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Surface Transportation Board
Attn: Docket No. EP 774 (Sub-No.1)
395 E. Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20423-0001



Dear Members of the STB Board,

I am writing to declare my interest in serving as one of the two members representing rail passenger advocacy on STB's new rail advisory committee.

I have had a life-long interest in passenger rail, but it wasn't until I retired from the University of Massachusetts-Boston as a professor of Community Planning and as an academic dean that I was able to focus attention on advocacy work. I was selected to serve as a member of Amtrak's National Customer Service Advisory Committee and served as its Vice-Chair and Chair, 1997-2001. I am a founding member of the Rail Users' Network and have served as its Chair since its creation in 2002 and serve on the Board of Directors of the Maine Rail Group, a non-profit organization working to enhance and expand passenger rail in Maine.

The Rail Users' Network is a national volunteer organization which has been representing long distance, regional / commuter rail passengers and rail transit riders interest since its formation as 501 (C3) organization in 2002. It encourages the development and use of customer-friendly rail passenger services that are affordable, efficient and reliable. This organization undertakes a number of activities on behalf of rail passengers and transit riders and serves as a supportive organization for rail advocacy groups across the United States. Under my leadership, we have advocated at many levels, including the local level of our member organizations, the State level with letter campaigns and in-person testimony at legislative hearings and lobby days. In addition, we have semi-annual conferences around the country which address both national and regional issues by engaging experts as speakers and on-the-ground updates from advocates. This has

helped me to establish and maintain relationships with other key advocates around the U.S. as well as to stay informed about their issues and concerns.

As RUN's Chairperson, I have written and testified on a variety of issues regarding passenger rail at both the state and national level and have written a number of op-eds for the **Bangor Daily News**, **Kennebec Journal / Morning Sentinel** and **Portland Press Herald** and other community newspapers. I also write a column for **Passenger Train Journal** and quarterly articles for the Rail Users' Network newsletter.

At the State level, I have testified in Maine before the Joint House and Senate Transportation Committee on a number of bills over the past decade. For example, I testified in support of the Maine Rail Group's effort to restore passenger service over the "Lower Road" which the State of Maine purchased from Guildford Industries in the early 1990's and on two bills which would provide funding for a feasibility study to restore passenger rail service from Brunswick to Augusta, Waterville and Bangor. In addition, I voiced opposition to removing tracks on State owned rail lines and converting them to bicycle paths before considering the impact on the potential mobility of citizens in interior Maine and on future economic development.

At the national level, I have written a number of letters over the years which have been directed to the chairs of House and Senate Committees which address passenger rail issues. These letters addressed a number of issues regarding Amtrak's decision to curtail daily services, furlough operating and service personnel across the entire system of routes and shut down their hiring and training department. Other advocacy letters have been sent to the U.S. Secretary of Transportation urging a restoration and upgrading of Amtrak Long Distance service and the need to replace Long Distance Passenger Equipment which is more than 40 years old. Our most recent RUN newsletter contains a copy of the letter which also notes the need for Amtrak's accountability and responsibility to citizens who rely on it.

I have been a professor who has published numerous articles on a wide variety of topics, co-authored **Power Struggle, the Hundred Year War over Electricity** which was published by Harper and Row and have directed a non-profit educational organic farm. I currently serve on the boards of the Cumberland County Food Security Coalition and the Green Energy Consumer Alliance in Massachusetts. I also produce and host a weekly community radio show called Community Voices for Change which is broadcast on WMPG which is the

University of Southern Maine's 4500watt FM radio station which can be heard throughout Southern Maine.

I am deeply interested in serving on the STB's rail advisory board and believe my life experiences and decades long work as a rail advocate would make me a valuable addition to the board. I represent all rail passengers in the present and in the future. A special concern is for those who are without other means of transportation including Seniors, those who cannot drive and those who do not wish to drive. The STB has made great strides in supporting rail travel. It's decision regarding CSX's purchase of Pan Am's railway, for example, has had a positive impact on passenger rail in Maine and in Massachusetts. I have also followed the precedent setting case regarding the restoration of passenger service to Mobile, Alabama and provided testimony at the STB public hearing last year. Hopefully, passenger rail service to Mobile will be restored within the next several years.

The creation of the passenger rail advisory committee, I believe, will help the STB to better understand other issues such as the on-time performance of Amtrak's Sunset Limited and render a decision which can set a precedent for handling other delays in the future. The creation of a rail advisory committee will contribute greatly to the STB's understanding of what is ultimately at stake in decision making regarding passenger rail service.

Thank you for the opportunity to be considered for the STB Passenger Rail Advisory Committee.

Sincerely,


Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.

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RUN CONFERENCE EXPLORES RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADVOCACY FOR RAIL AND FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

By David Peter Alan

While there seems to be general agreement that passenger trains and rail transit benefit the environment, there also appears to be little crossover between advocates on both the environmental scene and the rail scene. RUN addressed that situation at an on-line conference on Saturday, October 21; an event titled *Passenger Rail & The Environment – Natural Allies: Environmental benefits of passenger rail / rail transit in North America*.

RUN Chair Richard Rudolph kicked off the conference with remarks on environmental

issues and called on Amtrak to start new services, suggesting that Amtrak proceed on its plans to order new equipment for its long-distance routes and to hire and keep more crew members. He also called on Congress to make host railroads more accountable for the way they treat Amtrak trains. He also said that electrically powered vehicles are not the answer to the problem of improving mobility in a sustainable manner, and added that widespread use of such vehicles would not improve the environment, but they would condemn non-motorists to losing mobility they now have.

Katherine García, Director for

the Sierra Club's Clean Transportation for All Campaign, was the first presenter. She said that the Sierra Club is calling for more rail transportation, bicycles, and electric vehicles. She also expressed concerns about the climate crisis, public health, and mobility issues, blaming congestion, unsafe streets, and pollution from freight transportation.

Other attendees made similar comments. Carl Jackson, a RUN member and retired transit manager who restored historic PCC streetcars from El Paso and placed them back in service there, called for reactivating

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NOTES FROM NEW YORK: CONGESTION PRICING UPDATE!

By Andrew Albert

After almost a decade of debate on the subject of charging vehicles a charge for entering Manhattan's Central Business District—in this case, Manhattan below 60th Street—the MTA Board voted 9-1 to move the project forward! Not only is gridlock on city streets delaying people, deliveries, and emergency vehicles; it is having a deleterious effect on New York's air quality, another reason many transit advocates and clean-air advocates urged the approval of congestion pricing. The money raised from congestion pricing would raise

approximately \$1 billion per year, which would allow the MTA to bond that money and bring in \$11 billion per year, which would go towards the MTA's \$52 billion capital program, which would fund necessary upgrades to the tracks, signals, rolling stock, accessibility of stations, as well as system expansion. The MTA recently settled a lawsuit with accessibility advocates to make 95% of the 472 subway stations accessible by 2055, which will cost billions of dollars and would not be possible without the funds raised by congestion pricing. It will also help pay for signal upgrades, such as CBTC

(Communication-Based Train Control) on many lines, which will allow trains to run closer together—safely.

The Traffic Mobility Review Board held several public meetings, where they debated the cost of the congestion fee, the hours the fees would be in effect, how to help lower-income drivers, the # of possible exemptions, how to treat taxis and for-hire car services, motorcycles, and how to avoid causing traffic to divert to environmentally sensitive areas. It was stated numerous times

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December 2, 2023

RUN COMMENTS ON AMTRAK BOARD'S TRANSPARENCY

Subject: Transparency of Amtrak's Governance by the Amtrak Board of Directors

To: Mr. Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, Stephen Gardner, and other members of the Amtrak Board of Directors

Dear Sirs and Madam,

The rail passenger advocacy community across the country has fought long and hard, even prior to the creation of Amtrak during President Nixon's administration, to keep passenger rail alive in the U.S. We have recently and successfully encouraged our federal politicians to appropriate even more funding to expand passenger rail on both the current routes and potential new routes. These funds also included the purchase of new equipment, in addition to rebuilding/refurbishing older equipment. While we have been successful along these lines, we have three new concerns stemming from the manner in which Amtrak has been operating.

Foremost of these is Amtrak's lack of transparency in its business dealings, and how this is adversely affecting the public view of Amtrak as a choice for transportation. Although Amtrak currently has no legal obligation to open its Board meetings to the public or give advance notice of such meetings, we believe it is the right thing to do. As a publicly-funded passenger rail service, Amtrak Board meetings should be open to the public and the media, and meeting agendas, meeting minutes, and other material presented to the board should be available, without the need to submit a FOIA request to obtain the information. Every other publicly-supported passenger rail service in the country holds open and transparent board meetings, and we believe Amtrak should do so as well.

This lack of concern is also evident by the failure to even have a single board member who truly represents riders' interests on Amtrak's board. While recommendations are officially made by the President of the U.S, Amtrak officers and Board Members certainly have a role in this process. It appears that the process continues to exclude rider representation, even though Congress has applied this addition to the qualifications desired for new members of the Amtrak Board of Directors. Certainly, there are persons in the advocacy community who ride Amtrak extensively and would be qualified to participate in Amtrak's decision-making process as members of the Board.

Our third concern is the lack of geographic diversity of the Amtrak Board. We have supported Senator Jon Tester's efforts to block President Biden's nominees to serve as members of the Amtrak Board of Directors – five of whom were from Northeast Corridor states, violating provisions secured by Tester when he worked with four Democrats, five Republicans and President Biden to craft the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Part of that effort included crafting a bipartisan fix that restructured the Amtrak Board of Directors so that it better reflects the nation's geographic diversity. In addition to other requirements, Congress mandated in the law that no more than four members of Amtrak's Board should come from the Northeast Corridor, which statute defines to include Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia. Prior to Tester's successful block, five of the six nominees for Amtrak's Board were from the Northeast Corridor.

We are also aware of other desirable characteristics for possible board selection other than business expertise. It could include military experience, rail background or rail passenger advocacy experience. Organizations of all types from small nonprofits to mega corporations are governed by a board of directors that appoints the agency head. Serving on a board of directors requires strong leadership, commitment to the mission of the organization, and impeccable credentials. At RUN, we do not see good passenger rail service as a partisan issue. We believe that improved mobility for motorists and non-motorists alike is compatible with both liberal and conservative political thought, and that improving mobility benefits places that are represented either by Democrats or by Republicans.

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NOTES FROM NEW YORK

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that each exemption would raise the rate for everyone else, as it was important to reach that \$1 billion yearly revenue (\$11 billion bonded) for the MTA's Capital Program. After much deliberation, public testimony, debate (some of which was in the TMRB itself), they came up with the following proposals, which were approved at a special MTA Board Meeting held on December 6, 2023:

1. The congestion fee for cars during weekdays-5AM-9PM will be \$15, and will be charged upon entering the congestion zone - once per day, even if there are multiple trips to & from the zone.
2. Nighttime rates (9PM-5AM) will be 75% lower.
3. Weekend hours are 9AM-9PM.
4. Trucks will be charged either \$24 or \$36, depending on their size.
5. Commuter buses will be exempted.
6. Other buses will be charged \$24 or \$36, depending on their size.
7. Motorcycles will be charged \$7.50
8. Vehicles utilizing any of the four

tunnels which access the congestion zone—the Holland Tunnel, Lincoln Tunnel, Queens-Midtown Tunnel, or the Hugh Carey (Brooklyn Battery) Tunnel—will be given a \$5 credit towards the tolls they've paid. \$12 for small trucks, \$20 for large trucks, \$2.50 for motorcycles.

9. Taxis will be charged (& will pass the fee on to customers) \$1.25 per ride. For-hire vehicles, such as Uber & Lyft, will pay \$2.50 per ride. There will be no crossing credits in the nighttime, when the congestion fee is 75% lower.

10. Low-income drivers will be eligible for a 50% discount on the daytime congestion fee, after the first 10 trips in a calendar month.

Now that the MTA Board has passed the proposal, there will be a 60-day period, as mandated by the NY State SAPA Process—the State Administrative Procedure Act—whereby four public hearings will be held on Congestion Pricing, to get more public feedback. At the end of this process, the MTA Board will weigh all the public comment, and decide if any changes need to be made to the proposal. After that process, the Board may vote again to finalize the proposal.

In the interim, the lawsuit filed by the State of New Jersey will be adjudicated.

New Jersey has deemed the proposal to be against the best interests of NJ, and has not only filed a lawsuit to stop the program, but has also proposed cutting off New York from federal funding for capital projects. It is not clear how NJ believes they are being targeted, as Congestion Pricing will also affect New Yorkers driving to the congestion zone. A delay in getting the program approved will not only affect the MTA's capital program, but also the operating budget, as more bonding may need to be done to fund the MTA's capital needs, which will also affect the operating budget - putting pressure on fares and service.

Some of the questions raised about the program are A) will the MTA be able to accommodate the approximately 20% of drivers who say they will switch to transit if the congestion fees are imposed? B) How quickly can the MTA increase service levels if many more riders begin using the system? C) Will the MTA be able to catch those who alter their license plates to avoid tolls/fees?

New Yorkers are so fortunate that we have the incredible transportation

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

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

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

Editor for this issue: Paul Bubny

NEW JERSEY TRANSIT PLANS STATION CONSOLIDATION IN LYNDHURST

By Sally Jane Gellert

The Lackawanna Coalition passed a resolution supporting the continued operation of Kingsland Station on the NJ Transit Main line in Lyndhurst, NJ. The municipality has 2 stations, the other being called "Lyndhurst," and the agency is planning to create a new Lyndhurst station, closing both existing stations in town.

However, we believe that closing Kingsland would be a mistake: a member recently reported some 30 people disembarking at Kingsland during the afternoon rush hour, and unlike either Lyndhurst station, current or planned, it is right in the Ridge Road business district, with many shops in walking distance and immediate access to Ridge Road's frequent bus service, including the #76 bus that runs between Hackensack and Newark. We realize that Kingsland has accessibility issues and could use some maintenance, but to close a well-used station deprives current riders of service. Stopping at Kingsland certainly does not add much time to a Main Line train's route, and seems to the Coalition to be well worth the effort.

The N.J. Commissioner of Transportation is also the Board Chairperson of NJ Transit as well as chairperson of the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, the South Jersey Transportation Authority, the NJ Transportation Trust Fund Authority, and vice chairperson of the New Jersey Motor Vehicle Commission. The current commissioner, Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, was recently announced as Governor Murphy's chief of staff. She is listed as such, with her current titles, on the governor's senior staff Web page, and we at the Lackawanna Coalition wonder how one can do quite that many jobs. It has been reported that she will step down from the Department of Transportation at the end of the year, but even for this month she has more than a full plate.

At last month's NJ Transit board meeting, and in time for the 40th anniversary of SCDRTAC (NJ Transit's Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Advisory Committee), the NJ Transit board ratified the committee's historic purview: in addition to the SDCRTAP (Senior Citizens and Disabled Residents Transportation Assistance Plan) program, which is primarily related to county community transit programs, the committee advises on all facets of transportation used by New Jersey's senior citizens and disabled residents.

Although staff had tried to curtail the committee's sphere of influence, limiting it to the SCDRTAP program alone, past practice, as discovered in original SCDRTAC by-laws and pointed out by SCDRTAC chairperson David Peter Alan, set a precedent that held fast. The committee was established by the state legislator in 1984, making January 2024 the start of the committee's 40th anniversary year.

The event will be marked at a celebration at the Committee's January meeting, to be held at NJ Transit's headquarters in Newark on January 22nd at 10:30 A.M. Invited guests will include NJ Transit executives, some individuals who remember the early days, other past members, and local transportation reporters.

Railway Age and *RT&S* held a conference on light rail in Jersey City on November 15th and 16th, with the keynote speech by NJ Transit CEO Kevin Corbett. RUN board member David Peter Alan was part of a panel at this day-and-a-half conference detailed elsewhere in this issue.

Sally Jane Gellert is chairperson of the Lackawanna Coalition, a RUN Member Organization.

NOTES FROM NEW YORK

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system we have. It is valued at 1.5 trillion dollars! No one could afford to build this system today, so we MUST take care of it. Nothing gets cheaper the longer you wait - so our infrastructure, tracks, signals, rolling stock, bridges, elevated structures, resiliency, etc. must be maintained.

Fortunately, the leaders of NYC Transit, the Long Island Rail Road, Metro-North Railroad, and MTA Bridges & Tunnels know this, and are dedicated to maintaining and improving this amazing system. New York is set to be the first city in the nation to move ahead with congestion pricing. Let's get the ball rolling!

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

**Like the newsletter?
Care to make it
better?**

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

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

RUN CANADA REPORT: DECEMBER 2023

By Ken Westcar

VIA Rail Canada's 2023-2027 Corporate Plan combines vision with hope.

From a spectator standpoint, VIA's 4 year corporate plan, released on December 1, shows both positivity and pragmatism. Perhaps this relates to a slate of new senior management appointments over the past 12 months or so where transportation or related experience and business acumen have trumped a history of political patronage.

While VIA's customer-facing and maintenance staff have essentially kept operations going for several decades, management and its political masters have often demonstrated lack of expertise or become politically directed agents of doom. The 2019 Siemens' contract to supply new trains for corridor services (Quebec City – Windsor/Sarnia) narrowly avoided service collapse and the benefits are now being felt as the new trains enter service and customer reaction is positive.

The plan makes mention of this and is optimistic that, once the entire fleet of Siemens equipment is operational, passenger growth should follow. Although not mentioned in the plan, a study by experienced transportation consultants, CPCS Transcom, focused on service scope, frequency and on-time reliability improvements on existing or optimized host infrastructure could make this a reality.

Many VIA-served municipalities in southwestern Ontario are doggedly supportive of this because major highways in the region are heavily congested and short-haul air services are vestigial with no likelihood of relief in the short to medium-term. The default of building new highways seems to be falling from favour with critical thinkers on mobility issues but is unfortunately still favoured by urban sprawl obsessed politicians and their sponsors.

Long-distance fleet replacement.

A recent post by a rail transport columnist correctly stated that the existing fleet of 65+ year-old Budd-built equipment used on the iconic "Canadian" and formerly the "Ocean" cannot survive on political myopia and will be determined by absolute mechanical limits. Hence a hard push by advocates to move the procurement of new long-distance equipment forward.

This is not off-the-shelf product so customized design-build will be expensive, given that long-distance trains are rolling hotels requiring a variety of customer-centric accommodations, accessibility, physical robustness, climate resilience and operational redundancy. One must hope that sticker-shock will not delay the procurement or perhaps lead to compromises resulting in an inability to meet service needs, customer expectations and revenue generating potential.

Nevertheless, the procurement process has reached the Expression of Interest stage by potential global suppliers. While the allocation of funds will be a federal responsibility, one would hope that the final specification will be established by subject matter experts and reflect the heritage and potential of these internationally popular services.

Revenue versus costs.

In its 2023-2027 plan VIA indicates that the operating cost growth rate will exceed that of revenue growth (Canadian highways are faced with the same problem although no one wants to talk about that) so there needs to be focus on ridership growth. New, lower operating cost corridor trains, improved frequencies and on-time performance should attract more passengers although counter-productive actions such as higher baggage fees and restricted ticketing arrangements could act as disincentives.

Critical to this is the need to return train travel to the public psyche by making them

more convenient to use, especially in the Windsor/Sarnia to Ottawa/Montreal corridor where VIA generates most of its revenue. While VIA has this in sharp focus, it will be up to the federal government to work to remove existing impediments, primarily track access and form improved alliances with provincial transit authorities to encourage customer-centric cooperation.

The High-Frequency Rail (HFR) Specter.

Although beyond the scope of VIA's 2023-2027 Corporate Plan, there is concern that the privatization aspect of HFR, should it come to pass, could negatively impact short to medium term investments by the Canadian federal government in VIA since its corridor services are currently included in the HFR plan.

Transport Canada, the federal department responsible for VIA, has yet to offer any coherent explanation of how this would work. The fear is that it gives the Canadian government an excuse to delay further public investment in VIA for another decade or so, while the future of HFR is determined.

Passenger rail-served communities are justifiably alarmed at this prospect because it infers that needed, sustainable infrastructure investment will continue to lag population and potential economic growth. At a time when Canada laments its sub-par, per-capita GDP performance compared to the U.S. and other western countries, one would expect improved mobility and its economic benefits to be a national priority. Yes, hope springs eternal.

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

LATEST PROGRESS REPORT ON EAST-WEST PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

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

The need for expanded east-west passenger rail service in Massachusetts has been discussed, studied and debated over the past decade or so. Options were considered as part of the Northern New England Intercity Rail Initiative (NEIRI) study (2013-2016 and the East-West Passenger Rail Study (2018-2021). The second study projected infrastructure cost ranging from \$2.3 billion to \$4.6 billion, roughly ten times the cost estimate in the 2016 NEIRI Study.

While these budget estimates may seem beyond the pale, because of the passage of the Bipartisan Infrastructure bill in 2021, Massachusetts and the other states now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to apply for significant federal funding to expand passenger rail.

The Massachusetts House and Senate both passed \$56 billion budgets last May, but neither included Governor Healey's request for \$12.5 million for East-West rail projects including \$650,000 for five full-time employees to work on the East-West rail and an East-West rail director. The entirety of the East-West Rail Budget was cut. Despite this setback, Governor Healey remained optimistic, telling reporters, "We're going to push for funding and for resources. It continues to be a priority." She said East-West rail is one way of addressing the high cost of housing in the burgeoning economy of Boston and its suburbs. It's important not only for Western Massachusetts, it's important for the entire state.

At a meeting of MassDOT Board of Directors in late June of this year, it was announced that the East-West rail-related Palmer and Pittsfield Rail Projects had been added to Healey's FY2024-2028 Capital Investment Plan. In addition, Healey now has \$600,000 in her budget to hire staff for the East-West rail project and MassDOT is already advertising the positions. This was

welcome news to Ben Hood and Anne Miller, the co-chairs of Citizens for a Palmer Rail Stop, which has been working on this initiative over a number of years. A train stop in Palmer, they believe, would provide a tremendous boost to the Commonwealth's goal to expand homeownership opportunities to low- and moderate-income workers. The cost of housing in Palmer is especially affordable - the typical home is less than \$200,000 and average rent is nearly \$800 per month. The value is even greater when you consider the difference between the nearby Lower Quabbin region and the Greater Boston area, where many neighborhoods have median incomes values in excess of \$600,000.

A train stop in Palmer would also provide the most convenient rail access point to the 70,000 full- and part-time students attending the 26 colleges and universities located within 20 miles of downtown Palmer. Many regularly travel East for family visits, internships or recreation. UMass Amherst and the other members of the five college networks (Amherst College, Mount Holyoke, Smith and Hampshire) collectively account for nearly 40,000 students and are already connected by a free shuttle bus system.

In late September, MassDOT received word that the state has won a \$108 million grant for rail infrastructure upgrades that will allow for faster, more frequent passenger train service between Springfield and Boston. MassDOT, in partnership with Amtrak and support from CSX, applied last December through the U.S. Department of Transportation's expanded Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvement (CRISI) program which funds railroad infrastructure projects. The grant awarded by the FRA will go toward the total project cost of approximately \$135 million. MassDOT and Amtrak plan to cover the remaining amount at \$18 million and \$9 million, respectively.

According to MassDOT's grant application, the \$108 million will be used to upgrade key bottlenecks on the 54-mile section of the railroad, owned by CSX, that connects Worcester and Springfield. Approximately 10 CSX freight trains and two Amtrak trains—the *Lake Shore Limited* (one in each direction)—share a single track over 44 of the 54 miles of railroad between Worcester and Springfield.

The grant money will also be used to add a second passing track on about 23 miles of the route, which would enable more trains to use the corridor. With upgraded tracks and signals, more of the corridor would meet federal standards for a Class 4 railroad. These improvements will enable Amtrak trains to run up to 80 mph, and reduce passenger rail trips from Boston to Springfield to 2 hours and 10 minutes—roughly the same amount of time it takes to drive. The funding will also enable Amtrak to add two daily round trips on the Inland Route to improve connections between Boston, Worcester and Springfield, and to communities beyond in Connecticut and to New York City. An earlier \$1.75 million federal rail infrastructure grant received by Mass. DOT will be used to make track improvements near Springfield Union Station. The project will develop preliminary engineering and environmental clearance work for track, signal and infrastructure improvements, including rebuilding passenger platforms and adding more elevators at Union Station.

MassDOT is still waiting to hear whether its two applications to the FRA for its Corridor I.D. program have been accepted. If accepted, this would bring federal support for a future service development plan for west of Worcester to Pittsfield and Albany, NY and to the inland route from Boston, Springfield, and to cities in Connecticut.

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Chairman's Message

The Rail Users Network continues to work hard to advocate for viable passenger rail alternatives across the country. Among our efforts are publishing an award-winning quarterly newsletter as well as contributing to rail journals including the *Passenger Train Journal*, *Railway Age* and *Steel Wheels Magazine* of the Western Passenger Train Coalition.

We conducted two virtual rail conferences this year. The Spring conference focused on Why the Northeastern Rail Network is important to the entire U.S. Our fall conference highlighted the environmental benefits of passenger rail / rail transit in North America. Several members of RUN continue to work with the Maine Rail Group to expand passenger rail to Bangor and to save three of the four state-owned rail lines from being transformed into bicycle/walking paths. RUN is now headquartered in western Massachusetts, which provides the opportunity to play a greater role in helping to expand east-west rail service from Boston to Pittsfield and to become involved in the ongoing effort to restore passenger rail from North Adams to Greenville, MA and North Station Boston.

RUN has supported Montana Senator Tester's effort to block the confirmation of new Amtrak Board members because there is currently no representation on the board from Western states. We sent letters to Representative Samuel Graves, the chairman of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and to his counterpart in the Senate, Maria Cantwell, the Committee Chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation. It now appears that at least one new board member will be selected from one of the western states.

While we weren't granted a seat at the table that the FRA established to restore possible pre-Amtrak Long Distance Rail Service, we sent two detailed letters to the FRA Long Distance Study Committee and to Pete Buttigieg, U.S. Secretary of Transportation, regarding this matter. (These letters are posted on our website.) We asked that the FRA prioritize several projects to serve as test cases to prove the merits of an enhanced national network, and to subsequently work with host railroads on more in-depth engineering studies, itemizing and providing cost estimates for the infrastructure capital projects needed to restore these corridors.

We continue to work with rail advocacy groups across the country to hold Amtrak management accountable for a host of issues including crew shortages, lack of equipment, lack of transparency, and failure to provide passengers with basic information such as route guides, onboard maps and printable timetables. Please contact us if you feel there are other issues that need to be addressed.

In order to continue this important work, we need your generosity. Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution during our Annual Appeal. Your contribution is vital to the continuation of our work representing the interests of all rail passengers, including long distance, commuter, and transit riders.

Contributions may be made either by check or on RUN's website at railusers.net.

We thank you in advance for your generosity and ongoing support and hope you will have a great holiday season and New Year.

Sincerely,

Richard Rudolph, Ph.D.
Chairman, Rail Users' Network
P.O. Box 354
Northampton, MA 01060
207-776-4961

NEW ORLEANS CELEBRATES A CENTURY OF SERVICE FOR ITS HISTORIC STREETCARS

By David Peter Alan

On Saturday, October 28, with a low-key event by Crescent City standards, the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA) celebrated the centennial of the city's famous Perley A. Thomas streetcars that have been a fixture on historic and picturesque St. Charles Avenue since they entered service. By transporting both New Orleanians and tourists for that length of time, the cars have become part of the city's culture and legend.

The celebration was held at the historic Carrollton Barn, where the cars are maintained and stored when not out on the line. According to the RTA, about 300 people attended the three-hour event. It included tours by RTA CEO Lona Edwards Hankins, who was quoted in an agency press release as saying, "It was an honor to join our community to celebrate the legacy of the Perley A. Thomas streetcar, St. Charles streetcar line and the RTA workforce that has maintained the system for generations. We hope that by celebrating our skilled craftsmen and their work to maintain our iconic streetcars, we are planting seeds in our young people who may one day want to pursue careers in transit, engineering and skilled trades" and added that, of the 173 cars ordered a century ago, 38 remain and 10 to 13 are in service at any time. She also noted that the cars originally cost \$15,000 each, but building replicas to replace them would cost about \$4 million each.

RUN member and local rider-advocate Alan S. Drake attended the event. He enjoyed the low-key nature of the celebration: "devoid of speeches" but featuring many "retirees and trusted employees who showed up" and he mentioned that "there was a great deal of reminiscing."

According to Drake, the historic buildings along the line and the century-old cars complement each other. In an interview for *Railway Age*, he told me,

"St. Charles Avenue is the most-picturesque street in the country, and having beautiful century-old streetcars elevates it to beat any competing boulevards." He added that it wasn't only the buildings; "The streetcars go well with the live oaks and the neutral ground, too." A "neutral ground" is what New Orleanians call a broad median in an even-broader street, and most of the city's streetcar lines occupy them today. Drake also said that, according to a military historian, the Army was selling surplus olive drab paint after World War I, and the newly formed New Orleans Public Service, Inc. (NOPSI, which merged utilities and streetcar operations) made it the standard color for its cars. Drake added, "it was designed to fit into the scenery, anyway."

The famous cars have operated on St. Charles Avenue for their entire century of service, except after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city in 2005, when the line was taken out of service and rebuilt. For a brief time, they ran on Canal Street; the city's widest street and one of the widest in the world. They kept running through the decline and eventual expansion of streetcar service in the Crescent City.

Canal Street had four tracks for streetcars in the 1920s, but the street became a bus route in 1964, leaving only one track on the single block between St. Charles Avenue and Carondelet Street, where the St. Charles cars turn before heading uptown. In the past twenty years, the Canal Street line came back, a new line to the city's Union Passenger Terminal (where Amtrak trains and intercity buses stop) was built along Loyola Avenue, and a freight track between the Mississippi River and the historic French Quarter was converted into the Riverfront Streetcar line. Another line opened on Rampart Street and St. Claude Avenue, but a building collapse in October, 2019 knocked it out of service. The RTA hopes to restore service soon.

The historic cars now operate only on St. Charles Avenue, while red cars with yellow trim, designed by legendary engineer Elmer von Dullen, whose streetcar career spanned 49 years, run on the other lines. Those cars were built at the Carrollton Barn and, according to Drake, von Dullen and his crew had maintained the cars for so long that they were able to build the "von Dullen cars" in-house, which he said, "nobody else in the world can do."

Locals and tourists alike continue to enjoy riding the streetcars, as those on St. Charles Avenue begin their second century of service. Perhaps some of the impetus for the preservation and expansion of the comfortable and relaxed transit mode that survives in the city was Tennessee Williams's 1947 hit play *"A Streetcar named Desire."* The Desire Line is gone and will probably never come back, but for the last 100 years or more, New Orleanians apparently continue to act on *A Desire Named Streetcar*.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member who has visited New Orleans extensively through the years and ridden on the historic streetcars many times. For more detailed coverage of the 100th anniversary of the cars in service, see his article: New Orleans Celebrates Streetcar Centennial, posted on the Railway Age website on November 17 (and found at <https://www.railwayage.com/news/new-orleans-celebrates-streetcar-centennial/?RAchannel=home>).

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RUN CONFERENCE EXPLORES RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADVOCACY FOR RAIL AND FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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more abandoned rail transit lines. Ron Kamilkow of Rail Workers United said that the freight rail system is not properly utilized, either. Another caller said it was "time to put more RAIL in the Sierra Club's outreach."

Next was Darrell Clarke, Chair of the Transportation Committee for the Los Angeles chapter of the Sierra Club, who spearheaded the campaign to build the Expo Line in that city. He touted the environmental benefits that the line has brought to its service area, presented a history of the line since the campaign started in 1989, and summarized its benefits as "speed, comfort, and capacity." The question that he and his campaigners asked of local officials and the public was "What are you FOR?"; an approach that caught on and gained support. Clarke said that last summer was the hottest on record, that the transportation sector accounts for 29% of greenhouse gas emissions, and that passenger vehicles use 28.5% of fossil-fuel refining capacity and called for more electrified railroads. His concluding advice was: "Get support for a particular project, attend meetings, and know what to do."

Barry Scott, a Board Member of the advocacy group Coastal Rail Santa Cruz, which is pushing for a corridor that would contain both an active rail line and a recreational trail, described a demonstration project that featured excursion runs on a 32-mile rail line through Santa Cruz and Watsonville. His campaign slogan is "People, Planet, and Prosperity." David Schonbrun, another advocate in the region, cautioned against "anti-rail 'environmentalists'" as a force opposing new starts.

Next came Tom White, a Seattle-area advocate, longtime railroader, and Co-Chair of the Climate Rail Alliance. He said that trains are a good response to

the current climate emergency, but the United States ranks 40th in the world in railroad utilization, with "big, long freights on an otherwise-empty railroad." He criticized the freight-carrying railroads by saying: "They take your money, and you get a shipment when it's convenient for them." He suggested using the Commerce Clause of the U.S. Constitution as a basis for more-active government intervention, as occurred when Amtrak and Conrail were created in the 1970s. He added that countries in Europe nationalized and reformed railroad corporations. He also called for separating infrastructure ownership from operations, referring to his proposal as "toll roads for trains." White called for better infrastructure management, with scheduling that would also improve freight and passenger performance; reducing the delays that Amtrak and its riders experience. He concluded by alleging that the industry does not know how to solve that problem, and it can be solved better through public purchase of the infrastructure than by regulation.

RUN Board member Brian Yanity, who is also Vice-President of the Rail Passengers' Association of California (RailPAC), began his presentation about electric technology by noting that young people are pushing for electric rail in California. On the passenger side, he cautioned about barriers like up-front capital costs, need for more clearance, and NIMBY opposition. Still, he said that ridership usually increases after a line is electrified. He called for more electrification on the freight side, too, but questioned whether battery power is ready for widespread use.

Maine advocate Peter Cole, representing Train Riders Northeast and the Maine Rail Group, presented a cautionary tale about largely unsuccessful efforts to save state-owned lines in Maine, lest they be converted to trails without rails. He denounced "Maine's destruction of the railroads" and said the advocates were "outspent and overpowered." He described the state's railroad history, noting that there were many lines with passenger trains in 1937 and described routes that he and his colleagues had

attempted to save: the Mountain Line, Berlin Sub to Lewiston/Auburn, Lower Road to Bangor, and Rockland Branch (which hosted passenger excursions several years ago). He also criticized the State Rail Plain, which he said "talks a good game, but the lines are going to trails." Cole noted that the bicycle lobby is strongly opposed to preserving lines, and that the Sierra Club is "inactive" rather than supporting preservation. He criticized the state-appointed Rail Utilization Advisory Committees (RUACs), which were supposed to be neutral, but sided with the persons and organizations that called for removing the rails.

On a different front, New York City is fighting congestion with a "congestion pricing" plan that would charge motorists a fee by the day for bringing vehicles into the Midtown and elsewhere in Manhattan south of 60th Street. The fees would support capital improvements for city transit, the Long Island Rail Road, and Metro-North. New Jersey officials, apparently representing motorists in the Garden State, strongly oppose the plan and have filed suit to stop it, so it has not been implemented yet.

Michael Wojnar, Senior Adviser for Information and Policy at the State's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), gave the concluding presentation: an overview of the Congestion Tolling program. He started by saying that New York City is the most-congested city in the nation, which is bad for the local economy. He said that the congestion toll will improve air quality, while raising money for the MTA. Toll collection would be implemented by the Triboro Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA), an MTA component agency.

He mentioned that 11 million people live in the region and that 1.5 million work in Manhattan's Central Business District, but only 143,000 drive there in personal vehicles. He reported that the outreach effort included a 4,800-page Environmental Impact Study (EIS) and

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25 outreach sessions where 950 speakers appeared. There were 122 requests for exemptions from the toll from "all sorts of different groups" and other requests *not* to grant exemptions, but he added that exemptions increase the toll for everybody else. He concluded by saying that \$200 million would be spent for mitigating the effect of the toll with discounts for some vehicle uses, and then said that the revenue can only be used for capital projects; 80% for city transit projects and the other 20% for the two railroads.

On November 30, New York's NPR station WNYC reported that the base charge will be \$15.00 from 5:00 AM until 9:00 PM on weekdays and 9:00 to 9:00 on weekends, and \$3.75 during overnight hours for passenger automobiles, with higher for trucks and buses. Motorists who use a tunnel to get to Manhattan will receive a \$5.00 discount, but no other exemptions or discounts were reported. There would be a lower fee for taxis and other for-hire vehicles. The MTA Board must approve the plan.

RUN Vice-Chair Andrew Albert, who is also a rider-representative at the MTA Board, joined Wojnar in supporting the congestion toll, stressing its importance to keeping transit going. Albert mentioned other projects that would benefit city riders: on the New York Connecting Railroad and the Interborough Express (IBX), a proposed light rail line that would connect with subway/elevated lines in Brooklyn and Queens, from Bay Ridge in Brooklyn to Jackson Heights, in Queens, along with others.

After the presentations, Rudolph mentioned geographic diversity (outside the NEC) on the Amtrak Board; an issue

raised by Sen. Jon Tester of Montana. He also recommended advocates from Oregon and Montana as potential candidates for the Board. Following his comments, I gave the closing remarks, which are summarized below. Rudolph concluded the event by saying that it was "a great conference" that the presentations were "superb" and it's time for rail advocates to educate environmental advocates about the advantages of and need for trains and rail transit.

A SUMMARY OF THE CLOSING COMMENTARY

Essentially all conference attendees were rail and transit advocates. Some also have long experience advocating for the environment, but few stand in both camps. Rail and transit advocates need to convince environmentalists that trains and rail transit will not only benefit train and transit riders, but will also improve the environment through increased use of "green" rail transportation.

In 1973, I saw a bumper sticker affixed to a 50-year-old car on the Central Railroad of New Jersey (later part of Conrail and now New Jersey Transit's Raritan Valley Line) that said "Pollution Solution: Ride CNJ." Fifty years later, it still seems unclear whether all environmentalists understand the current environmental threats, and it seems that relatively few of them comprehend that passenger trains and rail transit are necessary parts of the solution. I led a breakout session at a conference sponsored by the Sierra Club several years ago, where I asked for recommendations about how better transit can help the environment. To get the session started, I suggested that the Shore towns along the North Jersey Coast Line use their "senior shuttle" vans on week-ends to take riders from the train to the beaches and boardwalks, and back. The session participants seemed more concerned about how "green" the vehicle was than the positive effect of getting motorists off the highways and onto the train.

Certainly, there are rail advocates who

care about the environment, including Brian Yanity, Darrell Clarke, Barry Green and Tom White, who presented at the conference. So do folks like RUN members Alan Drake in New Orleans and Sally Gellert in New Jersey, who came to the rail scene after decades of advocacy for the environment, and who participates in a radio program about environmental concerns; *Eco-Logic* on New York station WBAI. Sadly, environmental advocates seldom seem to care similarly about trains and rail transit as parts of the solution. Not all officials seem to care, either. In New Jersey, Gov. Phil Murphy and other elected officials are fighting New York's congestion pricing plan in court, even though implementing the plan could entice some of the Garden State's motorists to make the trip into Manhattan on a train or bus, instead. The issues in that case are not partisan, either; those officials are all Democrats. Similar things are happening elsewhere, as Peter Cole reported on the defeats suffered by rail advocates in Maine.

Yanity and other rail advocates at the Sierra Club issued a thoroughly documented report that promoted the benefits of electrifying rail lines for both passenger and freight trains. While the Sierra Club organization disseminated most of the report, it censored about 10% of the content; the part that questioned the efficacy of electric vehicles (trucks and passenger automobiles) as a solution to the current environmental difficulties. Elon Musk, one of the biggest manufacturers of such vehicles, gave the Sierra Club a contribution of \$6,000,000 anonymously, and later publicly admitted that he had made that donation (reported in July, 2018 by *The Hill* at

<https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/397903-elon-musk-asked-environmental-group-to-publicize-his-anonymous/> and by Fox Business at <https://www.foxbusiness.com/business-leaders/elon-musk-asked-sierra-club-to-make-donations-public-amid-gop-check>

[spat](#)). Can those two events be purely

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coincidental, or do they serve as an example of a New Golden Rule: "He who has the Gold makes the Rule"?

So what does all of this mean for advocates who want to promote more trains and better transit as part of a program to fight climate change and improve the environment? The "mainstream" of environmental advocacy might not yet be ready to embrace rail wholeheartedly, as demonstrated by the Sierra Club's tacit support for electrified rail combined with censoring concerns about a related core issue. Can people who sincerely, and apparently correctly, believe that trains and transit will bring improvements succeed in persuading the environmental movement generally to join them without reservation before it's too late? Nobody knows for sure, but climate change is advancing quickly and there is no time to lose, so advocates must decide if attempting to convince "mainstream" environmentalists to join them in the battle is an effective use of their limited time and resources.

With or without that support, it is vital for rail and transit proponents to continue their efforts, and accelerate them, if possible. They need to convince elected officials and opinion leaders whose voices matter. They need to stress the importance of trains and transit to facilitate the movement of people and goods that keeps the local economy (as well as the national economy) going. In other words, they need to make the "business case" for trains and transit.

That does not detract from the environmental arguments or the social justice and equity arguments that could be made along with the business case.

Nobody seems to dispute the broad concepts that concern the daunting challenge that climate change presents (if they admit it at all), or that a clean environment is better for humans and all other life than a polluted one. These arguments will win points with some elected officials and opinion leaders, but not with all of them.

The business case is different. It is difficult to fathom that any elected official, whether a Democrat or a Republican, would refuse to support a program that would bring more money to their constituents in a cost-effective manner. Improved mobility for everybody, motorists and non-motorists alike, helps everybody get to worksites and other places, including where they spend the money they make. The tricky part is to convince officials and opinion leaders, essentially all of whom are motorists, that improving mobility for non-motorists as intended beneficiaries is good for motorists, too. Still, there are plenty of stories about cities and regions that improved their passenger-train networks and invested in rail transit, and then reaped the benefits of a stronger economy and a cleaner environment.

Southern California is one place where that happened, due in large part to the resurgence of rail transit (both Metrorail and Metrolink) in and around Los Angeles. That city's downtown core, which was essentially moribund a half-century ago, has become one of the busiest downtowns in the nation. The air there has become cleaner, too. That can also happen elsewhere, and it's up to rail and transit advocates who also care about the environment to push for improvements of that sort.

David Peter Alan is a RUN Board member and a Contributing Editor at Railway Age.

RUN has made recordings of the entire conference through Google Drive in both video

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nzk7HuOlXNvxNwNzmgzbcUoEFgaNvN1/view>) and audio

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aMtmRpaa3kxpJhWhep7gcbcVITAqdtfl/view>) formats. Speakers' bios and slide presentations are also available. For more information about RUN, see the RUN website at www.railusers.net.

LATEST PROGRESS REPORT ON EAST-WEST PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

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A final piece of good news! The Western Massachusetts Passenger Rail Commission issued its report. It was first due in March, then pushed back to June, then September and was finally released a few days before Thanksgiving. The Massachusetts State Legislature established the commission to investigate and receive public testimony regarding which public entity should build and manage the East-West Rail project and the passenger rail service associated with this project.

The report places responsibility for East-West rail with MassDOT and not with a new rail authority as called for earlier by former Governor Charlie Baker's administration. The Commission recommended that MassDOT should continue to serve as the agency responsible for the development, construction, procurement and oversight of both existing inner-city passenger rail service in Massachusetts and any new enhanced or new intercity passenger service connecting Boston, Springfield, Pittsfield and other cities and towns within the commonwealth.

The Commission stated that MassDOT is the "clear choice to develop, design and build East-West Rail as it is "the best applicant the commonwealth can put forth for the projected current cost estimate place up to \$6 billion." The Commission also pointed out that there is already significant project momentum with MassDOT at the helm. During the

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

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

By Brian Yanity

Southern California-Las Vegas regional trains on the UP/BNSF-owned corridor

The Amtrak *Las Vegas Limited* ran between LA and Las Vegas on weekends for only three months in 1976. Such a weekend excursion train, with special amenities, could find a market today. In the 2010s, Las Vegas Express Inc. proposed the luxurious "X Train" between LA and Las Vegas, complete with all first-class seating, high-end cuisine, and a "dance club" bar-lounge car with DJs and live music. California stations discussed include LA Union Station, Fullerton, and San Bernardino. News reports from late 2022 indicated that this was still an active project in the works. More conventionally, Amtrak's 2021 Connects US plan included a LA-Las Vegas corridor. It envisioned two roundtrips per day and a run time of 6 hours and 45 minutes, connecting LA Union Station, Fullerton, San Bernardino, and Barstow to a new Las Vegas Amtrak station. Sometimes confused with the Brightline West project, Amtrak's proposal would be a separate project using the BNSF and UP-owned track.

Existing track infrastructure, with a small number of capacity improvements, could also allow dedicated Las Vegas-San Diego and Las Vegas-Bakersfield trains. Such SoCal-Las Vegas regional trains could factor into a future *Desert Wind's* benefits, even if a restored *Desert Wind* itself does not extend south of Las Vegas, as that is where passengers would connect between the two services.

Finally, the most recent Nevada State Rail Plan envisions that service between the Las Vegas and Reno areas of that state by use of the "C" Corridor via the Central Valley of California. The State of Nevada could be engaged by California

or coordination and support of this service, which would be another beneficiary of infrastructure upgrades to the UPRR Cima Subdivision.

The 2007 *Las Vegas to Los Angeles Rail Corridor Improvement Feasibility Study* was done by the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada: (<https://assets.rtcnv.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2019/06/24201329/la-vegas-RailStudy.pdf>). This study looked at reestablishing intercity passenger rail service between Los Angeles and Las Vegas on the existing BNSF and UPRR right-of-way, and concluded that it would be feasible. The 2007 study recommended completion of 2nd track for the entire 176-mile length of the UPRR Cima Subdivision between Yermo and Las Vegas (a total new build of nearly 136 miles of track), and track upgrades to Class 5 standard for 90 mph passenger train speeds. The cost estimated at the time was \$830 million.

UPRR freight capacity, and public rail investment decisions

The UPRR Cima Subdivision sees 20 to 25 freight trains per day between Las Vegas and Yermo. Like the BNSF Southern Transcon, which is shared by the UPRR trains between Daggett/Yermo and Riverside, the dominant freight business on the line is long-haul intermodal to/from the Ports of LA and Long Beach. However, there is also a sizable amount of bulk mining and agricultural, along with other carload /manifest traffic coming into California from Nevada, the intermountain West and further East. Shifting more freight to rail, to get trucks off of I-15, is crucially important for reducing congestion, crashes and pollution along this busy freight corridor. As many as 10,000 trucks per day cross Interstate 15 on the California/Nevada border.

In 2021, the Port of Long Beach

announced a new partnership with the Utah Inland Port near Salt Lake City, to be connected by dedicated UPRR intermodal trains via the Cima Subdivision. The Las Vegas Valley has become its own major freight origin/destination. The states of California and Nevada should work with UPRR to investigate and demonstrate short/medium-haul freight trains between Southern California and Las Vegas, to capture traffic currently on trucks. Perhaps public investment in freight capacity on the UPRR Cima Subdivision, or other incentives for UPRR to invest in capital improvements, would have significant public benefits such as less truck traffic, and enabling passenger trains to use the line. Parcel or 'light freight' cars could even be added to passenger trains between Southern California, Las Vegas and Salt Lake City.

Completion of double track on various sections between Yermo and Las Vegas would enable freight traffic to grow, and provide capacity for future passenger trains. A logical place for UPRR to start a series of double tracking projects would be Cima Hill in the Mojave National Preserve. Of the 20 miles between Kelso and Cima Summit, about half the notorious grade is double-tracked in the form of a series of sidings. It also happens to be the halfway point between the UPRR yards/crew change points of Las Vegas and Yermo. Filling in the ten or so remaining miles of 2nd track would have a great benefit for capacity and reliability of the Cima subdivision. Other useful UPRR infrastructure upgrades along the historical *Desert Wind* corridor include additional main track in Las Vegas (3.3 miles between Arden and Maul Ave.), and siding upgrades north of Las Vegas and in Utah (Caliente Subdivision).

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UPRR Cima Subdivision, in the Mojave National Preserve on Cima Hill several miles south of Cima Summit (photo by author)

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

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Public and private investments in rail capacity involve tradeoffs and choosing priorities on a broader network, and there are unique challenges to extending a restored *Desert Wind* from Las Vegas to LA on the UPRR Cima Subdivision. As described by RailPAC President Steve Roberts:

1. UP is going to want some capital investment to operate the *Desert Wind* LA to Las Vegas. Double tracking Cima Hill is a project they asked for in an earlier iteration of Las Vegas service. There is no way the FRA is going to invest \$3+ billion in Brightline West plus several billions in revenue bonds and then invest a large amount into a parallel 48 mph route. We need to consider the alternative investments. How about double track and catenary on the San Bernardino line for a one seat HSR ride LA – Las Vegas instead of Cima Hill double track?
2. It takes two additional sets of

equipment to extend the *Desert Wind* from Las Vegas to Los Angeles. I think we can "squeeze the equipment pool" which will enable the *Desert Wind* Chicago – Salt Lake City – Las Vegas to be an early action item. The two additional sets needed for Las Vegas - LA service most likely means the *Desert Wind* will be a post 2035 action.

3. Given the existence of a high profile HSR rail service between the Inland Empire and Las Vegas, there will likely be relatively little LA – Las Vegas ridership on the *Desert Wind*. Frequency and travel time are powerful drivers of mode choice and Brightline wins on all accounts.

4. Through riders get an option of several hours at the Brightline Resort and then arriving in Southern California hours before the *Desert Wind* would have, with a first available connection other travelers can arrive in SoCal before Noon.

Right now the FRA is keeping each of its initiatives, Long-Distance and Corridor ID, at

arms length despite some parallel routes. At some point, probably during the prioritization, they will look at how Long-Distance and corridor investments can complement each other. We should anticipate that shift and strategize how to guide it. Just remember you don't have an unlimited capital budget. Every dollar spent on the LA – Salt Lake City corridor is one dollar less than can be spent on say the Coachella Valley Rail service.

My key focus is for rail advocates to coalesce around a strategy for maximizing near-term service additions as outlined in the FRA Long Distance Study. What compromises are required to stretch the equipment that is available to get new routes? Like a key new transit line, it is critical that, as much as possible, traffic be fed into the new line. In this case it is critical that Brightline's service to Las Vegas be as profitable as possible - to pay off bonds,

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RUN COMMENTS ON AMTRAK BOARD'S TRANSPARENCY

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Besides the above, we also have concerns about Amtrak's long-distance network generally. We note that, although the route map has changed from time to time during Amtrak's half-century of operation, there are only fourteen routes available to non-motorists as well as motorists in the entire network; the same number of routes that were available when Amtrak started in 1971. We also note that some trains on those routes now operate with only a single coach and a single sleeping car, despite repeated assurances from Amtrak that new equipment for the long-distance routes will soon be ordered. We are aware that it takes several years from the placement of an order until new equipment can be placed into service, and we express our concern that lack of new equipment can lead to the demise of one or more of the routes that are operating today.

The Rail Users' Network (RUN) represents the interests of persons who ride all modes of rail transportation in the United States and Canada. Our goals are an improved Amtrak, more rail transit, and better connectivity between the two. Our membership comprises local and state-level advocacy organizations, transit advisory committees, and concerned riders who volunteer their time to help improve mobility for non-motorists and motorists alike. Our Board includes members who live along the NEC, in states that support Amtrak trains within their borders, and from places that are served only by a one of the few trains in Amtrak's network.

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

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make capital investment in the San Bernardino Line to extend service to downtown LA, financially underpin an extension to San Diego, and enable Brightline to build HSR from Southern California to Phoenix, Tucson. Also, the High Desert Corridor would allow Brightline to operate trains from the San Joaquin Valley via Palmdale to Las Vegas and connect with Metrolink trains to serve the San Fernando Valley with a more convenient service.

References:

https://i15alliance.org/Documents/I-15_CSMP_v31.pdf

Brian Yanity is a RUN Board member and vice president of RailPAC.

RUN's Upcoming Membership Questionnaire

Next month we will be sending out a brief questionnaire to get your response to a number of questions that the RUN's Board will be putting together.

We hope to gather your ideas regarding what can be done to further RUN's impact and how we can engage more of our members in the work of organization. This could include attending annual regional membership meetings, serving on one of the standing committees of the board, soliciting your ideas regarding potential new board members especially from areas of the country that are not currently represented. We also want to receive your ideas on how we can further improve our award-winning newsletter.

So, be sure to fill out our questionnaire next month. In the meantime, be sure to enjoy the holiday season and the coming of the New Year.

Let me know what you think. Also include other ideas as well. Thanks, Richard.

MAINE NEWS: GOOD AND BAD

By Peter Cole

Starting with the good news, the Downeaster service has rebounded if not exceeded the ridership numbers of pre-pandemic times. A double tracking at the Wells Station has started, along with a passenger bridge. The design will allow two trains to load and unload at the same time, which will permit an additional sixth train for Maine-only service. CSX has taken over from PanAm, and CSX is doing a respectable job of improving track and providing more reliable engines for freight service.

There are still three items on the agenda for improved service on the Downeaster. The first and highest priority item is relocating the Portland station to the mainline. At present, the Portland station requires backing the train into the Concord Coach bus station that is a mile off the mainline. This adds an additional 20 minutes to service in Freeport and Brunswick, which are north of Portland.

The second item is an additional stop in Falmouth, which would be located between Portland and Freeport. The third item is the "Coastal Connection" which would involve self-propelled (RDC) equipment from Brunswick to Rockland. Unfortunately, a lack of equipment, liability insurance issues, and most recently the closure of the largest freight service generator has the project stymied.

Expansion of Downeaster style service for the remainder of the state appears to be stubbornly caught without enough political strength to move forward. Advocates from three advocacy groups (Maine Rail Group, Maine Transit Coalition and Train Riders Northeast) have been working to extend service from Brunswick through Augusta to Waterville and Bangor plus service between Lewiston/Auburn and Portland. The State Senator and the City

Council of Bangor have been attempting to gain favor from the State transportation committee, but the road building coalition has the backing of most of the legislature and the Maine Department of Transportation. (In the words of Senator Baldacci, "Portland gets a train, while the rest of the state is promised a bus").

The greatest tragedy for the state is the political movement encouraging existing but under-utilized rail lines to be converted into "bicycle trails." While using the term "active transportation," the reality is that due to the climate, the distances, and the locations these trails will become little more than strips of pavement for wealthy people to drive to and then ride their electric bikes. Meanwhile, a potential asset for economic development and transportation for those who are willing to forsake a car for financial and environmental reasons will be left with no alternative.

Peter Cole is a member of RUN, Train Riders NorthEast and the Maine Rail Group.

LATEST PROGRESS REPORT ON EAST-WEST PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

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time the Commission held its public hearings, MassDOT submitted three separate applications for federal funding related to Western Massachusetts rail projects, one of which has already resulted in an award of \$108 million.

There is still some fear that East-West rail might get sidelined in a busy MassDOT bureaucracy which tends to focus on Boston and its suburbs. However, Congressman Richard Neal, who represents the first

Congressional District of Massachusetts as the ranking member of the House Ways and Means Committee, has stated that he would reserve the right to intervene, if funding is diverted. "The Governor knows that. Former Governor Baker knew that, as well".

Although the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority is saying it needs \$24.5 billion in backlogged construction to reach a state of good repair, Neal made it clear that the problems at the MBTA don't consume the funding that we desire for East-West rail and North-South improvements. He also has confidence in Governor Healy's committeemen to the project. "Now, the plan is to get things going, Neal said. "We have the money. We have the allocations."

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