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## HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

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

Our first-ever virtual mini-conference held on October 10 was an overwhelming success, with over 80 people preregistered for the event.

The afternoon began with welcoming remarks by Richard Rudolph, RUN's Chair. Rudolph briefly talked about the origins and history of the organization as well as some of the challenges and opportunities that rail advocacy groups are facing nationwide. One example is the difficulty of remaining relevant when fewer people today have experienced the joy of riding a passenger train and Amtrak's market share is less than a half-

percent of the travel market. Further, the fact that Amtrak, under the direction of William Flynn and Executive Vice President Stephen Gardiner, is fixated on making a profit and is primarily focused on the Northeast Corridor and state-supported services. On the brighter side, young and older rail advocates have pushed back, noting that long distance service is faring better. Ridership is down 67% on long-distance service compared to over 80% on the Northeast Corridor. Rail advocates are not only working to restore and expand passenger rail and rail transit service, but also recognize the need for a new Federal Passenger Rail Infrastructure Agency to determine the level of service

needed, infrastructure improvements that will be needed to achieve it and the cost to build, maintain and administer it.

Our first featured speaker of the afternoon, Art Guzzetti, Vice President of Policy, American Public Transportation Association, talked about how Mass Transit Agencies are faring during the COVID-19 Pandemic. While the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act provided \$25 billion to transit agencies to help them prepare for and respond to the pandemic, more funds are needed going forward, given the loss of revenue and increased costs to keep riders and transit workers

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## COVID-19 UPDATE: AMTRAK SERVICE SLASHED, A SLOW RECOVERY FOR TRANSIT, BUT HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

**By David Peter Alan**

As the COVID-19 virus raged across the nation and around the world last spring, ridership on the rails plummeted, and so did service: everything from Amtrak's corridors to local rail transit almost everywhere in the United States and Canada. Today, local rail transit has recovered well in some places, but not in others, while the resurgence of the virus threatens cuts that could be more severe than those experienced by riders last spring. To make matters worse, Amtrak has slashed service on almost all of its routes to historically-low levels, while VIA Rail's future in Canada also remains uncertain.

The big news is about Amtrak. Not a single Amtrak long-distance train that a motorist or a non-motorist can ride operates every day anymore. With only two exceptions, every Amtrak long-distance train now operates only three days a week. The exceptions are the *Silver Meteor* between New York and Florida, which runs on the four days that the *Silver Star* does not, and the *Auto-Train*. It is the only train that still runs every day, but only motorists accompanied by their vehicles are allowed to ride it.

These reductions occurred in October, and are the most-severe in Amtrak's history; dwarfing the infamous Mercer cuts from the mid-1990s. Those reductions

were recommended by a consulting firm, lasted for about two years, but left most trains in the East running every day. Amtrak lost more money than it saved by reducing service, and it appears that the conditions that Amtrak is now demanding for a return to daily service on any specific line (90% of last year's bookings must be placed by February 21<sup>st</sup> for service to be restored this summer) cannot possibly be met. This writer has chronicled these service reductions and explored issues surrounding them in a series in *Railway Age* titled *Farewell, Long-distance Trains?* which can be found at [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com) in the "Opinion" section.

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# TRANSIT ARMAGEDDON COMING TO MTA WITHOUT FEDERAL AID

**By Andrew Albert**

We all knew it was coming, but now we are staring down the worst financial crisis New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority has ever faced. And make no mistake - without \$12 billion in federal aid, we are looking at the worst service cuts, fare hikes, layoffs, and delays to our Capital Program that could ever be imagined. New York has faced severe threats before - from financial downturns to the Great Depression, to Hurricane Sandy, and more - but never has there been a greater threat to the "New York way of life" than has been caused by COVID-19.

Because of the pandemic, ridership on the subways, buses, and commuter rail has tanked. While it is slowly returning, this has caused a tremendous lack of fares, and also dedicated taxes. In addition, had there been promised funding from the "Heroes Act," the MTA would have received \$3.9 billion to help plug the gap. This, however, never materialized. And while the MTA did receive funding from the "CARES Act," it has already been fully exhausted.

The MTA is now taking advantage of the federal government's Municipal Liquidity Facility, which allows it to borrow \$2.9 billion, at a low rate of interest. But these loans all have to be paid back, and of course it isn't any transit facility's fault that COVID-19 has hit our state, cities, towns, and regions. Only the federal government has the financial ability to help our transit systems from the brink of failure. In New York's case, we are talking about a 40% reduction in subway and bus service, as well as a 50% reduction in commuter rail service. Some bus lines may be eliminated completely, and some services may not run on weekends. The MTA is facing losses of \$16 billion through 2024, without federal aid. There could be up to 9,400 workers laid off, and an indefinite suspension of the all-important capital program, which has been upgrading signals, stations, accessibility, rolling stock, and route extensions, including Second Avenue Subway-Phase 2, as well as Penn Access for Metro-North's New Haven line, which will bring trains into Penn Station via Amtrak's Hell Gate Bridge route.

While the election of Joe Biden to the Presidency is cause for some optimism, nothing is certain. The MTA is now setting up a series of fare-hike hearings, which takes place every other year, and, depending on whether our elected officials have been able to convince the president-elect of the urgency of the matter, the amount of fares to be charged beginning in March of 2021 is yet to be determined. Six virtual public hearings will be held, between Dec. 1 and 21, and the public will get their chance to sound off on the service cuts/fare hike proposals, which should be out within a few days of this article. The MTA Board will vote on the 2021 budget at the Dec. 16 Board Meeting, and on the new fares at their January Board Meeting.

Of course, these service cuts/fare hikes are based on a "worst-case scenario," with no federal aid forthcoming. They could change, depending on what our new President and Congress allow. But make no mistake - these kinds of service cuts would so damage the city, the region, and the economy of the entire nation that they should not be allowed to proceed. They could result in a loss of 450,000 jobs, a reduction of \$50 billion in annual earnings, and an annual reduction of approximately \$65 billion in the regional GDP. If the federal government invested the \$12 billion in the MTA, it would get better than a 5-1 return in its investment - and prevent chaos throughout the Northeast.

And it wouldn't only hurt the Northeast, but the entire nation, as 10% of the nation's GDP is generated in the Northeast. And at least 20 states have companies that do business with the MTA, and they will also be hurt if the MTA doesn't receive federal aid, and has to do massive layoffs and suspension of the capital program. Certainly, both New York Senators - Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand - have been vocal as to the critical importance of New York's mass transit system to the economic well-being of the nation. And the MTA is also aware of some of its massive bureaucracy, and has taken measures to rid itself of unnecessary duplication - such as offices, IT, and duplicative functions, as well as undertaken significant lessening of overtime, use of consultants, and more. But, as Chairman Patrick Foye has said repeatedly,

"we can't cut our way out of this size deficit."

Yes, the pandemic will be over at some point. And hopefully, a vaccine will be available soon, and widely distributed. Ridership will return. But will workers still work 5 days a week in their offices? Will companies still require in-person attendance, or will working from home become the norm? Will rush hours no longer be rush hours, with workers spread out through the day more evenly? Will service be reduced in rush hours, but increased at other times of the day? With working from home becoming the norm, will there still be a need for centralized offices, and rush-hour commutations? Nobody knows the answer to these questions now, but one thing is certain: vital mass-transportation systems will continue to be the economic engines of their cities and regions, and help to make those cities/regions livable and sustainable. Not everyone can drive, bike, or use a motorized skateboard. We need our subways, buses, commuter trains to make our cities the economic powerhouses they have been and hopefully-continue to be. Finally, one thing the MTA has been waiting over a year for, an answer to what type of Environmental Impact Statement (or Environmental Assessment) is required for them to proceed with Congestion Pricing - which is now the law in New York State - should be forthcoming under a Biden Administration, which will contribute greatly to the MTA's Capital Program. We expected to begin the program in January, 2021, but the US Dept. Of Transportation has not given the MTA an answer, so the program has not gone forward. \$1 billion of the \$12 billion the MTA is asking for is money that would have been generated by Congestion Pricing.

These are hellish times, with so many unknowns - but Holiday Season is approaching, and we hope we all will have good news come the New Year. And helping the largest transportation system in the US should be on everyone's wishlist of things we'd like to see in 2021.

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

## FRA ISSUES MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR AMTRAK OTP

By Phil Streby

On Monday, Nov. 16, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), Department of Transportation (USDOT) released its final ruling, Metrics and Minimum Standards for Intercity Passenger Rail Service. This quantifies a means to measure the performance and service quality of Amtrak's intercity passenger train operations (Metrics and Standards) and is organized into four categories: 1) on-time performance (OTP) and train delays, 2) customer service, 3) financial, and 4) public benefit.

This OTP metric, defined as the percentage of all customers on an intercity passenger train detraining point no later than 15 minutes after their schedule arrival time, establishes a minimum standard of 80% for any two consecutive calendar quarters as well as when this standard begins to apply. It includes information as ridership data, published schedule, train delays/10,000 train miles, station performance, and agreed-to host running time (allotted time to travel station to station).

During a period of public hearings and written comment, the FRA received more than 320 comments from state agencies, port authorities, railroads, environmental

groups, transit agencies, unions, rail passenger advocacy groups, and even highway representatives, as well as more than 200 individuals. This final rule may result in lower operational costs for Amtrak to the extent it results in improved OTP. While not quantified by the FRA, these reduced costs include labor, fuel, and expenses related to passenger inconvenience, while at the same time providing benefits due to improved travel times and service quality.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) President George W. Bush signed into law on Oct. 16, 2008 required, under section 207, FRA and Amtrak to jointly develop new or improved metrics and minimum standards for measuring the performance and service quality of intercity passenger train operation, including cost recovery, OTP and minutes of delay (as reported by the conductor), ridership, on-board services, stations facilities, equipment, and other services. It also called for consultation with the Surface Transportation Board (STB), host railroads, states, Amtrak employees, and groups representing Amtrak passengers, as needed and appropriate. This is to aid in determining OTP and publishing a quarterly report to include, among other things, the minutes and

causes of delay. In meetings with the stakeholders FRA sought collaborative commitment to both determine and maintain published schedules. Because Amtrak trains often operate over multiple host railroads, train performance metrics in this final rule do not penalize host railroads for train delays for which they are not responsible (Example 1: Late at a given station on railroad B because of delays caused by or occurring on railroad A. Example 2: Late at a given station because of a trespasser incident.). These metrics are designed to provide a means by which to identify certain categories of delay and their frequency and duration in an effort to understand and improve passenger train performance.

Because the FRA believes the OTP metric should measure train performance from the eyes of the customer, the metric is meaningful because it reflects the passenger trains' actual performance.

This final rule report includes numerous comments and how the FRA responded. Suffice it to say, all commentary was reviewed and reflected in this ruling.

*Phil Streby is a director on the boards of RUN, NARP and the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance.*

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](mailto:rrudolph1022@gmail.com)**

*Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny*

# DRACONIAN SERVICE CUTS ON THE TABLE AT MBTA

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has announced draconian service cuts that could be implemented as early as the Spring schedules of 2021. Management has cited the reduction in ridership due to more people working from home, and the reduction in ridership that has been precipitated by the closure or suspension of business forcing many people out of work. The cuts could have a negative impact on essential workers, but also the economic health of all of Massachusetts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a drastic drop in ridership and associated fare revenues to the point that sustainability of the current service levels is now in question. Interesting enough, the MBTA added service to many of its transportation modes in recent weeks to assure social distancing, especially at peak service times. While this level of service will remain in place through most of the 2020 winter months and into early 2021, major cuts have been proposed.

No final plans have been announced as of this writing and a series of public meetings on these cuts are planned in the coming weeks. A final vote by the MBTA's Fiscal Management Board is currently scheduled for Dec. 7, 2020.

Most rail and transit advocates and their respective organizations, as well as various transit commentary blogs, believe that the MBTA may never recover from these cuts, and those services that are being considered may never return at all, even when (and if) service demand returns to pre-COVID levels. Of additional concern is the economic impact the service cuts would have to the state and region. During the Blizzard of 2015, the MBTA's rail lines were seriously cut back due to equipment breakdowns from heavy snow, and the loss to the economy of Massachusetts and surrounding states took years to recover.

With that noted, public outcry as well as political pressure to prevent these cuts has already seen raised voices, and some of them quite shrill.

The cuts as proposed would include:

## Commuter Rail

- Total train runs would be reduced by as many as 100 fewer across the system to a low of about 430 runs.
- All weekend service (Saturday and Sunday) would be eliminated. Current service operates on two-hour headways on most lines, with a few branch lines hosting no weekend service already.
- Weeknight service would end at 9:00 PM. Current service operates until between 11:00 PM and 12:00 AM on most lines.
- Stations with low-ridership or that are flag stops on most runs would be closed.

Station closures served by North Station lines would include:

- Cedar Park, Melrose (Haverhill Line)
- Hastings and Silver Hill stations, Weston (Fitchburg Line)
- Prides Crossing, Beverly (Rockport Line)

Station closures served by South Station lines would include:

- Plimptonville, Walpole (Franklin Line)
- Plymouth (Kingston-Plymouth Line)
- The special new 1-year pilot line connecting Foxboro Stadium to South Station has already been shuttered and will be revisited at a later date.

## Water Ferry Service

- Ferry boat service connecting coastal communities south of Boston would be eliminated, and an inner Boston harbor shuttle is also being considered for closure.

## Subway-Transit Service

- Surface and subway rail transit would end at midnight. Currently many trains operate until 1:00 AM with a final outbound run holding at some stations to connect with other "last trains," and meet with a final bus departing their respective terminus stations.
- The total subway and streetcar service frequency would be reduced by about 20% across all lines, with some adjustments on each line to be factored as needed.

- The Green Line subway/streetcar "E" Branch would terminate at the end of its dedicated surface right-of-way at Brigham Station (Brigham Circle) eliminating about one mile of street running to the current terminus loop at Heath Street. The "E" branch surface run is served by parallel bus route #39 which uses extra-long articulated buses

## Bus

- The MBTA's bus frequency would reduce by as much as 5% system-wide, but select routes could see a service reduction by as much as 30%. The plan calls for 14 bus routes to be merged and have their routes adjusted, and 25 low-ridership bus routes to be eliminated completely. The eliminations include inner city routes that may be near or parallel to existing subway lines, but which provide surface stops between subway stations, and several suburban routes or express commuter bus routes where ridership has experienced drastic drops.

Through the current situation, the MBTA has continued its rail repairs and upgrades, as well as system expansion across its transit and commuter rail systems, with funding coming greatly from other pockets.

Whether a change in administrations in Washington DC would be amenable to helping with the funding shortfalls due to the reduced ridership is yet to be seen. A final service plan, which will include these reductions, will likely not be announced until sometime in December at the earliest.

Riders in Boston and communities serviced by the MBTA should watch [www.mbt.com](http://www.mbt.com) for updates.

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



## A SMALL VICTORY FOR RIDERS, AMID LITTLE CHANGE AND CONTINUING UNCERTAINTY AT NEW JERSEY TRANSIT

*By David Peter Alan*

Not much has changed at New Jersey Transit (NJT) since we last reported to you, but this writer and other advocates won a small victory for riders on NJT's Raritan Valley rail line and for bus riders in Hunterdon County, a rural county in West Jersey.

NJT had returned to its former train schedules on July 6, after 15 weeks of reduced service due to the sharp drop in ridership caused by shutdowns in the wake of the COVID-19 virus. Five weeks later, the agency eliminated three weekday round trips on its Trenton (part of Amtrak's NEC), North Jersey Coast, and Raritan Valley lines. There were no public timetables issued to indicate those service reductions. Before the trains at issue were discontinued, Hunterdon County had established its LINK bus system, consisting of a small number of lines that serve the county on weekdays, and that connect at a hub in Flemington, the historic county seat. One connecting route leaves the county and takes riders to and from Somerville, a stop on the Raritan Line that has full service; approximately hourly.

When the trains were eliminated, several gaps of about two hours were introduced into the schedule. To make matters worse, the LINK route was scheduled to connect with three of the trains that were discontinued, so some transit-dependent riders in Hunterdon County were stuck for almost two hours in Somerville without a comfortable place to wait for their train or LINK bus (indoor waiting areas that were locked during the early days of the pandemic have yet to reopen, with few exceptions).

At a meeting of an NJT Board committee, this writer and other members of the Lackawanna Coalition joined forces with Erin Neukum, Transportation Coordinator for Hunterdon County and manager of the LINK system, to call for the Raritan Line trains at issue to be restored to the schedule. That request was met with the customary silence

at the time, but 10 days later, on November 9, two of those trains were restored to the schedule. Raritan Line riders are now rid of two extremely long gaps between trains, and many LINK riders have their Somerville connections back. This marks the first time in New Jersey that rail advocates and a county transportation manager have successfully joined forces to secure a service improvement for their constituents, so now it's two down and one to go!

Elsewhere on the New Jersey scene, not much has changed. Riders are slowly returning to the trains, as weekend ridership is picking up, and so is midday ridership to a lesser extent. At peak-commuting hours, trains going in the "reverse" direction (outbound in the morning and inbound in the late afternoon) are among the busiest in the system. This is probably due in large part to "essential" workers commuting to their jobs further out on the lines. The least-crowded trains are the traditional "commuter" trains to Penn Station, New York. When this writer boarded one of those trains earlier in November, the conductor asked: "Did you bring anyone with you today?" Sadly, the answer was NO.

This situation may indicate more about politics than about planning. The agency has applied for a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to help pay for building their proposed Portal North Bridge, including long approaches in the environmentally-sensitive Meadowlands. NJT claims that it is needed to increase capacity for peak-hour commuters into New York City, even though the proposed bridge adds no new capacity, would not be needed outside peak-commuting hours even if it did, and the existing bridge no longer opens during peak-commuting hours, as a result of a new Coast Guard regulation. Still, it appears that NJT is unwilling to cut any nearly-empty trains now, for fear that the FTA could construe such an action as an admission that the system is no longer running close to pre-COVID ridership at peak-commuting hours. The Lackawanna Coalition and other advocates have disputed NJT's assertion

that commuters will return in pre-COVID numbers when the dust settles. Instead, we expect more employees to work from home in the future, at least some days of the week, and possibly with staggered hours when they do go into the office. That, coupled with the widely-expected economic slowdown that will probably come from soon-to-be-imposed restrictions due to the resurgence of the virus, is expected by advocates and other commentators to keep "commuter-hour" ridership below pre-COVID levels for years to come. In fact, it may never return to pre-COVID levels.

Two big infrastructure proposals are in the news again. The Gateway Program Development Corp. commissioned a report from British engineering firm London Bridge Associates (LBA). LBA recommended repairing the tunnels under the Hudson River between New Jersey and New York now, rather than waiting until new tunnels can be built. LBA called for "in-service refurbishment" of the existing tunnels, similar to the way the Canarsie Tunnels on New York's L-Train were repaired during nights and weekends. Now New Jersey politicians and transit officials are criticizing the LBA report, even though their own backgrounds are in the fields of law and finance, not civil engineering. On a different project, NJT is considering spending \$431 million for its proposed Portal South Bridge; far less than the \$1.8 billion estimated for Portal North. The Portal South plan calls for a movable bridge closer to water level, rather than a higher fixed bridge with long approaches – hence the large cost difference. The Lackawanna Coalition opposes Portal North as a high fixed span, when Portal South could be a movable span closer to the water, and costing much less. In any event, it is unclear how much New Jersey can afford to spend on large-scale transit projects, or anything else. Like other states in the region, New Jersey is in dire financials traits as a result of shutdowns caused by the virus.

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# SAN FRANCISCO MUNI HAS TROUBLED PAST, FACES CHALLENGES, BUT NEW LEADERSHIP GIVES HOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

By Dana Gabbard

The San Francisco Municipal Railway (Muni) is the public transit agency for the city/county of San Francisco. From its humble origins as a single municipal electric streetcar line on Geary Blvd. that began operation on Dec. 28, 1912, it has grown to being a multimodal operator providing service via a fleet that includes bus, trolleybus, heritage streetcars, cable cars and light rail. By ridership, it is the seventh largest transit system in the United States and the second largest in California after Metro in Los Angeles.

Marked by rapid growth during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and in that period by acquiring its private competitors, becoming the sole transit provider in the city, by the 1950s Muni had converted most streetcar lines to bus or trolleybus except for five lines not suitable for conversion by reason of operation along private rights-of-way or through the Twin Peaks or Sunset tunnels. Through the 1970s, service on those lines was provided by an aging fleet of 1940s-era PCC cars. .

## CABLE CARS

There are three cable car lines operated by Muni (Powell-Mason at 1.6 miles, Powell-Hyde at 2.1 miles and California Street at 1.4 miles) serving 62 stops. Twenty-eight single-ended cars are available for operation on the two Powell lines and 12 double-ended cars on the California Street line. The bulk of the ridership are tourists and the fare is \$8 (whereas the cash bus or rail fare is \$3).

Twenty-three cable car lines were established in hilly San Francisco between 1873 and 1890. When the first electric streetcar line in San Francisco began operations in 1892, the technology proved much less expensive to build and operate than the cable cars. The trend toward conversion was accelerated by the devastation of the 1906 earthquake, in the aftermath of which most cable car lines were rebuilt for streetcars.

By the 1940s, the cable cars were icons and much beloved by Bay Area residents, who rebelled against the proposed closure of the

last remaining lines. This resulted in the preservation of the three remaining lines, the last manually operated cable car system on Earth. They are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and designated National Historic Landmarks. The system has been shut down during the pandemic.

## HERITAGE STREETCARS

Muni operates two heritage streetcar lines: E Embarcadero with 18 stops and F Market & Wharves with 32 stops and six miles of track.

In response to a shutdown of the cable car lines for maintenance beginning in September 1982, the city partnered with the Chamber of Commerce to hold a Historic Trolley Festival along Market Street as a substitute tourist attraction during the summer of 1983. It proved so popular it was repeated the subsequent years through 1987. The festival used historic streetcars from several different countries, as well as a number of preserved San Francisco cars.

The success of the festival convinced Muni to launch a permanent historic service on Market. Additional historic equipment was acquired and the tracks rebuilt. The F line opened Sept. 1, 1995. While operated by Muni, its cost is supported by the Market Street Railway [streetcar.org], a nonprofit organization of streetcar enthusiasts which raises funds and helps to restore vintage streetcars.

The popularity of the F convinced Muni to launch a second heritage streetcar line, this one operating double-ended historic Muni streetcars. The E commenced weekend operation on August 1, 2015 and added weekday service on April 23, 2016.

There have been discussions about extending the E through the abandoned Fort Mason single-track rail tunnel. This formerly was part of the San Francisco Belt Railroad, which moved railcars from connecting railroads about the Port of San Francisco and points nearby until ceasing operations in 1993.

Service on the two lines is shut down during the pandemic.

## MUNI METRO (LIGHT RAIL)

There are seven light rail lines (J Church, K Ingleside, L Traval, M Ocean View, N Judah, S Shuttle and T Third), 33 stations (nine subway, 24 surface) plus 87 additional surface stops. Total trackage is 36.8 miles.

Plans for a regional heavy rail system (Bay Area Rapid Transit, aka BART) began in the 1950s. Besides a tube under San Francisco Bay, it was to include a bi-level subway tunnel through downtown San Francisco under Market Street. The upper level was to be for local service while the lower was for express. Cost overruns necessitated a state bailout and abandonment of the planned BART local service.

Instead, the upper level was given over to Muni. It upgraded its streetcar system to light rail acquiring from Boeing Vertol 131 US Standard Light Rail Vehicle cars to replace the PCC cars. On April 23, 1979, the first car operated in revenue service.

The Boeing cars were plagued with numerous issues. By the late 1980s, Muni began the process of acquiring replacement vehicles. On Dec. 4, 1991, a contract was signed with the Italian firm Breda for 151 vehicles known as the LRV2. The first cars were put into revenue service in 1996. These also had, "... a host of mechanical issues and design flaws," in the words of then-Streetsblog SF editor Aaron Bialick ("Muni's Next Train Fleet: Breda Disqualified from Another Contract", Sept. 16, 2013). The *SF Weekly* described these faults to include being, "... too heavy, too long, too wide, and too noisy" ("Rewarding Failure", Dec. 9, 1998). When rail service commenced operating in the tunnel on February 18, 1980, it now was known as Muni Metro.

Combined with the problems of a new Automatic Train Control system, the cumulative effect beginning Aug. 22, 1998 was a catastrophic system breakdown known as the Muni Meltdown that to some extent lasted into the following month.

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## REPORT FROM NEW MEXICO

*By JW Madison*

### The status of the NM Rail Runner Express (NMRX)

As I write this, this is what regional passenger Rail looks like in New Mexico.



I suppose the news could be a lot worse.

The NMRX is set to return on a limited schedule and with sanitary precautions,

### THE MBT-APOCALYPSE—A DISCONNECTED VISION

*By Mela Bush-Miles*

The year 2020 opened with all of the fanfare and jubilation of any other new year. We cheered and toasted, hugged and drank off of the same cup.... welcoming in a new year and a new decade. We were so happy! MMXX.... Little did we know, nor could we ever have imagined what was to come. Around St Patty's Day, everything changed! The whole world shut down. We were suddenly presented with a pandemic and politics converging into a quagmire of death and the destruction of democracy and normalcy. Something as simple as getting on a bus, a train or a boat suddenly became a matter of life or

but our favorite pandemic is back in New Mexico with a vengeance, and the Governor is not about to "fly" in the face of all this. The following is from the proverbial "reliable sources":

"Regarding PTC - the FRA approved Rio Metro to begin Revenue Service Demonstration (RSD) and we are currently in extended RSD. This is the final phase of testing the PTC system and is proceeding relatively quickly, partly due to the fact that operations were suspended.

"We were also permitted to proceed with interoperability testing with our interoperable partners, BNSF and Amtrak, which is now complete. We anticipate having a fully FRA compliant PTC system prior to the December 31 deadline. "

### Update on Albuquerque's BRT service

Haven't been hearing lately from my friend in that outfit. But driving to work past several of the "ART" stations tells me that it's running regularly and ridership looks about the same as before the pandemic.

### Need another reason for publicly-owned rail infrastructure?

Here it is: Several organizations (and some

death. Bus and train schedules were scaled back and placed on Saturday schedules and workers essential for our lives and to keep our economy going were forced to crowd onto the few buses that were left running. Many who could not work from home tried their best to get to work risking their lives and livelihoods.

Transit revenues dropped due to low ridership and now... Our Transit authority has presented a doomsday scenario of the future of Transit in Massachusetts based upon ridership numbers collected during the worst days and months of the pandemic. They have decided to "Forge Ahead" with planned service cuts. These cuts, or amputations to be exact, will be severing connections to work family, worship, healthcare, entertainment and safe ways to travel from point A to point B. The MBTA's "Forging Ahead" plan is rolling us back to the time when car was King and many

regular citizens of my acquaintance) realize that "Government" is the only entity that can organize and finance the up-front expense of installing solar generating stations and, in some locations, wind turbines along railroad rights of way, where there's room and vertical clearance (and not too many migrating birds). This of course fits hand in glove with the move toward long-distance electrification of our tracks, another project (I think) too big for any entity other than the Nation itself.

Such power would operate the trains and signals, likely with some left over to sell to nearby communities, saving the latter the sometimes prohibitive expense of putting in their own renewable energy facilities.

I'm positive there's plenty of expertise available to modify and arrange tax policy and other financial matters so as to benefit all parties concerned (and Class I's), with a little good faith and a lot of long (online) meetings...

*JW Madison is a RUN Board member, a solidarity member of the Railroad Workers United, and president of Rails Inc. in Albuquerque, NM.*

communities were cut off from connections to others. Communities have been pitted one against the other fighting for resources. People and the planet will suffer as people are forced back into their vehicles, if they have them, and pollution will increase once again.

Proposed cuts include: All MBTA service ends at 12:00 midnight, no weekend commuter rail service, some commuter rail stations will close, some bus lines will be cut. All ferry service to Boston will cease.

E Branch trolley service will end at Brigham Circle, resulting in Vets being cut off from a one-seat ride to the VA hospital. Unthinkably, paratransit fares will be increased for many seniors and disabled who will now find themselves in premium rate zones of The Ride.

*Continued on page 8*

# RUN CANADA REPORT, NOVEMBER 2020

**By Ken Westcar**

Recent Toronto Board of Trade and Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium virtual conferences during the last week of November gave encouragement to those who have long seen a greater role for rail in the national transportation matrix. Both events had a star-studded cast of ministerial grandees and delegates from global rail industries who clearly smelled new steel in the blood in Canada's mobility and climate plans.

Ontario's Minister of Transport, Caroline Mulroney, appeared at both conferences with speeches carefully tailored to inspire hope for intercity rail expansion in the province while avoiding commitment on what, how and when. But re-instatement of the "Northlander" passenger train between Toronto and Cochrane got an honorable mention, as did improved rail services in southwestern Ontario.

Phil Verster, the CEO of Metrolinx, Toronto's operator of transit, regional bus and rail services, was unusually candid on the need to keep building out the network as his crystal ball saw significant, post-pandemic demand growth from a burgeoning population in the Greater Toronto – Hamilton Area and beyond. He expressed only modest concern over the rapidly escalating cost of transit infrastructure, even though building subways has escalated by around 800% per mile since the Toronto Transit Commission constructed the foundational network in the 1960s and 70s. He noted that Toronto is now only second to New York City in per-mile transit infrastructure costs.

A subsequent panel discussion on this issue remained highly subjective until one member suggested that political meddling, gold-plated engineering and risk transfer to the private sector were largely to blame. This likely ruffled many political feathers. Coincidentally,

prior talks by senior people in provincial infrastructure procurement left many online audience members with raised eyebrows and puzzled looks. Students of the latest in business jargon would have been impressed. Rail fans – not so much.

Cynthia Garneau, CEO of VIA Rail, talked about their new, Sacramento-built, Siemens trains expected in 2022, mainly for use on Corridor services between Windsor and Quebec City. The best of the existing 1950s-built clunkers will be refurbished for non-corridor work so EMD, GE and Budd products will not pass into history for a while yet. Garneau didn't elaborate on the High Frequency Rail project between Toronto, Windsor and eventually Quebec City other than saying the federal government will be making an announcement "soon." A question asking at what point the project may be abandoned due to a totally absorbed, realistic cost estimate went unanswered. Subject matter experts remain skeptical that C\$4.5 billion (diesel) or C\$6.5 billion (electric) touted for the initial 340-mile section of the project is anywhere close to reality.

Hydrogen fuel cell propulsion was a hot topic at both conferences as was digitization and the role of artificial intelligence. Alstom and Siemens showed the practicalities of their new fuel cell/ hydrogen powered, single floor, multiple unit trains including the fact that they have a 500-mile range between refueling and a performance equal to or better than Tier 4 diesel. They are possible solutions for intercity rail services in Canada as the hydrogen can be sourced from "green" electricity that is abundant in Canada, if a tad pricey. Seems around C\$0.07c/kwh is needed and will not be politically easy to obtain due to interprovincial trade restrictions. Crush resistance issues and the requirement for Dellner style, multi-function couplers rather than traditional AAR couplers would need to be addressed.

After about 50 years of hard slogging, it seems that passenger rail advocates are starting to see light at the end of the tunnel. It will really depend on whether various levels of Canadian government can maintain or increase momentum and if President-Elect Joe Biden puts his faith into regional and intercity rail as a growing mobility option and part of his climate change agenda. At 73 years old, your writer will be happy to see robust and frequent trans-border passenger rail services between the U.S. and Canada. The Hyperloop dreamscape will be left to others. Sounds good for life on the planet Mars.

*Ken Westcar is co-coordinator of InterCityRail.*

## THE MBT-APOCALYPSE

*Continued from page 7*

The question now is, Should the MBTA take a vote in early December and implement some of these cuts starting in January of 2021? Rider advocates say NO! The decision makers at the MBTA are deciding now to cut things out that will take years to bring back. Irreparable harm will be done to the economy of Massachusetts. And now at the end of 2020, our vision has become clear.

The MBTA apocalypse will cost us all. What next? Transit advocates are rallying together and presenting alternatives, demanding that the MBTA and the state and federal legislature work together to find creative ways to fund public transit now and in the future. Transit advocates have worked tirelessly to write and submit bills and amendments to the state budget and to implore the MBTA to work together with the riding public and to listen. They must not cut service now and they must find creative ways to "Build back better," as our new president said. We must find ways to recover in a healthy and sustainable way.

Together, we can find a better way.

*Mela Bush-Miles is a RUN Board member and member of the T Riders Union.*



## A NORTHEAST ALTERNATIVE

By Joshua D. Coran

One day in April of 2013, I received a call at Talgo from a Scott Spencer, who said he had an idea for using some Talgo equipment that had recently become available. I was, of course, very interested.

At that time Talgo was completing the construction of the first two of what had been planned to be four consists for an expanded and improved *Hiawatha*. That 79 MPH Chicago - Milwaukee service was to be extended to Madison and the maximum speed increased to 110 MPH. Unfortunately, the recently elected governor, Scott Walker, had just cancelled the entire project (not only killing the passenger improvements, but also leaving freight service on the Watertown-Madison segment to continue running at 10 MPH).

Mr. Spencer's idea was to move these train sets to the Northeast Corridor. When I pointed out that this low-slung equipment had a floor level just 30 inches above top of rail and was thus not compatible with the

high-level platforms found on the NEC, he informed me that his plan was to run nonstop between the former Lackawanna ferry terminal in Hoboken and the through tracks in Washington Union Station, both of which have low-level platforms.

The more I thought about the idea, the more sense it made. The two choke points on the NEC are the B&P Tunnels in Baltimore and the segment between Newark and New York City, which is limited to two tracks due to the North (Hudson) River tunnels and Portal Bridge. While Mr. Spencer's proposal did not address the former, it was a brilliant solution to the latter. How many *Acela* seats run empty on that segment because people are traveling between North Jersey points and DC? How many now occupying seats on that segment are headed to or originating in Lower Manhattan and would just as soon catch PATH to Hoboken instead of NYCT to Penn Station?

A study of the NEC further showed that

this service would require very little additional capacity. Because *Acela* is limited to 135 MPH on the former PRR (and to 130 in numerous curves), the lighter (thus faster accelerating) non-stop Talgo could run close behind an *Acela*, keeping up with it for the entire Newark-Washington trip even though it would be subject to the FRA's "Tier I" maximum speed of 125 MPH.

It is no surprise that such an innovative (and "not invented here") idea has never seen the light of day, but Mr. Spencer was not discouraged.

Seven and a half years later, on Oct. 23, in an online "brown bag lunch" organized by Rick Harnish of the High Speed Rail Alliance (formerly the Midwest High Speed Rail Association), Mr. Spencer presented the much more ambitious plan of AmeriStarRail, of which he is Chief Operating Officer and Paul Reistrup, Amtrak's second president, an advisor.

*Continued on page 10*

## A SMALL VICTORY FOR RIDERS, AMID LITTLE CHANGE AND CONTINUED UNCERTAINTY AT NJ TRANSIT

*Continued from page 5*

Positive Train Control (PTC) is still a cliff-hanger for NJT. The agency barely made its last deadline two years ago, and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has warned that it is in trouble again. The Extended Revenue Service Demonstration (ERSD) phase of testing is slated for two lines in December, covering nearly one-third of NJT's route miles. NJT claims it will make the year-end deadline for having a fully operational system. If NJT misses the deadline, though, the FRA could impose fines, or even shut non-compliant lines down. It won't be long before all of us know the result.

Can NJT keep its current level of service, including "commuter trains" that carry few riders into Penn Station? Time will tell, but the Lackawanna Coalition and

some other advocates doubt it. There are historically-severe cuts planned for other legacy transit systems in the region: in New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia. Can NJT, and New Jersey generally, avoid the same fate? That appears unlikely, because the virus is raging all over the country, and the Garden State is no exception. Time will tell, but transit riders in New Jersey and elsewhere are bracing for a rough year.

To conclude with a personal note: at the end of the year, I will retire as Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, after 21 years in that position. Before that, I was Vice-Chair. The Coalition will continue under the leadership of Sally Jane Gellert, the sole candidate for the position as of this writing. I will remain an "ordinary" member, acting in an advisory role. I will also continue as a member of NJT's Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee (SCDRTAC). While I will be doing less on the local scene in New Jersey, I will be concentrating more on the national scene.

That means staying active on the RUN Board, continuing to write for the *RUN Newsletter*, and still hoping to help with a "live" conference in Newark after the dust settles and people are once again attending live events. I will also continue to write about these and other subjects concerning Amtrak and rail transit for *Railway Age*, where I am a Contributing Editor. I invite you to check out my efforts and other great writing about our railroads at [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com).

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

## A NORTHEAST ALTERNATIVE

*Continued from page 9*

Much of the plan is illustrated by the map below. It contains some interesting ideas. Starting at the southwest end one can see that:

- The Hoboken service Mr. Spencer had proposed years ago is still part of the plan, with these trains now running between that point and Richmond. Between 30<sup>th</sup> Street and Trenton, these trains will use an alternate route on SEPTA (former Reading) track through Center City Philadelphia.
- *Acela* and NE Regional trains are extended to and from Alexandria (apparently using diesels added south of Washington)

- Additional Washington-New York trains will run through Penn Station to and from Ronkonkoma on Long Island
- *Keystone* trains will also use the SEPTA route between Philadelphia and Trenton. They will run to/from Springfield, MA
- *Empire Service* trains will also serve Ronkonkoma
- *Downeaster* trains will run to and from Springfield.

Regarding that last point, readers may recall my article in the Summer, 2020, *RUN Newsletter* discussing the Massachusetts East-West project in which I addressed the issue of limited capacity at Boston South Station by using this same connection to avoid South Station.

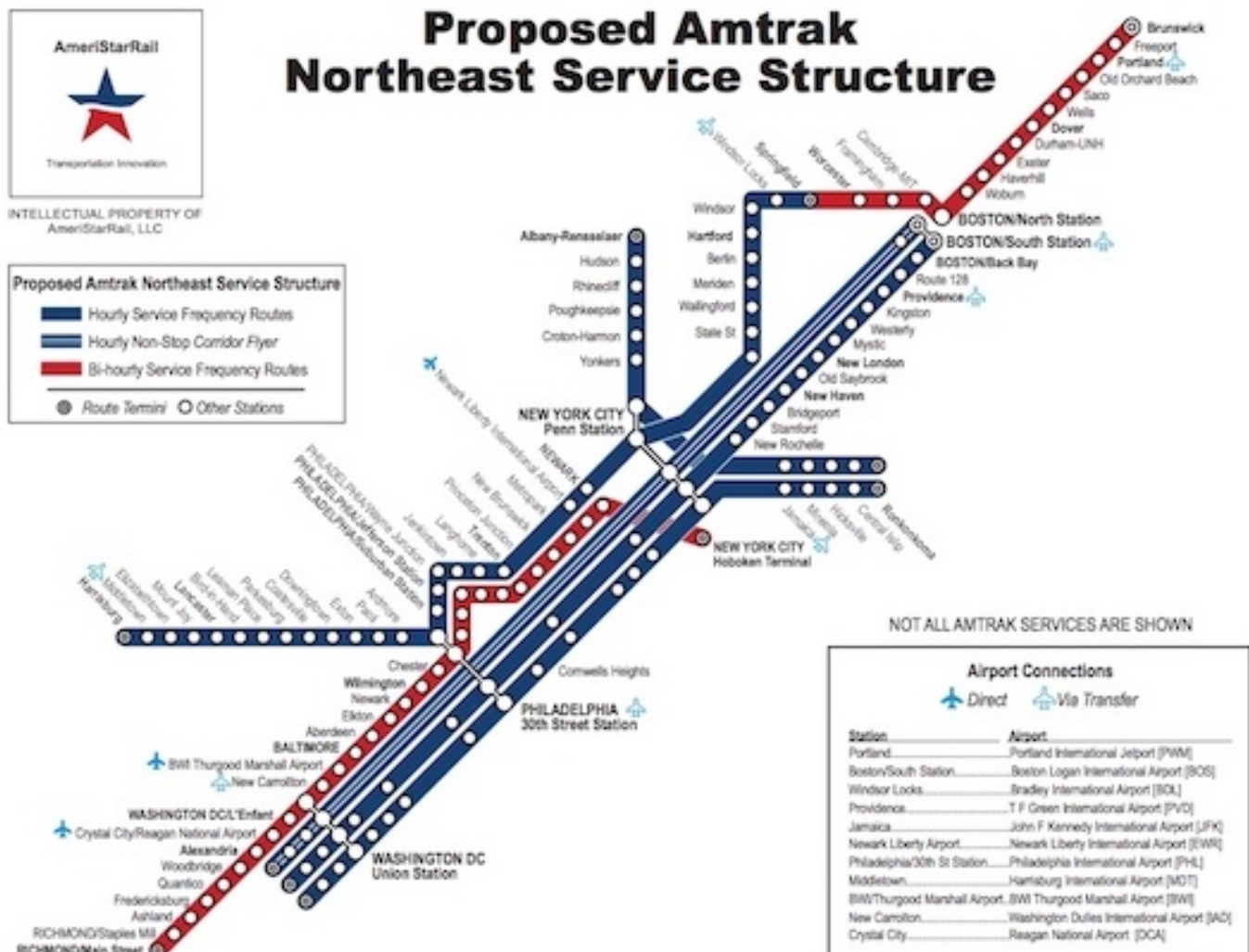
Most remarkable, however, is what is *not* there; notice that nothing originates or terminates in Washington or New York.

Mayor De Blasio can develop Sunnyside Yard to his heart's content, and Ivy City is open for development as well. The funds generated by these projects should go a long way towards covering the capital costs of this plan.

Which brings us to what is not apparent from the map: the company's equipment plans.

Although it is not well known, the FRA is becoming quite uncomfortable with the deteriorated condition of the Amfleet. When Amtrak took over on May 1, 1971, it inherited a few pre-WW-II cars that were nearly 35 years old, but most of the equipment it acquired had been in service for between 15 and 25 years. Four years later, Amfleet I cars began to replace these "old" ones, none of which was even 40 years old at that point.

*Continued on page 12*



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

*Continued from page 1*

safe, and to ensure that transit will be there when the crisis is over. Without additional funding, many agencies will need to further reduce service and lay off employees. Art also talked about how APTA has responded to the crisis by creating a Mobility Recovery and Restoration Task Force to address challenges regarding how to increase safety and insure the health of riders and transit workers. The task force has created a set of standards based on the research it has done, as well as asking transit users what would make them feel safe. These standards for cleaning and the use of disinfectants have been adopted by transit agencies across the nation, and transit riders have been asked to wear masks, keep their physical distance from each other as much as possible, and not to ride if they don't feel well. Some agencies have given out free masks to riders, others have installed vending machines that contain gloves, masks and hand sanitizer. Some have also reduced fares and made monthly passes more flexible.

Our second speaker, Mark Dowd, the MTA Chief Innovation Officer, gave a presentation on the various cutting-edge technologies the MTA is testing on its subways, buses, and commuter rail systems, to protect riders during the pandemic. These included anti-microbials, which keep surfaces free of viruses for periods of up to 90 days; ultra-violet C light, which is being tested in subway cars without passengers, as continued exposure to the rays could be harmful; and perhaps - the most promising of the new technologies - a game-changing air filtration system. This new system passes air through three stages: the first stage applies an electrostatic discharge to viruses, and then uses physical filtration to remove the charged particles. The air is then safely transferred to a self-contained unit, and exposed to ultraviolet radiation

that has been proven to kill bacteria, mold, and viruses - down to the common cold. It is then exposed to a wave of ionized particles that attack pollutants, chemically decomposing them. Then they travel deeply through air distribution ducts of the car, and into the vehicle interior to enhance disinfection of surfaces inside the cars. This is being tested on Metro-North Commuter Railroad, as well as the Long Island Rail Road. Thus far, it looks quite promising.

Our third speaker was David Peter Alan, Esq. David is a contributing editor to **Railway Age**, Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition and a RUN Board Member. He provided a legislative update regarding federal legislation and administrative regulations, which determine funding for Amtrak and its demands for more federal money. Although it has received \$1.02 billion in CARES Act Funding, Amtrak first demanded \$1.475 billion more to run daily long-distance trains. Since then, Amtrak raised its demand to \$10.05 billion, with \$5.19 billion for infrastructure and equipment or state supported trains would be cut and (mostly NEC) infrastructure projects would be suspended. The House Bill, HR-7616, which was folded into the HR-7617 appropriation bill, included \$750 million for the NEC, \$200 million of that for capital projects and \$1.3 B for the National Network. This included 88% of the \$1.475 billion that Amtrak demanded to keep long distance trains running every day.

David pointed out that H.R. 7617 specifically states none of the funds provided under this heading shall be used by Amtrak to discontinue or reduce the frequency of service on any portion of such route operated in fiscal year 2018. However, Amtrak would argue that it is not using the funds to cut service, but rather to preserve some of it. Also, under a current provision contained in a separate bill, Amtrak is allowed to discontinue service during the first month of a fiscal year if appropriations are not enacted 90 days before the fiscal year begins. Both of these issues gives Amtrak wiggle room to get away with cutting long distance service. To prevent that, David

said, Congress must include "clear and unequivocal language" requiring Amtrak to operate every train daily that ran in 2018, and to restore service 90 days after enactment, notwithstanding any other provisions in the laws. He pointed out there is no way to stop Amtrak from implementing the cuts now, but Congress could act early next year if it passed "a clean bill," although it would take about 90 days to restore the service.

Our final speaker, J.W. Madison, who is the president of Rails Inc. based in Albuquerque, considers "passenger rail advocacy in America as an eternal state of Trench Warfare; a little forward, a little further back, no major victory, no total defeat." He cited, among other reasons, a long-time massive federal subsidy program for All Things Auto and the arrogant (and possibly illegal) treatment of passenger Rail at the hands of what he calls Big Freight. The major reason this situation continues and worsens? While other modes of American transportation rest on publicly-owned infrastructure hosting a rich mix of private and public moving parts, national passenger Rail is held hostage to the opposite model: privately-owned infrastructure hosting (kind of) one feeble passenger Rail organization, neither properly public nor properly private. The logical long-term American solution? The "Rail Interstate"; that is, to bring our national Rail operating model into line with that of all our other modes. Rails Inc is remodeling its website, [www.nmrails.org](http://www.nmrails.org). Among the new additions will be the full version of his presentation, with slides.

After a short break, a panel presentation was held to highlight some of the current efforts underway to expand passenger rail and rail transit in the U.S. The moderator, Richard Rudolph, provided a brief overview of what is happening in New England regarding efforts to expand passenger rail in Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont. The panelists included Scott Rogers, Chair, West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition,

*Continued on page 12*



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

*Continued from page 11*

who talked about the ongoing effort to restore passenger rail service from Eau Claire, WI to St. Paul, MN. (See separate article in this issue of our newsletter).

The second panelist, David Strohmaier, Missoula County Commissioner, talked about the ongoing effort to create the Big Sky Rail Authority to restore passenger rail service to Southern Montana. In the absence of leadership at the state level, he and other county commissioners have taken steps "to create a regional rail authority, which will provide the governance structure to investigate, analyze, seek or accept funding for, and facilitate implementation of, long-distance, intercity rail service across southern Montana." While Strohmaier recognizes the importance of advocacy groups in this effort, he believes there is a need for a governance structure to collaborate across jurisdictions, and with the private sector to seek funding to conduct studies and, ultimately, to implement a project. So far, 14 counties have joined the effort.

Our third panelist, Michael Noland, President / General Manager, Northern Indiana Commuter Transit District, talked about the West Lake Corridor Project, which includes a double track 7.7-mile southern extension that will provide new passenger rail service to Hammond, Munster and Dyer in Lake County, IN. The project is estimated to cost at least \$852 million, and includes approximately eight miles of dedicated guideway, four new stations with high-level platforms, parking lots, Kiss-and-Ride areas, and ADA parking areas. The project is expected to not only double ridership on the South Shore line and create more than 7,000 new jobs, but also generate over \$2 billion in private investment. Given these expectations, Governor Holcomb had made the "West Lake DT Top Priority."

The Mini-Conference closed with a forum which provided an opportunity for members of the audience to virtually share their ideas and concerns regarding passenger rail / rail transit in the U.S. Andrew Albert, RUN's Vice Chair, who is also the Chairman of the New York City Transit Riders Council, Chair of the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, and a MTA Board Member, gave closing remarks.

Today, we heard from quite a few areas of the country, and from various sources - how important rail and rail transit is to life in the USA. Whether it be intercity rail transportation or rail transit—which, as we heard, is vital to folks in all parts of the country, as people and organizations are trying to bring new service to Montana, Indiana, Illinois, etc.—the big picture is: if you want better rail transportation, you must speak up, get others involved, involve your elected officials and newspapers—and ADVOCATE for it! It will not come if you just sit around and wait for it! We also heard about the various new technologies transit systems—in this case, New York's MTA—are utilizing and testing to make sure riders feel safe and ARE safe in this COVID era. We all hope they are successful, and that we can return to normal as soon as possible.

### A NORTHEAST ALTERNATIVE

*Continued from page 11*

The newest Amfleet I cars have now been in service for over 43 years. (The *Capitol Liner* cab cars used in *Keystone* service are former *Metroliners*, now 53 years old.)

The FRA will be pleased to learn that AmeriStar plans to retire all Amfleet I cars. As the *Acela* replacement sets come on line, rather than retiring the existing *Acela* equipment AmeriStar will repurpose it for regional service. It recognizes the fact that this equipment cannot serve stations with low-level platforms and plans to install prefabricated high-level platforms throughout the expanded NEC. This project will be challenging, because high-level platforms cannot be close enough to any track used by freight trains to produce

gap-free level boarding. In addition, the services indicated on the AmeriStar map require about 70 train consists to be available for service at all times, implying a fleet of about 80. Will there be enough equipment between Amfleet II (said to also be in poor condition), Horizon and the 20 Acela I sets, even at the reduced train lengths that may be adequate in a post COVID-19 era?

AmeriStar plans to offer three classes, all of them accommodated in European style compartments. This approach is being taken to address concerns with "social" distancing. Presumably these compartments will be occupied by single parties traveling together. The impact on capacity would appear to be significant.

Mr. Spencer certainly has come up with some out-of-the-box ideas, many of them very interesting. We can only hope he will have answers for all the challenges and unintended consequences they may produce.

*Joshua D. Coran is Director of Product Development and Compliance at Talgo, Inc. in Seattle. He is a RUN Board member and also serves on the board of Texas Rail Advocates.*

If you would prefer to receive the RUN Newsletter electronically, please let us know by e-mailing **RRudolph1022@gmail.com**



# AMTRAK IS MISSING YET ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY

By Joshua D. Coran

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of last August, I had a brief email exchange with Joe McHugh, then Amtrak VP- State Supported Services Business Development. Having just learned that he would be taking a buyout, I expressed my sorrow at the news and then suggested a way for Amtrak to increase revenue substantially at very little additional expense. To introduce the idea, I first shared with him the following consist of PRR train 152 leaving Washington Union Station for New York on Sept. 6, 1943:

PRR 4930	Locomotive (GG1)
PRR 4706	Coach
PRR 3854	Coach
PRR 3940	Coach
PRR 3751	Coach
PRR 3971	Coach
PRR 3861	Coach
PRR 1860	Coach
PRR 3941	Coach
PRR 8023	Lunch Counter – Kitchen
PRR 8024	Dining Room Car
Pullman <b>Quaker Valley</b>	Parlor Car
28 Chairs, 1 Drawing Room	
Pullman <b>Susan B. Anthony</b>	Parlor Car
28 Chairs, 1 Drawing Room	
Pullman <b>Bay Head</b>	Parlor Car
28 Chairs, 1 Drawing Room	
Pullman <b>Richard Henry Lee</b>	Parlor Car
28 Chairs, 1 Drawing Room	
Pullman <b>Willow River</b>	Sleeping Car
7 Drawing Rooms (in day service)	
Pullman <b>Alexander Hamilton</b>	Parlor Observation
12 Chairs, 1 Drawing Room, Buffet, Lounge	

There are several striking features of this train, especially when compared to pre-pandemic Amtrak consists.

	No 152	Regional	Acela
Length (ft.)	1400	835	664
Weight (tons)	1440	600	624
Capacity	824	618	299
Coach	640	600	256
Business Class*	-n/a-	18	43
First Class*	184	-n/a-	-n/a-
Tons/Pass	1.75	0.97	2.08

\*Here "Business Class" denotes 2+1 across, "First Class", two across. Amtrak's terminology differs and is inconsistent.

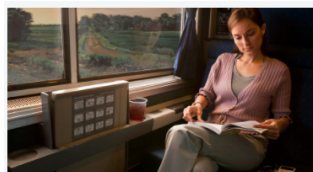
While what certainly stands out is that weight-per-passenger for the Acela compared to number 152's "heavyweight" consist, what I pointed out to Mr. McHugh was the presence of that seven drawing room sleeper in number 152's consist.



*Willow River* was one of six sleepers with seven drawing rooms built by Pullman in 1928. *Willow Trail* shown.

Apparently in 1943 the five drawing rooms in the regular parlor cars were not sufficient. The train had a total of 12!

In post-pandemic 2020, with people avoiding commercial travel because it is "impossible to socially distance," Amtrak has recognized its unique ability to offer private rooms. Just go on its website today and you'll see images like this one: (Article continues on page 14)



Travel in a Private Room

Available in many routes across the country.

# AMTRAK IS MISSING YET ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY

*Continued from page 13*

So why not offer this amenity on the NEC? As I explain in another article nearby, AmeristarRail plans to make European-style compartments its standard in all three classes it proposes to offer. A Viewliner sleeper will accommodate as many as 28 in its “roomettes”, but even if every one is reserved by solo travelers, fourteen tickets would be sold. Each of the three bedrooms (one of them accessible) can comfortably accommodate three; they will probably generate at least six more fares. If a ticket costs just four times a coach fare this car will generate more revenue than a 100% full Amcoach and twice what one with reduced seating for Covid-19 would produce. Four times the price of a coach ticket may actually be conservative. On Nov. 23, a roomette to WAS from NYP a month later cost 6.8 times a single coach ticket. For two, it was 5.2 times.

Departure: Mon, Dec 21			
NYP → WAS <small>Compare fares</small>			
<div> </div> <div> <div>DEPART</div> <div>3:15p</div> </div> <div> <div>ARRIVE</div> <div>6:46p</div> </div>	<div> <div>Coach fare</div> <div>\$78</div> <div>100% of the price</div> </div>		
	<div> <div>Bedroom</div> <div>\$405</div> <div>5.2x of the price</div> </div>		

The lowest price room for two from NY to Washington was \$405, **5.2 times** the \$78 coach fare.

Bedrooms are apparently blocked, but if offered, based on NYP-ALB, they would be priced at about \$745, or **nearly ten times** the price of a coach ticket!

The availability of such isolation will also generate more travel among those reluctant to leave home. No public mode -- short of a cruise ship -- can touch an Amtrak sleeper for privacy and “social” distance.

In his response to my suggestion, Mr. McHugh said, “Hey Josh, they are looking at adding sleepers on the regional services. I just don’t know how far along we are. ...”

Nearly four months later, Joe Mc Hugh has retired and Amtrak is, at best, still “looking at adding sleepers on the regional services.”

Why not at least give it a try? Viewliner sleepers are sitting idle, the cost of a strikeout here is minimal, and there is a chance of hitting a homerun.



Prior to the arrival of Amfleet, Amtrak used these Budd-built 29-chair one drawing room parlor cars on the NEC; the New Haven’s *County* series parlor cars had a pair of “day roomettes” accommodating two.

*Joshua D. Coran is Director of Product Development and Compliance at Talgo, Inc. in Seattle. He is a RUN board member and also serves on the board of Texas Rail Advocates.*

## 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.*

*Many thanks,  
Richard Rudolph, Ph.D. Chairman, Rail Users Network*

## COVID-19 UPDATE: AMTRAK SERVICE SLASHED, A SLOW RECOVERY FOR TRANSIT, BUT HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

*Continued from page 1*

Will Congress require Amtrak to restore daily service on its long-distance network? Time will tell, but Congress must act shortly after the next session begins and the Biden administration takes office. This writer has called for a standalone bill to appropriate the needed funds, and require Amtrak to restore the trains to daily operation and switch to a more-reliable and more-transparent accounting system. If that does not occur, are the long-distance trains doomed to disappear? Again, time will tell.

Amtrak's state-supported corridors and trains are a mixed bag. Some trains operated with state support are still (or again) operating every day, including the *Pennsylvanian* and the *Heartland Flyer*. Others, like the trains in Vermont, are still suspended. Trains to Canada (Seattle to Vancouver and New York to Toronto and Montreal) are also completely gone. That includes most of each such route; the portion on the U.S. side of the border. Communities along those routes have lost their trains entirely.

On the corridors, the big success story is the *Downeaster* service between Boston and Maine. It was suspended completely in the spring, but has rebounded to four daily frequencies; only one less than the pre-COVID schedule. Other corridors around the country, including the *Piedmont* route in North Carolina, the *Wolverine* route between Chicago and Detroit, and the *Cascade* route between Seattle, Portland and Eugene, are down to one daily round trip. The pre-COVID schedule called for three or four daily round trips on each of those routes. Without the Toronto train

or a daily *Lake Shore Limited*, there are only two daily round trips left on New York's *Empire Service* west of Albany, while more trains go only as far north as Albany from New York. The Northeast Corridor (NEC) and its branches are running about half the pre-COVID level of service (it had been even less during the spring and early summer), and there are fewer *Acela* trains than before the virus hit. Some advocates complain that Amtrak unfairly gives the NEC preference over better-performing long-distance trains.

The amount of service running on local transit today depends primarily on the mode, although service levels vary considerably between metropolitan areas. Local rail transit ridership is running at about 30% to 50% of last year's levels in many cities. Bus ridership in many places has recovered more strongly, as many "essential" workers who, nonetheless, are not highly-paid, take the bus to work.

Local rail transit is running well in some cities: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Denver, Dallas, and Washington, D.C. among them. Service is close to pre-COVID levels in those cities, although ridership is not. One exception is that the New York subways still shut down during the overnight hours; an event that never happened since the original IRT subway opened in 1904. New Jersey Transit restored its full weekday schedule on July 6, made a few service cuts on August 10, and restored two trains on November 9, as noted elsewhere in this issue.

Other lines have not yet returned to service. The New Mexico Rail Runner Express, the El Paso Streetcar, the streetcar line in Little Rock, AR, and the streetcar and downtown People Mover in Detroit remain completely suspended. All local rail transit in San Francisco is suspended, too, except for Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) trains rolling deep under Market Street on reduced schedules. The unique cable cars, the historic streetcars on Market

Street and the Embarcadero, and the six light-rail lines operated by the San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency (Muni) remain completely shut down. Muni attempted to restart some light-rail service in August, but the effort failed. They will try again during the winter. To make matters worse, Muni cut its bus system from 89 lines to 17 in the spring. It has recovered to 32 routes operating until 10:00 pm and 10 routes operating through the night.

Regional Rail (also known as "commuter rail") is the hardest-hit mode. Service in the New York area is almost back to pre-COVID levels, at least for now. There have been some service reductions in Boston, Philadelphia, and other places in the Northeast. MARC and Virginia Railway Express (VRE) service in the Washington, D.C. area has been cut in half. That also holds for similar routes in California and Seattle. Metra in Chicago continues to operate a relatively-robust service with some reductions. Until now, the major systems, whether "legacy" or new, have been able to weather the crisis relatively well, despite a steep decline in ridership; especially former commuters who are no longer going to their offices in the city's core, or are only going there on certain days.

This writer has documented these recent events in an article titled *Rail Transit in Slow Recovery* and posted on the *Railway Age* website, [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com), on Oct. 22. The link is

<https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/rail-transit-in-slow-recovery/?RAchannel=home>.

The already-acute threats to transit have gotten worse since then, and managers and advocates alike remain concerned. After all, San Francisco has one of the largest percentages of transit-dependent persons of any American city, as well as one of the historically-strongest transit systems. If the virus could bring a strong transit system like San Francisco's to its knees, what damage could it eventually do elsewhere?

*Continued on page 16*

## COVID-19 UPDATE: AMTRAK SERVICE SLASHED, A SLOW RECOVERY FOR TRANSIT, BUT HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

*Continued from page 15*

In addition, the elections did not bring many victories to rail transit. There were some, though. Voters from San Francisco to San José approved a tax measure that will keep Caltrain going. The line's survival was at stake, since commuting has plummeted, bringing farebox revenue down with it. Despite California's requirement that any tax increase must be approved by 2/3 of the vote, the measure passed. So did a plan to build several new light-rail lines in Austin, along with other improvements.

On the other side of the scorecard, Portland, OR voters rejected a measure that would have built new infrastructure, including one new light-rail line for the MAX system. It would have taxed employers for benefits that the measure's supporters claimed employers would receive from making it easier for their employees to get to work on transit. Employers campaigned hard against the proposal, and local commentators credited that campaign with its defeat. By a narrow margin, voters in suburban Gwinnett County, GA again rejected an incursion by the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) into their county. Last year, they rejected a MARTA takeover of the county's bus system. This year, they voted down a proposal to keep the bus system intact, but to extend a MARTA rail line. Earlier this year, there had also been proposals to add transit in San Diego, Sacramento, the Bay Area, and Seattle. Rather than face the voters, officials withdrew the measures from the ballot. So,

counting those defeats, the final score was 2 in favor, and 6 against new transit initiatives. To learn more, see this writer's article in *Railway Age* entitled *Voters Have Their Say on Transit Initiatives, With Mixed Results*, posted November 4. It can be found at <https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/voters-have-their-say-on-transit-initiatives-with-mixed-results/?RAchannel=home>.

There is not much rail transit in Canada. There are major systems in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and minor ones in Edmonton and Calgary, Alberta and Ottawa and

### *Passenger trains and local rail transit in the United States and Canada remain a mixed bag.*

Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario. Schedules on local rail lines, as well as most regional rail in Toronto and Montreal now run close to pre-COVID levels.

VIA Rail, Canada's counterpart to Amtrak, presents a different story, though. All of VIA Rail's corridor operations serve Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, or a two of those cities. According to pre-COVID schedules, all lines ran at least three round trips per day, and up to eight on weekdays between Montreal and Toronto. Today, each of those corridors hosts only two daily round trips. It was worse earlier this year; for awhile there was only one daily round trip on each line.

Outside the corridors in Quebec and Ontario, no train ran more often than three times per week. Today, only the northern portion of the *Hudson's Bay* route between The Pas and Churchill, Manitoba (on the Arctic Coast) still does; primarily to serve the local aboriginal communities. It still runs

twice a week south from The Pas to Winnipeg. Former tri-weekly trains between Montreal and Jonquiere and Senneterre, Quebec, between Sudbury and White River, Ontario (a surviving segment of the historic *Canadian* route on CP Rail), and between Jasper, Alberta and Prince Rupert, B.C. now run only once a week. The *Ocean* between Montreal and Halifax remains suspended, as does the current *Canadian* route which formerly ran twice a week between Toronto and Vancouver. The western half of that route, between Vancouver and Winnipeg, is slated to return to service with one round trip per week, effective Dec. 11. It remains unknown when, and even if, any other routes or frequencies will come back.

So passenger trains and local rail transit in the United States and Canada remain a mixed bag. Some cities have most of their transit back, while others are doing surprisingly poorly. Ridership is recovering slowly, but revenue is not, so essentially every provider is facing financial difficulties. So are the states and political subdivisions that support transit. To make matters worse, the virus is again ravaging the nation. Infection rates are the highest since last spring in some places; the highest ever in others. Governments everywhere are struggling to provide services and keep afloat. We don't know exactly how Amtrak and our rail transit will fare in the near future, but it will definitely be a rough ride.

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



## SAN FRANCISCO MUNI HAS TROUBLED PAST, FACES CHALLENGES, BUT NEW LEADERSHIP GIVES HOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT

*Continued from page 6*

The first substantial expansion of the system, T Third Street, opened April 7, 2007. It has 18 stations and is 5.1 miles long and notably brought service to the Caltrain commuter rail depot at 4<sup>th</sup> and King. Currently under construction is a 1.7-mile extension known as the Central Subway, linking the depot and Chinatown with three subway stations and one surface. The extension is budgeted at \$1.578 billion, and Muni recently posted a status report on its website. "Our current projections put the completion of construction this spring [2021] and the start of service in the following spring of 2022" ("Central Subway: Slowed by COVID-19 But Still Making Progress", Nov. 12, 2020).

As the unreliability of the Breda cars increased and faced with the need for more vehicles to serve the Central Subway expansion, in September 2014 a contract was awarded to Siemens for 175 vehicles known as the S200 SF. With options, the total order is now for 219 railcars, manufactured at Siemens' Sacramento plant. The first car was delivered in January 2017, and on Nov. 17, 2017, the first one operated in revenue service. In April 2019 a problem with door sensors resulted in an incident where a woman with a hand stuck in a door was dragged along the platform by the vehicle and seriously injured. Within two months, Siemens developed an updated door design that resolved the issue. Deliveries are to continue through 2028.

On Friday, April 26, 2019, around 6:30 a.m. the overhead lines that provide the power to the vehicles became detached between Powell Street and Civic Center stations, halting service in the Market Street tunnels. The resumption of normal service took 13 hours. The fallout from the incident

included the announcement that Ed Reiskin, Director of Transportation for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) which has overseen Muni since 1999, was leaving his post the following August.

Muni Metro suspended rail service March 30, 2020, replacing it with substitute bus service. This was to dedicate scarce cleaning resources to the remaining operations in response to the pandemic. On Aug. 22, 2020, Muni attempted to begin operating a reduced version of Muni Metro service, but broken power line switches caused a quick shutdown (the same problem that occurred the previous year). The decision was made to acquire replacement switches of superior design and suspend rail service through the end of 2020 while the tunnels are completely rewired with the new switches.

The most recent embarrassment to afflict Muni involves a mistake made when the Twin Peaks tunnel was rehabilitated, a project completed two years ago. The old gravel (aka ballast) underlying the trackbed to provide stability and drainage was reused to save time and money. Inspection has determined the gravel could cause potential problems and needs to be replaced at a cost of tens of millions of dollars.

In an extraordinary display of public candor, new SFMTA Director of Transportation Jeffrey Tumlin, when questioned by the county/city supervisors in their capacity as the San Francisco County Transportation Authority board (a planning and funding agency) regarding what had gone wrong, cited what he stated is a "culture of fear" among Muni staff. "This is something I'm working very hard to correct," he added. "Employees are afraid to diagnose the problem and elevate it because that might make us look bad. Well, nothing makes us look worse than failing to deliver decent service or deliver a project on time. All of that must be resolved before we go to the voters and say trust us with more capital money."

The last part alludes to a proposed regional transportation tax known as Faster Bay Area [[fasterbayarea.org/](http://fasterbayarea.org/)] that may be on the ballot in 2021 or 2022. Tumlin in his remarks also alluded to the culture of bullying, verbal abuse and harassment that was detailed in a February 2019 report by Dolores Blanding, appointed by San Francisco Mayor London Breed as an independent ombudsperson to investigate reports of dysfunction within Muni. Activists are encouraged by Tumlin admitting there is a problem and see signs he is working to fix it.

Incoming San Francisco Transit Riders [[sftransitriders.org](http://sftransitriders.org)] Executive Director Mark Cordes summed up the situation and the challenges Muni faces in an interview with Streetsblog SF [[sf.streetsblog.org/](http://sf.streetsblog.org/)] editor Roger Rudick: "We've had decades of under-investment if not disinvestment, in the system as a whole and particularly in the subway. This is what happens when you don't invest, when you don't take care of maintenance the way you need to. This is what happened when you don't make the long-term investments you need in the fundamentals." ("San Francisco Transit Riders Welcomes New Executive Director")

The official website of Muni is [www.sfmta.com/](http://www.sfmta.com/)

I wish to acknowledge the journalism of the aforementioned Roger Rudick at Streetsblog SF which I found invaluable regarding the recent problems of Muni and the concerns of activists. Also my thanks to Cat Carter, Spokesperson for San Francisco Transit Riders, for a delightful freewheeling conversation that educated me on the lay of the land in re Bay Area transportation.

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

## THE REVIVAL OF PASSENGER SERVICE BETWEEN EAU CLAIRE, WI AND ST. PAUL, MN

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

Reprinted from **Passenger Train Journal**,  
2000-4, Issue 284, pp. 55-56.

This is an update on what rail advocates are doing to promote passenger service from Eau Claire, Wisconsin to the Twin Cities in Minnesota. It is the thirteenth in a series of articles highlighting what rail advocates are doing to improve and expand passenger rail and rail transit in America.

The passenger train, the Twin Cities 400, made its last stop in Eau Claire, WI on its final run from Chicago to St Paul / Minneapolis on July 23, 1963. Originally called The 400, this express train took its name from the 400-mile schedule, which took 400 minutes to complete. The Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Company (C&NW), which provided the service first petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1961 and in 1963 for discontinuation due to losses it had experienced in the last three years of service. Both the Wisconsin and Minnesota agencies in charge of regulating transportation opposed the abandonment, and C&NW encountered stiff opposition from residents and businesses in Eau Claire and in the surrounding communities. The city of Eau Claire put up about 50% of the \$10,000 spent on the two hearings, while the nearby communities of Chippewa Falls, Menomonie, and Merrillan supplied the other 50%. In Eau Claire alone, 33 parties testified against the discontinuance. Many passengers "testified that the trains were needed, used, and preferred over other available transportation because of economy, comfort, safety, convenience, time schedules, and, in some cases, fear of air travel."

Given the above history and the ongoing economic revival of the city during the past several decades, it is not at all surprising that there is renewed interest in passenger rail in Eau Claire. This city, which lies about 85 miles east of St. Paul, MN, is a post-industrial community

that has reinvented itself into an outdoor cultural mecca, complete with new boutique hotels, coffee shops, craft breweries, restaurants, a farmers market and a \$80-million arts complex at the confluence of the Eau Claire and Chippewa rivers. The community has a diverse and expanding economic base in manufacturing, information technologies, healthcare, and retail trade. The healthcare sector alone employs over 12,000 people at three full-service hospitals and various smaller medical facilities and clinics. The city is also home to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, Chippewa Valley Technical College, and Immanuel Lutheran College. While its estimated population in 2018 was only 68,866, there are a number of nearby towns including Chippewa Falls and Menomonie, which create a combined Metropolitan Statistical Area with a population of over 210,000.

The West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition (WCWRC) has been actively pursuing restoring passenger service from Eau Claire to St. Paul since 1999. Scott Rogers, who is the chair of the Coalition as well as the workforce director for the Eau Claire Chamber of Commerce, has been working to find a private firm to operate the line over the existing single track Union Pacific freight line. The goal is to get this potential commuter line operational without government money. With tens of thousands of commuters traveling each morning on I-94 from western Wisconsin communities to the Twin Cities, it seems like a no-brainer.

Based on the prospect of hundreds of thousands of rides annually, Minnesota Department of Transportation's 2010 State Rail Plan classified the Eau Claire corridor as a "Phase I" project – top priority – with good potential to recover costs from fares. The cost estimate for the start-up of the service included converting UP's Automatic Block Signaling to Central Traffic Control, Positive Train Control, four train sets,

rolling stock and Capacity Rights. These costs were estimated to be approximately \$227.2 million. Potential rail service from Eau Claire and the Twin Cities was also mentioned as an option in the Wisconsin Rail Plan 2030, which was adopted in March 2014 as one of the options to be explored in the long-term plan time frame.

The Gateway Corridor Commission, which was created in 2009 "to advocate, study and plan for transportation options along the I-94 route," also included commuter rail to Eau Claire as one of eight options that was to be considered in a federally financed alternative analysis. This was completed in 2012. The Commission was interested in providing bus rapid transit service to the eastern metropolitan area, especially the city of Woodbury, MN; the rail option was ruled out. Instead, it recommended the idea to MnDOT for continued consideration as an intercity rail corridor in the Minnesota Comprehensive Freight and Passenger Rail Plan. (Metro Transit's Gold Line, a planned 10-mile BRT line, is slated for start-up in 2024 connecting St. Paul, Maplewood, Landfall, Oakdale and Woodbury generally along the I-94 corridor.)

Over the past two decades, the WCWRC has moved ahead with its efforts to restore passenger service over Union Pacific's single track 87-mile rail line from Eau Claire to St. Paul. The goal is to offer four roundtrips per day between Eau Claire and St. Paul. With an estimated travel time of 75 to 90 minutes, supporters believe 900,000 trips could be made annually using the service. The train would make stops in Menomonie, Baldwin, Hudson and Stillwater, MN before arriving in St. Paul. Extending service to Target Field in Minneapolis is a priority, and there is also planning underway to establish a shuttle bus service that would take passengers to/from Amtrak's station in Tomah, synchronized with the *Empire Builder's* arrival and departure times.

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## THE REVIVAL OF PASSENGER SERVICE BETWEEN EAU CLAIRE, WI AND ST. PAUL, MN

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In 2015, WCWRC established a sister organization, the Passenger Rail Organizing Council (PROC), to build a partnership of business and corporate interests which have a "strong desire to attract and retain talent in Western Wisconsin" through the development and operation of passenger service from the region to the Twin Cities. Given the lack of public funding for such a service and the emergence of several public-private and fully private passenger rail projects across the U.S., this group, chaired by retired MnDOT rail planner David Christianson, began an investigation into the feasibility of a private venture. Since February 2016, the Council "has developed plans, performed engineering and financial analyses, designed a service model, and entered into conversations with railroads, potential private operators, suppliers and lessors, and partners." The Council is also working with the Union Pacific Railroad in order to define investment goals and operational parameters.

The combined work of the WCWRC and PROC has paid off. A number of Eau Claire businesses support the current effort, including Royal Credit Union, which has over 200,000 members, and Jamf Software, which is an Apple management company with 1,300 employees. Both the Eau Claire and Chippewa county boards have approved resolutions supporting the idea, and the Eau Claire City Council voted unanimously in March 2018 to support a resolution backing the project.

The Union Pacific Railroad (UP), which owns and operates freight trains over the line, has expressed interest in hosting the proposed service, provided private capital is used to pay for a professional engineering study to determine what else needs to be done. It has already installed positive train control over most of the line and has made other improvements. UP is willing to make the additional improvements called for in the study. The expenses to be incurred would

be recovered over a three- to five-year period through the compensation that UP would receive for providing slots for passenger trains. Estimated costs range from \$140 million to \$400 million, depending on what needs to be done besides building two 10-mile sidings, which would allow for better average speeds and overall performance. It is estimated that up to 1,000 to 1,200 riders would use the daily service. With a goal of covering operating costs from the fare box, it is estimated that a one-way ticket would cost \$32, with discounts offered to commuters.

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

The ongoing effort to start up service from Eau Claire has attracted the attention of several private operations which are interested in the project. Jim Coston's firm, the Chicago-based Corridor Rail Development (CRD), is willing to invest in the project. Jim has extensive experience in raising private-sector money for the nation's publicly funded passenger-train industry. Recently, he headed a team which has acquired control of a fleet of 40+ High Level Santa Fe cars that Amtrak sold to private collectors in 2002 with the expectation they would be overhauled, re-manufactured and reconfigured for use somewhere on the nation's railroads.

CRD has agreed to invest in the Eau Claire project, promising to pay for a \$200,000 professional engineering study which HDR, based in Omaha, has been contracted to complete in the coming months. CRD is also working with a "sister" company, Rail Plan, to create a prototype train. Rail Plan will strip down five of the Hi Level Santa Fe cars and re-design, build and install modular components to create a train set consisting of three coaches, a business class car and a diner with engines at each end.

Next steps in the development of this private / public partnership between WCWRC and CRD include creating a nonprofit entity such as a transit district, which would not only run the trains, but would also be eligible for obtaining grants to help cover some of the upfront cost of starting up and managing the service. This entity also would work with local communities to determine where depots will be located with an eye on sites that would promote transit oriented development within walking distance of stations.

Both Coston and Rogers believe this venture will be successful, especially given that both governors and MnDOT and WisDOT are supportive. Coston expects that four or five major companies in the Eau Claire area will encourage their employees to utilize the service, sponsor excursions, and buy branding rights, which would help cover some of the maintenance costs. They both believe the service, with a 75-to 90-minute schedule, will not only be used by commuters going to and from work in the Twin Cities, but will also attract folks who want to shop or attend events. Young families who are priced out of the Twin Cities housing markets and seek out less expensive housing in the Chippewa Falls area will also use the service. It will also attract discretionary travelers on weekends who are interested in recreational activities that are available in the Eau Claire area, such as hiking, biking, swimming, canoeing and skiing. Rogers also believes the service will promote talent retention and promote transit-oriented development around the area where new rail stations will be built, similar to the \$220 million investment recently seen in Normal, IL, a city similar in size and make-up to Eau Claire.

The best estimate for the startup of the service is within 18 to 24 months. Coston believes a prototype train could be ready within a year, and the work that needs to be done to upgrade UP's rail line could only take a year, depending on what needs to be done. Christianson is also quite optimistic. He believes a partial start-up is possible within the next 18 months with one or two trains a day running over the line. Only time will tell, however, whether these estimates are correct.

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