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## THE COMMONWEALTH RAIL SUMMIT: ADVOCATES FOCUS ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

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

The Commonwealth Rail Summit was held May 17, 2019 at the Virginians for High Speed Rail headquarters in Richmond, VA and included attendees from Virginia, Indiana, Maine, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Oklahoma.

The day began with welcoming remarks: Danny Plaugher, Executive Director of VHRS, described how in the past 10 years Virginia has expanded passenger rail and passed legislation which provides a dedicated source of tax revenue to support rail in the state. Richard Rudolph, chairman of the Rail Users' Network, outlined the origins and history of the organization as well efforts to improve passenger rail/ transit

rail in the country and recent work to save Amtrak's national network.

Our first featured speaker of the day, Meredith Richards, spoke about the renaissance that has occurred over the past decade in the Commonwealth. Thanks to her hard work as chair of Cville Rail and the Piedmont Rail Coalition, passenger rail service was restored to Lynchburg in October 2009. This service has been the most successful train on Amtrak routes in terms of cost recovery, with Charlottesville providing the most riders of any station on the route. A second state-supported regional train was launched in 2010 between Richmond, VA's Staple Mills Station and Washington, DC with continuing service to New York, and Amtrak came to Norfolk in 2012.

Meredith said the key to the Commonwealth's success was the creation of the Intercity Passenger Rail Operating and Capital Fund (IPROC). It first provided short-term funding in 2011, but with the adoption of a transportation tax package in 2013, now provides funding for operations costs, equipment upgrades and capital improvements for intercity passenger rail in the state. The transportation funding package made Virginia the first state to sustainably fund intercity and high speed passenger rail. Since FY 2013, Virginia has invested \$467 million to sustain and improve its passenger rail network, including the return of passenger rail to Roanoke in November 2017 and a second train to Norfolk last March.

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## NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT LAUNCHES THE OMNY TAP CARD

**By Andrew Albert**

Since 1993, New Yorkers have been "swiping" their way into New York's mammoth subway & bus system by gliding their MetroCards through a narrow path on top of turnstiles, or into a fare box on the bus. The iconic MetroCard has since become a symbol of New York, much as the venerable token had before it. Advertisers took advantage of the millions of MetroCards sold as a way to make their presence

known to millions of subway & bus users. In fact, the MetroCard allowed for the "one city-one fare" program, replacing the subway/bus double-fare problem for much of the outer boroughs. Uniting the city with one fare, it allowed you to go from Eastern Queens to Southern Brooklyn or Northern Bronx, all for the price of one fare. Now, the OMNY card has been introduced to selected subway & bus lines—and you can now "tap" your way into the system.

How does it work? I've been lucky enough to be part of a test group who have been using OMNY for the past month and a half. It works really well—it is easy, quick, and you don't see any "swipe again" or "swipe again here" messages. Presently, it is only on Lexington Avenue Line (4,5,6) stations between Grand Central in Midtown Manhattan, and Atlantic Ave/Barclays Center in Downtown Brooklyn. It is also on all Staten Island buses.

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## AT LAST—CHANGE IS COMING TO MIDWEST RAIL CORRIDORS

By James E. Coston

If it seems like the development of state intercity corridors in the Midwest has taken forever—well, it has. Much of what the Midwest states now plan for service improvement and growth have been on the drawing boards—and some fully funded—for going on a decade. But 2019 does hold the promise of *some* movement in the upgrade of state rail corridors in the Midwest.

**Illinois:** Now going on for 10-plus years in the planning, the long-promised—and fully funded—start of a route from Chicago to the Quad Cities (Moline, IL) may actually commence buildout in 2019. On hold for years during the Rauner administration, Governor Pritzker finally gave the route his go-ahead, and put the required Illinois “match” in the budget passed May 31. To date, no work of any kind has been done to start service. Engineering to build a ramp from the BNSF at Wyanet, IL to the Iowa Interstate (former Rock Island) mainline must be performed, the ramp built and most of the Iowa Interstate to Moline signaled and equipped with PTC as well as substantial replacement of joint rail and ties for the entire route to Moline.

The other route project remains on hold: Service from Chicago to Rockford, IL, and continuing to Galena and across the river to Dubuque, IA, remains moribund, despite great local support for initiation of service. No capital or operating funds have been allocated, and even the route to be used to Rockford remains in question. Plus, the Canadian National, which owns the track from Rockford to Dubuque as well as the track on one of the alternate routes between Chicago and Rockford, remains viewed as a serious obstacle to any service ultimately being started on the route.

The eight daily round-trip trains on the three existing Illinois corridors remain unchanged: Siemens Charger locomotives, standard Amfleet and Horizon coaches leased from Amtrak and no discussion of increased frequency on any route. Also, still no word on when speeds will be raised to 110 mph between Joliet and Alton on the Chicago – St. Louis route. Nor any decision or funding to create new routes for this “high-speed” corridor between Chicago and Joliet and between Alton and St. Louis. Nor is there

funding for the state’s plan to re-route all Union Pacific trains (including Amtrak trains) through Springfield over a permanent detour over the Norfolk Southern.

**Michigan:** The same holds true for the five daily trains operated in Michigan on three corridor routes. Siemens Charger locomotives have not yet been introduced, and no specific date for increase in track speeds to 110 mph on the Porter, IN to Dearborn, MI portion of the *Wolverine* route. The state continues to have a challenging relationship with Amtrak, particularly with regard to maintenance of Amtrak of track now owned by Michigan.

**Missouri:** The St. Louis – Kansas City *River Runners* are now hauled by Siemens Charger locomotives. These trains also must haul additional cars, usually new or retired Amtrak baggage or dining cars – to satisfy the UPRR that the otherwise short and light Amtrak rolling stock fails to adequately trip signals to activate grade crossing gates and lights and requires that the state lease these cars from Amtrak at substantial expense in order to operate.

**Wisconsin – Minnesota:** Wisconsin DOT has long planned to expand Chicago – Milwaukee *Hiawatha* service to 10 daily round-trip trains. Projects to expand infrastructure and track capacity to accommodate more trains have been planned and capital appropriated to pay for these projects. But, one of the major projects to increase throughput over the line by extending an existing holding track at Glenview, IL to avoid freight train interference was vetoed when the local communities raised over half a million dollars to engage lobbyists and fight the improvement, which residents claim would diminish the quality of life in these suburbs. Illinois had put a halt to this project last year when, facing re-election, Governor Rauner ordered Illinois DOT to put the project on hold. IDOT has now cancelled the project. The states now say that other infrastructure tweaks can be made, but there is no timetable for the work nor planned start date for the additional trains.

Also, both states continue to move forward with a planned new daily frequency from Chicago to St. Paul on the route currently served only by the daily *Empire Builder*. It was believed that this project was in

jeopardy, but the new governors of both states are pro-rail, so now the states are looking to finalize plans and seek necessary grants during 2019.

Also, in Wisconsin, a grass roots effort is moving forward to commence service over the UP’s former Chicago & Northwestern “Route of the 400’s” from Eau Claire to St. Paul, with four daily round-trips planned to make the 85-mile trip. This project is being developed as a unique public-private partnership which enjoys both strong local support as well as the support of the UP.

Finally, Minnesota DOT is moving forward with its long-planned new route connecting Target Field Station in Minneapolis with Duluth, MN/Superior, WI, featuring 90-mph top speed and four daily roundtrips over the BNSF.

There continues to be talk, mainly from Amtrak, about extending train service from Chicago and Carbondale (a route which has the worst on-time performance of a corridor in the nation) to Memphis, TN. Other potential new routes include restoration of long-gone service between Detroit and Toronto, Ont. However, none of these proposed services has been sponsored nor monies appropriated for the capital necessary to improve the route for passenger train service.

Finally, Indiana’s *Hoosier State* will cease making its slow, four-days-per-week trek between Indianapolis, Lafayette and Chicago. Indiana decided that it no longer wished to provide financial support for Amtrak to run the train. The route will continue to be served by the tri-weekly *Cardinal* with arrivals from Cincinnati, West Virginia and Washington, DC.

So, although for now things appear to stay pretty much the same for state corridor rail in the Midwest, there may actually be some new trains and routes for Midwest train riders in the not-so-distant future.

*James E. Coston is chairman of Corridor Capital LLC.*

# THE STATE OF RAIL ADVOCACY IN THE EVERGREEN STATE

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

*Reprinted from Passenger Train Journal,  
2019-2, issue 279.*

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

Over the past eight years, Washington State has used nearly \$800 million in federal grants to fund 20 different rail construction projects to upgrade passenger rail stations, enhance rail safety and relieve rail congestion. The projects included the 19-mile bypass route south of Tacoma to relieve congestion, a new rail station in Tacoma which serves Amtrak Cascades trains and the Coast Starlight, King Street station improvements, the installation of new advanced-warning signal systems to improve safety, and landslide mitigation efforts to catch debris before it hits the tracks. The funds were also used to purchase eight new Siemen Charger locomotives which were to be used for the Cascade Service.

Currently, Amtrak operates the state supported Cascade Service with two roundtrips from Eugene to Portland, Oregon, four roundtrips from Portland to Seattle and two Seattle-Vancouver, B.C. round trips each day. With over 802,000 riders in FY18, the Cascade service is the eighth most heavily traveled corridor in the country. Amtrak also provides daily service on the Coast Starlight between Los Angeles-Portland and Seattle and the Empire Builder between Chicago-Minneapolis-Spokane-Seattle / Portland.

Members of *All Aboard Washington*, the major rail advocacy group in Washington, are pleased that the state received a greater share of the funding from President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 "High Speed Rail" money than any other states except California and Illinois. It lobbied their Washington Congressional delegation by arguing that the state had earned significant AARA funding more than other contenders had. The organization was pleased that "merit seemed to rule in distributing the money rather than just, say, the number of electoral votes a state might have!"

Lloyd Flem, the long-time Executive Director of AAWA, believes in working both sides of the aisle and both sides of a very geographically diverse state to advocate for additional frequencies of trains within the Northwest Corridor. Through his encouragement and support, a small group of state legislators has been meeting informally as the Legislative Rail Caucus (LRC). The LRC has no formal membership, but consists of House and Senate members from both parties and from all over the "physically, economically and politically varied state."

While having differing perspectives on a variety of issues, those associated with the LRC cooperate well when it comes to rail. Since 2014, AAWA has hosted an annual reception at the state capitol in Olympia with members of the LRC and other interested parties to encourage all groups to work cooperatively for the good of the rail mode and for the benefit of the state.

The tragic derailment on Dec. 18, 2017 of the Amtrak Cascades passenger train on its inaugural run on the Point Defiance Bypass has been a major setback. It not

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

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*Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny*

## LACKAWANNA COALITION CELEBRATES 40TH ANNIVERSARY, WHILE ITS CONSTITUENTS WAIT FOR BETTER TRANSIT

*By David Peter Alan*

April was a big month for the Lackawanna Coalition, as it celebrated its 40th anniversary with a members-only dinner on April 9 (the anniversary of its first meeting) and a public celebration at its regular monthly meeting on the 22nd. To commemorate the occasion, the Coalition also installed a small exhibition of memorabilia at the library in Millburn, NJ, the town where it was founded and has met throughout its history.

New Jersey Transit (NJT) was also founded during the same transportation crisis four decades ago, and the agency will celebrate its own anniversary in July. Transit in the Garden State was facing a serious crisis at the time, with elements reminiscent of the situation today: unreliable service, trains that were cancelled or annulled, lack of funding, unreliable governance of transit and a general lack of concern for the riders.

Today, there are a few bright spots on the transit horizon in New Jersey, but most of the news is still bad. There was a positive event on Sunday, May 12. Service on the

Atlantic City Rail Line between that city and Philadelphia, and the Princeton Dinky, a two-mile branch from Princeton Junction on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) line toward Princeton University, reopened for service after a suspension that began after Labor Day last year and lasted for more than eight months. The suspensions were ordered purportedly to facilitate the installation of Positive Train Control (PTC), and the agency had met the interim progress deadline at the end of last year; a difficult feat, given the lack of funding and attention from the former administration of Gov. Chris Christie.

The agency had talked about restoring service in late January and then in mid-March. Gov. Phil Murphy promised that Atlantic City and Dinky trains would return on May 24, the Friday before Memorial Day weekend. They actually returned 12 days earlier.

Riders on other lines further north have not been so fortunate. New York service on the Raritan Valley Line has been suspended, and those trains do not go east of Newark. Weekend trains on the Gladstone Branch have been eliminated

and replaced by buses. Selected trains on other lines were taken off the schedule, and only one (the last inbound train of the night on the Morris & Essex Line) has a bus to substitute for it (and that at least partly due to the efforts of the Lackawanna Coalition). There is no word on when, if ever, any of those trains will return to the schedule.

NJT Executive Director Kevin S. Corbett told this writer that the missing services could be restored, starting in the fall. He blamed the ongoing shortage of engineers, which has left the agency short of crews to run the trains. This has resulted in numerous annulments over the last year or two. A new class of engineers has completed its classroom training, so 12 more people will soon be available to operate the trains. There are also three more training classes in progress. Corbett has expressed his hope that the new employees will alleviate the shortage, and riders everywhere agree.

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

## AMTRAK AND NEW JERSEY TRANSIT TO WORK ON NORTHEAST CORRIDOR INFRASTRUCTURE

*By Bill Engel*

In a May 14, 2019 press release, Amtrak announced \$31 million of joint improvement work in New Jersey on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) with New Jersey Transit (NJT). NJT shares the NEC with Amtrak for some 50 miles between Trenton, NJ and the tunnels under the Hudson River to Pennsylvania Station in New York City. The work involves several projects. Starting in the northern part of the state, bridge timbers on Portal Bridge will be replaced. The intent of this project is to improve bridge conditions until a new Portal North bridge can be constructed.

Next up is a tie replacement program at

Newark Penn Station. Deteriorated wooden ties on tracks one and four will be replaced with concrete ties. Newark Penn Station is an important stop for NJT, as it is where their riders may transfer to the PATH system to access Lower Manhattan in New York City.

Moving south in New Jersey, work will be performed at Fair Interlocking in the Trenton area. It is named Fair because of its proximity to the New Jersey state fairgrounds. Work here is to include switch replacement, upgrading switch machines and new switch heaters. (It does get cold in New Jersey in the winter.)

Since this is electrified territory, much

work will be done to the catenary system as well. The goal of the catenary upgrade to a constant tension system is to improve reliability and to be ready for the next generation of Acela trains. These are to start service in 2021 if current plans stay in place. This is four-track territory, so the catenary work will be complex.

Very little of this work will be visible to passengers. Hopefully it will meet the goal of increased reliability. Passengers do notice when their trains are delayed!

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



## THE BAD, THE GOOD, THE FUNNY

By Lloyd H. Flem

Passenger rail advocates in Washington State endured bad news, enjoyed good news, and some of us laughed at a relentlessly repeated transportation cliché.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) published its findings May 21 of the fatal Dec. 18, 1917 derailment near DuPont, WA (southwest of Tacoma) on the initial run of Amtrak Cascades 501, on what was to have been one of two added round trips of service between Seattle and Portland OR. Particularly painful for rail advocates was the deaths of three passengers, including two, Jim Hamre and Zack Willhoite, who were close friends and valued officers of all Aboard Washington, the state's principal intercity passenger train advocacy organization.

The NTSB found plenty to blame to go around concerning conditions leading to the disaster. Among those cited were Sound Transit, owner of the tracks on which the tragedy occurred; Amtrak; WSDOT; and Talgo, the Spanish manufacturer of the trainset that derailed.

The NTSB in particular found the atypical technology of the Talgo equipment, with wheelsets having detached from a car, as a probable direct cause of some of the injuries and deaths. It was recommended by the NTSB that the 'Series SIX' Talgo trainsets, like those involved in the tragedy, be replaced as soon as possible. The NTSB recommends, but has no enforcement power.

Countering NTSB was Curtis Tate, writing for "Trains Industry Newsletter", May 22, 2019:\*

"But was the NTSB too quick to find flaws in the Talgo design when other high-speed crashes it investigated involving conventional equipment also resulted in fatalities? Take for instance the derailment of Amtrak Train 188 in North Philadelphia, PA in May 2015. The train entered a 50-mph curve at Frankford Junction, on the Northeast corridor, at more than twice that speed. Eight passengers were killed when the train, consisting of conventional Amfleet cars, jumped the tracks and became

entangled with a catenary support.

"NTSB also probed the December 2013 derailment of a Metro-north commuter train in the Bronx. That train, consisting of conventional cars, derailed on a 30-mph curve at 82 mph. Four passengers were killed in the crash.

"The DuPont, Bronx and North Philadelphia derailments were all overspeed events that could have been prevented with positive train control, the NTSB concluded."

While the agencies and the rail equipment involved in the DuPont tragedy may be somewhat responsible, the common factor in the three cited multiple-death incidents was not the technology nor who/what was in change, but the greatly excessive speed. That was the ultimate cause in all three cases.

We await the day when the two added Amtrak Cascades frequencies, so cruelly ended with the first run, can again serve riders on the Northwest Corridor. We believe, despite the massive publicity given to the DuPont derailment, that passenger rail travel is dramatically safer than that on our highways. It is not too much to suggest

that NOT having the full planned complement of Amtrak Cascades trains since Dec. 18, 1917 has forced some people to endure the miseries of I-5, I-405 and such, with the mathematical probability that there would be an increase in the all-too-common "not even news" litany of highway injury and death as a result.

At exactly the time the NTSB's findings were made public on May 21, a happier event was underway at the Washington State Capitol office of Gov. Jay Inslee. Within the larger 2019-21 Legislature-passed transportation budget was a \$215,000 proviso to study restoration of regular passenger train service to the Stampede Pass (original NP line) east from Puget Sound across the Cascade mountains and through the Yakima valley to Pasco, with connection to Spokane and east via the *Empire Builder*. AAWA had been working on such restoration since 2015, with the big step forward this year.

Legislators most responsible for getting the proviso included were House Transportation Committee chair Jake Fey and Ranking Member of the HTC Andrew Barkis. Both

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Seated: Gov. Jay Inslee; AAWA members from left: Louis Musso, Harvey Bowen, Loren Herrigstad, Lloyd Flem, Mark Fouch and Rep Andrew Barkis. AAWA's Government Affairs Director, Luis Moscoso, who worked closely with the LRC, was visiting family in the Midwest on May 21. (Yes, he got there via Empire Builder.)

## FROM NEW MEXICO AND POINTS EAST (MOSTLY POINTS EAST)

By J.W. Madison

### Albuquerque "Transit"

There are still NO ART buses running along Central; neither the high-priced electric phantoms, nor the promised new diesel substitutes. I can get no information as to a timeline for getting the diesels in operation. The city transit Website makes no mention of the subject.

The appropriate public information entity is having trouble finding anybody who can take coherent and grammatical minutes of its meetings.

Have I said before that you can't make this stuff up?

### Points East

This is a catchall summary of facts and observations from Texas and along the route of the *Texas Eagle*, arising out of the TEMPO meeting in Fort Worth on March 30:

- Concerning track repairs, such as tie replacement, along portions of the *Eagle* route, Kim Fosslund from the BNSF explained that current maintenance procedures mean that the maintenance crew still "fouls" the second track, so even in double track sections the entire section needs to be shut down.
- Concerning Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR), This will mean longer trains, but fewer of them. BNSF is also actively looking at siding extensions.
- Concerning the smaller consist of the *Texas Eagle*: The baggage car has been removed from consists on the *Eagle*, so effectively there is no bicycle accommodation. Only two coaches are now on the *Eagle* consist.
- Because the state of California is demanding more Superliner coaches, coaches are scarce for other trains. However, at least 30 to 40 Superliner coaches are not being used

within the Amtrak system on any given day. So why has the *Texas Eagle* consist been permanently reduced?

- Ridership has dropped on the *Texas Eagle*, *Heartland Flyer* and *Sunset Limited* trains.

### Illinois/Missouri/Arkansas stations update

Springfield, IL developments: Passenger Information Display System has been

installed; roof repairs completed, December 2018.

Dara Casey in Malvern, AR, has been cited for spearheading the rehabilitation of the station and the surrounding area.

Amtrak has been trying to reduce the dwell time of trains at the Bloomington/Normal and Springfield stations. The excess over "normal" dwell time has been five minutes per train.

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### Interstate highway system



### Current passenger rail system



### Our future passenger rail system



Map created for Rails Inc. by John Perry

*This is a reprint of the Rails Inc three-map graphic we ran in the last Newsletter. Due to space considerations, we were unable to run this graphic full size at that time.*

## NEW YORK CITY TRANSIT LAUNCHES THE OMNY TAP CARD

*Continued from page 1*

The public pilot of the OMNY fare card will run through the end of 2019 to make sure all the kinks are worked out of the system, but is expected to be expanded to the entire subway system in the next 18 months. Eventually, it will also be usable on the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroads as well. And much as the MetroCard was also usable on the PATH System between New York and New Jersey, the OMNY card may well be usable on PATH in the future, as well as other systems that accept it. During the pilot period, only full-fare options are usable on the OMNY system—i.e. no weekly or monthly unlimited ride options. For those who need those options, the MetroCard will still be usable—in fact, MetroCards won't be phased out until 2023. Both systems will operate side by side.

The beauty of OMNY is that it can be incorporated into any bank debit or credit

card that has the wi-fi symbol on it. Many banks have already indicated their intentions to make their cards—with the OMNY option—available to as many customers as they can. You can also utilize your smartphone to pay in the OMNY system by setting the payment up with Apple Pay or Google Pay systems.

There are several advantages of the OMNY system. Speed is an obvious one, with a tap taking much less time than a swipe—and on the buses, tapping is WAY faster than having the farebox digest the MetroCard, then spit it back out to you. Another huge advantage of the OMNY card in this day of massive fare-evasion in our system is that proof of last payment is easily verifiable by either the Eagle Team inspectors or a law-enforcement officer. You can also load fare onto your OMNY card by computer or your smartphone, so no longer a need to line up at the MetroCard machines in stations.

The idea is to get you on your way faster and easier - and in those departments, OMNY definitely delivers. It will also allow innovative fare options, such as fare-capping, and promotes the use of all-door boarding on buses, making for a much faster bus ride. Contactless payments are coming to all retail and banking establishments, so having it in

our transportation system makes sense. Cubic Transportation Systems—who were the suppliers of the current MetroCard turnstiles—are also the suppliers of the OMNY system fare readers, and have long experience with the New York subway system. At the end of the conversion to the OMNY card, all that will be required to do is unscrew the slot on the top of the turnstile, and it will become OMNY-only.

In 2021, the MTA will issue its own OMNY card, for those who do not wish to use a bank card or their smartphone. The ability to refill your fare from your computer, smartphone or other device is a huge selling point for many, avoiding lines, malfunctioning machines, and crowds.

So New York is finally moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with its huge transit system. We're modernizing our signals, rolling stock, stations and fare-payment systems. It's about time!

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

## THE BAD, THE GOOD, THE FUNNY

*Continued from page 5*

men are also active in our Legislative Rail Caucus, with Rep. Barkis assuming strong leadership of the LRC this year. A preliminary study done by the state in 2001 concerning restoration of the passenger train service showed the idea was feasible, but the then-Secretary of Transportation was determined that WSDOT would not pursue it further. This time, AAWA, the LRC, legislators from Central Washington, as well as business, local government and rail advocates will ensure the study this time will be given a fair consideration.

We fully understand the tracks belong to BNSF and they are justified in

expecting investment and compensation for use of their property. We trust such would be fair and reasonable.

Now, to really go light: The word "infrastructure" is now heard/seen on a daily basis. While there is agreement investments are needed, the poisonous partisanship, particularly in Washington, DC, appears to be hindering movement forward. But the plan here is not to lament that sad situation, but to giggle at the cliché near-universally babbled forth from anyone, from top government and business officials to Joe at the end of the bar. When the word "infrastructure" is uttered, the next words are "Yes, we need investment in ROADZANBRIDGES!" Always, roadzanbridges and pronounced as a single word! Not even bridgezanroads,

nor highways and tunnels. Once in a while a very involved individual may add waterways or airports, some modern electronic communications forms, and once or twice, transit. Passenger rail? Not ever, to my knowledge.

Whether from one dedicated to green, modally balanced transportation or an unreconstructed road-ganger, political left, center, or right, the instinctive response these days to infrastructure investment need seems to be "We gotta fix our ROADZANBRIDGES." (Another cliché today is the excessive use of the word "robust." You notice?)

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



## THE COMMONWEALTH RAIL SUMMIT: ADVOCATES FOCUS ON REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

*Continued from page 1*

Meredith still hopes for a second frequency to Lynchburg and an extension of service from Roanoke to Christiansburg and the New River Valley, but Norfolk Southern has shown little interest in expanding capacity. Both CSX and NS are reducing their capital expenditures, service frequencies and track mileage. The freight railroads want "to operate the longest trains possible as infrequently as possible on reduced infrastructure." The state wants more frequent, on-time passenger trains serving more routes and more regions. She believes this conflict could be reconciled by the state purchasing slots on freight lines for passenger transit at competitive market rates with performance standards or the state could negotiate the purchase of rail corridors to benefit freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail service. She also pointed out that the "Long Bridge" is in need of repair and a new bridge is needed to carry passenger trains across the Potomac. There are no new slots for additional trains across the existing bridge until 2028!

Our second morning speaker, Steve Powell, President, Buckingham Branch Railroad, talked about the challenges that the BB faces as one of only four short line railroads that host Amtrak trains. He stated there is intricate planning to prepare for the two *Cardinal* trains which operate over the BB three days a week. Some freights are turned away, which would give BB more money than the *Cardinal* and BB locals run before the *Cardinal* gets on line. Overhead trains are held at Gordonsville until the westbound *Cardinal* goes by and planning is done to provide the best eastbound/westbound meet possible with limited sidings which typically cause a five- to 10- minute delay. Steve also talked about what BB needs to increase passenger service. The list includes additional passing sidings, more

welded rail and more federal support for long-distance trains, including reasonable compensation and OTP incentives.

Our third morning speaker, Joe McHugh, Amtrak's Vice President for State Supported Services, believes "state supported corridors are the future of rail passenger service in the U.S." There are currently 29 routes under contract funded by 21 partners from 18 states. In FY 2017, 15.2 million passengers utilized the service providing \$515 million in fare box revenue. He said it is the "fastest growing rider based accounting for 47% of total Amtrak ridership."

Amtrak is currently working on 18 initiatives with 14 DOTs or agency stakeholders to establish new or expanded intercity passenger rail service. If successful, this would add service to 60+ communities. In the Northeast, there are plans underway to extend the *Ethan Allen* to Burlington, VT, provide service from Springfield to Holyoke, Northampton and Greenfield, MA, and seasonal weekend service on the *Downeaster* to Rockland, ME.

In the Midwest, there are plans to add three additional round trips on the *Hiawatha* service from Chicago to Milwaukee, two roundtrips from Chicago to the Quad Cities, Chicago-Rockford, IL service, a second frequency from Chicago to the Twin Cities and possibly four daily round trips from Minneapolis to Duluth, MN. There is currently a conceptual engineering and alternatives analysis study underway looking at providing service from Chicago to Columbus, OH, and discussions are underway regarding the extension of service from Carbondale to Memphis, TN. Amtrak is also seeking restoration of Detroit-to-Toronto service among its \$1.8 billion budget request to the federal government in Washington.

In the South, there is talk about extending the *Heartland Flyer* from Oklahoma City to Wichita and Newton, KS; a fourth round trip from Raleigh to Charlotte, NC; two daily round trips from New Orleans to Mobile, AL; and possible service on the S line from Petersburg, VA to Raleigh, NC.

In the West, the Front Range Passenger Rail Commission is considering service from Denver north to Fort Collins and

south to Colorado Springs and Trinidad. Amtrak's *Pacific Surfliner* may add two additional frequencies and there are discussions underway to extend passenger rail service from Los Angeles through the Coachella Valley to Palm Springs and beyond to Indio.

The morning session closed with a panel moderated by Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair, Rail Users' Network and Chair of the New York City's Transit Riders Council. The panelists included Danny Plaugher, Meredith Richards and David Foster, Executive Director, Rail Solutions. David led off talking about the organization that he founded in 2006 which promotes "more efficient, environmentally responsible and effective rail transportation with emphasis on expanding and improving freight rail systems." The other panelists agreed that freight rail is important and highlighted best practices used to expand freight and passenger rail in the Commonwealth. In closing, Andrew summed up all that was said stating that "advocacy is vitally important. Talk to elected officials, the press, attend press conferences, hold press conferences, talk to other advocates, labor—anyone who will listen. We are the key to holding our politicians and Amtrak responsible for expanded & improved service!"

During lunch, Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy, Rail Passengers Association, gave a brief assessment of the legislative scene in DC, stating that "Advocacy Works." Rail passengers led the charge against the Trump administration's budget proposals to eliminate the National Network. Instead, Congress provided \$2.5 billion for passenger rail in Fiscal Year 2019 which represents a significant boost of more than 40% over previous years. While the Trump administration's 2020 funding proposal would cut \$1.06 billion in passenger rail accounts, the White House budget will be ignored. Sean believes Congress will miss the Sept. 30 passage deadline and the House will vote more money for Amtrak while the Senate likely will not.

The afternoon session began with Emily Stock, Manager of Rail Planning at the Virginia Department of Rail & Public

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## THE COMMONWEALTH RAIL SUMMIT

*Continued from page 8*

Transportation, who spoke about rail as a key to the state's economy. It not only drives 6% of Virginia's total economy with more than 6,000 jobs created, but 37% of all cargo arrives at and departs the Port of Virginia by rail as well. While she is involved in a number of planning projects, her primary focus is on the existing Long Bridge, which is owned by CSX and was built in 1904. It is the only rail bridge connecting Virginia to DC; the next closest crossing is at Harpers Ferry, WV. The bridge is at 98% capacity during the morning and evening peak period, supporting 80 freight, intercity and commuter rail trains per day. The plan is to make improvements to the existing bridge and to build a new passenger rail bridge over the Potomac River.

The second panel of the day, "Expanding Passenger Rail in Virginia & beyond," was moderated by Richard Rudolph. The panelists included Trip Pollard, Esq., Southern Environmental Law Center; Ed Lawhorn, President, New River Valley Rail Coalition 2020; Ellen Tolton, CDBG Coordinator/EZ Administrator for the City of Bristol; and Ken Anderson, President, VHSR. Trip related the ongoing effort to add a second frequency to Lynchburg and pointed out that only six of the 21 roundtrip regional trains operating on the Northeast Corridor currently serve Virginia. The 15 regional trains that now terminate in Washington could be extended into Virginia, enabling the Commonwealth to significantly increase passenger rail service without having to invest in costly train equipment.

Ed Lawhorn shared his thoughts on why passenger rail should be restored to the New River Valley and to Bristol, VA. Congestion on I-81 is a nightmare and rail travel hits a "sweet spot" for distances that are too long for auto travel and too short, costly or inconvenient for air travel. The local effort to restore service, which ended in 1971, has public support

including NRV local governments, Virginia Tech and Radford University. There is also bipartisan legislative support and Chambers of Commerce, service organizations and Onward NRV are onboard as well. The NRV Rail Coalition was first formed in 2013. It has achieved several milestones: it has conducted market demand and location studies and successfully lobbied for a \$350,000 operational study to evaluate required infrastructure improvements which would need to be made.

Ellen Tolton provided an overview of the final report, titled "The Economic Impact of Restoring Intercity Passenger Rail to Bristol, VA/TN," which was released in February 2019. Key findings include: 1) passenger rail would fill a gap in the region's transportation network 2) the current projections of rail ridership and revenue for a Bristol extension offer a reasonable estimate of future outcomes and that operating revenues could nearly offset operating cost. The panel closed with Ken Anderson sharing his thoughts regarding what is important for success. The list includes amenities, cost, frequency, location and connectivity of terminals/stations, reliability and on-time performance, schedule, and trip time to destination.

The third panel focused on Amtrak's National Network. David Peter Alan, Esq., chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey, served as moderator. The panelists included Donald Boyd, President, Unite Here (Local 23); Don Phillips, columnist for *Passenger Rail Journal* and writer for *Railfan* and *Railroad Magazine*; and Phil Streby, who is a RUN and RPA Board Member and treasurer of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance. David gave an update on the *Southwest Chief* and talked about how everyone should care about the National Network because it provides connectivity and opportunities for all of us to travel. Politically, places like Virginia and Northeastern states need support from the states that only have long-distance trains, so Amtrak will receive the funding needed to keep going in our part of the country.

Donald Boyd talked about Amtrak unions leading the fight against shrinking the national network. The cuts in amenities are hurting ridership. Union members are

being forced to do twice the work with no increase in compensation. Don Phillips said these are uncertain times for Amtrak and that Congress will play a big part in whether Amtrak keep going. Phil said that whether we are advocating for the National Network (or a train that forms part of it) or a regional or local train, we should all boost our knowledge and make our views known at meetings or where ever else we can. He also suggested using visual aids, like a map of where an endangered train goes or a proposed service would go, and a schedule or proposed schedule.

In keeping with our shared vision and past precedents, time was also set aside at the end of the day for attendees to share their ideas about how passenger rail service can be improved and expanded. While there were a number of innovative ideas, what stood out was the difference of opinion regarding the obligation of freight railroads to provide access so that more passenger rail service can be provided in Virginia and all across the nation.

## FROM NEW MEXICO AND POINTS EAST

*Continued from page 6*

### Kansas and the Southeast

There has been a political change in Kansas, so "the stars have lined up for us in the governor's office."

There is a chance of state-supported service east of New Orleans. States in the Louisiana-Mississippi-Alabama coalition have marshaled the funds to implement the service.

**To access the Texas Eagle website:** Texas [Eagle.com/admin](http://Eagle.com/admin)

**For inquiries:** [webmaster@TexasEagle.com](mailto:webmaster@TexasEagle.com)  
**OR :** [rails@nmrails.org](mailto:rails@nmrails.org)

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



Existing Amtrak service via the Cascades and Empire Builder, and a proposed route for restored service along the Stampede Pass between Auburn and Pasco, WA.

## THE STATE OF RAIL ADVOCACY IN THE EVERGREEN STATE

*Continued from page 3*

only took the lives of three men, two of whom were AAWA members, but also has stalled the effort to expand the number of daily frequencies on the *Cascades* service from four to six.

Members of AAWA are working to improve the existing service by increasing ridership getting and advocating for improved on-time performance, but are reluctant to take sides in the apparent dispute regarding replacement of lost train equipment. Amtrak has offered to replace equipment with the two Talgo train sets

which are currently stored at Beech Grove. They were originally ordered by the state of Wisconsin a decade ago to expand service to the state capital, but the project was shelved by then-Gov. Scott Walker. The Washington State Rail office wants to replace the Siemens Charger locomotive but seems prepared to wait until there is an insurance settlement before making a decision regarding purchasing other new replacement equipment. Given this and other variables, it is impossible to predict when the service expansion on the Amtrak *Cascades* corridor will resume. The final findings of the National Transportation Safety Board are expected to be released in the next few months.

Meanwhile, the AAWA is continuing to work on its long term goal of restoring passenger rail service over the Stampede

Pass Corridor from Pasco to Auburn, WA. From 1971-1981, service was provided by Amtrak's *North Coast Hiawatha*. Two years ago, AAWA contracted Dr. John Brown, Chair of the Central Washington University's Geography Department, to conduct a survey to determine whether there is interest in restoring passenger rail service on this route. Over 475 people participated in the survey. Ages ranged from 18 to 76+. The majority of respondents in the groups between 31-45 and 46-60 indicated that they would travel at least 15 times a year to Seattle if passenger service was restored on the route.

Both the survey and the Rail Summit which AAWA held in September 2017 show that there is substantial interest in restoring

*Continued on page 11*

## THE STATE OF RAIL ADVOCACY IN THE EVERGREEN STATE

*Continued from page 10*

service. However, it isn't an easy task and will be expensive. Lloyd believes BNSF has a proven record of cooperation with passenger rail interests, but "they also have restrictions and required investments before any increases in passenger rail service can occur on BNSF property."

AAWA is currently faced with a new challenge: the I-976 initiative which would cap annual car registrations fees at \$30, roll back vehicle weight fees set by the state legislature and repeal approved car tab taxes to pay for Sound Transit 3, the \$34 billion plan to expand light rail from Everett to Tacoma, to West Seattle and east to Redmond. It would also gut funds for Amtrak's *Cascades* and freight mobility projects. AAWA has joined the coalition to oppose I-976. Members held a small demonstration of their own at the Capitol the day the proponents of the initiative brought boxes of signed petitions to the Secretary of State's Office.

While Lloyd believes voters may be instinctively conservative regarding raising taxes, support for I-976 may be tempered as it would override local jurisdictions' ability to help fund local transit or even road improvements. Some may also balk at granting "a bigger government control (the state) over local choice." Lloyd hopes high-tech firms will speak out against the initiative, especially since their employees depend on light rail to get to and from work.

Lloyd is planning to step down from his leadership role, but will continue to stay involved. He is delighted that former Rep. Luis Moscoso, All Aboard Washington's Legislative Affairs Director, is willing to take on much of AAWA's heavy lifting, in particular reviving the LRC which faltered after he no longer served in the legislature beginning with the 2017 session. He has already recruited Rep. Andrew Barkis, who

is a rail advocate and like a number of other legislators, many from politically conservative Eastern Washington, who support passenger rail and want service expanded to their 60% of the state.

While AAWA continues to advocate for the incremental approach to more and faster intercity rail service, Gov. Jay Inslee is working with Microsoft's Bill Gates and their counterparts in British Columbia to push ahead with the dream of ultra- high-speed rail between Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. The Washington state legislature in 2018 committed \$750,000 in direct grants and another \$450,000 in

***Gov. Jay Inslee is working with Microsoft's Bill Gates and their counterparts in British Columbia to push ahead with the dream of ultra- high-speed rail between Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.***

appropriation authority for private and local funding to conduct a business case study for high-speed rail from Vancouver to Portland. Consultants are expected to finish their work in June.

The governor expects the analysis will provide the detailed ridership and revenue numbers needed to further attract private sector investment and move the project forward. It builds on an earlier feasibility study which found ridership within a few years of operation could be as high as 1.8 million and the service could pay for its own operations and maintenance.

This past January, Washington State Democrats introduced new legislation which would create and fund a Cascadia high speed rail authority. The bill would provide \$3.25 million, with an additional \$250,000 also available if private parties provide additional funding, in biennial appropriations through 2021 to establish an authority in partnership with the State of Oregon and the Province of British Columbia.

If passed, this interstate high-speed rail authority would be charged with developing an organizational structure that operates harmoniously across the two states and British Columbia. It would address a variety of issues: governance, operations, contracting requirements, jurisdictional laws and regulations and the powers of the authority. A sister process will be needed north of the border in B.C. Reports from this newly created authority would be submitted by June 30, 2020 on any needed addendums, agreements, regulations or laws needed to make the high speed corridor a reality.

Meanwhile, the Washington State Department of Transportation is currently updating the state's rail plan to provide a framework for future passenger and freight rail actions. The stated long-term goals included 13 round trips between Seattle and Portland with a travel time of two hours and 30 minutes and four round trips between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. with a travel time of two hours and 37 minutes.

The new plan will guide WSDOT and partners to support essential rail service, and to implement and enhance intercity passenger rail service. This effort will update the Washington State Rail Plan 2013-2035 completed in 2014, which has served as a blueprint for rail development over the past 5 years.

No doubt, members of All Aboard Washington will provide their input into the state's new rail plan; they have a strong track record of getting things done in Olympia by working closely with other groups alongside government and business to improve rail transportation in the state.

***Next RUN Board meetings:***

**August 3 and Nov. 17 at MTA headquarters, 2 Broadway, New York City. For more information, contact Richard Rudolph, Chair, 207-776-4961**





## A FAMOUS TOURIST RAILROAD CHUGS ITS WAY THROUGH THE COLORADO MOUNTAINS

By David Peter Alan

We seldom write about tourist railroads here, but one of the most famous is accessible without an automobile. For this writer, at least, the bus ride to the train was part of the adventure.

That railroad is the Durango & Silverton, officially the Durango & Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad, which is nestled on the Colorado Rockies in the southwestern portion of the state. It is an isolated railroad, running only between its two namesake towns. It carries tourists through canyons and other scenic places from a former railroad town with touches of the Old West to a former mining town with even more of them.

The railroad's peak season begins in May and runs through the fall. During the busiest part of the summer season, they run three trains. On Memorial Day

weekend, when this writer was on board, they ran two. That schedule allows some extra time in Silverton, which is well worth taking. During the winter and spring, the railroad runs to Cascade Canyon, halfway to Silverton, and turns on a wye to return to Durango. Riders get off for a few minutes to have a picnic in the snow.

The railroad itself is narrow gauge, with the rails set only three feet apart; a form of railroad construction favored in mountainous areas during the early days of railroading. Motive power is supplied by Alco and Baldwin steam locomotives built in the 1920s, while the railroad also has a few vintage diesel switchers for yard service. It carries no freight. Some of the passenger cars were built for the railroad in the 1880s, while others were built in the 1960s, but in the old style. In some coaches, the original seats with seat-backs that flipped over were replaced with bus

seats. The railroad also converted some gondola cars that once carried freight into open-air observation cars by adding bus seats facing outward from the center line of the cars. The consists also carried extra-fare cars, including unique open-sided observation cars with glass-paneled roofs and bar-lounge cars with rear-end observation platforms.

The scenery was beautiful and rugged; breathtaking in places. There were several motion pictures that were shot on the line's locations, including scenes from *Around the World in 80 Days* and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. The line is only 45 miles long, and it took three hours and 40 minutes each way to make the trip. Nobody is in a hurry on an excursion through scenic country, anyway. The one-way trip was scheduled to take more than five hours in the 1880s.

*Continued on page 13*



## A FAMOUS TOURIST RAILROAD CHUGS ITS WAY THROUGH THE COLORADO MOUNTAINS

*Continued from page 12*

The railroad attempted to replicate a railroading experience of the late 19th century and, to an extent, they succeeded. The crew members were friendly and interesting. Conductor Ben Barker, the senior employee on the roster with 33 years' service, reminisced with the writer about his trips on the Long Island Rail Road. Brakeman (yes, they still use the traditional title) David Dibble had studied film. Conductor Wayne Pratt had come from Maine and had a "first career" developing software in Silicon Valley. Car Attendant Ellie Harris had worked for the State of Alaska as a geologist and pointed out interesting rock formations along the line.

In addition to the regular train excursions, the railroad offers several other experiences. One of the most popular is a bus ride in one direction, as an alternative to taking the train both ways. They also offer cab rides and a ride on a speeder, a small vehicle normally used for maintenance purposes.

Silverton is an interesting destination; slightly corny but containing a few nuggets of Old West flavor, if you know where to look. The town is small and the attractions are all located within a few blocks of the train station. The local museum, next to the old Court House, is a good place to take in the local mining and railroad

history. There are tourist-oriented shops and restaurants in a Western setting, while the Grand Imperial Hotel looks and operates much like it did when it opened in 1884.

Durango has some of the flavor of the Old West, too. Some of the buildings on Main Avenue date from that period, including the train station and the Strayer Hotel, which retains much of its original 1887 atmosphere. The General Palmer Hotel (named after Gen. Andrew Jackson Palmer, who founded the D&RG) came only slightly later, in 1898. The railroad operates a museum in part of its roundhouse, located behind the station. It is more than just a railroad museum, as it also contains historic vehicles of all sorts and covers some of the history of Durango. The Animas County Historical Museum, located a short bus ride north of town on North Main Avenue, completes the picture. This writer learned the history of the area at both museums on Saturday, before taking the train ride on Sunday

The Durango & Silverton was originally a branch of the Denver & Rio Grande (although it never reached south of Santa Fe, NM) to serve the mining town of Silverton, which had become a boom town in the 1870s. It was built in 1881 and 1882, using only hand tools, and today is considered an amazing feat of construction. At one time, Durango was served by trains that ran from Denver, south through Colorado Springs to Antonio, and west to Durango. That service ended decades ago.

Today, Durango has no rail access to anywhere else except Silverton. The only non-automobile transportation to downtown Durango is a single bus

operated by Bustang Outrider, a part of the Colorado Department of Transportation, from Grand Junction. The bus does not connect with Amtrak Train #5 at Grand Junction, but an early-morning Bustang bus from Denver does connect for Durango. For passengers going west or coming from farther west on Amtrak, the bus connection to or from Durango works.

For this writer, the bus ride was part of the adventure. On Friday, May 25, a giant boulder rolled down a mountain and blocked the highway that the bus normally uses. Supervisor Jay Rhodes, who also acts as a relief driver, got this writer and the other riders to Durango safely, taking back roads with a smaller vehicle. On Monday, the bus took an alternate route through mountain passes, with snow falling steadily and quickly at the high elevations. That was Memorial Day in the Colorado Rockies, with an adventurous bus ride to Grand Junction.

The entire trip was an interesting adventure, and everybody who rode the Silverton train appeared to enjoy it. Except for this writer, they all used their automobiles to get to Durango, so they could ride a train. That fact, in and of itself, is more than a little disquieting.

*For information about the Durango & Silverton or to make reservations, call (888) TRAIN-07. The railroad's website is <https://www.durangotrain.com/>.*

*David Peter Alan is a RUN Board Member, Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey, and Contributing Editor at Railway Age. When not traveling, he lives and practices law in South Orange, NJ.*

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## A SURVEY OF LONG DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.– PART SIX: PROPOSED HIGH SPEED RAIL

By Dana Gabbard

To keep this survey at a manageable length, it is being divided into multiple parts. This one deals with the two high speed rail proposals in the Western U.S. Future installments will be on proposed long distance conventional rail projects plus efforts to revive discontinued Amtrak routes.

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

### Portland, OR to Vancouver, BC via Seattle, WA

The Pacific Northwest Corridor (Vancouver, BC to Eugene, OR via Seattle, WA and Portland, OR) is one of the 11 federally designated high speed rail corridors. This area along the Pacific coast is often referred to as Cascadia. In 2016 the Cascadia Innovation Corridor [connectcascadia.com] was born to work on unifying the corridor as an economic unit. That year at the first CII conference, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee and British Columbia Premier Christy Clark signed an agreement which included a commitment to study the feasibility of a high speed transportation system for the corridor.

With the support of Governor Inslee, shortly thereafter the Washington Legislature appropriated \$300,000 for the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to prepare a feasibility study. The report was submitted to the legislature on Dec. 14, 2017. An Economic Analysis Addendum funded by Microsoft (\$50,000) and the Washington Building Trades (\$10,000) was added to the report on Feb. 1, 2018. While the report included comments on a possible east-west conventional rail branch through Stampede Pass to Spokane via Yakima and Pasco (which I will cover in a future installment), and the possibility of

extending south to link with the California high speed rail project in Sacramento, CA, the emphasis was on the Portland-Seattle-Vancouver corridor. It studied three potential technologies (high speed rail, maglev and hyperloop) along with alignment and station placement options.

After receiving the report the Legislature determined that a more in-depth analysis was warranted and directed WSDOT to undertake a Business Case Study (BCS). Per the agency website, it will evaluate:

- Corridor options, including station and alignment opportunities, technologies, and costs
- Potential ridership and revenue
- Governing structures and economic impacts

Funding and finance alternatives (including public-private partnerships)

An advisory group of public and private stakeholders from throughout the corridor are providing input for the BCS. It is being paid for with \$750,000 from the Washington state Legislature and an additional \$650,000 from the Province of British Columbia, the Oregon Department of Transportation and Microsoft Corp. The BCS will be finished and submitted to the legislature at the end of June 2019.

In order to continue to move the proposal forward, ground work is being laid to create an Authority to design and construct it. The Washington Legislature appropriated \$224,000 for the biennium beginning July 2019 to study the steps necessary to create an Authority. The funds will not be released until an additional \$671,000 is committed by other state and local parties (such as Oregon, British Columbia and business interests).

The position of All Aboard Washington [aawa.us] on the proposal was outlined by

longtime AAWA member (and former Executive Director) Lloyd Flem in our last newsletter ("Passenger Trains in Washington State: Two New Challenges, Some Good News"):

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

In a similar vein, Jon Nuxoll, President of the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA) [aortarail.org], responded to my query with the following statement:

*AORTA supports the study of high speed rail in the Cascades Corridor. But we believe primary emphasis must be on implementing increased frequency, reliability and connectivity of our existing system. Additional keys, but of secondary importance, are (1) reducing trip time (not the same as increasing top speed) and (2) higher speeds (generally more expensive than increasing speed where track requires slower speeds).*

*"High speed rail" is not successful without an adequate system of more conventional rail and transit serving intermediate and outlying communities. In other words, "high-speed rail" follows expanding "higher-speed rail."*

*Increased frequency, reliability and connectivity will have a dramatic, positive impact on ridership. Increased ridership will generate familiarity with rail's potential, and the grassroots support needed for further investment.*

*Continued on page 15*

## LONG DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE

*Continued from page 14*

Two other organizations are helping shape the discussion about high speed transportation in the corridor.

Cascadia High Speed Rail [cascadiahighspeedrail.com] is a private limited liability company working on behalf of high speed rail between Eugene, OR and Vancouver, BC. The website contains ambitious plans outlining a bold vision. Unfortunately, its approach to secure funding is essentially to take an empty tin cup and shake it at "private parties, legislative members, mayors, governors, and others, to secure private and federal funds." Weak tea, to say the least.

Cascadia Rail [cascadiarail.org] is a more conventional community-based rail advocacy group that supports high speed efforts to connect the region. Besides chapters in several key areas, it holds events to raise awareness and engage the public. CR has received substantial media coverage (including social media).

The website for the study is [wsdot.wa.gov/planning/studies/ultra-high-speed-travel/ground-transportation-study](http://wsdot.wa.gov/planning/studies/ultra-high-speed-travel/ground-transportation-study)

### Las Vegas to Victorville

Since Amtrak discontinued its *Desert Wind* route in 1997 linking Los Angeles and Las Vegas, there have been various proposals floated for rail service between those two cities to resume, roughly paralleling the often severely congested I-15 freeway.

In 2006, one such proposal was put forward, under the name DesertXpress, to link Las Vegas and Victorville, CA with high speed rail. The decision to start/end in Victorville (90 miles from Los Angeles) was shaped by a desire to avoid the huge expense of building through developed areas. Many thought it a fanciful notion

that someone would drive 90 miles from Los Angeles, then hop off the freeway, park and go the last 190 on a train (however fast). To address this flaw, it was subsequently announced the line in time would be extended further west to Palmdale, allowing a connection with the Metrolink commuter rail that serves Los Angeles and also the eventual high speed rail. Care was taken in the project design to have it interoperable with the California bullet train project.

Over the years, the project was expanded to be part of a proposed network of lines serving Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. The name was eventually changed to XpressWest, reflecting the wider scope. At one point it partnered with a Chinese company which held the promise of

***Since Amtrak discontinued its Desert Wind route in 1997 linking Los Angeles and Las Vegas, there have been various proposals floated for rail service between those two cities to resume, roughly paralleling the often severely congested I-15 freeway.***

funding and expertise. But aspirations for federal funding were thwarted by Buy America provisions. The partnership eventually dissolved. While this played out, a competing mag-lev project sputtered then slowly faded away.

After a long languid period, recently the project has had a burst of renewed activity. On Sept. 20, 2018, Fortress Investment Group, owner of the recently opened Brightline passenger rail line in Florida, acquired XpressWest from longtime owner Marnell and announced plans to start construction in 2019 with initial service to start in 2022. An update dated Jan. 2019 to the Nevada High-Speed Rail Authority [nvhsra.com] reiterated the plans to begin

construction this year. Brightline, as part of a partnership with Virgin Group, has rebranded itself Virgin Trains USA, which will be the name of the entity to operate the line upon opening.

As this issue was about to go to press, there were startling developments. Mick Akers in a May 30, 2019 *Las Vegas Review-Journal* article "Start of high-speed rail construction likely delayed 2 years" disclosed that lobbying of the Nevada legislature for a partial abatement of property and sales taxes (while still paying the portion related to schools) had failed. Similar abatements had been a key component of financing the Brightline project in Florida.

Bob O'Malley, Virgin Trains' vice president of government affairs, stated in the article, "Not getting those abatements will likely push the start of planned construction back at least two years ... If we had been able to do something this session, we were ready to start construction in 2020." Without the abatements, O'Malley said, "we'll have to go back and reevaluate the timeline. Abatements are a critical component of the financing package, so without it I don't think so." They will try again for the abatements next year.

I am sure sharp readers have noticed the January status report had spoken of construction starting this year, but now we are being told the most optimistic scenario is that it will begin next year. Obviously, this is an evolving situation that we will be keeping an eye on.

The website for the project is [xpresswest.com](http://xpresswest.com)

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

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We invite you to become a member of the Rail Users' Network, which represents rail passengers' interests in North America. RUN is based on the successful British model, which has been serving passengers since 1948. RUN networks passengers, their advocacy organizations, and their advisory councils. RUN is working to help secure an interconnected system of rail services that passengers will use with pride. RUN forms a strong, unified voice for intercity, regional/commuter, and transit rail passenger interests. By joining together, sharing information, best practices, and resources through networking, passengers will have a better chance of a vocal and meaningful seat at the decision making table.

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

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

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

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- \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 (Public Agency or Bureau)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 (Private Carrier or For-For-Profit)

**Mail to RAIL USERS' NETWORK. P.O. BOX 8015, PORTLAND, ME 04104 USA**