

RUN REGIONAL CONFERENCE KEEPS ADVOCATES CONNECTED

*By Richard Rudolph
Chair, Rail Users' Network*

From all accounts, the Rail Users' Network's third regional conference, held at APTA's headquarters, Friday, April 20, 2012 in Washington, DC, was a success. It afforded conference participants who came not only from the region, but also from the Northeast, Midwest and as far away as Seattle, an opportunity to learn what's happening in the Mid-Atlantic region between Philadelphia and Charlotte, NC and west to Charleston, WV and Pittsburgh. While the panelists focused largely on local projects and issues, the day's four featured speakers offered invaluable insights into what is happening on the national stage. The

conference also afforded participants an opportunity to explore how rail advisory and advocacy groups throughout the region and beyond can improve their practices to better represent rail passengers in a pro-active, coherent, and effective manner.

Kate Hallahan, a member of the House Appropriations Committee Staff, started the day by reporting that Congress had provided \$50 million in additional funding for transit, but cut out the High Speed Rail grant program this year. She also stated the TIGER grant program was alive and well and that the \$100 million program for High-Performance Passenger Rail would be used to improve existing rail corridors.

Art Guzzetti, APTA's Vice President for Policy, who is one of 36 million transit riders, expressed his appreciation for the work that transit advocates have been doing over the years. He reported that transit ridership is growing and outpaced both population and vehicle miles traveled last year for the first time since 1995. He noted that there were only nine commuter railroads in 1997, compared to 29 today. Only seven cities had streetcar service in 1997, while 36 have streetcars or light rail lines operating today. He also stated that Positive Train Control can't be done without a dedicated radio spectrum and this unfunded mandate may be deferred to 2018, if pending legislation is passed.

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LOS ANGELES SEES COMPLETION OF LIGHT RAIL PROJECT'S FIRST PHASE

By Dana Gabbard

On April 28, most of Phase 1 of the Exposition Light Rail Project opened, providing the first mass transit access to the jobs-rich Westside of Los Angeles County. This was to be followed on June 20 with the opening of two final stations completing this first stage of the project, extending it to Culver City. Costing \$932 million, the 8.6-mile light rail line in this initial phase has 12 stations

linking such destinations as the University of Southern California, the Exposition Park complex of museums and the Coliseum (where USC plays its football games), the mid-city area, Crenshaw District and Culver City.

The second phase of the project, a \$1.5 billion, 6.6-mile extension from Culver City to Santa Monica, will consist of seven stations and is likely to open in 2016. Meanwhile the

Crenshaw light rail project (an 8.5-mile line connecting the Expo Line and Green Line via LAX) is undergoing preliminary engineering. And the Gold Line Foothill Extension light rail project (an 11.5-mile extension of the Gold Line from the Sierra Madre Villa station in eastern Pasadena to Azusa) is now under construction.

Meanwhile, the two projects poised for federal funding (the Purple Line heavy rail extension

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CINCINNATI TROLLEY LINE BEGINS CONSTRUCTION...

By Bill Engel

Years ago, the “Queen City” of Cincinnati had an extensive trolley car network. When Cincinnati Union Terminal was built to consolidate passenger train operations, it had special platforms for city streetcars. There was even a stillborn subway that would have allowed interurban cars access to downtown. Remnants of this project are still visible if you know where to look. With the renewed interest nationwide in “light rail” transit (the modern term for trolleys), plans surfaced in the early 2000s for a \$128 million downtown circulator starter system for the city of Cincinnati. Opposition to the plan arose, of course, as is the case with any public endeavor.

A group known as COAST (Citizens Opposed to Additional Spending and Taxes) collected enough signatures to place an initiative on the ballot in 2009 that would have required a public referendum before any funds could be spent to develop the project. The public voted against this requirement, so streetcar planning was able to go forward. Not satisfied, COAST was able to place another issue on the ballot in 2011 that would have prevented even discussion by City Council of the streetcar until 2021. This issue was also defeated by the public, thus clearing the way for construction to begin.

Accordingly, a groundbreaking ceremony was held on Feb. 17, 2012 to officially begin construction of the Cincinnati Streetcar project. The initial phase of the work is relocating utilities such as sewer and power lines. When underground utility work is complete, track construction will begin. The target date for the start of track construction is fall 2012.

This “starter” project is to be an approximately 3.8-mile-long loop through downtown Cincinnati connecting the “Over-the Rhine” neighborhood with the Ohio riverfront area (referred to locally as “The Banks”) near Great American Ballpark, home of the Cincinnati Reds. Along the way it passes through the Central Business District. There are to be 18 stops, servicing such well-known Cincinnati landmarks as Fountain Square, Memorial Hall and Findlay Market.

As mentioned earlier, this project has endured much controversy. Now utility relocation is also proving to be an issue. An example is the distance that manhole covers should be located from the track. The local utility feels that eight feet is needed, but the city is OK with three to five feet. At issue is the question of who pays the added cost of the greater distance. If utility relocation is not seriously delayed and construction

remains on schedule, streetcars could be rolling in 2014.

As initial construction moves along, other tasks such as vehicle procurement must be handled. In April, an announcement was made that CAF-USA was to be vehicle supplier of choice.

Even though it will be two years or so before the initial phase opens, there is already talk of expansion. Initial expansion would extend service to the University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati Zoo, a hospital and the Uptown neighborhood.

This project has the strong support of the Mayor of Cincinnati, Mark Mallory. Hopefully, construction will proceed smoothly and in 2014, riders will flock to a modern streetcar system in numbers exceeding the initial 3,700 to 5,600 daily estimate. If that happens, city residents will hopefully applaud the \$110 million project.

To obtain more information about the Cincinnati Streetcar, visit www.cincinnati-streetcar.com. For more information about passenger rail around Ohio, visit www.allaboardohio.org.

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

... AS NEW ORLEANS STREETCARS KEEP ROLLING

By David Peter Alan

New York has its subways, San Francisco has its cable cars, and New Orleans has its streetcars. Streetcars have been a part of the Crescent City since 1835, and remain so today. In fact, the city’s streetcar system is expanding. General Manager Justin T. Augustine III told this writer in an interview in 2010: “If you want to involve the community, you have to involve the streetcar.”

The most famous cars run on St. Charles Avenue, a fashionable boulevard that runs from downtown, upriver past the upscale Garden District and the neighboring

campuses of Loyola and Tulane Universities. The cars were built by the Purley Thomas Car Company in 1923 and 1924, and have been in service ever since. Even when only seven cities in the United States and Toronto in Canada still had any streetcar lines at all, the old cars kept running on St. Charles.

Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005, and knocked out the transit and many other city services. The new cars (with a “heritage” look) that had run on Canal Street for only 20 months before the storm were so badly damaged by the flooding that only the shells could be saved. Local transit officials did the best they

could to somehow keep minimal service going. When Augustine came to head the transit system, he and his team slowly built the transit back up, including restoring streetcar service and purchasing a new fleet of buses. The historic St. Charles cars ran on Canal Street temporarily, while the St. Charles Avenue line and the Canal Street cars were rebuilt. Today, both lines operate full schedules, and the Riverfront Line alongside the French Quarter does, too. All-night streetcar service is back, as well. There is a gap of slightly more than two hours in the Canal Street line schedule, but St. Charles Avenue cars run every 30 minutes, all through the night.

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SAM SCHWARTZ'S "FAIR PLAN": A BETTER WAY TO FUND TRANSIT IN NYC

By *Andrew Albert*

The transit and commuter rail system in the New York Metropolitan Region suffers from the same malaise that afflicts most transit systems in the United States—insufficient funding, aging infrastructure, state legislatures that have many demands on their discretionary funding, and a growing ridership base that would like and certainly deserves to have better and more frequent service, clean stations, a modern fleet, and new lines built to serve growing population centers. Up to now, we have relied on the old, traditional methods: hoping for more federal and state funding, bonding to build new lines and rehabilitate existing infrastructure, resulting in burgeoning debt service, and a huge drag on the fare, with regular fare hikes the norm. How can we extricate ourselves from this downward spiral and start to treat our transit systems like the treasures they truly are, funding them adequately with enough resources to allow expansion and keep up with an aging infrastructure?

Enter traffic guru Sam Schwartz, a former traffic commissioner for the City

of New York, and a genius when it comes to putting together all the pieces of the traffic and transit puzzle. Mr. Schwartz has come up with what he calls “The Fair Plan,” and while it is a complex and unique amalgam of funding sources, the point of it becomes readily apparent: New York simply cannot keep raising fares and tolls, allowing government to take funds that were dedicated to transit and put them into the general state treasury, and allowing automobiles and trucks to determine how New Yorkers get around.

Mr. Schwartz envisions placing tolls on currently free bridges that connect Manhattan south of 59th Street (59th Street Bridge, Williamsburg Bridge, Manhattan Bridge, Brooklyn Bridge) raising tolls on existing toll facilities (Queens-Midtown Tunnel, Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, Holland Tunnel, Lincoln Tunnel), and REDUCING tolls in areas of the region that are not well-served by transit, such as the Throgs Neck Bridge, the Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, the Verrazano Bridge, the Marine Parkway-Gil Hodges Bridge, the Cross-Bay Blvd bridge, etc. This would “equalize” traffic into Manhattan’s central

business district by allowing motorists to choose the crossing that best met their needs—rather than wasting fuel and driving many extra miles out of their way, just to get to a “free” bridge. Not only would this unclog the currently free crossings, but would also remove the bottleneck from several neighborhoods where the currently free crossings converge, such as Downtown Brooklyn and Long Island City. The plan would also allow different rates at different times of the day, encouraging (if one can use it) more off-peak travel.

There have been other plans before, notably Mayor Bloomberg’s Congestion Pricing plan of a few years ago, which was met with indifference by the state legislature. There were flaws in that plan, notably that there was no congestion pricing fee for vehicles west of the Hudson River—only for those east of the East River. The Sam Schwartz plan also calls for the end of the parking tax rebate for Manhattanites south of 86th Street, a detail that removes the “advantage” that Manhattanites would have over the other boroughs, since Manhattanites are already in the borough.

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Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users’ Network at:
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VIA RAIL SPELLS OUT DETAILS OF KEY SERVICE INITIATIVES

By *Bert Titcomb*

On May 28, VIA Rail Canada held its Annual Public Meeting in the Winnipeg Station. Senior executives from VIA Rail presented a number of details. VIA Chairman Paul Smith stated, "We are building a strong, resilient national passenger service that will deliver better service to Canadians at less cost to taxpayers—a service that is capable of growth for the future."

CEO Marc Laliberté outlined several key initiatives for 2012. These include:

- To complete capital investment projects in trains, tracks, stations and technology. Rebuilt locomotives and passenger equipment will deliver faster, more efficient, and more reliable service. Increased track capacity will meet growing market demand for passenger rail service in the Quebec City—Windsor Corridor. Better passenger stations and facilities, along with better online services, will enhance the experience of traveling by rail;
- To continue to fine-tune VIA Rail's services, schedules and fares to serve



markets more efficiently, and to better integrate passenger rail service with other public transportation services; and

- To increase efficiency and customer service through technology initiatives, such as electronic ticketing and mobile booking. A new and more customer-friendly online fare display will give customers more options at their fingertips to plan and buy a train trip most suitable to their needs.

There had been a strong rumor that VIA Rail would announce service cuts to two trains during the meeting: The *Canadian* would be reduced to two trains per week during the off-season (winter) and that the *Ocean* would be reduced to three times per week. We hope the service cuts will not take place.

In late May, the union representing conductors, trainmen, yardmen, locomotive engineers and rail traffic controllers employed by the Canadian Pacific Railway voted to go on strike. The Federal Government enacted legislation to force the union to end the strike that had lasted nine days. Passenger rail service was not affected except for the VIA trains from Ottawa to Toronto that operate over CPR tracks from Ottawa to Brockville. As a result, VIA Rail had to lease buses to transport passengers between Ottawa and Brockville during this period.

GO Transit has announced it will again offer seasonal GO Train service between Niagara Falls and Toronto on weekends and holidays through Sept. 3. The train trips will run Friday to Sunday evenings, to allow travelers to maximize their weekends away. Every trip will accommodate passengers at Union, Exhibition, Port Credit, Oakville, Burlington, St. Catharines and Niagara Falls stations. Schedule information is available at gotransit.com.

Bert Titcomb is National Office Manager with Transport-Action Canada.

L.A. SEES COMPLETION OF LIGHT RAIL'S FIRST PHASE

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from Western Avenue to Westwood, and the Regional Connector providing an underground connection of the two halves of the emerging light rail network) are finishing preliminary engineering. With the long-awaited resolution of the federal transportation reauthorization, they will commence drawing federal new starts funding matched by the proceeds of a local sales tax approved by voters in 2008 to expand the rail network.

In case Congress continues its gridlock next year, an effort is being mounted to convert the aforementioned tax measure from a 30-year program to an open-ended one. This would provide new flexibility (and ability to go forward sans federal funding) for the issuance of bonds to facilitate the accelerated completion of the region-wide program of urban rail projects that in various forms have been the object of desire since 1992 (and the infamous 30-year plan).

And in the midst of this, we have NIMBY obstructionists, including

one gentleman playing the race card regarding the Crenshaw project and a near hysteria gripping Beverly Hills over having the subway pass under their high school. I expect in the end the projects will not be impeded, and in hindsight many will profess puzzlement at what all the fuss was about. Such is transportation progress in Los Angeles County.

Dana Gabbard is Recording Secretary of Southern California Transit Advocates.

SAM SCHWARTZ'S "FAIR PLAN" FOR NEW YORK

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In fact, there are many pieces of the plan that elected officials of the boroughs other than Manhattan should embrace. There are reductions in fares on bus services that don't traverse the boroughs from one neighborhood to another. There are no service reductions on buses or subways for three years without Community Board approval. There are restorations of some of the services that were eliminated during the June 2010 massive service cuts.

The result of this new pricing plan? Approximately \$1.4 billion (net) per year, or \$56 billion over 40 years. This is estimated to produce 35,000 annual recurring jobs, due to the infrastructure repairs & building of new lines, not to mention no layoffs of transit personnel. How would this massive amount of newly-generated money be distributed? Two-thirds for transit and commuter rail,

and one-third for roads and bridges. \$400 million annually for "state of good repair" transit improvements, as well as commuter rail improvements, and of course, road and bridge improvements. None of this money would go to subsidize fares. Fares would continue to rise, but moderately. Other obvious benefits would be less congestion, less noise, better air quality, a stronger economy buttressed by improved transit & rail, and a re-routing of trucks to avoid local streets.

Pie-in-the-sky? Not necessarily. Mr. Schwartz has a sterling reputation, and has taken his presentation to many organizations and politicians. No one has thrown him out of their office yet! He made a presentation to the Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA, of which I am a part, and was well-received. Naturally, some people differ on exactly how to implement some of these proposals, but all believe they

have merit and could be done. There is something for almost everyone in these proposals. They are all presented on Mr. Schwartz's website, samschwartzengineering.com. They merit serious consideration.

Will our elected officials listen? Only time will tell. In the case of New York, ridership on our subways is at a 45-year high-and this is with an economy that is not what anyone would call robust. Imagine when things improve and many more people are working. Our systems must be ready to handle the increased traffic on both subways and commuter railroads. Our infrastructure must be tended to, before we have even more extensive repairs to make than we do right now. We have to do SOMETHING. The clock is ticking.....

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

SW CHIEF COALITION'S CHAPTERS COME TOGETHER

By J.W. Madison

On May 31, a meeting was held in Santa Fe, NM, of the New Mexico branch of the Southwest Chief Coalition (SWCC), headquartered in La Junta, CO. After a recap and update from Ford Robbins, the coordinator of the branch, we heard from Rick Klein and Bill Jackson of La Junta, who attended the meeting. Mr. Klein, the head of the SWCC, filled us in on the SW Chief effort in general. Their presence was good news, serving to solidly tie together the three state-chapters of the SWCC.

The communities along the line in Kansas and Colorado have organized, passed pro-Chief resolutions and gotten their respective legislatures to do the same. No such good news in New Mexico, where the ownership status of the Lamy-Raton Pass segment is still in limbo.

On the bright side, nobody seems to mind if the BNSF holds onto those tracks, since the BNSF is a competent organization with an interest in keeping the tracks "alive" (they just don't need them kept up to passenger rail speeds). And not to be forgotten is the fact that several Northern NM counties derive much of their revenue from the BNSF right-of-way—revenue that would be lost under state ownership.

The general sentiment of the NM group is to work at the federal level. This may be a promising strategy. There is apparently a decent possibility of scoring the required track upgrade money (approximately \$111 million) through various federal grants. "After market" yearly maintenance money would have to be raised, probably from the "stakeholders."

The group had been called the Santa Fe branch of the SWCC. We have agreed to change the name to the "New Mexico Group of the SW Chief Coalition."

To complement this auspicious work (and because we have no federal-related expertise), Rails Inc. continues to promote the many uses the tracks can be put to, besides the vital one of hosting the Chief. We are also trying to instigate a university study of the environmental, economic, transportation and land use benefits of an upgraded Newton-to-Lamy segment, and a survey to try to identify revenue customers for the line. The NM Group has agreed to "look into" such a study.

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

RUN'S MID-ATLANTIC CONFERENCE KEEPS RAIL ADVOCATES CONNECTED



Keynote speaker Don Phillips encouraged attendees to keep the pressure on politicians.

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Brian Rosenwald, Chief of Product Management for Amtrak and an outspoken champion of long-distance trains, stated that they are in a precarious position for they lack independent funding. However, these trains are incredibly important for they not only provide Amtrak legitimacy as a national network, but also offer an essential service to folks living in rural America who have few if any transportation options. The 15 long-distance trains carried 4.5 million passengers who traveled 2.8 billion passenger miles or 44% of the total Amtrak passenger miles last year.

Long-distance train revenue has grown by 30% and passenger ridership is up 20% in the past five years, Rosenwald said. Despite a host of problems, long distance trains have a cost-recovery ratio of 46%, up from a low of 41%. Tri-weekly operations such as the *Cardinal* and *Sunset Limited* are losers, he said. The “host” railroads over which Amtrak trains operate have been unwilling to allow Amtrak to make changes that would benefit the company’s bottom line and its riders. Amtrak is looking into the *SW*

Chief carrying Auto Racks from the Chicago area to Arizona or New Mexico, and a business class car may be on the *Coast Starlight* soon. The *Empire Builder* should have an extra sleeper and a cross-country café, to alleviate crowding in the diner. To improve the *Crescent*, Amtrak wanted to switch off cars at Atlanta, but Norfolk Southern vetoed the idea. If Amtrak could remove two coaches and a café car in Atlanta, it could improve the financial performance and use equipment better. With new sleepers on order from Elmira, NY, Amtrak could switch the *City of New Orleans* to single-level equipment, freeing Superliners to be used west of Chicago and on the *Capitol Limited*. With new sleepers, a Viewliner sleeper could also be added to the overnight Boston to Washington train.

In closing, Rosenwald advised rail advocates to embrace the concept of “ownership of trains” and to continue their political work, for many politicians may not even know that they have a train operating in their state.

Don Phillips of *Trains Magazine* gave the keynote address. He first focused his remarks on the daily *Sunset Limited* saga, explaining how Amtrak assumed the Union Pacific would be amenable,

only to discover that they didn’t like Amtrak’s attitude and demanded \$750 million in capital improvements for Amtrak to operate the *Sunset Limited* daily.

Phillips also criticized Amtrak President Joseph Boardman for blaming long distance trains for losing money. Below-rail expenses are included in the operational cost of long-distance trains, but not in Northeast Corridor operational costs. They are treated as capital investments on the NEC. This results in a misleading comparison between long-distance trains and NEC trains.

Phillips praised Gene Skoroposki for his skillful management of the Capitol Corridor trains running between Sacramento and the Bay Area. Skoroposki proved to UP officials that lots of trains—freight and passenger—can work together when people cooperate. He paid UP 10% extra when UP eliminated slow orders and defects that would delay trains. Phillips also rebuked the media for their characterization of money to Amtrak as subsidy and money going to other transportation modes as “investment.” “It’s pure terminology and nothing else,” he said. In closing, he encouraged the participants to keep up their pressure on politicians. “Politicians can be really anti-people BECAUSE WE LET THEM,” he said.

The morning session ended with a panel on best practices for advocates. Moderated by Andrew Albert, Chair of the New York City Transit Riders Council, the panel consisted of Mike Testerman, President, Virginia Association of Railway Patrons’, Aissia Richardson, Chair, SEPTA Citizen’s Advisory Committee; David Alpert, member of the WMATA Riders Advisory Council; and Jack Corbett of metro riders.org. The panel focused

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on advocacy and how it can be used to 1) improve service in a given area; 2) forestall service cuts; 3) build a rider base to improve ridership; and 4) Interact with the media to focus attention on the importance of rail service. The panel provided a detailed look at how the various organizations deal with the ongoing issues of inadequate funding, service cuts, improving service, and getting new services established.

The panel ranged from legislatively-mandated groups—such as the New York City Transit Riders Council, serving over six million daily riders in the five boroughs of New York City, and the SEPTA Citizen's Advisory Committee, serving subway, light rail and commuter rail services in the City of Philadelphia and its suburbs—to the WMATA Riders Advisory Council, a legislatively-mandated organization serving the ridership of the Metro Rail System in Washington, DC and its Virginia and Maryland suburbs; metroriders.org, a group of volunteers dedicated to the improvement of service on the Metrorail system; and the Virginia Association of Railway Patrons, who are trying to improve rail services in the Commonwealth of Virginia. While vastly different in the types of services involved, the common thread was that advocacy is vitally important

in improving and expanding rail services wherever they are.

The first afternoon panel afforded participants an opportunity to learn about several success stories in the Mid-Atlantic region. This writer moderated the panel, which included James Price, Chief Operating Officer of Hampton Roads Transit, who described the TIDE, HRT's new light rail line in Norfolk, VA. Ridership has exceeded expectations by 50% and the line celebrated its first one millionth rider on April 7th. Plans are underway to extend the service to Virginia Beach. He praised its safety record and said "It's safe because we work at it."

The next presenter, Gene Kirkland, Treasurer of the Carolinas Association for Passenger Trains, reported on the *Carolinian*, which started as a one year experiment. Amtrak estimated 51,000 passengers would ride the train the first year; the actual number was far greater—133,000 passengers. The *Carolinian* continues to run between Charlotte and New York, and two trains run on the Piedmont corridor between Charlotte and Raleigh. Every rail station has been rebuilt between Raleigh and Charlotte, and Raleigh will likely get a new station within the next two years. Kirkland also reported that a 4th and 5th frequency will occur in 2017 and 2018. In closing, he gave credit for the outstanding work that Carolina Train Host Association has performed and the rail staffers at

the North Carolina Department of Transportation.

The final panelist, Councilwoman Meredith Richards of Charlottesville, VA, described her efforts as Chair of Civille Rail (a local Charlottesville organization) and the Piedmont Rail Coalition to bring rail service to Lynchburg, VA. This new service, which began running from Lynchburg to New York in 2009, has exceeded everyone's expectations: it now delivers 253% of first-year ridership and 246% of first-year revenue.

The final panel of the day, moderated by David Peter Alan, Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition and a RUN Board Member, highlighted efforts underway to improve service in the region, even though those improvements have not yet come to fruition. Carl Palmer, the General Manager of the Greater Roanoke Transit Company, also known as Valley Metro, operates buses in the Roanoke, VA area. To determine and stimulate demand for rail service to Roanoke, he has started the SmartWay Connector, a bus that connects with the new Amtrak service to Lynchburg effectively extending the reach of the train to Roanoke. "For funding of the Roanoke Smart Way bus service, we argue that it results in economic development and utility of transit and therefore revenue will only cover a small portion of the operating costs," said Palmer. Along with many others, Palmer hopes the train will soon be extended beyond Lynchburg.

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The other panelists described efforts in their states to expand service. Richard Beadles, the former CEO of the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad, described the new service to Norfolk. "NS has agreed to three round trips a day to Norfolk, with one scheduled to start in December 2012." He also stated that Newport News is constrained by the fact that the line is just a single track. The Norfolk line will be double-tracked.

J. Charles (Chuck) Riecks, who has spent the last three years in the West Virginia Legislature, described his efforts as

President of the Friends of the Cardinal to raise the public profile of the train in his home state. His group is focused on pushing for station improvements for making communities, and Charleston politicians, aware of passenger rail and its benefits.

The final panelist, Attorney Kenneth Joseph, Chair of the Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail, reported on his organization's efforts to convince decisions-makers in Pennsylvania of the importance of passenger trains west of Harrisburg. The organization is advocating for more service between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg. Only one train per day serves the two cities.

Closing remarks were given by Richard Rudolph, RUN's Chair, who thanked members of the planning committee for all of the advance work done to insure the conference success. Gary Prophet, RUN's Treasurer and Vice President of the Empire State Passenger Association, also spoke briefly, summarizing the major points that the speakers presented during the course of the day.

The conference closed with a brief overview of the optional tour that was held the next day. The tour, described in the article beginning on page 9 of this issue, provided participants an excellent opportunity to sample public transportation in the nation's capital. RUN plans to hold its next regional conference in April 2013, in either Chicago or Seattle.

DURBIN SUPPORTS SURFACE TRANSPORTATION BILL



Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) discusses possible cuts to transportation funding in this October 2011 file photo.

By Steve Hastalis

(Editor's Note: This article illustrates the importance of regular interaction with key legislators for rail advocates.)

On Thursday morning, June 21, I attended the weekly Illinois Constituent Coffee which United States Senators from both parties have held jointly for many years. Over the past several months,

Richard Durbin, Democrat and senior Senator from Illinois, has continued holding these events. Mark Kirk, Republican and junior Senator, continues recovering from a stroke.

Sen. Durbin asked people representing organizations or causes to introduce themselves. I introduced myself as representing the National Federation of the Blind and the Rail Users' Network. He asked if I came to Washington, DC on Amtrak. I replied that I did and enjoyed my ride.

He then made several comments and observations about Amtrak service. Ridership continues increasing substantially. People have difficulty making reservations because trains often are sold out. Chicago has the largest Amtrak ridership in Illinois, Bloomington-Normal comes in second, and Champaign third. This demonstrates the importance of good train service to communities with institutions of higher education. Work continues to upgrade the important line between Chicago and St. Louis, including the acquisition of new locomotives and passenger cars. Sen. Durbin expressed the desire to have this equipment manufactured in America, preferably in Illinois.

The Senate, he added, had passed a two-year extension of surface transportation legislation but the House had not done so yet. He hoped for positive developments in the House Senate Conference Committee deliberating this important legislation. *(Editor's Note: A bipartisan long-term reauthorization bill, HR 4348, passed both houses of Congress on June 29.)*

Steve Hastalis is a RUN Board member based in Chicago.

RUN CONFERENCE ATTENDEES SAMPLE WASHINGTON, DC TRANSIT



A Circulator bus in Washington, DC. The buses provide access to many DC subway stops.

By David Peter Alan

Rail advocates and managers from around the Northeast and elsewhere in the nation attended the RUN Conference in Washington, DC on Friday, April 20. It was a busy and informative day, and Saturday was the day to ride transit in the nation's capital.

A group of conference attendees met at Union Station, the home of Amtrak and commuter trains to Maryland and Virginia. Since many conference participants arrived on Amtrak and local commuter trains do not run on week-ends there, the tour concentrated on local transit. The tour leader

was M. Paul Shore, a veteran transit advocate who lives in Arlington, VA.

Along with Shore, West Virginia advocate J. Charles Riecks conducted a walking tour of the area near the train station. Riecks heads the advocacy organization Friends of the Cardinal, and he grew up in the neighborhood we toured, when it had more residential character than it does today. He gave us historical perspective by telling us stories of his boyhood in the area, and how the neighborhood had changed over the years. That included reminiscences of his experience with the D.C. Transit streetcars of bygone days.

Then it was time to see where the streetcars of the future would run. The D.C. Department of Transportation is building a streetcar line on H Street and the group noted the progress of construction. The tracks were already laid, but the overhead wire had not yet been installed. The tracks were not laid in the curb lane, but in the lane next to it. There were bumpouts at stops that extended the sidewalk for boarding the streetcars. The cars will run in the same lanes as motor vehicles on the street, in traditional streetcar fashion.

After the walking tour, it was time for lunch. Shore escorted us back to Union Station, where the group ascended several escalators to the roof level, which has been turned into a bus terminal. We took a Circulator bus, operated by D.C. DOT, to Georgetown, an historic and upscale neighborhood that is not served by MetroRail, the region's subway system. Even without MetroRail, Georgetown was crowded. This

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CRESCENT CITY'S STREETCARS KEEP ON ROLLING

(Continued from page 2)

Today, as in the days before Katrina, tourists and "locals" alike enjoy riding the streetcars. Augustine and his team have responded by expanding the system. There is a new line, now under construction, that will connect the St. Charles and Canal Street lines with service along Loyola Avenue. The new line will pass the Union Passenger Terminal where Amtrak trains and Greyhound buses stop, the main library, and other civic buildings. Regional Transit Authority (RTA) spokesperson Patrice Bell Mercadel says the new

line should be operating by the end of 2012, using cars from the Canal Street fleet.

If Augustine and his team have their way, there will be more streetcar lines coming to the Crescent City. One would be a new line along Elysian Fields Avenue on the border of the Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods, and the other would be a circulator near the Convention Center, where thousands of transit-dependent residents and tourists suffered together for several days after Katrina pummeled the city.

New Orleans today is a busy place, where tourists go to join local residents for some fun. Many of the city's historic neighborhoods have recovered well from the storm, and so has the transit. Streetcars are not only alive and well in New Orleans, but they also will soon run in more places than they do today.

David Peter Alan is a member of the Board of Directors of RUN and a member of the Conference Committee. He lives and practices law in South Orange, N.J. His home transit is New Jersey Transit.

ADVOCATES SAMPLE WASHINGTON, DC TRANSIT

(Continued from page 9)

was especially true of the neighborhood's main street, M Street. Our lunch spot was Clyde's, a pub-style restaurant on M Street that reputedly inspired the 1970s pop hit "Afternoon Delight." After lunch, the group left the crowded streets of Georgetown and headed toward downtown on the Circulator bus.

For the next several hours, the group rode several of MetroRail's subway and elevated lines. Shore pointed out

the construction and style of both underground and elevated stations in the system, as well as the original National Airport and several other points of interest along the routes. It was an opportunity for rail advocates from out of town to absorb some of the flavor of transit in the nation's capital.

The tour wound down and ended at Union Station, as the participants caught their trains to go home. Some had begun with the Day on the Hill on Thursday, and made the RUN conference a three-day

event. All had learned something about transit in the Mid-Atlantic Region and how to fight for transit in their own home towns. Those who stayed for the tour had the additional experience of sampling transit in the nation's capital, perhaps as a reference point when comparing it with the transit they ride regularly at home.

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**RUN Board Meetings for the remainder of 2012 are scheduled as follows:
August 25, October 13 and December 8.**

Board meetings normally take place at the MTA headquarters in New York City, 347 Madison Ave., from 1-5 pm, but please call 207-776-4961 to confirm.

RAILROAD *POST OFFICE*



Higher Track Speeds Warrant Grade Separation

To the Rail Users' Network:

Coincidentally, I read F.K. Plous's article "Michigan Again" after a round-trip on Amtrak's *Blue Water* over the Easter weekend. My experience was similar to his on the *Wolverine* service that shares the same route after it leaves the CN trackage east of Kalamazoo, MI.

My first reaction was that the return coach-class fare between Port Huron, MI and Chicago was very cheap for a journey lasting nearly seven hours in each direction (\$126). I was prepared to pay more than this to avoid flying or driving, but business class appeared to be sold out so there was no choice.

Before leaving Port Huron, the conductor announced that the train was completely sold-out on this trip and that over 500 passengers would eventually be aboard (same for the return trip). As a Canadian, my first reaction was that passenger rail was alive and well in the U.S.A. in spite of continued attacks by Republican forces. How would 500 people otherwise have traveled to and from Chicago if there was no train? We had several delays because of CN priority en route to Kalamazoo, and station dwell times (for passengers who smoked) seemed unnecessarily protracted. On the return trip, these "smoke breaks" added almost an hour to the journey time.

I believe we were just west of Niles, MI at an estimated 90 mph or so when the engineer applied emergency braking as the locomotive passed a protected grade crossing and it was quite clear that there had been a collision with a person or car. The crew contained the concern of passengers as the "technical issue" was investigated. Indeed, we had hit a car whose driver had, for whatever reason, decided that the plastic fender molding was more than a match for the pilot on the locomotive but who otherwise escaped serious injury. After about 30 minutes, our journey to Chicago continued uneventfully but was frequently dogged by NS freight traffic that made us about an hour late.

This collision (I had previously been on the *Ontario Northlander* train when some poor soul had ended his life by parking himself and his car on the tracks) confirmed my thinking that higher-speed rail is not really feasible unless fully grade separated. Suicides and the rapidly escalating incidence of distracted driving will forever play into the nay-sayers court as such events, when combined with trains, make good press whereas the highway variety are merely statistics.

Another apparent problem with this trip was that the gate area at Chicago's Union Station was overloaded with passengers all trying "to get there first." Amtrak agents showed patience but one wonders what the Chicago Fire Dept. would have thought about legal occupancy levels and evacuation in the event of emergency? Has Amtrak thought about this in their quest to make passenger rail more attractive to more people?

Clearly, Amtrak is doing its best and more people are seeing the potential benefits of city-center-to-city-center passenger rail. However, the daunting challenge will be to increase punctuality and reduce journey times to have more people perceive it as an option to the car or the plane. Rather than having the focus on token higher running speeds perhaps the answer is to pursue this incrementally while tightening-up station dwell times and better planning around freight train conflicts. Grade crossing incidents will remain a fact of life no matter what protective measures are taken and they will become even more spectacular (newsworthy) as track speeds increase.

The real solution is for total grade separation and dedicated passenger trackage. The cost is daunting and politics at all levels have the potential to destroy the progress that's already been made. But what choices do Americans and Canadians really have when the price of oil is clearly on a long-term upward trend and more energy intensive car and plane travel takes a bigger bite out of people's pockets? If nothing else, 110 mph in Michigan should be tantalizing to those who really care.

Ken Westcar

Transport Action Canada/Ontario member.
Woodstock, ON

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FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

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

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

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