RUN RAIL USERS NETWORK

NEWSLETTER

FALL 2023 VOL. 20 ISSUE 4

INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S OCTOBER 21 ANNUAL MEETING / VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

"Passenger Rail & the Environment - Natural Allies: Environmental benefits of passenger rail /rail transit in North America"

1:00 P.M. - 4:45 P.M. EDT

By Richard Rudolph, Ph.D., Chairman, Rail Users' Network

Please join us at the Rail Users' Network's Annual Meeting / Virtual Conference which is taking place on Saturday, October 21 from 1 p.m. - 4:45 p.m. This exciting event will highlight the environmental benefits of passenger rail / rail transit in America.

The program will begin with the election of RUN Board members and a brief presentation regarding RUN's thoughts on FRA's Long Distance Rail Study Committee work regarding and expanding Amtrak Long Distance Service. The roster of speakers includes:

Darrell Clarke, Sierra Club Los Angeles, Chapter Chair of its Transportation Committee. He will talk about the history of the Expo Line to Santa Monica and its environmental significance.

Peter Cole, TrainRiders NorthEast and Maine Rail Group Representative. He will talk about the ongoing fight to save Maine's state-owned rail lines from being torn up and converted into bicycle/walking paths.

Katherine J. Garcia, Director, Clean Transportation for All, Sierra Club. She will provide an overview regarding the environmental benefits of passenger rail and rail transit.

Barry Scott, Board Member, Coastal Rail Santa Cruz. He will talk about the ongoing effort to build trail with rail in Santa Cruz. It will be 12-16 feet wide and run along the coastal side of the existing rail line.

Tom White, Co-Chair, Climate Rail Alliance. Tom will talk about Toll Roads for Trains.

Continued on page 7

NOTES FROM NEW YORK:
FARE INCREASES/SERVICE INCREASES

By Andrew Albert

Fare Increase - 1st increase to the base fare since 2015! The base fare for subways and buses is now $2.90, up from the long-running fare of $2.75. While the weekly & monthly fares were raised in 2019, the base fare was not raised at that time. In addition to the new $2.90 base fare, the price of an unlimited weekly Metrocard or Omny card was raised from $33 to $34, while the unlimited monthly fare was raised from $127 to $132. The new price for Express Buses was raised by $.25 to $7. City Ticket - the reduced price for riding commuter rail, such as the Long Island Rail Road or Metro-North Railroad within the boroughs of NYC remains at $5, however there is now the ability to use City Ticket during peak hours, for $7. Previously, City Ticket was not usable during rush hours, so this is a major improvement!

Additionally, Atlantic Ticket has been discontinued, which primarily served Southeast Queens & Brooklyn. Unfortunately, one of the best parts of Atlantic Ticket was the ability to purchase a weekly Atlantic Ticket for $60, and this included free transfers to subways and buses. While it is great that City Ticket is now usable where Atlantic Ticket existed, the loss of the weekly ticket is very unfortunate. I gave a long and detailed history and explanation at the MTA Board meeting where the vote on these new fares was taken. I mentioned that when Omny is available on the commuter rails, which is likely in 2025, that the return of the weekly – and, indeed a monthly option - should once again include free transfers to subways and buses.

Continued on page 3

RUN COMMENTS ON FRA'S LONG-DISTANCE STUDY

August 20, 2023

USDOT: Pete Buttigieg (Cabinet Secretary)
FRA: Amit Bose, Administrator
FTA: Nuria Fernandez, Administrator

To: contactus@fralongdistancerailstudy.org

Subject: Comment letter on Round 2 on FRA Long-Distance Service Study

The Federal Railroad Administration has twice this year asked for input regarding passenger rail in the United States. As a nationally recognized rail passenger advocacy organization, RUN answered the request for public comment on the Federal Railroad Administration's Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study.

This is a follow up to our March 13, 2023 comment letter on the FRA Long Distance study, which included our recommendations for an enhanced passenger rail system with additional routes and services. We now respond to the second call for additional input to the Conceptual Enhanced Network which the FRA has proposed based upon input received thus far.

To reiterate and clarify our position, RUN advocates on behalf of all riders on rail-based transportation, whether Amtrak or local rail transit. We appreciate the importance of Amtrak in providing mobility throughout most of the nation, and we also advocate for improved connectivity between Amtrak and local rail transit.

Members of RUN have studied the report developed by the FRA which has explained the methodology used to develop the enhanced network, and deeply appreciate the legislative considerations guiding that planned development. Hopefully this effort will not only enhance connectivity between major cities and regions and will also connect rural and/or less advantaged communities between those cities and within those regions. Enhanced and expanded routes will result in a true system of interconnected passenger rail routes producing increased ridership, as well as developing and increasing local and state economies.

Enhanced Network:

For the maximum public benefit of this Long Distance Study, we need the FRA to champion the expansion and improvement of - the Amtrak long distance network after the conclusion of this study process.
We ask that the FRA prioritize several projects to serve as test cases to prove the merits of this enhanced system. For the credibility of FRA and Amtrak, we need some near-term wins of "low-hanging fruit" routes that would require minimal new infrastructure. It could be a new route or an improved current route, but improvements needed should be accomplished to demonstrate the effectiveness of enhancements to passenger rail. We suggest the following restorations of service:

- Daily service on the *Cardinal* and *Sunset Limited*
- The *Desert Wind* from Salt Lake City to Los Angeles (with perhaps initial service SLC - Las Vegas)
- The *Pioneer* from Seattle and Portland to Salt Lake City via Idaho
- A new route from Meridian, MS to Dallas/Fort Worth, TX
- The *Floridian* directly connecting the upper Midwest to Florida via Atlanta
- The *Broadway Limited* from New York to Chicago
- The *North Coast Hiawatha* from Seattle through southern Montana to Chicago
- *Rocky Mountain Flyer*, connecting El Paso, Albuquerque, Denver, Casper and Helena, MT to Shelby, MT
- The *National Limited* connecting the East via Pittsburgh to St. Louis via Columbus, OH and Indianapolis

Continued on page 10

NOTES FROM NEW YORK

Continued from page 1

There was one additional improvement to our fare structure - Far Rockaway is now part of City Ticket! Previously, due to the fact that riders from the Far Rockaway LIRR station had to ride into Nassau County before returning to city limits at Rosedale, this station had not been part of Atlantic Ticket or City Ticket. Due to some clever innovations, such as the fact that Far Rockaway City Tickets are only available at the Far Rockaway station or on e-tix, this station, which is part of Queens, can now benefit from reduced fares - especially important, as Far Rockaway is a long ride to Manhattan or Downtown Brooklyn!

A wonderful addition - which I had been advocating for - has also been introduced: Rolling Fare Capping! Prior to this fare increase, fare capping had been available to users of the Omny tap card, beginning on Mondays and ending on the following Sunday. This meant that once you tapped 12 times, all remaining trips until that next Sunday were free. With rolling fare capping, the count begins the first time you tap!

Since not everyone travels in the same pattern, this is a major improvement, and will likely further increase the amazing growth of the Omny card, which will within two years - completely replace the aging Metrocard. Commuter rail riders weren't exempt from fare increases either - fares were increased on both the LIRR & Metro-North Railroad by about 4.5%, with some ticket types increasing by 10%. However monthly fares are capped at $500. Fares haven't been increased during the pandemic, but the MTA will return to the process of every-other-year low (4%) fare increases, rather than what once took place, which was no fare increases for many years, and then a whopping fare increase! Smaller, predictable rate hikes are returning.

Service Increases!

One of the benefits of the recently adopted NY State Budget, for which we must thank Governor Hochul and the members of the State Legislature, is money dedicated to treating the MTA as the essential service that it is. This means money to lessen the fare increase, and money to run additional service. The additional service has been up and running for a few months now, and more has just occurred! In July, weekend service on the G,J,M lines increased to every 8-9 minutes. In August, weekday service on the C,N,R lines increased to 8 minute headways, and on weekends, #1, 6 lines decreased headways to every 6 minutes! And - on August 28, midday service on the N,R lines will run every 8 minutes! And this will be vitally important, as work will be beginning on the 63rd Street Tunnel fixation project. And that's not all - in July of 2024, weekday service on the B,D,J,M lines will run every 8 minutes, and on weekends, #3,5 lines will run every 10 minutes. So good times and good service are in place and planned for the largest transit system in North America! The further good news is that ridership has rebounded, and hopefully will beat the McKinsey estimates of 80% of pre-COVID.

And further good news is that on September 5, new schedules will be implemented on the Long Island Rail Road, providing much more direct service to Atlantic Terminal, Brooklyn. While Brooklyn service has increased dramatically, it is largely a shuttle

Continued on page 4

The Rail Users' Newsletter is published quarterly by the Rail Users' Network, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation.

Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users' Network at: RUN; P.O. Box 354, Northampton, MA 01060 or email to rrudolph1022@gmail.com

Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny

NEW JERSEY TRANSIT KEEPS GOING, BUT A FISCAL CLIFF IS LOOMING

By David Peter Alan

It's "business as usual" on New Jersey Transit's trains, light rail and buses, as the agency and the Garden State's elected officials seem oblivious to a fiscal catastrophe that could befall it and its riders in the next two years. At least that's what advocates in the state are saying, as they warn transit leaders that the COVID-19 relief money that has kept transit operations going in the wake of plummeting ridership that started its downward trajectory when the virus struck 3½ years ago will soon run out; probably within the next two years.

The latest warnings came at the July 19 meeting of the agency's Board of Directors. The main point of criticism was a new lease deal that would entail NJ Transit moving from the headquarters building it now owns to the Gateway Center complex on the other side of Newark's Penn Station. The new lease was the most expensive the agency considered; a situation made less palatable to rider-advocates by the fact that the landlord was a contributor to Gov. Phil Murphy's campaign. Sally Jane Gellert, chairperson of the Lackawanna Coalition (a position that this writer previously held) told the Board: "At a time when we are watching a fiscal cliff approach, instead of conserving assets by renovating a building that you already own, and in which you renovated the board room just before the COVID-19 shutdown, you choose to sign a massive lease for the most expensive property of the ones proposed, for more space than originally requested. Even worse are the optics of the building agent being a political donor, regardless of whatever the reality is in this pay-to-play state." Gellert also asked for numbers from the deals under consideration. Other criticisms were expressed in stronger language.

In the meantime, the Murphy Administration and the agency have approved a budget that does not call for a fare increase. Fares have not gone up since July 2015, almost five years before the virus struck, but the prospect of another year without an increase has brought concern as well as relief. New York City advocate Joseph M. Clift, former planning director at the Long Island Rail Road, told this writer that it would have been better if NJ Transit had instituted a modest fare increase, like the 10% hike that New York's MTA implemented this past July, because such a move could mitigate the severity of the coming fiscal disaster. Current estimates place the deficit for the fiscal year beginning in July 2025 between $900 and $950 million.

There are as-yet-unconfirmed rumors of coming fare hikes as high as 35%, which would be the steepest in the agency's history, as well as service cuts. A number of private-sector bus companies in the state have either gone out of the business of running scheduled service, implemented service cuts, or announced such moves in the near future. NJ Transit is operating substitute service on a few affected lines during peak-commuting hours only, but some lines that ran full-service before COVID are now running only limited service for peak-hour commuters and other lines have been eliminated completely.

Locomotive engineers on NJT recently voted to authorize a strike. Unions for other crafts have agreements in place, but the engineers do not. At this writing, a strike does not appear to be imminent.

The situation remains unsettled and, although the agency's transit is running for now, the next few years could be a rough ride. At this writing, we do not know of any plans that the state's elected officials are making to meet the fiscal challenge. This stands in contrast to New York's plan for the MTA which, according to RUN Vice-Chair Andrew Albert, will get that agency past the coming crisis.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair Emeritus of the Lackawanna Coalition in Millburn, NJ. He is a contributing editor to Railway Age.

NOTES FROM NEW YORK

Continued from page 4

service from tracks 11 & 12 in Jamaica, requiring an up-and-over transfer from other LIRR lines. As there is only one elevator at the eastern end of the platforms at Jamaica, this transfer was not greeted by riders, even though frequencies had improved to Brooklyn. Beginning on September 5, there will be direct Brooklyn service on the Hempstead, Port Jefferson, Long Beach, & Far Rockaway branches, largely negating the need to do the up-and-over transfer at Jamaica. In addition, service will be added to Penn Station, especially after events at Madison Square Garden, as well as larger consists on some trains. The opening of Grand Central Madison, giving LIRR riders East Side service, had some opening schedule glitches, and too much service was taken away from Penn Station, which has been and will continue to be rectified.

Congestion Pricing

The battle to implement congestion pricing in Manhattan below 60th Street continues, with New Jersey instituting a lawsuit, claiming congestion pricing will hurt NJ residents, as well as decrease air quality in Bergen County, where many motorists are expected to divert, believing they will be double-charged for using the Holland & Lincoln Tunnels to get to Manhattan. The MTA has done an extensive environmental assessment, which has been approved by the Federal Government, but that hasn't stopped NJ from suing to prevent congestion pricing from beginning. In fact, the TMRB - the Traffic Mobility Review Board - which is deciding the rates & any exemptions from the congestion fees - has met twice, and is expected to meet again soon, prior to sending their recommendations on fees, times of day, exemptions, and any credit for utilizing either a Port Authority or MTA Bridge/Tunnel, with their respective tolls. Staten Island also believes congestion pricing will be bad for

Continued on page 7

MASSACHUSETTS SEEKS FEDERAL GRANTS FOR HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE; MBTA PROJECTS INCLUDED

Draw 1 is a bascule type, 2-span, 4-track bridge at the mouth of North station. An MBTA commuter rail train has just departed the platforms for an outbound trip. The platforms are just 1,000 feet away. Photo: Wikimedia Commons By Lexcie, CC BY-SA 3.0. Inset: Draw 1 shown in the up position to allow boat traffic to pass through. Photo courtesy of MassDOT.

By Dennis Kirkpatrick
Developed from a MassDOT press release

The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is seeking $672 million in grant funding from the National Infrastructure Project Assistance (MEGA) program and the Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight and Highways Projects (INFRA) program for the construction phase of the North Station Renovation and Draw Bridge Replacement Project.

The draw bridge designated "Draw 1" that is located immediately adjacent to Boston's North Station is a critical connection that carries all MBTA Commuter Rail traffic on the north side of Boston across the Fitchburg, Lowell, Haverhill, and Gloucester/ Newburyport Lines. It is the last crossing before these trains terminate at North Station. Draw 1 is also a critical asset for Amtrak's Downeaster, as ten Downeaster trains (five inbound, five outbound) traverse the bridge into Boston per day. This project will support improved service, facilitating the growth of this critical New England route.

The existing bridge structure and associated signaling and control tower are outdated and in need of significant repair and maintenance, leading to service delays. In addition to replacing the bridge and upgrading signals, the project will also widen a bottleneck across the bridge from four to six tracks and extend and activate two additional tracks at North Station, resulting in significant operational improvements, strengthened service, and anticipated reduced congestion.

"The project to replace the North Station drawbridge is crucial to ensuring that we can safely and reliably provide train service in and out of North Station. It will allow us to operate trains more efficiently as we expand the number of tracks across a new bridge," said MBTA General Manager and CEO Phillip Eng. Mr. Eng recently came on board as the MBTA's new general manager after serving in New York with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Long Island Rail Road. "This is a significant investment in our MBTA system to better serve the public, and we are confident that our forward strategy to pursue and secure federal funding will help us meet our capital needs. I want to thank the Healey-Driscoll administration for their leadership and support and our dedicated finance team for their diligent work. This project is another step to fulfill our commitment to rebuild the MBTA system for our riders and for future generations."

A date for design and construction have yet to be estimated. Draw 1 crosses the Charles River in Boston and while most water traffic is small craft, the bridge does have to raise on occasion and cannot be replaced with a fixed bridge.

Dennis Kirkpatrick has been riding the rail in Greater Boston (MA) since childhood and has been engaged in rail and transit advocacy for over 30 years. He is a Board member of RUN.

Like the newsletter? Care to make it better?

Why not send us an article, so we can possibly include it in the next edition!

Send your article to rrudolph1022@gmail.com, and get published!

FROM NEW MEXICO (ACTUALLY, ALBUQUERQUE)

By JW Madison

Another Albuquerque vision unbuilt: the Yard Bird

Readers will hopefully recall, or will look up, my recent illustrated Newsletter articles about the giant prefab carport structure serving as the maintenance facility for our Rail Runner regional commuter train (NMRX). I'm trying to expand the view. This photo is looking South. The "carport" is at the lower center. The abandoned brick building glimpsed above the right side of the Carport (and snuggled up next to the big former locomotive repair sheds) is the old Rail Yard Blacksmith Shop, with (also) abandoned trackage connecting this building with onetime facilities downtown (North) of said Shop.

We have for at least 10 years advocated for a short starter Modern Streetcar line which would run the approx. 3/4-mile segment between the Alvarado Multimodal Center at First Street and Central to a station stop / food court / tavern / information center to be located in the old Blacksmith Shop. The Streetcar in question would be called the **Yard Bird**, a wordplay on both **Rail Yard and Rail Runner** (the latter features an attractive Road Runner paint scheme on the rolling stock). This vehicle would not be cute, nostalgic, Ding Ding Ding. It would be a modern, sleek, and quiet (perhaps) EMU. The paint scheme would resemble that of the Rail Runner.

The **Yard Bird** would, to us, be the first link in a future Modern Streetcar loop route following existing Rail industrial spurs (also largely abandoned), serving many existing cultural and tourist attractions within the central core of Albuquerque. Former Mayor Martin Chavez called this route the **"String of Pearls."** The "String" is still unrealized; a vision in urban Rail ditched in favor of the 'ART' Bus Rapid Transit service on Central Ave (old Route 66); an artery already served by lots of ordinary buses.

Continued on page 7

SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S OCTOBER 21 ANNUAL MEETING / VIRTUAL MINI-CONFERENCE

"Passenger Rail & the Environment - Natural Allies: Environmental benefits of passenger rail /rail transit in North America"

Continued from page 1

Brian Yanity, Vice President-South, RailPac and RUN Board Member, will talk about the need and benefits of electrifying railroads.

A spokesperson from the New York MTA will talk about Congestion Pricing Coming to New York City.

The afternoon session will close with a **public forum** to provide an opportunity for members of the audience to share their ideas and concerns regarding passenger rail / rail transit in the North America.

The conference is designed not only for rail advocates, but also civic and business leaders, environmentalists, planners, real estate developers and members of the general public who are interested in knowing more about passenger rail and rail transit in America.

Short Closing remarks will be given by David Peter Alan, RUN Board Member and Contributing Editor at **Railway Age.**

Please note this is a free event for RUN members, but registration is required. A registration fee for non-members is $25 which includes RUN membership through 2024.

Please be sure to register by October 15 so that we can send along the info needed to attend RUN's Virtual Annual Meeting/ Mini-Conference. To register, please go to our website railusers.net, and click on the "to register" link.

We look forward to your participation. In the meantime, stay safe and well.

NOTES FROM NEW YORK

Continued from page 4

islanders, and is considering joining NJ's lawsuit. All of this will likely be decided in September by the MTA Board, but lawsuits could delay the implementation, which is scheduled to begin either in late April or early May, 2024. Stay tuned!

Interboro Express

New York's newest mass-transit line is set to begin construction! The Interboro Express - which will run along a freight line from the Bay Ridge section of Brooklyn, across Brooklyn, and north into Glendale, Maspeth, and into Jackson Heights, Queens, utilizing light rail, will transform travel from Brooklyn to Queens. It will connect with 17 subway lines, and eventually may utilize the Hell Gate Bridge and extend into the Bronx! This could potentially cut travel times for millions of riders between Brooklyn & Queens, and save much time getting to LaGuardia Airport. While there is, of course, subway service between Brooklyn & Queens (The G,M,J,A) , this line has the potential to make interboro travel much quicker, and with fewer transfers. It may well cut down on automobile usage, depending on one's destination. Governor Hochul has been instrumental in getting this project going, and many thanks to her and the State Legislature in funding this vital project.

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

FROM NEW MEXICO

Continued from page 6

To add insult to transit injury, the ART-BRT line was **not** built to accommodate future Urban Rail, a contingency long advocated by Rails Inc. In response to a letter, measurements, and pictures from us, a prominent transit activist said, "Do you mean to tell me that the transit authorities in Albuquerque have condemned your city to 35 years of bus-only transit?" (his remarks lightly paraphrased)

We have so far to go, even to catch up with the "Conservative" cities and regions of the Inland West. Check the Bus-Rail Comparison Chart at : **https://www.nmrails.org**.
It's not fully up to date, but the proportions are still close.

JW Madison is a RUN Board member and president of Rails Inc in Albuquerque, NM, and solidarity member of the RWU.

NEWS FROM PHILADELPHIA

By Chuck Bode

SEPTA issued new timetables for all regional rail lines Sunday August 27. There are still gaps in service although overall it is about 75 percent of pre-COVID.

SEPTA has repaired 6 of the PCC cars used on Girard Avenue. They will return to service September 10 providing service along with buses.

Chuck Bode is a RUN Board member and member of the Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation.

If you would prefer to receive the RUN Newsletter electronically, please let us know by e-mailing **RRudolph1022@gmail.com**

RAIL TRANSIT IN CANADA: GROWING SLOWLY, BUT STILL LIMITED

By David Peter Alan

Most of our reporting about rail transit has concentrated on lines and systems in the United States. We have featured reports about Europe, including the U.K., from time to time; and Ken Westcar has a report about new developments in Canada elsewhere in this issue.

I recently returned from a trip that included two of the most-remote trains on VIA Rail in that country, and I had the opportunity to ride three new rail transit lines, while also catching up with transit in Montreal and Toronto for the first time since the COVID-19 virus struck in March, 2020. After I ride two more trains in Quebec, I will have completed the entire VIA Rail system, and I will report on it in the near future. In the meantime, here is a look at rail transit in Canada, as it stands today.

Three big systems and not much else

There are only seven places in Canada that have any rail transit today, unless you count a funicular in Quebec City. Ontario has the most rail transit, with the massive and well-run system in Toronto, along with two new light-rail lines; one each in Ottawa and Kitchener-Waterloo. Alberta's rival cities, Edmonton and Calgary, each have two light-rail lines; one long one and another that is considerably shorter. The westernmost system is in Vancouver, with its three-line Sky Train system and a small commuter-train operation. The easternmost is in Montreal; the second-largest system in the country, with subways, a new light-rail line, and some commuter trains.

Starting from the West

Vancouver's Pacific Central Station hosts two departures per day on Amtrak's Cascade Service to Seattle, with through-running or further connections to Portland, OR. The same station hosts only two departures per week on VIA Rail's transcontinental four-day journey to Toronto through Edmonton and Winnipeg, on the *Canadian* train. That, in itself, might underscore the similarities that Vancouver shares with Portland and Seattle, its "neighbors" to the south.

Vancouver has an automated system called the Sky Train, which consists of three lines that serve the city and several suburban towns near it. The system reached its current length in 2016 with an extension of its original Expo Line in the city's eastern suburbs. There is also a single commuter line, the West Coast Express, which runs four trains into the city on weekday mornings and back at the end of the business day. The other non-bus feature of the city's transportation network is the Sea Bus, a high-capacity ferry that runs between the city's waterfront and North Vancouver.

The only other Western province with rail transit is Alberta, where the light-rail systems in Edmonton and Calgary may have been spurred by the rivalry between those cities. Edmonton's ETS system came first, and Calgary's C-train started service a few years later. Today, both feature a long line through downtown and extending outward from it, a shorter line extending from downtown in another direction, and plans for a new major line that is scheduled to open for service several years from now. Both systems also have long-term expansion plans.

Toronto's Transit still strong

Ontario has three locations with rail transit today, and Toronto is the "rail transit champion" of North America. Some advocates say that Toronto's transit is better than that in New York, or any other American or Canadian city. It features several modes: subways, streetcars, and commuter rail. The Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) runs local transit, while Metrolinx runs the trains under the system's original name, GO Transit. There is also the Union-Pearson (UP) Express to the airport, which is an independent operation.

The Toronto subway started service in 1954 and is still going strong. The Yonge-University Line (#1 line or Yellow Line) is a U-shaped line that runs mainly on two north-south alignments. The last expansion of that line, and of the subway system generally, came in 2017, when the northwestern terminal was extended to Vaughan. The Bloor-Danforth Line (#2 Line or Green Line) was added in 1966 on an east-west alignment. The line that had been #3, the Scarborough RT, began service in 1985, using an alternative technology. It was scheduled to be shut down this fall, but was decommissioned on July 24, after a derailment. It will eventually be replaced by another rail line, but buses are running on the route in the meantime. The Sheppard Line (Line #4 or Purple Line), east of the #1, opened in 2002.

There are plans for new lines, too. The Eglinton Crosstown Line (Line #5 or Orange Line) will be a light rail line on an east-west alignment north of the Bloor-Danforth. It is expected to begin service next year, and an extension of it will eventually replace the recently discontinued Scarborough RT. Also scheduled to open next year is the Finch West Line (#6), a light-rail line which will be short. In the longer term, there are plans to build the Ontario Line (new Line #3 or Blue Line), which is scheduled to open in 2031. It is slated to run east-west through downtown, and northward east of there.

Toronto's streetcar system is going strong. The cars are longer now, with Flexity Outlook cars; articulated, with five sections. They contain fare machines that allow riders to pay a

Continued on page 9

RUN CANADA REPORT: AUGUST 2023

By Ken Westcar

Since the last Canada Report, much has been happening across the country on passenger rail issues, although it remains somewhat aspirational, formative or problematic. Perhaps encouraging is the influx of talent, both domestic and foreign, into the industry that bodes well for the future, providing politicians accept the fact that major projects are both expensive and transcend provincial and federal election cycles.

VIA High Frequency Rail

Observers are waiting to see if the new federal Transport Minister, Pedro Rodriguez will be as enthusiastic as his predecessor, Omar Alghabra. As this passenger only, Toronto to Quebec City, approximately 800-km (500-mile), electrified route receives further technical analysis, the original myth of a C$12bn ($9bn) capital cost has now morphed into C$40bn ($30bn) and will likely go much higher as more project development work is completed. Although it's tempting to benchmark it against California HSR and Britain's troubled HS2 project, the final cost estimate will depend on a mix of 175kph (110mph) operation and the aspirations of the Quebec provincial government for up to 320kph (200mph) on parts of the route.

Three international consortia have been selected by the HFR project team to carry the project forward to the next stage. Details are available on the HFR website and they all include high bench-strength, global companies. This bodes well for the project as it should ensure realistic proposals from all three prior to the selection of the winning consortium in 2024. Detailed engineering, procurement, construction and initial in-service time is estimated to take 10 -12 years although this may be optimistic.

Although the project is based primarily on private sector financing there are concerns about how much taxpayer money will be needed to cover risk and revenue issues that haunt most P3 projects. Canada, in common with most other western countries, will need to invest hundreds of $billions in defense and national security, immigration management, climate-change mitigation and health care. Whether HFR will succeed therefore depends on spending priorities of the incumbent government. It could be the elephant in HFR's room until the last spike is driven.

Alberta initiatives

A new, right-wing provincial government in Alberta is taking a more pragmatic view of previously aspirational passenger rail projects between Calgary and Edmonton and Calgary and Banff - an increasingly popular international tourist destination. The Calgary-Edmonton route would provide an alternative to the existing congested and hazardous Highway 2 and carbon-intensive short-haul flights. Supplementing this is consideration of a passenger rail link between Calgary downtown and international airport.

Banff risks becoming one big parking lot and unattractive to many potential visitors, unless a modern passenger rail service is introduced and integrated with local transit. Calgary-Banff is proposed on existing CPKC infrastructure, as is Calgary-Edmonton, unless a new route is ultimately a better solution.

Pressure on VIA Rail in the Corridor

Two of the first jobs for VIA's new President and CEO, Mario Peloquin, will be to reinstate Trains 82/83 between London and Toronto and trains 651/653 between Kingston and Toronto. These trains, vital to commuters, were dropped during the COVID pandemic with necessary reinstatement being delayed due to equipment availability. Communities served by these trains vehemently rejected this excuse and have vociferously demanded their return.

At the time of this report, Trains 82/83 are scheduled to reappear this Fall whereas a 651/653 remain in limbo. Rumours suggest that track owner, CN, has commercial and technical issues to resolve with VIA before both trains return.

VIA's new, Siemens-built, "Venture" trains are gradually being introduced and initial customer feedback has been positive. Initially deployed on the Ottawa-Montreal route they will operate on other Corridor services as the fleet builds. To welcome them both London and Woodstock VIA stations are receiving a total of C$25m ($18m) plus in mechanical and cosmetic upgrades.

Cross-border disappointments

Problems with CN infrastructure south of the Quebec border means that the Amtrak New York to Montreal "Adirondack", a very popular service, terminates at Saratoga Springs. Reports suggest that under-maintained trackage and the expansionary effect of summer heat precludes safe train operation. How this will be resolved is yet unclear.

It's regrettable and embarrassing that important cross-border services are inhibited because of the lack of stakeholder leadership at a time when they are growing in commercial, social and strategic importance. Advocates on both sides of the border are working hard to resolve this but it will not be quick, as multiple federal agencies on both sides of the border are involved.

Ken Westcar is secretary of Transport Action Ontario.

RAIL TRANSIT IN CANADA

Continued from page 8

cash fare on board or use the local stored-value card, the Presto card. There are several lines in the city's streetcar system; the only one in Canada that survived the rash of discontinuances that began with Alfred P. Sloan of General Motors and his decades-long fight against rail transit.

Continued on page 11

RUN COMMENTS ON FRA'S LONG-DISTANCE STUDY

Continued from page 2

Our proposals, if implemented, will allow for this enhanced network, carrying many more travelers to many more destinations to become even more successful.

Infrastructure:

Following the 'conceptual-level identification of capacity improvements' in this Long-Distance study, the FRA needs to subsequently work with host railroads and others on more in-depth engineering studies to itemize and provide cost estimates on infrastructure capital projects needed along each of the proposed new/enhanced/restored corridors. The current study should recommend a path forward for this work to begin as soon as possible.

Also worthy of investigation are new policy incentives for host railroad capacity improvement projects

Economic and Social Well-Being of Rural Areas, Rural Accessibility:

We are very pleased to see that the study will prioritize rural and disadvantaged communities not served by the existing passenger rail network, including tribal lands.

There are also many urban, suburban and rural residents alike who do not "choose" to live without personally driving their own car. They might be too young or too old to drive, have a disability that does not allow them to drive, or they might not be able to afford to buy, insure and maintain a car. The concept of "Universal Basic Mobility" is gaining popularity. It is an idea that all citizens should have a decent range of affordable transport options, regardless of their socioeconomic status, disabilities, or geographic location. An expanded nationwide system of regional and intercity passenger rail coordinated with local public transit would enable more urban and rural low-income families to access health care, education, jobs, and community life. It is also true for youth, elders and the disabled who neither can afford a car or no longer want to drive. Expansion of passenger rail service would also improve transportation access and help support local economies in rural communities, cities, suburbs, and Native American reservations.

As part of this study, FRA needs to measure both the public and economic benefits of Long -Distance trains, including quantifying (in dollars) both direct and indirect benefits to local economies.

Measures of Effectiveness and Benefits:

Transportation safety benefits of Long-Distance trains -
One important benefit to rural travelers provided by the Amtrak long-distance trains is a safer alternative to driving. Rural residents make up less than 20% of the U.S. population, but account for about half of the total number of traffic fatalities nationwide, due to higher per-capita miles driven (or being a passenger in car for more miles).

The FRA study should estimate the safety benefits (reduced car accidents) of existing and new Amtrak Long Distance train services.

Environmental and energy efficiency benefits of Long Distance trains-
The FRA study should estimate the environmental benefits (estimates of reduced pollution, fuel consumption compared to driving) of existing and new Amtrak Long Distance train services. Particularly important is estimation of the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions enabled by Amtrak long-distance train services- both new and existing.

Equipment:

An essential step for improving Amtrak long distance service is the acquisition of new equipment: there are currently not enough locomotives and passenger cars (the Superliner fleet) in a good state of repair to reliably sustain the existing Amtrak Long Distance Network.

This FRA study needs to estimate how much new equipment is needed for these routes, and how much service can be supported with refurbishment/repair of existing Long-Distance equipment not-in-service (in storage at Beech Grove yard?). FRA needs to make specific recommendations to Amtrak on procurement of new Long-Distance equipment, and help find ways to expedite this procurement.

The FRA study should also investigate maintenance requirements for new Long- Distance services, including possible locations for new Amtrak maintenance facilities.

The FRA study team should engage rail advocacy groups to address passenger comfort in designs for new long-distance Amtrak equipment.

Congress has recently allocated funding to restore to service the hundreds of cars and locomotives currently out of service for maintenance/overhaul/rebuilding.

Rail passenger advocates using government information sources have concluded that several daily, on-time trains each way on a route are proven to lure and keep people riding the rails. We propose building to this several-trains-per-day concept as new rolling stock is manufactured and put into regular service. By our estimates, approximately 10,000 new passenger cars of various configurations will be required to supply a minimum of six daily trains for each of the current routes, as well as the new proposed routes. We can begin this process by making every passenger train in the US a daily service.

RAIL TRANSIT IN CANADA

Continued from page 9

The city has several streets with tracks and wire that are not used in regular service. During my visit early in August, the Queen Street (#501) line run part of the way over McCall Street, a north-south street, due to construction. McCall Street does not have regular service.

GO Transit regional trains are going strong; most at peak-commuting hours, but week-end service is increasing. The seven-line system is inching toward full-service in some places, and there is now summer service to Niagara Falls. Buses that use the terminal near Union Station fill in when the trains do not run, so most lines have some sort of full-time transit.

Elsewhere in Ontario

Ottawa, the Nation's Capital, has a new rail transit line, too. The Confederation Line runs east-west, with three of its 13 stations in a downtown tunnel under Queen Street. This is the second line on OC Transit's O-Train, and it runs light-rail-type equipment with four articulated sections and open gangways between those sections. The Trillium Line, the original O-Train line, is a diesel multiple-unit (DMU) operation, which has been out of service. When it comes back, it will connect with the Confederation Line (also known as Line 1) at Bayview, west of downtown Ottawa.

The other new Line is the ION light rail line, which serves Kitchener and Waterloo; two adjacent towns slightly less than two hours west by southwest of Toronto. It connects with buses or GO Transit trains at Kitchener (when they run), and on weekends with the Waterloo Central Railway, a tourist railroad that goes to the historic town of St. Jacobs, the location of a huge farmers' market on the outskirts of town and the impressive St. Jacobs & Aberfoyle Model Railway off King Street downtown.

Expansion in Montreal, too

Along with Toronto and Vancouver, Montreal sports Canada's only other major rail transit system. Its base is the four-line Metro system, which runs underground on self-contained lines of varying length; two are long, one is very short, and the other is in-between. That line, the #4 line or Blue Line, is slated to be extended by four stops soon. The newest trains have open-gangway cars, with articulations between cars, but no walls. The trains ride smoothly and fast, but they are protected from the weather, which means they last longer than similar equipment.

The big news in Montreal is the new REM Line, which opened for service on July 31. It uses four tracks of Central Station, the home of VIA Rail and other commuter-rail lines. It runs with subway headways, stations have airport-style platform doors, and the ride to Brossard, at the other end, takes about 20 minutes. There are plans to extend the line on the other side of Central Station, through the Mount Royal Tunnel and the Village of Mount Royal, to Deux Montagnes; a line that ran commuter-style service from 1918 until 2020 and was part of CN. There are plans for a suburban branch off the Deux-Montagnes line, as well as another one to the airport. Planned opening dates are 2024 and 2027.

Even with the loss of the Deux-Montagnes line, there are still suburban lines radiating from the city in five directions. Service outside peak-commuting hours is limited, though. The agency that runs those trains was formerly called AMT, but now it is called Exo. Two of the lines were originally part of the CN system, and the other three were part of CP Rail and use a different station as its terminal.

There are other cities where there is no rail transit, including Winnipeg, Halifax, and Quebec City. Rail transit is only strong in three cities, though. Except in parts of Ontario and Quebec, VIA Rail's intercity service is even weaker. We will report further about VIA's trains in the near future.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and Chair Emeritus of the Lackawanna Coalition, a RUN member organization in Millburn, NJ. He is a contributing editor to Railway Age.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, write to:

RUN, P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104

or contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at RRudolph1022@gmail.com

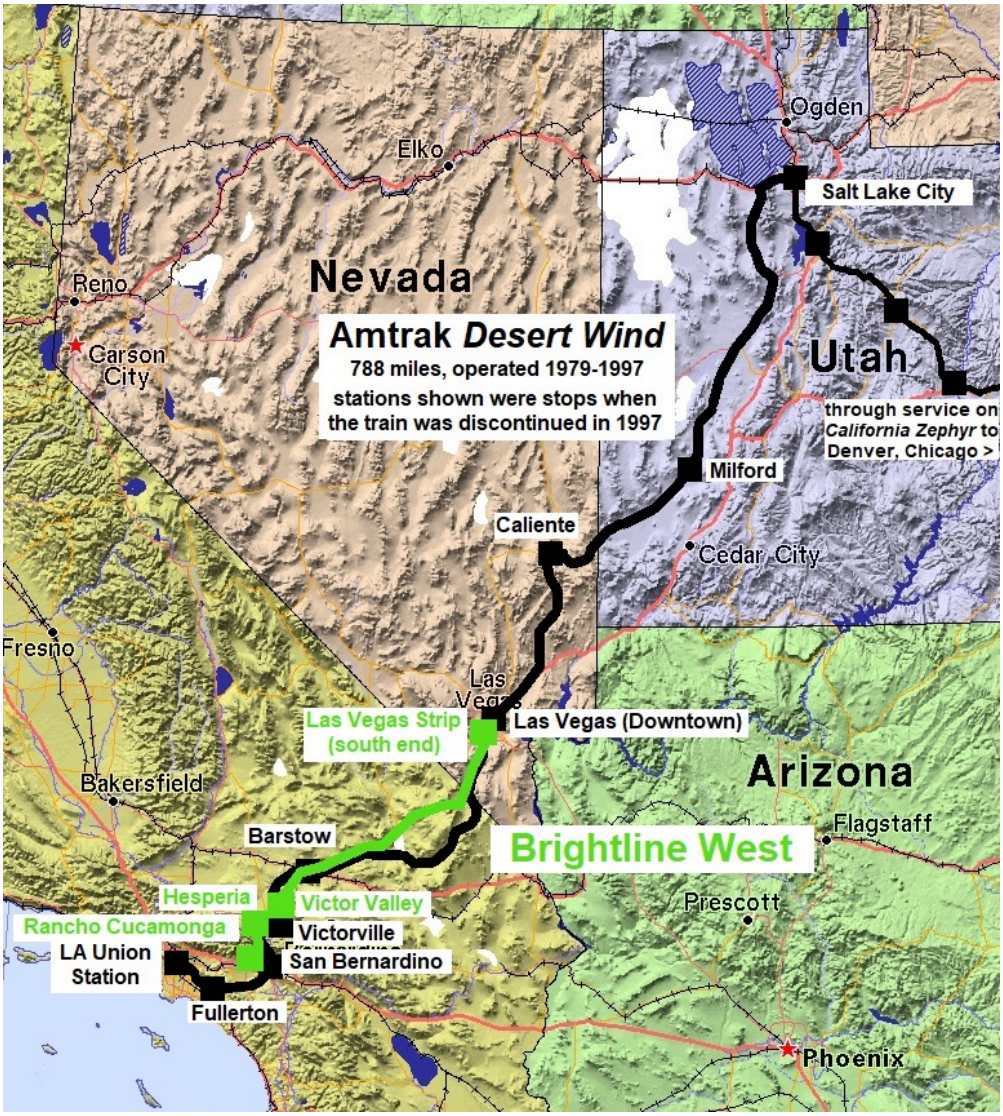
or visit our new, improved website at: www.railusers.net

'VIA' LAS VEGAS: BRIGHTLINE WEST, THE *DESERT WIND* AND MORE (FIRST OF TWO PARTS)

THE EMERGING SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA-LAS VEGAS-SALT LAKE CITY PASSENGER RAIL CORRIDOR

By Brian Yanity

The broadly defined Interstate 15 corridor between Utah's Wasatch Front and Southern California has a population of 25 million people. Las Vegas and Salt Lake City are two of the fastest-growing metro areas in the U.S. Thus, there is tremendous potential for intercity passenger rail on this corridor. Most notably Brightline West is planning to offer America's first true high-speed train from Southern California to Las Vegas in a few years on brand new electrified tracks. On existing Class I-owned track, there are other passenger train possibilities, like a new long-distance train following the route of the discontinued Amtrak *Desert Wind,* or new regional trains.



The need for passenger rail on the I-15 corridor

The Southern California-Las Vegas travel market in particular is huge and growing. Clark County, Nevada now has a population of 2.2 million people. Las Vegas could even be considered the largest metro area in the U.S. without

Continued on page 13

'VIA' LAS VEGAS: BRIGHTLINE WEST, THE *DESERT WIND* AND MORE

Continued from page 12

intercity passenger rail service (as the Phoenix metro area is technically served by the Maricopa *Sunset Limited* station). In addition to heavy inbound tourist traffic, there are thousands of Las Vegas Valley residents travelling each day to Southern California, for all kinds of reasons. There is much traffic between Las Vegas and LA County, but also the Inland Empire, Orange County, and San Diego. As shown in the table below, on average more than 10,000 people fly each day between Las Vegas and Southern California. Another 1,600 fly to and from Salt Lake City.

Las Vegas Harry Reid International Airport (LAS) **Passengers travelling to/from Southern California & Salt Lake City** (June 2022-May 2023 FAA statistics):		
		~ per day
Los Angeles International (LAX)	1,311,000	3,590
San Diego (SAN)	851,000	2,330
Orange County (SNA)	599,000	1,640
Burbank (BUR)	448,000	1,230
Ontario (ONT)	262,000	720
Long Beach (LGB)	209,000	570
Santa Barbara (SBA)	84,000	230
Palm Springs (PSP)	56,000	150
Total Southern California	**3,736,000**	**10,465**
Salt Lake City (SLC)	584,000	1,600

Between Greyhound, FlixBus and Megabus, there are 24 daily roundtrip buses between LA and Las Vegas. Numerous other scheduled and chartered bus and van services exist. Traffic volume on Interstate 15 on the California/Nevada border at Primm is typically over 50,000 vehicles per day. This number often skyrockets to well over 100,000 vehicles on Fridays, Sundays, holiday weekends and during large special events in Las Vegas. In all, over 50 million people travel between Las Vegas and Southern California annually, or an average of about 130,000 per day. About 100,000 of these travelers are on Interstate 15 in private vehicles, buses or vans. High speed crashes and traffic fatalities are all too common. On Sunday nights, I-15 southbound backs up for miles as Southern Californians head home after a weekend in Las Vegas, particularly around the state line and the California passes of Mountain Pass, Halloran Summit and Cajon. Most people's escape from Sin City down Interstate 15 into the vast desert expanse is less like the wide-open highway depicted in the ending scene of the cult film *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*, and more like rush hour on the Cross-Bronx Expressway. The absurdity of being stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic in the middle of the Mojave Desert wilderness, many miles from the nearest town, has long been a "Vegas weekend" cliché.

Between Nevada and Utah, I-15 traverses the far northwestern corner of Arizona, where traffic averages 20,000 vehicles per day. It is safe to assume that several thousand people drive between the Wasatch Front and Southern Nevada each day. Between Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, the *Desert Wind* made stops in Caliente, NV and Milford, UT, along with a stop in Delta from 1983-1988. Boasting a grand 1923 Mission Revival-style train station and railway hotel (now the city hall, library and art gallery), Caliente is a hub for Lincoln County (pop. 4,500). Most famous for Area 51, the county is larger in area than Massachusetts. Milford (pop. 1,400) offers a gateway to Cedar City and the vacation wonderlands of Southern Utah via bus connections. New rail service to Caliente and Milford would provide interregional public transportation access for a vast rural region larger than some Northeastern states.

Brightline West

Brightline West has been making steady progress. Pending funding availability and final regulatory/permit approvals, will hopefully start construction this year on its exciting high speed rail service between Las Vegas and Southern California. If construction does begin this year, service is expected to start in 2027. With a total cost of more than $12 billion, Brightline expects to hear back by the end of the year if it won a $3.75 billion FRA grant that it applied for with the Nevada Department of Transportation.

Continued on page 14

'VIA' LAS VEGAS: BRIGHTLINE WEST, THE *DESERT WIND* AND MORE

Continued from page 13

Brightline West is a subsidiary of Brightline Holdings, backed by Fortress Investment Group. The project is funded from a mix of public and private sources. Since 2018, the company has operated the successful passenger line in Florida, which now extends from Miami to Orlando. It is the successor to several prior private sector attempts over the past few decades to start a high-speed rail line between Las Vegas and Southern California. Thankfully this time, all indications are that Brightline West will finally be the real thing. It will be what many consider the first true high-speed train in the Americas, electrified with 25 kV overhead wire. With an overall average speed of 100 miles per hour, including two intermediate stops, top speeds will approach 200 mph. The planned trip time is 2 hours and 10 minutes to travel the 218 miles from Rancho Cucamonga to Las Vegas, with stops in Victor Valley (Apple Valley) and Hesperia. The driving time between these two locations is at minimum 3 hours and 15 minutes without traffic, but often takes much longer than this due to congestion on I-15. Brightline West expects to serve up to 11 million one-way passengers annually, or over 30,000 per day. Hourly frequency is planned. The Rancho Cucamonga station will be constructed adjacent to the existing Metrolink Station on the San Bernardino Line, enabling passengers to walk down the stairs/take the elevator from Brightline to Metrolink trains. Metrolink's busiest and most frequent line, it connects Los Angeles Union Station to San Bernardino-Downtown, with a future extension to Redlands. Brightline West has been working with Metrolink on schedule coordination and integrated ticketing.

The Brightline West track will be in the Interstate 15 right-of-way almost the whole way between Rancho Cucamonga and the south Las Vegas Strip. The corridor will be leased from Caltrans and Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT). Devore Heights is the northernmost part of the city of San Bernardino, about 15 miles on Brightline West's route from the planned terminus station next to Metrolink's existing Rancho Cucamonga station. The Devore area, at the base of the San Bernardino Mountains below Cajon Pass, is where the BNSF and UP mainlines, Brightline West/I-15 and I-215 intersect. Between Devore, California and the Brightline West station in Enterprise, Nevada on the southern reaches of the Las Vegas Strip, the I-15 route of Brightline West (205 miles) is about 15% shorter in length than the existing BNSF/UP rail route of 240 miles. However, the Brightline West route has much steeper grades. Interstate 15 grades can be as steep as 6% at Cajon Summit, Halloran Summit and Mountain Pass, and are 4% to 5% at multiple places along the route. Brightline West track grades will not be much gentler than the freeway. These allegedly will be the steepest grades ever attempted by HSR trains anywhere in the world. For the track grades purported to be 5%-6%, Brightline West will use lightweight, fast electric multiple unit (EMU) trainsets with high power-to-weight ratio and special braking systems. By contrast, both the BNSF Cajon Subdivision (Cajon Pass) and the UP Cima Subdivision (Cima Hill) have comparatively gentle ruling grades of 2.2%.

A question that has been raised by some rail advocates is if Amtrak (the *Southwest Chief* or a future *Desert Wind*) could share Brightline West infrastructure in the future, in order avoid freight train interference between San Bernardino, Barstow and Las Vegas. However, no Amtrak equipment, at present or in planning, could handle the 5%-6% grades of the Brightline West railroad. Amtrak's existing fleet of Long-Distance equipment can (very slowly) handle only up to 3.3% at Raton Pass. In the future there could be new hybrid EMUs that could handle such grades, similar to what Brightline West will be using but with diesel or battery capability, even if it is not possible for the *Southwest Chief* or *Desert Wind*. This could open up interesting opportunities for 'bimode'-powered Southern California-Las Vegas regional trains, for an Amtrak/California HSR/Brightline Las Vegas-San Diego regional train for example.

Las Vegas stations

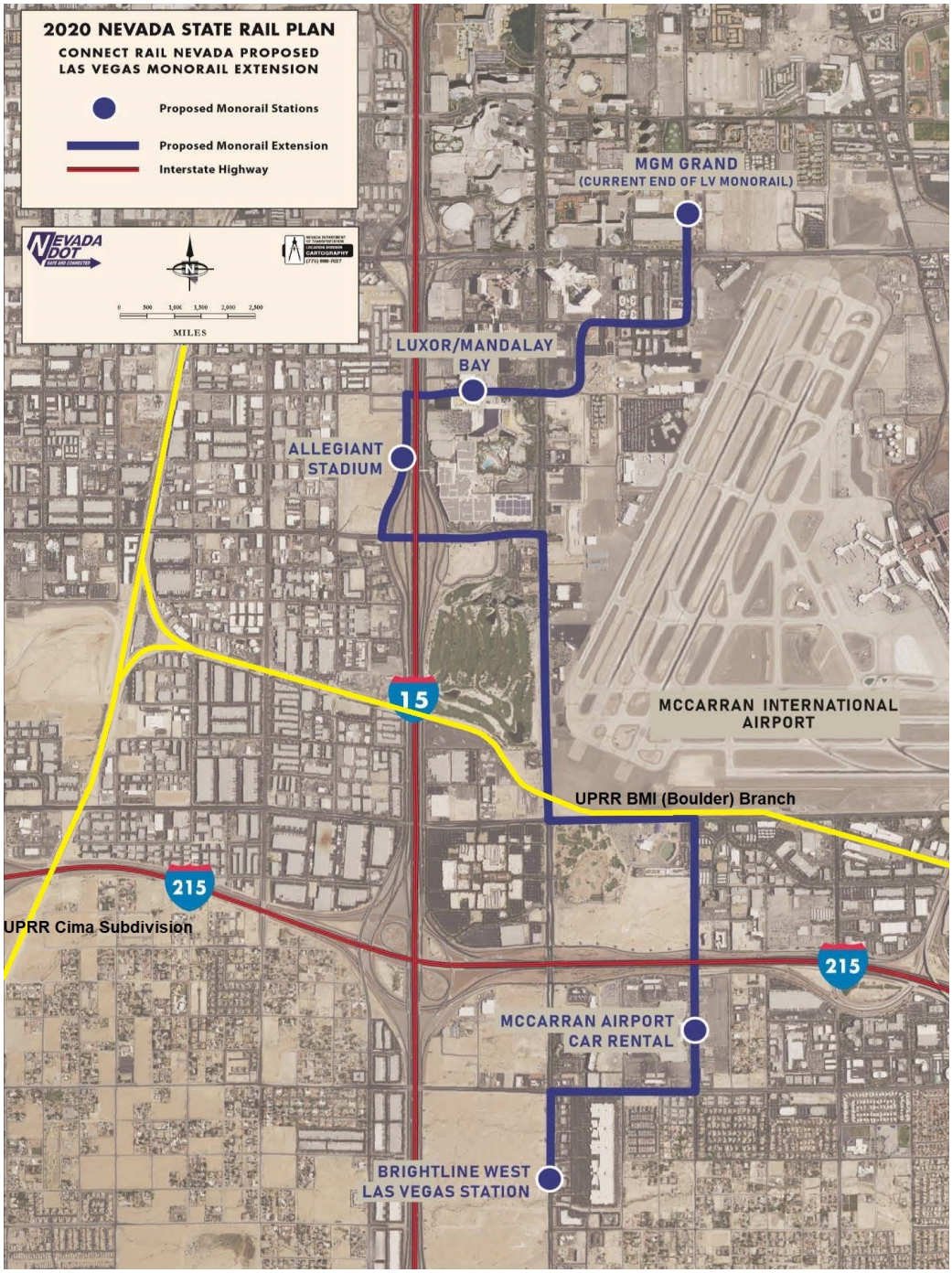
The Amtrak *Desert Wind* station in Las Vegas was centrally located Downtown, adjacent to (and actually owned by) the Plaza Hotel & Casino, and right across the street from the Fremont Street Experience. This location is about 10 miles north of where Brightline West plans to build its station, the "Brightline Resort," at the south end of the Las Vegas Strip. Given that the UPRR mainline parallels the Las Vegas Strip, it would be conceivable to build a new Amtrak station near Spring Mountain Road or Flamingo Road, perhaps in tandem with a Downtown Las Vegas station. Another possibility is using the Boulder Branch to get off the UP mainline for a turnaround facility at Las Vegas Blvd. at the south end of the airport. From that point it is about one mile south down Las Vegas Blvd. to the location of the Brightline Resort. A shuttle, extension of the Las Vegas Monorail, or future airport people mover could connect the two locations. The Brightline West station plan has been criticized for being entirely dependent on local road vehicles (transit hotel/casino shuttle vans, rideshares/taxis, private automobiles) and not integrated with local public transit. The 2021 Nevada State Rail Plan (p. 3-33) proposed a five-mile extension of the Las Vegas Monorail from the MGM Grand to the Brightline West station. It would add new monorail stations at Luxor/Mandalay Bay, Allegiant Stadium,

Continued on page 15

'VIA' LAS VEGAS: BRIGHTLINE WEST, THE *DESERT WIND* AND MORE

Continued from page 14

McCarran [now Harry Reid] Airport (Rental Car Center). Below is Figure 3-13 from the 2021 Nevada State Rail Plan, showing the proposed monorail extension to the new Brightline West Las Vegas terminal (annotated by the author to show the existing UPRR tracks).



Article continues on page 16

'VIA' LAS VEGAS: BRIGHTLINE WEST, THE *DESERT WIND* AND MORE

Continued from page 15

The Amtrak *Desert Wind*

The Amtrak *Desert Wind* started in 1979 as a Los Angeles-Las Vegas-Salt Lake City-Ogden train with Amfleet coaches. By 1982 both a through coach and sleeper were added, exchanged with the *San Francisco Zephyr* at Ogden, and pulled on that route through Denver and Omaha to Chicago. Rebranded the *California Zephyr*, the interchange moved to Salt Lake City the following year. The *Desert Wind* last ran on May 12,1997, a victim of the same round of Amtrak budget cuts in which *Pioneer* was also discontinued. The Las Vegas Amtrak station structure at the Plaza Hotel & Casino still exists.

The FRA Long Distance Service Study in 2023 included the discontinued *Desert Wind* as one of the Amtrak routes under study for possible restoration. One alternative under discussion is using the *Desert Wind* route on the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) for a train from Salt Lake City that would terminate in Las Vegas. In this scenario, any passengers wanting to continue on to Southern California from Las Vegas would take Brightline West. A Chicago-Denver-Salt Lake City-Las Vegas long-distance train is one option that would have a major vacation draw year-round. However, restoring the full 1997 version of the *Desert Wind* route to Los Angeles could still have an appeal to many passengers. It would provide a one-seat Amtrak Long-Distance ride from Southern California to Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, and perhaps further east to points in Utah, Colorado, Nebraska and all the way to Chicago. The *Desert Wind* stopped at existing major stations serving the counties of Los Angeles (pop. 10 million), Orange (3.2 million) and Riverside (2.5 million).

Brightline West will provide a one-seat ride between Las Vegas and only San Bernardino County (Hesperia, Victor Valley, Rancho Cucamonga). Brightline West also does not plan to provide service from Las Vegas to Barstow (metro pop. 30,000), which the *Desert Wind* did offer along with downtown stops at LA Union Station, Fullerton, San Bernardino and Victorville. Many Southern Californians like to vacation in Utah and Colorado, to which the *Desert Wind* could provide a convenient one-seat ride. Another option would be to extend the *Desert Wind* from Las Vegas to Bakersfield, where riders could connect to the *San Jaoquins* or future California HSR. The Las Vegas-Barstow-Bakersfield segment is being examined as part of the FRA Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study. Possible combinations of the historical *Pioneer* and *Desert Wind* corridors include Las Vegas-Salt Lake City-Boise, or further extension to Portland or Seattle. In mid-2023, the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT), with support from NDOT, submitted a Corridor ID grant application to the FRA, requesting $500,000 for studying the Las Vegas-Salt Lake City passenger rail corridor (see UDOT map for study area below). Idaho Transportation Department submitted a Corridor ID application for studying Salt Lake City to Boise in collaboration with UDOT, Utah Transit Authority and the City of Boise.

According to the 1996 Amtrak timetable, the eastbound *Desert Wind* left LA Union Station 10:45 AM, arriving Las Vegas 5:35 PM and Salt Lake City the following morning at 3:20 AM. The westbound train left Salt Lake City at 1 AM, arriving Las Vegas 8:05 AM and Los Angeles 3:35 PM. The *Desert Wind* thus provided a daylight LA-Las Vegas run in about seven hours, and overnight Las Vegas-Salt Lake City run in eight hours. This is a leisurely pace compared to Brightline West or driving. While a restored *Desert Wind* (or regional train on the UP/BNSF tracks) could never compete with Brightline West on frequency or speed between Southern California and Las Vegas, an overnight service could offer a niche still useful to many travelers. The train could leave LA or Bakersfield late at night, and arrive Las Vegas early morning, and later arrive in Salt Lake City by late afternoon. Between Las Vegas and Salt Lake City, day (morning to early evening) and overnight (late night to early morning) daily trains both ways could also complement one another. Offsetting the seven-hour LA-Las Vegas running time by burying it overnight would mitigate its competition with Brightline West, which would be more focused on daytime service. A Chicago-Las Vegas *Desert Wind* could connect to Brightline West during the day, while the LA-SLC regional train operates overnight from LA to Las Vegas, then to Salt Lake City. The multiple services combined provide a great deal of frequency value in the corridor.

The original *Desert Wind* route between Los Angeles Union Station and Salt Lake City is 788 miles (entirely on UPRR), and thus within the scope of the current FRA Long-Distance Service Study. While the 340-mile LA-Las Vegas segment of the *Desert Wind* route is less than 750 miles, so not a prime focus of FRA Long Distance study, its unique characteristics should be carefully examined by the FRA Long-Distance Study team in the context of the larger *Desert Wind* route, as should the Salt Lake City-Las Vegas segment (448 miles). Southern California-Las Vegas is an order-of-magnitude larger travel market than Las Vegas-Salt Lake City. However, even a *Desert Wind* or regional train terminating in Las Vegas could be significant feeder for Brightline West.

Article to be continued in the Winter 2024 issue of the RUN Newsletter.

Brian Yanity is a RUN Board member and vice president – south, RailPac.

WHERE SHOULD ADVOCATES SUPPORT NEW PASSENGER SERVICE IN RURAL AMERICA? IT DEPENDS! THE CASES OF WYOMING AND SOUTH DAKOTA

Above: An advocacy "vision map," which includes hundreds of miles of route in South Dakota, Wyoming, and Nebraska currently with no track, epitomizes the "lines on a map" concept.

By Mark Meyer

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 is turning out to be somewhat of a conundrum for passenger train advocates. For the first time in its 52 years, Amtrak has actually received a quantity of money capable of launching new long haul services (but without the promise of perpetual funding for their operations). On the other hand, most current Amtrak long-distance trains have never been so endangered because the decaying 30-to-40+-year old Superliner fleet may expire before any replacement equipment could be available.

And then there's the "just drawing lines on a map" problem where advocates, salivating over potential funding, make out their wish list for new routes to try to "fill in the gaps" in the Amtrak map. It's not much of a concern for states such as California and Nevada, for example. Nevada's rail network is mostly well-maintained for freight traffic with few branch lines. For a state the size of California, most of its routes are also worthy of rail passenger service, as long as one ignores the laughable calls for service on obscure routes like the former Northwestern Pacific to Eureka. And, with 39 million people, access to online population is not as much of a concern.

But it's not that way everywhere, and not all state rail networks are the same. Existing railroads tend to conform to geography and operating characteristics rather than borders. Politics, on the other hand, give us anomalies such as the Idaho and Oklahoma panhandles and the Northwest Angle, which gives Minnesota the bragging rights to be the northernmost state in the continental USA.

In the 48 contiguous states, only South Dakota and Wyoming are without Amtrak service. (Wyoming had Amtrak service for about 18 years, but only as a result of the preferred route from Denver to Salt Lake City via Grand Junction not being usable for one reason or the other). South Dakota has about twice the population density of Wyoming (Wyoming is larger in area), with South Dakota having a population similar to the Bakersfield, California metro area and Wyoming that of Modesto. Still, additional long-distance trains are desirable. With large states and relatively few residents, potential route augmentations must then be limited to the existing infrastructure. In this respect, South Dakota and Wyoming are polar opposites.

Southern Wyoming, of course, is

Continued on page 18

WHERE SHOULD ADVOCATES SUPPORT NEW PASSENGER SERVICE IN RURAL AMERICA? IT DEPENDS! THE CASES OF WYOMING AND SOUTH DAKOTA

Continued from page 17

home to America's first transcontinental railroad, the Union Pacific, which remains a vital multi-main track artery for freight traffic between the Midwest and West Coast. Except for coal, in-state traffic is primarily soda ash in the Southwest part of the state. As it was in years past for Amtrak's *San Francisco Zephyr* and *Pioneer,* the UP main across Wyoming remains an attractive higher-speed alternative to the current *California Zephyr* route for any proposed new service between Omaha/Denver and Salt Lake City (and beyond).

BNSF dominates trackage in the remainder of the state including the all-important route to serve numerous open pit coal mines roughly from near Gillette to northeast of Douglas (UP also serves many of these mines). These coal routes tie into a main line between Lincoln, NE and Billings, MT via Gillette and Sheridan and are largely equipped with multiple main tracks and Centralized Traffic Control (CTC). These lines still currently have substantial coal traffic and are equipped with superb infrastructure, worth considering as viable passenger routes in light of the comment by retired BNSF CEO Matt Rose in 2015, who referred to the routes as becoming "stranded assets" with generating plants switching from coal to natural gas and renewable energy.

The route through Wyoming most-often touted by passenger train advocates desiring a north-south service in the Intermountain West is the BNSF route from Denver to Billings, Montana via Cheyenne and Casper, serving Wyoming's two largest cities. However, the route is fraught with problems for a passenger train. Of the 667 miles between Denver and Billings, only about 45 miles are signaled (though much of the route has a speed limit of 49 MPH for freight trains, the maximum allowed in dark territory). The line has limited siding capacity, significant curvature, street-running in Longmont, Colorado and is subject to curfews for use near Warren Air Force Base at Cheyenne. And, though a northward train arriving in Billings would most logically continue north or west, the train would be facing east or south via this route. Significant investment would be required to achieve running time even twice that of driving from Denver to Billings. Therefore, the route via Sterling, Alliance, Edgemont, and Sheridan – though less desirable – would be infinitely cheaper to implement and allow faster running times and better equipment utilization.

While all Wyoming routes are well-maintained and have sufficient freight traffic which would benefit from any improvements of infrastructure with the addition of a passenger train, such is not the case in bordering South Dakota. South Dakota has – by far – the worst rail network of any state west of the Mississippi River. Development of numerous earlier major east-west transcontinental lines in Nebraska and North Dakota meant that the area in between – South Dakota – did largely without. The Black Hills and the lack of any viable crossing of the Continental Divide in Central or Northern Wyoming quashed fantasies of a bona fide transcontinental railroad across South Dakota. Even the "transcontinental" Milwaukee Road main line across Northern South Dakota ducked into North Dakota before completing its trek across South Dakota (the route was subsequently abandoned west of Terry, MT in 1980).

Today's rail system in South Dakota reflects its service to local agriculture, South Dakota's primary economic driver. Only about 55 route-miles of track in the state can be categorized as important through freight routes: The BNSF coal route through Edgemont in the southwest corner of the state between Nebraska and Wyoming, and BNSF's "Mid-Continent" corridor through Garretson in the southeast part of the state temporarily ducking out and in from Minnesota between Canada and the Twin Cities to the north and Omaha and Kansas City to the south. These are the only routes in the state with a track speed over 40 MPH; most South Dakota lines are good for 10 MPH or 25 MPH. Other than the route through Edgemont, the only route with signaling in the state is the former east-west Milwaukee Road main line through Aberdeen, and that is not continuous, being dark territory in adjacent states. BNSF serves by far the lion's share of South Dakota's rail customers, with numerous short lines handling most of the remainder. One regional railroad, the Rapid City, Pierre and Eastern, does cross the entire state with a connection to CPKC (Canadian Pacific) in Tracy, MN and BNSF in Crawford, NE. Pierre, by the way, is the state capital and is pronounced PEER (one syllable).

The lack of suitable – sometimes any - rail infrastructure has not deterred some local and regional advocates from fantasizing about passenger trains returning to South Dakota. The accompanying map is one such example. State boundaries are not indicated, but Rapid City, Pierre, Aberdeen and Sioux Falls are in South Dakota. Pierre – on the only existing east-west rail line (the RCP&E) across the entire state – is not a consideration for service. However, proposed routes radiate in three directions (east, west, and south) from Rapid City and all three have one thing in common: No track. For the routes east and south, significant stretches of track no longer exist. The route west from Rapid City includes 80 miles which have never had a railroad – ever. The route from Rapid City to Sioux Falls (using the route with the most existing track) includes 98

Continued on page 19

WHERE SHOULD ADVOCATES SUPPORT NEW PASSENGER SERVICE IN RURAL AMERICA? IT DEPENDS! THE CASES OF WYOMING AND SOUTH DAKOTA

Continued from page 18

miles of no track (railbanked, but no rail), 81 miles out of service and unused for over 30 years, 107 miles of shortline railroad (the Ringneck and Western Railroad, named for South Dakota's state bird, the Ring-neck Pheasant) mostly at 10 MPH, and 100 miles good for 25 MPH. All told, railroad mileage is 386 miles. Highway mileage is 39 miles less than by rail/reconstructed rail. Driving time is about 5.5 hours (80 MPH is the speed limit) with a daily bus making the trek in 5 hours, 50 minutes. Traffic on I-90 across most of the state is 6,000 to 8,000 vehicles daily, about the same as I-94 through North Dakota and about one-third that of I-80 in Nebraska, which parallels the UP main line, currently without passenger train service. Clearly, the cost of infrastructure enhancement would be enormous simply to allow running time for a passenger train to even be remotely competitive with the highway.

A challenging reality in the United States is that outside the Northeast Corridor and a few other places (including some in California), Amtrak trains use infrastructure provided by freight railroads. Through state and federal appropriations, freight railroad infrastructure has been upgraded to allow additional passenger train frequencies, and these improvements have also benefited the host railroad (such as with California's *San Joaquins* and *Capitol Corridor* trains). When freight railroads benefit from enhanced infrastructure, society in general can benefit if the increased capacity can entice shippers to change from trucks to freight trains. Fewer trucks on freeways improves highway safety, and freight trains are on average four times as energy-efficient as trucks. When large capital expenditures are contemplated to enhance a right-of-way for passenger train operation, it is therefore logical to prioritize routes which can make rail freight service also more efficient, and to place projects that have no such value far, far on the back burner. Such is the case for passenger service in South Dakota, outside possibly between Sioux Falls and Minneapolis/St. Paul (about 20 miles of route in South Dakota). With the exception of the aforementioned routes through Edgemont and Garretson, as well as one lone shipper in Wyoming (American Colloid, 20 miles west of Belle Fourche, SD at the end of track), no rail freight in the Western U.S. needs to traverse anywhere in South Dakota. BNSF does operate a freight train between Minneapolis and Laurel, Montana via Aberdeen, South Dakota with traffic moving between those terminals, but this is merely an efficiency move as the train is needed to move origin/destination cars to and from South Dakota; the preferred route for through trains between these terminals is via Fargo and Bismarck in North Dakota.

The lesson from South Dakota passenger train route "lines on a map" must be that in addition to all the considerations about utility which would go into determining whether a passenger route is viable, research into the route's utility for freight service should also be required as that freight railroad would likely be the entity responsible for maintenance and operation of the route (and would require perpetual funding to do so, as is the case of the *Southwest Chief* between La Junta, CO and Lamy, NM where no freight trains can subsidize route maintenance). In the case of the routes from Rapid City, a "build it and they will come" mentality is inappropriate. Most of the freight traffic in the area is moving via the most-efficient route as it is, and little opportunity exists for significant additional freight traffic as agricultural activity is less productive West River (a South Dakota term meaning west of the Missouri River, which divides the state both geographically and climatically). Most of South Dakota's rail traffic is centered on agriculture, such as unit trains of wheat, corn, soybeans, milo, Ethanol, fertilizer, dried-distilled-grain, etc,. and is primarily "East River," far from Rapid City.

When it comes to lobbying for additional passenger trains, advocates in populous California, Illinois and the Northeastern states have it easy. With a huge population base, highway congestion and generally well-maintained rail infrastructure, making a case for new service can often write itself. But in sparsely-populated areas, more parameters must be considered, such as whether the area is a Wyoming or a South Dakota.

Mark Meyer's enthusiasm for passenger trains predates the formation of Amtrak, and is supplemented with 40 years of experience in railroad operations at Burlington Northern and BNSF.

Get Involved with the work of RUN!

To find out how to volunteer, write to:

RUN, P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104

or contact Richard Rudolph via e-mail at RRudolph1022@gmail.com

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

FROM THE

RUN

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Rail Users' Network Newsletter is published quarterly by the Rail Users' Network, a 501 (c) (3), nonprofit corporation.

We welcome your thoughts and comments about our newsletter. Please write to us:
RUN, P.O. Box 354, Northampton, MA 01060

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

RAIL USERS NETWORK
P.O. Box 354,
Northampton, MA
01060

RUN
RAIL USERS NETWORK

Please become a member of RUN...

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

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

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

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

Please register me / us as a member of RUN today

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

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

_____
Street Address City State/Province Postal Code

_____
Phone Number Fax Number E-Mail

Enclosed are dues of:

_____ $25 (introductory/first-year only)
_____ $40 (individual/family)
_____ $100 (Advocacy or Advisory Group)
_____ $250 (Public Agency or Bureau)
_____ $250 (Private Carrier or For-For-Profit)

Mail to RAIL USERS' NETWORK. P.O. BOX 354, NORTHAMPTON, MA 01060 USA