

## INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

MBTA Emerges  
Slowly from  
Pandemic p. 2

Notes from New  
York p. 3

Mixed Bag for NJ Rail  
Riders p. 4

TransportationCamp  
PHL p. 6

RUN Canada Report  
p. 7

A Second Option for  
a Second Chicago-  
St. Paul Train p. 10

SEPTA Increases  
Train Service p. 12

The Convoluted  
History of Restoring  
Passenger Rail in  
New Hampshire  
p. 14

## SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S ANNUAL MEETING AND VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2021. 1 - 5:15 P.M.

*"You can't get there from here! - the Midwest's missing passenger connections and what's being done about them."*

**By Richard Rudolph, Chairman,  
Rail Users' Network**

Please join us at the Rail Users' Network's Virtual Mini-Conference, which is taking place on Saturday, Oct. 15, 2021 from 1 pm – 5:15 p.m. This free, exciting event will highlight the ongoing efforts of rail advocates to improve and expand passenger rail service in the Midwest and in Ontario, Canada.

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

will briefly talk about RUN's current activities and some of the challenges that rail advocates are currently facing across North America.

Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair, RUN, Chair of the NYC Transit Riders Council and Riders Representative on the MTA Board, will provide the Nominee Committee's Report and conduct the election of board members for 2021-2022.

### The roster of speakers includes:

- Michael Fuhrman, Executive Director of the Lakeshore Rail

Alliance, which is a new, seven-member umbrella organization, will talk about the organization's efforts calling for four daily trains between New York and Chicago.

- Dana Gabbard, Treasurer, Southern California Transit Advocates, will provide a critique of Amtrak's Expansion Plans and the need to restore passenger rail routes that were abandoned in 1998.

- John Guidinger, Chairman, Michigan Association of Rail Passengers, will talk about the effort to restore passenger rail service from Chicago, Detroit to Toronto, Canada.

*Continued on page 8*

## AMTRAK'S CONNECTS US AND THE NEW POSSIBILITIES

**By Dana Gabbard**

How does one grapple with aspirations and dreams versus cold reality when that reality is shifting before our very eyes as the infrastructure bill, a game changer, evolves as it moves through the Congress? That is the challenge in discussing the Connects US proposal for expansion of state-supported corridor passenger rail routes released by Amtrak earlier this year.

The comments of David Strohmaier, Missoula County Commissioner and Chairman of

the Big Sky Passenger Rail Commission  
[<https://www.bigskyrail.org>], capture this paradigm shift:

"From our perspective, Amtrak's vision is old news since it's been out there for a while, and is rendered somewhat moot by the infrastructure bill moving through Congress right now in that it includes some significant investment in long-distance passenger rail. Suffice it to say, the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority takes exception with the current Amtrak vision map in that we don't believe it really connects the United States in a

forward thinking way.

"Ideally, Amtrak would have incorporated into its Connect US plan a true vision for passenger rail that included a robust national long-distance network. They did not, and instead chose to focus on state-supported corridors. Provided that the Senate version of the surface transportation reauthorization and jobs bill stays largely the same during House deliberations and gets signed into law, there will be at least \$12 billion available for intercity passenger rail enhancements, of which a

*Continued on page 6*

## MBTA EMERGES SLOWLY FROM PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS; SCHEDULES ADJUSTED, REPAIRS ONGOING

**By Dennis Kirkpatrick**

As the pandemic conditions start to be lifted across the nation, changes are being precipitated within Greater Boston's commuter rail and transit systems operated by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). With the release of the summer schedules, a number of major changes have taken place. Of specific interest is the commuter rail system schedules.

At the beginning of July 2021, almost all commuter rail lines that had been in some form of suspension due to COVID-19 shutdowns (over lack of ridership), have resumed operation. The service most impacted was weekend trains which all but disappeared from many of the branch lines as a condition of pandemic cutbacks. With the summer schedule, most (not all) of those branch lines have returned to service on weekends. Most noticeable is that restored lines have eliminated all express service and close-timed headways during peak service periods (rush hours). Instead, weekday trains are now operating on a more-predictable schedule, with some on one-hour headways and with a somewhat closer schedule on those lines having a ridership demand. On weekends, the same trains are operating on two-hour headways, which closely matches what their pre-pandemic schedule looked like.

While a few lines have yet to be restored, the current schedule seems to be working with some success. Of course, ridership still remains low, since many people remain out of work or are now working from home, or some form of hybrid, so the long-term success of these schedules is yet to be seen.

On the transit front for subway and streetcar operations, some frequencies have been adjusted, and as long as low-ridership is being experienced, many of the MBTA transit lines are getting some much-needed repairs and upgrades. This does result in bus substitutions at times which is unavoidable. The long touted

Green Line Extension Project from Boston/Cambridge extending to Medford, MA continues somewhat behind schedule, having been impacted by COVID illness and supply chain delays.

Several years ago, Massachusetts Governor Charles "Charlie" Baker (R-MA) created an MBTA Fiscal Management Board made up of the governor's hand-selected people to reduce cost overruns at the MBTA and to review existing contracts. As a result, the new board made many changes and brought expenses into better alignment. On June 30, 2021, the order creating that board expired, and the state legislature allowed that board to sunset. This transferred oversight of the MBTA's processes to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) Board of Directors.

In July, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a supplemental state budget that, in part, establishes a new seven-member MBTA Board of Directors.

The board will take the place of the Fiscal Management and Control Board that dissolved at the end of June, and consists of the Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation, serving as an ex officio member, and five members appointed by the governor; and one member appointed by the MBTA Advisory Board.

The bill requires that one of the governor's appointees to the MBTA Board of Directors be a rider that is a resident of an environmental justice population. The legislation also requires one of the seven board seats to be given to a member of the labor community.

Although Boston makes up the bulk of the MBTA service area by population, it does not have a seat on the MBTA Advisory Board, but has been lobbying strongly for that for some time.

MBTA board members would not be compensated for the position but may

be reimbursed for some expenses. At present, this reimbursement is limited to \$6,000, but the State Senate is pushing for a fixed \$12,000 stipend. Details on this are still pending at press time.

The new board will be charged to meet monthly or at least 12 times per year.

At press time, the fall schedules for all MBTA modes of transportation were still being worked up, and will be published in September. Persons traveling within the MBTA commuter and transit system should reference schedules and service alerts at [www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com) for the latest information.

*For over six decades, RUN Board member Dennis Kirkpatrick has ridden both above and below the streets of Boston and its suburbs on all forms of the MBTA's rolling stock. For nearly 20 years of that, he was webmaster and managing editor of Destination: Freedom, the weekly newsletter of the National Corridors Initiative (NCI), an advocacy group similar to RUN.*

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

# NOTES FROM NEW YORK

By Andrew Albert

## New leadership at MTA & NYC Transit!

Gov. Cuomo, soon to be Former Gov. Cuomo, has wanted to split the MTA leadership into two parts: Chair, & CEO. This would have given him control over both titles, as the Governor of New York has the lion's share of MTA Board nominations, as well as virtual control over how the MTA functions. While the State Assembly went along with this splitting of titles, the State Senate did not, and then both adjourned for the season, leaving the current joint roles of MTA Chairman and CEO intact. As both Patrick Foye, Chairman, and Sarah Feinberg, Interim President of NYC Transit, both stated their intentions to leave at the end of August—Foye to take over the helm at the Empire State Development Corp, and Feinberg, who had hoped to be named MTA Chair, and was leaving her role in any event—this would have left a gap at the top of both the MTA and NYC Transit, which was unthinkable, given the size & importance of the agencies. Cuomo's pick for CEO had been Janno Lieber, of

MTA Construction & Development, with Sarah Feinberg as Chair. As the roles were never split, Janno inherited the title of Acting Chair & CEO. Janno knows the system well, and has overseen many important construction projects, such as LIRR East Side Access, Metro-North Penn Access, and many station accessibility projects.

As Gov. Cuomo has announced his resignation, effective August 24, Janno will preside over the MTA until or if he is replaced by incoming Gov. Kathy Hochul. And as one of his first decisions, Janno named Craig Cipriano - former head of the Bus Division as Interim President of NYC Transit. Again, Craig is extremely familiar with the transit system, of which buses is a huge part. And as another step of promoting from within, Demetrius Crichlow, who had been Acting Senior V.P.-Subways, was promoted to Senior V.P.-Subways. Demetrius is a great choice too, as he has a great background at the MTA, having formerly been at the Long Island Rail Road, as well as the Staten Island Railway. Demetrius is extremely responsive, and knows the system well. When I report an error in

announcements or signage, Demetrius often has the fix applied before I leave the train! It is not clear where Sarah Feinberg will end up. She has a tremendous resume, having worked at the Federal Transit Administration, NYC Transit, & more. There are likely to be more announcements soon, such as who will take over at MTA Construction & Development to replace Janno, and who will become the head of the Bus Division of NYC Transit. There are other changes in the wind too, so be sure to follow this column!

## Bus Speed-ups Coming

At a news conference held on August 16, Acting Chairman Janno Lieber & Interim President NYC Transit Craig Cipriano, along with NYC DOT Commissioner Hank Gutman, announced an aggressive plan to speed up buses in New York City. This will be done in a variety of ways, each of which has the potential to speed travel on the nation's largest bus system. Firstly, while all NYC buses (as well as subways) have been equipped with OMNY readers (NYC's new tap card system), thus far

*Continued on page 12*

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

Name	Location	Affiliation
Richard Rudolph, Chair	Portland, ME	NARP / TrainRiders Northeast, Maine Rail Group
Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair	New York, NY	New York City TransitRiders Council
Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary	Philadelphia, PA	Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation
David Peter Alan, Esq.	South Orange, NJ	Lackawanna Coalition
Mela Bush-Miles	Boston, MA	T Riders Union
Joshua D. Coran	Seattle, WA	Talgo Inc.
James E. Coston, Esq.	Chicago, IL	Corridor Capital LLC
Bill Engel	Canal Fulton, OH	Ohio Rail Tourism Association
Dana Gabbard	Los Angeles, CA	Southern California Transit Advocates
Steve Hastalis	Chicago, IL	National Federation for the Blind
Dennis Kirkpatrick	Boston, MA	Rail Users' Network
J.W. Madison	Albuquerque, NM	Rails Inc.
Andy Sharpe	Philadelphia, PA	SEPTA
Phil Streby	Peru, IN	Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance

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

Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny



## A MIXED BAG FOR NEW JERSEY'S RAIL RIDERS AS SOME TRAINS COME BACK, BUT MOST WAITING ROOMS DON'T



*The Summit, NJ train station, seen here in a 2007 file photo. (Credit: Daniel Case/Wikipedia)*

**By David Peter Alan**

It has been a season of mixed news for riders on the rail lines operated by New Jersey Transit (NJT). Some of the news was good, some was disappointing, some was indifferent, and some was ominous. Through it all, the riders' advocates, including the Lackawanna Coalition, kept persevering.

The good news is that a number of trains that were eliminated over the last several years returned to the schedules on June 6. They included weekend trains on the Gladstone Branch, which connects with the Morris & Essex (M&E) Line at Summit. The agency began running buses instead of normal train service in October, 2018. Several weekday trains were also restored on

the Northeast Corridor (NEC) Line to Trenton, the North Jersey Coast Line, and the Raritan Line. One of those trains provided a connection for riders on county-run buses in rural Hunterdon County in West Jersey, which connected with Raritan Line trains at Somerville. Some Coalition members joined with Hunterdon County transportation officials to advocate for the restoration of all connecting trains to the schedule, which has now been accomplished. Hunterdon County riders again have the connections they had lost.

The traditional summer hourly service weekend service at the Shore on the North Jersey Coast Line came back this year, too, until the weekend after Labor Day. The agency runs a train hourly, seven days a week (more during peak-

commuting hours) between New York and Long Branch, but only every two hours south of there, also except for commuter-hours. For now, weekend "shuttle" trains ran almost every hour on the entire line to Bay Head. Advocates have observed that weekend ridership is increasing steadily system-wide, as activity is increasing in New Jersey and New York City. Ridership on weekday trains outside historically peak-commuting hours is increasing, too, but early-morning trains into New York's Penn Station remain among the least-patronized in the system.

Speculation persists about how demand for commuter-peak seats into New York and other cities served by regional rail

*Continued on page 5*

## A MIXED BAG FOR NEW JERSEY'S RAIL RIDERS

*Continued from page 4*

lines (including by this writer in a three-part series headlines *Commuting post-COVID*, posted by *Railway Age* in May and June on their website, [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com)) peaked before the virus appeared and will not reach those levels again in the foreseeable future. Caltrain in San Francisco eliminated peak-commuter service earlier this year and now runs a train every half-hour on weekdays until mid-evening, and hourly later in the evening and on weekends. Boston's MBTA essentially eliminated the "commuter peak" system-wide with the June 28 schedules. Trains on most lines now run at evenly-spaced intervals (usually hourly) throughout the day on weekdays and every two hours on weekends. Metra in Chicago and SEPTA in Philadelphia are considering following suit, or at least moving some trains from the "commuter peak" to mid-day. At this writing, Metra has increased mid-day service to hourly on some lines, with half-hourly short turns. In the New York area, especially on NJT, commuter-oriented trains still dominate the schedules, and there are no plans to change that.

As the COVID-19 virus hit last year, NJT closed essentially all indoor waiting rooms at train stations and bus terminals. With great fanfare, the agency re-opened a few waiting rooms last spring, at places like Hoboken Terminal, Newark Penn Station, and Secaucus Junction Station. While riders had hoped for the end of locked

waiting rooms and barricaded benches, it was not to be. Most station and bus terminal waiting rooms are still off-limits, as advocates continue to push for NJT to re-open them. At this writing, the agency has not said when most rail or bus customers will have indoor seating again.

In the meantime, a dispute between New York, New Jersey and Connecticut on how to divide the money coming to the region from the COVID-19 relief bills passed by Congress has resulted in NJT not passing a new budget for the current fiscal year, which started on July 1. The agency will continue with last year's numbers until the dispute is resolved; a situation that NJT head Kevin Corbett described as ominous. Many of the state's rider-advocates have criticized New Jersey's legislature for consistently failing to enact a stable source of funding for NJT, and some have also criticized the agency for spending funds on operations that were originally earmarked for capital projects. Others disagree about the latter practice, arguing that spending for operations provides needed mobility, while some of the proposed capital items, especially some large projects, are wasteful and not cost-effective.

Advocates have scored some recent successes, though. With the support of the Lackawanna Coalition, Randy Glucksman called for two outbound trains that stop at Secaucus a few minutes apart and leave on different lines to be assigned to separate tracks, to minimize the likelihood that riders will get on the wrong train. NJT made

the change that Glucksman requested. Lackawanna Coalition Chairperson Sally Jane Gellert wrote in the July-August issue of the *Railgram*, the organization's newsletter: "Our valued colleague, Randy Glucksman, the MTA [Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York] board's rider representative from Rockland County, took up the cause with NJ Transit management – and ... the change has been made.... Thanks to Randy ... and to NJ Transit personnel for being willing to make a simple change for riders' convenience."

As other organizations resumed activities during the summer, the Lackawanna Coalition also resumed holding in-person meetings at Millburn Town Hall, starting on July 26. In addition to attending in person, members can also participate by phone. The meeting room had been closed since the virus hit in March, 2020, and was used to host only one Coalition meeting since then: last December, when this writer retired as Chair after holding the position for 21 years and 250 meetings.

*David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and a Contributing Editor at Railway Age. He previously served as Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey for 21 years.*

## Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, **write to:** RUN, P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104

or **contact Richard Rudolph** via e-mail at [RRudolph1022@gmail.com](mailto:RRudolph1022@gmail.com)

or **visit our new, improved website** at: [www.railusers.net](http://www.railusers.net)



# TRANSPORTATIONCAMP PHL HIGHLIGHTS ENTHUSIASM FOR PHILADELPHIA-AREA MASS TRANSIT

By Andy Sharpe

There continues to be a huge amount of enthusiasm towards rail and transit, transit advocacy and transportation in general in Greater Philadelphia. Recognizing that, we held our first-ever TransportationCamp PHL summer scavenger hunt and happy hour in July and our fourth annual TransportationCamp PHL “unconference” and second annual TransportationCamp Virtual in April. These two events brought together people in the Philadelphia area, and even across the country, with an interest in rail, transit, bicycle/pedestrian issues, supply chain issues, aviation, and/or highways.

Our inaugural summer event was designed to relieve people of their cabin fever from the past 16 months by providing our first in-person event since the pandemic began. Most of the day featured a scavenger hunt with a multitude of popular (and in some cases obscure) transportation-related locations across Greater Philadelphia. Some of the locations were right in Center City, while others were much further out, including the Atlantic City Airport, Christiana Mall, and Darby Diamond (which is the only at-grade crossing of a trolley with a freight train). Groups took pictures of themselves at each site to get the points for that particular site. The winning team, which named itself the Northeast Corridor team, won \$150, while the 2nd-place team, named Suffolk Northern, won \$100, and the 3rd-place team, ACY, won \$50.

After the scavenger hunt, we held a Happy Hour at Cira Green, which is a park on top of a parking garage with expansive views of Center City and beyond. Amtrak and freight rail horns could be heard for much of the evening, underscoring the location's proximity to all different modes of transportation. It also offered a great view of the Schuylkill River and Schuylkill River Trail (for all the bicyclists who attended). During the happy hour, we held a raffle for Indigo Bike Share swag, with the grand prize being a free one-year membership to the bikeshare. Finally, the jam-packed day ended with a Phillies game at Citizen's Bank Park. Attendees were thrilled to finally be able to see each other in person and talk transportation.

Not to be overshadowed by the summer event, our typical unconference in April was also a big success. Despite some people beginning to experience Zoom fatigue from a year of working from home, we still had about 130 people attend the virtual conference. Some of the most popular sessions included SEPTA trolley modernization, private transit service at DisneyWorld, and abolishing SEPTA and placing transit service under local and state control in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The trolley modernization session was particularly timely, as word had broken shortly before that Amazon would be purchasing SEPTA's preferred storage site for the trolleys, thus forcing SEPTA to find an alternate site. Aside from DisneyWorld, another non-Philly centric topic focused on high-tech innovations at the LIRR (they've done some amazing things with passenger counts that have proven useful with the pandemic). That presentation was given by a member of their app team and a consultant.

For the first time ever, we also awarded a \$500 scholarship towards educational expenses. We were looking for essays that addressed our topic of smartcards and stored value payment systems, both as they relate to transit fares and highway tolls. The winning essay was from Dariana Garcia, who is a student at Community College of Philadelphia and a member of SEPTA's Youth Advisory Council (YAC). In addition to the \$500, Dariana got a shout-out for her work during the opening session of TransportationCamp. Congratulations, Dariana! We first came up with the idea for a scholarship in 2019, but unfortunately had to put it on hold due to the pandemic. TransportationCamp NY was able to pick up on our scholarship idea and successfully hold their own.

Despite the fact that our unconference was free and virtual this year, we still received a great response from sponsors. Our five sponsors were the Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS), WSP (formerly Parsons Brinckerhoff), Gannett Fleming, Evans Logistics (a supply chain firm), and Azavea (a local tech firm). In response to their generous donations, we named the virtual rooms after them. We continue to have three hosts for the event, which are Young in Professionals in

Transportation's (YPT's) Philadelphia chapter, WTS' Philadelphia chapter, and the Lindy School at Drexel University (which has always been the physical host during non-COVID years). Many thanks to all supporting organizations!

We used a few different tech platforms for each event. We stuck with Free Conference Call's video platform for the actual Camp, as we find that works much better than Zoom when it comes to naming our rooms after sponsors, and is also not as strict with capacity limits. We used Slack for the summer scavenger hunt and the unconference. For the scavenger hunt, it enabled teams to take pictures of themselves to receive credit for being at the various sites. For the unconference. It allowed attendees to give their three-word intros (a very popular TransportationCamp tradition that allows people to succinctly learn a bit about each other and their passions), and to continue the conversation about each session afterwards. For the unconference lunch and post-event networking and socializing, we used Gather Town. Gather Town's a really cool tool where you have an avatar and can actually walk your avatar around a virtual room and seek people out who you want to talk to.

We continue to be excited about the groundswell of energy around transit and transportation, especially among younger folks, in Greater Philadelphia over the past five or so years! We don't advocate or take positions ourselves, but rather our mission is to harness conversation among those who do. We'd like to think our four-year run has played some role in this burst of energy! Hopefully, as the horrors of the pandemic subside and ridership slowly returns to SEPTA, PATCO, NJ Transit, we will continue to see this level of excitement. It's clear that transportation has a bright and engaged future here in Philadelphia. Here at TransportationCamp PHL, we're here to foster the conversation around this future.

*Andy Sharpe is one of the founding organizers of TransportationCamp PHL and the Chair Emeritus of YPT Philadelphia.*

## RUN CANADA REPORT: AUGUST 2021

*By Ken Westcar*

Persistence is a key element of passenger rail advocacy and can be rewarded both infrequently and in surprising ways. Positive developments are usually difficult to link to any specific work done by advocates because decision makers seldom give credit to third parties. Nevertheless, we need to be satisfied and motivated by the fact that our historic inputs may have been part of the decision-making process.

July and August have seen several interesting Canadian passenger rail developments, primarily in Ontario and Alberta, all of which bear the mark of work by both Transport Action Ontario and our umbrella organization, Transport Action Canada.

### Calgary to Banff

Banff National Park in Alberta has long suffered from extreme traffic congestion so it's encouraging that the Governments of Canada and Alberta are now planning a passenger rail service along 93 miles of CP trackage that connects Calgary and Banff. Currently, access to this popular tourist destination is by personal automobile or bus. Parking and traffic congestion are often a nightmare in Banff – more so than a chance encounter with a hungry black bear.

Funding will come from both levels of government with the Canada Infrastructure Bank playing a significant part. Privately-owned Liricon Capital Ltd., a project developer, has already stepped forward with proposals for the upgrade of Banff rail station and lead the project. It is said to be part of Banff's Net Zero 2035 plan so it will need to advance quickly. Will Edmonton to Jasper be next?

### VIA Rail in Southwestern Ontario

Federal Transport Minister Omar Alghabara recently visited the cities of London, Windsor and Brantford with a commitment to improve VIA services in this corridor. While superficially good news, he was taken to task by the media, who reminded him of the litany of unfulfilled promises by previous transport ministers and VIA. He was adamant that the federal cabinet had experienced an epiphany on national passenger rail services and that southwestern Ontario would be an extension of VIA's plans for high-frequency rail between Toronto and Quebec City.

The minister gave no timeline or funding details (the route is a busy CN domain) and did not mention how the many traffic bottlenecks, currently limiting VIA schedules, would be removed. Mayors of VIA-served cities will be watching for concrete progress as will several advocacy groups. Cynicism stems from the fact that federal ministers with far-reaching plans often experience short cabinet tenures.

Rumor has it that Minister Alghabara and U.S. Transportation Secretary Buttigieg are comparing notes on passenger rail issues which may be driven by President Biden's interest in cross-border services.

### "GOst" trains spotted

The first weekend in August saw the southwestern Ontario passenger rail community turn incandescent when six-car, bi-level GO trains were spotted running between Kitchener and London on what is known as the North Main Line. Surprisingly, Metrolinx, operator of GO trains and buses, had its media and

public relations responding to questions over this long-holiday weekend, which suggests a degree of seriousness.

Previously, initial approaches to Metrolinx to study services on this corridor were rebuffed because it was not in their current business plan that runs until 2041. What has happened to change this remains a mystery although several theories including a 2022 provincial election and fierce, farmer resistance to completing four-laning of a parallel highway are possibilities. Currently, this largely CN-owned route sees a single daily VIA return trip to and from Sarnia via London and frequent Genesee and Wyoming-hauled freight traffic. It seems VIA had very short advance notice of these GO train tests so it's unclear whether it's a precursor to differentiated services on these two southwestern Ontario rail corridors.

GO Transit's low-level boarding, walk-on, no-frills, commuter-style service makes total sense on this route that connects two growing cities focused on advanced technology and two of Canada's premier universities. Halfway along the route is Stratford with its Shakespearian festival that will attract over 600,000 live theatregoers annually, post-pandemic.

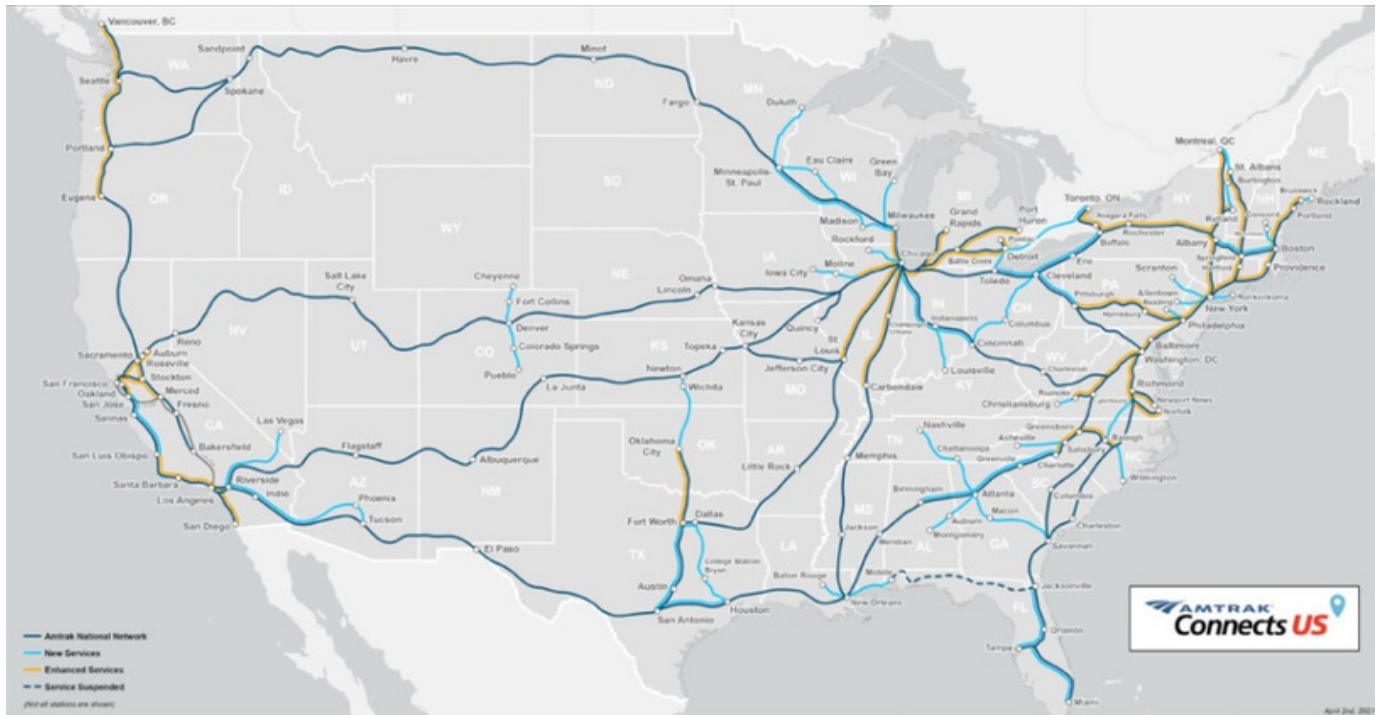
These positive developments align with Canadian passenger rail advocates' past efforts. The emphasis will now be on ensuring robust services on these routes. Wins don't happen that often, but this is, indeed, progress.

*Ken Westcar is secretary of Transport Action Ontario.*

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

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

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



## AMTRAK'S CONNECTS US AND THE NEW POSSIBILITIES

*Continued from page 1*

minimum of 20 percent must go to long-distance. I'm hopeful that in discussions with Amtrak, this congressional direction will help recalibrate Amtrak's vision for the future, planning passenger rail from a position of abundance rather than scarcity, and becoming truly visionary that lives up to the Connects US moniker, putting us one step closer to restoring the *North Coast Hiawatha* and *Pioneer* routes in our region."

Amtrak is not unaware of the shifting landscape and exciting opportunities. Marc Magliari, Public Relations Manager (Spokesman) Amtrak Government Affairs & Corporate Communications, in an e-mail confirmed the vision of Connects US "... was never seen by [Amtrak] as exclusive or prescriptive."

Besides Mr. Strohmaier, I solicited comments on Connects US from a cross-section of public agencies and advocates, which provide a kaleidoscope of reactions.

Ken Prendergast, Public Affairs Director of All Aboard Ohio [allaboarohio.org]: "All Aboard Ohio and many others in our state are very excited about Amtrak's expansion plans for Ohio, the nation's seventh-most populous state, that would add or expand service on five routes – Cleveland-Columbus-Dayton-Cincinnati (3C+D), Cincinnati-Indianapolis-Chicago, Cleveland-Toledo-Detroit, expansion of Empire Corridor service from Buffalo to Cleveland, and expansion of Keystone Corridor service from Pittsburgh to Cleveland. Plus, there are regionalized efforts to expand service between Chicago-Columbus-Pittsburgh and Chicago-South Bend-Toledo-Cleveland that has caught Amtrak's interest.

"We need Amtrak's leadership to pursue development of these routes directly in partnership with the federal government without relying on our state government to initiate action. If we are going to depend on a state like Ohio to initiate a passenger rail development effort, Ohio will continue to be one of the most neglected states. Ohio is one of the nation's least-served states when it comes to passenger-rail and Columbus is the nation's largest city without any regular passenger rail service of any kind, be it light-rail or Amtrak. Ohio has

failed to lead on passenger rail development in the Amtrak era, and indeed has exhibited much pride in giving back \$400 million in federal funds to develop the 3C+D Corridor a decade ago. If we hope to develop passenger rail service in Ohio, it would be best to leave our state government out of it as much as possible."

JW Madison, President of Rails Inc and RUN Board member [www.nmrails.org]: "This [2035] map is remarkable for what it doesn't show. Any visionary US passenger Rail map should include the short easy-to-restore Rail links without which we can never build a true national passenger network, of any speed class.

"My New Mexico group, Rails Inc, put out better maps years ago, notably our 'Future Passenger Rail System,' and our 'Rocky Mountain Flyer'. NARP / RPA's recent Grid and Gateway (sic) map is more inclusive than our FRPS. Gotta hand it to them.

"Why does the work of some smart groups get all the notice and that of others get ignored? No solid answer here."

*Continued on page 9*



## AMTRAK'S CONNECTS US AND THE NEW POSSIBILITIES

### *Continued from page 8*

Jason Orthner, Director of the North Carolina Department of Transportation Rail Division [ncdot.gov/divisions/rail]: "Having a robust and well-connected rail network is a vital component of our state's economy, ensuring that people and goods can move safely and efficiently. We look forward to continuing our partnership with Amtrak as we work together to connect communities."

Mike Christensen, Executive Director of the Utah Rail Passengers Association [UtahRPA.org]: "Any passenger rail expansion anywhere in the country is helpful. Given that our LinkUtah proposal is relatively young, it's understandable that Amtrak didn't include it in its Connects US plans. The expansions that Amtrak did include have garnered substantial support and have been thoroughly studied, which is a goal that we hope to attain in the near future with LinkUtah."

Jennifer Mitchell, Director of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation [drpt.virginia.gov]:

"State-sponsored passenger rail service provides a critical link connecting rural communities to America's largest cities. Virginia is leading the charge by making significant investments in rail that expand passenger and commuter service throughout the Commonwealth. Amtrak's partnership with Virginia demonstrates a united front with state partners as we work toward the same goal- a rail network that connects us."

DJ Stadler, Executive Director of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority [drpt.virginia.gov/vpra]: "These strategic investments build on our partnership with Amtrak, CSX, Norfolk Southern, and Virginia Railway Express to Transform Rail in Virginia. The Transforming Rail in Virginia Program is poised to increase service to Hampton Roads and Richmond, extend service to the New River Valley, and proactively seek additional opportunities with Amtrak for passenger rail expansion. The key component, which aligns nicely with Amtrak's ConnectsUS plans, is a new Long Bridge across the Potomac River that will provide a vital link between the North and Southeast."

Todd Liebman, President of All Aboard Arizona [allaboarizona.org]: "My view is that it's exciting. For the first time in years, Amtrak has a viable and realistic growth strategy. The challenge

now is to implement new service timely, and to enhance and expand the long distance network along with the new corridors."

Peter J LeCody, President of Texas Rail Advocates [texasrailadvocates.org]: "It is encouraging to see that Amtrak has turned the corner from being a railroad constantly trying to downgrade service and amenities to a company interested in expanding its horizons. It is long overdue."

"Texas Rail Advocates is pleased to see that Amtrak recognizes the growth in Sunbelt states, especially Texas, and recognizes that we will need expanded rail passenger service for the future. More highways alone will just not cut it. We stand on the threshold of a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to bring more trains to more people in the Lone Star State, but there are several mountains we will have to climb. We have a department of transportation that spends 99% of its \$7 billion yearly budget on highways, allocating only \$2.5 million a year for its share of the *Heartland Flyer*. Our legislature must wake up and smell the vehicle fumes and understand we can't keep widening highways forever. Our state does not have federal-state cost sharing programs for rail and we lost

*Continued on page 13*

### ***To Our Members...***

Do you have friends or associates that are also interested in a better rail system? There is strength in numbers. The Rail Users' Network (RUN) has established a first-year introductory membership rate of just \$25.00. As we move forward, we hope to expand membership and make our voice louder.

RUN can accept online processing, secured through the facilities of PayPal, as well as a check or money order via postal mail. Adding your email address to your membership will also get you on distribution for additional information on upcoming virtual meetings, invitations to conferences, and receive timely alerts on important legislative issues. Please take a moment to pass this information along to those in your area who may want to be a part of our cause.

Share with them this link: <https://www.railusers.net/our-network-join/> or offer them our postal address: RUN, P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME. 04104.

If you have not yet sent in your 2021 membership dues, please also consider doing that today.

## A "SECOND TRAIN" IS NEEDED BETWEEN CHICAGO AND ST. PAUL, BUT NOT ON THE CURRENT PROPOSED SCHEDULE

**COMMENTARY by David Peter Alan**

Since Amtrak unveiled its proposed 2035 map this past spring, everybody in the advocacy scene has been talking about it. For the most part, the reception has been negative. The plan does not include any new long-distance trains. Such an expansion is precluded by PRIIA, the Passenger Rail Investment & Improvement Act of 2008. It would, therefore, depend on the states to introduce new or enhanced state-supported trains or corridors, but that would also place a severe financial burden on the states. In effect, the Amtrak plan would offer financial assistance to a state or group of states to get a train or corridor started but, after a few years, the states would be left to pay the full cost on their own.

At our online RUN conference coming up in mid-October, we will focus on advocates' efforts to establish new trains and corridors in the Midwest. A few initiatives would bypass the busy rail hub of Chicago (like the 3C+D in Ohio, which would serve Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati and Dayton), but most trains and corridors in the region would have one end placed firmly in the Windy City.

The proposal for a "second train" between Chicago and St. Paul, Minnesota is a case in point, even though planning for it commenced long before Amtrak announced its plans for the next 14 years. The project is called the "TCMC Project" (Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago), and *Railway Age* reported *TCMC Second Train Project Advances* on its website, [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com), on June 29. In her report, Executive Editor Marybeth Luczak explained the funding for the proposed new train, after reporting that Minnesota will chip in \$10 million: "The \$10 million investment is from Minnesota's \$7 billion omnibus

transportation funding package recently signed into law by Gov. Tim Walz. It will be combined with funds committed by Wisconsin (\$6.5 million) and Amtrak (\$5 million, plus additional funding for Winona, MN station upgrades), resulting in a full match for the \$31.8 million Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) grant awarded in 2020. The \$53.3 million total covers the capital portion of the project and green lights final design and construction of freight rail track and signal improvements in and around Winona and La Crescent, MN, according to Saint Paul, MN-based [Great River Rail Commission](#)."

That seems to be the model: the states put up most of the money, and Amtrak adds some. After the first several years, the states are left on their own to pay the full cost of keeping the trains rolling. The train at issue would run on the route occupied by the *Empire Builder*, which runs northwest from Chicago toward Seattle and Portland. There would be 13 stops; the same ones the "Builder" makes.

Luczak also reported: "Service is slated to begin in 2024 with an annual ridership of 124,000." That number of riders would average 340 passengers each day, or 170 on average in each direction. The Great River Rail Commission claims on its website, [www.greatriversrail.org](http://www.greatriversrail.org), that the *Empire Builder* "typically provides 123,000 trips each year." To this writer, it appears questionable that merely adding a train would more than double existing ridership. That assertion appears to assume that departure time is meaningless; with so much pent-up demand for the new train that none of its potential riders are using the *Builder* today, with its morning departure from St. Paul and mid-afternoon departure from Chicago.

Whether or not the new train would actually carry that many people, the question remains whether a different schedule could attract more riders and,

therefore, represent a more cost-effective investment. The currently-proposed schedule would leave both points of origin late in the morning: from Chicago at about 11:00 and from St. Paul about 11:30. That would be 3:15 earlier than the "Builder" currently leaves Chicago and 3:30 later than it currently leaves St. Paul. To deliver the whopping ridership claimed by the Great River Rail Commission, those departure times appear far too close to those for the existing train.

It makes more sense to assume that the further apart the departure times of the two trains from any given station, the more riders those trains would attract, because they would have a clear choice of departure times: one for a train that would arrive in the mid-afternoon, and the other late in the evening.

Let's consider a different schedule. The "Builder" stays on its current schedule, and the second train (we will call it the *Hiawatha* in recognition of that name from its historic railroad, the Milwaukee Road) would leave Chicago early in the morning, shortly after the CTA has started its day and the first trains on most Metra lines have arrived in downtown Chicago. A 7:00 a.m. departure would arrive at St. Paul at 2:30 p.m., if we believe the Great River Rail Authority's claim of a 7½-hour schedule. After turning the train quickly, it could leave St. Paul at 4:00 p.m. and arrive in Chicago at 11:30 p.m.; before the CTA winds down for the night and before the last runs on a number of Metra lines leave downtown Chicago (at least if Metra restores the pre-COVID departures around 12:30). That schedule would include an 8:30 northbound morning departure from Milwaukee and a 10:00 evening arrival there, and it would also mean a late-evening departure from Milwaukee for Chicago, which Amtrak never offered.

*Continued on page 11*

## A "SECOND TRAIN" IS NEEDED BETWEEN CHICAGO AND ST. PAUL, BUT NOT ON THE CURRENT PROPOSED SCHEDULE

*Continued from page 10*

Besides offering two departures during different parts of the day to maximize riders' convenience, the proposed schedule would also improve equipment utilization. It would be feasible to make the round trip with a single train set. It would not be useful to recommend such tight scheduling on most Amtrak routes, but CP Rail, the host railroad on the historic Milwaukee Road line, has consistently received high marks for its dispatching on the line. Except for a short segment near Chicago where Metra trains run, the proposed *Hiawatha* would not leave CP-dispatched territory. The officially-proposed schedule would require two train sets, because the northbound and southbound trains would meet near the middle of the route.

In effect, the proposed schedule would provide more utility as a "third train" for the route, because it would run about mid-way between the *Empire Builder* schedule and the *Hiawatha* schedule proposed here. For a full and useful corridor, the best-case scenario would include three daytime trains and an overnight train, which the Milwaukee Road operated until 1971 and which was revived briefly during the 1980s as part of the *North Star*, an overnight train between Chicago and Duluth.

There is an ongoing effort toward restoring a train that could provide service on the officially-proposed Chicago-St. Paul schedule. It would be a revival of the historic *North Coast Limited* (inappropriately named the *North Coast Hiawatha* during the 1970s), serving the larger towns in Montana, south of the "Builder" route. The current initiative is led by Dave

Strohmaier, a Missoula County commissioner in Montana. His organization, the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, is attempting to restore a passenger train along the historic "North Coast" route, at least within the state.

Any new start for a long-distance train would face enormous obstacles. PRIIA has effectively frozen Amtrak's long-distance network where it was in 2008, and only Congress could allow it to thaw. Amtrak has only a limited supply of Superliner equipment for long-distance trains and has not ordered any

***Without service west of St. Paul or the Hiawatha schedule proposed here, the late-morning-departures make little sense, because they do not provide much benefit for potential riders.***

new cars to replace them, much less augmenting the fleet for expansion. Amtrak's proposed 2035 map relies entirely on state initiatives for new trains and new or enhanced corridors, but there are no new proposals for long-distance trains. The map almost proposes a route between Chicago and Florida, similar to the *Floridian* (discontinued in 1979), but there is a gap between Louisville and Nashville.

Still, if circumstances change, a restored "North Coast" could easily feature late-morning departures northbound from Chicago and southbound from St. Paul. Because the "North Coast" route is longer than the "Builder" route, its running time was three hours longer. If a restored "North Coast" were to run combined with the "Builder" west of Sandpoint, Idaho, the eastern portion of its schedule would be similar to the one officially proposed for the second Chicago-St. Paul train.

Without service west of St. Paul (a local light-rail line connects the station with Minneapolis) or the *Hiawatha* schedule proposed here, the late-morning-departures make little sense, because they do not provide much benefit for potential riders. In effect, planners and politicians from the states through which it would run seem to treat it in a vacuum, without considering a level of convenience that would attract such riders. That seems to be a problem with Amtrak's entire 2035 proposal. It might add a few new trains here and there, but the result would remain a patchwork of trains developed by a state or by two or three states acting in concert on schedules that have little to do with existing long-distance runs.

Corridors developed through the states have never been entirely successful. The best-performing line of that sort is the *Downeaster* corridor between Boston and Brunswick, Maine. There are five daily trains in each direction on that line, but there have always been difficulties getting New Hampshire to chip in for the costs. Other such trains, including one between New Orleans and Mobile and a 1971 incarnation of the *Lake Shore Limited*, were experiments that lasted only a few months.

So it's time for Wisconsin and Minnesota to reconsider the schedule for a new train between Chicago and St. Paul. Taxpayers and potential riders deserve to get more for their money than they are currently being offered.

*David Peter Alan has been a member of the RUN Board since 2005. He has visited every town on the route between Chicago and St. Paul. He is also a Contributing Editor at Railway Age, where he commented on Amtrak's 2035 plan in an article headlined Amtrak's 2035 Map: Hopes and Challenges and posted on their website, [www.railwayage.com](http://www.railwayage.com), on April 9.*



## SEPTA INCREASES TRAIN SERVICE

*By Chuck Bode*

With new timetables on Sept. 5, SEPTA increased service on several regional rail lines. Many trains have new times; be sure to check the new timetables.

Several lines have a small increase in peak period service including a few express trains. A few Bryn Mawr short turn trips resumed on the Paoli line. The significant development is restoration of limited service on the Cynwyd line, the last line to resume service. Weekdays have five Cynwyd round trips, about half the pre-pandemic service.

A few lines have increases in weekend service, along with some changes in times. Sunday service to Thorndale has been discontinued.

### Burn hazard at 30th Street Station

Be warned that the water in both the main men's and women's restrooms in 30th Street Station in Philadelphia is so hot that the briefest exposure causes pain. Far too hot to wash hands. With the need to reduce energy use to combat global warming, this issue ought to be corrected promptly, before someone becomes injured.

*Chuck Bode is Executive Director of the Philadelphia Trolley Coalition and a RUN Board Member.*

## SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S ANNUAL MEETING AND VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2021

*Continued from page 1*

- Ken Westcar, Director, Transport Action, Ontario will talk about Ontario's government efforts to expand service on the Canadian side of the border.

- Fred Lanahan, President, Northern Indiana Passenger Rail, will provide an update on the Chicago, Fort Wayne & Columbus Corridor and its inclusion in Amtrak's 2035 plan.
- Stu Nicholson, Executive Director, All Aboard Ohio will talk about the new "3C" project, which could provide thrice-daily round trips from Cleveland - Columbus - Dayton and Cincinnati with intermediate stops.
- Derrick James, Amtrak's Senior Government Affairs Officer, Greater Chicago Office, will be on hand to talk about Amtrak's 2035 Plan.
- Tom Porter, Chairman, Northwest Ohio Passenger Rail Association, will talk about the organization's efforts to restore rail service from Toledo to Ann Arbor and Detroit.
- Carolyn Zulstad, Transportation Program Manager, Groundwork, Center for Resident Communities will talk about the Ann Arbor to Traverse City, MI Rail Project.

The mini-conference will close with a Public Forum, which will enable participants to share their ideas for improving / expanding passenger rail / rail transit services in North America.

David Peter Alan, Esq., contributing editor to *Railway Age* and also a RUN Board Member, will provide closing remarks.

Our mini-conference is designed not only for rail advocates, but also civic and business leaders, environmentalists, planners, real estate developers and members of the general public who are interested in knowing more about passenger rail and rail transit in the Midwest.

**Please note that this is a free event, but registration is required. Be sure to register early. The deadline is Oct. 8, 2021 so that we can send along the info needed to attend RUN's virtual mini-conference. To register, please go to our website [railusers.net](http://railusers.net). and click on the "to register" link.**

## NOTES FROM NEW YORK

*Continued from page 3*

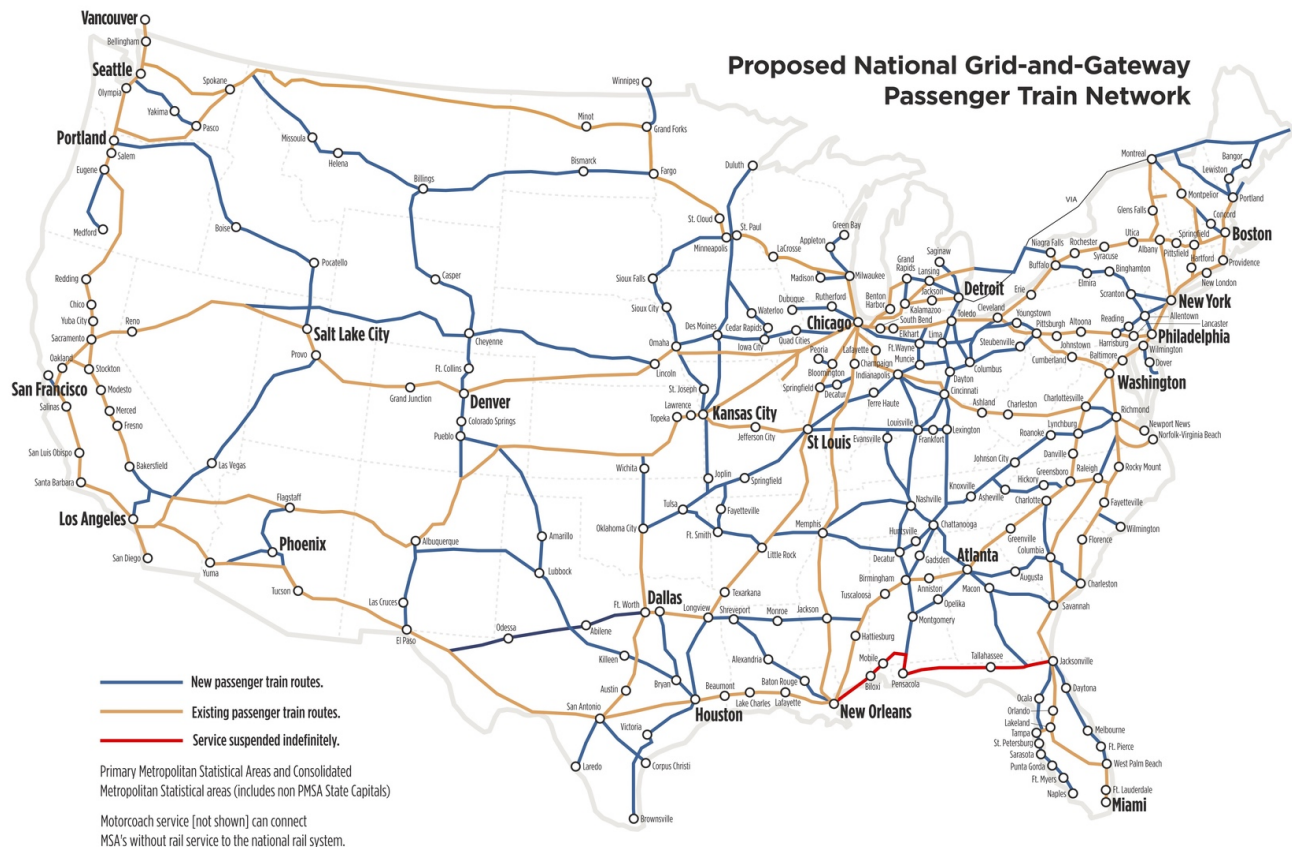
they have only been utilized for regular fare payment at the front doors. On Select Buses, the readers have been activated at all doors.

Soon, and only on certain trial routes - the OMNY card will allow for all-door boarding of buses, which should certainly speed the boarding process. In addition, Transit Signal Prioritization will be installed on many more bus routes, which allows buses to send a signal to the traffic lights at intersections to change the light to green, allowing the buses to proceed. While already in effect on several routes, this will magnify in a huge way the number of bus routes equipped with TSP. Further, many more miles of bus-only lanes will be constructed, which speeds bus travel by huge amounts.

And to help guarantee this will work, many more cameras will be installed - both above the lanes, as well as on-board buses, which will help to identify any vehicle blocking the bus lanes. Camera enforcement is slated to cover 85% of bus lanes by 2023. It is hoped the legislature will increase the financial penalties for those with multiple infractions, and there's no doubt that once these measures are in place, the word will get out quickly. In addition, the Borough Bus redesigns will resume again in the fall, with the Bronx coming in first. Many people turned out during the public hearings previously held on the Bus Redesigns, and it is expected that this will occur again.

In New York, while the subways carry more people than buses, there is a greater chance that you live closest to a bus stop, rather than a subway stop. Getting the bus system moving faster, making better connections to subways & commuter rail, and getting travelers where they need to go faster will help boost ridership, get automobile usage down, and increase NYC's economic activity. It's a win for all!

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



Route map courtesy of NARP

## TRAINS: A TRAVEL CHOICE AMERICANS WANT

### AMTRAK'S CONNECTS US AND THE NEW POSSIBILITIES

*Continued from page 9*

out on millions if not billions of rail project dollars in the last decade. We need multi-modal solutions for a growing state."

Echoing Mr. Pendergast about the hazards of state funding, Jim Souby, who chairs the Colorado Front Range and Southwest Chief Commission [codot.gov/about/southwest-chief-commission-front-range-passenger-rail], was quoted in the August 15 *Denver Post* article "What a Front Range passenger railway could look like" as opining that Colorado will need plenty of help from the federal government.

Besides action in the Congress, there is action in the structure of the state-supported services. The Connects US vision document refers to "Amtrak and

its state partners are collaborating on a review and revision of Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) Section 209 state supported corridor funding formulas" (page 26).

Jeremy Steinemann, Executive Director of the State-Amtrak Intercity Passenger Rail Committee [saiprc.com], kindly indicated the status of this effort in response to a query I made. "SAIPRC is at the early stages of its work to refine the PRIIA cost methodology. At this stage, the Committee's members have not yet achieved consensus and, thus, do not have a report-out to share."

Perhaps the most significant manifestation of Amtrak incubating new corridor services is the series of roundtables it has held since releasing the Connects US vision document. Magliari notes "our Corridor Roundtables. They have helped to advance expansion of Amtrak service where there was already work underway (Front Range), a while ago (Ohio) and not recently (Tucson-Phoenix-Los Angeles). This won't be our only mechanism for

advancing Amtrak expansion, but I hope you'll agree they've produced some very positive results."

There are all manner of issues swirling around Amtrak, only some of which the infrastructure bill and Connects US address. They include the preference and access issues regarding the relationship with host railroads, Amtrak Board reform, repeal of both the Mica onboard food "profitability" requirement and the limitation of the long-distance routes to the 15 in existence in 2008, and, lastly, reform of Amtrak's widely rebuked accounting and cost allocation (aka Amtrak Performance Tracking).

The years ahead promise to be interesting.

The website for Connects US is [amtrakconnectsus.com/](http://amtrakconnectsus.com/)

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

# THE CONVOLUTED HISTORY OF RESTORING PASSENGER RAIL IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

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

*Passenger Rail Journal, 2021 - Issue 288.*

*This is the 16th in a series of articles highlighting what rail advocates are doing to improve and expand passenger rail service and rail transit in America.*

In order to understand the convoluted history of efforts to restore passenger rail service in New Hampshire, it is important to be aware of obstacles that have to be overcome in order to finance almost any project in the state. New Hampshire does not have a state income or sales tax. Both the governor and state legislators have two-year terms and the Executive Council has to approve any state expenditure over \$10,000. Any proposed expenditure of funds needs to be included in the state's 10-year rail plan. The state receives the lowest amount of money from federal funding dollars. Because over 30% of the workforce commutes to Boston, Manchester and Nashua, along with the rest of Southern New Hampshire, it is considered part of the Greater Boston Metropolitan area.

The last Boston & Maine (B&M) passenger train made its farewell run from North Station in Boston to Concord, New Hampshire on Friday night, June 30, 1967. The *Manchester Union Leader*, the State's major newspaper, reported that the event was like an "Irish wake." One or two people wandered around unaware that anyone died, and the ticket agent didn't ask anyone whether they wanted a round-trip ticket. The day was its burial, the day before was the wake when 80 or so commuters from Nashua, Manchester and Concord held a little party. Despite the fact that the regulars had signed hundreds of petitions over the years to save the train, this seemed like the end of the story.

However, as early as 1981, there was an effort to bring the train back. The New Hampshire Rail Authority, in conjunction with the MBTA, obtained a federal grant to provide funding for the Boston &

Maine to run two weekday frequencies from Concord, Manchester, and Nashua, NH to Boston via Lowell, MA. Trains left Concord at 5:00 and 5:40 a.m. providing commuters an opportunity to travel by train to Boston. The return trains left Boston at 5:00 and 5:45 p.m. On weekends, one round-trip was provided enabling visitors and families to spend the day in Boston. By April, Merrimack, NH was added as a stop between Manchester and Concord. Despite the fact that the service was considered a success, with over 30-40 boarding in Merrimack and 125 in Nashua, the service was abruptly terminated when incoming President Ronald Reagan and the State of New Hampshire declined to provide an operating subsidy to support the continuation of service. At the request of the mayor of Nashua, the MBTA tried to preserve at least one round-trip a day to Nashua, at a cost of \$5,000 per-year, but no funds could be procured and the service died.

The retired Sr. VP of Passenger Rail Development for All Aboard Florida, a former New Hampshire resident who served as the Chief Railroad Services Officer for the MBTA, was interviewed by the *NH Business Review* staff in 2008. He stated that this "very limited experimental service back in 1980 proved that the passenger rail market in New Hampshire was indeed there to be tapped. It was a well-used service, even with its limited one directional schedule." The only reason the trains did not continue to exist was "New Hampshire's unwillingness to provide any financial support for it once the federal grant was terminated." According to Eugene Skoropowski, if those modest dollars had been provided, Central New Hampshire would likely have service today that would be at least as frequent, and have as much ridership, as the MBTA-Rhode Island service to Providence, or the *Downeaster* Service to Maine.

Since the 1980s, numerous studies and plans have been completed which support the return of passenger rail service. The most important is the New Hampshire Capitol Corridor Rail and Transit Alternatives Analysis, completed in

December 2014. It was commissioned by the New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority (NHRTA). This agency was first formed in 2007 to oversee the development of rail transit in NH, with a specific focus on advancing what is called the Capitol Corridor project. They received grants from the Federal Railroad Administration (\$2.24 m) and the Federal Transit Administration (\$1.9 m) in 2010 to study and plan the Capitol Corridor. While this was the first time that the two federal agencies committed to work jointly on a planning grant, the New Hampshire Executive Council, controlled by Republicans, rejected the \$4.2 million in federal and state grants for the study in 2012. With the election of a new Democratic governor, Maggie Hassan, and with new members elected to the Executive Council, the study got underway in early 2013.

The Capitol Corridor Rail and Transit Alternatives Analysis Study was released in September 2014 and evaluated several rail options. The Nashua Minimum Commuter Rail option would provide MBTA minimal peak-hour rail service to and from South Nashua to Lowell, Massachusetts. It was specifically designed to minimize MBTA operating costs, and could be developed and operated as an "interim service with bus service beyond to Manchester and Concord."

The second option was the Manchester Regional Commuter Rail Option which would extend MBTA commuter rail service 30 miles north from Lowell, MA to Downtown Manchester, with intermediate station stops in South Nashua, Nashua Crown Street, and at the Bedford/Manchester Airport. This service initiative would provide all-day commuter rail service to Nashua, with 34 weekdays trains and lower frequency regional service, with 16 trains continuing north to Manchester. Eight optional connecting bus trips could be added between South Nashua and Manchester to provide midday and evening options.

*Continued on page 15*



## THE CONVOLUTED HISTORY OF RESTORING PASSENGER RAIL IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

*Continued from page 14*

The third option, called Intercity 8, would provide four daily round-trips over the 73-mile route between Concord, New Hampshire and Boston, making intermediate stops at Manchester, Bedford/Manchester Airport, Nashua Crown Street, Lowell, Woburn, and North Station in Boston. The end-to-end time was estimated to be 96 minutes. It would operate much like Amtrak's Downeaster service between Boston and Brunswick, ME, operated by Amtrak or contracted to a third-party service provider. It would cost approximately \$7.7 million per year to operate. The service could also provide last-mile connections via private bus services to North Country destinations in New Hampshire and Vermont.

Based on an analysis of the report, the NHRTA Board in 2015 selected the Manchester Regional Commuter Rail option, with a continued interest in extending passenger rail service to Concord as the preferred alternative, for it offered "the greatest economic benefit with moderate construction investment." Capital costs were estimated at \$246 million. This included \$10.8 million in annual operation costs, which were assumed to come from federal, state and MBTA sources, and non-governmental revenue such as passenger fares and parking fees. Ridership was estimated at 3,120 per day or 668,000 weekday riders per year.

With the completion of this study, then-Gov. Hassan added funding for it in the state's 10-year transportation plan, but it was removed by the Republican majority two years later. Since then, it has been a "political football." Gov. Chris Sununu first dismissed the project as a "boondoggle" while running for governor. He changed his tune in 2018 as he pitched Amazon to build its second headquarters in New Hampshire. When it became clear that Amazon had a

different location in mind, the New Hampshire legislature voted not to include the project in NHDOT's 10-year rail plan.

The failure of the Capitol Corridor Initiative to move forward once again led to interest in a privately funded passenger rail alternative. In 2017, the Boston Surface Railroad Company (BSRC) proposed a low-cost service called the Nashua Rail Transit service between Bedford, NH and Lowell, with one stop in Nashua. This private company, founded in 2012, proposed commuter rail service between Providence, Rhode Island and Worcester, MA with a stop in Woonsocket, RI. It also planned to expand the service from Worcester to Lowell, MA and to Nashua, Bedford, Manchester-Boston Regional Airport and Concord. The BSRC actually signed a memorandum of understanding with the City of Nashua to develop the project in 2017. Nashua hired AECOM of Los Angeles to provide consulting services to help with the initiative in the following year. Unfortunately, the company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in Bankruptcy Court in Concord in October 2019. It had only \$166,815 in assets and \$1,867,955 in liabilities.

The formation of a statewide nonpartisan business coalition called New Hampshire Business for Rail Expansion, established several years ago, has played a major role in convincing state officials to take the next steps necessary to move forward with the Capitol Corridor Project. A poll conducted by the Saint Anselm College Survey Center found that 75.5% of residents surveyed supported rail, with 14.5% opposed and 10% with no opinion. With more than 110 statewide businesses and now three quarters of residents indicating their support, E.J. Powers, the spokesperson for the business group, urged policymakers to "act and to take the next step in expanding rail and realizing the vast economic benefits it would deliver."

The New Hampshire House of Representatives voted in 2018 to designate federal funds to conduct an in-depth financial, engineering, and environmental tax analysis of the proposed passenger rail expansion project, and to include funding for the

project in the state's 10-year Transportation Improvement Plan. Members of the House Public Works & Highway Committee, however, stripped funds from House Bill 2018, and instead approved a last-minute amendment to spend \$4 million to fund a study on bus service from Concord to Nashua.

With Democrats back in control of both houses of the legislature in 2019, they were finally able to pass Senate Bill 241, allowing NHDOT to access existing federal funding to complete the critical Project Development Analysis of the NH Capitol Corridor Rail Expansion Project. It officially became law without the governor's signature. The prospect of bringing commuter rail to the Capitol Corridor was further brightened in December 2020, when the governor and executive council authorized NHDOT to contract with AECOM Technical services to undertake the development and engineering phases of the project. The \$5,448,607 contract, funded entirely with federal dollars, includes not only preliminary and design work, but also environmental and public engagement services and the development of a plan to finance the project.

Given the nature of New Hampshire state politics and the major obstacles that still need to be overcome, it is far too early to predict whether passenger rail service will ever be restored on the Capitol Corridor. Meanwhile, Amtrak has included the restoration of passenger rail service over this line, which is currently owned by Pan Am Railway, in its Connects US 2035 rail plan. Five daily round trips would be offered from Boston to Manchester and Concord. It is concerned, though, about the possible purchase of Pan Am Railway by CSX. Ten days before releasing the details of its Connects US plan, Amtrak filed a letter of opposition to the CSX-Pan Am deal with the Surface Transportation Board. Amtrak claims the merger poses a grave threat to its goals. The MBTA and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation have also expressed serious concerns about the deal, especially if CSX plans to expand freight service in the region.

# FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rail Users' Network Newsletter is published quarterly by the Rail Users' Network, a 501 (c) (3), nonprofit corporation.

We welcome your thoughts and comments about our newsletter. Please write to us:  
RUN, P.O. Box 8015,  
Portland, ME 04104

As a grassroots organization, we depend upon your contributions to allow us to pursue our important work. Please donate to help us grow.

RAIL USERS NETWORK  
P.O. Box 8015,  
Portland, ME 04104



## Please become a member of RUN...

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

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

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

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

### *Please register me / us as a member of RUN today*

---

Advocacy or Advisory Group or Agency Name (affiliation if appropriate)

---

Name of individual Applicant (or group, Agency, or Company Contact Person's Name)

---

Street Address	City	State/Province	Postal Code
----------------	------	----------------	-------------

---

Phone Number	Fax Number	E-Mail
--------------	------------	--------

#### **Enclosed are dues of:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ \$25 (introductory/first-year only)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$40 (individual/family)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$100 (Advocacy or Advisory Group)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 (Public Agency or Bureau)
- \_\_\_\_\_ \$250 (Private Carrier or For-For-Profit)

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