

STEEL WHEELS

PASSENGER RAIL IN CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST

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RAILPAC • ALL ABOARD ARIZONA • PASSENGER RAIL KANSAS • NEW MEXICO RPC • MINNARP • PASSENGER RAIL OKLAHOMA

SW 1Q22 Contents

Editor -

*Commuter Rail's
Uncertain Future*

*Roberts - Legislation
and Funding*

*Watson - Monterey
County Reports*

*Commentaries from
Russ Jackson and Paul Wilson*

*Roberts -
Where will the money go?*

Jazz at Traxx

*Kerr - Getting people
out of their cars*

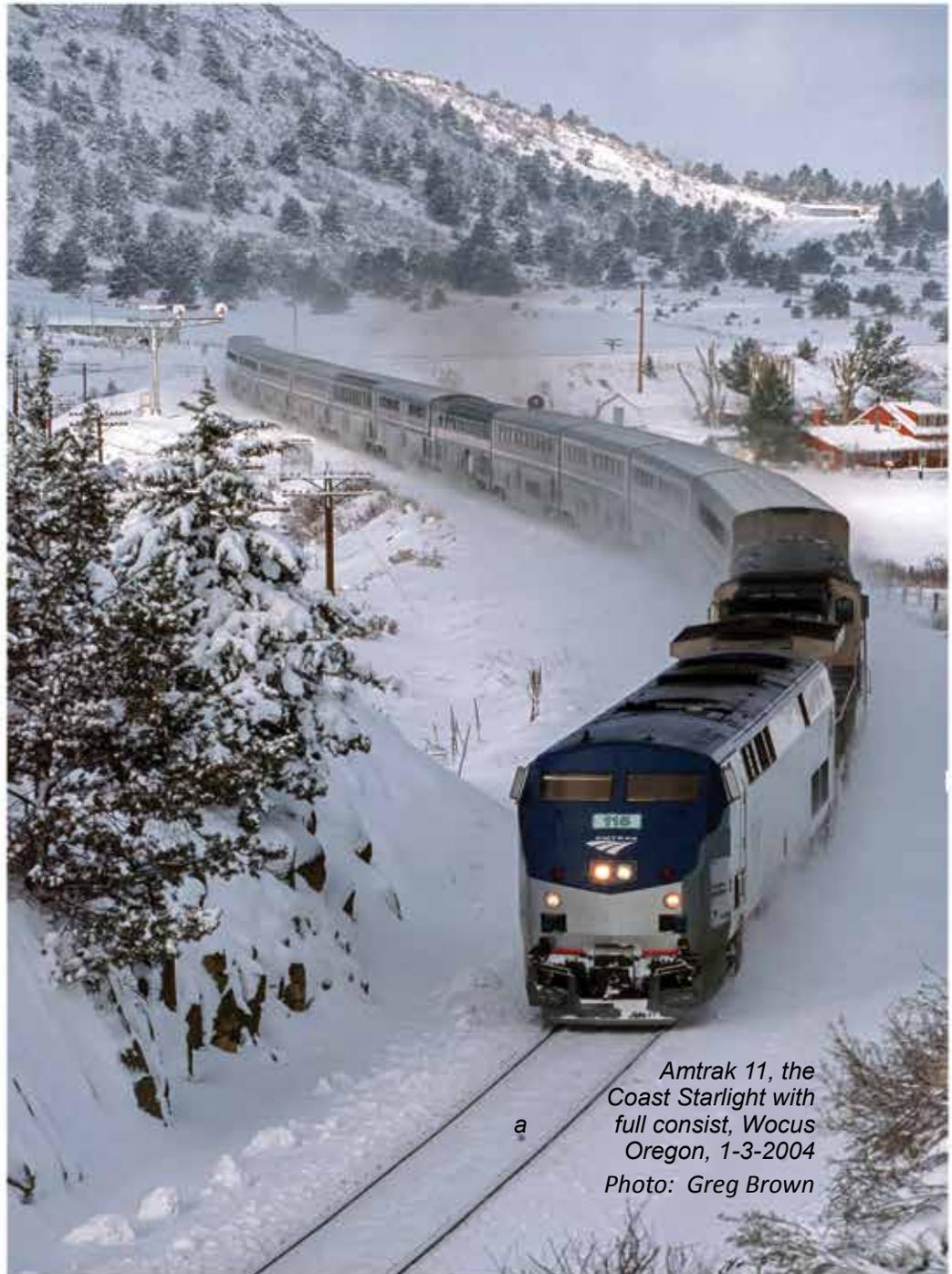
*Norman - Inland Empire
Vision Part 2*

*Dyson - RailPAC
Campaigns Illustrated*

Arizona News

Nevada News

*Dyson -
From the Rear Platform*



Amtrak 11, the
Coast Starlight with
full consist, Wocus
Oregon, 1-3-2004
Photo: Greg Brown

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From the Editor's Desk

By Paul Dyson - RailPAC Editor

Sooner or later someone will notice . . .

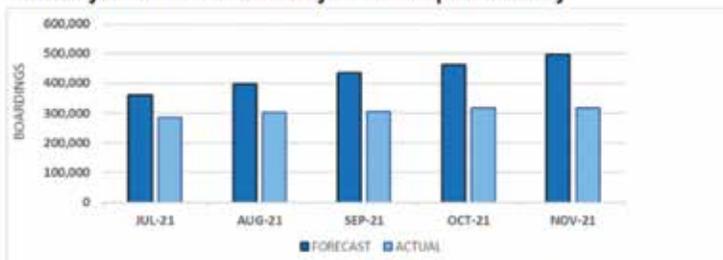
that there are a lot of commuter trains running with very few seats occupied, and we are shoveling

large amounts of money to agencies such as Metrolink and Caltrain simply to keep operations running. Our friend Andrew Selden from Minnesota tells me that there is a serious chance that the Northstar commuter service into the Twin Cities may be permanently discontinued because patronage is so poor. So far the California operations have flown under the radar, and in general there is more political support for rail here. But that support may evaporate once it is realized that traditional commuter rail is not delivering environmental benefits or improved mobility for a lot of people.

RailPAC has been asking for years for Metrolink to grow up and become a true regional rail operation. After forty years of talking about it, we still don't have through tracks at Los Angeles Union Station; we still don't have connecting trains between lines; and we are without an integrated regional timetable or ticketing system. Just like Minnesota's Northstar, Metrolink still relies predominantly on traditional peak hour, Monday to Friday office workers to and from downtown, and even there the operation still does not have great market penetration. Also like Northstar and most similar agencies, the federal government has propped up the operation with special subsidies during the pandemic. How long will this continue? And if this traditional market has permanently declined as most of us believe, who will make up the loss of farebox revenue?

Commuter rail has a major dilemma. With revenue down

FY22 Systemwide Monthly Ridership Recovery



PERIOD	FORECAST		ACTUAL		
	BOARDINGS	RECOVERY	BOARDINGS	VARIANCE	RECOVERY
JULY-21	358,863	35%	285,002	(73,861)	28%
AUGUST-21	396,638	39%	303,021	(93,617)	30%
SEPTEMBER-21	434,413	43%	304,649	(129,764)	30%
FY22 Q1 TOTAL	1,189,913	39%	892,672	(297,241)	30%
OCTOBER-21	462,744	44%	317,593	(145,151)	30%
NOVEMBER-21	495,797	50%	318,375	(177,422)	32%
Year to Date	2,148,454	42%	1,528,640	(619,814)	30%

significantly and pressure to cut costs, train service is reduced. But how do Metrolink et al. bring riders back despite big gaps in the schedule and no return to a full pre-pandemic service for lack of a full complement of crews. Omicron is causing a short-term problem with crewing, and this is exacerbated by a two-year hiatus in hiring, which must be accelerated to catch up with demographics. Rail advocates may suggest patience while these problems are resolved, but sooner or later the question will be asked: "Why are we running all these trains with no passengers?" I'm already hearing this question here in Burbank. At a recent hearing for a development adjacent to the Airport South station, people commented that no one is riding the trains and therefore transit-oriented development will not work. Similar statements were made recently about the Coaster service in northern San Diego County.

Should we continue to support Metrolink and similar operations to the tune of hundreds of millions a year in the hope that 2018 ridership patterns will return? Empty passenger trains are polluters too, so we can't claim any environmental benefit. Eventually the hard questions will be asked. Will management be up to the task of pivoting to the type of service that we believe is needed, namely, pan-regional operations with through trains and connections, based on an all-day, seven days perweek span of service? Will their Boards support them, or do they not even understand the problem? Most crucially, what will induce passengers to respond by buying tickets? Of one thing we are sure. Business as it used to be will not suffice.



Where are the coaches?

I was planning to report on the status of the new Siemens coaches for the San Joaquins and made multiple requests to Calsta in Sacramento, with no response as of January 31. I think we're entitled to know. After all, we're paying for them. Accepted? Apparently not. I hear rumors of missing tray tables!! More in the next Steel Wheels.

pdyson@railpac.org

From SCRRRA Board Meeting Agenda, January 2022

President's Commentary

By Steve Roberts – RailPAC President



As I write this, in what seems like an endless circle, we are again experiencing the impact of a pandemic spike and consequent service reductions. With its conservative capacity philosophy, Amtrak escaped the

holiday service meltdown of the airlines, who made the mistake of expanding the number of flights right into a pandemic spike. However, while Amtrak employees went the extra mile during the holidays, extreme weather and rising illness rates in January resulted in the need for a reset. The result has been reduction in corridor and long-distance route train frequency. I hope that by the time you read this, Omicon will have rapidly declined and the reduced frequencies will have been rescinded.

On the political side there remains no clear consensus for maintaining and expanding rail passenger service. The Department of Transportation is developing the requirements and processes to implement the Infrastructure Bill, but it appears that the funding that will be available will be less than the “top line” \$102 billion initially reported.

The reason for this difference is that, though more than half of the Infrastructure Act funding is an immediate appropriation, to be allocated to projects over the next five years, the remaining funds are authorizations--the normal yearly authorizations for the Surface Transportation Act funding over a five-year period. The authorizations process gives Congress the ability to appropriate a set amount of funds up to the authorized amount each fiscal year for the next five years. Less funding can be appropriated at Congress's discretion. That has occurred in the past. So now the games begin!

The FY 2022 budget still has not been passed. Instead there has been a series of continuing resolutions to keep the government in operation, but a continuing resolution just carries the prior year's (in this case FY 2021) appropriated funding forward. The strategy of the fiscal conservatives is to use this effort to hamstring the Administration's efforts to increase funding for initiatives that fiscal conservatives generally don't support, such as intercity rail. Going forward into FY 2023 and beyond, the fiscal conservatives' goal is to use their (anticipated) control of the House to facilitate defunding through the regular budget process. So while \$66 billion, the amount directly appropriated for funding over the next five years, will be available, up to \$36 billion, the amount authorized under the Surface Transportation Act portion of the Infrastructure Bill, may never be appropriated during the normal yearly budget process. There is further discussion of the implication of this in my story Where might the money be spent? on page 7.

In California, the governor has once again put authorization for the sale of the remaining Proposition 1a High-Speed Rail Bonds into his budget; but it is not clear whether he has an agreement with restive Southern California Assembly members. Using part of California's revenue surplus, Newsom added more transportation funds to his budget, but will it be enough to “sweeten the pot”, especially for those in southern California looking for more investment? Stay tuned. Meanwhile robust cap and trade carbon allowance sales provided sufficient funds to forestall a cash crisis, so the high-speed rail project continued to move forward in 2021 with only small adjustments.

Over the past few months I have written about the importance of the Surface Transportation Board's case regarding Gulf Coast Service and how the decision will impact Amtrak's access to the freight routes. The hearing for this case was set for February 15th and possibly the 16th. Thus by the time you read this the hearing probably will have been held, though it may take a few months for the decision to be rendered. This hearing and a possible court case will define Amtrak's future relationship with the freight railroads. Many questions are presented. Will Amtrak only have to fund the avoidable capital costs of the proposed passenger rail service (costs that a freight railroad could avoid if it did not have to accommodate passenger trains)? Or will Amtrak have to fund the capital costs for state of good repair projects (important to the freight road in any case) and those associated with resolving network bottleneck delays considered important by Amtrak but deemed not immediately critical by the freight carrier? Will this case also address the common carrier obligations of the freight railroads and their responsibility, as stewards of an irreplaceable strategic asset, to maintain these assets in a state of good repair with capacity to accept additional traffic?

Finally, RailPAC along with other rail advocacy organizations will keep pushing Amtrak management to ramp up consist capacity and develop a strategy to allow coach passengers access to the dining car. A quick decline in the Omicon variant could ease the latter change. While the “Great Resignation” (which turned out to be the “Great Early Retirement”) affected staff availability, shouldn't the new situation be reflected in Amtrak's planning and hiring? Moreover, while Amtrak's tight-fisted operating policies conserved cash and helped it avoid the service failures that airline passengers saw in August and December, shouldn't the company peek over the top of the trench and position itself, with expanded capacity and more aggressive pricing, to take advantage of market opportunities? Getting a second mortgage should not be a prerequisite for the purchase of a roomette on an Amtrak train.

Monterey County Has A Vision For Integrated Rail

by Christina Watson - TAMC

The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) adopted a **Monterey Bay Area Rail Network Integration Study in August 2021, confirming the Agency's vision for a 2040 rail network that connects Monterey County to the San Francisco Bay Area, to Santa Cruz, and southward to San Luis Obispo and beyond.**

The near-term implementation of that vision is the Monterey County Rail Extension project, which extends passenger rail service in California from Santa Clara County south to Salinas. This is a transformative project that will revitalize the downtown Salinas train station and create new multimodal transportation hubs for the disadvantaged communities of Pajaro and Castroville in Monterey County. These multimodal stations will be served by an extension of Caltrain service and integrated bus transit that will provide peak period connections for Monterey County and Santa Cruz County residents and visitors, to access Silicon Valley, San Jose, the greater San Francisco Bay Area, and Sacramento.

TAMC is pursuing a phased implementation of the Monterey County Rail Extension Project:

- Kick Start Project: Salinas train station circulation improvements & train layover facility, Gilroy track connections
- Pajaro/Watsonville Multimodal Transit Hub: Connection point for Santa Cruz County
- Castroville Multimodal Station: Connection point for Monterey Peninsula

The Kick Start project, Phase 1 of the overall Monterey County Rail Extension project, is focused on improving the existing Salinas train station to accommodate new passenger rail service connecting Salinas to the San Francisco Bay Area and making track improvements at Gilroy to allow the extension of Caltrain from Gilroy and will also permit through trains to stop at the Gilroy train station.

The Salinas train station, also known as the Intermodal Transportation Center, is in downtown Salinas on State Route 183 (Market Street), a walkable distance to the Monterey Salinas Transit (MST) bus center and the main employment areas of downtown Salinas. Recently constructed improvements to the Salinas station as part of the Kick Start Project include a new direct signalized access point to downtown via the extension of Lincoln Avenue across Market Street, a five-bay bus transfer area, bike lanes and bike lockers, safe pedestrian crossings and sidewalks, and commuter parking. This station will integrate new passenger rail service to the San Francisco Bay Area with existing service by Amtrak intercity trains and buses, MST local and regional buses, and Greyhound intercity buses.

The current work is focused on design and right-of-way for a train layover facility in Salinas and improvements to the tracks between Salinas and Gilroy, which are now at 90% design (plans, specifications & estimates). The new layover facility in Salinas will be built to accommodate six trains, supporting the State's vision of more robust service to Salinas beyond the

early service scenario of two round trips on Caltrain. TAMC is working with Caltrain and Caltrans to develop an operations and implementation strategy. The Transportation Agency is negotiating with the track owners, Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), on the capacity analysis (an evaluation of the number of trains the current infrastructure can accommodate) and on the design of the improvements on their network. TAMC is also coordinating with Amtrak and UPRR on upgrading the existing 1,800-foot train platform at the Salinas station.

Future work on this project includes a grant application for the Pajaro/ Watsonville Multimodal Transit Hub, as the connection point for the Santa Cruz branch line and the station closest to the City of Watsonville, and for the Castroville Multimodal Station, as the connection point for the Monterey Branch line and the nearest station for Monterey Peninsula and coastal residents.

The Castroville station is connected to the future vision of light rail service on the Monterey Branch Line, with the potential for a round-the-bay service connecting to Santa Cruz. Building toward that vision, TAMC is working with MST on a near-term express busway, nicknamed the "SURF!" project, using a portion of the TAMC-owned branch line corridor to build transit ridership while preserving the tracks for the future vision.



HAPPY NEW YEAR

Amtrak, here we go again ... and remembering John Madden

Another Commentary by Russ Jackson



The new year opens optimistically just as all the previous ones have for the past 50 years of Amtrak's existence. Rail advocates have lived with the good and the mediocre and some bad these past five decades as we work and work to get Amtrak to do what it should be doing on its own. This 2022 year ahead is

no exception. We look at the great crews that run Amtrak's long distance trains on here, not to ignore the crews on the other trains, and see a dedicated group of people who do the day to day work of running the country's invaluable western inter-regional trains. It's rare that complaints are filed anymore about the quality of on-board service. For the most part these trains are reliable sources of transportation and must continue to be so to serve the public along its routes where they are needed!

Yes, the long distance trains are under scrutiny. More than that, they are under fire from Amtrak headquarters. Look at the «musical chairs» that have taken place since CEO Joe Boardman retired. It's quite likely the turmoil at Amtrak HQ has been a result of finding out when Stephen Gardner would finally be installed as the CEO/President, and that has now been accomplished. The fly boys are gone...and Gardner and Board Chairman Anthony Coscia are left. Coscia's term has expired, but the Congress has not gotten around to a replacement. Through all of the turmoil, meanwhile, the Congress has thrown a pot full of money at Amtrak and given it a list of things it wants Amtrak to do with it. Amtrak, however, has its own ideas of what it will do with it and came up with the unrealistic list of 41 Corridors it wants to build over the next 15 to 20 years. Gardner has already told Congress it "might be 18 months before any significant work begins." That includes upgrades to NEC projects, tunnels, and proposed new corridors.

Many rail advocates are convinced the Coscia/Gardner goal is the elimination of those pesky long distance trains that just seem to always interfere with Amtrak's real job: losing money on the Northeast Corridor and grabbing as much money from state legislatures as they can. Never mind that the long distance trains generate the most revenue passenger miles of the system. NEC: as one rail advocate said, "I thought it stood for "Never Enough Cash." Should there be a smiley face after that? Probably, but it is too true to laugh.

So, where did 2021 end and 2022 begin "out there" on the railroad that serves us in "flyover country"? Well, according to Evan Stair of the great Kansas-Oklahoma

group of rail advocates, the Southwest Chief WAS sold out for the last two weeks of December (and probably earlier), the busiest time of the year for travel outside Thanksgiving week and summers. SOLD OUT Coaches, Bedrooms, Roomettes, and the Family Bedrooms, on every train during that time. We must ask, when did Amtrak know that sellout happened? Was it early enough to add an additional Coach? An additional Sleeper? They threw away large chunks of revenue passenger miles by keeping the train consist the same as it had been since summer. The Texas Eagle, too, ran with the same consist of 4 (FOUR) cars throughout the Holidays and is still doing so in January.

Winter weather is always a challenge for any transportation provider. Look at the airline cancellations. Amtrak cancelled some trips across the New Year's weekend, including one round trip for the California Zephyr (confirmed by Mike Jensen who runs the Ft. Morgan CO camera each day). Whether it was because of the weather, Covid, and/or a lack of sufficient crews being available, is unknown. But, how long can Amtrak use the shortage of crews as an excuse? Although we have survived a threat of tri-weekly for all western long distance trains already this winter will it come up again?

Andrew Selden rightfully called it "Sabotage." When the two-coach consists of the Southwest Chief became standard Selden pointed out in writing and in his two ARP presentations in Arizona and Wisconsin, that there was no chance that the train could ever recover its costs without additional space to sell. That can't be because of lack of available Coaches. This writer observed one of the Chicago-Carbondale Illinois-sponsored trains with 7 (SEVEN) Superliner Coaches. When I noticed that another train on that route was on the rails at the same time that meant 14 (FOURTEEN) needed cars were tied up. All Surfliner consists have a Superliner Coach, the Pere Marquette and the Heartland Flyer are all-Superliner consists. Where are the baggage cars and transition sleepers that should be on the Southwest Chief, releasing Roomettes for sale that now are occupied by crew?

As for personnel hiring, what's happened to the jobs at Amtrak HQ? In the Reservation Centers? When this writer called in December to make our next reservation I spoke to an agent in the Philadelphia center who said he had just returned from a two week vacation (!) and had found more people working there than when he left. That's fine, and I hope those folks will stay and be happy working with passengers who are in their initial contact with Amtrak. The same for the new workers who are hired to be out on the railroad. Speaking of Reservation Centers, RailPAC

VP James Smith tells us that the center that was closed in Riverside, CA, is still empty and Amtrak still owns it.

John Madden . . . and Betty White. The last week of 2021 brought the sad news that both of these superstars had passed away. While Betty had nothing to do with Amtrak, at least as far as we know, we assume she rode trains early in her career of brilliant comedy performances that began in the late 1930s. It was her cheerfulness and optimistic look on life that endeared her to everyone. The same can be said for John Madden, whose career in football, broadcasting, and video games was known to everyone. His enthusiasm for what he did was always there. On radio in the Bay Area at 7:15 in the morning on KCBS, fans and folks listened to hear what he had to say. As for Amtrak, Madden rode the long distance trains to game sites early in his broadcasting career. Crews were excited when they learned he would be on board. Eventually, the trains couldn't take him everywhere he needed to go fast enough, and

he made a deal with Greyhound to provide him with a vehicle and driver. John rode the highways of the country, stopping for such things as look at flowers along I-80 in Wyoming or stopping at Chuy's Restaurant on I-10 in Van Horn, Texas, which still has a display of his visits. That place is now seen by travelers who come there to watch space launches!

What both of these personalities have in common, and the universal love for them, should be an inspiration to anyone wanting to be successful. Some corporate people have it, most don't. You must believe in yourself, your product, and enthusiastically "sell it" to the world. John Legere did that with T-Mobile. Gene Skoropowski did it with the CA Capitol Corridor. Brian Rosenwald did it with the Coast Starlight. How about it, Amtrak? Believe in ALL of your product enough to get out here and let the country know what you've got! Mr. Gardner, we're looking for you.

GUEST COMMENTARY

by Paul Wilson, URPA

Amtrak received an eye-popping \$7.7 billion over the two fiscal years 2020-21 from the feds. That's the sum of its ordinary annual appropriations, plus special COVID relief. The \$3.714 billion in COVID relief was spread across three emergency spending bills in March and December, 2020, and March of 2021. The cash rolled in at a good clip. So where did that all money go? The combined loss on the audited annual financial statements was "only" \$3.68 billion for FY 2020 and 2021.

It's unclear where it went, but here's where it didn't go:

1. Keeping sufficient personnel on the payroll to assure reliable operations and to deal with the inevitable service disruptions due to normal winter weather, etc.
2. Keeping sufficient rolling stock on hand and in good repair to address persistent initial terminal delays and en-route failures. And—dare to dream—for make-up consists, spares, etc.
3. Providing a reasonable on-board food service that's available for all passengers; or,
4. Augmenting Amtrak's unique product, the private accommodation, during a public health emergency.

I would have thought that funds specified as "COVID relief" would have been used to make the company more resilient to entirely foreseeable interruptions caused by employee illness, quarantines, etc. But no, it hasn't; quite the opposite. Amtrak

took the money and launched yet another round of aggressive cost-cutting, including furloughing employees and encouraging early retirements and voluntary resignations.

From the audited statement of expenses, comparing FY '20 and '21 in the "salaries, wages, and benefits" category, the net result of the furloughs, buyouts, and other personnel expenses was a \$65 million reduction in labor cost, year over year. The expenses of train operations arising from reduced service were down \$60 million; fuel and utilities declined \$27 million.

So it seems, at first glance, management put the company in the ditch to "save" \$149 million while sitting on \$4 billion in federal subsidies aimed specifically at preserving employment levels in excess of its actual losses. \$149 million is a paltry 7% of the company's loss in FY '21. Passenger revenues were off \$349 million from FY '20 to '21. As usual, revenues dropped much faster than expenses. But the COVID relief money obviously wasn't spent retaining staff to make rapid recovery possible. Dozens of trains were abruptly canceled over the holidays due to short-staffing, and the Inspector General says that the HR department is too small to be able to bring on as many new employees as the company needs.

So the four-billion-dollar question is: What happened (or will happen) to that \$4 billion in surplus cash? Am I missing something?

New Passenger Rail Funding – Where might the money be spent?

By Steve Roberts – RailPAC President

While there was great anticipation of what could be accomplished as a result of funding in the Infrastructure Bill (i.e., new routes), the reality is that we are more likely to see more modest improvements. Outlined below is my best judgement of how investments will unfold in the next few years. In developing the groups of projects, four factors influenced my choices:

- Reduction in funding as a result of money being authorized but not appropriated in yearly budgets.
- Limited cooperation from the freight railroads, at least until the Gulf Coast case is resolved.
- The length and complexity of the planning, stakeholder coordination, and environmental study process. Unfortunately the most that rail passenger advocates who are just starting can hope to achieve from the Infrastructure Bill is either a key project or a larger completed planning effort (in preparation for the next funding cycle);
- Political opposition in some states. This can be overcome with outreach to local cities, but most cities will focus only on projects directly benefiting them, such as a new station. The exception--an example of something bolder--is the Southwest Chief coalition.

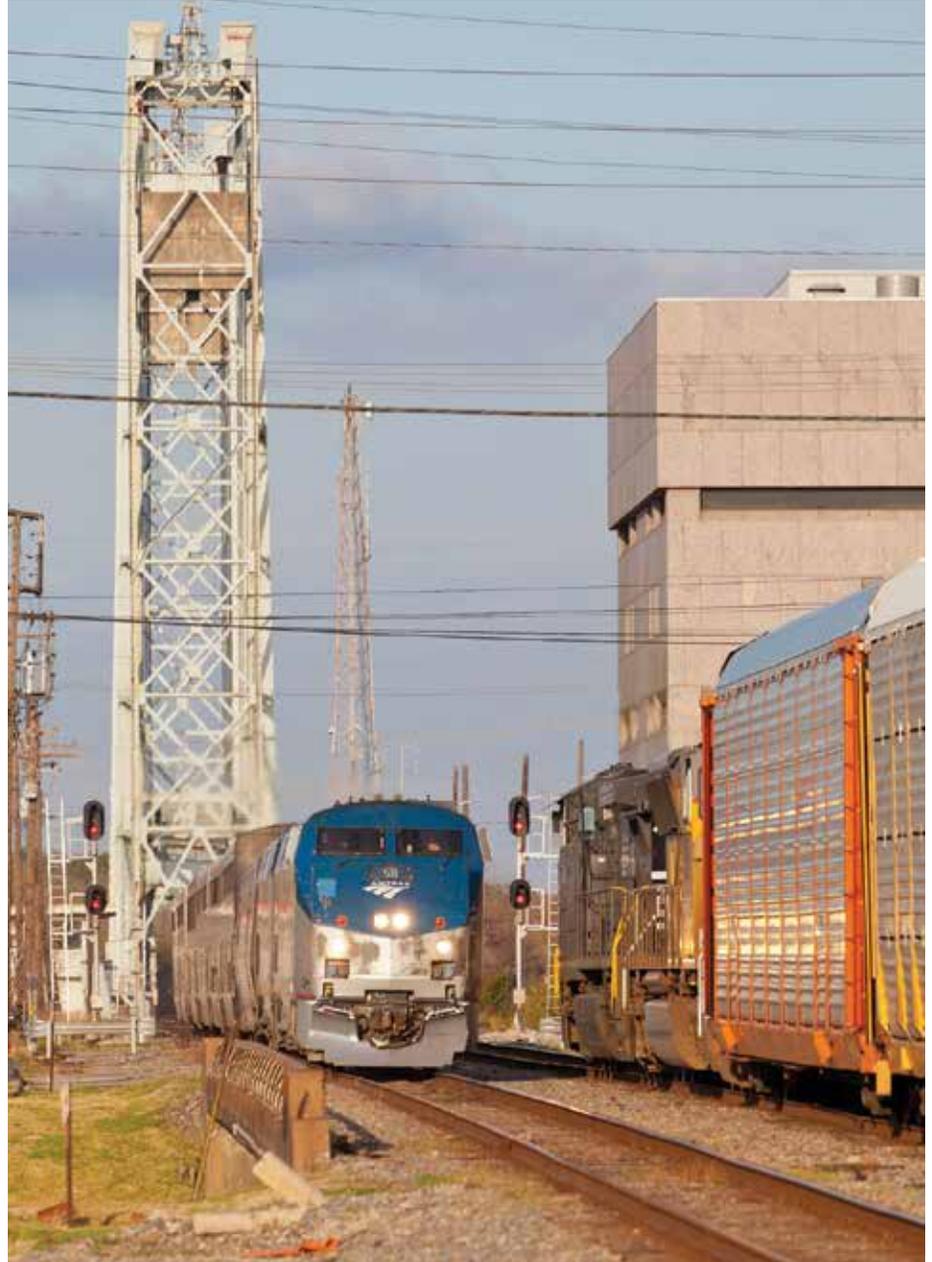
In the end the odds will favor projects with state or local involvement, active stakeholders, planning and environmental work that is complete or near completion, and some level of matching funds. That said, we should remember the Southwest Chief case, where the \$10,000 and \$15,000 local matches from all the small towns along the route accomplished much.

Outlined below, divided into funding categories, are the projects which I believe have the best chance of moving forward.

\$16 Billion National Network Direct Appropriation to Amtrak

* Amtrak System Core

Re-fleeting – With its recent purchase of locomotives and Amfleet I replacements, Amtrak has started the process of a complete replacement of its fleet. Long-distance cars will be next. Funding levels may allow the single-level and bi-level orders to progress concurrently rather than sequentially. In addition to improved passenger amenities and satisfaction, new state of the art rail cars will improve revenues while reducing maintenance-driven operating costs. This explains Amtrak's priority for fleet replacement. It will also need additional equipment for the corridors initiative discussed below.



Neches River Bridge, Beaumont, TX - Major bottleneck on the Sunset route. Photo: Brad Kindschy

Level-Boarding - The Americans with Disabilities Act set the goal of removing barriers to access for disabled persons. For buildings (i.e. stations), that mandate has meant ramps and elevators. For the passenger rail car it has meant platforms the same height as the rail car floor. Over the past two decades Amtrak, with limited capital funding, has focused on access to the stations from parking lots and streets as well as key station features such as restrooms. The reason is that for both bi-levels and single level cars the elevated platforms impinge on the freight railroads' clearance envelope. Thus Amtrak not only needs to fund elevated platforms, but gauntlet tracks or station sidings, which is very expensive. Having recently lost a suit in West Virginia over train access by the disabled and with significant funding now available, this will be a key Amtrak priority.

Support Systems – While not visible to the passengers, office support systems, maintenance facilities, and maintenance equipment are vital to providing a competitive service. My assumption is that many of Amtrak’s support systems could use an upgrade, and I therefore anticipate this to be a priority.

Wi-Fi – Wi-Fi with robust connectivity on long-distance trains would be a valuable passenger amenity. It would also be a valuable management tool for tracking food inventory, space inventory (real-time reconciliation of no-shows), and for the real-time download from the equipment of any mechanical issue. WiFi would allow the mechanical department to be aware of needed repairs days ahead of time. It could also boost on-train productivity by allowing passengers to make dinner reservations or order a meal for delivery to their seat or room.

***Non-Corridor Route Additions Studied by Amtrak**

Listed below are route additions with high revenue potential analyzed by Amtrak in the past, but never implemented because even the modest capital required was not available. Because of the past planning, analysis, and strong ticket revenue forecasts, these projects could be prioritized.

Daily Cardinal – Changing from tri-weekly to daily service would substantially improve the financial performance of the route. This service expansion is relatively straightforward.

Pennsylvania Leg of the Capitol Limited – The operation of through cars off the Capitol Limited, Pittsburgh – Philadelphia – New York, was forecast to generate healthy incremental ticket sales.

Extension of the Vermonter from St. Albans to Montreal – It is less than 70 miles from St. Albans, Vermont to Montreal, an extension that would yield substantial additional revenue. Once this gap is closed, re-instituting the overnight Montrealer would also be feasible at some future date.

Silver Star Re-route via the Florida East Coast Railway – This change would split the Miami section and the Tampa section of the Silver Star at Jacksonville, thereby providing a more direct, faster route to Miami. Smaller consists would allow the service to use the Miami Airport Tri-Rail Station with its Metrorail and other intermodal connections.

Meridian, Mississippi to Dallas – Studied as a leg of the Crescent, this would be a highly productive route, adding major cities and increasing connectivity by allowing a more passenger-friendly transfer between the Crescent and the Sunset/Eagle Routes. A new study was part of Amtrak’s agreement to support the Canadian Pacific merger.

Chicago to Toronto – The Canadian Pacific’s agreement with Amtrak will allow CP to operate passenger service in conjunction with VIA Rail through the Detroit tunnel between Detroit and Windsor, Ontario.

Chicago Terminal – Two of Amtrak’s routes to Chicago, the City of New Orleans/Carbondale trains and the Cardinal, have tortuous paths through the Chicago terminal network. In addition to the route used by the Lake Shore Limited, the Capitol Limited and Detroit Service use a route through Northern Indiana and eastern Chicago that is quite congested with freight traffic. I expect Amtrak to prioritize investment with partner states to address these congestion/delay challenges.

Second Frequency Chicago – Minneapolis – This initiative is already underway.

Extension of the Heartland Flyer to Newton, Kansas – This extension would add markets and improve connectivity. A later extension to Dallas with a connection to high-speed rail would enhance connectivity further.

Southwest Chief Pueblo Reroute – This route alteration adds key markets and connectivity.

Replacement Atlanta Station – With poor passenger access, lack of operational capacity and flexibility, and negative impact on freight rail capacity, Atlanta’s Peachtree station is probably Amtrak’s worst station. We can expect Amtrak to push its replacement with a station off the freight mainline, fully accessible, with the capability to switch cars to: (a) enable train legs to different cities; (b) originate trains at Atlanta; or (c) change the number of cars in a consist to meet different demand levels north and west of Atlanta.

Federal/State Partnership with the appropriation for National Network (long-distance and state-funded corridors) of \$12 Billion.

This funding category requires a state or local contribution

***2035 Corridors Initiative**

Amtrak has an initiative underway to expand rail services on a number of new corridors nationwide. For the most part, due to the complexity of the planning process, expansion will likely be achieved on the existing corridors or possibly on new corridors where advanced planning has already been done.

California Corridors – With each Joint Powers Authority having a robust list approved, and partially funded projects, there will be a goodly number of project requests from California. See list of California Priority Projects in the 3rd Quarter 2021 issue of Steel Wheels (page 7).

Coast Line – By leveraging improvements for the extension of Caltrain to Salinas, early morning service from San Luis Obispo to the Bay Area could be initiated. These improvements would allow San Luis Obispo service to meet the Coast Starlight between San Jose and Salinas. Additional siding improvements south of Salinas would allow later schedules (i.e., a Coast Daylight).

Cascades – Washington and Oregon have an active rail program with substantial planning completed. Recently

equipment shortages have limited service. Cascades will be first to receive the new Amtrak equipment, allowing a relaunch of the service and laying the foundation for future capacity investment and frequency expansions.

Front Range – With a supportive state government, active planning and stakeholder effort underway, the Front Range (Cheyenne-Denver-Pueblo) initiative is poised to move forward. Its pace should be aided by softness in the coal market which has reduced the number of freight trains in the corridor. It also has a near term goal: a reroute of the Southwest Chief via Pueblo.

Chicago Hub – I expect there to be a focus on the three core Chicago Hub routes – Chicago-St. Louis, Chicago-Detroit and Chicago-Milwaukee. On all three routes, capital investment for capacity expansion and enabling additional frequencies will probably be a key focus. For the first two routes, expanding frequency will leverage the value of upcoming 110 mph operation.

Chicago – Dubuque – This initiative is already underway; additional funding should lead to completion and service inauguration.

Chicago – Moline (Quad Cities) – Planning and environmental work is underway.

Baton Rouge – New Orleans – Mobile – These are high-profile, high-priority routes for the State of Louisiana, and significant planning has been completed. The New Orleans – Mobile segment is the subject of a Surface Transportation Board (STB) case, while Baton Rouge – New Orleans is of keen interest to the Canadian Pacific (CP), which will probably partner with the state in upgrading the rail line, since it is a critical part of CP's expanded network.

Virginia – Virginia has a busy rail program and now owns over 500 miles of right-of-way for passenger service. Since its service leverages long-distance high-fare ridership to and from the Northeast Corridor (NEC), its trains require little or no operating subsidy. Virginia will undertake major capital initiatives.

Second Pennsylvanian – With the current Pennsylvanian's schedule slot potentially becoming a basic system train (as a

leg of the Capitol Limited), that would free up state resources for a second frequency across Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh.

New York – Scranton, PA – (Binghamton NY) – We have witnessed highly active stakeholder involvement and planning efforts over the years. Scranton is the President's hometown.

***Other Possible Initiatives on a Longer Timeline**

Florida – With the capacity that has been added to the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC), it may be possible to operate both the Silver Meteor and Silver Star Miami sections on the FEC direct to Miami. The southern connection from the FEC to the current route, just north of West Palm Beach, was built earlier and appears to be missing just a switch to connect it to the CSX. After the Tampa sections serve Tampa Bay, they would operate to Miami, maintaining equipment servicing at Hialeah. If the Silver Palm were added back, the Miami – Tampa route would become a mini-corridor. Florida would segue from little rail service to Brightline service for Miami – Orlando, combined with Amtrak Jacksonville – Miami and Amtrak Tampa – Miami.

S Line – One of the rail lines Virginia bought from CSX was the former Seaboard Air Line Railroad route between Richmond/Petersburg and Raleigh, NC. It is a key part of the planned Southeast Corridor and is more direct and shorter than the current route. Early improvement would yield a more competitive route for the Silver Star and Carolinian from Raleigh to the Northeast, so there is incentive for early action.

Daily Sunset – Changing from tri-weekly to daily service would markedly improve the financial performance of the route. However, unlike the Cardinal, which uses secondary rail lines, the Sunset's route is longer and the UP's Sunset Route is a high-volume trunk line. A favorable outcome in the Gulf Coast case and progress on a third main track, Colton – Indio (Coachella Valley Service), coupled with progress on the Sun Corridor, Phoenix – Tucson, paired with some key capacity projects in Texas, could improve the timeline for daily service on the Sunset Limited.

Coast Line – Purchase by California of the Coast Line from the Union Pacific would create new opportunities in the most populous state.

WANTED: Photographers for Steel Wheels
If you have a collection of hi-res jpeg photos, especially of passenger trains in California, or enjoy taking them, contact the Editor,
WE NEED YOU!
pdyson@railpac.org



Don't forget to check your subscription expiration date on the mailing label and renew your membership if it is due.

Thank you for your continued support for RailPAC and passenger rail.

Union Station Restaurant fights back with live entertainment.

Paul Dyson reports:

I think it's fair to say that Los Angeles Union Station is the most important station in California. As such it should carry a certain amount of prestige and set a high standard for passenger rail amenities, in addition to first class ease of use by users of all the types of transportation represented. One signature of a major passenger rail station should be a restaurant that provides a level of service over and above the essential but prosaic fast food and coffee establishments. Traxx Restaurant fills that need. Located close to the original main entrance off North Alameda Street, Traxx has indoor, patio and concourse tables, as well as a separate bar on the south side of the concourse.

Over the years Traxx has had a full and varied menu, best described as American traditional, or bistro. After a temporary closure and change of ownership in 2019 Traxx has had a very tough two years fighting Covid-19, its variants, and all the regulations that accompany it.

Back in December I traveled to Tucson on a Friday night to the All Aboard Arizona meeting. My brother in arms, James Smith (RailPAC VP) had told me about Jazz Night at Traxx at Union Station. What better way to start the journey? We arrived at the restaurant and were shown to the Patio (with heaters!) for some great food and cool contemporary jazz.

After the music we met the band and the restaurant manager, and James and I decided that we should figure out how to support this endeavor.

Guitarist Jinshi Ozaki was just about to make a return trip to Japan so Jazz night was anyway going on hiatus for a month. Jinshi was the one who put the band together for the Traxx evenings. He is a Los Angeles-based guitarist with 30 years of professional experience playing with well-known artists all over the world. He has performed worldwide with grammy award-winning recording artists Kirk Whalum, Jody Watley, Keiko Matsui, Kenny Garrett, Akira Jimbo, and sax legend Bill Perkins, and many others. He is also a signed recording artist with Crown Japan and L.A sound record. In addition, he has been a faculty member of the Musicians Institute since 2004.

Asked about trains, Jinshi replied "in Japan, I took Shinkansen (bullet train) for my gig tour. There are lunch boxes (called Ekiben) sold in each station, and I enjoyed eating them while looking at the scenery passing by the window. Oh, I remembered now that I took a train from Boston to Philadelphia when I was a student. It stopped at DC and the station was beautifully structured. It was autumn, and the colors of the



Jinshi, Jeffrey and Scott on the Patio at Traxx. Photo: Paul Dyson

autumn leaves and the station were stunning."

The other two players are equally distinguished. Bassist and band leader Jeffrey Littleton is one of the most versatile and in demand bassists on the West Coast. He has toured and performed with a virtual "who's who" of top jazz artists including Herbie Hancock, Nancy Wilson, Freddie Hubbard, Billy Higgins, Pharaoh Sanders, Charles Lloyd, and Bobby Hutcherson, to name a few. He continues to tour the world, as well as lead his own quintet in performances throughout Southern California.

Keyboard player Scott Kinsey has performed worldwide with Tribal Tech, Human Element, the Zawinul Legacy Band and his own groups. He's played legendary venues including Carnegie Hall, the Bottom Line, Blues Alley, the Great American Music Hall, and many more throughout the country. A versatile musician who feels at home playing almost anything with almost anyone, Scott has worked with incredible and diverse artists such as Joe Walsh, Dan Aykroyd (now THAT'S great bass...), Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, flamenco vocal genius Concha Buika, legendary saxophonist James Moody, jazz guitar original Kurt Rosenwinkel, Philip Bailey (Earth Wind & Fire), classical soprano star Anne Sofie von Otter, saxophonist Bill Evans, blues guitar great Robben Ford, David Holmes & The Free Association, Danny Carey (Tool), Nicholas Payton & Sonic Trance, Plus, Joe Zawinu.

RailPAC applauds this initiative by Traxx, and the musicians' dedication in playing to a small but intimate and appreciative audience. For updates, see traxxunion.com.

What Will It Take to Get People Out of Their Cars?

Commentary by Doug Kerr

Some public transportation agencies have tried cutting fares with the hope of increasing ridership and reducing personal automobile use. These attempts often have only minimal effect on getting people out of their cars. Some basic marketing principles can be used to better understand why fare reduction does not produce the desired results. Cost is only one of the factors people consider in choosing a method of travel. Others include convenience, ease of use, reliability, comfort, and safety. Public transportation already is cheaper than driving a car, so reducing fares is not targeting the primary reasons why people prefer to drive.

In my opinion, above all considerations, the convenience of the personal auto is paramount in that it provides door-to-door travel to any destination at any time of day. For most people, a car is easy to use, especially with GPS navigation. Travel time in an automobile can be approximated with good reliability, even accounting for congestion delays; this mode generally is much faster than public transportation. Finally, with a good car, the seating is comfortable and there is personal space.

The Internal Revenue Service, not famous for its liberality, sets the cost of driving between \$0.50 and \$0.60 per mile. Public transportation is almost always less expensive than driving a personal car, often far less. For example, traveling the 43 miles between Santa Rosa, CA and San Rafael, CA costs \$21.50 at \$0.50 per mile by car. The SMART train's full fare for this trip is \$6.00 (which was recently reduced on a promotion to \$3.00). For most cars the SMART fare would not even cover the cost of gasoline. This in a land where many people find it necessary to watch their nickels and dimes pretty carefully! If the cost of driving were the only consideration in travel choice, everyone would already be using public transportation.

Why don't more people rely on public transportation? The primary drawback for this mode is inflexibility of schedule. One must travel when the bus, train, or ferry is going. Lengthy breaks in service during the day can cause long waits for the next opportunity to travel. There are first/last mile issues, how to get to the transit mode, and how to get from the mode to the destination.

Public transportation systems can be complicated and difficult to use. This becomes a critical shortcoming when trying to piece together an itinerary involving different modes from different agencies. To give a personal example, consider a trip from my home in Healdsburg (Sonoma County) to San Francisco Airport. It's possible, but it requires two Sonoma County Transit buses with a transfer, and then rides on SMART, the Larkspur Ferry, and BART. To build an itinerary for getting to the airport at a desired time requires coordinating four websites!

One quickly learns that schedules don't mesh very well. It is much easier to drive a car and park at the airport, though this is far and away the costliest alternative. Public transportation can be uncomfortable: hard seats, crowded space, and standing room only. Lastly, poor on time performance (especially on Amtrak corridor services) means the mode really can't be considered for time-sensitive travel. Also, it should be acknowledged that many would-be transit users are worried about safety; some also see riding trains or buses as a step-down in class position.

There are a number of proposals to get people out of their cars that are aimed at making driving less convenient and even more costly than it already is. These include charging for all parking, reducing lanes and parking on city streets, charging a per mile use fee, and increasing the gasoline tax. I believe that these initiatives will only irritate drivers without significantly reducing miles driven. Degrading the convenience of driving to make transit more competitive is really going in the wrong direction. Instead, we should improve public transportation to make it more competitive with the automobile.

Here are some suggestions.

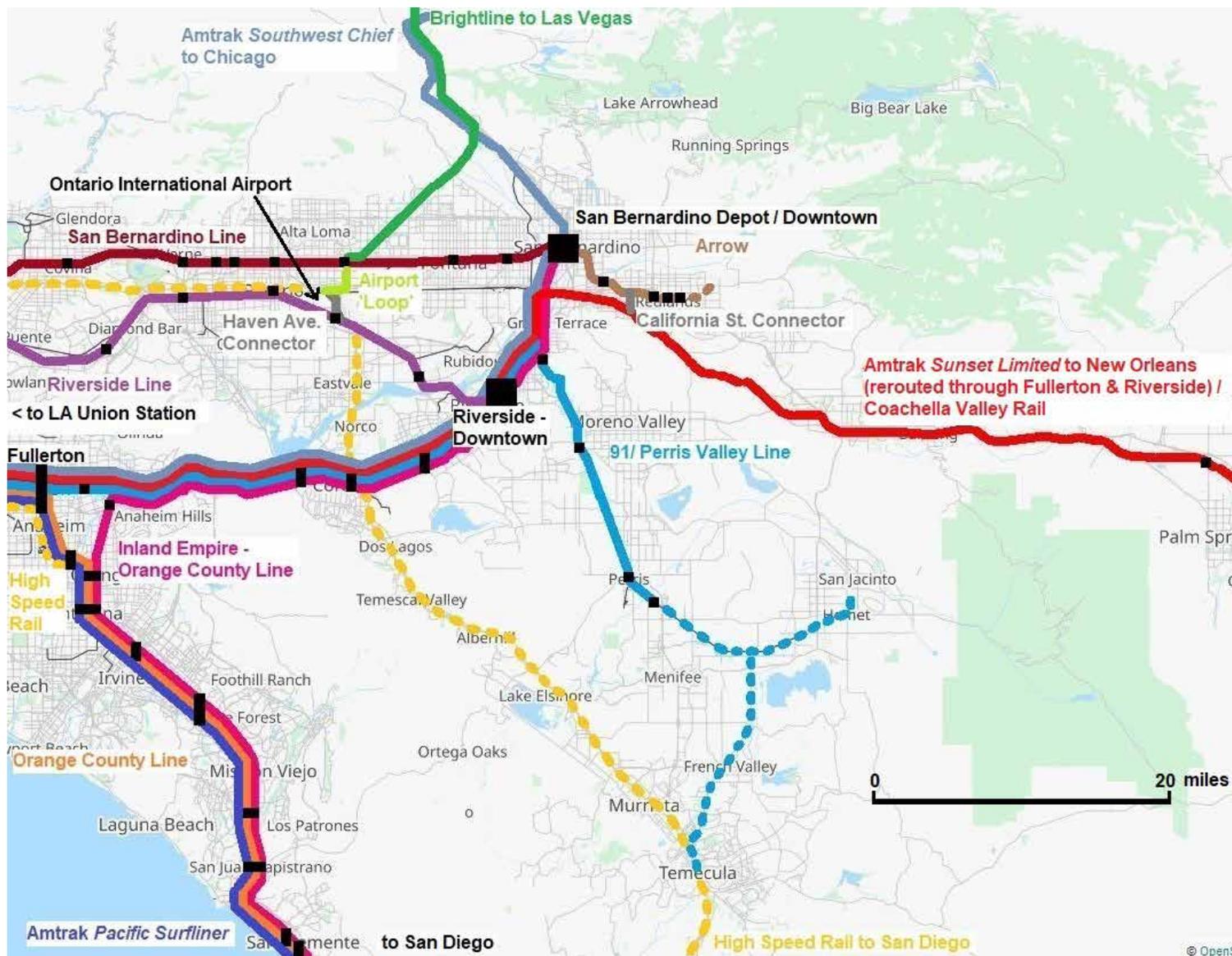
- To combat the schedule issue, urban transit should run every 10 to 15 minutes throughout the day. Intercity services should run every half hour.
- On time performance should be a minimum of 90%, with a goal of 95%.
- Public transportation agencies need to coordinate schedules and fare payment systems. Getting from point A to B using these systems should be easy.
- Comfortable, uncrowded conveyances that are appropriate for the distances traveled are important.
- Law enforcement, especially on inner-city routes, is essential.

I am most familiar with SMART here in Sonoma County. SMART does some things really well, but needs improvement in others. The SMART trains are clean, comfortable, and well-maintained. On time performance runs close to 100%, all of which encourages ridership. SMART connectivity with other transit systems, however, ranges from fair to poor. This is one area where improvement is imperative if we are ever to reduce traffic on our local freeways and roadways.

To compete with the automobile the overall goal for all public transportation agencies must be to provide a combined service as convenient and easy to use as the automobile to get from A to B.

A Vision for the Future of Rail in the Inland Empire, Part 2

by Marven Norman



Planned Services

In the coming years, travelers seeking to make their way around the Inland Empire by rail can expect several additions. Many of these projects have been in the works for a number of years yet still do not have a definite start date; but with the potential for significant funding opportunities on the horizon, it is critical to get as many as possible ready for funding without delay. Brightline West

Brightline West (sometimes "BW") plans to operate high-speed trains from a station on the Victorville/Apple Valley border to Las Vegas, with further extensions to Rancho Cucamonga and Palmdale. BW is essentially dusting off the plans from XpressWest, but adding new elements, including the development of a transit-oriented community around the Victorville station. The Victorville station would be on the border of Victorville and Apple Valley. Proponents hope to spur transit-oriented development and build a community so that

the station is more than just a parking lot in the desert. The other station is planned for Rancho Cucamonga, where there would be connections to the San Bernardino Line and the Loop connector (under construction) to Ontario International Airport.

Some have wondered about the value of coming to Rancho Cucamonga as opposed to going to Palmdale. The High-Desert Corridor has already received environmental clearance, and a line there would connect with Phase 1 of California High Speed Rail (CAHSR). However, the uncertainty facing many aspects of CAHSR makes the Rancho Cucamonga station a more viable option, because BW plans to use the median of I-15 and also because a station in Rancho Cucamonga is closer to more of the population of Southern California than Palmdale. Although Brightline West is planning only a handful of stations, growth along the route would provide opportunities for some additional stations. The first infill station would be in the area of Devore, near the I-15/I-215 junction, providing closer access to Rialto and San Bernardino and the Glen Helen Regional Park and

Amphitheater. It is not far from CSUSB, and travelers could transfer at Rancho Cucamonga to reach points west along the San Bernardino Line

The second infill station ought to be in Hesperia. This would provide a welcome alternative to driving the Cajon Pass. Additionally, with various connection opportunities, it would be possible to reach places in Orange County, the Temecula area, and San Diego—a commute that is not unheard of—far faster and more conveniently than the current options.

The next infill station would be on the route to Las Vegas itself. At present, no station is planned for Barstow, but with the Marine base nearby and given its location at the crossroads of I-15, I-40, and SR-58, a case for a station there could be made.

California High Speed Rail to the Inland Empire

The language of AB 3034 (Galgiani, 2008) which put Proposition 1A on the ballot set specific service corridors in statute, including the one for LA to San Diego. That route was assigned to go through the Inland Empire, including the Riverside segment. The California High-Speed Rail Authority has developed preliminary routes. Two main options, which run south from the Inland Empire below the Ontario station, are projected. Option 1 would continue the route down I-15 to San Diego with stops in Corona and Temecula.

Option 2 itself has two variants, with service either (A) directly to San Bernardino via the San Bernardino Line then turning back down to Riverside, or (B) remaining adjacent to the Alhambra Subdivision and I-10 to Colton, to include a station for the San Bernardino area, then turning south to Riverside. From Riverside, the alignment would be the same and follow the existing Perris Valley Line infrastructure and I-215, then I-15 on to San Diego, with stations at March Field and Temecula.

However, in the 2018 State Rail Plan, the 2040 buildout scenario assumes that the I-15 alignment is chosen and that Riverside and San Bernardino are both served by spurs of the high-speed system which branch off from Ontario. (Thus, it appears that Option 1 is being tacitly chosen even if actual planning has not begun. To maximize the usefulness of the CAHSR line, several stations need to be added over what is planned. The first infill station for the I-15 CAHSR route is in the Eastvale/Jurupa Valley area. The second infill station is Corona-North Main. Although the plans at present would only have a station in Corona at Dos Lagos, that would miss a huge opportunity to facilitate transfers to Inland Empire Orange County Line and 91/Perris Valley Line trains, easing the terrible congestion that plagues The next four additional stations are those identified as Alternative D in RCTC's I-15 Commuter Rail Feasibility Study from 2007 at Dos Lagos, Temescal Canyon Rd., Nichols Rd., Bundy Canyon Rd., and Temecula/Ranch Murrieta. However, the Alberhill development in Lake Elsinore is being planned with the right-of-way and space available for a station so it might make sense to swap it for Nichols Rd

Coachella Valley Rail

For over 30 years Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and Caltrans have been conducting studies on introducing daily intercity passenger rail service to the Coachella Valley.) Based on the Tier 1 document, Union Pacific is requiring that a new third track be constructed for the entirety of its line, which would be shared from Colton to the terminus in Indio or Coachella. The capital expense is at least a billion dollars, which is a tall order, considering that the plan at present is to operate just two daily roundtrips.

As RailPAC stressed in our comment letter on the draft environmental documents, this level of capital investment makes it imperative that RCTC and other regional partners add daily trips to this service, to maximize return on investment and serve more travelers. The Coachella Valley Rail Project (CVRP) plans to have six or seven stations in the Inland Empire: Riverside, Loma Linda, the San Geronio Pass, the existing Palm Springs station, a station near the center of the valley (in the, Indio, and possibly Coachella. If more than two daily departures are provided as RailPAC has urged, then it is certain that this line will attract commuters. Another station that should be added to the route is Corona-North Main. The station already exists; all that is needed is to add CVRP stops. The missing link remains the fact that the plan skips the San Bernardino Transit Center (SBTC). Due to the objective of serving Riverside-- the project is being spearheaded by RCTC--s well as the challenges of using the San Bernardino Line, this plan was dropped. But the rehabilitation of the Redlands Branch for the Redlands Passenger Rail Project (RPRP) brings the solution tantalizingly close: Close the gap between it and the UP Yuma Subdivision with a connection along California St. and run trains over the RPRP to the SBTC.

Desert Wind/Las Vegas XTrain

In its Amtrak ConnectsUS document, Amtrak proposed reestablishing service to Las Vegas that was discontinued in 1997, using the same route as the Southwest Chief over the BNSF Transcon and the UP Cima Subdivision to Las Vegas. With two daily roundtrips added to those of the Southwest Chief, would provide at least three daily train options for people who need to travel between the Victor Valley and the rest of Southern California area. The big question is whether such a service would be viable, since Brightline West would serve about the same market with trains running more frequently at higher speeds. Unless Brightline West capsizes, the benefit of a new Desert Wind seems questionable.

Another planned option is the Las Vegas XTrain which is designed to be a luxury train service. It would follow the same route as a revived Desert Wind, but no stops are planned anywhere in the Inland Empire, with only LAUS and Fullerton to be stops. Previously announced plans to start service by the end of 2021 have not panned out.



The author proposes a Brightline station at Devore. Here a train of Brightline coaches is headed for Florida passing Devore in March 2017 Photo Matthew Griffin

Appendix: Proposed Passenger Improvements and Investments for the Inland Empire listed in the 2018 California State Rail Plan (Chapter 4)

<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/rail-and-mass-transportation/california-state-rail-plan>

2022- Service Goals and Improvements:

- Half-hourly peak and hourly off-peak regional service between Los Angeles and San Bernardino, and Los Angeles and Riverside/Perris Valley, with Integrated Express Bus filling any gaps in the schedule due to insufficient available railroad capacity.
- Integrated regional service between San Bernardino and Redlands that matches the service frequency between San Bernardino and Los Angeles.

2027- Service Goals and Improvements:

- Half-hourly all-day service on the San Bernardino line between Los Angeles and San Bernardino, with core capacity improvements.
- Half-hourly peak rail service on the 91 Line, with all-day rail and Integrated Express Bus services leveraging remaining available rail slots on the Riverside and 91 Line corridors to connect to the statewide rail network serving Orange County, San Diego, and Los Angeles on a half-hourly basis.
- Two trains per day between Los Angeles Union Station and Indio in the Coachella Valley.
- Half-hourly regional rail service between Perris Valley and Riverside, with extension of rail and/or Integrated Express Bus service to Hemet and Murrieta, based on regional development timelines.

2040- Service Goals and Improvements:

- HSR service between Los Angeles Union Station and San Diego via the Inland Empire, with the following

characteristics:

- HSR trains running from Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino via Ontario Airport, with trains providing service at local stops at least half-hourly to maximize statewide connectivity.
- Express intercity and HSR trains providing at least half-hourly all-day service between Los Angeles and San Bernardino via Ontario Airport.
- Express intercity and HSR trains providing at least half-hourly all-day service between Los Angeles and Riverside via Ontario Airport.
- HSR trains on express service schedules driven by market demand between Riverside and San Diego, as well as San Bernardino and San Diego.
- HSR between Ontario Airport and San Diego via Corona.
- Potential to upgrade east-west express rail corridors beyond 2040 to accommodate HSR extension to Coachella Valley and Arizona.
- At least half-hourly local service between Los Angeles Union Station and San Bernardino via Fullerton, Corona, and Riverside.
- Half-hourly local service connecting Laguna Niguel to Riverside via Corona.
- Half-hourly local service between Riverside and Hemet via Perris. Trains could continue on to Orange County (Laguna Niguel).
- Half-hourly service between Los Angeles Union Station and San Bernardino, making local stops via a San Gabriel Valley Hub that provides connectivity to other rail services and urban mass transit.
- At least half-hourly service between Redlands and San Bernardino, with train connections to the state network.
- Hourly service to the Coachella Valley from San Bernardino and Riverside. The State foresees the provision of this service as an opportunity to provide the groundwork for anticipated HSR service to Arizona.
- The State envisions that a high-speed line will eventually run between Phoenix and Los Angeles, serving the Coachella Valley.
- Half-hourly Integrated Express Bus service from San Bernardino between the Inland Empire and HSR service at Victorville (with service to Las Vegas).

RailPAC priorities in pictures

by Paul Dyson

Sea Level rise, the Long-Distance trains, the Surfliner route



Charles Freericks’s picture of a work train with side dump ballast cars fortifying the track structure at San Clemente tells the story from September 2021. As we reported in the last issue, rising tides and crumbling cliffs leave the line squeezed between the devil and the deep blue sea. We must also mention that this section of the Los Angeles – San Diego route is a single-track bottleneck. RailPAC will be devoting a lot of time and effort to highlighting and campaigning for solutions to both these issues in 2022 and beyond.



Chris Mohs’s fine image of the Coast Starlight at Elkhorn Slough near Watsonville from December 2016 highlights two issues. The track over Elkhorn is barely four feet above sea level, and will surely need attention in the near future. At the same time the train consist of the “Starlight” includes the Pacific Parlor car, which we have lost, and a lot more coaches and sleepers than are seen on the current train, or on the rest of the long distance trains for that matter.

All Aboard Arizona

Todd Liebman – President All Aboard Arizona

There is so much to write about currently in passenger rail advocacy, and many things, positive and not so positive, happening in Arizona. Let's start with the positive.



AAAZ Summit at Tucson December 2021 - Photo: AAZ

Our annual Fall Passenger Rail Summit in Tucson in December was extremely successful and thought provoking. We had a tremendous attendance and great presenters from a broad spectrum of rail passenger advocacy. Speakers came from all over the country to share their thoughts on where we've been, where we're going, and the current state of advocacy. Along with the impressive presenters were high-profile attendees, including elected officials, local officials, and influencers from Tucson, Phoenix, Yuma and Flagstaff. I believe everyone walked away from the conference with a real enthusiasm for what is possible for improved rail passenger service to Arizona.

As a direct result of the meeting, we are working with local officials to organize a broad consortium of local leaders from governments and organizations to work on the Sun Corridor project. Our efforts are bearing fruit, as evidenced by the enthusiasm of many local units of government and media interest.

The Sun Corridor and the Daily Sunset Project are top priorities for our organization. Both are essential. The Daily Sunset Project should benefit from the mandate in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill which requires that Amtrak study making all tri-weekly trains daily.

Now for the not so good news. We still don't have a partner in Arizona state government to move forward. The draft rail plan states that local units of government must move the ball forward, and that the state cannot be relied upon for funding. We need the state to directly support or provide legislative authority for local units of government to support the Sun Corridor.

Perhaps even more unwelcome news is presented by the odd happenings at Amtrak. For 50 years, I have been an Amtrak booster, always willing to give Amtrak the benefit of the doubt. It is understandable that the Omicron variant is having an impact, as it is on all industries and travel modes. However, the decisions of Amtrak management, and the effects on the long-distance trains, are just bizarre. Cutting the days of operation of the long-distance trains, and suspending the Silver Meteor in the depths of winter--for the first time since its introduction in the 1930's--is just odd. I am sure that many travelers want to go from the Northeast to Florida in the winter.

Most of Amtrak's problems seem to stem from poor management decisions: buy-outs of key personnel, failure

to maintain the Superliners, furloughs of skilled workers even as the pandemic was lifting, and failure to recruit new employees. Amtrak appears to be in a serious mess, and it isn't getting better. Although long-distance train ridership held up far better than either the state-supported corridors or the Northeast Corridor, Amtrak seems ambivalent about, perhaps even opposed to, this service. I continue to be harshly critical of Amtrak's decision to stop issuing timetables. A train is not like an airplane, and it is critical to know where a train stops and what cities it serves. Lest you think I am a Luddite, every international railway I informally surveyed continues to have regular timetables linked on their websites.

Long distance trains are having their capacity limited while Superliners are being used in corridor services like the Illinois service. Many cars are tied up in the weekly Ski Train service. The Ski Train is wonderful, but to tie up these cars in a weekly service when the long-distance trains are being curtailed and shorted cars is worrisome. To the extent bad management impairs Amtrak's ability to prudently spend the money provided by Congress to grow the system, we should all be concerned. We advocates need to consider how to present a cogent and united front in addressing these management blunders. We need to urge the Biden Administration to appoint a new board of directors that will address these issues now.

I was recently listening to an excellent podcast from Wisconsin Public Radio entitled Derailed. It's about the last federal government money to expand rail, how it was awarded to Wisconsin, and how it was ultimately lost when Scott Walker was elected governor in Wisconsin. I urge everyone to listen to it. The Talgo trains built for the service are now headed to Nigeria to be placed in commuter service, a profound waste of this beautiful inter-city equipment. This is a cautionary tale for advocates. A large part of the money that would have built a turn-key corridor between Chicago-Milwaukee-Madison went to other states. This caused me to think about high-speed rail.

High speed rail is well-suited to California, but it is not a panacea or appropriate for many services. It is extraordinarily expensive and ridiculously time-consuming to build. We can't wait 30 years to address the serious mobility and environmental challenges facing America. We need trains that can enter service in two to three years at a reasonable cost. The Wisconsin corridor and the Sun Corridor are examples of services where high performance rail would be far preferable to high speed rail for a host of reasons. A point to ponder is whether high speed is even desirable for short distance corridors like Tucson to Phoenix. More intermediate stations mean more economic benefit for more communities. Being able to zip past your destination at 185 mph is not the objective. Now that one can work on the train thanks to WIFI and cellular phones, and many people are telecommuting anyway, the need for speed has diminished. Perhaps we can get more value, and more corridors and service, by focusing on high performance rail in some corridors and on improved long-distance trains. Travel times competitive with driving may be fast enough. High speed can then develop incrementally, as it has almost everywhere else in the world.

I have finally scheduled an Amtrak trip on the beautiful Sunset Limited. I can't wait to ride the rails next month and enjoy a real meal in the dining car and a night in the sleeper. I'll look forward to seeing you on the rails.

Nevada News

by Ron Kaminkow

The Nevada Rail Coalition is progressing. The group has had Zoom meetings with some key elected officials in both the Reno and Las Vegas areas. The coalition now has a website, www.nevadarailcoalition.org.

We have seen a number of encouragingly optimistic reports about Brightline West in the last few weeks. This includes a plan to complete approvals for the route from Victorville to Rancho Cucamonga by the end of 2022, as well as the beginning of construction.

Railway Age reports:

“Before Brightline became involved in 2018, plans only called for the line to run between Apple Valley and Las Vegas, without the segment to Rancho Cucamonga that Brightline West now plans to build. Planners and rider-advocates had criticized the former concept as ignoring the Los Angeles region with its millions of residents, many of whom depend on transit, a lifestyle that is now feasible due to the remarkable and continuing growth of the city’s and region’s transit systems over the past 30 years.

[Alan Ohnsman reported in Forbes on Jan. 24:](#) “Beyond Brightline West and Florida, Eden’s plan is to build passenger lines connecting other large cities that are between 200 miles to 300 miles apart, distances that are often too far to drive and too close to fly. To hold down costs, it also seeks to build tracks adjacent to existing highways—at ground level and not elevated—as it’s doing in Florida and intends to do in California and Nevada.”

With respect to Brightline West, the company hopes to break ground about one year from now. The required permit will cover the portion of line from Rancho Cucamonga to Victor Valley Station, a location in Apple Valley north of Victorville (the Cajon Pass Project, which will be 49 miles long). The FRA already issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for the segment from there to Las Vegas (the High Desert Project, 186 miles long) before Florida’s Brightline took over the proposed railroad. During its earlier history, it started as DesertXpress in 2005, and became XpressWest in 2012.

Current plans call for the entire line to open all at once, and all of it will be newly constructed railroad. Those plans also include a two-seat ride between the gambling mecca and the City of Angels, with adjacent stations at Rancho Cucamonga at a transit hub that will be established there for Brightline West, Metrolink trains and local buses. The proposed schedule calls for 25 daily round trips, leaving 45 minutes apart. Travel time for the 235-mile journey would be two hours, making the

average speed about 115 mph. The top speed will be 180 mph. There are also plans to build two intermediate park-and-ride stations, at Hesperia and the previously-mentioned Victor Valley Station at Apple Valley.

Brightline West is not currently contemplating through-running on the Metrolink line (historically part of the Santa Fe), but a Metrolink schedule designed to offer a quick connection at Rancho Cucamonga to every train to Las Vegas would give all of that line’s riders a far-more-robust service than any regional rail line in southern California has ever offered. The current Metrolink schedule, which became effective on Oct. 25, offers 15 trains in each direction (one of which runs express) on weekdays, nine on Saturdays and seven on Sundays—more service than any other Metrolink line offers. The trip on Metrolink takes about 75 minutes.

When the new line enters service, it will fill a gap in the nation’s passenger rail network that has existed since May 1997. That was when Amtrak discontinued the *Desert Wind*, a train between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City that stopped at Las Vegas and connected with the *California Zephyr*, which still runs between Chicago and the Bay Area. The station in Las Vegas will be located on Las Vegas Boulevard at Warm Springs Road, with local bus access to the Strip and downtown locations like Fremont Street, where the older casinos are located.”

RailPAC supports this exciting project, which has become much more viable with the extension to Rancho Cucamonga.



From the Rear Platform

By Paul Dyson, Editor

We regret to report the death of friend and longtime RailPAC member Dana Gabbard. Dana had a wide variety of interests, and the best place to read about his life is at StreetsblogLA. (la.streetsblog.org). I remember him best for the many occasions at such events as National Train Day when Dana manned the SoCaTa booth alongside us at RailPAC. In the last few years he kept SoCaTa running almost single-handedly.

Dana had a formidable memory and a deep knowledge of public transportation in southern California. It was his only means of getting around. Bart Reed of the Transit Coalition recalled: "Dana was absolutely passionate about transportation. He had a deep knowledge of the service and the policies behind transit and the power structure and financing that developed and provided Southern California mobility. His research skillset was incredible." The latter point is especially significant, as Dana was a subject expert long before the internet made research easy for everyone. He is renowned for his "Rules of transit Advocacy", equally applicable to passenger rail

- 1) There are no magic bullets
- 2) Transit's main purpose is to move people, not solve pollution, social equity, congestion, etc.
 - 2a) Transit is a means (mobility) to an end (the destination), not an end in itself
- 3) Beware (and be aware) of unintended consequences
- 4) Things can always get worse; change should be for the better not just for the sake of change
- 5) The greatest challenge is changing perceptions
- 6) Parochialism will always rear its ugly head (aka "fair share")
 - 6a) Also NIMBYism
- 7) Never promise congestion relief resulting from a transit project
- 8) Always get the actual documents and studies; don't rely on summaries or media stories about them
- 9) Everyone is a transportation expert, just ask them

While Dana was primarily concerned with transit, he supported every RailPAC event that he could, and traveled by train to visit his family in Washington state.

Dana was not shy about making himself heard, in person and in the media. A few days before he died, Dana participated in the inaugural Sierra Club "national rail interest group" and had high hopes for it. We are the poorer for losing him.

RailPAC congratulates our VP South Brian Yanity, who was recently appointed to National Electrical Manufacturers Association Rail Electrification Council's Advisory Committee

(the first member from the West coast). Brian's profession is electrical engineer.

Metrolink is planning an \$86.5 million upgrade of its tracks and crossings in **Simi Valley** to increase the frequency of its



*A smoky Tier 4 Metrolink train departs Simi Valley, December 2021.
Photo: Juan Carlo, VC Star*

commuter train service yet decrease train horn noise. The project will build 2.15 miles of new track parallel to existing track from approximately Hidden Ranch Drive to Sequoia Avenue on the Ventura County Line. The project will also enhance five rail crossings at Sequoia Avenue, Tapo Canyon Road, Tapo Street, East Los Angeles Avenue and Hidden Ranch Drive. The enhancements will include warning devices and will allow the city to apply to the Federal Railroad Administration for "Quiet Zone" consideration.

Sounds good doesn't it; like another step forward? The only problem is that, according to a Metrolink spokesman addressing the Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC), construction will be completed in 2026. Two miles of track and systems, and four years of design and construction. At this pace the SCORE program of enhancements for Metrolink will take three or four decades. We have to learn how to deliver projects faster than this, or there will be complete disillusionment with passenger rail, especially given the raised expectations from recently announced increases in federal funds.

In the third quarter issue of Steel Wheels last year, I reported on the end of the Fillmore and Western operation on the Santa Paula Branch in Ventura County. VCTC appointed a new operator at a special meeting in December. Sierra Northern has been awarded an extraordinary 35-year contract to operate the line. At the VCTC meeting in December Ken Beard, Sierra Northern President, said that his company will operate freight trains on the line. A sister company, Mendocino Railway,

will operate tourist trains on the line if it determines it's cost effective to do so; but it might choose not to operate on the line, Beard said. I have asked Sierra Northern to comment but have had no reply. As the former commercial representative for Southern Pacific (SP) on that line, I can say that freight prospects are slim and dependent on cooperation from Union Pacific. I will follow with interest what Sierra Northern does. I have asked the company for comment but no reply received to date.

Back to the **long-distance** trains, whereof I can share a personal anecdote. A few weeks ago I had occasion to inquire about trains and fares to Chicago and was quoted \$2100 roundtrip from Los Angeles for a roomette. I demurred and made other arrangements. I had occasion to re-check the fare a couple of weeks later. Lo and behold, the same accommodation for the same dates was available for \$1200! Now Amtrak may think they are being super clever by attempting to extract the maximum revenue from each passenger; but in this case they didn't extract a single dime from me, and at departure time there was space still available. In the last issue of Steel Wheels Andy Selden described this behavior by Amtrak as sabotage, and I strongly recommend that you give this another look. When I see trains with half the number of cars compared to before the pandemic, when I see a near total absence of advertising of these trains, and when fares are quoted at nosebleed prices, then I am inclined to agree with his assessment. You can draw your own conclusions.

Here's another way to **discourage passengers**. (Thanks to Doug Kerr for the analysis).

Amtrak is reverting to a 5-day a week operation for its long-distance trains, supposedly due to a shortage of crew members. I find this hard to believe when I look at the schedule of the California Zephyr, train #s 5 and 6, the train I'm most familiar with.

On a normal 7-day a week operation, On Board Service (OBS) crews leave Chicago on #5 day one, arrive in Emeryville day three, leave Emeryville on #6 day four and arrive in Chicago day six.

With the 5-day a week operation, #5 and #6 do not leave their origins on Sundays or Mondays. This means the crew on #5 departing Chicago Thursday arriving Emeryville Saturday lays over for two days until the next departing #6 on Tuesday. The same follows for #5 arriving Sunday, crews will depart Wednesday and #5 arriving Monday, crews will depart Thursday. Keeping several able bodied OBS crews housed and fed for two day/three night layovers can hardly be seen as an efficient way to handle a shortage of crews.

A similar situation occurs with train operating crews (engineers and conductors). As an example, a Reno, NV crew takes #6 in the afternoon from Reno to Winnemucca and returns on #5 the next morning. With 5-day operation, Tuesday's #6 crew lays over in Winnemucca until Thursday because there is no #5 on Wednesday at Winnemucca for the return. Monday's #5 from Winnemucca will have to have its crew deadhead from Reno on Saturday's #6 and layover Sunday as there is no #6 on Sunday. Tuesday's #6 crew will layover Wednesday in Winnemucca and return on Thursday's #6. The alternative is to shuttle the crews the 170 miles between Reno and Winnemucca as needed. Again, hardly seems a solution to a crew shortage.

Add into this mix that it's nearly impossible to tell on Amtrak's website what days each train is running and 5-day operation means connections may only be possible 3 or 4 days per week. Hard to believe human minds could create such a mess.

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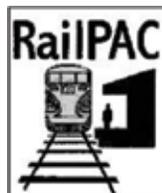
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