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RUN'S GREEN SIGNALS AHEAD ANNUAL MEETING SURVEYS BAY STATE RAIL

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

RUN's Annual Meeting / Public Forum, held at the Metropolitan Area Planning Council's Office in Boston on Oct. 11, highlighted the current efforts underway to improve and expand passenger rail / rail transit in Massachusetts.

The afternoon began with Marc Draisen, Executive Director of the MAPC, who welcomed attendees and described the work of the organization. As the MPO responsible for conducting the federally-required transportation and planning process for the Greater Boston region, it develops a vision and plans for allocating federal and state funds toward transportation projects such as roadways, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle projects.

Following Mr. Draisen, Richard Rudolph, RUN Chair, talked about the history of RUN and some of the challenges that rail advocates are currently facing across North America.

After a brief business meeting, the rest of the afternoon was devoted to a public forum. The first speaker was Jim Aloisi, the former Mass. Secretary of Transportation and Principal, Trimount Consulting. Mr. Aloisi spoke about the MBTA's two-year Rail Vision Project launched in 2018 to identify cost-effective strategies to transform the existing commuter rail system into one that better supports improved mobility and economic competitiveness. He pointed out that Metro Boston is suffering from the negative environmental and economic impacts that daily traffic congestion causes. The

solution requires a modal shift to get people out of their single occupancy vehicles and move them to a train or bus. This will require a regional rail system that operates differently from today's antiquated commuter rail service model.

The new business model would be based on a new approach to service delivery, which would require system-wide electrification, high level platforms, strategic signaling system improvements and frequent all day service – 15-minute urban frequencies and 30-minute service outside the inner core. Ultimately it would require regional connectivity, replacing the "antiquated dead ends currently in place at North and South Stations with a seamless rail link."

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HOW THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD IS MAKING TRANSPORTATION MORE HAZARDOUS

By Joshua D. Coran

In the predawn darkness of Dec. 18, 2017, Amtrak train 501, the first Amtrak *Cascades*® train of the day from Seattle King Street Station to Portland Union Station, derailed on a curve in DuPont, Washington, 18 miles south of Tacoma. Three passengers, two of whom were known to this writer, were killed and 57 of those onboard were injured. My employer may yet become a fourth fatality.

I was the second Talgo employee

on the scene, the first being our onboard technician, who was among the injured. By the time I arrived, he had been transported to a hospital.

Approaching the scene, I could not miss the carnage on the highway where the railroad crosses it on a bridge, but recognizing what I saw as the middle of the train I went looking for the front half, which I assumed had made it across the bridge. When I found it still on the near side of the highway, it became obvious that the

derailment was due to over-speed in the curve approaching the bridge.

This accident occurred on the newly rebuilt Lakewood Subdivision, and train 501 was the first regular *Cascades* train to use it. The new route would not only shorten the distance between Seattle and Portland by almost six miles (saving about 10 minutes), but also bypass the single-track Nelson Bennet tunnel, a bottleneck that the BNSF has cited for limiting Amtrak to the

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RARITAN LINE RIDERS ON NEW JERSEY TRANSIT GET SOME GOOD NEWS, BUT NOBODY ELSE DOES

By David Peter Alan

Riders on the Raritan Valley Line on New Jersey Transit (NJT) got some good news at the beginning of November. Most of their "one-seat ride" trains to and from Penn Station, New York were restored on Nov. 4. Mid-day and some evening trains on the line, historically the Central Railroad of New Jersey, ran through to New York, so riders did not need to transfer at Newark Penn Station. That convenience was never available for peak-hour commuters or for weekend riders, and the through-running to and from New York was not offered until 2014.

Advocates, including at the Lackawanna Coalition and the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP) were happy for their Raritan Line constituents and for the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition, the organization that pushed so hard for one-seat-ride service for years, but could not have similar feelings for any other riders, because no other lines north of Princeton have gotten any service restored, despite several rounds of cuts over the past four years. Trains on the Atlantic City Line (to and from Philadelphia) and the Princeton Dinky (a shuttle to the Northeast Corridor line) came back on May 12, but riders on those other lines do not know when, if ever, they will get any of their trains back.

Transit management blames a lack of engineers and the need to take equipment out of service to install Positive Train Control (PTC) equipment. The shortage of engineers remains severe, although there are several training classes ongoing. It takes more than 16 months to train an engineer, so it will take some time before riders see relief; probably another year or more. The agency needs conductors and bus drivers, too, but not as severely. All PTC installation and testing must be completed by the end of 2020, so there is light at the end of the tunnel. It will not be easy for NJT to get all of the required tasks done in the time allotted, so the light at the end of that tunnel may be an oncoming train.

At this time, funding remains a problem, as the agency heads into labor negotiations. Gov. Phil Murphy, who appears to micro-manage the agency, judging from its press releases, had offered an increase of only \$25 million for the agency's appropriation from the legislature this year. Other Democrats under Sen. Loretta Weinberg got another \$50 million, but the overall \$75 million increase constitutes only about 2% of the agency's budget; an amount that will not go very far. Democrats in the legislative majority continue to blast former Gov. Chris Christie (a Republican, who left office almost two years ago) for "starving" NJT in his budgets, but many of the legislators who are blaming Christie voted for those budgets. Meanwhile, legislators are holding hearings and giving members of the public (including this writer and other advocates) a chance to sound off. Once they hear from the riders, will they do anything about it? Time will tell, but many advocates and ordinary riders seem to doubt it.

Meanwhile, the \$30 billion set of projects collectively known as the Gateway Program seems no closer to any green signals. Some advocates support the program, but others oppose it, believing that there will never be enough money available to build the entire program, and that a less-expensive set of projects will suit the region's transportation needs. The Hudson Tunnel Project, which calls for construction of two new tubes under the Hudson River before the existing tubes are repaired, would cost at least \$16 billion and provide no additional capacity into New York City until the entire program is completed. Previous plans for financing that project called for most of the money to come from federal sources, even though the FTA (Federal Transit Administration) requires that more than 50% of the money come from non-federal sources. Every Gateway proposal so far has flunked the FTA's test, and it appears the plan proposed this past September

will, too. The same appears true for Portal North Bridge, the other Gateway project for which a financing plan has been filed with the FTA.

It may not be necessary to spend much of the projected \$1.6 billion cost for Portal North Bridge, though. The current bridge allows 23 feet of clearance at mean high tide, while the plan for a new bridge calls for 53 feet of clearance and includes building long approaches in the Meadowlands, an environmentally-sensitive wetlands area. That would account for most of the cost of replacing the existing bridge, even though there are very few occasions when it is opened for tall boats to pass. Since last March, the Coast Guard has allowed the bridge to stay closed for five hours in the morning and another five in the late afternoon and early evening, so trains can cross the bridge without interruption during peak-commuting hours. That change could become permanent, which would essentially eliminate the need for the proposed high-level bridge and 90% of the construction costs.

Gateway officials remain resolute in supporting the entire program, even though it appears highly unlikely that there will ever be enough money available to build it as proposed. They blame President Trump, who is generally not supportive of transit, but so far they are not meeting the FTA's guidelines. They are also asking for more than 60% of the national pot for new transit starts or capacity enhancement projects. Even if Trump is not re-elected next year, it appears highly unlikely that transit providers in the rest of the country would settle for less than 40% of all available funds. These cities include Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, Chicago, New Orleans, Boston and other places in line for FTA funding, too. The proponents for those projects want a share of the pot, as well.

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NEW YORK MTA UPDATES/MUSINGS

By Andrew Albert

Another month, let alone three, and lots of news to report from the MTA, the agency that moves over 12 million New Yorkers and visitors each and every day throughout the New York Metropolitan Region. While most transit advocates are eagerly anticipating the advent of congestion pricing - the first in the US - along with all the good news for the capital program that this massive new infusion of money will bring, we hear, not unexpectedly, that on the operating budget side of things, there is a bleak outlook for the years 2020, 2021, and beyond, if drastic measures are not taken to reduce costs. And these bleak forecasts come with both toll and fare increases every two years.

Of course, with the huge MTA transformation currently underway, some of those savings will likely be realized, but huge unknowns still remain, such as how the current negotiations with all three railroad unions will turn out, whether fare evasion can be gotten under control, and what the local economy will bring. It may well be months before we know the answers to

many of these questions. But we do know some new developments! The MTA has hired Anthony McCord as the new Chief Transformation Officer. Mr. McCord will lead the transformation to a leaner, more efficient MTA, with an emphasis on customer service and service provision. Mr. McCord comes to the MTA following leadership positions at various global companies, such as Veolia, Bouygues Energies & Services, the Air Liquide Group, and Cryolator SA. He most recently worked at Vedia as the site director at the University of Montreal Health Centre. While he comes to the MTA with a great resume, he will discover (and already has) that the MTA is quite a different animal than anything he has yet dealt with. We certainly wish him the best of luck in making the MTA a more efficient, transparent, and service-oriented organization where the customers come first.

Another new hire for the MTA is the position of Chief Operating Officer, which we can now confirm will be filled by Mario Peloquin. Another Canadian, Mr. Peloquin will oversee each of the MTA's operating units - such as NYC Transit, the LIRR, Metro-North, and Bridges & Tunnels. Mr.

Peloquin has worked for SNC Lavalin and Thales. Thales, along with Siemens, is the company that has installed CBTC on the #7 line in Queens and Manhattan. It remains to be seen how the relationship between those companies and the MTA will proceed with Mr. Peloquin as the COO, but we will see. There is a lot more CBTC and UWB installation scheduled for New York's subway system.

Some good news about the budget is there are no budget-driven service cuts scheduled. While we have all breathed a sigh of relief, as service cuts would be exactly the wrong message to send at this time - what with congestion pricing coming in 2021 and rising ridership in the past six months - we still must remain vigilant, as there will be seasonal adjustments and other work-related service interruptions. An example of this would be the M train. Normally, the M trains on weekdays run between Metropolitan Ave in Glendale, Queens, over the Williamsburg Bridge, up Sixth Avenue in Manhattan, through the 53rd St tunnel back to Queens, and along the Queens Blvd line to Forest Hills. During

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

Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny

RUN CANADIAN REPORT, NOVEMBER 2019

By Ken Westcar

Tourism and the environment

A recent article in *The Globe and Mail*, a quality Canadian daily newspaper, had an interesting feature on how to vacation at the least cost to the environment. Canadians love to globe-trot, irrespective of their political alignment, and the article explored "greener" options including paying carbon offsets to ease their environmental conscience.

The article included a chart of the relative emissions per passenger mile of air, highway and rail travel and, as we all know, rail ranked the best, being about five times lower than equivalent road trips and around 20 times less than flying. But the article itself excluded any discussion on the social, scenic and cultural benefits of train travel.

It typifies the North American public and political apathy towards passenger rail travel and indicates the challenge advocacy groups have on both sides of the border in achieving concrete improvements. Canada has now fallen from seventh to 17th place in global tourism arrivals, and yet few in the Canadian tourism industry or supporting government departments consider intercity and transcontinental rail service diminution part of the problem.

The Canadian government has come under fire for allowing VIA Rail's services to deteriorate to Third World status while offering dismissive responses. In southern Ontario, outside of the Greater Toronto - Hamilton Area (GTHA), the first words out of politicians' mouths are invariably "roads and bridges." Little wonder that tourists go elsewhere, and induced traffic congestion gets worse.

GO train service improvements

Metrolinx, the provincial crown corporation responsible for GO Transit

train and bus service, is holding public meetings in Guelph and Kitchener in November to harvest input on double-tracking of the currently vestigial train services between Toronto and Kitchener. This and proposed electrification are intended to reduce journey times and increase frequencies to help manage parallel road traffic congestion and boost private investment in the regional high-tech sector.

Needed rail infrastructure improvements will impinge on non-rail properties and almost certainly generate NIMBYism by those living close to the corridor. GO

The Canadian government has come under fire for allowing VIA Rail's services to deteriorate to Third World status while offering dismissive responses.

Transit seems committed to minimizing disruption and local property value diminution. The subsequent reports to be published in 2020 will make interesting reading.

VIA Rail High-Frequency Rail (HFR) project

In previous Canada Reports, the author has expressed skepticism as to whether VIA Rail can reactivate and rebuild the previously abandoned CP Rail Havelock subdivision between Peterborough ON, Ottawa and Montreal PQ into a freight-free, passenger rail corridor to compete effectively with other travel options.

Facing a dearth of Canadian passenger rail expertise VIA Rail recently hired Vernon

Barker, an experienced passenger rail manager and consultant from the UK, to move the project forward including coordinating planning financing from the Canadian Infrastructure Bank. Barker's credentials include stints with FirstGroup U.K. (a rail franchise operator) and Siemens Rail Systems U.K.

As with most passenger rail projects, VIA's HFR will be fraught with technical, political, commercial and financial challenges, and it will be interesting to see if Barker can pull it off in an environment in which he has limited experience. Soggy British rail operating conditions in a mildly conducive political environment are in stark contrast to weather extremes in Ontario and transportation thinking that has largely ignored intercity rail for half a century. We wish him well.

Southwestern Ontario waits

The provincial government plans an announcement for improved public transportation in the region before year-end 2019. Although they have received highly qualified advice from municipalities and advocacy groups, the fear is that they will ignore most of it. Those who have met with senior policy advisors to the current transportation minister are rightly concerned. Provincial Premier Doug Ford's right-leaning government has adopted a "shoot, ready, aim" approach to policy making and has walked back many pieces of ill-conceived legislation after massive public protest. However, they have demonstrated considerable lucidity on public transportation and are investing heavily in light rail, bus and heavy rail projects, mainly in the GTHA. Whether this will result in evidence-based, non-road public transportation investments in the southwest of the province remains to be seen.

Ken Westcar is co-coordinator of InterCityRail.

A SURVEY OF LONG DISTANCE AND STATE-SUPPORTED PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE IN THE WESTERN U.S.– PART EIGHT: NEW CONVENTIONAL PASSENGER RAIL SERVICES (MONTANA, WASHINGTON AND OREGON)

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 three western states. The next and final installment will be on proposed new services in California 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.

MONTANA

In the last issue, I discussed the hopes among passenger rail advocates that the recently formed Legislative Interim Transportation Committee would be a vehicle to study options for such services. Unfortunately, the committee members decided to not allocate any funds to rail studies and instead are focused on trendy topics such as e-scooters and autonomous vehicles.

Thankfully the Missoula County Commission, under the leadership of Commissioner David Strohmaier, is "... investigating what role counties in Montana can serve to create the institutional and organizational governance structure to move forward with restoration of passenger rail service through southern Montana," Strohmaier informed me via e-mail.

The first concrete step in that direction was the convening of a Southeast Montana Passenger Rail Summit on Oct. 24 in Billings, MT. Attendees included staff representing all three members of Montana's congressional delegation, Montana State Representative Andrea Olsen, county commissioners, city council representatives, members of the public, and representatives of the Rail Passengers Association (Montana Representative Barry Green, President and CEO Jim Mathews).

Among the action items that were adopted to be pursued include:

- Update Amtrak's 2009 *North Coast Hiawatha* Restoration Study (conducted by a third-party entity).
- Conduct additional economic benefits analyses
- Examine creating a regional passenger rail

authority, which would establish the organizational and governance infrastructure to set the stage for restoration of service through the southern part of the state. This could be achieved either through the state of Montana or by a coalition of counties, which is something that is authorized by state law.

- Continue to emphasize the importance of retaining and strengthening the Empire Builder along the Hi-Line.

The next step in the process of building alliances is the convening of a western Montana summit, planned to be held in late January 2020. For further details, contact Strohmaier at 406-258-4877 or dstrohmaier@missoulacounty.us.

WASHINGTON

As has been noted in past issues, All Aboard Washington (AAW) [www.aawa.us] has been a vigorous advocate for the start of passenger rail through Stampede Pass and the Yakima Valley, linking Seattle and Pasco, where it would connect with the Portland branch of the *Empire Builder*.

In an exciting development, at the instigation of AAW and its allies, the state legislature has directed the Joint Transportation Committee to conduct a feasibility analysis of an east-west intercity passenger rail system for Washington State along the alignment outlined above, plus the possibility of operating further east to Spokane. The study is due for presentation to the transportation committees of the legislature by June 30, 2020.

A fact sheet on the study can be seen at <http://leg.wa.gov/JTC/Pages/eastwestpassengerail.aspx>

An additional challenge for passenger rail in Washington state (both established and new) is the passage in November of Initiative 976, rolling back car tabs to \$30 and negating numerous local passed transportation funding measures. The brainchild of Tim Eyman, a bombastic anti-tax crusader, it is currently on hold as a judge in King County considers its legality. If implemented, it would have a huge impact on transportation funding. AAW has called for the measure to be a wake-up call for

policy makers to re-evaluate priorities and take a more integrated multi-modal approach.

OREGON

The Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA) [www.aortarail.org] as noted in the last issue has long been a staunch advocate for the resumption of Amtrak's Pioneer route. They also have sought new service along a portion of the Pioneer route, linking Portland, OR and Boise, ID.

To build support along the alignment, it sponsored an Eastern Oregon Rail Summit Oct. 26, 2019 in La Grande, OR. AORTA President Jon Nuxoll reports an estimated 150 people attended part or all of the four-hour gathering.

La Grande Mayor Steven Clements welcomed attendees. Besides Nuxoll, presenters included Luis Moscoso of AAW, Mark Meyer of AORTA, Jeff Broderick (Portland State University graduate student and former Amtrak employee), Stephen Hunt of Boise's Valley Regional Transit and Hal Gard, Director of the Oregon Dept. of Transportation Transit and Trail Division. A supportive message by Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett, unable to attend, was read aloud. Idaho Dept. of Transportation Planning Services Manager Ken Kanownik also attended on behalf of the Idaho Transportation Commission. Some of the presentations are posted on the AAW website at www.aawa.us/posts/la-grande/. The crowd included local government and tribal officials, past Pioneer employees and several AORTA and AAW board members.

The meeting received significant coverage in local media plus a follow-up story on Boise State Public Radio. Formation of a local advocacy group is the hoped-for next step. A number of people from Idaho expressed their regrets at being unable to attend and AORTA is mulling the possibility of a similar meeting there in 2020 to jump-start an Idaho organization.

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

NEW STARTS WEAK IN U.S. IN 2019, BUT STRONG IN ONTARIO

By David Peter Alan

There were not many new transit starts in the United States in 2019, but there are new lines running in Fort Worth, Denver, Boston and Mesa, AZ. The Province of Ontario in Canada fared better, with a restored rail service to and from Toronto, and two cities now sporting new light-rail lines.

The year began with the start of TEXRail, a new commuter-rail line that runs between downtown Fort Worth and DFW Airport.

The line runs a full-service day, seven days a week on the same schedule. Service runs half-hourly during the busiest times of the day, and hourly at other times. It takes slightly less than one hour to run between Terminal B at DFW Airport and the "T&P Station" in downtown Fort Worth, with a stop at Fort Worth Central Station for connections to Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* and local buses. Both TEXRail and Fort Worth's local buses are operated by Trinity Metro, and connections are available at the airport to DART's Orange Line light rail to Dallas. The DART station is at Terminal A, about a seven-minute walk from the TEXRail station; not optimal, but feasible.

After a ceremonial run on Dec. 31, 2018, service was supposed to begin on Jan. 5. The opening was delayed for five days, due to some last-minute de-bugging that was required. Transit managers gave especially high marks to officials from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) who helped get the job done, despite the federal government shutdown, which forced many federal employees to work without pay "for the duration." The shutdown lasted for 35 days.

Denver's Regional Transportation District (RTD) is the nation's New Starts champion for 2019, with a new rail line and an extension of an existing line. The G-Line opened on April 26 and runs 11.2 miles from Union Station to a park-and-ride station called Wheat Ridge/Ward, and comprises eight stations. The "G" stands for Gold, which was discovered in 1850 near Olde Town Arvada, which is the historic highlight of the line. The town's old train station is still standing, and the historic part of town is a busy suburb; no doubt made busier because of the rail line. The newest

segment of the light rail system, the Southeast Extension, opened for service on May 17. It runs south of the existing E, F and R lines, along Interstate Route 25. It comprises three new stations along the 2.3-mile extension to Lone Tree. Both projects are components of the Fastracks program, which has included several new lines and expansions, with more to come. The North Metro Rail Line or N Line will extend 13 miles from Union Station to Thornton. That line is under construction and is expected to open for service next year.

Valley Metro's Metro Rail line in the Phoenix area keeps growing. The most recent expansion runs 1.9 miles east of the old terminal, along the center median of Main Street in Mesa. The two-station extension cost \$184 million and opened for service on May 18. The line is now 28.2 miles long, and is the only rail transit line in Arizona, except for a streetcar line in Tucson. There are plans to expand rail service in the Phoenix area; the next project is a streetcar line in Tempe, which is expected to open in 2021. The proposed rail expansions almost did not happen, though. Opponents gathered enough signatures to call a special election on referendum questions that would have essentially stopped any expansion of the rail system. The vote was held last August, and voters in the affected area chose to allow the system to keep expanding; a result hailed by transit advocates as a major victory.

The only new start elsewhere in the country is the "Foxboro Weekday Service Pilot" on the MBTA (the "T") in Boston. Service began on Oct. 21, 10 days after the RUN fall meeting was held in that city. This writer made a special trip to ride the new service on Oct. 29, and has now ridden every rail transit line in the United States.

The new service is a one-year pilot study to determine whether there is sufficient ridership to keep it going. There is no new mileage involved, because the Foxboro station was built for special service for Patriots football games. The station is near the stadium, and riders use the stadium parking lot for a park-

and-ride origin. There are 10 trains in each direction through the day, but mostly at peak-commuting hours. The track to Foxboro branches off the T's Franklin Line, so some trains proceed to South Station and Back Bay Station on that line. Service on outlying stations to Franklin has been reduced to accommodate the Foxboro service. Other trains use the Fairmount Line (also known as the Dorchester Branch), which goes only to South Station. The T has also introduced a lower "reverse commute" fare; an innovation which this writer hopes will be extended to the entire system, whether or not Foxboro service continues to operate outside of game days after the pilot program is over.

While new starts were sparse in this country, they were plentiful in the Canadian province of Ontario, with a restored train service and two entirely-new light rail lines. The service restoration does not involve any new route miles, because Amtrak's *Maple Leaf* (Trains 63 and 64) run on it between Toronto and Niagara Falls, Ontario, on the way to or from New York. VIA Rail sells tickets for local travel on that portion of the line. VIA Rail once ran an early-morning "commuter" train which left Niagara Falls early in the morning and returned late in the afternoon. GO Transit, which operates the extensive commuter-rail and bus networks in Toronto, started a train on a similar schedule on Monday, Jan. 7. More newsworthy is the expansion of weekend service on the line. There are now four trains in each direction on weekends, which started as a summer service, and they now run year-round.

One of Go Transit's lines runs northwest of Toronto, to Kitchener. That town and its neighbor, Waterloo, now have a light rail line. ION Rapid Transit, operated by Keolis, is part of the Grand River Transit system, which also runs local buses. Phase I of the rail line, a 12-mile (19 km) line with 19 stations, began service on June 21. The line runs a full-service schedule with cars manufactured by Bombardier. The federal government and the Province of Ontario helped with financing.

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NEW STARTS WEAK IN THE U.S. IN 2019

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The nation's capital, Ottawa, also has a new light rail line. The Confederation Light Rail line opened for service on Sept. 14. It is 7.8 miles (12.5 km) long, runs on an east-west orientation with a tunnel under downtown Ottawa, and has 13 stations. It connects with VIA Rail and with the original "O-Train" diesel-light-rail operation, which opened in 2001 and is now called the Trillium Line. There are plans to extend the Confederation Line to both the east and the west, and to expand the Trillium Line, too.

There were a number of projects slated for completion in 2019, but they are still under construction. Three of them are located in the San Francisco Bay Area: the Central Subway Light Rail Tunnel under downtown San Francisco (part of the MUNI system); Phase I of the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) system toward Silicon Valley and eventually toward San José; and the extension of the SMART (Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit) line from its current terminal at San Rafael to Larkspur for connections with ferries to and from San Francisco's historic Ferry Building.

Two other projects are located in Canada: an extension of GO Transit's Richmond Hill line to a park-and-ride station in Bloomington, and Phase I of the Valley Line light rail in Edmonton, Alberta.

There are other new lines and extensions coming to Los Angeles, Chicago, Washington, DC, Boston, San Diego, Charlotte, Seattle, Dallas, Philadelphia and other places during the next few years. We will ride them, report on them, and keep you informed about transit progress in the U.S. and Canada.

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

NEW YORK MTA UPDATES/MUSINGS

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the Canarsie Line work, after 8 p.m. and on weekends, when the L trains are scheduled to run only every 20 minutes, the M changes its route, and after heading up Sixth Avenue loops onto the Q line and runs up to 96th St/2nd Avenue on the 2nd Ave subway.

There is on the table now, after the L train resumes normal service in April of 2020, a proposal in which the M train in the evenings and weekends would only run between Metropolitan Avenue and Delancey/Essex St on the Lower East Side, to allow for CBTC installation on the Queens Blvd line. While we are all in favor of this much-needed work, cutting the M back to just Delancey/Essex St will mean a 50% cut in service at the 14th and 23rd St stations on the Sixth Avenue line. I spoke against this proposal, and suggested that the M run

at least as far as 34th St, which would still provide both F and M service at 14th and 23rd St stations, and was told they would look at this. We are all in favor of vital track and signal work, as we upgrade all our signals to the latest technologies (or almost the latest technologies), but service is also vitally important. I have heard from too many people that they don't use the system nights and weekends, as there is so much work going on, you'd need a scorecard to keep up with it!

A sad note to end the discussion. Nov. 27 was Ronnie Hakim's last day at the MTA. Ronnie has served in various positions throughout her long career at the MTA, including President of NYC Transit, where she oversaw the operations of the subways and buses. She even served as Acting MTA Chair for a period in 2017, and was Managing Director for the past few years. Prior to that, she had been Executive Director of NJ Transit, Executive Director of the NJ Turnpike Authority, plus more. It is expected that Mario Peloquin, the MTA's new Chief Operating Officer, will be taking over many of the responsibilities of the Managing Director.

Ronnie will certainly be missed, as she was an excellent spokesperson for both the management and ridership of the MTA. We wish her well in all her future endeavors.

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

Your Help Is Needed!

By now you should have received our annual appeal letter. While it is always difficult to ask for financial help, your generosity will help us to continue and deepen our work in the coming year. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution before the end of this tax year. Rail advocacy is important to a balanced national transportation system. Each organization is stronger working together rather than individually; RUN can make a stronger case for rail service with a geographically diverse, larger membership base. Your contribution will strengthen our impact and broaden our reach as we continue to represent all rail passengers, including long distance, commuter, and transit riders. You can donate online using your credit card or PayPal account on the Rail Users' Network website or make a check out to RUN and mail it to Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104. We thank you in advance for your support and hope you have a great holiday season and new year.

RUN'S GREEN SIGNALS AHEAD ANNUAL MEETING

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Aloisi believes that Massachusetts is at a rare moment and is optimistic that real change will occur. There is overwhelming public support for Regional Rail and the state legislature seems serious about doing something transformative to raise net new revenue for transportation initiatives. In closing, he said "we have a moral obligation to get this right, not simply for those who are being left behind in this booming economy: the people being displaced by high urban housing costs who need a Regional Rail system they can rely on to give them the access they need - but also for future generations who will reap the benefits of our work today."

Following Aloisi's presentation, a short video was shown regarding the East-West Rail Study, which was first proposed by Massachusetts Senator Eric Lesser (Longmeadow, MA). While neither the Senator nor Ethan Britman, MassDOT's Project Manager, were available to give an update regarding the study, Travis Pollack, AICP, Senior Planner, MAPC and a member of the official advisory committee was on hand to talk about the study that is currently underway.

Six different alternatives are being considered to provide rail service to and from Pittsfield to South Station, Boston:

Alternative 1: a no-build alternative utilizing the existing infrastructure and service (i.e. the *Lakeshore Limited*, which takes 3:15 - 3:50);

Alternative 2: up to 6 round trips per day from Springfield to Boston with a rail-to-bus transfer required to get to and from Pittsfield, Lee and Branford Service Plaza—3:05 - 3:40 hours / minutes;

Alternative 3: 6 rail round trips per day from Pittsfield to Boston, which would require restoring doubled-track in missing sections, upgrading tracks, signals, and new diesel-powered trainsets—maximum speed, 90 mph; 2:40 - 3:10 hours/minutes;

Alternative 4: up to 10 round trips per day, with maximum speed of 110 mph which requires restoring double-track in missing sections and new alignment within the existing CSX right way of way—2:35- 3:05

hours/minutes;

Alternative 5: up to 10 round trips per day from Springfield to Boston, with maximum speed of 110 mph and bus transfer required at Pittsfield, Lee, and Blanford Service Plaza—2:35-3:05 hours/minutes;

Alternative 6: up to 16 round trips per day on a separate new electrified rail line built in the Interstate 90 Corridor, with a maximum speed of 150 mph—2:10 - hours/minutes.

These alternatives are currently being analyzed regarding their physical and environmental impacts, ridership, scheduling and cost. The next step is to analyze three final alternatives and develop recommendations, including a Public Involvement Plan and a Final Report.

Our third speaker, Jared Freedman, Chief of Staff for Senator Jo Comerford (Northampton, MA), outlined the proposed Northern Tier Rail Study which could lead to the restoration of passenger rail service from North Adams, Greenfield and Fitchburg to North Station in Boston. The study will begin next Spring and should be completed before the end of 2020.

Our fourth speaker, Ben Forman, Mass INC's Research Director, focused on the need for a more equitable regional commuter rail fare policy. He summarized the findings of a study that he recently co-authored, which indicates that a new commuter rail fare policy is needed to achieve equitable outcomes for low -and moderate income households, especially in "Gateway Cities" such as Fall River, New Bedford and Worcester. The current Gateway City fares and fare discounts inhibit mobility for residents; high transportation costs combined with relatively high housing costs place significant financial strain on this population. Policy recommendations include experimenting with means-tested fares; lower fares for reverse commuters and reduced fares for off-peak travel.

Our fifth speaker, Jean Fox, MBTA Project Manager, highlighted the South Coast Rail Project, which is now proceeding "full speed ahead." Gov. Charlie Baker has dedicated more than \$1 billion in state bond funds to complete the first phase, which will extend the Middleborough commuter rail line to New Bedford and Fall River, with service projected to start in 2023. FY 2020 activities are underway including land acquisition and track work, 24 of 46 culverts are already reconstructed and construction activities have started on four bridges, installing earth support. The South Coast projected benefits include: a

boost to the economic vitality of the region, creating thousands of construction jobs and net new jobs expected; rail will open the southeastern housing market, result in savings in travel costs, accessibility to jobs and gains in business and labor productivity and provide greater connections to tourism, education and health care. The proposed weekday service includes seven inbound/outbound trips to New Bedford and six inbound / outbound trips to Fall River & Freetown.

The final speaker of the day was John Dalton, Green Line Project Manager. He provided an update on the Green Line Extension Project which will extend the existing MBTA Green Line Service north of Lechmere Station into the communities of Somerville, Cambridge and Medford. The original MBTA project was halted in late 2015 because of projected cost overruns and was restarted after the MBTA Board approved a new Design Build procurement process in November 2016. The \$2.3 billion project includes relocating Lechmere Station and building five new stations on the Medford Branch and one on the Union Square Branch, building a vehicle maintenance facility, a multi-user community path and the procurement of 24 Green Line light rail vehicles. The projected completion date is December 2021.

Following the presentations, RUN's Vice Chair, Andrew Albert, moderated a panel discussion which focused on Passenger Rail / Transit Advocacy in eastern Massachusetts. The panelists included Jarred Johnson, COO and Development Director, TransitMatters; John Kyper, Chair, Sierra Club's North-South Link Sub-Committee; Mela Bush Miles, Chair, T-Riders Union; and Ellin Reisner of the Somerville Transportation Equity Project. All have been fighting over the past 20 or more years to get the Green Line extended to Medford and Somerville, from Lechmere. The panel brought out the importance of advocacy, with each member showcasing all their efforts to improve/expand service, whether it was on the Green Line, the Fairmount Line, or the entire Boston area. It also showcased one of the biggest missed transit opportunities in history: the failure to link North and South Stations.

The event closed with a forum which provided an opportunity for members of the audience to share their ideas and concerns regarding passenger rail / rail transit in Massachusetts.

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

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10 daily trains it had long scheduled. The early departure of train 501 that morning was because this day was to be the first at the new 14-train frequency.

Train 501 that morning consisted of two locomotives (a nine-month-old Siemens SC-44 in the lead and a GE P-42 on the rear) with the *Mount Adams*, a 12-segment articulated Talgo "Series VI" trainset, between them. The event recorder on the SC-44 indicated that the train had entered the 30 mph curve at 78 mph. The engineer had completely missed the brand new reflectorized advance speed board two miles before the curve, the similar board at the curve and a distant signal for the mainline junction, purposely positioned to provide yet a third clue that there was a curve there. He never put the train into emergency.

The *Mount Adams* was one of three Washington State DOT (WSDOT) owned Series VI sets in the *Cascades* pool. (Amtrak owns two others and Oregon owns two newer Series 8 sets.) Four 13-unit Series VI sets began protecting that service on Jan. 12, 1999. Just 120 days later, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) published a new "Final Rule". It contained several requirements for passenger cars, all but one of which applied only to equipment not yet in service. That one exception, a requirement to "resist a minimum static end load of 800,000 pounds applied on the line of draft without permanent deformation" did apply, and the Talgo equipment, built to European standards, did not meet it. Because this requirement was not phased in like the others, the FRA provided for any operator affected by it to petition for permission to continue operation on a specific route (or routes). The FRA specified the information the petition would need to contain for it to evaluate the safety of the equipment for that defined service.

Amtrak provided that information in a petition filed on Oct. 18, 1999. Over nine years later, on March 27, 2009, the FRA published its "Final Decision." Participating in that long study were the well-established Boston engineering firm of Arthur D. Little and the US DOT's own research and development organization, the Volpe Center in nearby Cambridge. The long-awaited decision concluded that "sufficient information has

been submitted to determine that the five Talgo trainsets can be operated consistent with railroad safety in the Pacific Northwest Corridor ...". The five conditions relevant to that corridor limited approval to the 67 existing Talgo cars, the route between Eugene, OR, and the Canadian border (en route to Vancouver, BC) via the UP and BNSF, 110 mph and cant deficiency (speed in curves) to six inches (allowing the low slung equipment to realize 83% of its design capability). There was also a requirement for annual inspection of a feature unique to this North American version of the Series VI, collision posts at each end of the articulated consists.

I was a member of the team that inspected the damaged equipment a few months after the accident. The NTSB, Amtrak, the FRA and Patentes Talgo, our Spanish parent company, participated in this inspection. We found no loss of occupied volume due to insufficient end strength, the grandfathered requirement. During the NTSB hearing a board member asked Gary Fairbanks, Staff Director of the FRA Office of Safety, if the equipment performed adequately. He replied in the affirmative.

Contrary to that evidence and testimony, the final NTSB report says that "contributing to the severity of the accident was the FRA's decision to permit railcars that did not meet regulatory strength requirements to be used ...". This statement has absolutely no basis in fact. Thus, on Oct. 29 Talgo petitioned the NTSB for reconsideration.

The NTSB report contains 53 "findings." Sixteen of them (30%) criticize the Talgo equipment. They contain statements such as:

- "The Talgo Series VI passenger railcar AMTK 7424 [which ended up on its roof under the bridge] did not provide adequate occupant protection..." (this misleading implication notwithstanding, everyone in that car survived.)
- "The Talgo Series VI trainset is structurally vulnerable..."
- "The Talgo Series VI trainset does not meet current US safety standards..."

Not one of the 53 findings criticizes the Siemens locomotive, which due to its high center of gravity tipped off the track in the curve at the excessive speed. Talgo's

calculations show that at 78 (or even 79) mph the train set would likely have not derailed. It was pulled off the track by the locomotive. Three findings did address the engineer's confusion with the information screens and alarms on the Siemens locomotive, but attributed that confusion to lack of training, not the poor layout of the Siemens displays and control desk. In fact, the report goes out of its way to complement Siemens, saying "The NTSB concludes that the lead locomotive's crashworthiness [sic] design and [crash energy management] features minimized the severity for injuries and fatalities to the train crew by performing as intended in this accident." Contradicting itself, the reports also states "The crash energy management features in the front and rear coupler[sic] was not activated."

Of the 26 "New Recommendations" in the NTSB report two are of particular interest. One, directed to the FRA, is to "Remove the grandfathering provision within Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations* 338.206(d) and require all railcars comply with the applicable current safety standards." The intended reference is apparently to 49 CFR 238.203(d). There is no 49 CFR 338, and if there were it would belong to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. Nor is there a .206, under 238, the even numbers being reserved. (This sort of error exemplifies the quality of the NTSB report). That this recommendation is completely unjustified is clear from the evidence found during the inspection of the equipment after the accident and from Mr. Fairbanks' testimony at the hearing. FRA Administrator Ronald L. Batory rejected that recommendation (and all six of the others directed to his agency). In a letter to the NTSB dated Sept. 27, 2019 he writes, "... the end structure ... proved to perform exceptionally well for such a high energy event" and that this recommendation is being rejected, "Because the grandfathering provision concerns end-frame compression strength and this strength ... was not a factor ..."

The other recommendation of note is the one to WSDOT. It reads, "Discontinue the use of the Talgo Series VI trainsets as soon as possible and replace them with passenger rail equipment that meet all current United States safety requirements." This recommendation is unprecedented and defies logic.

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It is unprecedented because the NTSB has never recommended the removal from service of an entire class of equipment, even when that equipment had been found to be noncompliant with regulations. On Oct. 30, 1972, two Illinois Central suburban trains collided at 27th Street in Chicago. I am quite familiar with this accident, as I was employed by that railroad at that time. The lead car of the older single level consist telescoped the new gallery type "Highliner" at the rear of the train ahead. Forty-five were killed and 322 injured. The NTSB determined that the attachment of the collision posts to the under frame of the *Highliner* did not meet the required strength. On April 25 of the following year, it issued two recommendations to the FRA and then went on to say, "The Board believes, however, that this condition can be corrected" and "The problem of the inadequately attached collision posts does not imply that the cars are unsafe to be operated ...". There was no recommendation to remove the cars from service, even until they could be brought into compliance, let alone permanently.

While the NTSB had never, until now, recommended removal of an entire class of equipment, it has often recommended improvements. No such recommendation was made in the case of the Talgo Series VI. While the grandfathered feature was not relevant in this accident, had it been, the NTSB would normally have recommended a modification to provide the static end strength the cars lacked. For the first time in its history, it did not. The recommendation also defies logic. Shortly after the report was issued many headlines read something like, "Three Killed on Non-Compliant Train." Editors could be forgiven for reaching the implied conclusion given those three findings that accused the Talgo equipment of failing to "provide adequate occupant protection", being "structurally vulnerable" and posing "unnecessary risk." In fact, the Talgo Series VI was in compliance with all FRA regulations. While compliance with one of them was "grandfathered," that requirement was irrelevant in this accident. A recommendation to replace compliant

equipment with compliant equipment makes no sense, as it accomplishes nothing except negative commercial impact on the manufacturer of the criticized equipment (Talgo) and benefit to that of the replacements (which appears to be Siemens).

There is an irony here. The grand-fathered 800,000-pound requirement originated from a ca. 1912 U.S. Post Office regulation requiring Railway Post Office cars to be designed for 400,000 pounds of compressive force "at half yield" (later changed to 800,000 pounds without yield, making it testable). The force was to be applied "on line of draft" because the wooden cars of the day at best had a steel center sill but certainly no other structure to support the load. It took more than a century, but on Nov. 21, 2018, the FRA issued a "Final Rule" for Tier III (220 mph) equipment providing alternate methods for demonstrating safety at least equivalent to that produced by the traditional 800,000-pound rule. Recognizing that semi-monocoque designs have been universal since the 1930s, the new rule specifies that this load is to be applied on the "collision load path," not the "line of draft," thereby involving the entire structure just as it would be involved in a collision.

The FRA also added provision allowing conventional (125 mph) train sets to alternatively comply with these new rules. Thus while the existing Talgo Series VI sets will continue to operate under the FRA waiver, an identical but newly manufactured one would not need that waiver (or any waiver at all) if it could be shown to be in compliance with the new high speed rules. Talgo retained Simpson Gumpertz and Heger, a highly-regarded engineering firm with recognized expertise in railroad passenger equipment design and evaluation, to analyze the 35-year old Talgo Series VI design. The conclusion was that with one small (and easily accomplished) modification that design would appear to be fully compliant with the new rules.

These rules were hammered out over a 10-year period by an Engineering Task Force of the FRA's Rail Safety Advisory Committee. Members of the Task Force included car and locomotive builders and their suppliers, operating railroads (including Amtrak), consultants, the American Public Transportation Association, operating and shop craft unions, the FRA and the Volpe Center. Given the diverse membership and the time taken, one might infer that the process was quite rigorous. I know it was; I was there representing Talgo. From the beginning, the FRA

made it clear that it would not accept any recommendation that would decrease the safety of new equipment compared to that of the existing. In fact, these new rules improve that safety.

Thus, the initial WSDOT plan, to use old Horizon (or even older Amfleet) cars to replace the Series VI, would have reduced the safety of railroad passengers. When Amtrak told WSDOT it had no surplus equipment, the plan became to obtain *Brightline* cars as soon as Siemens completes delivery to California and the Midwest. What it has either not recognized or does not consider important is that replacing the light, tilting Talgo sets with heavy conventional coaches will have two negative impacts:

First, trip time between Seattle and Portland will increase by at least 15 minutes. The heavier *Brightline* consist will not accelerate as quickly, adding at least five minutes. Without tilting, the trip is about 10 minutes longer. This increase in travel time will divert at least some to automobiles, exposing them to a greater hazard.

Second, the heavier *Brightline* cars will consume more energy. Fuel consumption will increase by about 25% (well over a million dollars annually), creating a budget "hazard." CO₂ emissions will increase by 4,500 tons per year, creating an environmental hazard.

A final irony: The "alternative compliance rules" under which the Series VI appears to qualify are the same ones to which Alstom is currently building its *Avelia Liberty*. Thus, if the NTSB considers the Talgo Series VI to be unsafe, it must come to the same conclusion regarding Amtrak's *Acela* replacement.

Postscript:

As of this writing, the four surviving Talgo Series VI trainsets continue to run every day in in Amtrak *Cascades*® service. Because the equipment pool is now short one set, they are running more daily miles than ever. Do the folks at WSDOT really believe the Talgo equipment "poses unnecessary risk"?

Joshua D. Coran is a member of the board of Texas Rail Advocates. He is Director of Product Development and Compliance for Talgo, Inc., of Seattle, the U.S. subsidiary of Patentes Talgo of Spain.

SMART STRATEGIES FOR RECRUITING YOUNGER TRANSIT ADVOCATES

By Andy Sharpe

It's a widely accepted belief that millennials and Generation Z behind them are much more enthusiastic about using rail and mass transit service than the generations that came before them. The challenge for rail advocacy groups, many of whom tend to skew older in age, is how to reach out to this younger, politically active group of transit users. It seems like many of these millennials and Gen Z'ers are active in urbanism and smart transportation groups, which tend to not just advocate for better rail service, but also for better bicycling infrastructure, better pedestrian conditions, and disincentives to driving in Central Business Districts and other dense downtown areas.

Some examples of these groups are TransitCenter in New York, Active Transportation Alliance in Chicago, 5th Square in Philadelphia, and TransitMatters in Boston. These groups make ample use of social media (Twitter, Facebook, and in some cases Instagram), feature younger Board members, are adept at raising money online through smaller donations, and provide plentiful outreach to younger generations.

Many cities across the U.S. have developed events where like-minded folks with organizations such as the above, as well as curious people not involved with any organization, can come out and drive (pardon the pun) discussion around transportation-related topics. These events are called TransportationCamps, and are billed as "participant-driven

unconferences" where topics ranging from transit, to rail, to bicycle/pedestrian, to aviation, to supply chain logistics can be discussed. These Camps have been active in cities including Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Washington D.C., Baltimore,

It may be wise to be willing to talk about other sustainable transportation areas to tap into both the millennial and Z generations.

Los Angeles, and Atlanta for anywhere from two to seven years. They feature very active social media use, plenty of networking opportunities both during the event and at post-event Happy Hours, and a multitude of very active discussion. Participants are typically a mix of those within the industry, those involved in advocacy groups, and university students who are either interested in getting into transportation or who use local transportation.

For some reason, it's been somewhat difficult for local ARPs (Rail Passenger groups) to tap into both the millennial and Z generations. Part of the issue may be a laser-sharp focus on rail-related issues. While that's certainly a good thing, it may be wise to be willing to talk about other sustainable transportation areas, certainly

including bicycle, pedestrian, and even buses (when they don't actively conflict with rail service) in order to engage them. While those involved in these next-generation advocacy groups are generally not big fans of cars, they are very multi-modal.

RUN is now active on social media (both on Twitter and Facebook) in an effort to reach out to folks 35 and under. We are also looking to attend TransportationCamps so we can engage this younger generation to see how we can better reach out to them and represent the rail transportation issues they care about. In order to remain relevant and active, it's incumbent upon an organization like ours to do so. If you're interested in helping us reach out to younger generations, we'd love to hear your ideas.

Also, if you know of any other local transportation-related events that we could attend, certainly feel free to let us know. Together, we can bridge the gap between rail advocacy groups and millennials/generation Z'ers.

Author's Note: The author is a founding organizer of TransportationCamp PHL (Philadelphia).

Andy Sharpe is a RUN Board Member based in Philadelphia.

Save the Date for RUN's Annual Conference "Good Connections-why the northeastern rail network is important to the entire US", taking place in Newark, NJ at the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, One Newark Center, 1085 Raymond Blvd., 17th floor, May 15 - 8:30 am to 5 pm.

CURRENT RAIL ADVOCACY IN THE PINE TREE STATE

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

Reprinted from Passenger Train Journal, 2019-4, issue 281

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

There is a lot happening regarding rail advocacy in the Pine Tree state. The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) remains committed to offering weekend pilot seasonal passenger rail service on the Rockland branch by expanding the operation of the Amtrak *Downeaster* to connect the communities of Bath, Wiscasset, Newcastle and Rockland with the 12 communities currently served between Brunswick and Boston. Although a pilot program has been considered during the past two years, no detailed rail inspection had been completed.

Amtrak has finally conducted an inspection trip on the 56-mile Rockland branch over the state-owned railway currently leased to the Central Maine and Quebec Railroad. According to Patricia Quinn, the Executive Director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA), the inspection trip "was conducted to evaluate the condition of track and to help determine scheduled travel times, as well as any improvements which may be needed to support the operation of passenger trains". In addition to visual inspections, a specially equipped geometry car operated over the line to collect detailed data about track conditions. An analysis of the data and further safety assessments by Amtrak will be a major factor in determining whether passenger service begins in the spring of 2020.

In the Portland area, there is interest in restoring passenger rail service from Westbrook to West Commercial Street, which is in walking distance of the Old

Port. Waterstone Properties Group, Inc, a Needham, MA-based real estate development company, is transforming a former industrial quarry site in Westbrook into a two-million-square foot mixed-use village called Rock Row. The 110-acre site is located alongside Interstate 95 in the middle of a 70-mile web of recreational trails, and is traversed by a section of the Mountain Division rail line, which Pan Am Railways owns and occasionally runs trains over from Portland's waterfront to Westbrook. At full build-out, the 110-acre project will contain 1,000 apartments, 400,000 square feet of office space including a medical and wellness campus, and 450,000 square feet of retail space, including shops, restaurants, a movie theater, beer hall, and an 8,200-person concert venue. The group approached NNEPRA last year to discuss the possibility of restoring passenger service from their site to the existing Portland Transportation Center at Thompson's Point.

The initial discussions led NNEPRA, in partnership with the Waterstone Properties Group, to engage VHB consultants "to perform a high-level conceptual evaluation of the potential rail transit link." The study concluded the proposed rail service could alleviate rush hour traffic between the two cities and provide a faster alternative to bus service. Weekday ridership was estimated to be 2,162 passenger trips per weekday when the Rock Row Development is completed, and would total about 562,000 trips annually. The study assumed a service schedule of 5 a.m. to 11 p.m., seven days per week. Peak service would be hourly or every 30 minutes from 7 to 9 a.m. and 4 to 6 p.m. on weekdays, 6 to 11 p.m. on weekends. The proposed rail service would require significant infrastructure improvements, which are estimated to cost \$70.8 million and an additional \$24 to \$42.6 million would be needed to buy train equipment used, depending on the frequency of

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A train from Westbrook to Portland?

A study released Tuesday shows a proposed rail corridor connecting a station on Commercial Street in Portland with a station on Main Street in Westbrook that could cost over \$100 million. Stops at the Portland Transportation Center and Rock Row would also be part of the route, much of which would be on existing tracks.



SOURCE: Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA)

STAFF GRAPHIC | MICHAEL FISHER

CURRENT RAIL ADVOCACY IN THE PINE TREE STATE

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service. As the study was intended “as a discussion-starter” and there is no specific funding in place for the project, it is safe to conclude that tickets won’t go on sale until private capital as well as local, state and federal dollars come available to finance this project.

A second study has also been completed to extend train service from the twin cities of Lewiston-Auburn to Portland. The project began in 2015, when the Maine State Legislature approved \$500,000 to conduct a study, with each city contributing \$50,000 toward project costs. NNEPRA served as the project manager and through a competitive procurement process, VHB in partnership with WSP, was selected as the project consultant team.

The first phase - The Transit Propensity Analysis - was completed in August 2018 and concluded that there is “a latent demand” for transit service between L/A and Portland. With transit-style service of 12 -20 trips per day, 600 - 800 would utilize the service in 2025 and 700 to 1,900 in 2040. An intercity type of service with four round trips would generate 210-240 riders per day by 2025 and 700-1,900 in 2040.

The second phase of the study - the Lewiston-Auburn Passenger Rail Service Plan, which was finished in May 2019 - narrowed the list of possible alignments from eight to three to provide passenger rail service between Lewiston-Auburn and Portland. Alignment A would utilize the existing Pan Am Line from the Portland Downeaster Station to L/A; Alignment B would utilize the same Pan Am line to Yarmouth Junction and then on the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad (SL&A) to Lewiston-Auburn and Alignment C involves utilizing the SL&A from a new Ocean Gateway Station near the Old Port to Lewiston-

Auburn. Construction cost ranged from a low of \$189 million up to \$295 million, depending on which alignment is chosen. Vehicle costs were estimated between \$75 million and \$95 million and O&M costs ranged from \$15 million to \$21 million per year.

The project committee overseeing the project recommended eliminating the third option, which would require building an Ocean Gateway Station located in downtown Portland near the Old Port. The committee instead recommended building a new passenger station on Pan Am’s main line in Portland. At least one member of the committee believes there was never a vote taken on either of these matters.

Members of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition believe the formal report did not meet the expectations of the original authors and advocates of the legislative act,

The Maine Rail Group envisions in the corridor’s future a revival of passenger rail service through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor not only for year-round public transportation, but also as a powerful driver of economic development throughout the region it serves.

which provided funds for the study. They believe the study, along with previous reports, provide all the data needed to implement service. The SLR route between Yarmouth Junction and Portland waterfront offers substantial opportunities to address the traffic congestion and parking issues in Portland, while providing benefits to residents and business owners

on the Portland Eastern Waterfront. The communities of Yarmouth, Cumberland and Falmouth would also benefit from increased mobility and Transit Oriented Development if a station stop was in their towns. Evaluating the challenges of reconstructing the trestle bridge over Back Cove in Portland, relocating the tourist narrow gauge railroad along the Eastern Prom, designing a modern multi-use Rail with Trail, and assuring pedestrian access along the entire corridor should be the next step.

A Resolve - LD 1141, which has recently been introduced in the Maine State Legislature, has led to another clash of visions regarding the future of a state owned corridor called the “Lower Road” between Augusta and Brunswick, ME. The resolve, which has been carried over to next year’s legislative session, directs the Maine Department of Transportation to construct a recreational trail, to be known as the Merrymeeting Trail, along the existing railroad corridor from the Town of Topsham to the City of Gardiner.

However, the Maine Rail Group envisions in the corridor’s future a revival of passenger rail service through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor, not only for year-round public transportation, but also as a powerful driver of economic development throughout the region it serves. On the other hand, Merrymeeting Trail proponents want to create a pedestrian and bicycle trail, usable by those “with the health and leisure to enjoy it as a linear playground for recreation, and with its use governed by favorable conditions of season, weather, daylight, weekends and vacations”. The trail proponents maintain the trail could serve as a greater economic stimulus compared to restoring passenger rail service on the corridor, for the latter would end up costing people more than it would give them in economic benefits.

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While a feasibility study would be needed to determine the cost of restoring passenger rail service, the Maine Rail Group believes the economic benefits would far outweigh what walkers and cyclists would contribute utilizing the proposed trail. In addition to the initial jobs and investment from the construction and the ongoing operation of the proposed passenger rail service, to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor, it would address other issues. Maine is demographically the oldest state in the nation with 56% of Mainers living in rural areas. This cohort needs greater mobility options.

Rail service will also provide greater mobility for commuters working at the State Capitol and for many of the 47,000 college / university students who attend the University of Maine in Orono and the other nine college / universities in Central Maine. The potential economic benefits also include increased tourism and visitor spending and economic development, which would attract millennials and families who can no longer afford housing in southern Maine.

An Augusta City Council Informational meeting was held in late August to determine whether councilors would reaffirm their 2014 pass support for a resolution calling for a study to determine whether it makes sense to restore service on the "Lower Road." No action has been taken as of this writing.

MRG directors plan to resubmit a proposal to the State Legislature in December 2020 to fund a feasibility study, but only if the Augusta City Council reaffirms its past support along with the cities of Bangor and Waterville. Given past precedent

established by the cities of Lewiston and Auburn, the state legislature will undoubtedly ask for financial commitments from the three cities.

Each of the proposals deserves public support, but it is unlikely Maine has the resources to accomplish all three at once. Currently, the FRA requires each state to update their rail plans every four years. It is incumbent on the Department of Transportation to update its state rail plan which was adopted in 2014. The Department needs to evaluate each of these proposals for expanding rail service in the Pine Tree State, set priorities, and establish a time line and strategies for implementation.

RARITAN LINE RIDERS ON NEW JERSEY TRANSIT GET SOME GOOD NEWS, BUT NOBODY ELSE DOES

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Meanwhile, NJT is losing credibility, while rider-advocates are becoming more united. There is a new manager named Stewart Mader, who holds two titles. One is "Customer Experience Officer"; a title that connotes acting as a liaison, which is not objectionable.

The other is "Customer Advocate"; a title that appears chosen to cause public confusion about who advocates for NJT's unhappy riders, while discrediting the genuine "customer advocates" at the Lackawanna Coalition and NJ-ARP, who have been representing the interests of the riders for 40 years. The two advocacy organizations have demonstrated a new solidarity lately, issuing joint statements and boycotting Mader, until he no longer claims to act as an "advocate" for the agency's customers or is touted as one by NJT management.

NJT is also running its news releases on online "news" sites, in formats that look

like news content, but are referred to as "sponsored content" in small type. That content contrasts sharply with reports from the mainstream media of continuing woes for the agency and its riders.

Lackawanna Coalition Communications and Legislative Director Sally Jane Gellert commented on that situation in the November-December issue of the Coalition's newsletter, the *Railgram*. She said: "What we need is for the governor to hire rail and bus professionals and then to step out of their way; to find the stable funding that the agency needs, and to resist the urge of so many of our governors to micromanage and to fill the NJ Transit staff with political patronage jobs. Both parties have been guilty." It is unlikely that Gov. Murphy would heed that advice, any more than his predecessors did, but we can still ask.

It will be a long time before things get better for New Jersey's beleaguered transit riders, but RUN will do more than watch from the sidelines. Our annual conference will take place in Newark next year, on Friday, May 15. There will also be a transit tour on Saturday. We are planning an interesting and informative program for you, and we hope you will join us in Newark.

We can't promise that NJ Transit will be running better by that time, but we can give you some insight about how transit works (and does not work) in the most transit-rich market in the nation.

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

WHAT A CHANGE IN AMTRAK'S SILVER SERVICE DINING CAR SERVICE (NOT FOR THE BETTER)



The *Capitol Limited* route between Chicago and Washington, DC. Lunch is no longer offered on eastbound *Capitol* trains. (Photo courtesy of Amtrak.)

By Bill Engel

In 1990, dining cars on the “Silver Service” (Trains #91 & #92 “Silver Star” and #97 & #98 “Silver Meteor”) were a hot buffet in one car with tables as well as an adjoining table car.

This was not particularly popular, but the food was prepared on the train. This arrangement didn’t last too long before regular dining car service returned, albeit using some of the oldest cars in the Amtrak fleet. Finally, in about 2017, beautiful new Viewliner dining cars were placed into service on Trains #97 & #98, while passengers on Trains #91 and #92 had to rely on food purchased from the café cars, since the dining car had been removed altogether.

Fast forward to 2019. Those Viewliner diners with modern kitchens are being used to serve pre-prepared meals for

lunch and dinner, and a buffet breakfast, which has a hot egg-and-sausage sandwich (think egg McMuffin), assorted cold cereals, juices, and fruit. Coffee, tea, and soft drinks are also served.

At lunch and dinner, you stand in line to order your entrée, and pick up your beverages. This obviously reduces the number of people needed to work the car, but does nothing to enhance the quality of the food. If desired, your sleeping car attendant will bring you your meal. The dining car is only available to sleeping car passengers, whose meals are included in their fare.

The same arrangement also exists now on the *Capitol Limited*, and *Lake Shore Limited*. On the *Capitol*, lunch is no longer served eastbound. With the 1:05 p.m. arrival at Washington, this is understandable.

On a trip from Fort Lauderdale, FL to New York City on Nov. 9, almost all of the space on Train #98’s three sleeping cars was taken by a group of people from Great Britain. As an American, I was embarrassed by this minimal food service. The Brits were interesting to talk to. We learned about their thoughts regarding Brexit, and they learned about our thoughts regarding impeachment. Happily, #98 was early arriving at New York’s Pennsylvania Station, allowing the Brits extra time to transfer to the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal for their voyage home on board *Queen Mary 2*.

Since the New-York-to-Miami route is Amtrak’s only overnight route with two trains (even though they do not follow the exact same route all the way), one would hope Amtrak could offer better food service than they are at present.

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

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

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