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GOOD CONNECTIONS—WHY THE NORTHEASTERN RAIL NETWORK IS IMPORTANT TO THE ENTIRE U.S.

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

The Rail Users' Network annual conference this year is taking place Friday, May 15, 2020 from 8:45 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. at the offices of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, One Newark Center (1085 Raymond Blvd.), 17th floor, which is one block from Newark Penn Station. The conference, which is sponsored by the Rail Users' Network in cooperation with the Lackawanna Coalition, will examine why the Northeastern rail network is important to the entire U.S. The focus will be on what's happening on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, the debate about the proposed Gateway Program, and other initiatives that are taking place. Time will also be set aside to hear from the

grassroots rail advocates who are working at the state and local level to expand passenger rail in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

The day will begin with opening remarks by Richard Rudolph, Chair of the Rail Users' Network, and David Peter Alan, Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition.

William C. Vantuono, Editor-in-Chief of *Railway Age*, will give the keynote address. The morning's featured speakers include U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio (invited), who chairs the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and will talk about the efforts underway to reauthorize the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act, which is expiring this year.

The other featured speakers include:

- Raymond Kenny, the Executive Director of New Jersey Transit, who will talk about NJ Transit Rail Operations.

- Art Guzzetti, Vice-President for Policy at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), who will talk about his initiative to get Congress to authorize a trust fund for passenger rail infrastructure, primarily for passenger rail.

- John Dinsdale, the National Vice-President, Transportation Communications Union, who will talk about the changing culture at Amtrak, how it is affecting employees who live in fear for their livelihood and careers and what can be done going forward to improve Amtrak.

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BYE-BYE BYFORD & OTHER NEW YORK STORIES

By Andrew Albert

It has been a tumultuous few weeks here in New York, and quite obviously the overriding story has been the predicted and sadly unquestionable departure of NYC Transit President Andy Byford from the New York transit scene. On Feb. 21, 2020, accompanied by bagpipes and the music of Coldplay, Andy took his final walk down the lobby of MTA Headquarters at 2 Broadway, across from Bowling Green.

In the lobby were hundreds of thankful and grateful employees, managers, fans, press, and just

ordinary people who had come to say their final goodbyes to the man that had been such an important part of their daily lives as he brought our struggling transit system from a state of disrepair and "anything could happen on a daily basis" to a well-functioning, 83% on-time performance, and the respect and gratitude of both transit workers and the riding public. In fact, I've been watching transit matters in this city since the '80s, and I cannot remember a time when the man or woman in the street actually knew the name of the President of NYC Transit! But everyone knew Andy Byford, his charming

English accent, and his voice and face, which were on screens in stations, imploring riders to "mind the gap" and letting riders know of upcoming service changes, or weekend diversions.

To make matters worse, leaving with Andy was Pete Tomlin, a world-renowned signal specialist, who Andy had brought over from the UK (via Canada) to help upgrade our signals, and convert from older technologies to Communications-Based Train Control (CBTC), as well as Ultra-Wideband (UWB). When the #7 line was converted to CBTC, on-time performance skyrocketed,

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MASSACHUSETTS' MBTA ANNOUNCES COMMUTER RAIL IMPROVEMENTS AND ACCELERATED REPAIR PROGRAMS

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

In a series of recent press releases, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), serving Boston, MA and its outlying communities, has announced a series of system-wide improvements, but at the same time has also announced some painful repair schedules that will impact all of its rail systems, heavy and light.

The MBTA is planning to add service to its shortest commuter rail branch, the Fairmount Line. Starting in May of 2020, a total of four trains (eight trips) will be added to the weekday schedule. The line is fully contained within the City of Boston limits and local advocates have sought either conversion to a subway service, or increased headways to approach subway-like service. The service increase plan also calls for the installation of a series of special fare gates that will allow passengers to utilize their transit system cards, known as "Charlie Cards" (or "Charlie Tickets"), on the commuter rail system. At present, there are two dissimilar fare systems for surface bus lines and light rail transit, and the heavier commuter rail systems. The service change is hoping to increase ridership on the line by making it emulate subway-type service, and match the cost. The project is slated to start sometime in May of 2020 and run as a pilot program for 12 months.

The branch is also participating in a pilot program that extends service from the Town of Foxborough into downtown Boston. The pilot service runs from Foxborough (at Foxborough Stadium, home of the New England Patriots football team) — along the Framingham Secondary inland route, and then connects to the Franklin line to the Boston city limits. From there, trains alternate between the Fairmount branch or the Northeast Corridor main line into Boston.

In an article appearing in the *Bay State Banner* newspaper, Mela Miles, a member of the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition (and RUN board member), offered, "We're hoping [the added trains] will become a permanent part of the service. The early morning workers need to get to their jobs. This train will leave much earlier so people can get to their jobs."

The increased service may also address students traveling to and from schools along the route or by improving commuting connections.

Miles also stated to the *Banner* that people do not only use the Fairmount Line for work — but rather, for "reverse commutes." "People use it for stops within the community in the morning and early afternoon. This line gets people where they're going within the line, station to station."

She further observed that transit is central to everyone's life, and it can also be a major cost factor in a family budget. "We need to have affordable transportation that goes where we need to go, when we want to go, at a price we can afford," she said.

The proposed start date for the pilot program is May 18. Miles stressed the importance of informing the community of the change.

"This is a lifeline to our communities," said Miles, in the *Banner* article.

Elsewhere, Gov. Charlie Baker and the MBTA announced a broad list of upcoming repairs and upgrades to its many rail lines. Every one of the lines will be impacted, both light and heavy rail, and will participate in an "accelerated repair" schedule so as to gain the most work completed in the shortest amount of time. Unfortunately, that will also translate to major inconveniences to the ridership.

In a recent press conference, Gov. Baker, State Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack, and MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak unveiled the 2020 plans for infrastructure work on all four subway lines, the Silver Line Bus Rapid Transit system (BRT) and on the commuter rail system that will require frequent weekend shutdowns to complete repair projects more quickly. The work includes closure of entire lengths of the Green Line service this coming summer for an entire month.

In a statement given to TV station WCVB, Poftak stated, "We understand that these projects will result in inconvenience for our customers, but they will also result in a decreased risk of service incidents, an increase in reliability, a faster ride and an improved customer experience."

According to Secretary Pollack in her comments to WCVB, "A lot of thought went into the acceleration plan for 2020 because we are all aware how much more disruptive it is going to be. The MBTA, for the first time, will be closing entire services for weekdays and weeks and a month, not just weekends as we did in 2019."

According to GM Poftak, the system's ridership has indicated that they are willing to endure additional inconveniences if the service will become more reliable and improvements evident. As it stands, the MBTA experiences train failures across its multiple transportation formats on an almost-daily basis, primarily due to the age of its rolling stock, which ranges from 25 to 35 years of age. New subway trains are currently under assembly, on order.

Riders are encouraged to visit the MBTA's online information sources to stay up to date on closures and substitute bus service through 2020, especially during the summer months, when entire branches of the MBTA's system will be completely closed for work. The MBTA can be found at: <http://www.mbtta.com> for service alerts and adjustments, or their Twitter account at: @MBTA for service disruptions as they may occur. Various smart phone applications also provide alerts and updates.

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.

REPORT FROM NEW MEXICO

By JW Madison

The Latest on Albuquerque's BRT Effort ("ART"):

A sharp and talented friend of Rails Inc has informed us that BRT is most successful when it's an actual cheaper (though inferior) substitute for LRT; express speeds, fewer stops, bells, whistles, lights, etc.

Albuquerque's ART is no true BRT, especially not along the denser parts of East or West Central Avenue. It looks a lot like the other articulated bus service still plying the same route, except for the more or less dedicated (but not separated) lanes. Because drivers are trying to avoid East Central, the adjacent Eastbound and Westbound major streets (Coal and Lead respectively) run less smoothly than before.

All the "regular" buses are still running along Central. A couple of friends have said that the "regular" Rapid Ride is more "Rapid" than ART. One reason is that, due to several recent ART-pedestrian fatalities, the ART drivers are being extra careful; meaning a slower if safer ride.

The City didn't listen to the alternatives presented by Rails Inc and others in 2007. You read that right—2007!

The Rail Runner:

Several months ago, our Chair Richard Rudolph tried to use New Mexico's *Rail Runner* commuter service to get from the Albuquerque Sunport (Airport) to a conference in Santa Fe. The train schedule didn't match his schedule, and he had to take alternate transportation at about 4 times the cost.

The biggest deficiency of the *Rail Runner* is that there is just *not enough of it*. It's still a starter commuter line. My own feeling is that, given the backward state of transit and public transportation in general in New Mexico, a very well-funded so-called Conservative think tank camped out in Albuquerque, and the recent near-disastrous eight years in our Governor's mansion, we're lucky the damn thing still runs at all.

In order to acquire more solid information about our regional train than JW's feelings, I met on February 26 with a Rio Metro official (Rio Metro is the governing body of the *Rail Runner*, which is operated by Herzog). Our meeting was pretty hasty, but the next day he sent me this:

"Rio Metro's installation of PTC is progressing smoothly, with the required funding in place. This will allow Rio Metro to pursue the inventory of capital projects in 2021 and beyond that have been deferred to accommodate the PTC. These projects are

designed to improve operational flexibility, enhance the customer experience and reduce travel time". (JW Note: They're also working on CTC improvements for the Albuquerque segment, and on Wi Fi in the cars).

The Dangerous Side of Amtrak's Dining Car Abuse:

There's a small section of my *Report* in our Fall 2019 issue that I believe bears repeating. Here's a reprise:

Last April 15, Lake Shore Limited. In addition to putting up with something less than a Healthy Choice dinner, we sleeper passengers had to stand in line at the kitchen doorway, like welfare cases. The booths we could have sat in were a few yards away from said doorway; a long hike for the attendants. No hand rails, no straps, no anything to hang onto when the train lurches, and the train lurched enough.

This goes beyond inconvenience or a healthy disagreement about how to move people around in America. This is abusive and dangerous. Though I'm fit and quick for my age, my "dinner" and I almost took a spill as I lurched about 15 feet back to my table. Remember this when somebody gets hurt a lot worse than I would have been had I fallen.

JW Madison is a RUNBoard member and president of Rails Inc. in Albuquerque, NM.

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
Steve Albrow, Treasurer	Cleveland, OH	Cleveland RTA Citizen Advisory Board
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

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BUSINESS AS USUAL CONTINUES AT NJ TRANSIT, DESPITE THE GOVERNOR'S ASSURANCES

By David Peter Alan

Phil Murphy has been Governor of New Jersey for more than two years now, and New Jersey Transit (NJT) is still having problems. Murphy is a Democrat, and he and the other members of his party control both houses of the Legislature. They continue to blame former Gov. Chris Christie for the difficulties that the Garden State's transit riders continue to face. They say that Christie starved the agency, but Democrats in the legislature at the time agreed to Christie's budgets, and recent budget increases for transit have been modest. As of now, the riders' collective patience is growing thin, as they (including this writer) expressed their grievances at a number of legislative hearings recently.

The agency continues to face a severe shortage of engineers and a less-severe shortage of conductors. Murphy praised a graduating class of seven new engineers in January, but they are not ready to operate the trains yet. NJT claims to need 50 more engineers to get to normal staffing levels, and there are more classes in training. Still, at that rate, it will probably take about two years for the agency to reach its staffing goal. Installing the federally-mandated Positive Train Control (PTC) system has also required taking equipment out of service, and NJT faces a difficult task to meet the deadline for full PTC installation and operation by the end of this year. Those factors have resulted in a number of trains being eliminated from the schedules on several lines, as well as numerous trains in the schedule being canceled on short notice and with disquieting regularity.

There seems to be no end in sight. When NJT started trimming the schedules in 2018, they said the service reductions were temporary, and that the trains were supposed to come back early in 2019. To date, not a single train that was taken off the schedules of the Northeast Corridor (NEC),

North Jersey Coast, Morris & Essex, Montclair-Boonton, Main-Bergen or Pascack Valley Lines has returned, and the same holds true for weekend trains on the Gladstone Branch (currently running buses instead).

NJT has not said when any of these trains will run again, or even if they ever will, with one exception: a commuter train that used to leave New Brunswick at 7:10 a.m. for New York. The agency only said that it would be back by April, 2026; the projected date for the opening of its controversial proposed Portal North Bridge. Riders have expressed their frustrations at the loss of their trains, both through advocacy organizations and through social media. They are concerned

Riders have expressed their frustrations at the loss of these trains, which they fear will never run again.

that they are being conditioned to live without those trains, which they fear will never run again.

As much as Murphy and legislative leaders have promised "reform" at NJT, there has not been any to date, and prospects for genuine reform appear dim. There are new members of the NJ Transit Board, but none represent the riders, and none depend on transit for all mobility. All are motorists, who appear to have strong connections to the Democrats who run the state. The two who are familiar with transit policy appear to represent the professional "transportation establishment" and not any grassroots rider-oriented organization. There is little hope that the situation will change anytime soon.

In the meantime, the \$30-billion (or more) Gateway Program is becoming more controversial. NJ Transit's numbers

supporting their application for a grant to help pay for their proposed Portal North Bridge were inaccurate, but the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approved it anyway, for now. Ironically, the Coast Guard now allows the existing Portal Bridge to stay closed during peak-commuting hours, which eliminates the primary argument for an expensive high-level bridge. The proposed \$12-billion Hudson Tunnels Project still lacks the local funding needed to match a federal grant, so it was rejected again.

In addition, Gateway Vice-Chair (and Amtrak Board Chair) Anthony R. Coscia expressed doubt that the existing tunnels will last long enough to meet his proposed construction schedule, which would take at least 10 years from now to build new tubes before starting to repair the existing ones. In light of that, U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao called for the existing tunnels to be repaired the way the Canarsie Tunnels in the New York subway system are being rehabilitated at this time. That project should be completed this spring, and it averted a 15-month total shutdown of the busiest part of the line. New Jersey politicians, including Murphy and Sen. Bob Menendez, have criticized Chao, but New Jersey has not chipped in enough money for the Gateway tunnel project to secure a grant from the FTA.

On top of that, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has proposed a "go it alone" plan to build a variation on the "Penn South" component of Gateway, which would serve trains on Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road; not NJT. To learn more about these various Gateway-related issues, see this writer's coverage: "Gateway – The Series" for *Railway Age* on their website, www.railwayage.com.

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

PHILADELPHIA-AREA NEWS

By Chuck Bode

End of an era on SEPTA Market Frankford line

Friday, Jan. 21, 2020 was the last day of skip-stop service on SEPTA's Market Frankford rapid transit line. Skip-stop service was used to speed the trip slightly by having alternate trains serve lightly patronized stations. A few stations on each end of the line were designated "A" or "B" and only served by the corresponding trains during weekday peak periods. Following the demise of the industrial economy, Philadelphia has slowly developed education and technology facilities and built housing on the former industrial sites. This has changed ridership patterns.

Some of the former less-used stations, for example 34th Street, are now busy stations. At the end, skip-stop service only operated an hour each morning and afternoon. The last trains departed from Frankford and 69th Street around 5 p.m. At 69th Street, car 1111 led the last eastbound A train and a few minutes later car 1181 led the final eastbound skip-stop train, a B, at 5:03 p.m. The only ceremony was the platform dispatcher photographing the last train with her cell phone.

Buses replace streetcars on SEPTA's Route 15

In a rush before SEPTA's new General Manager took the helm, streetcars were removed from Route 15 with minimal public notice. While transit fans began to hear rumors of a changeover to occur at the end of February, a sudden rush began to remove the streetcars in January.

SEPTA management did considerable pre-planning because an alternate schedule and pick had been made before the September schedule began. In addition, operators had been issued instructions that buses would operate on Saturday, making Friday Jan. 24 the final day. On the last few days, the fans that had learned about the change rode and photographed, but most of the public was taken by surprise. There was a determined effort to remove the streetcars from Callowhill Depot as soon as each car finished service on Friday.

Although SEPTA had already planned a schedule change and new pick of runs by operators for Feb. 23, the streetcars were removed in much haste a month earlier. The justification was that this would enable construction work to begin on two bridges. One bridge carries I-95 over Frankford Avenue, the other carries a CSX track under Girard Avenue. Of note is that neither project had begun as of Feb. 23.

Brookville Equipment seems to have a good reputation elsewhere. In Philadelphia, SEPTA alleges some defect with the cars. The confusing information from SEPTA failed to clearly indicate what the actual defect is that makes the cars unfit for further service. By the end, over half of the cars had been taken out of service. SEPTA claimed that following their removal from service, the cars would be evaluated and repaired over the next 18 months.

SEPTA has a long history of discontinuing rail service. The strange circumstances surrounding this latest discontinuance have caused local advocates to again feel that SEPTA will fail to restore service in the future. The mystery continues as the Feb. 23 public timetable folder is the green streetcar color with a streetcar on the cover and the note inside that "In the event of a service substitution, buses will stop at the center island carstops." SEPTA's real-time website vehicle locator now includes Route 15 with the bus routes, with a note that buses will operate through 2021.

SEPTA rapid transit cars need repair too

It is not just SEPTA's streetcars that seem to suffer defects. The entire fleet of cars used on the agency's busiest line, the Market Frankford route, seems to be in dire need of repair, according to a report in WHYY's Plan Philly newsletter. 220 cars were obtained in the 1990s. Two were soon removed from service to serve as maintenance of way cars. WHYY reports that "Cracking steel has plagued the El cars since at least 2017, when about 90 ... were pulled off the route for emergency welding work."

Although SEPTA obtained 220 cars, of which 218 should be in passenger service, WHYY goes on to report that SEPTA has difficulty keeping 138 cars in service to operate the line. SEPTA is repairing four cars a month. 218 minus 4 gives 214, minus 138 gives 76 cars unavailable every day.

Why over a third of the cars are under repair daily was not explained. Despite the poor availability record, WHYY reports that once repaired, SEPTA expects the cars to remain in service until 2050.

Coronavirus reaches PATCO

The coronavirus has reached the Philadelphia-area PATCO rapid transit line. PATCO's fare cards are manufactured in China. The most recent shipment of 30,000 cards could not be shipped because the factory was closed by the coronavirus. PATCO had only 500 cards on hand, a week's

supply. Port Authority CEO John Hanson located 10,000 cards in the United Kingdom, which were obtained for \$37,000, as an emergency purchase to enable riders to continue purchasing cards. After going to Vermont to be printed, the cards were expected to arrive before the on-hand supply ran out.

Wilmington, DE station to lose local transit service

DART, the local transit system in Wilmington, is preparing to discontinue bus service to the Amtrak station. At one time, buses stopped at the station's front door. A few years ago, that convenient service was discontinued and the stop moved a block away. The intervening intersection has little traffic to endanger passengers crossing the street.

Recently, DART has indicated that it will discontinue that stop and relocate to a parking garage. The difficulty is that for passengers to get from the station to the parking garage, they need to cross busy South Walnut Street. Not only is the street busy, but visibility is also poor as the street comes down from a bridge to go under the station.

The Wilmington Bus Riders Coalition has taken the issue to the governor's office. Their letter to the governor said, in part:

"This intersection at Martin Luther King Boulevard and South Walnut Street is one of the most dangerous and heavily trafficked intersections in the State. This intersection will be especially dangerous for senior citizens, the disabled, children and passengers with luggage who try to cross S. Walnut St.

"Richard Klepner, your deputy director of the Office of Highway Safety, said, in part, in a recent *News Journal* article: 'It's not fair to ask people to walk a half-mile out of their way to go to a crosswalk. Nobody's going to do that.'"

This author has experienced the danger trying to get from the station to a bus route that operates on Walnut Street. RUN members can join the protest by writing to: The Honorable John Carney, Governor of Delaware, 12th floor, Carvel State Office Building, 820 N. French St., Wilmington, DE 19801.

Chuck Bode is RUN Membership Secretary and chairman of the Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation.

BYE-BYE BYFORD & OTHER NEW YORK STORIES

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and the line went from 25 trains per hour to 29 at some times of the day. The L train is the other line to have CBTC installed, and that line, apart from the ongoing construction in the Canarsie Tube under the East River, also saw its on-time performance and frequency jump.

So, exactly, what drove Byford out of New York? That's an easy one. Governor Andrew Cuomo! Byford was getting too much good press for his transit improvements, his face and voice were everywhere, and while the MTA is a State Agency, the majority of whose Board Members and Presidents are chosen by the Governor, it's the Governor who wanted the credit for all the transit improvements. So, under the guise of "transformation," the MTA is being reorganized into separate divisions, including Construction & Development, and Byford's job would have measurably changed, and he would have been relegated to just running the buses & subways, which is not what he came here to do. He was involved in the upgrading of stations, signals, expansion plans, accessibility, new rolling stock, etc. His "Fast Forward" plan was/is a blueprint for rebuilding the subways, and everybody knew that name, as it was plastered all over posters—both paper & electronic—in stations, in news clippings, etc. His Subway Action Plan was busy rebuilding stations & signals throughout the system, and his "Save Safe Seconds" Plan helped to get trains out of stations more quickly, cutting the wait times for trains, and shortening journeys measurably.

His departure need never have happened, but personalities being what they are, there's just no way he would stay under the present conditions. We wish him well, and thank him for everything he has done for users of this amazing transit system! Aside from Pete Tomlin, we certainly hope the team he has assembled—Sally Librera, Senior V.P. of Subways; Craig Cipriano, Acting President, Bus Division; Sarah Meyer,

Senior VP and Chief Customer Officer; Alex Elegudin, Senior Advisor, Systemwide Accessibility; Frank Jezyski, Exec. V.P.-Chief Operating Officer, Subways—all remain and complete the job Andy began. That would be a fitting tribute to "Train Daddy," as Byford came to be known. Andy has let it be known that he loves NYC, and is in no hurry to go anywhere else. He is no doubt being courted for countless other transit jobs world-wide, but we hope he stays here to watch his beloved transit system expand, become more accessible, gain new signals, rolling stock, and besides, he is loved here!

Sarah Feinberg

Taking over on a temporary basis for Andy Byford is the former Chair of the Transit Committee of the MTA Board, Sarah Feinberg. A former FRA Administrator under President Obama, Feinberg is very knowledgeable on railroads, system safety, technology, and legislative initiatives. She is also the founder of Feinberg Strategies, a business and communications consulting firm. Because she has a small child, she has made it clear that she is undertaking the job of President of NYC Transit on an interim basis until a permanent person is named. As Ms. Feinberg has been chairing the Transit Committee of the Board for over nine months, she is well aware of all the issues facing our transit system, and we wish her the best of luck, for however long she is President.

Junius/Livonia

The junction where two subway lines cross in the Brownsville/East New York sections of Brooklyn—Livonia Ave on the L line, and Junius Street on the #3 line—is getting a lot of attention! Livonia Ave will be getting elevators, making the elevated station fully ADA accessible, at long last. While these two stations are fairly close, there has never been a direct connection between them. In fact, it is the second-to-last of two places in the subway system where lines cross, but are not connected. During L train Canarsie Tube construction, which will be completed in April, there has been a free transfer (a walking transfer) between the Junius St station and the Livonia Ave station. At a press conference I attended about three

weeks ago, it was announced that this "walking transfer" will be extended indefinitely. And in the MTA's next Capital Program (2020-2024) these two stations will finally be connected with an enclosed walking all-weather transfer! So this junction, which now has a rider walking up a lonely stairway, crossing a rail yard, walking down, and then up again to Livonia station, is getting the attention it deserves, much to the gratitude of the people and elected officials of Brownsville/East New York.

Outer Borough Transit Fund

As part of the agreement among State Legislators to pass the nation's first Congestion Pricing program, we have discovered there are a few "flies in the ointment," one of which is the Outer Borough Transit Fund. The first thing we learned about this plan is that- if you are a Bronx resident, you will not have to pay the toll on the Henry Hudson Bridge, between the Bronx & Manhattan! If you are a Queens resident, you will not have to pay the toll on the Cross Bay Veterans Memorial Bridge, between the Queens mainland and the Rockaways! Huh?! So, to discourage the use of motor vehicles, which is basically what congestion pricing does, some lucky motorists now have their tolls removed?! If that weren't enough, it also calls for a 10% reduction on Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Commuter Railroad fares within the boroughs of New York City! Now, that part isn't bad—our Freedom Ticket and Atlantic Ticket do those very things—except that, when developing that program, we did exhaustive research on where there were available seats, which stations were in "transit deserts," and which neighborhoods had the longest commutes. This plan does none of that - and even reduces fares in places where the commuter rail stations are adjacent to subway stations! As it is legislatively mandated, it is going into effect on May 1. The railroads say they will monitor this very carefully, and they must. The inbound trips are less likely to be a problem, but on the outbound trips from Penn Station or Grand Central, it would not be good to have someone who paid in excess of \$500 ticket per month for their rail ticket have to stand while

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someone who paid a much lower fare gets the seats. We will be following this plan closely, and plan to meet with elected officials to apprise them of our concerns about this well-meaning, but not completely thought-out plan. And Freedom Ticket/Atlantic Ticket is a better deal!

Rutgers Tube

The last of the under-river tubes that NYC Transit uses and that was damaged by Superstorm Sandy is about to get its repair. The Rutgers Tube, which carries F trains under the East River between the York St station in Brooklyn, and the East Broadway station on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, will partially close later this year, as the Canarsie Tube work is scheduled to be completed in April. The reason for the quick announcement and movement on this project is now clear: CBTC installation on the 8th Ave subway line between High St in Brooklyn Heights and 59th St-Columbus Circle, is scheduled to begin in 2022. In order to repair the Rutgers Tube, F trains will be diverted to the 8th Ave A, C lines under the East River, through the Cranberry Tube. You wouldn't want to have two projects going on at the same time - diverting F trains to the A, C lines while installing CBTC on those same lines! So later this year, nights & weekend work on the tube will cause F trains to travel on the 8th Ave A, C, lines between Jay St/Metrotech and West 4th St, where they will resume normal service. We are fortunate that the builders of our subways gave us these re-route options, giving amazing flexibility to re-route trains, yet still serve the travelling public.

R262 Procurement

When the R211 B-division cars were ordered (and currently under construction by Kawasaki), a small group of open-gangway cars was ordered as a test. These are likely to arrive by Summer, and will commence testing in The New York environment. Now, talk of the new fleet to replace the aging A division R62, R62A fleet has commenced, with a vote to secure over 450 open-gangway cars. I have asked why we wouldn't wait to see how the test train of R211 cars performs in the New York environment - with all the people

requesting money, musicians, and other people who currently exit from car to car to ply their wares on a "just want to be left alone" riding public, and have been told we would still have time to cancel the open-gangway order of R262 and change this to regular cars with doors on each end, should the test prove problematic. The goal of open-gangway cars is, of course, to move people more easily, avoid overcrowding, and improve the flow of riders through the cars. While that goal is laudable, this is New York - and we frequently have people blocking the doors, not to mention musical troupes blasting their way through the trains, performing dangerous acrobatic moves while a train is lurching around curves! Time will tell, but it's kind of nice to be able to have some peace while riding underground, and the open-gangway cars may not add to that peace.

Clark St

While Andy Byford was still here, I attended a community meeting in Brooklyn Heights about the state of the crumbling Clark St elevators, which have lasted long beyond their normal service life. President Byford told the group about three possible options - 1) shut all three elevators down, replace them, and then re-open the station, after approximately eight months. There are other stations close-by, such as Borough Hall, High St, Court St, etc. Another option would be to keep one elevator operational, shut down the other two, keep the station open (and the businesses that are in the station), and then repair the elevator that wasn't shut down. This process would likely take two years. The third option was to do one elevator at a time, but this option was not really feasible, as you needed the room for the workers to remove, replace the elevator, so keeping two in operation might endanger the workers. Well, a decision has been made, and it is to shut the Clark St station for eight months, and replace all three elevators. The businesses in the station are not happy, as you can imagine, although multiple efforts will be made to keep them going, such as signage outside the building stating the businesses are open and doing business. Additionally, there could be some kind of rent forgiveness, but that is still to be

worked out. It is not clear when the starting date for the work and closure of Clark St station will begin, but it is expected to commence later this year.

On-time Performance

Subway service continues to ratchet up its on-time performance, and now stands at almost 84%! Riders notice this, and many have commented that it seems there are shorter waits for trains now. Of course, all it takes is a sick customer, police action, or a signal issue, and the delays are obvious, but these are hopefully occurring less frequently. There are platform controllers at several stations to help riders board more quickly, and allow the train to depart more quickly - in some cases 15-20 seconds more quickly. Multiply that savings by 40 stations on a line, and that means the train can depart its other terminal more quickly. We hope this progress continues, and with CBTC being installed on the Queens Blvd, 8th Ave, Lexington Ave, and Culver Lines, this bodes well for continued progress, although those installations do not come without any pain.

MTA Transformation

Anthony McCord has been brought in to "transform" the MTA into a leaner, more efficient operation. Unfortunately, this also means the loss of 2,700 positions - most administrative, but also 700 operating positions. How this can be achieved without the loss of vital services remains to be seen, but he has said he's not here to be a "hatchetman" - he genuinely wants to see service and efficiency improve.

We will see how this plays out, but already there has been some pushback by union representatives, who have also stated that - with the loss of that many employees - overtime costs will undoubtedly soar, and there will be fewer people here, but the work that must be done remains, so more overtime for those that are still here. This one bears watching, as we cannot have service reduced, especially as so much rebuilding will be taking place.

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

GOOD CONNECTIONS

Continued from page 1

The morning session will close with a panel presentation focused on initiatives that Amtrak is undertaking to improve service on the Northeast Corridor. It will be moderated by Bill Hollister, Senior Manager, Government Affairs. The panelists will be announced shortly.

During lunch, participants will have an opportunity to share information and experiences regarding their efforts to reach out to members of other organizations who also promote passenger rail and rail transit in their local areas.

The first afternoon session will focus on the Gateway Project. Andrew Albert, Chairman, New York Transit Riders Council, will moderate the discussion. Speakers include Craig Schultz, Senior Manager, Infrastructure Planning-Gateway Project, Amtrak; and Joseph M. Clift, former Director of Planning for the Long Island Rail Road (LIRR). More recently, he served as Technical Director for the Lackawanna Coalition. He received his engineering degree from M.I.T. and his MBA from Stanford. He lives in New York City.

The rest of the afternoon will be devoted to two panel presentations and an audience forum. The first will be moderated by Richard Rudolph, Ph.D., who is also a Director of the Maine Rail Group. It will focus on Expanding Passenger Rail in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Panelists include Len Resto, President, N.J. ARP, who will talk about past and ongoing efforts to expand rail service in New Jersey. Ed Bombaro, Board Member, DVARP, will talk about his effort to reactivate the Historic "Blue Comet Route." Tyler Kusma, Executive Director, Scranton Rail Restoration Coalition, will provide an update on the Lackawanna Cut-Off restoration project and the possible expansion of passenger rail to Scranton, PA.

The second panel will be moderated by David Peter Alan, Esq. It will focus on Making the Case: Presenting your ideas to managers, politicians and journalists. Panelists include Jim Blaze, a Contributing Editor at *Railway Age*, who spent 21 years

with Conrail and another 20 in the consulting field. His specialties are transportation economics and logistics. Mark Magyar, Associate Executive Director for the New Jersey Senate Democrats. He came to politics in Trenton following a four-decade career as a journalist with the Bergen Record, Asbury Park Press and NJ Spotlight. Paul L. Wyckoff is Chief of Government and External Affairs for NJ Transit. Before coming to NJT, Paul practiced law in New York and was Transportation reporter for the Newark-based *Star-Ledger*.

After a short break, an Audience Forum will be held enabling conference participants to share their ideas about how passenger rail and rail transit services can be expanded and improved in the northeast and elsewhere in the nation. It will start off with a brief presentation given by Andy Sharpe, a RUN Board Member who will talk about Train Camps and how we can reach out to younger passenger rail / rail transit advocates.

Participants attending the conference will also have an opportunity to take an optional tour on Saturday, May 16. It will include some of NJT's busiest facilities in the area, along with some rides on NJT lines, with an emphasis on connectivity. We will cover Northern New Jersey, as well as New York City, and we are planning some surprises. So we hope you will join us for the tour as well.

The early registration fee until April 15 is \$45, \$50 from April 16 – May 8 and \$55 thereafter and at the door. It includes morning refreshments, lunch, and an afternoon refreshment break, and all conference materials/handouts. If you wish to stay in Newark before or after the conference, we suggest that you look at the official tourism website for Newark.

Please join us at what promises to be an exciting, thought provoking event. Participants can register and make payment on RUN's website: railusers.net or via regular mail. Checks should be sent to RUN, Box 8015, Portland, Maine 04104. Further details concerning the conference will be announced as arrangements are made on our website. For more information, you can also call Richard Rudolph, Chair, Rail Users' Network. He can best be reached at 207-776-4961.

AMTRAK ACELA UPDATE

By Bill Engel

On Feb. 13, an Amtrak news release announced that the first trainset of the new Acela fleet would leave the Hornell, NY Alstom plant on Feb. 17 to be moved to the Transportation Technology Center near Pueblo, CO for nine months of extensive testing. The Hornell facility was at one time a major locomotive repair shop for the Erie Lackawanna railroad. The news release stated the trainset would be moved from Buffalo, NY to La Junta, CO via the route of the *Lake Shore Limited* and the *Southwest Chief* trains.

The same release reported a second trainset would be moved to Philadelphia's Penn Coach Yard for testing in March of 2020. The release also boasted that the Acela service had experienced a 4.3% increase in ridership during FY19 compared to FY18. Further, in December 2019 Acela had its best month ever, with a 16% ridership increase over the prior year.

AMTRAK SOUTHEASTERN U.S. UPDATE

By Bill Engel

Although I now reside in Northeastern Ohio, some 40 years ago I resided in Charlotte, NC for 18 months. A friend there keeps me posted about rail related news from the region.

One of the most exciting developments in the region actually comes from Virginia. The Commonwealth of Virginia and CSX hope to finalize an agreement during 2020 that would allow for a phased 10-year plan that would, among other plans, include a new Long Bridge over the Potomac River at Washington, DC. This would allow for several passenger rail-related improvements. Some examples would be: increased Washington, DC to Richmond Amtrak service; increased Virginia Railway Express service along the I-95 corridor in Virginia with Saturday service, and a third Amtrak train to Norfolk.

There is good news from North Carolina as well. Ridership on the state-supported *Piedmont* trains between Charlotte and Raleigh was up 9% in October 2019 vs. October 2018. Although I never met the gentleman, Mr. Allan Paul, North Carolina's Deputy Rail Division Director, retired February 1, 2020.

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

RUN TO NEWARK, RIDE SOME TRANSIT, AND SPEND SOME TIME!

By David Peter Alan

RUN to Newark! That is what local rail advocates and RUN members from around the nation will do in the middle of May for RUN's annual conference on Friday, May 15. Newark is a city that had severe problems in the past and has always lived in New York City's shadow, but it has plenty of transit, and it is coming back. There is a lot to see in Newark and in the surrounding suburbs that you can reach on New Jersey Transit (NJT), and we suggest that you take our Saturday tour after the conference, and also plan to spend more time seeing what this often-overlooked city has to offer.

Newark is the transit hub of New Jersey, particularly the Art Deco Penn Station, which was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad and opened in 1935. It is a stop on Amtrak's busy NEC (Northeast Corridor), with frequent service to Boston, Washington, D.C. and other places, including as far south as Miami and New Orleans. It is also a hub for NJT, with trains to Trenton on the NEC, to the famous Jersey Shore on the North Jersey Coast Line, and on the historic Jersey Central Railroad, now known as the Raritan Line. Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) trains to Jersey City and lower Manhattan also leave from Newark Penn Station. So does NJT's Newark Light Rail, the sole survivor of a once-vast streetcar network in the Garden State, as well as dozens of local bus routes.

Historically, the Lackawanna Railroad stopped about a mile north of Penn Station. That location is now called Broad Street Station, and the building on the eastbound side has been restored to its 1903 glory. It serves trains on the Morris & Essex, Gladstone and Montclair-Boonton Lines, and it is connected to Penn Station by local buses and by a branch of the Newark Light Rail that runs frequently during peak-commuting times and much less-often at other times.

Newark is New Jersey's largest city, and it has had a troubled past, especially when riots tore the city apart in 1967. It has suffered from poverty and neglect, but

there has been significant development in downtown Newark lately, especially between the train stations. Some of the historic office buildings in town have been renovated or re-purposed, and nearby parks have gotten face-lifts. Broad and Market Streets (the intersection is called the "historic Four Corners"), and Halsey Street are slowly reclaiming their former glory; Halsey Street is becoming the city's new restaurant row. There are some new hotels that have recently opened, although the Robert Treat, named after the Puritan leader from Connecticut who founded Newark in 1666, is the most famous (but is not historic).

Newark has some interesting museums, too. The New Jersey Historical Society, off Military Park, explores the history of the city and its surroundings. The Newark Museum, on Washington Street, about an eight-minute walk from Broad Street Station, features extensive collections of historic glass and Tibetan art. The classic Newark Public Library, built in 1901, is a block closer to that station.

Not all Newark neighborhoods are tourist-friendly, but some are definitely worth visiting. Lincoln Park, going west from downtown on Broad Street, is surrounded by historic homes and is becoming an arts district. The North Ward, especially along Bloomfield Avenue, is a historically Italian neighborhood, although it is more diverse today. It still has classic Italian restaurants. Nearby is Forest Hill, with its stately old houses. Both neighborhoods are on the Newark Light Rail line to Bloomfield, most of which has been in service since 1935. It is the sole surviving rail transit line in the state, when Newark was one of only seven American cities that still hosted at least one streetcar line that survived from the former golden age of rail transit. The line runs in the roadbed of the Morris Canal, which operated from 1832 until 1924. Part of the route now runs under McCarter Highway, an arterial street that was created when some of the canal bed was paved-over.

One of Newark's most popular tourist destinations is the Ironbound, a formerly-industrial area that heads away from

downtown, in back of Penn Station and along Ferry Street. The ferry is long gone, but the neighborhood is alive with shops and restaurants, frequented by the residents, many of whom have Portuguese or Brazilian heritage. The neighborhood hosts one of the largest Portuguese communities in the country, and its name came from its industrial past: on one side was the New Jersey Railroad, later part of the Pennsylvania Railroad and now part of Amtrak's NEC. On the other side was a branch of the Jersey Central that went south to Elizabethport, and has not hosted a passenger train since 1967, although the facade of the old station on Broad Street still stands, with nothing behind it.

The rail lines which radiate from Newark can take you to a number of historic and interesting destinations. Local NJT trains on the NEC go as far as Trenton, the state capital. From Princeton Junction, there is a shuttle called the "Dinky" that will take you near historic downtown Princeton and the Princeton University campus. New Brunswick, also on the line, is home to New Jersey's other major university, Rutgers. The original "Old Queens" campus is only a block from the train station. There are other towns with their own history and flavor, including constantly-changing Elizabeth.

The Jersey Shore is famous, and the North Jersey Coast Line goes as far as Bay Head; about halfway to Atlantic City. The towns along the line are year-round communities today. Red Bank has its own music and art scene, and the towns from Long Branch south to Bay Head still have the flavor of the Shore. The beaches and the boardwalks of Asbury Park, Point Pleasant and other towns are about one mile from the rail line, but the "season" at the Shore does not begin until Memorial Day, a week after the RUN conference. The Raritan Valley Line also serves Penn Station, and provides limited service to High Bridge through rolling hills in the western part of Central Jersey. The line runs full service to Raritan, stopping at such historic towns as Westfield, Plainfield and Somerville.

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RUN TO NEWARK!

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There are also lots of interesting day trips available from Broad Street Station. On the Morris & Essex Line, a few weekday trains go as far west as Hackettstown, in West Jersey. Full service goes as far as Dover, a town recently enlivened by Latino arrivals who keep it busy and offer some interesting food options. Morristown also has a lively downtown area, as well as historic attractions, including George Washington's headquarters when his army camped there during the frigid winter of 1779-80. Many of these attractions are located within walking distance of the train station. There are many other interesting towns along the M&E too, with numerous examples of homes and businesses that were part of the "transit-oriented development" of the late 1800s and early 1900s, and that are still going strong.

The line to Gladstone branches off from the M&E at Summit. It has an interurban character, as it traverses rolling hills and serves small towns. The ride is scenic, but service is somewhat limited, and there are no trains on weekends. There is better service to Montclair; a town with history and a strong art scene, including the Montclair Art Museum (you will need a local bus along Bloomfield Avenue to get there). Full service on weekdays ends at Montclair State University, while peak-hour commuter trains continue along the old Boonton Line to Dover. Boonton is a historic hillside town that was on the Morris Canal, but visiting it and other towns along the line west of Montclair State can only be accomplished on weekdays in the late afternoon and early evening. It can be done by stopping over, taking a later train to Dover, and coming back to Newark on the Morris & Essex Line.

We suggest that you plan to spend a few days in and around Newark. The Greater Newark Convention and Visitors' Bureau has plenty of information about the city. Their phone number is (973) 735-2135, and their website is www.newarkhappening.com. With Newark itself, the towns that can be reached from there on NJT, and New York

City only about 20 minutes away, there is plenty to do in the area. There are also some rail-related activities that you can enjoy when you come for the conference.

Part of the RUN Conference experience is the tour that will follow on Saturday, May 16. Since much of the conference will concern connectivity, we will show you some of the places where NJT services connect with each other and also connect with other providers like Amtrak, PATH and local buses. NJT officials will help us with the tour, and we plan to ride on several of their lines, so you can get the flavor of the transit network in northern New Jersey and into New York City, where we will also take a look at Penn Station. We will have some other surprises for you, too. The Lackawanna Coalition will sponsor a pre-conference reception at Millburn Town Hall (within walking distance of the Millburn Station on the Morris & Essex Line) at 6:00 pm on Thursday. If you can stay in the area until Monday evening, May 18, the Lackawanna Coalition invites you to attend their meeting that night also at Millburn Town Hall, at 6:45. The Coalition plans to feature a presentation by Alan S. Drake of New Orleans about the benefits of electrically-powered trains. We may plan to have a meal at a genuine New Jersey diner, too.

So we hope you will RUN to Newark with us for our conference on Friday, May 15, and stay in the area to experience an interesting variety of transit, as well as some of the history and scenery that the cities and towns served by New Jersey Transit have to offer.

AN UPDATE ON NEW STARTS

We published our New Starts Roundup in the Winter issue of the *RUN Newsletter*, as we always do. After we went to press, we learned that a new start which had been scheduled for the beginning of this year had been pushed forward to Dec. 14, 2019. It is the two-mile extension of SMART (Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit) from San Rafael to Larkspur, CA, where it now includes questionable connections with ferries to the historic Ferry Building in San Francisco. There is also a new station in downtown Novato, and there are plans to extend the line north from its current terminal in Santa Rosa.

December gave us not only a new start, but a sad end to a streetcar line that ran for only 235 days. It was the Delmar Loop Trolley in St. Louis; a troubled line that began service on Nov. 16, 2018 and broke down during its final run on Dec. 29, 2019. The line may come back, but its future is uncertain, at best. For more detailed coverage, see this writer's article "A Streetcar Thought Undesirable" in *Railway Age*, posted on Jan. 3, 2020 at www.railwayage.com.

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

RUN CANADA REPORT

By Ken Westcar

Rail blockades

As anticipated, the barricading of Canadian rail infrastructure by First Nations peoples protesting the new Coastal Gas Link pipeline in British Columbia (BC) was a tough challenge for the Trudeau (Liberal) federal government. Anxious to avoid a repeat of a similar crisis that happened about 10 years ago, resulting in loss of life, they asked conflicting factions in the Wet'suwet'en band in BC to sort out their internal differences and remove the illegal barriers peacefully and voluntarily. This didn't happen, so the Canadian government ordered clearance by police on the basis that internal band disagreements over resource projects must not kneecap the Canadian economy.

At the start of the crisis, VIA Rail cancelled most Canadian passenger services, even those not on barricaded lines, which was initially puzzling but may have been to reduce the risk of train stranding should other spontaneous blockages be initiated by other bands sympathetic to the Wet'suwet'en cause. At the time of writing, many services had been restored and full operations will return once remaining barricades have been permanently removed in eastern Ontario and Quebec.

Financial gurus believe the blockades could reduce Canada's Q1 GDP by about 0.2%, with a quick recovery thereafter.

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A SURVEY OF LONG DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.– PART NINE: NEW CONVENTIONAL PASSENGER RAIL SERVICES (CALIFORNIA, NEVADA AND THE INTER-MOUNTAIN REGION)

By Dana Gabbard

To keep this survey at a manageable length, it is being divided into multiple parts. This one deals with proposed long distance conventional rail projects for California, Nevada and the inter-mountain region.

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

COAST DAYLIGHT

The 474-mile Coast Rail Corridor, which runs from San Francisco to Los Angeles, currently hosts a full complement of urban commuters, as well as regional, intercity, and interstate travelers. Constructed by the Southern Pacific Railroad between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Coast Corridor was originally built as a one-seat ride (*The Coast Daylight*) that moved passengers between San Francisco and Los Angeles. While the present adaptation has service in every region of the Coast Corridor, there is currently no one-seat ride option that serves the entire length of the Corridor. Current passenger rail services that operate on segments of the Coast Corridor include Caltrain, Amtrak *Pacific Surfliner*, Amtrak *Coast Starlight*, and Metrolink.

The 2018 *State Rail Plan* has identified extending state-supported rail service north of San Luis Obispo and south of San Jose to connect the state's two megaregions, which would fill the gap in passenger rail services between northern and southern California. The Coast Rail Coordinating Council (CRCC) and its member agencies are working on a number of projects to help lay the groundwork for this emerging state-supported service, including: network integration studies to better connect rail passengers with local and regional bus systems, and layover facility expansions and improvements to support increased train frequencies.

The CRCC consists of a technical and policy committee made up of staff and elected officials representing coastal agencies focused on improving passenger rail service along the Coast Route. In October 2018,

SLOCOG, SBCAG, VCTC, Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC), and Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) formalized their relationship through a Memorandum of Understanding establishing themselves as the CRCC, with SLOCOG acting as the managing/administering agency for meeting coordination, grant submission, and other administrative responsibilities. The CRCC and its member agencies help evaluate options for developing and operating state-supported intercity rail service between San Luis Obispo and San Jose.

SLOCOG/CRCC Staff Anna Devers informs me that, "the CRCC is currently talking with a group of people interested in studying the return of the Coast Daylight train and how we might help them achieve their study. Support for this type of service continues to be in our plans, and the State Rail Plan indicates support for a new through [train] before 2027."

The CRCC website is at <https://www.slocog.org/programs/public-transportation/rail/coast-rail-coordinating-council-crcc>

SANTA BARBARA COMMUTER

On April 2, 2018, Amtrak's *Pacific Surfliner* began operating a weekday early morning service to provide convenient transportation for commuting workers who live in Ventura County and work in Santa Barbara to the north (and with an afternoon trip for workers to go home). This was intended as the first step toward an eventual commuter train with multiple frequencies between Santa Barbara and Ventura County.

Initial ridership was tepid (80-100 daily riders). Dennis Story, a longtime rail activist and champion of the service, informs me, "Ridership has increased in the last month or so. We are at about 125 passengers per morning train trip. I've noticed that the morning train has been late much less lately."

At its Feb. 20, 2020 meeting, SBCAG

approved renewing the subsidy for the *Surfliner* commute run one more year.

The website for the train is www.trafficsolutions.org/Train

COACHELLA VALLEY

For some years, there has been an effort on behalf of additional Amtrak intercity rail service between Los Angeles and the desert cities in the Coachella Valley beyond the thrice-weekly *Sunset Limited*. The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) has taken the lead in studying options, in coordination with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)

RCTC plans to release the draft environmental documents this summer for public comment, and then proceed with the next phase of planning and design.

Grant funds have been secured for a demonstration of the service. This would be to the internationally famous annual Coachella and Stagecoach music festivals, with direct service from Los Angeles to a platform in Indio that the grant is funding the cost of constructing. There were hopes it would begin this year but protracted negotiations with the host railroad, Union Pacific, preclude this and now the hope is everything can be worked out by next year,

The project website is <https://www.rctc.org/projects/coachella-valley-san-gorgonio-pass-corridor-rail-corridor-service-project/>

X TRAIN

A "party train" between Los Angeles and Las Vegas has been the object of several ventures in the past decade, with at least one eventually becoming stillborn.

The website of the X Train project parent United Rail, Inc. states "X Train project now scheduled to run in 2021." The project website describes it thusly (with an updated

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

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description of stations served provided by Michael Barron, Chairman/CEO of United Rail, Inc.):

It will be scheduled as a Friday through Sunday service with passengers boarding the train at LA Union Station with stops in Fullerton and San Bernardino before continuing to a terminal built in Las Vegas and owned and operated by the X Train. ... Only the X Train will be able to use our station in Las Vegas. A typical X Train will carry 10 passenger cars and will include food service and will carry on average, 500 – 700 passengers per trip.

The project website is <https://vegasxtrain.com/>

FRONT RANGE

In 2011, longtime rail advocate Jim Souby (currently President of ColoRail [<http://colorail.org>]) began the campaign for a Front Range passenger rail service linking Denver and New Mexico with possible extensions north to Wyoming and Montana. It was an outgrowth of the Save Our Station campaign to prevent Denver Union Station from being razed for a convention center.

Rails, Inc. of Albuquerque, NM, founded by RUN Board member J.W. Madison, has for over a decade promoted a similar concept it dubs the *Rocky Mountain Flyer* [<http://www.nmrails.org/rocky-mountain-flyer-maps/>].

On July 1, 2017, the existing Southwest Chief Commission of the Colorado Dept. of Transportation was replaced by the Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission [<https://www.codot.gov/about/southwest-chief-commission-front-range-passenger-rail>].

Earlier this year, Colorado House Speaker

K.C. Becker (D-Boulder) announced she would not support legislation for funding the Front Range, all but guaranteeing it will not be introduced this year. Becker's key objection is the unfairness of it going forward while a promised commuter rail line linking Boulder and Longmont to Denver as part of the regional FasTracks program is in limbo due to ballooning estimated cost. Becker is term-limited next year and with the Governor a key supporter, this may just be a delay in it going forward.

To learn more about the project and its status, I posed three questions to Mr. Souby (who sits on the Commission) and Randy Grauberger, Project Director of the Commission, which they kindly answered:

1) Am I correct this is anticipated to be operated as a state-supported Amtrak route as part of the national network per PRIIA? Some references to it as commuter rail makes it sound more like separately operated services (Metrolink, Sounder, Coaster, etc.) with rail access through agreements with the host railroads.

Grauberger: The determination as to "what type of service" has not yet been determined. Amtrak has expressed interest in being the operator, but we'll also most likely be considering private operators in the event the service is more likened to commuter rail. That will all be part of the service development planning that is currently taking place. If an alignment is elected that is NOT within or adjacent to the I-25 right of way, the route would most likely be adjacent to, but not on, the existing Class I freight rail corridors.

Souby: We are undecided. The results of the Commission preliminary Service Development Plan findings will help us decide on the type of service that is best for Colorado at this time. Both options mentioned are on the table.

2) While the main emphasis seems linking Denver and New Mexico, I have also seen references to it going further North to Wyoming. Is that true?

Grauberger: The main focus at this time is connecting Pueblo to Fort Collins, a 180-mile

corridor. The State of Wyoming has a non-voting member on the Commission, and the SWC&FRPR Commission has been working closely with New Mexico and Kansas DOTs on preserving *SW Chief* service on its existing alignment through SE Colorado. We are working to ensure that Front Range Passenger Rail in the future can link to Cheyenne, WY and Albuquerque, NM.

Souby: Wyoming has expressed definite interest in eventually tying into the Front Range passenger rail system. They requested and now hold a non-voting seat on the Commission.

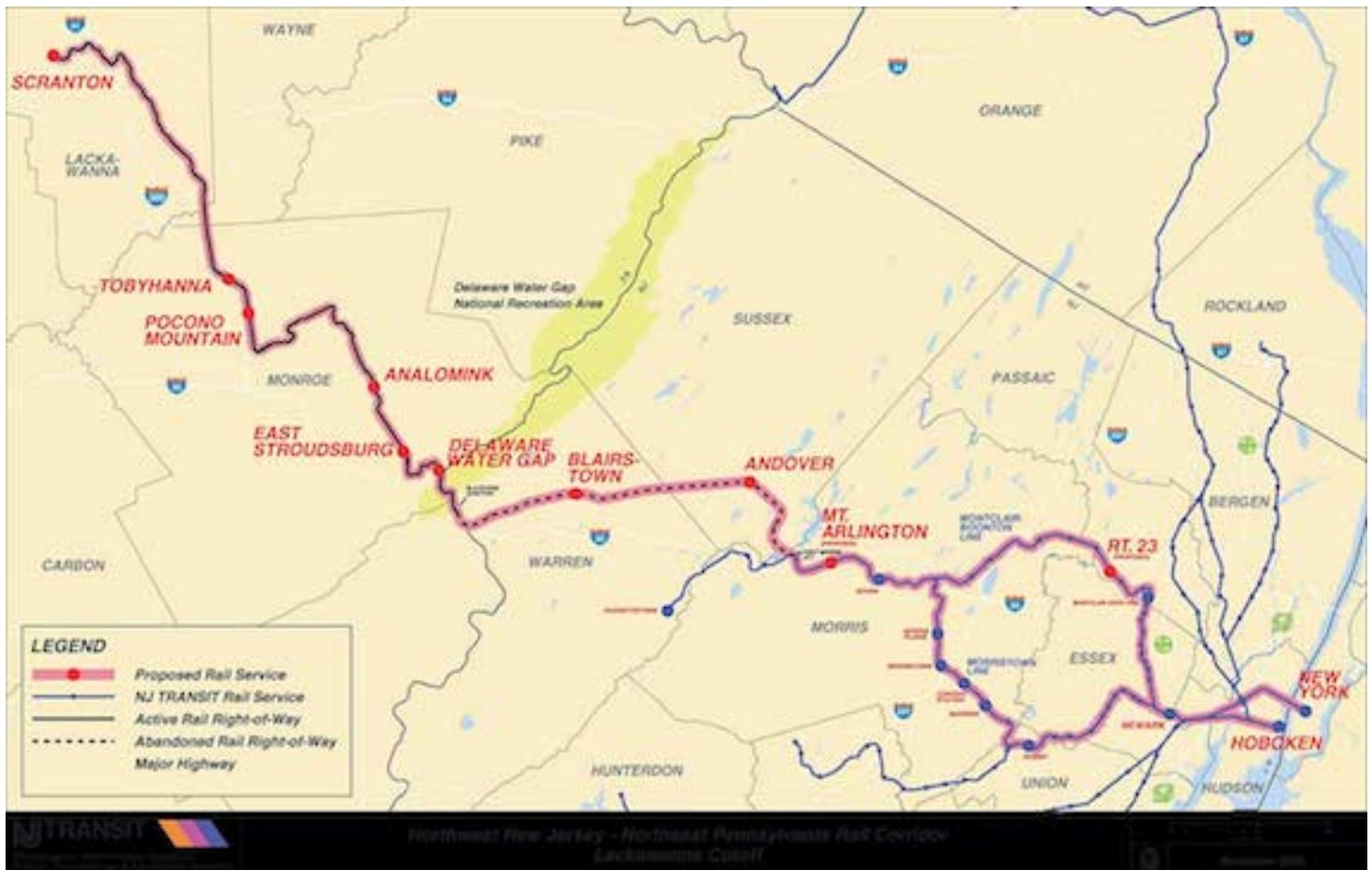
New Mexico participates in Commission meetings and projects but primarily from the *SW Chief* side of the Commission's legislative charge. It is important to remember that the Commission is also charged with rerouting the *SW Chief* from La Junta through Pueblo to Trinidad with a possible stop at Walsenburg. This would provide an initial rail linkage from the Colorado Front Range to New Mexico. A first step could be through car service off the *SW Chief* at La Junta to Pueblo and Colorado Springs. This concept is being actively looked into at the present time. Initial ridership and revenue estimates indicate this service would be a strong contributor to the *SW Chief's* performance.

3) While Ms. Becker's stance seems to put a hold on legislative action, are other aspects of the process still going forward like environmental clearance, working with the host railroads, modeling, coordinating with multiple levels of government in Colorado and adjacent states, etc.?

Grauberger: You are correct that all of the other elements (stakeholder engagement, service development planning, pre-NEPA) of the Front Range Passenger Rail Project are moving ahead in calendar year 2020. The SWC&FRPR Commission has decided not to *initiate* a legislative effort related to governance in the current legislative session. However should any legislator propose to move a passenger rail-related bill forward, the Commission would stand ready to monitor such an effort.

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THE ENDLESS QUEST TO RESTORE RAIL PASSENGER SERVICE TO SCRANTON, PA



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

Reprinted from *Passenger Train Journal*,
2020-1, issue 282

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

Hope still exists for the return of rail passenger service through the Poconos to Scranton, PA despite more than a quarter century's worth of discussions, feasibility studies and political advocacy to restore service. The last regularly scheduled passenger train, the Hoboken-Chicago *Lake Cities*, ran over the line in early January 1970. Amtrak considered restoring service in November 1979 when it ran an inspection train between Hoboken, NJ and Scranton. The idea, however, faded as

Amtrak faced funding shortfalls and the need for significant track and station repairs in order to run passenger service on the line. There is now a new sense of optimism given the Lackawanna Cut-Off Restoration Project is finally underway.

The Lackawanna Cut-Off, a.k.a. the New Jersey Cutoff, was built by the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western, between Port Morris, NJ and the west bank of the Delaware River at Slateford, PA. It served as a faster, more direct route that bypassed DL&W's circuitous route between those two points by way of Washington, N.J. Built between 1908-1911, the 28.45-mile cutoff was considered an engineering marvel with deep cuts, tall fills, and two stately viaducts. It was approximately 11 miles shorter than the "Old Road." It was built

without grade crossings to avoid collisions with newfangled automobiles, horse-drawn vehicles, and pedestrians. All but one curve on the Cut-Off allowed for speeds of 70 mph or more.

Although the DL&W and its successor, the Erie Lackawanna Railroad, offered freight service over the line until 1976 (1970 for passenger service), the conveyance of EL to Conrail on April 1, 1976 ultimately led to its abandonment in 1984 and subsequent track removal.

The objective of the Lackawanna Cutoff Restoration Project is to reinstate passenger rail service over this abandoned right-of-way to make connection to Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Railroad Authority's mainline that runs from

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THE ENDLESS QUEST TO RESTORE RAIL PASSENGER SERVICE TO SCRANTON, PA

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Portland, PA—just south of the Delaware Water Gap—to Scranton. The current operator of this line is Genesee Valley Transportation's Delaware-Lackawanna Railroad, which operates freight and occasional passenger specials, over the line. The ultimate goal is to provide NJT service between Hoboken and Scranton as well as from New York Penn Station via transfer to Midtown Direct service at Secaucus Junction.

The project includes complete reconstruction of the line, including track and signal improvements to approximately 88 miles of right-of-way, eight new stations, parking facilities, a train storage yard and additional rail rolling stock. The proposed stations would serve Blairstown and Andover in New Jersey and Delaware Water Gap, Stroudsburg, Ansonia, Pocono Mountain, Tobyhanna and Scranton in Pennsylvania. In 2007, the estimated cost for the full build-out to Scranton was \$516 million. Unfortunately, only the first phase of the project has been fully funded, a 7.3-mile segment from Port Morris to a new passenger station to be built at Andover, NJ. Despite this fact, the goal of returning service to Scranton lives on.

Larry Malski, the president of the PNRRA, who has shepherded the restoration of freight railroad service in the region, remains optimistic given the fact that it is perceived as a federal "New Starts" rail restoration project that is under construction and continues making progress toward its terminus in Scranton. All the feasibility, environmental and preliminary engineering approvals, he maintains, have already been completed on the 133 miles from New York City to Scranton.

With a \$150,000 federal grant received in 2017, PNRRA has hired an environmental engineering firm to start gathering updated costs and other data needed. The Authority has matched this federal grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, with

\$50,000 each from Lackawanna and Monroe counties, \$25,000 of its own money and another \$25,000 from the Lackawanna Luzerne Metropolitan Planning Organization. This past spring, the authority was awarded an additional \$400,000 state grant for engineering services needed to continue track and structure construction for the passenger-rail restoration project.

According to Tyler Kusma, the executive director of the Scranton Rail Restoration Coalition (SRRRC), a new organization which was established in the spring of 2019, there is strong support for completing the Lackawanna Cut-Off Restoration Project. When Leslie Richards, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Transportation, held a virtual town hall last year to solicit feedback from Pennsylvania residents on what should be included in PennDOT's new 12-year rail plan, SRRRC supporters raised questions about the state's role. Tyler completely agreed with Richards who stated federal funding assistance is necessary, but believes PennDOT and the state need to step up to the plate as well.

Although it is too early to predict whether passenger service will ever be restored to Scranton—though the operation of Scranton-based tourist and charter passenger trains is quite common—it certainly can be justified based on the federal feasibility and environmental studies that have been completed to date. According to these studies, the northeastern Pennsylvania region is a primary travel destination for a million residents living in the New York/New Jersey area, many of whom rely on public transportation. It would also attract back and home office professional businesses that are related to the New York City/Northern New Jersey Megalopolis. The studies also identified over 20,000 Pennsylvania commuters who reside in Northeastern Pennsylvania and have jobs in New York City or northern New Jersey and must commute on Interstate 80, which for years now has been a parking lot during rush hours.

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But one should wonder what the longer-term harm to Canada's rail transportation sector and commercial

reputation will be if internal third-party spats can have such a debilitating effect. Perhaps it's the cost of being a "rule of law" nation.

Hamilton LRT fiasco

After a decade of planning, expropriation (eminent domain property acquisition) and related investments by local businesses in anticipated transit-oriented development (TOD), the Ford conservative government in Ontario spontaneously cancelled the entire LRT project. Every stakeholder was taken by surprise and Carolyn Mulroney, the provincial transport minister, decided to hole-up in an office across the street in Hamilton rather than face their ire in the nearby conference venue where her announcement was originally planned.

It seems the decision hinged on a "secret report", done by a government-appointed consultant, that the project cost had ballooned from C\$1.1 billion to approximately C\$5.6 billion over its decade-long gestation period. While some cost inflation is to be expected, it seems that a 30-year operating and maintenance budget had been added into the construction and commissioning estimate. Credits for farebox revenues, local TOD-related business expansion and collateral benefits were not considered.

To placate the various angry stakeholders, the City of Hamilton would still receive the original C\$1.1 billion for public transit and a local task force would be struck to consider the best way of investing it. The issue caught the attention of Ontario's Auditor General (government spending watchdog) who launched an independent "value for money" audit on the project and will report later in 2020.

The Ford provincial government has developed a reputation for public relations gaffes and policy failure, so Hamilton's LRT project is not quite toast. But it's a classic example of overstating the costs while understating the benefits for political reasons and hobbling a city trying to drag itself out of a smokestack past
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A SURVEY OF LONG DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.

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Souby: While Speaker Becker's stance certainly put a damper on the Commission's own initial thinking for the legislative session, it is important to remember we had not arrived at nor drafted any legislative proposal for the current session when the time to introduce legislation arrived in December. There is strong support for the Commission's efforts in the Legislature and it is not our province to speculate on the outcomes of this year's session, which is not even halfway over. The Commission continues to proceed on its path toward initial Service Development Plan and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. We received a two year appropriation to prepare to meet these requirements and that work is underway.

The website for Front Range advocates is <http://frontrangeontrack.org/index.html>. After some two years, this survey has reached its conclusion. I launched it out of curiosity and as something positive to undertake while coping with life challenges. It has been educational and I anticipate following up on some of the projects and issues that it touched on in future newsletters. My thanks to our readers for their interest.

A tip of the hat to the e-newsletter of the Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada (RailPAC), edited by Noel Braymer, for bringing to my attention articles that were useful to my research. This is sent out every Monday, featuring rail-related news articles from California and beyond. To subscribe to this free e-newsletter, send your name and email address to nbraymer@railpac.org. I also found useful the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) weekly Hotline.

Thanks also to Marc Magliari, Spokesman out of Amtrak's Media Relations Chicago Office; Michael Koch, Transit Manager for the city of Winter Park, CO; Barry Green,

RPA Montana representative; the City Clerk Office of Culbertson MT; Stacy Snider, Oregon Dept. of Transportation (ODOT) – Rail Operations and Planning Manager – Rail and Public Transit Division; Jennifer Sellers, ODOT – Operations and Planning – NW Rail Corridor Project Manager; Janet Matkin, Communications Manager – Washington state Dept. of Transportation – Rail, Freight and Ports Division; Paul Dyson, President of RailPAC; Bob Manning of the Southwest Rail Passenger Association; John Daniel Garcia, Big Bend Sentinel; Bruce Flohr; Robert Reber, Adjunct Planner, city of Hercules CA; Kenneth Pratt, L.A. Metro Deputy Executive Officer for Real Estate, Union Station Operations and Management; Jim Allison, Manager of Planning Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority, Dan Leavitt, Manager of Regional Initiatives – Manager of Marketing and Outreach, **San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority**; Michael Litschi, Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Deputy Director; J.W. Madison, President, Rails Inc. (and RUN Board member); Micah Flores, Information Office California High Speed Rail Authority; Mike Dukakis; Andy Kunz, President & CEO, US High Speed Rail Association; XpressWest; Jon Nuxoll, President, Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA); Dan McFarling, Director, Secretary, AORTA; Olivia Irvin, Public Relations Manager, Amtrak Oakland; Lloyd Flem, Former Executive Director All Aboard Washington; Andrea Olsen, Montana House of Representatives; Michael Hicks, Director, Media Relations, Brightline; Evan Stair, Rail Kansas; [Adrian Gurule](#), New Mexico Rail Passengers Coalition President/founder; Minerva Lopez, Director City of Marfa Texas Visitor Center; Ann Marie Nafziger, Mayor of Marfa Texas; John Spain Chair Southern Rail Commission; Steve Roberts RailPAC, Dennis Story, Board member RailPAC; Anna Devers, Public Affairs and Planning, San Luis Obispo Council of Governments; Sheldon Peterson, RAIL Manager, Riverside County Transportation Commission; Randy Grauberger, Project Director, Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission; James M Souby, President, ColoRail; Michael Barron, Chairman/CEO, United Rail. Inc. and Maria Bailey of Success City Online marketing.

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

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Connecting the Southwest

Fresh from announcing the cancellation of the Hamilton LRT, Ontario's Transportation Minister, Carolyn Mulroney appeared in London, ON on Jan. 17 to introduce a new transportation plan for southwestern Ontario. Covering everything from highway improvements to ferry services, it was received positively by the audience and media. Incorporating major elements of the County of Oxford's "SouthwestLynx" high-performance rail plan, while excluding high-speed rail, it signaled that the conservative provincial government had finally acknowledged growing mobility problems outside the Toronto region.

Passenger rail and bus advocates responded constructively by stressing the need for the province to work with CN Rail and the federal government to get shovels in the ground quickly to remove rail infrastructure bottlenecks between Toronto, Windsor and Sarnia. Overcoming a lack of trust between the three stakeholders and funding could be problematic.

So, the provincial plan will remain largely aspirational until money is found, contracts written and physical work starts. The big risk for the conservative Ford government is that losing the next provincial election to the Liberals could result in high-speed rail being brought back into contention unless there's demonstrable progress on critical, existing rail infrastructure improvements. Advocates in southwestern Ontario fear the return of passenger rail purgatory.

Ken Westcar is co-coordinator of InterCityRail.

FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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