

STEEL WHEELS

PASSENGER RAIL IN CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST

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REGIONAL RAILS SEEK PASSENGERS
ESCONDIDO JC. JULY 3, 2020
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From the Editor's Desk

By Paul Dyson - RailPAC Editor



This is not a drill

I had the opportunity to have a conversation with Darren Kettle, the recently appointed CEO of Metrolink here in southern California. The main topic was post pandemic recovery. It's a conversation I could have had with the CEO of any transit or regional rail organization

around the country, and probably much of the world as well. The long-term plans, and associated capital and operating budgets, have more or less been consigned to the round bin. They probably won't use those terms, but any Board of Directors overseeing these operations must surely at minimum be calling for a thorough review to see if those plans match the new reality.

The new reality is that the passenger head count is still below 50% of pre-pandemic, and the rebound is by no means even. As I suspected, thus far at least, Mondays and Fridays see much lighter loads than the three midweek days. It's human nature to add your "work at home" days on to the weekend, especially to avoid the Friday evening commute, always the worst. Unfortunately, the impact on those operators with a heavily weighted commuter peak hour operation is dire. Empty trains must surely provoke the question, "why are we doing this?" at least in some quarters. Those quarters are of course the County Boards that appoint directors to Caltrain, ACE, Metrolink and Coaster, and they are right to ask the question. It is after all

taxpayers' money. And when farebox recovery has dropped from 50-60% down to 10-20% it quickly becomes a lot of taxpayers' money. Scarce resources, capable of alternative uses, as my Econ lecturer used to say. There are still plenty of public agencies ready, willing and able to spend that money on more freeway lanes because you know, that's what drivers want, and it reduces congestion and improves the air!!!

My answer to "why are we doing this?" is threefold. First, we have the infrastructure, the rolling stock and the workforce, so the marginal cost of using it versus shutting it down is not that great. Second, while the passenger numbers are on an upward trend, we are justified in continuing. Third, management should be transitioning the organization to serve a much larger customer base, as well as making the existing offering more reliable, safer, and for a while, cheaper. Here's where there is a glimmer of good news. The competition, the automobile, has taken a hit with the increased price of gasoline. Yes, cars are more fuel efficient than twenty or thirty years ago, (or electric), but in the longer haul market the train has a distinct advantage in overall cost to the passenger.

So no, this is not a drill. If the numbers don't come back up, and the rail agencies prove themselves unable to attract and keep new types of riders, making different trips for a multitude

of purposes, then organizations like Metrolink face an existential threat. As one of my old British Railways bosses used to say, "we are not here to keep the rails polished, we're here to put backsides on seats". We wish the new generation of passenger rail managers every success in this critical endeavor.

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*2,000 seats waiting for passengers Los Angeles Union Station April 13, 2022
Photo: Paul Dyson*

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,

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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.

President's Commentary

By Steve Roberts – RailPAC President



First I would like to acknowledge the steadfastness and bravery of the railway men and women of the Ukrainian Railways as they go about their tasks, often going above and beyond. Despite the risks and demands of operating

in a war zone they are operating as professionals. They are an inspiration to railroaders everywhere. The metrics of their efforts are astounding. Evacuating almost four million displaced Ukrainian citizens (and their pets) to safety and then loading up the trains with medical and relief supplies and heading back in harm's way to evacuate others. And their work continues. The accomplishments of the Ukrainian Railways are also a testament to the value and surge capacity of the controlled and coordinated operations that railway technology offers. (See March 31, 2022 Photo Essay in The Guardian).

As I outlined in the last issue of Steel Wheels, part of the Infrastructure Bill funding was a direct appropriation (money in the bank) and part was an authorization (future appropriation by Congress required). As I noted don't count on all that funding as Congress often appropriates less funding than authorized. Recently when Congress passed the FY22 budget that advisement came true. Compared to the FY22 funding authorized, the funding appropriated for Amtrak operations and capital and also railroad investment in general was 50%, or about \$4 billion, less than authorized. It was 17% (\$484 million) above FY21 appropriated levels which is slightly positive especially if spending in FY23 is covered with a continuing resolution. Given Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner's dismal management of Amtrak's state of readiness during the pandemic by not investing for a seamless return to full service, he needs to offset that failure by delivering the most critical priority over the next few years. That priority is Congressional appropriation of a large proportion if not all of the funding authorized in the Infrastructure Bill for Amtrak and other rail investments. After all, knowing the ins and outs of Capitol Hill is supposedly Stephen Gardner's key skill set.

Also in Washington, as I write this, the Gulf Coast Service hearing before the Surface Transportation Board has become a marathon with additional days of presentations and cross-examination added. One thing the Gulf Coast hearing and other recent hearings has laid bare, is that despite CSX's efforts to keep its operations behind a cloak, current railroading has become a service disaster. Whatever the attributes of Precision Scheduled Railroading (PSR), the closing of redundant pre-merger hump yards, running general merchandise trains instead of trying to make every traffic flow a unit train, using new technology (remote units) to always clear the yard on a daily basis, balanced operations, etc., as implemented the freight railroads have made a hash of it. Instead of making investments - longer yard arrival and departure tracks and sidings, regular schedules to guarantee connections, a sufficiently robust crew base to assure no train is held for a rested crew and misses its scheduled departure,

etc. - they have instead focused on using PSR to reduce costs, increasing cash flow to investors and then making do day-by-day to make things work. It's the same old sloppy railroading just with longer trains. Also as became clear looking at the CSX rail line and its operations between New Orleans and Mobile, CSX's version of PSR has in fact substantially reduced the capacity of its rail line. And when you cut capacity by the amount they and other railroads did, there was no ability to handle the post-pandemic traffic surge. Beyond the economic impact from supply chain disruption, it is hard to operate an on-time passenger train when many of the sidings are plugged and main tracks are occupied by priority trains waiting for rested crews. As a result the on-time performance of Amtrak's long-distance trains has been negatively impacted to a substantial degree.

Calls to Action

Serra Siding Extension – RailPAC has always advocated that the potential of existing rail right-of-ways be fully leveraged to address increased transportation demand, mitigate the need to expand existing freeways, utilized land already disturbed by the existing rail line and reduce energy usage. However, leveraging that potential generally requires additional capacity to create reliable and flexible rail operations. Achieving this goal generally requires segments of double track. However the planning process, especially in California, is heavily weighted toward local control. This local control, which may be appropriate for a proposal for a standalone business, presents a real challenge for transportation investments which involve a continuous integrated infrastructure. Such a situation has arisen is Dana Point where there is opposition to replacing a life-expired bridge and to lengthen the existing Serra Siding by 1.2 miles. The apparent goal of at least some of the opponents is removal of the rail line, part of the "Surf Line" between Los Angeles and San Diego. And not only is the "Surf Line" the second busiest corridor in the US, as outlined in an article by Brian Yanity RailPAC VP South, it is of strategic and economic value as well (page 8). Since all politics is local, RailPAC members in Southern Orange county need to voice their support. If you reside in Southern Orange County send your email address and city you live in to steve@railpac.org so we can let you know when the vital public outreach associated with the project is occurring. Not undertaking this improvement of the rail line is a vote for expanding I-5 through Laguna Nigel, San Juan Capistrano and San Clemente.

Amtrak's FY2023 Grant Request – In Washington the FY2023 Federal budget is being developed. Send an email to your Representative asking their support for Amtrak's FY2023 grant request. Adequate Federal resources will allow Amtrak to continue operating its long-distance trains, continue support state funded short-distance corridor service; and to continue normalized maintenance and replacement of aged assets.

Amtrak's Board of Directors - Finally, as Paul notes (page 12), Amtrak's Board needs to be reconstituted. **Send your Senator an email about the need to reconstitute Amtrak's Board of Directors.**

Readers will recall RailPAC’s role in the successful passage of SB 742 which allowed non train passengers to buy tickets on Amtrak Thruway buses. Roll out has been slow; here’s a press update from the San Joaquin route:

RIDERS CAN NOW PURCHASE “BUS-ONLY” TICKETS FOR THREE MORE ROUTES

Riders on Amtrak San Joaquins will now be able to purchase bus-only tickets for Routes 1C, 7, and 19, without the need for their trip to include a train connection. This is the next step of implementing SB 742, legislation that opened up the Amtrak thruway bus network for riders and made the Amtrak San Joaquins service more convenient and accessible. Already, Routes 10 and 18 are open for bus-only ticket purchases.

THE BUS-ONLY TICKETING OPTIONS ARE NOW AVAILABLE IN THE FOLLOWING LOCATIONS:

- Route 1C: Bakersfield – Van Nuys – West Los Angeles/UCLA – Santa Monica
- Route 7: Martinez – Napa – Santa Rosa – Humboldt State University – Arcata
- Route 10: Santa Barbara – Bakersfield – Barstow – Las Vegas
- Route 18: Hanford – Lemoore – San Luis Obispo – Santa Maria
- Route 19: Bakersfield – Pasadena – Riverside – San Bernardino

MAKING AMTRAK’S THRUWAY BUS ROUTES AVAILABLE TO NON-RAIL RIDERS BRINGS SEVERAL BENEFITS INCLUDING:

- Improved access to transit for priority and underserved communities
- Reduction in greenhouse gas and air pollution emissions by diverting trips that would have previously been taken by an automobile
- Reduced car trips on some of the state’s most congested freeways
- Better utilization of current transit infrastructure
- Increased revenues for the state at virtually no additional cost

State legislation, SB 742 authored by Senator Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica), was passed in 2019 to remove the requirement for intercity passenger rail/thruway bus services to sell companion rail tickets as condition of the sale. The bill specifically allows Joint Powers Authorities, including San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA), Capitol Corridor, and the Los Angeles San Diego-San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor Agency (LOSSAN), to pick up and drop off passengers on their Amtrak intercity thruway bus routes without requiring them to have a train ticket as part of their trip.

Thruway Buses meet the train at Martinez CA. Soon the bus will also be a stand alone service. Photo: John Ryan



RailPictures Net - Image Copyright © John Ryan

Taking the Texas Eagle to Tucson

...on Amtrak's Stepchild?

Another Commentary by Russ Jackson



It was a great trip... The future of Amtrak train 21/22 (and 421/422) the Texas Eagle has been a concern in recent years, which is justified until you board the train for an overnight trip from Ft. Worth, Texas, to Tucson, Arizona in March, 2022. We did just that. As in past trips, what we found on board the

train as far as atmosphere, service, employee morale, etc., supersedes any concern. We all know that it is a four (4) car train from Chicago to San Antonio daily where the sleeping car and a coach join the Sunset Limited tri-weekly for the trip west. A writer on TrainOrders recently described the Eagle as "Short trains, Short staffed, Short service, and Short-sighted management." Agreed, particularly the management part. As a crew member said, "How can they run only four cars: one Sleeping car, no Sightseer Lounge, no baggage car, and only one person working the Diner-Lounge when the train is full and could fill more cars? The Texas Eagle is Amtrak's step-child and we're tired of it." On March 28 Amtrak will challenge the Eagle again by running the Capitol Limited's Washington DC originated four-car trainsets through Chicago to San Antonio and Los Angeles with minimum maintenance enroute, a procedure they learned was wrong years ago because of late trains, bad order cars, etc. Wrong again. Now to us:

Ft. Worth to San Antonio on 421 in Sleeping car 32001, a Pullman-Standard original Superliner I now over 40 years old ...The interior has been rebuilt and in the words of someone close to me, "Very comfortable." ...Depart FTW at 3:00, one hour late ...All 5 bedrooms occupied, all but two roomettes occupied ... A trip to the Diner-Lounge to see who was riding found a Diet Coke cost \$4.50 in the Cafe ... and then I saw this:

Am I suspicious or does this look like a vending machine? Right now it's a display of the items that can be purchased from the lone Diner-Lounge attendant, but what would it take for Amtrak management to automate some items sometime?



We require room service at our ages to avoid having to walk between moving cars, but dinner reservations for only 5:00 and 5:45 were efficiently taken by the crew for other passengers in the lone Sleeping Car ...We ordered the Braised Beef Shortribs TV dinners which arrived promptly and turned out to be tasty with a Chardonnay, but not too eye appealing ...The train left the efficient BNSF onto the Union Pacific at Taylor and the slow orders and meets situation changed, our first of many ... Large turnover of Coach riders at Austin, most going on past San Antonio to Arizona or California stations ...Arrival at San Antonio at 10:45 and then the bang-bang-slam as the through cars were transferred ...Departure ON TIME at 2:45 AM.

San Antonio to Tucson on 421 We're on the Sunset Limited now! ...The coffee was hot, and ready at 6 AM ...Now it's "Traditional Dining!," and our scrambled egg and bacon breakfasts were excellent ...The new Attendant says both Sleeping Cars are full for the rest of the trip and the Coaches remain 60-70% occupied, most going to Los Angeles! ... Of course it also meant the famous Union Pacific On Time problems to Del Rio and El Paso, plus with the construction of a new extra long passing track at Dryden just east of Sanderson, two 200-freight train meets that got preference, and another one that delayed us entering the Alpine, Texas, station for a half hour AND another near Marfa ...however, the UP has committed itself to welcome improvements that are underway on this line!

Oh, we had one interesting meet, not unusual out there in West Texas, when we heard long horn blows that finally got a cow to get off the right-of-way ...Our cheerful Cafe attendant informed the riders that someone had stolen 200 mayonnaise packets overnight, but Ha, he had some more ...Lunch was this writer's favorite: the Angus Cheeseburger with all the trimmings, and as usual it was great ...Our arrival at El Paso was at 3:10, but not into the station until 3:40 as we waited just feet from the switch for it to change to let us into the station track ...Several PA notices that the "burrito lady" IS THERE, and she did a big business ...A rider couldn't be found who was supposed to get off at Lordsburg after boarding at El Paso ...A triple stop at Benson, Arizona required a backup move so passengers could de-train at the tiny platform instead of in the rocks ...Arrival finally in Tucson was at 10:00 instead of 7:45 ...Ah, there's "nothing" like waiting outside for a taxi on a cold Tucson night ...Then a great week of reunions and family visits. How great it is to have a trip to your "hometown" for inspiration!

Return trip: Tucson to Ft. Worth on 422 was like day and night different from the westbound trip (mainly due to the Union

Pacific!) ...Isn't it interesting that taxi drivers all miss Rush Limbaugh ...When we arrived at the Tucson station we found the train had arrived 30 minutes EARLY ... Sleeping car 32088, a Superliner II (Maryland), not rebuilt ... AC under control but not as comfortable, with all the new amenities, but a broken latch on the cabinet door ...Different crew but a good one, another cheerful helpful attendant ...Masks, Masks, Masks until April now ...Again every bedroom was occupied and would be until Chicago AND New Orleans (our room would be occupied again at Dallas) ...A great breakfast leaving Tucson (on time), Cheeseburger lunch into Lordsburg, New Mexico (no one on or off there or at Deming) ...A beautiful day in the Southwest ...UP operations were flawless, including crawling through a massive wood tie replacement program ongoing between Benson and Willcox ... We were either on time or early on that time-change Saturday night/Sunday morning including when we saw this:

All these people were waiting to board the northbound Texas Eagle at Austin, Texas, many going to Ft. Worth/Dallas, but more going on as far as Chicago on this Sunday morning during Spring Break.

T

I can happily say that for a change on our many travels the Texas Eagle arrived at the Ft. Worth Transportation Center 20 minutes EARLY ... Amtrak's on time map showed this trainset arrived ON TIME into Chicago the next day ...They can do it when the UP allows it to happen! ...OOPS, if we had traveled the same trip a week later that trainset departed Chicago ON TIME, but got only to Joliet, Illinois, where it sat for 6 HOURS waiting for a replacement locomotive to arrive from Chicago; that wasn't the UP's fault, it was Amtrak's.... According to Amtrak's On Time Performance list, the Texas Eagle was OT only 57% in 2021, and the Sunset Limited was worst at 28%.

CONSISTENCY, thy name ain't Amtrak or Union Pacific.



The Texas Eagle as it was May 3, 2021 Westbound 421 at Tower 55 Ft Worth

Photo: Gregory Grice



Gregory Grice ©

What Will It Take to Get People Out of Their Cars? – Part 2

Commentary by Doug Kerr. Photos by the Author

In the last issue of Steel Wheels I commented on the importance of connectivity amongst public transportation agencies if we will ever get people out of their cars and onto public transportation. In this issue I will expand on this concept with a detailed personal example.



The San Rafael bus transit center is located across Third Street from the SMART station.

I live outside Healdsburg, Sonoma County, California, about 70 miles due north from San Francisco. In April I attended a Save the Redwoods League luncheon at the de Young Museum in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park. Because the League is a conservation and environmental organization, I thought using public transportation instead of driving my car would be most appropriate. I used Google Maps to see what was available and was pleasantly surprised at how well it worked. The itinerary used the SMART train from Santa Rosa to San Rafael, a connection to Golden Gate Transit bus to the Golden Gate Bridge toll plaza, and a final connection to San Francisco Muni bus from the toll plaza to the Park via Park Presidio. This itinerary nearly parallels the route I would drive. But now the problem showed up. I wanted to arrive for an 11AM luncheon around 10:30 to 10:45 to allow time for meeting and greeting. My choices using public transportation were to arrive at 9:20AM or after 11AM. So, either I'm over an hour early or I'm late.

Why is there an hour and 45 minutes gap? I dove deep in the details and discovered why I couldn't arrive at 10:20AM, much closer to my desired time. The problem is the SMART train arrives in San Rafael at 9:26AM. Golden Gate Transit leaves from the San Rafael Transit Center, across Third Street from the SMART station at 9:30AM. Four minutes is not enough time to exit SMART, tag off, walk to the third street intersection, wait for the light to change and find the bus bay for the right bus. To test this, I ventured to San Rafael on SMART one afternoon. The walk time from SMART to the bus bay is 2 minutes. The Third Street stoplight can add 1 minute 10 seconds for a total of 3 minutes 10 seconds, just barely enough time to make a 4 minute connection. In my test case, the train

arrived 2 minutes late and the Clipper Card scanners at the Transit Center end of the platform were out of order adding an additional minute to walk to and from the other end of the platform to tag off. This totaled to 6 minutes 10 seconds. Were I connecting to a bus I would have missed the connection. A ten minute connection would work, but not four.

So how did this affect my trip? I could drive by leaving home at 9AM to arrive by 10:30 to 10:45AM even allowing for the normal amount of freeway congestion I'm likely to encounter. Due to the lack of an adequate connecting time in San Rafael I would have to take an earlier SMART train requiring me to leave home at 6:45AM, over two hours earlier! For a trip I can drive door-to-door in less than two hours, it makes no sense to leave home over two hours earlier to use public transportation.

The issue certainly isn't cost. Driving my itinerary using the IRS mileage rate plus parking and bridge toll runs over \$100 for the round trip. Transit at full fare is less than half that and even less for me using my senior discount. The issue is time wasted. Public transportation already takes longer than driving and becomes nearly useless when poor connections are encountered. Here a lack of six extra minutes connecting time meant an extra hour in travel time for me. Providing excellent connections requires public transit agencies to work together, a seemingly difficult task as many agencies only work within their own "silo". Excellent connections, however, must be a top priority if we are ever to get people to use public transportation instead of driving. And, by the way, I did drive my car to the luncheon instead of taking public transportation.



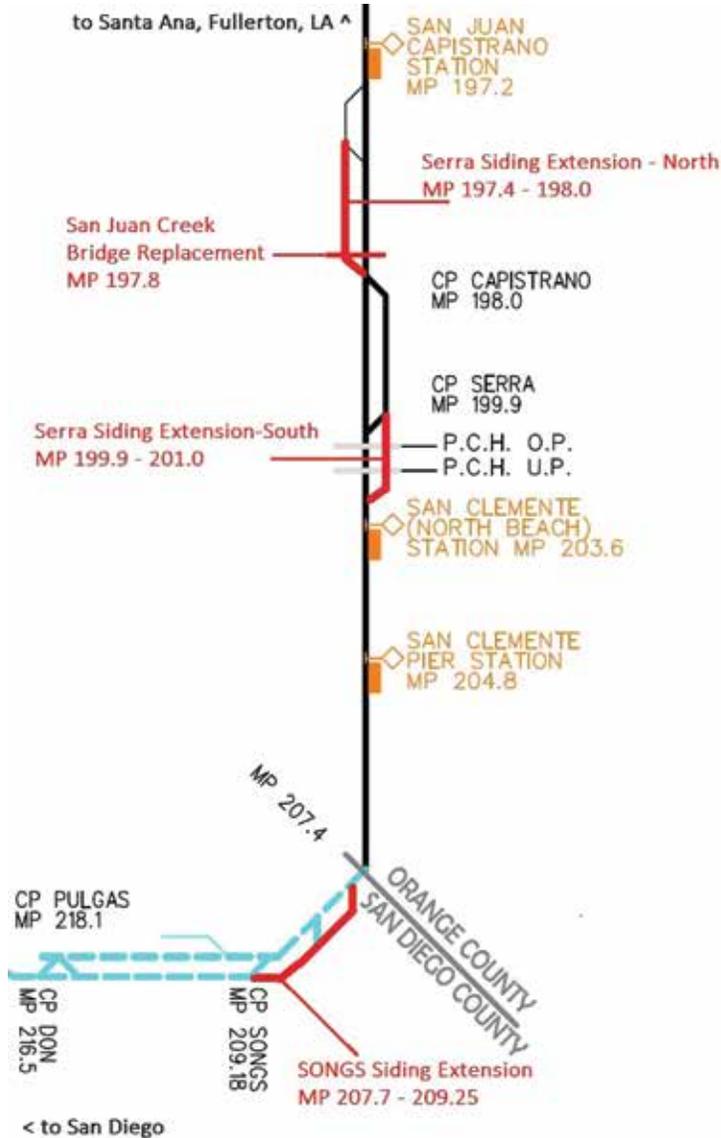
Not Helpful!

The Serra Siding Extension is a Project of National Significance

by Brian Yanity

Synopsis:

The 'Surf Line' railroad track through Orange County plays a key role in the state and national economy, and national defense. The Serra Siding Extension Project in Dana Point will add reliability and flexibility at a critical point midway along the railroad track between LA and San Diego.



...track diagram from Metrolink, annotated by Brian Yanity to show track projects in development. Replacement of the existing century-old bridge over San Juan Creek is fully funded by OCTA, and is expected to be completed in 2024. The Serra Siding Extension-North is the second phase of the Serra Siding extension project, and is currently unfunded. The SONGS siding extension/double track in San Diego County is in planning/design by Metrolink and track owner North County Transit District.

The Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) rail corridor through Orange County is a vital economic corridor for the entire Southern California region. Passenger and freight trains have run on this 'Surf Line' track since 1888. Its alignment through Dana Point and San Clemente is defined by the terrain, a key gap in the rugged coastal geography. The

rail line will remain. In addition, the 'Surf Line' isn't just a local railroad track; it is a route of national and regional importance, connecting the 2nd and 8th largest cities in the nation, and is the second-busiest intercity passenger rail corridor in U.S. Several thousand rail passengers pass through Dana Point each day on Metrolink and Amtrak Pacific Surfliner trains.

Stewardship:

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) as owner has the responsibility to manage this key national and regional asset, and needs to consider not just local stakeholders but national and regional stakeholders. The 'Surf Line' plays a key role in the state and national economy, and national defense. Amtrak and BNSF Railway also have Federally-guaranteed rights to use the corridor. As owner OCTA is legally required to provide a functional railroad with sufficient capacity to meet its obligations to the Amtrak and the BNSF.

America's Supply Chain and National Defense:

Currently several BNSF freight trains pass through Dana Point and San Clemente each day, resulting in about a thousand fewer trucks per day on I-5. Over one billion dollars' worth of goods move on this track per year, and it is vital to California's economy. Transporting cargo on rail means that it not going by truck. Per ton-mile of freight moved, this means much less fuel consumed, pollution, road wear, and risk of accidents. Some residents in Capistrano Beach wish the freight trains would just disappear from the track going through their community, while others have even suggested that the whole railroad track be abandoned and allowed to erode into the sea, and that any improvements to it are therefore pointless¹.

No railroad line in the United States can be abandoned before receiving permission from the Surface Transportation Board, the independent Federal agency that regulates transportation. In addition to its great utility for passenger and freight movement, the military value of the Los Angeles – San Diego line would be an important factor to consider in any attempt to abandon the line. Freight trains running through Dana Point provide logistical support for the routine and ongoing needs of the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet in San Diego. The U.S. Army Military Surface Deployment & Distribution Command, which is responsible for all U.S. military rail shipments, has designated the LA-San Diego line as part of the Strategic Rail Corridor Network (STRACNET)². As the only direct railroad link connecting the principal mainland port of the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet, Camp Pendleton and MCAS Miramar to the rest of the nation, the line must be maintained in a state of good repair and have sufficient capacity for reasons of national security. It is also a key link in the movement of equipment for deployment of Army divisions from their domestic bases to overseas. The military prefers to transport its heavy vehicles by train whenever possible, as it is safer and more secure than by highway. It also causes less wear and damage to roads and equipment, while saving a great deal of fuel. Because armored military vehicles are so heavy, most are considered oversized loads on public highways. So, moving military cargo by train is much easier, less hazardous and less disruptive than in a

¹ <https://voiceofoc.org/2021/11/nelson-how-many-rocks-will-it-take-to-hold-back-the-pacific/>

² <https://www.sddc.army.mil/.../RailroadsNationalDefense.aspx>

convoy on I-5, I-15, or other public highways. All the major militaries of the world depend upon a strong domestic railroad network for logistical support.



BNSF Railway train carrying U.S. Army tanks to the Port of San Diego through San Clemente on May 15, 2021 (rear 'pusher' locomotives in foreground) © Mark MacDougall

If the U.S. military gets more involved in the Asia-Pacific region in the years ahead, you can expect more military freight trains to and from San Diego. As a historical reference, the Surf Line through Dana Point saw an average of more than 40 freight trains per day during World War II, or about ten times the current number.



View from pedestrian bridge looking northeast to Doheny State Beach, along Coast Highway. The new siding extension will be to the right of the existing track in the photo, and extend southeast to Beach Road, about 1/3 of a mile behind from where this photo was taken. Photo: Brian Yanity

Reliability, Flexibility and Options:

Reliability and flexibility are key to successful freight and passenger movement, and the Serra Siding Extension Project will add reliability and flexibility to this critical 'meeting point' mid-way between LA and San Diego. Dana Point is the location where all scheduled trains meet. But even "on-time" trains can vary by a few minutes. A lengthened Serra Siding mitigates this variability by providing the distance to allow both trains to avoid stopping and the resulting extra fuel use and pollution from accelerating from a stop. Also, if there is an emergency incident or maintenance/repairs on one track along the 'double-tracked' siding, then a train can pass it on the other unimpeded.

One thing we have learned over the past two years is that having options is vital and has real bottom line value. Not having transportation options is in fact a high risk, "bet the company" strategy. One of the factors OCTA and Metrolink must consider in their funding decisions is unforeseen circumstances. For example, only five years ago, US 101 in Santa Barbara County was completely blocked by a mudslide³. The Surfliner train offered expanded service, but the service that was offered was limited because of the lack of key sidings along the largely single-tracked route. What happens if a bridge on I-5 collapses in a flash flood or the road is filled with mud? Will OCTA's rail line through Dana Point have the capacity to provide an option to I-5?



"Existing track under Pacific Coast Highway overpass at Doheny State Beach. The new siding extension will be to the left of the track in the photo. Photo: Brian Yanity



South end of existing Serra Siding. Photo: Brian Yanity

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

"originally published on Voice of OC website on April 8, 2022: <https://voiceofoc.org/2022/04/yanity-the-serra-siding-extension-is-a-project-of-national-significance/> "

Post-Pandemic Travel Update

by Steve Roberts - RailPAC President

In the 1st and 2nd Quarter 2021 issues of Steel Wheels ([Steel-Wheels-2021.Q1.pdf \(railpac.org\)](#) page 6 and [Steel-Wheels-2021.Q2.pdf \(railpac.org\)](#) page 6) Doug Kerr and I explored the changes in travel, especially the daily commute and business travel, as a result of the pandemic driven expanded work at home transformation.

I found that the reprinted article below provides a good profile at perhaps the midway point of the business trend of relocations and work from home, balanced against the beginnings of the movement back to the office. While the article is focused on relocation, it also provides an overview of upcoming trends in daily commuting and business travel.

Please note: *The reprinted article has been edited for length and to focus less on the details of business relocation and to highlight the authors work from home observations.*

Los Angeles Times Column:

That Big Tech Exodus Out Of California Turns Out To Be A Bust

Michael Hiltzik Wed. March 23, 2022

Wannabe innovation hubs from coast to coast have been slavering over the prospect that the work-from-home revolution triggered by the COVID pandemic would finally break the stranglehold that California and Silicon Valley have had on high-tech jobs.

Here's the latest picture on this expectation: Not happening.

That's the conclusion of some new studies, most recently by [Mark Muro](#) and [Yang You](#) of the [Brookings Institution](#). They found that although the pandemic brought about some changes in the trend toward the concentration of tech jobs in a

handful of metropolitan areas, the largest established hubs as a group "slightly increased their share" of national high-tech employment from 2019 through 2020. (Emphasis theirs.)

Stories of discontented California entrepreneurs decamping for up and coming new hubs or even remote (but broadband-enabled) climes are common fodder in the news. Yet "the big tech superstar cities aren't going anywhere," Muro told me. "There's a suggestion that we're on the brink of an entirely different geography. I don't think recent history or the nature of the technologies point in that direction."

Muro, in harmony with other experts in the geography of work, divides tech employment hubs into three groups. There are the superstar metro areas: Silicon Valley and San Francisco; New York; Boston; Washington, D.C.; Seattle-Tacoma; Los Angeles; and Austin. Next come "rising stars": Dallas, Atlanta, Denver, San Diego, Miami, Kansas City, Salt Lake City, St. Louis and Orlando. Finally, everywhere else. (*Note: Based on observations of travelers on the Capitol Corridor, I would add Sacramento to the rising star list. - SR*)

The superstars increased their share of total tech employment by 0.3% during the pandemic — less than the increase of 1.4% they experienced in 2015-2019, but still positive. The rising stars as a group increased their share by 0.1%, down from 0.5% in the earlier period. Both gains came at the expense of other would-be hubs.



Capitol Corridor at Jack London Square: Photo, Chris Mohs

“The California metropolises really do retain their irreplaceable depth and strength,” Muro says. “That’s not to say there won’t be some movement. Early in the period we saw some exiting, especially from the Bay Area, but it turned out that much of it was within California, rather than to Kansas.”

This shouldn’t be too surprising. The value of concentrated ecosystems in nurturing innovation has been documented for decades. As [Nicholas Bloom of Stanford and colleagues](#) pointed out in 2020, elite academic institutions attract highly skilled innovators and spin off their learning into new technologies and new industries; their presence tends to attract others like them. The allure of living and working in such a cluster outweighs the downsides of high living costs, taxes and congestion. “High-tech clusters tend to be located in cities with high labor and real estate costs — cities like San Francisco, Boston, or Seattle — rather than in cities where costs are low,” UC Berkeley economist Enrico Moretti observes, possibly because for creative intellectuals, intellectual productivity outweighs those costs.

Tech companies have been moving some operations away from their traditional headquarter locations or expanding elsewhere, Moretti says, but that was happening long before COVID. “I’m skeptical that COVID-induced changes are driving an acceleration in an exodus of tech firms,” he says. Muro’s research points to an evolutionary change in high-tech geography triggered by the pandemic, rather than “a wholesale decentralization of tech.”

There may be several reasons why a large-scale flight from the big hubs hasn’t happened. One is that most tech companies don’t plan to abandon office work entirely but expect their workers to commute to work two or three days a week. This hybrid system “allows employees to move further from their place of work, such as from a city center to a surrounding suburb,” Bloom reckons. “But it does not allow an employee to move to another metro area entirely because they must still commute to work on some days.”

Instead, Bloom found increased movement within metro areas, rather than between metros — a trend he terms [the “donut effect.”](#) signifying movement out of the central city and into suburbs or exurbs.

His findings cast doubt on the theory, put forth by [urbanist Richard Florida and economist Adam Ozimek](#), that habits of remote work would give rise to “Zoom towns,” communities such as Tulsa, Boulder, Colo., and Bozeman, Mont., remote from traditional business centers but inviting for workers who need only keep in touch with their bosses and colleagues digitally via the Zoom and Slack platforms. While Postal Service statistics do show some movement from densely populated cities to distant locations, the trend is “small relative to the within-metro movement from city centers to their suburbs,” Bloom wrote.

The pandemic-driven shift to remote work does seem to have opened entrepreneurs’ eyes at least to the potential for doing away with centralized workforces.

The authors don’t give this supposed exodus (“to Zoom Towns”) its proper context, which is how many businesses have been created or moved into California in the same period. The answer, [according to the Census Bureau](#), is 133,503. In the same time span, Texas added 90,916

It’s doubtful when, if ever, 100% work-from-home jobs will amount to a large share of employment. Full-scale work-from-home only applies to about 6% of workers, Moretti says. That’s triple the 2% level of the pre-pandemic era, but still an exception to the rule.

(Note: As referenced in Doug’s article, Statista’s surveys found work from home increased from 17% pre-pandemic to 44% during the pandemic period. It is likely each study used a different definition of workers. Statista survey may have been a more focused survey covering workers who could work in the office or at home while Moretti used a broader definition of workers. In either case work at home has clearly grown during the past three years, but it should be noted not all workers can work at home.)

For all that, it’s also true that some “rising star” metros may offer entrepreneurs and tech workers some qualities that established hubs have lost. There may be a cultural shift going on in what Moretti calls the [“geography of jobs.”](#) But “it’s still unclear how far it will go,” he says. “It will take at least a few years to know.”

Some final comments: *The article noted that as a result of the hybrid work pattern, some days working at home some working in the office, many employees are relocating to the exurbs of the tech hubs, which means a longer trip on office work days. Even pre-pandemic one could find these hybrid travelers on many Amtrak corridor routes i.e. Empire Service, Northeast Corridor, Hiawatha, Capitol Corridor and Pacific Surfliner. Also with the change in the traditional white collar commuter rail market, several commuter rail carriers are reimagining their schedules to serve new markets such as the longer distance hybrid workers, essential workers on non 9-5 shifts and leisure travelers. For example Chicago Metra’s CEO Jim Derwinski noted that its recent schedule expansion increases service for those with early shifts and reverse commutes. In addition, Midday service features more consistence schedules, called pulse scheduling (a key to increase usage by riders on leisure trips i.e. shopping trips, museum visits, sporting events, etc.)*

Amtrak Machinations – The Board, the Money, the Plan, and Disappearing Trains

Paul Dyson, President Emeritus

The Amtrak Board

The terms of office of the members of Amtrak's Board of Directors have all expired and no replacements have been proposed by the Biden administration. This is perfectly legal, but hardly designed to energize an organization with record amounts of public funds to spend (Congress appropriations permitting). Here is what the new legislation states, from 49 U.S. Code § 24302 – Board of Directors

(a) Composition and Terms.—

- (1) The Amtrak Board of Directors (referred to in this section as the “Board”) is composed of the following 10 directors, each of whom must be a citizen of the United States:
 - (A) The Secretary of Transportation.
 - (B) The Chief Executive Officer of Amtrak, who shall serve as a nonvoting member of the Board.
 - (C) 8 individuals appointed by the President of the United States, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, with general business and financial experience, experience or qualifications in transportation, freight and passenger rail transportation, travel, hospitality, cruise line, or passenger air transportation businesses, or representatives of employees or users of passenger rail transportation or a State government, at least 1 of whom shall be an individual with a disability (as defined in section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12102)) who has a demonstrated history of, or experience with, accessibility, mobility, and inclusive transportation in passenger rail or commuter rail.
- (2) In selecting individuals described in paragraph (1) for nominations for appointments to the Board, the President shall consult with the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the minority leader of the House of Representatives, the majority leader of the Senate, and the minority leader of the Senate.
- (3) An individual appointed under paragraph (1)(C) of this subsection shall be appointed for a term of 5 years. Such term may be extended until the individual's successor is appointed and qualified. Not more than 5 individuals appointed under paragraph (1)(C) may be members of the same political party.
- (4) Of the individuals appointed pursuant to paragraph (1) (C)—
 - (A) 2 individuals shall reside in or near a location served by a regularly scheduled Amtrak service along the Northeast Corridor;
 - (B) 4 individuals shall reside in or near regions of the United States that are geographically distributed outside of the Northeast Corridor, of whom—
 - (i) 2 individuals shall reside in States served by a long-distance route operated by Amtrak;
 - (ii) 2 individuals shall reside in States served by a State-supported route operated by Amtrak; and

(iii) an individual who resides in a State that is served by a State-supported route and a long-distance route may be appointed to serve either position referred to in clauses (i) and (ii);

- (C) 2 individuals shall reside either—
 - (i) in or near a location served by a regularly scheduled Amtrak service on the Northeast Corridor; or
 - (ii) in a State served by long-distance or a State-supported route; and
- (D) each individual appointed to the Board pursuant to this paragraph may only fill 1 of the allocations set forth in subparagraphs (A) through (C).

The current Board does not meet these criteria, and in any event it is surely time for new talent to provide direction to management as to how and where to invest the new funds that are supposed to be available soon. It's time to call your Congress member and Senator to put a fire under this administration and nominate some candidates. **Yes, You!**

Amtrak and the Money (From Bloomberg News)

- Amtrak Warned of Struggles to Spend 'Unprecedented' Funding
- Watchdog outlines staffing challenges, outdated systems
- Infrastructure law provided \$66 billion for rail expansion

April 4, 2022 3:53 PM By Lillianna Byington

The surge in spending to Amtrak from the infrastructure law could hurt the rail company's ability to manage its current resources, according to a new watchdog report.

Amtrak will need more staff, updated asset management systems, and better fraud detection as it implements billions of dollars from the recent infrastructure law, Amtrak's Office of the Inspector General found in a report unveiled Monday.

The law increased Amtrak and Federal Railroad Administration funding by about \$66 billion, which the OIG called “an unprecedented expansion.” The report warned of “a potential strain on the company's ability to manage its current operations while concurrently planning and managing a long-term multibillion-dollar infrastructure portfolio.

Many of Amtrak's systems, such as its incident reporting and workforce scheduling systems, are outdated and don't offer timely data, OIG found, although it said the company has started to work on upgrades.

Amtrak will need to manage at least \$22 billion in capital spending to its national network and Northeast Corridor from the infrastructure law. To stop any fraud and waste, the report said Amtrak will need “robust internal controls” after recent investigations discovered bribery and bid-rigging.

Amtrak CEO Says \$75 Billion Growth Plan Relies on State Support

Amtrak has struggled with staffing challenges in recent months. It plans to expand its workforce by as much as 21% this year, including hiring new managers to lead projects funded by the infrastructure law, which the OIG report warned would be challenging.

Many of the railroad company's employees retired or left during the pandemic. A previous OIG report from December found the company's human resources department didn't have adequate staff or managers to recruit and onboard new workers. The company was forced to reduce trips amid staff shortages because of outbreaks.

Amtrak Five Year Plan

If you have time for 234 pages of bedtime reading it will help you understand Amtrak's priorities, and also those items that will stay on the back burner. Quote from page 58: "Close to 60 percent of the approximately 450 Superliner railcars were built more than 40 years ago and are rapidly approaching the end of their useful life". But from page 50: "Amtrak is beginning to plan formally for the replacement of the fleet of passenger cars serving the long-distance network". I don't think that I am the only one concerned by these statements. Given the lead time to design, procure and build new rolling stock, surely this is a matter for immediate action, not "beginning to plan"?

"Changing Demographics and Travel Demand Many Amtrak routes date to the company's opening in 1971 and have operated continually ever since. Since Amtrak's inception, however, there have been significant population and demographic changes in the U.S.—but Amtrak's National Network map has remained largely the same. The static nature of our network has led to a growing mismatch between likely demand for intercity passenger rail services and Amtrak's routes and frequency levels. Our greatest opportunity is in growing corridors and regions where we can offer a competitive product that provides an alternative to driving or flying. However, our service to some of the nation's biggest and fastest growing cities and regions is minimal and, in

some cases, non-existent. The only Amtrak service in many cities is Long Distance trains that have poor OTP, offer only one or at most a couple of round trips a day with slow trip times, and arrive when nearly all potential customers are asleep. Changing demographics mean the services and products that Amtrak provides must be modernized if we want to stay relevant. The service and experience Amtrak provided in 1971 or even in 2000 is no longer desirable to our current and future customers. Millennials, the largest population cohort, seek travel experiences that are inexpensive, with seamless Wi-Fi capability for any work or leisure/social activity. By contrast, Baby Boomers gravitate toward luxury experiences with differentiated amenities, yet also value seamless connectivity." In other words, Amtrak management thinks that a third or more of its business, the National Network, is obsolete.

AMTRAK LONG DISTANCE PASSENGER CAR FLEET AS OF MARCH 2022

		Note 1	Note 4	Note3	Note 2	Note 6	Note 5	Note 7
		As built	Active	New Stored	Other			Stored/
		or rebuilt	Feb 2022	Since Feb 2015	Fallout	Stored %	Fallout %	Fallout %
Amfleet 2	Coach	125	114	6	5	5%	4%	9%
	Café Lge	25	24	1	0	4%	0%	4%
Total		150	138	7	5	5%	3%	8%
Viewliner 1	Sleeper	50	49	1	0	2%	0%	2%
	Diner	1	1	0	0	0%	0%	0%
Viewliner 2	Baggage	70	66	4	0	6%	0%	6%
	Bagg Dorm	10	10	0	0	0%	0%	0%
	Diner	25	25	0	0	0%	0%	0%
	Sleeper	25	25	0	0	0%	0%	0%
Total		130	125	5	0	4%	0%	4%
Superliner 1&2	Coach Baggage	48	42	1	5	2%	10%	13%
	Coach Café	11	9	0	2	0%	18%	18%
	Coach	129	104	5	20	4%	16%	19%
	Sleeper	119	104	4	11	3%	9%	13%
	Delux Sleeper	6	6	0	0	0%	0%	0%
	Lounge Café	50	42	2	6	4%	12%	16%
	AT Lounge	5	5	0	0	0%	0%	0%
	Diner	47	42	0	5	0%	11%	11%
	Diner Lounge	17	13	2	2	12%	12%	24%
	Trans Crew sleeper	47	41	1	5	2%	11%	13%
Total		479	408	15	56	3%	12%	15%

1. As built or rebuilt
2. Written off. Most extensive wreck damage. Picked for parts and the remains sold for scrap.
3. Stored. Wreck damage held for litigation, otherwise varying degrees of work needed to restore to service. This would be the total pre Feb 2015 plus post Feb 2015.
4. Balance Active Feb 2022.
5. Percent written off
6. Percent stored
7. Percent Written off & stored.

Disappearing trains – Will we see the Silver Meteor again?

An informed source tells us that the following long distance schedule restorations are in the works:

Empire Builder, California Zephyr, Southwest Chief, and Lake Shore Limited are restored to daily service.

- Current 5X weekly schedules on the Crescent and City of New Orleans are extended through September 11.
- Silver Meteor suspension is extended through September 11, 2022.
- The above changes mean that all LD routes will be back to full service on May 23 except the Crescent, City of NOL, and Silver Meteor.
- Capitol Limited-Texas Eagle equipment run through is discontinued May 2.
- Consists are adjusted on several routes, reflecting lower expected car availability and OBS workforce limitations.
- On the Cardinal, excess Combination Sleeper Roomettes not occupied by OBS crew will be made available for revenue sale.

URPA's Bruce Richardson writes:

“The Silver Meteor, until 2022 in continuous operation since February 1939 and historically one of the premier New York-Florida passenger trains is not currently in service due to alleged employee and equipment availability. It appears that in a coming announcement about Amtrak operating changes as of May 23rd, the Silver Meteor will still be sidelined, most likely until September 11th, at the end of the busy summer travel season. Some are openly speculating whether the Silver Meteor will ever be restored under the Stephen Gardner Amtrak regime.

In place of the Meteor, companion train the Silver Star has been carrying a longer consist and passenger load. But, the Star does not have as convenient of a schedule as the Meteor, making connections on the north end at New York Pennsylvania station difficult or impossible.

“But,” some wail, “the Silver Star and the Palmetto are still providing service to every station also provided by the Silver Meteor, so, therefore, service is adequate.”

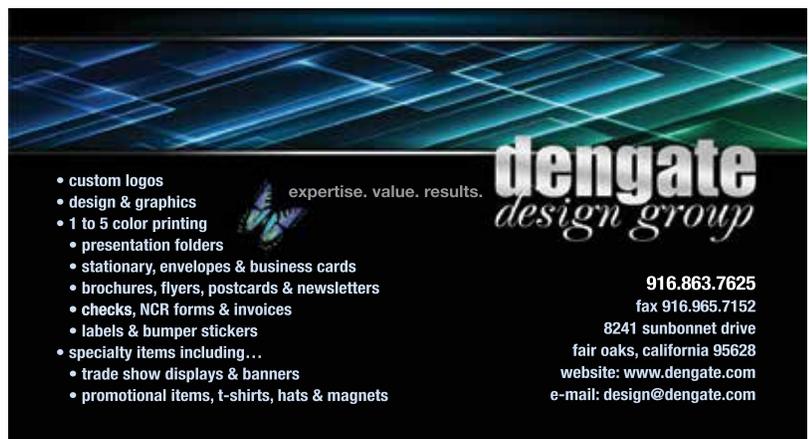
Well, no. Both the Meteor and Star have always been high performers both in terms of load factors and ridership. From the days Henry Flagler and Henry B. Plant invented modern Florida at the end of the 19th century business to Florida has remained brisk. The advent of Central Florida's Walt Disney World, Universal Studios and Sea World and all of the supporting attractions starting in the early 1970s turned Florida into consistently the one of the world's top vacation destinations, and despite Amtrak's best efforts to shorten consists and overall reduce train service, Florida continues to flourish.

Keeping the Silver Meteor out of service makes little sense unless Stephen Gardner's Amtrak is rife in poor management incapable of retaining existing employees or attracting new employees.

On the issue of employee staffing, particularly for train and engine crews, before the pandemic Amtrak had plentiful employees for every job category, be it T&E or onboard services or station staffing, even with little or no extra board support.

But, in an unnecessary pandemic panic (Amtrak received every penny of federal financial assistance it begged for from Congress), Amtrak laid off operating employees and many of them as a result fled the company. Even though there has been adequate time to refill the employee ranks, apparently decisions are being made not by the dictates of employee availability, but the dictates of senior management cutting down on the number of long-distance trains in service.”

Summing up the above stories, we have a disconnect between Amtrak management and the market for passenger rail. While we acknowledge that many long-distance trains arrive at inconvenient times at some intermediate stops, they can and do still carry a full load of passengers. What is needed is additional trains on staggered schedules to fill those service gaps, not undermine the trains we already have by failing to maintain and replace rolling stock. And for those of you that think trains like the Silver Meteor and our own Sunset Limited and Coast Starlight are relics from a bygone era, note that they are the placeholders on railroad rights of way for improved service with modern trains. There would be little possibility of say a Palm Springs and Indio train if the Sunset went away, nor a Coast Daylight without the Starlight maintaining passenger service between San Luis Obispo and Gilroy. SO I make no apology for highlighting the Silver Meteor; it is very relevant to us in the west, as was the Southwest Chief fight a couple of years ago.



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Accessing the Future

By Paul Bendix

In the late 1990s my decades-old injury worsened, and I began riding Amtrak from San Francisco to Seattle. Flying was tedious, driving impossible and the Coast Starlight was in its prime. I hadn't made ground trips in decades, and the train thrilled with scenery and service. Boarding at night, I'd park my wheelchair in the downstairs accessible bedroom. Next morning, with one working arm strapped into a crutch, I would assault the train's tilting stairs and bouncing corridors.

My lower-level Superliner bedroom offered ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) safety features like grab bars. But passengers on the swaying upper level would search in vain for the handrails standard on any cruise ship. Rough Union Pacific freight track can rival many a storm. Still, I threw neuromuscular caution to the winds and lurched through the upper level.

Within a few years I had to give up riding the Coast Starlight. But I didn't give up on trains. When the Department of Transportation sought input on accessibility of new Amtrak California railcars, I happily volunteered.

In 2019 at DOT's cheerless Stalinesque headquarters in Sacramento, I watched Siemens' video of its new Venture coaches. The agency's Division of Rail has ordered seven trainsets, with seven cars each, for its San Joaquins service. Similar coaches have proven popular on Florida's Brightline, and from the perspective of a wheelchair user, it was easy to see why. The coaches offer access throughout the train. The aisles are wide and only curve slightly at the couplings as passengers walk, or wheel, from car to car.

Momoko Tamaoki, who heads DOT's new railcar program, explained the San Joaquins' three-way approach to wheelchair access. The Siemens cars will rely on bridge plates and mini-high platforms for routine boarding. Two of the coaches have onboard wheelchair lifts, and stations will also store hand-cranked lifts. There's plenty of redundancy.

Last August, 2021, stakeholders toured one of the new coaches at Siemens' plant in suburban Sacramento. I rolled the wide aisles, effortlessly lowered the window shades and pronounced the wheelchair spaces ample. It was hard not to marvel at the German precision. The coach, then described as a café car, included a counter. More recent accounts cite vending machines.

The only deficiency in the displayed coach involved hard-to-reach door locks for the restroom. A Siemens representative noted the problem and took a video. We discussed mounting an additional electronic lock. Since my visit, sixteen of the new Venture Coaches have been delivered to the Stockton Regional Maintenance Facility. They should see service on the San Joaquin Corridor this spring.

Last summer I exited the Venture car on the onboard hydraulic lift, a long and mildly terrifying descent to the low factory floor. The journey back to the front gate took me through a quarter mile of the sprawling facility. In my power wheelchair, I followed the golf cart of a Siemens engineer from Stuttgart. Winding between coaches for VIA Rail Canada, I asked about future Superliners. Would Siemens consider getting involved? He was tightlipped, although my question didn't surprise him.

Designing next-generation Superliners raises questions about Amtrak's accessibility and future service. Steve Roberts, RailPAC president, outlined the trade-offs in a recent Steel Wheels article.

I could imagine bi-level cars with wheelchair lifts that provide access to spaces in both a dining car and Sightseer lounge. Configuring coaches and onboard elevators will be a worthy challenge for future designers. There will be trade-offs. Access throughout the upper level may not be practical. Fold-up seats and table sections in lounge and diner can boost flexibility. Onboard lifts always pose challenges in safety and reliability.

In my 15 or so stays in the disabled bedroom of the Coast Starlight, I can't recall a car attendant offering to bring me meals. There was no reliable way to request staff assistance. Despite the mechanical challenges, there's no substitute for access to diners and lounges...where the action is.

Another issue looms more darkly in "Sabotage," a recent Steel Wheels article by Andrew Selden: Why should we trust Amtrak to improve accessibility in national trains it wants to kill?

Selden has a point. Anyone who joins Amtrak management hoping to build a modern rail system confronts a mind-boggling reality: an advanced nation with 90% of its long-haul passenger train mileage operating once a day, at best, over freight track on 19th century routes.

All this can only confound managers with conventional graduate degrees in, say, transportation planning or public administration. It's up to rail advocates to acknowledge the reality of American passenger rail – and leverage the popularity of trains that sell out...though barely advertised and under resourced. Someday Amtrak leadership may do the same. For now, it's up to us. If we can harness consumer power, U.S. passenger rail, accessible and otherwise, may just have a future.

All Aboard Arizona

Todd Liebman – President All Aboard Arizona

Fast, frequent, passenger rail service between Tucson-Phoenix-Buckeye, Yuma and LA is going to happen. I believe it is going to happen soon. My optimism is informed by both the Rail Passenger Association's Rail Nation conference in March, and the Arizona Transit Association's Rail Conference in April of which All Aboard Arizona was a co-host. This effort has essentially three parts. First is the Sun Corridor from Tucson to Buckeye. Second is the Buckeye to Coachella Valley piece. Third is the currently developing Coachella Valley corridor.

Passenger rail advocates are notoriously pessimistic, and not without cause. For years, the rail passenger scene has been dominated by battles over scarce funding, potential cutbacks, lost service, lost routes, and lost opportunities. That pessimism is frequently our own worst enemy in that it doesn't allow us to accurately appraise the situation. The nation, and Arizona, have never been in such a good position to advance intercity passenger rail and the need has never been so great. To use a football analogy, we are on the opposing team's 30 yard line, and now we have to get the ball into the end zone.

The playing field is excellent. There is money to do this; \$66 billion in the bipartisan infrastructure legislation. Every indication is that Congress is supportive and that Amtrak should get a good appropriation in FY '23. The current Federal Railroad Administration Director, Amit Bose spoke to the Rail Nation Conference, and he understands the need for rail passenger service expansion. The Chair of the Surface Transportation Board, Marty Oberman spoke to the Rail Nation Conference. Mr. Oberman is an incredibly accomplished attorney, former chairman of the board of METRA, Chicago's commuter railroad. He knows rail in and out. Karen Hedlund, a recently appointed member of the Surface Transportation Board, came to Arizona to speak to the Arizona Rail Conference in April and her talk to us demonstrated that she understands the need for improved passenger rail service, particularly in Arizona. With the solid support of this administration, and the solid appointments in place, the Federal piece of this team is ready.

The local support is the strongest in the country. Mayor Regina Romero of Tucson spearheaded an effort of mayors of communities between Tucson and Phoenix to sign a letter asking for funding for the Sun Corridor. She was at the conference and was joined, in complete support and enthusiasm, by Mayor Kate Gallego of Phoenix. These two big city mayors in the anchor cities of the Sun Corridor are dedicated to getting this done. Equally impressive was the near universal attendance by the other communities such as Gilbert, Tempe and Goodyear. The local portion of the team is absolutely ready to win this game.

Amtrak was represented at the conference by Alex Khalfin, Senior Manager for Government Affairs State and Local Relations, who expressed that the Sun Corridor is a high priority for Amtrak. In Amtrak, we have an enthusiastic operator who comes to the table with a statutory right of access to the rails needed to get this done. These are the technical skills we need to get the ball into the end zone.

Consultants who are working on Colorado's Front Range Corridor were at the conference and remarked that Arizona is

actually further ahead in one key area than Colorado: Arizona is in the enviable position of having a completed Phase I Environmental Impact Statement and an identified route. The EIS identifies the selected route for the Sun Corridor which just happens to go to all the right places. Yes, there will be negotiations with the UP, but the UP has already indicated many of their needs as part of the Phase I EIS. We know that UP wants a third main track from Tucson to Picacho Junction and major upgrades to Phoenix. That is roughly 30 miles of a new third main. This is doable and should be able to be accomplished for a relatively reasonable amount. Remember that a large freeway interchange can easily cost \$1 billion. Perhaps, with the right mix of incentives, UP will be a cooperative partner as they are in several corridors.

There is a critical need for the Sun Corridor. Maricopa County is the fastest growing county in the country. The cities in the Valley are growing by leaps and bounds, and can be expected to continue to grow as the population of Arizona swells by 37% by 2036. We can't continue to rely on the current, limited mix of transportation in the state.

A weaker link on our team is the State of Arizona. Despite lots of money and large budget surpluses, the Arizona State Rail Plan draft indicates that state funding should not be counted upon to develop passenger rail and that it is up to local units of government to carry this. However, the local units are up to the organizing task, and the Conference discussed next steps to moving the process forward. It would be positive to get the State of Arizona to support this effort. Representatives from the Arizona Department of Transportation and legislative staff attended the conference. Arizona will have a new governor elected in November, and at least one candidate is very interested in this project. The key for everyone is to ask the candidates where they stand on this project and educate them about the benefits.

It is important to remember that the stars are in near perfect alignment, and this may not happen again for some time. We have to be active. Please keep contacting your elected officials at the federal, state and local level and tell them you want this project. We need to keep pressing on this while wind is at our backs.

I had the chance to get reacquainted with an old friend last month; Amtrak's Crescent. I flew to Atlanta and took the Crescent from Atlanta to Alexandria for the Rail Nation Conference. I was joined by All Aboard Arizona's Vice President, Roger Clark who just happened to have the same great idea I did for taking the Crescent. The late departure from Atlanta near midnight is ideal, and Amtrak needs to renegotiate that. In the event, the departure was pushed two hours because the Crescent was late. But when I got on at 1:30, my berth was made up, and all was forgiven. I slept well through the Piedmont and had breakfast in the dining car with Roger. Yes, it was the flex dining, but I did not find it bad at all. I have ridden the Crescent a number of times since my first ride on the Southern Crescent when I was 15. I spent some of my Army time in Virginia, and it was nice to get back to that part of the country. It was simply wonderful to be back on the rails, and I hope to see you out there soon.



NEVADA RAIL COALITION

April 13, 2022

Welcome to the Nevada Rail Coalition's first e-news

The Nevada Rail Coalition (NRC) is a citizen-based initiative that brings together unions, environmental organizations, businesses, passenger/freight rail advocacy associations, social justice organizations, and community associations for the purpose of building an expanded, robust rail system in Nevada and neighboring states as the keystone of a low-carbon, environmentally sustainable and socially just transportation system.

What we're up to: Nevada Rail Coalition Update

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law: Funding for Nevada rail?

The 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) will provide \$66 billion in guaranteed funding for rail in the US over five years, with \$42 billion flowing through the Federal Railroad Administration as competitive grants. Nevada has an adopted state rail plan that lists projects that could become the backbone of a rail system to serve our state, so this is an unprecedented opportunity to diversify and expand Nevada's multi-modal transportation system. We must make sure Nevada gets its share of this funding.

But with Nevada's existing structure for rail planning and funding, that is easier said than done. Why?

Each rail project proposed for funding under the law must have a "champion" - a public agency or business to apply for the funds, identify matching funding, and carry the project forward. The Nevada Department of Transportation prepares and updates a state rail plan, but it has no funding and no authority to manage a rail system. Regional transportation commissions do have authority to build and manage public transportation systems including rail, but many of the rail projects in the state rail plan cover multiple jurisdictions, even crossing state lines.

We urge transportation leaders in the state to step up to identify statewide priorities for rail and apply for BIL grant funding. Such an opportunity to jumpstart our state rail system should not be lost.



Westbound California Zephyr at Arnold's Loop, NV.

Photo: Dick Ebright

NRC suggests Reno Capitol Corridor passenger rail extension to Federal Railroad Administration

Northern Nevada has a growing population, expanding industries, thriving universities, Lake Tahoe - one of the west's premier tourist destinations drawing millions of visits a year - and a clogged, hazardous interstate highway over the Sierra Nevada mountains between Nevada and California. It is time to add the option of sustainable, affordable, and safe regional passenger rail to our transportation offerings.

One of the priority passenger rail projects laid out in NDOT's state rail plan is to extend California's existing Capitol Corridor passenger train service to Reno; currently, the Capitol Corridor provides several daily trains between San Jose, Oakland, and Sacramento.

A new Corridor Identification and Development Program laid out in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act creates a process for building a funding pipeline for rail projects. In comments submitted to the Federal Railroad Administration last month, NRC suggested that the extension of California's Capitol Corridor passenger rail service be a part of this program.

From the Rear Platform

By Paul Dyson, Editor



Cleaner Fuel – But it's still diesel

Metrolink provided samples of regular petroleum diesel and the new renewable diesel at the press event, April 13, 2022.

Photo: Paul Dyson

I attended Metrolink's press conference to announce their 100% adoption of what is known as renewable diesel. The good news is that it is cleaner burning than petroleum-based fuel, and also is not supplied by Vladimir Putin. Less welcome is the fact that it is imported all the way from either Finland or Singapore, which must surely take some of the green out of the equation. We were told that a local supplier is under development. I believe that is based at the old Paramount Petroleum refinery, southeast of Los Angeles. It's interesting that the fuel is derived from vegetable and animal oils and fats, which I believe is what Rudolph Diesel had in mind, to free the farmer from the tyranny of the oil companies.

I hope this is a success. Some new fuels and additives (ethanol) are known to damage engines and fuel systems, so I hope this has been thoroughly tested. More to the point, this fuel is cleaner, but by no means clean. It still generates greenhouse gases and particulate matter, NOx and CO2. Metrolink's press releases calls this "a bridge to a zero emissions future". Let's hope so. We are strongly opposed to Metrolink buying more diesel locomotives and hope they can use some of the abandoned diesel locomotives at Keller yard as platforms for battery propulsion.

And the walls came tumbling down...

Or maybe a few cracks finally appeared; I don't want you to be carried away by unbridled optimism. The topic? The Berlin Wall at Oceanside and the institutional barrier that has prevented the establishment of regional rail service between southern Orange County and San Diego County.

For those of you who haven't read my columns over the years, I have frequently referred to the lack, not only of through trains between the two regional rail services, Metrolink and Coaster, but also the lack of connections at Oceanside between the trains that are run, hence the Berlin Wall analogy. RailPAC VP Brian Yanity and I recently Zoomed with Matt Tucker, CEO of NCTD, Coaster's governing agency, and he revealed that some pilot operations would be forthcoming, subject to availability of train crews. An eleven-page Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) dated December 21, 2021 outlines such details as the revenue and cost split, safety protocols etc. for special event services.

The idea is to use either Metrolink or Coaster rolling stock which would otherwise be idle to run additional trains for such events as Comic Con and Del Mar races. With the return of leased coaches to Amtrak from Surfliner service there is less "intercity" capacity and this would be one way of providing seats. It is unfortunate that the cars employed by these agencies are designed for short distance trips, so creature comfort will be lacking if traveling from Los Angeles to San Diego, and no food service. I hope that the operators will try something interesting, such as a direct Inland Valleys to San Diego avoiding Los Angeles.

More to RailPAC's point, here we are after thirty years of Metrolink and twenty seven years of Coaster and they have finally exchanged 'phone numbers and are thinking about dating. Meanwhile Metrolink 800 departs Oceanside at 7.39am. Coaster 621 from San Diego and intermediate stations arrives Oceanside at 7.43am. And so it goes on.

BUT...on the good news front Metrolink is collaborating with LOSSAN on a codeshare scheme from Los Angeles to Ventura. In order to bring back customers post pandemic two of the four Surfliner trains will be available to Metrolink passengers, including on weekends. Quite how the revenue will be accounted for I don't know, and what will happen when Surfliner patrons fill the seats is an unanswered question. During all this the Executive Director of LOSSAN has left the organization. It strikes me as being a "seat of pants" move with the details to be filled in later, and that's no bad thing given the urgency of the situation. When ridership is down 70%, management needs to react fast.

Quotes from our brother railroaders in the Ukraine:

Viacheslav Chumak, 43, who runs the evacuation train from Kyiv to Lviv.

"I work for the Ukrzaliznytsia from 1996 and I have travelled all over Ukraine: Kyiv-Lviv, Kyiv-Kostiantynivka, Kyiv-Dnipro, Kyiv-Kharkiv. I am feeling a sense of anxiety from doing my job. How can you look at the children's eyes, who are scared, and at their mothers, who are going nowhere. Their soul is torn and their heart aches. As a train driver I see what is going on.

Eugen Zagoruk, train driver on the route Lviv – Przemyśl.
"I run the evacuation train in the western direction. To the stations Mostyska, Sambir, Syanky, Lavochna, Mukachevo and Uzhorod. The journey from here to Poland takes 21 hours, and they already traveled from the east for who knows how many hours. When we arrive in Poland, they still have to go somewhere else and it is impossible to know how many hours that will all take."

Roman Gasyuk, an evacuation train driver, in his cabin at a stop in Lviv doing final checks before departure to Przemyśl, Poland. *"I'm doing evacuation routes from Lviv to Przemyśl. Lviv can not provide enough beds for refugees and while Europe is accepting them we need to give them the opportunity to reach safe place during the war. Yes, our profession is kind of dangerous because we might have attacks on the way,*

but still I think that risk is low because our territorial defence units are looking after our safety, controlling all bridges and all securing the vulnerable places.”

Olexiy Stasenko, 31, runs the evacuation train from Zhmerynka, Ukraine. His family remains in Zhmerynka. When asked if he is planning to evacuate them he says: “Why? Why would I evacuate them? If we leave, who will be here to protect our country?” His longest route was 17 hours. Then they rest for 6 hours and go again. “Today we are doing the evacuation route from Zhmerynka, we departed at 06:24 am. We will have a rest now and then we will be driving back. We have huge amounts of passengers, everyone is leaving. For sure it’s dangerous, but we were are well prepared for it.”

Reprinted from *The Guardian* March 31, 2022

Housekeeping

We are in the process of updating our membership contacts, many of which are out of date. We are also working on relaunching our weekly e-news. We need you to confirm your e-mail address by e-mailing me at pdyson@railpac.org. Please do it now while you are thinking about it. You have our absolute assurance that we never give away or sell your personal information. We remain a true, all-volunteer advocacy group and we pride ourselves on staying that way.



Jim Wrinn, Obituary

By J. Bruce Richardson,

Corridor Rail Development Corporation;
March 31, 2022

Word has come from several sources that Jim Wrinn, the longtime innovative and respected editor of *Trains Magazine* has passed away after a battle with cancer. Mr. Wrinn was only 61 and had been editing *Trains Magazine* for over 17 years.

Notable about Mr. Wrinn is that he was a professional journalist who studied journalism at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. After college he worked for daily newspapers, including *The Charlotte Observer* where he worked from 1986 to 2004 serving as both a reporter and weekend city desk editor. He also authored books.

Mr. Wrinn never strayed from his role as a professional journalist and *Trains Magazine* and its readers benefited from that role. He took a legacy magazine that was primarily known as a railfan magazine with the occasional long-form Amtrak fact-finding article or opinion piece and turned it into a respected source of investigative journalism which isn’t afraid to ask probing questions and offer relevant and credible critique about Amtrak operations and corporate policies among other things.

Under Mr. Wrinn the *Trains Newswire* has become required reading for those seeking good information beyond press releases handed out by railroads and associated enterprises. While other legacy railroad industry trade publications have become mere shadows of themselves with reduced staffs and a too-narrow focus mostly on commuter/regional passenger rail issues, *Trains Magazine* and *Trains Newswire* have flourished and expanded, garnering entire new audiences of professional railroaders who once thought *Trains Magazine* was only for entertainment purposes, not comprehensive industry news and analysis.

Kalmbach Media Company made a wise decision to hire Mr. Wrinn for their flagship publication. Here’s hoping they will continue his legacy by selecting the next editor with the same outstanding level of credentials as Mr. Wrinn.

We extend our condolences to his family, friends, and co-workers.

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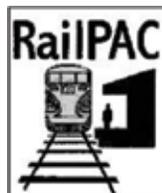
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