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THE COMING MOBILITY CRISIS: A POTENTIAL NIGHTMARE FOR TRANSIT RIDERS

By David Peter Alan

We have been hearing a lot of talk lately about how Americans are losing mobility. Gasoline prices are higher, so people are using their automobiles less. Airlines are suffering and cutting back on service. Prices are going up on almost everything, since the cost of shipping is higher than it used to be. Of all of the communities that will suffer because of higher fuel prices, transit riders are poised to take the most punishment.

On the surface, higher gasoline prices appear to be the greatest thing that has happened to transit in the past 50 years. Gas is part of the price of driving an automobile and, when the price

of one good rises, demand for a substitute good increases, too. That substitute good is transit, and many new riders have flocked to their local trains, light rail lines and buses. There have been strong increases in ridership on Amtrak trains, too.

Unfortunately, these short-term gains for transit can't last. Many transit providers hedged the price of fuel for their trains and buses, so fuel costs will soon rise sharply for these providers. That means fares will rise sharply as well. There have been large fare increases in Chicago, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and other transit cities recently, while more modest fare increases are going into effect in other places. These fare increases may be

justifiable from a management perspective, but increased fares encourage riders to stop using transit. With decreased ridership come cuts in service, which curtails mobility for everyone.

Transit riders who have no access to an automobile will pay the increased fares and take fewer trips, because they have no choice. With less rail service, there will also be less incentive for motorists to get off the highway and onto the rails. Thus the cycle of fare increases and service cuts begins anew. It is true that transit-dependent people will just suffer with decreased mobility. If transit deteriorates enough, they will be essentially the only riders left.

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PORTLAND, OR RETURNS TO ITS ROOTS WITH A RAIL RESURGENCE

By Chris Smith

After a connection to the trans-continental rail system in 1868 replaced the Oregon Trail, Portland grew up around rail. The city is now a major multi-modal transportation center with strong freight connections via rail, marine transport, the Interstate Highway system and air cargo.

Portland's urban fabric was also shaped by rail, as the period of intense growth following the 1904 Lewis and Clark Exposition was constructed around a streetcar network that extended

to over 100 miles at its peak. The neighborhoods centered on former streetcar corridors continue to be Portland's most popular and livable today, served by excellent bus service provided by TriMet, the regional transit operator.

The last original streetcar line stopped operation in 1958, and Portland pursued auto-centric growth policies like most western U.S. cities. But that began to change when the Oregon Legislature passed landmark land-use regulations in the 1970s, requiring metropolitan

areas to establish urban growth boundaries. New thinking about urban growth led to the cancellation of a freeway project and the initiation of the region's first light rail project, which opened in 1986, linking downtown Portland to Gresham, a suburb to the east.

Since that initial investment, three more light rail lines have gone into service: an 18-mile extension of the original Blue line to the western suburb of Hillsboro, the Red line to the airport and the Interstate Avenue Yellow line.

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NYC SUBWAY STATIONS SHOW YEARS OF NEGLECT

Transit Riders Council Finds Most Stops Fail a 34-Point Evaluation

By Andrew Albert

The New York City Transit Riders Council released its third survey of conditions in many of New York's subway stations, and the results are not pretty. While only 50 randomly chosen stations out of a total of 422 (includes complexes) were surveyed, the picture is quite clear: conditions in NYC's subway stations are far from acceptable.

We surveyed entrances—the area leading from the street to the fare control area—the fare control areas themselves and the platforms. While some stations have improved since our last survey, and the stations that have had a complete rehabilitation are quite attractive, the majority of stations showed a decided lack of maintenance and care—the result of years of neglect. Some stations showed rotting platforms, leaking canopies in elevated stations, peeling paint and obviously deferred maintenance.

We evaluated 34 indicators, which is more than NYC Transit uses when doing its own evaluations. We did our surveys from the viewpoint of the passenger: are these fit places to wait for trains? Are conditions such that customers will feel comfortable waiting on platforms with peeling paint overhead, leaks coming through walls, and exposed electrical wires left by contractors years ago? Sadly, the answer is no. In some cases, it's hard to explain the extent of the deferred maintenance.

In the case of the Smith-9th Street station—a very high elevated station on the F and G lines in Brooklyn—the cost of rehabilitating this station has soared due to DECADES of neglect. One has to wonder how much less it would cost to rehab stations if they'd kept up with the basic maintenance throughout the years. The lack of painting, waterproofing and scraping has left some stations looking like stygian places with stalactytes dripping from the ceilings. And this is at a time when ridership is at a 35-year high.

The power of water

Water intrusion has taken quite a toll on our subway stations. In some places, Transit management has resorted to Rube Goldberg-like methods of diverting water into drains. At the downtown platform of the 51st Street/Lexington Avenue station in Manhattan, one can see a very intricate system of pipes, funnels, and drains to divert water into its proper place. Clearly, Transit is not responsible for all of the water intrusion problems—some of which are due to overflowing sewers or commercial establishments diverting their water waste into the subway system—but a greater effort must be made.

A small fortune was spent on renovating the Nevins Street station in Brooklyn, only to have frequent heavy rains undo what was

a very nice renovation. In some places, particularly the outdoor stations, it seems no attempt has been made to do any waterproofing at all. Historic canopies at the Avenue H station on the Brighton Line in Brooklyn have all but collapsed. Thankfully, this station will be getting a complete renovation, but at what additional cost? And, does the additional cost mean that other stations, which were scheduled to get renovations will now be deferred?

Sadly, the answer appears to be yes. Some stations that were included in the 2005-2009 capital program and which were scheduled to go into renovation will now be delayed or deferred. So what should be done to ensure that proper funding and maintenance can be done to our stations so the public will have fit places to wait in and enjoy, as ever-growing numbers of people switch to mass transit?

Recommendations

The State of New York must increase its support of MTA operations so that maintenance and repairs of stations can proceed. It is the lack of support from NYS that has led to the inordinately high bonding of major capital projects, resulting in debt service that is impossible to maintain. Of course, this has led New Yorkers to the point of paying a greater percentage of the cost of their ride than any other system in America. And we have 75% of all the riders!

Station impact fees should be levied on new development or substantial redevelopment projects within a quarter-mile of a subway station. Much as we have Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Park Improvement Districts, the time has come for Transit Improvement Districts. All institutions and real estate developments benefit from safe, attractive stations in their midst. Eyesores bring down the value of their properties, and more importantly, devalue users of the system, which is exactly the opposite of what management should be doing.

Local BIDs could become involved in stations in their districts, contributing cleaning staff and graffiti-removal personnel to NYC Transit's overworked teams. Adopt-a-Station programs could be started, where corporate sponsors or large developments, such as Madison Square Garden or Yankee Stadium, could "adopt" their local stations, in return for some corporate presence in the station. This is already being looked at, with some hopeful results.

Water Damage Mitigation

The Transit Riders Council urges NYC Transit to create a "water intrusion taskforce," which would investigate the range of causes and perhaps get reimbursed from third party sources of water intrusion, such as restaurants, or the City of New York.

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FEDS GIVE INITIAL APPROVAL TO EXTENDING METRORAIL INTO VA AND DULLES INT'L

By *Jack Corbett*

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in late August gave approval for the beginning of construction of a 23-mile extension of the Washington, DC area's Metrorail system, even though the requested federal funding of \$900 million toward the estimated \$5.2 billion extension cost has not yet been approved. The FTA's letter was considered a definitive federal approval for the project that had been opposed by Transportation Secretary Mary Peters just a few months earlier. Local politicians and Congressional leaders apparently convinced DOT to change its position. A federal full funding agreement from FTA is expected to follow in the coming months.

The proposed Silver Line in Northern Virginia will extend from the current Orange Line's East Falls Church Metrorail station in Arlington County through the commercially important Tysons Corner, the state's largest jobs center, stopping at Dulles International Airport and ending in exurban Loudoun County. Today's 86 Metrorail stations extend a total of 106 miles, so the 23-mile addition will be a

major expansion of the Maryland-DC-Virginia Metrorail system.

Surprisingly, Metro's Silver Line project will be controlled by the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority, the neutral public agency with adequate capital financing capability and Dulles Airport's proprietor. The rail cars will be provided by Metrorail's parent, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), and construction



A Metrorail stop in the nation's capital. Photo courtesy of Destination DC.

will be controlled by the private Dulles Transit Partners.

Construction is slated to begin in March 2009 and with its Phase 1 to Reston, Virginia, scheduled to be completed in July 2013. The extension to Dulles Airport is due to be completed in 2015.

DOT had tentatively opposed the project because of its escalating cost, WMATA's inability to fund even the modernizing of its existing system and the airport authority's lack of experience in controlling a construction project of this type. Virginia's Gov. Tim Kaine and local leaders had also urged that the Silver Line go underground at Tysons Corner to facilitate a more pedestrian-friendly environment, but the extra costs would have violated FTA's cost-benefit formula for approving transit projects.

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NEXT-GENERATION LONG-DISTANCE CARS: WHAT SHOULD THEY LOOK LIKE? HOW SHOULD THEY WORK?

By **James E. Coston**

A breakthrough of sorts has occurred: Emboldened by apparently unstoppable double-digit ridership growth, Amtrak has finally come out of the closet and begun talking seriously about augmenting its meager fleet of passenger rolling stock with a new generation of equipment. CEO Alex Kummant has told the media he wants a budget for hundreds of additional cars, and all 15 states that support Amtrak corridor trains say they want new and better equipment too.

Additionally encouraging is that the new-car thinking apparently includes Amtrak's long-spurned network of overnight long-distance trains. In his most recent pronouncements, Kummant has begun to rein in Amtrak's venerable habit of ignoring—and sometimes even denigrating—its long-distance trains. In an interview with former CBS Radio reporter Wes Vernon in the August issue of *Railfan & Railroad* magazine, Kummant even suggested a separate Chicago-Denver overnighter.

“I think we could have wonderful service between Chicago and Denver, even for business travelers, let alone skiers,” he told Vernon. “In today's travel environment, when you have limited quality time, get a little tired of airports [or] driving. I think—Gosh, you can get on a train at four in the afternoon. You have a nice dinner. You go to bed and [when you wake up] you're in the middle of town...[S]ounds pretty good to me.”

Kummant's new enthusiasm is understandable. With long-distance ridership growing at an average of 15 per cent a year (and with former dogs such as the *Sunset Limited* and *Texas Eagle* now growing at 25.2% and 27% , respectively), it has become increasingly hard for Amtrak to keep arguing that long-distance train travel has been

rejected by the traveling public. To paraphrase the reaction of the pundits surprised by Harry Truman's upset victory over Thomas E. Dewey in the 1948 presidential election, “Nobody loves 'em but the people.” All that's needed now is for America's chronically clueless media—still lip-synching 10-year-old propaganda that makes long-distance trains sound like the only money-losers in Amtrak's system—to get the message that the overnight trains are a success.

But what should the new trains look like?

So it's not inappropriate for rail advocates to start thinking seriously about what Amtrak should be looking for in the next generation of long-distance rolling stock. The double-deck Superliners running on the Western trains are over 20 years old. Some of the single-level equipment running on the Eastern trains is over 50. What should replace it?

Or, more appropriately, what should Amtrak order to *supplement* its current fleet? After all, with passenger demand growing by double digits we can't just swap out the old equipment for new and come out with the same number of seats. The fleet must grow in size, with rebuilt Superliner, Amfleet and Viewliner equipment augmenting the new equipment hopefully coming on line.

Based on my own years of experience in operating passenger trains as well as contributions from colleagues in the industry, here's what I think Amtrak's new long-distance fleet ought to look like and how it ought to work.

Upstairs, downstairs

Some self-styled purists have never accepted the idea of double-decked equipment, insisting that only single-level cars makes a “real” train. I disagree. While single-decked equipment will still be necessary because of low tunnel clearances on the Northeast Corridor, double-

decked equipment makes tremendous sense in all other theaters of operation.

The main reason is economic productivity. The standard 85-ft. North American passenger car can comfortably carry only about 48-50 passengers in an overnight coach configuration and no more than about 24 in a private-room sleeping car. A double-decked overnight coach can carry 72 and a sleeper 44. It's hard to ignore that kind of math. It's also hard to ignore the productivity of a lower-level dining-car kitchen that doesn't have to sacrifice work space to an offset aisle.

But even when economics is set aside, double-decking makes sense. The ride on the upper deck is virtually silent. And because only the upper deck is used for passage into adjacent cars, double-deck cars have the option of dispensing with the aisle in some of their lower-deck accommodations. Each end of the lower deck of a Superliner sleeper carries a bedroom occupying the full 10-foot width of the car. One is a family bedroom, the other a very commodious space for a handicapped traveler and attendant. Designers of a new generation of double-decked cars might want to set some of that space aside for a really spacious bathroom with shower.

Plumbing

With the possible exception of the Acela fleet, no current Amtrak rolling stock is equipped with truly modern and functional toilets. Coaches are a particular problem because all 72 passengers use two or three toilets. Sleeping cars distribute a lighter “load” over a larger number of toilets. “We need a toilet that will provide low maintenance and high function (i.e. smells O.K. after, say 2,200 miles),” writes a railroad mechanical engineer. “No one has come close.” The stakes are particularly high for long-distance trains, which may not see a mechanic for as long as 48 hours.

Diagnosics

Current Amtrak cars lack computerized diagnostics. The next generation needs to have this feature. The Talgo trains operating in the Cascades Corridor have it, and it works. On-board monitors identify and log defects as they develop and transmit reports to the destination so that mechanical forces can swarm the train when it arrives and begin treating problems. The next-generation cars should supplement the diagnostic regime with a keyboard allowing crew members to input manually any defects they spot—say a burned-out light bulb over a seat—not caught by the computer. Also needed is an extra diagnostic channel to compare the vibration frequencies of the cars in the train. If one appears to be vibrating at a rate substantially different from the others—usually from a wheel spot—the defect would be noted and transmitted to the mechanical department.

Fabrics—time to “lose the blues”

Will somebody—anybody—please tell Amtrak that there are other colors in the spectrum besides electric blue? With very few exceptions, such as the exclusive Pacific Parlour Cars used on the *Coast Starlight*, Amtrak's interior designers have been relentless and unsparing in their use of electric blue and cavalier in their neglect of warmer colors. The result is a stifling uniformity not only throughout the consist of each train but across the fleet.

What's the problem with blue? In North American culture blue is perceived as an expression of power, order and control, particularly of organized, masculine control—one reason it's so popular in the logos of large, older-style corporations such as IBM, General Motors and United Airlines. It's common as well as in political campaign posters because voters sense it as “steady” and “reassuring.”

So what's the downside? Blue is considered one of the “cold” colors, which is why anyone spending 48 hours trapped inside a train with blue carpeting, blue curtains, blue seats, blue bulkheads and blue dining-car napkins can be excused for feeling that maybe somebody set the thermostat too low. It's not just the sameness of the color, it's the chill, an effect that is only aggravated by the yards and yards of harsh, shiny plastic surfaces and glaring fluorescent lighting inside most Amtrak trains.

In its next generation of equipment, Amtrak needs to hire a designer with some experience in earth colors (including wood—the faux-wood Formica panels available today are astonishingly lifelike). Yesterday I visited Chicago's historic Palmer House Hilton to check out the newly remodeled lobby after its year-long makeover, and I couldn't help marveling over how skillfully the designers used earth colors—soft tans, greens, burgundy, maroon, brown and khaki, to create a warm and welcoming feeling. Everything from carpets to furniture to

flower arrangements had been carefully coordinated to create a space that was large and liberating yet at the same time intimate and cozy. Hint to Amtrak: If you have trouble with the concept, just open any coffee-table book on the streamliners of the 1930s and '40s. Now *those* guys knew how to decorate a train.

Balance openness with coziness

One of the finest train-riding experiences you can have is a trip on one of VIA Rail Canada's LRC trains, and not just because of the 100-mph speeds that Transport Canada allows these Light, Rapid Comfortable streamliners. Part of the effect is the car design itself. The windows are huge: more than twice the glass area of an Amfleet I car and deeper even than the generous-sized windows of a Superliner coach or sleeper, truly a gift to anyone who enjoys watching scenery—and railroad operations—from a moving train.

The one problem with oversize windows, however, is that they can create a sensation of agoraphobia—the feeling of being almost lost in a vast space without shelter or enclosure: The scenery outside almost seems to be invading the train; sensitive passengers can suffer the sensation of traveling in an open sided-car with no protection from the external environment.

So the LRC's designers compensated for the agoraphobic effect by making the rest of the car as cozy as possible. Take your
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Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, *write to*:
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or

contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at:
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or

visit our new, improved website at: www.railusers.net

THE COMING MOBILITY CRISIS: A POTENTIAL NIGHTMARE

(Continued from page 1)

We learned in the 1960s and '70s what the combination of declining ridership and service cuts did to damage our transit systems and the mobility of the riders who used them. It appears that a similar cycle is occurring today.

New Jersey Transit, this writer's home transit, is a case in point. Under the late George Warrington, NJT management decided to emphasize service for peak-hour commuters, with far lower priority for off-peak riders and other non-commuters. Off-peak rail fares were raised by 25%, while bus fares and peak-hour rail fares (both commutation and single-trip) were increased by only 10% in 2005. Transit managers used the resulting decline in off-peak ridership as an excuse to slash service at off-peak hours, a trend that continues at this writing.

The Morris & Essex Line lost half of its weekday off-peak service in May, while the traditional weekend service to Hoboken was essentially eliminated. Other cuts have gone into effect on the Raritan Valley and North

Jersey Coast Lines, and on the Newark Light Rail, which has lost one third of its weekend service. Rumors are flying that severe service cuts on the Gladstone Branch and Main-Bergen Lines are coming soon. New Jersey has also seen reductions in bus service, and some of the cuts in county-sponsored bus service have been particularly severe.

The downward spiral continues. Higher energy prices make everything more expensive. This means less demand for products and services, so fewer employees are needed to produce these goods and services. People lose their jobs as the economy contracts, so they have less taxable (and disposable) income. Revenue collection for states, counties and municipalities goes down, so there is less money for all government services, including transit. That means less money to operate transit, so service is cut. More riders abandon transit and return to their automobiles, further reducing demand for transit and providing an excuse for still more cuts.

The vicious cycle will not end until something happens to change it. During the bleak economic times of the 1930s,

many economists expected a long wait until "market forces" brought improvement for the economy. They did expect improvement in the long run, but they had no idea how long this would take. In reply, John Maynard Keynes said "In the long run, we're all dead" and called for government intervention to keep economies going. Economists in this country are divided on whether the New Deal policies of the Roosevelt Administration, which were based partly on Keynes' ideas and enacted at about the same time, actually lifted America out of the Depression. There is much more agreement that, even if the New Deal did not end the Depression, at least it helped many people to keep working and earning a living.

Transit needs a New Deal, too. So do passenger trains. The massive subsidies given to the airlines since World War II have given air travel an unfair advantage over rail, reducing the number of long-distance trains in this country to a handful. The even more massive subsidies for automobile use, coming from taxes which non-motorists are compelled to pay, have

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CLEVELAND'S TRANSIT AUTHORITY FACES A BLEAK REVENUE PICTURE

By Steve Albro

Rising diesel fuel costs, a declining economy and cuts in state subsidy resulted in a \$20 million budget shortfall in the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority's (GCRTA) FY2009 operating budget.

Projected fuel costs for 2009 are double the actual cost of fuel in 2006 and are 400% of the cost in 2006. Proceeds from a 1% county sales tax have not kept up with inflation for much of the decade. Forecasts show no material gain in sales tax revenue going forward. Finally, operating revenue from the State of Ohio sits at \$20 million or one-tenth of the funding level in neighboring rust belt states.

As a result of this bleak revenue picture, GCRTA was placed in the unpopular position of raising fares and cutting service. A 50-cent fare increase, a rise of more than 30%, was proposed along with total or partial service cuts to nearly half of the bus routes and curtailment of service to rush hour and special events on the Waterfront extension of the light rail.

The service cuts would put large holes in the coverage of many areas of GCRTA's service area. Many users of paratransit service, door to door service for disabled, would be without transportation to many destinations because by federal guidelines the service does not have to be provided where there is not regular bus or rail service.

Public hearings on the proposed changes brought an unprecedented outcry from

GCRTA riders. More than 5,000 people attended four public meetings to speak in opposition. Students, low-income people, senior citizens and person's with disabilities spoke to the need to find the funding to keep the integrity of the system alive. As a result of the outcry, the state found some unused federal anti-pollution funds that will plug the deficit for a few months while the legislature considers a possible revenue stream.

With use of transit on the increase and public awareness heightened, there is no better time to advocate for better transit. The challenge is to communicate to riders to take an active role and hold public officials accountable.

Steve Albro is a member of the Greater Cleveland RTA Citizens' Advisory Board.

THE MOUNTAIN DIVISION: A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

By *Richard Rudolph*

With gas prices falling over the past several weeks, it's easy to dismiss the idea that we are headed towards a mobility crisis. This short-sighted thinking may explain why town leaders in Windham, ME recently thrashed the idea of reestablishing the Mountain Division Rail Line between Portland, ME and North Conway, NH. The Maine Department of Transportation recently paid \$800,000 for the last five-mile stretch—in South Windham—needed to re-establish train service between Portland, and Fryeburg, and beyond. While this news has generated excitement among residents living in other communities along the line, some town officials in Windham and elsewhere have dismissed the idea as impractical and nostalgic. They point to a state-funded study which concluded that the line doesn't have the population density needed to sustain passenger service nor would it be able to provide regular, low-cost, direct-delivery freight service required by most commercial and industrial users.

HNTB, the consulting firm which did the study, didn't rule out commuter rail service. Instead, it suggested several actions which could lead to and facilitate a viable commuter service. This would include encouraging greater residential density along the rail corridor, especially near potential commuter rail stations, and building a Portland rail terminal closer to the main employment centers on the Portland Peninsula, thus reducing a three-seat ride. HNTB also postulated that the Mountain Division could potentially serve several gravel pits and rock quarries located on or very close to the line. Other commodities such as cement, propane,

building material and petroleum products may have some small potential as well. The study also examined the feasibility of a tourist excursion service and concluded that the Mountain Division may have a promising future as a key link in a regional, tourist oriented rail system carrying groups of passengers enjoying a land cruise experience while participating in varied tourist activities. Although the trip itself is an attraction, North Conway offers a variety of amenities. Rail tourists could transfer to the Conway Scenic Railroad's highly scenic run through Crawford Notch. Mountain bikers and winter sport enthusiasts could also use the service, provided they could store bikes, skis and baggage on board. Innovative marketing of various tour packages that include arrangements for local transportation between the train, lodgings and tourist destinations provided under a single rate or group rate could open up unlimited possibilities.

While the naysayers dismiss this as wishful thinking, the State of Maine needs to take the next step to explore how it can raise the money to upgrade the Mountain Division to FRA Class Three service. This would allow for 60-mph passenger service and 50-mph freight service. Push-pull diesel equipment could be used to provide for commuter service as well as tourist excursions to North Conway. The trip is projected to take one and a half hours each way. While some estimates place the cost at \$82 million (the figure projected in the study), it could probably be done for much less.

The state is already spending \$22 million to build a 3.4-mile bypass, connecting

Routes 114 and 25 outside of Gorham Village, to accommodate the tremendous influx of commuters traveling each workday. Another \$35 million is needed to build a four-mile, two-lane bypass north of Gorham. This may bring some temporary relief, but it does not provide an alternative for commuters who no longer want to drive because they either can't afford it, have failing health or simply prefer riding the rails to sitting in a traffic jam as they drive to work.

Citizen groups and town planners in Standish and in other communities are already examining how they can encourage greater community economic development along the corridor, especially where train stations were previously located, and there are plans to extend Amtrak service beyond Portland to Brunswick with the possibility of a second station closer to employment opportunities and Portland's commercial district.

The critics see this as Maine's "bridge to nowhere," but if we are serious about providing alternatives amid gas prices rising again with no end in sight, snarled traffic on major arteries, and an aging population, we should view it as a bridge to a brighter future. At present, Mainers living in the western suburbs have no choice but to take their cars to work. We will need to come to grips with the new reality sooner or later.

Richard Rudolph is the present chair of the Rail Users' Network and serves as a consultant to various environmental organizations at the local and national level.

TRANSIT RIDERS FACE A POTENTIAL NATIONAL NIGHTMARE

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all but destroyed rail transit. Transit, especially the new light rail systems, is beginning to make a slight comeback. Without appropriate government intervention, increased costs of operation will stop this comeback in its tracks. With a more enlightened government that understands the advantages of frequent and affordable rail transit, mobility for all Americans, with or without an automobile, will improve. A continuation of the current

policies that promote over-dependence on oil can have only the opposite effect.

Before you vote, learn what the candidates say about rail and transit issues. This applies to the presidential campaign, as well as any statewide, Congressional or local elections in your city or town. RUN is a nonpartisan organization and will not endorse any specific candidates for office. Still, we know that it is in your interest to elect candidates at every level of government who will take

the steps that will improve mobility for everyone who rides transit.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition. He is involved in several campaigns in New Jersey, including scrapping the proposed "ARC" terminal in favor of a better alternative, restoring service that was cut by New Jersey Transit and funding NJT through a formula that specifically achieves the restoration of the trains that were recently taken away and the eventual enhancement of service.

RUN TO PORTLAND FOR THE NARP MEETING

By *David Peter Alan*

RUN is going to Portland, OR for an outreach meeting with rail advocates in the Pacific Northwest. The meeting will take place on Wednesday evening, Oct. 15 and is timed to coincide with the fall meeting of the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), which begins the following day.

RUN will be represented by Board members from the Northeast, Midwest and Northwest regions. Northwest rail advocates representing the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA), All Aboard Washington and the Citizens' Advisory Committee for the Portland Streetcar will also be on hand to introduce their groups. Anyone who is interested in rail transit in the Portland and Seattle areas, as well as service on Amtrak's Cascades Corridor is urged to attend. The agenda will be informal and dress will be casual.

The meeting will take place from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Portland Building, 1120 SW 5th Ave., at Main St. MAX light rail runs along 5th Ave., so it is easy to get there. If you wish to have dinner with us, we will be enjoying traditional food, good beer and rail talk at Huber's, Portland's oldest restaurant. Huber's, located at 415 SW 3rd Ave. in the historic Railway Exchange Building, has been in operation

since 1879 and features traditional turkey and ham dinners. We will meet there at 5:15. If you are attending the NARP meeting, we suggest that you assemble in the lobby of the Doubletree Hotel at Lloyd Center (site of the NARP meeting) at 4:45 and take MAX to the restaurant. The RUN meeting will be held within walking distance of Huber's.

We are looking forward to an enjoyable and informative evening, so we hope you will join us in Portland. We will need a list of attendees, so please confirm your interest in attending with Chris Smith of the Portland Streetcar CAC. His phone number is (503) 223-3688, or you can send him an e-mail at chris@chrissmith.us.

If you are also attending the NARP meeting, we suggest that you come to Portland early, learn more about RUN and meet some of the rail advocates in the Northwest Region. Even without NARP, there is plenty of good reason to visit Portland. Celebrate your arrival at Union Station, a beautifully preserved masterpiece that has served the riding public since 1896. There is also plenty of local transit: three MAX light rail lines, the Portland Streetcar, a tramway to a hospital on the side of a hill and an excursion on the Willamette Shore Trolley on a historic streetcar. When you are not riding transit, Portland's blocks are short and it is a pedestrian-friendly city.

The downtown area has plenty to offer: people-watching in Pioneer Square (where the Convention & Visitors' Bureau can supply you with tourist literature and sell you a day pass for your transit riding), historic buildings clad in white terra cotta, interesting museums, Powell's Bookstore and much, much more. Enjoy your exercise walking around downtown between transit rides.

There are also some unique places to eat, which you won't want to miss. Jake's (officially "Jake's Famous Crawfish Restaurant") at 401 SW 12th Ave. has been serving great seafood since 1892. Dan & Louis' Oyster Bar at 208 SW Ankeny St., has been doing the same since 1907. For a taste of Portland and some good browsing, stick around for the Saturday Market near 1st Ave. and Burnside St. You might also find a hand-crafted item to take home. If you need to catch a train, grab a meal in Chinatown. It's only about a 10-minute walk from Union Station. Portland also offers shopping (New York is the only other city where Saks Fifth Avenue is actually located on Fifth Avenue), sports and the customary downtown attractions. There is plenty of activity downtown, so you can keep busy from the time you step off the train.

So RUN to Portland for Wednesday, Oct. 15 and stay awhile. We'll see you there!

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board Member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, based in Millburn, NJ.

PORTLAND, OR RETURNS TO ITS RAIL ROOTS

(Continued from page 1)

Streetcars have also returned to Portland. In the 1990s, community leaders began working to make the Central City Plan's vision of a "central city circulator" a reality and in 2001 the Portland Streetcar opened as a 2.4-mile double-track loop, the first modern streetcar system to return to a U.S. city. The system has since been extended three times and now serves a four-mile loop, linking downtown with two new neighborhoods constructed on former brownfield sites: the Pearl District on a

former rail yard and the South Waterfront on a former ship-building area.

A 3.3-mile extension to take the streetcar across the Willamette River, the first step in a loop reminiscent of Vienna's Ringstrasse, has just entered final engineering and is poised to be the first streetcar project to receive FTA funding under the "small starts" program. While visions of a high-speed rail corridor linking the Willamette Valley via Portland to Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. continue to be unrealized, Portland's rail future is bright with new coordinated planning

efforts underway by TriMet to map the future of the region's high-capacity transit system and by the City of Portland to complete city-wide streetcar network.

Chris Smith is a citizen activist focusing on transportation, neighborhood issues and civic engagement. He chairs the Citizens Advisory Committee for Portland Streetcar and has been a citizen representative on the Metro Policy Advisory Committee. He publishes the PortlandTransport.com blog, "a conversation about access and mobility in the Portland/Vancouver metro region."

NYC SUBWAY STATIONS SHOW YEARS OF NEGLECT

(Continued from page 2)

Other Station Concerns

We found a wide variety of problems in stations, some of which are easily remedied:

1. Establish criteria for placement and timely removal of service change notices. We found signs from service changes of weeks or months ago still up. Unacceptable.
2. Repair or replace deteriorated tactile warning strips in all stations. We found some of these strips almost completely worn out, and in some cases the running boards at the border of the platforms were severely deteriorated. These must be replaced immediately before a disaster occurs, and someone falls to the tracks.
3. Ensure that Station Agent badges are properly displayed at the booths. Station Agents are the face of NYC Transit, and a bad initial experience with insensitive personnel can leave a lasting negative impression.
4. Establish criteria for numbers and placement of trash receptacles in stations. There is frequently a lack of receptacles in the larger stations, leading to overflowing baskets, which, of course, leads to litter on tracks and the possibility of track fires.
5. In the case where water damage is the result of defective conditions of private

properties above or adjacent to the station, owners of those properties must be held liable for damage caused to the station and made to correct the conditions.

Additionally, we recommend that NYC Transit add the following indicators to its Passenger Environment Survey (PES):

- Cleanliness of ceilings
- Condition of ceilings
- Water leakage on ceilings
- Cleanliness of walls
- Conditions of walls
- Water leakage on walls
- Obstruction of track drains and drain boxes
- Lighting (burned-out bulbs, poor lighting)
- Visible exposed wires
- Existence of platform tactile warning strips & condition
- Physical condition of stairs (uneven stair treads, loose or missing metal stripping, missing tiles)
- Physical condition of handrails
- Cleanliness of stairs & handrails
- Service Notices (current, placement, accuracy)
- Public Telephones with #3333 MTA Service Information Stickers

Fallout

NYC Transit President Howard Roberts received our report with his usual grace and spirit, and acknowledged that they have

much to do to provide New Yorkers with adequate, decent station conditions. He acknowledged that many stations they now consider to be in a “state of good repair” are actually not, and it is a never-ending battle to keep up with the ever-changing conditions in our massive subway system, especially given the declining support from the state, city and federal government. Roberts said that where Transit previously considered approximately 225 of the 468 stations to be in a state of good repair, the actual number was probably closer to 100. It was refreshing to hear the President of the Transit Authority state the obvious, and we look forward to working with him and the MTA Board to try to get our world-class city a world-class subway system.

As we said at our Press Conference in the 149th Street-Grand Concourse station—a once-beautiful station with gorgeous details and architectural elements now sadly decomposing before our eyes—stations are the front doors of the transit system. If riders don't feel welcomed there, the entire trip gets a black eye. Clearly, we've got to do better for our eight million riders a day. (To see the entire station survey report, go to www.pcac.org.)

Andrew Albert is the chair of the NYC Transit Riders Council, and riders' representative on the MTA Board.

RUN LEADERSHIP MEETS WITH CONGRESSMAN CHARLES RANGEL

By Andrew Albert

On August 14, 2008, RUN Chairman Richard Rudolph, Vice-Chairman Andrew Albert and Treasurer Gary Prophet met Congressman Charles B. Rangel, Chairman of the House Ways & Means Committee, at his Harlem office on 125th Street. A wide range of topics was discussed, beginning with an introduction to the Rail Users' Network, and the work we do. From there, we branched out into the difficulty Amtrak finds itself, being subject to the vicissitudes of Congress on a yearly basis. Clearly, this is no way to run a railroad, and the Congressman agreed.

We spoke about the ironic difficulty our local transit systems find themselves in, with burgeoning ridership, yet facing declining

state and federal subsidies. If this trend continues, transit systems in our cities will find themselves having to raise fares, cut back services (or both—the double whammy), all while experiencing record ridership in some cases, thanks to the high price of gasoline. Congressman Rangel opined that this scenario was “the perfect storm” for increasing membership in RUN, and getting more members of Congress on our side, or, more properly, the side of rail passengers. The Congressman gave us some names we should contact, and Chairman Rudolph and I are already in the process of setting up some of those meetings. Of course, we will keep you all informed as to the progress of these meetings. (The Congressman also relayed that he was a “convert” to Amtrak, and takes the *Acela* back and forth to D.C.)

While a meeting with a New York Congressman may be seen as “preaching to the choir,” a powerful man like Charlie Rangel can open doors for us, and he led us to believe he would be as helpful as he could in this regard. We believe it is important for key members of Congress to learn of the existence of RUN and the good work we do, for it can only benefit all rail passengers, as Congress tends to act when it believes there are numbers behind constituencies. After 45 minutes or so, we said goodbye to Congressman Rangel. All in all, a very good meeting with a very important man in Washington.

Andrew Albert is the chair of the NYC Transit Riders Council, and riders' representative on the MTA Board.

NEXT-GENERATION LONG-DISTANCE CARS: WHAT WILL THEY LOOK LIKE?

(Continued from page 5)

eyes off the scenery and let them rest on the car interior, and everywhere you sense security and snugness, almost as if you were being cradled. How is this done? One technique is the way the designers canted the upper half of each car's sidewall slightly inward—what ship designers call “tumble-home.” The car is several inches narrower at the roofline than at the bottom of the window line. The tumble-home is repeated by the shape of the airline-style overhead luggage bins. They cant inward slightly over the center aisle to create a tapered channel along the ceiling that reinforces the sensation of snugness. Curtained windows and earth-tone carpeting and seats complete the sensation of being safely snuggled. In all of Amtrak's fleet, only the Acela coaches—designed and built by the LRC's manufacturer, Bombardier—embody this essential amenity.

Use upper-berth windows

Balancing openness with snugness is a critical question in sleeping-car design, too. A private room on a train is the supreme expression of coziness, wafting us back to those childhood days when we would place a blanket over a folding card table and then crawl inside to experience our own miniature “house.” But the weak spot in any sleeping-car room is the upper berth. Having the ceiling right over your face can quickly tip the scales from coziness to claustrophobia. The answer is simple: upper-berth windows. They were the only innovation in Amtrak's Viewliner-series sleeping cars that made sense, and they need to be standard equipment in all future generations of sleeping cars, whether single- or double-level.

And speaking of Viewliners, can we all agree that putting toilets in the roomettes was a huge mistake? It may have made sense in the first-generation single-occupancy roomettes, but nobody

traveling with another person is going to use an open toilet in the presence of the second traveler. All single-level roomettes should use the same system used in the double-decked Superliners: Go down the aisle and use the public toilet. It's private, roomy and not far away. And a car with one or two public toilets has a dozen fewer toilets to break (and stink up those little roomettes).

Tunnels belong on the outside, not the insides, of trains

To make one final pass at the openness/coziness issue, I'd like to suggest that the next generation of double-deck coaches have a full-width room divider at or near the central stairwell. Because the rest rooms in a double-deck coach are on the lower deck, virtually the entire 85-foot length of the upper deck is available for passenger seating. That's great for capacity, but it also creates a “tunnel effect” that can make passengers toward the rear of the coach feel more like passengers on a plane than on a train—even like patrons in a theater or a stadium. You're so aware of all the other people in the car that your privacy can feel threatened.

The answer: Break up that vast linear interior with a divider panel—perhaps etched glass, as in the early streamliners, or perhaps a carpeted bulkhead with some art on it. One of the charms of the Talgo is the cozy feeling of riding in a coach only 44 feet long. Chop a Superliner in half and you get the same effect (and you also halve the number of other passengers you can hear talking).

Dividers can be used in dining cars too. The last diners built by the Budd Company for service on the *Empire Builder* and *North Coast Limited* used etched-glass dividers to set off the first and last pair of tables at each end of the dining room, and a dropped ceiling over the same space created an enhanced sense of specialness and intimacy that

broke up the tunnel effect at the front and rear of the room. Henry Dreyfus used dividers to break up the 85-foot dining room in the Twin Unit diners he designed for the 1948 *Twentieth Century Limited*, and he varied the seating configuration as well. Amtrak might think about this for its next generation of dining cars.

One further note re dining cars: Can somebody at Amtrak think about creating one table—probably longitudinal—where five or six people can eat together? Not all families are conveniently scaled at two or four, and parents should not have to be split up from their children or siblings seated with strangers.

Lounging and viewing are not the same thing

Let's hear it for the Amtrak designers who finally “got it” about putting booth space on the upper deck of the Sightseer lounge cars. In their original configuration, the Sightseers placed all upper-deck occupants in serpentine seating that faced outward from the car, perpendicular to the direction of travel. This was done presumably to promote viewing, even though any ergonomist will tell you that moving scenery is most conveniently viewed while facing forward or backward rather than laterally. And any rail traveler can testify an outward-facing seat makes it very difficult to socialize. Turns out that even dedicated scenery-watchers in glass-topped cars occasionally want to chat with fellow passengers or family members while facing each other over a table holding a snack or beverage, and they don't necessarily want to go to the tiny lounge downstairs to do it. The Sightseer lounges now acknowledge that the openness/coziness balance is just as important in the lounge car as in a coach or sleeper. Congratulations, Amtrak, for getting it right after only 20 years.

(Continued on next page)

AMTRAK'S FY 2008 INITIATIVE: A PROGRESS REPORT

By *Chuck Bode*

Amtrak began a new initiative to improve a group of trains in fiscal year 2008. Known as the Route Performance Initiative, it includes six routes including the *Coast Starlight*, *San Joaquins*, *Hiawathas*, *City of New Orleans*, and Northeast Regional service. The project includes new identity, improvements to the car interiors, customer service and advertising, with a goal of increasing ridership and revenue. The emphasis is on equipment quality, service quality and product identity.

The project began in October 2007 with a cross functional team meeting. This effort includes employees from several departments. A team of 15 from across the country began meeting in October. This June, the public press announcement was made, and advertising began in July. The enhancements to the cars were coordinated with scheduled maintenance and therefore occurred over a period of time, with minimal impact on availability.

Northeast Regional is the biggest route in the program, with 35% of the ridership and 25% of the revenue. The idea was to make this service something other than "not the Acela." For this service a new brand (Northeast Regional) and logo were developed and made public in June. The 36 café cars were refurbished between December 2007 and May 2008. Improvements to the café cars include new, more comfortable blue cushions in the booths, a new menu that includes regional brands (Entenmanns, Jimmy Dean, UTZ and Yuengling), bulkhead posters and cityscapes in the sales area. The new vendors sponsored some of the improvements, such as the bulkhead posters which feature their products. Also, the café cars were moved to the center of the consists to reduce the length of the walk to the car. In May, eight new en-route cleaner positions were added covering 22 weekday and 14 weekend trains. In March, the train and engine crews and the onboard service crews received a customer service refresher. Advertising, including on the back of city buses and on gas pumps, occurred during July and August. Northeast Regional was

featured in the Travel Trade travel agent website video and magazine in July and was "train of the month" at Amtrak's reservation centers in September. A program of discount weekend fares, \$49, to certain city pairs is ongoing.

At the August meeting of the RUN Board of Directors, where Mr. Pat Pietrantonio, Amtrak's Director of Project Management East, made a presentation, members raised a number of questions. Some issues are proving difficult to address, such as storage of supplies in café car booths. A lack of supply points requires stocking supplies for an entire round trip at the beginning. Requiring reservations eliminates standees, but prevents spontaneous travel. In addition, because the reservation is only an access to the train and not a true reserved seat, people traveling together may not be able to sit together. Evening service for Boston and the absence of overnight sleeper cars remain problems, as seen by RUN members.

The year's initiative was completed on time and under budget. Revenue has increased 14% and readership 11% over the previous year. Overall customer satisfaction is up and food and beverage revenue per passenger is increasing monthly. In October, the initiative moves to another group of services, including the *Empire Service* and the *Maple Leaf*.

RUN thanks Pat Pietrantonio for giving up part of his Saturday afternoon to make a presentation on the initiative at the August meeting.

RUN is developing a list of suggestions for presentation to Amtrak for consideration in the upcoming Route Performance Initiative which will target trains on the *Empire Route* and the *Lake Shore Limited*. Members are encouraged to forward their suggestions to the Maine address for inclusion in this effort.

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

NEXT-GENERATION LONG-DISTANCE CARS

(Continued from page 10)

"Conductor, please call your office"

Finally, can we have all Amtrak trains—long-distance or corridor—designed with an office for the train crew? Nothing depresses me more than walking into a lounge car and finding the crew taking up an entire table to go through their paperwork. If you're not a railfan the chatter on the radio is annoying and distracting, and the sight of crew members taking care of business in what is supposed to be passenger space is perceived as intrusive and disruptive. My fantasy is to see each

lounge car designed with a small office at one end—not totally private, but with a Dutch door open at the top to allow passengers to communicate with the conductor if necessary. A two-person seat with a fold-out table from the sidewall or bulkhead should provide enough surface for paperwork, and the enclosure will dampen the sound of the radio enough to prevent passengers from becoming annoyed. And because he'll occupy a fixed space, everyone will know where to find the conductor if he's needed.

James E. Coston is chairman of Corridor Capital, LLC.

RUN's MAILBOX



Amtrak CEO Sees Opportunities for Intracity Rail

Dear Mr. Rudolph:

Thank you for your letter and newsletter updating me on the recent activities of the Rail Users' Network. I am glad we had the opportunity to meet at the TrainRiders Northeast annual meeting last spring. Let me share with you my thoughts on a few of the matters you raised.

You are correct that our nation faces a mobility crisis. Passenger rail can play a unique role in addressing that crisis, but this will require funding for significant service expansion and other capital investments to reduce trip times, improve service and increase capacity.

With ridership up 11.3% compared to last year, getting more equipment on our trains is an urgent priority. Since customers using our automated reservation systems can check availability without requesting a reservation, we cannot quantify how many potential passengers do not travel because space is unavailable. However, we know that figure is growing as load factors and the number of sold-out trains increase.

I have recently returned from a trip to Illinois, where I met with elected officials to discuss our need for more equipment in the Midwest and elsewhere. We have approximately 60 single-level cars in storage that could be returned to service at a cost of around \$700,000 each, plus the additional cost of converting some of these cars from food service cars to coaches. We currently have sufficient funding to overhaul and return to service 12 of these cars in the coming fiscal year, and hope that additional funding will allow us to do more. Shop capacity is also an issue. Meanwhile, we are working with elected officials and our state partners to develop plans and come up with funding to acquire new equipment.

As your letter suggests, expansion of state-supported services is critical to growing ridership and enabling passenger rail to achieve its potential. Current economic conditions have indeed created funding challenges for our state partners. Given this, we are gratified by the continued support for Amtrak service that all of them have demonstrated. We are currently working with many states that wish to add, increase or extend state-supported Amtrak services. Twenty-two states have applied to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a portion of the \$30 million in federal matching grant funds that Congress appropriated this year for state-initiated capital projects to improve intercity passenger rail service. The FRA has indicated that it hopes to award the grants this month.

As you probably know, the Amtrak reauthorization legislation approved by both houses of Congress would create a multi-year federal matching capital grant program for intercity passenger rail development, modeled on the federal programs that provide funding to states for other transportation modes. The enactment of such a program into law would be an important first step in creating the passenger rail network our country needs.

I appreciate RUN's educational efforts regarding the benefits of intercity passenger rail. I hope you have found the information available on Amtrak.com—including the "Amtrak and the Environment" section of our "Whistle Stop" website, Congressional testimony, reports and *Amtrak Ink*, our employee newspaper for which I write a column every month—useful in this endeavor.

One of the things I have found most gratifying during my time at Amtrak is the support of organizations and individuals who recognize passenger rail's unique potential. The mobility crisis that confronts our nation provides the opportunity to turn the vision of an improved passenger rail system into reality. I look forward to working together to make that happen.

Sincerely,

Alex Kummant

President and Chief Executive Officer
National Railroad Passenger Corporation

(This letter was received in response to my request for a meeting with Amtrak's CEO.—Richard)

The National Passenger Rail Map Has Some Big Gaps

Dear Richard:

We had been thinking of taking a long Amtrak tour this summer, visiting many friends all over the country. Unfortunately, my health does not seem to permit this. But we did notice a discrepancy in the Amtrak route map: service is shown from Jacksonville, FL west to New Orleans, but there is no such service in the time table. We had intended to visit friends in northern Florida, and then head west. We had also wanted to see friends in Phoenix, AZ, but Amtrak now skips that city. Killing Amtrak silently by such underhanded means gets us very, very annoyed.

I am sitting here with "NARP's Proposed National Grid-and Gateway Passenger Train Network" map before me. A few comments:

1. There are several cross-border routes into Canada, but nothing into Mexico. As one of the larger cities in North America, Mexico City should be linked into the rail system.

2. The NARP map shows restoration of service to the Southern Tier (New York State) cities of Binghamton and Elmira, but the route through Pennsylvania is not clear. A number of advocacy groups have been pushing to restore the former Lackawanna service from New York City to Scranton, PA. This would miss the important Lehigh Valley (Pennsylvania) cities of Easton, Bethlehem and Allentown, and also Wilkes-Barre. While less direct between the endpoints of Scranton and New York City, the route along the Lehigh River, with a jog from Wilkes-Barre to Scranton, would bring more population centers onto the network. It would also facilitate connections from Philadelphia and points south (Baltimore and Washington). The Lackawanna route is heavily favored by resort operators in the Poconos. If two routes are ever open, I think that makes a good second choice, but not a first choice.

3. At the most recent meeting of the Regional Citizens Committee, a motion was passed to restore electric operations on three trackless-trolley routes and one trolley route where the infrastructure was still in place, but service was being provided by diesel buses. Considering how many other cities are going ahead with electric rail transit project, we feel that SEPTA (Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority) is behind the national spirit.

Ernest B. Cohen, PE & Ph.D.
Sustainable Society Action Project, Inc.

Pennsylvania Also Provides Free Intrastate Transit to Seniors

Dear Sirs:

With reference to the article in the summer newsletter about Illinois being the first state providing free transit rides to seniors, I wish to note that Pennsylvania has been using lottery funds to provide free transit rides to senior citizens since 1972. For most of this period, use was restricted to off-peak hours with six hours blocked on weekdays. However, in the 1990s this restriction was reduced to two hours per weekday and then eliminated altogether. The free carriage is offered for all intrastate transit (bus and rail) trips taken by seniors 65 and older and is not restricted to state residents, as Medicare and rail retirements cards are accepted as proof of eligibility. In contrast to Illinois, it should be mentioned that Pennsylvania does not provide free carriage for trips taken on regional (commuter) rail, although seniors can ride for a single fare of \$1 or on 10-trip tickets bought for \$8.50. The \$1 flat fare can be purchased on trains.

Although I personally benefit from this program, whether this is good social or transit policy is another question. On average, seniors have higher incomes than those younger, and lottery tickets are preferentially bought by individuals in lower income brackets. To some extent, what we now have is lower-income folks subsidizing the work trips of higher-salaried managers. And by eliminating the rush hour restriction, Pennsylvania has lost an inducement to shift traffic to less crowded times.

Sincerely,
John A. Dawson
Bala Cynwyd, PA

