

## INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

Restoring the Pioneer, Part 2 p. 2

Notes from NY p. 3

MBTA Sets Capital Budget p. 4

Chair's Report p. 5

Canada Report p. 6

Questions Rail Advocates Should Be Asking p. 7

Report from New Mexico p. 8

DC Streetcar's Potential Shutdown p. 8

Advocacy in Maine p. 15

Philadelphia Notes p. 19

Carolinas/Virginia News p. 20

Front Range Update p. 21

## RUN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR RAIL TRANSIT IN THE UNITED STATES

*by David Peter Alan*

Both of RUN's semi-annual online conferences in 2024 focused on potential Amtrak operations, long-distance routes in the spring and corridor-length routes in the fall. This spring, on Friday, May 16, the conference focused on rail transit, with presentations by transit managers from around the country. The theme of the conference was "Mixed Bag" New Transit Starts and Fiscal Cliff Service Cuts – What to Expect in 2025." Conference attendees heard some good news: about one new start that is already running and three more that are under construction, as well as bad news: about the fiscal cliff that is creating or exacerbating funding

crises for almost every transit provider in the country. I delivered the closing remarks, which I will summarize in a companion commentary to this report.

RUN Chair Richard Rudolph, who moderated the conference, started by expressing concern about the future of Amtrak, in light of today's political realities. Then the subject turned to transit.

Philip Eng, General Manager and CEO of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA or "The T"), which serves Boston and nearby towns, kicked off the conference with his presentation about the

improvements he has made since coming from the Long Island Rail Road to join the T in 2023. He said that the agency was struggling when he came on board, including concerns about safety expressed by the FTA. Since that time, he said that its workforce has grown and there has been less attrition caused by employees quitting. A track improvement program has eliminated speed restrictions as the state of repair on the local rail lines has improved. He said: "The riders are getting the results and the benefits of it today." On the regional rail side, Eng reduced the traditional emphasis on peak-period

*Continued on page 10*

## WHY OPEN MEETINGS FOR THE AMTRAK BOARD OF DIRECTORS ARE CRUCIAL FOR AMERICA'S RAILROAD

*By Ben Heckscher*

Amtrak is the nation's primary provider of intercity passenger rail service, connecting millions of Americans annually and supporting economic development in communities large and small. Yet, despite being funded largely by federal and state dollars, the decisions that shape its future are often made behind closed doors.

As a publicly funded passenger rail service, Amtrak should hold open live streamed board meetings, accessible to both the general public and the media.

Meeting agendas, minutes, and supporting materials should be readily accessible so stakeholders can fully understand how Amtrak conducts its business.

Our research has shown that nearly every other publicly funded passenger rail entity in the United States—including the Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority, the Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, and the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority—already holds open and transparent board meetings.

The contrast with Amtrak is stark. Amtrak's regular Board of Directors meetings are held in private, with no public notice. Meeting agendas and minutes are not normally released, unless a formal Freedom of Information Act request is submitted to Amtrak. For an organization that receives more than \$2 billion in annual federal support—and that is currently managing billions more in capital investment—this lack of transparency is unacceptable for a publicly funded entity of this size.

*Continued on page 7*

## THE CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE THE AMTRAK *PIONEER*, PART 2

By Brian Yanity

### **Seattle-Denver route evaluated by FRA Amtrak Long Distance Study**

The FRA Long Distance study examined the Seattle-Denver corridor for restoration of long-distance service. As

currently proposed, it would follow the route of the historical *Pioneer* between Seattle and Salt Lake City, and from there follow the route of the *California Zephyr* to Denver.

The final FRA Amtrak Long Distance Study final report released in January 2025 gave these cost estimate ranges for the new Seattle-Denver route.

<b>Seattle - Denver Preferred Route Option</b>	<b>(millions FY 2025 dollars)</b>
Vehicle Cost Estimate Range	\$650 - \$840
Station and Maintenance Facility Cost Estimate Range	\$1,090 - \$1,410
Infrastructure Cost Estimate Range (Track Class 4, signalization, and positive train control upgrades)	\$350 - \$450
Total cost range	\$2,090 – \$2,700
Total cost range, per route mile	\$1.27 – \$ 1.64

Only 38 route miles of the existing UPRR track (of the 1,647-mile route) were determined to need upgrades to Class 4 track, and 110 route miles were deemed in need of signaling and communication upgrades. These costs compared very favorably to the 14 other long-distance routes studied. The FRA study also estimated that a population of 1,660,000 would be added (on the I-84 corridor between Portland and Salt Lake City) to the Amtrak network by the new route. A slight majority of whom (close to 900,000) live in the Treasure Valley (metro Boise region, spanning from Ontario, OR to Mountain Home, ID). This metro population is about double what it was when the last *Pioneer* train ran back in 1997 and is growing fast.

According to the study's Appendix C, *Estimated O&M Costs and Public Benefits*, Table 3-4, "Estimated Earnings Generated by Operation of Selected Preferred Route Options" for the Seattle-Denver route was estimated to be \$69-97 million annually (FY 2025 dollars). However, this figure was estimated for the direct/indirect labor (plus induced economic spending) dollar figures for Amtrak employees operating the train. The study did not give numbers for overall economic benefits to communities or regions served by the new proposed routes. These broader

economic benefits need to be thoroughly evaluated in the next round of study.

The FRA Long Distance study also evaluated a Los Angeles-Denver route, which follows the historical route (1979-1997) of the *Desert Wind* between LA, Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, and then the UP Overland Route through Wyoming (used by the *Pioneer* 1977-1983 and 1991-1997).

The relationship between FRA Long Distance Study's proposed Seattle-Denver route and the proposed Corridor ID study of Boise-Salt Lake City, or Portland-Boise service, would need to be clearly defined. FRA has considered the CID program "nearer-term" than the Amtrak Long Distance Study- which reportedly has a 10- to 15-year timeframe.

### **Next steps for restoring the Pioneer**

A practical operation for a *Pioneer* could operate Chicago – Salt Lake City – Portland, part of the *California Zephyr* between Chicago, Denver and Salt Lake City, along with a

*Continued on page 17*

# NOTES FROM NEW YORK

By **Andrew Albert**

## 1. Congestion Pricing update

After receiving many threats from the US Dept. of Transportation, the MTA filed for a temporary restraining order against the feds to prevent the Dept. of Transportation from withholding any federal funding for New York, which had also been threatened by Secretary Sean Duffy. Judge Lewis Liman granted the TRO, which had an expiration date of June 9. As of this writing, no action has been taken by the feds. We will obviously be watching this very closely.

In the meantime, Congestion Pricing has been in effect for many months, and is bringing in the amount of money towards the MTA's Capital Program that had been anticipated. This also means fewer traffic accidents, cleaner air, less waits at the crossings that enter the Congestion Zone, such as the Lincoln & Holland Tunnels, the Queens Midtown Tunnel, Hugh Carey Tunnel, as well as the Brooklyn, Manhattan & Williamsburg Bridges. I have also heard from many who drive into the

congestion zone (Manhattan south of 60th Street) that while they initially opposed congestion pricing, they now favor it, and gladly pay the \$9 fee, as they are getting to and from their destinations much more quickly. Polling also tells a similar story - congestion pricing is gaining approval from the public, as it has proven to be working as projected.

## 2. Rockaway A & S service restored

After 17 weeks of work on the A line to Far Rockaway and the S line to Rockaway Park, service has been restored. This intensive work inconvenienced thousands of daily riders who rely on the subway to get to & from the Rockaway Peninsula. Shuttle buses, reduced fare on the Long Island Rail Road at the Far Rockaway station, and rerouting of other buses served the public for those 17 weeks, while the South Channel Bridge was completely rebuilt, as well as the Hammels Wye, the concrete structure that separated the Far Rockaway and Rockaway Park service as the line enters the Rockaway peninsula. I got a tour of the work in

progress, and it was very impressive.

During the 17-week stretch that no trains from Queens or Brooklyn served the Rockaways, a shuttle train ran from Far Rockaway to Rockaway Park, which proved quite popular. Many hoped this shuttle train would be preserved when service was restored, but it was not. The South Channel Bridge had been devastated by Superstorm Sandy, and needs to open to allow freighters to enter Jamaica Bay to serve JFK Airport. It now swings open much easier and much more efficiently. And - service to the wonderful beaches in the Rockaways was restored in time for the busy summer beach season!

## 3. Power substations

A recent report indicates that of the MTA's 224 active substations, 81 are in poor or marginal condition. A recent failure of the State Street substation in Downtown Brooklyn, which forced many F train riders to exit the train and walk through the dark tunnels to a nearby

*Continued on page 14*

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

Name	Location	Affiliation
Richard Rudolph, Chair	Northampton, MA	NARP / TrainRiders Northeast, Maine Rail Group
Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair	New York, NY	New York City Transit Riders Council
Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary	Philadelphia, PA	Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation
David Peter Alan, Esq.	South Orange, NJ	Lackawanna Coalition
Joshua D. Coran	Seattle, WA	Talgo Inc.
Clark Johnson	Madison, WI	All Aboard Wisconsin
Dennis Kirkpatrick	Boston, MA	Rail Users' Network
J.W. Madison	Albuquerque, NM	Rails Inc.
Andy Sharpe	Philadelphia, PA	SEPTA
Phil Streby	Peru, IN	Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance
Martin Wheeler	Charlotte, NC	All Aboard Carolinas
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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 354, Northampton, MA 01060 or email to [rrodolph1022@gmail.com](mailto:rrodolph1022@gmail.com)

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# MASSACHUSETTS BAY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY SETS MULTI-YEAR CAPITAL BUDGET



*An MBTA Green Line "E" line 2-car trainset pulls into the Brigham station platform in Boston's hospital district on Huntington Avenue on a rainy April day in 2025. Here, the center-road track reservation ends and the last 3/4 mile to its destination at the Heath Street Loop will be all street running. A new anticollision system is now under test and will eventually be installed on the current fleet and all new purchases. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons, User: IliketrainsR211T.*

## By Dennis Kirkpatrick

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has recently set forth its multi-year capital plan with some interesting goals, especially in light of the current uncertainties in the US Capital.

The 2026-2030 Capital Improvement Plan approved by the MBTA Board on Tuesday, May 20, will include, among other things, new equipment for the commuter rail fleet.

The expenditure plan, well into the vicinity of \$9.8 billion, includes more than 660 projects.

The overall plan includes

- replacing the oldest commuter rail F40 and GP40 class locomotives.
- adding more bi-level coaches so single level coaches may be retired.
- improvement to transit lines with power system upgrades.
- completion of the new car orders for the Red and Orange line from CRRC.

- signal upgrades toward modernization and improved headways.
- a streetcar protection system (similar to heavy rail PTC) on the Green Line streetcar system to prevent collisions.

Among the many projects would also be the installation of a battery-electric series of commuter rail trainsets for the Fairmount line which is totally within the Boston City limits. These could serve as a test bed for electrification of other MBTA commuter rail branches.

In a recent interview, MBTA General Manager Phillip Eng stated, "I am grateful to the [MBTA] Board for their continued support, and I thank the public for taking the time to provide invaluable feedback on the capital investments they'd like to see the MBTA prioritize. While the [Capital Investment Plan] needs to be balanced within the available funding at this time, we will always be nimble and ensure that we can deliver projects and meaningful results."

Massachusetts State Transportation Secretary Monica Tibbets-Nutt also opined, "This plan includes historic levels of funding to modernize our fleet, maintain and improve infrastructure, expand accessibility, and advance both our climate and equity goals. We're especially proud of how this plan was developed."

While the State has made some adjustments in MBTA funding, the input from federal sources remains in limbo.

Among the stalled projects associated with funding is a new bus depot in Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood located about 5 miles southwest of downtown. The plan called for a new bus garage to service an all-electric fleet and has been in the works for several years. The plan also called for some of the MBTA land to be released for a transit-oriented housing development.

The bus yard is a short walk from the Forest Hills south-most terminus of the ORANGE line subway and associated bus hub. Earlier this year, the MBTA announced the plan was stalled due to ambiguous future funding that would allow the construction to take place. Depending on who you talk to, the plan is either on the "back-burner" or totally off the stove. The fleet currently operating from that bus yard is powered by Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) to lower the emissions. This is the only CNG fleet operated by the MBTA and in its day was deemed "state of the art." The new battery fleet would have eliminated all emissions.

As always, visitors to the region are encouraged to visit [www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com) for current information on status and conditions that may impact your stay.

*Dennis Kirkpatrick is a RUN board member and is a lifetime user of public transit in and around Boston, MA.*

# CHAIR'S REPORT

First, thank you to those of you who have contributed to our annual appeal. The Rail Users' Network is an all-volunteer organization which is supported by members' annual dues. This covers expenses to print and distribute our quarterly newsletters, maintain our presence on the web and to maintain our nonprofit status at the state and national level. The contributions received enable us to reach out beyond our membership base to improve and expand passenger rail and rail transit service at the national, state and local level.

Thank you also, to all of the presenters at our most recent conference as well as those of you who attended the event. By all accounts, it was an outstanding success for it provided critical information about the fiscal cliff that many transit agencies are currently facing and how they are dealing with this economic crisis. It also highlighted what's happening in a number of states to expand rail transit and commuter rail service.

Our Legislative Committee recently sent a letter to Amtrak's leadership team, including President Roger Harris and members of the board of directors, stating that time is fast running out to purchase new equipment to serve the demands of the U.S. passenger rail market. The current long-distance fleet, more than half of which is over forty years old, needs to be replaced. Despite this, Amtrak's equipment process and specifications for new long-distance equipment is slowing things down despite the Congressional allocation of \$22 billion several years ago. Evidently, complex requirements for a manufacturer are causing delays in procuring new equipment. The federal government has an opportunity to help start the manufacturing of Amtrak passenger cars and locomotives in the U.S., creating many well-paying manufacturing jobs.

In response to our request, we received a short letter from President Harris reminding us that "Amtrak's rail car procurement process is an open competitive process, and as such, Amtrak can only comment that we are actively engaged with various car builders. Our intent is to award the bi-level contract as soon as possible."

*Richard Rudolph*

# RUN CANADA REPORT: JUNE 2025

By Ken Westcar

The weather forecast across the Canadian passenger rail scene is foggy or smoky with limited sunny breaks. Advocates and municipalities hoping for clarity remain frustrated despite our new federal infrastructure mandate to switch from populist spending to pragmatic investing. Although this includes transportation and supply chains, it seems that light and heavy passenger rail remain at the back of the crowd hoping to get some attention from policymakers.

This report could fill half this edition of the RUN newsletter so I will summarise as follows:

## Alto high-speed rail.

Transport Canada and Cadence, the private development partner, have embarked on a funded, three-year, C\$3.9bn co-development and planning phase before any shovels go into the ground. Meanwhile the planned transfer of VIA Rail Canada into the Cadence consortium has been delayed. Two primary issues arise from this:

- Transport Action Canada, a leading rail advocacy group, has stated, unequivocally, that for Alto to be successful in the longer term, VIA Rail must build more success in the shorter term with major improvements to OTP and new Siemens train deployment. Without this it's almost certain the appetite of Canadians for intercity passenger train travel will fade and potentially make Alto an easy sacrifice for a future Canadian government less enthused about trains than the current one.
- Related to this is the need for the Cadence consortium to be fully transparent in the co-development and planning phase and to be ready to start construction within the three years or preferably before. Since Transport Canada and the private consortium have now fessed up to a capital cost more than C\$80bn (some believe C\$125bn to be more realistic) it is important the project remains scandal-free and is widely recognised as a necessary step forward in interprovincial mobility on par with

European and Asian HSR projects. As with U.S. HSR projects, there will be no shortage of detractors waiting to pounce.

## Alberta regional and high-speed rail.

In a November 2024 conference, the Government of Alberta announced fast tracking of major passenger rail projects in the province. Top of the list was high-speed rail between Calgary and Edmonton followed by a Calgary – Banff service on CPKC infrastructure and a direct light rail link from Calgary airport to downtown.

The consultants appointed to these projects and Alberta's transport ministry faced a very aggressive timeline of a preliminary report by July 2025 with a commitment to complete a detailed review and fund one or more of the projects in October 2025. Alberta's premier, Allison Smith, noted that the province would not engage with VIA Rail Canada or tap federal resources except on rail regulatory matters.

The world has changed since last November, both politically and economically including a drop in the price of Alberta's lifeblood – oil and gas. Passenger rail advocates in Alberta are looking for any updates in the province's financial situation that might indicate if promises made are promises kept. Ladies and gentlemen, lay your bets.

## Toronto region GO Expansion collapses.

In May it was announced by Metrolinx, operator of GO trains and buses in the Greater Toronto- Hamilton area, that Deutsche Bahn and another key partner had exited the GO Expansion consortium charged with expanding, intensifying and electrifying much of the GO train network. The fallout from this is that the visionary plan for something that resembled a regional surface subway but with GO bi-level rolling stock and electric or bi-mode locomotives, has been de-scoped to more modest improvements on existing GO routes with selective electrification delayed until the late 2030s.

There has been much speculation as to

what happened with all parties acting mum on what is clearly a major setback for commuter rail in the heavily traffic-congested Toronto region. And then a bombshell report appeared in The Trillium, an Ontario publication covering news from Queens Park, the provincial government seat. There may be some poetic license in the article but it makes intriguing reading:

<https://www.thetrillium.ca/news/the-trillium-investigations/how-metrolinx-plan-to-deliver-european-style-train-service-went-off-the-rails-10786705>

The whole affair is a study of how and why public/private partnerships have many potential points of failure as evidenced by other, similarly structured and problem-plagued transportation projects. It is tempting to draw conclusions about competency, cultural issues and government meddling but, more importantly, it's about precise project definition, iron-clad consensus and leadership. Toronto's aspiration to be a world-class city has taken a major step backwards.

## Cross border issues.

A collapse, some say by up to 80%, of Canadian travel to the U.S., does not bode well for cross border passenger rail services. Already subject to more intrusive interrogation than flyers and drivers, it's hard to think of anyone, whether squeaky clean or not, entering a country where they have zero rights and risk being detained because an agent takes exception to something on their cell phone, their ethnicity or a previously valid visa is spontaneously declared invalid.

Until the political situation changes and legitimate traveller rights are respected on both sides of the border, any discussion on cross border passenger rail services now seems purely aspirational. For how long? Nobody knows.

*Ken Westcar is a RUN Board member and secretary of Transport Action Ontario.*

## COMMENTARY: ADVOCATES NEED TO ASK WHY

*By Phil Strebly*

There has been much talk about the best manner in which to provide for passenger rail in the U.S. This has ranged from changing the political side of both federal and state office holders to building wholly separate passenger tracks to include both conventional and high-speed trains. Nowhere have I seen actual deliberation taking place within separate rail passenger advocate entities or between/among said groups. I would even go so far as to state that I haven't observed any real identification as to why this country hasn't provided for passenger rail.

I think that to solve a problem such as this, it would be beneficial to narrow the cause to one or even maybe two main issues, then work to provide real workable solutions which can be implemented around the country quickly with an acceptable cost backed by solid reasoning why this has to be done.

Such reasoning may well include which political party is in office, but I believe this to be a waste of time since both major parties have killed or tried to kill passenger rail. It would be difficult to determine which political party was the more successful, but keep in mind that we actually lost several trains (*National Limited, Floridian, Hilltopper*, and several others) under Democrat "leadership" while the Republican Party from Nixon on have stories about their rather unsuccessful desire to kill what they considered a "boondoggle" known as Amtrak. So now what? What are your arguments for keeping and enhancing passenger rail beyond that you like trains?

We can talk about high-speed rail (HSR) but do we really need it at this time? Yes, it would be desirable to build it and prove the point, but do we need it now?

Do we need to build separate tracks, not including HSR, on separate rights-of-way for passenger rail? Why?

What sources of income can enhance passenger rail?

Should the freight haulers be provided better incentives to handle Amtrak, or to even run their own passenger trains?

What should be done about the severe lack of equipment? How many new pieces are needed and for what purpose? (This may sound like a stupid question, but think about it a bit more.) What types of equipment? If you could just wish and make it happen instantly, what would you then do with the current rolling stock?

Have you made any plans for scheduling, servicing, operating, or customer service? What convincing argument would sway politicians to pay for your dream? That is the bottom line.

*Phil Strebly is a RUN Board member and a director on the board of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance.*

### WHY OPEN MEETINGS FOR THE AMTRAK BOARD OF DIRECTORS ARE CRUCIAL

*Continued from page 1*

Since 2022, Amtrak's Board has held a single public meeting annually—but only because the 2021 Infrastructure Law requires it to do so. And on May 22, 2025, Amtrak's Board allowed the public—for the first time—to observe a portion of a regular board meeting via livestream.

Recent legislation introduced in both the U.S. House (H.R.181) and Senate (S.174) reflects growing support for applying federal open meeting requirements to Amtrak. These efforts underscore a simple truth: transparency improves governance.

The benefits of open board meetings are clear. When discussions and decisions happen in public, board members are more likely to act in the public interest. Transparency also fosters trust. When people feel informed and

included in the governance of an essential public service like Amtrak, their confidence in the institution grows.

Public access to board agendas, meeting minutes, live-streams, and recordings of each meeting would help demystify the Board's decision-making process. This clarity would not only improve public discourse but also enable stakeholders to provide meaningful feedback—and contribute to a shared vision for the future of America's passenger rail network.

Some may argue that closed meetings are necessary for efficiency or to protect sensitive information. While it is reasonable to hold private sessions for matters such as contract negotiations or personnel issues, these should be the exception, not the rule. The current practice of conducting nearly all board business behind closed doors undermines Amtrak's status as a publicly accountable institution.

Amtrak is at a pivotal moment. Thanks to unprecedented federal funding from

the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the railroad is undertaking transformative capital projects and replacing most of its aging fleet. This once-in-a-generation investment demands rigorous oversight and transparent governance.

Congress has a unique opportunity to set a new standard for openness—ensuring that Amtrak's leadership operates with integrity and accountability in full view of the American people.

The time for the Amtrak Board of Directors to embrace open meetings is long overdue. Doing so will strengthen public confidence, reinforce accountability, and help ensure a stronger, more transparent future for America's railroad.

Further information can be found here: [Amtrak Board of Directors – A Transparency Assessment](#).

*Ben Heckscher is Co-founder, Trains In The Valley, based in Hatfield, MA.*

# REPORT FROM NEW MEXICO

By *JW Madison*

## The Rail Interstate

As you hopefully know, the above is the name RAILS Inc has always called our national track network, should public ownership ever come to pass ("Always" referring to the 15 or so years that RAILS Inc has been promoting this). This would bring this network into line with all our others---- highways (interstate and otherwise), airports, waterways, and all the infrastructure and personnel serving these.

NOTE: a shocking number of regular citizens, including most of the very bright ones your JW deals with, think those tracks are a Rail equivalent to the Interstate system. These people are shocked and outraged to learn the truth of near-monopoly ownership of this essential and abused network.

The Railroad Workers United (RWU) has in recent years jumped into this issue with both feet. The attached document (see page 9) is one being spread around by these fine folks; illustrating the brief and murdered history of public track ownership (also called Nationalization). Don't let "nationalization" fool you; public national transportation infrastructure is as American as the proverbial apple pie.

Another group (Public Rail Now) has recently arisen to join in (and lead) this struggle. Their information:

<https://www.publicrailnow.org>  
Phone # 314-884-8233

## Belen-Socorro (NM) Update

We recently reported on the "Doodlebug" one-car commuter Rail service operating from the 1930's to the 60's between Belen and Albuquerque, NM; hauling people, express, some freight, and the mail along this

route. An old Santa Fe RR doodlebug car presently sits in a future park in Downtown Belen, awaiting restoration and maybe excursion service. Some day. Here's an update:

There's a father-son team in Belen, James and Matt McKelvey, respectively. The former runs the Belen Model Railroad Museum, the latter is devoted to someday bringing back the Doodlebug. Someday meaning at least 10 years and \$10 million for a complete restoration, including a modern power plant, safety system, and a lot of additional track work going to Socorro (about 45 miles South of Belen). The latter is because the BNSF Railway runs a lot of very long (too long) trains through Belen (known as the Hub City).

Your \$1.98 visionary JW would like to see service extended to Socorro, which boasts some fine commuter destinations. He's a dreamer. Our excellent Rail Runner Express terminates in Belen, from Santa Fe, Albuquerque, and points in between.

*J.W. Madison is a RUN Board member and president of RAILS Inc, based in Albuquerque, NM.*

## THE PROPOSED SHUTDOWN OF THE DC STREETCAR AND THE POTENTIAL CLAWBACK OF THE FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN ITS CONSTRUCTION

By *Mark D. Sanders*

A radical transformation is in store for the DC Streetcar--i.e. the H Street/Benning Road Line of our nation's capital. In a surprising and controversial move, the government of Washington, DC has, according to *Metro Report International*, proposed to cease the operation of streetcars on the line, in favor of electric buses. The latter vehicles, if actually procured, "would use the existing 750 V DC overhead to charge, but would not have fixed tracks." (See <https://www.railwaygazette.com/light-rail-and-tram/dc-streetcar-to-be-replaced-by-buses/68905.article>.) In

essence, Mayor Muriel Bowser and her administration wish to replace the streetcars with trolleybuses capable of in-line charging. In-line charging would allow the trolleybuses to operate off-wire, east of the line's current terminus at Oklahoma Avenue.

City Administrator Kevin Donahue, in announcing this proposal, has specifically referred to these replacements as "electric trolley buses." They are typically more reliable than battery buses, the rollout of which here in Philadelphia has been beset with intractable problems.

At last report, both the DC Streetcar's

trackage and rolling stock are still encumbered by the Federal Transit Administration. It remains to be seen whether the FTA's Region 3 office--itself located here in Philadelphia--ever requires the District of Columbia to repay the substantial federal investment in these facilities. (The construction cost alone of the line has totaled approximately \$200 million.) To date, the Region 3 office has yet to announce whether it intends to recover this investment.

*Mark D. Sanders is President of the Philadelphia Street Railway Historical Society.*

## U.S. Rail Nationalization and the "Plumb Plan Idea"

In late 1917, during World War I, the railroad system in the eastern U.S. had virtually come to a halt. Problems included a shortage of labor due to low wages, combined with policies designed to maximize profits that prevented movement of empty cars. On December 26, 1917, the Federal government of Woodrow Wilson took over control of the railroads. Attorney Glenn Edward Plumb counsel for sixteen major railroad labor unions - was in favor of making this arrangement permanent. He defined a cooperative structure in his "Plumb plan," and set up the Plumb Plan League to promote the plan in February 1918.

The Armistice with Germany took effect on November 11, 1918. The railway labor unions wanted to retain government control after the armistice, but on December 2, 1918 President Wilson insisted to Congress that the railroads had to be returned to their former owners. Later that month in a referendum of railroaders, 306,720 out of 308,186 rail workers voted to keep government control. The Railway Employees' Department of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) put its weight behind the Plumb Plan League. The Plumb Plan was supported by labor leaders such as Warren Stanford Stone of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, who felt it should be extended to other industries. Workers should be given an incentive to make their industry productive, and a reward for their effort.

Under the Plumb plan, the railways would be owned cooperatively. The federal government would sell bonds and use them to purchase the railroads. All railroads would be merged in a public corporation. Rates would be set by the Interstate Commerce Commission. The government would be paid 5% of revenue as a rental fee,<sup>[19]</sup> Half of the profits would be given to the employees of the railroad and the other half would be used to retire the bonds. The Plan called for a board of directors with 15 members that would control the railroad. The President of the United States would appoint five members, who would represent the public. The workers would elect five members and management would elect five members. (18) The administration would be tripartite, including representatives of workers' unions, shippers' organizations and bondholders. The plan showed how the interests of workers and farmers in the national transportation system could be protected. It could readily be adapted for industries such as mining. Plumb said the plan would supplant the old system of competition under which the profits of the workers' labor went to stockholders, by a new system where the profit of industry accrued to the workforce, where all employees were united by a common purpose, all working toward a common end, inspired by the same motives, by the same incentives, and with no opportunity for a division of interest and no apprehension that another would reap what he had sown.

Plumb submitted his plan to the U.S. Senate's Interstate Commerce Committee in 1919. At the United Mine Workers (UMWA) convention in Cleveland, Ohio in September 1919 the delegates endorsed the Plumb Plan, and also approved nationalization of the mining industry. The Labor Party of the United States held its first national convention in Chicago in November 1919. The party endorsed the Plumb Plan in its Declaration of Principles agreed to during the Convention. And despite the opposition of AFL President Sam Gompers, the delegates to the 1920 AFL Convention ignored his wishes and voted overwhelmingly - 29,159 to 8,349 in favor of nationalizing the railroads and placing them under democratic management.

Despite worker enthusiasm, the plan had little chance of being adopted. The National Association of Owners of Railroad Securities (NAORS) represented bank and insurance companies with railroad holdings. They had noted the improvements during the period of Federal control of the railways but rejected the Plumb plan, although they did call for some public ownership of railroad infrastructure. The railroad executives were hostile, and there was little support in the House or the Senate. The Plumb Plan was considered by Congress in the Sims Bill of 1919, which did not pass. In February 1920 Congress passed the Cummins-Esch bill, returning the railroads to their private owners.

## RUN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR RAIL TRANSIT IN THE UNITED STATES

*Continued from page 1*

commuting and moved toward providing more-frequent service on weekdays. He told the conference that he had instituted more trips with shorter headways, taking a "regional rail" approach, which also improved on-time-performance. He described his agency's latest projects, including the new South Coast Rail route to the historic towns of New Bedford and Fall River.

The next presenter was Arthur S. Guzzetti, Vice-President for Policy and Mobility at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). He began by complimenting RUN on the "transition to virtual" for its conferences, and divided the rest of his presentation into three parts: news and notes from APTA, updates from Washington, and how to navigate the challenges ahead for transit. More specifically, he called for the 80/20 split in federal appropriations for highways and transit to continue, and reported that APTA is supporting a rail title to be included in federal legislation. He also called for a means for local passenger railroads to obtain liability insurance for their operations. APTA has a new slogan: "Do more with more!" and Guzzetti added: "When you have connections through rail, good things happen." He reported that, regarding the budget for the current fiscal year, continuing resolutions are keeping the money from the COVID-era IIJA (Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) going. Regarding electric vehicles for transit, he said APTA has "eyes wide open, but we're hopeful." Guzzetti did not express the strong concern about the current government in Washington that many advocates have expressed. He added: "The public wants more transit and is willing to pay for it." He also said

that funding for operations should stay local, although some attendees questioned that view, noting that state and local authorities will face financial conditions that will make it more difficult to support transit operations, while some advocates have called for the current 80/20 matching formula to be changed to give a higher percentage of the total to transit.

### First the Bad News: the Fiscal Cliff

The next event on the schedule was a panel on the Fiscal Cliff, which is causing a funding crisis for almost every transit provider in the country, especially those with a railroad or rail transit component. Managers at a number of providers in big cities have predicted that, if they do not find new funding sources, their current financial situations will require severe service cuts; some in the 40-45% range. Many of these agency-level "funding crises" stem from declining ridership since the COVID-19 virus struck five years ago, and the end of the money from the one-shot infusion of federal funds that can be used for operations. This "emergency" operating assistance will run out soon for many transit agencies, if it has not run out already. Conference panelists described the current situations in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and the Bay Area in California, in and near San Francisco.

RUN Vice-Chair Andrew Albert, who is also a rider-representative at the MTA Board in New York, moderated the panel. He began by expressing concern about the situation in New York City, but the facts are similar in other cities served by major transit systems that include rail. He noted the loss of ridership and the increase in the number of people working from home in recent years, and said: "We don't want the death spiral." He reported that New York State is funding the agency's capital program for 2025-29, and that the Congestion Pricing toll, about which we have been reporting extensively, is working well. A federal judge recently issued an injunction against USDOT Secretary Sean Duffy and

his department, so the toll is still being collected. Duffy had ordered Gov. Kathy Hochul to terminate it. Juliette Michaelson, Deputy Chief, Policy & External Relations for the MTA, reported on the effects of the congestion toll, saying that 90% of people who come to Manhattan's Central Business District (CBD; defined as the part of the island that includes Midtown, the Financial District at the island's southern tip, and the area in-between) arrive on transit, and also complained about "decades of underinvestment in transit." She recounted the recent history of the congestion toll, which is designed to speed traffic by reducing the number of vehicles on the streets of Manhattan, while providing support toward capital projects for the city's transit, the Long Island Rail Road, and Metro-North. She reported a smoother flow of traffic at higher speeds than occurred before the toll went into effect, along with a 12% reduction in traffic. That translates to about 80,000 vehicles per day into the CBD, with increases in travel speeds of 15% within the tolling zone and 8% outside of it.

Early indications show that New York's transit and New Jersey Transit might weather the funding crises better than many other providers, because those states enacted legislation that raised taxes or fees on certain businesses to help pay for transit, at least for the next few years. Other providers are in worse financial shape, and the conference heard from three of them.

Kevin Bueso, Chief Financial Officer for the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) in Illinois, an umbrella agency for Chicagoland's transit (Metra trains, the Chicago Transit Authority, and PACE buses in the suburbs) described the local situation. He said his agency is fighting the fiscal cliff, but the proposed merger of the providers now under consideration would be "disruptive," but he called for more authority for RTA to coordinate activities between them.

*Continued on page 11*

## RUN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR RAIL TRANSIT IN THE UNITED STATES

*Continued from page 10*

Regarding funding, he said that there is still some COVID money left, but the agencies are facing a \$1 billion gap in 2027 and 2028. For next year, the prospect of a 20% budget gap is looming, which would force a 40% reduction in service. He stated the choice in stark terms: either expand the system or face service cuts.

Erik Johanson is Senior Director for Budgets and Transformation at the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), which runs transit in Philadelphia and its suburbs. He began by saying that the agency had "sustainable funding in the past, but COVID broke it"; that 15% of its budget is gone. He warned that the agency is facing a 45% service cut, which would "kill SEPTA as we know it." He described SEPTA as an "economic engine for the region" and gave the example of rising home values along the Main Line (the rail line between Center City Philadelphia and Paoli), but said those houses could lose some of their value if service is cut. He concluded by saying SEPTA is efficient but still faces a funding crisis.

The final presenter on the panel was Sam Sargent, who had worked for Caltrans, the California Department of Transportation, until recently, and is now Director of Strategy & Transformation at the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), which serves San José and nearby towns. He noted that ridership on the rail transit agencies in the Bay Area is lagging behind other places, and mentioned "economic headwinds" in the region, including slow "return to office" rates. He cautioned that BART (Bay Area Rapid

Transit) and Caltrain (trains between San Francisco and San José on a newly-electrified line) depend on the farebox for more than 50% of their revenue, while San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency (Muni) has city funding. He concluded by saying: "Transit, especially rail, has an amazing story that people want to hear." He advised conference attendees to keep talking about the economic impact that transit has, and finished his presentation by saying: "It's about people!"

### Now the Good News: Four New Starts

The conference then heard from four presenters who described new starts that their agencies have been building. One of those operations has already been running for almost three months at this writing, while the others have been under consideration for decades and look forward to service in the future.

Ray Biggs II, Senior Project Director at the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), described the Purple Line, a light-rail line that will run on an east-west alignment to serve Washington, DC's Maryland suburbs and connect with Metrorail's line at some of that system's Maryland locations. He reported that dynamic testing started in March. His colleague, Dorin Basso, said that construction is still ongoing, and that service is expected to start in the winter of 2027. Biggs described the project as a P3 (public-private partnership) with MDOT owning the line, and private-sector entities operating and maintaining it. The line will run in Prince Georges and Montgomery Counties, between New Carrollton (where MARC and Amtrak trains also stop) and Bethesda with 21 stations. It will be 32 miles long and will use 142-foot, five-section cars built by CAF. The earliest planning for the line began back in 1970.

The next presenter was Jean Fox, Outreach Director for the South Coast Rail Project at the MBTA in Boston,

which opened for service on March 24. It includes 37 miles of track that were upgraded, along with six stations and two layover facilities. Trains run on three segments of a Y-shaped service area: from Boston to Taunton, where separate lines run southward to the historic towns of New Bedford and Fall River.

Fox titled her presentation "The Tale of a Railroad" and noted that the former service on the lines ended in 1958. She said that construction started in 2019 and testing took place last year. Fox described the agency's interactions with MassDOT and the State's DEP, the need to move utility lines, and adhering to FRA safety rules. She described the service area as "a mix of urban, suburban, and rural." She predicted that the line will bring new economic development to the three towns it serves, including transit-oriented development (TOD).

Dee Leggett, Executive Vice-President and Chief Development Officer at Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), described the Silver Line, a rail line that will link various suburbs and DFW Airport, running on a former Cotton Belt Line route, on an east-west alignment north of downtown Dallas. She started by describing DART, which started in 1983 and now covers 130 miles with four light rail lines; 98% of the original 1983 commitment. She mentioned that DART owns the light-rail and freight corridors, and connects with Trinity Railway Express (TRE) trains between Dallas and Fort Worth and the DCTA (Denton County Transportation Authority) A-Train. She said that the line will run with Stadler Diesel Multiple-Unit (DMU) units, and touted new access and mobility that the new line will bring to the area, and added that Herzog is designing and building the line and will operate it, that the stations are almost completed, and that DART is hoping to start service next March.

*Continued on page 12*

## RUN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR RAIL TRANSIT IN THE UNITED STATES

*Continued from page 11*

The final presenter was Brian Nolodny, Project Manager at the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS). He described the Red Line, a rail line now under construction that will run north from Uptown Charlotte (their term for the city's urban core) north to a station past Davidson (home of Davidson College), with ten stops. He said that planning for the line began in 1988, when CATS first got a ½% sales tax increase for transit. It took until 2013, when Norfolk Southern (NS), which owned the 22-mile line, to allow passenger trains on it. CATS bought the line in 2024. There is a Comprehensive Rail Agreement (CRA) with the State that calls for some double-tracking, other upgrades, and a freight bypass for NS. The line will use the Gateway Station in Uptown Charlotte, which will also serve Amtrak and CATS light rail. Nolodny said that there have been changes since the former 2009 design, including using DMU units instead of locomotive-hauled trains. The proposed schedule calls for 21 round trips with a 45-minute running time, end to end, running 30-minute headways at peak times and 60 minute-headways at other times. He also said that CATS is advocating for a 1% sales tax increase for transportation that would comprise 20% for rail, 40% for buses, and the other 40% for roads.

After the conference, RUN Chair Richard Rudolph told this writer: "The conference was a smashing success. We had over 75 people who had pre-registered for the conference, and at least 55 to 60 people listening in during the 4½ hours while the conference took place. The speakers were superb. They gave us some real information about

what's happening to transit agencies facing the fiscal cliff. Hopefully the federal government will step up with some funds to help keep people out of their cars and riding on transit. We also had superb speakers about new starts. All in all, it was a great learning experience for all the folks who attended. For other organizations, I would suggest using Zoom as an approach, rather than in-person conferences. Many more people can attend, especially people who can't afford hotels and transportation to get there. It's a strategy we've been using since COVID started, and it's been good for the Rail Users' Network."

### Looking Forward Toward a Questionable Future: A Companion Commentary

Largely due to my writing at *Railway Age*, bolstered by my experience riding almost all rail transit in the United States and Canada, as well as all of Amtrak and VIA Rail, I often deliver the closing remarks at conferences sponsored by RUN and other organizations. This conference was no exception. Here is a summary of what I said at the end of the conference, presented here as a commentary, separate and apart from the report on the conference itself.

### The Good News, such as it is: There are Still New Starts Coming

South Coast Rail in the Boston area is already running, and other presenters expressed the hope that their projects would start running soon. It sounds like these lines will become assets to their regions, adding to the mobility map for non-motorists who depend on transit, and also attracting some motorists to use the expanding transit networks where they live or work.

Still, all of those projects faced long delays in the process that started with early planning and cannot come to a

successful conclusion until service begins. Because of factors like the fiscal cliff that essentially all transit providers face, along with an apparent antipathy from Washington regarding new rail transit starts, rail transit throughout the United States faces an uncertain future; even more so for the prospect of expansion in the foreseeable future.

Transit lines, especially rail transit of all modes, serve different purposes that vary according to local needs. Maryland's Purple Line and DART's Silver Line will bypass the urban cores of the cities whose suburbs they will serve, but they will connect with rail transit that serves those cities and, thereby, extend its reach and attract new riders. The Red Line running northward from Charlotte, will bring rail transit to a new service area, joining Amtrak and other local rail transit with new connectivity. South Coast Rail is already restoring a piece of the Boston area's mobility map that was gone for more than 66 years and never should have gone away. Similar things could be said about almost any proposed new rail transit start, but there seems at the moment to be little reason to expect that projects that have not yet entered the funding and construction pipeline will ever be built. At least, if they are, they will face more years of delay, while communities are denied the economic benefits that transit delivers and potential riders will continue to make do with a transit network that appears doomed to shrink for years.

### The Bad News: the Fiscal Cliff Aggravates Funding Crises Surrounding Transit

Funding crises that stem from transit's Fiscal Cliff are looming essentially everywhere, as COVID-19 relief money is running out, and while ridership has not recovered to pre-COVID levels. Given changes in work customs along with demographic changes, in addition to

*Continued on page 13*

## RUN CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS FOR RAIL TRANSIT IN THE UNITED STATES

*Continued from page 12*

rising costs of providing service, states and elected officials in the providers' service areas must find the money to keep service levels where they have been historically, or severe cuts appear certain. Presenters from Chicago and Philadelphia warned about drastic cuts that will occur soon if more money is not found to keep transit in those cities going at or near today's service levels. Similarly, the presenter from California warned about local providers that depend heavily on farebox revenue. Caltrain was saved recently, when voters in the three counties where it runs approved a funding measure, despite a rule in California that any tax increase must be approved by voters with a 2/3 majority.

We also heard from New York about the Congestion Pricing toll that will help the capital side of the city's transit and in-state railroads, and appears to be succeeding in both its primary purpose to reduce automobile congestion on the streets of Manhattan and its secondary purpose to help fund capital projects for transit. Still, U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has ordered the MTA to shut the tolls down. At this writing, the State's transportation agencies are fighting back in court and have won a preliminary injunction, and motorists are still paying the tolls. Some have said that the faster trip they now enjoy is worth the extra money.

### A few personal thoughts

RUN has established a reputation for sponsoring good conferences, and this one was no exception. One advantage of RUN's "bite-sized" afternoon-length conferences is that they can focus on a topic and give attendees the information they need, in depth and

presented in an efficient manner. It is also easy and inexpensive to hold them, so attendees are not required to pay the cost of getting to an "in-person" conference or paying for lodging while there. The number of managers who register for RUN's semi-annual conferences is increasing, which enriches the mix and gives advocates a different perspective. Almost all presenters at this conference were managers (RUN conferences customarily feature a mix of advocates and managers), which provides a good opportunity for managers and advocates to interact.

I was also impressed with the two featured speakers: Keynoter Phil Eng from the "T" and APTA's Art Guzzetti. Eng has done a lot in his relatively-short time as head of the agency. He brought it into a state of good repair, and he changed the scheduling on the regional rail lines away from the historic heavy emphasis on peak-hour commuting. Today the schedule focuses on more-frequent service during the entire service day, while some lines run a few extra "peak-hour" trains, too. I have often called for such a "regional rail" approach, as opposed to a "commuter rail" approach, and I hope it works well for the riders in and around Boston. I have had the honor of knowing Art Guzzetti for more than 20 years and, in my opinion, his knowledge of transit is unsurpassed. He also cares about mobility for transit riders, even though he has worked for the providers' trade association for more than a quarter of a century.

My request to APTA, through him, would be that the organization work together with the advocates to help save (and eventually improve) our "transit railroads" and local rail transit. That includes calling for transit getting more than 20% of the amount shared between transit and highways. Calling for a 30% share would begin to remedy the historic imbalance that has given motorists complete freedom of movement while relegating non-motorists who depend on transit access to only limited and increasingly isolated

parts of the country. Even a 25% share would significantly improve mobility that motorists and non-motorists alike could use. The disparate nature of mobility for those two groups is not local, but stems from national policies and places non-motorists throughout the nation at a mobility disadvantage. Returning to the old pattern of keeping almost all funding for operations at the local level does not only ignore the mobility disparity between motorists and those of us who depend on transit, but it also forces states and localities to find money to pay for transit at a time when the impending loss of federal funding for other purposes could leave those governments in a precarious financial state.

Only a few attendees were in New Jersey, but there were no trains running on New Jersey Transit that day, due to the engineers' strike. The trains are now running again, but a few attendees and lots of other New Jerseyans got a preview of what it's like to get around without trains, if that's even feasible.

*David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair Emeritus of the Lackawanna Coalition in Millburn, NJ.*

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

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

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

## NOTES FROM NEW YORK

### *Continued from page 3*

station to exit the system, is proof that this condition must be addressed. Fortunately, replacement and repair of the electrical substations is an important part of the MTA's Capital Program, and will be addressed in upcoming repair initiatives taking place. We must have dependable power so that the millions of subway riders every day can reach their destinations safely and reliably.

#### **4. Broadway Junction complex to become ADA Accessible!**

The most important subway complex in the East New York section of Brooklyn - Broadway Junction, which serves the A,C,J,Z,L trains is becoming ADA accessible! This long-awaited upgrade comes at an opportune time for the complex, as much development is taking place near the station, as well as the recent approval of the MTA's 2025-2029 Capital Program, recently approved in the New York State Budget, which will also bring the Interborough Express (IBX) to the complex.

Work has already begun on the A,C, section of the complex, which runs along Fulton Street in Brooklyn. As each section of the complex is at different elevations - the A,C being underground, the J,Z being elevated, and the L elevated above the J,Z, this is a complicated project! Recently, another elevator project - at the Woodhaven Blvd station on the J,Z, was the first station to have elevator service from the street level to the platform level! No need to switch elevators at a mezzanine level! Hopefully, that progress can be included in the Broadway Junction complex.

#### **5. Emergency Communication Upgrade**

Emergency communications is obviously essential in a massive system like New York's subway system, which consists of 472 subway stations, in operation 24

hours a day, 7 days a week. This is one of those unseen, unsexy pieces of our massive system that no one thinks about, but is absolutely essential to the safe, smooth operation of this essential part of a New Yorker's life. Fortunately, this has been recognized and will be upgraded during many of the ongoing updates/repairs to stations, structure, and communication systems vital to everyone's safe travels. Thanks to a fully-funded Capital Program, Emergency Communications will be updated to 2025 standards. Some of the facilities where these systems are located are in unbelievably old communications rooms, and are in desperate need of renewal. This is happening, as I am making this report!

#### **6. New Countdown Clocks!**

Amazingly accurate and readable new countdown clocks have arrived in the subway's B division - the lettered lines! I have watched them, checked them against extremely accurate transit apps, and these new countdown clocks are amazingly accurate! The older ones, largely in the A division (Numbered lines), are far less accurate, although the new electronic screens, made by Outfront Media, are also very accurate. The new countdown clocks will be coming to the numbered lines shortly, although both the A & B divisions both have the digital screens. However, the new countdown clocks are very readable, located in several places in stations, and have been very pleasing to subway customers. Anything that makes the trip more predictable and enjoyable is a win for riders!

#### **7. Best subway performance in years!**

Since last summer, when service was increased on many subway lines, subway service has improved to the point where virtually every line is providing the best service in years! Service was increased on weekends on the G,J,M,1,6 lines to every 6 minutes! On weekdays, service was increased on the C,N,R,B,D,J,M lines! On weekday

evenings, service was increased on the C,N,R, G lines, allowing for much more frequent service virtually any time of day or evening. Combined with upgraded signals, better maintenance, and attention to detail, subway service is much more predictable, and people are responding with ridership at its highest level since pre-pandemic times! This additional service is vital, as many have switched from driving to transit, thanks to congestion pricing and better service!

#### **8. Andy Byford to lead Penn Station Redevelopment!**

Yes, Train Daddy is returning to New York! With Texas cancelling its high-speed Dallas-Houston train service, Andy Byford has been tapped to lead the Penn Station redevelopment here in the city that Byford loved and who helped convert our subway system into the best shape it's been in years! While there are many issues involved in the Penn Station redevelopment - such as accommodating more trains than ever before, the possibility of through-running (which also has many issues involved, such as incompatible power systems), the possible move of Madison Square Garden to another location, the possible demolition of a city block, and much more, if anyone can make sense of these systems that serve Penn Station, Andy Byford certainly can. And with Metro-North's Penn Access plan set to begin in 2027, Penn Station will have more trains serving it than ever before! Depending on when the new Gateway Tunnels are completed, this could be a game-changer. I had a wonderful talk with Andy and he is looking forward to returning to a city he loved.

#### **9. Overnite #3 service extended to 34 St/Penn Station**

Thanks to electrical work taking place along the 7th Avenue subway line, overnight service on the #3 line has been extended from Times Square to 34th St/Penn Station. This is great

*Continued on page 15*

# ADVOCACY IN MAINE: VICTORIES AND DEFEATS

*By Peter Cole*

In June 2024, we started with two goals: first, protect existing rail corridors from rail removal for "interim" trail use; and second, to take advantage of the corridor ID program to get intercity service extended to serve the three largest cities in Maine.

Twelve months later, after massive efforts and expenditures, we had small victories and heartbreaking defeats. The greatest victory was that we started to consolidate various advocacy groups around the state. I would add that our knowledge base has increased greatly both in our need for advocacy and the reality of what to prioritize.

Regarding our first goal of protecting existing rail corridors which are state owned and by law required to prioritize rail use, we have had to let go of unrealistic dreams. It quickly became apparent that resuming scheduled passenger service on rail corridors that have been minimally maintained for thirty years is fiscally impossible. Instead, thanks to CSX taking over the freight mainline, the greatest hope is for short line freight operators to start service and attract local business.

The freight operators can use the lines with minimum upgrades to start service at low speeds and slowly improve the lines for possible excursion services in the future. Three of the lines in question have scenery that could support excursion service, and the fourth line can serve as a freight corridor with connections to two different carriers. One line already has been cleared by Maine DOT for service – the Rockland Branch which will be used by Maine Switching Services under the operating name of Cumberland and Knox Railroad. They are also collaborating with DOT on two of the other corridors. The fourth corridor is also under consideration to be operated as a freight line by Conway Scenic Railroad. The second goal should not have been

as difficult as it turned out to be. We advocated for legislation that would have required Maine's rail authority to apply for the corridor ID program to extend service using the newly upgraded to Class 3 CSX corridor from Portland to Bangor.

To boost our chances, we funded a statewide survey which demonstrated that 60% of Maine registered voters would use the proposed service from occasionally to regularly, and 63% supported a bond issue to pay for needed upgrades. We assisted in creating a full day rail symposium organized by college students at Thomas College in Waterville. We then funded an economic study by the Rail Passenger Association which demonstrated a 61.5-million-dollar annual benefit for Maine by creating the passenger rail extension, bringing economic benefits to every county in the state. In addition, we took advantage of Facebook and email blasts to supporters and maintained an active website combined with our presence at community events. In addition, a study came out showing that Maine is only meeting 11% of the state's transit demand. At the hearings we had a great turnout of individuals representing all age groups. But in the end, we could not overcome the intransigence of Maine DOT and the Maine rail authority who stated they were just too busy to apply. We fought for every vote in the Maine House of Representatives and the Maine Senate. While it won bi-partisan support, it could not overcome DOT's efforts to kill the bill and with a 17 to 18 vote it was "tabled indefinitely."

Even though we were disappointed, we did have some successes. We did great outreach and built bridges to state environmental groups and rural transportation advocates. The short-line and seasonal tourist railroads joined with us in our efforts, as did colleges, notably Colby and Thomas College in Waterville. The bill sponsors in Augusta were more than supportive and argued our case. Another great

supporter was the Rail Passenger Association. Jim Mathews and John Cristoph came up to Maine for the unveiling of the cost benefit analysis. Jim came up again when we were amid the battle for the Maine House of Representatives and the Maine Senate support.

In Maine, the next legislative session starting in the fall of 2025 is short and focuses on follow-up and emergency legislation. In 2026, there will be a new governor and a full legislative session. Thus, our efforts next year will be building up grassroots support and we look forward to getting our message out. While traveling around the state, I always thank people when they tell us they appreciate what we are doing. What we really need are more "doers"!

*Peter Cole is President of Maine Rail Group.*

## NOTES FROM NEW YORK

*Continued from page 14*

news for those who might have been changing to a Long Island Rail Road, NJ Transit, or an Amtrak train, and previously had to change trains at Times Square.

### **10. 3 Peregrine Falcon Chicks hatched on the Verrazano Bridge!**

A blessed event took place on the Brooklyn tower of the Verrazano Bridge a couple of weeks ago! 3 magnificent Peregrine Falcon chicks were hatched, and they and their mother are doing well! Workers from MTA's Bridges & Tunnels made sure the chicks received proper care & handling, and are destined to enjoy the skies over New York for many years!

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

## NJ TRANSIT RIDERS LOSE A STATION AND ENDURE A BRIEF RAIL STRIKE

By David Peter Alan

Rail riders on New Jersey Transit (NJT) suffered some losses lately; one is permanent, while the other lasted only four days.

The permanent one is the loss of the Kingsland Station, on NJT's "Main Line" that operates between Hoboken Terminal and Suffern, NY (some trains go as far as Port Jervis, NY under Metro-North's flag) through such places as Paterson and Ridgewood. The closure was coupled with the opening of a rebuilt Lyndhurst Station, roughly ¾ of a mile from the Kingsland location, but not served by any bus lines. It takes about 15 minutes for an able-bodied person to walk between the two places.

Service at Kingsland began on December 14, 1870, and the station was historically located on the Lackawanna Railroad's Boonton Line. NJT's current "Main Line" was created from Lackawanna and Erie trackage in the 1960s, after the two railroads merged. Kingsland had been the first stop after Secaucus Junction Station for outbound trains, and its riders had benefitted from connectivity with the #76 bus line, a route that runs a full span of service and connected Kingsland with Penn Station and Broad Street Stations in Newark, as well as with the Bergen County Line at Rutherford and the Pascack Valley Line at Essex Street in Hackensack. That connection and the resulting mobility no longer exist.

Due to a labor dispute between NJT and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), service was suspended for four days in May. The issue was money, as NJ's engineers wanted parity with their counterparts at other railroads in the area, notably Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road. A Presidential Emergency Board had recommended a raise that the engineers deemed inadequate, and the agency and the union later reached a tentative agreement in March, but 87% of the union members who voted rejected that deal.

NJT and the union negotiated a new deal. This time the engineers approved the agreement overwhelmingly, by a vote 398 to 21 (95% approval). NJ Transit CEO Kris Kolluri announced the result at the agency's June 11 Board meeting, and said that it was fair to the employees and revenue neutral. He called it a "net-neutral" and "precedent-setting" agreement. He said: "Our obligation is to the riders and the broad taxpayers" and added that concessions on such issues as health care and work rules regarding hours would pay for the wage increase the employees will get. He withheld details, but said they will be disclosed when the board officially ratifies the agreement for the agency on July 17.

The work stoppage began on Friday, May 16, the day RUN held its spring online conference. Before the dispute resulted in train service being suspended, rhetoric on both sides was adversarial, including by Gov. Phil Murphy and Kolluri. The agency alleged that a 17% raise for the engineers would damage NJT's finances. On Sunday the 18th, a new deal was announced. Trains did not run on Monday the 19th either, while equipment and tracks were inspected and the agency made other preparations to resume service on Tuesday.

NJT had set up four "contingency" bus routes from park-and-ride lots for commuters; operations that actually ran only one day: Monday, May 19. The NJT website also listed "ABC's" (Alternative, Backups, and Contingencies) that listed buses which service some rail stations. For its part, the Lackawanna Coalition published an extra edition of its newsletter, the *Railgram*, with a comprehensive list of bus alternatives, described in more detail than the agency's website revealed; demonstrating that local advocates at the Coalition also "know their ABCs."

The only previous strike at NJT Rail came in the wake of the Congressionally-mandated termination of local

passenger service operated by Conrail at the beginning of 1983. Three new railroads: NJ Transit Rail, Metro-North, and SEPTA Regional Rail, were formed at that time, and all three endured long strikes: 35 days at NJT Rail, 42 days at Metro-North, and 114 days at SEPTA Rail.

In the meantime, a political change has come to New Jersey, which might affect funding and other issues concerning NJ Transit and its riders. Until this year, primary candidates endorsed by the county party organizations (both Democrats and Republicans) occupied a special place on the ballot; an advantage that, effectively, no other candidate could surmount. Sen. Andy Kim and political reform organizations fought for that ballot, which was not used in any other state, to be scrapped, in favor of a conventional ballot that lists all candidates for a particular office together. That reform has been implemented, and its first test was the primary races for governor this month, with six Democrats and five Republican candidates running for the office. From the crowded field, Rep. Mikie Sherrill won the nomination for the Democrats, while Trump-endorsed Jack Ciattarelli won the Republican nomination.

Congestion Pricing, the toll charged for motor vehicles to enter the part of Manhattan south of 60th Street, won a victory in court. On May 24, Judge Lewis J. Liman of the federal court for the Southern District of New York, issued a preliminary injunction restraining USDOT Secretary Sean Duffy and his department from following through on Duffy's order that the toll be terminated. Gov. Kathy Hochul has consistently supported the toll, with its objectives of reducing congestion on Manhattan streets and raising money for capital projects for the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the State agency that operates New York City Transit, Metro-North, and the Long Island Rail Road, along with other transportation entities.

*Continued on page 23*

# Seattle – Denver

## Conceptual Service Overview

Not an FRA proposal for service

ROUTE SERVICE METRICS		
Scheduled run time	average of both directions	approximately 40 hours
Route length	average of both directions	1,647 miles
Seattle, Washington departure time	local time	early morning
Denver, Colorado arrival time	local time	late evening <sup>+1</sup>
Denver, Colorado departure time	local time	late evening
Seattle, Washington arrival time	local time	midday <sup>+2</sup>
Average travel time improvements	hours	18
ROUTE STATIONS		
Total number of stations	count of stations	29
Stations in small communities	count of stations	8
Existing stations adding new service	count of stations	16

Average travel time improvements are for existing origin-destination pairs when using a selected preferred route option compared to an existing route

+1 = one travel day    +2 = two travel days

### THE CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE THE AMTRAK PIONEER, PART 2

*Cotnued from page 2*

restored *Desert Wind*. This allows through-cars from the *Pioneer* and the *Desert Wind* to provide critical capacity for travel over the *Zephyr's* peak segments - Iowa through Denver and Denver through Grand Junction. Like the 1983-1991 era *California Zephyr*, it would be a long train requiring extra locomotive power over the 9,239' apex of the Moffat Tunnel route. However, a Portland truncation would reduce the constant

on-time performance issues when the historical *Pioneer* operated to Seattle. This would address the crew rest and equipment turn time issues resulting from any late westbound train and allow a network reset before the next day's operation. Truncating the *Pioneer* at Portland provides sufficient time to offset any late arrival. Connecting service to Seattle would be provided by the Amtrak *Cascades* service, with riders transferring at Portland. The *Cascades* had record ridership in 2024, and is undergoing expansion with the introduction of new Airo equipment. This *Cascades* service expansion would complement and boost ridership of a new long-distance train on the *Pioneer* corridor.

It is also possible that a future *Pioneer* could split at Pendleton with a Seattle leg over an upgraded Stampede Pass route, serving Washington's Tri-Cities, Toppenish, Yakima, Ellensburg, Cle Elem, Auburn and Tukwila.

### Bus service

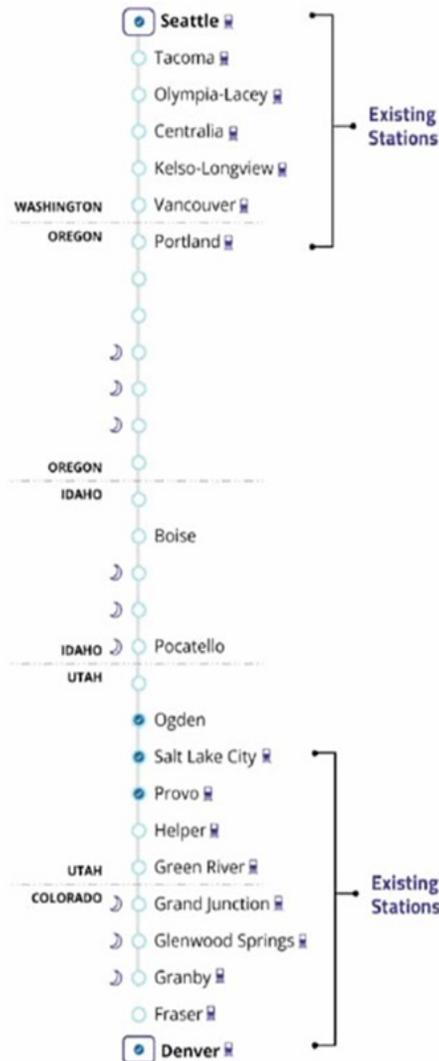
Greyhound/FlixBus service between Portland and Boise (and to La Grande, Baker City, Ontario) was discontinued on January 16, 2025. Therefore, the first order of business for intercity public transportation along the historical *Pioneer* corridor is re-establishing bus service between Portland and Boise, stopping at Eastern Oregon cities along the way.

The state-subsidized Public Oregon Intercity Transit (POINT) bus system is the most likely candidate operator for a new bus on the Interstate 84/*Pioneer* corridor between Portland and Boise. Perhaps Amtrak also could provide a Thruway bus from Portland to Boise, or perhaps one connecting Pasco, WA (*Empire Builder*) to Salt Lake City (*California Zephyr*). In spring 2025, ODOT released a Notice of Funding Opportunity to fund "intercity bus service to the public on the I-84 corridor at a minimum between The Dalles and Boise, ID. The service may extend from Boise as far west as Portland." Funded with Statewide Transportation Improvement funds (STIF) or Federal Transit Administration Section 5311(f) Intercity Bus (5311(f)) funds, the award will be announced by July 2025.

### Equipment needed for a new long-distance service

A Portland-Salt Lake City *Pioneer* option described above would only be possible in the near-term if Amtrak can return to service all of the Superliners leased to states, needing overhaul and repairs and there are no additional major derailments. Under these assumptions it would appear that there might be enough existing equipment for a modified *Pioneer* and

*Continued on page 18*



**Legend**

- ☾ Some arrivals at night
- ☽ All arrivals at night
- Station
- Terminal
- 🚊 Connecting Existing Amtrak Rail Service
- 🔵 Connecting to another Selected Preferred Route Option

Some arrivals at night depending on direction.

All existing stations and new stations in cities with over 50,000 people are labeled.

## THE CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE THE AMTRAK PIONEER, PART 2

*Continued from page 2*  
 Desert Wind (combined with the California Zephyr). Chicago based on-board service

crews would staff the trains. However, this is unlikely. If such “extra” long distance equipment even becomes available, it would make far more practical sense for it to support increasing the frequency of the *Sunset Limited* to daily. It would only take one more complete trainset to run the *Sunset* seven days a week, because the route’s existing trainsets/consists would get more utilization than they do with the current three day a week schedule. By contrast, a new *Pioneer* would require at least two trainsets, and four if there is through-car service on the *Zephyr* to Chicago.

With the current Amtrak long distance equipment fleet stretched thin, restoration of the *Pioneer* in all likelihood will have to wait until Amtrak’s new long-distance rolling stock starts rolling out of the factory. The timing on this is uncertain, but likely will be in the early 2030s. ODOT, ITD and UDOT, and their Congressional delegations, should be pushing the Amtrak long distance equipment issue, not only to enable a new version of the *Pioneer*, but also to maintain the National Network trains they already have, including the *Coast Starlight*, *Empire Builder*, and *California Zephyr*. It is imperative that all advocates of the *Pioneer*’s restoration tell their Congressional representatives the importance of procuring new Amtrak long-distance equipment.

### Union Pacific Railroad capacity and track upgrade/rehabilitation projects

Amtrak, FRA, ODOT and ITD need to start having serious conversations with Union Pacific Railroad about capital projects required to restore passenger service between Salt Lake City and Portland. Any capacity bottlenecks along the *Pioneer* route need to be identified, to prioritize the most cost-effective siding and double track projects which could be completed in the short to medium term. The FRA Amtrak Long Distance Study estimated that 38 miles

of track need to be upgraded to Class 4. ODOT, ITD and UDOT need to work with UPRR on requesting rail grant capital funds for adding sidings and double track where needed.

A big challenge on the *Pioneer* corridor, like the rest of the North American Class I rail network in recent years, is “precision scheduled railroading” practices of more long, slow trains. This is especially concerning given the historical (1979-1997) *Pioneer*’s past reliability issues on the Union Pacific tracks, back when freight trains tended to not be as long and heavy as they are today. Investment in freight capacity would support public policy goals of getting trucks off I-84 with more freight mode shifted from road to rail. In the future, sufficient capacity on the UPRR could enable new short- and medium-haul freight rail services between Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Utah.

Key to restoring passenger train service through Boise is rehabilitation of an 18-mile section of out-of-service track that connects the Boise Valley Railroad (BVRR) with the UPRR mainline eastward from the city. The Watco-owned shortline BVRR operates the Boise Branch, from the UPRR yard and mainline at Nampa eastward through central Boise to the Boise Airport area. The out-of-service track section was purchased by the city of Boise in 2000, after the UPRR wanted to abandon it. This track is in relatively good condition, but does require some refurbishment, such as tie replacement. The 2009 Amtrak study estimated that restoring the ‘Boise cutoff’ track to connect downtown Boise Depot with the UPRR mainline east of the city, would cost \$13.5 million in 2009 dollars (the equivalent to over \$20 million in 2025 dollars). This refurbishment project would be a ‘low-hanging fruit’ near-term capital investment for which the city could seek grant funding for. Reopening the entire Boise branch would also

*Continued on page 19*

## THE CAMPAIGN TO RESTORE THE AMTRAK *PIONEER*, PART 2

*Continued from page 18*

benefit UPRR and BVRR freight rail capacity and fluidity, and encourage new business, given the warehousing and industrial growth occurring in the southeast edges of Boise.

### Governance and organizational structure

Perhaps the cities and counties along the *Pioneer*/I-84 corridor could follow the example of Montana's Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority and some form of joint-powers rail authority. This entity could be an applicant for Corridor ID or other grants, and lead the effort to create a service development plan. Given economies of scale and a much greater number of unique direct city pairs.

The circa 1990 *Pioneer* schedule between Portland and Salt Lake City had 14 total stops (including those two cities), with 91 possible unique trip pairs directly connecting the stops within this segment. By contrast the segment consisting only from Boise to Salt Lake City had five total stops, resulting in only 10 unique city pairs. Given this bigger ridership potential, and operating economies of scale, the full restoration of the Portland-Boise-Salt Lake City long distance train is likely preferable to the "piecemeal" approach of two separate Portland-Boise and Boise-Salt Lake City trains. Spreading the costs over three states, plus whatever federal support there could be, would bring down costs for everyone along the route. The longer route is also likely to have better overall equipment utilization.

State transportation departments in Idaho and Utah have endorsed studying passenger rail between Boise and Salt Lake City, by at least attempting to go after a federal grant. City governments, Boise in particular, have been egging them on and doing a lot of the legwork. Meanwhile in Oregon, interest from ODOT for studying restoration of passenger service between Portland and Boise has been tepid, despite strong support of the concept at the local level in eastern Oregon and from some state legislators. Oregon really does need to take the lead on the Portland-Boise passenger rail restoration, as 88% of the 491-mile route segment is in Oregon. SB1202 was introduced to the 2025 Oregon state legislative session, which would have moved rail transportation out of ODOT into a new Oregon Department of Rail and Transit, with dedicated funding sources. This could be a boon for starting new passenger rail services, including between Portland and Boise. However, the bill did not advance. The comprehensive HB2025 transportation funding package bill was released on June 9,

2025, which included dedicated rail funding (although nothing specific to the *Pioneer*/I-84 corridor), and may have an amendment added for a study for new rail and transit department. HB2025 was still being negotiated as the RUN Newsletter goes to press, with a legislative session deadline of June 29, 2025.

### Acknowledgements:

Thanks to Matt Krabacher, Eastern Oregon Vice President, Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA); Art Poole, President, AORTA; Bre Brush, Transportation Advisor to the Mayor of Boise, and Steve Roberts, President, Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada (RailPAC), for contributing information to this article.

*Brian Yanity is a RUN Board member and vice president of RailPAC.*

## PHILADELPHIA NOTES

*By Chuck Bode*

As of the newsletter deadline, the future of rail service in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, along with bus service in both cities and several others around Pennsylvania, was still unknown. 300 advocates and passengers from several locations rallied in Harrisburg, the state capital, on June 4, but the legislature has yet to provide funds.

SEPTA issued new timetables for most Regional Rail and some transit lines June 15. Of note is that from June 15 through September 1, the Chestnut Hill East line is closed for repairs to five bridges best described as antique.

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

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## CAROLINAS AND VIRGINIA NEWS

By Martin Wheeler

### S-LINE: RALEIGH, NC TO RICHMOND, VA

The S Line higher speed rail project between Richmond and Raleigh has seen quite a bit of activity recently. A \$1.2 billion federal grant is funding improvement of the 18-mile line between Raleigh and Wake Forest with completion expected by 2030. Preliminary engineering for Wake Forest to Richmond is funded, and Virginia hopes to evaluate various propulsion modes when the design phase reaches 50 percent. The economic impact of the project by 2033 is expected to reach \$1.38 billion, with over eight thousand jobs created, resulting in \$42.5 million in local and state tax revenues. Eleven grade separations will be constructed, along with 2 miles of track realignment north of Raleigh to avoid freight conflicts with CSX. Wake Forest's S-line station was awarded a \$13.2 million federal grant for station mobility study, design and construction. The money for the project is expected to flow with FRA grant obligations being awarded in the second quarter of 2025. Other possible S-line stations will get mobility studies also, and include Norlina, Henderson, Franklinton, and Youngsville north of Raleigh, and Apex and Sanford south of Raleigh. The line south of Raleigh is being considered for additional rail passenger services in the future.

### CORRIDOR ID STUDIES UPDATE

Phase 1 of the Raleigh-to-Wilmington Corridor ID Study will be completed by November 2025. The design and construction cost of the passenger line is projected to be \$810 million, with the local/state share of \$162 million. Phase 1 of the Asheville-to-Salisbury Corridor ID Study is expected to be completed by October. The proposed passenger line is projected to cost \$665 million with a local/state share of \$130 million for design and construction. Norfolk Southern is now rebuilding the Old Fort Loops needed for the route. Repair costs are projected at \$60 million, with repairs done by January 2026. NS has opened up the AS line between Morristown, TN and Swannanoa, NC for

freight service. The line was also severely damaged by Hurricane Helene last year.

### SIEMENS MOBILITY PLANT, LEXINGTON, NC

Siemens Airo equipment is planned for the *Carolinian* and *Piedmont* services between 2027 and 2032, with the "Carolinian" equipped first. The cars are expected to be built at the new Siemens Mobility Plant being completed in Lexington, NC and beginning operations by the end of 2025. The plant is a manufacturing and rail services facility that will provide 500 new jobs, and will cost \$220 million. It is considered a high tech operation "to build the trains of the future."

### PIEDMONT CORRIDOR TO BENEFIT FROM IMPROVEMENTS

A major construction project getting underway soon is the improvement of the Carolinian/Piedmont passenger rail corridor between Greensboro and Raleigh. The work is expected to be funded by a \$105.9 million federal grant, \$17.8 million from the North Carolina Railroad, \$13 million from Norfolk Southern, and \$34 million from the NC DOT Rail Division. The improvements will allow improved passenger movements in the segment, better coordination with freight, and enable the extension of Piedmont service north of Raleigh to Wake Forest possibly by 2032. Additional sidings will go in between Elon and Burlington, and in Hillsborough. The line between Cary and Morrisville will be double tracked.

In other corridor news: Orr Road on the north side of Charlotte will get a grade separation costing close to \$5 million. \$3.7 million from the Federal Department of Transportation will be supplemented by over \$900,000 from the City of Charlotte. The funding share of the project by Charlotte was approved in May. Design and construction would take a couple of years. This investment will help close and replace the existing Orr Road rail crossing with a new grade-separated crossing in the I-85/Sugar Creek corridor. This grade separation project would enhance safety, improve rail operations, and increase efficiency for the existing rail service and

future high-speed passenger rail service between Washington, DC, Charlotte and Atlanta as part of the Southeast High-Speed Rail corridor.

### PIEDMONT CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENT CAMPAIGN

The N.C. Department of Transportation is completing public engagement by NC By Train, the state's intercity passenger rail service. The effort is aimed to prepare for an additional passenger frequency between Charlotte and Raleigh, and address any concerns about the present service. For more information about NC By Train service, visit [NCByTrain.org](https://ncbytrain.org). Visit the Public Input website at <https://publicinput.com/piedmontservice-expansion>. This site includes a survey that will be open until June 30.

### RAIL AND BUS PROJECTS TO BE FUNDED BY POTENTIAL NEW SALES TAX FOR CHARLOTTE APPROVED

The Metropolitan Transit Commission is now on record approving a plan to guide transit corridor construction if the Transportation Sales Tax is eventually approved by Mecklenburg County voters. 40 percent of the money would go to road related construction, and the remaining 60 percent would be used for rail and bus transit. The plan would fund the Red Line commuter/regional rail project (Charlotte-Mooresville), the Silver line light rail between the Airport and Bojangles Arena. Further light rail expansion from Bojangles to Matthews would be worked in as money becomes available and in segments. In the interim, bus service would fill the gap. It would extend the Blue line light rail from I-485 near Ballantyne to Pineville. Finally, the Gold Line Streetcar would be extended to north of I-85 on Beatties Ford on the west end, and from Sunnyside to Eastland on the east end. All existing bus services would be upgraded and made more frequent. No Bus Rapid Transit is included in the 30-year plan due to significant community support for rail instead. The Blue Line

*Continued on page 23*

# AN UPDATE ON FRONT RANGE RAIL

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

This is a follow-up up to the previous column, *Rail Advocacy on the Front Range: Fort Collins to Pueblo*, published in the 2020-2 issue of PTJ. While it appeared it would take decades, some progress has been made during the past five years. The effort to develop service along the corridor entered into a new phase with the creation of the Front Range Passenger Rail District (FRRPD), which was established by the Colorado state legislature in 2021. The board is made up of appointees from communities across the district, which encompasses all or part of 13 counties along the Interstate 25 corridor. It has more authority than the former Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission, created 5 years earlier, including raising funds through a district wide tax hike. It is tasked with "planning, designing, developing, financing, constructing, operating, and maintaining a passenger rail system" along the Front Range and is required to work collaboratively with the regional transportation district (RTD) to ensure interconnectivity with any passenger rail system operated by or for the RTD and with Amtrak on interconnectivity with Amtrak's *Southwest Chief*, *California Zephyr*, and the Winter Park Express trains.

Although the mission of the FRRPD is to provide passenger rail serving the entire Front Range from Cheyenne, Wyoming to Raton, New Mexico, it has been primarily focused on restoring service on the I-25 corridor between Fort Collins and Pueblo, CO. Jim Souby, the former chair of the rail commission who was appointed as the chair of this new organization, pointed out at the initial meeting in 2022 how much had changed since 2019. After years of ups and downs, he stated, conditions were uniquely favorable to the project. A lot indeed has happened. Governor Jared Polis campaigned on it, Amtrak included Front Range passenger rail in its service expansion plan for 2035 and new

funding was available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. In 2020, the Southwest Chief and Front Range Passenger Rail Commission received a CRISI grant totaling \$66.4 million to develop and complete a preliminary service development plan for the Front Range Passenger Rail Corridor. The Rail commission assigned the grant to CDOT to coordinate with the FRA to complete planning work and to obtain approvals.

The new rail district has had lots to do. In 2023 it applied and was accepted into the FRA Corridor Identification and Development program and has received a \$500,000 planning grant. It was one of just two corridors accepted into step 2 of the program. This has enabled it to begin work on a service development plan which will identify station locations, service frequency, infrastructure improvements as well as other activities such as costs and financial planning. The district also needed to consider putting a sales tax referendum on the ballot. According to Jim Souby, both he and the Governor wanted to put the proposal on the ballot in 2024, but the elected members who served on the District's Board were evidently fearful that it might hurt them politically. Andy Karsian, the general manager for the FRRPD, agreed the 2024 electorate was likely to be the biggest and most favorable to passenger rail in the coming years, but reminded members of the district that the proposal has to be a "clearly explained, defensible" vision.

The passage of Colorado Senate Bill 24-184 in Spring 2024 which Governor Polis spearheaded, provided a major turning point for passenger rail on the Front Range. The bill contained a legislative mandate requiring CDOT, RTD and FRRPD to work together to implement the completion of construction and operation of RTD's unfinished Northwest Rail Corridor connecting Denver, Boulder, and Longmont. This would include an extension of the corridor to Fort Collins as the first section of the Front Range Rail

project. SB 184 also secured dedicated funding for rail projects and requires the Colorado Transportation Investment Office (CTIO), a state business enterprise, to develop a multimodal strategic capital plan aligned with CDOT's 10-year transportation plan and statewide greenhouse gas reduction goals.

In 2024, the Colorado State Legislature also created two new revenue streams totaling nearly \$200 million annually. This can be used to finance rail projects and to expand transit frequency, increase ridership and fund passenger rail projects. The new transportation fees include a \$3 rental car fee, a fee on oil and gas production and a 3-cent per gallon charge on gasoline and fuel which increases annually. In addition, CDOT's application for federal funding through the CRISI program resulted in the awarding of a \$66.4 million grant. The funds are to be used for track improvement, siding installation, and Positive Train Control (PTC) design and installation on a portion of the Front Range Subdivision that is owned by BNSF. Additionally, the funds will be used to improve several railroad crossings at five high-priority locations along the Subdivision.

The three agencies are now working to create a rail starter service which could provide three round trips per day from Denver's Union Station along the RTD B-line tracks to Westminster, the current terminus of the line. Then, on to BNSF's North Front Range Subdivision to Broomfield, Louisville, Boulder, Longmont, Loveland and Fort Collins. The RTA had plans for the route authorized by voters as part of the 2004 Fast Track Initiative to serve Longmont and Boulder, but years of delay have pushed back its completion as far as the 2040s. It currently has about \$170 million in the bank from a 1% sales tax levied in the eight-county RTD district that could also be used for the start up of this new service.

*Continued on page 22*

## AN UPDATE ON FRONT RANGE RAIL

*Continued from page 21*

In their required report to the Governor and the House and Senate Committee in March 2025, the Executive Director of CDOT, the General Manager and CEO of RTD and the interim General Manager of FRPRD pointed out that they have explored alternative options for governing and have agreed on using an Intergovernmental Agreement structure with a joint Service Executive Oversight Committee of six members. This agreement will be presented to each agency's governing boards this summer. Once approved, the governing board will start formal access agreement negotiations with BNSF, owner of the track to be used for service to Fort Collins.

HNTB, the external engineering construction firm that was hired to estimate the state's initial financial investment, includes \$198 million in expenditures on signaling communications upgrades, \$124 million for train engines and passenger cars and \$92 million for station infrastructure. Estimated start-up costs range between \$800 million to \$900 million. The total price tag, including operating costs and debt payments for projected capital expenditures, is estimated at \$83 million a year beginning in 2029. Almost half of that, according to state officials, could be covered by the dedicated revenue provided by the state's new fees on rental cars and oil and gas production. RTD sales tax revenue could cover the other half.

What else BNSF will need to provide access remains to be seen. Its price tag for the use of their tracks was a crucial factor that derailed RTD's plans for its commuter rail line to Boulder in 2004. Agency officials had estimated that it would cost \$66 million, but BNSF quoted an upfront cost of \$535 million in 2011 which set the project's timeline back by decades.

There have also been some concerns about promoting service to Fort Collins first, especially among folks in southern Colorado, who feel they have been left out far too long. Sal Pace, who has served as Pueblo County Commissioner as well as a member of the Colorado State Legislature and is a member of the FRRPD, however, sees it as a political necessity. The overall Front Range project will require new, voter-approved taxes - and residents of the northern corridor, he believes, won't vote for a new train plan unless it fulfills the original Boulder train promise.

Chris Nevitt, who is the Chair of the Board of Directors of the FRPR and assumed this role last spring upon Jim Souby's retirement, fully supports the plan to initially start up service to Fort Collins. He is firmly committed to the whole project and has reminded folks that the original statue "says that Fort Collins is first, and that phasing has always been the plan." He believes there will be a five-year lag between getting starter service on the north segment before service would begin down to Pueblo.

He and the other members of the Board of Directors are moving forward with long-term plans for service between Pueblo and Fort Collins with a vote on a district-wide sales tax hike to fund the project as soon as next year. In the meantime, the district has launched a virtual open house to invite Coloradans to give feedback on parts of the service development plan which it expects to complete by the end of this year. The Preliminary Alternative Analysis Report that was completed in March 2025 showed that five different alternatives have been studied by CDOT and FRPRD and that the district is recommending a plan that envisions a "full build of 10 daily round trips along the proposed line from Pueblo to Fort Collins by 2045." The SDP, which is expected to be completed before the end of this year, will also include analysis related to station planning, preliminary

engineering, travel demand modeling as well as other project development elements, and documentation of public and stakeholder involvement.

There has also been some concern that the proposed new service from Denver to Steamboat Springs and Craig may have an impact on the Front Range Rail Project. Governor Polis, who has been a great champion for FRPR, is also working to expand what is being called Mountain Rail from Denver to Winter Park, Granby and beyond to Steamboat Springs, Hayden and Craig. CDOT received \$3 million in state funding in 2023 to create a plan for the 230-mile Mountain Rail Corridor. The governor and other state officials have been talking for months about plans to build on the success of the Winter Park Express that takes passengers from Denver to the Winter Park ski resort and back, to expand rail service to Steamboat Springs, Hayden and Craig. It would enable Denver-area residents to avoid traffic on I-75 and ride the train to Hot Sulphur Springs and Steamboat Springs. The proposed new service could also carry commuters from Hayden or Craig to their jobs in Steamboat. The new lease of the Moffat Tunnel which replaced the 88-year lease agreement that expired this year will enable Union Pacific to continue using the Moffat Tunnel for 25 years in exchange for allowing the state of Colorado to run three daily passenger trains over the line. "While it's not unfair to say these projects are in competition," Chris Levitt maintains "FRPR still has pride of place, as well as the partnership with RTD. The Mountain Rail enterprise is a purely state project. They don't anticipate federal money and will use only state funds."

In closing, it is far too early to predict what will happen with either project going forward, especially since Governor Polis is termed out next year. Jim Souby, who was interviewed for this article, believes both could happen especially if a statewide rail authority is created. The state is already planning to extend rail service to Granby this year and has the funds to start up service to Fort Collins.

## CAROLINAS AND VIRGINIA NEWS

*Continued from page 20*

will get 3-car-length platforms at the 11 stations that don't have them already. This will allow all trains to run with three cars, the equivalent hauling capacity of 9 buses. At press time there have been no new developments on a passage of a measure in the NC General Assembly concerning the Sales Tax or companion bill to create a Regional Transportation Authority to oversee the plan and transit operations. At present the measures remain in committee.

### CHARLOTTE GATEWAY STATION

The NC Department of Transportation's Rail Division is engaged with the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) in an attempt to speed up the location of Charlotte's Amtrak station stop adjacent to the proposed Gateway Multimodal Transportation Center site. Discussions have centered on building a temporary station before completion of the entire transportation center development. More recently the idea of building the permanent station ahead of the other multi-use components has surfaced. Charlotte has the highest ridership of all 16 Amtrak stations in North Carolina.

CATS Chief Development Officer Kelly Goforth says the team of NC DOT, CATS, and the City of Charlotte are continuing to work with Charlotte Gateway

Partners to finalize the Preliminary Master Plan for the Charlotte Gateway Station Project. A \$1 million grant from US DOT's Innovative Finance and Asset Concession Grant Program is assisting in developing a funding and financing strategy for the project. An update is expected late this Summer.

### LEASE EXTENDED FOR CURRENT COLUMBIA, SC, TRAIN STATION

The City of Columbia and Amtrak are entering into another lease renewal of station property at 850 Pulaski Street in the capital city's Congaree River Vista. The Amtrak station has been located there since the Amtrak station was moved from the historic Seaboard Railway station in 1991. It was required as a result of a railroad consolidation project which removed the viaduct servicing the Gervais Street location. A consolidated rail corridor through the river district now serves both Norfolk Southern and CSX Transportation. The new lease will now end January 31, 2030, unless terminated sooner in accordance with the provisions of the lease. At that time Amtrak would have an option to renew under the same terms for up to 15 years through separate 5 year agreements. The station site could be hemmed in if not expanded or moved elsewhere due to development measures in the area. The current station is a modular building used since 1991. Over the years, a desire has been voiced for a more permanent structure by rail passenger supporters. All Aboard Carolinas

supports this and has also suggested historic Union Station be considered as a new site if the present site is not pursued.

*Martin Wheeler is a RUN Board member and President, All Aboard Carolinas.*

## NJ TRANSIT RIDERS LOSE A STATION AND ENDURE A BRIEF RAIL STRIKE

*Continued from page 16*

The MTA and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA), which collects the tolls through E-Z Pass, initiated the action that requested the injunction. It was filed on February 19, the day that Duffy first ordered Hochul to kill the tolls. Liman, who heard the New York case against the toll last year, issued a preliminary injunction on May 24. Elected officials in New Jersey, from Gov. Murphy down and including both Democrats and Republicans, also fought against the tolls in court, even though most people going into Manhattan from New Jersey use NJ Transit or PATH trains.

*David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair Emeritus of the Lackawanna Coalition in Millburn, NJ. He is a contributing editor to Railway Age.*

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by the Rail Users'  
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corporation.

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Northampton, MA  
01060

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

RAIL USERS NETWORK  
P.O. Box 354,  
Northampton, MA  
01060



## Please become a member of RUN...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Street Address                      City                      State/Province                      Postal Code

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Phone Number                      Fax Number                      E-Mail

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

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