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FRA HOLDS SCOPING MEETINGS ON THE FUTURE OF NEC; RUN RECOMMENDS IMPROVEMENTS

By David Peter Alan

For eight days in August, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) held a series of "scoping meetings" to hear suggestions from the public about the future of the Northeast Corridor (NEC) line through the year 2040. The hearings are part of the FRA's "NEC Future" Project that will recommend capital investments and service plans for the next three decades. Consulting firms Parsons Brinkerhoff (PB) and AECOM are overseeing the scoping process, as well as the rest of the project. Work products will be a Tier I Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Service

Development Plan (SDP). Current plans call for the final SDP and Record of Decision (ROD) to be completed in the spring of 2015.

The official announcement of the hearings was made on www.necfuture.com, the project's website, which said: "The FRA welcomes the involvement of NEC residents, businesses and travelers in helping to shape the future of our intercity rail system. NEC Future will consider broad alternatives for revitalizing and expanding the services offered on the NEC over the coming decades."

The NEC, defined as the

line between Boston and Washington, DC, is the nation's busiest rail line, and it operates primarily as a passenger railroad. Many of Amtrak's trains operate in the region, as do several regional rail carriers, from the MBTA south of Boston, to MARC trains in Maryland, to Washington, DC. Between those endpoints, Metro-North, New Jersey Transit and the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transit Authority (SEPTA) operate full-service schedules on many lines. FRA officials have said that the NEC must be able to accommodate Amtrak, regional rail services, and freight.

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SAMPLING ALASKA PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

By Bill Engel

A unique railroad for a unique region. This is not an official slogan for the Alaska Railroad, but it would fit the railroad very well. After all, what other U.S. railroad faces winter temperatures of 40 or more degrees below zero, summer temperatures 90 degrees above zero, conducts carload interchange with the rest of the North American rail network solely by barge, offers passenger service over a majority of its routes, and employs field artillerymen on its maintenance of way forces? (They use

105mm howitzers to create manageable avalanches, before snow accumulation creates a real disaster).

The main line of the Alaska Railroad stretches 448 miles from Seward to Fairbanks. A branch line runs from Portage to the port of Whittier to meet the barges. Track extends a short distance beyond Fairbanks for freight service. Other short branch lines also exist. While the Alaska R.R. conducts considerable freight business to and from the three seaports of Anchorage, Seward, and Whittier, connecting them

with Fairbanks inland, the main interest for readers of this newsletter is surely the passenger service.

The Alaska operates passenger trains year round. The busiest time is the summer tourist season, when the Anchorage-to-Fairbanks *Denali Star* operates daily. This service is supplemented with daily trains from Anchorage to Whittier and Seward, as well as a unique flagstop service between Talkeetna and Hurricane, the *Hurricane Turn*, which operates Thursday thru Sunday only.

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WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO WISCONSIN'S TALGOS?

Governor Pulls the Rug Out from Under the Program

By James E. Coston

What a difference four months makes. On May 20, I took my 11-year-old son up to Milwaukee on one of Amtrak's *Hiawathas* so we could attend an open house held by Talgo, Inc., to showcase both its Milwaukee manufacturing plant and the two trains it had just built for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

The crowds poured in as soon as the doors opened at noon. There were balloons and soda and pizza and lots of Talgo people milling around to answer questions and show off the company's products.

The employees had good reason to be proud: The trains were beautiful—sparkling and eye-catching on the outside with interiors almost overwhelming in their style and comfort. The new seats were particularly impressive. The reclining backs are so thin that in effect each passenger gets a couple of extra inches of leg room. Yet the slimmer profile does not detract from passenger comfort. I found the coach accommodations entirely agreeable (the bistro car was not open for inspection).

Despite the party atmosphere and the beauty of the new rolling stock, however, there was something of a pall over the event—at least among insiders, who knew that Wisconsin's Talgo program was in trouble.

The problem is the change of political leadership the state underwent in 2010 when Republican Scott Walker defeated Milwaukee's Democratic Mayor Tom Barrett in the race to succeed two-term Democrat Jim Doyle as Governor.

Walker, who was elected with strong Tea Party support, had promised to gut Doyle's ambitious passenger-rail program, including a federally financed \$800-million



Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker

extension from Watertown to Madison that would have represented the first thrust of a 110-mph infrastructure buildout all the way to the Twin Cities.

Once in office, Walker followed through on his threat, sending the ARRA funding back to Washington and promising continuing support only for the existing 85-mile Chicago-Milwaukee *Hiawatha* service. ("I have no issue with it," he is said to have told Talgo, Inc. CEO Antonio Perez.)

Among the casualties of Walker's re-election was not just the infrastructure project, but also a state commitment to build a \$35-million maintenance base in which Talgo technicians would service the new trains the state had ordered. The General Assembly withdrew the plant's

construction funding and clawed back the \$4-million-per-year, 20-year-maintenance contract, leaving the two remaining Talgos scheduled to take over the *Hiawatha* service with no home (Amtrak, which services the current conventional *Hiawatha* trainsets at its Chicago maintenance base, said it had no space, trained personnel or tools with which to maintain Talgos).

Did the state of Wisconsin unilaterally break its contract with Talgo? On one level it did, but on another it didn't. Most contracts between state governments and private vendors contain a clause reading "subject to appropriation," i.e. the contract is not valid unless and until the legislature appropriates the money to cover the purchase. The money for the trains had been appropriated by the General Assembly under Gov. Doyle, but under Gov. Walker it refused to follow through with the maintenance money, leaving the two trains essentially fatherless.

The issue also is complicated by geography and logistics. When the buildout to Madison was still alive, so was a plan to put the Talgo maintenance base in the Wisconsin capital city, which made an ideal layover point. Once the Madison extension was up and running, four state-owned Talgo trainsets would operate a new Chicago-Milwaukee-Madison corridor divided roughly into two equal segments of 85 miles each—one between Chicago and Milwaukee and one between Milwaukee and Madison, the latter equipped with 110-mph signaling and grade-crossing protection to create a highly competitive three-hour Chicago-Madison running time. The seven daily *Hiawatha* frequencies would continue operating in their same Chicago-Milwaukee time slots, but thanks to the

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THE TWO-WAY BLEECKER/BROADWAY-LAFAYETTE TRANSFER: FINALLY, YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE!

By *Andrew Albert*

It took approximately 55 years, but now the two-way Bleecker Street/Broadway-Lafayette connection has finally opened! For 55 years, travelers needing the uptown Lexington Avenue local after transferring from the IND division (now the B/D/F/M lines) had to either ride downtown to Brooklyn Bridge and cross over to the uptown side, or (with the advent of the MetroCard and unlimited-ride farecards) exit to the street, and enter the uptown IRT Lexington local (#6) and continue the ride uptown.

Why has it taken so long for this seemingly obvious connection to take place? Well, there's always the unfortunate issue of money... but this time it was more than just money. In the case of Bleecker Street on the Lexington Avenue subway, there was also the issue of asymmetry.

It isn't exactly clear why the uptown and downtown platforms at Bleecker Street are (were) asymmetrical—but that is how they were constructed. The downtown platform extended much further south than the uptown platform. This made

the connection from the IND division on the lower level to the uptown Lexington Avenue local trains much more difficult—and much more expensive. Complicating the issue further was the fact that New York's subway system originally consisted of three separate companies: the IRT (Interborough Rapid Transit), the BMT (Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit), and the IND (the Independent System). When the City of New York eventually unified the separate systems, the lack of transferability was immediately obvious in several places throughout the system.

Some of these have already been addressed, and beautiful (and handicapped-accessible) transfers have been built in recent years—notably the Jay Street-Metrotech complex, linking the A, C and F with the R; the South Ferry/Whitehall Street connection, linking the #1 with the R; and the Court Square complex in Long Island City, joining the #7, E, G and M lines. All of these inter-divisional connections help make the subway much more convenient, with trips taking shorter times, due to fewer connections.

Many transit and elected officials were on hand for the ribbon cutting of the Bleecker/Broadway-Lafayette two-way connection, including MTA Chairman Joseph Lhota, NYC Transit President Thomas Prendergast, Congressman Jerrold Nadler, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, State Senator Howard Squadron, Assemblymember Deborah Glick and Councilmember Grace Chin, as well as hundreds of spectators. Not only was the extension of the Houston Street concourse, which made possible the connection, an engineering feat, but also the station has now been outfitted with new elevators and escalators, one of which was provided for by Assemblymember Glick, and will now be referred to as the “Glick Escalator”!

While the MTA is describing this new connection as the fixing of the “only incomplete transfer point in the system,” which is technically correct, there are other places where lines cross, but no transfer possibilities exist. Two of the most obvious ones are Livonia Avenue on the L and Junius Street on the #3, and

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Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users' Network at:
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SAMPLING ALASKA PASSENGER RAIL

(Continued from page 1)

When the tourists have left and the Alaska days begin to get short in mid-September, schedules are drastically reduced. The Anchorage-to-Fairbanks service becomes the weekend-only *Aurora*, while the *Hurricane Turn* operates only once a month on the first Thursday but begins its trip in Anchorage. The other trains do not run.

An interesting feature of the Alaska R.R. passenger service is the involvement of the cruise ship companies which service Alaska in the summer. Both Princess Cruises and Holland America Line operate their own cars in the consist of the *Denali Star*. These cars are double-deck, with excellent views from the upper level and a dining area on the lower level. There is also a small open air viewing area on the lower level.

When this writer was on a Holland America Line tour in 2003, some Budd built full-length dome cars were still being used, but I believe those have now all been replaced by new purpose built cars similar to the cars used by Princess Cruises.

In its own fleet, the Alaska R.R. owns 44 passenger cars. Some were built new for the railroad, while others have come north after seeing service in the "lower 48." Many of the second-hand cars have been extensively refurbished for their service in Alaska. One very unusual car I encountered in 2003, which apparently is no longer used, was the "Tiki Bar." It was a former double-deck commuter car. In one end both the upper and lower level seating had been removed. In its place was lounge seating and a service bar complete with a fake palm tree to complete the "Tiki Bar" décor.

Let's take a ride to see how the Alaska RR operates a passenger train. We'll ride the *Glacier Discovery* service from Anchorage. It is a bright, early July day in Anchorage. A Holland America Line shuttle bus has delivered us the short distance from shipside in the Port of Anchorage to the Alaska Railroad Depot. We booked our

trip through the MS Amsterdam's Shore Excursion Office, but could have made independent arrangements directly with the Alaska Railroad. When the boarding call is made we go outside, collect a box lunch which was included in the fare and go onboard. Finding our seats on the lower level of the 1950s-era Budd built dome car is easy. It is one of two such cars in the train consist which also includes three regular coaches, a café car, and a baggage car at the rear for a total of seven cars. Power is two Alaska Railroad 3000 class four-axle EMD built locomotives. At the rear of the baggage car is an EMD F40PH which has been converted to a cab car for push-pull operation. I should mention that upper level dome seats are open to any passenger.

Promptly at the 9:45 a.m. scheduled departure time, we pull out of the station. We view typical urban sights for a brief time as well as the junction with the branch line to Anchorage International Airport where there is a high level platform to service cruise line passengers. The on-board tour guide keeps us informed as to the sights we are seeing.

This would be a good time to mention the railroad's Tour Guide Program. High school students in both Anchorage and Fairbanks are able to participate in a vocational program to prepare for careers in tourism. Some are then hired to work summer jobs on the railroad as tour guides. They must have good speaking voices and excellent knowledge of Alaska. On board they assist passengers and provide narration about the sights. After stops at Girdwood and Portage we take the branch line to Whittier. The most interesting feature on this line is the nearly four-mile-long tunnel just before arrival at Whittier. Once rail only, it now has a paved floor to allow motor vehicles to use it on a one-way basis between trains. Before the paving, all vehicle traffic to Whittier arrived on special flatcars in shuttle trains.

Leaving Whittier, we return to Portage,

reversing direction again and head toward Seward. We stop at Spencer, where some passengers leave for a hike to Spencer Glacier. The tracks pass within a few hundred yards of the glacier, which seems to have retreated quite a bit since I last saw it in 2003. Next up is another scenic highlight of the day, the climb up the Chugach Gorge through several tunnels and around a horseshoe curve. The end point for our train is Grandview, an aptly named place of snow capped mountains and scenic waterfalls. The crew changes ends and we head back. Before descending the gorge we pull onto a siding to let a train load of cruise ship passengers pass on their way to board ship in Seward.

Brief stops are made to pick up hikers and rafters. The rafting gear goes into the baggage car. All too soon we are back in Portage. Since the train has to make a second trip to Whittier before returning to Anchorage, motor coaches are available to return passengers to Anchorage. The Holland America tour passengers all take the motor coach.

What lessons can passenger train advocates learn from how the Alaska Railroad operates? The first is the demand-based scheduling. The next is the relationship with the cruise lines. Someone else owns cars and markets the service, while the railroad simply moves the cars. And the last is the friendly, enthusiastic on board crew who seem glad to be informing and helping passengers.

For more information about the Alaska Railroad, see their website at www.alaskarailroad.com. For information about Alaska cruise tours, including trips on the railroad, see either Holland America or Princess Cruises websites. The author took the trip described in July 2012 and a previous trip in July 2003. There was also an extensive article recently in *Trains* magazine about the Alaska RR.

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

FRA HOLDS SCOPING MEETINGS ON NEC FUTURE

(Continued from page 1)

The meeting schedule was ambitious: nine meetings over eight business days in the middle of August. All meetings were scheduled to run from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. Despite the schedule, most of the meetings were well attended. Former Presidential candidate Michael S. Dukakis presented his views at the Boston meeting. Other presenters at the hearings were not as well known, with rail advocates well represented among the presenters. Many of the speakers were riders on Amtrak or local trains, and many of them had specific concerns that they wanted to express. Several RUN members spoke, although they either spoke personally or represented other organizations to which they also belong. RUN did not make an official statement at the hearings, but prepared one for submission in writing. It is reproduced in its entirety on page 6 of this issue of the *RUN Newsletter*.

Several commenters complained about difficulties with the process, especially the lack of notice before the hearings took place. The official announcement on the project website appeared on August 8th, only five days before the Boston hearing. There were complaints that members of the public would only have three minutes to express their views, and they would have no opportunity to present their views about the future of the NEC. Some called for a group of Regional Citizens Liaison Committees (RCLCs) to be formed, so project managers will have a regular communications channel to the public. The current Northeast Corridor Commission Infrastructure and Operations Advisory Commission (NEC Commission) consists only of Department of Transportation representatives, state representatives (including D.C.) and Amtrak. There is no independent "public" representation. The 32-page "Scoping Package" booklet, which contains information about the project, was not available at the hearings. Only people who had previously seen it on the project's website could comment on its contents.

The FRA had originally set Friday, Sept. 14 as the deadline for written comments. One week before that deadline, the FRA extended it by five weeks, to Friday, Oct. 19. RUN has expressed its approval of the extension, calling it "a step in the right direction," although it falls short of the 60-day extension which several rider advocates requested.

Many advocates attended the hearings; organizations such as the Empire State Passengers' Association (ESPA), the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP), the Delaware Valley Association of Railroad Passengers (DVARP) and the Lackawanna Coalition were represented. New Jersey advocate James T. Raleigh was the most diligent attendee and presenter; he attended five hearings: Boston, New York, Newark, Philadelphia and Washington, DC. Raleigh expressed concern that the process worked against the stated goal of coordination, giving as an example the fact that there were separate hearings in Philadelphia and Wilmington, DE scheduled for the same time. "Why aren't we all here together?" he asked at the Philadelphia hearing, and called for better coordination throughout the region.

Substantively, many presenters called for action on local issues. In Baltimore and Washington, there was much concern expressed about the condition of the Baltimore Tunnels. Advocates from New York City and New Jersey called for an extension of the line to Grand Central Terminal on Manhattan's East Side, so riders would have access to that side of Midtown Manhattan, as well as to the West Side through Penn Station. RUN Secretary Charles Bode, speaking for the Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation, took a more global view. He called for the NEC to be redefined to extend from Portland, ME to Norfolk, VA. There are plans to start a new train to Norfolk this December.

Amtrak has plans to build the infrastructure for high-speed rail (HSR) service in the NEC under its Next

Generation ("Next Gen") program, and to operate high-speed trains within the project's time frontier. This concept was not universally popular among the presenters, however. Vukan Vuchic, a retired faculty member from the University of Pennsylvania, gave a passionate defense for the concept. Matt Mitchell of DVARP expressed support for the concept of high-speed rail, but was not sure that it would be cost-effective. Jesse Gribin, an advocate with ties to New Jersey and Pennsylvania, mentioned the high cost of a high-speed system and said, "They could start up service in hundreds of communities that don't have it for that kind of money."

Many speakers mentioned their personal concerns about their local rail lines, as if their local railroad did not allow them that opportunity at the local level. SEPTA rider Eddie Glover complained about crime on the railroad, especially about graffiti that had not been removed. The audience was sympathetic, even though Glover's issue will probably be considered outside the scope of the project.

RUN has submitted its own statement as part of the process, and it is comprehensive. Procedurally, RUN has expressed its concern over the flaws mentioned before, and called for the formation of RCLCs, as well as an extension of time for the public to submit statements. RUN also called for more participation in the entire process by independent rider advocates. Substantively, RUN called for an emphasis on projects that will be useful in the near term, a broad definition of the NEC, strong oversight by the FRA, construction of a new 2-track extension from Penn Station to Grand Central Terminal in New York and expansion of Amtrak services, including an "economy" service for price-conscious travelers.

David Peter Alan is a member of the Board of Directors of RUN and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey. He attended the hearing in Philadelphia and presented his views there.

STATEMENT OF THE RAIL USERS' NETWORK (RUN) CONCERNING NEC FUTURE SCOPING

September 12, 2012

The Rail Users' Network, Inc., otherwise known as RUN, is a not-for-profit corporation of national scope chartered in the State of Maine. Our members are individuals and organizations concerned with improving passenger rail service and local rail transit in the United States and Canada. Our organizational members are rail passenger advocacy organizations, as well as transit advisory committees, appointed by transit providers under statutory authority. We also have individual members, who are concerned citizens. We are an all-volunteer civic and educational organization.

RUN's mission is to advocate for improvement in passenger rail service, whether on Amtrak or on local and regional passenger railroads, as well as transit systems. In this context, RUN is concerned with the quality of the rail passenger experience and level of service on Amtrak, in the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and elsewhere. That includes connectivity between Amtrak trains and those of such local/regional carriers as Metro-North, New Jersey Transit and SEPTA, so that travelers can get from one place on the NEC to another, with a minimum of difficulty and wasted time.

RUN wishes to make recommendations concerning the substance of rail services in the region, but first, we make the following suggestions to improve the procedure of the "NEC Future" process.

PROCEDURAL RECOMMENDATIONS

RUN is concerned that the public must have an adequate opportunity to participate in the entire "NEC Future" process, from the current scoping stage through final issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD). We express our concern that the public did not have enough opportunity to prepare statements and otherwise participate effectively in the process. We note that public notice was

released on August 8, 2012, only five days before the first scheduled scoping meeting held in Boston. We express our concern that such scheduling does not comport with the traditional 30-day notice of such events that is normally given to the public. We also note that the 32-page "Scoping Package" document was not available in hard copy for members of the public to take with them and review. Accordingly, any person who desired to make a statement, and did not or was not able to review the document on the project web site, was forced to speak without the benefit of having reviewed this information.

We view these deficiencies as an indication that project management does not view its obligation to involve the public seriously enough to implement that obligation appropriately. Therefore, we request that the scoping phase be re-opened for public participation for an additional sixty (60) days, and that the rest of the process be rescheduled accordingly. While we applaud the F.R.A. for extending the comment period an additional 35 days, we believe that is still insufficient given the magnitude of this project.

We call for the establishment of Regional Citizens' Liaison Committees (RCLCs) throughout the Northeast Region to provide a regular channel of communications between project management and concerned citizens. This was done in the 1990s on the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) and Portal Bridge Capacity Enhancement Projects in New Jersey. Some of the members of the management team on this project were involved with those projects as well, and remember the RCLC process from those projects. Accordingly, project management can replicate that process on the current project, and expand from a single RCLC to such committees on a regional basis, with channels of communications between the various RCLCs, so they can exchange information and share ideas concerning the project. We expect that members of these RCLCs will also be members of local, statewide and national

rail and transit advocacy organizations, as well as other concerned individuals. We call for a diversified array of stakeholder organizations and individuals to be represented. We also call for monthly updates to be given to all interested persons and organizations, so that everyone concerned will be fully informed between meetings, as well as at meetings.

SUBSTANTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Many members of RUN, including members of the organization's Board of Directors, live in places that are served by both Amtrak trains and local rail transit. Although RUN is a national organization, many of its members live in the Northeast Region and use Amtrak's NEC trains, as well as those of regional "commuter" rail carriers. Accordingly, RUN and its members recognize the importance of using the NEC infrastructure efficiently for Amtrak, regional rail carriers and freight.

RUN calls upon the FRA to exercise its oversight authority to ensure that the use of the NEC infrastructure is not only efficient, but also equitable for all users, including Amtrak passengers and riders on the regional "commuter" railroads. We define the term broadly, to include riders who use the railroads at any time, not only traditional peak-hour commuters, but all riders at all times. We recognize that only the FRA has the authority to ensure such efficient and equitable use. RUN calls for the FRA to take the lead in coordinating the use of the railroad between Amtrak, the regional railroads and freight. This also includes coordination between regional carriers, to ensure the best connectivity for riders between Amtrak and local trains, and between local trains operated by different carriers. Without such administrative leadership, the public will not enjoy the most efficient use of the railroad, with the consequent cost of such inefficiency. This should be done in consultation with the advocates

for the riding public, as well as other stakeholders, on a permanent and continuing basis.

We call for an emphasis on projects that can be completed in the near-term, and in a manner whereby each phase of a project will yield independent utility. We note that Amtrak's Next Generation ("Next-Gen") high-speed rail program requires a planning frontier that extends until 2040, and that Amtrak's "Gateway" Project would not be completed until 2025, with no independent utility for any portion of the project to be derived, as the project is built. RUN has not endorsed the "Gateway" Project, and believes that a phased implementation of improvements in the New York City area would be preferable. RUN also calls for a new 2-track extension to Grand Central Terminal on the East Side of Midtown Manhattan, which NJ Transit would use, so that commuters and other rail riders from New Jersey and beyond will have access to both the East and West Sides of Manhattan.

Certain rider advocates in the New York and New Jersey area have called for approaches to new trans-Hudson infrastructure and mobility that are different than the Amtrak Gateway proposal. This includes a phased-implementation approach that would build a third track from the New Jersey Meadowlands to Penn Station, followed by a fourth track, along with associated switching and other infrastructure improvements. The final stage would be the extension to Grand Central Terminal. RUN calls for this project to be given thorough study as a preferable alternative to the Amtrak Gateway proposal, due to the independent utility of each stage, the lower price for the entire project, and the earlier potential completion date, compared to Gateway. There is also a proposal for a new route to Manhattan via Hoboken. RUN believes this plan should receive serious study as well.

RUN calls for projects that create the most utility for the lowest cost, along with projects that are most urgently needed, to be completed first. An example is the proposed improvement to the Baltimore Tunnels, which must be completed sooner, rather than later. In another example, the Metro-North portion of the NEC from

New Rochelle should be upgraded to four tracks and the catenary replaced, so travel on that part of the line is at least as fast as on the rest of the line to Boston. Bridges in Connecticut should be rebuilt at a sufficient height so that there would be no further conflict with boat owners, who have succeeded in blocking service improvements in that state, including improvements in Boston service. Together, these improvements would greatly improve service to and from Boston.

RUN believes that the project should define the NEC as broadly as possible, to recommend and implement projects that will enhance the public welfare. "Branch" lines of the NEC should be considered part of the study area, so that trains on those lines will maximize the availability of rail transportation, through scheduling for efficient connections, as well as scheduled through-running. Those lines include New Haven to Springfield, Philadelphia to Harrisburg and the Empire Corridor from New York City to Upstate New York. We note that local rail services operate on some of those lines today, and that there are plans to establish such services in other parts of these lines in the future. We note that some riders go beyond the NEC to the Downeaster trains to Maine or Amtrak trains south of Washington, D.C. to points as far away as Miami or New Orleans. Amtrak and its long-distance trains should be part of the NEC study, especially with respect to scheduling those trains to meet the needs of riders, along with the freight-carrying railroads, over whose track they operate.

We believe that it is vital to use the capacity of the NEC and lines whose riders connect with NEC services to the greatest possible extent, for the public good. Accordingly, we believe that capital improvements should be built with this over-riding principle in mind. We note that, because of high Amtrak fares on its NEC trains, many price-conscious travelers are choosing to take buses between city pairs in the region. We recommend that steps be taken to introduce a viable rail alternative for price-conscious travelers, which would serve to divert such travelers from buses on highways to the rails of the NEC and connecting lines. Amtrak

should purchase or lease additional coaches for conventional trains to increase capacity for such riders; lengthening only premium-fare Acela trains is not enough, although the Acela trains should be lengthened.

We also call for any potential high-speed project to be designed and implemented to maximize useful connectivity with existing rail infrastructure, rather than a totally separate system. We note that European high-speed rail systems run on "conventional" rail when traveling through urban areas and use existing stations for transfer to and from conventional trains. We call for a similar approach in the NEC, as a means of saving on construction costs, maximizing the efficiency of using existing infrastructure, and increasing the convenience for travelers.

In the short run, there should be more trains on Amtrak, with better amenities. Dining cars should be offered on trains traveling south of Washington, DC to such destinations as Newport News, Lynchburg and Norfolk (service scheduled to begin this December). Premium "business class" or "Parlor Car" service should be offered whenever sufficient riders can be induced to pay for such service. Features such as regional food specialties and sightseeing commentary should also be offered to induce riders to use the trains for discretionary travel. Along with these improvements, the frequency of service on Amtrak should be increased. Half-hourly conventional train service should be operated when and where customer demand warrants. If an "economy" service could compete successfully with intercity buses, it should be offered.

We look forward to receiving the response from Project Management to these comments and proposals, and we hope this is the start of a dialog that will continue throughout the project's process.

Sincerely

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ALBUQUERQUE RAIL YARD DEVELOPMENT LEAVES RAIL TRANSIT OUT OF THE PLAN

By *J.W. Madison*

The city of Albuquerque has finally bought the old Santa Fe Rail Yard property and has signed up a highly regarded developer called Samitaur to re-develop same. There will be provision for “affordable” housing on the site, along with the Wheels Museum, which covers transportation history in general, including vintage rail. So far, however, there’s no provision for rail transit in these plans. A little background:

About four or five years ago, several modern streetcar route proposals were floated for Albuquerque. The “official” pro-rail forces went for Central Avenue between Downtown and Nob Hill, about three miles to the east. This proposal was shot down, in part because most people (and Councilors) in Albuquerque couldn’t see what that project would do for them.

Although any rail transit is a good deal, we think a couple of alternate proposals would have made for a better local urban Rail debut. One is called the “String Of Pearls”, a circulator beginning and ending at the (adjacent) Rail Runner and Amtrak stations and picking up many important local destinations: Old Town, the Bio Park, museums, several major cultural centers, etc.

We (Rails Inc) are attempting to tie the “String Of Pearls” to the redevelopment of the Rail Yard, through contact with local leaders and through public outreach. We’ll be pushing big rocks uphill here, since Albuquerque transit is bus-only, and the Establishment wants it to stay that way.

The Southwest Region

This is what the *Southwest Chief* situation looks like as I write this (absent a near-miracle). Read this as an opinion piece, although I don’t hold these opinions alone:

For whatever reasons, neither Amtrak, the BNSF nor the New Mexico, Colorado or Kansas DOTs can or will come up with the money required to upgrade the Newton, KS-to-Lamy, NM track segment to 80-mph passenger speed standards. So when Amtrak’s present contract with the BNSF expires in 2015, the *Southwest Chief* will likely be re-routed through Wichita, KS; Woodward, OK; Amarillo, TX; Clovis, NM; and Belen, NM. An Amtrak employee tells me that the re-routed Chief would still call at Albuquerque (!) There must be a wye or something south of town that I never noticed.

This re-route is by no means a disaster, since it re-serves several hundred thousand people not served by passenger rail for decades. But its existence depends on Wichita, Amarillo, Clovis, etc, realizing just how damn lucky they’re about to get.

As to Newton-Lamy, they’re not so lucky at all. The SW Chief Coalition, based in La Junta, CO, is valiantly working through political channels to keep the Chief where it is. Rails Inc is trying to promote the value of the segment for its versatility beyond hosting two trains a day (see previous and future Newsletters).

We are also trying to interest short lines and other interested parties in setting up a company or consortium to fund improvements to the tracks (or at least keep them from getting worse) and to operate replacement trains if the Chief moves over; possibly pulling mixed passenger-freight consists. Anybody want to get mixed up in this?

Note: The newly renovated Rails Inc. website is at large. Click <http://www.nmrails.org>.

J.W. Madison is a board member of Rails Inc., based in Albuquerque, NM.

FINALLY, YOU CAN GET THERE FROM HERE

(Continued from page 3)

Broadway on the G line and Hewes Street on the J, M and Z lines. When I spoke at the opening of the Bleecker St/Broadway-Lafayette two-way transfer, I referred to these lines, and hoped that I might live to see them connected as well. Of course, it takes lots of money, but it also takes a will to make the system more useable for its customers. I am happy to say that our new MTA Chairman, Joe Lhota, appears to take this to heart, and is doing what he can to make the system both accessible and more useable for the almost 6 million daily customers of the MTA.

Here’s hoping that there are many more ribbon-cuttings, as New York’s subway extends and expands throughout the boroughs. The Capital Program, with the help of Federal & State Funds, will soon bring us the extension of the #7 line to the Javits Center (34th St & 11th Avenue), the Fulton Transit Center, and phase one of the 2nd Avenue subway. As New York continues to grow, it only makes sense for our invaluable transit system to grow with it.

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

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO WISCONSIN'S TALGOS?

(Continued from page 2)

two extra sets, four of the frequencies would be able to continue on to Madison.

But the killing of the Madison Extension also killed the plan for the state to order a total of four Talgo sets, and it left WisDOT without a Talgo maintenance site and with the expensive prospect of opening a \$35-million maintenance facility with only two train sets to take care of. That number, plus the 20-year, \$4-million-a-year maintenance contract, made the General Assembly gag, and the budget for the maintenance base never was passed.

So Wisconsin ended up with maybe a quarter of a loaf—two new trainsets and no place to maintain them. At this point it looks as if the train sets will be mothballed—and hopefully

“It’s like we’re talking about a Third World country where people don’t have respect for their contracts.”

sold at some point to a Talgo-operating state such as Oregon or Washington—and WisDOT will continue to operate the seven daily Hiawatha frequencies with the same old Amtrak

equipment—which isn’t getting any younger.

At the time of my May visit to the Talgo plant, there was still hope in the air. Scott Walker was facing a recall election that could have replaced him with Mayor Barrett.

But the recall failed, Walker will serve the remaining two years of his term, and Talgo, having finished the two trains it built for Wisconsin and another two purchased by Oregon, has furloughed all but five of the 85 employees working at the Milwaukee plant.

There’s an irony there. The 30th Street Corridor where the Talgos were built—in a former A.O. Smith factory—is the centerpiece of Gov. Walker’s plan to revive the moribund industrial district by attracting new industry. But Perez said that the state’s treatment of Talgo could subvert that worthy goal.

“What message does this send to other businesses?” Perez asked Urban Milwaukee feature writer Bruce Murphy. “They should be careful of doing business here because Gov. Walker does not keep his word. It’s like we’re talking about a Third World country where people don’t have respect for their contracts.”

Phone calls and e-mails to WisDOT personnel failed to yield any plan for disposition of the orphaned Talgos.

James E. Coston is chairman of Corridor Capital LLC, based in Chicago.

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CLEVELAND TRANSIT PLANS SMOOTHER TRANSFERS, MORE RAIL SERVICE

By Steve Albro

The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (GCRTA) recently announced two rail projects.

The first is the Cedar/University Rapid Transit Station Renovation. The project will make the heavy rail station ADA accessible. In addition, there will be extensive improvements in lighting to the rail station and the adjoining bus concourse. Bus transfers will be consolidated to the north side of Cedar Road instead of both sides as is now the case. There will also be a much smoother tie-in to University Circle for walkers and bike riders. In the next two years, work will begin on a new Red Line heavy rail station on Mayfield Road. The

station will be in the Little Italy Arts and Entertainment Neighborhood and Case Western Reserve University. This station will replace the existing station at East 120th Street and Euclid Avenue.

Secondly, the Waterfront Extension of the Blue Light Rail Line will be running more regularly. The Waterfront Line was built in 1996, but service was cut back severely in the last five years. The opening of the Horseshoe casino, the construction of the Medical Mart and Convention Center and extensive housing and entertainment construction on the East Bank of the Cuyahoga River will bring a rebirth to the Waterfront Line. Indeed, it could be argued that the presence of the line spurred development. Now, if Amtrak will only schedule the *Lakeshore* and the *Capitol*

Limited to arrive in Cleveland when the light rail runs...

Additionally, bus loop services in Downtown Cleveland have been extended until 11 p.m. Monday thru Friday. Service has also been extended to weekends from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. The buses look like early 20th Century streetcars. The trolley buses have been popular with downtown workers for about 10 years. The expanded hours of operation will provide riders with connections to many downtown entertainment areas as well as the rail stops. Travel on the trolley loops is free due to funding from the City of Cleveland and private sponsors.

Steve Albro is a RUN Board Member and a member of the Greater Cleveland RTA Citizens Advisory Board.

METROLINK EXTENSION POISED TO FINALLY START CONSTRUCTION AFTER NIMBY DELAYS

By Dana Gabbard

I have written previously about the extension of Metrolink regional train service from Riverside California to Perris, inland from Los Angeles. Specifically, it is an extension of Metrolink's 91 line that currently links Riverside and Los Angeles via northern Orange County. The right-of-way (a/k/a the San Jacinto Branch Line) was purchased by the Riverside County Transportation Commission in 1993. Work on the project commenced in 2002 with an Alternatives Analysis/Environmental Studies undertaken in 2004 and the Federal Transit Administration

granting approval of RCTC's Small Starts application in 2007.

That is when the project hit a major obstacle. A group of NIMBYs living near California State University—Riverside, claiming concerns about noise and safety, demanded a full environmental review process be undertaken. After jumping through all sorts of environmental hoops, the project is finally about to start construction and is slated to open in 2014.

The line will be 24 miles long with four stations (Hunter Park, Moreno Valley/ March Field, Downtown Perris and South

Perris). Service initially will be 12 trips per day (five trains each in a.m. peak and p.m. peak plus two mid-day). The construction cost is \$152 million with estimated daily ridership of 4,350. It is envisioned the line will not only expand rail service to more of Riverside County but also provide economic development opportunities at station sites.

For further details, see the project website: <http://perrisvalleyline.info/>

Dana Gabbard is Recording Secretary of Southern California Transit Advocates.

The last RUN Board Meeting of 2012 is scheduled for Saturday, December 8. 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.

RETURN OF PASSENGER SERVICE TO BRUNSWICK, ME AND BEYOND

*By Richard Rudolph
Chair, Rail Users' Network*

After years of planning, Amtrak's *Downeaster* will begin providing daily service to Freeport and Brunswick, ME starting November 1. This expansion of service which Trainriders Northeast has been instrumental in promoting over the past decade follows a \$38.3 million upgrade of 36 railroad crossings and 30 miles of track owned primarily by Pan Am Railways. The work took two years and was funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

While only two of the five round trips that run daily to Portland will be extended north to Brunswick, it certainly is cause for celebration. It will provide not only a gateway to Maine's midcoast region, but also a connection to the Maine Eastern Railroad, which provides excursion service to Rockland, ME during the summer and early fall.

The planned start-up of the new service raised controversy in several towns regarding train noise, speed, safety and maintenance issues in recent months. Several communities are planning or considering additional railroad crossing upgrades that would allow "quiet zones," where train whistles would be blown only in emergencies. A planned train storage and maintenance facility in Brunswick has also raised controversy because it would be near residential neighborhoods. Higher construction bids for an alternative train layover facility in Brunswick are forcing the Northern New England Rail Passenger authority to look for additional funding or possibly change plans.

Day trippers from Boston going to Freeport to shop at L.L. Bean and other national name brand outlets will be able to take the

9:05 from Boston arriving in Freeport at 12:10 pm, providing almost six hours of nonstop shopping before returning on the 6:05 pm which arrives back in North Station at 9:15 p.m. In future years, additional frequencies will hopefully be added, but this will require an additional train set. This would also help reduce the gap in service, which exists between 5:40 pm and 11:20 pm, heading north from Boston to stations along the right of way to Portland, ME.

A logical next step is to extend the *Downeaster* to Augusta, the state capitol. The state already owns the existing right of way which is currently leased to the Maine Eastern Railroad. The current lease is set to expire in several years and Amtrak has prerequisite rights. The Maine Rail Group, which was founded in 1988 to help save the former Maine Central main line between Brunswick and Augusta from abandonment, is planning to invite community leaders from the Waterville-Augusta area to ride the new service to see first hand how the extension of the *Downeaster* is already generating new economic development in Freeport and Brunswick.

The former President of the organization and newsletter editor, Jack Sutton, who was interviewed for this article, believes extension of service could attract a large number of riders if a regional station was built on the east side of the Kennebec River just north of downtown Augusta close to the new highway bridge which connects Rt. 3 and Interstate 95. The land is currently owned by the city and there is enough space for parking as well as for a layover facility for the *Downeaster*. This would solve the parking problem in downtown Augusta, which is in a hollow, and has a catchment area for those passengers wanting to take the train to downtown Augusta, Brunswick, Portland or other stops along the right of way to Beantown.

Like the newsletter? Care to make it better?

Why not send us an article, so we can possibly include it in the next edition! Send your article to rrudolph@fairpoint.net, and get published!

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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.

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

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

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

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!

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