

## DOT PROPOSES FEDERAL SAFETY STANDARDS FOR TRANSIT

*By Jack Corbett*

After a June 2009 crash on Washington, DC's Metrorail system that killed nine and injured 80 people, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood announced that he would propose federal legislation to authorize his Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to set and enforce minimum federal safety standards for rail transit systems, and optionally for bus systems.

Although the National Transportation Safety Board held three days of hearings in February, that independent federal agency has not yet determined the probable cause of the accident in the District

of Columbia that resulted when a computerized train-separating signal malfunctioned and a Metro train collided with another train stopped at a station. Washington's Metrorail system is the second largest in the nation, behind New York City's. A succession of subsequent safety problems has taken its toll on the interstate transit agency with General Manager John B. Catoe, Jr., unexpectedly retiring earlier this month.

### New Safety Legislation Introduced

Even though U.S. Department of Transportation agencies had set federal safety standards for commuter and passenger rail, aviation and highways,

since 1965 Congress has prohibited FTA and its predecessor, the Urban Mass Transit Administration, from establishing federal safety standards for rail transit. The argument has been that transit was not in interstate commerce and that FTA should focus just on giving grants to local transit agencies.

DOT has recently sponsored broad federal transit safety legislation (S. 3015, H.R. 4643) authorizing FTA to establish safety standards covering rolling stock and train operators as well as FTA inspections, investigations and audits of transit agency equipment. As outlined, the new federal standards would apply to

*(Continued on page 3)*

## RUN TO TOLEDO!

*By David Peter Alan*

RUN to Toledo, OH on Friday, April 23. That's when several officers and Board members of RUN will be on hand to meet with local officials, as well as rail and transit advocates, in northwestern Ohio and southeastern Michigan.

Our day will start with a morning meeting with members of the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, the local Metropolitan Planning Organization. After lunch, we will have an open meeting with

any officials and rail advocates from the Toledo and Detroit area who wish to join us. We will meet at 1:00 at Central Union Terminal (the train station). We want to know about your concerns on the rail and transit front, and we would like to know how we can help you improve your rail service.

If you are planning to come to Toledo on the train, you probably know that the trains come through in the middle or the night or early in the morning, so you will want to spend some time in town.

Fortunately, there is plenty to do in Toledo. Downtown is interesting, with many restored buildings on avenues named after the Great Lakes. If you want to see a really beautiful neighborhood, visit the Old West End. It is a historic neighborhood, full of well-kept Victorian houses; just the place for a stroll back in time.

Toledo's best-known museum, the Toledo Museum of Art, is located across the street from the Old West End. So is the Glass Pavilion, a comprehensive

*(Continued on page 11)*

### INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

Amtrak's Fleet Strategy  
p. 2

MTA Cuts: Doomsday  
Arrives p. 4

2009's Starts Mainly in  
Western U.S. p. 6

Ohio's 3-C Plan Gets  
Stimulus Grant p. 7

More Intercity Corridors  
Needed p. 7

Maine DOT's Busway  
Plan p. 8

NJT Hikes Fares By  
25% or More p. 10

# AMTRAK'S FLEET STRATEGY: REPLACING OLD STOCK, NOT GROWING CAPACITY

*Note: This article is based on a consensus of comments at the most recent RUN Board meeting.*

On Feb. 1, Amtrak released its long-awaited plan for acquiring desperately needed new cars and locomotives. The document, titled "Amtrak Fleet Strategy: Building a Sustainable Fleet for the Future of America's Intercity and Hi-Speed Passenger Railroad," ran to 97 pages.

Most advocates who read the full report came away disappointed. For all its length and discussion of the issues, the fleet document makes it clear that Amtrak management does not intend to add new fleet capacity. It merely plans to replace existing capacity with new capacity one on a one-for-one basis. In fact, of the six categories of fleet "strategy" that Amtrak addresses, the first four open with the word "replacement:"

- **Replacement of all AEM-7 locomotives with new electrics**
- **Replacement of approximately 40 Heritage cars with new single-level vehicles**
- **Replacement of approximately 420 Amfleet I cars with new single-level coaches**
- **Replacement of the approximately 250 Superliner I vehicles with new bi-level vehicles**
- **Development of a next generation of fuel-efficient high-speed diesel locomotives [this too looks like "replacement," since there is no mention of a bigger fleet]**
- **Providing for growth expected in the Acela services...**

In other words, Amtrak expect little growth in its business except—ta-dah!—in Acela, the only line of business it seriously promotes.

The news that Amtrak management expects little growth becomes even more discouraging in the light of the lame excuses Amtrak presents for that scenario. On page 8, under the title "Market Context," Amtrak tries to explain where it expects its growth to come from.

- **Baseline secular growth associated with increased demand for the existing services.**
- **Incremental growth from market demand that is stimulated by substantial service improvements due to new investment in rail infrastructure.**

- **Externally driven growth due to a "seismic" change in demand drivers—such as dramatically increased gasoline prices or collapse of a competing travel mode—that generates drastic levels of new demand.**

The third and final paragraph of tiny space Amtrak allots to the all-important question of marketing is this meaningless one-sentence whopper: "Given these variable scenarios for potential growth, this fleet plan, of necessity, is scaled to resource baseline needs, but is also built on a premise of flexibility to meet the actual requirements for passenger rail equipment as they unfold in the future."

The only possible translation of this bureaucratic gobbledygook seems to be that the best Amtrak can expect is a modest continuation of existing growth trend lines, possibly enhanced by better train performance enabled by the new infrastructure to be built under President Obama's \$8-billion Recovery Act programs, and that if any new passengers do show up—well, then we'll increase the size of the equipment order.

The only other possibility for growth the company envisions is what it clearly sees as a long shot—a tsunami of new riders driven to the railroad by unbearably high motor fuel-prices and possibly the collapse of the airline industry! The terror with which Amtrak views the possibility of growth is reflected in the adjectives and adverbs it chose to illustrate this alluring growth prospect: "seismic," "dramatically," "drastically." Amtrak makes growth sound like a catastrophe.

Please note that in all three cases Amtrak sees substantial growth in ridership only as the product of forces outside its own control. It does not see itself as having what organizational-dynamics experts call "agency," i.e. the company assumes it has no role in, or responsibility for, its own growth. The best it can do is to accommodate growth generated for it by forces outside its control.

This is another way of saying Amtrak does not want to grow. It is comfortable with its current passive role and does not intend to take an active role in determining its own future. The fleet plan, which should be the expression of a growth plan, is simply a repeat of the earlier fleet at a higher technological level—because there is no growth plan.

In most industries, any plan to acquire new equipment, whether it be trains, airplanes, buildings, machine tools, real estate, computers, or delivery trucks, is driven by the company's growth

*(Continued on page 5)*

# DOT PROPOSES NEW FEDERAL SAFETY STANDARDS FOR RAIL TRANSIT

## LaHood Introduces Legislation in Response to Fatal 2009 Crash On DC's Metrorail System

*(Continued from page 1)*

major transit systems in New York, Chicago and Atlanta, as well as to other rail transit systems.

As an option, the DOT legislation proposes to establish a safety certification program that would allow complying states (most likely only California) to set and to enforce even higher standards for transit system safety than the FTA requirements. Federal grant funds would subsidize those states that have satisfied certification standards and that are running their own state-wide programs.

### Bill's Enactment is Likely, But Not Soon

Although many Capitol Hill legislators expressed surprise that transit safety

was not already federally regulated, and most Congressional transportation leaders indicated generalized support for the legislation, early enactment of the measure isn't likely. Rep. John Mica, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's ranking Republican, indicated, according to press reports, that he doesn't support "a whole new regime for enforcement" of transit system safety.

In addition, the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) reportedly believes FTA doesn't need to duplicate all the voluntary transit safety standards that APTA has developed over the years.

Imposition of civil penalties and criminal enforcement authority would be within DOT's enforcement powers. The DOT Secretary would be given the option to extend the Federal transit

safety program to cover buses owned by transit agencies that have received FTA grants.

These transit safety bills will likely be melded into the multi-year surface transportation reauthorization bill covering highways, transit and high speed rail that has been placed "on hold" in the current 111th Congress. The Obama Administration prefers to delay that measure until after this fall's mid-term elections, since increased funding sources (such as higher federal gas taxes) will be required and that runs counter to the President's promise not to increase federal taxes on other than the very wealthy.

*Jack Corbett is cofounder of MetroRiders.Org. He can be contacted via e-mail at [jack.corbett@metroriders.org](mailto:jack.corbett@metroriders.org)*

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

# MTA CUTS: DOOMSDAY COMES TO NEW YORK

## *Drastic Service Reductions Threaten City's Way of Life*

*By Andrew Albert*

By an 11-2 vote, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board has given the go-ahead for a slashing-and-burning of transit service in the New York Metropolitan Area by an amount unseen in at least the 35 years I've been observing the transit scene in New York. How could this happen in a place where something in the neighborhood of 69% of commuters to the Central Business District utilize mass transit of one type or another? Well, there are many reasons this has happened, and one might say that it's the "perfect storm" of calamities.

What's even more amazing is that this is an election year in New York—and these types of things NEVER happen in election years! Yet come late June/early July, New Yorkers will see cuts that aren't just fat—they're well into the bone.

Here are some of the reasons this is happening, without getting too specific. First, we have a lame-duck governor, who has announced he is not running for re-election, and that's probably a good thing, since there was no way he was getting re-elected. Secondly, New York (and the nation) is still in the grip of the recession, possibly just emerging from the worst of it—and many of the taxes and fees that support mass transit in our area are just not producing the revenue that they usually do. Due to a steep decline in commercial property sales, the mortgage recording tax, of which the MTA gets a percentage, is not even close to producing the revenue that is needed to sustain all our valuable transit services, which includes our subways, buses, commuter rails, etc.

To make matters even worse, a "mobility tax" was levied by the State Legislature when it appeared that doomsday was going to happen last year—and that tax is, again, NOT EVEN CLOSE to producing

the revenue that was estimated. Then to make matters EVEN WORSE, the Governor took away \$143 million that the mobility tax DID produce, and placed it in the general revenue fund, just about guaranteeing a huge deficit for the MTA. Honestly, you can't make this stuff up!

Then there's our dysfunctional State Legislature, who just can't agree on anything. The Assembly is fighting with the State Senate on so many things that you'd need a scorecard to keep up with it. So, in this "perfect storm" of a situation, the Chairman of the MTA had the staff of the various operating agencies draw up a humongous series of service cuts, and several public hearings were held in March to get public feedback.

In the background of all of this is the MTA's desire to not foot the bill for the passage of school children who get student Metrocards, paid for by (unbelievably) the MTA! Now, in the rest of New York State, not to mention the rest of the United States, it's the municipalities or the board of education in the various states that pay for carrying students. Not in New York City! Here, the transit provider is expected to pay for this! So, the Chairman has told the city and state that the MTA can no longer foot the bill for the students, the city and state having cut back their contributions by very large amounts over the years. Just before the beginning of the public hearings, the MTA announced that the student Metrocard issue would not be voted on at the same time as the service cuts, so most of the hearings was dominated by an angry public venting over the loss of their buses, subways, access-a-ride vehicles and much more.

How bad are the cuts? How about the chopping off of two entire subway lines: the W and the V trains? The M service that, during the rush hours, paralleled the D line in Brooklyn and took passenger from the Financial District out to Brooklyn

will no longer run. However, the M service will take over for the V, at least for the portion that runs out along the Queens Boulevard local line in the heart of Queens. This actually is not a bad idea, giving riders in Middle Village and Ridgewood direct service to midtown Manhattan, utilizing the long-closed Chrystie Street connection, and which riders will welcome.

To take up the slack of losing the W train, the Q train will be extended on weekdays only, to Astoria in Queens. However, Lower Manhattan south of Canal Street will only see one service—the R, running through the tunnel to Brooklyn. As if this weren't bad enough, off-peak service on many lines will go from 100% of seated load to 125%, meaning headways will lengthen, and riders will have additional wait times. Since the system is far from running like clockwork, that one or two minutes of "extra" wait time could easily balloon into eight or 10 minutes of extra wait time, guaranteeing that some lines will look like rush hour—on a Saturday afternoon. Schedule adherence will continue to go down, as passengers scramble to hold doors, and push into already crowded trains.

The bus picture is even more bleak, as many routes (about 80) will see their service either completely eliminated, or the spans of service changed, with some routes losing their weekend service. Some examples: once again, the M6 bus is eliminated (they tried it last year, but gave in when the Speaker of the State Assembly, whose district was severely impacted, yelled bloody murder). With the M5 extended to South Ferry to make up for the loss of the M6, the M10, which ran from Harlem to Penn Station will be cut back at Columbus Circle, making passengers transfer to another bus to continue their journey. The Bx14, the ONLY bus serving the Country Club section of the Northeast Bronx,

*(Continued on page 9)*

## AMTRAK'S FLEET MANAGEMENT NON-STRATEGY

(Continued from page 2)

plan, which is not a projection of the existing growth curve but an actual plan—a strategy—for steepening the curve and growing faster. Amtrak has no such growth plan, so its alleged fleet plan is a big “Huh?”

Serious advocates thus need to ask themselves—as well as the Amtrak board, Amtrak management and the elected representatives to whom Amtrak has appealed for funding its new acquisitions—the following questions:

- Why does Amtrak not have a growth strategy, especially for the long-distance trains?
- Why does the Fleet Plan assume that growth will come only from a) states willing to pay for trains, or b) an increase in the price of motor fuel? Does Amtrak not see itself as an agent capable of inducing its own growth? Has it not become aware that young people are shunning cars and choosing the train (and Megabus *et al.*) because a) they can use their personal electronics on board and b) with this generation personal electronics have replaced cars as personal status symbols (Prof. Joe Schwieterman at DePaul University has shown this in a recent paper).
- In 1994, then-CEO Tom Downs paid a consultant a huge sum of money to show Amtrak how and why it should downsize.

Is Amtrak today willing to pay another consultant any money at all to show Amtrak how and why it can grow?

- Fares keep going up on the long-distance trains, suggesting that demand is there. Why has Amtrak no plans to add frequencies on any overnight route, or to start up new routes, or to restore old L-D routes that were abolished?

This is more than sluggishness; it is flagrant disdain for an entire line of business. Note that Amtrak's report on restoring service on the Sunset Route east of New Orleans claims that trains could not be run until stations are upgraded to comply with ADA. It fails to note, however, that the ADA applies only to new or rebuilt stations or to stations at which passenger rail service is being started up. Stations already served are grandfathered until they are replaced or given a major rebuilding.

The service east of New Orleans is not a startup. Amtrak refers to it multiple times in its *PRIIA Section 226 Gulf Coast Service Plan Report* as a “restoration” of service following a “suspension” of service due to an Act of God (Hurricane Katrina). Why is Amtrak holding this service restoration hostage to an inapplicable statute if not through bad faith and a reluctance to grow?

- When will Amtrak install software showing the date and hour when a particular train sold out and documenting

whether discouraged passengers a) defaulted to a less busy train or date or b) made other plans? In other words, is Amtrak even interested in how many potential passengers it's turning away?

The key issue at Amtrak is whether the company wants to grow and whether it sees itself as an agent of its own growth or merely a passive responder to growth thrust on it by exogenous forces. A corollary question is whether Amtrak defines “demand” as something originating with individual travelers or whether it will acknowledge demand only when it is expressed by states.

And a further corollary is the question as to why Amtrak insists on state demand in the territory outside the NEC while responding directly to consumer demand on its own property.

Advocates and railfans love to talk about hardware—perhaps too much. While it's fun to think about the newer, more comfortable equipment we're soon (hopefully) going to ride, it's irresponsible to ignore the 800-pound gorilla that's stinking up the “Amtrak Fleet Strategy” document: Why isn't Amtrak ordering more of it? Why isn't Amtrak adopting a supply-side strategy—more trains, on more routes, now!—instead of waiting for vague forces supposedly outside its control to deliver it an army of new customers it hasn't even shown it wants?

RUN Board Meetings for the balance of 2010 are scheduled as follows: April 23 (in Toledo, OH), June 26, August 21 and Oct. 23. Board meetings normally take place at the MTA headquarters in New York City, 347 Madison Ave., from 1-5 pm, but please call 207-776-4961 to confirm.

## MOST NEW TRANSIT STARTS DURING 2009 OCCURRED ON WEST COAST

By *David Peter Alan*

The West again dominated new transit starts in 2009, with five of the six new starts that opened last year in the USA, and one in Canada. The others were in Minnesota and Texas. A majority of the new starts occurred in the Northwest: Portland, Seattle and Vancouver.

Portland, OR led the nation in new starts, with two in that system alone. Tri-Met, the Tri-County Metropolitan Transit District of Oregon, began service on its new MAX Green Line, a light rail line from downtown Portland to the Clackamas Transit Center, southeast of the city. The 8.3-mile line began service on Sept. 14, bringing a new light rail routing along Fifth and Sixth Avenues in downtown Portland, between Portland State University and Union Station. This provides a light rail connection with Amtrak's Cascades Corridor trains, Coast Starlight and Empire Builder, which use the historic train station. At the east end of the line, the extension into Clackamas County makes the light rail system an actual "tri-county" operation for the first time.

Earlier in the year, on Feb. 2, an unusual commuter rail operation began service in the Portland area, but not in downtown Portland. WES, or Westside Express Service, began as a peak-hour only service between the Beaverton Transit Center on the MAX Red and Blue Lines and Wilsonville, 14.7 miles to the south in Washington County. According to Tri-Met, daily ridership averaged 1170 trips during the first year of operation. Service operates every half-hour, but only during peak hours on weekdays. The line uses the last four units ever manufactured by the now-defunct Colorado Railcar Corporation.

In Seattle, Sound Transit's Central Link Light Rail began operating a 14-mile segment between downtown Seattle and

Tukwila on July 19, with the last 1.7 miles to Sea-Tac Airport opening for service on Dec. 19. The line uses the Transit Tunnel under downtown Seattle and shares the tunnel with several bus routes. Before 2005, only dual-powered (diesel and battery-powered) buses ran in the tunnel, which was retrofitted to add rail capability for the Central Link line. The line connects with King County Metro's South Lake Union Streetcar at the Westlake Transit Center. Sound Transit also operates buses, Sounder commuter trains to Everett and Tacoma, and a short light rail line in downtown Tacoma, known as Tacoma Link.

Further north, Vancouver (one of only six Canadian cities to boast rail transit) added the new Canada Line to its Skytrain system. TransLink opened the new Canada Line on August 17. The line runs from Waterfront Station, south along Cambie Street to Richmond, with a branch to Vancouver Airport. The new line connects at Waterfront Station with the Expo and Millennium Skytrain Lines, West Coast Express commuter rail and the Seabus ferry to North Vancouver. At this writing, TransLink is also running special transit for the Winter Olympics. West Coast Express trains are running at off peak hours for two weeks in February, for the first time in the history of the line. There is also a special two-month streetcar operation on the "Olympic Line" from Granville Island to the Olympic Village.

Back in the USA, Los Angeles again expanded its light rail system with the introduction of the Metro Gold Line to East Los Angeles. The line opened on Nov. 15 and added eight new stations to the city's light rail map. The new service area includes the city's historic Japanese community know as Little Tokyo, the historic neighborhood of Bunker Hill and several stations in the predominately Mexican neighborhoods of East L.A.

Trains operate between East L.A. and Pasadena, through Union Station in the middle of the line. Riders can connect at Union Station with the Red and Purple subway lines, MetroLink commuter trains and Amtrak long-distance and corridor trains. Further expansions of the rail system are under construction.

The next day, Nov. 16, saw the first commuter train in the State of Minnesota. Northstar Commuter Rail now operates between downtown Minneapolis and Big Lake, 40 miles away, in the direction toward St. Cloud. Trains consist of Genesis locomotives and Bombardier multi-level cars, similar to those used on most commuter rail lines outside the Northeast Region and Chicago. The line operates mostly in peak commuting hours, with one train in "reverse direction" during peak time and three round trips on weekends. Trains connect with the Hiawatha Light Rail line in Minneapolis. A bus connection is available at Big Lake for St. Cloud, and Metro Transit is considering extending the line to St. Cloud in 2014.

Light rail is expanding in Dallas, too. The DART (Dallas Area Rapid Transit) Green Line started operation on a portion of the anticipated route on Sept. 14. The new line adds Victory Station, a stadium station, to the line, and then proceeds along the same route as the existing Red and Blue Lines to Pearl St. The new stations beyond Pearl St. serve the Deep Ellum and Fair Park neighborhoods, ending for now at the MLK Transit Center. The entire Green Line is slated to open for service in December of 2010. DART officials plan more expansion of rail service, with the Orange Line to DFW Airport and an extension of the Blue Line to be completed by the end of 2013, which would complete the planned rail system. Fares on DART and Trinity Railway Express (TRE) commuter trains also rose substantially the day the new line began service.

*(Continued on page 8)*

## OHIO'S 3-C CORRIDOR AWARDED STIMULUS GRANT

By *Bill Engel*

Thursday, Jan. 28, 2010 was a red-letter day for passenger rail advocates in the State of Ohio. That day, President Obama announced that Ohio's 3-C "Quick Start" Passenger Rail Corridor was awarded a \$400 million federal stimulus grant. Ohio Governor Ted Strickland also announced the award at the Ohio Statehouse in a ceremony attended by U.S. Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, Ohio Department of Transportation Director Jolene Molitoris, state and local officials, and rail supporters from around Ohio. It is hoped that train service can begin as soon as 2012.

Much of the excitement of passenger rail supporters in Ohio at the announcement is generated by the ridership potential of the line. The Amtrak study projects nearly 500,000 riders in the first year. That number would make Ohio's 3-C Corridor the 12th largest generator of passenger rail traffic in its first year, according to ODOT Director Molitoris. Ohio U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, enthused "Rail is good for business and good for our cities." There certainly are many potential riders, since nearly six million Ohioans live within 15 miles of the 250-mile-long corridor. This makes it one of the most densely populated corridors in the U.S. currently without rail service.

Not everyone shared Democrat Governor Strickland's enthusiasm for the project. In an editorial titled "Train ride for Ohio" the *Akron Beacon-Journal* newspaper pointed out some questions they feel need to be answered. A big one is the fact that Ohio's grant request was for \$564 million versus the \$400 million awarded. The same editorial also questioned where the funds for the estimated \$17 million annual operating subsidy will be found. The editorial concluded "the grant provides a boost in the right direction, in terms of jobs, energy and the environment, and the long-term economic benefits of tighter bonds between urban centers that power the state's economy. The task now is to attract the dollars and riders needed to keep rolling."

Soon after this somewhat supportive editorial appeared, the *Beacon-Journal* published an article under the headline "Skeptics say Ohio's business travelers would shun proposed Amtrak routes." The article was written by two reporters from the *Columbus Dispatch* newspaper. Their main criticism was the proposed schedule that has trains taking six hours and 30 minutes to travel from Cleveland to Cincinnati compared to four hours and 12 minutes by automobile.

It has also been reported that Republicans, who control the Ohio Senate, are reluctant to let the project

start until operating funds have been found. Republican State Senator Tom Patton of Strongsville, a Cleveland suburb, was reported to favor the project if it didn't create a drag on taxpayers. In a state facing huge budget deficits finding operating funds could be a major problem.

Much work must be done if trains are to begin operating on the 3-C Corridor in 2012, as is hoped. New station facilities will be needed at all proposed stops except the Cleveland terminus, where the existing Amtrak Lakefront station would be used. Surveys have been conducted at the West 150th Street Cleveland RTA Red Line stop in southwest Cleveland and at Dayton. It is proposed that the southwest Cleveland location would become a joint station with the Red Line to allow access to Cleveland Hopkins Airport. At Dayton, a survey was made of the old Dayton Union Station location downtown, where a new facility would be constructed.

A likely location for the Columbus stop would be underneath the existing downtown Convention Center. When that facility was built on the location of the former Columbus Union Station, provision was made for future access to the railroad tracks and construction of a passenger platform or platforms.

*(Continued on page 11)*

## MORE INTERCITY CORRIDORS NEEDED, WITH OR WITHOUT HIGH SPEED

By *Gary Prophet*

With much fanfare, the Obama administration announced about \$8 billion in high-speed rail grants earlier this year. Corridors to receive major funding included Florida, California, the Pacific Northwest, and corridors around Chicago. More modest funding was provided to Maine, Vermont, and upstate New York. Many other rail corridors need to be funded, although 110 mph is not necessarily required for many of them.

Now in 2010, it seems surprising that there is no passenger rail service on corridors such as Los Angeles to Las Vegas, Denver to Seattle, Denver to Dallas; and once a day or less infrequent service on corridors such as Dallas to San Antonio, or Houston to New Orleans, or Los Angeles to Phoenix to Tucson. Each of these corridors needs multiple trains daily in each direction and could be very successful at speeds below 80 mph. Other popular intercity routes with one train a day, should have at least two

trains a day, such as Chicago to Denver, Chicago to Memphis, and New York to Buffalo to Cleveland to Chicago. Let's hope intercity rail service is not viewed as successful solely on the results of the billions to be spent between Tampa and Orlando, a route of only 86 miles that is more like a commuter route than an intercity corridor.

*Gary Prophet is RUN Treasurer and Vice President of the Empire State Passengers Association.*

# MAINE DOT'S BUSWAY PROPOSAL

By *Richard Rudolph*  
Chair, Rail Users' Network

Maine Department of Transportation officials have spent \$1 million over the past two years to determine whether the state should promote bus rapid transit or restore commuter rail service north of Portland. The findings from this MDOT study called Portland North will be used to apply to the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Small Starts program, which funds transit projects in small cities across the nation. The New Starts program is the federal government's primary financial resource for supporting locally-planned, implemented, and operated transit "guideway" capital investments. From heavy to light rail, from commuter rail to bus rapid transit systems, the FTA's New Starts program has helped to make possible hundreds of new or extended transit fixed guideway systems across the country. The FTA pays 80% of the engineering and planning costs and 50% of the capital and operating costs, with states paying the rest. These rail and bus investments, in turn, have improved the mobility of millions of Americans; have helped to reduce congestion and improve air quality in the areas they serve and have fostered the development of viable, safer and more livable communities.

The options being considered in Maine include frequent commuter rail service or rapid bus transit service between Portland and Bath or between Portland and Auburn. While transit advocates favor the former, it appears that MDOT will submit a request calling for establishing frequent bus service utilizing dedicated breakdown lanes on Interstate 295. Tram-like buses, which are narrower than ordinary buses, would be used. The preliminary data gathered to date shows that there is a greater demand for commuter service from Yarmouth, Freeport, Brunswick and Bath instead of Gray, New Gloucester, Durham and Lewiston-Auburn. The Portland to Bath route offers the greatest potential for attracting commuters: 860 daily riders in the first year, according to the MDOT analysis. The number of people commuting from Lewiston-Auburn to Portland is relatively small compared to commuters on the I-295 corridor.

MDOT's ridership estimates have been called into question for new starts elsewhere have far exceeded initial ridership projections, and despite claims to the contrary commuters certainly prefer taking a train than riding a bus. MDOT's cost estimates are equally suspect. The capital cost for rail service between Portland and Bath, according to state officials, would be over \$100 million while bus service could be established for as little as \$19 million. This estimate flies in the face of reality. Maine has already received \$35 million dollars to extend Amtrak's popular DownEaster service 30 miles north from Portland to Freeport and Brunswick. The funds will be used by Pam Am Railway to replace 28 miles of track, to install 30,00 new ties and to improve 36 grade crossings on its inland route.

It shouldn't take any more to upgrade the Saint Lawrence and Atlantic Railway which is the preferred commuter rail route which runs parallel to I-295. The bridge over Back Cove would need to be rebuilt, but this would enable commuters to detrain on the west end of the waterfront near India and Commercial Street in downtown Portland. The SLR route would provide connectivity to the DownEaster Amtrak service at Yarmouth Junction, and to ferry and cruise ship business at the Ocean Gateway Center in downtown Portland. From Yarmouth Junction, the commuter rail service could connect at the PanAm mainline to the State-owned rail in Brunswick, and to Bath and Rockland. Local stations would need to be built, but two are already there: Brunswick's Maine Street Station and the restored station in Bath. The proposed Freeport station could serve both Downeaster Amtrak riders as well as commuters going to Portland.

Train equipment wouldn't be a stumbling block, either. While the only diesel-multiple (DMU) car manufacturer in the U.S., Colorado Rail Car, went out of business in 2008, there are former VIA diesel rail cars that have been rehabilitated by Industrial Rail Services in Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada that could be

purchased to provide half-hourly service during rush hours. This would certainly have a greater impact on easing traffic congestion on I-295, as well as providing an alternative mode of transportation for those who do not want to commute by car or tram-like buses.

## 2009 NEW STARTS

*{ Continued from page 6 }*

The other "new start" news in Texas is the new start that never happened. After much fanfare about an expected March 30 opening of Metro Rail in Austin, no trains ran. Capital Metro had planned the opening of peak-hour rail service from downtown Austin to Leander for 2008, and then postponed the start of service into 2009, citing difficulties in obtaining necessary approvals from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). At this writing, nearly one year later, service has still not begun, nor has a specific opening date been promised.

For the second straight year, there are no new starts in the East. Still, there was one restoration of service worthy of note. New Jersey Transit restored weekend rail service on its Montclair-Boonton Line to the Town of Montclair on Nov. 8. The service is limited, but it marks the first Sunday service in 50 years. Limited Saturday service lasted until 1966.

The New Starts process may be changing. New FTA "New Starts/Small Starts" rules are changing the criteria for awards of FTA grants for new start development. Until now, the primary consideration was "cost-effectiveness." Now, environmental impact and effect on livability of cities and towns will become more important in the selection process. This sounds like an improvement, which should result in more new starts for transit that does not run alongside highways. This will not happen soon, but time will tell.

*David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey. He writes for this and other publications on transit policy issues.*



# DOOMSDAY COMES TO NEW YORK

*(Continued from page 4)*

is eliminated, with the BX8 re-routed to take up some of the slack. The Q79, the ONLY bus running along the eastern spine of Queens, along Little Neck Parkway, is completely eliminated, and the list goes on and on and on.

On the commuter rail side, all weekend service on the West Hempstead branch of the Long Island Rail Road is eliminated! Off-peak service on the very crowded Port Washington branch, which had been half-hourly, becomes hourly—a 50% cut in service on one of the busiest branches! In something of a “victory,” where all service on the Greenport branch had been slated to be eliminated, after 200 screaming attendees at one of the public hearings demanded they be taken out of the MTA’s service area, the MTA relented and retained all weekday service on the branch, and summer weekends.

Other Greenport weekend service is still slated to be eliminated. Several runs on the Babylon branch, and one Montauk train is slated for elimination, and on Metro-North, several runs are scheduled to be combined.

One of the most ridiculous cuts of all is the elimination of all overnight service on the LIRR’s Brooklyn (Atlantic) branch. This, after renovating the Atlantic Viaduct by almost \$80 million, and the soon-to-open new Nets Stadium and Entertainment Complex in downtown Brooklyn! What if a concert goes late, or a Nets game goes into double overtime? (Miracles COULD happen.) Some of these cuts go right to the accessibility issue, with paratransit service facing huge reductions.

I’ve always viewed public transportation as one of the four essential services—right up there with police, fire and sanitation. These cuts will affect the New York way of life. They are the antithesis of “going green.” And I hear they are happening all over the country, not just in New York.

How did we get to this terrible place? How is it that our federal government doesn’t step in and help our cities in their time of need? I’ve heard several elected officials speak of federal operating assistance, but as of yet—nothing. Some cities have used up to 10% of their federal stimulus funds for operating assistance for mass transit, but our Chairman steadfastly resists doing

this, even after many elected officials have implored him to do just that.

The upshot of all of this is that many folks will head back to their automobiles, burning more fuel and tying up more streets. Mobility will be impaired, and New York will have a tougher time pulling out of the recession.

Our transit system was our ace-in-the-hole, our reason many companies locate here, expand here, create jobs here. When their employees are forced to be packed in like sardines, at all hours of the day or night, when it becomes a hassle just to get a train or bus to go shopping or to a concert or museum, they may look elsewhere. When are we going to get serious about cutting our dependence on foreign oil and making transit the logical method of getting around our cities and suburban communities? Let’s hope the choice is made soon—before we have no transit systems to fall back on. Because as of right now, they’re dying.

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

## Get Involved with the work of RUN!

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# NJT HITS RIDERS WITH BIGGEST FARE HIKE EVER

By Paul Bubny

Despite clamorous protests from rail advocates, members of the riding public and political leaders, New Jersey Transit's Board of Directors voted on April 14 to implement massive fare increases as well as service reductions. Effective May 1, rail fares will go up 25% across the board, with off-peak riders facing increases of 47%. A few off-peak rail fares are scheduled to increase by as much as 64%. At the Board's meeting in February, NJT Executive Director James Weinstein said the increases were part of an effort to eliminate a deficit of nearly \$300 million during fiscal 2011, which begins July 1.

Gov. Chris Christie has already slashed NJT's state subsidy by \$32.7 million for this fiscal year. The governor has ruled out raising the state's gasoline tax, which hasn't been increased since 1988 and is among the lowest in the country.

Additionally, Weinstein said in February that some service cuts will be necessary because ridership is down 4% from last year. He said he directed his managers to make the cuts, which could also include salary and management reductions at NJT, "with a scalpel, and not with a meat ax." However, the cuts may be severe; in particular, weekend service on some lines is now in jeopardy.

"A 20, 30 or even 40% fare increase, which the executive director is talking about, is a huge tax on working families," said John S. Wisniewski, Chair of the New Jersey Assembly Transportation Committee, at a hearing the following day. "It's the wrong signal to be sending to working families of the State of New Jersey."

NJT had also planned to raise the local bus fare, and the fare on its Newark Light Rail and River Rail line in South Jersey, from \$1.35 to \$1.70. Management relented on the local bus fare and will increase it only to \$1.50. In addition, fewer bus routes will be eliminated than had

originally been proposed.

But rail riders were less fortunate. They will face the largest fare increase in NJT's 30-year history. Discounts for seniors and people with disabilities will still be offered, but the only "regular" riders who will receive any discount are commuters, many of whom ride at peak commuting times.

Rail advocates and ordinary riders were out in force to protest the fare hikes and service cuts. About 25 riders chanted "No more cuts" in a demonstration outside NJT headquarters in Newark. At the Board's April 14 meeting, many rail advocates and ordinary riders made their voices heard.

Weinstein said at the April meeting that the agency had "stabilized state assistance" and thanked transit advocates for their comments. Although the advocates at the meeting did not appear grateful for the word of thanks, Weinstein said that raising the local bus fare to only \$1.50 gave a break to 70% of bus riders and 52% of NJT's riders overall. The other 48%, those on rail or interstate buses to New York City or Philadelphia, must pay at least 25% more than their current fare.

Many speakers complained about the large subsidies given to automobile transportation, while transit riders were singled out to pay more. Suzanne Mack, Chair of the North Jersey Transportation Advisory Committee (NJTAC), expressed her concern that another funding crisis will occur soon, called for a dedicated source of funding for transit, and recommended that a panel be convened to study transit funding. William R. Wright, also an NJTAC member, said the current policy capped "a quarter-century of discrimination against the transit rider and the transit employee" and called for an emergency 25¢ user fee on each gallon of gasoline.

Other advocates agreed. Gary Johnson of the Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee said that since each penny added to the state's

gasoline user fee represents \$50 million in revenue that could be used for transit operations, the amount that each motorist or trucker would pay for improved transit would be "a drop in the gas tank." Daniel Chazin, an attorney and Lackawanna Coalition member, said he would gladly pay an extra \$100 per year in gasoline user fees, because it would cost more than that to take a family of four from New Brunswick to New York City for the day under the new fare policy.

The environmental community was on hand, too. Kate Slevin, Executive Director of the Tri-State Transportation Campaign, called the higher fares "a bad deal for New Jerseyans and a "tax increase on the working people in the state" and suggested that \$42 million in available Stimulus funds be used for transit operations. Jeff Tittel, Director of the New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club, called the proposed NJT fares "a train wreck" and expressed the concern, seconded by other speakers, that the proposed fares would encourage people to use the highways instead of the train, which would increase pollution and congestion.

Joseph M. Clift of the Regional Rail Working Group said that the steep hike in the off-peak rail fare was a bad business move for NJT. He said that when he was Director of Planning for the Long Island Rail Road, increasing the off-peak discount from 25% to 33% substantially increased the number of riders, shifting many from peak-hour to off-peak trains, which reduced the need for costly peak-hour operations.

Yet the pleadings and arguments by the advocates and rail riders went unheard. The Board voted unanimously to approve the fare increases, even though several Board members expressed their dismay at the proposal. This was unsurprising, since no NJT Board member has cast a dissenting vote since 2003.

*Paul Bubny is Newsletter Editor and Treasurer for the Lackawanna Coalition.*

## OHIO'S 3-C RAIL CORRIDOR GETS STIMULUS GRANT

*(Continued from page 7)*

Stations in suburban Cincinnati at Sharonville and the Boathouse location for the Cincinnati terminus would have to be totally new. The proposed Cincinnati site would also require upgrading several miles of railroad to access it.

Equipment design is another issue. The Amtrak feasibility study and the ORDC application to the FRA proposed five train sets of conventional push-pull equipment including coaches and a café car. Meanwhile, an Ohio business man was in the process of purchasing the Diesel Multiple Unit (DMU) car designs of Colorado Rail Car. This individual

would like to begin manufacturing the cars in Ohio. His company is US Railcar, LLC. With this development, the ORDC is now giving serious consideration to DMU equipment for 3-C Corridor trains.

Maintenance facilities for the trains must also be constructed. An easily accessible site has been identified in Cleveland which is east of the current Amtrak station. If this became the main maintenance location, it could also service additional trains between Cleveland and Chicago.

The Ohio 3-C Quick Start Passenger Rail Corridor offers an exciting opportunity to expand passenger rail in a state which

for too long has had only middle-of-the-night service from Amtrak. The potential riders are there. Now it is up to the rail professionals and political leadership to get the trains rolling.

To obtain more information about Ohio's "3-C" corridor, check out 3CisME.ohio.gov online. For more information about US Railcar, visit www.usrailcar.com. The website has a page where you may sign up to receive their newsletter. The website also has pictures and specifications for their DMU cars.

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

## RUN TO TOLEDO

*(Continued from page 1)*

antique and art glass piece that opened only a few years ago. Toledo celebrates its heritage as the Glass City there; Libbey Glass and several other major glass-making companies had their headquarters in the city. Admission to the Toledo Museum of Art and the Glass Pavilion are free.

If you want another unique Toledo attraction, visit the *S.S. Willis B. Boyer*, a 1911-vintage Great Lakes freighter that now serves as a museum ship. It may not be open for the season yet, but you can always go back another time. Locals also rate the Toledo Zoo as one of the best in the country.

As with most other cities, there is plenty

to eat in Toledo. If you want a quick snack, try Coney Island Hot Dogs (we call them "chili dogs" in the East) on Superior St., downtown. If you want historic atmosphere, go to the Oliver Inn. For a unique taste of Toledo, go to Tony Packo's Cafe at 1902 Front St. (the original location; Dave's pick.) It has been there since 1932, and was often mentioned on *M\*A\*S\*H* by Sgt. Maxwell Q. Klinger (a character who, appropriately enough, came from Toledo). The atmosphere is authentic and the food is great. The fare is American, with a Hungarian influence. The hot dogs taste a bit like Hungarian sausage (kolbasz) and the stuffed cabbage is first-rate. They also have cherry strudel for dessert.

Part of the experience of going to Tony Packo's is to take a TARTA (Toledo Area

Rapid Transit Authority) bus from the lineup on Jackson Avenue, downtown. You have 80 minutes between buses, which is just enough time for dinner.

Even with the inconvenience of trains arriving and leaving in the middle of the night, and buses that only run every 80 minutes outside of peak commuting hours, Toledo is worth a visit. Join us as we RUN to Toledo on Friday, April 23. If you want to learn more about the city, contact the Toledo Convention & Visitors' Bureau at (800) 423-4667. Their website is www.dotoledo.org.

*David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition in New Jersey. He writes for this and other publications on transit policy issues.*

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