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AMTRAK SLUGS IT OUT WITH CSX, NS, AND THE PORT OF MOBILE AT THE STB OVER GULF COAST TRAIN PROPOSAL

By David Peter Alan

A battle is raging before the Surface Transportation Board (STB) between Amtrak and potential host railroads over Amtrak's proposal to run two daily passenger round trips between New Orleans and Mobile, AL along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. The trial started early in April, and more sessions are scheduled. Potential host railroads Norfolk Southern and CSX strongly oppose the plan; at least if they do not get hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of infrastructure before they allow Amtrak trains on their lines.

The last time an Amtrak train ran

along that line was in 2005, before Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Mississippi Gulf Coast. All trains to and from New Orleans, including the tri-weekly train between that city and Florida, were suspended then, but all of the others came back and still run today. Amtrak ran a single daily train to Mobile briefly in 1984-85 and 1996-97, but those services ran for less than a year. A train ran on a tri-weekly schedule in 1970-71 and again from 1993 until 2005.

When we reported to you in our last issue, there had been a bitterly contested public hearing in mid-February that included

statements by public officials, railroad managers, rider-advocates, and other people around the country who either wanted the new trains or opposed them just as strongly. RUN Chair Richard Rudolph and board member J.W. Madison, also head of Rails, Inc in New Mexico, were among the advocates who made statements calling for the new Gulf Coast service to start.

Now the hearing before the STB, which looks and feels more like a courtroom trial, is in full swing and at least as adversarial as the February hearing. The board had originally scheduled four days for

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HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S APRIL 29, 2022 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

By Richard Rudolph, Chair, Rail Users' Network

Our virtual conference "Look West - here's where advocates are fighting to restore / expand rail service in the Western U.S. / British Columbia" began with a moment of silence to honor Dana Gabbard, who recently passed away. He was an outstanding RUN Board Member and one of the most knowledgeable, passionate and persistent transit advocates in the Los Angeles area.

Chair Richard Rudolph gave opening remarks. He stated that this month marks the 20th

anniversary of the Rail Users' Network, but there is still a need for the organization to press for reinvestments in our passenger rail and rail transit infrastructure as well as to provide a forum for rail passengers and advocates to share information and ideas about best practices through newsletters, regional meetings and conferences. RUN has been involved in the historic slugfest between Amtrak and CSX over the return of passenger rail from New Orleans to Mobile, AL. At the Surface Transportation Board hearing held in February, Rudolph represented RUN and testified in favor of restoring the service. He pointed out that

there is a huge discrepancy between the Federal Railroad Administration's cost estimate to upgrade the track along the line and CSX figures which would allow for two daily round trips from New Orleans to Mobile. The FRA's estimate is \$118 million. CSX first estimated \$2.3 billion would be needed; their figured has since been lowered to \$440 million. He also expressed concerns regarding the lack of mobility along the line and pointed out that CSX's estimate should be rejected, for it would create a dangerous precedent that could ultimately undermine Amtrak's 2035 plan

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ORANGE COUNTY'S SERRA SIDING EXTENSION IS A PROJECT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

By Brian Yanity

The Serra Siding Extension Project is under development by Metrolink (Southern California Regional Rail Authority) and Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA). Currently under environmental review, this fully-funded \$50 million project replaces a life-expired bridge and constructs a 1.2-mile siding extension alongside the 'Surf Line' track along Capistrano Beach in Dana Point. Part of Metrolink's \$10 billion Southern California Optimized Rail Expansion (SCORE) program, it will add reliability and flexibility at a critical point midway along the railroad track between LA and San Diego.

This piece was originally published on the Voice of OC website on April 8, 2022 (<https://voiceofoc.org/2022/04/yanity-the-serra-siding-extension-is-a-project-of-national-significance/>), and in the 2nd Quarter 2022 issue of RailPAC's quarterly magazine Steel Wheels.

The Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) rail corridor through Orange County is a vital economic corridor for the entire Southern California region. Passenger and freight trains have run on this "Surf Line" track since 1888. Its alignment through Dana Point and San Clemente is defined by the terrain, a key gap in the rugged coastal geography. The rail line will remain. In addition, the "Surf Line" isn't just a local railroad track; it is a route of national and regional importance, connecting the second and eighth largest cities in the nation, and is the second-busiest intercity passenger rail corridor in U.S. Several thousand rail passengers pass through Dana Point each day on Metrolink and Amtrak Pacific Surfliner trains.

Stewardship

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) as owner has the responsibly to manage this key national



The Serra Siding Extension project is currently under environmental review.

and regional asset, and needs to consider not just local stakeholders but also national and regional stakeholders. The "Surf Line" plays a key role in the state and national economy, and national defense. Amtrak and BNSF Railway also have federally guaranteed rights to use the corridor. As owner, OCTA is legally required to provide a functional railroad with sufficient capacity to meet its obligations to Amtrak and the BNSF.

America's Supply Chain and National Defense

Currently, several BNSF freight trains pass through Dana Point and San Clemente each day, resulting in about a thousand fewer trucks per day on I-5. Over one billion dollars' worth of goods move on this track per year, and it is vital to California's economy.

Transporting cargo on rail means that it is not going by truck. Per ton-mile of freight moved, this means much less fuel consumed, pollution, road wear, and risk of accidents. Some residents in Capistrano Beach wish the freight trains would just disappear from the track going through their community,

while others have even suggested that the whole railroad track be abandoned and allowed to erode into the sea, and that any improvements to it are therefore pointless.

No railroad line in the United States can be abandoned before receiving permission from the Surface Transportation Board, the independent federal agency that regulates transportation. In addition to its great utility for passenger and freight movement, the military value of the Los Angeles – San Diego line would be an important factor to consider in any attempt to abandon the line. Freight trains running through Dana Point provide logistical support for the routine and ongoing needs of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet in San Diego. The U.S. Army Military Surface Deployment & Distribution Command, which is responsible for all U.S. military rail shipments, has designated the LA-San Diego line as part of the Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET). As the only direct railroad link connecting the principal mainland port of the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet, Camp Pendleton and MCAS Miramar to the rest of the nation, the line must be maintained in a state of

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THE INTERBOROUGH EXPRESS: NEW YORK'S NEXT GREAT TRANSIT LINE?

By Andrew Albert

Many folks who have ridden various elevated subway lines in Brooklyn, such as the F, B, Q, D, and others, may have noticed an open-cut railway underneath the street, largely just south of Avenue H. When we see it, we notice it looks largely unused, and often there are discarded items of furniture, mattresses, and other debris littering the track. Unbeknownst to most people, this is actually a working freight line, with tracks stretching all the way from Bay Ridge, on the fringe of New York Harbor, stretching through Central Brooklyn, northeast through East New York, up past the cemeteries on the Brooklyn/Queens border, and northwest up through Middle Village, Maspeth, and into Jackson Heights. Known originally as the New York Connecting Railroad, it is now owned by CSX, and there are actually some freight trains—often in the middle of the night—that utilize this line.

Now, there is also talk, spurred by New York's Gov. Kathy Hochul, of using this line for public transportation! This 14-

mile line could cut the travel time of travelers from Western or Central Brooklyn to Jackson Heights to just 40 minutes! Along the way, the line would connect to 14 different subway lines, and make commuting between Brooklyn and Queens a breeze! While the G, M, J/Z, and A subway lines do connect Brooklyn with Queens, many are locals, and are basically oriented towards a Manhattan-centric commute. The Interborough Express could cut travel times in half, offer new routes & destinations, and get people out of their cars and onto mass transit.

While this route was originally also going to connect the Bronx with Queens and Brooklyn, there is no current capacity on the Hell Gate Bridge to accommodate a frequent transit service, especially with Metro-North's Penn Access service coming in a few years, which will connect the New Haven line with Penn Station. So planners have determined, although it is not yet final, that Jackson Heights, with connections to the E, F, M, R, & 7 trains, will be the final destination. Many are also calling for a bus connection to LaGuardia Airport,

which could make the trip to the airport from Central Brooklyn quite fast.

What is not clear yet, and will be the subject of public hearings and studies, is what mode of transport would be used on the Interborough Express. It would be built alongside the existing freight line, so the options are light rail, heavy rail, or bus rapid transit. It is also unclear who would operate the service, as it will be connecting with some of the Long Island Rail Road's infrastructure. If it is determined that it will be a commuter train-type service, it could end up being operated by the LIRR. If it is to be a light rail service, it could be operated by NYC Transit, or it could be a combination of the two. Heavy rail would mean installation of a third rail, while light rail would likely mean installation of catenary. Bus rapid transit would present a whole new set of problems, as two road surfaces would have to be constructed next to the existing freight tracks, which could be problematic. In any event, the line would connect the following subway lines: R, N, D, F, B, Q, 2, 5, L, A, C, J, Z & M lines, so as you can

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

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MBTA REPAIRS AND VEHICLE FAILURES PLAGUE THE SYSTEM; CONSOLIDATED EFFORTS SEEK TO MAKE TRAVEL EASIER LATER

By **Dennis Kirkpatrick**

For the past quarter, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has been engaged in both voluntary and emergency repairs on several of its transit lines. This has resulted in bus substitutions, delays, and some service cuts, and there is more to come.

On May 19 of this year, new Orange Line trainsets manufactured by Chinese-owned manufacturer CRRC were removed from service after a "braking issue" caused one trainset to become disabled. After the newer cars were taken out of service, it was discovered via a detailed analysis that bolts were improperly installed in the brake modules. There are 144 bolts like this on each train requiring a thorough examination and repair of all new Orange Line trainsets, and one test trainset in use on the Red Line.

The two lines' trainsets are nearly identical in that they share design, control mechanisms, and mechanics. They only differ in car body dimensions due to the subway tunnels that they operate in, each built in the early days of

subway build out, when there were few to no standards.

While these trainsets were eventually returned to service, an additional seven sets are now out of service for examination. The need to repair these bolt mountings will be ongoing as new cars are received, and until CRRC can start to review and implement corrective measures on their end.

According to MBTA General Manager Steve Poftak, "We have found seven cars where the bolts were out of the specified torque range. In many cases, it was not visually obvious that something had occurred, but just they were out of the specified torque range."

Earlier, these same trains were out of service after a slow-speed derailment at Wellington Station caused all the new vehicles on the Orange Line to be pulled off the tracks for about five months. In this case, a mounting plate between the car body and wheel truck was found to be worn and causing friction, resulting in wheel trucks binding and not turning on curves.

On the MBTA's Blue Line, service was shuttered to make repairs on the tunnel that passes underneath Boston Harbor. The tunnel is the oldest of its kind in the USA. The work was slated to only be required for about 2 weeks but several derailments of a "tool cart" extended the work several additional days. The work replaced a substantial amount of rail, ballast, and support ties or "sleepers." Once the harbor tunnel work was completed, a different section of track has been closed to perform emergency repairs on a pedestrian bridge that spans the tracks at the Suffolk Downs Station.

Elsewhere, the system's Green Line has completed part of the extension project. The branch to the City of Somerville and Union Square has been completed and is now open. Testing of vehicles has started on the branch to the City of Medford and plans state that will open sometime in the summer of 2022. Along with the extension, some additional transit cars were purchased from CAF USA, with delivery and testing ongoing. The extensions have also changed the terminus destination of several lines to better distribute passenger traffic.

B line now operates Boston College to Government Center, C Line operates Cleveland Circle to Government Center, D line now operates Riverside to North Station. The E line operates Heath Street to Union Sq., Somerville.

On the commuter rail side, a new system of fare gates is being installed at both North and South Stations, which will create a "boarding zone" similar to that found at airports. Passengers will use their rail pass or tickets to pass through fare gates and board trains from the new boarding area. This has been established to cut down on fare evasion.

Some closures have been executed or planned on several branches this year

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MBTA CRRC car 1426 leads an Orange Line trainset into a station. Trainsets have been rotated for repairs several times in their very early life span.

THE OTHER N-WORD: ENDING OUR PASSENGER RAIL TRENCH WARFARE?

By J.W. Madison

Here are an amateur activist's summary snapshots of national Rail in America.

You can learn more via these websites:

<https://www.railusers.net>

<https://www.railroadworkersunited.org>

<https://www.railwayage.com>

The ongoing Surface Transportation Board (STB) hearings about Amtrak's bid to restore service between New Orleans and Mobile AL, and the arrogant, untruthful, and downright outrageous resistance to this bid on the parts of CSX and NS, the two freight railroads "serving" this route;

A long string of fatal, disruptive, and expensive freight train disasters all over the US and Canada over the last ten years;

A deterioration of worker safety, working conditions, and customer service on the part of Big Freight;

Far greater spending on stock buybacks and other dubious (to say the least) financial tricks in the service of a limited number of Big Freight executives and preferred shareholders focused only on big short-term gains;

Increasing dissatisfaction, not only among workers and Rail passengers, but also among shippers and freight customers themselves;

The inefficiencies and dangers of running trains too long, too seldom, too slow, and hauling too small a variety of products;

A scarcity of fast, nimble, and customer-friendly short-to-medium-range freight and express trains;

The chronically feeble and half-starved condition of our national passenger Rail system;

A widespread public perception that our major track networks are public utilities like our highways, coupled with outrage at learning that they are in fact owned almost entirely by a few (and getting fewer) huge rail conglomerates;

These are several of the seemingly eternal obstacles to a smooth, fuel-efficient, safe, and pervasive national freight and passenger Rail system in service to the entire American public, including businesses trying to make a profit by actually providing needed

products and services—as opposed to making a few billionaires into multi-billionaires.

There is, in my opinion and that of damn few others (so far), only one long term solution to these crippling problems: The other N-Word:

The N-word you're thinking of represents attitudes of backwardness and, well, Evil. The one I'm thinking of, while in no way new under the sun, may represent forward thinking and, well, Good.

That word is Nationalization. This is an American concept, in that every other mode of transportation in our country features major infrastructure (and some rolling stock) in the hands of the entire public—which some call The Government. The RWU uses the term "public utility." Rails Inc calls this fantasy the "Rail Interstate."

Rails Inc strongly urges RUN to take the lead (i.e., stick our collective neck out) in setting up a thought experiment to study and explore answers to these questions:

— What if America's major track networks were publicly owned, in the manner of our freeways and other highways, our streets, our airports, and our waterways?

— How would this affect the welfare of our passenger trains and the prospects for short-and-medium-scale freight and express?

— How would this affect or change the structure and function of Amtrak?

— What would the role of Big Freight be on this national stage?

While you all are chewing on this, bear closely in mind that to Rails Inc, "Nationalization" **does not** mean seizure by force (we're not in the Third World yet), but a transfer of ownership achieved through ongoing discussion, negotiation, public input, and a fair purchase agreement, most likely monitored, I imagine, by the STB.

If you don't like this, let's hear some alternative visions. **If you do**, let's get started. Then maybe someday our national trackage might look like this (see below):

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



THIS IS WHY I ASK THE QUESTIONS

By Phil Streby

The following article from *Trains* magazine provides another great example of why I ask the questions. What are we, as rail passenger advocates, doing about the lack of equipment and personnel as well as low employee morale and late trains?

Our answers are most often perceived as "spouting the company (Amtrak) line." While, as Jim Mathews, CEO of the Rail Passengers Association, has said, there is a fine line we must walk in order to maintain our accessibility with Amtrak's upper management, that accessibility doesn't mean much if we can't successfully influence Amtrak management, as well as the rail passenger advocacy movement. At the same time, we strive to grow our own membership within state, regional, and national organizations while increasing our voice with our political representatives at each level of government. To do that, we need to be more active and more aggressive with our message: Passenger rail can help solve multiple issues in transportation, the environment, the economy, and society in general and with less initial cost.

If we can provide answers, we need to ensure they are being received as intended. Are we viewed as being aggressively critical? Again, as Jim mentioned months ago, RPA advised Amtrak against making the cuts and other choices which they did anyway. This needed to be voiced broadly outside our circle. As I am certain we are doing, Congress, the FRA, and the STB should be our target audience. It is clear that Amtrak isn't listening or has their own plan unknown to any of us, including the above government entities. Are we demonstrating our engagement with these entities and promoting the basis for these talks? Even more important, how can we assist? Conspiracy theories aside, it does appear that Amtrak wishes to rid itself of long-distance trains

The latest "information" going around the "net" concerns all the equipment now at Beech Grove supposedly for heavy maintenance or refurbishment or complete overhaul. It doesn't take much "swerving of thought" to believe this is just another example of Amtrak taking cars out of service, thus deliberately shorting inventory and restricting both ridership and revenue. Along with the lack of amenities supposedly caused by a lack of personnel, it appears that LD trains are being downgraded prior to being discontinued just as was done over 50 years ago by the now-host railroads when they needed to rid themselves of passenger trains. How, you ask?

The trains are running without the equipment (translation: passenger space available) they once had. Dining

It is far beyond the time to put Amtrak in the "hot seat." Congress provided the funding. What is Amtrak doing with it?

cars, if even available, do not serve coach passengers (continuous service notwithstanding), and table service is not an option (take-out only). While masking is no longer mandatory, "Vee half ways of keeping you in your seats! Anyvon leaving your seats vill spend the night 'in the box'!" [adapted, with attempted foreign accent, from the movie *Cool Hand Luke*] More often than in the not-too-distant past, passengers are being involuntarily removed from the train. (This is certainly good for word-of-mouth business.) What is causing this surge of unruly passengers which is also affecting airlines? I think I have some answers, and I've been told Amtrak is discussing this issue. But I digress.

Shorter trains with lack of the service that passenger rail traditionally provided would tend to discourage ridership which, could, in turn, further reduce the need for that LD train. Logic would suggest that shorter corridor routes could use less equipment and fewer OBS personnel while providing more frequent schedules, thus, corridor routes are more desirable than LD routes.

So, you ask, what has any of this to do with the dozens of Superliner and Viewliner cars now sitting at Beech Grove awaiting....?

If Amtrak doesn't have the mechanical personnel at the Grove to perform the needed work, then why are the cars not "on the road" serving the public and earning revenue while they await their turn for scheduled maintenance? (See how these theories get started?) It is a legitimate question, though, and Amtrak should be tasked with the response. To answer my question, "What are we advocates, doing about it?," I see our job as ensuring Congress has the proper questions to ask or even asking those questions during Congressional inquiries.

Although we might have some of the inside information, we come across as "drinking the Amtrak Kool-Aid" when we provide that information publicly. It is far beyond the time to put Amtrak in the "hot seat." Let them be the ones defending their own poor decisions as well as those who are making these poor decisions which are causing such widespread collapse of what little train service we do have here in the U.S. Congress provided the funding. What is Amtrak doing with it?

And now, the mentioned article: (see page 7)

'TEXAS EAGLE' SHOWS AMTRAK FAILURE TO CAPITALIZE ON ADVANTAGES OF RAIL TRAVEL: SPECIAL REPORT

By Bob Johnston

(Reprinted from *Trains* magazine)

ABOARD THE *TEXAS EAGLE* — “There is no Sightseer Lounge on this train. Once again, there is no Sightseer Lounge on this train,” emphasized the public-address announcement. “You must buy food to sit in the café car; if you don’t buy food and we see you sitting in the café, we will ask you to return to your seat.”

Another announcement warned passengers not to bring laptops into the car. There was, of course, no “fasten seat belt” sign or announcement, but there might as well have been. The message was clear: passengers were basically expected to stay where they were.

A recent round trip on the Chicago-San Antonio, TX train — once nurtured by the home-grown Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization, or TEMPO — showed how service has been castrated from Washington, D.C., by a cost-enamored management and a complicit board of directors.

Decline by degrees

The downsizing began in October 2020 with triweekly frequencies predicated on assumptions, made early in the summer, that in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, ridership and demand for all long-distance trains would be weak for the entire fiscal year. Prepared dining car meals available to all passengers had already devolved into portable meal-in-a-bowl entrees served only to sleeping car patrons, a pandemic-inspired panacea that fit comfortably into communal-spread before a COVID vaccine was available.

At that time, the Sightseer Lounge cars were sidelined from the *Eagle* and the *Capitol Limited*; the official justification was that these were “one-night long-distance trains” whose passengers supposedly didn’t need or want them.

The same reasoning was invoked when traditional dining-car service was eliminated in 2019 for all passengers on the *Silver Meteor*, *Crescent*, and *City of New Orleans*, after the debut of “flexible” meals on the *Capitol* and *Lake Shore Limited*.

However, the *Coast Starlight*’s Seattle-Los Angeles trip is only slightly longer than the *Eagle*’s journey. The *City of New Orleans*, on a much shorter schedule, has mercifully retained its Sightseer Lounge, in part because Canadian National requires a minimum 32-axle count on a portion of the route to activate signaling. The *City* has occasionally run with a combination diner-lounge Cross Country Café and an unstaffed Sightseer Lounge (with a “keep out” sign scrawled on a box blocking steps leading to the lower level).

In a 2021 letter to an *Eagle* passenger, Amtrak claims “retirement of the Sightseer Lounge car ... is part of Amtrak’s plan to modernize our fleet of equipment,” though the cars are not being retired. The letter adds, “these determinations were not made lightly and are being implemented wholly with the purpose of ensuring the financial excellence Amtrak requires to deliver intercity transportation into the future with superior safety, customer service, and efficiency.” The writer appears to have borrowed from communications responding to discontinuance of the *Starlight*’s popular Pacific Parlour Car first-class lounge, a move ordered by then-CEO Richard Anderson in 2018. Those popular but significantly older cars were, indeed, retired.

Ignoring the advantages of space

The company’s characterization of “financial excellence” is telling. A train is capable of providing a quality experience getting from here to there that travelers can’t get anywhere else. That’s because other modes aren’t capable of offering walk-around space and amenities. Air, bus, and highway alternatives effectively either restrict

passengers to a seat, require them to drive a vehicle at the expense of being productive, or both.

Rail’s drawbacks? In most parts of the U. S., those are comparative convenience and speed. Cars let you leave when you want and allow you to go door-to-door, rather than conforming to a schedule and figuring out how to get from station to destination. Except when traveling to rural or medium size cities, air service is generally fast and frequent. It’s no accident that news reports over the Memorial Day weekend talked about crowded flights and highways, with scant mention of Amtrak.

Today’s *Eagle* operates with lead service attendant in the café car who, when not manning the counter, is also supposed to serve sleeping car meals on the dining side of the car. Food is heated downstairs by the diner lead service attendant. Neither that person nor the sleeping car attendant are supposed to serve meals in the dining section. In practice, they usually pitch in to reduce customer wait times. Recent reports indicate that on *Auto Train*, the *Capitol*, and other services, sleeping car passengers are supposed to eat all meals in their rooms, thus extending onboard sequestration.

The thin staffing and equipment availability extends to *Eagle* sleeping accommodations, where four rooms are occupied by the onboard service employees. Historically, they occupied space in a separate transition sleeping car, which also provided additional revenue accommodations. With limited inventory, the lone sleeper is often sold out, or its high prices discourage patronage.

TEMPO involvement

Amtrak is developing its fiscal 2023 operating plan now. If its inflexible handling of national-network equipment

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A WILD SPRING AT NJ TRANSIT, BUT MOST RIDERS WOULD NOT HAVE NOTICED, EXCEPT FOR ONE EVENT

By David Peter Alan

There were a number of interesting events at the Garden State's transit agency this past spring, but most riders would not know about them, because they occurred at meetings of the Board of Directors. After longtime Secretary Joyce J. Zuczek, the last original NJT employee, retired, meetings went back to the traditional "in-person" format, there was a historic "No" vote, and a member who voted "No" on his own will soon be canceled from the Board.

Before the winter ended, there was an event that riders on the Morris & Essex Line certainly knew about, because it disrupted service on most of that line for a full week. On Monday, March 7, a strong storm blew down a large tree in Maplewood. It fell onto the elevated railroad structure in Maplewood, taking the catenary wire and a support down with it. There was no service anywhere on the line on Tuesday, but trains ran hourly between South Orange and Penn Station, New York starting on Wednesday. Riders west of South Orange were not so lucky. There was no service between Maplewood and Dover, nor did the line between Summit and Gladstone run at all. Advocates from the Lackawanna Coalition called on the agency to run diesel trains from Maplewood to Dover and a bus bridge to South Orange (the next stop east) and to restore service to Gladstone, where the line was not affected. That request was denied, and service was not restored until the following Tuesday, March 15.

While most of the M&E and the entire Gladstone Line were shut down, the agency's Board held a meeting that featured a historic vote. It concerned contracts for Academy Express, a privately-owned bus company, to operate buses in Hudson County (which contains Hoboken and Jersey City) for NJT. Academy had been paying fines and forfeitures for charging NJT for thousands of trips that the company did not run, but management still planned to hire the

company to operate the service. At the meeting, many advocates complained, and there had apparently been a change of mind at the top. Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, Transportation Commissioner and NJT board chairperson, complained about Academy in her statement. That apparently signaled to the rest of the board that Academy should not get the job. All other members voted accordingly. This marks only the third time in NJT's 42-year history that the Board had voted against a management initiative, and the only such vote that was unanimous. Coach USA was awarded the contracts instead, even though they came at a higher price.

Unanimity remained essentially an ironclad custom, as James Adams was not re-appointed to the board. Adams, a civil engineer from Newark, had voted "No" on a few occasions previously, including

NJ Transit Board meetings went back to the traditional "in-person" format, there was a historic "No" vote, and a member who voted "No" on his own will soon be canceled from the Board.

voting against budget proposals because he was not given an opportunity to review them before the vote was called. Adams has served for slightly more than two years, and the Lackawanna Coalition voted to honor him for his integrity in voting against measures he opposed. There were no dissenting votes cast between April 2003 and December 2014, and few since then. Flora Castillo, who cast two dissenting votes in 2016, was not renewed in 2019. Adams voted "No" a few times, and now he is leaving.

The April meeting was the first "in-person" gathering at the agency's offices since the COVID-19 virus hit. The board

was larger, as well-connected motorists joined the board. Lackawanna Coalition Chairperson Sally Jane Gellert complained in the *Railgram*, the Coalition's newsletter: "Populations not mentioned – as usual, they are again overlooked – are grassroots advocacy groups, transit-dependent individuals, or transit agencies outside our state. It seems that rubber-stamping will continue."

At its meeting on May 23, the Coalition voted to endorse the idea of "mask cars" on NJT trains. Adam Reich, an advocate from Central Jersey, suggested the idea at an NJT board meeting and was circulating a petition in support of it. Reich wants the agency to make certain cars available on each train for riders who will wear masks, much as everyone had done for 25 months, beginning in March 2020, when the COVID-19 virus struck.

From that time until April 18, when a judge invalidated the federal mandate that all riders on public transportation had to wear masks, most riders did so, and could be penalized if they did not. Now that the nationwide mandate is gone, some states (including New York) still require masks on transit, while other states (including New Jersey) do not. Some riders on NJT still wear them, but the majority do not. Reich argued that persons who have compromised immune systems or are otherwise susceptible to the virus should be allowed to ride in a car where everybody wears a mask. Presumably, that would also apply to riders who would feel safer or more comfortable riding in a car where everyone else wears a mask, too. The unions representing the crews oppose the "mask car" proposal, but the Coalition voted to endorse it. These cars would be similar to the designated "Quiet Commute Cars" that NJT has been running for several years.

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

KEEP UP THE PRESSURE. IT'S WORKING!

By Stu Nicolson

You could hear jaws drop all over Ohio on Jan. 29, 2021: the day a big story showed up on the pages of one of Ohio's smallest newspapers, the *Ashtabula Star-Beacon*.

The headline was innocuous enough: **"Federal Transportation Bill Could Bring Amtrak Station to Ashtabula"**. But the body of the story revealed much larger news. Amtrak, the now 50-year-old, perpetually underfunded national passenger railroad, not only was looking at massive funding increases, but also had big plans for Ohio.

Amtrak was planning historic increases in passenger service to every one of its existing corridors in Ohio. But the biggest news in what has become known as the "Amtrak Connects US" plan was the news that Amtrak had identified the Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati (3C&D) route as a "priority" project for reviving passenger rail in Ohio's most densely populated and most heavily traveled corridor.

We knew immediately this was "game on" time for All Aboard Ohio and our advocacy and political allies, especially those of us who remembered the promising 2010 attempt to start-up passenger rail in the 3C&D when then-Gov. John Kasich killed the plan by returning a \$400-million grant to the Feds, effectively killing it.

This time is different.

This time it's Amtrak knocking on Ohio's door with a bold, broad plan. Ohio has a second chance. And this time, it's up to all of us to make sure our leaders don't blow that chance.

As I write this, it is Spring 2022 and the question on all our minds is whether the current Ohio Governor, Mike DeWine, will issue an executive order to the Ohio Department of Transportation to commit to work with the Federal Railroad Administration and Amtrak. In simple terms, will Governor DeWine

"raise his hand" and roll Ohio's transportation future on rails?

You can make... and have made a difference.

- You've made calls, sent emails and written letters to your state legislators and local officials.
- You've authored op-ed columns and letters to the editors of all of Ohio's major newspapers...
- And those newspapers have also taken prominent editorial stances in favor of Amtrak's plans for Ohio.
- All Aboard Ohio has become the "go-to" source for broadcast, print and Internet journalists for their stories.
- A resolution in support of Amtrak's plans has been approved by city councils in every city along the 3C&D Corridor. Metropolitan Planning Organizations around Ohio have stood up in support and have made expansion of passenger rail in Ohio their #1 lobbying goal in the Ohio General Assembly.
- A resolution of support was introduced in the Ohio House and has 10 sponsors, including one Republican.
- All Aboard Ohio volunteers delivered a fact sheet and letter to every member of the Ohio General Assembly, asking for their support and to ask the Governor to "Raise Ohio's hand".
- All Aboard Ohio has posted almost all the above on our Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Instagram pages and other social media.

But our message to you today is....
Don't....Let.....Up!!!

We are being told our voices are being heard at the Ohio Statehouse and in The Governor's office. Now's the time to keep up the pressure.

Keep writing letters and making calls and sending emails....and tell your story.

- Tell your story to the Governor and legislators about why YOU need the option of connecting to jobs, education, health care or just going to a ball game, concerts or museums....by taking the train.
- Let them know that most Ohio legislators live in and represent districts that are or could be served by Amtrak. One Republican

legislator has already been quoted saying he would ride to Columbus from his district for every session.

- Let them know the millions of dollars in travel expenses by state employees that could be saved by not having to drive a car on state business.
- Let them know how more Ohioans riding trains helps reduce traffic, automobile emissions and dependence on oil and gasoline at a time when pump prices are gouging all of our budgets.
- Let them know how the Amtrak station stops in or near your community means attracting more economic development and jobs as it has in other states.

Ohio gets billions in federal dollars for highways, airports to move people. Why would we not want more investment in moving more Ohioans by rail and making our state a more attractive place to live, work or visit?

We share your impatience and frustration waiting for our state's leaders to make a decision. But I'm convinced we are very close on this and that now is NOT the time to let up.

UPDATE: Since my column, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine has ordered the Ohio Rail Development Commission to begin working with Amtrak and the FRA on both environmental study and a needs assessment of the 3C&D Corridor, as well as the existing Amtrak corridors in Ohio that are slated for possible service expansions. All Aboard Ohio has thanked the Governor for this action, but recognizes that when these studies are done, Ohio will have to decide if it wants to partner with the FRA and Amtrak to help financially by providing a share of FRA grants to get actual work underway.

We continue to educate and inform state legislators about Ohio's part in the "Amtrak Connects US" plan. We have gained significant support for these plans from several of Ohio's metropolitan planning organizations as well as city councils, mayors and corporate CEOs.

Stu Nicolson is executive director, All Aboard Ohio.

SEPTA RELEASES SCENARIOS TO REVOLUTIONIZE REGIONAL RAIL

By Andy Sharpe

SEPTA's Strategic Planning and Analysis department has released 3 scenarios as part of its Reimagining Regional Rail initiative. The three scenarios would dramatically transform Regional Rail by providing much more frequent service, cheaper fares, or more express service. The scenarios provide a marked contrast with current Regional Rail service, which is still reduced due to the pandemic.

The first scenario, which SEPTA is calling "Regional Coverage," would have half-hourly service across much of the Regional Rail system, with 15 minute-service between Glenside and the Center City, Philadelphia stations. Even far-flung locales such as Newark, DE and Thorndale would enjoy trains every half hour. Notably, this would put them on the same level as service to the Philadelphia International Airport, which would be half-hourly. This service would be in effect every day 5 AM- 1 AM, which would mark a dramatic increase even

from pre-COVID frequency. The second scenario, which SEPTA is calling "Metro Frequency," has proven to be popular among transit advocates and urbanists. This would introduce train service every 15 minutes coming from Chester, Media, Radnor, Norristown, and all stations between them and Center City. Further out stations like Newark, DE and Thorndale would have hourly service. Service between Glenside and Lansdale and Cornwells Heights and Center City would be half-hourly. This is a popular plan for those who live in inner-ring suburbs, and would mean for the first time ever Regional Rail headways would be on par with city bus headways.

The third scenario, which SEPTA is calling "All Day Speed," is all about speeding up Regional Rail trips through frequent express service from select suburban park-and-rides. This is more controversial among urbanists, as it emphasizes driving to select stations and parking. It would not result in a large increase in frequency for the majority of Regional

Rail stations, although the Norristown Line is a major exception with 15-minute headways to Norristown and all intermediate stops. The other component to this plan is better integration with Amtrak for inter-city service, and could possibly even include fare integration with the much more expensive carrier.

Ultimately, the final reimagined Regional Rail system will likely be a mix of the three scenarios above. It would likely also result in cheaper fares for Regional Rail, making the system more equitable with the bus, trolley, and subway system. As there continues to be a push away from the commuter rail model across the country with more people continuing to work from home, Reimagining Regional Rail looks to transform the system into a "lifestyle" network, and not merely a way to get to and from work.

Andy Sharpe is a RUN Board member and customer service social media specialist at SEPTA.

PENNSYLVANIA UPDATES

By Chuck Bode

SEPTA to resume Wawa service August 21

The Delaware County *Daily Times* recently reported that train service to Wawa is expected to return on August 21. Service to Wawa and beyond to West Chester was discontinued in 1986 because of poor track, a legacy of inadequate maintenance resulting from the financial difficulties of the Pennsylvania and Penn Central railroads and SEPTA itself. The 3-mile project, which includes a 600-car parking garage at Wawa, has been underway since 2010. The current date is dependent on resolving "supply chain issues" for the signal system. The *Times* also reported that regional rail ridership is at 44% of pre-COVID level while transit ridership is at 53%.

Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority

WHYY's web newsletter reported the formation of the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, which is to work on restoring passenger train service to Reading. The Authority was formed by Berks, Chester, and Montgomery Counties, each of which will have three members on its board.

The Authority has received a grant to fund a study. At the present time, Amtrak is expected to operate the service. A key party—Norfolk Southern, which owns the track from Norristown to Reading—seems to be missing from the project.

SEPTA Issues RFP for new streetcars

On May 10, SEPTA issued an RFP for new

streetcars for all 8 routes. Proposals are due July 28. The request is for 130 cars, with an option for 30 more. The RFP itself is 140 pages and the specifications are another 954 pages. The first 3 cars are to be delivered in 2026, followed by 36 a year for 3 years, with the final 19 in 2030. If bought, the optional cars would be delivered in 2030 and 2031.

"The vehicles shall be modern, articulated, low-floor, Streetcars, designed to be safe, reliable, and maintainable." The cars are required to be articulated with at least 3 sections and 80 feet plus or minus 6 feet long and 104 inches wide. The minimum curve radius is 35 feet 7 inches and the maximum grade 7%. The manufacturer is "to base the vehicle and its systems on proven designs" with a 30-year life. Four bicycle stowing racks are required.

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HOPES RISE FOR CHICAGO-MILWAUKEE-TWIN CITIES TRAIN SERVICE

By Clark Johnson

Motivated by the potential availability of funding, politicians and supporters of rail service seem to have awakened. Amtrak has restored full service (7 daily trains each way) between Chicago and Milwaukee, and the *Empire Builder*, 7 and 8, now runs daily. As part of their acquisition of the KCS, CP has relaxed their requirements for adding a second Chicago-Milwaukee-Twin Cities (TCMC) train. These are requiring the installation of a second platform on the west track at the Milwaukee airport station; completion of the Muskego yard bypass second track (to reduce the number of freight trains passing through the passenger station); extending CTC several miles west of the Milwaukee station. Other requirements including two sets of crossovers have been dropped.

A ceremony at LaCrosse on March 9 announced agreement among the three participating states--Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota—with Amtrak. Those attending the event included Stephen Gardner, Amtrak president and Amit Bose, FRA Administrator. TCMC service may start as early as next year.

There has also been a significant renewed interest in Madison service. Hopes for Madison service were high back in 2010 when an in-place fully federally financed program was ignominiously terminated by then-Gov. Walker. A Request for Proposal (\$120,000) by the City of Madison for a study on the location of a passenger station has been granted to a consulting firm.

Meanwhile, the Wisconsin Association of Railroad Passengers held its Spring meeting in Appleton and elicited considerable local support, including by local politicians. Of special interest was the possible re-establishment (after 50+ years) of rail service to the Fox River Valley. This would include Green Bay, DePere, Neenah-Menasha, Appleton, Kaukana, Wrightstown and Milwaukee.

Meanwhile, Minnesota rail supporters continue to face persistent objections from Republicans regarding funding for the Northern Lights Express between the Twin Cities and Duluth-Superior.

Clark Johnson is executive vice president of the American Association of Private Railcar Owners.

PENNSYLVANIA UPDATES

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Of significance to passengers is that only 44 seats, including tip-up seats, are required. The present non-articulated cars seat 51 in a much shorter vehicle. More passengers will be forced to stand, especially if service is reduced because of the larger cars. Many of SEPTA's passengers are elderly or mobility impaired and will be harmed by the reduced number of seats. It is also significant that articulated cars are required despite non-articulated low-floor cars now entering service elsewhere. Articulated cars will require additional funds to be spent to replace the present shop facility.

The cars are also only required to operate on the current routes. This condemns the remainder of SEPTA's transit passengers to bus service and residents in the remainder of SEPTA's service area to breathe the harmful, tiny particles made by bus tires as they wear.

Pennsylvania May Get Additional Train

Pennsylvania and Norfolk Southern are finally working together on a possible second daily train between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. WESA reported that "rail space" would be added at five yards costing \$142 million to \$170 million. Station improvements are also mentioned in a possible three- to five-year construction period.

Chuck Bode is a RUN Board member and member of the Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation.

ORANGE COUNTY'S SERRA SIDING EXTENSION

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good repair and have sufficient capacity for reasons of national security. It is also a key link in the movement of equipment for deployment of Army divisions from their domestic bases to overseas. The military prefers to transport its heavy vehicles by train whenever possible, as it is safer and more secure than by highway. It also causes less wear and damage to roads and equipment, while saving a great deal of fuel. Because armored military vehicles are so heavy, most are considered oversized loads on public highways. So, moving military cargo by train is much easier, less hazardous and less disruptive than in a convoy on I-5, I-15, or other public highways. All the major militaries of the world depend upon a strong domestic railroad network for logistical support.

If the U.S. military gets more involved in the Asia-Pacific region in the years ahead, you can expect more military freight trains to and from San Diego. As a historical reference, the Surf Line through Dana Point saw an average of more than 40 freight trains per day during World War II, or about 10 times the current number.

Reliability, Flexibility and Options

Reliability and flexibility are key to successful freight and passenger movement, and the Serra Siding Extension Project will add reliability and flexibility to this critical "meeting point" midway between LA and San Diego. Dana Point is the location where all scheduled trains meet. But even "on-time" trains can vary by a few minutes. A lengthened Serra Siding mitigates this variability by providing the distance to allow both trains to avoid stopping and the resulting extra fuel use and pollution from accelerating from a stop. Also, if there is an emergency incident or maintenance/repairs on one track along

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AMTRAK SLUGS IT OUT WITH CSX, NS AND THE PORT OF MOBILE

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the event, but there have now been 10½ trial days, which took place from early April through mid-May, and, at this writing, proceedings are scheduled to resume on Monday, June 13.

On one side is Amtrak, which has called four witnesses so far. Amtrak's opponents are the Norfolk Southern Railway Co. (NS), CSX Transportation, and the Port of Mobile, which was given permission to intervene as a defendant. NS owns the Back Belt, a line through New Orleans, which would host the proposed trains for about three miles. Amtrak's *Crescent* to New York uses it. CSX owns the rest of the route, about 138 miles on the New Orleans & Mobile, from Gentilly Yard in the Crescent City to Mobile. Both railroads argue that, without major infrastructure improvements, adding the new trains would seriously impair their current freight service and their projected growth of business.

The STB has jurisdiction over cases of this sort by statute, and the standard is that the new passenger trains could not "impair unreasonably" freight service on the host railroad (49 U.S.C. §24308(e)(2)(a)). CSX and NS have called for more than 11 new infrastructure projects on the route that is slightly more than 140 miles long. The total cost of those projects for both railroads could be as high as \$524 million. In contrast, the Federal Railroad Administration has suggested \$117.6 million for all necessary projects; a number endorsed by the Gulf Coast Working Group, an organization consisting of local officials in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana who support the proposed service.

Amtrak's adversaries, including the Port of Mobile, do not claim that they oppose the proposed trains *per se*, but they say that they need all of the infrastructure

projects they cite to avoid unreasonable impairment of their freight service. In effect, it is up to the STB to decide exactly how much new infrastructure will be needed to accommodate the passenger trains without "unreasonably" impairing the freight service and, in essence, to determine how much impairment would be "unreasonable."

Support for the proposed trains or opposition to the service falls along industry lines and geographic lines, more than political ones. Officials in Mississippi want the trains, because they would serve an area along the Mississippi Gulf Coast that is essentially unserved by any public ground transportation (there is one round trip on Greyhound between New Orleans and Mobile through Biloxi, and another run leaving Mobile and Biloxi in the middle of the night). Biloxi has a number of casinos, who apparently are eyeing New Orleanians, or tourists taking a side trip from there, as potential customers. Sen. Roger Wicker, from that state, is also a strong supporter. Most officials in Alabama, including those from the City of Mobile and the Port, strongly oppose the new service. Elsewhere in the country, CSX and NS shippers who fear that their freight service will be impaired oppose the introduction of passenger trains, while rider-advocates and officials in towns that have trains or want new ones support the proposal.

The trial centered on a model for simulating operations on a rail line: Rail Traffic Controller (RTC). Many of the witnesses for Amtrak's adversaries modeled the line at issue for CSX or NS, and used the results of their studies to claim that the infrastructure that had to be built before the new trains could run cost an amount in accord with the numbers that the railroads had demanded. For its own part, Amtrak's witnesses attacked the studies that the railroads had presented. They said that CSX and NS did not share information with Amtrak that would have been needed for Amtrak to model the line, and that the study in question used "randomized" information in part, which

does not deliver the precise picture of operations on the line that would show reliably how much new infrastructure is needed. Amtrak's witnesses also claimed that there were 1,265 movements over the line for which CSX could not account. For those reasons and others, they attacked the credibility of the railroads' studies, but not that of the RTC model itself.

There was some discussion about where the Amtrak trains would terminate in Mobile. Amtrak wants to use the location it had used when trains ran before; in downtown Mobile, near the Convention Center, the cruise ship terminal, and the city's museums and historic attractions. City and Port officials want the station at the future site of Brookley Airport, about five miles south of the city, in a location not served by local buses. The current Greyhound bus station is several miles from the downtown core, and local buses only go there to connect with some of the Greyhound runs. Although Amtrak has not submitted its own estimate of the cost of the infrastructure it considers necessary, the Amtrak proposal includes a station track downtown. Since the proposed trains would be short, a station track where trains would be stored during the layover could also be short; perhaps as short as 500 feet. A station track would also have the advantage of keeping Amtrak's trains away from the Port's yards, which are about 2,500 feet or more from Amtrak's proposed downtown station location.

There were few dramatic moments during the trial, as most of the witnesses concentrated on technical aspects of the model and of railroad operations. "Getting into the weeds" can be interesting to some people, but spending 10½ days or more in those weeds can be difficult. The members of the Board asked good questions; some difficult ones and some thought-provoking ones, of the witnesses for both sides. They seemed willing and competent to learn what they need to know, so they can make intelligent decisions in this case.

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AMTRAK SLUGS IT OUT WITH CSX, NS AND THE PORT OF MOBILE

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If anyone has established himself as the “star” of the proceedings, it’s STB Chair Martin J. Oberman. He is a longtime Chicagoan, with more than 50 years’ experience as a trial lawyer. His evidentiary rulings made sense, he never held back on questioning witnesses when he believed that he needed the information that they could furnish, and he stood his ground when lawyers made objections or questioned his rulings. Throughout the proceedings, he mentioned the Board’s role in protecting freight operations, passenger operations and, most importantly, the public interest.

On May 12, after the last witness had concluded, Oberman made a 35-minute statement concerning the case. There was only a half-day of trial testimony, because Oberman and the other STB members had spent the morning before the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee, defending the Board and presenting its plans for the future. Other Board members commented too, but Oberman got right to the point.

He criticized both sides for deficiencies in their cases. He said that he and his colleagues did not yet know enough to make the sort of decision they are required to make, with the information they had so far. He blasted Amtrak for relying on the argument that CSX and NS had not met their burden of proving that the Amtrak trains would not impair their freight operations unreasonably. He leveled more criticism at the railroads for not proving that they would need all the infrastructure they demanded, saying that they appeared to be calling for “no impairment” and enough infrastructure to allow Amtrak trains a 95% on-time-performance level, when the applicable standard is only 80%. He also criticized the parties for not presenting evidence about how

Amtrak could run the proposed trains at 60 miles per hour; the standard speed authorized by the statute.

Oberman acknowledged in his statement that he can’t force the parties to come back and present more evidence, but he strongly suggested that they do so. The trial is now scheduled to resume on June 13.

This is a case of first impression, and the precedent it sets will determine how much infrastructure must also be built to accommodate other lines that Amtrak hopes to establish along with various states, as expressed in its *Connects US* plan for starting new routes and corridors between now and 2035. So, this is a very important case, which will decide how much it will cost to start those proposed new services.

This article provided only a summary of the action, which is not yet over. This writer has been covering the case throughout the trial and before it for *Railway Age*, with about 30,000 words of reporting so far. Two full-time editors and two other Contributing Editors have also reported about it, and all of this coverage can be found on the *Railway Age* website, www.railwayage.com. Read all about it there.

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

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE RAIL USERS' NETWORK'S APRIL 29, 2022 VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

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to expand service to other cities across the nation.

RUN has also submitted testimony to the Chairs of the House and Senate Transportation Committees regarding Amtrak’s decision to extend its current five-day-a-week long distance service until May 31 and now even later. Amtrak reduced all its daily services to

three days each week in the fall of 2020, doing so because of COVID. RUN strenuously opposed this decision, and contacted congressional and senatorial representatives. Even though Congress ultimately provided extra funds needed to continue 7-day-a-week long-distance service, Amtrak ignored the concerns of Congress and rail passenger advocates, not only curtailing daily service, but also furloughing operating and service personnel across its entire system of routes.

Congress not only came through with funds enabling Amtrak to continue operating until the government mandated nationwide COVID shutdown ended; it also added an additional \$66 billion to repair, refresh and buy new equipment, and to improve and expand service around the country. The restoration of daily long-distance, however, has not fully occurred because of Amtrak’s service reduction plan which included closing its hiring and training departments. Some of the furloughed service and operating crews are not returning, as RUN forewarned, while Amtrak has been unable to rapidly hire and train new personnel.

The first featured speaker, Elaine Gregg, President of Boise City Council and Program Director of Idaho Smart Growth, described the ongoing effort to restore passenger rail service in the Northwest, including the *Pioneer* and *North Coast Hiawatha* routes, which ended in 2007. The City of Boise, along with the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho and various state rail groups and regional organizations, are spearheading the effort. She pointed out that the Infrastructure Investment Jobs Act (IIJA) provides \$15 billion in funding to study discontinued long-distance lines including the *Pioneer*, *North Coast Hiawatha*, *Desert Wind* and others, as well as routes with less than daily service for feasibility and cost benefit for restoration. It includes \$12 billion in funding for long-distance routes, including \$4 billion that must be spent

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on rural long-distance routes. The IJIA also authorizes up to 10 regional rail compacts or commissions. She also pointed out that long-distance passenger train routes connect major urban areas with each other and with smaller cities and communities, which are becoming more isolated as regional airlines and intercity bus services disappear. Given the economic benefits of passenger rail and environmental advantages, she is optimistic that the long-distance routes which have been abandoned will be restored.

The next speaker, Matthew Buchanan, a Board Member of Transport Action, B.C., described the ongoing efforts to improve and restore intercity passenger rail service in British Columbia. The *Skenna* which runs from Prince Rupert to Jasper in the Rocky Mountains, was originally an overnight train, but is now a two-day train that operates from Prince Rupert to Prince George and then the next day to Jasper. The train currently only runs one day a week but will return to 3 days a week later this summer. Matthew believes the train equipment, built in the 1950s, needs to be replaced, the train schedule needs to be respected by the Canadian National, which runs over this line and the service should be extended east to Edmonton. Matthew also provided a brief critique of the *Canadian*, which runs twice a week from Toronto to Vancouver eastbound on CP's tracks and westbound on CN's tracks. As a result, some stations are only served in one direction. The trip now takes four nights, reducing its usefulness for local travel. Trip time is now the same as it was in the 1940s. It now takes 19 hours from Vancouver to Jasper and there is only one day a week where the train can possibly make a same day connection with the *Skenna*. Given all this, there are those who still enjoy the train's dome car, good food, glass roof cars and places to read or talk to other passengers on the train.

Matthew was more upbeat describing the potential for the return of passenger train service between Victoria, Nanaimo and Courtenay on Vancouver Island, B.C. It was suspended indefinitely due to poor track conditions in 2011. The Island Corridor Foundation, which took over ownership of the land and track in 2016, hopes to restore service next year. The B.C. government has conducted a study estimating that it would cost between \$326 million and \$728 million, depending on the class of service offered, to restore the line. The foundation's CEO believes it would cost less and hopes it will happen next year. The B.C. Supreme Court dismissed a First Nation Tribal claim that the land which the track sits on was expropriated in 1911 and is no longer needed, so it should revert back as reserve land. Matthew also mentioned that Amtrak's *Cascade* service is currently suspended because of a lack of crew members to operate the trains. Amtrak just announced the service will not be restored until December of this year.

David Strohmaier, a Missoula, MT County Commissioner, was the next speaker. His topic was the creation of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority in November 2020, and the possible restoration of the *North Coast Hiawatha* train service from Chicago through Southern Montana and northwest to Spokane and Seattle, WA, a service which ended in 1979. He pointed out that advocates had been working over the past four decades to restore passenger rail service to southern Montana without much success. The Montana Legislature was not particularly interested. Through his own research, David discovered that there was indeed legislation still on the statute books that could allow for the creation of a passenger rail authority. Given this discovery, he took the initiative to establish the Montana State Rail Authority in November 2020. Currently 18 counties have joined the effort and their representatives have been meeting with tribal officials and BNSF officials. In closing, David pointed out that rail advocates need to find out if there is statutory authority to establish a regional rail authority where they live. "Advocates shouldn't be

deterred by recalcitrant legislators, just-say-no bureaucrats, or well-meaning, but circular firing squad passenger rail advocates. Passenger rail is bipartisan." He said, "We can do this."

Steve Roberts, President California RailPAC, described the Valley Rail Program, its history and the current status of several different segments that are taking place in the San Joaquin Valley. The Valley Rail Sacramento Project will expand Amtrak's *San Joaquin* service and the Altamont Corridor Express (ACE) passenger service to the greater Sacramento area through the construction of new rail stations and track improvements along the Union Pacific Railroad's Sacramento Subdivision, to the greater Sacramento area. The second component, called the Valley Link Rail Project, will connect Northern San Joaquin County communities to the Tri-Valley and Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) through frequent and fast rail service via the route through the Altamont Pass. This will provide an unprecedented opportunity to deliver a fast and efficient inter-regional rail service—connecting people, housing and jobs in the Northern California region and providing much-needed congestion relief.

Construction of the first stage of the project—the line between Dublin/Pleasanton BART and Mountain House—is scheduled between 2025 and 2027. The third segment involves an extension of the Altamont Corridor Express, which currently runs from Stockton to San Jose, from Lathrop to Ceres, using ACE funding from Senate Bill 132. The next phase from Ceres to Merced will be double-track and will extend ACE passenger rail service along approximately 34 miles from Ceres to Merced. The proposed project would include the development of a layover & maintenance facility, located in north Merced.

Our next speaker, Julie Owen, Senior Executive Officer, Project Management Oversight, L.A. Metro, described some of the major construction projects which are being undertaken to improve and

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expand service for transit riders in Los Angeles County. She pointed out that a lot is happening now, especially since the Summer Olympics will be held in L.A. in 2028. There is currently \$24 billion for construction projects, of which \$4 billion is being spent this year alone. Two major segments of the Crenshaw/LAX line between the southern terminus and 48th street are complete and the northern terminus at the E Line (Expo) is anticipated to be completed later this year. Metro also has under construction an \$898.6 million Airport Metro Connector Project that will directly connect the Metro system to the Los Angeles International Airport. The Airport Metro Connector Project is the ninth station along the Crenshaw/LAX Line currently under construction and will connect directly with the Los Angeles airport's automated people mover project.

The Purple line is being extended to the West Los Angeles VA Medical Center in Westwood, with a completion date set for 2028. The third phase will also include a station adjoining the UCLA campus, connecting the Olympic village and Pauley Pavilion with venues in downtown. Los Angeles Metro has also reached an agreement with the California High-Speed Rail Authority to modernize LA Union Station, which will allow trains to enter and exit from both the north and south ends of the station. This will increase capacity for rail service and reduce train idling times. The project will also improve connections between Metrolink, Metro rail and bus services.

Jim Souby, President of Colorado Rail Passenger Association, first talked about some of the lessons that he and other members learned from first serving on the Colorado Southwest Chief Commission before the repurposed Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission was established in 2017. The effort to save and restore Denver's Union Station, as

well as the effort to prevent Amtrak from suspending the *Southwest Chief* train service in a section of Kansas, Colorado and New Mexico provided invaluable lessons regarding the need for collaboration and support from Amtrak and BNSF officials. It was equally important to provide rail excursions to get legislators and other public officials on trains. Being on trains, Jim said, changed people's minds. The restoration of the ski train from Denver's Union Station to Winter Park Resort has also led to sparking interest in having trains along the Front Range. A poll conducted by Colorado Rail showed that 85% support front range rail and 62% said they would support a bond issue.

The 17 members of the repurposed Commission, which include non-voting members from CDOT, BNSF, UP and the RTD, have focused on building a rail system from Fort Collins to Wyoming's border and down to Pueblo, CO. In 2018, the Colorado General Assembly made a \$2.5 million General Fund transfer to fund the Commission, including the development of a rail passenger service plan for the Front Range corridor. Since then, the commission has considered several different route options north of Denver but is now focused on the line which goes to Boulder, Longmont and Fort Collins. Last year, the Colorado Legislature created the Front Range Passenger Rail District, which will replace the existing commission on July 1, 2022. The new commission hopes to ask voters in 2026 to approve a new sales tax up to 0.8% within the district to pay for the new train service, but only after making every effort to receive federal funds.

Our final speaker, J.W. Madison, President of Rails, Inc., described the *Rocky Mountain Flyer*, which his group has been advocating for over the past 12-13 years. The proposed service would run from El Paso, TX to Shelby, MT. He related that progress has not been made because of massive subsidies given to other modes of transportation. What's needed, he stated, is public ownership of the major track, funded and operated as a single rail interstate system. Amtrak has never been fully funded nor is it a private company. The

question that needs to be decided is: is it a business or mere charity. There is also the matter of big freight. Historically, freight railroads have done a good job but with 2- to 3-mile-long freight trains, there are problems. J.W. believes a publicly owned interstate railroad might have the power to get rid of the excesses that currently exist.

David Peter Alan, a RUN Board Member who is a contributing editor to *Railway Age*, gave a wide-ranging summary of the presentations as well as sharing his views on the major projects, the direction Amtrak is currently headed, and the actions that must be taken to ensure Amtrak does indeed bring back many long-distance routes to the system. Needless to say, the repeal of PRIAA legislation featured prominently in Dave's summary.

ORANGE COUNTY'S SERRA SIDING EXTENSION

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the "double-tracked" siding, then a train can pass it on the other unimpeded.

One thing we have learned over the past two years is that having options is vital and has real bottom line value. Not having transportation options is in fact a high risk, "bet the company" strategy. One of the factors OCTA and Metrolink must consider in their funding decisions is unforeseen circumstances. For example, only five years ago, U.S. 101 in Santa Barbara County was completely blocked by a mudslide. The *Surfliner* train offered expanded service, but the service that was offered was limited because of the lack of key sidings along the largely single-tracked route. What happens if a bridge on I-5 collapses in a flash flood or the road is filled with mud? Will OCTA's rail line through Dana Point have the capacity to provide an alternative to I-5?

Brian Yanity, of Fullerton, CA, is a RUN Board member and the Vice President-South of the Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada (RailPAC), a 501(c)3 all-volunteer non-profit passenger rail advocacy group founded in 1978.

THE INTERBOROUGH EXPRESS

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see, all types of convenient connections could be utilized. It will absolutely change the commute of millions of New Yorkers, but several questions remain.

In January, Gov. Hochul directed the MTA to begin the environmental review process, and identify the best mode of transit for the line—heavy rail, light rail, or BRT. In addition, we will have to identify the best funding sources for construction & operation of the line, which will determine the timeline for construction, the mode of operation, and potential stops. A virtual town hall on the Interborough Express was held recently, with large audience participation, and there's no doubt excitement is building over this potential game-changing new transit option. The fact that the route already exists, and would require upgrades, some widening, a general cleaning up, as well as station construction, is also building momentum, as well as a discussion as to the best way to get freight across New York Harbor to New Jersey.

It is unclear what will happen to the project should Gov. Hochul not be re-elected. But the discussion of this little-used rail line has begun, and will likely continue pending a determination as to how to proceed. There is no doubt that excitement is building, especially among those who live within close proximity to the rail line, and we expect the excitement to continue, as future plans for the line become known. Stay tuned!

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

'TEXAS EAGLE' SHOWS AMTRAK FAILURE

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and personnel deployment in 2021 and 2022 is any indication, the initial plan will remain etched in stone for the entire year, regardless of revenue-generating opportunities or demand trends that might develop. The real danger is that the *Texas Eagle's* ability to link vibrant rural and mid-sized Southwest communities with Chicago, St.

Louis, Little Rock, Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, and San Antonio is being permanently stymied by its downsizing. Embedded in this route are multiple city pairs Amtrak insists it wants to serve with the "Connects US" 2035 corridor plan — and some it doesn't care about. Restoring personnel, equipment, and amenities to attract more customers means adding costs, even if the moves enhance the train's revenue and Amtrak's relevance.

But that's where the Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization wants to help — again. The *Eagle* had been on the same management chopping block that claimed the *Pioneer* and *Desert Wind* in 1997. Local political activism by civic leaders, the promise of future mail and express revenue, and a state loan approved by Gov. George W. Bush at the urging of Texas U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison helped save the *Eagle* after it had literally disappeared from the May 10, 1997, timetable. In response, the locals formed TEMPO to assist Amtrak in actively marketing the train. The vow at the time: we can't ever let this happen again.

The group's contributions included establishing promotional initiatives in online communities and, with the blessing of then-Amtrak president George Warrington, nightly management of inventory to maximize revenue. Dr. Bill Pollard, a Little Rock, AR-area dentist, voluntarily matched sleeping car pricing to inventory every night for 20 years until Amtrak CEO Anderson ended the practice in 2018.

These stories were recounted recently at a combination TEMPO business meeting and 25th-reunion barbecue, hosted by former Amtrak local revenue manager Griff Hubbard, to celebrate the 80th birthday of now-retired *Texas Eagle* General Manager Joy Smith.

TEMPO member Christina Anderson of Marshall, TX, unveiled a prototype sign that was enthusiastically received by representatives from other communities, including those along the *Heartland Flyer's* route. All agreed more attention to the website in the digital era is required as well. Participants were ready to roll up their sleeves again, but most had a major concern: how can we promote the *Eagle* experience if capacity remains constricted and the onboard product isn't right?

and quality dining car meals available to coach passengers entered virtually every conversation. Will those current deficiencies become "the new normal?" The jury is still out.

Phil Streby is a RUN Board member and director of the Indiana Rail Passenger Alliance.

MBTA REPAIRS AND VEHICLE FAILURES

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to improve or implement Positive Train Control (PTC). The MBTA has taken a stance of performing these construction and repair windows in a way that allows continuous repairs or construction until complete. This shortens the repair window substantially reducing work from several months or years to just a few weeks.

One specific project to the north, the Gloucester Rail Bridge over the Annisquam River has been completed to a point where trains can once again go the full route through Gloucester and on to Rockport. The bridge is currently operating a single track but when fully completed it will be a double track crossing. For now, trains are back in service the full route.

To the south, the extension of MBTA commuter rail to New Bedford and Fall River is ongoing and so far on schedule.

On the surface, the MBTA has recently announced a project to redesign all of its bus routes throughout the system. Some will be extended and attempt to eliminate duplications and change some end points. The project would also see new stops added but some older ones eliminated. The design is still in its early stages and subject to public input that is just starting. While a few routes could be adjusted this summer, many will be months in dialogue.

As always, travelers are encouraged to consult the MBTA online system for details at www.mbta.com or download one of the many popular applications for your phone.

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.

AN UPDATE ON PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

By Richard Rudolph, Chair, Rail Users' Network

A lot has been happening in Western Massachusetts over the past four years regarding passenger rail. Ridership on the new CT Hartford line, first launched in June 2018 to provide faster and more frequent service from New Haven to Hartford and Springfield, MA, continues to be viewed as a model that can be replicated elsewhere. Before COVID, the new service averaged nearly 51,000 passengers per month and hosted more than 630,000 passenger trips in its first year of operation.

These impressive ridership numbers were only part of the success story of the Hartford Line. It also provided over \$430 million in transit-oriented development in Wallingford, Meriden, Berlin, Windsor, and Windsor Locks. These new residential and commercial developments, combined with convenient rail service, helped to connect communities and generate economic growth, while providing a strategic link to travel corridors and markets within and beyond the region. In March 2020, train service was cut back to ten roundtrips on weekdays because of the COVID pandemic. Since then, the service has been fully restored and there are 22 trains operating a day during the week.

A new transit-oriented project is currently underway in Windsor Locks. The development will include a new 500-foot-long boarding platform, traffic improvements, parking, indoor public market, and retail space. The historic train station will be restored and transformed into a welcome center, bistro, and a small-batch brewery. The 160-unit Montgomery Mill Apartment complex, built last year, is already fully occupied.

The success of this service sparked new interest in passenger rail service elsewhere in the Pioneer Valley. Amtrak, in conjunction with MassDOT, launched the *Valley Flyer* service on Friday, August 30, 2019. It is a state-supported

seven-day-a-week passenger train service from Greenfield, Northampton, Holyoke, Springfield and continues on to New Haven, CT, where passengers can embark on Metro-North or Amtrak to New York City or elsewhere on the Northeast Corridor. While this train service was reduced to one roundtrip per day at the height of COVID, trains currently depart Greenfield at 5:45 and 7:35 a.m. and northbound trains arrive 10:23 p.m. and 12:35 a.m.

There is also renewed interest in east-west rail from Pittsfield to Boston. In January 2021, MassDOT issued its final report for the East-West Passenger-Rail Study. The report examines the potential benefits, costs and investments necessary to create a passenger rail service that would connect riders in western, central and eastern Massachusetts.

The study outlined three alternatives that could be most favorable for East-West service. All three alternatives recommended the use of shared track from Pittsfield to Springfield on CSX's rail corridor, and the use of shared track on the MBTA line from Worcester to South Station in Boston. The estimated cost ranged from \$2.4 billion to \$3.9 billion or \$4.6 billion, depending on whether the existing CSX track from Springfield to Worcester, an independent track between Springfield and Worcester, or an independent passenger track with high-speed shortcuts between Springfield and Worcester is used. Depending on which option is selected, travel time ranged from 3 hours and nine minutes to 2 hours and 49 minutes between Pittsfield and Boston. Travel time ranged from an hour and 57 minutes to an hour and 37 minutes from Springfield to Boston. The study also recommended next steps: a follow up - which would detail economic and community impacts and potential governance of the new passenger rail service, and possible funding sources and discussions with CSX about the use of

its tracks from Pittsfield to Springfield and onto Worcester.

The lead sponsor of the study, Democratic State Senator Eric Lesser, along with other rail advocates, questioned the ridership numbers that were estimated in the study. MassDOT's two-year feasibility study only looked at ridership on the East-West route. It didn't include passengers who would transfer from trains on the Hartford Line. It ranged from 278,000 to 500,00 riders a year. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the Capital Region Council of Governments in Connecticut questioned these numbers and hired a consulting firm to do a sketch-level analysis. AECOM put ridership at 469,000 to 720,000 a year.

In November 2021, MassDOT issued a white paper which provided background on the issues that influence passenger rail operations and governance operations. The approach taken, however, was "a slight departure from the original concept for the paper, which contemplated a menu of options examining different ways to approach governance and service models for further discussion." Given the likelihood that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act would pass, MassDOT officials included a number of recommendations in the paper which would help position the Commonwealth to take advantage of the federal funding opportunities, and proposed Amtrak as the Intercity Passenger Rail Service operator for east-west rail.

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Proposed East-West rail service map

AN UPDATE ON PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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Although east-west rail service isn't part of the proposed sale of Pan Am railway to CSX, Amtrak has raised a number of concerns about the proposed sale before the Surface Transportation Board when it held its two-day hearing in January of this year. CSX has agreed to almost all the conditions that Amtrak raised, including full cooperation in good faith with Amtrak and third-party public agencies "for addition, expansion, or modification of existing intercity passenger service over Pan Am routes and CSX's Albany-Worcester route."

CSX also agreed that it would cooperate with Amtrak and third-party public agencies to identify improvements that would be required to make accelerated speeds on Pan Am routes and CSX's Albany-Worcester route safe and practical. Currently, Amtrak runs only one train a day, the *Lakeshore Limited*, between Boston and Springfield and onto Albany/Rensselaer where it is joined with the

New York section of the train from Penn Station to head west to Chicago. CSX also submitted a signed letter between CSX and Amtrak representatives that states that CSX agrees to operation of the *Berkshire Flyer* service in 2022 and 2023 as a Special Train without the need for a station track in Pittsfield.

While East-West rail advocates are encouraged by the CSX-Amtrak agreement, they recognize it may take many years before it will ever happen. Last year, Transit Matters issued a document showing a 90-minute ride between Springfield and Boston could be accomplished in nine years for under \$2 billion in upgrades, including work along the commuter rail tracks east of Worcester. MassDOT's estimates range from \$3 billion to \$5 billion depending on the route and extent of improvements needed. It now appears that it could happen since Charlie Baker, the Massachusetts Governor, has met with U.S. Representative Richard Neal, chair of the U.S. House Ways and Means Committee. The Baker administration has long been wary of the high cost and lower projected ridership. The possibility of federal funding, however, appears to have eased those concerns.

At a press session held in Springfield following a rail-focused meeting, Baker and Neal called for the creation of a western Massachusetts passenger rail authority that would apply for federal funds and administer the expansion of east-west rail. Baker said he'd like to see the state legislature take up the formation of an authority by the end of the current session later this summer. Backers on both sides of the state see east-west rail as a way to revitalize economic growth across western Massachusetts and help solve Boston's housing crisis by attracting residents to find affordable housing in western Massachusetts cities.

In the meantime, MassDOT and Amtrak have announced the return of passenger rail service between Pittsfield and New York City's Penn Station via Albany - Rensselaer, NY. The *Berkshire Flyer* is a delayed experiment to enhance tourist access to the Berkshires. It will finally roll out this summer, five years after a subsidy was secured. It is a two-year pilot which will provide Friday and Sunday service on summer weekends beginning July 8 over CSX-owned tracks.

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Springfield Union Station. Image courtesy of SpringfieldMA.gov..

AN UPDATE ON PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

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MassDOT is also looking into the feasibility of restarting passenger rail service from North Adams, MA to Greenfield and Boston. The eighteen-month study was required by legislation passed in 2019. While over 700 western Massachusetts residents submitted testimony on behalf of the enabling legislation when it was heard by the Joint Committee on Transportation, no action had been taken because of COVID. MassDOT finally held its first virtual working group meeting of the Northern Tier Passenger Rail Study on Dec. 16 and the next virtual working group meeting is scheduled to take place on June 22, 2022.

The proposed service would operate over two segments of an existing rail corridor. The first segment, between

North Adams and Fitchburg, is owned by Pan Am Southern LLC, which is a freight railroad jointly owned by Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) and CSX Corporation subsidiary Pan Am Railways (PAR), after the June 2022 acquisition of PAR by CSX. This line will be independently operated by the Berkshire and Eastern Railroad, a subsidiary of Genesee & Wyoming Railroad.

The second segment, between Fitchburg and Boston North Station, is owned by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). Travel times would be similar to the peak-hour time to travel by car to/from Boston via Route 2. Any new service provided would be designed so that it does not negatively impact the existing MBTA Fitchburg Line commuter rail service or existing freight service along this rail corridor. This line could also provide connecting service via Greenfield to Southern New Hampshire, Vermont and possibly Montreal after the *Vermont* is fully restored. Given that this line is now jointly owned by

CSX and NS, it is too early to predict whether passenger rail will ever be restored from North Adams, Greenfield to Fitchburg and Boston.

While it isn't clear whether East – West rail or the Northern Tier route will ever happen, we certainly should acknowledge that progress is clearly being made.

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

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