RUN
RAIL USERS' NETWORK

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Individual Highlights

Houston Light Rail Lines Gaining Steam

By Robin Holzer

Two years ago, RUN readers learned that Houston—despite its reputation for auto-dependent sprawl—is growing a successful urban transit system. Despite being one of the largest and fastest-growing cities in the US, most of Houston is served only by fixed-route bus service. But since 2004, Downtown and the Texas Medical Center have been connected by street-running urban light rail. And with more than 40,000 boardings a day, Houston's Main Street rail line is carrying more passengers-per-mile than any modern light rail line in the US!

To build on this success, Houston voters approved a bond referendum in 2003 to build five new rail extensions. These lines are planned to serve the urban core, connecting two additional major job centers, three universities, and dozens of neighborhoods to the light rail network. Six years later, there are few visible signs of new rail coming, but 2009 has brought major progress nonetheless:

First, new US DOT Secretary Ray LaHood visited Houston in March. Shortly thereafter, METRO garnered $30 million in federal stimulus funds for utility relocation for the planned North and Southeast rail lines. Also, President Obama included $150 million for these lines in the administration's 2010 budget, making them two of only five transit projects proposed for new funding under the New Starts program.

Second, METRO gained essential approvals from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in August that allow these projects to move forward. FTA authorized Houston to begin final design for the North and Southeast lines, and begin right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and other construction preparation activities. This is the final prerequisite before entering full funding grant agreements for both lines which will bring Houston about $332 and $334 million for these lines, respectively. The North and

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At Last! MTA Begins Much-needed Culver Viaduct Rebuilding

By Andrew Albert

The long-awaited (and much-needed) Culver Viaduct Rebuilding Project has finally begun in Brooklyn. The viaduct, which carries the F and G trains over the Gowanus Canal, has surely seen better days. The support beams are crumbling, the station platforms at both Smith-9th Street (the highest in the system) and Fourth Avenue, are crumbling, with gaping holes in station canopies and walls. This is a complicated four-year project, with many different phases and service impacts.

Ironically, the first service impact is a good one for riders: the G train has been extended from its normal southern terminus at Smith-9th Street to Church Avenue, an extension riders have been requesting for many years. In fact, it was never a good idea to end the trains at Smith-9th Street station, as they then were stored just south of Smith-9th Street, halfway to the Fourth Avenue station. As such, they were blocking tracks that might have been used for other purposes, such as the also long-awaited restoration of F express service to Coney Island, an improvement that will have to wait, now that the viaduct is under construction. In fact, tracks have already been removed from the viaduct, thus necessitating the extension of G service to Church Avenue. Huge sheaths have been erected around the crumbling support beams, leaving the appearance of an erector set when viewed from the street below.

The viaduct was opened in 1933. Very little maintenance has been done since then, and it shows. There is much concrete

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3-C Corridor Moves Ahead in Ohio

By Bill Engel

A long-sought goal of passenger rail advocates and planners in Ohio has been rail service connecting Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati—the "3-C" corridor. It has been talked about even prior to the establishment of the Ohio Rail Development Commission by an act of the Ohio Legislature in 1994.

At one time two railroads offered service between Cleveland and Columbus. Travelers could choose between the Pennsylvania Railroad on a somewhat roundabout route via Akron or a more direct route on the New York Central via Galion. In 1958, the New York Central was still offering two round trips daily between Cleveland and Columbus and three between Columbus and Cincinnati. The Pennsylvania had dropped their Cleveland to Columbus service but still offered two trips a day between Columbus and Cincinnati. Since the creation of Amtrak in 1971, there has been no service on this route.

There was serious discussion of passenger rail returning to the 3-C corridor in 1998 and 1999 in connection with a major highway project to improve Interstate 71 between Cleveland and Cincinnati. This was to take ten years to complete at a cost of about $1 billion. Improvements planned included a third lane and widened shoulders over most of the distance. Unfortunately the trains never appeared, partly because CSX and NS were in the process of buying Conrail over whose tracks the service would have operated.

At least two scenarios were discussed at this time. One would have had service only between Cleveland and Columbus, while the second would have extended service to Cincinnati. The running time from Cleveland to Cincinnati would have been between six and six-and-a-half hours. If service had been between Cleveland and Columbus, one train set was planned to make two round trips. Extending service to Cincinnati would have required a second train set with each making one round trip. It is interesting to note that the schedule proposed for this service was not significantly different than the timing in 1958.

Now in 2009, there is again serious talk of "3-C" service. Democrat Ted Strickland is Ohio governor and Democrats control one house of the Ohio legislature. Amtrak is about to complete their study of the proposed service as requested by the Governor over a year ago. President Barack Obama seems supportive of developing high speed rail corridors. Federal monies are available under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The Director of the Ohio Department of Transportation is Jolene Molitoris, a former FRA Administrator, who is supportive of the project. Planners hope to have trains up and running by 2011 in 79-mph service, with a goal of reaching 110-mph in the future.

To be able to begin service in 2011 ODOT and ORDC have a tight schedule to meet. The Amtrak study was not expected to be received until early September. The ARRA application had to be submitted to the FRA no later than Oct. 2.

The trains would run from Cleveland via Galion to Columbus, then continue to Cincinnati via Dayton. Initially there would only be a limited number of intermediate stops. In 1999 intermediate stops were proposed at Berea, Galion, Delaware, Worthington, Springfield, Fairborn, Dayton and Sharonville. Intermediate stops for the current proposal are still being discussed. A group in the Dayton area was disappointed to learn that their idea of a stop very near the United States Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB would not be included at start-up.

In a press release dated August 19, 2009 ODOT and the ORDC reported early projections of travel times between Cleveland and Columbus would be three hours. The Columbus-to -Cincinnati trip via Dayton would also take about three hours. These times are slower than in 1958, when New York Central train #321 *Cleveland –Columbus Special* was allowed two hours and 35 minutes to cover 138 miles between Cleveland and Columbus. The New York Central was a little slower over the 122 miles between Columbus and Cincinnati, allowing train #15 *Ohio State Limited* two hours and 55 minutes.

In 1958, the Pennsylvania trains did not travel via Dayton but their Columbus to Cincinnati mileage was very similar to the Central's at 125. Train #40 *Cincinnati Limited* was allowed just two hours and 33 minutes between Cincinnati and Columbus.

The press release stated that the train times would be competitive with automobile times because of the work travelers could accomplish while on the train as opposed to having to concentrate on driving. It admitted that actual driving times are slightly faster than the proposed train timing.

The release did not mention what equipment might be used for the new service. In a parallel development, an Ohio-based entrepreneur has purchased the former Colorado Railcar DMU designs and hopes to begin manufacturing them. The new company will be known as known as US Railcar.

Even with a three lane I-71, the trip between Cleveland and Columbus by auto is not much fun. Modern passenger trains, with facilities to work on a laptop computer, make telephone calls, meet with one's business associates or simply relax should be well received by Ohio travelers.

To obtain more information about Ohio's "3-C" corridor, check out 3CisME.ohio.gov online.

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

CULVER VIADUCT WORK FINALLY BEGINS

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spalling and exposed steel under the viaduct. The NYC Transit Riders Council recently took a tour of the viaduct, and found parts of the steel beams could be flicked away with a finger! Fortunately, there hasn't been any disaster yet, so the project is extremely necessary, and, of course, expensive. At approximately $313 million dollars, this is one of NYC Transit's major construction projects. The work will be done in phases, as mentioned earlier, with phase 1 being the extension of G service to Church Avenue, and the removal of the center tracks, as well as the shoring up of the support beams and waterproofing of the decks under the platforms.

This first phase will last until near the end of 2010, when phase 2A will begin. This will see the northbound local track taken out of service, leaving the F and G service running on the northbound express track between Church Avenue & Smith-9th Street. 15th St-Prospect Park and Fort Hamilton Parkway will only see southbound service during this phase. A temporary platform will be erected at the Fourth Avenue station, and G-only service will operate at the northbound side of Smith-9th Street. Phase 2B, beginning around the 2nd quarter of 2011 until the end of 2011, will see the F & G back on the northbound local track, except at Smith-9th Street. Service will be normal south of Smith-9th Street. However, the Smith-9th Street station will be closed for rehabilitation from the 2nd quarter of 2011 until the first quarter of 2012, necessitating supplemental bus service for users of the station.

Phase 3A will run for approximately four months, from the fourth quarter of 2011 until the 1st quarter of 2012. The southbound local track will be taken out of service, meaning that the F and G will run on the southbound express track between Smith-9th Street & Church Avenue. (the reverse of what happened in phase 2A) There will only be northbound service at 15th St-Prospect Park & Fort Hamilton Parkway. A temporary platform will be constructed at the 4th Avenue station for southbound service. Remember—the Smith-9th Street station is closed during this period.

Phase 3B will run for about six months—from the first quarter of 2012 until the 3rd quarter of 2012—and will see the F & G back on the local track south of Smith-9th Street. That station is reopened, but with G-only southbound service via a temporary platform. Northbound service is normal. The last phase, phase 4, will begin around the 3rd quarter of 2012 and run until the first quarter of 2013. During this final phase, the F and G service is back on the local tracks, serving all stations. The G continues to run to Church Avenue, with project completion slated for early 2013.

Obviously, there is major service disruption and confusion during this time. When NYC Transit undertakes a major project such as this, they usually distribute excellent brochures showing all service patterns, destinations, "if you're starting here...." scenarios, and platform conductors explaining the various disruptions to customers. This project will be no exception, and I expect a high level of customer understanding and knowledge of this important project. Riders of the F & G trains using Smith-9th Street & Fourth Avenue have long-suffered with inadequate and dangerous conditions for so long, due to DECADES of neglect of these important structures. Now that relief is finally on the way, most riders will put up with some inconveniences and disruptions of their service, so that their commutes will be more reliable, safer, and much more pleasant. Let's hope the project gets done under budget and in record time!

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

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

The New Normal in Passenger Rail Funding

Federal Capital Available Despite Dismal Business Climate

By James E. Coston

These days, in our shop, we constantly talk about "the new normal": what we think the railroading and transportation and leasing and finance baselines will look like when things settle down from the upheaval of the last year or so of financial distress and drop in business activity.

It is a prognostication that we need to recalibrate frequently. Usually downwards.

We're "optimistic realists." There is a future, it's not that far off, but it's going to look different for a long time, maybe permanently. When we hear people use the expression "when business gets back to normal," we caution them by saying, "Yes, but don't think of 'normal' as 2007. That was a bubble. Think more like 1998."

What is 'the new normal' likely to look like for capital-raising for railroad projects?

With both the ugly business climate on one hand, and the federal government's new willingness to provide capital for rail projects—particularly those building intercity passenger rail lines—it remains a moving target. Though business in general remains depressed, the availability of federal capital offers us the opportunity to develop a new travel market that already was growing back when capital was short.

As an example, I'd like to provide a brief overview of an emerging rail-travel corridor with big potential, one that represents a complex and interlocking set of improvement projects requiring a massive amount of public and private monies.

The Chicago-to-St. Louis line, originally known as the "Alton Route" and acquired in 1941 by the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Railroad, was never looked upon as a "corridor" by its owners. Until the collapse of the passenger-rail business in the mid-1960s it was a rather old-school, mostly double-track mainline with less than half a dozen passenger trains each way, a mix of through and local freight traffic and a single commuter train on the Chicago end.

In 1972, the Illinois Central Railroad acquired the GM&O and even changed its name to "Illinois Central Gulf" to reflect the new acquisition. But when Harry J. Bruce became ICG's CEO in 1983, he launched a downsizing strategy, and in 1985 he sold all of the Alton Route except the 38 miles between Chicago and Joliet. The property failed under its new owners and went into an ugly bankruptcy, and the trustee came close to abandoning it. Ultimately, the Southern Pacific Railroad acquired it as part of its effort to reach Chicago, and when the Union Pacfic acquired the SP in 1996 it found it had acquired the truncated Alton Route as well.

Until recently, the UP had no great plans for the line. But the state of Illinois did. It saw its potential as a fast passenger route linking Chicago with the state capital, Springfield, and St. Louis. Carefully investing its own money plus a modest federal grant, it rebuilt 118 miles of Downstate track to 110-mile-per-hour standards.

Things change: Today, the line that was almost lost is being viewed by its owner, Union Pacific, as a high-performance intermodal route able to compete with the Burlington Northern Santa Fe for lucrative Long Beach-Chicago steamship traffic. The Illinois Department of Transportation, well aware of dwindling petroleum supplies and growing environmental concerns, sees the Alton route as a viable, valuable high-speed intercity passenger line with strong potential for diverting both auto and short-haul commercial air traffic. And Chicago's Regional Transportation Authority recognizes the Chicago-Joliet segment as a growing commuter-rail corridor.

There's only one problem: The capital required to realize these multiple visions amounts to billions of dollars.

Only a few years ago, rail investments on this scale would have been dismissed as the pipe-dreams of naïve idealists. Today, the Alton Route buildout is on the radar screen of government officials at every level, railroads and financing sources, and no one is laughing.

The particular needs of the various players have yielded an amazing balance of opportunities, with inherent conflicts and complications, particularly in the area of financing capital improvements for the corridor to reach its full potential.

Joliet – St. Louis

IDOT has targeted the Chicago-St. Louis corridor for upgrading to handle 8 daily round-trip frequencies at 110 mph on a mostly double-track railroad, and has commissioned the UP to determine what that will take in terms of building and dollars. The UP, which historically had little local business on the line and virtually no through traffic, now is in a position to link the Alton line to its other properties to form a fast, flat, direct, mostly double-track railroad from L.A. to Chicago—the first railroad able to compete head-to-head with BNSF's Transcon.

UP will use its newly double-tracked Sunset Route from L.A. to El Paso, then head northeast to Kansas City via the Golden State Route—now totally rebuilt—that it acquired from the Rock Island bankruptcy. From Kansas City, it will head east to St. Louis over former Missouri Pacific trackage, on which the state of Missouri is now financing capacity

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Maine's 10-year Rail Plan Must Set Priorities

By Richard Rudolph
Chair, Rail Users' Network

Rail advocates and members of the general public attending public meetings in Bangor and Portland recently weighed in on what Maine's priorities should be for investing in the state's rail infrastructure over the next 10 years. The Maine Department of Transportation is conducting an eight-month study to develop a comprehensive rail plan to address future needs. While the department should be applauded for launching this initiative, it is not at all clear that this represents a sea change in attitude at MDOT, which has been historically fixated on building roads rather than investing in alternative modes of transportation. Just last year, MDOT unveiled a plan to build additional lanes to widen Interstate 295 from South Portland to Yarmouth to address projected rush-hour traffic congestion increases over the next 20 years, even though commuter rail service could be provided at a much lower cost on the St. Lawrence and Atlantic railway, which runs parallel for most of the distance.

Consulting firm HNTB, which was hired to do the study, is conducting an in-depth analysis of the state's rail infrastructure—its conditions, operations, trends and opportunities for investment. The plan will provide the basis for federal and state investment in rail and as required by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act passed by Congress in 2008. The plan must be updated every five years.

A Technical Advisory Committee has been set up to help identify issues and trends that affect the quality of life and business conditions in the state and to help Maine DOT prioritize rail investment in Maine. The TAC, which is composed of representatives from groups who own, operate and maintain the rail system, along with manufacturers, shippers and rail advocates, have recently met to give their initial input. They will have another opportunity to provide comments before HNTB presents a draft of its plan to the public, as required by federal rules if the state is to be eligible for federal rail funding.

About 25 people from railroads, economic development groups and government agencies showed up at the public meeting held in Bangor. While some in attendance expressed interest in long distance and commuter rail service, the focus was primarily on strengthening the state's freight rail system, which isn't adequate. The timing of the public hearing couldn't have been better for the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic Railway, which owns 241 miles of track running from Madawaska to Millinocket, about half of the track that it owns in the state. It recently announced plans to abandon the tracks or to sell them to the state. The tracks are used to transport pulpwood, heating fuel, wood chips, cooking oil and other products. The tracks and land are worth about $17 million. Upgrading the tracks would cost an estimated $6 million, and the annual maintenance fee would be about $2.5 million.

Close to half of the 80 or so folks who attended the Portland hearing spoke up. Their concerns ranged from extending the *Downeaster* to Brunswick, upgrading the existing line to provide two-hour service to Boston and restoring rail service to Lewiston, Augusta and other cities north of Portland. There was also a great deal of interest in commuter rail service, not only along the Mountain Division Line that runs from the Portland Peninsula to North Conway, NH, but also in restoring service on an abandoned right-of-way that was part of the Portland and Rochester Railroad that runs through the towns of Gorham, Buxton, Hollis and beyond.

Several speakers questioned why MDOT seems to be primarily concerned with mitigating traffic congestion and reducing greenhouse gas emissions rather than reducing the state's dangerous dependency on foreign oil. The issue of affordability doesn't seem to be part of MDOT's concerns. This speaker talked about the need for social inclusion. Mobility should be considered a human right, the same as the right to good food, clean air and water. Students and seniors who are living on fixed incomes will need alternative modes of transport, especially as the economy recovers and gas prices skyrocket again.

While many folks remain skeptical of MDOT's intentions, the audience was reminded at the close of the session that the same political and institutional obstacles remain that existed when Trainriders Northeast first began advocating for the restoration of passenger service from Portland to Boston. These obstacles can be overcome when the public is organized and persistent in its demand for a brighter transportation future.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, ***write to***:
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or
contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at:
RRudolph@fairpoint.net

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Massachusetts Transportation Has its Resignations

By Pamela Bush

Two things were constant in Boston in the summer of 2009: rain and public transit woes. Over this summer, MBTA riders experienced a very bumpy ride. The summer began with riders in the throes of apprehension over yet another fare increase, the fourth in the past eight years. Transportation Secretary Jim Aloisi announced the need for an MBTA fare increase and possible drastic service cuts just a little over a week before Governor Patrick passed his huge Transportation Reform bill. The sales tax also was increased from 5% to 6.25%, with $160 million of the sales tax revenue going to fund the MBTA, but the Secretary still wanted more money for the MBTA and let the planned fare increases stand. Some riders *resigned* themselves to have to accept poor service and higher prices. Others decided to fight!

Transit advocates mobilized their troops for another fare increase battle similar to the one that had been waged just a few years earlier in 2006. Thousands of flyers with the heading "**Are You Ready To Pay More For Less,"** were distributed at train and bus stations throughout the system. Phone calls were made, rallies and press conferences were held, press releases and blogs were written, coalitions coalesced and there were countless pre-meetings, meetings and post-meetings, all with the same goal: **STOP THE FARE INCREASE**. The MBTA and the Executive Office of Transportation planned a dozen public workshops and a public hearing, to allow riders to voice their concerns and make recommendations on the pending fare increase.

The day before the first public workshop for the fare increase, amidst nearly a dozen news cameras, in a standing room only board room, the Secretary of Transportation and the MBTA's Board of Directors forced the *resignation* of the MBTA's General Manager, Dan Grabauskas. During the public comment period, I stated that this much publicized in-fighting was a distraction and asked them to put aside their differences and focus on the needs of the riders and address the real issues of a pending fare increase and the huge debt issues the MBTA was facing.

On August 11, the day of the second scheduled fare increase hearing, Gov. Patrick announced the abrupt cancellation of ALL future public hearings and took the fare increase off the table pending a stem-to-stern review of the MBTA's finances. This is scheduled to be completed by Nov. 1, 2009. The actions of all opposers of the fare increase came screeching to a halt and public transit riders *resigned* themselves to wait.

On Sept. 11, Secretary Aloisi announced HIS *resignation*, ending a mere nine months of service (the former Secretary resigned under pressure on Jan. 2, 2009). The governor will have to find someone else to head up his new massive transportation agency. We will have to once again *resign* ourselves to wait and see what transpires. Our hope is that the next Secretary will have a vision that will promote affordable and sustainable public transportation that will attract drivers to get out of their cars and utilize the services. That is a vision that is not only good for our state but also good for the planet as a whole.

Pamela Bush is Co-Chair of the MBTA Riders Oversight Committee and a RUN board member.

Amtrak Virginia to Start New Service

By Bill Engel

An Amtrak press release dated August 31, 2009 announced new *Northeast Regional* service to be sponsored by the Commonwealth of Virginia. The new service will start in Lynchburg and offer a single-seat ride as far north as Boston.

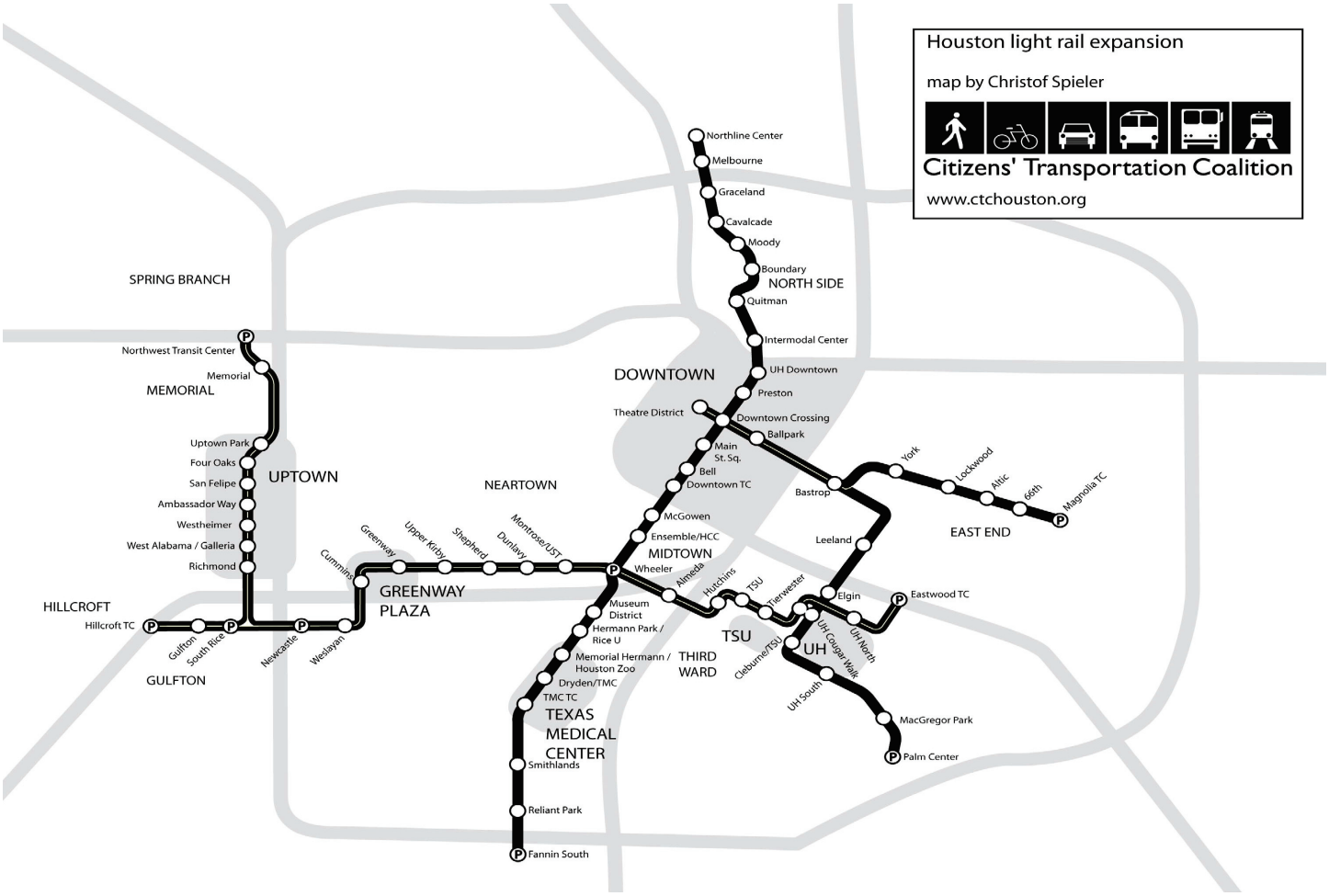
This new service will operate as Amtrak Virginia and is part of a three-year pilot program developed by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. Also coming under this program will be an additional Richmond –Washington, DC frequency, which is slated to begin service in December 2009.

The plan for the new service is that train #176 will depart Lynchburg at 7:38 a.m. Monday through Friday, arriving in Washington at 11:20 AM. Reserved seat coach, a business class car and a snack car will be offered. On Saturday and Sunday train #156 will depart Lynchburg at 9:59 a.m. and arrive in Washington at 1:34 p.m. Returning to Lynchburg, train #171 will depart Washington at 4:50 p.m. Monday through Sunday and arrive in Lynchburg at 8:36 p.m. Intermediate stations to be served by the new train include Charlottesville, Culpeper, Manassas and Alexandria. The running time will approximate that of existing trains #19 and 20. If there is to be any criticism of this new service, it could be that is scheduled very close to the *Crescent*.

Introductory 14-day advance purchase fares are as low as $29 one-way between Lynchburg and Washington on the new service, which compares favorably with the $74 one-way fare charged on trains #19 and #20 the *Crescent* between the same points. According to the Amtrak press release, Virginia becomes the 15th state to partner with them to offer rail passenger service. This is a very positive development for the future of rail passenger service in the USA.

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

NEW LIGHT RAIL LINES GAINING STEAM IN HOUSTON



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Southeast lines are scheduled to open in 2012.

A third line—the University line—is also in the queue for federal funds, though it's at least a year behind the first two. This 10-mile east-west backbone of the expanded system is awaiting environmental clearance. We expect to see a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) this fall and hope for a record of decision (ROD) from FTA soon after.

The final two lines—East End and Uptown—will be funded locally by Houston's $.01 transit sales tax and street work has already begun in the East End. Though an ugly political deal in 1992 resulted in 1/4 of Houston's transit tax being diverted to roadways and other projects, METRO still collects nearly $400 million each year for transit. Houston transit advocates hope to end the diversion of our transit tax when the current agreement ends in 2014.

Many cities have focused rail expansion on suburbs, seeking out abandoned freight rail rights-of-way and waiting for transit-oriented development to follow. Houston is instead pursuing a decidedly urban strategy, bringing new rail service to existing vibrant business districts. The short-term cost is construction headaches; the long-term benefit is ridership.

Once these five lines open, Houston will have 39 miles of urban light rail with 65 stations. Transit riders will soon have access to 478,000 jobs within a half-mile walk of a rail transit station, as well as schools, shops and other destinations. METRO expects over 200,000 daily boardings.

We still need to ensure these new lines are the neighborhood-friendly amenity they need to be. Neighborhood groups are working on issues like lane widths, crosswalk locations, and whether the rail goes over or under freight rail tracks. It's going to take hard work to get these lines built. Nonetheless, some of us can hardly wait!

Robin Holzer chairs the board of the nonprofit Citizens' Transportation Coalition (CTC), an all volunteer, grassroots transportation advocacy organization, committed to engaging citizens in the planning of transportation projects that affect their neighborhoods.

RUN Adopts 'Penn Station First' Plan for new Tunnels from New Jersey to Manhattan

By David Peter Alan

RUN has adopted the "Penn Station First" plan for proposed new rail tunnels to be built by New Jersey Transit for additional rail service into Manhattan. The plan approved by RUN calls for any new tunnels to be constructed into the existing Penn Station, rather than to a proposed deep-cavern terminal favored by NJT. The NJT proposal would bring trains into a separate terminal nearly twenty stories below street level, with no convenient connections to Amtrak, the Long Island Rail Road or other NJT trains that would still go to the existing Penn Station.

The Penn Station First Plan is favored by several local and regional rail advocacy organizations, including the Regional Rail Working Group, Empire State Passengers' Association, New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers and Lackawanna Coalition. Rail advocates from New Jersey and New York favor a plan that would further connect any proposed new tunnels to Manhattan's East Side, so trains could serve both sides of town. They also endorse regional through-running of trains to increase flexibility for riders and operating efficiency.

Other rider advocates in New England have endorsed the Penn Station First plan, due to concerns that the current two-track line under the Hudson River will not provide sufficient capacity for future service needs, which would create a permanent choke point between points north of New York City and other points south.

The full text of the resolution adopted by RUN at its Board of Directors meeting on August 29 is published below:

New Trans-Hudson Rail Tunnels Should Go to Penn Station First

The Rail Users' Network (RUN) supports the construction and operation of a strong and extensive national passenger rail network. This includes regional corridors which can support a high volume of service, with convenient connections to long-distance trains, other regional rail corridors and local rail transit (including commuter rail services).

To further these goals, RUN recommends that the new trans-Hudson rail tunnels proposed by New Jersey Transit (NJT) be routed to the existing Penn Station, and not to a separate, stub-end NJT-only terminal planned for a location twenty stories below Manhattan's 34th Street. The "Access to the Region's Core" (ARC) Project originally proposed new tunnels that would connect into the existing Penn Station and eventually add a track connection to Grand Central Terminal on Manhattan's East Side. RUN endorses this idea and recommends its implementation.

Along with routing any new trackage to the existing Penn Station, an interagency task force comprising representatives from Amtrak, New Jersey Transit and New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority should also be established to plan and build a rail connection between the existing Penn Station and Grand Central Terminal. This would permit both Amtrak and commuter rail services to reach both sides of Midtown Manhattan.

RUN also recommends that Amtrak, New Jersey Transit, the Long Island Rail Road and the Metro North Railroad should coordinate planning and operational efforts to increase efficiency by establishing through-running of trains to the greatest extent possible.

Routing new tracks into the existing Penn Station will assure redundancy and operational flexibility for Amtrak and NJT. It will also allow convenient connections between Amtrak and NJT trains for customers of both railroads. This plan also provides needed capacity, if either or both of the existing tracks (built in 1910) should be taken out of service for any reason. NJT plans called for the proposed new tunnels to connect into the existing Penn Station until that feature was removed in June, 2008. Therefore, the connection recommended here is feasible.

RUN believes that, if NJT were to build a separate "deep cavern" terminal that does not connect to the existing Penn Station, rail service in the Northeast Region would be insufficient to meet projected future demand. Restriction of Amtrak trains to the existing tunnels built in 1910 will create a permanent choke point that will preclude expansion of long-distance or regional rail service from points south of New York City to New England and upstate New York. The current NJT plan will also divert many NJT riders from the existing Penn Station to a less safe and far less convenient location, and eliminate the convenient connectivity to Amtrak that they now enjoy.

The current NJT plan also precludes future expansion to the East Side of Manhattan, due to the New York water tunnel, which would be in the way. The water tunnel has already caused the elimination of tail tracks for the planned stub-end terminal. RUN calls for any new rail tunnel to be built with the ability to eventually take Amtrak and NJT riders to the East Side, as well as the West Side, of Manhattan. Since the current plan cannot provide such access unless New York consents to the abandonment of its water tunnel, RUN objects to the current NJT plan.

RUN also expresses its concern about the cost of building the proposed "deep cavern" terminal, and believes that the $3 billion required to construct this facility alone could be better spent on other rail projects in New Jersey, New York and elsewhere in the region.

Many other rail advocacy organizations and individual passenger rail advocates, in the region and elsewhere in the nation, have called for NJT to build only new rail tunnels that would connect to the existing Penn Station, rather than to construct an NJT-only stub-end terminal without such a connection. RUN agrees with them.

Therefore, RUN recommends that New Jersey Transit and Amtrak should put "Penn Station First" by assuring that any new trans-Hudson rail tunnel be routed to the existing Penn Station and be available to both Amtrak and NJT. No facility that lacks access to the existing Penn Station, including the proposed deep-cavern terminal to be located 175 feet below 34th Street, should be built under any circumstances.

This Statement was adopted by the RUN Board of Directors on August 29, 2009.

The 'New Normal' in Rail Funding

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improvements for its state-supported Amtrak trains. At St. Louis, UP freight trains will access the rebuilt and double-tracked Alton for a fast ride to Elwood, just south of Joliet, where the railroad and its developer are building a logistics park similar to the highly successful one BNSF opened nearby eight years ago. It will take $2 billion to $3 billion of capital to complete the infrastructure upgrades for both the freight and passenger trains, and stimulus grant monies can pay for a substantial amount.

That money, however, will cover only the improvements between St. Louis and the new logistics park at Elwood. To make the entire 284-mile route work as a high-speed passenger railroad will require improvements on the 38-mile Joliet-Chicago segment. How will that be accomplished, and who will pay for it?

Now that the Canadian National has acquired the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern to get its freight trains around Chicago, its Chicago-Joliet portion of the old Alton Route will be left with little freight activity. Passenger trains will well outnumber freight trains as the number of daily Amtrak round trips sponsored by IDOT rises from four to eight and Metra expands its operation beyond today's three weekday-only round trips. Amtrak's Texas Eagle adds a ninth daily Chicago-St. Louis round trip, making Chicago-Joliet almost an entirely passenger corridor.

Would it not be best if this trackage (from south of Union Station to Joliet) were placed in the public domain? Who might own it: Metra, Amtrak, IDOT? If it were publicly owned, would it not be easier to secure both private and public funds for its upgrading? Improvements made to private railroads with tax-exempt financing are difficult to collateralize, while public funds like those available from the Federal Transit Administration for infrastructure improvements and expansions are easily applied to properties already in public ownership. Would it not be logical for a single railroad—say, the UP—to manage the entire corridor, under contract for the public entity that would own Chicago-Joliet, so that the entire corridor has single dispatching, management and maintenance all the way from Chicago to St. Louis and on to Kansas City?

CREATE

Even if Illinois receives its TIGER Fund grant request of $323 million from the Secretary's $1.5-billion special-project fund, together with the $150 million in the Illinois capital bill, and with the CN no longer needing the full buildout of the Central Corridor due to its acquisition of the EJ&E, the expanded price tag for a full buildout of CREATE (the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program)—one that builds the necessary flyovers and other projects needed for an unimpeded Chicago-Joliet commuter and intercity passenger rail corridor—is well beyond the current availability of public funds. It will likely require substantial private-sector financing for completion.

For full implementation of both passenger and freight upgrades, additional capital in substantial amounts will be required for intercity and commuter rolling stock, stations and platforms, servicing and maintenance facilities.

For the big picture of transportation capital needs, the December 2007 report of the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission identified as much as $286 billion in capital investment needed through 2020 for passenger and freight rail, transit and highway spending. The "gap" between the capital required and projected sustainable revenue is as much as $200 billion. To pay for that "gap" out of the Motor Fuel Tax would require $1.02 per gallon additional tax (in constant 2007 dollars). But in a spending (and potential taxing) frenzy of late, there has been no public discussion of raising the gas tax. So it is unlikely that this will be a "magic bullet" to fund all transportation capital needs.

So, multiple sources of funding and investment will likely be required. In addition to stimulus grants, some of the options include:

1. Tax-exempt municipal financing

Has been used effectively for passenger rail rolling stock acquisition. Allows for long-term (25-year) financing, creative lease structuring (backloaded/skipped payments, etc.) Could be used for infrastructure owned by the lessee/borrower. Could be secured by creating and using a dedicated revenue stream of surcharges collected from end users.

2. RRIF Financing

Low-interest, long-term financing from Uncle Sam for infrastructure, facilities and rolling stock. Available to both government entities and railroads.

3. Recovery Zone Facility Bonds and *Recovery Zone Economic Development Bonds*

Permits state and local governments to issue bonds to finance certain depreciable property and economic development.

4. Build America Bonds

These are taxable securities that states and municipalities can sell, that pay 1 percentage point more in interest that corporate debt on average. The federal government pays borrowers 35 percent of the interest cost if they issue taxable debt for capital; projects. This dampens the appeal of tax-exempt financing as it represents cheaper money.

Regardless of which mechanisms are used, the entry of the federal government into the financing of passenger-rail infrastructure is a watershed event that will not just change—but will recalibrate and rebalance the American surface-transportation system for good. It's not just that American travel and shipping habits will change. Even more important, the

(Continued on page 10)

Change Must Come to Transit Spending

(Continued from page 9)

way we raise, spend and account for our transportation dollars is going to change.

And that's good. Because we need to change the way we've been spending our transportation dollars.

The idea of a public-private partnership in which the "private" partners are U.S. railroads offers Americans an unprecedented opportunity to make carefully targeted, cost-effective additions to both their mobility as travelers and their logistical efficiency as shippers.

Let me explain what I mean by "unprecedented," and particularly what I mean by "cost-effective."

About 18 months ago—in March 2008—the Texas Department of Transportation committed an embarrassing faux pas when it briefly published on its Web site a document that most taxpayers had never seen and which most taxpayers are never supposed to see. It was a short paper—less than two pages—titled, "Do Roads Pay for Themselves?"

TxDOT didn't really want to issue this document. It had to, because its highway-maintenance costs were running wild and the governor wanted to shift over to a toll-road system. Toll roads are wildly unpopular, and TxDOT understood that motorists would never accept tolling unless the state disclosed to them what roads really cost, how little of that cost is actually covered by the Motor Fuel Tax, and how much of the state's highway expenses were actually coming from taxpayer subsidies.

So TxDOT let the cat out of the bag. It opened with a startling admission that "Until recently, when TxDOT built or expanded a road, no methodology existed to determine the extent to which this work would be paid off through revenues."

The paper then explained that to fill this information gap, TxDOT had developed an Asset Value Index that would enable state highway planners to understand how much of a road's lifetime expenses would be paid for by the gas taxes.

To their shock, the TxDOT people found that the gas taxes came nowhere near paying the costs of any the state's highways.

Let me quote again: "For example, in Houston, the 15 miles of State Highway 99 from I-10 to U.S. 290 will cost $1 billion to build and maintain over its lifetime, while only generating $162 million in gas taxes." Quoting further: "That gives a tax-gap ratio of .16, which means the real gas tax rate people would need to pay on this segment of road to completely pay for it would be $2.22 per gallon."

You can understand why TxDOT shortly afterward took this document down from its Web site and failed to respond when my office asked for a copy of it. Eventually, we were able to get it from a rail advocate who had saved it when it first briefly appeared.

Now, I bring this embarrassing disclosure up in order to demonstrate something that so far seems to have gone unappreciated: Because most of the ARRA money for passenger-rail infrastructure improvements is going to end up as assets owned by the railroads, it is going to be accounted for with a stringency and credibility that has never existed in our government-financed highway system.

Because railroads in the U.S. are a private business and must disclose to their shareholders as well to government the capital and operating revenues they dedicate to infrastructure, concealment of costs such as that disclosed in the Texas highway program will be impossible.

That means that a passenger-railroad project built on the property of a freight railroad will be unable to attain the subsidy levels we have permitted to exist in our road-financing system. No railroad would ever tolerate a .16 return on its infrastructure investment. In fact, during the 1960s the railroads closed or abandoned thousands of miles of infrastructure strictly because they could not earn back their costs.

So what government investment in privately owned railroads really means is that for the first time in history, American travelers and taxpayers are going to get honest accounting of their travel costs.

Government will, of course, continue to subsidize the capital and operating costs of passenger trains, and those contributions will rise as the system expands and ridership grows.

But because of the transparency inherent in railroad accounting, the excesses we have permitted in our highway accounting and financing are unlikely—I would say "very unlikely"—to develop in rail. It will be very difficult for public officials to fool the taxpayers about the cost of their railroad transportation.

This transparency, and its utility as a cost-control tool, is an attribute of public-private partnerships that has seldom been mentioned but may prove to be the most important part of the whole concept.

I believe that transparency will give U.S. travelers something they have had very little of since the dawn of the highway age: honest transportation pricing in a government-financed product. I think the American people are going to welcome this new way of financing mobility, and I believe they're going to reward it with their patronage.

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

New York Plans Rail Upgrades

State Hopes High Speed Rail Funding via FRA Will Finance New Tracks Through Albany, New Stations for Niagara Falls, Schenectady

By Gary Prophet

New York State is planning for many rail upgrades, hopefully to be funded by the FRA under the $8-billion Stimulus funds for High Speed Rail. Of most importance are projects to build another track through the Albany-Rensselaer Station and to build a second track between the Albany-Rensselaer and Schenectady stations.

Portions of a third track along the CSX right-of-way between Utica and Buffalo are also planned, which would reduce delays with freight trains and would allow passenger trains to operate at speeds of 110 mph. Additional crossovers and some signal improvements on CSX across New York State would also improve passenger rail service with the goal of four hours' Albany-Buffalo travel time.

Other track and signal improvements between Poughkeepsie and Albany could reduce Albany-New York City travel time to two hours. Track and signal improvements along the Buffalo to Niagara Falls segment would eliminate many slow orders and result in 60- to 70-mph speeds over this slow, 23-mile rail segment.

Station replacements are envisioned at Niagara Falls, NY and at Schenectady. Amtrak may also move its Manhattan station across the street to the historic Farley Post Office building, but it would still be interconnected with the existing Penn Station, as the same tracks/platforms would be used as are used today.

Gary Prophet is Vice President of the Empire State Passengers Association and a RUN board member.

LIRR Celebrates 175th Anniversary With Special Excursion Train

By David Peter Alan

The Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) celebrated its 175th anniversary with a special excursion train to Greenport on July 25. In a move that harkened back to the "golden age" of railroading, the railroad ran a special train on its historic Main Line to Greenport. The train originated at Jamaica (passengers from Brooklyn and Penn Station, New York took connecting trains to get there), stopped for 90 minutes at the Railroad Museum of Long Island in Riverhead and proceeded to the end of the line at Greenport. Riders had almost five hours to enjoy the town, while the excursion train set parked there. Two-hundred-and-thirty-nine persons were on board for the trip, including rail fans, New York City residents and some railroad officials, all of whom wanted to enjoy a trip that was different.

The LIRR is the oldest American railroad still operating under its original name. It was chartered on April 24, 1834, and it reached Greenport 10 years later. During the 1840s, it was part of a new "fast" route to Boston, which required eight hours of travel time. Travelers would take a ferry from Manhattan to Brooklyn (then an independent city) and catch the train to Greenport. There they would connect with a steamer to Stonington (the easternmost town in Connecticut) and make the last leg of the trip on a part of the line currently used by Amtrak. The same trip can be made today by taking a local bus from Greenport to Orient Point and the ferry to New London. Making all connections, the trip still takes about eight hours. The route was rendered obsolete when the Shore Line Route (used by Amtrak trains today) was completed in 1850.

Everyone on the train had about five hours to explore Greenport and enjoy the historic houses and commercial buildings in the downtown area. The town also features the other location of the Railroad Museum of Long Island, a maritime museum, a history museum, a miniature railroad, a ferry to nearby Shelter Island, several well-known seafood restaurants and several other attractions.

The trip was a success and railroad managers and riders alike were pleased with their special day. Michael Charles, Media Relations Manager for the railroad said: "People were friendly and they enjoyed themselves. We had a nice, full day and the weather cooperated." He was also pleased with the turnout for the railroad's special train. Members of the LI Sunrise Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society acted as guides for the trip. One of them, Samuel Berliner III, said he was looking forward to another special excursion to celebrate the railroad's 200th anniversary in 2034. "I'll be 101 then, and I expect to be on board for it," he said.

David Peter Alan is Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition and a RUN board member.

From the RUN Board of Directors

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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.

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Please become a member of RUN...

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

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

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

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

Please register me/us as a member of RUN today

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