

INDIVIDUAL HIGHLIGHTS

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RUN SPRING CONFERENCE ADDRESSES MID-ATLANTIC AND NATIONAL RAIL AND TRANSIT ISSUES

By David Peter Alan

On Friday, April 28, a number of advocates gathered online to hear a number of nationally known and regionally known presenters give their views about expanding rail lines and transit in the Mid-Atlantic region, as well as the current state of Amtrak and rail transit at the national level. The conference was originally planned as RUN's first "in-person" conference since the COVID-19 virus struck, and it was scheduled to occur in Newark, as it had been three years ago, when the virus forced the cancellation of that event and pushed all subsequent RUN events into "virtual-only" status. That happened again, so the planned participation by New Jersey Transit and the North

Jersey Transportation Planning Authority did not occur. Still, all scheduled presenters shared their knowledge with the attendees, and none of the intended educational value of the conference was lost.

The theme of the event was "Good Connections: Why the Northeastern Rail Network is important to the entire U.S." and the conference featured talks that concerned both the region and the nation as a whole. It was the latest in a series of conferences that focused on specific regions; past conferences described the rail scene in New England, the Midwest, the West, and the South. Though this event featured the Mid-Atlantic region, it began and concluded with a look at the national scene.

RUN Chair Richard Rudolph kicked off the conference by introducing RUN (which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year) and mentioning some of the organization's priorities, including restoring long-distance trains that Amtrak once ran and adding new routes in the future. He said that Amtrak "will be obligated to expand" in the future. In the Northeast, he called for service to Augusta and Bangor in his home state of Maine, as well as for the projects that other presenters would describe later in the conference. He noted Sen. John Tester's objections to the current Amtrak Board nominees, all of whom are from the Northeast, and said that RUN is concerned that riders elsewhere in the country should be represented, too.

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NOTES FROM NEW YORK: GOOD NEWS FOR A CHANGE!

By Andrew Albert

There's very good news for riders of New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in the state budget recently passed by Governor Hochul and the State Legislature. The MTA's "fiscal cliff" has been avoided for quite a few years! The massive service cuts and massive fare hikes have been avoided! Instead, while there will still be fare increases for New York's subways, buses, Staten Island Railway, the Long Island Rail Road, and Metro-North Railroad, they will not be the 5.5% that had been predicted, but a lower 4%, thanks to \$65 million in state aid.

New York will increase the top rate of the Payroll Mobility Tax (PMT) for the largest businesses in the five boroughs of NYC, from .34% to .60%, which will generate an additional \$1.1 billion annually for the MTA. Additionally, there will be a one-time \$300 million State Aid to the MTA to help offset the loss of ridership during COVID. Further, New York City will increase their share of funding for the paratransit system to \$165 million annually. There will also be \$35 million to the MTA to improve subway service on weekday middays, weeknights, and weekends. There will also be \$35 million to install safety

improvements to protect riders. And looming in the distance - 2026 at the earliest - will be a dedicated \$1.5 billion in licensing fees if three downstate casinos are approved by the state. There would also be an estimated \$231 million to \$413 million in annual incremental tax revenue generated by the casinos.

It remains to be seen whether those casinos will actually be approved and operating by then, but it shows that the State recognizes the importance of our mass transit systems, and how they are, in fact, an essential service and should be treated

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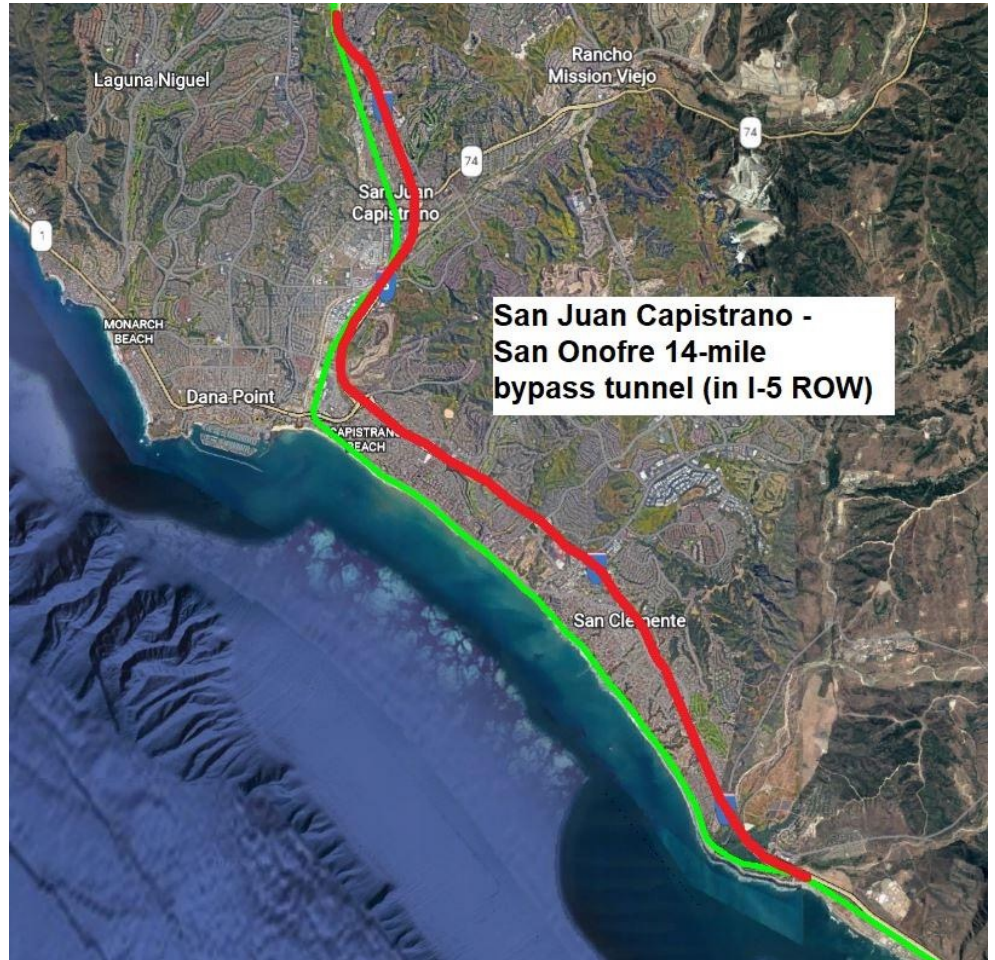
IT'S TIME TO RELOCATE THE SURF LINE RAILROAD TRACK INLAND, AND BUILD THE SAN CLEMENTE BYPASS TUNNEL

By Brian Yanity

It is of critical importance to address the land slippage and coastal erosion threatening rail service on the coastal railroad section in San Clemente. This is a transportation emergency that must be taken seriously by local, state, and federal stakeholders, both in the near and long term. The cost of past inaction is catching up to us now.

Amtrak and Metrolink train service through southern Orange County has been temporarily suspended three times in the last year alone due to the instability of the land beneath and beside the tracks. This occurred in the Cyprus Shore area in south San Clemente due to instability of the hillside slope above the tracks: a six-month period from September 2022 to April 2023. This followed a two-week track closure at Cyprus Shore in September 2021. More recently the track was closed for a one-month period ending May 28, 2023 at a different location: just over two miles north due to a landslide beneath the Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens near the San Clemente Pier. The track was open for only one week before another landslide at Casa Romantica closed the track again on June 5, 2023 [as of this writing service has not yet been restored]. During these track closures, bus bridges have connected passengers between Orange and San Diego counties on a reduced schedule.

The "Surf Line" is both a key regional and intercity rail route boasting the 2nd highest intercity ridership in the nation. For 130 years, the Surf Line has provided travelers between Los Angeles and San Diego a convenient and efficient alternative to the automobile. Passenger rail is also the most environmentally friendly way to move large numbers of people rapidly between the nation's 2nd and 8th largest cities. Per passenger-mile travelled, the greenhouse gas emissions of riding even a



Google Earth perspective of alignment for potential relocation of LOSSAN rail line: a bypass tunnel underneath the I-5 right-of-way (ROW) from San Juan Capistrano to San Onofre.

diesel-powered train are only a fraction of that going by car. It is also a vital freight route that supports the regional and national economy and reduces truck traffic on parallel I-5, further reducing pollution and wear and tear on the roads.

Because it is the only direct rail link connecting the principal mainland port of the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet and Camp Pendleton to the rest of the nation, it has been designated part of the U.S. military's Strategic Rail Corridor Network. When the track is closed, the San Diego-Tijuana bi-national metro area (population 5 million) lacks a railroad connection with the rest of North America (the slow and windy San Diego & Arizona Eastern track from Tijuana/Tecate eastward to the Imperial Valley has been closed for years).

The first priority is to stabilize and maintain the existing Surf Line tracks

through San Clemente to be an operable railroad for as long as geologic conditions allow. The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), as steward of this vital regional, state, and national asset, has led the effort to repair and reinforce the slopes above the tracks.

But concurrently, planning must proceed to relocate the tracks inland. No amount of reinforcement of the bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean will prevent the inevitable loss of the tracks. After all, this particular stretch of coastline has been naturally eroding eastward for thousands of years. Human-induced climate change and rising sea levels, along with sediment flows into the ocean reduced by flood control infrastructure and other factors, are accelerating these natural processes. What is required is to develop a new alignment

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ADDITIONAL AMTRAK NORTHEAST REGIONAL TRAIN SERVICE FROM CT ANNOUNCED

By **Dennis Kirkpatrick**

From a CTDOT Press Release

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT), and Amtrak have announced the addition of two Amtrak trains originating on the Hartford [CT] Line beginning June 5. These additional Amtrak Northeast Regional trains will offer customers single-seat rides from Connecticut to New York City, with stops in Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Stamford as well as direct access to New York Penn Station. Riders should make Penn Station in less than three hours.

“Bringing additional train service and more options for riders along the Hartford and New Haven Lines is the result of a strong collaboration between CTDOT and our partners. We worked closely with Amtrak, MTA Metro-North Railroad, and the Massachusetts Department of Transportation to make this happen,” said CTDOT Commissioner Garrett Eucalitto. “Governor Lamont has

charged us to improve rail travel in the state and give people more sustainable travel options. We delivered on the Super Express trains, which get riders from New Haven to New York in as little as 99 minutes, and now we are bringing this service to riders through funding provided in the Governor’s budget last year. Thank you to everyone who worked so hard to make this possible. I look forward to future collaborations with our regional partners so we can continue to provide additional environmentally friendly commuting options for riders.”

“We appreciate the partnership with the Connecticut Department of Transportation, MTA Metro-North Railroad, and Amtrak, which is leading to additional train service from Springfield,” said Massachusetts Transportation Secretary and CEO Gina Fiandaca. “These additional trips providing direct service between Western Massachusetts and New York City enhance the rail network and will make passenger train service an even more attractive travel option for visitors

and residents. Additional travel by train will have many benefits, including taking vehicles off the roads, lessening traffic congestion, and helping to reduce greenhouse gases.”

“Adding two new Northeast Regional trains between Springfield and New York City meets the growing demand of train travel and allows more people to experience the benefits of passenger rail,” said Amtrak President Roger Harris. “Thanks to our collaboration with MassDOT and CTDOT, and with support from MTA Metro North, we can offer more service, reduce travel times and provide greater travel flexibility for our customers, including arriving in New York from Springfield and Hartford before 9 a.m.”

Amtrak Northeast Regional trains offer single-seat ride options from Hartford to New York Penn Station with intermediate stops in New Haven, Bridgeport, and Stamford. Customers can leave Hartford Union Station at 5:26 a.m. and arrive at New York Penn Station

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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:

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THE PROPOSED HEARTLAND FLYER EXTENSION TO NEWTON AND BEYOND TO KANSAS CITY

By **Richard Rudolph**
Chairman, Rail Users' Network

Reprinted from **Passenger Train Journal**, 2023-2, issue 295.

At the very time that the FRA has launched its long-distance study site to promote public engagement over the next year to look at discontinued Amtrak routes and possible new service, Amtrak is pushing ahead to extend the *Heartland Flyer Service* to Wichita and Newton, KS, and to establish additional frequencies from Oklahoma City to Fort Worth. The current service that operates from Fort Worth to Oklahoma City was established in 1999, 20 years after Amtrak discontinued the long-distanced Chicago-Houston *Lone Star* train, which ran between Chicago and Houston via Kansas City, Wichita and Fort Worth. The proposed extension of service is part of Amtrak's 2035 plan to provide new state-supported short-distance corridors. The proposed extension to Newton would provide a connection with the *Southwest Chief*, enabling passengers to travel onto Los Angeles, Albuquerque, Kansas City and Chicago. Currently, Amtrak offers Thruway bus service between the *Heartland Flyer* in Oklahoma City and the *Southwest Chief* in Newton, with a stop in Wichita.

Providing a rail connection with the *Southwest Chief*, however, is not a new idea. Rail advocates have long advocated for an extension of the *Heartland Flyer* to Newton and a second frequency to Kansas City. It was first officially considered in 2008. The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT), in cooperation with the Oklahoma and Texas Departments of Transportation, formally requested Amtrak to conduct a feasibility study to establish what would be needed to provide state-sponsored intercity rail passenger service between Kansas City, Oklahoma City, and Fort Worth.

The study released by Amtrak and Kansas DOT on March 11, 2010 examined four different routes and schedules. Amtrak estimated ridership between 65,900 to 174,000 per year, with start-up costs ranging from \$164 million to \$479 million. The first

alternative would extend the *Heartland Flyer* from Oklahoma City to Newton, where it would terminate. It would provide a connection for passengers wanting to get onboard the eastbound or westbound *Southwest Chief*.

The second alternative would extend the *Heartland Flyer* from Oklahoma City to Kansas City, providing a new daily overnight service between Ft. Worth and Kansas City in both directions via Newton. The third option would provide a new daily daytime service in both directions between Kansas City and Ft. Worth, which would not be connected to the *Southwest Chief* or *Heartland Flyer*. The fourth alternative offered new daily daytime service in both directions between Kansas City and Oklahoma City that would not connect with either the *Southwest Chief* or the *Heartland Flyer*. The existing *Heartland Flyer* would continue on its current schedule and the stations it served.

The Amtrak study provided the necessary background needed to obtain funds from the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail program funded through the Federal Railroad Administration. This was later received in 2010. As a result, KDOT and Oklahoma DOT committed \$125,000 to match the \$250,000 grant award provided to Kansas to develop a service development plan. The SPD was prepared by Parsons Brinckerhoff and published in November 2011. It examined the first and third alternatives analyzed in Amtrak's feasibility study. The *Heartland Flyer* extension to Newton would offer a convenient connection to both the westbound and eastbound sections of Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* at Newton.

The existing *Heartland Flyer* schedule would remain, with the train turning around at Newton instead of its current overnight layover at Oklahoma City. The transfers at Newton would occur in the very early morning hours. Annual projected ridership for this train was 200,500 annually. Estimated

infrastructure costs with contingencies totaled \$132.5 million. Train equipment costs for this service were estimated to be \$4 million.

The second proposed service would depart both Kansas City and Fort Worth early in the morning, arriving at the opposite ends in the evening. While the daytime train didn't connect with other national Amtrak trains, it presented a convenient schedule for regional travelers. Annual projected ridership for this day train was 270,000. Estimated infrastructure costs with contingencies totaled \$368.2 million, and equipment cost for two new transits that would be needed was estimated to be \$68 million.

Given the amount of money needed to pursue either option, it's not surprising KDOT officials were ultimately reluctant to pursue either one. In testimony given before the Joint Senate /House Kansas Transportation Committee regarding the Service Development Plan in January 2012, KDOT officials stated that no additional work should be taken on passenger rail until funding for the entire project was obtained. Recognizing that this most likely wouldn't happen, KDOT instead applied for a TIGER 4 grant to make grade crossing improvements on the BNSF railroad between Newton and the Oklahoma state line.

The Northern Flyer Alliance, an advocate for the reintroduction of passenger rail service from Kansas City through Wichita to Fort Worth, hasn't given up. It is a coalition of 49 cities, six counties, and 19 Chambers of Commerce along the I-35 corridor that have joined together to promote passenger rail service in their communities. Amtrak also continued to be interested in extending passenger rail service from Oklahoma City to Kansas. It sent an inspection train on June 9, 2017 from Oklahoma City to Kansas City to inspect the section of BNSF's right of way, exploring the possibility of

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NOTES FROM NEW YORK

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like one! The MTA must also institute \$400 million annually of operating efficiencies. We were shown a possible method of achieving these efficiencies, and they involve using the latest technology to prevent catastrophic incidents from developing, and correcting weaknesses in infrastructure, rails, and other places BEFORE they become expensive and potentially dangerous.

So, the budget is definitely good news for riders - and here are the predicted service increases from the money dedicated to more service: In July, on weekends, G,J,&M lines will increase frequencies from 12-13 minutes to 8-9 minutes. In August, on weekdays, C,N,&R lines will operate every 8 minutes, instead of every 12 minutes! And on weekends, the #1,6 lines will operate every 6 minutes! In December, on weekday evenings, the C,N,R, & G lines will operate every 8 minutes! So ridership will likely increase, due to much shorter wait times for trains.

Congestion Pricing Approved!

The tremendous news that the Federal Highway Administration has approved the MTA's request for an environmental approval of their congestion pricing plan to toll Manhattan streets below 60th Street, is tremendous news for the MTA's Capital Program, which congestion pricing will help finance. Of course, suburban areas and the State of New Jersey are not happy with the proposal, although EVERYONE who uses the MTA's facilities - whether you're from Long Island, Westchester, New Jersey, or California - will benefit from a well-financed and improved MTA. Ironically, 75% of New Jersey commuters to Manhattan utilize mass transit - either NJ Transit trains or buses, meaning only 25% drive into the city - and those drivers would also benefit from clearer streets, and faster travel, due to fewer automobiles. And while some folks pay big tolls to cross bridges & tunnels

operated by either the MTA or the Port Authority, those tolls could be credited towards the congestion fee that will be imposed. The Traffic Mobility Review Board (TMRB) will meet shortly to decide what the fees should be, what times of day, days of the week they will apply, who will get exemptions, and much more. Stay tuned for this ongoing story.

The State of New Jersey has said it will try to pass federal legislation to deprive NY State of federal monies for transportation if NY goes through with congestion pricing, but it's not clear if that will pass or be modified at some point. Other U.S. cities—including Los Angeles—are looking at possibly installing their own version of congestion pricing to reduce auto emissions, boost their mass transportation systems, and rid their cities and regions of greenhouse gases. Several European cities have installed congestion pricing, and there's no doubt their transportation systems have benefitted from it.

In other good news, the MTA has settled a lawsuit with accessibility advocates which will mean 95% of New York's 472 subway stations will be made fully accessible by 2055. This will cost billions of dollars and would not be possible without the massive infusion of capital dollars made possible by congestion pricing! Congestion pricing will raise approximately \$1.1 billion per year, which will allow the MTA to bond those dollars and get \$15 billion per year towards the \$55 billion MTA Capital Program. This will improve stations, signals, railcars, infrastructure, and much more.

Currently, CBTC (Communications-based Train Control) is on only the L & #7 lines - the two discrete lines that run without joining other lines. However, it has improved service greatly on those lines, and the MTA is currently installing CBTC on the Culver, Queens Blvd, 6th and 8th Ave lines. This will massively expand the ability to run more trains more closely together, yet safely, thus improving service to millions more riders. And, speaking of millions of riders, our buses and trains are seeing a return of ridership numbers similar to

pre-COVID numbers! On several days in the past few weeks, for example, over 4 million people rode the subways! And on weekends, ridership is very high, proving people are using the system for discretionary travel and getting out to enjoy the city's great dining & entertainment!

So all in all, the news here in New York is good. Service is improving, maintenance is improving, accessibility will be improving, and fares aren't going up as much as originally predicted. The State of New York recognizes the importance of mass transit to its economic livelihood, and is treating it as the essential service it truly is!

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

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at 8:10 a.m. or leave Hartford at 8:35 a.m. and arrive in New York at 11:21 a.m.. Riders heading north can depart from New York at 6:59 p.m. and get into Hartford at 9:51 p.m. or leave New York by 8:50 p.m. and get into Hartford at 11:41 p.m.

Some additional service changes were made to the Hartford Line service to accommodate this addition. Updated schedules can be found at HartfordLine.com.

For information about all rail services in Connecticut, visit CTrail.com.

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.

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The “advocacy host” for the conference was the Lackawanna Coalition, although some events that the organization had planned did not occur, since there was no “in-person” component. Coalition Chairperson Sally Jane Gellert introduced the organization and said that she had become involved with rail advocacy through longtime participation in environmental advocacy, which she said “goes well with rail.”

The Coalition began in 1979 (the same year New Jersey Transit was founded), advocating for riders on the Morris & Essex and other lines of Lackawanna Railroad heritage. Today its purview includes “connecting transit” which broadens its scope to all of North and Central Jersey and into New York City. She mentioned the Coalition’s outreach tools – its newsletter, the *Railgram* and its website, www.lackawannacoalition.org – and also her concern about the impending loss of funding when the COVID-relief money runs out, about two years from now.

Two Nationally Known Keynoters

Then it was time for two keynote speakers who enjoy national prominence. The first was William C. Vantuono, Editor-in-Chief of *Railway Age*. He began by saying that *Railway Age* is more than just a magazine; that it’s “a 24-hour news service” through its website, www.railwayage.com. He called himself “an experienced observer of the industry” with 31 years’ experience and noted that he first “rode the rails” on the Newark City Subway, which is now part of NJ Transit’s Newark Light Rail.

His remarks concerned the national scene more than the local scene, and he

said, “A passenger railroad should be run like a business, even though it’s a public service.” He complimented Brightline in Florida for providing good service, including frequency, on-time performance, and attractive equipment. He noted that “money is always the problem,” but said electrification on the Caltrain Line in San Francisco and some lines in Toronto stand as two bright spots. He restated that Amtrak’s Northeast Corridor (NEC) is not profitable and added that it would be expensive to install constant-tension catenary. He also agreed with many advocates, saying: “Amtrak is still trying to figure out what it’s supposed to be” and noted that Amtrak’s long-distance trains are well-patronized. Vantuono concluded by contrasting this country with Europe when it comes to high-speed rail, but expressed hope that it would catch on.

Arthur S. Guzzetti, Vice-President for Policy and Mobility at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), was next. He mentioned that, before joining APTA, he had been one of the original employees at NJ Transit in 1979, and also worked at Port Authority Transit in his hometown of Pittsburgh. Regarding APTA, he said, “We are the voice of public transportation and intercity rail” and that its roots go back to 1882, before electric streetcars were invented. He noted that the transit providers’ problems today also faced them then: “pollution, congestion, and the cost of fuel.”

Guzzetti noted three transit milestones from last December: San Francisco’s Central Subway, the Long Island’s new East Side terminal, and Metro Rail’s Silver Line to Dulles Airport and beyond, but cautioned: “We’re in a battle to defend our gains.” He gave the recent Bipartisan Infrastructure Law high marks for promoting infrastructure but warned that the current debt crisis could result in cuts in spending for transportation. He called on Congress to establish a Passenger Rail Trust Fund and noted how former New Jersey Congressman Jim Howard first got 20% of “highway funds” to go for transit.

Three Proposals for Pennsylvania and a Cautionary Note from Baltimore

Three presenters from Pennsylvania then described their proposals to bring more passenger trains to the Keystone State; proposals that have been floated for years, but which now seem to have a better chance of being funded, with the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The first was Thomas E. Frawley, Executive Director of the Schuylkill River Passenger Rail Authority, which advocates for trains between Philadelphia and Reading; a route that last ran in 1981. Plans call for intermediate stops at Norristown, Phoenixville and Pottstown, and Frawley also called for service on other ex-Reading lines between Reading and Harrisburg (southwest) and Allentown (northeast).

Next was Larry Malski, President of the Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Rail Authority. He is pushing for return on the Lackawanna Cutoff line to Scranton, with the railroad replaced between Scranton and New Jersey Transit’s Morris & Essex Line. He hopes to get corridor funding from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and noted that the route is mentioned in Amtrak’s 2035 *ConnectsUS* Plan (as is the proposed Reading service), and that ridership could come back as it has on the *Downeaster* trains.

The last Pennsylvania presenter was Mark Spada, President of Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail, based in Pittsburgh. His group is advocating for more trains between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, beyond the single daily round trip that runs today. He noted that PennDOT and Norfolk Southern are more favorable toward passenger trains now than they were in the past. He also said that frequency is more important than speed, although he said the train is faster than air travel between Johnstown and Philadelphia.

Samuel Jordan, President of the Baltimore Transit Equity Coalition, raised

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a cautionary note about transit, race, and politics in his hometown of Baltimore. He has been advocating for the Red Line, a light-rail line in his city since 2006 and blamed former Gov. Larry Hogan for canceling the project in 2015. He claimed that it would have performed better than the Purple Line in the Washington suburbs, now under construction, and blamed Hogan for killing it, based on “racially discriminatory” policies. Jordan complained that only about 2% of state funding goes for transit in Baltimore and elsewhere in the state, and hopes for better results under Gov. Wes Moore, including “the first installment of a state buildout of an equitable and reliable transit system.”

A Panel on “Making the Case”

Much of the lineup for the conference was changed from the original 2020 plan, although keynoters Vantuono and Guzzetti were also scheduled to present then. The other portion of the conference that remained from the 2020 proposal was a panel on “Making the Case for Transit,” which I moderated. It was the only “skills and methods” portion of the conference, and the purpose was to give some pointers for how to make the case for transit to elected officials and business leaders, as well as for rider-advocates to “make the case” for their proposals to senior transit managers.

Andrew Albert, RUN Vice-Chair and Chair of the NYC Transit Riders' Council, led off by praising the rider-representation at the agency, including the Permanent Citizens' Advisory Committee (PCAC), where he had served as Chair on a rotating basis. He stressed the importance of making the case for

improved transit to elected officials and complained that MTA agencies (city subways and buses, Metro-North, and the Long Island Rail Road) carry 40% of the nation's riders, but get only 16% of the funding. He said that it's really important to engage with elected officials and write op-ed pieces for the local papers and added: “It's really important that they know who you are, but you really have to know your stuff.”

The second presenter was Jim Blaze, a transportation economist and fellow Contributing Editor at *Railway Age*. He stressed the importance of making a good business case when advocating to the local business community for better trains and transit. He said: “As an economist, I have to look for balance” and cited “competition” and “a critical shortage of resources” as causes of the funding disparity that Albert had mentioned.

The other presenter on the panel was Mark Magyar, Director of the Sweeney Center for Policy at Rowan University and a former journalist and Senate staffer in Trenton. He began by advising advocates of a three-step process: find the few legislators who are concerned with transportation issues, educate them on what the real issues are, then reach out to other people and places for support.

Magyar spent most of his presentation focusing on NJ Transit as a case study. The agency's funding has been problematic for years, because it does not have a dedicated funding source and depends on money from the highway side. He added that riders pay about 70% of the cost of running the trains, 40% of the cost of intercity buses, and only about 10% of the cost of local buses and light rail. He concluded by saying that the lame-duck period between legislative sessions is a good time to advocate.

Two Pitches for Gateway

The last two local presenters made pitches for the Gateway Program, a series of infrastructure projects at New

York Penn Station and nearby New Jersey. The largest are building a new tunnel under the Hudson River, refurbishing the existing tunnels after it is built, and two new bridges to replace the existing Portal Bridge over the Hackensack River between Newark and Secaucus.

Craig Schulz, a former journalist and now Director of External Affairs for the Gateway Program at Amtrak, started with an overview of recent developments on the NEC, saying it is “bringing a new era for passenger rail.” He said that demand is back on the corridor, and that the region would lose \$100,000 in daily productivity if it lost the NEC as a transportation resource. He also mentioned other projects, including the B&P Tunnel in Baltimore, and the role of private investment and transit-oriented development near stations.

Stephen Sigmund, Chief of Public Outreach for the Gateway Program Development Commission, made a more-direct pitch for Gateway. He gave an overview of the Gateway projects and said that they would bring significant benefits for riders by reducing delays and warned that “a vital link is at risk.” This writer had reported on Gateway extensively in *Railway Age* before the COVID-19 virus struck, but it appears now that the political situation is more favorable for Gateway under the Biden administration than it was under the Trump administration.

Responding to a question from RUN Vice-Chair Andrew Albert, Sigmund said that Gateway is designed to improve resiliency and redundancy, rather than to facilitate service improvements. He also said that workers are going back to the office now and said, regarding New York City: “You have to be able to get to it. That's not a question now.” Although nobody seems to dispute the importance of access to the City generally, there is still concern about the necessity of the entire Gateway program, given post-COVID reductions in commuting.

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RUN SPRING CONFERENCE

Continued from page 7 **Closing Remarks from a Veteran Railroader**

After attendees had their say during a Customer Forum, it was time for closing remarks. They were delivered by Philip L. Streby, a RUN Board member and an Amtrak retiree with over 40 years' experience on the railroad, including in the Army Transportation Corps. He decried the loss of so much track in this country and called for it to be restored. He stressed connectivity between trains, which he said "provides for uninterrupted journeys."

Streby recommended courting the local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) as an ally and advised against making assumptions about legislators on a partisan basis, mentioning a Republican senator who he believed could be convinced about rail. He agreed with other advocates that "stable, adequate funding" is necessary for any new start, and suggested calling money for trains and transit "an investment, rather than a subsidy." He said that running Amtrak's *Cardinal* train every day would bring an additional \$19 to \$29 million per year to the local economies. The train currently operates only three times a week.

In conclusion, Streby called on advocates to be better-educated. He advised: "Know what must be done to get a train on the tracks" and the cost of doing that, and said: "Show Amtrak that they need to expand and that they can't cut their way to prosperity." At the end of his presentation, he called on Amtrak to bring back printed timetables so riders would know where the trains go and when they go there. With his presentation, Streby brought the conference back from a regional perspective to a national one.

The Planned Tour Took Place, but...

The tour planned for Saturday was held, but attendance was low, due to the lack of out-of-town visitors and the pouring rain. Still, a few local attendees had a

look at points of connectivity on NJ Transit at its two stations in Newark, and in Secaucus, Hoboken, and New York Penn Station. There are plans to run the tour again for local advocates in the region, with the hope that the weather will be better the second time.

Even without the "in-person" component, the conference was interesting and educational, and featured a combination of national and regional presenters who had a lot to say about the future of rail and of advocacy. RUN is now planning an online mini-conference to be held in the fall. It is expected that the focus of that conference will be the nexus between advocacy for trains and transit, and environmental advocacy. We will let you know as plans for that event develop.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member who lives and practices law in South Orange, NJ, and is also a Contributing Editor at Railway Age. In New Jersey, he also serves as Chair of the Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee at NJ Transit, and was Chair of the Lackawanna Coalition from 2000 through 2021. For more detailed coverage of the conference, his article on the subject can be found on the Railway Age website. That report was posted on May 17, under the headline RUN Conference Highlights National Issues. The link is <https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/run-conference-highlights-national-issues/?RAchannel=home>.

THE PROPOSED HEARTLAND FLYER EXTENSION TO NEWTON AND BEYOND TO KANSAS CITY

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of extending the *Heartland Flyer* from Oklahoma City to Newton. Along the way, the inspection train met with enthusiastic crowds. Joe McHugh, who was then serving as vice president of state-supported business development, said the level of interest seen showed promise for opening a Texas-Kansas route.

Thanks to the hard work of rail advocates and public officials at the state and local level, Kansas has finally jumped on board to support the extension of the *Heartland Flyer* from Oklahoma City to Newton. It was included in the 2020 FORWARD Kansas transportation plan, with the expectation that ridership would double if the service is connected to the *Southwest Chief*. At a Passenger Rail Forum held on February 10, 2021 Amtrak presented a proposal for the state of Kansas to request 100% federal funding for the Heartland Flyer Extension capital costs, as well as three to five years of operation costs, through the federal reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act. Since then, both the Kansas House and Senate have passed resolutions of support for the extension of Amtrak service between Oklahoma City and Newton. They also resolved to urge the Kansas Congressional delegation to support full federal funding for the complete implementation and development of the Heartland Flyer Extension to Newton, "as well as a second frequency directly connecting Kansas City and Fort Worth, Texas in the upcoming reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act." Both the Oklahoma House and Senate also passed resolutions in 2021 supporting the extension of the *Heartland Flyer* to Newton, as well as a second day time frequency from Kansas City to Ft. Worth.

Even before the Infrastructure and Jobs Act was actually signed into law, Stephen Gardner, president of Amtrak, and CEO Bill Flynn were touting the *Heartland Flyer* extension to Newton as a high priority, stating it would add between 100,000 and 200,000 riders a year and would have an estimated \$64.8 million annual economic impact. Gardner estimated the extension of service would require additional construction of double tracking and other upgrades to insure that passenger trains wouldn't stall freight trains, and the capital costs could be in the \$500 million or more range.

Since the FRA has announced its new Corridor Development Plan, the Northern Flyer Alliance has been busy garnering support from over 22 cities,

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PHILLIP “PHIL” ENG TAPPED TO LEAD THE MBTA



Phil Eng. Photo Courtesy of MassDOT

By Dennis Kirkpatrick
Compiled from a MassDOT press release

After a comprehensive search for new leadership at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA), the Governor has appointed Phillip Eng as the transit system's new General Manager. Eng is an engineer with nearly 40 years of experience in transportation, including as President of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) Long Island Rail Road and Interim President of New York City Transit. The MBTA system consists of multiple commuter rail and subway transit lines, and over 150 bus routes.

“Phil Eng is the proven leader the MBTA needs to improve safety and reliability across the system and restore the public's trust,” said Governor Maura Healey (D-MA). “He understands that a functioning transportation system is essential to a functioning economy, and he has a track record of taking the reins of struggling public transit systems and dramatically improving service. He also takes a collaborative approach to his work and maintains open lines of communication with customers, workers, businesses, local officials and communities.”

“What impressed me the most about Phil Eng is that everything he does is driven by his commitment to customer service,” said Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll (D-MA). “He understands that

the success of our public transportation system relies on the trust of the public and that transparency, communication and reliability are the keys to earning that trust. I'm confident that he is the right leader for this transformative moment for the MBTA.”

In the appointment press conference, Eng stated, “It's time for a new way of doing business at the MBTA. As an engineer, a transportation professional for 40 years, and a commuter myself, I'm laser focused on finding innovative solutions to complex problems and approaching them with a sense of urgency that always puts the customer first. I'm also committed to supporting the hardworking employees who keep the MBTA running and ramping up hiring to ensure that we have the workforce in place to deliver the reliable service that riders deserve.”

Eng has already started to make changes and has established a residence in the region. Interim General Manager Jeff Gonneville will remain with the MBTA and assist with the transition to new management. Eng replaces outgoing general manager Stephen Poftak, who departed with outgoing Governor Charles Baker (R-MA). According to LinkedIn, Poftak is currently a visiting Fellow at the Taubman Center for State & Local Government.

Dennis Kirkpatrick is a RUN Board member with 30 years' experience in rail and transit advocacy. He lives in Boston, MA.

THE PROPOSED HEARTLAND FLYER EXTENSION TO NEWTON AND BEYOND TO KANSAS CITY

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towns, and state legislatures for “Corridor Designation,” which is required by the FRA to receive federal funding.

The FRA decision regarding what corridors will be selected will not be made until after this column is submitted for publication. There are

reasons to believe it could happen. Cory Davis, the director of multimodal transportation and innovation at KDOT, believes Kansas is well-positioned to receive federal funding for the *Heartland Flyer* passenger rail expansion, especially since it already completed a service development plan exploring expansion of the *Heartland Flyer* in 2011, and through a partnership with Oklahoma DOT, officials are updating that plan for the new round of funding. As Deborah Fischer Stout, the president of the Northern Flyer Alliance, pointed out in her letter to FRA's Administrator, Amit Bose, “Restoring the *Heartland Flyer* between Texas and Kansas is an important means of fully connecting the nation's fastest-growing economic development corridor located along Interstate 35 (Laredo, TX - Kansas City, MO) boasting over 40 million population, 10 million jobs, and a 28 percent growth rate.” The gap in rail service between Oklahoma City and Newton must be addressed “to ensure taking advantage of the opportunity to enhance our links with this enormous and growing economic super-region.”

There is still the issue of providing state matching funds for participation in extending the *Heartland Flyer* to Newton and providing additional frequencies from Oklahoma City to Fort Worth. There is some good news to report regarding the state of Texas. It has lost out on more than \$19 billion in federal rail grants over the past decade because no money has been allocated into the fund since voters approved the Texas Rail Relocation and Improvement fund in 2009. Texas rail advocates are pleased that Governor Abbott recognizes that federal grants from the IJA can be beneficial for meaningful infrastructure programs like those for rail projects.

There are a number of projects on which TXDOT has been waiting for available funding. Peter LeCody, President of the Texas Rail Advocates, last fall asked the Texas Rail Commission to request the legislature to place \$200 million in the Rail Relocation and Improvement Fund

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May 24, 2023

U.S. Representative Sam Graves
Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Dear Representative Sam Graves.

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

Our members, including those who serve on our Board, live in different parts of the country, including along the Northeast Corridor (NEC). We appreciate the mobility provided by Amtrak and the local railroads in that part of the country but, at the same time, we recognize the requirement that the Amtrak Board represent geographically-diverse regions of the country and the riders and potential riders who live in those regions. Throughout its history, RUN has advocated strongly for a robust Amtrak National Network, in addition to improvements in the Northeast.

RUN believes that the country outside the Northeast Corridor, which statute defines to include Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia, is grossly under-represented in terms of Amtrak services and its board members.

As such, the Rail Users Network is gravely concerned about the direction the President of the United States is taking in his choices of nominees for the Amtrak Board of Directors. His choices are in direct conflict with the provisions set forth in Public Law 117-58 by the 117th Congress as 49 U.S. Code (USC) 24302.

According to 49 U.S. Code § 24302 - Board of Directors, part (C):

8 individuals appointed by the President of the United States, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, [having the following characteristics]: 1) general business and financial experience, experience or qualifications in transportation, freight and passenger rail transportation, travel, hospitality, cruise line, or passenger air transportation businesses, 2) representatives of employees or users of passenger rail transportation or a State government, at least 1 of whom shall be an individual with a disability (as defined in section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12102)) who has a demonstrated history of, or experience with, accessibility, mobility, and inclusive transportation in passenger rail or commuter rail, 3) rail passenger advocacy, 4) union affiliation and service, 5) military experience, while not required, is a plus, and 6) candidates should reflect opposing political parties.

Congress mandated in IJA that no more than four members of Amtrak's Board come from the Northeast Corridor (NEC), which the statute defines to include Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, New York, Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia. Of the six individuals nominated all but one are from the Northeast Corridor, which is in direct violation of this Act which clearly defines Congress's intent for the Board to represent the entire nation. We agree with Senator Jon Tester, and we want to voice his ask to bring this slate of nominees into compliance with the IJA requirements. Further, we also believe the Board will be better served by candidates with familiarity with the operations and customer base of Amtrak's long-distance (LD) routes which are suffering from Amtrak's concentration on the NEC and the near abandonment of long-distance services. Selection of more regionally diverse candidates would greatly stem the slow dissolution of Amtrak's LD trains and services. To reiterate, RUN requests that any nominees for Amtrak's Board of Directors be representative of the entire United States and the services therein to include not only the Northeast Corridor and state-supported corridor services, but also the long-distance trains which establish the nationwide system, thin as it is.

Sincerely,

Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.
Chairman, Rail Users' Network
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rrudolph1022@gmail.com
207-776-4961.

The Rail Users Network (RUN) is a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt national organization which undertakes the following activities on behalf of rail passengers and transit rail users:

- Encourages the development and use of customer-friendly rail passenger services that are affordable, efficient, and reliable.
- Encourages expansion of existing service, as well as new starts to promote greater mobility and improve the economic vitality of regions.
- Actively seeks the views of rail passengers, including those with special needs, and those potential passengers not yet served by rail.
- Represents rail and rail transit passengers' interests to the industry and to those who regulate or influence it.
- Actively encourages rail and rail transit operators to become more accountable to their customers by including them in all levels of evaluation, decision-making, and planning.

SLOW ZONES PLAGUE BOSTON'S MBTA



PCC Streetcar #3087 in the original historic MTA (pre-MBTA) livery in everyday revenue service along the Mattapan-Ashmont loop. Photo: WikiMedia Commons by User Pi.1415926535. This photo is 10 years old and the unit looks the same today, thanks to good upkeep.

By Dennis Kirkpatrick

Last year, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) in Boston took drastic steps to shutter the entire length of its Orange Line subway to compress 5 years' worth of part time repair windows into a 30-day full-time, and sometimes round the clock, slot. From mid-August to mid-September, repairs were applied to track, signals, and stations. However, it was later found that this was not enough.

Ambiguity in repair logs and procedures forced the system to re-evaluate many recent repairs. This led to system-wide slow zones on all four of its color-coded transit lines. Speed in the slow zones ranged from 6 mph to 25 mph with slow zones ranging from a few feet to several hundred in multiple areas. The result was double the commute time for most transit travelers.

Compounding this is a major shortage of support staff and vehicle operators that need to be filled in the post-pandemic era. Despite sign-on bonus offers, the jobs remain difficult to fill. Federal oversight mandates are also being addressed in the MBTA's overall operation which is also resulting in some rail operations being cut back due to staffing issues.

Throughout the spring, part-time overnight repairs have been ongoing with slow zones being lifted as repairs were completed, but additional ones have been identified impacting the net improvements and travel time. In fact, the MBTA's newest and recently opened Green Line Extension from Boston to the communities of Somerville and Medford, were also found to be missing "finishing touches" that were not completed before the lines were open to revenue service.

Also plaguing the service has been new railcar deliveries from China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC). A perfect storm of pandemic slowdowns, supply chain issues, and quality of workmanship at the local level slowed and stopped delivery of the contracted new trainsets with most deliveries having stopped last fall.

Under the contract, CRRC was supposed to have delivered all of the Orange Line's trainsets by now and start delivery of the contracted Red Line sets. However, as of Spring 2023, the Orange Line fleet only has the required 13 trainsets (6 cars per trainset, or 78 total cars) in operation with no spares. As such, if one set is taken out of service for repairs, the

headways between trains is extended. The Red Line has one test set that only sees occasional revenue service and is used mostly for training purposes. In the meantime, the Red Line continues to operate equipment well-over the 40-year milestone.

Hope springs eternal seems to be considered with the appointment of a new MBTA General manager in the persona of Phil Eng, who has been brought in to sort things out from his successful tenure in New York with the MTA and LIRR.

Elsewhere on the MBTA, historians and rail fans may want to plan a trip to Boston sometime in the next couple of years to take one final ride on a revenue President's Conference Committee (PCC) streetcar.

The MBTA still has several of these in service on the Mattapan-Ashmont loop which is only 2.5 miles long. Some of the rolling stock has been updated with modern controls and wheel trucks but a few still have most of their original equipment. Among these is MBTA PCC car #3087, which has been in continuous revenue service since delivered and that is a decent 65 years and counting. Car #3087 is also deemed to be the oldest PCC car in continuous revenue service in all of North America. It's a piece of transit history you can still ride today.

Long-range plans will see the PCC cars retired and replaced with more-modern rolling stock at dates yet to be determined. However, that plan is on the drawing board already in the study phase.

As always, we recommend checking things out for travel announcements at www.mbta.com

Dennis Kirkpatrick is a RUN Board member with 30 years' experience in rail and transit advocacy. He lives in Boston, MA.

BUSINESS AS USUAL AT NEW JERSEY TRANSIT, BUT CONCERNS ARE MOUNTING

By David Peter Alan

There have been no outward signs of change at NJ Transit, but advocates and unaffiliated riders have been raising a number of concerns about the agency lately. They include long-term worries about the agency's finances, fares and funding, a proposed move to a building owned by a contributor to the governor's campaign, and a non-transit issue that has infuriated local environmental advocates.

Many of these issues came up, at least to some extent, at a meeting of the agency's Board of Directors on Wednesday, May 10. Attendees who walked from nearby Penn Station to the NJ Transit building across the street were greeted by a demonstration by engineers who want a new contract and a raise in pay. They had brought a large inflatable pig to make their point, and carried signs that echoed their chants of "NJ Transit: Millions for Penthouse Views, Not a Dime for Train Crews" and "No Way to Run a Railroad," the former being a reference to plans to vacate the building that the agency owns and move to the Gateway Center on the other side of Penn Station, where space would be leased.

Politics is apparently behind the move, as Lackawanna Coalition Chairperson Sally Jane Gellert reported in the May-June issue of the organization's newsletter, the *Railgram*: "NJ Transit recently announced plans to move its headquarters out of the building that it now owns outright, moving a short distance away to the Gateway complex, owned by a Murphy/Democratic Party donor, where the agency will be leasing space." Gellert also reported that NJ Transit's justification was that \$100 million in renovations would be needed; a claim that the Coalition and at least one Assembly member dispute. The governor of New Jersey, currently Phil Murphy, appoints all members of the NJ Transit Board and its CEO.

Advocates and others also expressed concern about the agency's future when the COVID relief money that Congress voted to give transit at the height of the epidemic runs out. That is a problem for transit everywhere, but that is expected to happen to NJ Transit in mid-2025, about two years from now. Gellert commented in the *Railgram*: "by fiscal year 2026, the agency will face a deficit approaching \$1 billion. It is time for the state legislature to get serious about finding money to keep the trains and buses running." The agency does not have a regular source of funding, so it needs to work out a political solution every year during the budget process. To make matters worse, it appears that the transfer payments it has been receiving from the highway side are going to decrease in the future. Some advocates believe that adding the expense of leasing space will further harm the agency's finances.

The most contentious issue did not concern transit, but the NJTRANSIT grid, a proposal by the agency to build a gas-fired power plant, despite Murphy's campaign promise to build only facilities fueled by renewable sources. Environmentalists formed the Don't Gas the Meadowlands Coalition to fight the plan, which they call "NJ Transit Power and Light." The Board meeting became contentious over calls for incumbent NJT management to resign over this and other issues; a level of criticism that has become stronger in recent months.

One bright spot is that the Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee (SCDRTAC) will be allowed to continue giving advice on a broad range of issues concerning transportation for its named constituencies. The agency launched an effort to eliminate all the Committee's purview, except for one program, at the end of last year. After negotiations earlier this year, NJ Transit changed its position and amended the proposed regulations to allow the Committee the

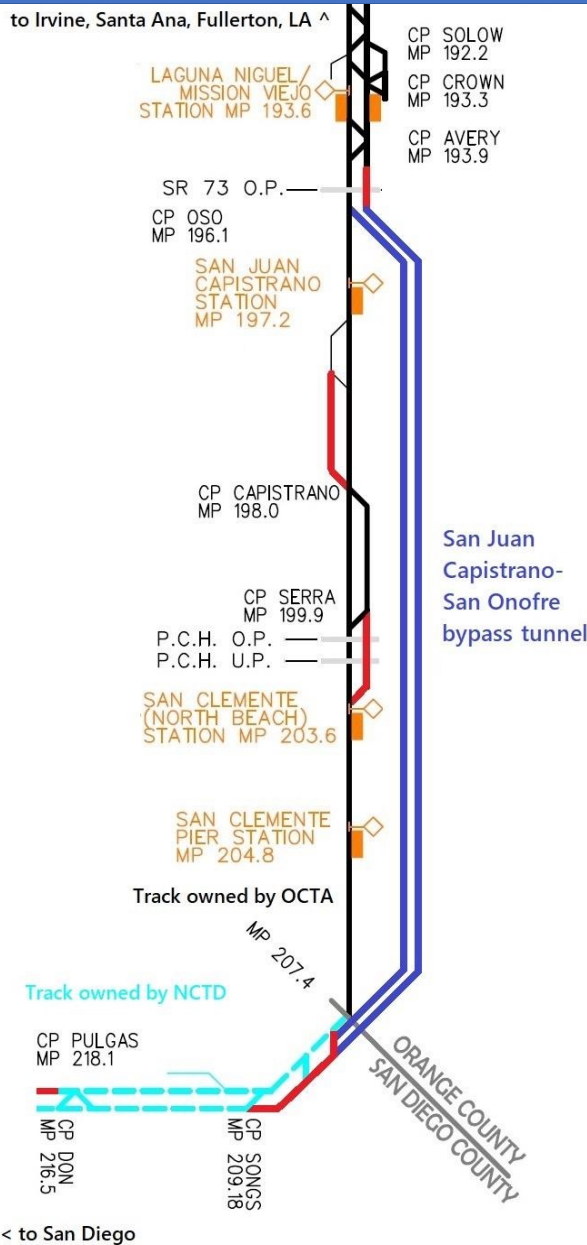
broad purview it had enjoyed since it was founded in 1984. Those regulations were approved by the Board on April 19, and they will soon enter the formal rule-making process.

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.

THE PROPOSED HEARTLAND FLYER EXTENSION TO NEWTON AND BEYOND TO KANSAS CITY

Continued from page 9 (RRIF). The Texas House Transportation Committee Interim report issued late 2022 strongly supported Governor Abbot's recommendations, and stated the legislature should appropriate funding into the RRIF to be used as a strategic funding mechanism to assist the rail industry in seizing IJA rails grant funds for improvements to the state's rail infrastructure. Hopefully, Texas will help provide its fair share to pay for the operation of the *Heartland Flyer* extension to Newton and to add additional frequencies from Oklahoma City to Fort Worth.

While it appears that that the two-decade effort to extend the *Heartland Flyer* may finally pay off in the not-too-distant future, it remains to be seen whether service over the *Lone Star* rail route will ever be restored from Houston to Kansas City and beyond to Chicago. There is, however, interest in restoring service from Chicago to Kansas City and Fort Worth. Given this interest, the Northern Flyer Alliance and other rail advocates are not ready to give up their fight.



and reduced travel time, so as to stimulate more non-highway travel between Los Angeles and San Diego, support regional economic growth, and aid military preparedness.

Both programs - stabilizing the existing tracks and planning the bypass - will need funding through state and federal grants. OCTA should aggressively pursue financing for both projects now since the current window of opportunity for funding must be leveraged before it closes. Competition for funding grants is based on the value of the project: its projected ridership. A passenger rail project's ridership forecast starts with the existing ridership as a baseline. If current ridership numbers are low because of service issues, a lower future ridership will be projected. This could create a financing shortfall for the planning, design, and construction phases.

To maximize available funding for the rail bypass, strategic planning and investment will be needed to generate high ridership numbers on the existing Surf Line once full service is restored. Bringing passengers back in force means establishing promotional programs, convenient scheduling, and high standards of service excellence and reliability. For California and the nation it is vital that the railroad linking Los Angeles and San Diego be secure and endure for future generations.

[An earlier version of this piece was published in the 1st Quarter 2023 issue of *Steel Wheels* magazine, and in [Voice of OC](#) on December 19, 2022]

IT'S TIME TO RELOCATE THE SURF LINE RAILROAD TRACK INLAND, AND BUILD THE SAN CLEMENTE BYPASS TUNNEL

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away from the shoreline, most likely via a bypass tunnel underneath I-5.

The San Clemente bypass megaproject will take years to plan and build, so OCTA and Caltrans should begin preparing for it without delay, starting with environmental studies and preliminary designs. The bypass tunnel should be electrified and designed to accommodate increased train capacity

Brian Yanity, of Fullerton, is the Vice President-South of the Rail Passenger Association of California (RailPAC), a 501(c)3 all-volunteer non-profit passenger rail advocacy group founded in 1978, and a RUN board member.

THE MAD RUSH TO TEAR UP STATE-OWNED RAILWAY LINES IN MAINE

By Richard Rudolph, Ph.D., Chairman, Rail Users' Network; Maine Rail Group Director

An effort is currently underway in Maine to convert three different state-owned rail lines which were originally purchased from Guilford Industries in the late 1980s / early '90s into walking / bicycle paths. The Maine State Legislature in 2021 passed LD 2124, enabling Bruce Van Note, the Maine Commissioner of Transportation, to create Rail Use Advisory Councils (RUACs) upon the petition of one or more governmental entities along a state-owned rail corridor. Each RUAC is required to submit a report making a recommendation within nine months regarding the use of the corridor either for rail use or trail use and bikeways. If the Commissioner concurs with the recommendation, he is then required to submit legislation to be evaluated by the Joint House/Senate Transportation Committee prior to track removal or other change in use of the line for non-rail purposes.

Over the past two years, three different RUACs have been established and two have already issued reports for the state-owned Mountain Division line from Standish to Fryeburg, ME and the Berlin subdivision between Portland and Auburn, ME. The third RUAC, which was established late last year for the State owned "Lower Road" from Brunswick to Augusta, plans to issue its report by early fall.

The RUACs appear to be stacked decks to ensure that these state-owned rail lines will be turned over to the trail and bicycle interests in the state. The statute allowing for the creation of each RUAC provided for one trail and one rail advocate to serve as members of each committee, along with other representatives of various municipalities along the line. More than half of the members of the Mountain Division RUAC have trail interest. Although two

members of the Maine Rail Group were listed as members of that RUAC, only one actually participated and was the lone dissenting member of the RUAC voting against interim trail use and for rail with trail. While the Berlin Subdivision RUAC was "more evenly balanced," it resulted in a 7-4 vote in favor of rail removal and replacement by a trail, with three members abstaining.

The RUAC process is deeply flawed. At no point were potential shippers along the Mountain Division Line asked whether they would use the service if it was available, even though over the past several decades a number of meetings had been held to discuss the possibility of restoring freight service on the line. Town officials, staff from the Greater Portland Council of Government and business leaders had expressed interest in restoring freight rail to transport cement, lumber, fuel pellets, aggregates and other fuels. The Conway Scenic Railway, based in New Hampshire, has actually made a recent offer to work with the state to find federal or state funds to rehab the line for Class 2 status for passenger and freight use and stated it would operate it without further State subsidy. This would enable this rail company which now carries about 135,000 riders a year on its line in the North Conway area to expand its service to take tourists, especially cruise ship visitors in Portland, who would enjoy spending time in a more rural area of the state. Unfortunately, there is no indication that MEDOT has followed up on this offer.

The consultants' report that MEDOT used to provide an economic analysis for the state-owned rail lines also leaves much to be desired. The consultants believe that people walking and riding bikes will spend much more money than those who might utilize the state-owned rail lines. They assumed that 23% of trail users would be non-local and would, on average, spend \$118 in the local economy around the trails. The reports include "no additional local spending for rail passengers on the Berlin Subdivision," and only a minor amount

of on-board spending while riders are actually on a Mountain Division Train. It also assumed that rail passengers neither eat, drink, buy equipment nor seek lodging when they reached their destinations, or all passengers are already making the same trip that they would be making by train and are spending no more on the items than they do now. The two RUAC reports also underestimated the economic impact that active rail lines would have on building new housing units.

The Mountain Division Bill, LD404, has passed the Joint House / Senate Transportation with a split vote. Fortunately, the House and Senate Chairs voted against it as written and instead supported a rail-with-trail-option, as opposed to pulling up the tracks, despite the fact that Commissioner Van Note lobbied hard for this one to pass. Rail advocates who are members of the three different rail groups in Maine plan to lobby legislators and other elected officials to veto this bill when it is considered by the Maine House and Senate.

The other bill, LD209: An Act To Authorize An Interim Use Trail On The Berlin Subdivision Rail Corridor, probably will not pass because of the RUAC's Committee split decision on this matter. At the hearing on this bill, MEDOT's Commissioner seemed a bit perplexed and annoyed that there was a split vote and that two members had abstained from voting, saying that the RWT votes didn't understand the facts and that they could be educated. Fortunately, this bill most likely will not pass since Senator Chipman, the chair of the Senate Transportation committee, voted against it, stating that he wanted to be consistent and support rail-with-trail options.

Instead, rail advocates support LD406, "An Act to Expand Passenger Rail Service," which is sponsored by Senator Chipman and co-sponsored by Representative Williams of Bar Harbor, who is the House co-chair of the Joint

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THE MAD RUSH TO TEAR UP STATE-OWNED RAILWAY LINES IN MAINE

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Transportation Committee. This bill directs the state of Maine to provide a Vision Plan for use of Maine state-owned railroads. The passage of this bill will enable MEDOT, through a competitive bid process and with the advice of an advisory committee established under section 4, the ability to evaluate the reasonable potential uses, benefits, and costs of restoring the state-owned rail corridors. It will also study where railroads could be built and how this could drive new economic activity. This bill, however, will most likely be voted down at the Transportation Committee level.

The "Lower Road RUAC" continues to meet monthly and plans to make a decision by early fall. It is also a stacked deck with only one rail advocate selected to serve on the committee, with other members who seem to support ripping up the rail and converting it into a bicycle / walking path. The Commissioner of Transportation has been approached to include a member from both Waterville and Bangor since these communities should have a voice in deciding whether the line should be torn up for a bicycle / walking path. The "Lower Road" from Brunswick to Augusta was originally a Maine Central Passenger rail line that provided service from Bangor to Waterville, Augusta and south to Brunswick, Portland and Boston.

A decision to tear up the "Lower Road" tracks would also undermine the current legislative effort, LD860, which Senator Joseph Baldacci has submitted to the 131st legislature this year. It would provide funding for a feasibility study to restore passenger rail service to Bangor and the other cities in central Maine. During the preceding legislative session, Senator Baldacci sponsored a similar bill, LD 227, which called for a feasibility study of the two passenger rails routes that emanate from Portland to Bangor. During the work session, the

Maine Department of Transportation instead offered to help pay for a propensity study after concluding a feasibility study would cost too much.

The \$200,000 propensity study, which was funded by MEDOT and the three principal cities, Bangor, Waterville, and Augusta, was a good first step. However, it failed to provide sufficient information regarding potential ridership on either rail line. The propensity study used streetlight data to determine current ridership via car or bus to and from Portland. It did not consider the potential new ridership or the economic benefits to central Maine. It also failed to address the issues of social and economic equity for seniors and others in Central Maine who do not have the ability or access to travel by car. This limits their access to medical care as well as cultural events in other cities. The current commercial bus system leaves passengers off several miles out of the downtowns of most cities.

Restoration of passenger service from Brunswick to Waterville and Bangor will contribute to an array of economic benefits. New jobs will be created from the construction, restoration and on-going operation of the service. Enhanced transportation options will also encourage young people to stay and grow the economy and attract families who cannot afford housing in Southern Maine. Passenger rail service with last mile connections will enable state legislators and others who are seeking to testify on bills to attend legislative sessions without using their cars. Thousands of students would have easy access to the nine colleges and universities in central Maine. Restoration of train service will also help reduce carbon emissions, alleviate congestion and reduce accidents on Rt. 95 / 295. The new service will also bring more ridership to the *Downeaster* and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor service.

Maine hosted 15.3 million visitors last year, who spent \$8.6 billion. With last-mile connections to museums and Acadia National Park, even more will come. The

transportation links would also provide options for tour companies other than mega buses and cruise ships.

While it may appear that we have reached the point of no return, as the current MEDOT work plan includes \$8 million in 2023 and \$11 million in 2024 for recreational bicycle / walking paths, with a minimal amount allocated to expand passenger train services, rail advocates are not giving up. Senator Baldacci's bill is being carried over to next year's legislative session and existing Maine law prohibits the removal of rail from State owned rail lines until MEDOT, in consultation with a regional economic planning agency, and a regional transportation advisory committee determines that it will not have a negative - impact on the region or on the future economic benefits of that region. MEDOT has not consulted with the required authorities to make such a determination.

Rail advocates plan to continue the fight to preserve and restore rail passenger service on these state-owned rail lines and believe Maine still has an opportunity that other New England States have recognized and acted upon. Two prime examples are the new service from Rutland to Burlington, Vermont and the extension of service to Greenfield and Northampton, MA.

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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!

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Please become a member of RUN...

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

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

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

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

Please register me / us as a member of RUN today

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

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

Street Address City State/Province Postal Code

Phone Number Fax Number E-Mail

Enclosed are dues of:

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

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