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## MTA ADOPTS "DOOMSDAY" BUDGET DRASTIC SERVICE CUTS THREATENED

*By Andrew Albert*

On Dec. 17, 2008, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority enacted what it calls its "Doomsday Budget." This moniker is apt. For over 30 years—as long as I've been monitoring transit issues in and around New York City—I have never seen as hideous a budget, or as many combinations of fare hikes/service cuts as this budget presents.

It's not as if we couldn't see this coming. For years, declining support from the state, city and federal government has required the MTA to issue bonds in order to prepare for system expansion and new lines, so that this important work

and infrastructure upgrades could take place. Well, the debt service on all those bonds is coming due, and, of course, pension costs keep rising, while declines in certain taxes that go toward supporting the MTA—such as the mortgage recording tax, which has diminished with the drop in real-estate activity—have all taken their toll. It may sound unusual for a rider advocate organization to say this, but the freezing of the fare for eight years during then-Gov. George Pataki's administration did not do the system any good. It caused a massive fare hike to take place, and now we are playing catch-up.

Of course, I spoke vociferously against these service cuts, which

absolutely threaten our mobility, our economy and our car-free way of life. If you think I'm exaggerating, let me enumerate some of the proposed cuts....

### **1. Increase headways on "B" division subways on weekends to 10 minutes.**

For non-New Yorkers, the "B" division refers to the lettered subway trains, specifically A through Z. Most of these trains run on eight-minute headways during the weekends, which is now proposed to go to 10 minutes. While this may not sound like much, this pre-supposes that the trains run like clockwork, which they do not. You can easily have a 10- or even 12-minute wait *now*,

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## NEW RAIL STARTS CONFINED TO THE WEST IN 2008

*By David Peter Alan*

2008 would have been a very lean year for new rail starts, but two new operations began service in December. All new starts were in the West. Transit managers also anticipated starting new commuter rail lines in Portland, OR and Austin, TX, but these openings were postponed until 2009. The same holds true for a new streetcar operation on River Street in Savannah, GA.

The first new start of the year was Sprinter, a diesel

light rail operation that began service between Oceanside and Escondido, CA on March 1. The service uses a historic Santa Fe (now BNSF) freight line, and must end the service day with a 7:30 p.m. run to free the line for freight operations at night. Perhaps the most unusual feature of the line is that it does not go to an urban core area. It terminates in Oceanside, a small coastal city, where it connects with Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner corridor, Coaster commuter trains to San Diego and limited service to Los Angeles on MetroLink. Sprinter is operated

by the North County Transit District, which also operates Coaster trains and local buses.

Commuter rail service came to Utah on May 1, with the opening of Front Runner service between Salt Lake City and Ogden, a 36-mile run. Service runs hourly on weekday evenings and Saturdays, and half-hourly service is provided at peak hours and weekday mid-day. There is no Sunday service yet. The line does not go to the downtown core in Salt Lake City, but to the site of the

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# ILLINOIS READY TO GO WITH NEXT PHASE OF PASSENGER-RAIL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

## 110-mph Track, New Connection to Quad Cities Described as "Shovel-Ready"

By **James E. Coston**

Nobody will deny that California leads the U.S. in passenger-rail development. With its own fleet of 88 passenger cars and 17 locomotives protecting over 30 state-funded daily round trips running on three routes totaling 884 miles, the Golden State clearly is the national pace-setter.

But second place isn't a bad place to be either, and its occupant, Illinois, is busily at work upgrading its infrastructure and planning to run more trains on more routes.

Since Oct. 30, 2006, when it doubled its passenger-train budget, Illinois has been sponsoring seven daily round trips on three corridors: two round trips each on the 310-mile Chicago-Carbondale corridor and the 251-mile-Chicago-Quincy corridor, and three round trips on the 284-mile Chicago-St. Louis corridor.

But the state-sponsored trains are only part of the Illinois picture, because each corridor also is served during daylight hours by at least one Amtrak long-distance train. The Chicago-St. Louis route enjoys a daily round trip courtesy of Amtrak's overnight *Texas Eagle* as well as its daytime *Ann Rutledge*, giving travelers in this corridor a choice of five daily departures. The Chicago-Carbondale route is served by two daily state-supported trains plus Amtrak's overnight *City of New Orleans*.

On the Chicago-Quincy corridor, two Amtrak long-distance trains, the *Southwest Chief* and the *California Zephyr*, operate over the 162 miles between Chicago and Galesburg, offering travelers on that segment four round trips per day between Chicago and the western part of the state. The state-sponsored *Carl Sandberg* and *Illinois Zephyr* serve the full length of the Chicago-Quincy route.

### The passengers just keep coming

Since state-sponsored round trips leaped from three to seven in 2006, ridership on the Illinois trains has nearly doubled, with sellouts common on Fridays, Mondays, major holidays and even "greeting-card" holidays such as last Valentine's Day, when all seats from Downstate points to Chicago mysteriously sold out. Adding cars to accommodate the overflow is out of the question except around Thanksgiving and Christmas. The rest of the year the small fleet of rapidly deteriorating "Horizon" rolling stock must be carefully nursed to assure availability on the big holidays, making it impossible to beef up consists for mere weekend surges.

FY 2008 ridership totaled close to a million passengers, and current growth rates—apparently unaffected by the recession—

suggest ridership will surpass one million in 2009. If local ridership on the long-distance trains is included, that mark already has been surpassed.

What's the state's response to all this growth? Prepare for—and seek—even more ridership by upgrading infrastructure and enhancing capacity on existing lines while building the system out to serve additional destinations that still lack train service.

### Chicago-St. Louis:

#### 110 mph, CTC and more sidings

Of Illinois' three corridors, Chicago-St. Louis clearly is the leader, with 465,405 boardings in FY 2008, more than 50 per cent of the system's total. Ridership is particularly heavy on the 184 miles between Chicago and Springfield, and IDOT is moving quickly to eliminate stress on this overburdened segment. A decade ago, the state rebuilt the entire 118 miles between Mazonia—just south of Joliet—and Springfield, replacing all wooden trestles with concrete, upgrading all steel bridges, replacing all ties, installing welded rail, recalibrating curves, installing 40-mph turnouts at all power sidings and closing little-used grade crossings while protecting the remainder with "quad" gates that make it impossible for a motorist to weave around a lowered gate.

The object of all the improvements, which cost IDOT, the Federal Railroad Administration and the Association of American Railroads more than \$60 million, was to ready the Mazonia-Springfield segment for installation of a Positive Train Control system that would enable Amtrak trains to cruise at 110 mph, eliminating 20 minutes from the schedule and cutting the Chicago-Springfield trip down to a flat three hours.

But the signaling contractor, Lockheed-Martin, never was able to make its PTC technology work. Two years ago it quit the project, paying IDOT \$6 million in damages. IDOT's Bureau of Rail and Union Pacific will be installing the UP's cab-signaling technology instead. It's expected to debut in 2010.

While the cab signaling is installed on the Mazonia-Springfield segment, Acting IDOT Bureau of Rail Chief George Weber plans to update the 36-mile gap between Mazonia and Joliet, the only part of this former Chicago & Alton main line that never got Centralized Traffic Control. Using a \$3.3-million grant from the Federal Railroad Administration and \$3.7 million supplied on a 50/50 basis by IDOT and the UP, the railroad will install CTC on this segment—and also rebuild and activate the currently

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# MASSACHUSETTS CONSIDERS GAX TAX FOR TRANSIT

## Bay State's Transportation Systems Face Multibillion-Dollar Budget Gap

By *Eric Bourassa*

In Massachusetts, there is discussion around increasing the state gasoline tax to fund transportation infrastructure, including the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA). The T suffers from a huge \$8-billion debt with interest, and will be forced to dramatically increase fares and cut service in 2009.

A blue-ribbon transportation finance commission reported that all of the Bay State's transportation systems—Mass Highway, the turnpike, local roads, bridges and the MBTA—have a combined \$15-billion to \$19-billion gap in funding over the next 20 years.

What's most troubling is that this shortfall is only in the cost of maintaining the state's existing transportation infrastructure. It does not even include funding for new enhancements needed in the years ahead to address environmental concerns, grow the economy and improve quality of life issues.

Spurring the debate over the gas tax is a recent announcement that the

Massachusetts Turnpike Authority will increase tolls around Boston, including a doubling of the harbor tunnels that connect to Logan Airport, to as much as \$7. The tolls are necessary to pay for debt incurred by the Big Dig project.

But transit advocacy groups argue that the Turnpike is not alone in suffering from Big Dig debt. The MBTA has nearly \$2 billion of debt caused by public transit projects the T was required to finance in order for the Big Dig to comply with the Clean Air Act. This debt has fueled the cycle of large fare increases that T riders have experienced over the past eight years and will soon cause another round of fare hikes and potential service cuts.

In fact, the T just raised parking fees to close a mid-year budget gap. At many commuter rail stations, an increase of \$2 per day translates into a \$500 annual fare hike.

Transit advocates and environmental groups support an increase to the gas tax, as long as a significant portion funds public transportation. With a

21-cent gas tax, Massachusetts ranks below average nationally, and many argue that it should be raised by at least 20 cents to fund transportation, as well as bank funds for future strategic expansions that can be invested in all parts of the state.

In October, MASSPIRG released a compelling report highlighting public transportation expansion projects across Massachusetts, from Greater Boston subway extensions to bringing high-speed rail to connect the regions hub cities. Even the less densely populated Pioneer Valley is looking to bring commuter rail to the I-91 region of western Massachusetts, connecting Springfield with the Connecticut cities of Hartford and New Haven.

A copy of the MASSPIRG report, titled *Connecting the Commonwealth: Key Public Transportation Projects and Their Benefits for Massachusetts*, can be found at [www.masspirg.org/report](http://www.masspirg.org/report).

*Eric Bourassa is Transportation Advocate for the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MASSPIRG).*

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# GO TRANSIT'S BILLION-DOLLAR EXPANSION

By Dan Parberry

GO Transit's current expansion program—worth about \$1 billion—is being funded by the Government of Canada, the Province of Ontario, and municipal governments in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Additional improvements are expected after an unprecedented regional transportation plan was approved in November by the provincial planning body Metrolinx. Also known as the “Big Move,” the plan foresees high-frequency all-day service on the region's rail lines as well as electrification of some GO train corridors.

The GO bus network is expanding steadily as new routes, route extensions or extra “train-bus” runs are added every few months. Train-bus service parallels existing rail corridors in off-peak times.

Bus ridership is growing fastest along a regional east-west route that links many universities and colleges. This line, which uses single and double-deck highway coaches, travels the privately operated toll highway 407 and is considered a precursor to BRT.

GO is also working to bring genuine bus rapid lanes and stations through the western suburb of Mississauga along a congested expressway and urban arterials.

Here are just some of the improvements already underway across the GO Transit rail network:

GO has embarked on an extensive renewal program for Union Station. The improvements will double the station's capacity to more than 80 million passengers per year, improve train operations and reliability, and reduce operating costs.

For more than 75 years, this grand building has remained the heart of transportation in Toronto. Once a small

shed on Front Street, Union Station became Canada's largest and most lavish depot erected during the last great phase in railway station construction.

Substantial—and long overdue—investment between now and 2014 will ensure that Union Station remains the country's premier transportation hub. It's already the busiest rail or air terminal in Canada.

GO Transit continues to build new stairwells and elevators to train platforms, and is converting some escalators to stairs.



*Toronto Union Station. (Photo courtesy Tourism Toronto)*

The historic roof at Union Station will be rehabilitated—including a central glass atrium—providing cleaner, brighter platforms than exist now. A new southern entrance to the station complex is planned, as well as a new passenger concourse; a proposed food court and a second key link to downtown Toronto's underground shopping network, known as the PATH system.

The existing platform enclosure is one of only two Bush train sheds left in Canada. The design provides weather protection as well as exhaust venting—originally for the

smoke of old locomotives and now, diesel locomotive fumes.

These pre-cast ducts were state of the art when first installed in 1927 and 1928, but the hot, corrosive exhaust gases along with the harsh waterfront weather have damaged them. They will be replaced with new concrete ducts that will look identical.

The vintage signaling system around Union Station operates safely but is expensive to maintain. The limitations of the system are being felt more and more as train volumes increase; this is particularly true when there are delays or bad weather. When the new signal system is installed, it will streamline and consolidate operations—including GO Transit's security and bus dispatching—into one control Centre.

Union's original track design was aimed at moving intercity long-distance passenger trains and freight. Currently Toronto's depot also serves VIA Rail, Amtrak to New York and a daily Ontario Northland run. The TTC's southernmost subway stop is here, as well as an underground platform for the Spadina and Harbourfront light rail lines.

As part of the renewal program, passenger platforms have been renumbered to a more international standard. New approach tracks will be added and they will be better aligned; trains will have more straight runs in and out of the station, rather than switching from one section of track to the next and so on.

Switching can be difficult in winter weather, although GO has been adding a good number of switch heaters on its network, which includes trackage owned by CN and Canadian Pacific.

To facilitate this multi-year upgrade, a brand new platform will open just south of the train shed, allowing other platforms to be closed for renovation.

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# THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX FOR 2009

By *Richard Rudolph, RUN Chair*

With the coming of the New Year and the inauguration of a new president, it's time to think outside of the box. President-elect Barack Obama and Congressional leaders are planning to invest countless billions to revitalize the economy and to create three million jobs over the next two years. While the details still need to be worked out, it seems clear that the emphasis will be not only on job creation, but also on infrastructure projects that promote the green economy while reducing our dependence on foreign oil.

The Maine Department of Transportation, however, seems fixated on road and bridge improvement projects rather than investing in passenger and freight rail. So far, it has only placed the extension of the Downeaster service to Brunswick, ME on its wish list of infrastructure projects that it would undertake if federal funds are forthcoming. While this is a very worthwhile project, the state has already applied to the Federal Railroad Administration for a \$31.5 million RIFF (Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing) loan to pay for upgrading Pan Am's track from Portland to Brunswick and the legislature has voted to set aside tax revenue from the state's car rental tax to pay the interest on the loan beginning in fiscal year 2010.

MDOT's policy should reflect what is needed at both the state and national level. New

investments in the state's rail infrastructure will not only stimulate the economy by creating more jobs, but also reduce our dangerous dependence on foreign oil, lower carbon emissions, reduce congestion on highways and at airports and improve safety.

Maine rail advocates who understand the need to seize the opportunity are busy drawing up their own list of what should be done. They plan to submit their ideas to MDOT in the near future. What follows is a list of what could be done in the short run to create a more balanced transportation network in the state:

**1. Portland to Boston.** Additional passing sidings, positive train control and/or double tracking to Haverhill, MA will allow for greater frequencies and the start-up of an in-state commuter rail service in southern Maine.

**2. Brunswick to Rockland, ME.** With the extension of Amtrak service to Brunswick, MDOT should revitalize former MDOT Commissioner John Melrose's grand plan to provide tourist service to Rockland. The state owns the right-of-way and the track has been upgraded. New automatic grade crossings are needed to run passenger equipment at reasonable speeds over the line.

**3. Portland to Auburn, ME via Marginal way and North Yarmouth Junction.** The building of a new bridge over

Back Bay is key to starting commuter rail service along the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railroad, which runs parallel to Route 295. The track would also need to be upgraded and the state would need to purchase push-pull diesel cars for the start-up of this service. A new passenger rail station at Marginal way would also create demand for commuter rail service on the Mountain Division Line.

**4. Portland to Freyburg and Conway, NH.** The state already owns the track and has commissioned a study, which pointed out several steps needed for action beyond track and grade crossing rehabilitation to facilitate a viable tourist/commuter rail service on the Mountain Division. The reopening of the Mountain Division Line would lead to greater residential density along the rail corridor, and a second rail station on the Portland Peninsula closer to main employment centers, such as the one proposed for Marginal Way, would reduce the need for a three-seat ride.

**5. Brunswick to Augusta and Waterville, ME.** The restoration of passenger service to Brunswick in 2010 should be viewed as the first step for extending service to Augusta, Waterville and beyond. Track rehabilitation and automatic grade crossings are needed for higher passenger speed service.

Let's hope MDOT seizes the opportunity to promote a more balanced transportation system in the new year. If not, citizens should demand it!

RUN's Annual Meeting is scheduled for  
**Saturday, April 25, 2009**

If you'd like to be considered for Board membership, please e-mail Andrew Albert at:

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## RIDING THE TRAIN THROUGH MEXICO'S COPPER CANYON

By Bill Engel

The American Society of Travel Writers describes the rail line from Topolobampo to Chihuahua across Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains as "the world's most exciting train ride" for the passage through the Copper Canyon region. Holland-America Lines offers its passengers the opportunity to ride a portion of this route as a shore excursion on its 10-night Sea of Cortez itinerary sailing from San Diego.

My participation in this adventure found me eating a full breakfast at 3 a.m. in the Lido Restaurant aboard *MS Ryndam* as we made our way into the port of Topolobampo. At 4 a.m., I joined about 300 fellow passengers in the main show lounge aboard ship to be assigned motor coach and train car numbers. With this process complete, we were ushered ashore to the waiting motor coaches for the two-hour trip to El Fuerte, where we would board the train.

At El Fuerte, a seven-car train was already in the station. Two EMD four-axle locomotives were on the head end. They were wearing lettering for Ferromex. The passenger coaches bore "El Chepe" logos after the Chihuahua al Pacifico RR, which once operated this line. The cars were modern smooth-side design riding on four-wheel trucks. They featured rooftop air conditioning units and sealed windows. Inside, the two-by-two seats could be turned to form facing pairs. Happily for photographers, the vestibules had dutch doors. As soon as all the Holland-America passengers were on board, the train departed.

Shortly after departure, polite attendants served coffee followed by a basic box breakfast consisting of a pastry, granola bar, piece of fruit and beverage. The sun rose, revealing a brushy, uninteresting terrain which was sparsely populated. Our train was not traveling very fast and there was evidence of much track maintenance.

About an hour after leaving El Fuerte, we began to see the foothills of the Sierra Mountains. We came to the first of many scenic highlights, the 1,637-foot-long

bridge crossing the Rio Fuerte. Beyond this point, our train entered a region with much more interesting scenery. As we rounded curve after curve following various streambeds, the foothills grew into mountains. Soon we were at the next scenic highlight, Temoris Station.

As the train neared Temoris, it followed a stream. To the left, two levels of track were visible on the mountainside above. To the right, there was a slender waterfall. The track crossed a curved deck girder bridge over the stream as it made a complete horseshoe to reach Temoris Station. Upon leaving Temoris, our train continued to climb, then reversed direction again in a curved tunnel. When we emerged from the tunnel, we saw the two levels of track below that we were recently on. We were really into the mountains now as the train steadily climbed. The right of way clung to the mountainside, passing through many tunnels and over high bridges. Spectacular rock formations were visible all around us.

After about five hours of travel, we came to San Rafael. It is a larger place than Temoris, with room for a small yard alongside the passing siding. Here a southbound freight train waited for us to pass. Following a short pause, we were underway once again to our destination at the rim of the Copper Canyon.

We halted at an unnamed station with a short wooden platform. Our crew let two carloads of passengers disembark, then respooned the train to unload the other two cars. Half of us went to eat a hot buffet lunch, while the other half of our group boarded school buses for a five-minute trip up a steep dirt road to the El Mirador Hotel and the overlook into the canyon. Our train departed north to a siding where the locomotives would run around and other servicing would be done, including turning the seats.

After lunch, some local Tarahumara natives put on a show featuring dancing. My attention to this folklore was distracted by the sound of a southbound train braking. A short "El Chepe" passenger train appeared, made a brief passenger stop and departed toward San Rafael.

Now it was our turn to board the buses to view the canyon. What a spectacular view! I chose to take a short walk uphill to a canyon rim vantage point while others walked down into the canyon to view some native dwellings. Later I got another perspective from the balcony of the El Mirador Hotel. After about an hour of canyon viewing, it was time to return to the station to reboard our train.

Upon boarding, we took seats on the opposite side of the train so all can see the spectacular views. Some visited the mid-train bar car as we headed toward San Rafael. Here a northbound "El Chepe" waited for us to pass. As we continued south, we saw a rural Mexico in contrast to the bustling port cities of Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlan. Even a horseback rider approached our train at one station. As we traveled down through the mountains two more trains were waiting in sidings for us to go by. Just before sunset, we had another chance to view the remarkable scenery at Temoris. As darkness fell outside, the attendants served a box supper with a sandwich, chips, beverage and a sweet treat.

This railroad route, originally conceived in the 1870s to shorten the distance between Kansas City and the Pacific Ocean, was only completed through the Sierra Madre Mountains in 1961. With relatively short passing sidings, and the many curves and tunnels, it was hard for me to envision it as practical route for today's long intermodal trains. But in a sparsely populated area with few paved roads, the "El Chepe" passenger trains seem to provide a needed transportation service for the natives. I hope there is enough freight along with the local and tourist passenger trade to sustain this amazing railroad for many years into the future.

Shortly after 8 p.m., the train arrived back at El Fuerte. The waiting motor coaches had us back at the pier in Topolobampo shortly before 10:30. The *Ryndam*'s captain led the welcoming party as we reboarded the ship.

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

# MTA PLANS DRASTIC CUTS IN “DOOMSDAY BUDGET”

*(Continued from page 1)*

when the scheduled headways are eight minutes. So, a *scheduled* headway of 10 minutes could easily blossom to 15 minutes or longer if there are any problems, such as a sick passenger, signal problems, police activity, etc.

**2. Revise midday and evening loading guidelines to 125% of seated load.** This is one of the more terrible service cuts. The New York Subway system is experiencing a tremendous increase in the number of customers—in many cases we are seeing 35-40 year highs in ridership. To subject our riders to even more “crush” conditions will wreak havoc on schedules, as riders try to cram in. Some riders will avoid the subway altogether, not wanting to arrive at work looking or smelling like a sardine. Employers will also not want their employees to arrive at work in these conditions. Of course, we’re not talking about rush hours, but commuting has seen a shift in recent years, with more travelers arriving after the traditional “peak” times. This has the ability to erode the fabulous ridership gains made as a result of the rapid rise in the cost of gasoline. Even when the price has dropped precipitously, high ridership remains. This could see an end to that.

**3. Operate the N train over Manhattan Bridge late nights.** Currently, during late nights, the R train runs as a shuttle between 95th Street/4th Avenue in Brooklyn and Pacific Street, Brooklyn. To pick up passengers the R normally serves, the N train, normally an express utilizing the Manhattan Bridge, runs local through Lower Manhattan and Downtown Brooklyn, picking up passengers at City Hall, Cortlandt Street, Rector Street, Whitehall Street, Court Street and Lawrence Street, before joining its regular route at DeKalb Avenue. This proposal would have the N running over the bridge at all times, necessitating the closure of those stations during late nights.

This is a real setback in the efforts to rebuild Lower Manhattan post-9/11, and would have passengers wondering:

“Is my station open now?” New York is a 24-hour city, and we recently restored service to two stations that didn’t have it for 14 years! Now, we’re going to close stations again?!? This scheme would save only \$230,000 per year, in a budget of over \$7 billion! Clearly, this is just to send a message, which I’ll get to later.

**4. Eliminate the W train/extend the Q to Astoria.** Currently, the W train runs weekdays only, from Ditmars Blvd/Astoria to Whitehall Street in Lower Manhattan. It is proposed to extend the Q train from its current terminus at 57th St/7th Avenue to Astoria along the N/W lines. This might seem fine as a substitute for Astoria branch customers, but south of Canal Street, the Q operates over the Manhattan Bridge to Brooklyn, which would leave City Hall, Cortlandt St, Rector St, Whitehall St with just one train—the R—for which there are currently two services—the R and the W. Naturally, this represents a 50% cut in service to those stations, and much longer wait times for those customers. Another wrong-headed proposal which doesn’t save a whole lot of money, but causes a whole lot of pain. Definitely designed to “send a message.” More on that later.

**5. Operate the M train to Broad Street during rush hours/eliminate the Z train.** Where do I begin? Currently, the M is one of the more confusing services in the entire system. Where it goes depends on the time of day and the day of the week. Weekdays, the M operates from Metropolitan Avenue/Middle Village to Chambers Street/Manhattan. Rush hours, it is extended to Bay Parkway/Brooklyn. Weekends, it only goes to Myrtle Ave/Broadway in Brooklyn. When it is extended to Bay Parkway, it operates along the Nassau Loop, picking up passengers in the Financial District and supplementing the D train, which also serves the West End line in Brooklyn. This budget cut would cut the M train back to Broad Street during rush hours, thus *not* extending to the West End line, and forcing all those passengers onto an already-crowded D train. The second

part of this hideous proposal would be the elimination of the Z train, forcing the J train to run local for virtually the entire route! The J/Z skip-stop service was always one of the skip-stops that actually did what it was supposed to do: give riders along the Jamaica Avenue & Broadway/Brooklyn lines the ability to speed their rides on a very long local route. There are approximately 20 stops along the J line before it will be able to switch to the express track, at Broadway/Myrtle Avenue. This will add at least 15 minutes to everyone’s ride, and *may* have some Jamaica customers consider switching to the E train, one of the most crowded in the entire system. A *terrible* idea, and since the J would have to have some service *increased* to pick up the load, not that much of a savings. Another clear message!

**6. Cut the G train back to Court Square all times.** Actually, this proposal makes some sense. Because of endless GOs (general orders)—the name for rebuilding projects and service outages—the G train hardly ever goes to Continental Avenue, which should be its Queens terminal nights and weekends. By a large majority, riders along the Queens Boulevard local stations are going to Manhattan—not Brooklyn. It would have been better if the Queens terminal could have been Queens Plaza, instead of Court Square, but that would have required some seizing of private property in order to build lay-up tracks, which would have taken quite some time and might not have been successful. Court Square allows riders continuing to Manhattan from Brooklyn to switch to the E or V or #7 trains to continue their trip. The G will be extended southward, from its current terminal at Smith-9th Street to Church Avenue when the Culver viaduct undergoes rebuilding, which is slated to happen around the end of 2009.

**7. Discontinue overnight bus service on low-performing routes.** An extremely terrible idea! The MTA has the franchise to serve the *entire* City of New York—not just the plum routes! This proposal will leave some neighborhoods

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# MTA PROPOSES “DOOMSDAY” BUDGET FOR ‘09

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without their bus service, or cause customers to endure long walks to get to the next nearest bus, sometimes in neighborhoods they might not wish to walk through late nights. This could have an impact on public safety. Again—a proposal meant to enrage!

**8a. Eliminate bus routes that duplicate subway routes.** This one's the corker! It is proposed to eliminate many bus routes that parallel subway routes, as if the ridership were interchangeable! Many elderly or handicapped riders cannot or will not use the subway, as it is difficult to manage the steps in stations where there is no elevator/escalator access. To presume that these riders will switch to the subway is one of the more ludicrous ideas to come out of what is already a very anti-passenger budget. Additionally, some neighborhoods, such as Washington Heights and Inwood in Upper Manhattan, are quite hilly, and this would require some people, who ordinarily got a bus near their homes, to trudge up steep hills to reach a subway! Are you getting the picture?

**8b. Discontinue low-performing buses with alternatives available.** Again, this will leave some neighborhoods without their bus service. And for some, there *are* no alternatives! For example, it is proposed to eliminate completely the BX14 bus, which connects the Country Club area of the Northeast Bronx with the subway and other Bronx neighborhoods. Without this bus, riders would have long walks to get to another bus and even longer to get to the subway. As I mentioned, the MTA has the franchise, or monopoly, if you wish, to serve the *entire* city—not just the profitable routes.

**9. Double the paratransit fare.** This one speaks for itself. While the Access-a-Ride system is extremely expensive to operate, it is a necessity for many handicapped customers who simply have no other way of getting to a doctor's appointment, a senior center, or their relatives. It is

arguable as to who should pay the cost of providing the service—we believe that the city and the state, as well as the federal government, ought to be picking up part of this tab. This is one of those “unfunded mandates” which ought to be borne by municipalities, not just the transit provider. Nevertheless, another proposal meant to make a point.

**10. Raise express bus fares from \$5.00 to \$7.50.** This one caught the attention of the mayor's representatives on the MTA Board, and quickly got shot down! You see, Staten Island always plays a huge part in mayoral races, and no mayor wants to lose the borough, which relies heavily on express buses! So, the new proposal is to raise the fare to \$6.25, not \$7.50.

**11. Eliminate Station Customer Agents.** One of the worst, most inhumane proposals in the entire budget, and one that definitely endangers customer safety. The Station Customer Agents, sometimes known as Booth Agents, are the burgundy-uniformed employees who, while no longer selling fares, answer riders' questions, explain how to use the ticket machines, and *provide a presence* at many stations. They buzz in customers with strollers, oversize packages, etc. They stop fare evaders, to a certain extent, by their mere presence. At less busy times of the day, they are a presence in what can be a lonely, uninviting place. This would remove most of them from stations, such as one-directional platforms of a station, leaving no human presence on one side. If you want to be buzzed in because you have a stroller or large package, good luck! You will have to communicate with the SCA on the *other* platform—via intercom! Not only will this endanger the safety of customers, but will invite fare evasion and vandalism of MTA property. If this one was thought out in terms of anything but saving money, you'd never know it. An absolutely *hideous* idea!

**12. Track-cleaning reduction.** Remember those track fires that used to plague our subway system? They've been substantially reduced by increased track

cleaning, and removal of debris after station rehab projects. By reducing track cleaning, we will be going back to the bad old days of track fires and reduced maintenance. The rat population will increase, and service disruptions will likely increase, as well. A *dirty* idea, and not that much savings involved, either.

**13. Commuter rail reductions in service.** The subway and bus system isn't the only victim in this vicious assault on riders. Both Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road will also see their share of service cuts. On the LIRR, there will be *no weekend service* on the West Hempstead Branch! Having no weekend service anywhere is an anachronism that we thought had gone away when Pascack Valley weekend service began on New Jersey Transit! Who'd have thought that New Yorkers would lose *their* weekend service? On the Port Washington Branch, off-peak half-hourly service will go to hourly, a 50% reduction on one of the busiest branches on the entire LIRR, and one that is 90% within the City of New York! This should really be a *transit* line, not a commuter rail line, and it's getting a major cut in service! Disgraceful! Again, there is a point here, which I'll get to shortly. Metro-North would see several trains combined, and cars removed from some runs, resulting in more crowding, and less frequency. Metro-North Commuter Railroad is a model of on-time efficiency and great service, and this will affect their sterling reputation tremendously, as riders cram on, and schedule adherence suffers.

**14. Massive fare hikes: bus/subway/commuter rail/express bus/tolls.** Fare hikes are never popular, same as toll hikes, but the combination of fare hikes with service reductions is a particularly horrific way to treat customers. If this were a private company, it would be out of business with proposals such as these. It is expected that the base fare in NYC would go from \$2.00 to \$2.50 at a minimum. The weekly and monthly passes haven't been decided yet, but the monthly pass could go from \$81 to \$103.00. Commuter  
(Continued on page 9)



*(Continued from page 8)*

rail hikes are predicted to be in the area of 23% or so.

All of these extremely disheartening and, to my way of thinking, dangerous proposals are intended to make a point: the MTA needs help from the state, city, and federal government. The State of New York, in particular, needs to step in and prevent this disaster from happening. Many legislators have come to MTA Board meetings and said, "Ask us for money! Don't pass massive fare hikes and service cuts!" Well, it's the day of reckoning, and all of us need to communicate with our legislators to prevent this attack on our mobility. Even the MTA Board is scheduled to travel to Albany and meet with state legislators. What can the state do, given its own terrible fiscal condition? Simple—it can pass some or all of the Ravitch Commission recommendations, which the governor requested as a way of easing the MTA's awful financial condition. I will get into the Ravitch Commission's recommendations shortly, but first, here's the timetable for the pain:

**January/February:** The MTA holds the required public hearings on these proposals. That should be a bundle of joy!  
**March:** The first of the service cuts go into effect—principally the bus cuts.  
**June:** Fare hikes go into effect.  
**Late 2009:** Subway cuts go into effect.

This is structured so that the Legislature has time to act and prevent all this pain from actually taking place. The Transit Riders Council will be sending every legislator in the 12-county MTA catchment area a description of the cuts in *their* area, and how it will affect their constituents, and urging them to act! We urge everyone—whether they are a transit user or a motorist—to contact their legislators and impress upon them that these cuts and fare hikes are a threat to our way of life. As I said at the Board meeting, it's as if someone went into a small town and told the population, "We're taking away one-eighth of all your cars." It's just that important!

## The Ravitch Commission recommendations

The Ravitch Commission was ordered by Gov. David Paterson to look into the persistent funding problems—both capital and expense—that the MTA has on a recurring basis, and to see if there might be a more predictable, dedicated, inflation-sensitive funding stream that could provide the MTA and its many agencies with funding for both the day to day operations, as well as providing for the system's capital needs, including maintenance and expansion. The Commission was composed of leaders in the banking, real estate, transportation and construction fields, headed by a former Chairman of the MTA, Dick Ravitch. The Commission actually went a bit beyond its purview, and touched on many other subjects, including the makeup of the MTA Board, the way construction projects are handled and creation of a regional bus authority. Their funding recommendations are as follows:

**1. *Impose a new regional mobility tax.*** A new regional mobility tax is recommended as an excise tax equal to one-third of 1% of wages paid in the 12-county MTA Commuter District. This tax is expected to generate \$1.5 billion on an annual basis.

**2. *Create the MTA Capital Finance Authority.*** Funds raised from the "mobility tax" would be set aside in a "lockbox" that would be under the purview of this new Authority. These revenues would be used exclusively to pay for new borrowing and direct expenses related to the MTA Capital Program and the debt service associated with the current expansion projects. However, the first year's "take" would go to preventing all the service cuts and the massive fare hikes that are proposed.

**3. *Establish a cycle of predictable fare and toll increases.*** The Commission believes that fares should be adjusted with some regularity and predictability, and taken out of the political circus that frequently surrounds this periodic ritual. The Commission recommends that the Legislature amend the powers of the MTA Board to increase fares without the traditional public hearings and not more

frequently than bi-annually. More frequent increases would require the traditional public hearings.

## **4. *Place cashless tolls on the currently free East and Harlem River bridges.***

A *very* controversial item. Placing tolls on the bridges that are now free would equalize distribution of traffic, and reduce air pollution by removing the massive traffic jams at the "free" bridges. Motorists drive many miles out of their way to avoid the tolls on the Battery Tunnel, Queens Midtown Tunnel, Triborough Bridge (recently re-named the RFK Bridge) and the Henry Hudson Bridge. Cashless tolling, by means of readers that record either an EZ-Pass or a license plate, would obviate the need for toll plazas. Many elected officials have already been heard on this one, yet their fury is misplaced. It is estimated that less than 20% of residents of Brooklyn and Queens (and even less from the Bronx) commute by car. So is this opposition reasonable? Over 80% of the population uses buses and subways to commute, so this would help the lion's share of their constituents, yet the politicians voice opposition anyway! (It's what politicians do.) It is anticipated that these tolls would raise at least \$600 million annually.

## **5. *Improve bus service in the region.***

If the new bridge tolls are imposed, the argument goes, many motorists will seek other means of getting to work, and the subway doesn't serve all areas of the boroughs. So beefing up the bus system, including new BRT routes, is seen as a way of coping with the new influx of passengers. Our feeling is that most folks would rather take trains—they're faster and more reliable—but feeder buses to the subways would also work. We're also strong believers in the "City Ticket" concept—allowing riders to use whatever means meets their needs, including commuter rail lines traveling within city limits—all for one flat fare. Now, *that* would truly get people out of their cars!

## **6. *Strengthen governance of the MTA.***

This is a recommendation that there be a combined Chairman/Executive Director, as there used to be. We agree that a

*(Continued on page 10)*

## ILLINOIS READY TO GO ON NEW DEVELOPMENT

*(Continued from page 2)*

disused Hitt Siding, providing a much needed site for trains to meet. Siding work also will be done at five sites south of Springfield. Each siding will be upgraded with 40-mph turnouts to speed up meets and passes on this 79-mph stretch of railroad.

### Chicago-Quincy: More tracks to “unchoke” Galesburg

Burlington Northern & Santa Fe Railway has always been known as one of the nation’s most Amtrak-friendly railroads, but when IDOT asked to add a second train to the BNSF-owned Chicago-Quincy route in 2006 the railroad responded with some demands of its own. If the state wanted to run more passenger trains over the line, BNSF officials said, it would have to provide some additional track capacity around Galesburg, where freight trains approaching from seven directions often back up onto the main lines while waiting for a track to open up in the carrier’s largest and busiest classification yard. Although the funding source has not yet been identified—state officials hope the long-promised public-works stimulus passage will contribute—they plan to build three staging tracks along the Chicago-Quincy main line so that incoming freight trains can pull off the main line well in advance of a following passenger train. Weber says the tracks will be two to three miles long, enabling most freights to pull well into the clear at a relatively high speed without slowing down to a creep and fouling the main line.

### The main event: the “Wyanet Connection” to access the Quad Cities

As exciting as it’s been to imagine trains hurtling down the Chicago-St. Louis line at 110 mph, the project that has exerted

the greatest grip on the imaginations of Illinois rail advocates probably is the so-called “Wyanet Connection” and associated track upgrades that promise to restore rail service to the “Quad Cities” of Moline, East Moline and Rock Island, IL and their trans-Mississippian neighbor, Davenport, IA.

The Quad Cities have been without passenger rail service for 30 years since the legendary Rock Island Railroad liquidated and ceased operations in 1978. The Rock’s 181-mile Chicago-Rock Island main line still exists, but the portion from Joliet to the Quad Cities has been reduced from double track to single, and the automatic block signals are long gone. CSX owns the east end, regional carrier Iowa Interstate the west end, and the freight-only track is good only for about 40 mph.

Since restoring the line for 79-mph passenger service would have cost \$100 million or more, Amtrak and IDOT decided on a cheaper alternative: Use the BNSF’s former Burlington Route—already host to the two Chicago-Quincy trains plus the *Zephyr* and the *Chief*—for the 111 miles between Chicago and tiny Wyanet, IL, then build a connecting ramp just west of Wyanet where the former Burlington crosses over the old Rock Island, so that Amtrak trains can clamber down off the BNSF elevation and switch onto the Iowa Interstate for the last 50 miles into Moline.

“It’s still on our wish list, but it’s shovel-ready if the money comes,” Weber said. “It should cost about \$7 million to build the connection and about \$23 million to install welded rail on the IAIS and put the block signals back in.” Weber said the plans have been drawn and contractors could be asked to bid as soon as funding is ready.

*(Continued on page 12)*

## MTA’S “DOOMSDAY” BUDGET PROPOSALS

*(Continued from page 9)*

strong chairman who can stand up to the governor is a good thing, but we don’t necessarily understand how *anyone* chosen by the governor—which would still be the case—can be completely independent. The jury is out on this one.

7. Increase transparency & accountability. This one largely deals with promoting schedule efficiencies, and the way the capital projects are handled—including streamlining project execution and realistic goals.

As a general matter, the Ravitch Commission believes that fares and current subsidies should pay for operating expenses, exclusive of new debt service. Growth in capital expenses should be funded separately and exclusively. However, *for the first year*, and to *prevent the terrible fare hikes and service cuts now proposed*, the Commission recommends that proceeds from the Mobility Tax should be

made available to support the operating needs of the MTA and its partners.

So, that is where New Yorkers find themselves at this juncture. We are all awaiting action by the state, whether it be to adopt recommendations of the Ravitch Commission and save our transit system and our uniquely car-free way of life, or allow the system to turn away—with massive fare hikes and debilitating service cuts—the millions of new riders that have adopted transit as the better way to get to work and recreation. It is truly ironic that this state—with two-thirds of *all* transit users in the United States—finds itself in such a predicament. This is a testament to the failure of state and city government over a long number of years, and many different political identities. It behooves all New Yorkers to remember this when they next enter the voting booth.

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

## OR ADVOCATES MEET WITH RUN BOARD MEMBERS

By *David Peter Alan*

Three members of the RUN Board, including this writer, held a Regional Outreach meeting with approximately 25 local transit advocates in Portland, Oregon on Oct. 17, 2008. The turnout was especially noteworthy, since the third presidential debate of the campaign occurred at the same time as the meeting. The RUN meeting was scheduled to coincide with the fall meeting of the National Association of Railroad Passengers, which began the following day. NARP directors and members from several states also attended the RUN meeting along with the Portland-area advocates.

The evening began with an informal and informative dinner at Huber's, a historic restaurant in downtown Portland. The meeting itself was held at a city-owned downtown office building. This writer served as moderator for the evening. Phil Copeland, a RUN Board member and NARP Director from Ohio, presented an introduction to RUN, its goals and structure. Josh Coran, a RUN Board member from Seattle, reported on the recent developments along the corridor, from Eugene, OR to Vancouver, BC.

Our host for the meeting was Chris Smith, a member of the Portland Streetcar Advisory Committee, who explained the structure of transit in the Portland area and gave us an overview of the local rail advocacy scene. Patrick Sweeney, Senior Transit Planner for the city's Office of Transportation Planning, explained the operation of the city-owned streetcar and its relationship to other transit in the region. The three "MAX" light rail lines are operated by Tri-Met, a tri-county transit authority,

which also operates bus service. Local buses in Vancouver, WA, also connect with MAX light rail. Although different transit modes are owned and operated by different entities, riders can transfer easily between them, and there is complete fare integration for single-trip riders. A day pass, or weekly or monthly commutation ticket, is good on all modes, including Vancouver buses in Washington State.

Local advocates in Portland are strong, vocal and effective. Three members of the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA) explained the organization's structure and told us about some of their initiatives. Representatives of the environmental, bicycle and pedestrian communities were also on hand to contribute their ideas. The discussion was lively and informative, and there was a strong consensus on two issues; that the Portland area had one of the best transit systems in the nation, and that many Portlanders were happy to be represented in Congress by Earl Blumenauer, a Democrat who is recognized as one of transit's strongest supporters in the House.

Another issue on which all participants agreed was that the meeting was highly successful. Participants established a new e-mail networking site, [runportland.org](http://runportland.org). While not an official organization, the new network will function like a "local chapter" of RUN. RUN has also established a presence in the Pacific Northwest through this regional outreach meeting.

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

## 2008 NEW RAIL STARTS CONFINED TO THE WEST

*(Continued from page 1)*

Amtrak station, a six-minute ride from Temple Square on the Trax light rail line. Other stations are park-and-ride facilities on the outskirts of town, except for the Ogden station, located downtown two blocks from the former Union Station, which is now a museum complex.

On Dec. 17, Rail Runner service began between Albuquerque and New Mexico's capital of Santa Fe. The schedule is designed primarily for commuters, with peak-hour service offered for a commuting schedule to both endpoint cities. There is also a single mid-day run and five trains on Saturdays. There is no Sunday service yet. Rail Runner began in 2006 with service to Belen (south of Albuquerque) and Bernalillo (east of Albuquerque) on the line used by Amtrak. The Santa Fe service runs on a new line, running for 19.3 miles near or along I-25 and onto the Santa Fe Southern Railway for a short stretch to the historic Santa Fe Station, located in a revitalized neighborhood. Trains will also serve the South Capital Station, built specifically for this service.

Phoenix, AZ is the home of the last new start of the year. Valley Metro began light rail service on Dec. 27 on a 20-mile line between downtown Phoenix and Mesa, through Tempe. Service

runs on a full-time schedule, seven days a week. Ironically, the nearest Amtrak service is in Maricopa, 30 miles away and served only by two commuter bus runs on weekdays during peak hours. Valley Metro's new line is the first full-time rail transit service in Arizona. The Old Pueblo Trolley, a quasi-museum operation, operates along a one-mile line in Tucson on weekends only.

Several more new starts are planned for 2009, again mostly in the West. Portland, OR plans to start "West Side Express" commuter rail in February, and similar service is slated to begin in Austin, TX on March 30. Other new starts planned for later in the year are the Metro Gold Line to East Los Angeles, light rail to SEATAC Airport (Seattle-Tacoma) and Max Green Line light rail in Portland, OR. Two services planned for elsewhere in the nation are North Star commuter rail in Minnesota and the River Street Streetcar in Savannah, GA. The latter is scheduled to begin regular service in January, operating Wednesday through Sunday as a tourist circulator.

Keep reading the *RUN Newsletter* for more stories about these new rail services.

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

## ILLINOIS READY TO GO WITH NEW DEVELOPMENT

*(Continued from page 10)*

Why is the Wyanet Connection so exciting? First, it involves opening up a new destination that has not previously enjoyed Amtrak service. Second, it involves building a new piece of infrastructure connecting two pieces of railroad that formerly occupied separate universes and creating a new Chicago-Quad Cities route that's actually 23 miles shorter than the historic Rock Island Line.

Finally, the new alignment gives Amtrak access to a bustling industrial metropolis of 400,000 people, four times larger than Springfield, currently the largest Amtrak stop in the state outside of Chicago. Amtrak predicts that two trains a day running at 79 mph on a three-hour-and-20-minute schedule would carry 110,800 passengers in their first year. With the much less populous Chicago-Quincy route already carrying nearly 200,000 passengers a year, that estimate seems highly conservative.

### Where will the rolling stock come from?

Even if all these projects get funded, however, one big question remains: Where will IDOT or Amtrak get the rolling stock it needs to handle all the anticipated new passengers?

As noted earlier, Amtrak's meager supply of "Horizon" coaches assigned to Midwestern routes is on its last legs, with cars frequently withdrawn for repairs and entire trains sometimes annulled for lack of ready equipment. With spares unavailable even for existing trains, it's hard to imagine how Amtrak can continue servicing current demand, much less outfit two new daily trains to the Quad Cities while accommodating all the new

## GO TRANSIT'S \$1 B EXPANSION PROGRAM

*(Continued from page 4)*

GO Transit has a midday storage yard just west of the station (between Spadina Ave. and Bathurst St.) to hold some trains downtown between the morning and afternoon peak periods. A newer yard lies east of Union near the Don River on land previously used for CN freight car storage.

Along with improvements to Union Station and its approaches, GO Transit is working on other major construction projects, including additional track capacity on the Lakeshore and Georgetown lines as well as several rail-rail overpasses across the system to separate GO trains from freight traffic.

GO Transit is Canada's first, and Ontario's only, interregional public transit system, linking Toronto with the surrounding regions of the Greater Toronto Area. GO carries nearly 55 million passengers a year in an extensive network of train and bus services that is one of North America's premier transportation

riders likely to be attracted by 110-mph service on the Chicago-St. Louis route.

Indeed, even if the House Appropriations Committee fully funds the capital budget in the 2008 Amtrak reauthorization, the process of specifying a new fleet, evaluating bids and waiting for delivery of the first new coaches would take an absolute minimum of three years and in all probability a good deal longer. Clearly, something has to give if Illinois' bold initiative is to bear fruit.

### The state plans its own fleet

What probably will give is Amtrak's ownership of the rolling stock assigned to Illinois trains. Both IDOT and key members of the General Assembly, including House Railroad Committee Chairwoman Elaine Nekritz, favor the idea of the state acquiring its own fleet of cars and locomotives and simply hiring Amtrak to run them, as California, Washington and North Carolina already do.

IDOT has its eyes on some 50 of the former Santa Fe Railway "Hi-Level" coaches that Amtrak sold off to private owners in 2000. Many of the cars are stored not far from Amtrak's Chicago-St. Louis main line in Madison, Ill., across the river from St. Louis. Engineering consultants estimate they could be "tubed out" and reconfigured into luxurious contemporary corridor coaches in less than half the time needed to build new "California-style" bi-levels and, best of all, at well under half the cost. The state is examining a series of funding scenarios now, and a decision probably will be made in the first quarter of the new year.

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

systems. Since it began operating in May 1967, over one billion people have taken the GO Train or the GO Bus.

*Dan Parberry is the President of Metis Transit, Canada's First Aboriginal municipal-style transit system.*

### Canadian High-Speed Rail Symposium Organized

High Speed Rail Canada has invited representatives from industry, government and the media for a one-day symposium on high-speed rail in Canada. The date is Saturday, Jan. 31, in Kitchener, Ontario.

"The time is right for high speed rail in Canada," says Paul Langan, founder of High Speed Rail Canada. "The U.S. government is asking for proposals to build 11 high-speed rail lines. Canada will be left far behind. It's time to reinvest heavily in high-speed and higher-speed rail in Canada."

The symposium will be held at the Region of Waterloo Council Chambers, 150 Frederick St., Kitchener, from noon to 5 p.m. Attendance is free. Guest speakers will be announced in early January.

High Speed Rail Canada is a national citizens advocacy group dedicated to the implementation of high-speed rail in Canada.

For more information, contact Paul Langan, (519) 654-0089. High Speed Rail Canada website: [highspeedrail.ca](http://highspeedrail.ca), e-mail: [highspeedrailcanada@yahoo.ca](mailto:highspeedrailcanada@yahoo.ca).

# RAILROAD *POST OFFICE*



## “Coach Plus” Could Open New Market for Amtrak

To the Rail Users' Network:

Jim Coston's Fall 2008 article, "Next Generation Long-Distance Cars, Etc.", is full of excellent suggestions. I'd like to add one, an idea I tried to lay on Amtrak at least 15 years ago: I call it Coach Plus:

“Coach Plus” would differ from Superliner Coach in these respects:

- 1) Seats would drop completely flat, not just to a low recline;
- 2) A curtain could be drawn around each seat;
- 3) Breakfast would be included as part of the deal;
- 4) Complimentary coffee/tea/juice available all day.

To this sciatica and crushed-disc sufferer, a completely horizontal sleeping surface makes all the difference in the world. The curtain feature would afford some of the illusion of snugness and privacy central to some of Mr. Coston's suggestions. Breakfast and drinks are not only desirable and fortifying, but also relatively cheap and easy to prepare and furnish.

I think every major long-distance consist should include at least one Coach Plus car.

Using a Bombardier Superliner Coach car as an example, I estimate a per-car seat reduction from 74 to about 60, a figure I admit is mostly guesswork. Enough between-seat space would have to be provided that a passenger could exit the foot of the seat-bed to go to the bathroom or for other errands. I also imagine that the adjacent seats might need to be slightly separated, and a trifle thinner, for the curtains.

Figuring in that factor, plus breakfast and drinks (and another bathroom!), I'd project a fare of approximately Coach+50%.

I think “Coach Plus” would open up Amtrak travel to a whole new market. I've heard from a lot of people about the huge overall price gap between coach and the cheapest accommodation. I believe there are many who might not be able to afford any level of Sleeper fare, but who could spring for the extra comfort of a flat bed and one hot meal per day.

If you folks have any more clout with Amtrak than we do, please pass this idea along with Mr. Coston's.

### **J.W. Madison**

Rails Inc.

www.nmrails.org. e-mail: rails@nmrails.org

## More Service Gaps in National Rail Map Identified

Re: Dr. Ernest Cohen's letter on P.13 of the Fall 2008 Newsletter: “National Rail Passenger Map Has Some Big Gaps.” He's right on, as far as he goes. Here are some more (gaps) that need serious attention:

El Paso, TX/Denver, CO  
 Denver, CO/Shelby, MT  
 Denver, CO/Spokane, WA

Rails Inc. is working on these. We could use a lot of help, especially in the states of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana.

### **J.W. Madison**

Rails Inc.

www.nmrails.org. e-mail: rails@nmrails.org

## PLEASE BECOME A MEMBER OF RUN...

### FROM THE RUN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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

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

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

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

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Please register me/us as a member of RUN today

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

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

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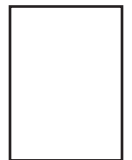
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As a grassroots organization, we depend upon your contributions to allow us to pursue our important work. Please donate to help us grow.

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