

## RUN CONFERENCE ATTENDEES WILL MONITOR PROPOSED FEDERAL ACTIONS ON RAIL

*By Jack Corbett*

When RUN's Regional Conference convenes in the Nation's Capital next month (Friday, April 20), many attendees will have visited the offices of their Congressional delegations and Congressional transportation leaders the prior day to discuss transportation policy issues important to their communities and regions.

Congressional policy on transit and rail funding will be completed this year through two major legislative vehicles: a multi-year authorization bill for highway and mass transit (Surface Transportation Reauthorization) and the

FY2013 DOT Appropriations Act. Last week the U.S. Senate passed a two-year Surface Transportation Reauthorization Act, 74-22, that continues mass transit funding at current levels, funded from Federal gas tax revenues. The Republican majority in the House of Representatives has had a difficult time developing a House bill that can generate the 218 votes needed to pass the House, and won't debate any bill for the next few weeks.

The FY'2013 DOT Appropriations bills—providing funding for Federal Transit Administration grants and for Amtrak—will be developed before the October 1, 2012, start

of the FY2013 year. Getting these measures conferenced for final Congressional approvals by the House and Senate will be difficult.

Among the transit and rail issues RUN conferees will have discussed with their Congressional offices are the following:

*1. Restore Tax Benefits for Deductibility of Mass Transit Costs to Equal Vehicle Parking Benefit.* The federal income tax provision allowing employees to exclude up to \$230 of their monthly mass transit costs from their taxable income expired last December. Currently

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## JOIN US AT RUN'S THIRD REGIONAL RAIL CONFERENCE IN WASHINGTON, DC

*By Richard Rudolph  
Chair, Rail Users' Network*

The deadline for early registration for the Rail Users Network 2012 regional conference - "Keeping Connected by Rail: Making our Voices Heard" is fast approaching. The registration fee is still \$50. After March 31, it's \$60, and \$75 at the door. The fee includes all conference materials /handout, as well as a continental breakfast, a hearty lunch and an afternoon beverage break.

The conference, which is being held on Friday, April 20 at the American Public Transportation Association headquarters, 1666 K St. N.W., Washington, DC, will provide participants an opportunity to learn first-hand what is going on in Congress regarding Amtrak and transit funding issues. Art Guzzetti, Vice President of Policy at APTA, 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 shed light on what Amtrak is doing in the short run to improve long distance service. Our keynoter, Don Phillips of *Trains Magazine*, will examine what needs to be done at both the state and national level to create a world-class rail passenger system in the United States. 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.

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# MICHIGAN AGAIN

## Successful 110-mph Rollout Followed by NS Slow Orders Leaves State and Amtrak Angry, Riders Confused

By F.K. Plous

For riders of Amtrak's Chicago-Detroit *Wolverine* service the months of February and March truly were Dickensian—"the best of times and the worst of times."

The "best" of times came Feb. 13, when Amtrak, for the first time, began operating its regularly scheduled passenger trains at 110 miles per hour over the full 97 miles of track it owns between Porter, IN and Kalamazoo, MI. The speedup affected all three Chicago-Detroit *Wolverine* frequencies plus the single daily *Blue Water* frequency between Chicago and Port Huron, MI. That train leaves the *Wolverine* route 23 miles east of Kalamazoo and uses the Canadian National's former Grand Trunk Western for the balance of the trip.

The Porter-Kalamazoo segment is part of the original Michigan Central line opened between Chicago and Detroit in 1852. Under New York Central ownership after 1867, it became the premier route between Chicago and Detroit as well as a popular alternate route to the Central's Water Level Route for trips between Chicago and New York. Popular overnights such as the *Wolverine*, the *New York Special* and the *Canadian Niagara* picked up New York- and Boston-bound passengers at Kalamazoo, Battle Creek, Jackson, Ann Arbor and Detroit, followed the New York Central's Detroit River Tunnel to Windsor, Ont., and then raced across 246 miles of Southern Ontario flatlands on the Vanderbilt-controlled Canada Southern before rejoining the Water Level Route at Buffalo. In the streamliner era, Chicago-Detroit day-trippers boarded speedsters like the *Mercury* and the *Twilight Limited*, both of which hit speeds of up to 100 mph. In 1954, the *Twilight* covered the 284-mile run in a flat five hours—with six intermediate stops.

Things went downhill after that as the Interstate highway system and the federally financed airport program created competition for which the New York Central had no practical answer. The Interstate Commerce Commission didn't help either when in 1955 it clamped a passenger-train speed limit of 79 mph on all main lines not equipped with either Automatic Train Stop or cab signaling. Ridership dropped, and when Amtrak took over the train service in 1971 it operated only three daily Chicago-Detroit round trips. The overnights to New York already were long gone.

### 1976: Enter Amtrak as an owner

The origins of today's higher speeds go back to 1976, when the U.S. Railway Administration created Conrail out of the wreckage of the doomed Penn Central and five other bankrupt Northeastern carriers. Since Conrail was to be a pure freight carrier, Penn Central facilities dedicated largely to passenger trains were distributed to the new government-owned carriers that were springing up: Metro North Railroad got the old New York Central's commuter routes out of Manhattan, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) inherited the Pennsy and Reading commuter routes serving Philadelphia, and Amtrak got the Northeast Corridor, Chicago Union Station and the 97 miles of former MC track on the Chicago-Detroit route. Conrail consolidated all of its Chicago-Detroit through freight on the Water Level Route, which has a connecting track up to the MC at Jackson, MI, bypassing the Porter-Kalamazoo segment and leaving it free for passenger service. Amtrak rebuilt the track and eliminated the slow orders, but in the late 1990s it began taking the pike up to the next level, installing a pioneer Positive Train Control technology to replace the deteriorating ABS system.

### Going faster...slowly

Raising the speed limit took a while. The software, which included millions of lines of code, needed lots of patient debugging. State cooperation was needed, because numerous grade crossings had to be closed and the remaining ones beefed up with more modern gate technology. New welded rail had to be laid on fresh ballast, curves had to be recalibrated for faster train operation, and new sidings had to be installed. Top speeds were raised from 79 to 90 mph in 2002 and the software upgraded again. Then in 2005, the limit was raised to 95 mph, where it stayed while the software was further fine-tuned. Originally, only the middle portion of the line was covered by the new technology, with the western 12 miles between Porter and New Buffalo and the eastern extremity between Kalamazoo and Oshtemo left out.

Finally, on Feb. 6 of this year, Amtrak and MDOT announced that on Feb 13 all 97 miles of track would be fully commissioned for a top speed of 110 mph. Two days later, I and my colleagues Jim Coston and Scott Braverman rode the 7:30 a.m. *Wolverine*, No. 350, to a meeting in Ann Arbor. The 110 mph track performed superbly, but the Horizon business/food service car in which we rode did not. The Horizons, which were adapted from a Pullman Co. commuter-car design, were a little noisy—although the ride was smooth. I clocked the train several times, but the fastest speed I was able to record on the eastbound trip was 101 mph. Still, it was a thrill to be traveling at more than 90 mph on track outside the Northeast Corridor. It reminded me of my many trips during the 1950s on the Chicago & Northwestern's "400" streamliners and the Milwaukee Road's *Hiawathas*, both of which regularly exceeded 100 mph.

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# KEEP THE G TRAIN EXTENSION!

By *Andrew Albert*

The Culver Viaduct spans the Gowanus Canal in Brooklyn, at times reaching a height of 90 feet above the street. The viaduct was opened in 1933 and is served by the F and G trains. Until recently, when the reconstruction of the viaduct began, the facilities in and around the viaduct have been allowed to deteriorate—in some cases, dangerously so. Anyone using the (now closed for rehabilitation) Smith-9th Street station immediately noticed chunks of the concrete platform missing, holes in the canopies which supposedly protected riders from the elements, and concrete spalling and exposed steel on the supports of the viaduct. I can tell you it was disquieting, to say the least, to stand on the platform at Smith-9th Street, and look through the platform at the ground 90 feet below you!

So in March of 2009, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority began a massive rehabilitation of this important link between Carroll Gardens and Red Hook, in Western Brooklyn, and Park Slope, in the heart of brownstone Brooklyn. The rehab included a rebuilding of the Smith-9th Street and 4th Avenue stations. It also meant that—at least *temporarily*—

the G train, which formerly ended its southbound run at Smith-9th Street, was extended to Church Avenue, five stops further down the F line, stopping at 4th Avenue, 7th Avenue, 15th St-Prospect Park, Ft. Hamilton Parkway, and Church Avenue. In fact, this was the first extension of the G line since the cutback on the northern end—from 71st Ave/Continental Avenue/Forest Hills to Court Square, in Long Island City. This cutback brought howls from riders who traveled the G line between Queens and Brooklyn—the only line in New York's subway system that doesn't travel through Manhattan.

The reason for that cutback was the coming of the (now-discontinued) V train to Forest Hills. With the V and the R train terminating at Forest Hills, both of which traveled to Manhattan, there really was no need for the G train to also terminate there. So, when the G was cut back to Court Square, it was a much shorter line, only running from Court Square to Smith-9th Street. Thus, when, due to the Culver Viaduct rehabilitation, it was extended to Church Avenue, G riders had cause for celebration! This was the first improvement in G service for many years. (One could argue that, when the G

was cut back to Court Square, there was a promise of more-frequent service. That was debatable, however.)

Now, riders and advocacy groups are mobilizing to keep the G train extension to Church Avenue. While the MTA hasn't said it was going to return the southern terminal to Smith-9th Street after the Culver Viaduct rehab is completed, riders aren't taking any chances. Both the New York City Public Advocate, Bill de Blasio, and Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz recently held a press conference to DEMAND that the MTA keep the G train extension. Many riders were present, explaining how the service connects northern Brooklyn and southern Brooklyn, and how their rides and commutes have improved since the G train extension. Some even used the ridiculous argument that, without the G extension, their commutes would increase by up to 40 minutes! Truth be told, it would add only a few minutes, as riders switched from the G to the F, which runs quite frequently.

So, is there a good reason to keep the extension? Absolutely! In fact, there are several good reasons to keep it.

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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:

Name	Location	Affiliation
Richard Rudolph, Chair	Steep Falls, ME	NARP / TrainRiders Northeast
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Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary	Philadelphia, PA	Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation
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J.W. Madison	Albuquerque, NM	Rails Inc.

Please send comments or letters to the editor to the Rail Users' Network at:  
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## FUNDING HIGH SPEED PASSENGER TRANSPORTATION WITH PUBLIC-PRIVATE-PARTNERSHIPS (P3s)

By *Richard J. Arena*

To secure a stable future for intercity passenger rail, it will be necessary to develop a predictable funding source for this travel. APT is in favor of creating a High Speed Passenger Transportation (HSPT) fund to accomplish that goal. This proposed bill would address funding needs in air travel, high speed rail (HSR) and higher speed rail (HrSR). Air travel and HSR are linked together because these modes are both competitive and complementary, just as automobile travel and public transit are both competitive and complementary.

The gist of this bill, which could be offered as either an amendment to the next Surface Transportation Bill, or as standalone legislation, would be to put a user fee of 6% on airline tickets, charter flights, air freight revenues, Amtrak tickets, and future HSR tickets to fund a High Speed Passenger Transportation (HSPT) fund. Proceeds are projected to be \$10 billion annually. 20% (\$2 billion) would be used to deploy NextGen Air Traffic Control, 20% (\$2 billion) to increase avg. speeds of intercity rail (e.g. Amtrak et al), where possible, to 60-70 mph so it can better feed HSR backbones, and 60% (\$6 billion) for the design and construction of HSR.

### **Benefits and Projected Results**

• **Next Generation Air Traffic Control (NextGen ATC):** The existing air traffic control system is 50 years old, obsolete, and unable to handle current traffic in high volume markets such as greater New York City. Congestion in this market ripples in both directions, delaying flights from the west (Mid-west, California) and the

east (Europe). The cost for this new system has ballooned from \$10 billion to \$40 billion and future funding for this project is not assured.

• **Higher Speed Rail (Amtrak and other Intercity Rail with an average speed of 60 to 70 mph or greater):** Higher Speed Rail (HrSR) is important as a feeder to HSR. At an average speed of 60 to 70 mph, HrSR, which still requires subsidization, would require less of a subsidy since it is far more competitive with both automobiles and buses. Many of these HrSR lines, also called emerging HSR, can become true HSR service in the future, as demand, conditions, and financing warrant.

• **High Speed Rail (HSR):** HSR construction is key component of this bill. Lack of funding is holding back HSR deployment. This fund will rectify that problem. Assuming a \$6 billion annual revenue stream for HSR, allocate \$3 billion for bond interest payments (the \$3 billion will float a \$100 billion bond offering at 3% coupon rate). This initial \$100 billion and the annual \$3 billion will fund government actions to minimize project risk to private developers. These actions include buying rights of way, purchasing land around HSR stations for transit-oriented development (TOD), completing permitting and environmental reviews. Future HSR fare revenues will be used to pay off the bond debt and fund more HSR lines.

It is important to realize that neither the federal government nor private industry has the wherewithal to construct HSR alone. The total cost of development along the 11 key corridors designated by the FRA

(Federal Railroad Administration) will be in the vicinity of \$500 billion to three quarters of a trillion dollars, or \$25 to \$30 billion a year for 25-plus years. With this fund, the government and private sector can work together in Private-Public-Partnerships (P3s). With the additional revenue streams from the commercial and residential TOD construction, along with the anticipated rail fares, HSR will turn a profit, covering not only operating and maintenance costs, but also capital costs. The added benefit is that the HSPT Fund is a user fee and will not require allocations from general federal tax revenues.

The benefits accruing from the HSPT Fund are numerous. America benefits because there is now another way to transport the additional 100 million inhabitants that will be here by 2050. Airlines benefit because they will have a new ATC system that will make their operations more efficient. And since many Americans will chose to travel by rail between key city pairs 200 to 600 miles apart, airlines will be able to concentrate on more profitable, longer haul flights. Americans benefit because they will have a viable, cost-effective, time-competitive alternative to airline travel. No more long lines at airports or intrusive TSA searches. Even travelers who cannot use HSR benefit because there will be less congestion at airports, and better on-time performance when they have to fly.

*Richard J. Arena is President of the Association for Public Transportation – Massachusetts Association of Railroad Passengers; Director, National Corridors Initiative; a member of the Advisory Board, US High Speed Rail; and Councilor, National Association of Railroad Passengers.*

# THE SOUTHWEST CHIEF AND ITS TRACKS

## (Second of two parts)

By *J.W. Madison*

This amounts to Part 2 of my piece in the Fall 2011 *Newsletter* (page 5), concerning Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* and the tracks it runs on, in particular the Newton, KS-Lamy, NM segment. As I write this:

Several cities and towns along the route have passed or are passing resolutions supporting their desire to keep the *Chief* running where it is, citing the many benefits the train confers on their communities. A New Mexico branch of the SW Chief Coalition (based in La Junta, CO) is putting itself together. The purchase by the State of New Mexico from the BNSF of the Raton Pass-Lamy track segment is still in limbo, where it has resided since the Martinez administration took over.

While we don't believe the tracks are in imminent danger of being torn up and scrapped, Rails Inc. has taken the position that to save the *Chief* we save the tracks, and to save the tracks "forever," we need to demonstrate what attractive resources they are. So "with a little help from our friends," we've compiled a list of uses for these tracks—beyond the important function of hosting two Amtrak trains a day. Here they are:

1) Hosting the *Southwest Chief*, of course.

2) Hosting future Amtrak Superliner (or similar) service from El Paso to Denver and points North, via Albuquerque, Raton and Pueblo (see our "Rocky Mountain Flyer" material at [www.nmrails.org](http://www.nmrails.org) or *Rail* magazine, #25).

3) Establishment or expansion of commuter and regional Rail in the three affected states.

4) Restoration of rail freight and express. The costs of fuel, tires and asphalt are not dropping. Private haulers, short lines and entrepreneurs might find this an acceptable risk if they don't have to buy and own the tracks. Truckers don't have to own the roads *they* run on.

5) Excursion trains, both modern and vintage. Besides their educational and cultural value, they can make pretty good money.

6) Hosting the field testing of new rail safety components and other rail products.

7) Hosting BNSF trains again, if something should happen to the Transcon.

8) **Not to forget:** Promoting the increased economic development, core-city renewal and tourism (with their considerable employment and tax revenues) that improved rail transportation always pulls in.

Anybody have any to add?

It has also been suggested to us that advocates should compile a list of potential users of these tracks (towns, cities, schools, ranches, attractions, transportation companies, excursion trains, etc) and ask them how permanent *and reliable* access to said tracks might improve or expand their operations. From this, revenue estimates might be put together to increase the attractiveness of the segment to either private or public potential ownership.

In the short haul, like heirloom seeds and range land, we need to "bank" these tracks until we can put them to the full use they deserve. If we're short-sighted enough to let them go, it'll look like the late 1940s all over again. Think of the cost and difficulty of starting over if we throw this one away.

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

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- 1) pay your dues using a debit or credit card or PayPal, and
- 2) Make a contribution to RUN!

## AN OPEN LETTER TO COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS GOV. DEVAL PATRICK AND MASSDOT SECRETARY & CEO RICHARD DAVEY

### Re: MBTA's Proposed 2012 Fare Increase & Service Reductions

By Richard J. Arena

**APT is unalterably opposed to any cuts in MBTA service.** While the MBTA has not had a fare increase for five years and is looking at a growing deficit, starting at \$161 million next year (fiscal year 2013), APT's position has been, and will always be, that the Commonwealth should have more mass transit, not less. **MBTA fares are among the lowest in the country,** as peer cities/regions have increased transit fares aggressively the past several years.

It is important to entertain some outside-the-box thinking with respect to alleviating the financial difficulties at the MBTA. While the MBTA must still address its increasing labor and benefit costs, fixing those problems alone will not solve the T's financial problems. The T is not responsible for all the cost drivers and cannot solve these problems by itself. It will require the assistance of the legislative and executive branches of the Commonwealth.

It is important to note that the \$161 million deficit for FY2013 is NOT a one-time problem. Operational deficits are projected well into the future. Additionally, there still are demands of the capital budget where the T is operating rolling stock beyond its useful life and there is no way to fund replacement equipment. Other unfunded capital costs include legal commitments for transit project such as the Green Line Extension as well as needed capacity improvement such as the South Station expansion. Since the US Postal Service will no longer be closing its South Postal Annex, the T will not be able to add platforms above

ground as planned. This is the perfect time to reopen the North/South Rail Link (NSRL) project which will enable the T to construct the tracks under the Postal Annex. The NSRL is even more important as a High Speed Rail station to ensure that Boston will be ready for this important 21st century infrastructure.

Any fare increase should balance the burden on transit riders with those of taxpayers, some of whom pay for transit services though none are available to them. **Concurrent with a fare increase should also be a gas tax increase** as well as tolling on I-93 to charge the principal beneficiaries of the Central Artery Tunnel the cost of its construction. A gas tax increase would fund much needed repairs of the Commonwealth's roads and bridges, while also acting as a disincentive to existing transit riders who would choose to drive instead. The T needs to keep working on **controlling expenses, especially labor, benefit, and pension costs.** It is instructive to note that while wages at the T increased by 41% from 2001 to proposed 2012, fringe benefit expense, including pension costs, more than DOUBLED. The CPI (Consumer Price Index) only increased by 28% during that same period.

### Fare Policy Recommendations

The T should attempt to implement the following initiatives as part of any fare increase:

- **Time of Day Pricing:** There should be a differential for

peak rush hour travel versus off peak travel. Additionally, the T should resume and extend its Night Owl Service (midnight to 3:00 AM) at a significant premium of two and a half times the peak fare, utilizing the same equipment and servicing the same stations as normal service. Night Owl service, even at this premium, is cheaper than a cab, can subsidize other T services, and will be attractive to suburbanites coming into the city to spend money and generate tax revenue for the Commonwealth.

- **Distance-Based Pricing:**

The fare from Park Street to South Station (two stops) should not be the same as the fare for the entire length of the Red Line. When the MBTA installed the automated Charlie Card system, a major piece of equipment was installed to make distance-based pricing possible, as is used in Washington, DC.

- **Comparable fare levels:**

The T should target its typical fare in the range of **peer cities** around the country. This works out at present to a range of \$2.25 to \$2.50. But to ensure fairness for both residents and taxpayer, **MBTA fare box revenues should cover, at minimum, 50% of the system's operations and maintenance costs.**

### Public Policy Recommendations

APT appreciates that a fare increase may be a hardship for some riders and believes that there should be reduced fares for those in genuine need. But it is not fair to burden the T with this task.

*(Continued on page 7)*

# AN OPEN LETTER TO GOV. DEVAL PATRICK AND MASSDOT'S RICHARD DAVEY

*(Continued from page 6)*

The T's number one objective should be running a transit system, not providing government assistance. When there is the need to ensure that people can afford to buy food, the state does not require grocery stores lower their prices; instead it establishes a program like food stamps. The same should be true for the MBTA. The **Commonwealth's legislature should allocate funds and provide reduced rate fare cards** to those who meet the appropriate criteria in conjunction with any MBTA fare increase. Along the same line, the **T should not be responsible for expenditures associated with "The Ride."** While the T can provide this important service, the funds to run the service should come from the Social Services budget.

In the year 2000, \$3.8 billion of debt were transferred to the MBTA,

primarily for **transit mitigation projects required by the Big Dig**. The T should never have been burdened with this debt. The state should assume this debt from the T. At minimum, the **Commonwealth should reimburse the T for the annual interest payments**.

APT agrees that a fare increase is in order. We suggest not only a larger increase now to bring the T in line with other major transit agencies, but also smaller fare increases every year or two so that there is no need for such a shocking increase in the future.

The T should be looking to **increase advertising revenue, not decrease it**. The T's recent action to refuse ad revenue from beer and alcohol distributors is counterproductive. That \$1.5 million that has been refused will have to be made up elsewhere. It also sends the wrong message to fare

payers and taxpayers who will be asked to contribute even more to make up for the rejected advertising dollars.

APT further notes that the **governor and the legislative leaders have been peculiarly silent on the MBTA's problems**. The governor made no mention of the T's budgetary problem in his State of the Commonwealth speech. **APT asserts that it is up to the Commonwealth to step in and assist MBTA management in finding a way out of the T's financial problem** without putting tens of thousands of its citizens out of work and out of school.

*Richard J. Arena is President of the Association for Public Transportation – Massachusetts Association of Railroad Passengers; Director, National Corridors Initiative; a member of the Advisory Board, US High Speed Rail; and Councilor, National Association of Railroad Passengers.*

## ***Like the newsletter? Care to make it better?***

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# NJ TRANSIT BOARD TAKES STEPS TO IMPROVE PUBLIC MEETING TRANSPARENCY

*Actions follow months of advocacy by Lackawanna Coalition Chair*

*By Paul Bubny*

The Lackawanna Coalition has called upon New Jersey Transit (NJT) repeatedly over the years to provide greater transparency and public accountability in its policy decision-making. Now it appears the Coalition's efforts, and those of Coalition Chair David Peter Alan in particular, have begun to pay off.

Effective in November 2011, the NJT Board moved its private executive sessions to the end of its regularly scheduled public meetings, rather than holding them prior to these meetings. A month later, the Board granted the Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee (SCDRTAC) the same "agenda item" status as NJT's other advisory committees. At its January 2012 meeting, the Coalition voted to commend the NJT Board for adopting two components of Alan's transparency initiative, while calling on the Board to go further.

For the riding public as well as NJT managers, the decision to hold executive sessions at the end, rather than beginning, of public meetings provides numerous benefits. First and foremost, it eliminates the public perception that the Board has already voted on important issues in private, rather than considering rider input before making decisions. The change also allows members of the public and managers to save time in attending meetings, since they are now able to leave after the public portion of the meeting is done rather than having to wait for the Board to convene after an executive session. Furthermore, the change does not require any greater time commitment on the part of Board members, and therefore no one loses.

The switch in timing for executive sessions was one of a number of changes in meeting procedures that Alan has sought for the past several months. He first recommended that SCDRTAC be given Board meeting agenda-item status in 2010. Prior to the July 2011 Board meeting, Alan met with New Jersey Transportation Commissioner James S. Simpson and NJT Executive Director James Weinstein and presented several recommendations to improve the agency's transparency.

These recommendations were incorporated into the Coalition's Jan. 23 resolution commending the NJT Board for its actions and requesting that the agency do more to encourage public participation, in line with New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie's often-stated priority of improving transparency in state business. (Alan recused himself from discussion and voting on the resolution at the Coalition's January meeting.) The resolution requests at least one seat for a Coalition representative on the North Jersey Transportation Advisory Committee (NJTAC), and endorses increased direct communications between NJT management and the Coalition.

Further, the resolution calls for improved public access more broadly, as well. It asks that all Board Committee meetings be open to the public, with adequate public notice and opportunity for public comment, and that the public have access to all non-confidential information that Board members receive, at the same time they receive it. In accordance with past practice, the resolution calls for a reinstatement of the five-minute time frame formerly allowed for each registered speaker to address both agenda and non-agenda items at each Board meeting.

All meetings of all three Transportation Advisory Committees (TACs)—SCDRTAC and NJTAC as well as the South Jersey Transportation Advisory Committee—should be open to the public, with adequate public notice and opportunity for comment, the Coalition says in its resolution. Additionally, the resolution asks that TAC meetings be integrated into the Board meeting calendar, and that bylaws and meeting minutes of all three TACs be posted to the NJT website.

Prior to the Coalition's January meeting, Alan commented that the two measures that the NJT Board has acted upon "should be the start of a new era of transparency, full disclosure and open discussion at NJT, in accordance with Gov. Christie's call for more transparency in state government." He added that it represents "a victory for the advocacy process, because NJT did change two policies in response to my requests. Change usually comes from the top, and I give much of the credit to Commissioner Simpson, Executive Director Weinstein and Joyce Zuczek, who has served as Secretary for the past year. If NJT implements the rest of my initiative, it will be a major step forward for the transit riders and taxpayers of New Jersey."

Relations between NJT and the Coalition, which turned adversarial under then-Executive Director George Warrington, have become more positive recently. Weinstein presented at the Coalition's January meeting, marking the first visit of an NJT Executive Director to a Coalition meeting in several years.

*Paul Bubny is a member of the Lackawanna Coalition, based in Millburn, NJ.*

## KEEP THE G TRAIN EXTENSION!



*The interlocking F and G line tracks over 4th Avenue in Brooklyn, near the Culver Viaduct.*

*(Continued from page 3)*

Firstly, when the G terminated at Smith-9th Street, it had to do a complicated switching maneuver between Smith-9th Street and the 4th Avenue stations. While it did this, it blocked the main line of the railway—the F train—and sometimes the switching to begin its northern journey delayed the F trains entering Smith-9th Street.

Additionally, while the G train laid over between Smith-9th Street and the 4th Avenue stations, it also blocked the F line from proceeding. So just from an operational point of view, it makes a lot of sense to keep the G running to Church Avenue, which was made to be a terminal station, and has four tracks.

It's also hard to justify cutting it back when ridership on the additional five stations has been good. The G has also relieved overcrowding on the F train, which travels all the way to/ from Coney Island and is always quite crowded. Williamsburg has become quite a destination lately, with bars and clubs expanding on an almost daily basis—and the G has become one of the best ways to get there from Southern Brooklyn.

The Culver Viaduct project is scheduled for completion in early 2013. It is running fairly close to schedule. Some officials are quoted as saying that they expect the extension to continue. Riders and elected officials aren't taking any chances. They're voicing their opinions loudly and frequently.

Blogs are popping up all over the place with a “save the G train” theme, and I wouldn't be surprised to see T-shirts appearing soon.

As it stands now, the G train serves Kensington, Windsor Terrace, Park Slope, Gowanus, Red Hook, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill, Downtown Brooklyn, Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Williamsburg, Greenpoint, and Long Island City. It is a vital link in the transit system. It should continue to serve ALL those communities.

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

## JOIN US FOR RUN'S THIRD REGIONAL CONFERENCE

*(Continued from page 1)*

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 of the 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 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. Panelists will discuss how effective advocacy in their respective geographic areas has 1) Increased service

levels or introduced new service to an area. 2) How effective advocacy has curtailed current or future service cuts, and 3) How partnerships with elected officials and the press has raised the public awareness of the importance of good transit or rail service.

After lunch, participants will have an opportunity to learn about several success stories in the Mid-Atlantic area and why we need to remain vigilant and continue to push the envelope if we are to keep new services going, extend their reach and give more people the option of riding a train rather than driving between the cities and towns of the Mid-Atlantic region. 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 and what's happening currently in the

Virginia Legislature which could derail “the little train that could,” which has earned universal praise for its outstanding convenience, comfort and reliability and for exceeding national standards for both ridership and financial performance. Jim Price, Chief Operating Officer at Hampton Roads Transit, will talk about how the new light rail service got started in Norfolk, Virginia and plans for future service. Gene Kirkland, the Treasurer of the Carolinas Association of Passenger Trains, will provide an overview and update 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 and Contributing Editor, Destination Freedom at [www.nationalcorridors.org](http://www.nationalcorridors.org), will serve as the

*(Continued on page 11)*

## RUN MEMBERS TO MONITOR CAPITOL HILL DURING NEXT MONTH'S CONFERENCE IN DC

*(Continued from page 1)*

these tax benefits are only available for vehicle parking costs, establishing a policy bias against transit expenditures. An amendment to equalize the tax benefits, retroactive to January 1, 2012, at a maximum \$240/month rate, was included in the recent Senate Surface Transportation bill but would expire again at year's end.

**2. Assure Full FY'13 Funding for Amtrak Operating Costs.** The Republican majority in the House of Representatives may recommend reducing Amtrak operating subsidies in their version of the FY2013 budget, which was expected to be announced this month. For FY2012,

Amtrak received about \$600 million in operating subsidies and about \$1.5 billion in capital funding from Congress. Generally, Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service operates subsidy-free, and Congress' subsidy covers operating losses on its other passenger rail services.

### **3. Retain Dedication of 20% of Federal Gas Tax Receipts for Mass Transit.**

Traditionally, each Surface Transportation Reauthorization law provides that 20% of the Federal gas tax revenues must be used for funding mass transit programs. This has provided stability in financing mass transit at about an \$8.4 billion annual level. This year, the House Republicans first proposed eliminating this source of funding for mass transit but they

reportedly backed off after a firestorm of protest from urban legislators. How this issue develops must await the House Republicans' release of their Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill in a few weeks.

While the state of play in these issues may change over the next month, RUN conferees should consider raising each of these issues with their Congressional delegations to help assure adequate funding for mass transit and Amtrak in the coming year.

*Jack Corbett is a director of MetroRiders.org, a volunteer coalition of transit riders in the Washington, DC metropolitan area.*

## RUN TO WASHINGTON, DC!

By *David Peter Alan*

We will RUN to the Nation's Capital in April for this year's conference. While the conference, plus the optional Day on the Hill and tour of the area's transit will keep our attendees busy for the better part of three days, there is plenty of reason to plan an extended visit.

You will not find as full a multi-modal array of transit as can be found in places like Boston, San Francisco, the New York area or even Baltimore. Still, there is plenty of transit to take you around town, and there are lots of interesting sights to see.

The Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA, often called "Metro") is the area's largest transit provider. It operates Metrobus and Metrorail (often called "Metro" for short), currently made up of five color-coded "heavy rail" lines, similar to New York City's subways. Most of the railcars, which were built between the 1970s and the 2000s, have a roughly similar appearance. All five of the Metrorail lines go through the District of Columbia (locals refer to it as "the District") and extend into neighboring areas in Maryland and Virginia. Most of the Metro lines are built on old railroad rights-of-way. For transit information, you can call (202) 637-7000 until 8:30 pm

(or at any time for WMATA's automated services), or go to Metro's website, [www.wmata.com](http://www.wmata.com).

WMATA also operates an extensive network of buses in the District, as well as the suburbs, and many connect with Metrorail. Other agencies operate local buses in Maryland and Virginia that connect with Metro trains. In addition, the DC Department of Transportation (DDot) operates a small network of "Circulator" buses in the downtown area. DDot is also building a streetcar line Downtown, but it will not be open for service this year. Their website is [ddot.dc.gov](http://ddot.dc.gov) and their phone number is (202) 673-6813.

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## JOIN US FOR RUN'S THIRD REGIONAL CONFERENCE IN DC

*(Continued from page 10)*

moderator. Panelists include: Charles "Chuck" Riecks, Charleston, WV, Chair, Friends of the Cardinal; Carl Palmer, General Manager, Valley Metro, Roanoke, VA; Richard Beadles, former CEO of the RF&P and a founder of Virginians for High Speed Rail; and Kenneth Joseph, Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail who is working to increase rail service in the Pittsburgh area.

Please also note that there will be a Pre-conference "Day on the Hill" on April 19 which conference participants are welcomed to attend. Join us to campaign for better transit, including funding for Amtrak and local transit as part of a new transportation bill. We will kick off the day at 8:30 a.m., with a briefing at APTA Headquarters. Then we will head over to the House and Senate Office Buildings to meet with Congressional staffers and, if we are lucky, with actual members of

Congress. At the end of the day, we will gather for a de-briefing session and an informal dinner. If you wish to join us for the Day on the Hill, please let us know when you register. We may assign teams to visit key members of Congress. You will want to visit the representatives from your own states and districts, so make your appointments soon.

And an optional tour will be held on Saturday, April 21 for participants wanting to sample public transportation in the Washington, D.C. area. We plan to take a walking tour of the downtown area where the D.C. Department of Transportation is building a downtown streetcar, which will be the first such service in over 50 years. We also plan to ride one of their Circulator buses, and also take a ride on MetroRail. Transit moves many people in the Nation's Capital, and we will ride, too. If we can, we may also visit the National Capital Trolley Museum. We are still working on the details, but we invite you to ride some

transit with us, and we will have details at the conference.

In closing, be sure to register for the conference. It is the third in a series of regional conferences sponsored by the Rail Users' Network. It will afford participants a wonderful opportunity to learn how advisory and advocacy groups can improve their practices to better represent rail passengers in a coherent, pro-active, and effective manner. This conference, and the Rail Users' Network, is for both official, carrier-sponsored advisory organizations, and other rail advocacy groups, as well as for individual rail customer advocates.

To register, please visit our website: [www.railusers.net](http://www.railusers.net) and click on the registration button. You can pay on line using your credit or debit card or PayPal account. You can also register by mail. Please send a copy of the registration form and check to the Rail Users' Network, 55 River Road, Steep Falls, ME. 04085.

# RUN TO WASHINGTON, DC IN APRIL!

*(Continued from page 11)*

There are two commuter rail providers in the area. Like Amtrak, they operate from the historic Union Station, a building designed primarily by Daniel Burnham. It opened for service in 1907. Union Station is also a stop for Metro Red Line trains, so it is easy to connect there from Amtrak or a commuter train to other points served by local transit. Union Station is a destination in itself, containing dozens of shops and eating places, including a food court downstairs. There is also a well-known station restaurant on the main level, namely B. Smith's, which serves classic Southern food in an upscale atmosphere that harkens back to the days when train stations featured restaurants catering to well-to-do travelers who could afford an upscale meal at the station between trains.

Two separate Maryland Area Commuter Rail (MARC) routes go north toward Baltimore, with a third line to Brunswick, MD. The MARC Penn Line runs on Amtrak's Northeast Corridor (NEC) line, and operates trains throughout the day on weekdays, but not late at night. The MARC Camden Line, which runs mostly on the historic Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad to a different location in Baltimore, operates in both directions, but during peak commuting hours only. The Brunswick Line also operates during peak commuting hours only, and only in the prevailing direction. A few of the trains are extended to Harpers Ferry and Martinsburg, WV, and a few take a branch line to Frederick, Maryland. There is no transit back to downtown Washington, D.C. from points beyond Rockville (on the Metro Red Line) from the MARC Brunswick Line without an overnight stay.

Commuter rail service to Virginia is also provided during typical commuting hours, with a small amount of mid-day service. The provider is Virginia Railway Express (VRE), and trains go to Broad Run Airport, slightly beyond Manassas, and to Fredericksburg. Amtrak trains also use both those lines, so there is no railroad mileage available on VRE that is not also available on Amtrak.

Most of the famous government buildings, such as the U.S. Capitol and the White House, are within a mile or two of Union Station; within walking distance or a short ride on a bus or Metrorail. Many of the Smithsonian museums and the famous "Memorials" are located in or near the Mall, an enormous grassy expanse between Constitution and Independence Avenues downtown. If the information booth in Union Station that is staffed by the Travelers' Aid Society (located near the Amtrak information booth) is open when you arrive, they have downtown walking maps.

There are a few special places which, in this writer's opinion, are definitely worth a visit. The former main Post Office building, which sits across the street from Union Station and is an architectural companion to it, is now mainly occupied by the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum, although the building also includes a functioning post office and a large restaurant. Like many big-city post offices, it was built next door to the train station, because most intercity mail was carried on trains; either passenger trains or trains whose sole job was to carry mail. The National Postal Museum includes the famous Smithsonian stamp collection, so any stamp collector would feel at home there.

Another site with a postal history is the Old Post Office Pavilion, located at 1100 Pennsylvania Ave., in the building occupied by an even earlier main post office. It was built in 1899, and saved from the wrecking ball by community activists in the 1970s. Today, it houses public spaces and offices for agencies such as the National Endowment for the Arts. The Congressional bells are located in the tower; if there is a group of bell ringers visiting, you are in for a treat. The nearest Metro station is Federal Triangle (Blue and Orange Lines).

The National Building Museum is another Victorian edifice that was almost demolished. It is located at 401 F St., N.W. and covers a full downtown city block. There is an admission charge for exhibits, but tours of the building are free. It was built in 1879 as the National Pension Building, and was designed by Civil War Quartermaster General Montgomery C. Meigs. The elevator had not been invented yet, so stairways were built with stairs sloping down slightly, so people who had difficulty walking would have an easier time climbing the stairs. Many wounded Civil War veterans worked for the government at the time, and the stairways were designed to accommodate them. It marked one of the first times that a building was designed to accommodate persons with a disability. An alternate theory was that the steps with the slight slant facilitated water drainage. The building is near the Mall; the nearest Metro stop is Judiciary Square on the Red Line (with an entrance/exit just across F Street), although Gallery Place on the Green and Yellow Lines is not far away.

The Willard Hotel, at 1401 Pennsylvania Ave., is also worth a visit, although the price is high if you want to stay. It has been in operation in some physical form or other since 1818, with the current

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## RUN TO WASHINGTON, DC IN APRIL

*(Continued from page 12)*

structure having opened in 1901. There is an apocryphal story that the terms "lobbying" and "lobbyist" originated from the actions of individuals who would attempt to influence the actions of President Ulysses S. Grant during his visits to the hotel's lobby, although in fact those terms go back to the early years of the 19th Century (and some related terminology goes back to the 17th Century).

There are few local food specialties in Washington, DC, although the city's international character brings a wealth of ethnic restaurants. Most near downtown are upscale; the lower-priced restaurants are more likely to be found on the edges of downtown or beyond. The city retains a few vestiges of a Southern flavor, and chopped barbecue sandwiches are available from some pushcarts. The Eastern Market, located southeast of Capitol Hill and about a mile southeast of Union Station at Seventh Street and North Carolina Avenue, S.E., is a famous place where locals go to grab a bite. There is an Eastern Market stop on the Metro Blue and Orange Lines. Another local specialty is the half-smoke. It is a semi-

hot link sausage, which many locals like with mustard, onions and chili on top. An inferior version of the half-smoke is available from many pushcart vendors; for one of the best versions, try Ben's Chili Bowl at 1213 U St. N.W. (Metro Green/Yellow Lines to U Street), which is also renowned for its chili and chili dogs. Local rail advocate M. Paul Shore recommends taking the 10B Metrobus from the Orange Line's Ballston Metrorail station to the Weenie Beenie stand at 2680 South Shirlington Road in Arlington.

There are a number of interesting neighborhoods in and around the District. Georgetown, especially on M Street, is a historic neighborhood full of beautiful Victorian town houses with corbelled brickwork. Lacking Metrorail, Georgetown is only accessible by a short bus ride, or a fairly long walk, from the Foggy Bottom Station on the Blue and Orange Lines. On the Virginia side, Old Town Alexandria is worth a visit. Alexandria Station, where Amtrak and VRE trains stop, is also served by Metro's Blue and Yellow Lines. A walk along King Street, back toward the District, leads to the Old Town, featuring block after block of historic town houses, museums and restaurants.

And, yes, George Washington slept here.

If you have time, take a MARC train to Baltimore, see the Inner Harbor, stroll on Charles Street downtown, visit the B&O Railroad Museum and the other museums set in the historic downtown area, and ride a variety of local transit provided by Maryland's MTA. Because of the way MARC trains are scheduled, you can only take a convenient Baltimore day trip on a weekday. Amtrak trains go there on weekends, but the fare is considerably higher than the MARC fare.

To find out more about attractions and hotels in the DC area, contact Destination:DC, the city's convention and visitors' bureau. Their website is [www.washington.org](http://www.washington.org), and it is packed with information. Their phone number is (202) 789-7000.

*David Peter Alan is a member of the RUN Board and serves on RUN's Conference Committee. He has ridden all of the rail transit in the area, and has been to most of the places mentioned in this article. He also wishes to thank local rail advocate and RUN member M. Paul Shore for his suggestions concerning this article and things to do in the Washington, DC area.*

**RUN Board Meetings for the remainder of 2012 are scheduled as follows:**

**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.**

## SUCCESSFUL 110-MPH ROLLOUT IN MICHIGAN IS FOLLOWED BY NS SLOW ORDERS

*(Continued from page 2)*

We came home on the last Wolverine of the day, No 355. Because the westbound trip was made entirely in darkness I was not able to see the mileposts, so there was no hope of clocking the speed. But the conductor, who had set up shop in the café section, was in radio contact with the engineer, and somewhere between Kalamazoo and Niles he reported to us several times that the train was doing 110 mph.

At this speed, the deficiencies of the Horizon equipment became very evident. The noise level was substantially higher than I remembered it from the morning trip at 101 mph, and as the train leaned left into a curve the truck beneath the business-class section began to rattle and pound in a very loud drumbeat that alarmed me. The knocking sound eased off once we returned to straight track, but several minutes later we entered another leftward curve and the noise and vibrations returned. I don't know enough about car suspensions to say which exact components were generating the noises and vibrations, but the cause was not just a wheel flat. The pounding noises were too far apart to be generated by a flat spot on a wheel turning at 110 mph, and some of the noises came in conjunction with a lateral lurching. A mechanical engineer I spoke with later said the trucks should have been good for 110 mph but probably had not been maintained adequately for the rigors of the higher speeds.

Despite the noises, the passengers appreciated the higher speeds because we arrived in Chicago two minutes early after leaving Ann Arbor almost 20 minutes late. Prior to the speedup, a late *Wolverine* could only get later. Now it can make up time.

### *Norfolk Southern drops the "slow" bomb*

Unfortunately, it can only make up part of the time—which is why the current state of the *Wolverine* route is best described as “the best of times and the worst of times.” On March 15—barely a month after Amtrak raised the speed limit to 110 on the Porter-Kalamazoo segment to 110, Norfolk Southern Corp. without warning *reduced* the speed limit on

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### *Somewhere between Kalamazoo and Niles, the conductor reported to us several times that the train was doing 110 mph. At this speed, the deficiencies of the Horizon equipment became very apparent.*

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several segments of the abutting 135 miles between Kalamazoo and Dearborn to as low as 25 mph. As reported here earlier in the last edition, NS has agreed to sell the Kalamazoo-Dearborn track to the State of Michigan for \$150 million, and the state and the railroad were in negotiations over the details of the transaction when NS unilaterally claimed it had found defects in the ties that required immediate and drastic speed reductions in order to maintain safe passenger-train operation.

Amtrak and MDOT officials could not

conceal their dismay, and noted that even prior to the sale, the state had been investing in the line in order to catch up with maintenance NS had deferred. Under the law, NS is obliged to maintain the track only to a level required to support its 25-mph freight service. Mutterings of betrayal were heard, and some observers speculated NS was playing a get-tough card as a last-minute negotiating strategy.

### *Amtrak slows—and shortens—the Wolverines*

The sudden slowdown forced Amtrak to scramble. On March 23 Amtrak issued newer, slower timetables for the Wolverines. Most drastically affected is the pair we rode to Ann Arbor—350/355. In order to make sure this consist is repositioned back in Chicago in time to receive adequate servicing, the train no longer will perform its full Chicago-Pontiac itinerary and will turn instead at Dearborn. And instead of leaving Dearborn at 6:40 p.m., it will start back earlier, at 5:35, arriving in Chicago at 10:53 p.m.

“The decision by Norfolk Southern to reduce train speeds on the track shared with the Amtrak Wolverine and Blue Water services will have a serious impact on passenger service, and could cause delays for freight shippers, too,” said MDOT Office of Rail Director Tim Hoeffner. “Last year, MDOT invested millions of dollars to upgrade this line at the state's expense, and we hope Norfolk Southern will bear that in mind and work to minimize slowdowns that inconvenience business and travelers.”

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

## MAINE PLANS TO RECONSTRUCT MOUNTAIN DIVISION LINE

*By Richard Rudolph  
Chair, Rail Users' Network*

At a recent meeting of the Joint Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee of the Maine Legislature, folks from the Rt. 113 Corridor Committee, state representatives from the affected legislative districts and business people spoke in favor of LD 63. This would authorize the state to issue \$20 million in bonding to reconstruct the Mountain Division rail line which stretches 50 miles from Portland to New Hampshire via Portland, Windham, Gorham, Standish, Baldwin, Hiram, Brownfield, and Fryeburg. The State of Maine owns 45 miles from Westbrook to Fryeburg with the balance owned by PanAm.

The bond would provide funds to reconstruct the Mountain Division line to FRA Class II standards, completing the rehab started last year with State bond funds. Class II would support freight service at 25 mph and excursion service at 30 mph. The rail line will be used immediately by five businesses, creating and or retaining 600-700 permanent jobs. A proposed wood chip plant in West Baldwin alone will create 427 new jobs in logging, transportation and manufacturing, generating an annual economic impact of \$82 million and a 20-year impact of \$2 billion.

While readers may be disappointed that the proposed bond authorization will only provide funds to upgrade the line to Class II freight service, it is nevertheless an important first step. In the long run, we will need to restore the line to Class III to provide commuter rail service for residents living in the suburbs west of Portland.

The Mountain Division is an important rail corridor that connects southwestern Maine to the North American rail transportation system and the Port of

Portland. While other speakers spoke eloquently about how this will benefit shippers along the line who are looking for viable alternatives for moving goods, my remarks focused on the socio-economic benefits that will accrue over time from taking this initial step.

Restoration of freight service will enable us to preserve this important transportation corridor for future use as an alternative for the movement of people as well as goods. I am especially concerned about the right of mobility or what is called social inclusion. As the price of gasoline continues to rise and cars become more and more expensive to operate, many folks who live in this economically distressed area of the state will find it harder to commute to jobs in Westbrook, Portland and beyond. We also need to provide an alternative for the ever growing number of seniors who may need to travel to Portland for medical care, to see loved ones or to begin a holiday. The National Transportation Safety Board recently held a two-day forum to understand the safety risks that older drivers face.

Older road users can be expected to have problems as drivers and as pedestrians, given the known changes in their perceptual, cognitive, and psychomotor performances. Within 15 years, more than one in five licensed drivers will be 65 or older. Their number will nearly double, from 30 million today to about 57 million in 2030. While smarter cars and better-designed roads may help keep them behind the wheel longer, most people will outlive their driving ability. Public transportation—buses, transit, commuter rail and high-speed trains—will be needed to insure their right to mobility.

There is also the issue of traffic congestion. According to the Gorham East West Corridor Study, the suburbs west of

Portland will continue to grow, attracting one third of the State's population growth by 2035. The state has already spent more than \$28 million to build a 3.4-mile bypass, connecting Routes 114 and 25 outside of Gorham Village, to accommodate the tremendous influx of commuters traveling each workday. Another \$35 million to \$40 million will be needed to build a four mile, two-lane bypass north of Gorham. This may bring some temporary relief, but it does not provide an alternative for commuters who no longer want to drive because they either can't afford it, have failing health or simply prefer riding the rails to sitting in a traffic jam as they drive to work.

Critics may see this as a boondoggle, but we don't have to look far to see how the Downeaster train service has promoted economic development up and down that line. Over the past 10 years, ridership has grown year after year as more are discovering the convenience of using the service. According to Amtrak's website, Downeaster ridership numbers exceeded more than 500,000 passengers in Fiscal Year 2011 and are up about 8% over the previous year.

If we are serious about providing alternatives amid gas prices rising again with no end in sight, snarled traffic on major arteries, and an aging population, we should view this bond authorization as the first step towards a brighter future. At present, Mainers living in the western suburbs have no choice but to take their cars to work. We will need to come to grips with the new reality sooner or later.

While the Joint Committee has not as of yet decided the fate of this and several other rail bond proposals, the Governor is rumored to be not be in favor of any bonding this year. He is currently on vacation and not available for comment at the time of the writing of this article. So much for job creation in Maine.

## PLEASE BECOME A MEMBER OF RUN...

### FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

We welcome your thoughts and comments about our newsletter. Please write to us: RUN, 55 River Road, Steep Falls, ME 04085

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

**Rail Users' Network  
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**RUN**  
RAIL  
USERS'  
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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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Please register me/us as a member of RUN today

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

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

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Enclosed are dues of:

- \$35 (individual/family)
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- \$500 (Private Carrier or For-Profit-Company)

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