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RUN FALL CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHTS FRA CORRIDOR IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

By David Peter Alan

RUN held its fall conference on Friday, Nov. 15. Its theme was “F.R.A. Corridor Grants – Boosting Economic Activity – the Rail Way!” and its focus was the Federal Railroad Administration’s Corridor Identification and Development (“Corridor ID”) Program. Not much was said about the anticipated boost to local economies when passenger train service starts or is upgraded in a community, but the conference stressed the FRA’s program as a means for helping get more trains onto the rails on corridor-length routes. Unlike the FRA’s long-distance train study featured at last

spring’s RUN conference, with a 2060 planning frontier, the Corridor ID Program is a near-term project. The agency will be giving grants to devise and implement Service Development Plans (SDPs) for new routes.

The conference was held online. RUN Chair Richard Rudolph welcomed the approximately 85 attendees from different regions of the country; mostly advocates, with some managers and elected officials attending, too. Before turning the program over to the presenters from the FRA, he made this observation: “It’s great that there are 69 corridor grants, but we must keep in mind that this is the first

step. States will need to pony up 10% for a Service Development Plan (SDP) and 20% for Phase 3 of the program. So, we advocates need to work hard at the state level.”

An overview from the FRA

As part of the outreach connected with the program, the FRA has been offering online sessions for prospective applicants and others. The slides that the presenters from the agency used at the conference were also used at the more-detailed sessions. Along with other subject matter, they described the program and its steps. Lyle Leitelt, Chief of the program
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NOTES FROM NEW YORK: CONGESTION PRICING!

By Andrew Albert

After “pausing” New York’s plan for Congestion Pricing, Governor Kathy Hochul in mid-November “unpaused” the pause - and requested the federal government to allow NY State to begin the first-in-the-nation Congestion Pricing plan! After receiving federal approval, the new rate will be \$9 for private cars during the “peak” period: 5 AM-9 PM weekdays, and 9 AM-9 PM weekends. During the overnight hours, rates for private cars would drop to \$2.25. Trucks would pay more, motorcycles would pay less. The idea behind congestion pricing is to raise \$1

billion per year, which the MTA could bond to approximately \$15 billion per year, to help pay for the MTA’s \$54 billion Capital Program, which will help the massive mass-transit system rebuild it’s signal system, bridges, elevated structures, purchase new subway and commuter rail cars, modernize many rail stations, make many more subway and commuter rail stations accessible, rebuild the massive tunneling surrounding Grand Central Terminal, and much much more.

Initially, the congestion fee was to be \$15 for private cars, but Governor Hochul stated she

believed this would be too expensive, and so it will now begin at \$9 for cars, which would climb after three years to \$12, and then three years later to the \$15 fee. Projects expected to begin quickly are installation of Communications Based Train Control (CBTC) on the Fulton Street A,C lines in Brooklyn, as well as on the 6th Avenue B,D,F,M lines in Manhattan. This is especially important, as CBTC has already been installed on major portions of the Queens Blvd F line in Queens, as well as most of the Culver F line in Brooklyn. To not have CBTC in the middle of the F line would be
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FULL SPEED AHEAD: MBTA FIXES SLOW ZONES; COMPLETION SET FOR END OF YEAR



A new MBTA Red Line test train with lead control cab car #1906, at the JFK/UMASS station in 2022. Attrib: Wikimedia-Commons, User: Aria1561

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

For the first time in about 20 years, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation authority (MBTA) is free of slow zones on two of its beleaguered subway lines. The few remaining slow spots on their Green Line are expected to be completed by the end of this year.

Taking a bull-by-the-horns approach, the MBTA's new general manager has wrestled the maintenance-of-way problems to the ground and seems to have won. Prior to the arrival of Phil Eng, most recently from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) in New York, made it a mission to get things fixed once and for all. The MBTA did have many repairs and even a month-long closure of one subway line to address needed repairs before his arrival, but they were either not done properly or not documented properly forcing a complete redo of many of the locations that had been "fixed."

Just a short time ago, the MBTA declared that its Orange Line subway that runs generally north and south on either side of downtown Boston, MA, was declared free of all slow zones. A few weeks later, its Red Line was freed of all of its remaining slow zones. The work, which has been ongoing for over a year, took all of the MBTA's subway lines out of commission for days or even weeks at a time, forcing commuters onto surface shuttle buses, but in the end the expense and inconvenience has resulted in a rebuilt system.

As of this newsletter, the MBTA still has a slow zone to be addressed on its newest segment, the Green Line Extension, running northerly from downtown Boston. This includes work that was not properly installed or to specification. This should be corrected by the end of this calendar year. Once done and signal work repairs and upgrades completed, the MBTA expects to be able return to posted speeds but also shorten headways.

New rolling stock purchased from the China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC), which will operate on the system's Orange and Red Lines, is also performing better than specified, according to recently released reports. Several months ago, the MBTA re-negotiated its contract paying an additional \$148 million to CRRC and forgiving some contract delay penalties. Since then, deliveries of new cars have been generally on schedule. In examining operation, the cars continue to perform above the contractual requirement of 90,000 miles between failures, and in fact, they are now exceeding 200,000 miles between failures. To date, the Orange Line now has enough rolling stock to meet peak service headways plus spares. All of the older Hawker-Siddeley units which preceded the CRRC rolling stock are totally off the property and were scrapped. The Red Line deliveries, scheduled to arrive after the Orange Line order is mostly completed, already have several trainsets in revenue test service. Both the Red and Orange Line cars are identical from a mechanical and electrical standpoint, which will allow for interchange of parts. However, each subway line was designed and built at a time when there were no standards, near the early 1900s, so their physical length and width differ.

On the commuter rail side, the MBTA has exercised an option to obtain additional "double decker" coaches from Hyundai-Rotem with deliveries and burn-in underway as they arrive. Over time, the MBTA plans to eventually retire all of its single-level coaches, many of a venerable age, making all of its trainsets bilevel once the purchase and cut-in is completed. The current bilevel fleet is a mix of coaches manufactured by Kawasaki and Hyundai-Rotem.

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NOTES FROM NEW YORK

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ridiculous, as trains would catch up with trains on the portion of the line not equipped with CBTC! Also planned is the immediate work to make 26 stations accessible, which was stopped during the "pause."

Work will also begin to boost resiliency on Metro-North's Hudson Line, which has seen flooding and landslides during some major storms. And work will also begin on the IBX - the Interborough Express, which will run on an existing freight line from the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn, across Brooklyn and up into Queens to Jackson Heights, giving people travelling from Brooklyn to Queens a quick ride, connecting with 19 subway lines! Plus, work will commence tunneling under the 2nd Ave subway to 125th St & Park Avenue! Additionally, much-needed work on the approaches to the Verrazano Bridge - on both the Brooklyn & Staten Island approaches - will begin.

Now the bad news - there are still around 11 lawsuits threatening the start of congestion pricing. The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has filed a lawsuit to stop the program, which has

been joined by Staten Island Borough President Vito Fossella. The State of New Jersey has also filed a suit, which Bergen County and the town of Fort Lee have joined.

In New York, New Yorkers against Congestion Pricing, a Lower East Side group, has filed a suit, claiming it will bring additional pollution to their neighborhood. And residents of Battery Park City have filed a similar lawsuit, claiming keeping cars on the highways will add pollution to their area. What is amusing is that cars move more quickly on the West Side Highway and FDR Drive, polluting less than cars on local streets, starting & stopping at lights, congestion, etc. In addition, Rockland County & the town of Hempstead have said they will file lawsuits to stop congestion pricing.

While one could argue that Rockland County won't see the benefit of congestion pricing until the Bergen Loop in Secaucus is completed, which will allow for a one-seat ride from Rockland County Metro-North stations to Penn Station, the Town of Hempstead on Long Island will greatly benefit from Congestion Pricing, as the Long Island Rail Road will definitely benefit from new rolling stock, upgraded stations,

and possible electrification of diesel-only lines.

We will see what transpires, as the start date of congestion pricing is Jan. 5, 2025. One can definitely say that the future of transit, cleaner air, less congestion for those who must drive, and better movement of emergency vehicles - such as police, fire, ambulances, will absolutely depend on congestion pricing. No one has come even close with an alternate idea to raise \$15 billion per year for the MTA's massive \$1.5 trillion asset!

Needless to say, we will be watching very closely what transpires, as President-Elect Trump has declared he will kill the proposal when he takes office. If it is in place prior to him taking office, it will be much more difficult to stop it. However, Congressman Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey has declared he will introduce legislation to prevent NY State from getting federal dollars if the program is implemented. Stay tuned!

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

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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

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RUN CANADA REPORT, DECEMBER 2024

By Ken Westcar

Alberta Moving Quickly to Advance Regional Rail

The Province of Alberta hosted a passenger rail forum on Nov. 22 in Calgary, Alberta to engage stakeholders and present their plan for passenger rail services in the province.

The core message of the conference was that the Province of Alberta is looking primarily to rail rather than highways to accommodate burgeoning population, industrial and tourism growth.

New and improved roads and highways will continue to serve some aspects of the Calgary/Edmonton economic region, but public transportation will have a strong commitment to expanded rail services.

Alberta Passenger Rail Master Plan

The plan is specifically for regional, light rail and intercity rail, unlike many other provincial plans that usually consider rail as a largely localized commuter issue with the Greater Toronto/Hamilton Area (GTHA) being a prime example. The Alberta plan will result in a long-term, high-level policy designed to extend passenger rail to target markets rather than an ad-hoc approach based on short-term political expediency and the availability of existing rail infrastructure.

This is a strictly provincial plan that does not consider VIA Rail operations nor Transport Canada as significant contributors other than being accommodative and compliant with national regulatory issues. It does, however, commit to holding CN, CPKC and Rocky Mountaineer operations safe and considers them as counsel on infrastructure planning matters, primarily the Calgary/Edmonton and Calgary/Banff passenger rail initiatives.

Ministerial Commitment

Provincial Premier Danielle Smith, Minister of Transport Devin Dreesen and Bryce Stewart, Deputy Minister of Transportation provided unequivocal support for the master plan, reiterating that it was “when” not “if”. Funding would be available based, not only on the more immediate business case, but on longer term considerations including future predictions of regional economic activity, population growth, smart land-use planning and proven economic multipliers from rail-based transportation.

The provincial government openly recognizes the true cost of highways including land-use, environmental harms, adverse health effects and climate resilience. Induced traffic demand is at odds with evolving economic, environmental and social policy goals. They noted the availability of needed human resources (engineering, construction and operations) are more certain with both a parallel and sequential project development approach and offers more scope for capital cost containment and timely project delivery. Transport Action Canada unequivocally supports these conclusions.

Plan Timeline

This forum was the official launch of the Plan but a group of planners, known as Alberta Connexion Partners has already received its provincial work scope briefing (July 2024) and are fully engaged. Anticipated is the Plan will be complete by the end of the first half of 2025 to enable ministerial decisions in the fall of 2025. Compared to similar exercises in Ontario, this timeline is extremely aggressive, suggesting a sense of urgency.

The Plan is an integral part of the 2026 Community Infrastructure Plan that has a C\$30bn budget. A brief, one-on-one discussion with Adrian Lightstone of CPCS confirmed the ministerial

statements and that the province is drawing heavily on national and international infrastructure planning resources.

In-Scope Projects

Calgary Green Line LRT - route selection and funding. A resolution is expected within the next 3 months, possibly sooner. The original plan will be modified but there is no provincial resistance to fulfilling the project, per se.

Calgary Blue Line LRT Airport Extension - Seen as the major initiative to make Calgary more internationally competitive and reduce highway congestion. By making it attractive to air passengers with tight scheduling and short journey times it is expected to be the preferred route to downtown and beyond and would integrate with the planned Calgary/Edmonton and Calgary/Banff heavy rail services.

Calgary/Edmonton Heavy Rail - Alberta Connexion Partners will be researching and reporting on the various technological options based on relations with CPKC, municipal land use preferences and business case scenarios. There are no plans to develop existing Highway 2 for additional vehicular capacity despite growing congestion. Currently 300kph HSR appears to be favored, with a consortium of AECOM and Ellis-Don having made what is rumored to be an unsolicited proposal.

Calgary/Banff Heavy Rail - Seen as a key component of lifting annual provincial tourism revenues from the current C\$10bn to eventually C\$25bn. Alberta hosted 28million tourists in 2023. Private developers of this project, Liricon Capital, have been working on this for almost a decade, using CPKC infrastructure, and require provincial support to advance. The business case is positive and stresses the “passenger experience” and reduction in

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PROBLEMS AT NJ TRANSIT, BUT LACKAWANNA COALITION PUSHES ON

By *Sally Jane Gellert*

NJ Transit has started to move into its new headquarters on the opposite side of Newark Penn Station from where they are now. The move will save money this year, as they will not be doing needed renovations on their existing building but will be an enormous cost in future years—much more than staying put. Heck, the move itself, a matter of a 0.3-mile walk or 0.5-mile drive, is budgeted at \$5 million, with the entire project cost coming in at >\$400,000.

At the board's last meeting, they approved an action item to do what is needed to close Kingsland Station when the new Lyndhurst Station opens. This comes with no explanation or reaction to local concerns—at the 2 required public hearings (to both of which board member Shanti Narra arrived late) a total of about 40 residents showed up to express their concerns—almost without exception opposed to the closure. The Lackawanna Coalition was active in opposing this closure, including a visit last winter to the Lyndhurst town council. Although the excuse for this closure is to improve “accessibility”, it actually decreases accessibility for all those who used the station (about 290 per day, according to NJT's own numbers, including pedestrians who now have a longer walk). The closure also eliminates an intermodal connection to the #76 bus, a long line connecting many towns with a stop directly in front of Kingsland Station, which cannot be rerouted to pass the new station. It appears that, despite their apparent ignorance of the plan to close Kingsland Station, the mayor at least knew of it back in 2021, as we found coverage from that time of his statements about negotiations with NJ Transit.

NJ Transit has finally hired a “customer advocate”, some 4 years since the position was last filled by the public-relations-oriented Stewart Mader. The new advocate—a corporate-hierarchy

term that the agency continues to use—is Franck Beaumin, who in addition to attending the last NJT board meeting, joined the Lackawanna Coalition at our November meeting, even making the effort to attend in person, and promising to return, maybe virtually, when he is able. Since that meeting, we have had e-mail exchanges that indicate that after years of silence, there may be someone connected with the agency (reporting to the board, not to staff) who will engage in productive conversation with citizen advocates. Mr. Beaumin has also indicated willingness to attend a meeting of NJ Transit's Senior Citizen and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee, a group that was conspicuously left out of NJ Transit's press release announcing the new hire.

Once again, riders of NJ Transit have suffered through late trains/cancellations, with substandard “ABCs”—alternatives, back-ups, and contingencies—and endless commuting times. Whether it is a downed tree, a mechanical problem, or staff absences, riders are frustrated with unreliable service—and with recent decisions, at a cost that increases 3% every year. To address this, Lackawanna Coalition Membership Director George Kaufer, with some help from Philadelphia resident and friend of the coalition Delvan Bradford, created a more comprehensive list of alternatives, which may be found on the Lackawanna Coalition's Website at “Alternative Transit Choices”:
<https://lackawannacoalition.org/stuck-on-njt/>

We at the Lackawanna Coalition, along with other riders and advocates, have been expressing our concern about barely translucent windows on many multilevel rail cars, as well as some others, for at least 2 years. President/CEO Kevin Corbett had stated that the windows would be replaced when the cars were overhauled; yet

when a contract was approved for that at the October meeting, no mention was made of replacing windows. Especially for occasional riders, being able to see out the windows is more than enjoyment; if an announcement is not made of the stop, seeing signs at the station can be critical for getting off at the right stop. This is a particular issue for the hearing-impaired, and also can be a problem for those with limited vision.

One would expect a transit agency to care about nonmotorists, their “captive audience” who relies on their services for all of their mobility. However, NJ Transit seems to disrespect nonmotorists, refusing to give substantial replies to most complaints submitted. It seems that Mr. Beaumin has a customer-service focus; we hope that he will be successful in getting the agency to take that subject seriously.

Sally Jane Gellert is chairperson of the Lackawanna Coalition, an organizational member of RUN, and also chairperson of NJ Transit's Senior Citizen and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee (SCDRTAC).

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better?**

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

Send your article to rrudolph1022@gmail.com, and get published!

SEPTA AT THE FISCAL CLIFF

By Chuck Bode and Mark Sanders

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), the nation's sixth largest transit system, continues to dangle over a fiscal cliff. Like an endless roller coaster, the half-century saga of SEPTA's lack of funding continues, with coronavirus funding running out before ridership recovers.

SEPTA's 2025 fiscal year began on July 1 with a projected deficit of \$240 million.

This year, Harrisburg has, unfortunately, come through only with limited funding, leaving the crisis unresolved. Although SEPTA's largely Democratic territory is home to much of Pennsylvania's population and the income that it generates, it is important to understand that a significant percentage of the largely Republican rural population would be happy if Philadelphia, SEPTA, and the Democrats were to disappear. The Senate is unwilling to provide more funds for public transit.

SEPTA's tale of woe continues. For some time and at considerable expense, for a system short of money, SEPTA has been working to redesign its network of bus routes to eliminate duplications and low ridership segments. This redesign of the bus route network would necessitate

several additional transfers for those passengers still able to ride. Now having alienated a great many of its patrons, SEPTA has been obliged to put this project on hold until funding is assured. In the meantime, the old standbys, fare increases and service cuts, have been proposed and adopted.

First have come parking fees. Before the pandemic, SEPTA charged for parking at many of its Regional Rail stations and at three parking garages. As ridership fell with the onset of the pandemic, SEPTA eliminated the parking fee in an attempt to retain riders. With riders returning and a deficit projected, the parking charges have been restored, at twice the previous rate. As RUN members might expect, the parking fee has produced little income, and it has failed to generate public agitation at the political level.

Next has come a fare increase of 7.5% slated to take effect on December 1. This unusual increase has not changed the cash fare, but has eliminated the discount for using prepaid fare instruments. Thus, all riders now pay the high cash fare whether paying in cash, using their credit card, or buying a prepaid fare card. This increase is expected to generate an additional \$14.4 million in revenue; however,

removing the incentive to use prepaid cards may slow the system as more riders fumble to put \$2.50 into the farebox using multiple bills and coins.

The deficit began at \$240 million. Even after SEPTA's receipt of a stopgap appropriation last summer, the reimposition of the parking fee (now doubled), and the enactment of the first fare increase, the deficit has still been expected to be \$153 million. Woe is SEPTA.

Earlier this fall, the first fare increase had not even progressed as far as Board approval, when SEPTA announced public hearings for a second, much greater, fare increase of 21.5%. This proposal also called for the elimination of 20% of the service, to be detailed after the hearings. SEPTA admitted that this was the start of its death spiral. Finally, a public reaction occurred. In the wake of the expected hue and cry, the governor has announced he will "flex", or redirect, to SEPTA \$153 million from seven highway projects that have not yet entered the construction phase, thereby solving the crisis of the day. The proposed fare increase and service cuts are on hold, perhaps to return next July 1.

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WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO SOLVE SEPTA'S FINANCIAL WOES?

By Chuck Bode

A bit of background may help readers understand SEPTA's predicament. SEPTA's predicament is essentially that the masses are gone, but the system and its costs remain. Limousine service is costly. The vehicles are expensive, every trip is custom, and a chauffeur is provided. The price, fare, is accordingly high. However, the customer is not paying for transportation. Instead, the customer is buying a unique, once in a great while experience and a lifetime of memories.

To begin to understand SEPTA's difficulties, it helps to go back before terminology became politically correct. Back then it was mass transit, a business designed to move multitudes on frequent repetitive trips. Capital was invested to enable the furnishing of many daily trips throughout an area. SEPTA has a large headquarters building, repair facilities, depots, miles of track, and hundreds of buses and rail cars. All of which require maintenance. Not to mention thousands of employees. It is a well oiled transportation machine capable of moving the masses.

For several reasons, mass transit ridership is down. Among them are coronavirus and the telecommuting it created, Uber and Lyft, electric bicycles, electric scooters and skateboards, and societal issues, for example, homeless in stations and the perception of crime. While ridership is down, costs do not go down proportionately.

Roughly half of SEPTA's riders need to transfer to complete their journey. Thus, for every two passengers lost from fare hikes and/or service cuts, another

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Chairman's Message

Dear RUN Members and Friends:

Thanks for your continuing support which enables us to advocate on behalf of Long Distance, commuter rail passengers and rail transit riders over the past two decades. Besides publishing our award-winning quarterly newsletter and monthly emailed Short Runs, we continue to hold conferences and annual meetings each year to highlight the work that advocates are doing to restore or expand passenger rail and rail transit services. We also have a column in the *Passenger Train Journal* which is published quarterly and often contribute to news stories published in *Railway Age*.

This year we have held two different virtual national conferences which were well attended. The first, which was held on May 17, focused on Expanding Long Distance Rail: Why Amtrak service to more towns and cities is important to the entire US! The second conference which was just held on November 15 focused on the F.R.A. Corridor Grants Program - Boosting Economic Activity the Rail Way! Both events were held in response to two different FRA initiatives - its Long-Distance Study committee formed to determine which routes can be expanded or restored and the awarding of sixty-nine I.D. \$500,000 Corridor Grants which underwrite the first step in a three-step process to move projects from inception to the ready-for-construction phase.

The RUN Board of Directors have also been involved in legislative initiatives at both the state and national level. For example, we submitted a letter of support to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials regarding Amtrak's failure to hold public board meetings. As a publicly-funded national passenger rail service, its meeting agendas, minutes, and other material presented at and to the board should be made available to the public so that those interested can better understand how Amtrak conducts its business. We have also expressed concerns over Amtrak's announcement regarding the return of the *Floridian*. While this gives travelers from the Midwest a direct, one-seat ride to the sunshine state, the route is hardly "the Floridian" that everyone remembers. The route replicates Amtrak's *Capitol Limited* between Chicago and Washington D.C, then utilizes the route of the *Silver Star*, which was canceled, to make its way down to the East Coast to Florida. While doing so, it removes the traditional *Silver Star* from service north of Washington, D.C. and bypasses large population centers in the south, making it far less useful than it could be. The new *Floridian* also reduces Amtrak's long-distance network from 15 trains down to 14 trains, with the loss of the NY-Florida *Silver Star*. This loss is due to the absence of viable long-distance Superliner coaches, which are sitting and rotting in the Beech Grove Yards, when they should have been refurbished and prepared for new long distance service. While we believe restoring through service from Chicago to Florida is a worthwhile goal, it should not come at the expense of taking away service from other states. The Rail Users' Network called on the Department of Transportation and our elected officials to "do the right thing" - by bringing back service from Chicago to Florida on a route that makes sense, while not harming any existing routes.

While we continue to hold our board meetings using Zoom, they are open to the public to attend and minutes are available on our website. Our annual meeting this year was held in person at the MTA headquarters in New York as well as on Zoom,- December 7 from 1-4:00 pm. EST. Besides a brief business meeting, we lined-up two great speakers who talked about success stories. Knox Ross, Chairman of the Southern Rail Commission talked about the successful effort to restore rail service to Mobile, Alabama and Troy Creasy, NCDOT's Chief railroad design and construction engineer talked about the S-line from Raleigh to Richmond, Va. NCDOT has received a \$1.09 billion FRA Federal-State Partnership Grant for Intercity Passenger Rail. This grant will fund the design and construction of the initial segment of the S-Line from Raleigh to Wake Forest, North Carolina. Additional segments will be applied for in future grant opportunities.

In order to continue our work, we need your financial help. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to our 2024 Annual Appeal. Your support will help us have a greater impact and broader reach as we continue to represent all rail passengers, including long distance, commuter, and transit riders. Contributions may be made either by check or on RUN's website at railusers.net. We thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,
Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.
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A COMBINED ROUTE AND A SERVICE CUT AS TWO GREAT TRAINS ROLL INTO HISTORY

By David Peter Alan

On Sunday, Nov. 10, two historic trains that had served their riders for nearly a century rolled on their home rails for the last time and into history. One was the *Capitol Limited*, which was the crack train between the East and Chicago on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) from 1923 until 1971, and again under Amtrak operation from 1981 until 2024. The other was the *Silver Star*, which provided service between New York and Florida on the Seaboard Railroad, and later the Seaboard Coast Line and Amtrak, from 1939 until its Washington arrival on Nov. 10. The latter train is now truncated at Washington, D.C. and combined with the *Capitol Limited* from there to Chicago.

Amtrak is calling the combined train the *Floridian*, but it bears little resemblance to the train of the same name from the 1970s. The two have nothing in common, except Chicago on one end and the Florida portion of the route on the other. The combined route is long, especially for the Amfleet II cars that are used regularly on the long-distance trains that serve Penn Station, New York. They are not as comfortable as the Superliner cars that ran on the *Capitol Limited* until its demise, and non-motorists and motorists alike can only ride them west of Chicago and New Orleans, or between those cities. The *Silver Meteor* is now the only train between Florida and the Northeast Corridor (NEC) north of Washington, DC, and riders going to or from points in the Carolinas or Florida that were served only by the *Silver Star* have lost direct access to any destination north of the Nation's Capital.

Gone after 84 years of service

The *Silver Star* began running in 1939 as part of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad's legendary Silver Service, which also included its running mate, the *Silver Meteor*; also between New York and

Florida, and the *Silver Comet* to Atlanta and Birmingham, which lasted from 1947 until 1969. Today's "Meteor" still operates, but it runs almost completely on the historic Atlantic Coast Line, which is now CSX's A-Line. Only the "Star" ran on part of the original Seaboard, now CSX's S-Line, in the Carolinas. It served the state capitals of Raleigh and Columbia on that part of the route, as well as several other towns. It also diverged from the A-Line in Florida between Auburndale and Tampa, with two stops at Lakeland; one on the way to Tampa and the other on the way back to the main from there.

I have been riding the "Star" on and off since my undergrad days, about 55 years ago. At that time, it and the other Florida trains were long and luxurious. There were so many sleeping cars and coaches that it needed two dining cars, carried a rear-end observation car for sleeping-car passengers, and a lounge car for both sleeping-car and coach passengers. Amtrak later downgraded it with shorter consists and, for most of the last several years, without a dining car. Crew members referred to it as the "Silver Starve" or the "Silver Starvation" at the time. On my last southbound trip, on October 22, I took advantage of the newly-restored permission for coach passengers to purchase and eat meals in the dining car. Like Amtrak food generally, it was nothing special, but it was part of my own farewell trip.

I chose to visit two cities that no longer have direct service north of Washington, DC. My first destination was Tampa. In the slightly more than four hours I had in town, I took a good look at historic Union Station (opened in 1912), had lunch at the Columbia Restaurant (serving Spanish and Cuban food since 1905), and rode the TECO streetcar; a disappointing experience because the windows were wrapped with advertising that obscured the view from the car. The line opened in 2002 and was lengthened in 2010, and runs heritage-

style Birney-type cars made by the Gomaico Trolley Company of Cedar Grove, IA. On the way back, I visited Columbia, South Carolina's capital. The city has some attractive buildings, classic Southern food, and the State Museum, which was interesting. One undesirable experience during my visit was the inconvenience of having to wait for the station to open at 12:45 AM; several hours after bars and restaurants had closed on the Thursday I spent in town.

Top of the Line a century ago; gone now after 91 years

The B&O's *Capitol Limited* offered a level of service and luxury between the East and Chicago that was unequaled through most of its first incarnation, from 1923 until April 30, 1971; the final day before Amtrak started. Its original terminal was New York's Penn Station, but from 1926 until 1958, it ran from the Jersey Central terminal in Jersey City; a building that is preserved but with no tracks to connect it to the outside world anymore. New York passengers took a ferry or a bus from a number of city locations. The B&O cut its terminal back to Camden Station in Baltimore, and finally to Union Station in Washington, DC. It left from there during the latter days of its B&O incarnation and for all of its time as an Amtrak train. During the Amtrak era, the "Cap" only used B&O heritage rails east of Pittsburgh; at least for much of that part of its life. It used a part of the historic Pennsylvania Railroad between Pittsburgh and Cleveland, and the current route of the *Lake Shore Limited* the rest of the way.

Sadly, it suffered during its final years. It lost its dining car in 2018, and sleeping-car passengers were given pre-prepared meals that were warmed up for serving. Coach passengers were only allowed to purchase lounge-car snacks. The consist was reduced to only two sleeping cars

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A COMBINED ROUTE AND A SERVICE CUT AS TWO GREAT TRAINS ROLL INTO HISTORY

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and two coaches for the train's final years. For some of that time, it was even worse; when I rode in the spring of 2022, there was only one coach and one sleeping car, with the food service car between them. An August 2023 photo of the train showed that same minimal consist. Still, the Superliner equipment represented a level of comfort not available on any other Eastern trains that both non-motorists and motorists could ride. Its final journey to Chicago on Nov. 10 was a lonely one; deadheading with no riders on board.

I took my final ride on Train 29 on Tuesday, October 28. The ride in coach was comfortable, the crew was friendly, and the train ran close to schedule. Only lounge-car snacks were available for purchase, and only after the attendant had served pre-prepared meals to the sleeping-car passengers. Three private cars bound for the Heber Valley RR, a tourist railroad in Utah, augmented the consist.

A new train, but not the old Floridian, either

There is still a train between Washington, DC and Florida, which makes the *Silver Star's* stops along the route, but it's not the "Star." Instead, it's half a train; the north-south component of a train that Amtrak now calls the *Floridian*, and which takes 46½ hours to run between Chicago and Miami; eight hours longer than it took the prior *Floridian* to span the endpoints in the 1970s and 17 hours longer than it took its pre-Amtrak predecessor, the *South Wind*.

When the two now-discontinued trains were still running, passengers could be ticketed on both of them, with a transfer at Washington, DC; an event that the station crew knew how to handle. Running a consist as a through train gained little, if anything, for those

riders. However, riders between NEC stops and places south of Washington have suffered a major detriment. "Official" running times have been lengthened by two hours in each direction, since traveling between the NEC and a station south of it is now a two-seat ride, with longer travel time and a new inconvenience, worse than the one that Amtrak touts that it has lifted from the backs of riders going through the Nation's Capital. It's too early to tell what the long-term effect on ridership will be, but early reports indicate that the *Silver Meteor* has become more popular since it became the only train between the Northeast and Florida that still offers a one-seat ride between points south of Washington, DC and NEC stations north of there.

Most riders going to or coming from points north of New York have lost their connections. The transfer time at Washington now requires an earlier departure from New York and a later arrival there. There are essentially no available connections to or from points to Springfield, or to Albany. Going to Boston or coming from there requires using the now-anonymous *Night Owl* (still known unofficially by that name); a train whose running time between Boston and Washington, DC (the official transfer point) has been lengthened to twelve hours. Ironically, the "official" running time between Miami and Boston is now slightly longer than the running time between Miami and Chicago on the new *Floridian*.

So why did Amtrak make this move? There are two reasons, and both lie within Amtrak's control. One is the lack of Superliner equipment available for trains running west of Chicago and New Orleans. Converting the former *Capitol Limited* to Amfleet II cars, which run on New York trains because they can fit in the tunnels on the NEC and Superliner cars are too tall, makes 15 cars available, plus spares. Fourteen such cars, plus spares, are used on trains between Chicago and Carbondale, IL because host railroad CN insists on it. Amtrak has been criticized for running short consists

on several Western trains because so many Superliner cars are at the Beech Grove, IN shops waiting to be repaired. Some advocates say that the railroad has been slow to repair that equipment, especially since the COVID-19 virus hit. So could Amtrak get busy and repair enough equipment to run the genuine *Capitol Limited* again? Maybe, but does Amtrak really want to do that? Maybe; we don't know.

Amtrak's other justification for truncating the *Silver Star* is the East River Tunnel Project in New York City, which is scheduled to take about three years. Amtrak says that discontinuing the NEC portion of the "Star" route will eliminate a daily round trip between Penn Station and Sunnyside Yard, where the equipment is stored. However, the train left Penn Station at 11:02 AM and was due to arrive at 7:10 PM; times outside peak-commuting hours. In addition, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul has pressured Amtrak into restoring some Empire Service trains between New York and Albany that were eliminated on account of the same project. Some advocates are saying that through-running for Empire Service trains and other work-around solutions can render it unnecessary to save the trip between the station and the yard that was used as a justification for cutting the *Silver Star's* route, if that's true, then both of Amtrak's justifications for the demise of the two legendary trains could become questionable.

Amtrak says that the change is temporary, but that assertion appears difficult to believe. Amtrak has refused to answer my questions on the subject, as documented by my coverage in *Railway Age*. Beyond that, Amtrak's very act of eliminating the names of the *Capitol Limited* and the *Silver Star* shows an intent to make the change permanent. If Amtrak had intended the route to be only temporary, the sole change that could have been considered necessary would have been truncating the *Silver Star* at Washington, DC "for the duration." Service to New York

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A COMBINED ROUTE AND A SERVICE CUT AS TWO GREAT TRAINS ROLL INTO HISTORY

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could have been restored when it becomes feasible to do so. Instead, Amtrak changed the branding by giving the through-routed train a new name. Amtrak is protecting the names of its trains with trademarks (actually service marks); intellectual property protection that associates a provider with its goods or services in the mind of the public. That includes brand names. It is not customary that an entity in either the private or public sector would launch a branding campaign for a service, like one of Amtrak's trains, with the intention that its new brand would only be used temporarily. The act of re-branding the train is at least *prima facie* proof that Amtrak intends to keep it that way for the long term, rather than for a period as short as three years.

Advocates, including RUN, express concern about the loss of the two former trains, including the lack of a one-seat ride between the NEC and certain stations on the route of the old *Silver Star*. The advocacy organization that supported the change without reservation is the Rail Passengers' Association (RPA), which offers discounts on Amtrak to its members; a benefit not available to members of other advocacy groups. Amtrak quoted RPA President Jim Mathews as saying: "Rail Passengers applauds Amtrak for this innovative solution to keeping passengers moving during critical state of good repair work. We believe riders will flock to this service." Other advocates were not as enthusiastic, with several expressing concern. The most vocal we found was Evan Stair, President of Passenger Rail Oklahoma and Passenger Rail Kansas, who accused Amtrak of violating its statutory obligation. Stair said this in a blog post: "Amtrak executives are breaking the law by ignoring

Congressional mandates. Excuses will rule the day as advocates marvel at the *Floridian* picture, painted with Amtrak's revisionist paint." Regarding the loss of service north of Washington, DC, he said: "To us it is an illegal albeit stated 'temporary' discontinuance. Those on the *Sunset Limited* route east of New Orleans understand what that means." Stair analogized to the elimination of service between New Orleans and Florida as the Gulf Coast extension of the *Sunset Limited*, and which ran between 1993 and 2005; a portion of the former route that Amtrak says is "suspended" instead of officially discontinued.

RUN also criticized the new change. In a statement sent to Congressional transportation committees and posted on its website, www.railusers.net, RUN said: "this route is hardly the *Floridian* that everyone remembers" and continued: "Another ridiculous aspect of this new 'Floridian', would be that it bypasses large population centers in the South, making it far less useful than it could be. Cities such as Louisville, Nashville, & Atlanta – obvious places a Chicago to Florida train should serve – would not get the train service they have been waiting for for years." At its conclusion, RUN contrasted the purported "gain" of through service between the two doomed routes with the actual loss of service that riders in the Northeast will experience: "we would hope that our elected officials and those serving in the U.S. Department of Transportation would see this for what it is – selling 'new' connectivity, while demonstrably cutting off those who have relied on Amtrak service for many years. While we believe restoring through service from Chicago to Florida is a worthwhile goal, it should not come at the expense of taking away service from other states."

For a detailed analysis of this change and its potential effects, see coverage by the author at www.railwayage.com, in articles dated October 4, October 22, October 28, and November 18, 2024.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and a Contributing Editor at Railway Age.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, write to:

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01060

or contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at rrudolph1022@gmail.com

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RUN FALL CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHTS FRA CORRIDOR IDENTIFICATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

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agency's Planning Division, and Barbara Moreno, CID Program Lead, were part of the presentation team for the detailed sessions, and also presented the FRA overview at the RUN conference. Moreno described the program, with an emphasis on state support. Step 1 included \$500,000 grants toward initial scoping. Step 2 calls for an SDP for each project, and Step 3 will develop the SDPs further. The agency has \$800 million available in grants for Steps 1 and 2, and \$1 billion for Step 3. There are four categories of projects eligible for grants: high-speed rail corridors, new conventional rail routes where there are currently no corridor-length passenger runs, extensions to existing routes, and upgrades to existing routes that are now running their entire length. Leitelt noted that there have been some recent changes to the program, especially concerning SDP variations. They include adding new projects to existing corridors and combining multiple planning efforts for a phased implementation. Prior FRA presentations and other information about the Corridor ID Program can be found on the FRA's website: www.railroads.gov.

Although the FRA program is not connected directly to Amtrak's *ConnectsUS* plan for adding state-supported corridor-length routes, the two are related. Amtrak itself has applied for grants to develop the former Texas Central high-speed-rail proposal to link Dallas with the Houston area, bring Amtrak service to Long Island, and upgrade the *Sunset Limited* and the *Cardinal* to daily operation. We counted 34 projects proposed in the Amtrak plan that are also grant recipients under the FRA program.

Advocacy from around the country

While advocacy organizations are not eligible to apply for grants directly, about half of the conference presenters are advocates at the state and local levels. The others represented "official" bodies such as state transportation departments, and some were present or former elected officials.

The first two presenters represented New England. Carl Fowler of the Vermont Rail Advisory Council, led off. After describing the decline of passenger trains in his state (there are now only the *Vermont* and the *Ethan Allen Express*), he described three proposals: improving service on the two existing lines, extending service to Montreal, and adding a new route between Albany and Rutland, through Bennington and Manchester, in the southwestern part of the state. He also called for a second train on the segment of the *Vermont* route between White River Junction and New York, through Springfield. The other New Englander on the program was Andy Kozioł, West-East Rail Director at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT). His agency is introducing a new brand, Compass Rail, to signify that passenger trains run to and from Springfield in all four cardinal directions. MassDOT plans to run new service between Boston and Albany, to add a station at Palmer (between Worcester and Springfield), and to add trains on the Inland Route, between Boston and New York through Springfield.

Three presenters represented the South. The first two described North Carolina projects that have been discussed since the *Piedmont* service between Raleigh and Charlotte began in 1995. Ray Rapp, a former legislator and now Co-Chair of the Western North Carolina Rail Committee, is pushing for new service to run between Salisbury (east of Charlotte) and Asheville. He noted the challenges of upgrading the mountainous line, where passenger trains last ran in 1975 on the Southern

Railway. He supports a plan that would expand freight service, accommodate tourist railroads, and bring passenger trains back to Asheville. He said that three daily round trips with a running time of 3:25 would generate 290,000 riders annually. Gene Merritt, Co-Chair of Eastern Carolina Rail, described the current effort to restore trains between Raleigh and Wilmington for the first time since 1968. He called for a station in each county and a major one at Goldsboro, and said that a track speed of 80 mph would allow a running time slightly less than three hours, with five stops.

Robert Reichert, former mayor of Macon, GA and a member of the I-75 Coalition, is calling for service between Atlanta and Savannah, which last ran in 1971. Macon is in the middle of that line, on the historic Central of Georgia Railroad and now part of NS. He said that the trains would relieve congestion on the highway, and called for Atlanta to act as a hub for other lines, too. John Spain of Louisiana, Vice-Chair of the Southern Rail Commission (SRC), said that it will be necessary to "re-educate governors and senior staff" about the benefits of passenger trains. His organization has been sponsoring the new service between Mobile and New Orleans that is slated to start next year. He also mentioned the proposed service between New Orleans and Baton Rouge on CPKC, which Amtrak would run. He also said that the proposed I-20 line between Meridian and Dallas through Shreveport can move forward quickly, because no new infrastructure would be needed for it.

John Esterly, Executive Director of All Aboard Ohio (AAO), who also represents rail labor through the Legislative Board of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), was the sole Midwesterner on the program. He described efforts to bring trains to the 3C+D (Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Dayton) corridor, which then-Gov. John Kasich rejected in 2010. AAO hopes to do better with current Gov. Mike DeWine, and Esterly called on Ohio's

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DOT (ODOT) and the Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) to establish an Office of Passenger Rail for the state.

Peter LeCody, President of the Texas Rail Advocates, gave a presentation titled "Making Tracks in Texas" and started by describing the high-speed-rail line proposed by Texas Central and now promoted by Amtrak's Andy Byford, the beloved "Train Daddy" of the New York subway system. He reported that Amtrak is deciding whether to keep supporting the project or eliminate it, and he also mentioned other efforts to link Texas cities by rail that were thwarted by highway and airline interests. LeCody also mentioned a 40-mile high-speed link between Fort Worth and Dallas that would become part of the proposed line, as well as the Texas Triangle proposal, which would form that shape between Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, with additional stops at Fort Worth and Austin. He also called for "a Fair Share for Rail" in state funding for both passenger and freight railroading, as well as for transit.

From further west, Todd Liebman, President of All Aboard Arizona, called for "an integrated vision for passenger rail" in his state, with a network connecting rural, urban, and tribal communities with cities like Phoenix and Tucson. He said: "Our tracks go the right places" and called for more passenger trains on them, ranging from daily operation of the *Sunset Limited* to the proposed Sun Corridor between Phoenix and Tucson, to expanding transit; noting that the Tucson Streetcar has brought \$5 billion of investment to downtown Tucson. The final presenter was Kyle Gradinger, Chief of Rail and Mass Transit for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). His job is involved with passenger trains in three

areas: rail planning, the Intercity Passenger Rail Program, and the passenger-car fleet. He mentioned goals of safety, equity, concern about climate, and economic prosperity. He concluded by calling for a Transit Transformation Task Force that would expand transit in the state, with the goal of having transit provide 20% of passenger miles by 2040.

A panel on State-level advocacy

The conference continued with a panel of advocates from politically-varied states, who reported on their efforts to advocate for more trains, in light of their differing political climates. RUN Vice-Chair Andrew Albert was moderator, and he opened the panel by stressing the importance of strong advocacy at the state level. He said: "Rail is the economic engine that really pays states back, big time!"

Peter LeCody returned for the panel, while the other panelists were Steve Roberts, President of the Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada, and Danny Plaughter, Executive Director of Virginians for High-Speed Rail. Roberts concentrated on California's State Rail Plan for 2040, with its plans for several new lines, including the California High-Speed Rail (CAHSR) project, which is now under construction. He mentioned some activities he considered necessary, such as campaigning in Sacramento, meeting with staffers in the capital, and fighting off rail's opponents.

Plaughter described his organization's "Transforming Rail in Virginia" initiative. His advice was: "Get your vision, meet with legislators, and campaign." He noted that his organization started with \$1 million in 2007 and has grown to \$500 million, and he urged advocates to "find out what needs to be done." He also called for more money for passenger trains and local rail transit to be added to the Transportation Trust Fund. LeCody mentioned similar advocacy themes, even though Texas is a "red state" where politics are often presumed to operate differently than in "blue" or "purple" states. He concluded the panel by saying that advocates need

"to be able to support their State DOTs and build relationships."

I delivered the closing remarks, and this Companion Commentary summarizes what I said.

THE FRA CORRIDOR ID PROGRAM AND THE FUTURE OF CORRIDORS: A COMPANION COMMENTARY

The FRA program will be helpful, because it is prompting local and state-level officials to use a relatively-standard method to develop and implement a Service Development Plan, while the agency is offering grants to help pay for it. There are no grants for capital projects or operations, but the FRA is providing guidance that will help spur the planning process, along with some "seed money." Raising the amounts needed to improve infrastructure on the host railroads and then run the trains will be much more difficult. While it's unofficial, there is a relationship between the FRA program and Amtrak's *ConnectsUS* plan for new corridor-length routes. Still, the Amtrak plan will require a large financial commitment from the states, especially after the first few years of operation. Of the projects described at the conference, eight of them were first proposed decades ago, and only the CAHSR project is under construction. While state officials and advocates express confidence that it will be completed, that outcome is not guaranteed. California is facing a large deficit, and there are other state needs that could be considered more vital than increasing the speed of trains, especially on a line that partially runs parallel to the San Joaquin Line, a nearby line that currently runs corridor-level conventional service.

The advocates proved themselves to be as well-informed as the officials who presented, which should be accepted as strong evidence of the credibility that advocates, including those at RUN, should be accorded, but seldom are.

The North Carolina projects, a train between Atlanta and Savannah, the 3C+D corridor in Ohio, and other projects mentioned by the presenters have been under discussion for a long time; some for 30 years or more. In

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2001, John Robert Smith, who was Chair of the Amtrak Board at the time, described to me what is now the I-20 project (a line between Meridian and Dallas that would connect with the current *Crescent* train) that John Spain is promoting. Smith had some other good ideas, too, but none of them have been implemented yet. However helpful the FRA Corridor ID program might be in giving these initiatives a new chance at life, the only tangible product that it can deliver is a plan for service, which is only a document, or its equivalent on a web site. Nobody can ride a document; it is not a physical train, and there have been many studies in the past that also generated nothing but a document.

Whether the means for starting a new service is Amtrak's plan or something else, the state must still pay much of the cost of improving the infrastructure on the lines at issue and operating the trains. That will not be easy, as "red states" are generally opposed to passenger trains, "blue states" are facing financial woes and will have difficulty paying for more trains, and "purple states" aren't sure what they want to do about trains; Virginia's program possibly being the exception that proves the rule.

Across the board, the situation looks grim, especially in light of the recent election. Democrats are generally more friendly to passenger trains than Republicans, and the latter will soon control all branches of the federal government. The money that Congress authorized for COVID-19 relief during the pandemic will soon run out, which is creating a fiscal cliff that could endanger transit essentially everywhere in the country. Congress could vote to "zero out" Amtrak's budget, which could mean the end of many

Amtrak trains, which would place most proposals for new starts out of the question. We can't even be sure that there will be much left of the FRA and many other federal agencies, with Vivek Ramaswamy calling for 75% of federal jobs to be eliminated and Elon Musk calling for \$2 trillion worth of cuts during the upcoming administration. Can advocates and others convince some Republicans to balk at such severe cuts and refuse to go along? That will be the question of the century.

Advocates and government officials who support passenger trains and transit are in for the fight of their lives in the coming years. Still, all is not yet lost. New trains between Mobile and New Orleans will be running next year, and one of the biggest boosters for that service is a Republican, Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi. Whether getting those two new daily round trips will end up being the exception that proves the contrary rule, or there will be more hard-won victories remains to be seen.

David Peter Alan is a member of the RUN Board and a Contributing Editor at Railway Age. For more extensive coverage of the conference, see his article that was posted on the Railway Age web site, www.railwayage.com, posted on November 25. (at <https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/run-conference-focus-fra-corridor-id-and-development-program/>). He has also been assigned to write the Passenger Rail Outlook for 2025, scheduled for publication in Railway Age Magazine in January.

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provincial highway expenditures and land-use.

Airdrie/Okotoks Rail Connection - Although embryonic, it is seen as a critical project offering improved, car-free mobility in the north/south Calgary axis in anticipation of major population growth. Alberta Connexion Partners will include a preferred solution in their summer 2025 report to the province.

Other Notes

Some other notes from the conference include:

- Indigenous partnerships are critical, and attitude is showing that indigenous leaders are largely supportive of the plan.
- The provincial rail strategy will be managed by a provincial crown corporation to reduce the impacts of major changes in political ideology resulting from a 4-year election cycle (like Metrolinx in the GTHA).
- Broad public consultation is critical, and the plan includes a robust outreach to all interested parties, including regional open houses to ensure smooth transition to shovels in the ground. (Initial sensitivity work indicates broad public support for rail expansion). The province will work to avoid perceived federal government "inconsistencies" in funding and regulatory matters. They feel that Ottawa is "putting the cart before the horse."
- Input from existing passenger rail operators (national and global) is that focus on the passenger experience is fundamental and rapid system recovery after an unplanned incident is critical. They will dictate the success of investments in terms of ridership and farebox recovery.
- Risk sharing between public and private partners must be equitable and Metrolinx's Phil Verster described the evolution of Infrastructure Ontario contracting policies as a means of avoiding conflict, cost overruns and project delays. Deutsche Bahn now breaks up its larger projects into smaller parcels and applies close management scrutiny to contractors. This new approach is proving successful in Germany.
- Modal integration with local transit and airports will be pivotal in network

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investments to encourage modal shift and reduce per capita average kilometers driven in the province. Privatization is not generally seen as solution to provincial passenger rail operations due to the conflict between customer service consistency and shareholder demands.

Transport Action Canada's Comments

It is refreshing to see a very pragmatic approach to provincial public transportation. We are very supportive of the Government of Alberta's plans and actions to date and will continue to support this promising plan as it develops. The emphasis on long-term institutional thought as well as cost comparisons to highways are novel developments in modern Canadian transportation planning. We hope that Alberta will be able to combine these stances with the knowledge and experience that Ontario has accumulated in creating a model for other provinces looking to unlock their economic potential through public transportation.

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

SEPTA AT THE FISCAL CLIFF

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Of course, the state legislature is unhappy over the delay in implementing the highway projects. As reported in the Nov. 25 Metro, Senate Majority Leader Joe Pittman and Transportation Committee Chair Wayne Langerhole, Jr. have issued a statement: "It is apparent today that the Democrats' mindset is that we can just spend more money on transit regardless of where it comes from... Now, instead of getting stuff

done, the governor is taking stuff away by allowing roads and bridges in Republican districts to deteriorate."

Thus, SEPTA slowly ascends to the top of the next roller coaster hill where the deficit beginning in July 2025 is again a projected \$240 million. When visiting Pennsylvania, wear a good pair of walking shoes.

Chuck Bode is a RUN Board member and member of the Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation. Mark Sanders is President of the Philadelphia Street Railway Historical Society.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT TO SOLVE SEPTA'S FINANCIAL WOES?

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transferring passenger is lost. Most passengers ride the busy routes; therefore the third lost passenger is likely to have been on a busy route, reducing its productivity.

Then there are the fixed costs which do not reduce as quickly as the passengers leave. Pension costs remain, and may even increase if senior employees retire with service cuts. Headquarters, repair shop, and depot costs change little with ridership changes. Rapid transit stations have one, sometimes two, cashiers the entire time the line is operating whether there is a train every four or every 30 minutes. Rapid transit and rail track and facilities require regular inspections, whether there is a train every few minutes or a daily franchise run. Because these costs remain, a given percentage deficit requires cutting a far greater percentage of service.

The author was surprised to learn a few years ago, when the Wayne Junction rotary converters were replaced with solid state converters, that in the middle of the night, when no trains operated, the electric load was still half the maximum load of peak times. In other words, most of the electric bill just keeps the wires and transformers

energized. Adding or reducing off-peak trains has minimal effect.

Cutting lines is the slow route to savings. The least productive routes have low cost recovery, but because they have minimal service the actual cost saved is little. As every passenger creates a deficit, it is the busiest routes that contribute most to the deficit. Thus, trying to reduce expenses some percent requires eliminating far more than that percentage of the routes.

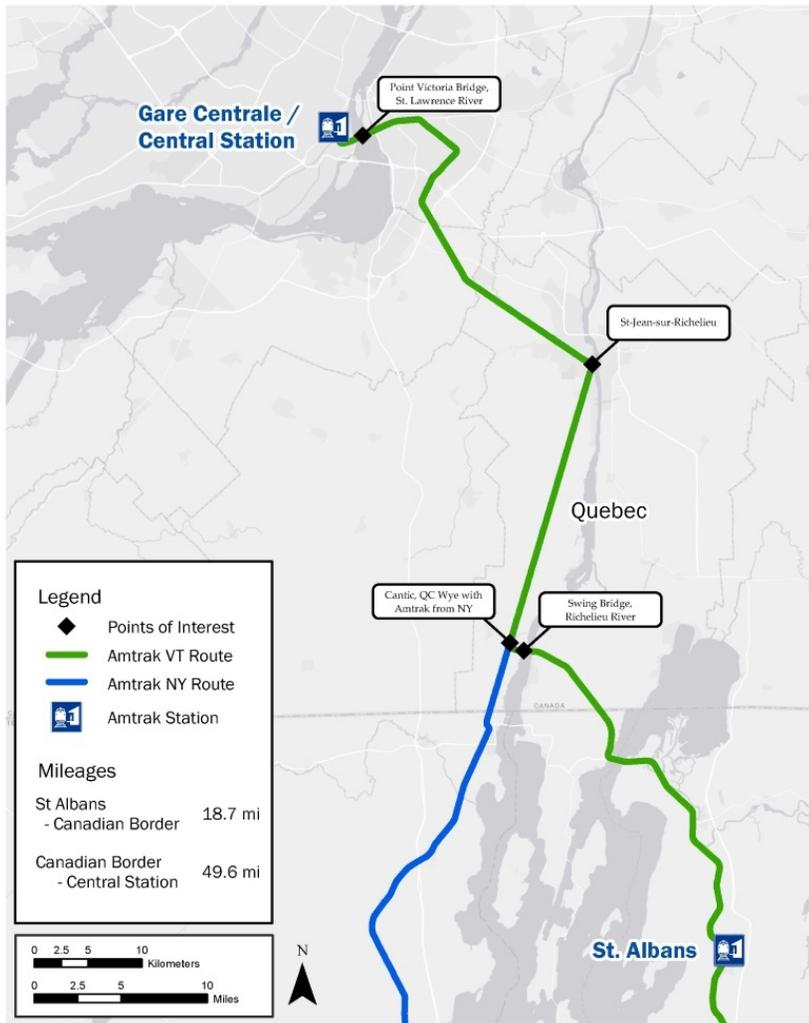
Here we arrive at the crux of the issue. What is needed to reduce the mass transit deficit is not less service and fewer riders, but more off-peak service and ridership. We are back to an image problem. Those former riders using Uber, Lyft, bike sharing service, electric bicycles, scooters, and skateboards have departed to a more costly or more physically demanding mode because mass transit fails to meet their needs.

Some of this must be SEPTA's and the City's own making. Years ago, SEPTA installed traffic light priority equipment on a few routes. The equipment was not used; the district Councilperson did not want her motorists to be inconvenienced! And so the buses and trolleys continue to run in multi-vehicle caravans separated by gaps in service. The author is of the age to use medical service often. A couple years ago in a new building situated at SEPTA's University City train station, I asked the person treating me if she used the train. She drove. She tried the train when first hired and nearly lost her job because the service was so unreliable. If SEPTA cannot operate a useful service with trains on dedicated tracks, is there any hope?

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

THE VERMONT AND THE ISSUE OF PRE-CLEARANCE AT MONTREAL'S CENTRAL STATION

Amtrak Vermonter- To Montreal



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

This is the third in a series of articles regarding the FRA I.D. Corridor Program and efforts to expand or restore passenger rail service in the U.S. While the state of Vermont received two different FRA I.D. Corridor Awards, the focus of this column is on the *Vermonter*, which currently runs from Washington, DC to St. Albans, VT. Ridership on the *Vermonter* day service reached 109,136 in FY 2024.

The \$500,000 received will be used to help expand passenger rail service to Montreal, to add a second frequency over the route from White River Junction to New York City and to examine possible operational upgrades such as installing centralized traffic control from Greenfield, Ma. to Brattleboro, VT. and from White River Junction to the Canadian border. The return of service to Montreal has stood at or near the top of Vermont's rail agenda since 2011. Then-Governor Peter Shumlin committed to restoring

the service which existed before the *Vermonter* was established in 1995. There has been no night train since March 31, 1995.

The precursor to the *Vermonter* - the southbound version of the train called the *Montrealer* - first entered service during the Prohibition era on June 15, 1924. It became known as "The Bootlegger" as passengers often carried well-hidden bottles of liquor on board. When Amtrak began running the service in 1972, the southbound train developed a reputation as a "party train" during the winter months as a large number of skiers who took the train stayed up late into the night or didn't sleep at all. Evidently, the train was equipped with a dedicated lounge car outfitted with an electric piano and for a time offered "specially priced Harvey Wallbangers."

Despite this popularity, Amtrak scuttled the service to Montreal on March 31, 1995 because of ongoing fiscal constraints. The very next day, it was replaced with a state supported daytime train from St. Albans, VT to Washington, DC. The state of Vermont, however, declined to pay for continuing the service beyond St. Albans to Montreal, 69 miles further north, citing high labor and terminal costs.

Almost forty years have passed since Amtrak discontinued the service to Montreal; it is not at all clear when it will be restored. Despite broad political support, after 9/11, security concerns at the border have made it difficult to reinstate the service. Presently there are three different Amtrak trains that cross the US/Canadian Border. On the *Cascade* service between Seattle and Vancouver, customs-and immigration is done at the Pacific Central State in Vancouver. On the *Maple Leaf* from New York City to Toronto, passengers take their baggage into the VIA Rail

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THE VERMONT AND THE ISSUE OF PRE-CLEARANCE AT MONTREAL'S CENTRAL STATION

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Station in Niagara Falls. The *Adirondack* between New York City and Montreal customs-and-immigration is done on the train at the border.

The issue of pre-clearance allowing for the immigration, customs and agriculture inspections required for entry into either country to occur on foreign soil has been a major stumbling block for extending passenger rail service on the *Vermont* from St. Albans to Montreal. In 2009, Amtrak prepared a preliminary design for a Montreal pre-clearance facility adjacent to track 23 at Montreal Central Station in 2009, but progress has since been very slow. In May 2012, Vermont's two U.S. Senators publicly urged border authorities to take the necessary steps to conclude an agreement by the end of that year. Meanwhile, the FRA awarded Vermont and the New England Central Railroad a \$7.9 million Tiger IV grant to improve the existing rail line between St. Albans and the Canadian border at Alburgh, VT. The grant proceeds were used to upgrade 19 miles of track to raise allowable passenger train speeds to 59 mph.

In March 2015, the Department of Homeland Security and the Canadian Ministry of Public Safety concluded an agreement that would allow customs and immigration pre-clearance of U.S. bound travelers boarding at Montreal's Central station. In the following year, the U.S. Congress passed H.R. 6431, the "Promoting Travel, Commerce, and National Security Act of 2016," which allows for the expansion of U.S Customs and Border Protection pre-clearance facilities in Canada. Although this law was signed by President Obama on Dec. 16, 2016, not much has happened on the American side of the border, other than Amtrak operating a special trip in

conjunction with the New England Central Railroad and the Canadian National Railway on July 18, 2017 for government officials from the U.S. and Canada to inspect the route between St. Albans and Montreal.

On the other side of the border, the Canadian government has passed into law Bill C-23, the Pre-Clearance Act of 2016 which allows for the establishment of U.S. Customs and Border Protection pre-clearance facilities at Montreal Central Station. Two years later the Government of Canada announced that Canada and the U.S. had brought into force the Agreement on Land, Rail, Marine, and Air Transport Pre-clearance between their respective governments.

Despite the fact that all of the necessary agreements are finally in place between the two national governments, there is still the issue of how Montreal Union Station can be redesigned to enable passenger pre-clearance. Unfortunately, no action had been taken to prepare the facility. In August 2022, the Quebec government announced that the Société Québécoise des infrastructures would serve as the lead agency to oversee a \$1 million dollar study to evaluate connectivity and security issues along the corridor between Montreal Central Station and the border, as well as a detailed study of modifications needed at the station to move the project forward.

According to a report titled *Beyond HFR - Advancing Passenger Rail Across Canada* that Transport Action Canada recently released, Track 23 is now the only location that can reasonably accommodate pre-clearance. The light rail network in Greater Montreal (Réseau express métropolitain) has taken over the other end of the station, using tracks 9 and 12 with a widened platform between them and the lower numbered tracks for storage. Track 23 is now the only location that could reasonably accommodate the facility. Amtrak's original design should only require minor updates to account for

advances in technology like automated passport gates.

Last year, Vermont's Congressional Delegation, led by Senate Commerce Committee member Senator Peter Welch and Senator Bernie Sanders and Representative Becca Balint, called on Amtrak's Board of Directors Chair, Anthony Coscia, to work with the delegation to expand rail service. The delegation requested Amtrak to detail the interim steps that it is taking to establish a preclearance program at Montreal Central Station and how it is working with U.S Customs and Border Protection on those steps. They also asked how soon Amtrak anticipates pre-clearance could begin between Vermont and Montreal and the additional federal actions needed to expedite the completion of the process.

At a meeting that the Vermont Rail Advisory Council held on September 12th of this year, Dan Delabruere, Director of the Rail and Aviation Bureau at the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans), briefly talked about an 80-page draft of the feasibility study regarding modifications needed to be done at Montreal's Central Station that he had just recently received. He said the study was well done given the complicated structure of the buildings and streets. Next steps include determining who owns what at the station and a pre-engineering study. He offered that it would take at least two years to complete an engineering study before any construction could be done.

In the meantime, additional track work will be needed to speed up rail service on the line that the *Adirondack* runs over from Rouses Point to Montreal. The *Vermont* would travel north on the New England Central's rail line north of St. Albans to Cantic in Quebec. It would then travel over the Canadian National rail line to Montreal. It remains to be seen whether the *Vermont* will ever make it to Montreal's Central Station. It certainly will require additional funding and a sense of greater urgency among the stakeholders to make it happen.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

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NORTHEAST CORNER – NEWS FROM MAINE



By Peter Cole

As 2024 slowly disappears, we are celebrating some success in uniting the pro-rail and transit coalitions and environmental groups, but we still have a long way to go.

At present, we are preparing ourselves for the next legislative session now that the elections are behind us. The major push is for expanding the Downeaster Amtrak service to the second and third largest cities in Maine – Lewiston/Auburn and Bangor. An intercity corridor extension of service would go a long way in better uniting Maine both economically and socially. With legislative support Maine could apply for an IJJA corridor grant. If the application is approved, Maine would be able to take advantage of the IJJA grant funds to pay for the service development plan and needed engineering studies. Those two steps would make the start of the extended intercity service much closer

to reality for the rural and urban populations in Northern Maine.

Meanwhile, the battle to prevent the state from tearing up four existing state-owned rail corridors continues. There are four branches at risk, and each is important in their own way. In a short-sighted vision by 'trail only' advocacy groups, the legislature, and the DOT there is pressure to tear out the track for trails. The trails are envisioned by different constituencies in many different and conflicting ways, but no matter what the final product is, it would destroy needed future rail transit corridors. We continue to advocate for 'rails with trails,' which has been a successful model in many parts of the country and has been shown to be successful in four locations around Maine.

In other news:

- Maine has successfully received CRISI

grants for freight service improvements in Northern Maine.

- The Downeaster tracks are in the best shape they have ever been in, ridership is up, but the goal of on-time performance still needs to be addressed.
- Track work on the CSX segment of the Downeaster will be occurring in the spring, along with transitioning to a fully PTC equipped line in February will cause some temporary cancellations of train service. The state has announced that there are five responses to the RFP for hosting the Rockland line. The goal is for Downeaster to provide summer weekend service, along with the resumption of freight service and excursion service. It is now with the Maine DOT to determine which bid is accepted.

Peter Cole is a member of RUN, Train Riders NorthEast and President of the Maine Rail Group.



An inbound MBTA train arriving at Auburndale station on the Framingham-Worcester branch in July 2021. Hyundai-Rotem control cab car #1823 is leading in push-pull configuration. Attrib: Wikimedia-Commons. User: Pi.1415926535

FULL SPEED AHEAD: MBTA FIXES SLOW ZONES

Continued from page 2

While the re-opening of the MBTA's South Attleboro Commuter Station on the Northeast Corridor occurred with much fanfare, the schedule of stops at that location remains very limited. This is because the station's inbound platform remains under construction as well as a connecting footbridge. Because of this, all trains stopping at South Attleboro are operating one-track between Attleboro, MA and Providence, RI and stopping only on the outbound platform. Adjustments and improvements to the schedule will not

improve until the stations construction is fully completed. Amtrak's Acela Express and Northeast Regional Service do use the inbound track mostly at speed, since they never stopped there to begin with.

Finally, stopped in its tracks (so to speak) earlier this year by MBTA General Manager Phil Eng, the new Southcoast Rail project is now on track for an opening sometime in early 2025. No specific date has been announced. The project was initially announced to open in the summer of 2024 but numerous issues were uncovered making such an opening impossible. After adjustments in project staff leadership, and an apology from Eng to the communities involved, work has continued and as of this writing test trains are now plying the tracks with a proposed

schedule so as to get the communities and abutters used to the new trains coming through their neighborhoods.

As always, we recommend travelers consult the MBTA web site at www.mbta.com for any unexpected schedule changes. These are listed individually for each transit, bus, or rail line.

Dennis Kirkpatrick has been in rail and transit advocacy for over 30 years, and now a board member of the Rail Users Network. He hails from Boston, MA, and lives a few hundred feet from the Northeast Corridor, where he observes Amtrak and the MBTA passing by daily.

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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.

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