

## KEEPING CONNECTED RUN REGIONAL CONFERENCE TO FOCUS ON MID-ATLANTIC

*By Richard Rudolph  
Chair, Rail Users' Network*

It's time to register for the "Keeping Connected by Rail: Making Your Voices Heard" Conference, April 20, 2012 at the American Public Transportation Association Headquarters, 1666 K St. N.W., Washington, DC. The conference, which is sponsored by the Rail Users' Network, will examine what's happening in the Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S. The focus will be on recent success stories, which projects are moving forward, and which are standing still and could use some help.

Of course, effective advocacy

is paramount to success. Our keynoter, Don Phillips of *Trains Magazine*, will examine what needs to be done at the state and national level to create a world-class rail passenger system in the United States. Other speakers include Art Guzzetti, Vice President of Policy, APTA, who will provide a layout of the land in DC, and what we can expect, given the present Congress, and prospects for change, both in the near future and long term. Brian Rosenwald, Chief, Product Management for Amtrak, will focus his remarks on what Amtrak is doing in the short run to improve long distance service. Participants attending the conference will

also hear from rail activists who are working at the grassroots and state level to improve and expand service in the Mid-Atlantic Region.

The rest of the morning will be devoted to exploring how advocacy—both official and unofficial—can improve and increase service in a given city or area, long-distance as well as commuter and rail transit. The panel will be moderated by Andrew Albert, Chair, NYC Transit Riders Council, a legislatively-mandated group appointed by the Governor of the State of New York, with members chosen by the Mayor of New York City, the Public

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## ADVOCATES VOICE APPROVAL FOR SIMPSON'S EFFORTS TO IMPROVE ARC

*By David Peter Alan*

New Jersey Transportation Commissioner James S. Simpson said that he did the best he could to improve the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) Project while he was Federal Transit Administrator during the Bush Administration. He told an audience of transportation professionals and advocates at a meeting of the Transportation Research Foundation in Newark on Dec. 1, 2011 that he had met on

numerous occasions with New Jersey, New York and Amtrak officials while the project was under consideration for an FTA New Starts grant. He also said that he abandoned those efforts when he was told that the project was considered a local one, and he criticized local officials for not cooperating on a regional basis.

One of the alternatives considered for the original project, which was conceived in 1995 as a way to add rail

capacity between New Jersey and New York City, would have extended the existing Amtrak Northeast Corridor (NEC) line beyond Penn Station to Grand Central Terminal, on Midtown Manhattan's East Side. The East Side alternative was dropped in 2003, and subsequent modifications of the project turned it into a new railroad, with a stub end in a deep-cavern terminal, that would not go to the existing Penn Station or connect with Amtrak or other

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## CHICAGO'S METRA RAISES FARES—BUT SO DOES ILLINOIS TOLLWAY

### *Is Sanity About to Prevail in Midwestern Mobility?*

By F.K. Plous

Metra, the commuter-rail element under the Chicago area's Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), continues its slow recovery from the decades of mismanagement it suffered under its late president, Phil Pagano and its controversial retired board chairman, Jeffrey Ladd.

Many problems persist unaddressed, however, including the widespread failure of conductors to check tickets and collect fares. Rider Clyde Nelson told the *Chicago Tribune* he has ridden for months at a time without paying. "After a while, it became a game to see if I actually would have to pay or not," he told a reporter.

The obvious answer—at least to anyone not employed by Metra management—has always been some kind of electronic fare-collection technology. But for years the Ladd/Pagano regime resisted, claiming, "We're a railroad, not a mass-transit system."

Now that the old guard has yielded to a younger management led by former California transit executive Alex Clifford, electronic fare collection finally is at least under consideration. But the study process has been slow, and no results have been announced. Remember, it was only about a year ago that Metra even began accepting credit cards for purchases of monthly passes. And even though most of its stations outside downtown Chicago are unstaffed, Metra still has nothing resembling Amtrak's TicketMaster machines to sell tickets to the many occasional riders who board during off-peak hours. But riders at least have the assurance that the matter is now under study.

What's particularly annoying is that Metra officials know the lack of a modern fare-collection technology is costing the system money. What's even more annoying is that they don't know how much revenue is being lost.

#### ***25% fare increase coming***

But one thing they do know is that the agency is facing a deficit of about \$100 million. That was one of the factors that forced the board in November to raise fares 25%—the largest single fare increase since Metra was launched in 1983 and immediately doubled the fares charged by its predecessor, the RTA. The 25% increases are scheduled to take effect Feb. 1, and everybody is watching closely to see how many riders stick with the system (after the 1983 increase, about a quarter of the riders left, and it took nearly two decades to get them back).

Metra also has taken an unusual measure to make sure the fare increases actually produce the promised revenue. It put a Feb. 29 expiration date on all tickets sold before Feb 1. After a 10% fare increase was voted in 2008, riders stockpiled 10-ride tickets in anticipation of the increase, with sales rising 67% in the weeks before the new fares took effect. This time very few people will be able to trade "fare futures."

Metra expects the additional ticket revenues, along with sales-tax receipts that now appear to be rising as the economy recovers, will enable the agency to stop borrowing from the capital budget to pay operating expenses. President Clifford said the new revenue also would be used to improve maintenance and on-time performance.

#### ***At least drivers will pay too***

While the Metra fare increases are bad news for the riders, they at least won't carry the same stench of injustice as fare increases in other jurisdictions, where transit is forced to charge more while highway user charges paid by motorists remain historically low.

Not long after Metra announced its 25% fare hike, the board of the Illinois Toll

Highway Authority announced an 87% toll hike to take effect Jan. 1. The Tollway, which basically encircles the Chicago suburbs and operates intercity stretches northwest to the Wisconsin state line at Beloit (I-90) and west to Sterling (I-88), said it needed to raise capital to undertake major improvements such as resurfacing and adding an additional lane between O'Hare Airport and Rockford. Motorists howled, many of them declaring they'll switch to parallel "free" roads, but as a *Tribune* story pointed out, congestion on the untolled roads will end up costing them more than they'll save in tolls. Time, after all, is money. Driving the Illinois Tollway now will cost most motorists about 38 cents a mile. How does that compare with your train fare?

#### ***Metra yields to advocates on UP North Line viaduct replacement***

Metra riders also are going to see capital improvements in return for their fares, including the long-awaited and recently revised project to replace 22 19th-century steel viaducts along the Union Pacific North Line's alignment through the North Side of Chicago and to raise the clearance over the streets it crosses by two feet.

As readers of this reporter will recall, Metra had to suspend the viaduct-replacement plan a year ago after an attempt to single-track rush-hour trains through the work zone failed in a shemuzzle of overcrowded, poorly spaced trains that left frequent gaps in the timetable and not enough seats for the passengers.

After sending its consultants back to the drawing board, Metra ended up adding \$65 million to its original \$185-million project so it could raise the bridges the way the critics had insisted on all along. Instead of closing one track while the other is elevated and equipped with new bridges, Metra will keep both existing tracks

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# MTA'S UNLUCKY 7 LINE: SUBWAY RIDERS FACE WEEKEND OUTAGES

By *Andrew Albert*

Beginning Jan. 21, 2012, and continuing for 12 weekends, #7 line riders between Times Square and Queensboro Plaza will have to find an alternative means to travel between Manhattan and Queens. Fortunately, since this is New York City, there are several alternative means of getting around. Unfortunately, that doesn't lessen the pain for the thousands and thousands of riders accustomed to sailing easily between Times Square, Grand Central, and Long Island City, Queens.

Now, we are very accustomed to weekend disruptions—hardly a weekend goes by without a line being changed or shut for essential work that must be performed. In fact, on a recent weekend, 22 of 24 lines were changed in some way! (Talk about needing a scorecard to keep up with it.) In the case of the Flushing Line, this is more than routine maintenance. The Steinway Tube—which is the underwater connection between Manhattan & Queens that the #7 line utilizes—has undergone severe deterioration over the years. Water has seeped into tracks and signals,

undermining the reliability and stability of those tracks and signals. In fact, the 7 line has been closed between Times Square and Queensboro Plaza on many weekends in 2011, but several circumstances have aligned that mean this essential work must be done now.

Of course, the #7 line is the subway line that serves both Citi Field and the Tennis Stadium in Flushing Meadow Park, so performing this work in the summer and fall is out of the question. The thousands of riders going to New York Mets games, as well as the U.S. Open at the Arthur Ashe Stadium in Flushing Meadow Park, mean that this work must be performed in the off-season, such as mid-winter.

In addition to the essential work that must be performed in the Steinway Tunnels, a critical upgrade to the almost 90-year old signal system is also being undertaken at this time, namely the conversion to CBTC, or Communications Based Train Control for the entire line. CBTC will allow closer spacing of trains, enhance safety, and improve reliability. At a meeting of the MTA's Capital Program Oversight

Committee, I questioned why it was necessary to spend the capital dollars on CBTC for the Flushing (#7) Line, when there were limitations inherent in the line that prevented anything more than perhaps two or three more trains per hour, such as the merge from three tracks to two between the 33rd Street-Rawson station and the Queensboro Plaza station, as well as the two track terminal proposed for the Javits Center Station on the #7 line extension, currently being built. I was told that while it was true these limitations exist, reliability and the provision of another two to three trains per hours was worth the expense, especially considering the signal system had to be upgraded anyway, and the cost differential between upgrading our old existing system vs. a CBTC system was minimal. After hearing these explanations, and noting that the #7 line is indeed one of the most crowded lines in the NYC Transit System, I believe this signal upgrade will result in a noticeable improvement in rush hour commutes for the hundreds of thousands of riders who travel from Flushing, Corona, Jackson Heights, and Woodside, into Manhattan.

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

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# SEPTA TELLS TALE OF DOOM WITH FY 2013 CAPITAL BUDGET

By *Chuck Bode*

In the past few years SEPTA, the transit system for Philadelphia, has added an additional public input step to its service planning and capital budget processes. Each year a public meeting is held to solicit input toward the beginning of each process. This year, the Annual Service Plan meeting was held in December with only routine changes proposed. On the other hand, the Capital Budget meeting held on Jan. 11 was a tale of doom.

For the recent past, going back at least to fiscal year 2003, the Authority was able to spend about \$400 million on capital items each year. This amount somewhat held the system together—no expansion with gradual decline. One year, fiscal 2009, was better thanks to \$191 million of ARRA (stimulus) funds, which enabled a number of backlogged projects to be undertaken.

However, with the recent change in political sentiment—the Tea Party etc.—Washington and Harrisburg cut funds to public transportation. Beginning with fiscal year 2011 SEPTA's available capital funds dropped to around \$300 million each year. Many projects began to be deferred. Now, SEPTA has concluded that for the foreseeable future that will be the best case. The issue seems to be that these funds are insufficient to sustain the current system in a manner fit for safe and useful service. Major service curtailments are projected as maintenance comes due.

Part of the problem, as is being discovered by even “new” systems such as Metro in Washington, is that much of SEPTA's infrastructure is old, perhaps better characterized as ancient. Three major failures seem poised for the near future. Newest of the failing facilities are two substations built by the then Reading Company when it electrified much of its suburban commuter rail system. Dating from the Depression, the substations at Wayne Junction and Jenkintown power all trains

operating north from Market East station.

The next problem seems to be the long bridge that carries the Norristown High Speed Line from Bridgeport to Norristown over the Schuylkill River. This bridge was built for the opening of the then branch to Norristown about 1912, and with the lack of profitability of public transportation seems perhaps to have suffered insufficient preventative maintenance over the years. Believed to be oldest is the Crum Creek bridge that carries the commuter rail line to Elwyn over Crum Creek. The Elwyn line has already been curtailed, when insufficient funds for track repair following the Penn Central debacle eliminated the outer end of the line to West Chester, now only used for occasional slow-speed tourist trains operated by a group of railroad buffs. Between Center City Philadelphia and Elwyn, the line crosses four waterways on high trestles, of which Crum Creek seems to be in most dire condition. Unless funds can be found to repair the two bridges, both lines face cutbacks to the section before the bridges at issue.

To SEPTA's credit, the Authority has over the years attempted to keep the West Chester line going. Back in the 1980s it attempted a low cost track repair project beyond Elwyn. What was learned from that is that once track and roadbed deteriorate badly, patches fail to last. It was necessary to terminate service only a few months after the repairs—again a case of shortfall of funding for public transportation, as has been true as long as this author has been involved.

The bridges on the line have also undergone various rehabilitation and life extensions. It seems that after a century, life extension no longer applies. In the case of the bridge to Norristown, it has a few curves and the vehicles proceed slowly. Perhaps the private company chose the path of least resistance building around existing structures. A modern bridge, in a straight line, might speed travel time between the two stations by a minute.

Also to the Authority's credit is a new method of publicizing the board meetings. Beginning a couple of years ago, SEPTA began placing large (perhaps two by four feet) posters in stations with high ridership. This replaced the previous practice of placing a notice in each vehicle. While that seemed commendable, the notice was among the advertisements and contained a large amount of tiny print which was thus ignored by almost everyone.

Unfortunately, despite the conspicuous notices attendance was, as usual, minimal. Two sessions, midday and after work, were held for both the Annual Service Plan and the Capital Budget. Each event attracted two or three dozen attendees, mostly the same community activists that attend every SEPTA meeting. Getting the riders involved in time to be effective remains one of the unsolved mysteries of transportation activism in Philadelphia.

Among the issues to be considered is the manner of financing public transportation. Instead of pay-as-you-go, bonds have come into favor. One in six of SEPTA's available capital dollars is now used to pay on bonds previously issued. It is understandable that it was necessary to buy the entire headquarters building as a unit. It even provides rental income from other tenants to reduce the need for external funding. But was it necessary to issue bonds to buy an entire fleet of railcars at once? Could not a couple dozen cars a year have been bought instead? That would have kept spending within each year's available funds, potentially reducing the cost by amortizing a smaller facility's set-up cost over more years, and also spread future overhaul and replacement over a period of years.

Another issue is prioritization of projects. While the substations and bridges are failing, the proposed doom-and-gloom Capital Budget includes borrowing \$40 million to replace the Wayne Junction

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## 2011'S NEW STARTS COVER DIFFERENT REGIONS

By *David Peter Alan*

New transit lines began operating in three different regions of the United States, as well as Canada, in 2011. Norfolk, VA saw the start of a new light rail line and Salt Lake City saw two, the Dallas area now has a new commuter train, and a commuter rail line in the Toronto area was extended.

Light rail made its first appearance in the Commonwealth of Virginia on August 19 as the Tide, a 7.4-mile light rail line, made its debut in Norfolk. There are 11 stations on the line, and the ride is scheduled to take 26 minutes in each direction. The base fare is \$1.50, and Hampton Roads Transit, which operates the line, reports good ridership numbers; 500,000 riders since service began. HRT also operates buses and three ferry routes in the area, and there is talk of extending the Tide line to Virginia Beach, a popular tourist destination. There are also plans to extend Amtrak service to Harbor Park in Norfolk, where it would connect with the Tide. That service would supplement the existing service to Newport News, which is located about one half-hour by highway from the new light rail line.

The Utah Transit Authority (UTA) has also opened two new lines in Salt Lake City. The West Valley City Line, with four new stops, branching off the main line at Central Pointe, and the West Jordan Line, with nine new stops, branching off further

south at the Fashion Place West station, began operations on August 7th. They branch off the line that goes south from Downtown Salt Lake City to Sandy, which began service in 1999. UTA also operates Front Runner commuter rail from Salt Lake City north to downtown Ogden.

UTA also plans more expansions for rail transit in the area. The Front Line 2015 initiative calls for an extension of the original line past Sandy, three more stops to Draper, as well as a new line to the airport, west of Downtown. In addition, there are plans to build a new streetcar to the Sugar House neighborhood and to bring Front Runner service south to Provo.

Texas is home to another new commuter rail line, Denton's A-Train. Not to be confused with the famous line of the same name on the New York subway, the A-Train in Texas runs between downtown Denton and a connection with the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) Green Line light rail at Trinity Mills, an outlying station on the line. The trip takes 40 minutes, as does the segment from Trinity Mills to downtown. Most trains run during peak commuting hours, with two extra runs later on Friday evenings. Saturday service is spread through the day, but beginning late in the morning.

While the Denton County Transit Authority (DCTA), which operates the service, waits for new cars on order from

Europe, the current service has a nostalgic flavor. It is run with RDC (Rail Diesel Cars) built by the Budd Company in the 1950s. They were once used on many railroads, especially in the Northeastern part of the country, and more recently on Trinity Railway Express (TRE) between Dallas and Fort Worth. There are plans to extend the A-Train to downtown Dallas eventually.

Commuter rail has also expanded on Toronto's GO Transit, on the peak-hour-only line that previously terminated at Georgetown. Since Dec. 19, two trains were extended for a 45-minute-longer ride to Kitchener. Kitchener also has VIA Rail service between Toronto and Sarnia, Ont..

Two other new starts that were originally scheduled for 2011 have been postponed. One is the proposed Green Line light rail line in Sacramento, from downtown to the River District. The other is the extension of commuter rail trains from Boston, which would take them another 10.7 miles past the current terminal at T.F. Green Airport to Wickford Junction. This service is an extension of a limited number of commuter trains on the line between Providence and Boston, on the Shore Line toward New London, CT.

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

## Save The Date—RUN's Annual Meeting

The Rail Users' Network's Annual Meeting will be held Saturday, March 3, 2012 at the MTA Headquarters, 347 Madison Ave., New York, at 1:30 p.m. for the purpose of electing Directors and for the transaction of other business that may come before the meeting. An amendment that the Board of Directors adopted at the last Board meeting will be voted on by the general membership present and voting at the Annual Meeting. The amendment if passed would enlarge the board from 13 to 15 members.

## IN CLEVELAND, SERVICE HOLDS THE LINE...

By *Steve Albro*

The Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority began 2012 with the promise of no fare increases and no service cuts. The 2008 fare increase together with increased Cuyahoga County sales tax revenue in 2011 has improved the income outlook. Further, ridership on both bus and rail increased at a rate of 5% per month in the second half 2011. Service cuts instituted in 2008 and 2009 cut service about 20% and fuel hedging kept costs down through the recession.

Service will increase 4% this year. There will be more frequency for the Red Line heavy rail and the BRT Healthline. Selected bus routes will experience frequencies that were cut back earlier.

The popular neighborhood community circulators will not be restored but there will be an expansion of the Downtown Trolley Loops. The renovation of the Higbees Department Store into a casino and the construction of a new convention center has prompted thoughts expanding the Trolley routes and extending service to nights and weekends.

The casino will be in the Tower City Complex where all rail lines stop. We would like to say that the Amtrak station will be moved to Tower City, but presently we can only dream. However, an ongoing construction project on the East Bank of the Cleveland Flats holds out some hope that Waterfront Line light rail service might be restored.

The City of Cleveland may throw a bit of a monkey wrench into the Downtown transit picture by closing Superior Avenue and Ontario Street. These streets presently bisect Public Square into four quadrants and facilitate traffic flow through Downtown. Besides the possibility of making for a more scenic central square, the city may be trying to make The Square to be less of a bus transit center. There has been a running conflict between the city and the transit system over the generations. It will likely take years to resolve the latest installment.

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

## ...BUT BOSTON RIDERS FACE DRACONIAN CUTS

By *Pamela "Mela" Bush*

The other day I went to my favorite bus prediction app, NextBus.com, and looked for my next bus arrival prediction so that I could plan my departure (It was 5 degrees that day and waiting 45 minutes for a bus could have proven fatal for my extremities). But I got a large bold print message on the screen of my smartphone: NO PREDICTION FOR SELECTED ROUTE. If the MBTA implements either of two proposed fare hike and service cut scenarios, the prediction for selected routes will be NO SERVICE FOR SELECTED ROUTES.

Why? How does a transit authority cut routes, jobs and services, raise fares for all and up to 500% for disabled riders, and continue to function as a viable entity? This is a classic example of the economist's law of diminishing returns. Pay more and more and more, and get less and less.

This problem is that the MBTA is in deep trouble financially. Over the next four years, large payments on refinanced debt related to the Central Artery Tunnel Project, a/k/a The Big Dig, will come due. The 2012 shortfall is \$161 million.

However, due to the state's mandate that the T must pass a balanced budget, these large payments are forcing the MBTA to hike fares and cut service and routes OUT!!! Key to this discussion is the fact that the riders' fares are not too low and a fare hike or even repeated fare hikes will not solve the problem. It will take an act of the legislature to address the big picture—unsustainable debt dumped on the T's books by the legislature when Forward Funding was implemented! Environmental Justice communities will feel it really bad, with no other options to get around.

Here are a few examples of proposed fare increases and cuts: no weekend commuter rail service, no service after 10 p.m., no more ferry/commuter boat service, cut Mattapan high-speed trolley service on the weekend, and cut the alternative bus service that runs somewhat parallel to that trolley line. More than 70 bus routes cut OUT! Seniors and student fares will double and the disabled RIDE service will go from \$2.00 to \$12.00—a whopping 500% increase—and all buses to outlying towns cut OUT. They even plan to cut the 52 bus in Newton; the bus runs by a school for the blind and is used to train blind people to use public transit.

Come on, really??!! It's all too much!! Cutting service for commuters is devastating! Imagine if you were a commuter AND blind or disabled or a senior who CAN'T drive anymore trying to shop for food, or a student trying to get to school or..... ???!!!

But Acting T GM Jonathan Davis admits some riders will likely be left with no service at all. "It's not an easy choice for us," Davis told Delores Handy of radio station WBUR on Jan. 5. "We understand the impact this could have on people who rely on our system to get to where they're going. But in some instances, there just would not be any public transportation options for some people."

To describe these measures as "Draconian" is an understatement.

Riders are turning out in droves to service-cut meetings, desperately trying to stop the madness. Davis and Richard Davey, MassDOT Secretary, are you listening?

*Pamela Bush is Co-Chair of the MBTA Riders Oversight Committee and a RUN Board Member.*

## RUN REGIONAL CONFERENCE WILL FOCUS ON MID-ATLANTIC

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Advocate of New York City, and the five Borough Presidents. Panelists include Mike Testerman, President, Virginia Association of Railway Patrons; Aissia Richardson, Chair, SEPTA Citizens Advisory Committee; David Alpert, member, WMATA Riders Advisory Council; and Jack Corbett, of [metroriders.org](http://metroriders.org).

After lunch, participants will have an opportunity to learn about several success stories in the Mid-Atlantic area. Rail Users' Network Chair Richard Rudolph will moderate. Panelists include Meredith Richards, Chair, Piedmont Rail Coalition, who will talk about how the new Amtrak service to Lynchburg got started. Jim Price, Chief Operating Officer, Hampton Roads Transit, will focus on how the new light rail service got started in Norfolk, VA and Gene Kirkland, Treasurer, Carolinas Association of Passenger Trains, will focus on the new state-

supported Amtrak service in North Carolina and the new light rail system in Charlotte, NC.

The final panel of the day will focus on Expanding Rail Service in the Mid-Atlantic Region. David Peter Alan, a RUN Board Member & Contributing Editor, Destination Freedom at [www.nationalcorridors.org](http://www.nationalcorridors.org), will serve as the moderator. Panelists include: Charles "Chuck" Riecks, Charleston, WV, Chair, Friends of the Cardinal; Carl Palmer, General Manager, Valley Metro, Roanoke, VA; and Michael Alexander, Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail (invited), who is working to increase rail service in the Pittsburgh area.

Participants attending the conference will also have an opportunity to sample public transportation in the Washington, DC area, with an optional tour on Saturday, April 21. We will ride on MetroRail and on local bus service. We are also planning to take a walking tour of the area in downtown Washington, DC

where a streetcar line is planned. We may also visit the National Capital Trolley Museum in Silver Spring, MD if we can make transportation arrangements, since the museum is no longer accessible by bus. Tour participants are responsible for paying their own transit fares and admission fees. More details will be announced as arrangements are made.

The registration fee of \$50 (until March 31; \$60 after that; and \$75 at the door) includes a continental breakfast, lunch, a refreshment break, and all conference materials/handouts. If you wish to stay in Washington or Virginia overnight, either before or after the conference, we suggest that you contact "Visit Washington DC" to learn about hotel accommodations in DC and nearby Virginia. Please join us at what promises to be a very exciting, worthwhile event. To register, download the form from our website: [www.railusers.net](http://www.railusers.net). For more information, call Richard Rudolph at (207) 776-4961. Checks should be sent to RUN, 55 River Road, Steep Falls, ME. 04085.

### Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, **write to:**  
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*or*  
**visit our new, improved website** at:  
[www.railusers.net](http://www.railusers.net)

## SIMPSON SAYS HE TRIED TO IMPROVE ARC

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New Jersey Transit trains. NJT management still pushed for the project during the term of then-Governor Jon S. Corzine.

Gov. Chris Christie terminated the project in October 2010, due to escalating costs, which he said New Jersey could not afford. He also called the project "flawed" because it would not go to Penn Station or connect with Amtrak, and it could not be extended to the East Side.

Many rider advocates and advocacy organizations, including RUN, opposed the project after these features had been dropped. One of them, New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP) President Albert L. Papp, told *Destination: Freedom* at [nationalcorridors.org](http://nationalcorridors.org) that a delegation from the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) had met with Simpson in April, 2008. Papp reported: "Simpson listened politely, even voiced his concern that there were indeed deficiencies in the project (like the lack of a connection between Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal), but gave the three advocate participants very little hope that the course of events could be modified."

At the December meeting, Simpson criticized the removal of the proposed track connection to Penn Station, which would have permitted Amtrak and NJT trains going to Penn Station to use the new tunnels that would have been built as part of the project. He said that decision was made stealthily, and that it would have deprived Amtrak of the benefit of the project, and deprived the project of High-Speed Rail funding.

Simpson also said that it would have been cost-effective to extend the line to Grand Central Terminal, since the extra two minutes of travel time (each way) for each commuter would have saved that rider 20 minutes of overall travel time for the same one-way trip. He compared the \$2-billion cost of the extension to \$15 billion worth of benefit, which he believed would have

resulted if New Jersey riders had direct access to the East Side.

Simpson concluded by calling for a regional partnership, recommending private sector involvement in a project of this size, and saying that it was worthwhile to spend more time to get the best project. He also posed the question of whether a regional rail system would constitute an improvement over the current operation.

This speculation pleased George Haikalis, Chair of the Regional Rail Working Group, which has been pushing for a regional solution. "It's a no-brainer," he said, and added: "This is a welcome change, and we look forward to a similar change on the New York side."

Other advocates were also impressed. James T. Raleigh, Political Director of the Lackawanna coalition and President of Friends of Monmouth Battlefield, said that Simpson had done the best he could to advance a project that was better than the one that was finally proposed. "He did well weaving his concerns about mega-projects in general into his criticism of ARC and of the Dulles Project," Raleigh said.

Raleigh was impressed with Simpson's knowledge of the subject and his efforts to get the best-possible project while he was at the FTA. Raleigh reported: "He [Simpson] praised Governor Christie for the way he communicated his decision to the public. 'The taxpayers are entitled to an explanation,' Simpson said, 'and Christie gave one.'"

Simpson had also criticized a plan to extend Metro Rail in Washington, DC to Dulles Airport. He said that the Dulles project was overpriced and not cost-effective, especially since Metro is not in a state of good repair.

Regional rail proponent Joseph M. Clift, who was Director of Planning for the Long Island Rail Road and is now Technical Director of the Lackawanna Coalition, said of Simpson: "His speech was like looking in the mirror. He said what we have been saying for the past six years.

Somebody has to take the lead to get things going, and here is a guy positioned well to take the initiative for a new trans-Hudson mobility project. He has the position, the perspective and the background."

The Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Transportation also serves as the Chair of the Board of New Jersey Transit. Simpson was appointed to the post by Gov. Christie shortly after he took office. Simpson was Federal Transit Administrator in the Bush Administration from 2006 until Bush left office three years ago.

*David Peter Alan is a member of the Board of Directors of RUN, Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey, and Contributing Editor of Destination: Freedom at [www.nationalcorridors.org](http://www.nationalcorridors.org). He participated in the campaign to defeat the ARC Project as formerly proposed, and to build a more affordable and more useful project, instead.*

### SEPTA'S DIRE BUDGET

*(Continued from page 4)*

train station. Although the present facility is, to be charitable, decrepit, it is not in the best area and is not extensively patronized. Certainly a less costly solution, such as a couple of bus shelters on the platform, would have enhanced the Authority's credibility. The recent purchase of an expensive, yet-to-be-proven fare collection system might also have been deferred until better times as a demonstration of fiscal understanding in tough times. If the substations and bridges fail, then no one will be using the stations or paying fares.

Prioritization issues aside, many transit systems around the United States are suffering similar difficulties. Transportation infrastructure is fundamental in today's world. Lost in the political shouting is that unless the United States makes adequate investment in itself, there will no longer be an independent country to bicker about.

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

## NYC'S UNLUCKY 7 LINE

*(Continued from page 3)*

Along with the signal and track and tunnel upgrades to the line will be a rehab of the Court Square station in Long Island City, which will bring this important transfer station up to ADA standards. However, this will mean that the Court Square station will be completely closed until April 2, 2012.

As I mentioned, there are alternatives to getting around this major disruption. The Court Square area is also served by the E, M and G trains. Riders who disembark from the #7 line at Queensboro Plaza can take a Q or N train on the same platform into Manhattan, straight to Times Square. Riders traveling to the Grand Central area will have to change at Lexington Ave/60th Street to the 4, 5 and 6 trains to Grand Central. Another option is to avoid this entire mess at 74th Street/Jackson Heights, and change to the E,

F, M and R trains there for the trip to Manhattan.

Many of the businesses that have been impacted on weekends by the absence of the #7 train in Long Island City are bitterly complaining about this 12-weekend shutdown. It is easy to feel their pain, as I witnessed during one of the Summer 2011, weekend shutdowns. The area around Court Square looked like a ghost town, with hardly anyone around, and the subway station closed tight. This time, it appears the MTA will take pains to promote the alternative routes to Long Island City, which will hopefully help the local businesses.

No one disputes that much work needs to be done to keep the NYC Subway system in top condition. Years and years of neglect have taken their toll, and now it is a battle to keep up with the various conditions, including

water intrusion, decaying roadbeds, an aging signal system, crumbling stations, deteriorated rights-of-way, etc.

Thanks to the ongoing system-wide upgrades taking place, it appears that the MTA is winning the battle against time. But now is not the time to either take one's eye off the huge challenge, or yet declare victory. It is estimated that it now takes almost \$2 billion per year to keep the system from further deterioration, much less make much-needed improvements. We can only hope our elected officials realize the treasure that exists here in New York, and treat it with the respect and taxpayer dollars necessary to keep it in tip-top shape. The economic future of the entire region depends on it.

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

## METRA RAISES FARES, BUT SO DOES ILLINOIS TOLLWAY

*(Continued from page 2)*

operating while the first bridge rebuild is conducted on the footprint of a third track—No. 1, the westernmost of the three—which was removed 20 years ago. Once that track is bridged and raised, it will open for train service while the center track is removed from service and rebuilt. When the center track re-enters service two feet higher, the existing east track will be removed from service, but its footprint will be retained so it too can be upgraded eventually and the ROW returned to three-track operation.

This revision is a real victory for rail advocates as well as for common sense. When the bridge-replacement strategy was first revealed over two years ago, riders and advocates scratched their heads in disbelief over a puzzling disconnect: Although the UP North Line is said to

be the second busiest route in Metra's network, its nine miles of third track were not scheduled for restoration—even though the less-busy Northwest Line retained all 29 miles of its triple track when it was rebuilt 15 years ago.

The disconnect was even more puzzling when you consider the Northwest line's orientation: Unlike the North Line, which crosses only the east-west streets in Chicago's grid system, the Northwest Line, true to its name, is diagonal and crosses the north-south *and* the east-west streets at an angle that makes each viaduct half again as long as its counterpart on the North Line. Yet each street on the Northwest Line got a huge, clear-span viaduct with no center columns to block the middle of the street below. How, we call wondered, did the Northwest Line rate such lavish treatment even though it had less ridership than the North Line?

I asked that very question of a Metra director over lunch several months ago.

"Well, where do you think the chairman and the president lived at that time?" he winked. "Jeff Ladd lives in Barrington, and Phil Pagano lived in McHenry. The Northwest Line was the one they rode to work."

So you might say that the busiest route in the Metra system isn't the UP North Line, or the popular BNSF line to Aurora, or the former Illinois Central electric line to the south suburbs. It's that well-worn local path known as "The Chicago Way." It has no signals and no printed book of rules, but everybody in Chicago knows to look both ways before you cross it.

*F. K. Plous is director of communications for Corridor Capital LLC, based in Chicago.*

## SARATOGA AND NORTH CREEK FAST-TRACKS SUCCESS

By Gary Prophet

On July 23, 2011, the Saratoga and North Creek began operation on a short line tourist railroad that previously was operated by the Upper Hudson Railroad. New equipment, new ownership and new marketing has completely changed the railroad into a huge success.

The line begins at Amtrak's Saratoga Springs, NY station and leases some adjacent land for more parking. For the popular Polar Express trains, after that parking was filled, a shuttle bus was brought in to transfer people from the nearby high school parking lot. From July through December, about 38,000 passengers were expected. The total was about 60,000 passengers. About 40,000 of those passengers were on the Christmas oriented Polar Express trains, which operated from mid-November

through Dec 28. Each Polar Express train averaged 500 passengers, with some weekend trains nearing the 800 passenger capacity of each train. Both coach cars and dome cars are used on the train.

Beginning Dec. 30 and running through the end of March, ski trains are operating from Saratoga to North Creek to serve Gore Mountain Ski area. The ski trains only operate Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, departing Saratoga at 7 a.m. and returning at 6:20 p.m., allowing for a full day of skiing. About half of the Ski Train passengers are expected to ski at Gore Mountain, while others get off at one of the smaller stations along the way or shop in North Creek for the day. On some days, the train has brought 450 passengers from Saratoga to North Creek.

After the ski trains end in March, tourist trains are expected to operate

from Memorial Day through the end of October and may operate six or seven days a week, instead of the five days a week that has been planned. Some tourist trains may have guaranteed connections to/from Amtrak trains at Saratoga. The 55 miles from Saratoga to North Creek currently takes two hours and 20 minutes of travel, about an hour longer than driving. There are plans to increase track speed and also to extend the line further into the Adirondack Mountains, past North Creek, as the tracks continue for 29 more miles, with 13 of those miles in the pristine Adirondack State Forest Preserve. Baggage (skis) is handled free of charge and food, including full meals, is offered to passengers at an additional cost. More information is on the website at: [www.sncrr.com](http://www.sncrr.com).

*Gary Prophet is Vice President of the Empire State Passengers Association and a RUN Board Member.*

## 'LAKE SHORE LIMITED' STEPS UP CUSTOMER SERVICE

By Gary Prophet

Recent passenger experiences on the *Lake Shore Limited* demonstrate an improvement in customer service. Departing New York City, the train does not have a lounge car, but does have a dining car. In the past, the dining car was used only for dining, but now, for the first 75 minutes, the diner is a lounge car and sells snacks to passengers in coach. Then, after the lounge service ends, the dining car is used to serve dinner. (At Albany, the section from Boston is added and it has the operating Lounge Car.) Although in the past, the diner served mainly sleeping car passengers, the dining car now also serves many coach passengers. On some days, the diner is in constant use serving dinner

from 5 p.m. through 9:30 p.m., after its use as a lounge car between 3:45 p.m. (New York departure) and 5 p.m.

Also, on many peak travel days during the November/December holidays of 2011, seven and even eight coaches were on the combined train west of Albany, providing much more capacity than the four coaches that were used on this train just a few years ago. The train continues to have three Viewliner sleepers, although for a while, when the Boston section of the *Lake Shore* was a bus between Boston and Albany, just two sleepers were on the train each day.

Improved procedures for handling baggage across New York State have

resulted in less station dwell time, which has also improved the on-time performance. On the eastbound *Lake Shore Limited*, for sleeping car passengers, wine and cheese are served in the dining car just before and during departure from Chicago. This is also a nice touch that provides a better customer experience at very little cost to Amtrak. Extra time has been added into the schedule of the eastbound across New York State, so that has improved its on-time percentage into both New York and Boston.

*Gary Prophet is Vice President of the Empire State Passengers Association and a RUN Board Member.*

## THE LONG RIDE HOME, OR... WHY ONCE MAY BE TOO MUCH

By *Muriel Pierce*

I arrived at Union Station in downtown DC in plenty of time to board train 164 at 9:25 a.m., tentatively expecting to chug into Boston's South Station at 5:18 p.m. or thereabouts. (I had traveled with Amtrak before!) The train left on time! I had a window seat! My seat companion was not chatty! All was well. I called my friend who was going to meet me and said, "We're rolling!"

And roll we did...all the way to Marcus Hook, PA, which is about 12 miles south of the Philadelphia 30th Street Station. Then, we stopped. I looked up from my book and peered out the window. I saw huge Sunoco oil storage tanks...the one closest to me was numbered 353. I know... I saw it over a long period of time.

I returned to my gripping short story, finished it and took another look out the window... we seemed to be parked. A barely audible, static-ridden voice came over the loudspeaker: "Ladies and gentlemen, we are experiencing mechanical difficulty. The engineer is trying to determine the cause. We will inform you as soon as we know anything. Thank you for your patience." Not good.

A few minutes later the voice was back, "Ladies and gentlemen, the engineer is unable to determine the cause of the difficulty. A mechanical (a mechanical??) is being sent to help diagnose the problem.

The rest rooms are closed until we get to Philadelphia. I repeat: **the rest rooms are closed.** Thank you for your patience."

The mood in the car was, well... patient. Passengers refocused on their books and computers or chatted. After an hour, cell phone use skyrocketed. "Honey, I'm going to be late." "No, I don't know how late. I'll call again." One man took the opportunity to do extensive-intensive telephone counseling with his daughter trying to convince her to forgive her mother. (Every bit as interesting as my book!)

Two hours into the wait, which was sprinkled with, "Ladies and gentlemen... thank you for your patience," the same man was calling 1-800-RAIL demanding his money back, followed by his calling his friends in New York City to revamp their dinner plans. His wife chimed in with how glad she was that they were taking the latest train back to DC; she hoped they got there in time to take it!

After two-and-a-half hours of restless waiting, we were informed that an Acela train was arriving and that we should "gather our personal belongings" and get ready for a transfer. We did. But, we didn't. The long-awaited "mechanical" arrived. Meanwhile, the Acela whizzed past. A uniformed attendant came by offering "snacks" which turned out to be some plastic utensils and a few CheezIt-sized crackers in the bottom of a vast box. Chemical cheese was also an option. Across the aisle, a polite young man was

talking with his friend.. "No, no don't wait for me. I am so sorry. No, I don't know when. Just go..." I heard one woman say to her friend, "You know, this is disgusting!"

"Ladies and gentlemen: this train is getting ready to move. We'll be moving shortly." Well, we did. And the engine was inspected in Philadelphia and in New York City, where frustrated passengers got off and got on and the clock continued to tick. We arrived in South Station a full three hours late. In the grand scheme of things, perhaps it doesn't mean much. We arrived at our destination. No one died. And, perhaps there is no blame. Amtrak has old equipment. Amtrak is understaffed. Things happen. But the reality is, the ripple effect of these delays is enormous both for the passengers and for those whose plans hinge on their arrival. People miss planes and parties and opportunities; other trains and their passengers are slowed down behind the disabled one. It also has consequences for Amtrak. People simply don't ride the train again. They tried it. They were late. They're done.

Hopefully, after May 2013, with the new equipment due to replace the relics they are now trying to bubblegum and hairpin together, the situation will change. Perhaps those disgruntled riders will try again.

*Muriel Pierce is a RUN member based in Somersworth, NH.*

RUN Board Meetings for 2012 are scheduled as follows: March 10, April 20 (Washington, DC), June 16, August 11, Oct. 13 and Dec. 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.

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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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