

SoCAL RAIL TRANSIT: DYNAMIC AND GROWING

By Dana Gabbard

Not so many years ago, Los Angeles and environs had no urban rail and only a few Amtrak trains running out of Union Station. Today the picture of rail in our region is dynamic and growing. Here is a snapshot of a moving target:

The voters in Los Angeles County in November 2008 approved Measure R, a 0.5% sales tax dedicated to transportation improvement with the promise of it facilitating rail extensions a key component of the winning campaign. In the past year, advocates under the leadership of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa through the Move L.A. Coalition have been

exploring how to accelerate the pace at which the rail projects R funds are constructed (this effort is known as “30 in 10,” based on the notion of doing in 10 years what had been planned to take 30 under conventional pay-as-you-go funding) via an infrastructure bank. The idea had long been discussed in policy circles but is now the object of newfound expanding interest, given the current limitations of infrastructure funding at the federal level.

It is hoped that after the mid-term Congressional elections, Congress will give serious consideration to providing seed funding for this sort of new way of facilitating transportation capital projects. In the interim, advocates in our region work

to build community buy-in and consensus among elected officials. It is amazing to witness this, given the reputation Southern California has for fractious politics.

Meanwhile, the Exposition Light Rail project phase I continues construction. Delays due to NIMBYs and dis-coordination with local utilities means the project is about a year behind schedule. Current projections are that by mid-2011 it will reach La Cienega Boulevard from downtown L.A., linking USC, the Coliseum and South L.A. The following year, it will reach Culver City. Phase II, to begin construction soon, will extend the line through West L.A. to
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DOOMSDAY IN NEW YORK: WEEK ONE

By Andrew Albert

June 27, 2010 has come and gone, and the “doomsday” service cuts on the New York City bus & subway system have taken place. Using the transit system has become more difficult, and certainly more time-consuming. Many folks awakened on June 27th to find their buses no longer running, or the span of service changed, so that buses start later, and end earlier. Some late-night buses as well as weekend service have been discontinued. Two major subway lines—the V and the

W—are now gone, with the Q taking up the W’s slack on the Astoria branch, and the M taking over the V’s route along Queens Blvd. However, where the M used to go along the West End (D) line in Brooklyn during rush hours, it no longer does.

Broad Street station was once a place where you could get a train from the Financial District to Brooklyn in EITHER direction: northbound would take you over the Williamsburg Bridge to Brooklyn and, depending on which train you were using, to Williamsburg,

Bed-Stuy, Bushwick, East New York, and on to Jamaica, or up to Middle Village & Ridgewood via the Myrtle Avenue M route. Now, Broad Street has become a stub-end terminal for the J & Z lines. Northbound service only is available, with the reduction and re-routing of the M line.

So, how did New Yorkers take the loss of over 35 bus routes and two subway lines? Not very well, I’m afraid. Newspapers and TV stations interviewed riders all over the city, and many did not even know of the service cuts!
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FROM ALBUQUERQUE AND BEYOND

Rails Inc. Works for Local, Regional, National Networks



By J.W. Madison

I'm writing this on behalf of Rails Inc. We are an all-volunteer non-profit (501-c-3) based in Albuquerque, NM. Our modest goal is the restoration of passenger rail, in all its modern forms, to its former dominance in American land transportation. We have existed since 1998. We are not policy people or planners. In our view, the struggle for passenger Rail in New Mexico was in need of a group of "regular" citizens with no political or transportation careers to worry about.

We played a role somewhere between major and minor in bringing about the existence of our commuter rail service, the NM Rail Runner Express (www.nmrailrunner.com). The Rail Runner commenced revenue service in July 2006, as a service of the Mid Region Council Of Governments (MRCOG), and operated by Herzog Transit Services. For about two years, the train ran the Belen/Albuquerque/Bernalillo corridor before being extended to Santa Fe in 2008.

The Rail Runner is well run—clean, on-time, safe and staffed with smart, courteous people. In 2009, a transportation tax to fund the Rail Runner and connecting bus services was passed by a comfortable majority of regional voters. Nothing good is completely safe, especially in our beautiful-but-backward state, but we're pretty sure the Rail Runner will be with us for a long time. To us it's just a beginning.

Rails Inc is now working on three fronts in the passenger rail struggle:

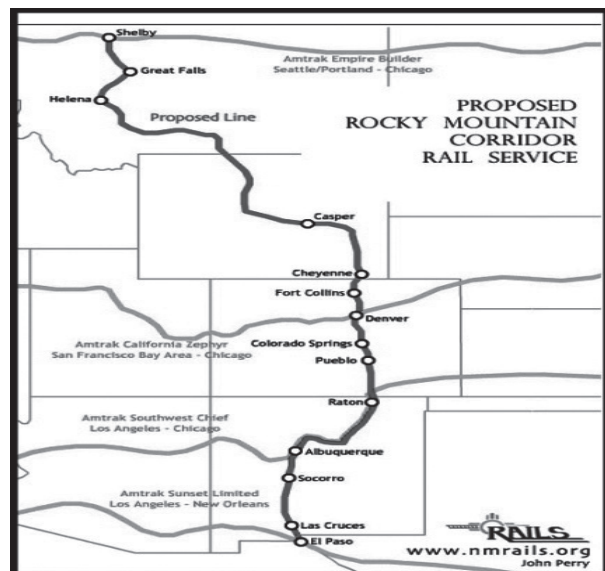
1) Our national rail network, or lack of one: Although we applaud the recent turnaround in passenger rail thinking at the federal level, and although we are as in love with sleek super-fast trains (and urban Mag-Lev) as anyone, we think our nation needs to add something simpler and less romantic to the rail agenda: namely, an actual passenger rail network—a network that doesn't really exist until our passenger trains can reach every principal destination our cars can.

There are too many city-pairs and city-groups in America that don't have passenger rail service any more, or even decent trackage to support it. The example closest to our own hearts is El Paso/Albuquerque/Denver, but there are lots of other blank spaces on the map.

We believe that, if our rails go everywhere our major highways go, even at modest Interstate-level speeds and with minimal interference from freight trains, we could implement (in relatively short order) a rail service very attractive to the general public, and build up from there. Look at how Amtrak's ridership has been climbing, despite Amtrak's considerable deficiencies.

2) Rocky Mountain Rail: We're trying to promote what we call the Rocky Mountain Flyer (RMF), an Amtrak (or similar) service connecting El Paso, Albuquerque, Denver and later, points in Wyoming and Montana. The RMF would connect Amtrak's four major East-West corridors west of the Mississippi and fill a gaping hole in our national Rail map. We think of it as a Rail I-25.

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NTSB SLAMS WMATA'S SAFETY RECORD

By Jack Corbett

The National Transportation Safety Board on July 27 issued a scathing report on safety practices at Washington, DC's Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), commenting that the collision of two Metrorail trains last June, with nine deaths and 52 injuries, could have been anticipated.

Citing known track circuit problems and a poor safety culture throughout the transit agency, NTSB Chair Deborah A.P. Hersman said, "Metro was on a collision course long before this accident. The only question was when Metro would have another accident—and of what magnitude."

NTSB maintained that safety had not been a priority for Metro's senior management and Board of Directors. "It's almost like we are talking with someone who is tone-deaf. They are not hearing it, they are not getting it and they are not addressing the problems," said Hersman. She was addressing, among other issues, NTSB's recommendation after an earlier crash that Metro's oldest (1000 series) railcars should be replaced or retrofitted because they collapsed easily upon impact.

WMATA has had too little capital funding capacity in recent years to

order and pay for new cars. However, in anticipation of the harsh NTSB findings, the WMATA Board just placed an order for new (7000 series) rail cars, which won't be ready to enter revenue service until much later in the decade. To provide extra funds, House and Senate Appropriations Committees for a second year just agreed to make available \$150 million in Federal funds for new Metro cars and buses as early as this October, provided the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia provide matching funds.

Other Transit Systems Have Large Unmet Funding Needs

WMATA's capital funding needs are not unique. DOT's Federal Transit Administration (FTA) recently released a report concluding that the 36 largest transit systems in the United States needed \$77 billion to achieve a "state of good repair" for their aging rail and bus systems, plus another \$14.4 billion annually to maintain the systems. While most of that backlog can be attributed to rail, more than 40% of the nation's buses are also in poor to marginal condition.

NTSB also recommended that Congress enact DOT Secretary LaHood's pending legislation to authorize FTA to regulate

transit rail safety, similar to existing safety regulatory authority over air safety and railroads. That legislation, just approved by a Senate committee, would also require transit agencies to establish safety plans and would increase spending for public transit safety. Unfortunately, the U.S. House of Representatives probably won't pass similar legislation until next year, as part of a multi-year Surface Transportation Reauthorization package of highway and mass transit grants.

At the local level, WMATA's Board of Directors had substantially increased rail and bus fares averaging about 18% starting July 1 to help make up a \$190 million annual operating budget gap. Polled Metroriders had favored higher fares rather than suffering the substantial cutbacks in rail and bus services that were being required at other major U.S. transit systems. Starting August 1, Metro is also implementing a new 20-cent surcharge during peak-of-the-peak weekday travel hours. In addition to generating revenue, the surcharge is intended to encourage customers to ride during less crowded time, alleviating congestion during the peak periods.

Jack Corbett is cofounder of MetroRiders.Org. He can be contacted via e-mail at jack.corbett@metroriders.org

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 |
| Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair | New York, NY | New York City Transit Riders Council |
| Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary | Philadelphia, PA | Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation |
| Gary Prophet, Treasurer | Ossining, NY | Vice President, Empire State Passengers Association |
| David Peter Alan, Esq. | South Orange, NJ | Lackawanna Coalition |
| Steve Albro | Cleveland, OH | Greater Cleveland RTA Citizens Advisory Board |
| Pamela Bush | Boston, MA | T-Riders Oversight Committee (MBTA) |
| Phil Copeland | Elyria, OH | NARP Council of Representatives |
| Joshua Coran | Seattle, WA | Talgo U.S. |
| John (Jack) Corbett, Esq. | Washington, DC | MetroRiders.org |
| James E. Coston, Esq. | Chicago, IL | Corridor Capital LLC |
| Bill Engel | Clinton, OH | Ohio Rail Tourism Association |
| Steve Hastalis | Chicago, IL | Chicago Transit Authority |

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

THREE MILLION LOST PASSENGERS!

By *Richard Rudolph*
Chair, Rail Users' Network

A recent news release which crossed my desk concerning "BoltBus Rockets to Three Million Passengers" provided the impetus for this article concerning Amtrak's Northeast Regional Service. Bolt Bus, a subsidiary of Greyhound Lines, has carried over three million passengers since it was first launched in March 2008. Its success can be attributed to the low one-way fares offered as well as the amenities provided on board including extra legroom, power outlets and free Wi-Fi service. BoltBus currently provides express service from New York to Boston, Cherry Hill, NJ; Greenbelt Park & Ride, MD; Philadelphia; and Washington, DC.

At least five other carriers are providing similar service on the Boston to New York route each offering 18 or more daily round trips with extra service on Friday, Saturday and Sunday with \$15 fares each way. Limoliner also travels this route providing business travelers door-to-door service from the Hilton Hotel in Boston's Back Bay to the Hilton in New York City for \$79 each way. Amenities include power outlets, wireless Internet, newly released DVDs on every trip and an on-board attendant.

While there has been a remarkable increase in bus ridership along the northeast corridor, the latest figures available from Amtrak for the period between April and June 2010 show an increase of only 3.3% in regional ridership compared to the same period last fiscal year. High unemployment and the recession continue to impact the travel market, and in fact may explain why bus travel is growing at a much faster rate, given the much lower fares. I'm still suffering from ticket shock from a recent trip taken from Boston to New York. Even with the 15% senior discount, my companion and I were each billed \$149.50 for a round-trip ticket.

To be sure, Amtrak will never be able to compete on price given the infrastructure that needs to be maintained and updated,

but it does need to offer reasonable fares. To its credit, it now offers a discount of up to 25% on tickets booked 14 days in advance. But few can take advantage of this offer.

Amtrak needs to lower its regular fares if it wants to hold onto and increase its market share in the Northeast Corridor. It should also market the service to first time travelers, i.e. vacationers, students, retirees and others who may have never experienced the Rhode Island and Connecticut coastlines. The views from the train are priceless, especially crossing the Thames and Connecticut rivers and viewing shoreline communities as the train heads south to New Haven and Bridgeport, CT. A member of the train crew or volunteer could describe some of the major sights along the right-of-way. At the very least, there should be brochures available on the train describing some of these sights.

WHERE ARE THE ADVOCACY GROUPS?

By *Chuck Bode*

One of the principal goals underlying the formation of the Rail Users' Network was a concept to link the numerous advisory and advocacy organizations in the rail transportation field. Through sharing of information and best practice, and through joint efforts when applicable, the entire movement would gain strength, thereby strengthening all of the individual organizations.

This goal has proven to be exceedingly hard to achieve. The first difficulty is locating the organizations. Typically they have a local focus, small size, and limited visibility outside their immediate vicinity. With years of effort we have identified slightly over 200 organizations, many only by name without even basic contact information. Significantly, less than half of the organizations located to date are in North America.

We are convinced that there are many more organizations active in passenger rail advisory and advocacy work. We suspect that our members, and other newsletter readers, know of active groups. Perhaps you are even a member of some of them. We

Amtrak also needs to provide free Wi-Fi service if it wants to attract more of the student market, and provide porters who would walk through the coaches picking up trash and cleaning bathrooms between Stamford and Philadelphia. These changes could go a long way toward enhancing the value of the service and could lead to additional growth and justify ordering additional equipment to satisfy demand.

Finally, Amtrak should restore the overnight Twilight Shoreliner that provided sleeping car service to and from Washington, DC. Now that Amtrak is finally implementing the first step in its long-term fleet plan with the purchase of 130 new single-level rail cars to support its long-distance train service including the purchase of 25 sleepers, there is hope that this overnight service will be restored.

are thus requesting your help to update our list of advisory and advocacy organizations.

Please take a few minutes to let RUN know about the organizations with which you are familiar. It would be helpful to have the official name of the organization and its "short" name, whether they are an independent advocacy group or an official advisory group, their mailing address, their telephone and fax numbers, their e-mail address, their website address, and the names, titles, and contact information for the officers. The information can be sent to RUN at 55 River Road, Steep Falls, ME 04085 or e-mailed to rrudolph@fairpoint.net.

The current administration in Washington offers the most hope in years for improving and expanding passenger rail service on all levels from local light rail, through rapid transit and regional commuter service, to high speed intercity lines. With your help we can grow the movement to take advantage of the opportunity while it exists. Thanks for your help.

Chuck Bode is Membership Secretary of RUN.

RUN HOLDS SUCCESSFUL TOLEDO MEETING

By *Bill Engel*

On Friday, April 23, 2010 RUN Board members gathered in Toledo, OH. They had been invited by longtime RUN member Bill Gill to attend a meeting of the TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee, which he chairs. The acronym TMACOG stands for Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments. It is the MPO for the greater Toledo area of northwestern Ohio and nearby points in southeastern Michigan.

The meeting was held in a conference room at the TMACOG headquarters. This was a very convenient location in the old Central Union Terminal building. TMACOG offices are upstairs in the building above the Amtrak Toledo station. Several board members were able to use Amtrak to travel to the meeting. Amtrak graciously stored their baggage for them while they went out for breakfast after the arrival of train #49/449.

The meeting was started promptly at 10 a.m. by Chairman Gill. All present introduced themselves. In addition to the seven RUN board members present, there was an Amtrak representative from Chicago.

The committee went through their regular business, which included final planning for their National Train Day event on May 1. Let me digress to tell a little about National Train Day. Although the official Amtrak National Train Day was not until

May 8, the event in Toledo was scheduled for May 1. That event included Amtrak equipment displays, table top exhibits by rail advocates and rail safety promoters such as All Aboard Ohio and Operation Lifesaver, musical entertainment and much more. An event like this tied to Amtrak National Train day is a great way to get info out to the public about passenger rail! (See related article on page 6.)

RUN was asked to make a presentation about who we are and what we hope to accomplish. Richard Rudolph made the main presentation. Other RUN members present added their own comments following up Richard's remarks.

The Amtrak representative, Derrick James, made a brief presentation about matters concerning Ohio. He announced that checked baggage service would be returning to the *Cardinal*. An improved on-board ticketing system is being tested which will allow the Conductor to update the seat inventory for the train in Arrow. Service improvement studies are being made or will be made for both the *Cardinal* and *Capitol Limited*. He also commented on the strong ridership that Amtrak is experiencing this fiscal year, which started Oct. 1, 2009.

When the meeting adjourned at noon, most in attendance carpooled to a nearby restaurant on the east bank of the Maumee River to enjoy lunch. Good conversation was had as we all got to know one another a little better. There seemed to be

much interest on the part of the Toledo committee in becoming active with RUN.

After lunch, we had a special treat. Bill Gill had made arrangements for a private tour of the *S.S. Willis B. Boyer*. Billed as once being the world's largest bulk freighter, this Great Lakes ship is now a floating museum moored on the bank of the Maumee River. Museum volunteers, many of whom had been sailors on the Great Lakes, gave us a comprehensive tour of the vessel. The beautiful sunny spring day made the tour even more enjoyable especially on the open deck parts of the ship.

Following the ship visit a car pool tour of some significant rail facilities in the Toledo area was planned followed by dinner at a well known Toledo restaurant. RUN board members would then wait at the Amtrak station to return home. Unfortunately, this reporter could not stay for those events. RUN Board members attending the Toledo meeting were Andrew Albert, Steve Albro, David Peter Alan, Phil Copeland, Bill Engel, Steve Hastalis and Richard Rudolph.

In this day of impersonal instant electronic communication, it is easy to lose sight of the importance of face-to-face personal relationships. I believe that is the main value of meetings like this one in Toledo. We all gain when we can see what other advocacy groups are doing.

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

RUN Board Meetings for the balance of 2010 are scheduled as follows: Saturday, August 21 and Saturday, Oct. 23. 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.

TOLEDO TRAIN DAY DRAWS BIG CROWD



By Bill Gill

An estimated 4,500-plus residents of northwest Ohio and southeast Michigan made their way to the Toledo Amtrak facility in May to be a part of the festivities in observance of National Train Day. According to an Amtrak spokesman, the attendance rivaled that of Chicago.

The Rail Users Network was an integral part of the exhibition area featuring “rail advocacy” groups. Newsletters and membership folders were among the handouts made available through the efforts of Richard Rudolph.

RUN was joined by other invited organizations including the National Association of Railroad Passengers, the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, the Northwest Ohio Passenger Rail Association, All Aboard Ohio, the Ohio Department of Transportation, the Ohio Rail Development Commission, Operation Lifesaver, Norfolk Southern, CSX, Toledo, Lake Erie & Western RR, the Ohio Higher Education Rail Network and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen.

History and rail history groups helped tell the story of the railroad heritage both nationally and regionally. And, helping to make it a family-oriented event, there were

railroad model layouts spanning all gauges. A “Thomas” play area was popular, as was a children’s train ride, clowns, balloons, etc.

An opening ceremony gave visitors a chance to hear some very positive remarks on the possibilities of more and better choices for us in rail transportation. Among those we were honored to hear were Rep. Marcy Kaptur, ODOT Director Jolene Molitoris, state legislators, the mayor of Toledo, leaders of the Port Authority and Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments. Amtrak representative Ray Lan reported on plans regarding service through northern Ohio.

Amtrak, spearheading this kickoff of activities around the country, provided tickets for a drawing and, by far the most popular exhibit, a Superliner Coach, a Lounge Car and, of course, a locomotive. A scaffolding was erected, enabling hundreds of fascinated people the chance to take a look inside one of these modern iron horses. Local bands performed throughout the day; four different food vendors prevented anyone from dying of hunger or thirst.

The National Train Day Toledo photo gallery is now posted on the TMACOG website: www.flickr.com/photos/tmacog/sets/72157624100099826/show/. Plans are already under way for an even more colorful and innovative National Train Day for 2011.

Bill Gill is chair of the TMACOG Passenger Rail Committee in Toledo, OH.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

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

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

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

SPENDING APPROVED FOR 3-C CORRIDOR PLANNING

By *Bill Engel*

The long sought goal of passenger rail advocates and planners to resume rail service connecting Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati – the “3-C” corridor - moved another step closer to reality on April 19, 2010. On that day the State Controlling Board approved spending \$25 million of the \$400-million federal grant for the service. The money will be used for further environmental studies and detailed design work on the project.

For readers outside of Ohio, a brief explanation is in order. After the Ohio budget is passed in the legislature spending authority for budgeted items must be passed by the State Controlling Board. The board has seven appointed members. A president is appointed by the governor (currently Democrat Ted Strickland). Three members each are appointed by leadership of the Ohio Senate and the Ohio House of Representatives, for a total of seven members. Since Republicans control the Ohio Senate and Democrats the Ohio House, the controlling board

membership is four Democrats and three Republicans. Most State Controlling Board actions require a simple majority vote.

Approval of the planning monies was not without controversy. In budgeting the \$400 million Federal grant a provision was included requiring a “super-majority” of at least five members of the State Controlling Board to approve actual construction.

3-C supporters argued that further studies did not constitute construction and could be approved by a simple majority of the Board. Skeptics argued that any 3-C spending required at least five votes for approval. A 4-3 vote to approve further studies won the day.

The real battle will come later this year or in early 2011 when the design and study work is complete. That battle will be to convince skeptics in the Ohio legislature and at least five members of the State Controlling Board that 3-C is indeed a worthwhile project. How that battle will turn out is a tough call at this point in time.

Just as this article was being written, the Cleveland *Plain-Dealer* newspaper published a brief article on June 23 describing plans for a new intermodal transportation center for Cleveland. The facility would be north of the existing civic center and south of the Shoreway expressway. It would have an Amtrak station and include access to Cleveland RTA's waterfront line. Plans include access to a planned new medical mart and convention center. 3-C corridor trains would use the facility as well as any new train services to Youngstown and Pittsburgh or Erie and Buffalo on the east, and Toledo or Chicago on the west. This is exciting news, since visitors to the medical mart could be a source of riders for 3-C trains.

To keep up with passenger rail developments in Ohio, please visit [www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Rail/Programs/Passenger/3C is ME](http://www.dot.state.oh.us/Divisions/Rail/Programs/Passenger/3C%20is%20ME) on the web.

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

SO CAL'S RAIL TRANSIT SYSTEM: DYNAMIC AND GROWING

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Santa Monica, and is projected to be completed in 2015. A branch line linking Expo, LAX and the Green Line along Crenshaw is currently entering the design stage, although the pace of construction is predicated on 30 in 10 proving out.

On June 26, phase I of the Gold Line Foothill extension had a groundbreaking. This will extend the light rail line east from Pasadena to Azusa, and may be completed by 2013, according to the Construction Authority overseeing it.

Meetings are ongoing for preparing the Wilshire subway extension and downtown light rail regional connector projects to compete for federal funding. The two proposals have the projected ridership that promises their being strong competitors in securing New Starts

funding once reauthorization is sorted out (next year?). The buzz for a branch subway line through West Hollywood is dimming given weak projected ridership. In its place some contemplate the aforementioned Crenshaw light rail line being extended northward to the Hollywood area and perhaps even beyond (although that would not even be remotely in the cards for at least 15-20 years or even later).

Meanwhile the Metrolink regional service is in the midst of a round of service cuts and fare increases but so far seems to have weathered this relatively intact. As of this month Metrolink has resumed having Amtrak operate its service, replacing contractor Veolia in the aftermath of the tragic 2008 Chatsworth crash.

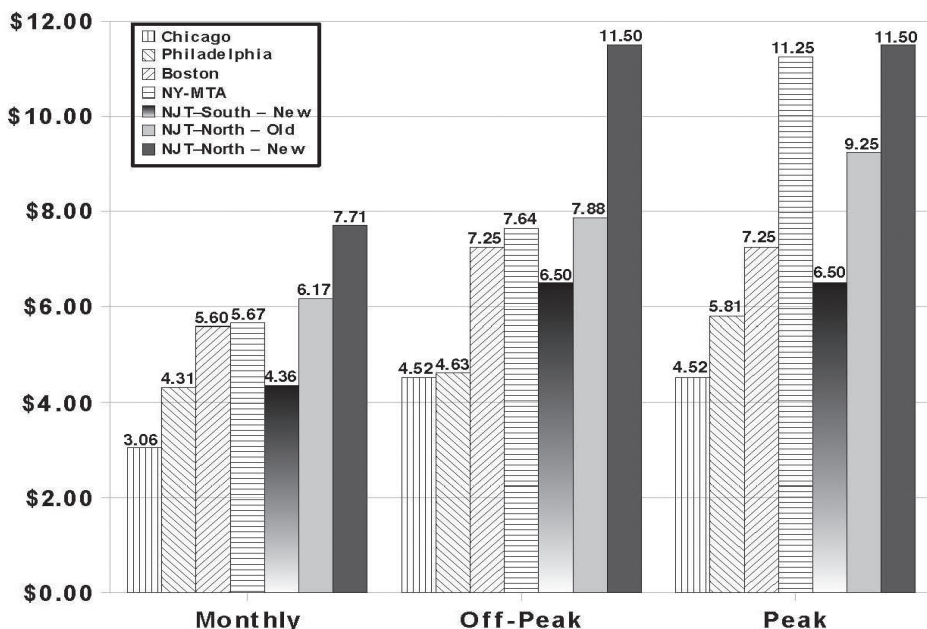
San Diego continues studies for a proposed Mid-Coast extension of the

Trolley connecting Old Town and the University of California - San Diego. In North San Diego County, the Sprinter service linking Escondido and Oceanside with Diesel Mobile Units has had modest success since starting operation in 2008. The Coast Rail Coordinating Council continues to pursue resurrecting the historic Coast Daylight service between Los Angeles and San Francisco but is impeded by funding challenges plus slow progress in enacting a cooperative agreement with Union Pacific to access its trackage in the mid-section. I'm amazed to learn the Pacific Surfliner (formerly known as the San Diegan) is already celebrating its 10th anniversary. And by all reports ridership (especially between L.A. and San Diego) is often resulting in standing-room-only loads. Amazing!

Dana Gabbard is Corresponding Secretary of Southern California Transit Advocates.

NEW JERSEY TRANSIT NOW HAS NATION'S HIGHEST COMMUTER RAIL FARES

Cost Per One-Way 30-Mile Trip - Selected Commuter Rail Operators
 Source: Operator Websites 5/1/10; Commonly Used Fares
 Compiled by Lackawanna Coalition



By David Peter Alan

New Jersey Transit implemented the largest fare increase in its 31-year history on May 1. Most fares went up by 25%, although local bus fares increased by only 11%, from \$1.35 to \$1.50 for one zone. Riders who take trains outside of peak commuting hours (mid-day evenings on weekdays, or on week-ends) will suffer the most. Their fares increased by an average of 47%, and some local fares went up by 64%.

The fare increase is part of an effort to fill an anticipated budget gap at NJT, a situation that was exacerbated when Gov. Christopher Christie cut the transit agency's budget by \$32.7 million, effective in May, 2010. There were also service cuts, but most of those were not severe (there were some severe cuts to light rail service in Newark, Jersey City and Hoboken on weekends). Many riders on the commuter rail lines, especially on the weekend, were shocked to find that

the amount of money that previously would have bought three round-trip tickets would now buy only two. This writer and other rail advocates overheard weekend riders complaining about the new fares and saying that they would use their automobiles in the future. NJT claims that weekend ridership has not fallen off, but it is too soon to tell how many riders will stay away from the trains, rather than pay the new, significantly-higher fares.

Joseph M. Clift, former Director of Planning for the Long Island Rail Road and now a rider advocate, told the NJT Board of Directors that it costs \$20 less for two people to pay for gasoline, a bridge or tunnel toll and parking in Manhattan than to take the train. Lackawanna Coalition member John Bobsin compiled a bar chart comparing fares on NJT and all other major commuter rail operations, which is shown here.

NJT has now pulled ahead of New York's railroads (the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North) for "standard" one-way fares, and off-peak fares on NJT are now higher than on the other commuter railroads, by a large margin. NJT Executive Director James Weinstein said: "with the level of service we provide and the fares we charge, New Jersey Transit is still a bargain." The rider advocates disagree.

Riders and the advocates who represent them were especially concerned that only transit riders were required to pay more for mobility. Motorists and truckers who use the state's highways will not face any additional expense at the toll booth or the gasoline pump, despite the fact that the state's motor fuel user fee is the third lowest in the nation (14.5 cents per gallon for gasoline and 10.5 cents per gallon for diesel fuel) and has not increased since 1988. Opponents of the fare increase called this disparity "unfair" and "discriminatory"; a theme echoed by a few legislators. Gary Johnson, who advocates for better transit along with bicycle and pedestrian issues, called for an increase in the gasoline user fee to fund transit operations. He said that the cost to the average motorist was so low as to constitute "a drop in the gas tank."

Clift related his experience at the LIRR, when his marketing department found that a deeply-discounted off-peak fare induced new riders to take the train outside of peak commuting hours, which generated new revenue. Other riders were diverted from peak-hour to off-peak trains, which required less service at peak hours, when the cost of providing service is highest. According to Clift, this was an example where a deeply-discounted off-peak fare (one third lower than peak-hour rates) helped both the railroad and the

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DOOMSDAY IN NEW YORK: WEEK ONE

Massive Service Cuts Leave Many Commuters, Tourists at a Loss

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To be fair, there have been posters all over the system for almost two months, and the media have been reporting on the developments. Yet, some riders were blissfully unknowing of the new developments, and not at all happy with them, as to be expected. Many riders claimed their commutes would now take much more time, and in many cases, would require a change of buses and/or trains to get where they were going.

In a case of “no good deed goes unpunished,” transit workers had been changing signs and maps weeks in advance of the changes, so in many cases, signs showed trains that were not running yet! In a real insult to riders, bus stop signs had inserts on the guide-a-rides (four-cornered signs showing schedules and maps on stanchions at bus stops) that told bus riders that “beginning Sunday, June 27, 2010, this will no longer be a bus stop”! Of course, there weren’t any signs advising riders where they SHOULD go to catch a bus!

If all this was confusing for residents, imagine how befuddling it was for tourists! It’s a big, complicated system at ANY time, but this was the most service cuts in almost

35 years! For example, tourists waited on 49th and 50th streets on Sunday, June 27, for buses that would never come. That route now has no weekend service! The M6 bus, which ran from Central Park South to South Ferry, formerly along Broadway most of the route, but with the Dept. of Transportation’s re-design of Times Square, it was changed to a 7th Avenue, 23rd Street, Park Avenue South & THEN Broadway route, no longer runs. The M5 had its southern terminus of Houston Street extended to South Ferry, making the M5 one of the longest runs in Manhattan. Want to go from Washington Heights to South Ferry by bus? Take the M5, and pack a good lunch!

The B39, which ran across the Williamsburg Bridge from Brooklyn to the Lower East Side in Manhattan, has been eliminated. Similarly, the B51 from Downtown Brooklyn to the City Hall area, has been eliminated. The logic behind these two bus eliminations? The subways duplicate those routes. Just one problem: many stations aren’t accessible, where the buses were. To drive home this very point, a State Senator from Brooklyn, Marty Golden, has filed an A.D.A. lawsuit against the MTA, to force them to restore these two routes, as well as others.

So, where are we after week one of the worst service cuts to the NYC Transit System in decades? It appears that all the new maps have been installed on stations and in trains, but NOT all the signs have been changed in the stations. Thus we still have signs for trains that no longer run, as well as signs for the new M service, but with the old V destinations! On the bus side, it will take months for the signs to be changed, as this is a partnership of NYC Transit & the City Dept. of Transportation. So where many bus routes have been changed or eliminated, the signs for those continue to exist! Yes, it’s a big system, but other “big” systems seem able to make major service changes, and the signs are all changed THE DAY THEY OCCUR!

These deep service cuts are beginning to sink in with the voting public. The change from 100% of seated load to 125% of seated load in the off-peak and weekend hours, has subway trains much more crowded than usual, and riders are fuming. It is hoped they direct this anger to their state officials, as well as City Hall. I am beginning to wonder if it makes any sense for legislators in Upstate New York, and the suburban counties, to be the ones to determine how much service the City of

(Continued on page 10)

NJ TRANSIT’S COMMUTER RAIL FARES NOW THE HIGHEST IN THE NATION

(Continued from page 8)

riders. NJT Board member Kenneth E. Pringle expressed agreement with Clift’s idea about off-peak fares, but voted to eliminate them, anyway.

Rail advocates, including members of the Lackawanna Coalition, have expressed concern that the steep rise in off-peak rail fares will lead to the elimination of much of the current off-peak service. They point to 2005, when off-peak fares

increased sharply, compared to peak-hour and commutation fares. A large amount of weekend service on the Morris & Essex Line was eliminated in 2006, and more was cut in 2008. At the same time, nearly half of the weekday off-peak trains were eliminated. The Coalition is concerned that history will repeat itself, although NJT management has denied that there will be any more significant service cuts in the fiscal year that will end in June, 2011.

Rider representatives and some elected

leaders place the blame on Gov. Christie, who made a campaign promise not to raise the cost of highway use. Transit riders were not lucky enough to secure a similar promise. They now pay the highest commuter rail fares in the nation. At the same time, it appears that the Garden State is sending a clear message that, despite NJT’s slogan, the highway is THE WAY TO GO!

David Peter Alan is Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, which opposed the recent fare increases and service cuts.

FROM ALBUQUERQUE AND BEYOND

Rails Inc. Works for Local, Regional, National Networks

(Continued from page 2)

3) Rail transit for the Albuquerque metro area: The success and popularity of our regional Rail Runner Express has not brought this goal one bit closer. At least two of our previous Mayors and perhaps three (out of nine) of our present City Councilors have spoken in favor of adding Rail to our area transit, but it has gone nowhere.

Official efforts in this direction have focused on a Modern Streetcar line in the downtown area. This line was promoted primarily in connection with re-development of Downtown and nearby

neighborhoods; development that was already happening before the recession. Little attention was paid to all the Good Transportation benefits of urban rail or to

We believe we have to go to the entire public with a case for rail transit that people all over town can relate to.

easy expandability to other parts of town. This is why, in our opinion, this initiative is dead.

Rails Inc believes that we have to go to the entire Albuquerque-area public with a case

for rail transit that people all over town can relate to; thereby creating upward pressure on our anti-rail city leaders. We're designing a public education campaign in hopes that we can raise the money needed when the time comes.

So that's Rails Inc and what we're up to. We welcome contact, criticism and especially money and high praise. Our contact information is:

PO Box 4268,
Albuquerque, NM 87196
rails@nmrails.org.

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

DOOMSDAY COMES TO NEW YORK: WEEK ONE

(Continued from page 9)

New York should get. I'm all for regional transit systems, but when the most transit-dependent city in North America gets short-changed the way New Yorkers have just been, something has to give. Yes, we still have more service than any other place on this side of the Atlantic, but compared to what we HAD, it's going to be tough for many folks to remain on mass transit.

What has just happened in New York is the antithesis of being "green." We SAY

we want people not to drive, and to use mass transit, so that our cities can be more liveable, and our air quality and use of scarce natural resources can be lessened. Yet we have just given countless New Yorkers an excuse for firing up the old automobile, and driving to their destinations. Let's hope that all New Yorkers put an end to this madness, and vote out every State Legislator that took \$143 million away from the MTA, after it had already been appropriated to them! Some even had the temerity to then blast the MTA for slashing service! The New York *Daily News* wrote a very appropriate

editorial about those legislators, and NAMED them calling them "weasels"!

We'll keep you posted on how all this goes, and where we go from here. If all the people who have been inconvenienced by these service cuts votes this November, perhaps the new governor and new state legislators will set things right. New Yorkers shouldn't settle for anything less.

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

If you would prefer to receive the RUN Newsletter electronically,
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RAILROAD *POST OFFICE*



Amtrak Takes Composting Policy a Step Too Far

To the Rail Users' Network:

I thought you might like to know about Amtrak's composting policy. Who knew they serve the stuff for lunch!

Try the Vegetarian Specialty Sandwich offered as the vegetarian option to first-class passengers on the Boston section of the Lakeshore Limited and you'll know what I'm talking about. It's billed as a tantalizing combination of thinly sliced Granny Smith apples, brie, arugula, and mango chutney inside a hoagie roll, which my friend and I ordered enthusiastically. What arrived at our table were two anemic-looking sandwich rolls that were rock-hard, bone-dry and tasteless, the approximate temperature of an ice cream bar.

An investigation of the contents revealed paper-thin slices of something limp and brown with a dull green edge... the apple slice! There was more... it was green, slimy and possibly decomposing. Could it have been the arugula?? Ah, then we spotted a minuscule wedge of rubbery Brie, but the chutney had apparently gone missing. Two tentative bites and I knew that I just couldn't, and probably shouldn't, eat it.

Still hungry and hopeful, I ordered apple crumb pie. Naively, I was thinking "warm" apple pie. The first taste told the tale. The filling was a surprising, but not pleasing, mix of ice crystals and strangely crunchy yet over-cooked canned apples resting atop a soggy sheet of lardy crust. We then did what any disgruntled herbivores would do: I ordered a beer and he ordered a wine, vowing next time to not only pack our bags but also our lunch. While it was great that there was a gourmet-ish vegetarian choice, Amtrak needs to seriously upgrade their quality control if they want to maintain the aura of serving first-class meals to first-class customers.

Muriel Pierce

Somersworth, NH

Michigan's Rail Service is Sorely Lacking

To the Rail Users' Network:

I read with interest your literature, and am encouraged that an organization like RUN exists. As a train-loving Michigan resident, I wonder if you have many members from my state. Our rail service is sorely lacking—we in the Detroit metro area need to go to Chicago first to go to New England by train, or take two carriers in two different countries (Via Rail and Amtrak).

Thank you for your good works. I will be joining.

Karen Siersma-Rosenstein

Troy, MI

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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04085

RUN
RAIL
USERS'
NETWORK

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

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

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

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

Please register me/us as a member of RUN today

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

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

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