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LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD FINALLY SERVES GRAND CENTRAL TERMINAL!

By Andrew Albert

After nearly 60 years of planning, design, construction, and \$11 billion in spending, the first Long Island Rail Road train began service to Grand Central Madison (the name for the Long Island Rail Road's terminal beneath the existing Grand Central Terminal) on Wednesday, January 25, 2023. The first train departed Jamaica station at 10:45 A.M., and 22 minutes later, it glided into a gleaming new terminal approximately 17 floors beneath Grand Central Terminal on Manhattan's East Side!

On board were many dignitaries, including Governor Kathy Hochul, MTA Chair Janno Lieber, and Long Island Rail Road Interim President Catherine Rinaldi. I was

also aboard, being an MTA Board Member, and the ride was definitely an exciting one! The excitement on-board was noticeable, especially when the Conductor announced, shortly after departure from Jamaica, "next stop—Grand Central Madison!" Cheers erupted from many as the train proceeded west towards the tunnel. After entering the tunnel, as the train proceeded west under Sunnyside Yards, the ride became incredibly smooth, and riders could hardly notice any turns, changes in elevation, or excess noise as the train proceeded into the 63rd Street Tunnel under the East River. At approximately 11:07 A.M., the train entered Grand Central Madison, to loud applause from all of the traincars!

What many riders didn't expect was how deep this new terminal actually is! It takes approximately 7 minutes to get to street level from platform level! The longest escalator in New York takes riders up to the lower level of Grand Central Terminal, and elevators and stairways are also available. The new terminal is magnificent, with some of the style and glamour of the existing Grand Central Terminal, which is breathtaking! The current schedule is a shuttle service from Jamaica to Grand Central, both non-stops, as well as stopping at Kew Gardens, Forest Hills, and Woodside, before terminating at Grand Central Madison. In a few weeks, the new increased Long Island Rail Road schedule will begin, representing something

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JOIN US AT THE "GOOD CONNECTIONS: WHY THE NORTHEASTERN RAIL NETWORK IS IMPORTANT TO THE ENTIRE U.S." CONFERENCE, APRIL 28, 2023

By Richard Rudolph, Chair, Rail Users' Network

This exciting conference is taking place from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm at the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, One Newark Center, 17th Floor, Newark, NJ. The conference, which is sponsored by the Rail Users' Network, will focus on efforts to improve and expand passenger rail and rail transit in the Northeast, regarding projects that are moving forward and those which are standing still and could use some help. Time will be also be

set aside to hear from the grassroots rail advocates who are working at the state and local level to expand passenger rail and rail transit.

The day will begin with opening remarks given by Richard Rudolph, Chair of the Rail Users' Network. Sally Gellert, Chairperson of the Lackawanna Coalition, will also be on hand to greet and talk with attendees.

The morning featured speakers include Bill Vantuono, the Editor-in-Chief of *Railway Age*, who will give the keynote address. Art

Guzzetti, Vice President, Mobility Initiative and Public Policy at the American Public Transportation Association, will talk about the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and how it will affect passenger rail and rail transit in the Northeast.

Other morning presenters include:

- Tim Frauley, Interim Executive Director, Schuylkill Rail Authority, who will talk about the effort to restore passenger service to Reading, PA.

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NEW CRRC TRAINSETS DELAYED AT THE MBTA; DELIVERY MAY BE PUSHED UNTIL 2027



An Orange Line trainset manufactured by CRRC transfers passengers at Boston's North Station. The station connects the MBTA's Orange Line, Green Line, and northbound commuter rail systems.

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

As the ridership was complaining about bad subway service in recent months, one of the reasons has been revealed that the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has not received any new rolling stock against an order from China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC) since last summer. The order has been plagued by pandemic setbacks, materials delays, and a recent discovery of labor issues at the assembly plant located in Springfield, MA. Because of this, a new delivery schedule for new Orange Line and Red Line trainsets will not meet the initial delivery schedule and may be delayed well into 2027.

Shipments of the new trainsets were halted last summer amid various failures

that pointed to both engineering, workmanship, and procedural issues. Overall, the failures experienced with the new railcars included derailments due to the wheel trucks binding to the car body, doors not closing properly, and a backup battery issue that caused at least one minor explosion. More recently, an electrical arcing problem with the 600-volt DC power to grounded sections of the wheel truck were uncovered, forcing multiple trainsets into the shop.

Recent revelations by former CRRC employees carried in the local press also revealed workmanship and labor issues shortfalls, with stories of workers standing idle because parts were not available, and train cars being pushed down the assembly line missing parts but being passed through assembly milestones that should not have been allowed.

The contract that was inked by then-Governor Deval Patrick (D-MA) over 8 years ago requires final assembly of the new trainsets to be performed in Massachusetts. The car bodies are assembled in China and shipped to the USA, but other parts such as wheel trucks and some electricals are made in the USA. Final assembly is then performed at the CRRC plant. However, CRRC and other vendors in the supply line have experienced setbacks and the MBTA is now seeking a more realistic delivery schedule.

The Orange Line's Hawker-Siddeley fleet are now over 40 years old, and many have been sent to the scrap yard. Some were retained as back-up units but there is some ambiguity whether federal authorities will allow this. In 2022, the MBTA was subject to a scathing review by federal rail inspection authorities faulting the transit system on many levels, including maintenance and staffing problems. The CRRC rail order will fully replace all of the Hawker units on the MBTA's Orange Line. As part of the contract, CRRC will also manufacture a complete set of Red Line cars as well. The two lines will have rail cars that are identical from a mechanical and electrical perspective, with the difference being the car bodies vary slightly in length and width.

The Red Line currently has rail cars made by Pullman that are approaching the ripe old age of 55 years and it is believed that these may be the oldest rail cars of this type in continuous revenue service in the USA, aside from museum pieces.

As such, 152 Orange Line cars scheduled to be delivered by December 2023 and 252 Red Line cars scheduled to be delivered by September 2026 won't be possible. As of this writing, the MBTA

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approaching a 40% increase in LIRR service, the first major service increase in over 100 years!

There will be service to both Penn Station and Grand Central Madison from each LIRR branch, and more reverse-peak trains, thanks to the new third track project, recently completed. More service to stations in Queens will also be in effect, combined with City Ticket, a reduced-fare \$5 ticket which will be good at all times of the day. As some Queens neighborhoods are far from subways, this will reduce the number of "transit deserts," and vastly reduce travel times to Manhattan. One casualty of all this good news is that service between Jamaica and Atlantic Terminal, Brooklyn, will become basically a shuttle service, more frequent than at present, but requiring a change of trains at Jamaica station. Riders that previously had either a one-seat ride to Brooklyn, or an across-the-platform transfer from track 2 to track 3 at Jamaica will now

have to go up an escalator, across towards the JFK AirTrain to Platform F, and down to the Brooklyn shuttle.

On the positive side, service will vastly improve, commuters needing access to Manhattan's East Side will save approximately 20 minutes each way on their commute, and the reduction of trips to Penn Station will allow work to commence on the East River tunnels, which were damaged by Hurricane Sandy. It will also allow room at Penn Station for the upcoming (2027 or thereabouts) Penn Access Project, which will bring Metro-North's New Haven line trains through the Bronx on Amtrak's Hell Gate line, along with the construction of 4 new stations in the Bronx, 3 of which are far from subways.

The new service to Grand Central will also allow riders of both the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North Railroad to purchase "combo" tickets, with an added \$8 fee to wherever on the other railroad you are travelling. All of this can be seen on the wonderful new "Train

Time" app, which shows all schedules, fares, connections, and more! Metro-North riders also now have a fast route from their towns to JFK Airport, by transferring to the LIRR at Grand Central, riding to Jamaica, and boarding the JFK AirTrain right in Jamaica!

To sum it all up, these are exciting times for rail riders in the New York Metropolitan Region, with connections that were dreamed of decades ago finally in place!

Governor's proposed budget helps the MTA

Governor Hochul revealed her budget proposals for the State, and financial aid for the MTA, which is approaching a fiscal cliff, is included. Gov. Hochul proposes to increase the Payroll Mobility Tax (PMT) paid by employers in the NYC area, from .3% of payroll to .5%, which would raise approximately \$800 million annually. She is also asking for a 3-year extension of a corporate tax

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

Name	Location	Affiliation
Richard Rudolph, Chair	Portland, ME	NARP / TrainRiders Northeast, Maine Rail Group
Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair	New York, NY	New York City Transit Riders Council
Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary	Philadelphia, PA	Tri-State Citizens' Council on Transportation
David Peter Alan, Esq.	South Orange, NJ	Lackawanna Coalition
Joshua D. Coran	Seattle, WA	Talgo Inc.
Clark Johnson	Madison, WI	All Aboard Wisconsin
Dennis Kirkpatrick	Boston, MA	Rail Users' Network
J.W. Madison	Albuquerque, NM	Rails Inc.
Andy Sharpe	Philadelphia, PA	SEPTA
Phil Streby	Peru, IN	Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance
Brian Yanity	Fullerton, CA	RailPAC

Please send comments, letters to editor or articles for possible publications to the Rail Users' Network at: RUN; P.O. Box 8015, Portland, ME 04104 or email to rrudolph1022@gmail.com

Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny

FROM NEW MEXICO

By JW Madison

Making life easier for the Rail Runner and its maintenance people

This is the latest we have on efforts to establish a better Operation and Maintenance Facility (OMF) for the New Mexico Rail Runner Express (NMRX):

I call your attention to my pictures (like this one) and articles highlighting the open-air structure housing the OMF, despite the presence of the abandoned Railyard locomotive repair shop a couple of hundred yards away (RUN Newsletter, Spring 2021; Rails Inc Newsletter, Winter 2022). You'll see that we have nowhere to go but up.

But some Big news might be in the pipeline (could this big carport become a thing of the past?). **From the Rio Metro RTD:**

" US Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) announced the inclusion of \$12,835,000 in funding for nine local projects that include: \$3,001,000 for Rio Metro Regional Transit District to improve the existing Operations and Maintenance Facility for the Rail Runner fleet.



<https://www.lujan.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/heinrich-lujan-deliver-over-273-million-in-fy23-funding-for-146-new-mexico-projects/>

But just in case, we are working on a revised, scaled down facility concept that we can hopefully move forward with, using existing budget. We just want to get our folks (and equipment) out of the weather. "

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AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF AMTRAK CHICAGO FROM A FORMER MANAGER

No one mentions that several years ago, Amtrak closed the RIP track (a track where cars are placed awaiting repair) at 14th Street on third shift. Then, last year, allegedly because of a shortage of mechanical personnel, they closed the RIP track on second track also. This was done, I was told, to force the employees into the yard to fill vacancies on running maintenance jobs. So the mechanical work forces have been cannibalized for several years in Chicago, I assume to cut costs so the perpetrators.....um.....I mean management, could reach their cost reduction goals so they could pad their salary with phony bonuses. Performance bonuses don't add anything to "performance" when they starve the ability to perform routine tasks.

This condition is totally the responsibility of upper management. Instead of using the Covid lull and service curtailments to perform overhauls and catch up with periodic maintenance, they retrenched, made little effort to determine the age of the workforce to plan for retirements and failed to continue to hire with the goal of having sufficient qualified personnel to be able to ramp back up after the pandemic was over.

But, Amtrak wasn't the only company to utilize this business philosophy. Unemployment figures for last week were at something like 3.4%, the lowest since 1969. Jobs are available and workers are shopping around for better wages and benefits and they are getting them.

Retention of employees is hard with the job market as it currently is and if you are going to survive and thrive you must be competitive. Amtrak can't figure this out and simply wrings its hands, quotes from the Amtrak "Big Book of Train Delay Excuses" and limps into another embarrassing operational day. I am ashamed of the "service" that they have operated since lessened COVID

restrictions have allowed a return to normalcy. I don't see how they will recover, as they are no longer a reliable form of travel. A four-car *Capitol Limited* is not a service. It does nothing more than maintain a franchise.

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Increase (which was set to expire this year), which would raise between \$800 million to \$1 billion over the next three years. She has also proposed giving the MTA money raised by the pending opening of and sales of casino licenses and funds raised from the operations of these casinos in the New York Metropolitan Area, as well as asking the City of New York to give the MTA \$500 million to fund student MetroCards as well as Access-a-Ride services for paratransit. As of this time, Mayor Adams is pushing back on this proposal.

The Governor has also insisted that the MTA reduce its losses by new efficiencies, which the MTA has agreed to, and is already putting some of them into place. All of this is to remove the possibility of severe service cuts, and drastic fare increases, both of which would reduce ridership and severely impact the economy of the region. Even with the proposed aid, which must still be approved by the State Legislature, there are still fare increases on the table, which would first raise the \$2.75 fare to \$2.90 for two years, and then it would jump to \$3.02 in 2025. There would still be discounts for frequent riders, and with the OMNY tap card being implemented system-wide, there are built-in discounts, such as fare-capping, which is proving quite

popular with all income groups.

The MTA is certainly not the only mass-transit system in the US that is approaching a fiscal cliff. The pandemic has hurt most transit systems, and a federal response is clearly indicated. Transit systems are the economic engines that move their cities/regions. They promote and stimulate economic activity, and an investment in transit systems is a good one!

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

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!

NEW MBTA PAWTUCKET-CENTRAL FALLS RAIL STATION OPENS ON THE NEC; NEW BUS GARAGE MAY SEE MBTA OPERATIONS CENTER MOVE IN

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

On Monday, January 23, 2023, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) and the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) opened the new Pawtucket-Central Falls commuter rail station for public access. The MBTA released a new schedule for its Boston-Providence rail line on the same day, adding the new infill station.

The project is a joint effort of the MBTA, Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority, the R.I. Department of Transportation (RIDOT), and the communities of Pawtucket and Central Falls, RI. The opening is the culmination of almost a decade of planning which included land acquisition and many public meetings. The cost has been stated to be about \$63 million to complete.

The new station replaces the former Pawtucket rail station that closed decades back due to low ridership and eventually fell into a state of decay. The former station still stands and spans the space above the tracks. Due to issues with the building's condition and roadblocks to making it fully handicapped accessible, the former station was deemed not usable for modern passenger access. As such, the new station, which is about one-half mile south (west) of the old station, has been built to fit the growing need for passenger rail in this area.

Weekend service is 12 trains each direction. All serve Wawa, eastbound departing from 6:10 A.M. to 10:10 P.M. and arriving westbound from 7:28 A.M. until 11:38 P.M. Service is basically every 2 hours, with 3 additional trains at busier travel times.

Pawtucket-Central Falls will have 200 parking spaces and a RIPTA bus hub connecting the station to the region and also to Providence. An additional 200



TOP PICTURE: Old Pawtucket Station. The original Pawtucket station dates back to the steam era but was closed decades ago. Seen here boarded up in this image from 2015. BOTTOM PICTURE: New Pawtucket Station. The new Pawtucket station is seen here being completed in December 2022. The Pawtucket/Central Falls station will serve the MBTA commuter rail as well as RIPTA bus lines connecting the region.

parking spaces and a RIPTA bus hub connecting the station to the region and also to Providence. An additional 200 parking spots and bathrooms are slated to be built later this year. The station features full ADA access and has full high platforms for easy boarding.

There are no plans for Amtrak to stop at Pawtucket-Central Falls, since it already stops at Providence, which is the next station south (west) of this location.

The new station is at 300 Pine St. in downtown Pawtucket, near the Central Falls town line.

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MAINE DOT PROPOSES \$3 MILLION FOR PILOT OF BRUNSWICK-ROCKLAND RDC SERVICE

By *Bob Johnston*

The prospect of regular passenger service on a state-owned route between Brunswick and Rockland, ME, received a big boost last week when Maine's Department of Transportation budgeted \$3 million to advance a two-year pilot project utilizing 1950s-era Budd Rail Diesel Cars. [Ed-Note: Rail Diesel Car is now referred to as a Diesel Multi-Unit or DMU in current rail vernacular.]

The Camden, ME *Courier Herald* originally reported the development.

Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority Executive Director Patricia Quinn tells Trains News Wire, "The equipment and the necessary operational and safety regulatory requirements are being assessed to determine a path forward."

Plans to extend the reach of NNEPRA's Boston-Brunswick *Downeaster* an additional 56 miles to Rockland have been contemplated since seasonal excursions on the branch ended in 2015. That's the year that the state declined to renew the operating lease of Maine Eastern, the company that had operated summer-only round trips since 2004.

Although Amtrak ran a test train over the former Maine Central branch in 2019, an intriguing proposal emerged last year when Midcoast Rail Services, a subsidiary of New York's Finger Lakes Railway, suggested using RDC equipment as part of its operating rights takeover from Canadian Pacific [see "Company offers plan for Rockland-Brunswick, Maine, passenger service," Trains News Wire, Jan. 27, 2022].

Proactively, Finger Lakes began making modifications to one of two RDCs it has leased for tourist service from Vermont-based AllEarth Renewals, which had acquired a fleet of 14 from Dallas' Trinity Railway Express. Rest rooms had been removed by the Texas commuter



RDC 2003 at Finger Lakes shops in Geneva, NY, on Aug. 27, 2022. The unit is being modified for service on the Rockland Branch. (Photo by the author)

operator, so the short line's Geneva, NY shop forces installed a replacement that is compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act accessibility standards.

"We're calling it a Coastliner," Midcoast President Mike Smith tells News Wire, adding, "The Class 3 track between Brunswick and Rockland has been well-maintained by the state DOT; we're planning on a running time of 1 hour, 50 minutes operating at a top speed of 55 mph." In addition to restroom-equipped RDC No. 2003, Smith plans on making two other units available.

Logistics still must be hammered out between Midcoast, NNEPRA, the Federal Railroad Administration, and Amtrak; a launch by the summer 2023 is being targeted.

In a News Wire interview last August, Quinn said, "Everybody is onboard; we just have to figure out what the formula is. There's a mobility opportunity to provide a year-round alternative to the automobile, that's why we would like to see three round trips a day, seven days per week." She points to the only

alternative, two-lane U.S. Route 1, as congested in the summer tourist season and a challenge in winter.

Most passenger rail startups consume cash by beginning with a ridership study, but that isn't happening here. As Midcoast's Smith puts it, "We can just run the damn service and see if it works!"

This article first appeared at Trains.Com. It has been reproduced here with the permission of the author. Bob Johnston is a member of RUN.

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

A LETTER FROM FRA ADMINISTRATOR AMIT BOSE

U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration
 1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE Washington, DC 20590

January 27, 2023

Mr. Richard Rudolph, Ph.D. Chairman
 Rail Users Network
 211 Ocean Avenue Portland, ME 04103

Dear Mr. Rudolph:

Thank you for your letter to Secretary Pete Buttigieg regarding the resolution passed by the board of directors of the Rail Users Network in response to the performance of Amtrak's trains 351 and 353 on October 7, 2022. I have been asked to respond on his behalf.

I want to express my regrets regarding the experiences of the passengers affected by the delay; ensuring a safe and comfortable customer experience is essential to Amtrak's mission. Following the incident, Amtrak conducted an extensive investigation and debrief of what occurred, and FRA's Office of Railroad Safety reviewed the results of that investigation.

Amtrak has also revised its policies and procedures for service interruptions to improve how it responds in the future to incidents like this one. I understand that Amtrak has offered passengers on the train refunds, vouchers, as well as additional compensation. FRA is committed to improving the safety and efficiency of our nation's rail system. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also referred to as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, includes \$550 billion in new federal investment in America's infrastructure. The legislation positions rail to play a central role in our transportation and economic future, providing supplemental appropriations of \$66 billion in rail funding which will, in part, help to eliminate the Amtrak maintenance backlog and make improvements to the National Network. This investment will create safe, efficient, and climate-friendly transportation alternatives.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Transportation is committed to ensuring responsible stewardship of taxpayer funds provided by Congress to Amtrak. We will continue to work with Amtrak to meet the responsibility of delivering and improving passenger rail in America.

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention. We appreciate the opportunity to respond to your concerns.

Sincerely,

Amit Bose Administrator

cc:
 Mr. Andrew Albert, Vice-Chair of Rail Users Network

RENEWAL TIME AGAIN

The Membership Secretary thanks the members who have promptly renewed for 2023. It makes the task far easier.

As a reminder, RUN dues are for the calendar year. If your newsletter label shows 2022, then your 2023 dues are now due. The Board has maintained the current rate again: \$40 individual and \$100 advocacy and official advisory organizations. Renewing promptly helps

RUN reduce waste. We send renewal postcards monthly, a lot of paper.

Lost member

We hope another member knows John Burns, last known address on Waterview Drive in Sandy Hook, CT. He moved without informing us of his new address. We do not have a cell phone or email and have no way to contact him. If you know John Burns, please let him know we need his current address. We need every member; every member is important.

Do we have your email?

Unfortunately, we have address difficulties several times a year. When we have an email address, or a cell phone number, we can quickly resolve the problem. If we do not have your current email, please email it to us. You can also write it on your renewal postcard when you pay. Hint: if you are not receiving Short Runs, we do not have a working email address for you. Thanks.

Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary

JOIN US AT THE "GOOD CONNECTIONS: WHY THE NORTHEASTERN RAIL NETWORK IS IMPORTANT TO THE ENTIRE U.S." CONFERENCE, APRIL 28, 2023

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- Samuel Jordan, President, Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition, who will speak about the proposed Red Line extension.
- Larry Malski (invited) will speak about the Penn Northeast Regional Rail Authority's effort to restore passenger rail service to Scranton.
- Mark Spada, President, Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail, will speak about the proposed second Amtrak frequency of service to and from Pittsburgh.

During lunch, participants will have an opportunity to share information and experiences regarding their efforts and those of their organizations to promote passenger rail and rail transit in their local areas.

The afternoon session will begin with a panel presentation "Making the Case: Presenting Your Ideas to Managers, Politicians and Journalists," moderated by David Peter Alan, RUN Board member and a contributing editor at *Railway Age*. The panelists include Andrew Albert, Chair of the New York City Transit Riders Council & MTA Board Member, Jim Blaze (*Railway Age*), and Mark Magyar, Director, Steve Sweeney Center for Public Policy, College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Rowan University, Morristown, NJ.

The remainder of the afternoon will feature Jane Brophy, Senior Manager, Gov't Affairs, Amtrak (invited), who will speak about the importance of the Northeast Corridor to Amtrak's finances, connections, and possible new initiatives, as well as rolling stock upgrades, such as the new Acela trainsets.

Stephen Sigmund, Chief of Public Outreach at the Gateway Development Corp., will also be on hand to speak about the importance of the Gateway program, the condition of the existing Hudson River tunnels, and the new services possible with the new under-river tunnels between New York and New Jersey. Closing remarks will be given by Chuck Bode, RUN Treasurer.

Who should attend: civic officials, environmentalists, planners, real estate developers, rail advocates and members of the general public. For more information, you can also call Richard Rudolph, Chair, Rail Users' Network. He can best be reached at 207-776-4961.

We have set the registration fee low (\$50) for RUN members and \$65 for other attendees, which includes RUN membership for the rest of 2023. The in-person fee includes morning refreshments, lunch and afternoon beverage break and conference materials/handouts.

Those unable to attend in person can attend by registering to participate via Zoom. The fee for RUN members is \$25, non-members \$40, which includes membership for the rest of 2023. Please note a \$5 late fee will be imposed on all registrations after April 15.

We hope to attract not only rail advocates, but also civic leaders, businesspeople, environmentalists, planners, real estate developers and members of the general public who want to know more about the issues that will be discussed.

You can register online at the Rail Users' website or send a check payable to the Rail Users' Network, Box 8015, Portland, Maine 04104. For more information, you can also call Richard Rudolph, Chair, Rail Users' Network. He can best be reached at 207-776-4961.

NEW CRRC TRAINSETS DELAYED AT THE MBTA

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only has 12 6-car units of the new CRRC rolling stock in service on the Orange Line. Under the current schedules,

which themselves are cut back for other reasons, the line needs 13 such trainsets operating in service. Because of this, the wait for a train can be as much as 20 minutes especially if the trains become bunched in the system for other reasons. Under normal conditions (long forgotten) headways are more like 5-8 minutes. The CRRC contract is also supposed to replace the Red Lines half-century aged Pullman units as well as sets made by Bombardier that are now 25 years old and passed the midlife rebuild mark. As part of the CRRC contract, the state found that rebuilding the Bombardier units would cost more than ordering the underpriced CRRC units, so a decision was made to scrap those as well. As of now, only one-and-one-half train set of CRRC Red Line cars is on property, and one new Red Line 6-car trainset is in revenue operation, but only sparingly. It has become somewhat of a unicorn for rail buffs to find it and ride it.

Adding to rider frustration is that after a month-long shutdown of the entire Orange Line to compress 5-years' worth of repairs into a 30-day framework, additional issues have been uncovered forcing additional slow zones that trains pass through at as little as 10 mph, and which is now resulting in weekend system shutdowns for repairs to be performed. It is also being rumored by those in the know that the Red Line might also be considered for a similar closure for repairs to its tracks and stations.

Federal legislation has also banned any additional new contracts with Chinese companies for this kind of work. As of this writing CRRC has no additional contracts in the USA. There are fears that they could pull out of the MBTA deal, especially since they were also hit with Trump-era high tariffs.

As always, it is recommended to visit the MBTA website (www.mbta.com) to check for service delays, closures, and bus substitutions.

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.

RUN TO NEWARK, RIDE SOME TRANSIT, AND SPEND SOME TIME!

By David Peter Alan

RUN to Newark! That is what local rail advocates and RUN members from around the nation will do at the end of April for RUN's annual conference on Friday, April 28; our first "live and in-person" conference since before the COVID-19 virus struck. Newark is a city that had severe problems in the past and has always lived in New York City's shadow, but it has plenty of transit, and it is coming back. There is a lot to see in Newark and in the surrounding suburbs that you can reach on New Jersey Transit (NJT), and we suggest that you take our Saturday tour after the conference, and also plan to spend more time seeing what this often-overlooked city has to offer.

Newark is the transit hub of New Jersey; particularly the Art Deco Penn Station, which was built by the Pennsylvania Railroad and opened in 1935. It is a stop on Amtrak's busy Northeast Corridor (NEC), with frequent service to Boston, Washington, D.C. and other places, including as far south as Miami and New Orleans. It is also a hub for NJT, with trains to Trenton on the NEC, to the famous Jersey Shore on the North Jersey Coast Line, and on the historic Jersey Central Railroad, now known as the Raritan Line. Trains from the NEC and the "Coast Line" also go to New York Penn Station, as do some weekday trains on the Raritan Line. Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) trains to Jersey City and lower Manhattan also leave from Newark Penn Station. So does NJT's Newark Light Rail, the sole survivor of a once-vast streetcar network in the Garden State, as well as dozens of local bus routes.

Historically, the Lackawanna Railroad had a station about a mile north of Penn Station. That location is now called Broad Street Station, and the building on the eastbound side has been restored to its 1903 glory. It serves trains on the Morris & Essex, Gladstone, and Montclair-Boonton Lines, and it is connected to Penn Station by local buses and by a branch of the Newark Light Rail that runs frequently during peak commuting times on weekdays and much less often at

other times, including weekends.

Newark is New Jersey's largest city, and it has had a troubled past, especially when riots tore the city apart in 1967. It has suffered from poverty and neglect, but there has been significant development in downtown Newark lately, especially between the train stations. Some of the historic office buildings have been renovated or repurposed, and nearby parks have gotten face-lifts. Broad and Market Streets (the intersection is called the "historic Four Corners"), and Halsey Street are slowly reclaiming their former glory; the latter is becoming the city's new restaurant row. There are some new hotels that have recently opened, although the Robert Treat, named after the Puritan leader from Connecticut who founded Newark in 1666, is the most famous (but has lost its historic look).

Newark has some interesting museums, too. The New Jersey Historical Society, off Military Park, explores the history of the city and its surroundings. The Newark Museum, on Washington Street, about an 8-minute walk from Broad Street Station, features extensive collections of historic glass and Tibetan and African art, as well as the Ballantine House, the 1885-vintage home of famed brewer John Ballantine. The classic Newark Public Library, built in 1901, is a block closer to that station and also features small exhibits about the city and its history. There are entertainment venues downtown: the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ-PAC) and the 1925-vintage Symphony Hall. Newark's sports team is the NJ Devils, a National Hockey League franchise, named after the "Jersey Devil," a character from folklore that originated in South Jersey, at the other end of the state.

Not all Newark neighborhoods are tourist-friendly, but some are definitely worth visiting. Lincoln Park, going west from downtown on Broad Street, is surrounded by historic homes and is becoming an arts district. The North Ward, especially along Bloomfield Avenue, is a historically Italian

neighborhood, although it is more diverse today. It still has classic Italian restaurants and bakeries. DiPaulo's and Callandra's are famous; Frank Sinatra (a Hoboken native) reputedly ordered bread from the latter and had it shipped to him when he lived in Las Vegas.

Nearby is Forest Hill, with its stately old houses. Both neighborhoods are on the Newark Light Rail line to Bloomfield, most of which has been in service since 1935. It is the sole surviving local rail transit line in the state (not counting NJ Transit's rail network), when Newark was one of only seven American cities that still hosted at least one streetcar line that survived from the former golden age of rail transit. The line runs in the roadbed of the Morris Canal, which operated from 1832 until 1924. Part of the route now runs under McCarter Highway, an arterial street that was created when some of the canal bed was paved over. The line has been extended to Bloomfield on part of the old Erie Orange Branch, but it used to terminate at Branch Brook Park, which is famous for cherry blossoms that bloom earlier in April.

One of Newark's most popular tourist destinations is the Ironbound, a formerly industrial area that heads away from downtown, in back of Penn Station and along Ferry Street. The ferry is long gone, but the neighborhood is alive with shops and restaurants, frequented by the residents, many of whom boast Portuguese or Brazilian heritage. The neighborhood hosts one of the largest Portuguese communities in the country, and its name came from its industrial past. On one side was the New Jersey Railroad, later part of the Pennsylvania Railroad and now part of Amtrak's NEC. On the other side was a branch of the Jersey Central that went south to Elizabethport, and has not hosted a passenger train since 1967, although the façade of the old Broad Street station still stands with nothing behind it. Many visitors and locals alike head to the Ironbound for Portuguese and Brazilian food.

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RUN TO NEWARK, RIDE SOME TRANSIT, AND SPEND SOME TIME!

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The rail lines that radiate from Newark can take you to a number of historic and interesting destinations. Local NJT trains on the NEC go as far as Trenton, the state capital.

From Princeton Junction, there is a shuttle called the "Dinky" that will take you near historic downtown Princeton and the Princeton University campus. The Dinky is one of the shortest passenger-rail lines in the world, and there is a proposal to replace it with a light-rail line, or perhaps even a busway. New Brunswick, also on the NEC line, is home to New Jersey's other major university, Rutgers. The original "Old Queens" campus is only one block from the train station. There are other towns with their own history and flavor, including constantly changing Elizabeth.

The Jersey Shore is famous, and the North Jersey Coast Line (NJCL) goes as far as Bay Head; about half-way to Atlantic City. There was never a rail line directly between New York and Atlantic City, and that trip by rail requires a change of trains in Philadelphia. The towns along the NJCL are year-round communities today. Red Bank has its own music and art scene, and the towns from Long Branch south to Bay Head still have the traditional flavor of the Shore.

Asbury Park is historic and has seen a major revival of interest in recent years. Ocean Grove, within walking distance of the Asbury Park station, is a beautifully preserved Methodist camp-meeting town from the Victorian era. The beaches and the boardwalks of Asbury Park, Point Pleasant and other towns are about one mile from the rail line, but the "season" at the Shore does not begin until Memorial Day, a month after the RUN conference. Still, the towns along the line are year-round places, and they still have the flavor of the Shore during the spring.

The Raritan Valley Line also serves Penn Station and provides limited service to High Bridge through rolling hills in the western part of Central Jersey on weekdays. The line runs full service to Raritan, including on weekends, stopping at such historic towns as Westfield, Plainfield, and Somerville.

There are also lots of interesting day trips available from Broad Street Station. On the Morris & Essex Line, a few weekday trains go as far west as Hackettstown, in West Jersey. Full service goes as far as Dover, a town recently enlivened by Latin-x arrivals who keep it busy and offer some interesting food options. The historic buildings on Blackwell Street, the town's main street, are worth seeing.

Morristown also has a lively downtown area, as well as historic attractions, including George Washington's headquarters when his army camped there during the frigid winter of 1779-80. Many of these attractions are located within walking distance of the train station, and there is plenty of activity on South Street and around the Green. There are many other interesting towns along the M&E too, with numerous examples of homes and businesses that were part of the "transit-oriented development" of the late 1800s and early 1900s, and that are still going strong.

The line to Gladstone branches off from the M&E at Summit. It has an interurban character, as it traverses rolling hills and serves small towns. The ride is scenic, although service is more limited on weekdays than on weekends. There are also trains to Montclair; a town with history and a strong art scene, including the Montclair Art Museum (you will need a local bus along Bloomfield Avenue to get there). On weekends, trains only go as far as Bay Street Station and only run every two or three hours, much to the dismay of many local residents. Full service on weekdays ends at Montclair State University, while peak-hour commuter trains continue along the old Boonton Line to Dover and beyond; some all the way to Hackettstown during peak-commuting hours.

It is possible to visit towns west of Montclair State and get back, but it's tricky. One such interesting town is Boonton; a historic hillside town that was on the Morris Canal. It's possible to visit Boonton and other towns along that part of the line, but such a trip is only feasible on weekdays from mid-afternoon until early evening. It can be done by stopping over, taking a later train to Dover, and coming back to Newark on the Morris & Essex Line. That can prove to be an interesting round trip if you time it right.

We suggest that you plan to spend a few days in and around Newark. The Greater Newark Convention and Visitors Bureau has plenty of information about the city. Their phone number is (973) 735-2135, and their website is www.newarkhappening.com. The site has listings for hotels and restaurants in the city, and you can also view their 68-page Official Visitors Guide. There is also a map for Newark Walks, a self-guided walking tour of downtown. With Newark itself, the towns that can be reached from there on NJT, and New York City only about 20 minutes away, there is plenty to do in the area. There are also some rail-related activities that you can enjoy when you come for the conference.

While you're spending time in New Jersey, don't forget our food experiences. New Jersey has lots of diners, including a few with the classic look. We get the overflow of the ethnic food scene from New York City, from the most popular (Italian) to among the most exotic (including Jamaican and Peruvian). We are also known for "Texas wieners" in Central Jersey, Taylor ham (very salty), pizza burgers, Italian hot dogs (with onions, peppers, and potatoes) in and near Newark, our version of the Sloppy Joe (turkey and another meat, Swiss cheese, coleslaw and Russian dressing on rye), and more.

The tour that will follow the session itself, on Saturday, April 29, will also be a part of the conference experience. Since much of the conference will concern connectivity, we plan to show you some of the places where NJT services connect with each other and also connect with

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REPORT ON NEW JERSEY

By Sally Jane Gellert

Last month, NJ Transit Rail Operations celebrated its 40th anniversary; it was noted by Kevin Corbett at this month's board meeting, as the board did not meet in January (the board traditionally does not meet in January).

The February 8th board meeting was unusual; it had been expected to be the first one in some time with a full complement of members, but just the day before, Cedrick Fulton, the vice chairperson, resigned abruptly, with no reason given. An article at northjersey.com indicated his disapproval of a newly added agenda item moving NJT headquarters from one side of Newark Penn Station to the other; from a building of which they only recently took ownership to a leased space at Two Gateway Center, owned and managed by Onyx Equities, LLC, whose principals each donated more than \$20,000 to Gov. Murphy's political campaign. Rail Users' Network board member and journalist David Peter Alan notes, "It probably won't matter; the board strictly enforces unanimity and anyone who votes No is removed at the first opportunity."

Public commentators regretted his departure, noting that Mr. Fulton had asked hard questions of staff and commented on statements by the public (occasionally, a few other board members do as well—at the Feb. 8th meeting, board member Shanti Narra made a number of detailed comments—but until the past few years, any discussion or comment by a board member was rare).

It was noted that Mr. Fulton's resignation follows the departure of board member James Adams, who was not reappointed after voting No on the budget each of the 3 years he was on the board, expressing his concern that, without enough advance time to work

with staff on the complex budget, he did not have enough information to vote in favor. Prior to Mr. Adams' appointment, Flora Castillo, who had been on the board for 20 years, had voted No on two items in 2016, and at the end of her term in 2019, she, too, was not reappointed.

Both at the Board meeting and at the livestreamed program for Transit Equity Day on Saturday, February 4th (Rosa Parks' birthday), local residents called for the reopening of Ampere Station on the Montclair-Boonton line, which has been closed since 1991. There was discussion of its opening in 2005, when the use of funds for transit-oriented development was contemplated, but nothing came of that.

The Lackawanna Coalition supported the project then and joins local advocates from East Orange in supporting it now. The Lackawanna Coalition has called for hourly weekend service between Montclair and Hoboken on this line.

Two other NJ Transit projects in the early stages:

- A new [North Brunswick station](#) on the Northeast Corridor, serving the Main Street North Brunswick transit-oriented development, with project management by the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, and
- Renovation of the [Walter Rand Transportation Center](#) in Camden, which was built in 1989 and is the largest multimodal transportation hub in South Jersey. The latter project is in the information-gathering stage, with a survey that reached about 1400 people and 2 public meetings, one online (about 140 participants) and in person (about 50).

Finally, just days before the December NJT board meeting, the members of NJ Transit's Senior Citizens and Disabled Riders Transportation Advisory

Committee (SCDRTAC) were distressed to learn of the agency's attempt to pass regulations that would limit their purview to a single program supported by casino revenues, starting with a board vote to begin the process at the Dec. 14th meeting. A number of committee members spoke at that meeting, and the item was tabled, then removed from the February agenda about 5 days before the meeting. Negotiations between the agency and the committee are proceeding.

Sally Jane Gellert is Chairperson of the Lackawanna Coalition, a RUN member organization.

RUN TO NEWARK, RIDE SOME TRANSIT, AND SPEND SOME TIME!

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other providers like Amtrak, PATH, and local buses. We also plan to ride on some NJT lines, so you can get the flavor of the transit network in northern New Jersey and into New York City, where we will also take a look at Penn Station and some other points of interest. We might have some other surprises for you, too.

So we hope you will RUN to Newark with us for our conference on Friday, April 28, and the Saturday tour, and stay in the area to experience an interesting variety of transit, as well as some of the history, scenery, and food that the cities and towns served by New Jersey Transit have to offer.

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.

FROM NEW MEXICO

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An open letter to Secretary Buttigieg

Mr. Secretary:

During Bush / Cheney's second term, my (now late) Other Half and I registered Democratic, being unable to find any principled honest-Conservative Republicans outside our own circles of friends and acquaintances. I remain Independent at heart; but I still get about 200 boiler-plate, alarmist, crying-Wolf, e-mails from one Democrat or another, every day.

One example of this is the repeated message your office sends out about "High Speed Rail" (whatever you think that is):

"Do you believe in High Speed Rail? Yes or No?"

There are serious problems with these simplistic "High Speed Rail" sleeve-tuggers:

What the hell is High Speed Rail (HSR)?

What does your question actually mean? Since my suggestion to adopt the FRA's Track Speed classification chart (RUN Newsletter, Spring 2021, p. 4; Rails Inc Newsletter, also Spring 2021) to ground these definitions, hasn't spread like wildfire, I refer you and your associates to both. Mr. Secretary (and everybody else), the FRA laid out a framework for us. Let's use it! Define your terms!

What would HSR be a part of? True HSR —let's call it Class 9; up to 200 mph; although overseas this is a modest High Speed indeed.

These trains are envisioned to compete with shorter air routes; roughly 500 miles. Fine. But our air networks are supported by pervasive multi-layered systems of shorter cross-country

(Amtrak) routes, local and regional Rail transit, highways, and local streets, with their buses, vans, and cars. What would HSR be supported and connected by?

Relatively nothing. Instead of the simplistic Yes or No messages you keep sending, you should take the time and space to explain to us all how—

If we rebuilt our regular-speed (Class 4-5) passenger Rail system to the density and reliability we all enjoyed until roughly 50 years ago, and run it right for a while, we could then add HSR (the higher Class numbers) for long fast runs. I submit, with fingers crossed, that We The People would gladly tax ourselves to pay for the latter, since we would by then have the reliable, pervasive, and modest-speed Rail network necessary to make HSR the keystone system it could be; along with the appetite for more than just modest speed.

Three more points, Sir:

- 1) How about explaining to all of Us the concept of **Cost as Investment**. We can help.
- 2) Please commence the conversion of our major trackage and Rail infrastructure to **public ownership**, as with **all our other modes** of transportation.
- 3) Gotta walk (again) before we can run.

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

NEW MBTA PAWTUCKET-CENTRAL FALLS RAIL STATION OPENS ON THE NEC

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The new Pawtucket-Central Falls station is also expected to fill a void for the currently closed South Attleboro (MA) station located on the Massachusetts-Rhode Island state line just off Newport Ave. The South Attleboro station closed over a year ago due to serious structural

issues that had been building for many years. It is now in a design phase to be completely rebuilt. An estimated \$65-million funding for the station replacement has yet to be secured. Until then, it is being served by RIPTA buses to the new Pawtucket-Central Falls station.

Elsewhere in the MBTA system, a new MBTA bus garage and layover facility is under design for the Jamaica Plain section of Boston. The garage will be solely for charging and servicing of electric buses that will replace the existing fleet of Compressed Natural Gas vehicles. The new bus yard will be located on the same footprint as the current yard, which historically is the site of the former Arborway bus and streetcar yard. This is located about one block from the Forest Hills MBTA station, the southern terminus for the Orange Line subway, and a hub for buses travelling outbound southerly.

Since the design is still on the drawing board, it will not manifest for several years. The design at this stage will also include the operational control center for the entire MBTA system which is currently located in downtown Boston. Additional design and abutter meetings have yet to be scheduled.

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.

RUN Board meeting schedule for the balance of 2023:

- April 28 -Spring Conference
- May 6
- August 12
- October -Fall Mini-Conference
- November 4

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE UNION PACIFIC'S WELLTON BRANCH: OPPORTUNITY IN THE "PHOENIX WEST LINE," PART 2

West end of Wellton Branch, junction with UP Sunset Route mainline at Wellton, Arizona



Photo: Matthew Griffin

RailPictures.Net - Image Copyright Matthew Griffin

By Brian Yanity

(Second of two parts; Part One appears in the Winter 2023 Run Newsletter.)

Upgrades to the Wellton Branch, above and beyond Class 4 track

To get the Wellton Branch (aka "Phoenix West Line") running again, Amtrak and the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) should work with Union Pacific (UP) to come up with a detailed capital improvement plan. Such a plan would determine exactly what projects are needed and what they will cost. The capital project plan could present an opportunity to propose rebuilding curves (with increased superelevation) and other improvements to increase train speeds.

Straight sections could be feasibly improved for trains traveling faster than 100 mph.

New higher speed track than the FRA Class 4 track proposed by 'Scenario 3' in the 2014 ADOT study is possible. There is no technical reason to limit the Wellton Branch to Class 4. A staged plan for double-tracking the line is also needed, starting with upgrades to existing sidings. If UP needs to continue storing more railcars in the area, then additional sidings can be built for that purpose.

While UP currently makes some revenue from buried communication lines along the route, the Wellton Branch right-of-way could also be used for electric power transmission. There is abundant solar energy in the area, some existing large-scale solar power facilities, and the

Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station near the eastern end of the Wellton Branch. Electrification with 25-kV overhead catenary is also quite possible.

New freight service between Southern California and Arizona

Passenger trains taking the Wellton Branch and Phoenix Subdivisions between Wellton and Picacho through Phoenix also benefit UP freight traffic by freeing up capacity on the Sunset Route mainline. The west side of Phoenix is now home to many large warehouses and logistics developments, much of it heavily reliant on truck traffic from California via the increasingly congested I-10.

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UP local freight crossing Agua Fria River Bridge, Avondale-eastern end of the Wellton Branch



Photo: Ryan Schmelzer

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE UNION PACIFIC'S WELLTON BRANCH: OPPORTUNITY IN THE "PHOENIX WEST LINE," PART 2

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The 205-mile Class III Arizona & California (A&C) Railroad currently provides the only direct rail service between Southern California and Phoenix, interchanging with BNSF Railway at Matthie, AZ (about 57 track miles northwest of Phoenix) and at Cadiz, CA (100 track miles east of Barstow). This combined BNSF+A&C routing is about 512 miles between LA and Phoenix, longer by 86 miles than the 426 miles on UP if Wellton Branch

were reopened.

Much of the A&C track is also limited to slower speeds compared to the BNSF or UP mainlines. The driving distance on I-10 is even shorter: 370 miles.

With a refurbished Wellton Branch, there would be a variety of new "short-haul" and "medium-haul" freight rail services possible along the Ports of LA/Long Beach-Inland Empire-Indio-Yuma-Phoenix corridor. International 40' containers imported on ships through the Ports of LA/Long Beach could go by direct rail service to west Phoenix and there be transloaded to 53' domestic containers.

LA basin/Inland Empire-Phoenix direct service also offers opportunities for domestic 53' intermodal containers,

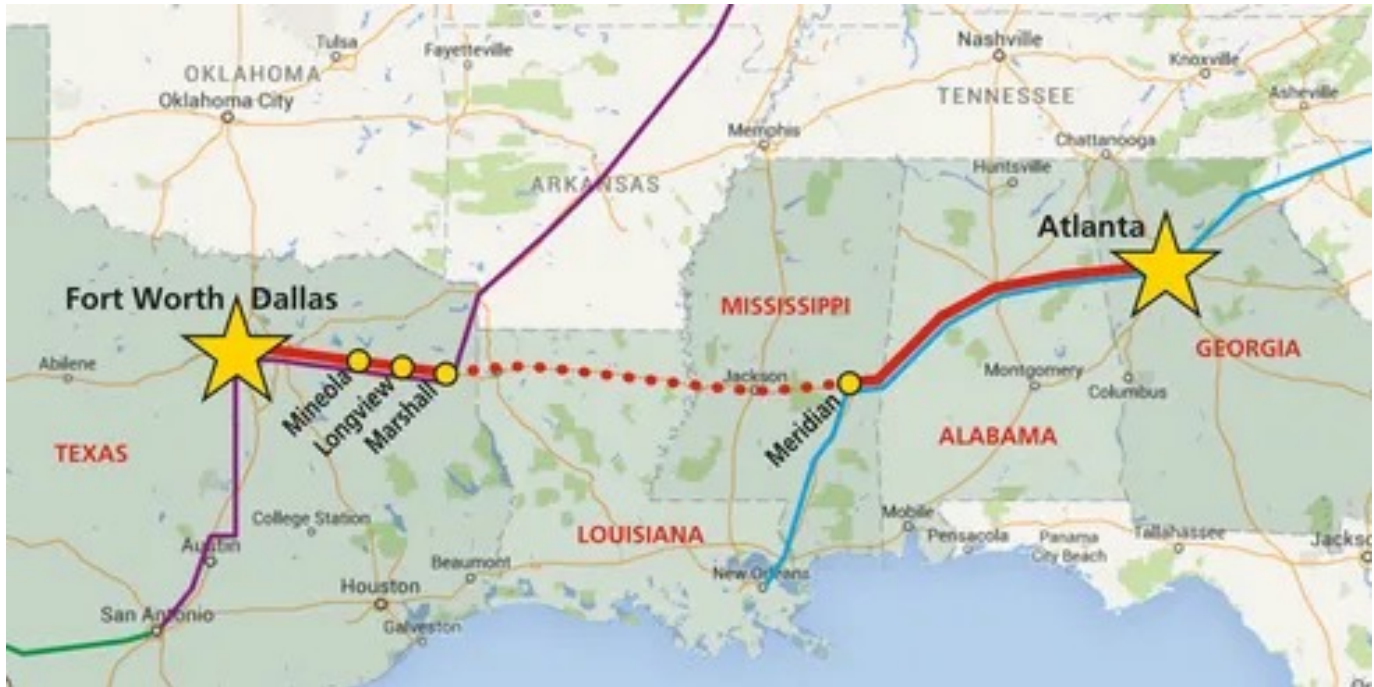
trailer-on-flatcar, and carload freight. There is also potential for Yuma-Phoenix direct short-haul freight service.

The Wellton Branch as a "Toll Road for Trains"

To get Amtrak and UP on board, funding must come from outside the normal budgets of both railroads. Public money or private investment could pay for the capital projects and allow UP and Amtrak to avoid any financial obligation. The state of Arizona could investigate purchasing the right-of-way, which would allow it to lease the branch to Amtrak or other train operators. Even if it is assumed that UP, the state of Arizona, or Amtrak remain unwilling to contribute money for refurbishment

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THE ONGOING EFFORT TO EXPAND LONG DISTANCE RAIL SERVICE FROM DALLAS / FORT WORTH, TO MERIDIAN, MS AND ATLANTA



The proposed I-20 Corridor envisions passenger rail travel along existing track owned by host railroads: Trinity Railway Express (TRE) between Fort Worth and Dallas; Union Pacific (UP) from Dallas to Shreveport, and Kansas City Southern (KCS) from Bossier City to Meridian (its acquisition of KCS pending by Canadian Pacific); and Norfolk Southern (NS) from Meridian to Atlanta. Map courtesy of the I-20 Corridor Council.

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

Reprinted from Passenger Train Journal, 2023-1, Issue 294, pp. 60-61. Over the past two decades, the I-20 Corridor Council, which now encompasses some 35 municipalities in Northeast Texas, Northern Louisiana and Central Mississippi, has been engaged in an inspiring effort to establish a regional consensus to provide support for passenger rail service on existing rail rights-of-way from Dallas / Fort Worth to Meridian, MS and Atlanta, GA. It has built a multi-state coalition of supporters including the four Councils of Governance in the three-state area, the Southern Rail Commission, Texas Eagle Marketing and Performance Organization, local Chambers of Commerce, business owners, universities and college presidents and other stakeholders.

The proposed 815-mile route envisions passenger rail travel along existing track owned by host railroads: Trinity Railway Express (TRE) between Fort Worth and Dallas; Union Pacific (UP) from Dallas to Shreveport, and Kansas City Southern (KCS) from Bossier City to Meridian (its acquisition of KCS pending by Canadian Pacific); and Norfolk Southern (NS) from Meridian to Atlanta. The proposed I-20 Corridor passenger rail route would require the agreement of the host railroads and the cooperation of elected officials. It would benefit the 15 million and more residents living along the I-20 corridor who would have passenger rail access to other urban centers in the southeastern U.S. such as Atlanta, and to East Coast destinations such as Washington, DC and New York City.

The Fort Worth to Marshall, TX passenger link currently exists as part of Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* long-distance route. The line from Shreveport, LA to Meridian is called the Meridian Speedway, and is a joint venture of Kansas City Southern and Norfolk Southern. It was approved by the Surface Transportation Board in 2006. Over the next year, close to \$130 million was spent on improvements from the ground up with new ballast, cross ties, and heavier welded rail. Several new and longer passing sidings were also installed, along with a new CTC signaling system.

By "connecting the dots" of the existing rail right of way between Marshall, TX and Meridian, MS, the proposed new service would not only create an East-West connection between Texas and the
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THE ONGOING EFFORT TO EXPAND LONG DISTANCE RAIL SERVICE FROM DALLAS / FORT WORTH, TO MERIDIAN, MS AND ATLANTA

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East Coast, but also create a transcontinental connection between Los Angeles and New York City. It would connect the proposed I-20 Corridor route with the *Texas Eagle*, *Sunset Limited*, and the *Crescent*.

While a number of studies have been conducted to determine the feasibility of providing passenger rail service on the Meridian-Fort Worth Corridor, the focus here is on several recent studies: Amtrak's feasibility study conducted in 2015, and the Capacity Study funded by a \$738,000 grant that the Council

obtained, with the assistance of Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and coordinated by the Council, the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT), and various transportation institutes, Mississippi State University and HNTB Engineering in cooperation with the Federal Railway Administration (FRA).

A third feasibility study conducted by the Alliance Transportation Group for the Northwest Louisiana Council of Government's Passenger Rail Feasibility Study in 2015 indicated that annual ridership from Shreveport and Vicksburg with a DFW Extension alone would total 180,995 riders per year.

The Amtrak feasibility study, requested by former Texas Harrison County Judge Richard Anderson, the Chairman of the I-20 Corridor Council, envisioned a daily frequency to and from Fort Worth to Meridian operating at the current authorized maximum speed of 79 mph. This could be increased with the addition of positive train control over the existing railroad tracks and a split in

Meridian to join the *Crescent* en route to Atlanta.

The study also pointed out Amtrak's determination that the proposed route would generate a positive cash flow for the company and be economically feasible, without any annual operating subsidy required from the states through which this long-distance route traverses. It also indicated that one-time capital expenditures needed for capacity improvements would be negotiated with the various host railroads, with the assistance of state and federal grants or funding. The Capacity Study, completed in 2017, indicated that \$82 million would be required to pay for additional sidings within the three states, and \$7.5 million for building passenger terminal facilities in Louisiana and Mississippi. But the final figure could be much larger, since two of the rail carriers chose not to participate in the study, and the proposed I-20 corridor passenger rail route would require the agreement of the host railroads and the cooperation

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The Fort Worth to Marshall, TX passenger link currently exists as part of Amtrak's Texas Eagle long-distance route. Photo courtesy of Amtrak.

THE ONGOING EFFORT TO EXPAND LONG DISTANCE RAIL SERVICE FROM DALLAS / FORT WORTH, TO MERIDIAN, MS AND ATLANTA

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of elected officials and the Surface Transportation Board.

Given the result of these studies, Judge Richard Anderson believes “the time is now to make this important connection a reality for the economy and transportation benefit of the urban, rural communities along the I-20 corridor route, for our Southern region and for our nation.” He sees it as a win-win for everyone, for the passenger rail route could be established with a comparatively small amount of funding in a relatively short period of time, and it would bring “many transportation, economic developments, environment, and other quality of life-related benefits to our communities, states and nation.”

It now appears that a breakthrough could finally be in sight. On January 6, 2022, Amtrak and the Canadian Pacific Railroad announced that the two transportation companies have reached an agreement formalizing Canadian Pacific’s support of Amtrak expansion of passenger service in the Midwest and the South. The announcement also conveyed that Amtrak supports the proposed merger of Canadian Pacific and Kansas City Southern railways, which is now before the Surface Transportation Board. CP indicated that if the proposed merger is approved, it would support Amtrak’s efforts to work

with the Southern Rail Commission and other organizations advocating for the restoration of service on two routes, i.e. Amtrak’s proposed service from New Orleans to Mobile, AL and to study the potential for Amtrak service between Meridian, MS and Dallas, TX.

Last month, the Southern Rail Commission convened a stakeholder meeting in Monroe, LA to discuss funding efforts needed to launch the service on the I-20 corridor. The meeting was hosted by U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy and Monroe’s Mayor Friday Ellis. Other attendees included representatives from Amtrak, Canadian Pacific, the FRA, Knox Ross of the Southern Rail Commission, U.S. Senators Roger Wicker and Cindy Hyde-Smith and numerous state legislators. Department of Transportation officials from Louisiana and Mississippi were also present, along with Texas Rail Division Director Jeff Davis. In a press release, Senator Cassidy cited the 2017 study which mentioned that \$80 million would be required to upgrade the route, and that the Louisiana State Legislature has already appropriated \$10 million for an extension of Amtrak’s long-distance service in Northern Louisiana. Knox Ross, the Chairman of the Southern Rail Commission, is also confident that the project will soon be underway, stating that funding is available, an agreement has been reached with a freight railroad, and there is strong leadership at the state and local level.

The passage of the Federal Infrastructure and Jobs Act provides several funding sources to which stakeholders can apply, and the Louisiana legislature has already appropriated \$10 million for an extension of long-distance Amtrak

service in North Louisiana. Nevertheless, it still may be difficult to raise funds from the other states to provide the match required to obtain federal funding for the project. In Texas, for example, over the years the state has lost over \$19 billion in federal funds because there wasn’t a state match. Peter Le Cody, the President of the Texas Advocates, is more hopeful now that Amtrak wants to deliver more frequent and reliable trains, and that Texas is included in its 2035 Connect Plan. He pointed out at the recent Rail Users’ Virtual Conference, held in late October, that the state has a \$27-billion surplus in 2023, which could be used to provide the 20% state share to be “in the game of expanding rail service.”

In closing, the idea of expanding service by adding a section from Meridian to Fort Worth and Dallas, TX on the *Crescent*, while the other section of the train continues on to New Orleans, is not only a creative idea, but it could also establish a precedent which rail advocates could use to build public support to convince Stephen Gardner, the Chief Executive Officer at Amtrak and its Board of Directors, to restore / expand service on other existing long-distance routes. For example, a second section on Amtrak’s *California Zephyr*, which would continue beyond Salt Lake City to Las Vegas, or another section from Denver to Portland, OR could be provided. This advocacy should include reaching out to government officials, local Chambers of Commerce, local and regional planning agencies, Councils of Government, businesses, university and college presidents, and government officials at the local, state and regional levels, as well as Amtrak officials.

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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

THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE UNION PACIFIC'S WELLTON BRANCH: OPPORTUNITY IN THE "PHOENIX WEST LINE," PART 2

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and repair of the Wellton Branch, there could be other sources.

Two possible candidates to be an 'independent entity' which could purchase or lease the 137-mile Wellton Branch segment from UP include:

1. A "joint powers agency" of Maricopa and Yuma counties, perhaps also including key cities
2. A private infrastructure-owning company other than UP or another Class I railroad, perhaps a Class II or Class III railroad.

UP and its predecessor, SP, have sold tracks and rights-of-way to public and private entities before, for the right price. With proper planning and supporting policies, either a public or a private "independent" owner could accomplish the goals of improving and utilizing the Wellton Branch for maximum public benefit.

Imagine for a moment that the Wellton Branch was in Germany. Railroad infrastructure in Germany is publicly owned by DB Netze, the infrastructure division of the state-owned national railroad, Deutsche Bahn (DB) AG. Like other European track owners, DB Netze more or less treats its track network as a "toll road for trains," open to access by any pre-qualified train operator, passenger or freight. The infrastructure owner in

this "open access" system has a financial incentive to maximize the number of trains using its tracks. More trains mean more "tolls" (track access fees), and thus more revenue for the infrastructure owner.

According to the US Census Bureau, Phoenix is the 13th largest Combined Statistical Area (CSA) in the US with 5 million people, while greater Los Angeles is 2nd with 18.5 million. It should be kept in mind that Metro Phoenix is not much smaller than the

UP and its predecessor, SP, have sold tracks and rights-of-way to public and private entities before, for the right price.

metro areas of Berlin (6 million), Munich (5.7 million), or Frankfurt (5.6 million) --all cities served by hundreds of intercity passenger trains every day. Phoenix has none. Maricopa station, a 35-mile drive south of Downtown Phoenix in Pinal County, is technically within the Phoenix metro CSA. Served three days a week each way by the *Sunset Limited*, the Maricopa station saw 11,194 Amtrak passengers in the entire year of 2019, a very small number for a station that purports to serve a metropolitan area of 5 million.

With open access, many segments of underused, abandoned or "fallow" railroad lines like the Wellton Branch could suddenly have tremendous value. Other mothballed lines in Arizona could be brought back to life, such as the Yuma Valley Railway, which has been out of service since 2005. But this is just a thought experiment. Even if an independent entity owned or leased the Wellton

Branch, UP would still control access to both ends of it. In the absence of a national "open access" policy like those of Europe, the Wellton Branch would be like many U.S. short lines: at the mercy of the Class I roads that control outside access to their lines.

Another way to incentivize rehabilitation of the Wellton Branch is to consider it to be a "climate investment." Arizona is already suffering badly from climate change, and increasing the mode share of rail transportation in the state is a sure way to reduce GHG emissions.

Realistically, the state of Arizona, meaning both the Governor and Legislature, will have to support restoration of Wellton Branch in some significant way. Even if the state government of Arizona itself does not purchase or fund repairs of the Wellton Branch, it may have to bless the creation of any rail joint powers agency, or any new passenger rail service within the state. Fortunately, the examples of state-supported passenger rail in states like California, Utah, North Carolina, Virginia, and Illinois, as well as multi-state collaborations such as the *Cascades* (Oregon and Washington) and the *Heartland Flyer* (Texas and Oklahoma) provide examples from which Arizona could learn.

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