

STEEL WHEELS

PASSENGER RAIL IN CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST

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RAILPAC • ALL ABOARD ARIZONA • PASSENGER RAIL KANSAS • NEW MEXICO RA • MINNARP
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AMTRAK ROLLING STOCK AWAITING REPAIR
SEE PAGE 3 FOR IMPORTANT MESSAGE

SW 4Q22 Contents

Editorial

*Important Message to
Elected Officials*

Amtrak Results Analyzed

President's Commentary

*Connections – SMART –
Jan De Vries*

*From The Heartland –
Evan Stair*

Food Stuff

Arrow Opening Ceremony

*Future of Long Distance
Travel – Roberts*

Motive Power News – Dyson

Arizona – Wellton line - Yanity

Rear Platform – Dyson

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From the Editor's Desk

By Paul Dyson - RailPAC Editor



Amtrak is running out the clock – by refusing to order repairs or replacements for the Superliner fleet it is only a matter of time before services are reduced, then eliminated.

In the third quarter edition of this magazine, in 2014, I wrote about

how Amtrak was being killed off by “the indirect approach”. I drew on a military analogy about using ruses and deception rather than frontal attacks to overcome an enemy. Instead of trying to shut down the national network as President Reagan attempted (frontal attack) Amtrak management is stealthily annihilating its long-distance sleeper and coach trains by failing to order replacements, or even to repair the rolling stock that it has. By running short trains and offering less accommodation at higher prices they are also destroying political support for what remains of the national network. The cover picture of the Amtrak shops at Beech Grove, Indiana taken just a few weeks ago illustrates a large part of the story. I make no apology for bringing this up time and again as it is our obligation as advocates, and because other quarters are notably silent on the subject. Fortunately, a national group of experienced and knowledgeable advocates, The Aurora Group, is leading the charge in pointing out this nefarious policy of upper Amtrak management to elected officials and the relevant government agencies to try and reverse Amtrak’s course.

San Clemente cliff won’t stop moving – the railroad therefore must.

We learned in late September that engineers had discovered further movement in the cliffs above the LOSSAN route at San Clemente and line owner OCTA and railroad of record Metrolink immediately ordered the cessation of passenger train traffic. BNSF Railway quickly mobilized with side dump gondolas loaded with barrier rock (rip-rap) to help stabilize the trackbed. Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) declared a state of emergency and provided initial funds for the repairs. Metrolink trains to Oceanside are turning back at the Laguna Niguel station, but RailPAC quickly requested that at minimum weekend service should be restored to San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente, and San Clemente Pier. We received a positive response from Metrolink and so trains



BNSF rock train bringing materials to shore up the track at San Clemente. Photo: Mark MacDougall

are now running to these important day trip destinations on weekends.

RailPAC’s position is to continue to push hard for swift action to relocate the railroad inland. While this is a major civil engineering task, it is a matter of urgency for both freight and passenger customers, and the end result will be a reduction in journey time and greater operational efficiency. The Los Angeles

Times published a letter from me October 9 stating the case for this, and some of the language of that letter was echoed in the statement from Secretary Buttigieg on a recent visit to DelMar. We are being heard.

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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,

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.

To Our Friends In State & Local Government:

Amtrak is required, by law, to operate a *national* network. Historic levels of funding are available now, but the network is at risk because Amtrak continues to store 13% of its equipment and is failing to maintain or replace the rest in a timely fashion. Shorter trains mean less availability, higher fares and last-minute cancellations of long held reservations. Equipment failures translate into poor on-time performance and compromised service on board. Coach passengers still have no access to real meals in the dining car. By not maintaining the long-distance intercity fleet in a state of good repair Amtrak is violating the spirit of the IIJA and failing to serve America's travelers.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provided an advance appropriation of \$16 billion for the Amtrak system, including the long-distance routes that are the core of Amtrak, delivering rail as a mobility choice for 179 million Americans, and the only access to the rail network for 67.3 million. The IIJA:

- Emphasizes the importance of Amtrak's long-distance routes to rural communities.
- Directs Amtrak to maximize the public benefits of federal investment *as opposed to cost reduction*.
- Provides that a long-distance route *may not be discontinued* if Congress provides adequate funding.
- Also provides for the *expansion of the national network*.

Unfortunately, Amtrak lacks enough serviceable equipment to sustain its current operations, much less to expand it to meet growing demand. The root cause is Amtrak's emphasis on *minimizing operating costs* without regard to the negative impact this strategy has on its ability to provide useful service to the traveling public *nationwide*.

To prevent further reductions in the nation's already limited national rail passenger system, Amtrak must use already appropriated IIJA funding to:

- Return all currently inactive passenger cars to service.
- Fund a comprehensive rebuild program to extend the service life of its aging and rapidly failing intercity coaches, sleeping cars, dining, and lounge cars.
- *Expedite* a procurement program to replace the oldest cars in the fleet which are rapidly approaching 50-years of age.

In 2010, Amtrak management indicated the pressing need to replace all of the railcars built in the 1970s. Yet, with funding now in hand, Amtrak's present five-year plan, released at the end of the first quarter, delays any replacement of the long-distance fleet for at least five more years with delivery not expected for at least ten more years - after the IIJA funding expires. This plan is unrealistic and violates the spirit of the IIJA.

The growing equipment crisis underway risks not only capacity and frequency reduction, but also outright route abandonments.

Congress can prevent this outcome. We need to get Congress to act.

Protect the service you have. Contact your representatives in Congress. Alert them to the fact that Amtrak service to your community is in jeopardy. Ask Congress to hold hearings about the meltdown of Amtrak's service on its national network. Get them to send a three word directive to Amtrak's board and management: **REPAIR, REBUILD, AND REPLACE** the national network. And do it **now**.

This letter is co-signed by the following organizations:

Rail Passenger Association
of California
The Aurora Group
All Aboard Arizona
Passenger Rail Kansas
Lakeshore Rail Alliance
Nevada Rail Coalition
High Speed Rail Alliance
Utah Rail Passenger Assoc

Florida Coalition of
Rail Passengers
Passenger Rail Oklahoma
Virginians for High Speed Rail
Trains in the Valley (Mass.)
Minnesota Association of
Rail Passengers
United Rail Passenger Alliance
New Mexico Rail Advocates

Association of Oregon
Rail and Transit Advocates
All Aboard Minnesota
Rail Passengers Association
All Aboard Washington
Train Riders Northeast
Louisiana Association of
Rail Passengers
Texas Rail Advocates

Rail Users Network
Vermont Rail Action Network
All Aboard Northwest
Wisconsin Association of
Rail Passengers
American Association of
Private Railway Car Owners
Climate Rail Alliance
Carolinas Association
for Passenger Trains

Amtrak Releases FY'22 Results

By Andrew Selden
President, United Rail Passenger Alliance

In mid-November Amtrak posted its September Monthly Report. Because Amtrak's Fiscal Year End is on September 30 each year, the September Monthly Report serves as a proxy preliminary report on the year-end results, pending publication eventually of the formal Annual Report.

FY 2022 was a recovery year, as Amtrak struggles to recover from the effects of the Covid epidemic and the sometimes draconian measures taken to combat it. In FY '20 and '21, Amtrak suffered significant traffic and revenue declines, offset by generous federal subsidy support and a rapid traffic recovery in the inter-regional segment. Short corridors, in the NEC and elsewhere, have been much slower to come back. From a purely monetary perspective, Covid was good for Amtrak, which received some \$3 billion in special Covid-related extra handouts from Uncle Sam in FY'20 and '21. What Amtrak did with that money is far less clear. It's obvious that they did not use it to retain staff and keep rolling stock in service, as congress intended.

Amtrak's favorite metric is "ridership," which is simply the number of tickets sold, irrespective of revenues, or distances passengers traveled. Historically, this has made the commuter-heavy Northeast Corridor look big and important (it is neither, by relevant objective metrics). In FY'22, the NEC recovered to about two-thirds of its pre-Covid riders (9.2 million), but was overshadowed by other Regional trains (10.2 million), while inter-regional trains—hobbled by Amtrak's refusal to restore normal consists—carried 3.5 million. The NEC's ridership, however, overstates its performance, because a solid majority of the 9.2 million were commuters, not intercity passengers. Adjusted to set aside the commuters, the NEC carried only about 2.75 million intercity passengers, far fewer than the 3.5 million riders on inter-regional trains. (Many riders on state-sponsored regional trains outside the NEC also are commuters, not intercity, but it is far more difficult to calculate the number; the statistical definition of an "intercity" passenger is one making a non-recurring trip of more than 100 miles.) (All numbers in this report are rounded off for clarity.)

Service Group	NEC	Regional	Inter-Regional
Riders (m)	9.2	10.2	3.5
Available Seat Miles (b)	2.8	4.1	3.4
Revenue Passenger Miles (b)	1.7	1.3	1.9
Load Factor %	62	32	55
Frequencies (t)	18.9	62.1	10
m = millions b = billions t = thousands			

The tables above reflect the key performance data for FY'22. Highlights include:

The NEC achieved record high load factors of 62% overall, and 61% for Acela. In a normal, pre-Covid year, the NEC LF is closer to 50%. Inter-regional trains' LF was 55%, down slightly from historic norms, reflecting weak coach traffic. Regional trains were at 32%, with some corridors obviously doing better than some others. Pacific Surfliners were 25%, Capitol Corridor 21%, and SAN Joaquins 20%. Chicago-St.Louis fared better at 40%. Load factor is the percentage of available seat miles (inventory) converted into revenue passenger miles (sales), and reflects the efficiency of deployed capital. Low LF numbers show the production of more inventory than can be sold. On inter-regional trains, the theoretical maximum LF is about 65% (due to the many en route on-and-offs), so 55% is a very strong showing in the current climate, especially given Amtrak's efforts to keep people from buying tickets on them by not publishing maps or timetables, not advertising them, providing hit-or-miss checked baggage service, and not allowing coach passengers to buy meals in the dining cars.

The most striking result, which Amtrak goes to great lengths to hide, is that inter-regional trains continue to produce more transport—measured in annual revenue passenger miles—than the entire NEC, commuters and intercity combined, 1.86 billion to 1.7 last year. Amtrak's refusal to operate full consists on inter-regional trains capped their output by preventing many thousands of high revenue sleeping car passengers from traveling. The ratio of annual RPMs, inter-regional to NEC, historically is closer to 1.5 to 1. Ironically, any two of the major western inter-regional routes produced more annual RPMs than all of the 5900 annual Acela trains combined.

While most Annual Reports are designed to disclose and elucidate results, Amtrak uses its to obfuscate. This year's report for example omits previous years' disclosure of capital spending below budget, which quantified the year's approximate deferred maintenance and purchasing in the NEC. It is the accumulation of these annual deferred maintenance amounts that adds up to the NEC's "state of good repair deficit" (now approaching \$40 billion) about which Amtrak constantly complains. This report also omits disclosure of "capital" spending by operating segment, which allows Amtrak to hide the fact that its NEC train operations depend entirely on a steady flow of federal subsidy often exceeding \$1 to \$1.5 billion a year to keep up the NEC's infrastructure, its track, tunnels, stations, power systems, etc.

Financial results reflect the continuing recovery from the depths of the epidemic. Total revenues were \$2.835 billion (of which \$2.147 b. was from passenger sources), while total costs were \$3.179 billion, for a loss before non-cash items (e.g., depreciation) and other non-financial items of \$1.825 billion. Offsetting the huge loss were capital inflows from

Amtrak's investment banker, Uncle Sam, totaling \$3.57 billion (about twice as much as the year's losses). The capital grants were used to cover the annual loss, plus pay \$139 million on debt from past borrowing in the private sector, and spending on new Acela II and Siemens Venture trains, for the NEC and regional corridors, respectively.

Amtrak's customer rating score in FY'22 declined by 2.7 points, to "80" (out of 100) points.



*NEC Acela Northbound in New Jersey -
Photo: Chris Gore*



*Regional
Surfliner Train
at Gaviota, CA -
Photo: Michael
Armstrong*

*Interregional Long Distance Train - Empire
Builder in Montana - Photo: Tim Stevens*

Editors note: Selden refers to three groups of Amtrak train service, Inter regional, regional, and NEC. Interregional is often referred to as long distance, and the regional trains are also known as the state supported trains. NEC services include both the Acela and the Northeast Regionals. Examples are shown here:



SMART and Golden Gate Ferry Service in 2022 vs. Northwestern Pacific in 1930.

Jan de Vries - RailPAC Member Photos by the author.



The recent extension of the Sonoma-Marín light rail service to the Larkspur ferry terminal makes it possible, once again, to travel from San Francisco's Ferry Terminal to Marin and Sonoma county points by a combination of ferry and rail. Once again, because it had also been an option until the 1930s, when the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge brought a swift demise to both the ferries and the local trains. How does the modern service of 2022 compare with that of, say, 1930?

In 1930 the Northwestern Pacific (NWP) ran six daily trains on its main line north from Sausalito. On Sundays it ran three more. The trains had various destinations (Eureka, Ukiah, the Russian River resort towns) but they all ran at least as far as Santa Rosa. Ferries sailed every half hour from the Ferry Building in San Francisco to Sausalito where the trains, powered by steam locomotives stood ready for their northbound runs. The NWP also maintained a frequent service of electric-



powered trains to Marin County suburbs. These ran as far as San Rafael and Manor. From Manor narrow-gauge steam trains continued to Point Reyes. But, our concern here is the steam train service on the main line to Santa Rosa, since this followed the route of the present-day SMART diesel multiple unit (dmu) service.

In 1930 one could leave the Ferry Building at fairly well-spaced intervals from 7.45 am to 8.30 pm, arriving at the Sausalito ferry terminal, 6.5 miles distant, in time to catch a train scheduled to leave exactly 35 minutes after the ferries left San Francisco. In an additional 25 to 27 minutes these same trains were scheduled to depart San Rafael, 10.5 miles from Sausalito. The trip from San Francisco to San Rafael by ferry and train, took between 58 and 60 minutes.

On the 36.8-mile trip from San Rafael to Santa Rosa the NWP



trains passed 13 intermediate stations, but most trains stopped regularly at only four or five of them; the remaining stations were flag stops. The trip took between 63 and 68 minutes. Altogether, the trip from the San Francisco Ferry Building to Santa Rosa, a total distance of 53.8 miles, took between 123 and 130 minutes – just over two hours: not blazing speed, but certainly the fastest way then available to travel between these points.

Today essentially the same trip can be made by taking a Golden Gate ferry from San Francisco's venerable Ferry Building to Larkspur and transferring to SMART for a trip over the old roadbed of the NWP to San Rafael and on to Santa Rosa. The distance is the same as in 1930

The ferry to Larkspur is scheduled for 30 to 35 minutes, but the time it takes a passenger to reach San Rafael varies greatly because the departure times of SMART trains from Larkspur ranges from 20 to 54 minutes after ferry arrivals. The average time gap is 35 minutes. Because the distance between the ferry slip and the train platform is 1800 feet (the length of 6 football fields); travelers must maintain a brisk pace to make this connection in 20 minutes. On the other hand, an average transfer time of over half an hour is a strong disincentive to using this service. Even worse is the fact that southbound only 9 daily SMART arrivals at Larkspur have any ferry connection at all (northbound there are 12 connections). In other words, a San Francisco-bound passenger has only a few more departure times to choose from today than in 1930.



Today's passenger, using ferry and train, can cover the distance between San Francisco's Ferry Building and San Rafael in somewhere between 57 and 95 minutes. The average for available connecting services is 74 minutes.

From San Rafael to Santa Rosa SMART follows the old NWP exactly, and stops at 7 intermediate stations. All 19 trains are scheduled to reach Santa Rosa in 58 minutes. Altogether, the trip from the Ferry Building to Santa Rosa now takes between 115 minutes (for the fleet of foot) and 155 minutes – the average is 132 minutes, or 2 hours and 12 minutes. SMART service overall is slower than the steam trains and ferries of 90 years ago.

Why can't SMART offer a better connection with the Golden Gate Ferry service? The latter is not as frequent as it should be – only ten departures from Larkspur (for some reason there are 12 from San Francisco) – but why can SMART not schedule its arrivals and departures to coincide with the ferries in a consistent way? At present SMART runs its weekday trains on a cycle (running time plus end-point layover time) that makes it impossible to schedule departures at consistent time intervals.

The second and more serious problem, is the 1800-foot distance between the train station and the ferry terminal at Larkspur. The passenger alighting from the train is directed to walk along a new bike path that crosses a busy road. The bike path is fairly

busy with recreational users who politely shout "on your left!" as they speed past. After the bridge the bike path then loops around to a sidewalk that leads toward the ferry terminal. If travelers are alert, they will see a small sign that directs them from the sidewalk to a public trail that then leads them the long way around the ferry terminal's vast parking lot. Altogether it is a 20-minute walk for most folks. In the other direction, passengers leaving the ferry are on their own in finding their way to the train. The only sign is a small, discreet directional marking embedded in the pavement.

The designated route between the ferry and the train is actually far longer than a direct route over another pedestrian overpass, and then across two parking lots and a road. Obviously, this is only for those who know where they are going, but it can be done in about 10 minutes. Also obvious is the fact that the private owners of these properties have no interest in accommodating pedestrians on this route.

As long as this silly gap remains, there is little hope that public transportation from San Francisco to Marin and Sonoma counties will ever be able to match what was on offer in 1930. Did whoever designed this strange and disappointing SMART extension design it to fail in its primary purpose?

Ed: RailPAC VP North Doug Kerr notes that it was the City of Larkspur that prevented SMART from bringing the tracks back to the ferry terminal.



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How Amtrak “Conned” US

Evan Stair – Passenger Rail Oklahoma



Heartland Flyer at Gainesville, TX – David Hawkins

In October 1979, Amtrak discontinued the Chicago-Houston Lone Star long-distance train. Twenty-years later, Amtrak returned to Oklahoma through proceeds from the Taxpayer Relief Act of 1997 and the strong arm of U.S. Senator Don Nickles.

On June 14, 1999, the Oklahoma Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Amtrak, under pressure from Nickles, begrudgingly inaugurated the 206-mile Heartland Flyer route. ODOT did not ask for the train, did not want it, and did everything possible to make it look silly.

Now even the states of Kansas and Texas have joined in the silliness... or maybe supportive DOT officials do not know of the superior alternative.

For years, the holy grail for the regional advocates was a 2:00 am hour connection between the Southwest Chief and the Heartland Flyer in Newton, Kansas. That seems underwhelming if not impractical today due to deteriorating on time performance.

Just how would this work? Today, at 2:19 am Train 4, the eastbound Southwest Chief arrives in Newton from Los Angeles followed by Train 3 at 2:41 am westbound from Chicago. A 2010 Amtrak study proposes a Heartland Flyer arrival in Newton at 1:46 am with a departure southbound at 4:20 am. This was the only practical alternative fifteen years ago, but times have changed.

The Infrastructure, Investment, and Jobs Act (IIJA) Section 22214 - Amtrak Daily Long Distance Service Study mandates that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) analyze Chicago-Houston Lone Star reinstatement. A once in a lifetime \$22 billion Amtrak appropriation plus \$36 billion in FRA discretionary funds exists to fund the reinstatement. The FRA also established the Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP) to designate eligible routes.

So what has happened? Why did Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas transportation officials last month request only Oklahoma City-Newton route designation from the FRA?

We believe these officials were simply conned by Amtrak officials who offered peanut butter sandwiches without informing diners that a four course dinner is available. It is well known that Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner is not supportive of long-distance routes of which a revived Lone Star would be designated. Indeed, even the Southwest Chief has been one of Gardner’s apparent targets.

The complexities seem to be beyond the understanding of state transportation officials and the over-exuberant amateur advocates at the Northern Flyer Alliance who continue to work at odds to the superior solution.

Time seems to have passed them by. You should have listened to us.

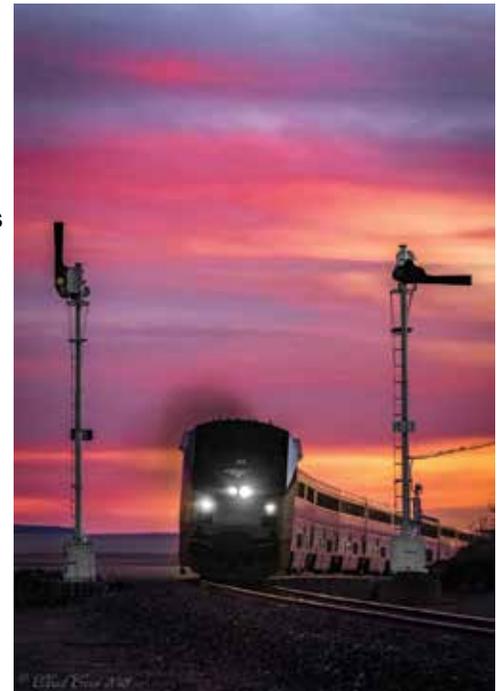
Look at the news stories out of Boise, Idaho where Amtrak officials have convinced local officials to pursue a Salt Lake City - Boise stub end rather than reintroduction of the Pioneer.

Look at how the Colorado Front range dialog stops 65-miles short of a crossover between the California Zephyr and Southwest Chief by not considering Pueblo-La Junta or Trinidad.

Our View: Last Days of the Southwest Chief Are Nigh

Only one of President Biden’s six Amtrak Board of Directors nominees resides outside of the northeast (Normal, IL Mayor Chris Koos). Only two seats remain for nomination. In fact, one of the President’s nominees is acting-Board Chairman, Anthony Coscia who began his first term in 2010, a real estate developer and lawyer from New Jersey.

Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner has spent his entire career in the northeast, entering the workforce with two northeast short-line railroads, with formative years spent as a Congressional staffer. As we posted earlier this week, Gardner is on record, claiming the future of



Southwest Chief at Sunset – Elijah Cross

the railroad is in short-distance corridors.

We have come to a sobering conclusion. The long-distance network will cease to exist as it does today within five years. This is primarily due to insufficient congressional outreach from the general public. Our pleas for action have resulted in only limited public response (We do not consider sad-face emoticons 'action').

How will this manifest?

Amtrak has collected data since tri-weekly cuts in October 2020 to make what we believe will be a carefully crafted discontinuance/restructuring case to Congress. Amtrak will likely also reference its Amtrak Connects US vision -- especially if states express sufficient interest to warrant long-distance route restructuring as short-distance corridors. Would you substitute the Heartland Flyer for the Southwest Chief?

Let's talk a bit more about data. Amtrak continues force-fitting

data. Amtrak is operating shorter long-distance train sets, announcing annulments beyond the tri-weekly cuts of October 2020, delaying long-distance equipment procurement, and continues reducing long-distance service standards.

Without western and southern geographic representation or rejection of President Biden's nominees by the US Senate Committee on Commerce Science and Transportation, the Board of Directors will be emboldened to continue restructuring through long-distance network neglect.

The public has spoken through silence. The people have not objected to the President's board nominees. Amtrak's new board of directors will likely use provincial means to steer the company in the future. We are past the date where your voice can be heard.

I truly hope I am wrong. As they say, ride em' while you can...

Food Stuff

Steel Wheels Editorial Staff
Photos by JLH



Presidential candidate Joe Biden had a slice of coconut cream pie there in March 2020.

I'm a breakfast man myself, morning noon or night when I'm on the road, and they do it in style, and definitely in quantity. As RailPAC VP James Smith puts it: "If you have breakfast there, you don't need lunch any place else".

Steel Wheels sent some undercover diners there early in November and reported that standards are still high. HH recommends the turkey dinner plate and daughter, also HH, had chicken and waffles. *see photos above*

If you want something a little spicier I've had good meals at Farmhouse Kitchen Thai Cuisine at Jack London Square, and Scott's Seafood nearby is another good choice.



"Everyone has to eat"

In this issue we turn to an old favorite in northern California, the ButtercuP diner, 229 Broadway in Oakland. (Yes, the capital P is correct!) This venue is family owned, and they also have establishments in Walnut Creek, Concord and Vallejo. It would be a stretch to say that the Walnut Creek and Concord locations are convenient for rail passengers, and that's only if you count BART as a railroad! Vallejo awaits an extension of SMART. Good luck!

ButtercuP in Oakland is about 4 blocks from the Jack London Square station. The Diner offers very traditional American food from 7.00am to 9.00m daily, and also has a bar and a meeting room. The extensive menu has all the traditional breakfast, lunch and dinner dishes you'd expect as well as home made pies.



President's Commentary

By Steve Roberts – RailPAC President



The New Normal?

Nine months or more into Amtrak's accelerated hiring push, we are still seeing recurring issues with car supply. As I write this (Mid-October) train cancellations

still occur and recently baggage service was cancelled on two state funded routes due to the lack of serviceable baggage cars (the new CAF cars). In short, progress appears limited and it appears that there is still some triage going on with the baggage car drop-out indicating a shortfall in production capacity.

First, an explanation. The FRA mandates that every four years a passenger rail car must have recertification of its air brake system. The inspection and maintenance is quite extensive and calendar driven and is not impacted by usage. That means even a new car or a car that has been stored during the pandemic must still be inspected. Deciding not to keep stored cars current during the pandemic has Amtrak trying to play catch-up and running short consists and most likely juggling equipment right and left to make up a train for departure.

The challenge is that once behind, it is hard to catch-up. Every month employees retire or find alternative jobs and a new batch of cars comes due for its air brake maintenance and inspection. Dozens of new employees need to be hired and trained each month just to keep from falling behind. In addition given the current meltdown of the freight railroads, if any progress is being made those additional cars are probably being sucked into the "protect pool" to cover scheduled equipment turns when an inbound train is 12+ hours late.

Despite efforts by the Fed to cool the economy, hiring remains brisk and available jobs still exceed the number of unemployed. The unemployment rate for the counties around Beech Grove, IN hovers around 3%, which is very low. In short, it is a very competitive hiring environment. Almost every industry is struggling to hire workers including the military which is falling short of recruitment goals. Several regional airlines have aircraft parked due to a shortage of pilots, flight attendants and mechanics.

The new Normal? Over the last two decades labor scholars have written articles predicting problems with work force availability when the "baby boomers" retired. Have we reached that threshold

where there are not enough Gen X, Gen Y, millennials, etc. to replace the Baby Boomers especially when everyone is competing to hire the same people? How do you operate a sleeping car if there is no one to staff the car?



Where are the workers? Amtrak Ivy City shop – Charles Freericks

And Amtrak faces other challenges in this hyper-competitive hiring environment:

Skill sets – Service attendants need good people skills and patience for a grueling work schedule. Mechanics and operating crafts need good process/mechanical skills.

Quality of Life – Railroading is more than a career, it is a lifestyle. Your family life revolves around the work schedule. That is a tough hiring and employee retention issue when employees have so many employment options.

Compensation Package – When viewed broadly Amtrak's compensation package, pay and benefits is top tier, however a key part of its package are its healthcare and retirement benefits. For a healthy 20 something these benefits are way in the future and as a result highly discounted compared to an alternative industry one with a higher hourly wage rate, weekends and nights off and offering a substantial hiring bonus.

Drug Testing – Railroading is a zero tolerance industry. The issue is that unlike alcohol, which purges from a person's system after several hours, the elements of cannabis stay in a person's system for days. The individual is not impaired, but they fail a drug test. Many perspective employees, even though they are good candidates, never apply or fail the pre-employment drug test because of this. Some solution, a better test or research on acceptable post use residual levels need to be developed. This impacts the entire transportation industry.

While we need to keep pressure on Amtrak to address the shortfall equipment due to lack of staffing, based on the perceived lack of progress and the fact this shortfall is common across multiple industries, I am concerned that we are at the "new normal" and it will take years, and maybe a recession, for Amtrak to fully rebuild its staff.

In other matters, FRA has awarded the contract for the Amtrak Long-Distance Study on new potential long-distance routes that was part of the Infrastructure and Jobs Act. The contract has been awarded to AECOM a large planning/engineering firm with experience with Amtrak projects, state rail plans, transit and regional rail projects.

Gulf Coast Service – Both parties have asked for and received extensions for continuing negotiations to achieve a mutually agreeable settlement so service can be introduced. The Surface Transportation Board has clearly hinted that a settlement between parties is preferred to a Board mandate and a proscribed remedy. The good news, a mutually agreeable settlement as opposed to a STB remedy would avoid further delay from a likely court challenge to STB's order. The bad news, a mutually agreeable settlement creates much less of a precedent than a proscribed STB remedy. Although even a settlement would probably take the railroad "multi-billion dollars to operate one train" response off the table for future new route requests. Despite some guidance from this case, negotiations for new routes may still be long and tortuous.

Arrow Opening Ceremony



21st November saw opening ceremonies at Redlands downtown station for the Arrow extension of Metrolink from San Bernardino. Strictly speaking it's not an extension since train type, signaling and platform heights are all different to Metrolink standards. The next issue of Steel Wheels will have an in depth review of the new service, timetable, rolling stock and stations.

Photos by Paul Dyson
Map by SBCTA



A Look at Future Long-Distance Accommodations and On-Board Service Packages

By Steve Roberts – RailPAC President

Amtrak's upcoming plan for replacement of its long-distance fleet has engendered discussion in Steel Wheels and other publications that envision future accommodations and on-board service packages. New equipment designs and on-board service will be shaped by Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and by the current and future transportation market.

One article outlined four markets (categories of passengers) for the long-distance trains.¹

A second article discussed how a new bi-level car design that meets the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) will change long-distance train accommodations and services.²

The third article, by J. Bruce Richardson, Corridor Rail Development Corporation, suggested a focus on improving the market competitiveness and quality of on-board accommodation designs and services to target the growing upper-income middle class market.³

Any future design for long-distance train accommodations and service packages needs to reflect the tectonic changes that have occurred since the original Superliners were designed. One railroad that offers some points of comparison with Amtrak's challenges is Canada's VIA, whose Canadian offers superb on-board service.

Three Major Shocks

Amtrak's current long-distance product and accommodations and its many iterations over the years, were designed for the large middle-income segment of the middle class. In retail terms it was Sears. Three major shocks that occurred in the last forty years have changed the market for the long-distance rail product and its accommodations.

The first shock was the hollowing out of the large middle-income middle class, the market for which current Amtrak long-distance trains were designed. Various trends have pushed many middle-income customers into the lower-income segment of the middle class. Discretionary income is tight for this segment. Others in the middle-income segment have moved into the upper-income segment of the middle class. They have discretionary income to travel but also have heightened expectations for service and quality of accommodations. Neither the leg-rest coach seat nor the economy room (aka Superliner roomette), which were designed for the broad middle-income market, is their choice for travel. The egalitarian concept of a shared diner and shared lounge, neither providing a good match for either the sleeping car or coach market, will fit today's bifurcated market well.

1 Fourth Quarter 2020 Steel Wheels, page 16, "The Diverse Markets of the Long-Distance Trains". [Steel-Wheels-2020.Q4.pdf \(secureservercdn.net\)](#)

2 Fourth Quarter 2021 Steel Wheels, page 8, "Bi-Level Challenge". [Steel-Wheels-2021.Q4.pdf \(secureservercdn.net\)](#)

3 [U.S., Creating A New, Better Superliner Sleeping Car Fleet – Corridor Rail Development](#)

The two other shocks are: (1) the rise of discount airlines, and (2) the route structure (hub and spoke) of the legacy air carriers. The first of these has severely cut into long-distance rail coach travel, while the latter has created a growing market serving the roughly 500 – 700 mile or so trip.

To accommodate these shifts in the marketplace, the long-distance rail product needs to be redesigned. That product will most likely offer three classes of service: true first-class service, affordable sleeping-car service, and price-competitive economy service.



Europe's answer to overnight service. Nightjet from Vienna to Zurich, with through coaches from Budapest and Zagreb, at Dietikon, Switzerland, Photo: Georg Trub

First Class

First class should be oriented toward the growing upper-income middle class market. As Mr. Richardson noted in his article, accommodations should shift to larger rooms. The goal would be to create a true first-class product. Some possibilities include having double bedrooms make up the majority of rooms, with a selected number of Prestige Rooms as offered by VIA, or even three-passenger drawing rooms. A few single passenger roomettes, slightly larger than present roomettes, might offer a product to fill smaller spaces in the car. All rooms would have in-room restroom facilities. As was noted in the Steel Wheels article on the ADA act, all accessible accommodations would be in a specially designed combi-sleeping car (a mix of standard and accessible accommodations) with elevators in that bi-levels.

Given the need for disabled access to these feature cars, a first-class diner-lounge car (Pacific Parlor Car in design) and a separate café-lounge car (Cross-Country Café in design) for coach and economy sleeping car passengers might be the most cost-effective strategy. Separate first-class and economy sleeping car/coach food service cars would also allow food and beverage service to be tailored to the specific clientele. The diner-lounge would feature gourmet full-service dining. Meals would be included in the accommodation fare. Like the Canadian, the economics of providing a true first-class product would require fares double pre-pandemic Amtrak fares – similar to what Amtrak is charging post-pandemic for its shortened

consists with restricted capacity. The market has shown it will pay this level of fare for a true first-class product.

Economy Sleeping Car

While the middle-income middle class demographic has shrunk over the last two decades, it is still a large market that needs to be addressed with a product/price mix that is attractive yet affordable. The new true first-class product will likely be price prohibitive for many current Roomette passengers.

The target market for the economy sleeping car would be travelers who were using Roomettes at the 2019 price points. It will also be necessary to create a service/price package to attract some of the remaining very long-distance coach passengers.



Nightjet Couchette

Meal and lounge service for economy sleeping car passengers would be a café-lounge car. Meal entrees would be simpler fare with lower price points. Streamlined but full service sit-down dining service would be offered in the café section of the café-lounge (similar to what is offered in the Cross-Country Café).



Nightjet in day mode

customer could easily turn into a flat seat with a push of the button (like a lay-flat airline first-class seat) would make a tremendous difference.

Already aiding in achieving this aggressive pricing is double occupancy (upper berth) which adds density and offers the option of another even lower price point. Another key strategy to affordable pricing is to adopt, like the ultra-low-cost airlines, the concept of “unbundling” to provide consumers with price options. The basic product, targeted to attract many of the remaining long-distance coach passengers, is a totally reclining seat in a private room with disposable bedding, all self-service. Price sensitive basic economy passengers could meet their travel budget by



Caledonian Sleeper Suite

bringing some of their own food, purchasing food from the lounge menu, and supplementing with a couple of meals in the café.

Current Roomette riders with higher expectations could purchase upgrade packages that would include full bedding and room make-up from the attendant. Customers could also purchase meal packages in the Café-Lounge car. A passenger purchasing all the upgrades would have a service package at a price point similar to the pre-pandemic Amtrak Roomette service package. Economy sleeping car passengers would get priority seating reservations for meals in the café-lounge. A combi-economy sleeping car, with accessible rooms and elevators in that bi-level car, rigidly coupled to the café-lounge, would allow access to the feature car.



Caledonian Second Class Berth

Coach

Rail travelers who ride in coach are also a major revenue source. Moreover, the widespread public support needed for expansion of passenger rail in the U.S. precludes giving short shrift to this customer cohort. With the ability to incentivize some current long-distance coach passengers into the basic economy sleeping car product, the coach rider profile will become even more oriented to shorter trip lengths (500 – 700 miles). Because of this a slight increase in seating density should be considered. Increasing coach capacity would allow lower prices, to compete the marketplace with motor coach and ultra-low-cost airlines. Meal options for coach



New Nightjet Comfort Plus Berth

passengers ought to be much broader than today. An added option for all classes of passengers, but especially valuable for coach passengers, the elderly, or families with children, would be the availability of Meals-to-Go, a very popular pre-pandemic option on the Coast Starlight and Sunset Ltd. A combi-coach with accessible seating and rigidly coupled to the café-lounge, would allow access to the feature car.

Presented above are some possible design options for new long-distance products. There may be other solutions to the market realities and regulatory challenges that influence equipment design. But one thing is certain: the interior design of the new long-distance fleet design will represent a marked departure from that of the current fleet.

Editor's note: I have included photos of the latest sleeping car accommodation in Europe to illustrate what the next generation of US night travel might look like. Photos courtesy of Caledonian Sleeper and Nightjet.

Motive Power News - Hydrogen

by Paul Dyson

The Electrification/Hydrogen/Battery debate continues. I still chip in diesel as an alternative, given the overall environmental impact of building new infrastructure while existing systems have useful life. There is no free lunch. I expect that puts me in a small minority, but so be it.

This column is provoked by a report from Baden Württemberg state (land) in southwest Germany stating that they will no longer consider hydrogen for rail propulsion as it is more expensive than battery or hard wire electrification by as much as 80%.

“The state has had a total of 16 non-electrified route sections examined for the use local emission-free rail vehicles. In most cases, battery hybrid trains turned out to be the best solution,”

the state said in a [press release](#). “In a direct comparison, this hydrogen was not able to assert itself on any of the examined routes in Baden-Württemberg — due to the infrastructure and operational characteristics.”

Now there are a couple of considerations here. First, the great majority of main lines, if not all, in Germany are electrified. The discussion here is about relatively lightly trafficked secondary routes. The secondary routes generally run between two major cities on a main line, or to and from a single main line station, which means that there are already opportunities for re-charging onboard batteries from existing overhead catenary. Having that investment already in place inevitably tilts the economic scales in favor of either battery or extending the catenary onto the secondary line.

“The positives for hydrogen were: minor impacts upon introduction and during operation, and no changes required to the rail infrastructure. But the negatives were: costly filling stations; low efficiency, high energy consumption and high cost; the possible need to increase the number of trains because the range would not be sufficient for a whole day of travel; limited availability of green hydrogen; and the need to continually resupply the hydrogen filling stations.”

From Hydrogen Insight: “This does not mean that hydrogen trains have no future in Germany or anywhere else. In fact, the Cuxhaven to Buxtehude line in northwest Germany will become [the world’s first 100% hydrogen railway](#) when all its 15 diesel passenger trains are replaced by H2-powered models made by Alstom by the end of this year. A hydrogen refuelling station has already been installed halfway along the 79km route — initially supplied by H2 produced locally as a by-product of

chlor-alkali electrolysis at the nearby Dow chemical plant. But there are question marks over how green the hydrogen will be — as the electrolysis is powered by grid electricity, rather than renewables. But there are plans to switch the supply to green hydrogen in the coming years.”



Stadler Hydrogen Flirt multiple unit for California Arrow service at Konstanz, Germany en route from Innotrans in Berlin. Photo: Georg Trub

With the introduction of the “Arrow” service in San Bernardino County, which will soon have a hydrogen powered multiple unit train, this discussion has increasing relevance to California. Unlike Baden Württemberg the route of the Arrow service has relatively flat terrain. But if Hydrogen power is to be extended further in the Metrolink network or elsewhere in California, gradients will become a factor in performance and range for any propulsion system other than diesel or overhead wire electrification.

The State of California (Caltrans) has ordered four 4-car H2 units from Stadler. At the time of writing I am awaiting details from Caltrans about the specifications and anticipated deployment of these trains. Look for updates in the next issue.

The California Air Resources Board (“CARB”) has proposed a rule to mandate zero emission power for passenger rail in California by year 2030. It has been clear to me over the years that CARB (a) doesn’t have any staff that have practical rail experience; and (b) has theoretician who in seeking the perfect manage to destroy the good. This is the agency that is responsible for the destruction of the Metrolink F59 fleet, still languishing and deteriorating in Los Angeles, and the replacement by the so-called F-125s whose emissions as in service multiple stop passenger locomotives have never been tested. Now CARB wants them scrapped, at least 10 years before the end of their service life, and demands that they be replaced by.....something that does not yet exist, a zero emission locomotive.

As an incentive to making this happen, CARB has proposed a tax on diesel fuel consumed, i.e. one public agency being “fined” by another to force compliance. Brilliant!

It will be interesting, to say the least, to see what will happen to Amtrak’s interstate long distance trains at the Oregon, Nevada and Arizona state lines. Will they have an exemption to operate what will still be relatively new Siemens Chargers into California or will a change to the as yet non-existent zero emission locomotive be required? At the same time, freight locomotives, nearly ten times more numerous, do not have to comply until 2035. RailPAC President Steve Roberts has written to CARB with our comments, and it is posted on [www.railpac.org](#).

The Curious Case of the Union Pacific's Wellton Branch: Opportunity in the 'Phoenix West Line'

Brian Yanity

There is great potential in re-establishing a direct passenger train service between Phoenix and Los Angeles. Re-opening of the Union Pacific Railroad's Wellton Branch west of Phoenix would allow the return of a daily *Sunset Limited* to Phoenix and support new regional trains. The business case for refurbishing the Wellton Branch is based not only on passenger service but also new "medium-haul" freight services between the Valley of the Sun and California.¹

Amtrak's Connects US plan, released last year, identified Los Angeles-Palm Springs-Phoenix-Tucson services as one of the "corridors under review" to be implemented by 2035. (See annotated map below.) Amtrak proposed to start a service of one round-trip a day between Los Angeles and Tucson via Phoenix, and three round-trips a day between Phoenix and Tucson. Amtrak has not proposed a budget, a project plan, or a timeline to start such a service. However, in July 2021 Amtrak President Gardner did suggest that LA-Phoenix direct service could start "within three years" but did not offer any specifics on how this could happen. This service would require re-opening of the Wellton Branch.

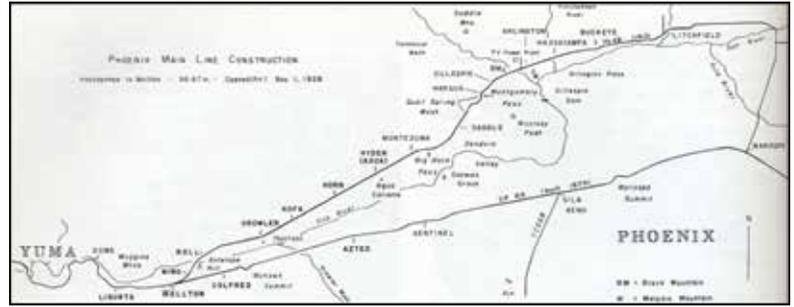


Background map: OpenStreetsMap (annotations by author)

Wellton Branch- the Phoenix 'West Line'

The Wellton Branch, also known as the "Wellton Cutoff" or the "Phoenix-West Line", is a Union Pacific (UP)-owned track which runs west from the end of the Phoenix Subdivision, west of Buckeye, to a junction with the mainline Sunset Route at Wellton. What was formerly the Southern Pacific's "Wellton-Picacho Cutoff" through Phoenix is today divided into UP's Wellton Branch to the west and the Phoenix Subdivision to the east. Southern Pacific(SP) completed this north cutoff in 1926, primarily to enable *Golden State* and *Sunset Limited* passenger trains to pass directly through Phoenix. Between Phoenix Union Station and Wellton Junction there are 137 miles of single track, with a few sidings. Aside from a few 50-60 mph curved sections, most of the route is very straight and could easily accommodate 79 mph or faster trains if the track were refurbished and reopened.

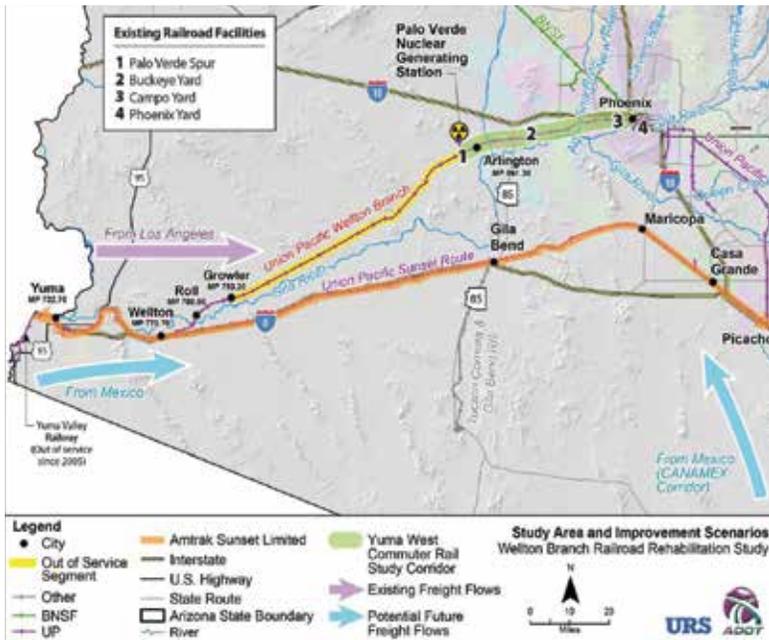
¹ For a detailed discussion, see The Prospects for Future LA-Phoenix Passenger Rail, 1st Quarter 2021 Steel Wheels



Detailed map of about 100 miles of the Wellton Branch between Buckeye and Wellton. Capacity of the segment was roughly 20 trains per day in the 1960s. Southern Pacific speed limits tables from that time showed that passenger trains ran 79 mph on the Wellton Branch, aside from several short 50-60 mph sections. .

About 64 miles of the Wellton Cutoff, from east of Roll in Yuma County to west of Arlington in Maricopa County, has been out of service since 1996. The 64-mile midsection of track is today used as a path by desert animals. The 1995 domestic terrorism incident on this section of track, in which one Amtrak crewmember was killed and scores injured, was not the reason for the track's closure. Southern Pacific absorbed by Union Pacific in 1996, had been wanting to discontinue use of the line due to deteriorating track conditions and very light freight traffic. By then the *Sunset Limited* was almost the only train using the Wellton Branch, and service was slow and bumpy along this worn-out section. SP had requested help from the state government of Arizona to refurbish the line. Neither UP or Amtrak wanted to pay for refurbishment and maintenance costs. and did not find any outside financial support from the state of Arizona's political leadership which, then as now, was unwilling to use any state funds to support intercity passenger rail. Thus by June 1996 the *Sunset Limited* was bypassing Phoenix, and UP promptly put the 64-mile mid-section of the Wellton Cutoff out of service.

To get the Wellton Branch back in service, the necessary capital projects include repair and replacement of ties, rail, and bridges, along with new signals and installation of Positive Train Control. In 2009, the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) requested federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to help restore the Wellton Branch and bring the *Sunset Limited* back to Phoenix but was unsuccessful. In 2014, ADOT hired the consultants URS to do a more in-depth Wellton Branch rehabilitation study.



Map from 2014 Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) Wellton Branch Rehabilitation Study

The 2014 Wellton Branch study looked at replacement of ballast, rail, ties, lengthening sidings, signal systems, crossings, and bridges. Four alternative scenarios were evaluated:

- **Scenario 1** – Through freight service only (FRA Class 2 Track) w/ max speed = 25 mph
- **Scenario 2** – Through freight service and basic Amtrak service (FRA Class 3 Track), w/ max freight speed = 40 mph and max passenger speed = 60 mph
- **Scenario 2A** – Same as Scenario 2, w/ PTC
- **Scenario 3** – Through freight service and higher speed passenger service (FRA Class 4 Track), w/ max freight speed = 60 mph and max passenger = 79 mph

WELLTON BRANCH RAILROAD REHABILITATION STUDY		
ALTERNATIVE #3: FRA Class 4 Track		
Requirement	Amount	Notes
Remove rail, ties and ballast	Multiple	90.8 miles of main track; 2.73 miles of passing sidings and grade roadbed
Drainage Improvements	Multiple	90.8 miles along main track
New ballast and ties	Multiple	12" sub-ballast and 12" rock crushed ballast, new concrete ties, new 136# CWR along 90.8 miles of main track and 10.2 miles of passing siding
New turnouts	19	12 new #20 turnouts and 7 new #10 with 136# rail;
New bridges	12	New bridges will be concrete or steel girder (600')
Bridge and handrail repair	Multiple	123 Minor repairs (12,124 ft.), 8 Major repairs (671 ft.)
Bridge replacement	23	2 at MP 482.75 where washout occurred plus 77 ft. per bridge 50% of 42 bridges that are 10' to 30' long (21 total - 360')
Talking detectors	6	Replacement
Active Warning Devices	21	10 existing at-grade crossings, 11 additional currently with passive warning
Passive Cross-Bucks	10	Private crossings up to latest standards
Concrete crossing panels	31	21 public crossings, 10 private crossings
Railroad signaling system	Multiple	Install PTC along 90.8 miles of main track

The 2014 study concluded that the level of freight demand at the time did not warrant re-opening Wellton Branch, although if demand increased, phased rehabilitation made sense. It also

recommended that the state seek to identify and develop freight opportunities for the Wellton Branch. Proposed next steps listed in the 2014 ADOT report included development of more detailed engineering design and construction cost estimates, and coordination with UP and Amtrak to conduct further studies.

Upgrades beyond Class 4 track

Ideally, to get the line running again, Amtrak and the ADOT should work with UP to come up with a detailed capital improvement plan. Such a plan would determine exactly what projects are needed and what will they cost. The capital project plan could present an opportunity to propose rebuilding curves (with increased superelevation) and other improvements to increase train speeds. Straight sections could be feasibly improved for trains traveling faster than 100 mph.

New higher speed track than the FRA Class 4 track proposed by 'Scenario 3' in the 2014 ADOT study is possible. There is no technical reason to limit the Wellton Branch to Class 4. A staged plan for double-tracking the line is also needed, starting with upgrades to existing sidings. If UP needs to continue storing more railcars in the area, then additional sidings can be built for that purpose.

While UP currently makes some revenue from buried communication lines along the route, the Wellton Branch right-of-way could also be used for electric power transmission. There is abundant solar energy in the area, some existing large-scale solar power facilities, and the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station near the eastern end of the Wellton Branch. Electrification with 25-kV overhead catenary is also quite possible.

WELLTON BRANCH RAILROAD REHABILITATION STUDY		
CAPITAL COST ESTIMATES		
Scenario	Total Estimated Cost	Cost/ Route Mile
S1 – Class 2 Track	\$165 Million	\$1.8 Million
S2 – Class 3 Track	\$195 Million	\$2.1 Million
S2A – Class 3 Track (w/ PTC)	\$266 Million	\$2.9 Million
S3 – Class 4 Track	\$420 Million	\$4.6 Million

New freight service between Southern California and Arizona

Passenger trains taking the Wellton Branch and Phoenix Subdivisions between Wellton and Picacho through Phoenix also benefit UP freight traffic by freeing up capacity on the Sunset Route mainline. The west side of Phoenix is now

home to many large warehouses and logistics developments, much of it heavily reliant on truck traffic from California via the increasingly congested I-10. The 205-mile Class III Arizona & California (A&C) Railroad currently provides the only direct rail service between Southern California and Phoenix, interchanging with BNSF Railway at Matthie (west of Phoenix) and at Cadiz, 100 track miles east of Barstow. This combined BNSF+A&C routing is about 512 miles between LA and Phoenix, longer by 86 miles than the 426 miles on UP if Wellton Branch were reopened. Much of the A&C track is also limited to slower speeds compared to the BNSF or UP mainlines. The driving distance on I-10 is even shorter: 370 miles.

With a refurbished Wellton Branch, there would be a variety of new 'short-haul' and 'medium-haul' freight rail services possible along the Ports of LA/Long Beach-Inland Empire-Indio-Yuma-Phoenix corridor. International 40' containers imported on ships through the Ports of LA/Long Beach could go by direct rail service to west Phoenix and there be transloaded to 53' domestic containers. LA basin/Inland Empire-Phoenix direct service also offers opportunities for domestic 53' intermodal containers, trailer-on-flatcar, and carload freight. There is also potential for Yuma-Phoenix direct short-haul freight service.

The Wellton Branch as a "Toll Road for Trains"

To get Amtrak and UP on board, funding must come from outside the normal budgets of both railroads. Public money or private investment could pay for the capital projects and allow UP and Amtrak to avoid any financial obligation. The state of Arizona could investigate purchasing the right-of-way, which would allow it to lease the branch to Amtrak or other train operators. Even if it is assumed that UP, the state of Arizona, or Amtrak remain unwilling to contribute money for refurbishment and repair of the Wellton Branch, there could be other sources.

Two possible candidates to be an 'independent entity' which could purchase or lease the 137-mile Wellton Branch segment from UP include:

1. A 'joint powers agency' of Maricopa and Yuma counties (perhaps also including key cities)
2. A private infrastructure-owning company other than UP or another Class I railroad, perhaps a Class II or Class III railroad.

UP and its predecessor, SP, have sold tracks and rights-of-way to public and private entities before. for the right price. With proper planning and supporting policies, either a public or a private "independent" owner could accomplish the goals of improving and utilizing the Wellton Branch for maximum public benefit.

Imagine for a moment that the Wellton Branch was in Germany. Railroad infrastructure in Germany is publicly owned by DB Netze, the infrastructure division of the state-owned national railroad, Deutsche Bahn (DB) AG. Like other European track owners, DB Netze more or less treats its track network as a "toll road for trains", open to access by any pre-qualified train

operator, passenger or freight. The infrastructure owner in this "open access" system has a financial incentive to maximize the number of trains using its tracks. More trains means more "tolls" (track access fees), and thus more revenue for the infrastructure owner

According to the US Census Bureau, Phoenix is the 13th largest Combined Statistical Area (CSA) in the US with 5 million people, while greater Los Angeles is 2nd with 18.5 million. It should be kept in mind that Metro Phoenix is not much smaller than the metro areas of Berlin (6 million), Munich (5.7 million), or Frankfurt (5.6 million) --all cities served by hundreds of intercity passenger trains every day. Phoenix has none. Maricopa station, a 35-mile drive south of Downtown Phoenix in Pinal County, is technically within the Phoenix metro CSA. Served three days a week each way by the *Sunset Limited*, the Maricopa station saw 11,194 Amtrak passengers in the entire year of 2019, a very small number for a station that purports to serve a metropolitan area of 5 million.

With open access, many segments of underused, abandoned or 'fallow' railroad lines like the Wellton Branch could suddenly have tremendous value. Other mothballed lines in Arizona could be brought back to life, such as the Yuma Valley Railway, which has been out of service since 2005. But this is just a thought experiment. Even if an independent entity owned or leased the Wellton Branch, UP would still control access to both ends of it. In the absence of a national 'open access' policy like those of Europe, the Wellton Branch would be like many U.S. short lines: at the mercy of the Class I roads that control outside access to their lines.

Another way to incentivize rehabilitation of the Wellton Branch is to consider it to be a "climate investment". Arizona is already suffering badly from climate change, and increasing the mode share of rail transportation in the state is a sure way to reduce GHG emissions.

Realistically, the state of Arizona, meaning both the Governor and Legislature, will have to support restoration of Wellton Branch in some significant way. Even if the state government of Arizona itself does not purchase or fund repairs of the Wellton Branch, it may have to bless the creation of any rail joint powers agency, or any new passenger rail service within the state. Fortunately, the examples of state-supported passenger rail in states like California, Utah, North Carolina, Virginia, and Illinois, as well as multi-state collaborations such as the *Cascades* (Oregon and Washington) and the *Heartland Flyer* (Texas and Oklahoma) provide examples from which Arizona could learn.

Special thanks to Todd Liebman (President - All Aboard Arizona), Tom White (VTD Rail Consulting), and Jon Talton (<https://roguetcolumnist.typepad.com/>), and for providing information and review of this article.

From the Rear Platform

By Paul Dyson, Editor



Brightline

In High Speed Rail news the FRA has published the environmental review for the proposed Brightline extension from Victor Valley to Rancho Cucamonga. This is the link:

<https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/environmental/environmental-reviews/brightline-west-cajon-pass-high-speed>



While construction has not yet started on the Las Vegas - Victor Valley part of the route the advancement of planning to bring the line into the Los Angeles basin adds considerable credibility to the project as a whole. Connecting directly to Metrolink at Rancho Cucamonga is important as it adds weight to our proposal for Electrolink, electrification of Metrolink from San Bernardino to Chatsworth and Santa Clarita to Mission Viejo. Brightline trains would then be able to operate into Los Angeles Union Station, offering a one seat ride.

Reno extension – From the Sacramento Bee

“Caltrans and Placer County transportation planners are considering expanding its popular Capitol Corridor commuter train service up the Sierra to the Lake Tahoe and Reno areas, and they are seeking input from the public.

Caltrans and the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency announced this week they are “studying the necessary improvements that would be needed to provide Capitol Corridor service from Sacramento to the Tahoe and Reno/Sparks area.”

The agencies said online “we want to know your thoughts on if you would use such a service, and for what purposes.”

Capitol Corridor currently provides service from Auburn to San Jose, with most trains operating between Sacramento and the Bay Area. One round-trip train per day serves Placer County with stops in

Roseville, Rocklin and Auburn.

An increase in service is already in the works for Roseville. The [Third Track Project](#), approved in 2015, will eventually add 10 round trips



California Zephyr leaving Truckee CA Photo: Chris Mohs

beginning in Roseville.

And now an expansion of service to the Lake Tahoe and Reno areas is under consideration. Stops could include Colfax, Soda Springs and Truckee, as well as Reno and Sparks in Nevada, according to a feasibility study produced by Caltrans and the Nevada Department of Transportation.”

Ed: Our friends at Nevada Rail Coalition are working on this from the Reno end.

FRA Amtrak review

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) on Oct. 28 announced that, as directed by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), it has kicked off a new Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Study to “evaluate the restoration of daily long-distance intercity rail passenger service and the potential for new Amtrak long-distance routes.”

The study, [FRA](#) says, will ultimately “create a long-term vision for long-distance passenger rail service and identify capital projects and funding needed to implement that vision.”

<https://fralongdistancerailstudy.org/>

According to the study website, the Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study will:

“Evaluate options for restoring or enhancing to daily basis intercity passenger rail service along routes.

“Select preferred options for restoring or enhancing service.

“Develop a prioritized inventory of capital projects and other actions required to restore or enhance the service, including cost estimates for those projects and actions.

“Develop recommendations for methods by which Amtrak could work with local communities and organizations to develop activities and programs to continuously improve public use of intercity passenger rail service along each route.

“Identify Federal and non-Federal funding sources required to restore or enhance the service.”

Engagement for the Long-Distance Service Study began in September 2022 and will conclude in late 2023.

RailPAC Annual Meeting – November 5

We were delighted to welcome **Metrolink CEO Darren Kettle** as keynote speaker. Darren gave a thorough and very candid overview of the serious problems facing his agency. You can find his power point presentation on our website. Bluntly, Metrolink lost about half of its regular customers to work changes as a result of the Covid pandemic, and so has to face a new reality or else fade away. Unfortunately, years of underfunding of infrastructure projects has resulted in a very limited ability to introduce the frequency of service, or the new cross regional routes that would be attractive to a new set of riders. SCORE-21 is the answer. You can read the details on the Metrolink website, but it's a very ambitious and largely unfunded program, the heart of which are the run-through tracks at Los Angeles Union Station. The dilemma Kettle faces is to convince his Board, together with the member agencies, the State and feds that these investments are justified at a time when patronage is so low. The one hopeful sign is that, at least at present, there are State and federal funds available, although of course there is plenty of competition from other agencies.

The meeting unanimously reelected the directors with the exception of Vaughn Wolfe, who has decided to retire after too many decades of advocacy to politely mention. Thank you Vaughn for all you have done we're too polite to mention.

projects on the SCORE list is the realignment and rationalizing



of Burbank Junction, where the Antelope Valley and Coast Main (Ventura County) lines diverge. When double track was added to the VC line the crossovers at the junction were left such that train speed was restricted to 35/25 mph. Also, the signaling was not upgraded so that a train heading west on the VC line occupied the track for some minutes, reducing capacity and limiting the number of train movements possible in a given period. In order to introduce half-hourly service in both directions on both lines, and accommodate Amtrak and the occasional freight train the junction will be slewed to reduce the curvature, higher speed crossovers will replace the existing track, and signaling will be upgraded to permit closer spacing of trains. The new speed limit will be 45/35.



Burbank Junction Project

A small piece of SCORE gets underway

One of the smaller

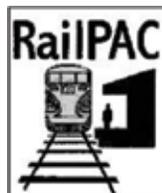


Photos and Maps by Metrolink

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