

INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

MBTA Pulls New
Subway Cars p. 2

Big News from New
York p. 3

Report from New
Mexico p. 4

California Passenger
Rail Roundup p. 5

NJ Transit Finally
Offers Vaccinations p. 6

Canada Report p. 8

Expanding
Passenger Rail to
Central and
Western Maine p. 14

AMTRAK OBSERVES 50TH ANNIVERSARY WITH LOWEST LEVEL OF SERVICE EVER

By David Peter Alan

Amtrak has now been “America’s Railroad” for 50 years! It was founded under the Rail Passenger Service Act of 1970 and was known as “Railpax” for a short time. Its purpose was to relieve the private-sector railroads of the responsibility of running passenger trains, but many riders at the time believed that its true purpose was to get rid of those trains more quickly than was allowed at the time.

There was good reason for that belief. Of all the trains outside the Northeast Corridor (NEC) that left their points of origin on April 30, 65% did not run the next day. Most of them never ran again. The result on the NEC and its branches (New Haven to

Springfield, MA and Philadelphia to Harrisburg) was the reverse; almost two-thirds of the trains on those lines survived. The advocacy movement as we know it did not exist yet, and very few riders expected Amtrak to last longer than five or 10 years. Yet it confounded the skeptics, lasted for 50 years so far, and continues to live on.

The original Amtrak long-distance network had only 14 trains. After a number of changes through the years, it still has only 15 trains (not counting the Auto-Train, which is only available to motorists who accompany their vehicles on the trip). There have been a few changes over the years, but the long-distance map looks much like it did at Amtrak’s inception; only less-comprehensive.

Amtrak killed six long-distance trains in 1979, including major routes between New York and St. Louis, Chicago and Florida, Chicago and Seattle/Portland through southern Montana, and Chicago and Texas via Kansas City and Oklahoma. None of those trains have come back, except for a segment between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth, which lives year-by-year at the sufferance and funding of Oklahoma and Texas. The last train that was added to the network and still runs is the *Capitol Limited* between Chicago and Washington, DC, which was restored in 1981 after being discontinued in 1971.

At this writing, Amtrak is running its lowest level of service ever on
Continued on page 9

HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS’ NETWORK’S MAY 15TH, 2021 VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

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

Our virtual mini-conference was held on Saturday afternoon, May 15. Over 75 people from across the country registered for the event.

Our first speaker, Richard Rudolph, RUN’s Chair, thanked participants who joined the effort last year to prevent Amtrak from eliminating daily long-distance passenger service and to provide emergency relief funds to the nation’s public transit systems. The good news, he said, is this effort has paid off. President Biden’s \$1.9-

trillion COVID relief bill includes \$1.7 billion for Amtrak and \$30.5 billion for rail transit. As a result, Amtrak is in the process of restoring daily service on its 12 long distance routes by late May/early June,

Richard acknowledged that Amtrak deserves credit for keeping its promise to return daily long-distance service. However, RUN is concerned about Amtrak’s Connect US plan released in March, which includes a map of an expanded network of routes to commence by 2035. RUN’s legislative committee met several times during the past month to

develop a response. The committee agreed there is much to like in the plan, such as the 3 C project in Ohio and the proposed Minneapolis to Duluth service, but it also agreed that has serious flaws. The proposed new routes are deliberately short, linking urban centers but with no new long-distance routes. This fixation on short routes not only creates odd gaps in the Connect US map, but also relies on states to provide money to support routes under 750 miles, which under PR2a are defined as state-supported. Richard said it is hard to imagine that states will appropriate funds to make

Continued on page 10

MBTA PULLS NEW SUBWAY CARS; MORE ISSUES WITH CRRC RAILCARS

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

In March of 2020, the Orange Line branch subway line of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), experienced a low-speed derailment in a work zone. Of the 100 passengers spread out over a six-car trainset, none were injured or required hospitalization. The accident occurred in a work zone where rail was being upgraded and replaced that required an outbound train to switch to an inbound track just south of the line's Wellington Station. As the train passed over the switch at reduced speed, the third car in the trainset came off the track. The trainset consisted of brand new rail cars manufactured by China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation Limited (CRRC).

CRRC is presently under contract to the MBTA to provide replacement rolling stock for its Orange and Red Line subway lines. The rail cars will be mechanically and electronically the same to allow for interchange of parts and simplification of maintenance. However, each line's railcars differ by inches in width and length requiring slightly different fleets. The limited handful of rail cars that have been tested and pressed into revenue service have seen several minor problems to date, each of which has taken all of the units off the track until a full diagnosis of the problem could be determined, and a fix initiated. In the meantime, the MBTA's Orange Line struggles trying to keep 40-year-old Hawker-Siddeley trainsets operational.

While an initial fault for the derailment focused on the work zone, additional data has come to light, forcing all of the CRRC trainsets back to the yard for more testing.

According to an article published by the *Boston Globe*, Deputy General Manager of the MBTA Jeff Gonneville said, "As we were going through the investigation [of the derailment], it did become clear to us that there was something acting abnormally with the vehicles themselves." This was reported in a meeting of the MBTA Control Board. According to Gonneville, testing showed that the truck frames need more force to turn the longer they are in usage, which is not as designed. Apparently this issue was identified some time back, but

a formal diagnosis was delayed because the agency had to develop a test rig at the Wellington Car House repair shops where Orange Line cars are serviced and stored. The special test rig calculates the force on a new car's truck frame and the railcar body as it turns.

Gonneville continued, "What we found after we built this test rig is that the force that is necessary to rotate the truck frame [at curved sections of track] is increasing directly with the mileage of the vehicles. In other words, as the miles of the vehicles are increasing, there is a greater resistance to the turning of the truck frames themselves." Support pads installed on the truck frames to regulate the force of the chassis as it turns on the wheel truck have been identified as the problem part.

Full test results are still pending to determine exactly why this is happening. For now, the new Orange and Red Line cars will remain out of service until a formal diagnosis is released, and a resolution is determined. An update on this problem is expected sometime in June.

Elsewhere, an \$8-million-dollar repair and refurbishment of several historic streetcars has ground to a halt due to a combination of COVID-19 restrictions and related work stoppages. The units in question are Presidents Conference Committee (PCC) class "trolleys" that started life during World War II, and are some of the last remaining PCC units in revenue operation in the USA.

While the MBTA has purchased modern rolling stock for its other streetcar lines, the Mattapan-Ashmont loop in the city's Mattapan-Dorchester neighborhoods carries some historical significance as the last remaining line that operates PCC units in Boston, and likely the only transit line that cuts through the middle of a cemetery. Another reason for the continued usage of these railcars is due to their lighter weight when compared to the MBTA's newer streetcar fleets. The single units pass with reasonable safety over two crossings of the Neponset River, and those bridges are just about as old as the streetcars, if not older. As such, any movement of more-modern units would require bridge upgrades or replacements.

The project was also delayed due to issues associated with lead paint removal on the car bodies.

At present, two PCC units are in the MBTA's Everett repair shops and have been stripped down to the bare shells and continue to have body work performed and new flooring installed. When the time comes, the streetcars will have new wheel trucks installed and control systems by Brookville, itself a manufacturer of historical streetcar replicas.

As to the rest of the MBTA's transit system, repairs are ongoing where needed, with stations on some lines being moved and consolidated based on ridership. The new Green Line Extension (GLX) from Boston to Medford, MA is almost on schedule. Some stations on the GLX could start taking passengers by later this year if the current work trends hold out.

On the commuter rail front, service is slowly starting to resemble some form of normalcy. While some commuter rail lines are still seeing service cuts, a slow process of service restoration is underway with the MBTA re-examining each line's ridership and trends. Based on this review, some lines have had their service levels adjusted with fewer runs in the morning and evening peak service times, and more mid-day runs to even out the schedules. Those routes that had commuter rail suspended on weekends remains under review.

On the new lines front, the South Coast Rail Project that will extend service (restore, actually), to Fall River and New Bedford, MA has turned the first ceremonial shovel of dirt, and various parts of the build-out have started. The line will use an existing freight line, to be upgraded with stations added.

Due to the ever-changing system updates and service changes, visitors to the MBTA service area should check the MBTA website at www.mbta.com for current schedules and service alerts.

Dennis Kirkpatrick is a RUN Board member in Boston. For 20 years he was the managing editor of Destination: Freedom, the weekly E-Zine of the National Corridors Initiative.

NEWS FROM NEW YORK

By Andrew Albert

There are some very exciting developments taking place at New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)! Some of these developments were years in the making, and some are brand new. One of the most exciting developments is the current testing on the Long Island Rail Road's electric cars—in this case the M7s, which at the moment are the dominant electric cars serving the LIRR's electric-powered branches. Today, if you are going to a station that is in diesel territory—on branches such as the Oyster Bay line, the Greenport line, the Montauk or Hamptons line, or the Port Jefferson line—you must switch from an electric-powered train to a diesel-powered train to reach your destination. While this is normally not a big deal, it is still a two-seat ride, and requires a change of trains at various locations to complete your journey. In some cases, this has caused commuters to actually drive to an electric-powered branch, park their cars there, and proceed on a third-rail powered train to their destinations.

Now, thanks to an agreement between the LIRR and Alstom, battery-powered electric trains are being tested on the

Oyster Bay branch, as this is the shortest of the diesel-powered lines. The trains are not being tested with passengers on board, but testing is taking place, utilizing battery power once the train is in diesel territory. The testing will see if there is sufficient battery power for the train to complete its journey, if the charging during the portion of the trip that is third-rail powered is sufficient for the train to complete its journey to the last station in diesel territory, and if there are any power issues en route, such as overheating, or exhaustion of power. While the trip to Oyster Bay is far shorter than the trip to Greenport or Montauk, the testing will determine if there is sufficient power to complete a longer journey under battery power.

This technology is in use in Europe and elsewhere, but has never been used in the United States. If it is successful, it will contribute to cleaner air, and one-seat rides on all lines to major destinations, and make using the railroad much more convenient and attractive to many travelers. If successful, the technology would also be used on the LIRR's newest cars: the M9s, of which there are increasing numbers in use. And, of course, if successful, this

technology could and would also be used by the Metro-North Railroad, which has long diesel-powered runs to Poughkeepsie, Southeast, Wassaic, etc. Stay tuned for updates on this exciting development!

Another exciting piece of news is the progress on Metro-North's Penn Access program, which will bring some New Haven line trains south of New Rochelle onto Amtrak's Hell Gate Bridge route, and into Penn Station, with four new stations in the Bronx! The new stations being built are Co-Op City, Morris Park, Parkchester/Van Nest, and Hunts Point. Three of the four new stations are far from existing subway lines, giving some Bronx neighborhoods rail access for the first time! Not only that, but it will cut journey times to Midtown Manhattan by more than half! For instance, residents of Co-Op City—a development that has the population of many mid-sized cities—will have direct access to Midtown West, in a short 25- to 28-minute ride! Compare that to either a bus to a subway, or an express bus—which take between 75 and 90 minutes to make the same trip!

Continued on page 7

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

Name	Location	Affiliation
Richard Rudolph, Chair	Portland, ME	NARP / TrainRiders Northeast, Maine Rail Group
Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair	New York, NY	New York City Transit Riders Council
Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary	Philadelphia, PA	Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation
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

Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny

HIGH-SPEED RAIL—WHATEVER THAT IS

FRA Track Classification - Maximum Speed Limits

Track Classification	Freight	Passenger	Section
Excepted Track	10 mph	Not Allowed	49 CFR § 213.4
Class 1 Track	10 mph	15 mph	49 CFR § 213.9
Class 2 Track	25 mph	30 mph	49 CFR § 213.9
Class 3 Track	40 mph	60 mph	49 CFR § 213.9
Class 4 Track	60 mph	80 mph	49 CFR § 213.9
Class 5 Track	80 mph	90 mph	49 CFR § 213.9
Class 6 Track	110 mph	110 mph	49 CFR § 213.307
Class 7 Track	125 mph	125 mph	49 CFR § 213.307
Class 8 Track	160 mph	160 mph	49 CFR § 213.307
Class 9 Track	200 mph	200 mph	49 CFR § 213.307

By JW Madison

There is a lot of talk lately about “High Speed Rail” (**HSR**). This is good, in that any serious discussion of modern passenger Rail beats none. But, there is astoundingly no universally agreed-upon way to define the various levels of “High Speed”; i.e., greater than 80 mph for passenger trains. In fact, “Higher-Speed Rail” is a lot slower than “True High Speed Rail.” Let’s see if we can clean this up:

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has long published standard designations for all train speeds this side of science fiction, or of countries more advanced than ours (**see table above**). For example, our fastest conventional train speed limits are known as “**Class 4**”; i.e., 60 mph for freight trains and 80 mph for passenger trains (if you want to know what parameters the FRA uses to define a “Class,” look it up. Those “49 CFR” numbers in the table will help).

This table provides a benchmark handed down from On High—kind of a 10 Commandments—which we can reference in all discussions of fast trains. Here’s a sample sentence:

“Rails Inc holds that, under the conditions listed just below, we as a nation can achieve Class 6, maybe Class 7, passenger train capability without building an entire

new network of dedicated tracks.” Love it, hate it, or in between, you know exactly what we mean “ (nice little rhyme there).

So should we get all excited about HSR?

I recently dropped this short letter to Midwest HSR:

Begin Quote: I once wrote an article called, “*High speed rail network? How about any rail network?*”. I believe this sentiment still applies. Let’s restore our conventional Rail network to the reach of about 60-70 years ago, and factor in:

- renewably-generated electrification,
- modern safety technology,
- anti-tilt (pendular) railcar technology, and
- **public ownership of all major track segments** (known to Rails Inc as the “Rail Interstate”).

A solid well-run *Class 4* speed limit system like this will set the stage for future public desire for, and acceptance of, moving up to *Class 6*, *Class 7*, and further over time.

End Quote.

Achieving the “Rail I-25” (aka The “Rocky Mountain Flyer”) Or: Colorado Front Range progress

There’s finally some potentially good news coming out of Colorado about

regional Rail. Serious discussion and advocacy is under way towards the establishment of service between Cheyenne, WY and Pueblo CO, via Denver.

Look at that now-famous Amtrak 2035 map. Notice the outrageous blank between Pueblo and La Junta CO (there are tracks there, folks). Close that gap with a bus link to begin with, then a short shuttle. This shuttle, consisting maybe of two coaches and a snack-lounge car (thanks, DPA) would connect all the way from Cheyenne to Albuquerque by including the *SW Chief*. Bingo; a big start toward the “Rail I-25” and true North-South connectivity between the prairie and the Pacific.

Now that wasn’t so hard, was it, Amtrak?

Rail Runner Update

The Rail Runner (NMRX) is back to running on a full pre-Covid schedule! Safety protocols are the same as I described in the last *Newsletter*. There was some trouble with the rail crossing arms at Isleta Pueblo, forcing a brief slowdown; but they got to work on it pretty quick and traffic was light at that time in the afternoon anyhow.

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

CALIFORNIA PASSENGER RAIL ROUNDUP

By Dana Gabbard

Understandably, many rail fans elsewhere are envious of those of us living in the Golden State who are experiencing a passenger rail renaissance. Here is an overview of the most recent developments:

To begin, I wish to offer a correction to my Link21 piece last issue. It has come to my attention regarding the Valley Rail program that south of Stockton the Alameda Corridor Express (ACE) commuter rail and the Amtrak *San Joaquins* will not share track but instead operate on two separate rights-of-way to Merced. The *San Joaquins* follow the existing BNSF Stockton subdivision, while ACE will use the Union Pacific Fresno subdivision.

The proposed 144-mile passenger rail service between Los Angeles and the Coachella Valley (including Palm Springs) with twice daily roundtrips recently reached a milestone with the release of the Draft Tier 1/Program Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report for public review and comment. A further favorable sign is its inclusion (along with an eventual possible extension to Phoenix and Tucson) in the map of proposed corridor services released by Amtrak as part of the ConnectUS program.

Meanwhile, negotiations continue with the host railroads Union Pacific and Burlington Northern – Santa Fe on the provision of additional track capacity to ensure the new service does not impact existing and future freight service. Also, work continues to build local support to make the project competitive for future state and federal grant funds.

There is an unexplainable outbreak of infatuation with exotic technology for two corridors being studied for mass transit options.

First, in the Bay Area, the San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans) on March 15, 2021 held a virtual community meeting on the Dumbarton rail bridge study currently underway. The agency revealed besides looking at commuter

rail, light rail and Bus Rapid Transit as the mode to carry riders across the bridge, it is considering AVT, Autonomous Vehicle Transit. These are rubber tired pod vehicles with eight seats and a capacity of up to 22 passengers. It combines attributes of people movers and PRT (personal rapid transit).

Second, in Southern California, a study by LA Metro for linking the San Fernando Valley and Westwood/UCLA area via the Sepulveda pass is having proposals prepared by potential contractors for heavy rail and monorail.

Frankly, both the AVT and monorail proposals have been so thoroughly ripped to shreds by local activists I don't feel any need to waste space on their obvious shortcomings. We will see if sanity prevails or if either (or both) agencies plunge down the rabbit hole.

Lastly and most heartbreaking is the ongoing drama of the Crenshaw/LAX light rail line in Los Angeles. The 8.5-mile route with nine new stations was due to open in 2019 but now, due to delays by the builder, is (hopefully) to commence revenue service in mid-2022. But only the northern half initially will run. This is because construction has not yet started on one of the stations, the Airport Metro Connector. This will be adjacent to LAX and provide a direct connection to the airport via a people mover. Building the facility in the right of way will take approximately 20 months.

There is also talk of adding an overpass at Centinela Avenue in Inglewood so trains do not interfere with traffic to the new football stadium being built near the line on game days. This might cause a further two-year service interruption although LA Metro staff hope, if the overpass project (which would cost \$200 million) goes forward, that temporary bypass tracks could be laid around the construction site.

My thanks to Ryan McCauley of SamTrans, Christina Watson of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County, President Steve Roberts of the Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada, Sheldon Peterson of the

Riverside County Transportation Commission, Dave Sotero of LA Metro, Aline Nassif of Bechtel and Roger Rudick of Streetsblog San Francisco for their assistance in researching this article.

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

CORRECTION:

In the Spring 2021 RUN Newsletter's coverage of New Mexico Rail Runner service, it was reported that "The passenger areas are sprayed and wiped down at the Santa Fe Rail Yard and Belen turnarounds and at the Downtown Albuquerque stop." This work is not being performed at the Downtown Albuquerque stop.

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

NJ TRANSIT FINALLY OFFERS VACCINATIONS ON A POP-UP BASIS, WHILE TRAIN CANCELLATIONS CONTINUE

By David Peter Alan

As more Americans, including New Jerseyans, line up to get the shots that will protect them against the COVID-19 virus, many persons who depend on transit for their mobility continue to face difficulty finding vaccination sites that are transit-accessible and accommodate walk-up visitors.

This writer first raised the issue of that difficulty in an article entitled *A Shot in the Arm – for Transit* in *Railway Age*, which was first posted on the publication's website, www.railwayage.com, on February 8, and in a statement before the Board of Directors of New Jersey Transit (NJT) two days later. The recommendation in that statement was for NJT to use some of its underutilized station facilities, particularly the cavernous Secaucus Junction Station, as temporary vaccination and testing sites. The Secaucus facility hosts trains on all lines in North and Central Jersey. One Board member suggested that management look into that recommendation, but his plea fell on deaf ears at the time.

The Board heard the same suggestion two more times: from the Lackawanna Coalition in March and from the Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee (SCDRTAC) in April (this writer is a member of both organizations, but does not hold an office in either). After hearing the suggestion for the third time in April, Transportation Commissioner and Board Chair Diane Guiterrez-Scacetti officially shot it down, saying that NJT would institute some other policy regarding vaccinations.

We do know that the agency will join a number of other transit providers in giving riders a free ride to existing vaccination sites, upon presentation of proof on an appointment for a shot. The new policy was proposed by former manager Stewart Mader, whose title was "customer advocate" but who drew constant criticism for his performance from the genuine customer advocates at

the Lackawanna Coalition and the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP).

NJT reversed its decision not to offer shots on its property to some extent, opening pop-up sites at Newark Penn Station, Secaucus, and Walter Rand Transportation Center, a bus terminal in Camden (they also offer shots at two of their major bus facilities for employees only). Shots were offered late in May and, at this writing, we don't know whether they will be offered again. In addition, New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) in Philadelphia have started to establish pop-up vaccination sites at some stations.

In a positive development at NJT, the agency announced that it has trained enough new engineers to alleviate the shortage that caused numerous train cancellations during the last two to three years. Despite this milestone, trains are still being canceled, although at a lower rate. Larry Higgs reported in the Newark-based *Star-Ledger* on May 18: "In April, NJ Transit canceled 156 trains, with 92 of those not running due to mechanical issues."

Cancellations are a continuing problem in the Garden State. Recently a weekend train bound for Penn Station, New York on the Morris & Essex Line was canceled. Two adjacent stations on that line are each served every two hours by alternating trains. The next train, which ran, went through the station normally served by the other train without stopping. That added 60 minutes to the delay for the riders who had already been waiting for an extra hour. Advocates are now calling on the agency to require dispatchers and crews to make such stops.

Commuting patterns appear to be changing, although NJ Transit does not appear to acknowledge such a change. The agency continues to run its entire pre-COVID schedules, with its emphasis on peak-hour commuting, even though the trains headed for Penn Station, New

York for the start of the traditional business day are the emptiest on the system. The agency says that rail ridership has recovered to about 30% of pre-COVID levels, but did not break that number down by day or time. Advocates' observations reveal that the increases are taking place on week-ends and outside traditional peak-commuting hours on weekdays. "Reverse-direction commuting" is picking up, too; many such riders are "essential workers" commuting outbound to their jobs from Newark and other towns nearby.

Other local railroads are adjusting schedules to reduce, or even eliminate, the commuting-peak. Caltrans in the San Francisco Bay Area has eliminated it completely, instead opting to run a train every 30 minutes from early-morning until mid-evening on weekdays (some trains skip certain stops, so some stations are served hourly and others half-hourly), with hourly all-stops locals later in the evening and on weekends. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA or the "T") in the Boston area has eliminated some of its commuter-peak trains and added service during mid-day on weekdays, although only five of its twelve lines offer week-end trains today. Metra in Chicago is planning to follow suit by running more "off-peak trains" and fewer traditional "commuter trains" on weekdays.

Still, NJT has no plans to adjust its schedules although, in some respects, the agency provided better service during its 15 weeks of "limited service" a year ago than it ever had on weekdays at any other time in its history. That schedule involved running an augmented weekend schedule on weekdays, with "mini-peak" service on some lines; a few trains were added to the schedule for the remaining commuters. For the first time since it opened, trains on the Morris & Essex Line stopped at the Secaucus Junction Station, a major transfer point, during "peak-hours." The last trains from

Continued on page 7

NEWS FROM NEW YORK

Continued from page 3

Another huge benefit of the program will be making reverse-commuting to major job centers - such as Stamford, CT, an easy trip. The one station of the new four stations that is adjacent to a subway line—Hunts Point—will also cut the commuting time into Midtown Manhattan by almost a half-hour, although at a considerably higher price-point. As to pricing, the PCAC (Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA) is working on introducing the second phase of our Freedom Ticket program, currently in service for stations in Southeast Queens to Atlantic Terminal, in Downtown Brooklyn, where it is known as Atlantic Ticket. We will be recommending that all stations within NYC limits be eligible for discounted rail tickets, which we believe will change people's travel habits, fill empty seats at various times of day, and contribute to the mobility of each and every resident of New York City. An environmental impact statement process is currently underway for the Penn Access program, and there is no doubt in anyone's mind that giving more folks rail access will contribute to cleaner air, take cars off the roads, and ease congestion.

Other major MTA projects are also underway, such as LIRR mainline third track program, which is installing another track on the LIRR Main Line between Floral Park and Hicksville, which will allow the rail road to run more trains, more reverse peak-hour service, and improved connections to connecting lines. And of course, East Side Access is making huge progress, with much of the major construction now completed, as announced by Governor Cuomo a few days ago. East Side Access will bring LIRR trains into Grand Central Terminal, so riders will have a choice if they want East Midtown or West Midtown in Manhattan.

Details have not yet been released on

service plans for the various LIRR branches, and how the service will be distributed between the two Manhattan terminals. But there will be a tremendous convenience if you are headed to the East Side, eliminating the switch to a subway to Times Square, and either the 42nd St shuttle or the #7 line over to Grand Central. It is estimated this will save travelers over a half-hour on their commutes. The lowest level in Grand Central Terminal—underneath what is now referred to as the Lower Level—is where the LIRR will enter Grand Central, and high-speed escalators will bring passengers up to the main portion of the station. The new service is set to begin service in December, 2022.

Of course, the biggest news emanating from New York is the return of 24-hour/7-day a week subway service! Overnight service was cut in May, 2020, due to Coronavirus, and the shutdown of the city. Later, service was restored to 20 hours per day, with intensive cleaning of cars and stations taking place between 1 AM and 5 AM. After many months of this four-hour shutdown, with things beginning to return to normal, service was restored to 22 hours a day, with the shutdown only between 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. Finally, with bars and restaurants staying open longer, and vaccination rates getting higher, and infection rates sinking, full 24-hour service was restored two weeks ago. This will enable businesses to stay open longer, employees and patrons to get to & from bars, clubs, restaurants, movies, etc.

It is a sign of a return to normalcy, which we all are very excited to see! Without a vibrant, healthy, safe transit system, New York and the Tri-State region cannot survive. It is no accident that New York is the economic engine of the Northeast, which is the economic engine of the entire U.S.! And, to help get riders back on board, the MTA has launched a new "Take the Train" campaign! Electronic billboards and signs are all over the subways, buses, and commuter rails, reminding riders that many wonderful summertime destinations - such as the Walkway Over

the Hudson in Poughkeepsie, the Appalachian Trail, Port Jefferson village, Bethpage State Park, Montauk, Greenport, and other area destinations are easily accessible by train! We hope everyone takes advantage of restored service, new technologies, expanding lines, new fare options, and state and federal support, which has brought our expansive and geographically inclusive transportation system back from what could have been a dismal place.

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

NJ TRANSIT FINALLY OFFERS VACCINATIONS

Continued from page 6

New York or Hoboken left later on weeknights than they do now, and long gaps in weekday late-afternoon and early-evening inbound schedules on three lines were eliminated. That had never happened before. Advocates had called for comparable improvements on the line to Montclair, but that did not happen.

Speculation persists that the agency is running the pre-COVID schedules to protect its application to the FTA for a grant to pay for a new high-level replacement for Portal Bridge; part of the \$30-billion (or more) Gateway Program for new infrastructure near New York's Penn Station and in nearby New Jersey. NJT had applied for a "Capacity Enhancement Grant" and, unless every commuter from the pre-COVID era returns to the early-morning trains and more join them, the allegation that such capacity will be needed in the future will no longer be credible, and NJT could lose the FTA grant.

In the meantime, the agency has proposed a new "flex pass" fare that would offer 20 rides for the price of

Continued on page 8

CANADA REPORT, MAY 2021

By Ken Westcar

Canadian passenger rail advocates are generally envious of their U.S. counterparts who seem to attract rather than repel service provider and law-maker attention and dialog. While Canadian advocates have some success with municipalities, there is a virtual diode at the provincial (state) and federal levels that allows advocacy input without meaningful feedback or engagement. Perhaps it's because advocates frequently offer inconvenient truths that conflict with party political expediences and priorities of the day.

Transport Action Ontario (TAO) has crafted a series of letters to federal transportation, environment and infrastructure ministers on the importance of rail, both passenger and freight, to the national economy and, in all fairness, has received personalized although non-committal replies rather than the usual "buzz-off" form letter. Topics include the need to expand and improve VIA Rail's services, the importance of preserving routes scheduled for or already abandoned by Class 1 railways, facilitating short lines and the overall competitiveness of Canada's transportation infrastructure—or lack thereof.

Corroborating this is a recent World Bank report giving Canada a global competitiveness ranking of 20th, six points behind the USA, in 2018 (Germany was #1). This is deeply concerning given the importance of international trade to both economies. Little wonder the Biden administration is pushing hard for major transportation infrastructure improvements. Perhaps coincidentally the Canadian federal Minister of Infrastructure and Communities has now launched a national infrastructure review to identify inefficiencies and, hopefully, work on remediation—similar to the Biden plan.

Government responses to advocacy, whether coincidental or causal, provide encouragement and keep volunteers engaged when most of their efforts seem to go unrewarded. Further encouragement comes from the fact that municipalities are being more vocal on the

need to invest in intercommunity transit rather than opting for the mad dog, tail-chasing exercise of relentless highway construction. Perhaps they have been paying attention to what advocacy groups have been saying all along.

Cambridge, a growing community of about 135,000 people 50 miles west of Toronto, is now advocating for GO Train service via Guelph to Toronto because it knows the recently widened Highway 401 expressway will soon return to historic congestion levels within a decade or less. It has invested significant local taxpayer funds in researching a business case and evaluating existing freight rail corridors to accommodate GO passenger services. It's too early to see if Metrolinx, the provider of GO train services, will be able to respond in a timely manner especially if the project is not in their current business plan, expiring in 2041.

On a very positive note, the Canadian federal government announced C\$12bn (US\$10bn) partnership funding for several transit projects in the Greater Toronto/Hamilton Area in May including the stalled Hamilton LRT and Toronto's "Ontario Line," a much-needed light-rail capacity expansion of the region's subway, bus and LRT network. A condition seems to be that the new rail vehicles are built in Ontario thereby providing long-term work for domestic manufacturers.

VIA Rail is also the recipient of about C\$500 million (US\$400 million) over six years to further advance its High Frequency Rail project. This amount is inadequate for any significant construction west of Montreal so there's speculation it could be for physical improvements to the Quebec City or Toronto to Peterborough portions of the route.

Not so positive is the Task Force stage of the Draft Southwestern Ontario Transportation Plan mentioned in the last RUN newsletter. It seems to have lost momentum. The required mayoral sub-committees have not been announced and there's speculation on reasons for the delay. Many observers thought the plan too highway-centric at a time when better, non-highway public transportation is being favored by municipalities, with

Cambridge being a prime example. Whether the Province of Ontario is rethinking its approach or other priorities have delayed progress is yet unclear.

Arising since the Draft Plan was released are Amtrak's longer-term plans to reinstate a passenger service between Chicago and Toronto. In southwestern Ontario, where traveler connections to the U.S. Midwest are limited to a rather ugly drive or a circuitous series of short-haul flights, an Amtrak service stopping in London, Chatham and Windsor before crossing to Detroit could be a game changer. But, as we all know, holding one's breath on transportation matters is not recommended.

Ken Westcar is Secretary of Transport Action Ontario.

NJ TRANSIT FINALLY OFFERS VACCINATIONS

Continued from page 6

16 base fares, but that fare would be limited by mode and time (valid for one month), and only available on the agency's app. Lackawanna Coalition Chair (and RUN member) Sally Jane Gellert complained about the lack of availability of the discounted fare through other means, including at station ticket offices. This writer recommended the "six-pack" fare on Metrolink in Los Angeles, which offers six round trips for the price of five; also valid for a month, as more flexible for riders.

Gellert plans to concentrate on environmental and social-equity issues during her tenure as Coalition Chair, and has renewed her call for NJT to build a power plant run with renewable energy sources; not natural gas. She also joined other advocates in calling on the agency to allow riders to sit on benches at stations, which was allowed in late May, after 14½ months. There were signs requiring riders to sit six feet apart; a rule that could have been applied during that time, instead of closing the stations.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member based in South Orange, NJ.

AMTRAK OBSERVES 50TH ANNIVERSARY

Continued from page 1

Its long-distance routes. Every such train runs only three times per week. There is some good news, though: by publication time, most of those trains will be running every day again. The COVID-19 relief legislation included enough money for Amtrak to bring 12 long-distance trains back to daily operation in time for the beginning of the summer.

Over the years, most of Amtrak's growth has been on the corridors; both the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and its branches, and on state-supported corridors elsewhere in the country. Service on Midwest routes radiating from Chicago had increased from 1971 levels, and other corridors were established elsewhere: *Piedmont* service in North Carolina, the *Cascades Corridor* between Portland and Vancouver through Seattle, expansion of service between Washington, DC and Richmond and other new trains in Virginia. The largest growth was in California, where the schedule on the *Surf Line* between Los Angeles and San Diego grew from two daily trains and one tri-weekly train in 1971 to 14 weekday round trips at one point. Starting in the 1970s, the *Capitol Corridor* between the Bay Area and Sacramento, the *San Joaquin Corridor* between Bakersfield and the Bay Area (with buses connecting to Los Angeles) and *Surf Line* service to Santa Barbara were added. The most recent addition is the *Downeaster* service between Boston and Maine, which was restored in 2001 after a 36-year absence. It is also the only corridor currently running as many frequencies as before the virus hit.

Amtrak is also running fewer trains on its corridors at this writing than it ran in 1971, even though most of the surviving trains at that time operated on the NEC. There are only 30 weekday trains (fewer on weekends), including the "higher-speed" *Acela* trains, on the NEC today; compared with 73 trains in 1971 (all of them conventional). There were 19 trains on other corridors then, including *Empire*

Service in New York State, and there are 23 on those lines today. There are 25 trains operating on newer corridors today, including in California, but there were more before the virus hit.

Still, as Amtrak embarks on its second half-century, there are major challenges: political, economic and statutory.

For the first time in 20 years, Amtrak is talking about expansion, and has proposed a 2035 map with lots of additions to the state-supported part of the network. This raises two problems: a legal prohibition against the long-distance network growing, and a formula that discourages states from stepping up to the plate to add Amtrak trains within their borders or over a state line to a neighboring state. Section 201(a)(5)(C) of the Passenger Rail Investment & Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA; that provision codified as 49 U.S.C. §24102(7)(C)) defines the "national network" as trains that operated at that time, which precludes any expansion. Even new long-distance trains would have to be established in the same manner as state-supported trains. Amtrak has set a formula for that, which includes Amtrak helping get the line going, but the states must pay the full costs after the first five years of operation.

Several advocacy organizations, including RUN, have called on Congress to repeal the PRIIA limitation on the long-distance network, and to change the payment formula for state-supported trains and corridors. That may be a major issue in the near future, as states are already cutting back on the number of trains they support. Indiana got rid of its *Hoosier State* train in 2019. It had run four days a week between Chicago and Indianapolis to offer daily service in that part of the state, since the *Cardinal* (which still stops at Indianapolis) has operated on a tri-weekly schedule since 1981.

At this writing, every corridor except the *Downeaster* has reduced service; often less than the level offered in 1971. Trains on three corridors through Illinois that were added in 2006 have all been eliminated. So have several trains to

Milwaukee. The "corridor" between Chicago and Detroit (and then on to Pontiac) now hosts only a single daily round trip at this writing, but restoration of a second frequency will soon bring the line back to its 1971 service level. Before the COVID-19 virus struck, there were two daily trains between St. Louis and Kansas City. One was discontinued since then, and it appears unlikely that Missouri will be willing to fund its return.

That raises another issue: many states are facing severe financial stress, following the economic contraction that has occurred in the wake of the virus. With vaccinations now available, although many Americans continue to refuse that measure of protection, business and other institutions are re-opening. Despite the increased activity, it is too early to tell how much Amtrak, along with local transit, will recover. With financially-constrained states having to balance the competing uses for funds and deal with reductions in revenue from taxes, it is unclear how many trains will come back or how many of the new starts for state-supported services that Amtrak now proposes will actually be implemented.

Amtrak has done well to defy the skeptics and last for 50 years. Stay tuned, though, because it looks like "America's Railroad" and its passengers will be in for a rough ride for the foreseeable future.

For more-comprehensive coverage of Amtrak's 50th Anniversary, see the author's reporting in Railway Age on that publication's website, www.railwayage.com, particularly Amtrak 2035 Map: Hopes and Challenges, found at <https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/intercity/amtrak-2035-map-hopes-and-challenges/?RACHannel=home>, and Amtrak at 50, in the April issue of the magazine and at https://issuu.com/railwayage/docs/railway_age_april_2021/1?e=5256929/84509517 starting at 14.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member, and has ridden on every rail transit line in the United States.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S MAY 15TH, 2021 VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

Continued from page 1

routes feasible, particularly because Amtrak proposes to only fully subsidize the first two years. Over the next several years, funding would be completely turned over to the states.

Our next speaker, Andrew Albert, RUN's Vice-Chair and the Chair of NYC Transit Riders Council and Riders' Representative on the MTA Board, talked about the devastating effect of the pandemic on the nation's mass-transit systems, particularly the loss of ridership and revenue, including loss of dedicated taxes and fares. Fortunately, two federal COVID relief bills helped the nation's transit systems to recover, build back services, and restore payrolls and employees to their jobs. The pandemic highlighted how important our transit systems are to the economies and lifeblood of our cities and regions.

Our first featured speaker, Karen Christensen, owner and CEO of Berkshire Publishing Group, and founder of the Train Campaign, shared that a trip on the high-speed rail line from Shanghai to Huayin in China motivated her to become active to restore the Housatonic rail line from Pittsfield, MA to Grand Central Terminal (GCT) in New York City. Also known as the Berkshire line, it was the route to the Berkshires from 1842 until 1971. The Housatonic Railroad currently operates freight service over the line which is mostly owned by the states of Connecticut and Massachusetts. The Train Campaign is working to restore passenger rail service over this line and envisions year-round service, with six to eight trains per day in each direction from GCT to Pittsfield, making stops in six or more towns in Western Connecticut and Massachusetts. Karen reported that progress that has been made. During the Deval Patrick administration, the state of Massachusetts purchased 37 miles of track from the Housatonic Railroad and

has been upgrading the track and replacing ties on the part of the line it now owns.

The Train Campaign has been successful in building community support in Western Massachusetts. However, working with towns and the CTDOT in Connecticut continues to be a challenge, including the question of which route to be used from Danbury to GCT. Until recently, the preferred route was following the Maybrook Line from Danbury, CT to Southeast Station and from there on Metro-North's Harlem line to GCT. Now there is interest in using Metro-North's branch line from Danbury to Norwalk, CT and then its New Haven line to GCT.

Karen remains hopeful. Senators Ed Markey, Elizabeth Warren and Congressman Jim McGovern have reintroduced what is called the BRAIN TRAIN ACT, which would authorize \$5 billion annually over five years to invest in high-performance passenger rail projects that offer service to unconnected and under-connected communities across the country—such as those in Central and Western Massachusetts.

Our next speaker, Ben Hecksher, the co-founder of Trains In The Valley, provided an overview of the East-West Rail Study conducted by MASSDOT. The study examined six different options, ranging from a very basic service from Boston to Springfield with bus service beyond to Pittsfield, to a high-speed rail project that could cost \$25-26 billion to complete. The study didn't look at the new service from New Haven, nor service beyond Pittsfield to Albany/Rensselaer. The final report issued in January 2021 listed four steps that would be needed to move forward with the project. The steps include understanding CSX needs, which might add \$1.9 billion to provide separation, another study to determine the economic benefits of E-W rail; the need for a white paper to determine how the MBTA or some other agency could be involved in providing the service; and the need to find a federal government funding source.

Ben remains hopeful that E-W rail will become a reality. In the meantime, it has led to greater cooperation among the four different rail advocacy groups that have attended the E-W public meetings. There is now a Western Mass Rail Coalition, which shares info online, op-eds and strategy going forward. Gov. Charlie Baker and Rep. Richard Neal, who represents the First Congressional District in Massachusetts and serves as the chair of the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee, now talk to each other on a frequent basis and believe Congress will need to take action to provide funding to move E-W rail forward. Without funding, MASSDOT isn't terribly excited about the project.

Ben also talked briefly about the Valley Flyer, which is a two-year pilot program to provide passenger rail service from Greenfield to Springfield, MA and onto New Haven, CT. The Massachusetts State Legislature provided funds for two daily round trips and \$250,000 to promote the service, but because of COVID only one daily round trip has been offered to date. The second round trip will start this coming September, along with a marketing campaign to encourage greater ridership. As neither CTDOT nor Metro-North includes information regarding the connections between the two different services, Trains In The Valley has put a schedule online that shows the connections between the two services.

Our next speaker, Peter Cole, is a board member of the Maine Rail Group. He described the organization's effort to convince the Maine State Legislature to pass LD227 to provide \$300,000 for a feasibility study to determine the scope, costs and advantages of passenger rail along the state-owned rail corridor from Brunswick, ME to Augusta and then on Pan Am's lightly used freight in East Augusta to Waterville and Bangor. It is the first step in a multi-year process to ultimately obtain federal funds to help underwrite the cost of construction and the purchase of equipment to operate the service.

Continued on page 11

HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S MAY 15TH, 2021 VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

Continued from page 10

Peter pointed out that extending passenger rail on this corridor is a strategic investment in Maine's future. It will promote new economic development in the communities and region that it serves, support young people who wish to stay and succeed in Maine's economy, provide greater mobility for seniors and for commuters working in Bangor, Portland and the State Capital and for many of the 42,000 college/university students who attend schools in Central Maine. It will support tourism and address many environmental concerns.

Tony Donovan, Chairman of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition and commercial realtor, provided prerecorded remarks. He shared MRTC's plan to restore passenger service on the state owned St Lawrence and Atlantic rail corridor (SLR) from the Ocean Gate terminal which is two blocks from the Old Port area of Portland to Danville Junction and then northeast six miles on Pan Am's freight line to downtown Lewiston, which is within walking distance of Auburn.

Tony maintains that MRTC's plan will address climate change and promote greater economic development. It is more likely to be eligible for federal funding since the project would separate passenger trains from freight, which would not be the case if Pan Am's mainline was used from Portland to Lewiston.

His group has identified a potential Prescott Street site in Portland for a layover facility and station sites in

Falmouth adjacent to a senior living community and shopping center, Yarmouth Village, and at Yarmouth Junction where the *Downeaster* service runs off from Pan Am's main line to Brunswick. Eight miles farther north, trains would stop at a Pineland site which is near one of the largest business parks in the state containing a farm, office buildings and recreational trails.

Tony said the state currently has a plan for a commuter train service operating up to 22 round trips each day. The Maine State legislature in 2015 approved \$500,000 for a study to extend train service to the twin cities, with the proviso that each city would contribute \$50,000 to help

Tony Donovan, Chairman of the Maine Rail Transit Coalition, said the state currently has a plan for a commuter train service operating up to 22 round trips each day.

cover project costs. This study, completed in 2019, indicated that there is latent demand for transit service between Lewiston/Auburn and Portland. With transit-style service offering 12 - 20 trips per day, 600-800 riders would utilize the service in 2025 and 700-1,900 in 2040. The list of alignments, however, was reduced from eight to three, eliminating the SLR route from a new Ocean Gate Station. The committee instead recommended building a new passenger station on Pan Am's line in Portland to eliminate the need to back out of the existing Portland Transportation Center to maintain service to and from Freeport and Brunswick. At the February 2021 NNEPRA Board Meeting, Executive Director Patricia Quinn

announced that the Maine DOT is onboard and has pledged up to \$2 million for a feasibility study to build a new train station, which is expected to take two years.

In response to NNEPRA's and state reluctance to move forward with expanding passenger rail service to Western Maine, the MTRC has submitted several bills to the Maine Legislature this year. The most important, LD 991, would provide \$250,000 for a feasibility analysis for the SLR route, which is needed in order to apply to the FTA's New Starts Program.

Our next speaker, Jay Minkarah, the Executive Director of Nashua Regional Planning Commission, has worked in planning, economic development, and transportation in New England for more than 30 years. Jay pointed out the major obstacles that have to be overcome to move forward with the financing of almost any project in New Hampshire. The state 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. Jay also pointed out that Manchester and Nashua, along with the rest of Southern New Hampshire, are clearly part of the Greater Boston Metropolitan area, for over 30% of the workforce commutes to Boston.

While rail service to Boston first started in 1835, it ended when the last Boston & Maine Passenger train made its farewell run from North Station in Boston to Concord in June

Continued on page 12



One of two rail lines running through Nashua, NH. (Photo courtesy of Nashua Economic Development.)

HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S MAY 15TH, 2021 VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

Continued from page 11

1967. As early as 1980, 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 B&M to run two weekday frequencies from Concord, Manchester, and Nashua to Boston via Lowell, MA. It was abruptly terminated when the state of New Hampshire declined to provide an operating subsidy to support the continuation of service.

Jay stated the most important study to support the return of passenger rail was the New Hampshire Capitol Corridor Rail and Transit Alternatives Analysis completed in December 2014, which was commissioned by the New Hampshire Rail Transit Authority. This agency received grants from the FRA and FTA in 2010 to study and plan the Capitol Corridor. Unfortunately, the New Hampshire Executive Council rejected the \$4.2 million in federal and state grants for the study in 2012. Following the election of a new governor and new members in the Executive Council, the study got underway in 2013.

The Capitol Corridor Rail and Transit Alternatives Analysis Study, released in September 2014, evaluated several rail options. The most favored was the Manchester Regional Commuter Rail Option, which would extend MBTA commuter rail service 30 miles north from Lowell to downtown Manchester, with intermediate station stops in South Nashua, Nashua and at the Bedford/Manchester Airport. Capital costs were estimated at \$246 million, with \$10.8 million in annual operation costs, which were assumed to come from federal, state and MBTA sources and state revenue from passenger fares and parking fees. Ridership was estimated at 3,120 per weekday.

With the completion of this study, then-Gov. Maggie 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, but changed his tune in 2017 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 rail plan. With Democrats back in control of the legislature, Gov. Sununu has allowed the legislation to become law without his signature.

Despite this tortuous history, Jay remains optimistic about the possibility of the return of passenger rail to southern New Hampshire, especially since the governor and executive council in December 2020 finally authorized NHDOT to contract with AECOM Technical services to undertake the development and engineering phases of the project. He warned, however, it could change again, as there is opposition in northern New Hampshire.

Our final speaker, Christopher Parker, is the Executive Director of the Vermont Rail Action Network. Christopher is a consultant with 15 years of railroad experience. He talked about how the organization has partnered with 125 organizations to improve Amtrak service and the current effort to improve Amtrak. This effort includes talking to farmers and other food providers to improve food service. VRAN is also concerned about the proposed plan to sell Pan Am to CSX and has a "dog in the fight" because of the potential impact on freight rail service. He also talked about the fleet of Budd Cars that David Blittersdorf recently purchased and the possible start-up of a regional passenger service between Burlington and other northern Vermont communities. While he believes it would be good if the diesel engines could be switched out and replaced with battery-operated Tesla engines, he mentioned that it isn't in the current state rail plan or part of New England Central Railroad's plan.

Christopher also talked about the start-up of the *Ethan Allen* service to Burlington, which is scheduled for 2022. The proposed extension of service arose when the *Ethan Allen* was threatened in 2009. Since then, Vermont has received federal funding to upgrade the line and to build the Middlebury rail tunnel, which will replace the temporary bridges that were installed in 2017. The tunnel is nearly completed. There is still the need to build station platforms in Middlebury as well as Burlington, and Amtrak wants the historic rail station in New Haven, VT removed to a different location, since it is too close to the rail line and has been hit several times in the past.

Continued on page 13



HIGHLIGHTS FROM RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S MAY 15TH, 2021 VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

Continued from page 12

Following a public forum which provided listeners an opportunity to ask additional questions regarding the various proposed rail initiatives in New England, closing remarks were given by David Peter Alan, RUN Board member and a contributing editor for *Railway Age*.

David summarized by saying that that

local advocates have been making a strong effort to establish new lines and improve the services now offered in the region, and they deserve to have their efforts better-known to the general public and, especially, to the decision-makers in Washington and the state capitals.

Amtrak appears to know little about advocacy efforts of this sort, because their proposed 2035 expansion map (see above) only contains suggestions that were contained in official State rail plans or made by quasi-official organizations like NNEPRA. While these ideas make sense, suggestions from citizen-advocates, including RUN

members, are ignored; a result that is unfair and insulting to knowledgeable citizen-volunteers.

He said it is past time for Congress to eliminate the prohibition on expanding Amtrak's long-distance network that was enacted in 2008, change the funding formula for state-supported Amtrak trains and corridors to one that is more generous to the states, ensure stable and sufficient funding for both Amtrak and local transit, and mandate operating support for transit, along with the existing grants for capital projects.

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.

TIME TO EXPAND PASSENGER RAIL TO CENTRAL AND WESTERN MAINE!

**By Richard Rudolph, Ph.D., Chairman,
Rail Users' Network
Passenger Rail Journal, 2021- Issue 287.**

This is 15th in a series of articles highlighting what rail advocates are doing to improve and expand passenger rail service and rail transit in America.

The oft cited “Maine’s Success Story,” namely the *Downeaster* service, which began in December 2001 and now runs from Boston’s North Station to Brunswick, Maine, fails to include the work of rail advocates and transportation professionals who, over the past several decades, have been working to expand service to the major cities in central and western Maine. Even before the start-up of the *Downeaster*, the Maine Rail Group worked to help save the section of the former Maine Central’s “Lower Road” [MEC’s more southerly main line between Royal Junction/ Yarmouth and Waterville] Augusta and Brunswick from abandonment. This segment of rail line, ultimately purchased by the state, was a major part of MEC’s freight and passenger operations long before the sale of the company to the Guilford Transportation System in 1984.

Within two years of the initial start-up of *Downeaster* Service, 14 communities in central Maine passed resolutions calling on the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) to identify the Brunswick–Augusta–Waterville Corridor as a future passenger route extension from Brunswick, and to preserve this contiguous rail corridor and its rail infrastructure for future passenger and freight service. Instead, MaineDOT launched the Portland North Alternative Modes Transportation Project to address growing traffic congestion on I-295, and mobility needs within the Portland North area. This study, conducted in several phases, examined transit options in three different corridors: Portland–Yarmouth, Portland–Yarmouth–Auburn/Lewiston and Auburn–Portland via Yarmouth, and Portland to Bath/Brunswick. For each transit corridor, there was a baseline express bus option that would operate on the highway shoulder, an exclusive

right-of-way express bus option, and two different rail options on two existing freight lines—Pan Am Railway’s line or the St. Lawrence & Atlantic Line (SLR).

The intent was to develop a project that would be eligible for the Federal Transit Administration’s Small Starts funding program. During Phase I, the preliminary alternatives were narrowed down from 30 to 10 options. Phase II options included Pan Am rail options and all highway/bus on shoulder options. The SLR rail option, which was eliminated at the end of Phase I, became a bone of contention later when rail advocates launched several efforts to extend passenger rail to Auburn/Lewiston.

Although there was initial interest in extending the *Downeaster* to Brunswick, it really didn’t take off until the passage of the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act in 2009 and the receipt of a multi-million-dollar grant in the following year. This result led to a further refinement of the phase II alternatives including eliminating the Lewiston–Auburn alternative from further consideration.

Ultimately, MaineDOT decided during phase III to not apply to the FTA to obtain Small Starts funding. The FTA had indicated that the bus-on-shoulder option “while creative and a good use of existing infrastructure investments would not qualify as a fixed guideway under Small Starts guidance. The extension of the *Downeaster* to Brunswick opened up the possibility of regularly scheduled passenger rail service on the former Maine Central’s Rockland Branch, which is now owned by the state of Maine and leased to the Maine Eastern Railroad, which operated freight and seasonal passenger service between Brunswick and Rockland. It also sparked renewed interest in restoring passenger service to Lewiston/Auburn, Bethel, and possibly even intercity service to Montreal. MaineDOT, in co-operation with the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments and the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, embarked on a study in 2010 to determine the feasibility of restoring passenger rail service from Boston to

Auburn, Bethel, and to Montreal.

Bringing passenger rail to Lewiston/Auburn and Bethel and farther west through New Hampshire to Montreal was viewed as the next logical step “for mass transit in Maine, for all the skiers, gamblers, leaf peepers, hikers, and other tourist the trains would carry.” Patricia Quinn, the Executive Director of the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) which operates the *Downeaster* service, however, was less than enthusiastic.

She pointed out that NNEPRA was able to win the grant to restore service to Brunswick because it was shovel-ready, “backed up by years of planning, and a slow build-up of the trunk service between Portland and Boston.” She did concede, however, that the “extension up there (to Lewiston) is part of our master plan.”

Despite the lukewarm response from both MaineDOT and NNEPRA, rail advocates haven’t given up. The Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Maine Rail Transit Coalition (MRTC) and Grow Smart Maine, held a “Northern New England Rally for Rail” at the Bethel Inn Resort on September 14, 2011. It drew over 70 attendees including Maine and New Hampshire business leaders, town and city officials, and staffers from the U.S. Congressional delegation. The goal was to raise the level of awareness regarding restoring passenger rail on the SLR line to Western Maine, Bethel, and beyond to northern New Hampshire and Montreal.

The president of MRTC, real estate developer Tony Donovan, received a Smart-Growth grant in 2013 from the National Association of Realtors to look at funding models, and how increased tax revenues from rising property values that might be generated along the rail corridor could be recouped to invest in the rail infrastructure. This Smart Growth Mobility Report envisioned a commuter-passenger rail service operating seven days a week, year-round from Portland to Lewiston/ Auburn over the SLR rail corridor that connects Portland to Auburn

Continued on page 15

TIME TO EXPAND PASSENGER RAIL TO CENTRAL AND WESTERN MAINE!

Continued from page 14

and then on Pan Am's rail line to Lewiston. The start-up costs were estimated to be approximately \$138 million and the annual cost of service would be about \$3.8 million. The study recommended using a combination of \$20 million in private investments and \$27 million in state bonds, which would make the project eligible for \$91 million in federal transportation grants. The model included recouping investments in the rail infrastructure by capturing the additional tax revenues generated by rising property values along the rail corridor.

Based on this report, Lewiston legislator Margaret Craven introduced a bill in 2013 to authorize state bonds to fund a portion of the project. Although Craven said her bill wasn't a do-over of previous studies, but rather a fresh look based on new information and new economic circumstances, it failed to pass in the legislature.

The Maine State legislature in 2015 finally approved \$500,000 for a study to extend train service to the twin cities with the proviso that each city would contribute \$50,000 to help cover project costs. This study, completed in 2019, indicated that there is latent demand for transit service between Auburn/Lewiston and Portland. With transit-style service offering 12–20 trips per day, 600–800 riders would utilize the service in 2025 and 700–1,900 in 2040. The list of alignments, however, was reduced from 8 to 3, eliminating the SLR route from a new Ocean Gate Station that would have been built near India Street in Portland. The committee instead recommended building a new passenger station on Pan Am's line in Portland to eliminate the need to back out of the existing Portland Transportation Center to maintain service to and from Freeport and Brunswick. At the February 2021 NNEPRA Board Meeting, Executive Director Patricia Quinn announced that Maine DOT is onboard and has pledged up to \$2 million for a feasibility study to build a new train station which is expected to take two years.

In response to NNEPRA's reluctance to move forward with expanding passenger rail

service to western Maine, the Maine Rail Transit Coalition has submitted several bills to the Maine Legislature this year. The first would strengthen NNEPRA, the State of Maine Passenger Rail Authority, which appears to be solely focused on the operation of the *Downeaster*, which is contracted to Amtrak. The bill would open up state oversight of additional routes and operations and provide 100% of the multimodal funds from the car rental tax, which was originally established to help pay for passenger rail, to be administered by NNEPRA. It would also transfer state-owned rail infrastructure/assets to NNEPRA and create two separate leadership staff positions: an executive leader for the State Rail Authority and Executive Management for the *Downeaster*/Amtrak operation.

A second bill would provide \$250,000 to complete a feasibility analysis to satisfy the Federal Transit Administration requirements to become eligible to apply to the agency's "Small Starts" program to implement passenger rail service between Portland along the SLR rail corridor which the state currently owns, to Danville Junction (29.9 miles), and then on Pan Am's Railway for six miles into downtown Lewiston. This route intersects with the Amtrak *Downeaster* passenger service in Yarmouth and bisects town centers in seven of the commuter communities north of Portland. The primary purpose of this project, as Tony Donovan stated in a recent op-ed in the *Portland Press Herald*, is to improve transit mobility options in the original Portland North study corridor, which continues to experience major highway congestion that is expected to worsen over time. He maintains "the state currently has a plan for a commuter train operating up to 22 round trips each day, moving as many as 600,000 travelers annually, taking cars off the roads, operating a modern fleet of hybrid-electric trains, on a restored railroad that will provide a valuable link in the long-sought train connection to Montreal." Emulating the success of the *Downeaster*, he believes, this plan will attract valuable transit-oriented development investments in all the towns served along the corridor.

A third bill would authorize the issuance of a General Fund Bond for \$50 million which would be used to position Maine for a match of the FTA funding for the \$300 million current estimate for rebuilding 30 miles of the state-owned rail infrastructure, buying equipment, and

building train stations for the proposed Auburn/Lewiston passenger train service.

A fourth bill, LD227, introduced by Bangor State Senator Joe Baldacci, endorsed by the Maine Rail Group and supported by the MRTC, will also be considered during this legislature's session. Passage of this bill is the first step in restoring the state-owned corridor. It calls on the state to conduct a feasibility study for the 100-mile corridor from Brunswick to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor. The sponsors argue that it is the responsibility of the state to provide the funds needed for the study of these state-wide railway transportation corridors. Citizens of the entire state will benefit from expanded rail service. Notably, 90 percent of state residents live within one hour of this potential passenger railway. The study will also send a signal to CSX, which is planning to purchase Pan Am's railway, that the state is serious, not only about improved and expanded freight rail service, but also passenger rail expansion as well.

MRG believe state action is also needed now to increase mobility choices for the young and old. Passenger rail will ease access between cities and will encourage young people to stay and locate in Maine. Seniors 65 and older are entitled to 50 percent off the regular one-way coach fares on most *Downeaster* trains. Passenger train service will help expand aging-in-place options for seniors and increase access to medical care and social events in other cities.

Looking toward the future, the restoration of rail service to central and western Maine will also ease traffic congestion, reduce pollution, and create new economic opportunities and development, especially in downtown areas where transportation stations would be built.

Rail advocates believe it is time to take action now to expand passenger rail service in Maine, given the growing concerns about climate change and the need to reduce carbon emissions from automobile pollution. The need to also boost the economy from the ravages of the pandemic-induced recession and the sheer value of these critical transportation corridors should convince the Maine State Legislature to move forward on these bills.

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