

NJ GOVERNOR KILLS “ARC” PROJECT; ADVOCATES CONTINUE TO PRESS FOR TUNNEL TO EXISTING PENN STATION

By David Peter Alan

On Oct. 7, it appeared that the long controversy over the “ARC” Project had finally been resolved. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie announced that he was ordering an orderly shutdown of the project to build new rail tunnels between New Jersey and midtown Manhattan and terminate them in a deep-cavern terminal twenty stories below 34th Street. Christie based his decision on financial concerns, although he said that the project was flawed. He mentioned the flaws often cited by advocates for rail riders: it would not go to Penn Station, Amtrak could not use it and it could not be

expanded to serve the East Side of Midtown Manhattan.

After Christie’s announcement, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood and FTA head Peter Rogoff went to Trenton to meet with him. After 17 days of negotiations, Christie reaffirmed on Oct. 27 that the project would be shut down; nobody had put enough money on the table to make him feel comfortable with continuing construction.

Rising costs have plagued the project for several years. In 2008, the proposed link between the new line and the existing Penn Station was removed from the project to save \$1 billion in construction

costs. That change would have kept Amtrak off the new line. New Jersey Transit and other project supporters had accepted a cost figure of \$8.7 billion for the project, but that number is no longer valid. A report issued the same day as Christie’s statement placed the cost at between \$11 billion and \$14 billion. The report was issued by a new committee, the ARC Executive Steering Committee, composed of senior managers from NJT and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which had pledged \$3 billion toward the project. In the report, NJT had acknowledged numbers most as high as the FTA’s.

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AN IMPOSSIBLE DREAM... REALIZED

By Pamela Cardoso-Bush

“To dream the impossible dream... To fight the unbeatable foe... To bear with unbearable sorrow... To run where the brave dare not go... To right the unrightable wrong... To try when your arms are too weary... To reach the unreachable star...” The words to this song portray the trek to victory of a small group of people who just wouldn’t give up! Some would say that what happened on July 16, 2010 was just a dream...an “impossible dream”!!

On a hot summer day in a little vacant lot, in the Four Corners section of Dorchester, MA, a dream was realized. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks believed in this dream and fought for it even to death. It was a civil rights battle ...the belief that we all have a right to a ride... transit justice, transit equity. Rosa Parks fought for her seat on a bus and this community stood up to fight to stop the train and give us our seat!

It started about 23 years ago, when the MBTA planned to shut down the Fairmount Line after using it as a bypass for Providence- and Franklin-bound trains while the Orange Line was being moved to the Southwest Corridor. When construction ended, the MBTA saw no need to keep the line in use, even though the line runs through Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, the most transit dependent communities in Boston, most of which are low-income and people of color.

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3-C PLAN FACES POLITICAL HEADWINDS

Incoming Governor Says He's Opposed to the Project



Governor-elect John Kasich

By Bill Engel

The long-sought goal of Ohio passenger rail advocates and planners to resume rail service connecting Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati – the “3-C” corridor – has encountered the stormy waters of the fall election season. A supporter of the plan, incumbent Democrat Governor Ted Strickland, was unseated by his Republican opponent, former U.S. Rep. John Kasich. Kasich, who served in the U. S. House of Representatives in the 1990s, expressed his opposition during the campaign and has continued to do so.

On more than one occasion during the campaign, Kasich stated he would kill 3-C if he were elected. He incorrectly derides the 39-mph average speed, including station stops and recovery time, of the tentative schedules in the initial plan.

On Sept. 24, the Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio Rail Development Commission announced that further analysis of the proposed schedule between Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati would allow a trip to be made in just over five hours. This works out to an average speed of about 50 mph, 11 mph faster than the much ridiculed 39 mph in the initial, very tentative schedules. Also, ODOT-ORDC announced that the Federal Railroad Administration approved spending the first \$15 million of the \$400 million Ohio was granted by the federal government to develop the 3-C corridor. These dollars will be spent on initial design studies which will include equipment

However, since the election, Kasich has expressed his continuing opposition to 3-C. Unless someone can change his mind, the future looks very bleak for 3-C.

Unfortunately for passenger train supporters, voters favored Kasich over Strickland by a wide margin. This dissatisfaction

probably had nothing to do with 3-C, but was caused by the overall economy in Ohio. The unemployment rate exceeds the national average. Manufacturing in Ohio relied heavily on the slumping auto industry for jobs. Even though there is little one governor can do when the national economy slumps, Republicans ran campaign ads that blamed Strickland for the loss of 400,000 jobs in Ohio alone.

Even the already-approved spending of \$25 million in federal money for more study of 3-C came under fire. A Republican Ohio State Senator, David Goodman, has called for a lawsuit to block the spending. Goodman claimed the approval, which occurred in April, did not have the required super-majority of the State Controlling Board.

What does the public at large think about 3-C? In a poll taken prior to the announcement of the federal grant, Ohioans favored improved rail service. When an Ohio State Senator from Stark County, Scott Oelslager, was asked for his position on 3-C at a public meeting in May, he spoke against it to applause from the audience. Stark County would not be served by 3-C.

At least one newspaper, the Akron *Beacon-Journal*, has written favorably about modern rail service. In an editorial published Sunday, September 19, the paper argued for spending \$25 million federal dollars for further study. “Critics pose many questions about passenger rail for Ohio. Then spend the federal money aimed at getting answers,” the paper editorialized.

Elsewhere in Ohio, some preliminary environmental impact studies are moving forward for extending corridor service westward from Pittsburgh to Cleveland. Besides the current route of Amtrak's *Capital Limited* via Alliance, OH, a grassroots effort based in the Youngstown area would like to see service via that city and Warren studied. They propose rebuilding the connection that used to exist in Ravenna, OH between the old B&O and PRR lines. Today those lines are CSX and NS. Certainly Warren and Youngstown have a larger combined population than Alliance plus service via Youngstown could service the student population at Youngstown State University.

With the Cleveland-to-Columbus-to Cincinnati area being the largest population center in the U.S. without rail service, it is of national importance that work go forward to plug this hole. Hopefully rail advocates will be able to convince public officials of this.

Bill Engel is a RUN Board member based in Clinton, OH.

NEW YORKERS SOCKED WITH THIRD FARE HIKE IN THREE YEARS

By *Andrew Albert*

As if the worst service cuts to New York's mass transit system in over 35 years weren't enough, now New Yorkers have been hit with the third fare increase in three years! On October 7, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board approved fare hikes, beginning on Dec. 30, of varying amounts on New York's subways and buses, plus Metro-North and Long Island Rail Road commuter trains, yielding a 7.5% increase in revenues. However, as we will see, some fare types suffered a much larger increase. In fact, if you're a commuter who uses the unlimited monthly Metrocard, you will see a whopping 17% fare hike, with the card going from \$89 a month to \$104 per month!

Of course, the increase in revenues is entirely necessary, as declining support from state and city coffers, not to mention swelling debt service and pension costs have wreaked havoc on the

transit system. Coupled with declining revenues from MTA-dedicated taxes, and you've got a prescription for disaster. Yet, this system is the arteries and veins that make the region viable, fueling the economic engine that is the City of New York and its suburbs. So the Board took the only viable way out, in their view, raising the fares on working New Yorkers, which will undoubtedly hurt many a commuter.

Two Board members spoke against the fare hikes, pointing out the recent terrible service cuts, and, in the case of the Nassau County representative (Long Island), the uncertain future of Long Island Bus, which the MTA is threatening to turn back to the county, citing insufficient county support. What was really telling about the five public hearings I attended, as a non-voting Board member, was the small amount of the public that turned out to protest the increases.

In past years, when fare hikes were on

the table, hundreds and hundreds of people turned out to protest the hikes. This time, there were fewer than 50 at some of the hearings. Those that did turn out, with a few exceptions, were union members or other groups representing transit riders or good-government groups. In no way do I mean to disparage these important voices, but the scarcity of ordinary folks, who did indeed turn out for the service cuts hearings, was a disturbing commentary on the public hearing process, and in many people's minds, the futility of even showing up to speak. Many believed the fare hikes were a done deal, and as it turned out—they were right.

In our view, other scenarios should have been brought to the table, specifically, tolls on the now free East and Harlem River bridges, which would bring the MTA an important, reliable source of revenue for operations, likely negating the need for these every-other-year

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

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Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users' Network at:
RUN; 55 River Road, Steep Falls, ME 04085 or email to rrudolph@fairpoint.net

THE WAY FORWARD THROUGH 2011 AND BEYOND

*By Richard Rudolph
Chair, Rail Users' Network*

Like many rail advocates, I was depressed to hear the election results. A lot could be written here regarding why working people tend to vote against their own class interests, but the focus of this piece is more on what can be done to insure that our voices are heard in the coming months before newly elected governors in Ohio, Wisconsin and other states give back stimulus funds to the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Some state officials even seem to welcome the move. Just three days after his election victory, Governor-elect Andrew Cuomo of New York sent a letter to Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, asking that he consider redirecting federal funding to New York. High-speed rail, Cuomo wrote, could be the 21st Century Erie Canal for New York State and it would help rebuild Upstate New York's economy. North Carolina's rail officials are also prepared to compete for the funds if they become available. "We have a rich tradition of rail in North Carolina, and we have a grand vision for how it works in the future to stimulate development," said Greer Beaty, a North Carolina Department of Transportation spokeswoman. "We gladly and with honor accept additional funds to help us achieve that vision."

We can applaud LaHood's recent statement that the funds will be reallocated in a professional manner to states where the money can be well spent on rail projects, but now is not the time to roll over and accept this outcome. With the election behind us, it's time for rail advocates to rededicate ourselves to advocating for high-speed rail all across the country. Over the last two years, the federal government has distributed \$10.4 billion in grants to construct or plan high-speed rail

projects, including incremental measures that increase the speed and reliability of existing passenger rail. This may seem like a huge amount, but it only represents about one-sixth of the funds requested by 37 states and the District of Columbia over the past two years. Those requests totaled over \$65 billion – about six times the amount made available by Congress. Even this amount pales in comparison to what may be needed in the long run. Compare this to what is being spent fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to protect our oil pipeline in the Middle East.

Our focus should be on how high-speed rail programs can create thousands of desperately needed jobs, while protecting the environment and reducing the nation's dependence on foreign oil. It will also improve business productivity and travel efficiency and expand regional labor markets, improving both job prospects and business efficiency. China, driven by concerns about factory unemployment during the recent global recession, has embarked on the world's most ambitious program of high-speed rail construction—creating jobs today while laying the groundwork for future economic growth. The Chinese plan includes the construction of 42 high-speed rail lines. When the recession hit, China accelerated the timetable for finishing the system from 2020 to 2012, dedicating \$100 billion to the project. More than 100,000 workers are involved in construction of the line connecting Beijing and Shanghai.

High-speed rail will also ease gridlocked highways and congested air space. High-speed rail service has virtually eliminated short flights in a number of air corridors in Europe such as between Paris and Lyon, France and between Cologne and Frankfurt, Germany. Even

Amtrak's Acela service, which leaves much to be desired, has captured 62% of the air/rail market on trips between the Big Apple and Washington, DC and 47% on trips between Boston and New York. High-speed rail stations located in city centers can also spark economic development and encourage revitalization of downtown areas.

We also need to talk about the right to mobility or what Europeans call social inclusion. As the price of gasoline continues to rise and cars become more and more expensive to operate, students and seniors will no longer be able to visit loved ones or take off on a holiday to tour the countryside. The National Transportation Safety Board recently held a two-day forum to understand the safety risks that older drivers face. Within 15 years, more than one in five licensed drivers will be 65 or older. Their number will nearly double, from 30 million today to about 57 million in 2030. While smarter cars and better-designed roads may help keep them behind the wheel longer, most people will outlive their driving ability. Public transportation—buses, transit, commuter rail and high-speed trains—will be needed to insure their right to mobility.

Finally, we need to remind politicians that fares need to be affordable. Fiscal hawks complain that trains and other public transportation are highly subsidized, as if highways are not. The latest Federal Highway Administration figures (2008) show that only 51% of highway costs are covered by users including gas taxes, vehicle taxes and tolls. At the same time, many passenger rail systems cover 50% or more of their operating expenses out of the fare box. Setting fares at reasonable prices will help insure that the ridership will be there to support high-speed rail, which will not only create jobs, but also save energy and protect the environment.

NJ GOVERNOR KILLS “ARC” TUNNEL PROJECT



The present tunnel portals used by Amtrak and NJ Transit between New Jersey and Midtown Manhattan.

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Advocates for rail riders in the region favor the *Moynihan/Penn Station First* alternative, which would direct new tunnels into the existing Penn Station, which would be enhanced to improve platform length and pedestrian access. Joseph M. Clift of the Regional Rail Working Group (RRWG), an umbrella organization composed of rail advocacy organizations in the New York and New Jersey area, said capacity at an enhanced station would be enough to accommodate 42 trains during the busiest 60 minutes of the morning peak commuting time: 36 trains on NJT and six on Amtrak. The current schedule calls for 25 trains: 22 on NJT and three on Amtrak.

The *Moynihan/Penn Station First* alternative could be built for \$3 billion less than the cost of the ARC Project with a deep-cavern terminal, as NJT proposes. Member organizations of the RRWG include the Lackawanna Coalition, New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP) and

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RUN Board Meetings for 2011 are scheduled as follows:

Saturday, January 8; Saturday, February 26; Friday, April 29 (New Haven, CT); Saturday, June 25; Saturday, August 27; and Saturday, October 29.

Board meetings normally take place at the MTA headquarters in New York City, 347 Madison Ave., from 1-5 pm, but please call 207-776-4961 to confirm.

AN 'IMPOSSIBLE' DREAM IS REALIZED

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The campaign to: a) keep the line open and operating much like other heavy rail/subway lines and b) get new stations built on the line was spearheaded by activists from the community and led by the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition.

If one looks at the “spider” map of the MBTA rail system, one might think that the Fairmount line ran through a rural community because there were no stops. It seemed the powers that be felt that it was OK to run diesel smoke-spewing trains through these neighborhoods and pollute the air and lungs of the residents but saw no need to at least let them get ON the train and get a faster ride to jobs, school, shopping and services in Boston!

Well, residents organized and rallied, marched, lobbied, prayed and met with everyone from the schoolhouse to the State House—finally winning four new stations on the line, attracting residential and economic development to these communities and attracting new jobs

housing and other opportunities along this line. The station construction on

It seemed the powers that be felt that it was OK to run diesel smoke-spewing trains through these neighborhoods and pollute the air and lungs of the residents but saw no need to at least let them get ON the train.

three stops is scheduled to be completed by 2012. One stop is in limbo and efforts to bring night and weekend service to the line are still being discussed. The contractors are also being monitored by the community residents and the MBTA to assure compliance with workforce diversity standards. The residents and organizations such as Greater Four

Corners Action Coalition and the other members of the Fairmount Coalition will continue to organize around these issues.

On Jan. 28, 2010, site clearing began on the New Four Corners/Geneva Station. Finally amidst tears and cheers, on July 16, the staff and members of the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, surrounded by local residents, MBTA and MBCR officials as well as state and municipal elected officials, community partners and members of the Fairmount Coalition gathered to celebrate the Groundbreaking for the new Four Corners/Geneva train station on the Fairmount/Indigo Commuter Rail Line. The youngest person holding a shovel was 7-year-old Jaeden Bush, the grandson of Pamela or “Mela” Cardoso-Bush, the Lead Organizer for the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition. History was made and Jaeden was there to participate in seeing this Impossible Dream realized.

Pamela Cardoso-Bush is lead organizaer at the Greater Four Corners Action Coalition, based in Dorchester, MA.

SAVE THE DATE

The Rail Users' Network will hold a regional meeting on Friday, April 29, 2011 in New Haven, CT.

Further details will be posted at www.railusers.net as they become available. Or call 207-776-4961 for more information.

RIDING VIA RAIL'S 'OCEAN' TO THE OCEAN



Via Rail's Ocean en route to Nova Scotia.

By Philip Copeland

On a beautiful June morning, my wife and I boarded the casino bus from our local mall in Elyria, OH to the Windsor, Ontario Casino. We transferred to Via Rail and we were off on a trip to the ocean and the *Ocean*. The only gambling at the casino was “would we make our connection to Via for our train to Toronto on the first leg of the trip?” We did an overnigher in the Courtyard Marriott in downtown Toronto and caught a corridor train to Montreal.

In Montreal, we boarded Via's *Ocean* for a trip to Halifax, Nova Scotia. We were pleased with our Renaissance sleeper, though the bedrooms were a little small, as we had been warned. Outside of that, the service—including the attendant, Peter, and the dining service—was outstanding. The ride was smooth with no rattles and bumps and harsh movements sideways. The connection with the other cars was tight and easy to navigate. All you would hear between the cars was a little swishing sound.

There was a heritage dome car at the end of the train and we enjoyed complimentary champagne and had our picture taken by the attendant on duty. There was a wine tasting on the return trip in the dome car. Crewmembers were polite, helpful and courteous with no temper flairs or uneven emotions of any kind. Food service was good to excellent. Our train arrived only about 20 minutes late into Halifax the next afternoon. In Montreal and Halifax, they have the Starlight Lounges for first class passengers. In both directions, reservations for dinner going out and lunch returning from Halifax are made in the station. Both meals were served only 10 minutes after we pulled out.

When we stepped out of our cab at the station to return, a gentleman came up to us and offered to help with luggage. To our surprise, he was the engineer of our outbound *Ocean* and he took us into the station to check one of our two bags.

One flaw, if you can call it that, was when we came into the dining car for

breakfast the morning we were coming into Montreal. I asked for the hot breakfast and they told me that they only serve the cold breakfast when they are coming in. I thought I was back on Amtrak for a moment, with the crews providing service to satisfy their needs, not the passengers. We returned much the same way we came out and it was a flawless trip except for the 105 degrees in Toronto and a slow cab ride from the hotel to the train due to traffic being diverted for the Shriner's parade, which caused us to almost miss our train for Windsor.

In Halifax, we attended the Nova Scotia Halifax Tattoo. This is not something burned into your skin; it's a huge extravaganza show with marching bands from Canada, the German Navy Band of the Baltic, the Royal Navy Band of Belgium and the Band of America's Few, a band of retired members of the U.S. Marine Band. There were acrobats from Europe including The Flying Grandpas of the Hamburg, Germany Police, and many others. The Royal Air Force Drill Team wowed us with their precision marching and handling of their rifles, which they actually fired. There were other talented military groups. The Tattoo is held yearly around the 4th of July. This year's performance was in honor of the 100th Anniversary of the Canadian Navy.

So, take a ride on the *Ocean* and see this great show in future years, and enjoy a beautiful city in the bargain.

Philip Copeland is a RUN Boasrd Member and a member of the NARP Council of Representatives, based in Elyria, OH.

NJ GOVERNOR SCRAPS “ARC” TUNNEL PROJECT

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Empire State Passengers' Association (ESPA). Clift is also Technical Director of the Lackawanna Coalition and had previously served as Director of Planning for the Long Island Rail Road.

Rider advocacy organizations in the region have criticized the NJT plan for its lack of cost-effectiveness; it would cost too much and not be effective in improving transit in the region. Other organizations representing rail riders have joined local advocates in calling for new tunnels to go to the existing Penn Station. They include RUN, the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) and the National Corridors Initiative (NCI) at the national level, along with several state and regional advocacy organizations throughout the eastern half of the nation.

Organizations based as far away as Chicago, Miami and New Orleans (the outer endpoints of the longest routes originating from Penn Station) have joined the call for construction of a line that both Amtrak and NJT can use.

They agree with NARP Vice-Chair and NJ-ARP Director Albert L. Papp that NJT needs to “right-size” the project.

One day after Christie ordered the shutdown of the project, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and Federal Transit Administrator Peter Rogoff went to Trenton to meet with him. The details of the meeting were not made public, but Christie said that they talked about options to get new tunnels built and allow New Jersey to keep \$3 billion in funds that the FTA could pledge toward the project. Christie agreed to give the project a reprieve, but also stated again that New Jersey still cannot afford it. During that time, various proposals for increased funding and cutbacks in the scope of the project were discussed, but Christie did not believe that they would bring in enough money to ensure that New Jersey would not be on the hook for billions of dollars. He killed the project, once and for all, on Oct. 27.

Before LaHood and Rogoff met with Christie, veteran Trenton-watcher and Lackawanna Coalition Political

Director James T. Raleigh suggested that Christie consider the plan favored by rider advocates as a way to save money, keep any proposed federal grant and build new tunnels to the existing Penn Station. The advocates are convinced that Christie and New Jersey transportation Commissioner James Simpson are aware of the *Moynihan/Penn Station First* alternative and its benefits, and some have dared to hope that their preferred alternative will be selected and built. That has not happened yet, but advocates plan to continue to campaign for that outcome. If it happens, Raleigh and his advocacy colleagues will get their wish, and rail riders from New Jersey and elsewhere in the nation will get a significant upgrade to their line.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition. He participated in the campaign against the proposed deep-cavern terminal and in favor of new tunnels to the existing Penn Station. He has also covered the campaign extensively and has recently written a series of in-depth articles on the subject in Destination:Freedom at www.nationalcorridors.org.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, **write to:**
 RUN, 55 River Road
 Steep Falls, ME 04085

or
contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at:
RRudolph@fairpoint.net

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

A SCHEDULE IN EVERY POCKET

RailBandit Software Puts Info at the Click of a Keypad

By Andrew Albert

What's the #1 item almost everyone has with them these days? Hint: It is your everyday companion, one that you find you just can't do without? All right—it's your cellphone! It keeps us in touch with our daily schedules, our contacts, our e-mails and more. Well, it's even better than that, now that RailBandit is on the scene. Because now, you can have just about every train schedule in the country in your pocket.

This ingenious program was developed by Yuriy Yakimenko, who several years ago found himself commuting from the Hamilton area of New Jersey to business school in Newark, NJ. As he saw people rushing to and fro, missing their normal trains and going crazy trying to find the paper schedules, he thought up a better way. So, at that time, he developed Train Logic, which, over time, has gotten better and better and has morphed into RailBandit, a potent force for keeping us up with our favorite pastime—riding trains.

Only now, it isn't just NJ Transit, LIRR, Metro-North, Septa, etc. Now it covers virtually every subway, commuter, and Amtrak train, with the exception of the long-distance Amtrak trains, such as NY-Chicago, NY-Florida, Chicago-California, etc. It DOES cover Amtrak corridor trains, such as the Northeast Corridor, the *Downeaster*, the *Cascades*, the *Capitol Corridor* in California, the *Empire Service* in NY State and the *Pacific Surfliners*, PLUS virtually every subway and commuter train line in the US.

And the way it works is nothing short of amazing. For a nominal subscription

charge (the actual program is free), you will get up-to-the-minute schedules which can be downloaded onto your smartphone, and once done, you can use them underground, on the trains, or anywhere.

It's also fast: you can get schedules or directions within five seconds of launching the program. And because it is tied into the time on your smartphone, RailBandit knows what your time is, and shows you the next train times, or even the next day or week's train times, YOU set the parameters. And (sorry to sound so excited) if you load more than one company's schedules—for instance, if you wanted to take a Metro-North train from Greenwich, CT and change to an Amtrak train to continue your journey to Baltimore—it will show you where to change trains, what the layover time will be and when your next train leaves! You can even adjust how much layover time you'd like built into your trip. It will even show you all your stops, and, when you're ready to return home, you can easily “swap” the schedules to find your way back. There's even a special program for the New York Subway System, as it is so large and complex, it needed its own program.

This one is a real gem: it will calculate your best route once you've entered your origin and destination station, and then, amazingly, it will even calculate if it's better for you to backtrack in the opposite direction, and then change for an express train to resume your trip! I've used this program extensively, and I can tell you it is truly amazing and it works.

For the record, I want to state that I have no fiduciary interest in RailBandit, and gain nothing from it, except peace of mind, knowing that I have just about every rail schedule in my pocket. If I want to go from New York to the Fullerton Station on CTA's Brown line, this program tells me how to do it, where to change, layover times, even latitude & longitude of each & every station. The program is available on virtually every popular smartphone platform, including Blackberry, iPhone, Nokia, Samsung, etc. An Android version is being developed as of this writing.

For those of us who love travelling by train, what could be better than having the latest schedules in the palm of our hand, without having to collect and keep updating all the latest timetables? From Metrolink to Metra, from the *Downeaster* to the D train, from the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail to the Houston Metrorail, from TRE to Tri-Rail to Trimet, this program has it all. It also features “live updates” from 14 transit agencies, so you can know, at a glance, if the service you're taking is experiencing any glitches or delays. And it will only get better from here, as more transit agencies make their schedules available to developers.

If this is what you've been waiting for, log onto www.railbandit.com, and check it out. It's a rail traveler's best friend. Oh, did I mention that it also has maps included?!

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

NEW YORK TRANSIT RIDERS GET SOCKED AGAIN

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crises. A small gasoline tax of one cent per gallon would hardly be felt by the motoring public, yet would also raise substantial revenue for the system. The return of congestion pricing, Mayor Bloomberg's rejected proposal of last year, would also have helped. Instead, we turn each time to the tried and true (and ridership-killing) formula of higher fares and less service. If my fellow Board Members cannot see the futility of this approach, I guess I have to speak louder!

Next up for a vote is toll hikes on the MTA bridges and tunnels. I have gotten wind that one of the proposals on the table is to raise tolls for cash customers only! The Staten Island Borough President, James Molinaro, has put

forth a proposal to raise cash customers a larger amount, while leaving EZ Pass customers alone this time. While I agree that cash customers ought to pay a higher toll, and perhaps a MUCH higher toll, I cannot agree with leaving EZ Pass customers alone. This would mean that ONLY transit users get hit with a fare hike, while motorists who use EZ Pass would not get ANY increase! If we truly want to move commuters to the transit system, and get them out of their cars, this proposal would stand good planning on its head! Imagine the message we'd be sending if the poorest New Yorkers who use transit got socked with fare hikes, while more affluent motorists sailed through without any increase!

You can be sure I'll be very vocal on this issue, as it is most certainly an

issue of fairness. Transit users support the environment and save millions of gallons of fossil fuels every year. If anyone deserves to get a break, it's riders of our subways, buses and commuter trains! (Update: EZ Pass users will see a 5% toll increase.)

One bright spot of news deserves mentioning: the Chairman of the MTA, Jay Walder, recently celebrated (?) his first year in office, and declared that he has heard all the advocates and the public at the recent public hearings, and that, under his watch, there will be no more service cuts! Stay tuned on this one, because I certainly intend to hold him to his word!

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

A WHIRLWIND OF PROGRESS ON L.A. RAIL PROJECTS

By Dana Gabbard

Just in the past month, we have had in the L.A. area a whirl of open houses, scoping meetings and such like for a vast array of rail projects. These include:

- The extension of the Green Line light rail to the South Bay (Redondo Beach, Torrance).
- LAX Master Plan proposal for the Green Line and eventual Crenshaw light rail line accessing the airport via People Mover.
- Preliminary plans for the aforementioned Crenshaw light rail project.
- Routing of the statewide High Speed Rail network in downtown Los Angeles to access Union Station.
- Expo Line Phases I & II outreach meeting (the current

vague rumor is this light rail line MAY open its first segment next September).

- The annual Mobility 21 regional transportation summit held this year at the Disneyland Hotel.
- A community meeting on possible uses of the Santa Ana Branch Corridor (a former Red Car right of way) linking L.A. and Orange counties.

Plus, the Metro Board at its Oct. 28 meeting made preliminary choices for the routes of the Purple Line subway westside extension and the Downtown Connector light rail linkage of the Gold Line and Blue Line/Expo Line networks. Also, Metro is providing bond funding for the Gold Line Foothill Extension Authority to soon commence construction for the segment from Pasadena to Azusa.

WOW!

Dana Gabbard is a member of Southern California Transit Advocates.

RAILROAD *POST OFFICE*



The Competitive Sprint for 'Reserved' Seating

To the Rail Users' Network:

You've got to be kidding! Standing next to my suitcase and my friend in Penn Station, my head was spinning in disbelief. What do you mean we don't know what track it's coming in on?? What do you mean we have to stand here and stare at the board and then rush to whichever side the track is on?? We can't just go down to the platform and wait?? Apparently not, unless of course you can figure out how to outsmart the folks who want to keep you hostage upstairs and away from the tracks.

Later, another friend in-the-know explained that if you know the number of the train you are planning to board and its track number appears on the arrival board, it's a pretty simple matter to just grab your stuff and rush down to that track. Of course, that presupposes that the arrival track will be posted in time for you to outmaneuver all the other anxious and eager passengers.

So—why do we have to rush? We have reservations. Well, sort of, but not really. It's merely a very expensive ticket that entitles you to a seat somewhere on some car. A reservation does not mean that you have an assigned seat nor that if you have a traveling companion you get to sit side-by-side. So, elbows out, on-your-mark, charge! It conjures up scenes of Lucy and Ethel jockeying for the best position before they careen through the doors on Sale Day at Macy's.

Reflecting at home, my mind harkens back to the glory days of riding trains in Germany. How did it go? Oh, yes. Look on the board, see the track number, go to the platform, watch the clock count down, (on time again!), train cruises to a stop, find your car, board the train, sit in designated seat, relax. So efficient and civilized!

If train travel is supposed to be relaxing, why begin it in such a competitive spirit? Why put up with folks who obviously don't want you or anyone else sitting next to them and express that by piling their belongings all over the "unoccupied" seat? How nice it would be to board a train and not need to scan car after car for available seats—and how nice it would be to know that you are guaranteed the companionship of your travelling companion!

What's up, Amtrak?

Muriel Pierce

Somersworth, NH

American Rail is Ready for a New Beginning

To the Rail Users' Network:

There is more talk going on about light-rail lines in and around Detroit. I heard these same tales 20 years ago. We need someone with authority to get a group of interested people and start constructing such a line. The airlines are brutalizing their customers with all kinds of unnecessary charges. As soon as the railroads get their act together and get all their rails constructed, it will be a more favorable world for travelers. European rails compete very well with airlines. This can also be true in this country. The first thing that needs to be done is sweep out the present government. They are too busy working on their retirements. From what I read, they have screwed up the entire world operating the way they have.

As long as we have automobile manufacturers, they will try their best to slow down any advancement of rail travel. We need some powerful people joining our cause like Mayor Bloomberg.

The nation is ready for a New Beginning in Rail Transportation.

Harold R. Monske

Inkster, MI

PLEASE BECOME A MEMBER OF RUN...

FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

Rail Users' Network
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Steep Falls, ME
04085

RUN
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NETWORK

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

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

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

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

Please register me/us as a member of RUN today

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

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

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