*

Bluffs to Omaha; a frequency increase to seven round-trips per day between Chicago and Des Moines, and five round-trips per day between Des Moines and Omaha; and an increase in maximum speed to 110 mph. The proposed service was viewed as a component of the Midwest Regional Rail System. The SDP did not commit Iowa or Illinois to implementation of the full plan. Incremental service improvements would be made in later phases, depending on needs and funding.

The standoff regarding funding the initial phase from Iowa City to Chicago was further exacerbated when IA DOT

reported in December 2013 that the federal match requirement had skyrocketed to \$72 million, because projected construction costs and infrastructure needs had risen since the money was first granted. While advocates for expansion believed the new rail system could boost Iowa's economy, Republicans in the Iowa Legislature balked at committing more state aid to passenger rail and Governor Branstad, reelected in November 2014, remained skeptical. He did not want the state saddled with a yearly subsidy once pegged at \$3 million, but had shrunk to \$600,000 to cover its share of operating costs and other expenses.

Despite these setbacks, Iowa officials forged a cooperative agreement with the FRA to do preliminary engineering work and follow-up environmental assessments for service from Moline to Iowa City. Iowa chipped in \$1.24 million paired with \$4.9 million from the FRA to do a preliminary engineering and detailed environmental assessment for the stretch of passenger rail from the Quad Cities to Iowa City, which was expected to be completed in 2018.

While advocates in Illinois are also pleased that that there is additional money for the Quad Cities project, some remain skeptical, given the project's history. It was initially believed the service would start up in 2012, but then it was pushed back to 2015 and now there is no longer a startup date. The State of Illinois reached a "key milestone" when it announced an agreement with IAIS to design construction work on its part of the 162-mile route in 2014. The project, however, was delayed by Governor Bruce Rauner in early 2015, when he signed an executive order for state agencies to halt nonessential spending, putting state contract activity on hold. As the federal deadline approached for spending the original federal grant for the line, the state released the matching funds needed to move the project forward. Since then, another extension has been received, insuring \$177 million in federal funding availability until 12/31/2024. Moline is also one step closer to being a hub in the return of

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## MBTA UPDATES FROM BOSTON



*Track work on the Green Line. Photo courtesy of MBTA.*

**By Dennis Kirkpatrick**

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has generally resumed a normal operating schedule across all modes of transportation, but with some exceptions. Given that ridership continues to be reduced due to people still working from home, and a certain amount of concern for overcrowded vehicles, the MBTA has opted to advance some of its repair and upgrade projects. The objective of this is to get repairs and improvements done at a faster rate than if they were operating at a full ridership capacity. This is resulting in service suspensions on some transit lines with alternate busing in place. Also, in response to the COVID-19 situation, some high-ridership bus lines have seen increased peak service while low-ridership lines have seen service reductions.

Elsewhere, general construction has resumed on special projects such as the Green Line subway extension

project from the City of Cambridge to Medford, and various track and station work on other subway lines is also being performed in advance of the winter months.

Of special note was the recent ground-breaking ceremony for the MBTA Commuter Rail extension to the communities of Fall River and New Bedford. Known as the “*South Coast Rail Project*,” the existing Middleboro-Lakeville line will be extended over two new branches to these communities. The project will use the existing MBTA Middleboro line and then connect to existing freight lines with upgraded track and Positive Train Control installations. The extension is expected to take several years to complete.

The MBTA’s current fare collection system recently underwent a small change so that the so-called “*Charlie Card*” (plastic) and the “*Charlie Ticket*” (paper) will cost the same amount of money. Previously there was a small surcharge on the paper version. The move is an adjustment to

accommodate a new unified fare system being developed that will eventually combine the fare collection systems now used for bus, subway, and commuter rail services. At present, the commuter rail service has its own separate fare system in place.

Under continuing pandemic restrictions in Massachusetts, riders are required to wear face covers but will not be refused access to transportation if they are absent. Given changing construction issues and schedule adjustments, riders are strongly encouraged to review current schedules, conditions, and alerts at: [www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com).

*Dennis Kirkpatrick lives in Boston, MA, and is a lifelong public transit user and advocate. For 20 years he was the managing editor of Destination: Freedom, the weekly E-Zine of the National Corridors Initiative. He recently joined the Rail Users’ Network board of directors.*





## THE ONGOING SAGA: RESTORING PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE TO THE QUAD CITIES AND BEYOND TO IOWA

*Continued from page 15*

passenger service to the Quad-Cities with the completion of the multi-modal train station, which includes a 95-room Westin Element Hotel and retail space, in February 2018.

The main hold-up continues to be the lack of an agreement between the state

and IAIS regarding what is needed to restore passenger service over the line and who will pay for it. The list includes the purchase of land at Wyanet for the connection track, track and signal upgrades and platform construction at the Moline station.

Despite setbacks, rail advocates remain hopeful and believe rail service to the Quad cities is a good investment and will have a transformative impact on the local economy. Tyler Power, director of government affairs for the Quad Cities Chamber believes the rail project would have a \$25 million annual impact and bring 550 to 825 jobs to the area. Rick Harness, Executive Director, High Speed

Rail Alliance, is also hopeful, but believes it is time to consider expanding the proposed service to five daily frequencies and offer 90-mph service. There is also renewed hope that the return of passenger rail to the Quad Cities will spur sufficient interest in Iowa to extend the line to Iowa City and Des Moines. Given the impact that COVID-19 is having on state budgets, it remains to be seen whether financial resources will be available to finally move forward with this project.

*(Editor's note: Surveyors have been seen surveying the connection area near Wyanet earlier this year. – M.S.)*

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## MEMORY OF THE NORTH COAST LIMITED

**By Bill Engel**

How many readers remember the airline pilots strike in July 1966? I remember it well. I was a Second Lieutenant, United States Army Reserve, fulfilling my two-year active duty obligation as an ROTC graduate. I had just completed a 13-month tour in Korea and was on my way home to New Jersey. A Military Airlift Command charter got me from Seoul, Korea to Seattle. But getting the rest of the way home was up to me. I was able to get Pullman space on the Northern Pacific's *North Coast Limited* Seattle to Chicago, connecting to the Pennsylvania RR's *Broadway Limited* to get home to New Jersey.

Military Airlift flights do not operate on convenient times, so it was after midnight when we landed at Sea-TAC Airport in Seattle. After Customs Inspection, which we had to do even as military in uniform, I grabbed breakfast at a 24-hour lunch counter in the airport and found another Army officer to share a cab with as far as King Street Station. By the time I had done that, it was after 5 a.m., but the station still wasn't open.

As soon as the station opened, I went inside. The Ticket Office was not open yet so I found a public telephone to call my parents and girlfriend in the East to let them know I was safely Stateside. When I finished the telephone calls, the ticket office had opened, so I picked up my tickets. I found I had a Deluxe Single Room to Chicago and a Roomette on the Pennsylvania's *Broadway Limited*.

When the boarding call came for the

*North Coast Limited*, I found my Deluxe Single Room was on the lower level of a dome sleeping car. It had storage for hand baggage, an enclosed toilet, and a sofa-style seat across the width of the car. As soon as possible, I found a seat in the dome.

The south end of King Street Station looked a whole lot different in 1966 than it does today! No sports stadiums, or Talgo trains, was the main difference. At departure time, four NP F-units urged our train into motion. This was new territory to me, so I was glad of the seat in the dome. The first stop was Auburn.

Almost immediately after leaving Auburn, we began climbing the grade up Stampede Pass. In my opinion, this was more scenic than the Amtrak route via Cascade Tunnel. The descent of the east slope of the Cascades was also very scenic following the Yakima River. At first call to dinner, I went to the diner. I know I had an NP Great Big Baked potato as a side dish but I don't remember the entrée. We stopped in Pasco while I was eating and I hardly noticed the pick-up of the through cars from Portland. After supper I had the porter make up the bed and turned in.

When I woke up after one of the best nights of sleep I have ever had on a train we were nearing Butte, MT. I quickly got ready, grabbed breakfast, and returned to my seat in the dome. As we pulled into Butte we passed the cars of the UP *Butte Special*, the overnight service from Salt Lake City. As we departed Butte, there were some scenic views of the copper mine. Then followed a morning of beautiful central

Montana Rocky Mountain scenery. Around noon, we pulled into Livingston. During a long servicing stop, I was able to replenish my film supply. The train acquired a freshly fueled and serviced set of F-Units, and the Livingston to Chicago sleeping car for Yellowstone Park visitors. Then we were on our way to St. Paul.

As we neared Chicago, my porter helped me tag my hand baggage for transfer to my space on the *Broadway Limited*. After arrival, I found a seat in a crowded and sweltering Great Hall. Finally, the boarding call that I had been hearing in my mind for 13 months "Now boarding, Pennsylvania Railroad Train #28, the *Broadway Limited*." I went out and found my Roomette in a "Rapids" class 10 roomette 6 Double-Bedroom sleeper.

After seeing the remnant of the New York Central *Twentieth Century Limited* just pulling into Englewood as we pulled out, I went to dinner. There would be no race across western Indiana tonight. I would be up early to get off at Paoli, and so wanted to eat early anyway.

After a prime rib dinner (always good on #28 or #29), I sat in the lounge for a while watching thunderstorms roil up behind the train. I grew tired of hearing men in business suits griping that if they could have flown they would be home, so went to my room and turned in.

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

## CORONAVIRUS IMPACT ON RAIL PASSENGERS IN BRITAIN

*Continued from page 7*

who'd made a journey by train in the last seven days whether they felt safe: 85% said they felt very or fairly safe. When asking those who hadn't made a journey by train, only 42% thought they would feel safe. Even when just looking at people who weren't travelling but who used to be regular users before lockdown it only went up to 47%. There is a big gap between those travelling and those not.

We also wanted to get a better a sense of how people viewed public transport in relation to other activities. Did they think it was more or less safe than other places such as shops, restaurants or pubs? The majority viewed it as equally safe but there were, once again, some big differences between those who use the service and those who don't. 38% say that they think using public transport is less safe than visiting a shop, pub or restaurant. This compares to 15% of those who used public transport that feel the same way.

It is clear that public transport operators will have to work hard at changing perceptions. And it still seems as if the best way of doing this is to tempt people back and let them see for themselves.

Timing will be key – it is going to be hard to do this while in the midst of local lockdowns and talk of a second wave. But at some point, operators will need to start looking at incentives and other offers designed to get people back on board.

It's not just about incentives, of course—there is a continuing need to reassure people and to tell them what is being done to make travel safe. We asked our [Transport User Community](#) what they felt the future would look like. It was clear that concerns about crowding or lack of cleanliness would remain for the long term. They wanted reassurance that trains are "COVID-ready." Interestingly, solving the crowding issue was seen as a shared

responsibility with employers, passengers and operators all doing their bit.

The results also point to a significant change in attitudes towards commuting. Most felt that their work would, at a minimum, become more flexible and that their use of the train will reduce. COVID-19 has created a turning point where they no longer feel 'hostage' to rail. Operators will need to adjust to this as well, not least by introducing new flexible tickets that offer an attractive alternative to traditional season tickets.

*Anthony Smith is Chief Executive, Transport Focus.*



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

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

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