

INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

Alternate Plans for South Dakota p. 2

Congestion Pricing Lawsuits p. 3

RUN Canada Report p. 4

MBTA Riders Giving Up p. 5

A Busy Time for NJ Transit p. 6

SMART Rail for Maine? p. 10

Possible Comeback for the Floridian p. 12

Backward Seating on Empire Service p. 14

SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S 2024 SPRING VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Expanding Long-Distance Rail Service: Why Amtrak service to more towns and cities is important to the entire U.S.!

May 17, 12:30 PM - 5:00 PM. EDT

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

Please join us at the Rail Users' Network's Spring Virtual Conference, which is taking place on Friday, May 17, 2024, from 12:30 - 5 pm. This exciting event will highlight the work of rail advocates who are working to expand long-distance rail service in the U.S.

The list of confirmed speakers includes:

12:30 - 12:40: Richard

Rudolph's introductory remarks.

12:40 - 1:05: Todd Liebman, President All Aboard Arizona - *Sunset Limited* Campaign.

1:05 - 1:30: Steve Williams, Mayor, Huntington, West Virginia - Daily service on the *Cardinal*.

1:30 - 1:55: Mike Christensen, Executive Director, Utah Rail Passenger Association - Restoring Desert Wind from Boise, Idaho to Salt Lake City and Las Vegas.

1:55 - 2:00: Break

2:00 - 2:25: Knox Ross, Chairman, Southern Rail Commission - Amtrak's daily *Crescent* from Meridian, MS to Fort Worth and Dallas, Texas.

2:25 - 2:50: David Strohmaier, Chairman, Big Sky Rail Authority - Restoration of the *North Coast Hiawatha*.

2:50 - 3:15: A success story - Passenger rail from Duluth, Minnesota to the Twin Cities.
Continued on page 7

FRA STUDY SELECTS POTENTIAL LONG-DISTANCE AMTRAK ROUTES

By David Peter Alan

As the upcoming RUN conference about advocating for more Amtrak long-distance routes approaches, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has released a list of suggested new long-distance routes for Amtrak to operate in the future. The list was released as the result of the "route identification" phase of the agency's Long Distance Rail Study, and detailed materials related to it can be found at www.fralongdistancerailstudy.org/meeting-materials.

The study was authorized under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 (IIJA). The statute requires the FRA to study the potential for restoration of routes that Amtrak once ran but discontinued, and routes that were run by host railroads directly before Amtrak started on May 1, 1971, but Amtrak did not continue. A few of the suggested routes included segments that lost their passenger trains before that time, and Amtrak's two tri-weekly trains, the *Cardinal* and the *Sunset Limited*, would be restored to daily service. The

first three routes selected under the agency's Corridor ID Program in December were daily operation of the two tri-weekly trains, and a train between Chicago and the Northwest (Seattle and Portland) on the route of the *North Coast Limited*, historically the Northern Pacific, and now part of BNSF. That train was discontinued in 1971, in favor of the *Empire Builder*, which still runs today on a route north of the *North Coast* route. Amtrak called the train the *North Coast Hiawatha* when it ran from 1972 until 1979. Its stops included
Continued on page 8

ALTERNATE PLANS TO PROVIDE SOUTH DAKOTA WITH MEANINGFUL PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE

By *Eric Clausen*

Introduction: Providing South Dakota with meaningful intercity passenger train service, no matter how it is done, will be a challenge and extremely expensive. However, at least 20 of South Dakota's communities could generate respectable passenger train ridership numbers should the right kind of train service ever become available. The challenges to providing South Dakota passenger train service include remoteness from existing passenger rail hubs, the nature of South Dakota's existing freight railroad infrastructure, the geographic locations of the state's larger communities, and a political climate where the majority of South Dakotans will need to support the development and operation of passenger train service before politicians will make the kind of investments needed to develop and operate the service. The question then becomes, which, if any, of the following passenger train service options will most South Dakotans actually use?

Option 1: The FRA Long Distance Study includes a daily long-distance train in each direction which would take about 26 hours to travel between Minneapolis and Denver via Sioux Falls, Pierre, and Rapid City. To make such a train possible, the entire South Dakota route will have to be built almost from scratch because existing rail routes now only permit freight trains to travel at greatly reduced speeds and do not offer a direct route between Sioux Falls, Pierre, and Rapid City. Also, if a long-distance train between Minneapolis and Denver is desired, there is a shorter route with much better existing rail infrastructure that bypasses South Dakota and that instead passes through good sized and now unserved Iowa and Nebraska communities.

Assuming a Minneapolis to Denver train via South Dakota should become reality, the train's schedule would require serving some South Dakota stations

and/or one or both of the end point stations at undesirable late night or early morning times. The scheduling problem becomes even more serious if there is a desire to connect with existing Amtrak service. Minneapolis does not now have Amtrak service although neighboring St Paul does; however, that service, like Denver's Amtrak service, currently consists of just one train a day in each direction. South Dakotans are not going to use a train that serves their stations and/or the end point cities in the middle of the night and that also does not offer good connections at either end point city.

While the proposed train will serve South Dakota's capital (Pierre) and two largest cities, the train will leave most other potential South Dakota passenger train markets unserved. However, rebuilding South Dakota's railroad infrastructure to permit passenger train speeds of up to 79 miles per hour might create a more competitive South Dakota freight railroad infrastructure than now exists. For that reason, some South Dakota businesses and industries might support making the infrastructure improvements the option 1 proposed passenger train will need.

Option 2: The Milwaukee Railroad once provided northern South Dakota with excellent long-distance passenger train service. While no longer maintained to support passenger train speeds, those tracks still exist (at least in South Dakota) and could be upgraded for a daily passenger train in each direction that could connect with a restored North Coast Hiawatha in Miles City, Montana and again in Minneapolis or St Paul, Minnesota. That train would serve South Dakota's third largest city, Aberdeen, and several smaller communities where passenger counts would probably be comparable to passenger counts at similar-sized North Dakota and Montana communities located along Amtrak's *Empire Builder* route. Upgrading the existing rail infrastructure to make the northern

South Dakota passenger train service possible would be less expensive than needed option 1 infrastructure improvements, although the option 2 train would serve lower-population South Dakota communities than the option 1 train would reach.

Option 3: A Sioux Falls-Minneapolis passenger rail corridor has been proposed as one of several rail corridors radiating out from a future Minneapolis passenger rail hub. Because almost all of a Minneapolis-Sioux Falls rail corridor will be located in Minnesota, South Dakotans will probably have to wait for Minnesota to take the lead, which may or may not happen. Establishing a Sioux Falls-Minneapolis passenger rail corridor is the least expensive option listed here, especially if Minnesota will provide most of the required nonfederal funding. However, while Sioux Falls is South Dakota's largest community, a Minneapolis-Sioux Falls rail corridor will not serve other South Dakota communities and most of the state's population will remain unserved.

Option 4: Forget about linking South Dakota with Amtrak's skeletal national conventional rail network (at least by train) and develop an intrastate South Dakota high-speed passenger rail network. Today, South Dakotans use automobiles for most intrastate travel. South Dakota roads are good and outside of urban areas (except in the Black Hills), congestion is rare, so automobiles often travel at speeds of up to 80 mph. There is limited intercity bus service, but few South Dakotans use it. An intrastate passenger rail network that large numbers of South Dakotans will actually use will need to provide frequent service and permit South Dakotans to greatly reduce the travel times they now spend when driving between South Dakota cities.

South Dakota is a large state where, even with good roads, travel times between the state's communities

Continued on page 7

MTA CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS/EXPANSIONS ON HOLD DUE TO CONGESTION PRICING LAWSUITS

By Andrew Albert

At a recent Capital Program Committee meeting of the MTA Board, Jamie Torres-Springer, President of MTA Construction & Development, gave a sobering update on where the various lawsuits challenging what is now NY State Law-a congestion fee for entering Manhattan south of 60th Street - has put the MTA's ambitious Capital Program. He said, "With any lawsuit comes risk, especially of delay, and we can't award contracts until the funding is assured. As a result, the MTA Capital Program must be placed mostly on hold. While litigation is pending, we will not be issuing any new construction contract solicitations, with very limited exceptions."

Congestion Pricing would allow the MTA to bond the approximately \$1 billion raised annually to \$15 billion, which would make up more than 50% of the remaining funds in the MTA's 2020-2024 Capital Program. The hold on the Capital Program means a suspension of many important capital improvements, such as new subway cars,

new M9A cars for the Long Island Rail Road & Metro-North, and many signal updates, such as installing CBTC (Communications-Based Train Control) on the A,C lines in Brooklyn, as well as on the 6th Avenue B,D,F,&M lines in Manhattan. It also means a suspension of plans to make many additional subway stations accessible, such as Brook Ave (#6), 3rd Ave/138 St(#6), Kingsbridge Road (#4), 167 St (D), & Wakefield-241 St(#2,5) in the Bronx, Hoyt-Schermerhorn(A,C,G), Neptune Ave(F), 18 Ave(D), Nostrand Ave(A,C), & Jefferson St(L) in Brooklyn, 145 St(A,B,C,D), 59 St/Lexington Ave(4,5,6,N,R,W), 42 St/Bryant Park(B,D,F,M,#7), 7 Ave(B,D,E), & 110 St(#6) in Manhattan, Briarwood(E,F), & Parsons Blvd(F) in Queens, and Clifton, on the Staten Island Railway. In addition, station renewals at 7 Ave(F,G), East 149 St(#6), 179 St(F), Briarwood(E,F), 3 Ave/138 St(#6), Brook Ave(#6), and upgrades to the public announcement system at more than 70 stations are at risk.

On the bus side, funding from congestion pricing would allow the purchase of more than 250 electric

buses is on hold, as are upgrades to 11 bus depots across all five boroughs to maintain the new electric bus fleet. This would have allowed historically underserved communities to have cleaner air, with the replacement of the diesel and hybrid bus fleet.

In addition, the next phase of the 2nd Avenue Subway is at risk, with electrical improvements at the next three stations - 106 St, 116 St, & 125 St - currently underway. Perhaps most troubling, the ability to update aging infrastructure, such as bridges, elevated lines, power updates, and much more are also at risk. We are incredibly fortunate to have this amazing transportation system here in New York, but it requires a lot of upkeep, and we cannot afford to slide backwards as happened years ago. Nothing gets cheaper the longer you wait, and many of the items in the Capital Program run the risk of costing much more if these lawsuits cause delays. There are also many jobs at risk.

Continued on page 9

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	Northampton, MA	NARP / TrainRiders Northeast, Maine Rail Group
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David Peter Alan, Esq.	South Orange, NJ	Lackawanna Coalition
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Phil Streby	Peru, IN	Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance
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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

CANADA REPORT: FEBRUARY 2024

By *Ken Westcar*

The accidental trial balloon that Canada's Minister of the Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault, released on February 15 announcing that the federal government was getting out of national highway construction financing resulted in incendiary reactions from most provincial (state) premiers.

Despite the minister trying to clarify that he was only referring to one specific project and that the federal government would continue to contribute taxpayer money to certain highway projects, several provincial, right-leaning premiers weaponized the issue to the extent it became farcical. The "war on cars" artillery was deployed, as was the threat of returning to the horse and buggy era.

But it did create some very sober dialog on the role of the federal government in mostly provincially sponsored and funded highway projects. Yes, the feds often contribute to the larger ones, but they seem increasingly hesitant to write checks when the projects run counter to their environmental and climate change policies. Whether these policies will be sustained if Canada shifts from a centrist to a populist right-wing government at the next federal election is uncertain.

A particularly good subject-matter analysis appeared in Canada's national newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, on February 17, where the very respected columnist suggested that: a) we should not consider roads and highways the default mobility choice and b) that private investors should build and operate highways, not governments. This likely ruffled the feathers of Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who coincidentally announced a ban on tolls on all but one existing, privately owned highway despite eye-watering construction and taxpayer subsidy costs of existing and new ones.

Coincidentally, Transport Action Ontario

(TAO), filed a letter with Canada's federal ministers of transport and environment and climate change questioning the national rail discontinuance and abandonment process. It was pointed out that, because such decisions are generally made by Class 1 railways who drop routes when they pose a threat to their Wall St. mandated operating ratios, they de facto influence both provincial and federal transportation policy. An abandoned railway often means compensatory highway expansion—at taxpayer expense.

TAO listed several examples in the letter of where Class 1 rail abandonments had ended both passenger and freight services. The Cape Breton Railway in Nova Scotia and the Gaspé Railway between Matapédia and Gaspé in Quebec both lost iconic VIA Rail services decades ago when the rails turned to rust and their future was in doubt. However, it seems that both initially threatened railways are now under reprieve: in Cape Breton with the possibility of two new deep water container ports and, in the Gaspé, because of the need to drive tourism, provide an all-season, low-carbon mobility option for the region's population and regional resource industries.

These, and a myriad of other examples of Canadian discontinuance and abandonment by operating ratio-obsessed Class 1 railways, require a rethink of related federal legislation, known as the Canada Transportation Act Division V. TAO is recommending that all lines facing freight discontinuation and dismantling should be considered for federal or provincial rail banking, where there is a perceived future need for freight and/or passenger service based on industrial and population growth.

Provincial governments generally plan decades in advance for growth and enthusiastically accept more spontaneous developments such as EV battery plants, marine terminals and critical minerals mining. However,

supporting infrastructure usually lags often by decades, causing chronic supply chain problems and people mobility issues. The default solution is to add taxpayer-funded highway capacity because local rail infrastructure has been dismantled. Class 1 railways may not see an acceptable return on capital employed by building or rebuilding a connection. Reinstating services on repurposed rail corridors is next to impossible.

Herein lies a problem, not shared in countries with publicly owned rail infrastructure where route abandonment and repurposing is relatively rare because it's not a short-term commercial consideration and land title is seldom questionable as it is in North America. It's why European and Scandinavian governments can more easily reinstate routes and expand passenger rail services to match economic and population growth and be much more selective on new highway developments.

Can governments in the USA and Canada find an equitable solution to a national transportation playing field historically fractured by, on one side, rigid commercial interests and, on the other, by a broader, national interest? Unless a sensible balance is achieved, it's almost certain that passenger rail will never reach its full potential in either country. To prosper in a rapidly changing world, we will need more mobility options and it would be a tragedy if we continue to look to Europe and Asia to witness them and their myriad benefits while we continue to struggle with the status quo and watch more rail infrastructure heading for the scrapyard.

Ken Westcar is a RUN member and Secretary, Transport Action Ontario.

WHEN BUSING IS NORMAL AND THE RIDERSHIP GIVES UP

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

As the title suggests, a decent portion of the ridership of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has just given up and has resigned itself to a reality that on any given day, you may not get to your destination. At least, not on time.

This has been a resounding summary for beleaguered riders of the MBTA when interviewed by the TV station cameras. Those cameras are present every time there is some kind of delay, malfunction, or slow zone on one of the subway lines. "Talking Heads" are what they are called in the communications business and the stations love them. Sadly, at this point, you are kicking a dead horse, but kick away the TV stations and press will do. After all, this is a current affairs story.

The MBTA, lacking necessary funding for decades from a legislature that lacked understanding, finally reached the bottom and now struggles to get back on its wheels. Several months ago, multiple services were halted with a promise that a full-service closure, some a month in length, would result in many years' worth of repairs being compressed. Had they been done on a part-time schedule, said repairs might have taken years to complete. It sounded great and while there was hesitation, the public bought into it. Unfortunately, those repairs were not done well and not properly documented. So, the MBTA sent them back. Do not pass "go" and do not collect anything.

Enter Phil Eng, formerly of the Long Island Rail Road and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York, as the MBTA's new General Manager, and things are finally getting done, or in some instances, redone.

The most serious issue to be addressed was associated with the new Green Line extension when it was found that the distance between the rails was somewhat narrow and out of acceptable tolerance levels. At least 20% of the Davis Square branch, and as much as 80% of the Tufts/Medford branch were out of tolerance. Then a re-inspection of the other lines found more questionable areas in need of repairs, sending a lot of it back to "square one."

As of this writing, the Red, Orange, and Green lines are under repair and continue to face "bustitution" on parts of each line. Repairs which include some full closures of lines for days at a time, are underway and a schedule for the next few months has been announced to allow passengers to plan accordingly. It is estimated that all repairs that will eliminate slow zones could take well into 2024 to complete. As to the alternate busing, while some of it is being handled by the MBTA itself, they continue to have staffing shortages, forcing the transit system to hire outside private carriers from time to time.

Additional work efforts toward the full implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) is also causing some commuter rail closures as well. Among these include

the new South Coast Rail project that will extend the MBTA Commuter rail to New Bedford & Fall River, Massachusetts. A grade opening appears to be on schedule for later this year.

Compounding the repair efforts to the infrastructure is the age of the various fleets, with almost daily failures of rolling stock at random intervals. New rolling stock for the Orange and Red lines remain slow to deliver from CRRC Corporation, a merger of two of China's major rail companies. New cars for the Green line are under design, with first delivery several years off. So far, the Blue Line, built by Siemens is holding up.

And so it goes.

With all of that noted, the ridership may complain on a daily if not hourly basis, hold on and welcome the fixes as they are completed. Faith abounds.

As always, we recommend that you check with the MBTA website at www.mbta.com for insight on the daily conditions.

Dennis Kirkpatrick is a RUN Board member, and a life-long user of the MBTA transit, bus and commuter rail system. He recently had the pleasure of riding one of the recent bus substitutions ("bustitution") and survived to tell his story.

Reminder: RUN has moved

We remind all our members that RUN moved last summer. The post office only forwards mail for six months. It is important to send all dues and correspondence to our new address: RUN, PO Box 354, Northampton, MA 01060.

Also, please notify RUN if you move. We have three members that we cannot contact because they moved and do not have an email address or phone number on file. It is important for activists to stay in contact and work together. If you are not receiving Short Runs monthly, please send your email address to rudolph1022@gmail.com. No email, send your phone number by regular mail. Thanks for your help.

Chuck Bode, Membership Secretary and Treasurer

A BUSY TIME FOR NEW JERSEY AND ITS TRANSIT RIDERS

By David Peter Alan

There is a lot happening in New Jersey with respect to the state's transit agency, New Jersey Transit (NJT) and its riders. A fare increase is in the works, the State is opposing a plan to implement congestion tolls for vehicles entering Manhattan south of 60th Street, and an advisory committee commemorates 40 years of service to its constituents.

The agency has started the process to raise fares by about 15% and make some other changes, effective July 1. This will be the first fare increase in eight years, and managers claim it is necessary to close a \$106 million budget gap. Hearings are scheduled for ten different locations across the state, but there will not be any opportunity for commenters to appear online. In addition to the fare hikes, a multi-trip rail ticket that appeared since the COVID-19 virus struck, and that was designed for riders who travel less often than those who would benefit from purchasing commutation tickets, will be eliminated. Also, tickets that are currently "good until used" would expire 30 days from the date of purchase.

The plan that NJT unveiled also calls for automatic 3% annual increases, starting next year. Motorists on the Garden State Parkway and New Jersey Turnpike already pay 3% yearly increases in tolls, but Gov. Phil Murphy vetoed this year's toll increase. He changed his mind when transit advocates complained that his appointees are hiking transit fares by 15% while motorists would not even be charged an additional 3%.

At a meeting of the NJT Board on January 13, many riders and advocates denounced the proposed fare hikes, but it appears unlikely that the agency will soften the blow, claiming that NJT needs the money.

A bigger worry raised by advocates is that NJT faces a shortfall of almost one billion dollars next year, when the

COVID-19 relief money that was authorized by Congress in 2021 runs out. The agency does not have a dedicated source of funding, and it does not appear that state leaders are working on a way to keep the state's transit going at current levels. A 3% fare increase will fall far short of doing that.

New York is proposing a congestion toll for vehicles entering Manhattan south of 60th Street. The toll zone will extend to the southern tip of the island, excluding the highways on its perimeter. The State of New Jersey is fighting the plan in court, although advocates for the environment, better transit, improved streets, and government reform are joining federal transportation officials in support of the plan. The core issue is whether those officials acted properly when preparing the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Environmental Assessment (EA) they issued to move the plan toward being implemented this spring. New Jersey officials also claim that the plan impedes interstate commerce and causes more harm to New Jerseyans than to New Yorkers. The proceeds would be used for capital projects that would benefit New York City's subways and buses (80%), with 10% each for Metro-North and the Long Island Rail Road. Some construction projects that depend on toll revenue have been suspended, pending the outcome of the case. A court decision is now expected in June.

The Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee (SCDRTAC) at NJT commemorated its 40th anniversary at its January 22 meeting. Committee members consist of seniors, some of whom have disabilities, and younger persons who have disabilities. Although the outcome was in doubt for much of last year, it has now been confirmed that the Committee deals with such issues as accessibility for seniors and persons with disabilities to NJ Transit's rail, bus, and light rail

services, funding, connectivity, accommodation under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), county-run services for seniors and persons with disabilities, and Access Link, NJT's paratransit arm for riders whose disabilities render it difficult for them to use fixed-route transit.

NJT CEO Kevin S. Corbett and Chief of External and Government Relations Paul L. Wyckoff appeared at the January meeting and praised the Committee for its efforts, while affirming its historic purview.

The Committee was formed under New Jersey's Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Assistance Act of 1983, which became effective on January 17, 1984, six years before the ADA.

Sally Jane Gellert, Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition, an organizational member of RUN, is also First Vice-Chair of SCDRTAC. She told the RUN Newsletter: "SCDRTAC has a unique role at NJ Transit. The committee was created six years before the Americans with Disabilities Act (usually called 'the A.D.A.' was passed in 1990. It is composed primarily of senior citizens and residents living with disability, giving the agency first-hand input into issues of accessibility. Having our original purview confirmed by the board and restated at our anniversary celebration, we look forward to raising our public visibility in the next years as we continue to raise the voices of NJ Transit's most vulnerable riders."

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.

SAVE THE DATE FOR RUN'S 2024 SPRING VIRTUAL CONFERENCE

Expanding Long-Distance Rail Service: Why Amtrak service to more towns and cities is important to the entire U.S.!

Continued from page 1

Ken Buehler, Executive Director of the Lake Superior Railroad Museum.

3:15 - 3:30: Amtrak Representative who will talk about the company's effort to order new long-distance rail car equipment.

3:30 - 4:05: Possible restoration of part of the *Floridian* route from Indianapolis, to Louisville, Nashville to Atlanta and onto Savannah, Georgia.

Richard Rudolph moderates:

- Mike King, Director, Office of Planning, Louisville Metro
- Tom Kelly, Mayor, Chattanooga Tennessee.
- Clement Solomon, Division Director-Intermodal, Georgia Department of Transportation.

4:05 - 4:10: Break

4:10 - 4:20: J.W. Madison, President, New Mexico Rails, will briefly talk about the organization's effort over the years to establish a *Rocky Mountain Flyer* from New Mexico to Montana.

4:20 - 4:50: What is needed for startup of new service - equipment and relationships with Freight Railroads. Andrew Albert, RUN's Vice Chair, moderates:

- Josh Coran, Former Director/ Product Development / Compliance, Talgo / RUN Board Member.
- Phil Streby, retired Amtrak Conductor / RUN Board Member.
- Jim Blaze, railroad economist, **Railway Age**.

4:50 - 5:00: Closing Remarks. David Peter Alan, Contributing Editor, **Railway Age** / RUN Board Member.

The conference is designed not only for rail advocates, but also for 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.

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 May 10 so that we can send along the info needed to attend RUN's Virtual Spring 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.

ALTERNATE PLANS TO PROVIDE SOUTH DAKOTA WITH MEANINGFUL PASSENGER TRAIN SERVICE

Continued from page 2

are significant. South Dakotans will probably use an intrastate passenger rail network if that network will get them where and when they want to go in less than half the time that an automobile can make the same trip. Designing such a passenger rail network will require careful planning and good market research. A South Dakota high-speed rail system should enable as many South Dakotans as possible to significantly shrink the amount of time they now spend when traveling between South Dakota cities. With the right design, South Dakota might be able to convince the federal government to provide demonstration project funding to determine how a high-speed passenger rail network can shrink a rural region's travel times.

Conclusion: There is no easy and inexpensive way to reach any South Dakota city with good passenger rail

service. Perhaps if Minnesota develops Minneapolis as a passenger rail hub, Minnesota will invest in a Minneapolis-Sioux Falls rail corridor. Otherwise, South Dakotans working with the federal government will have to figure out how to develop South Dakota passenger rail service or even if there is a conventional rail option that merits making the required investment. While having a train as suggested in option 1 would be nice, such a train will not reach many of South Dakota's communities, will not link South Dakotans with any existing passenger rail hubs, and will have significant scheduling problems. A train as suggested in option 2 could provide a few northern South Dakota communities with good service, but most of the state would be left unserved. Option 4 will require most South Dakotans to recognize that high-speed passenger rail offers a way to significantly shrink their intrastate travel times and that by doing so might be the best way to develop South Dakota passenger train service.

Eric Clausen is a RUN Member and Member of Amtrak's National Customer Advisory Committee, 1996-1999.

*Get Involved with
the work of RUN!*

**To find out how to
volunteer, write to:**

RUN, P.O. Box 354,
Northampton, MA 01060

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

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

FRA STUDY SELECTS POTENTIAL LONG-DISTANCE AMTRAK ROUTES

Continued from page 1

the North Dakota capital, Bismarck, and Montana cities such as Billings, Bozeman, and Missoula. The route's foremost advocate, David Strohmaier, head of the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, will present an update at the conference.

Meetings to decide which routes to suggest were held in six regions, with some states participating in meetings for two adjacent regions. The website contains extensive materials about criteria that the FRA considered in selecting potential routes and methodology for the study that preceded the selection.

Today's Amtrak long-distance network has fourteen routes, the same number as the original Amtrak network had in 1971, although there have been some changes in routing over the years.

Amtrak counts the AutoTrain as an additional long-distance route, but a passenger cannot ride it without a vehicle. For the study, the FRA added one existing service and three that are expected to start in the future for the "Baseline Network": Brightline between Miami and Orlando Airport (which began operating on September 22, 2023), Gulf Coast service between New Orleans and Mobile (optimistically predicted to start next fall), a second train between Chicago and St. Paul, Minnesota (part of the *Empire Builder* route), and California High-Speed Rail, but only between Merced and Bakersfield (under construction).

The FRA added the "Discontinued Network," a group of routes that were eliminated before Amtrak started or that Amtrak discontinued between 1977 and 2005, to the "Baseline Network." Some of the routes considered for restoration have the same endpoints as trains operating today, but different intermediate stops. Other route segments have not hosted a passenger train for more than 60 years.

Here's the list:

Chicago – Miami: This is essentially the *Floridian* route that was discontinued in 1979, but serving Atlanta and possibly Savannah, instead of Birmingham, Alabama. The route would go through Louisville, Nashville, Atlanta, and Macon, and use the current route of the *Silver Meteor* in Florida.

Dallas/Fort Worth – Miami: From Dallas to Shreveport on a proposed route to Meridian, Shreveport to New Orleans on a route that last hosted passenger trains in 1963, New Orleans to Jacksonville on the Gulf Coast Route that served as the eastern portion of the *Sunset Limited* from 1993 until 2005, and to Miami on the old Florida East Coast main from Jacksonville, where Brightline has operating rights.

Denver – Houston: This is a route not served by passenger trains today: from Denver south to Trinidad, Colorado, then through Amarillo, Texas to Fort Worth and Houston, on historic Santa Fe, part of BNSF.

Los Angeles – Denver: This is a combination of the *Desert Wind* (L.A. – Salt Lake City) and part of the *Pioneer* route (Salt Lake City or Ogden – Denver), both of which were discontinued in 1997. The route would restore rail passenger service to Wyoming, possibly with a backup move to serve Cheyenne.

Phoenix – Minneapolis/St. Paul: This route would use the old Santa Fe route between Phoenix and Flagstaff, the BNSF Southern Transcon route between Flagstaff and Kansas City (west of Albuquerque and east of Newton used by the *Southwest Chief*), and from Kansas City to Minnesota through Sioux Falls, South Dakota; restoring a train to that state. Sioux Falls last hosted a passenger train in 1965.

Dallas/Fort Worth – New York: The segment from Fort Worth to Oklahoma City is the route of the *Heartland Flyer* today. The proposed train would go to St. Louis through Springfield, Missouri on an old Frisco route; now part of

BNSF. Frisco's last train on the route, the *Meteor*, lasted until 1965. From St. Louis to New York, it would use the former Pennsylvania Railroad route, used by the train that Amtrak called the *National Limited* until it was discontinued in 1979. One change would be that it would not stop at Richmond, Indiana between Dayton and Indianapolis, but would take a longer route through Cincinnati, instead. The segment east of Pittsburgh hosts the *Pennsylvanian* today.

Houston – New York: This route would use the current *Sunset* route from Houston to New Orleans, and then the historic pre-Amtrak *Crescent* route through Mobile and Montgomery to Atlanta. From there, it would go from Atlanta through Chattanooga and Knoxville to Roanoke, and then to New York on the existing Virginia extension of two daily trains on the Northeast Corridor (NEC). The part between Montgomery and Louisville was part of the *Floridian* route until 1979.

Seattle – Denver: The part between Seattle and Salt Lake City was the route of the *Pioneer*, which was discontinued in 1997. The rest of the route is the scenic middle portion of today's *California Zephyr*.

San Antonio – Minneapolis/St. Paul: This route has not hosted a passenger train since the 1960s, except for the segment between Fort Worth and San Antonio, which is part of today's *Texas Eagle* route. The part between Fort Worth and Kansas City was a major portion of the route of Santa Fe's *Texas Chief*, which Amtrak called the *Lone Star Limited* until it was discontinued in 1979. The part between Kansas City and St. Paul was eliminated in the 1960s.

San Francisco – Dallas/Fort Worth: Some of that route has service today, on the San Joaquin corridor and on the *Sunset* route between Tucson and El Paso. The part from El Paso to Dallas is on the historic Texas & Pacific (now part of UP), which has not hosted a passenger train since the 1960s and was once suggested for revival.

Continued on page 9

FRA STUDY SELECTS POTENTIAL LONG-DISTANCE AMTRAK ROUTES

Continued from page 8

Detroit – New Orleans: This route would go from Detroit to Toledo on the route of New York Central trains that once went to New York. The segment between Columbus and Cincinnati was proposed as the “3C+D” corridor, which would have revived the line across Ohio as a passenger route during the Obama administration, but Ohio rejected the federal grant. The part of the route between Cincinnati and New Orleans was the route of the L&N’s *Pan American*, which lasted until “Amtrak Day” in 1971.

Service on the portion between Louisville and Montgomery lasted until 1979, as part of the *Floridian*. There is no Amtrak service on any part of that route today.

Denver – Minneapolis/St. Paul: This route is something of a mystery, although it might be suggested as a means for bringing a train close to tribal lands in the West. Denver and Cheyenne are only about two hours apart, and the segment has been proposed as a short corridor. The rest of the route through South Dakota was not a through route during the previous era of railroading, and there have been no passenger trains in the state (except for the Black Hills Central, a tourist railroad that uses vintage interurban cars as coaches) since the 1960s. The segment between Sioux Falls and the Twin Cities might have a better chance of coming back as a corridor-length route.

Seattle – Chicago: This is the *North Coast Limited* route, which appears to have the best chance of being restored of the potential routes listed by the FRA. Unlike the *Empire Builder*, it would go through major cities in Montana. The locals who live along the route would like to see it come back, too.

Dallas/Fort Worth – Atlanta: The

segment between Dallas and Marshall is on today’s *Texas Eagle* route, and there is a strong push to restore service the rest of the way to Meridian. The train would continue to Atlanta on the *Crescent* route, where it would connect with that train for New York or New Orleans.

El Paso – Billings: RUN Board member J.W. Madison has proposed this route under the name Rocky Mountain Flyer. Somebody at the FRA study thought of it, too. It would fill a significant gap in north-south service between the Texas Eagle route and the West Coast. The part between Albuquerque and Trinidad is on the *Southwest Chief* route, but there are no passenger trains anywhere else on the route.

We don’t know if any advocates were consulted during the process (RUN was not), but others probably came up with similar ideas; a process that could have been conducted at far less cost, and probably with no less effectiveness. We also don’t know if the potential host railroads were consulted, either. There is no doubt that the host railroads must approve the new routes; a situation that makes starting new routes like this time-consuming and expensive. The upcoming RUN conference will consider that subject.

There is no doubt that a map with more than twice the number of existing Amtrak long-distance routes will stir the hopes of railfans, advocates, and people who live along the lines at issue who would like to have the option of going somewhere on a train. Still, it’s far too early to tell what might eventually happen; especially how many of the 15 proposed routes on the FRA’s list will ever run.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and has ridden the entire Amtrak system, including all current long-distance routes. He also rode some of the other parts of the routes identified by the FRA. He is also a Contributing Editor at Railway Age. For a more detailed treatment of this subject, see his article FRA L-D Study Suggests Restored Routes, posted at www.railwayage.com on February 21.

MTA CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS/ EXPANSIONS ON HOLD DUE TO CONGESTION PRICING LAWSUITS

Continued from page 3

The MTA Capital Program is estimated to support 57,400 jobs, 23,000 of which are at risk.

MTA leadership, including General Counsel Paige Graves, estimates that we should get a ruling on the first lawsuits sometime in April, perhaps sooner. Hopefully, it’s a positive ruling for the MTA, who has done an exhaustive environmental assessment for the Federal Government. Not only will Congestion Pricing reduce carbon emissions, help clear gridlock in Manhattan, provide essential funding for the MTA’s Capital Program, but it will also save lives, as fewer vehicles will be inclined to speed, after being trapped on heavily congested streets. The MTA recently settled a lawsuit with accessibility advocates to make 95% of the 472 subway stations accessible by 2055. That will take billions of dollars and would not be possible without the funds raised by congestion pricing. It’s time for the naysayers to step aside, and let us make this incredible transportation system better, safer, and more efficient, as well as accessible! 90% of people entering the Central Business District arrive by public transportation. They deserve the benefits congestion pricing will bring.

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

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

A SMART IDEA FOR MAINE



By Peter Cole

Maine is geographically large with a year-round population of only 1.3 million. It is woefully short of any mass transportation and, for a state that prides itself on its forests, it is quickly realizing that sprawl decreases its quality of life.

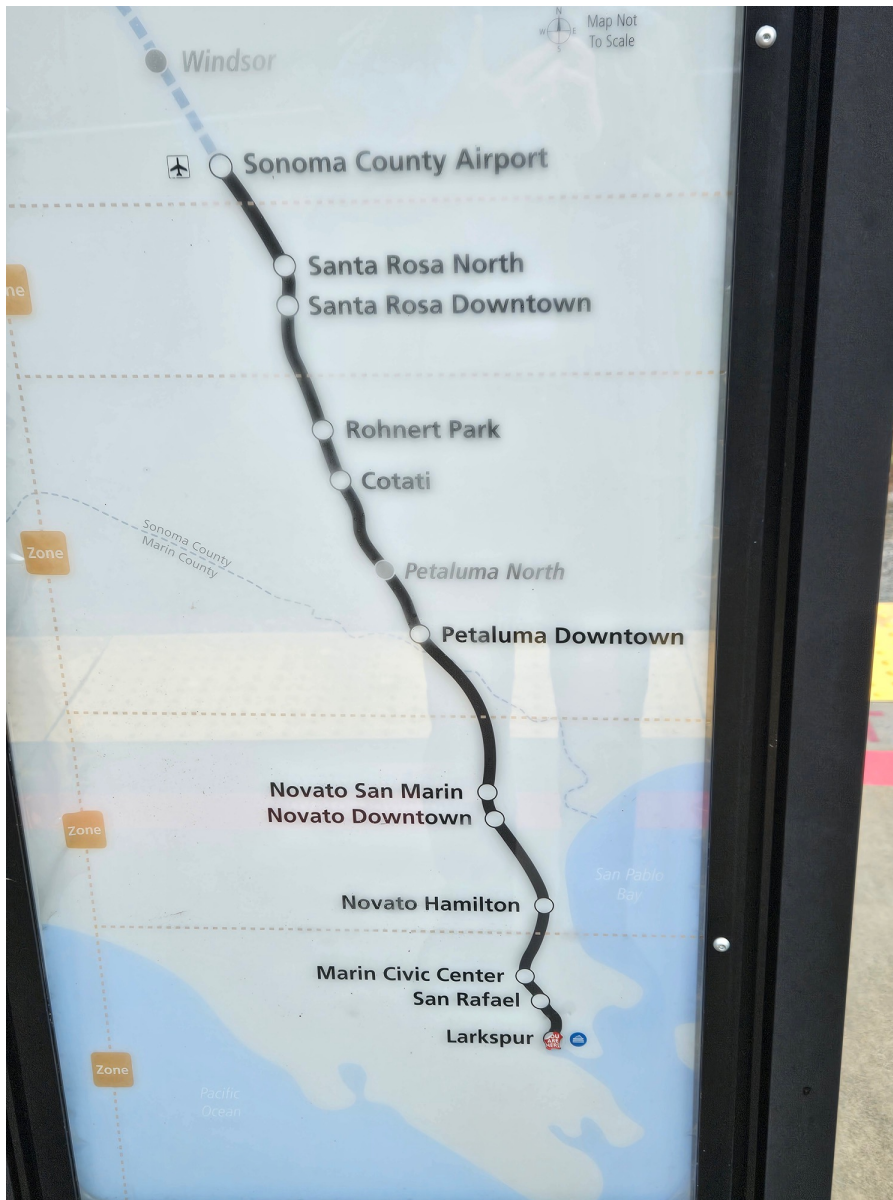
The only passenger train service at present is the interstate *Downeaster* Amtrak service connecting Boston to the six stations in Maine, of which four are in actual downtowns. There are presently five roundtrips a day which connect Brunswick to Boston in the morning and the reverse in the evening. There remains a real need to connect all of Maine together in this time of varied work schedules. Bus services are limited and often only serve interstate stops outside of the towns.

I recently visited relatives in California and became fascinated with the Sonoma-Marina Area Rail Transit (SMART). Serving small towns and cities, it was designed in a way that would be perfect for Maine.

The SMART service began in 2017 and was funded by a ¼ percent sales tax in the two counties north of San Francisco. In this area of California, one leaves urban areas behind upon crossing the Golden Gate. Vineyards and small farms dot the area. Even though it is growing in population, it does not have the barren concrete feel of the Bay Area or Los Angeles. The SMART service does not end in San Francisco just like the *Downeaster* does not end in South Station. SMART connects to ferry service to the city, rather than the subway connection for the *Downeaster*.

SMART offers relief from the crowded 101 Freeway corridor for people traveling from town to town in the two-county region. A major part of the concept includes a bicycle trail that follows the tracks, veering off from the narrow right of way at times, but always joining back at the stations. The two-car trains have space for twenty-four bicycles, and I saw many of the passengers also carried on skateboards or scooters. The train runs on an old train right-of-way that goes from town center to town center, with the last northern stop currently at the Charles Schultz Regional Airport in northern Santa Rosa. There a shuttle bus meets the train for the short distance to the airport terminal. At present, the train runs forty-three miles from the Larkspur ferry to San Francisco and construction

Continued on page 11



A SMART IDEA FOR MAINE

Continued from page 10

has begun to extend it twenty-seven miles to Cloverdale.

The line still serves freight traffic and all two-car passenger trains are compliant with FRA standards for safety and PTC. High platforms are standard at all stations and a gauntlet track system allows freight cars clearance of the platforms. The two-car Nippon Sharyo train sets are powered by Cummins tier 4 diesel engines assuring an extremely efficient and clean operation.

The SMART ride is smooth, unlike the jarring felt when traveling on a bus on a crowded road. The fare clipper cards (or smartphone) were “tap on-tap off” and use the same fare system that is used throughout the Bay Area. Most of the passengers using the system were not on for the entire ride, rather connecting between towns on the system.

While there are a few critics, the SMART service survived the Covid years and ridership is growing. Stops along the line showed businesses developing around the stations. An industrial park is located at the present terminus in northern Santa Rosa. Every trip on the line means fewer cars and micro-transit using the bicycle trail allows further alternatives

to car use. As the line ages, density will no doubt increase around the stations, thus minimizing the loss of farmland in the two-county region.

No system developed for one area immediately can be replicated in another area; however, SMART demonstrates that there are alternatives to increasing roads, parking lots and sprawl. Like the SMART region, Maine remains enticing and environmentally desirable but needs a way to allow for a growing population and economic development. In addition, Maine’s need for transportation faces tremendous seasonal tourist challenges. Frequent comfortable rail service would be a cost-effective means to avoid extending roads for the short tourist season while maintaining the small-town charm that attracts tourists in the first place.

Peter Cole is a member of RUN, Train Riders Northeast, Association of Rail Passengers, Maine Rail Group, High Speed Rail Alliance and Train Riders Association of California (TRAC).

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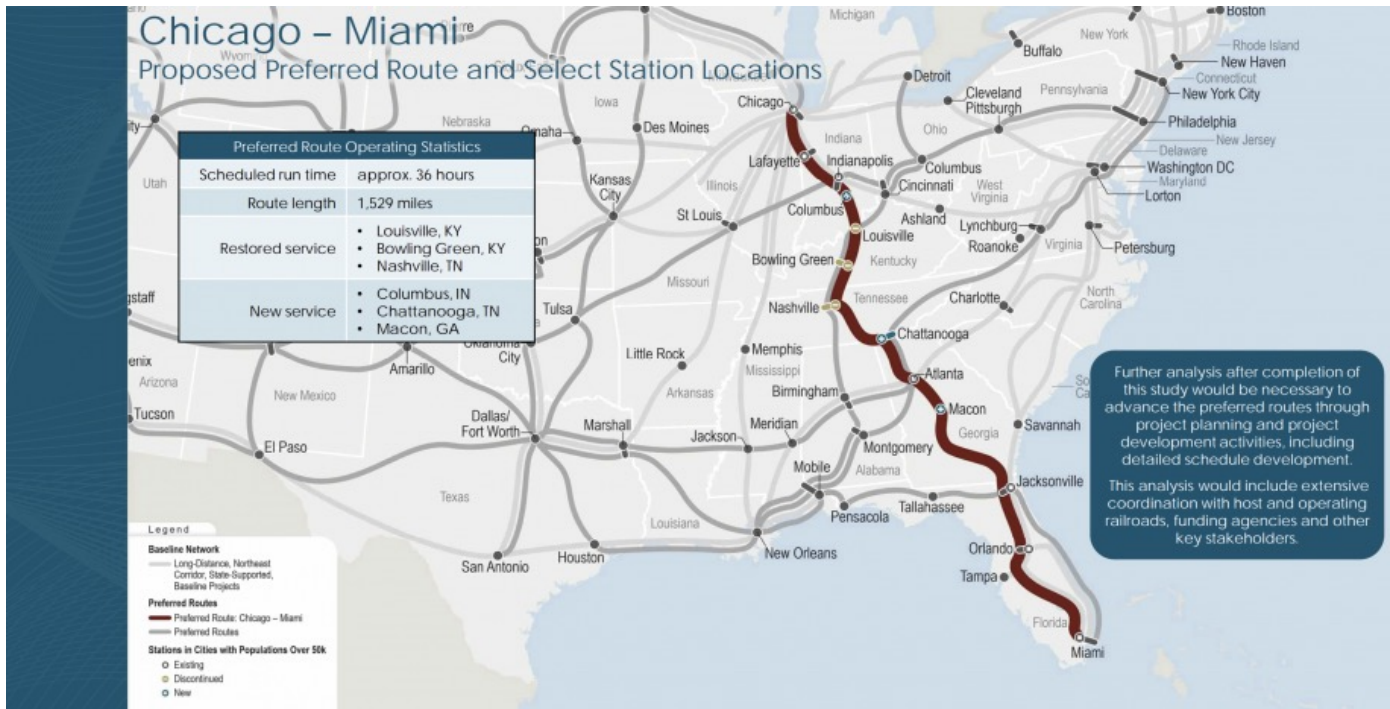
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POSSIBLE RESTORATION OF THE LONG-DISTANCE FLORIDIAN PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

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

This is the third in a series of articles regarding restoring long-distance passenger rail service on lines which Amtrak has abandoned since its start-up in 1971. While Amtrak's *Floridian* service from Chicago to Florida ended in 1979, there is now renewed interest in restoring at least part of the line which ran from Chicago to Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville and Birmingham and onto Jacksonville, Florida where the train was split into two sections with the St Petersburg section serving Tampa and the Miami section serving Winter Haven.

This article will look at the history of the service, efforts to restore it over time, and why it may be possible going forward. Even though some initial studies are now currently underway, it is not clear any of this will actually happen, but restoring the line would certainly make sense, given the population that would be served and the economy and environmental benefits that would be derived.

The *Floridian*, which Amtrak operated from 1971 to 1979, was the successor of the Pennsylvania Railroad's *South Wind*, which operated over its tracks from Chicago to Louisville via Logansport and Indianapolis, Indiana and from there on L&N tracks to Montgomery, Alabama, and then on the Atlantic Coast Line from Montgomery via Waycross to Jacksonville. From there, the train was split, with one section headed on the Florida East Coast Railway to Miami; the other section continued on the Atlantic Coast line to St Petersburg. While the *Floridian* should have been a success, it was fraught with a number of problems, including deteriorating tracks, bad weather and frequent derailments. The *Floridian* was ultimately the subject of Amtrak's first route study, which began in February 1977. Amtrak President Paul H. Reistrup believed rerouting the train via Atlanta was its only hope for survival, but the L&N would not allow it on its Chattanooga-Atlanta route due to heavy freight traffic and the Southern Railway also objected unless Amtrak made \$20 million in track improvements.

Ultimately, the U.S. Department of Transportation compiled a report in 1979 recommending the reduction of service on a number of routes that did not meet a metric for cost coverage. The Carter Administration required all Amtrak routes to meet a minimum cost/fare box ratio or face discontinuance. Given the steep decline in ridership resulting from bad track and other issues, the *Floridian* would make its last run on October 9, 1979. It was "shuttered" along with four other long-distance trains: the *National Limited*, *North Coast Hiawatha*, *Lone Star* and the *Champion*.

While rail advocates were certainly depressed with this outcome in Tennessee, they weren't ready to give up the fight. However, there hasn't been any concrete effort to re-establish direct Chicago-Miami service over the past three decades. Amtrak would extend the *Kentucky Cardinal* to a re-opened Louisville Union Station in 1998, but it was doomed to failure, given its lethargic schedule that averaged less than 30 MPH.

Continued on page 13

POSSIBLE RESTORATION OF THE LONG-DISTANCE FLORIDIAN PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Continued from page 12

It operated with merely one coach, no food service car, and an occasional sleeper. Initially, Amtrak carried a boxcar or two of mail, but expressed optimism that it could land additional business hauling canned and perishable goods. There was also talk that the *Kentucky Cardinal* might pick up express business from United Parcel Service, which operated an air express hub at the Louisville International Airport. But the express business that Amtrak had expected to generate was never realized. The *Kentucky Cardinal* would lose \$6.2 million in FY 2001. During the following year, the mail that the *Kentucky Cardinal* had carried was also diverted to trucks. With Amtrak giving up on the express business, poor operating conditions and low ridership, the *Kentucky Cardinal* no longer had a valid reason for existing in the eyes of Amtrak management. Amtrak on January 6, 2003 announced that it would end the *Kentucky Cardinal* in 180 days unless the states served by the train provided \$800,000 among them to help make up the losses.

None of the states served by the route indicated even a remote interest in doing that. The *Kentucky Cardinal* would make its last trip the next day. Amtrak kept the train between Chicago and Indianapolis and renamed it the *Hoosier State*.

With the passage of the Infrastructure and Jobs Act, there is finally renewed interest at the state level to possibly restore segments of the *Floridian* route from Louisville, Kentucky to Indianapolis. Possible passenger rail service is also being considered from Nashville to Chattanooga and Atlanta, and beyond to Savannah, Georgia. Given that there was federal funding available for passenger rail included in the federal Investment and Jobs Act, the Tennessee General Assembly passed two different

bills in 2022, directing the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Affairs to study and make recommendations regarding the potential for passenger rail service or other suitable alternatives for linking the major cities in the state. The study was designed to identify the alignments, condition and ownership of the tracks, define an integrated network for intercity rail travel and survey projects

With the passage of the Infrastructure and Jobs Act, there is finally renewed interest at the state level to possibly restore segments of the Floridian route from Louisville, Kentucky to Indianapolis.

that had been initiated over the past ten years. The information to be collected included the stakeholders, all costs related to establishing the new service, ridership estimates and other matters that would inform the Tennessee Legislature regarding the successful launching of the service. The Commission was also directed to collect information from at least three state departments of transportation that have successfully initiated, or are in the process of initiating, a new Amtrak intercity passenger rail service.

Finding that intercity passenger rail has the potential to improve mobility and the state's economy, the Commission identified five potential rail routes for further study and grouped them into tiers based on priority. Tier 1 involves rail service from Nashville to Chattanooga and Atlanta. Tier 2 involved two routes—Memphis to Nashville, and Chattanooga to Knoxville to Bristol—and Tier 3, Memphis to Carbondale, Illinois and Chicago and Memphis to Nashville. The Commission also recommended that TDOT submit the required supporting data and documentation to the FRA's Corridor ID program in support of the joint application already

made by local governments for the Nashville to Chattanooga to Atlanta Corridor. The Commission also recommended the creation of an office of rail and public transportation within TDOT to develop, implement, and manage any future passenger rail projects in the state, similar to offices created by other states that have successfully implemented passenger rail.

In its closing remarks, though, the Commission pointed out that rail projects can take decades to implement and require extensive initial and ongoing investment, while intercity bus service can be implemented in less time and for less money. It also pointed out that some communities that need transportation options would not be served by potential passenger rail routes. The expansion of intercity bus service in Tennessee, it stated, has the potential to work in tandem with the Transportation Modernization Act to improve the state's transportation system in an effort to ensure continued economic growth and the success of the state's residents and businesses. Incentivizing intercity buses to use choice lanes developed under the Transportation Modernization Act by exempting them from fees for using those lanes can be implemented in less time and for less money than rail projects.

It should also be pointed out that at least five other studies have been completed over the past two decades that have explored potential passenger rail in Tennessee. The list includes:

- * Chattanooga to Nashville Maglev Feasibility Study (May 2008)
- * Northwest Corridor (Nashville to Clarksville) Initial Feasibility Study (2008)
- * Potential Intercity Passenger Rail Corridors Evaluation (2011)
- * Chattanooga Passenger Rail Feasibility Study and Rail Implementation Plan (September 2016)
- * Atlanta – Chattanooga High Speed Ground Transportation Project Tier 1 (September 2017).

Continued on page 15

BACKWARD SEATING ON THE EMPIRE CORRIDOR

By Gary Prophet

It was very discouraging to read about the fact that Amtrak plans to operate ALL trains on the Empire Corridor with every coach with half of the seats facing backwards and half facing forwards. Riding backwards for 6 or 7 hours is completely insane, ridiculous, and unnecessary. Yes, on the NEC, most passengers are on the train for about 3 hours, as NEC trains have a virtually complete turnover of passengers at New York City and most of those passengers who are on the train through NYC often are traveling from say, Philadelphia to New Haven, a short distance.

The Empire Corridor has hundreds of passengers per train traveling from NYC and the Hudson Valley to Rochester and Buffalo. This is NOT a 3-hour trip. The examples that Amtrak listed as comparisons corridors that already have both forward and backward seating is insulting, as they listed the *Downeaster*, *Keystone*, *Hiawatha*, and *River Runner*, all of which are very short corridors, and the *Illini/Saluki*, where the majority of passengers are traveling Chicago to Champaign. And the example of the *Ethan Allen* is very misleading, as this train reverses direction at Rutland, so all passengers experience some forwards and backwards operation, if they are traveling to Burlington, VT.

Traveling backwards is not only uncomfortable for many people, truly physically harmful for around 10% of people, it also makes it more difficult to view the scenery. Taking this bad idea and implementing it on the NEC to produce a few extra roundtrips is one thing, but on the Empire Corridor, NO trains are being added and there is NO plan to change the current procedures of using the wye in Albany and Niagara Falls. The one additional roundtrip being added on March 4 on the Empire Corridor has been planned since last year and is just the return of the early morning train from Albany and late evening train back from NYP to Albany, which was removed from the schedule when there was no evening activities in Manhattan due to Covid, then a shortage of

employees delayed its return. So, with the Empire Corridor still using the wyes and using the loop at Sunnyside, why is the Empire Corridor joining with this incredibly poor customer focused option? Most of the Amfleet 1's used on the Empire Corridor are maintained in Albany and never need their seats turned. So, basically, Amtrak is forcing this horrible seating arrangement onto the Empire Corridor, simply so that if/when cars are swapped out at Sunnyside Yard, all the cars are the same. This provides NO operational benefit to the Empire Corridor and saves NO time at NYP, nor Albany, nor Niagara Falls.

The statement that conductors may "accommodate" passengers is a complete joke and unworkable. Let's take me as an example, as I board at Croton-Harmon, the suburban stop in northern Westchester, 33 miles from New York City. When I board an Empire Corridor train to travel upstate, 80-90 percent or more of the seats are taken, so I will NEVER be able to sit in a

The statement that conductors may "accommodate" passengers is a complete joke and unworkable.

forward-facing seat and if I state something to the conductor, he will not be asking someone who has been sitting in a forward-facing seat for the past 40 minutes to vacate that seat for me to sit there. In addition, due to Amtrak's use of yield-pricing, they discourage short distance (NYP to Albany) passengers on the Niagara Falls bound trains, so there may or may not even be an opportunity to change seats at Albany to a forward-facing seat. In fact, when I board at Croton-Harmon with my wife, we NEVER even get 2 seats together and the conductor announces, "Single seats only". Sometimes we are able to get 2 seats together at Albany or Schenectady (2 hours into a 7-hour ride), but unlikely

in the future to get 2 seats together and facing forward. This is NOT the same as your typical NEC three-hour passengers or your examples of people riding 2 hours from Chicago.

I have also heard from some of our ESPA members and non-members who frequently or daily take Amtrak from Rhinecliff to NYP. For morning trains that start from Albany, the Albany passengers will take all the forward-facing seats, as about half of the passengers boarding the morning trains board at Albany with the other half split evenly between Hudson and Rhinecliff. Therefore, Rhinecliff passengers will now ALWAYS have to sit backwards when they board. Note that daily Rhinecliff passenger pay \$756 for that monthly pass, as they are paying double the monthly fares on the slightly closer Metro-North stations of Poughkeepsie and Beacon, because they do NOT want to ride a commuter train with backwards seating and now ALL of them will be backwards. Several have already stated to me that if this is not changed within a couple weeks, they will become Metro-North passengers instead of giving Amtrak hundreds of dollars PER WEEK.

I am not sure how this affects trains like the *Toronto Maple Leaf* and *Adirondack*, as these trains usually have a mix of Amfleet 1's and Amfleet 2's, so I assume the Amfleet 1's will be half backwards and the Amfleet 2's will be all forward seating. My last trip on the Toronto Maple Leaf, we had one Amfleet 2 coach and three Amfleet 1 coaches. Since the Empire Corridor already has Amfleet 2's in limited use, they should not be forced to mimic the NEC train operations, as the Empire Corridor is NOT the NEC. The Amfleet 2's are the coaches with leg-rests and footrests that are used on the eastern overnight trains and are often mixed with Amfleet 1 coaches on both the train to Montreal and the train to Toronto.

In summary, everyone should vehemently oppose this passenger-

Continued on page 15

POSSIBLE RESTORATION OF THE LONG-DISTANCE FLORIDIAN PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Continued from page 13

Despite this negativity, the FRA has recently awarded a Corridor I.D. grant for the Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga and Atlanta Corridor. The Georgia Department of Transportation has also received \$500,000 for the next step in the proposed Savannah to Atlanta passenger route. In March 2022, Senator Ossoff delivered \$8 million in Congressionally Directed Spending to the Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) to begin the planning of a high-speed rail link between Atlanta and Savannah—the first significant investment in this long-desired rail corridor. The new \$500,000 grant to GDOT through the bipartisan infrastructure law will accelerate the Atlanta-Savannah rail project into its Phase 2 Study. The potential route between Atlanta and Savannah would also connect Atlanta to Amtrak's *Silver Meteor* train between New York and Miami.

Louisville is also one step closer to restoring rail service to Indianapolis and possibly on to Chicago. The Kentuckian Regional Planning and Development Agency (KIPDA) has recently received an FRA Corridor I.D. \$500,000 grant from the Federal Railroad Administration.

The FRA Long Distance Study Committee in its latest interim report has also identified 15 new routes, which will be offered up for consideration during the Round Four gatherings later this spring. Train service from Chicago to Miami, via Indianapolis, Louisville, Nashville, Chattanooga, Atlanta to Jacksonville, Orlando, and Tampa is on the list of possible new or restored routes. It meets FRA's Legislative Considerations for Long-Distance Service Expansion, for it not only would link and serve large and small communities and advance the

economic and social well-being of rural areas of the U.S, but it would also enhance connectivity with the Long-Distance Passenger rail system and reflects public engagement and local and regional support for restored passenger rail service.

While it is way too early to predict whether passenger rail will ever be restored on even parts of the former *Floridian* route, it will only happen if there is the political will to provide the funds needed to not only upgrade the various rail lines which the service would run on and to rebuild or restore railroad stations where needed. There is also the need to purchase equipment needed to provide daily service from the Midwest to Florida, which according to the Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission would provide new north-south "backbone" long-distance services for both western and eastern parts of the Midwest.

BACKWARD SEATING ON THE EMPIRE CORRIDOR

Continued from page 14

unfriendly change for trains like Empire Service and the *Carolinian*, where passengers routinely travel more than 3 to 5 hours and there is no savings in equipment usage. There is no reason why every Amfleet 1 coach in the Amtrak system needs to be half backwards. If Empire Service stays as it is today, with much of its equipment maintained in Albany, there is no point nor savings in forcing passengers to ride backwards for hours and hours and hours. If a coach must be substituted at Sunnyside and one coach is half backwards, it is not the end of the world, but making half of the seats always backwards on the Empire Corridor is a deal breaker for many passengers.

Also, expecting business class passengers on the Empire Corridor to ride backwards is a complete insult to a passenger paying for an upgraded fare. In fact, in the distant past when the Turboliners were used on the Empire Corridor, mostly between Albany

and NYP and not for all trips, only the business class seats that faced forward at one end of the Turboliner were business class seats, as the business class seats that were backwards were available for regular coach passengers. In fact, back then, when a group of 4 or a family were traveling together on the Empire Corridor, they would often ask the conductor to turn 2 seats to face backwards so that their group/family would all be facing one another. Hard to believe how customer service has deteriorated so far since then to this situation.

For me personally, I will greatly reduce my usage of Empire Corridor trains if this is not changed, knowing that I would always be backwards departing from Croton and I would likely not travel upstate with my wife on the train, as we will simply drive, where both of us can sit together and both face forward.

Gary Prophet is a RUN member and president of the Empire State Passengers Association.

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

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

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

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