STEEL WHEELS

PASSENGER RAIL IN CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST

Magazine of the Western Passenger Train Coalition

Summer 2026

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President's Commentary

Steve Roberts

Welcome to Summer 2026 edition of Steel Wheels. I hope everyone has a safe and enjoyable 250th anniversary of the United States. I also wish everyone good luck on catching one of the many special anniversary locomotive units traveling the rail network.



Amtrak/Kevin Burkholder

In this issue you will find "Observations of Amtrak's New Equipment Order", an article on railroad firefighting by Geoff McLennan, a look at another Orange County station, Part 2 of Ed D'Amato's "Creating a Robust American Rail System", an article on mode shift (highway to rail) as a strategy for reducing Green House Gas emissions, reimaging the LOSSAN Corridor (Pacific Surfliner) near-term and longer-term dramatically leveraging the Southern California passenger rail system (Electrolink). Finally, a word from Paul Dyson "From the Rear Platform".

As was noted in a recent NewsWire posting An Update on Contactless Fare Payment across Agencies in California – RailPAC Tap & Go contactless payment system is being expanded. In conjunction with the World Cup, San Francisco transit agencies and LA Metro and its partner agencies have rolled out Tap & Go acceptance. Tap & Go avoids all the hassles of ticket machines and ticket purchase. Also, in conjunction with the World Cup the Capitol Corridor becomes the first intercity rail service in the US to adopt contactless payment with its Tap2Ride program (remember to tap off on intercity and regional rail systems like Caltrain), Some systems are also introducing fare capping as a replacement for weekly and monthly tickets. With fare capping rides become increasingly discounted (and eventually free) as the trip payments reach the cost of current multi-ride fares. For the bank-less, stored value cards remain available for purchase. The next feature to be rolled out will allow customers eligible for demographic discounts, age, disability, etc. to register their card to receive these discounts within the contactless system. Within the next year, close to 95% of California transit trips will utilize the contactless system.

Not only is the contactless system more convenient for the customer, but it saves transit agencies the large cost associated with the handling and accounting of cash transactions. Tap & Go or the California Integrated Ticketing Project (Cal-ITP), is the result of all the very complex hard work by Caltrans undertaken behind the scenes with banks, clearing houses, software companies, and hardware companies to achieve a workable and reliable system, Caltrans and its partner agencies, the Cal-ITP team, deserve congratulations for reaching this milestone.

Regarding the UP/NS merger things are little changed. As I noted in the 2nd Quarter 2026 Steel Wheels the Surface Transportation Board (STB) rejected UP's initial application. On April 30th UP refiled the merger plan with additional detail as requested by the Board. On May May 27th, 2026, the STB conditionally accepted the merger application as complete but requested answers or data to specific questions. UP's has until July 27th to respond. Its nine questions centered around: enhanced competition, post-merger service levels. interchange gateways, car supply, market share projections and a projection of likely mergers that might occur as a consequence of the UP/NS merger.

At this point, the STB's task is still to rule on the completeness of the merger application and not on the merits of the merger. Over the last several weeks the message from opponents has consistently called for the STB to reject the merger application. If or when the STB accepts the application the discussion will shift to the merits of the merger. This is when the time is appropriate to suggest specific remedies to offset merger driven issues.

Some added information has arisen over the past few weeks. UP has indicated that it will accept the STB's proposed reciprocal switching rulemaking. It has also indicated that it is willing to sell its river line (former Missouri Pacific, route of the Amtrak River Runner route) between Kansas City and St. Louis. CN wants that rail line, which is why they may have "jumped to gun" and suggested that any merger approval includes line sales and trackage rights. UP has indicated that it would agree to Board imposed competitive concessions long as the impact of these concessions does not exceed a $750 million threshold.

While Amtrak has settled on-time performance issues with NS and UP, they have so far been silent about the merger. Given that the STB has delayed the start of merger proceedings, that is not unexpected. Also, any negotiations on a settlement and Amtrak's support for merger would be behind closed doors and would not become public until an agreement is reached. In case there is not agreement, one would expect that Amtrak would ask the STB to impose its requested conditions as part of the merger approval.

Finally, you might note that, freed from the constrictions of printing and mailing, allows this issue to have a great deal of content.

Some Observations Regarding Amtrak's Revised Equipment Procurement Initiative

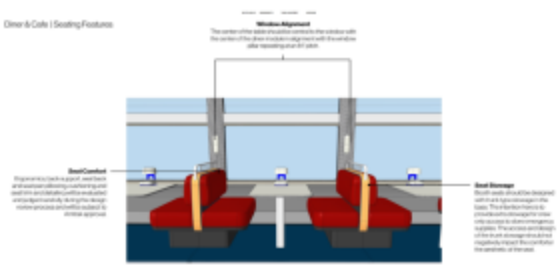
Steve Roberts

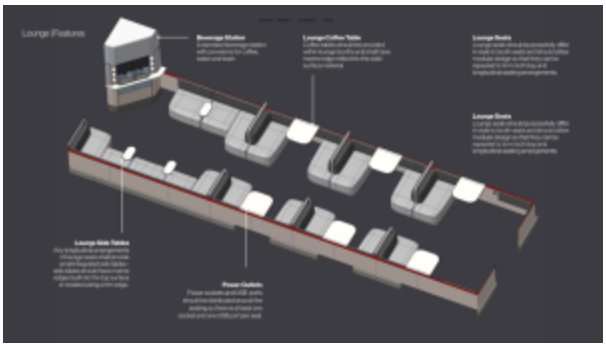
Reportedly because of the pressure to face reality by the FRA, Amtrak has moved forward with its procurement of new long-distance single-level rail cars. Rail advocates need to understand that the failure to resolve the bilevel standoff was a manufacturing and industrial policy failure of the first order. What Amtrak asked for was far less than what Juan Trippe, CEO of Pan American World Airways, asked of Boeing in producing the 747. It also reflects the lack of a passenger rail car procurement policy designed to develop and maintain a passenger rail car manufacturing base and supply chain.

To attract car builders, Amtrak developed a procurement order for 800 bilevel cars. Instead of adopting a "can do, we can make it work" attitude, car builders appear to have pushed back wanting to stick to their catalog. Given that there are elevators in California Car Café's, Rocky Mountaineer bi-levels, Alaska Railroad Gold Class bi-levels and Alaska Wilderness Adventure bi-levels, the reported tiff over elevators is likely not driven by engineering concerns but the overly cautious insurance and risk-management departments of the car builders.

That said the manufacturers have reason to be cautious given the lack guaranteed yearly funding for new equipment purchases and the lack of a passenger rail car industrial policy in the US. This policy oversight is compounded when the lack of guaranteed yearly funding is combined with the "Buy America" restrictions. With reportedly a price of $12 million for each bilevel car, the manufacturers were clearly reflecting the reality of Congress's "stop and go" capital funding for Amtrak and also factoring in a "bankruptcy premium" given financial results of all the other car builders that assumed the initial order for long-distance equipment would lead to further orders.

For both Amtrak and the car manufacturers, I do not see the 2-year timeline as excessive. The work to date has focused on a bilevel envelope. Now these concepts must fit into a single-level envelope, and any new car builders are starting from scratch.





While the delay has been frustrating for advocates, Amtrak deserves some credit for its persistence in trying to develop a signature product for the 21st century market with a wide array of accommodations all while meeting accessibility standards and at the same time retaining traditional separate accessible dining and lounge cars. Amtrak Takes Big Step Towards New Long Distance Trains – Amtrak Media The simple answer would have given us narrow seats for wide aisles and at-seat dining and lounge service from a central commissary car, Amtrak's efforts seem very customer-focused especially in the areas of equipment reliability and passenger comfort. However, it appears that the premium coach seats, with a 2-1 configuration and greater recline, are the "economy" overnight accommodations.

With no apparent movement regarding the VIA long-distance order, perhaps they are facing the same challenges from the car manufacturers that Amtrak faced. With a single-level order announcement there has been some discussion among advocates of domes. To be accessible domes would have to have elevators. And unlike bilevel elevators which would be used for boarding and detraining when the train is stopped, dome elevators would be used while the train is in motion. A sure issue for manufacturer risk management and insurance departments. So do not look for domes on the new *Canadian*.

A single-level order does mean more cars, about one-third more. This is a productivity reduction in a competitive environment that requires improved productivity from capital assets. More cars mean additional on-board staffing and higher maintenance costs from having additional trucks, HVAC and control systems, etc. This means elevated operating costs. With no productivity improvement (eastern LD trains) and a productivity decline (western LD trains) Amtrak needs cross-craft Auto Train style work rules to offset some of this forgone equipment productivity.

While the procurement order is for 800 single-level cars, that is the same number as the bilevel order. For the single-level order to match the capacity of the bilevel order the procurement should be for over 1,000 cars. And the price per car is unknown. Given the inflation that has occurred and is occurring during this process is the funding available in the Infrastructure Bill sufficient to completely re-fleet Amtrak or will additional funding be required in the new Surface Transportation Bill?

There is one intriguing result from this exceptionally lengthy process. This manufacturing failure radically changes the cost/benefit equation breakeven point for rebuilding the Superliners vs. new purchases. The analytics that drove Amtrak's prior thinking was that it was not economic to spend significant scarce capital to rebuild a 40-or 50-year-old car if a new car cost only marginally more.

But that has changed, bilevels cannot be acquired and their cost is likely excessive. Also, what is the strategy for Auto Train with its train length restrictions built around Superliners? How does that alter the path in the future?

In a presentation on the new long-distance equipment order, Amtrak indicated that it would undertake an in-depth analysis on extending the service life of Superliners – likely driven by the Auto Train issue and the potential funding short-fall for a complete fleet replacement. So, will the focus simply be fleet replacement, with no cars for route expansion, or will the strategy be to utilize available assets for both fleet replacement and route expansion? If the Air Force is rebuilding B-52 airframes with new engines for a 100-year lifespan, is there a future for the Superliners? For legislators who want additional rail routes would they sponsor a Buy American waiver for Superliner rebuild parts not available at any price in the US?

Finally, it would be interesting if Amtrak, as a demonstration of how bilevels can be developed, took a Superliner I bag-coach, cut a hole in the floor, installed an elevator, and operated it on some trains to see if any issues arose.

Finally, given that Amtrak's priority is to retire all the Amfleet II's and perhaps even the Viewliner I's first, it will be many years before most RailPAC members ride anything but a Superliners out west.

An Alternative Vision for the LOSSAN Corridor

Steve Roberts

Without a LOSSAN corridor reimagining, its passenger rail operators will continue to see stagnant growth, an increasing gap between ticket revenues and costs and pressures to reduce service to close this gap. The failure of the governing agencies to deliver critical and targeted capacity increases that would have allowed a dramatic increase in frequencies and improved on-time performance, to unlock the corridor's potential and increase ridership and ticket revenues, is especially telling. The schedules and fares of the numerous services should be seen by the rider as a nested, easy to navigate transportation network.

While the hope was that the LOSSAN Working Group would develop recommendations to jumpstart this reimagining, results have been disappointing. Based on the draft recommendations, the key agencies involved have not presented anything that resembles a vision of what the corridor could be or even actionable steps to address the current shortcomings and challenges.

Lacking from the draft recommendation is a vision that describes the regionwide potential of the LOSSAN corridor and how SB 1098 recommendations could be leveraged to build the foundation for developing that potential.

What the LOSSAN Working Group recommended is small-scale process, communication, and operational actions. While their adoption will improve the current service, the fact is that the current reality, even improved, is failing and losing mode share to the automobile.

Despite the wide variety of rail corridor governance models throughout the US, there is no exploration of these other models or acknowledge of the shortcomings of the current governance model. There is also no acknowledgement that the current corridor governance model is too locally focused and may not be the best foundation to transform the corridor by accelerating ridership and ticket revenue growth. Ironically, a literature search of past LOSSAN corridor studies would have provided a wide range of options to pursue.

The draft recommendations did not include any proposal for initiatives to streamline third-party agreements, government agency construction permitting and specific project environmental permitting where those projects are located within an existing rail right-of-way. Also not proposed is a regionwide funding initiative, linked to a vision, to support corridor investments and services, both intercity and regional rail services.

Given the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction goals combined with increased transportation demand as outlined in the State Transportation Plan, the Legislature should highlight its support for fully utilizing rail rights-of-ways, an irreplaceable asset with huge

potential. Also given the rail mode's dramatically lower GHG emissions compared to highway travel, the Legislature should clarify that capacity improvements within the existing rail right-of-way and the operation of additional frequencies generate significant regional and statewide public benefits that result in net environmental benefits.

In summary, it simply does not appear that the agencies can put aside regional competitive rivalries, a total focus on local issues and governance boundaries and develop a needed solution. These interagency conflicts are historical and structural in nature and inherent in the current Southern California governance model. At this point there is no confidence that these issues will ever be resolved and that we will ever see a low fare one seat Regional Rail Service (Metrolink/Coaster pool service) between Los Angeles and San Diego. Given that vacuum I offer an alternative that recognizes no change in the governance status quo but circumvents it.



LOSSAN JPA

The Concept

This alternative proposes to expand Pacific Surfliner service from two classes to three classes of service – Business Class, Reserved Coach and Economy Coach. This is similar to the three main classes of service on legacy airlines on their US domestic routes – Basic Economy (lowest fare, least amount of seat room, limited amenities), Economy Comfort (mid-range fare, additional seat

and legroom, more amenities) and First Class (higher fare, generous seat and legroom, wide range of amenities).

Current Pacific Surfliner classes would remain as present; Business Class reserved service (perhaps offering specific seat reservations), with a modest surcharge above coach, generous seat, and legroom, current or modestly expanded amenities. Current coach would become Reserved Coach at the same fare levels as present. It would offer riders confidence that they would have guaranteed access to a reserved seat. Current café service would remain available. Economy coach would offer high density unreserved seating compared to Reserved Coach at fares close to or the same (depending on the city pair) as those offered by commuter carriers. The increase in service classes would be facilitated by California's Integrated Ticket Project's (Cal-ITP) "Tap & Go" initiative. "Tap & Go" avoids all the challenges and decisions around ticket machines and which ticket on which train.

The reimagined LOSSAN Corridor (Pacific Surfliner) service would see some additional frequencies to round-out its service and clearly focus the route on the limited stop service, serving the broader Southern California Region and the choice for longer trips at all price levels. This reimagining also serves as a pathway for more state focus and involvement as the state moves LOSSAN Corridor through the Corridor ID planning process with the initiatives to expand the reach of the corridor.

Finally, expanding Pacific Surfliner to three classes of service combined with Tap & GO would address several of the service integration issues that have bedeviled LOSSAN Corridor discussions over the years. The three-class proposal separates the operations and market of each rail operator and lays a foundation to adjust for any upcoming commuter rail funding short-falls.

Key Connecting Hubs

To maximize ridership and ticket revenue across all the rail operators along the LOSSAN Corridor, it is critical that seamless ticketing of Cal – ITP, "Tap & Go" be leveraged in creating key connecting hubs for transfers between expanded Pacific Surfliner service and Metrolink and Coaster. In addition to the seamless Tap & Go ticketing, schedules need to be coordinated to facilitate timely connections to travel to any destination. Establishing key connecting hubs and seamless transfers will allow the Pacific Surfliner to focus on longer distance trips across all service classes while bolstering ridership on Metrolink and Coaster schedules. The key connecting hubs would be Oceanside, Irvine, Fullerton, Los Angeles, and Chatsworth.

Station Stops

In order for this transition to deliver maximum corridor ridership and ticket revenue growth, it is critical that three-class intercity service complement, not compete, with regional rail service. The clearest strategy to accomplish goal is to keep limited stop intercity service focused on longer distance trips and bringing lower cost Economy Coach service to unserved markets. In some cases, this could mean allowing Metrolink to exclusively serve some current stops while the Pacific Surfliner focuses on former Metrolink endpoint stations. Given the faster service an Economy Coach a fare premium could be considered for city pairs within the core Regional Rail markets.

Adding additional stops to Pacific Surfliner schedules would be counterproductive. It would undermine the competitive position vis a vis the automobile for longer distance higher yielding trips while also undermining Metrolink/Coaster baseline ridership and ticket revenues.

Some proposed Pacific Surfliner stop alterations:

- Replacing the stop at San Clemente Pier (except seasonally, for key beach access schedules) with Metrolink San Clemente. Alternatively, given the increase in Pacific Surfliner schedules, skip stop San Clemente Pier and Metrolink San Clemente.
- Given the relocation of the Burbank Airport terminal to the north side of the airport near the Antelope Valley Metrolink station, consider shifting the Pacific Surfliner stop to downtown Burbank and no longer stop at Burbank Airport.
- Focus Pacific Surfliner service on Camarillo and make Moorpark an exclusive Metrolink stop. Current ridership at Moorpark is lower than at Camarillo.
- To further orient the market focus of the Pacific Surfliner toward longer distance trips and to reinforce the market position of Regional Rail (Metrolink) there may be additional Pacific Surfliner stops that could become exclusively served by Regional Rail service.

Network Restructuring

In expanding the role of the Pacific Surfliner and to adjust for funding cutbacks of Metrolink Service by local counties, the following service shift is proposed:

- Metrolink would truncate its service at Moorpark with the LOSSAN JPA (Pacific Surfliner) assuming services from Ventura County. The layover facility at Ventura East would be used to support these schedules. Three new Pacific Surfliners would be operated although the planned frequency expansion to Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo could substitute for one of these frequencies. As more rail line capacity comes online additional frequencies to Santa Barbara are planned which will increase service to Ventura County.
- Metrolink would truncate its service at Laguna Niguel with the LOSSAN JPA (Pacific Surfliner) picking up service through the constrained San Clemente rail line segment. Current late morning and early afternoon Metrolink slots through San Clemente would allow Pacific Surfliner to move closer to all-day hourly service between Los Angeles and San Diego.

With the restructuring the LOSSAN Corridor would offer hourly three-class limited stop service between San Diego and Los Angeles. This would be paired with hourly Metrolink regional service between Irvine and Los Angeles with very frequent service to Laguna Niguel. North of Los Angeles LOSSAN JPA would offer nine three-class limited stop schedules to Oxnard. Additional Pacific Surfliner frequencies are possible as additional rail line capacity is added. This would be paired with hourly Metrolink Regional Rail service between Moorpark and Los Angeles.

Capacity

In order to integrate expanded three-class Pacific Surfliner service and frequent Regional Rail Metrolink/Coaster adequate track capacity is required. There are several capacity projects under way that will provide at least some of the required capacity. South of Oceanside the Batiquitos Lagoon Doble Track (Carlsbad to Encinitas) is under construction, while San Dieguito Double Track (Del Mar) is set to begin construction in 2027. North of Los Angeles the Simi Valley Double Track is ready to begin construction, while the Leesdale Siding Extension (between Camarillo and Oxnard) is also in the early construction process. Planned station improvements at Chatsworth and Camarillo will improve passenger safety as well as eliminating train delays.

Three critical track capacity projects remain and need to move forward to facilitate a robust intercity and Regional Rail service. These are Eastbrook to Shell (north Oceanside), Serra Siding extension (San Juan Capistrano/Dana Point) and Raymer to Bernson Double Track (between Van Nuys and Chatsworth).

Fares

As was noted above, Cal-ITP Tap & Go would be the key to integrating both Regional Rail and the expanded Pacific Surfliner fare classes. No ticket machines, just tap on and tap off with a credit card or stored value card. Tap & Go has been slowly rolling out with the World Cup underlying a major expansion to multiple operators. https://www.railpac.org/2026/06/02/an-update-on-contactless-fare-payment-across-agencies-in-california/

Additional functions are being added. Benefits, now in testing, allows for demographic discounts (i.e. Senior, Disabled Fares, etc.). Also close to introduction is fare capping. Fare Capping replaces 10-Ride and Monthly multi-ride tickets. As riders accumulated a number of trips each month the per trip discount increases until, when the previous monthly fare amount is reached, subsequent trips are free. One big advantage of fare capping is that, unlike multi-ride tickets which are linked to a specific city pair, riders get credit for all their trips. Current, the San Joaquin JPA is working with Cal-ITP on offering Tap & Ride for reserved service. The final Tap & Go module would give the rider credit for longer through fare (which has a lower rate per mile) even when they must make a transfer.

Equipment

Another critical factor is equipment. The Pacific Surfliner route has and will receive additional equipment as all the Venture cars are finally certified for service freeing up California Cars as a result. One would assume that for equipment maintenance efficiencies, the 22 second generation California Cars produced as an option to the Pacific Surfliner car order as well as the leased Superliner cars rebuilt by Caltrans would be the cars transferred to Southern California. These cars would replace the single level train set (Horizon then Comet Cars) that operated on the LOSSAN Corridor and add one new train set that would be used for the planned frequency expansion to Santa Barbara/San Luis Obispo.

The equipment impact of this proposal may not be as great as it would seem. In case of both the Metrolink replacement services, Oceanside, and Ventura East, some of the replacement Pacific Surfliner schedules would operate outside the current timeframe of Pacific Surfliner service – very early morning and later in the evening. Thus, the utilization of the equipment would be expanded. The mid-day replacement schedule would represent a challenge although the additional frequencies planned from second set of equipment may address this challenge. In fact Pacific Surfliner three-class there may result in an efficiency gain by avoiding the duplication of services.

Ideally, in order to expand the current fleet and to clearly differentiate the low-fare Economy Coach from Reserved Coach and Business Class, surplus commuter coaches from Caltrain, Northstar and

other commuter operators could be utilized to provide Economy Coach capacity on the LOSSAN Corridor (Pacific Surfliner).

Also, with the proposed three-class service, shifts in passenger demand, may allow another train set to be created from the existing fleet. While additional frequencies will generate new riders, at least some riders will shift from existing frequencies. In the demand forecasting world this is known as "cannibalization", and it is an often-observed phenomenon. The key is that it lowers the load factor on the existing frequency. In addition, with reserved seats in coach, some price sensitive Business Class riders will shift to Reserved Coach, while price sensitive coach riders will shift to Economy coach.

Furthermore, the additional frequencies to Oxnard/East Ventura will shift some of the demand away from the current 700 series trains. Finally, much like is done over Thanksgiving, information provided to customers as they reserve seats through revenue management can be used to shift shorter-distance customers from the 700 series trains to the 500 series trains. All these factors allow a smaller consist, allowing freed up cars to build another consist to facilitate adding additional frequencies.

Finally, to maximize equipment utilization a key capital investment is required. That is the construction of a layover and maintenance base south of San Diego. This could be done in conjunction with or as a precursor to the Corridor ID initiative that extends LOSSAN Service to San Ysidro.

Future Expansion

As more track and equipment capacity is added the frequencies that terminate in Los Angeles (500 series schedules) can be extended to Lancaster to provide connecting service for the future High-Speed Rail Interim service terminating at Palmdale. Pacific Surfliner would offer hourly service between Los Angeles and San Diego, frequent service to Oxnard/East Ventura and bi-hourly service to Santa Barbara. Metrolink service would be hourly between Moorpark and Laguna Niguel and twice an hour between Chatsworth and Irvine, facilitating passenger rail service every 20 minutes between Los Angeles and Irvine.

Rediscovering Orange County, One Station at a Time

Joel Beers

CULTURE OC

...inally appeared in Culture OC in 2025.
We thank Culture... generous permission to republish this

Fullerton's Metrolink Station Is the City's Past, Present and Pulse

Where historic depots meet bustling streets, Fullerton's station connects the city's rail-born roots with its constantly renewing downtown.



The Fullerton Transportation Center received an $800,000 state grant used to restore the historic depot. It includes fresh painting, new lighting and signage, and restoration of the pedestrian bridge, including a new public mural comprised of 16 4-foot vinyl prints celebrating aspects of Fullerton history and cultural identity. Photo by Joel Beers, Culture OC

Each of the 11 Metrolink stations on the Orange County Line – and the cities they serve – has its own deep-seated history with the railroad. Some, like Anaheim and Santa Ana, were already established communities before the first railway arrived in the 1870s. Others, such as Buena Park and Lake Forest/Mission Viejo, disappeared from the rail map for decades before being revived with Metrolink's expansion. Still others – Orange, San Juan Capistrano, San Clemente – were shaped by the rails that ran through their hearts.

But no city in Orange County owes its very existence, growth and ongoing vitality to the railroad quite like Fullerton.



Illustration by Kaitlin Wright, Culture OC

The City That Trains Made

In the spring of 1887, brothers George and Edward Amerige, newcomers from Massachusetts, purchased 430 acres of land north of Anaheim. The following year, they persuaded George Fullerton, the local land agent for the Santa Fe Railway, to route the new Los Angeles-to-Orange line through their property.

That decision created a city. Fullerton's location proved ideal – strategically positioned where goods, produce and passengers could move east through Santa Ana Canyon, west to Los Angeles, or south toward San Diego. By the mid-1920s, four separate railways converged in Fullerton, and the city boasted three depots. Oil from nearby fields, citrus from local groves, and passengers bound for destinations near and far all passed through the growing town.

As Fullerton expanded – slowly at first, then rapidly after World War II – it did so around the stations that had birthed it. Its high school, junior college, city hall, police station, library, first churches and many of its most significant structures, like the Fox Fullerton Theatre and the Chapman Building, were all built close to the stations.

Today, more rail traffic rolls through Fullerton than any other station in the county, some 150 trains. About 50 are Amtrak and Metrolink trains, heading north and south on the OC Line or east on the 91/Perris Valley and Inland Empire/OC lines. The rest are freight trains that don't just pass through Fullerton, they pass through time zones. The cargo that rattles through the Fullerton depot – containers stacked high and humming, originating at the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports – might be bound for Barstow, the Midwest, the Gulf of Mexico or the East Coast. The steel ribbons that built Fullerton's fortune still carry the commerce of a nation.




Track
3





One of three train depots still standing in downtown Fullerton, the one still operating as a station was built in 1930, and includes an Amtrak ticket office and a cafe.

PHOTOS 1 & 2: *Fullerton is the busiest train station in Orange County, and among the busiest of Metrolink's 69 stations on its seven lines.* ***PHOTO 3:*** *Amtrak's ticket office at the Fullerton Transportation Center is one of the few in Southern California with an enclosed waiting room.* ***PHOTO 4:*** *The Fullerton Train Museum is a volunteer organization open the first and third Saturdays of every month. It features several vintage rail cars that were used for passenger transportation, including a 1940s Union Pacific lounge car and a 1951 Santa Fe streamlined sleeping car. Photos by Joel Beers, Culture OC*

From Sleepy to Spirited

Downtown Fullerton has seen as many transformations as the rail lines that ran through it.

By the mid-1980s, after the postwar boom faded, downtown had become nearly deserted after dark. Pawn shops, thrift stores and antique shops dominated during the day and there were only a small handful of bars at night. Then a sort of rebirth occurred, with independent bookstores, coffeehouses and art galleries beginning to fill empty storefronts, attracting a creative crowd.

Then came the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the city exploded into a nightlife hotspot. Publications dubbed it Bourbon Street West for its boisterous bar scene. The energy was undeniable, though not always peaceful, and weekend chaos sometimes – no, make that routinely – spilled into the streets.

Over time, things mellowed. With stricter regulations, shifting tastes and a maturing downtown identity, the district has evolved again. Today, it's still lively, but more balanced – a blend of dining, culture and nightlife that reflects the city's layered personality.





PHOTO 1: *A restaurant since the the early 1980s and currently home to Hopscotch Tavern, this building was Pacific Electric Railway's train depot in Fullerton, which opened in 1918. It was one of three train stations that currently stand in downtown.* ***PHOTO 2:*** *In a downtown with no shortage of restaurants and TVs, the 27 TVs on the walls and patio of Roscoe's Famous Deli are the most. Photos by Joel Beers, Culture OC*

A Feast Around the Station

Counting the number of bars, restaurants and cafés within a short walk of the station is almost impossible – new ones appear as fast as old ones close – some with the names of the old places still up. Many have reduced their hours, some are only open on Friday and Saturday nights and others are transitioning from bars/restaurants to special event venues.

And then there are several vacancies, like the former Capri Shoes (not a restaurant), La Vida Nostra and Café Mo Mo along Harbor and Commonwealth.

But, starting at the intersection of Lemon and Commonwealth, located on the northwestern corner of the Fullerton Transportation Center, which includes the train station and bus bays, there are some 75 establishments within 10 walking minutes of the train station that serve food, drinks desserts or sweets, most of them licensed to serve alcohol. To put it another way: If you ate or drank in just one downtown Fullerton solid food and liquid libation purveyor a day, it would take nearly three months to wind through.

Other than a small cluster at Lemon and Commonwealth informally known as Little Tokyo, there's no predictable pattern to the mix. Indian next to Italian, sports bars/delis next to pub grub on steroids and Irish pubs next to country-western saloons. There is Mediterranean and Middle Eastern to high-end Mexican and tacos sold until 3:30 a.m.; crepes to kickin' crabs; plant-based Mexi-Cal to steaks; breweries, breakfast cafes, British pubs and bakeries; pizza restaurants, pizzerias and pizza parlors; Peruvian Rotisserie Chicken, Southern-fried chicken and waffles and chicken.

Amid the sheer number and constant turnover, some of Fullerton's oldest restaurants remain pillars: The Cellar (1969), Rutabegorz (founded in 1971), and Mulberry Street Ristorante (1984).

And remarkably, the chains are few. Aside from a McDonald's and a Domino's, nearly every downtown eatery is independently owned – a rarity in Southern California (although a few restaurants, like Wahoo's and El Farolito, have other locations in the county). Even the Starbucks that once anchored the corner of Harbor and Chapman has given way to a local coffee shop.

Vacancies come and go, but Fullerton's appetite for reinvention remains constant. There have long been rumors of a restaurant or brewery opening at the train station (which is one of the county stations with an existing eatery. And then there's the proposed Fox Block, a small village of restaurants proposed around the Fox Fullerton.

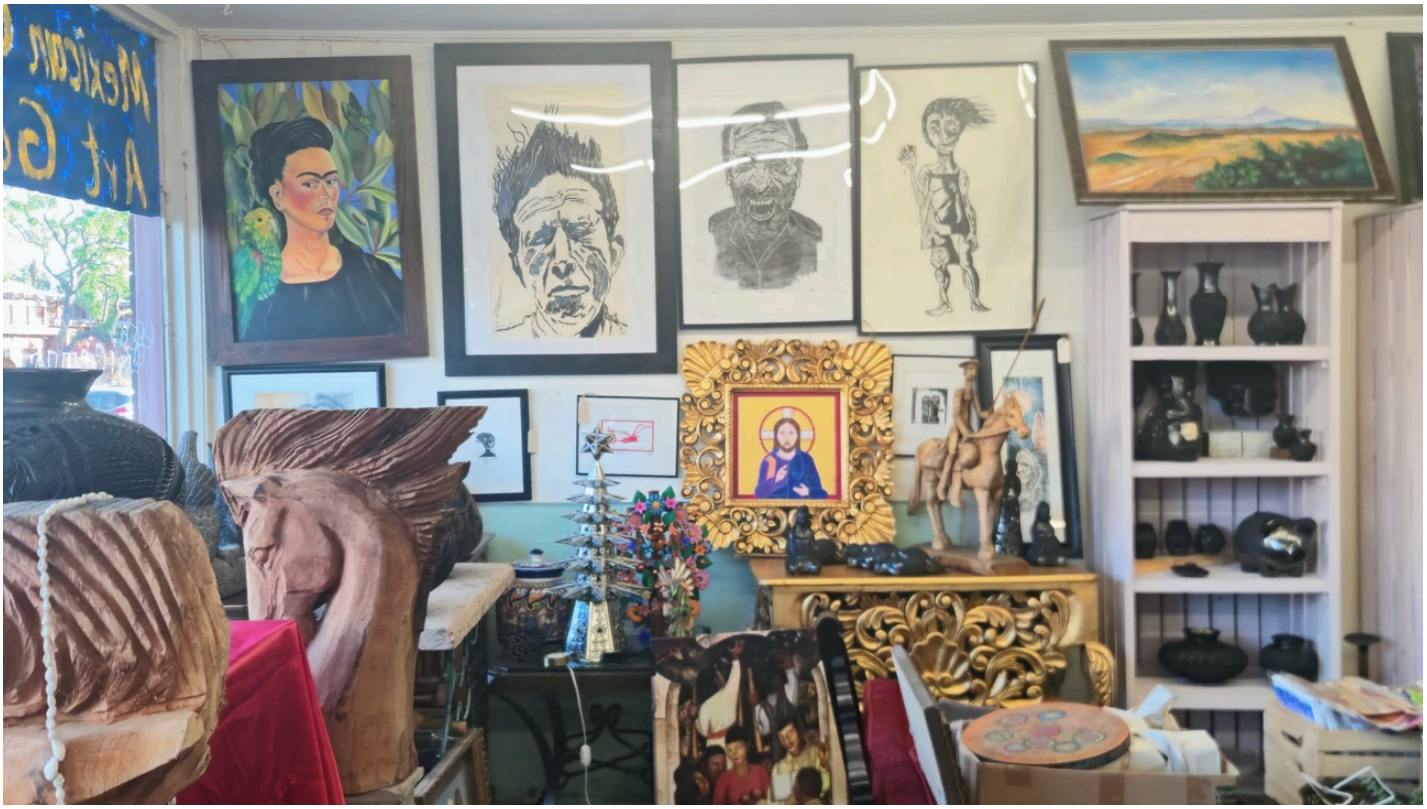






PHOTO 1: *Blanquel Popular Art, which makes custom furniture and also pottery and folk art, began in Guadalajara in the 1960s and expanded to Fullerton in 2000.* ***PHOTO 2:*** *When finished in 1923, the 65-foot Chapman Building was the tallest in Orange County.* ***PHOTO 3:*** *The Californian Hotel opened in 1923 at the*

northwest corner of present-day Harbor Boulevard and Chapman Avenue, in large part to accommodate rail travelers. Today, it is Villa Del Sol, a retail and office center with six restaurants and a baseball memorabilia among its tenants. Photos by Joel Beers, Culture OC

The Art of the City

Art and culture may not be as prominent as booze or boba in downtown Fullerton, but there are plenty of attractions.

Just steps from the station, the Fullerton Museum Center hosts exhibitions and concerts, while the Maverick Theater stages plays in an intimate converted warehouse. All the Arts for All the Kids turns children on to the arts, Blanquel Popular Art has a fascinating range of Mexican folk art, Half Off Books, Comic Book Hide Out, Pastimes Collectibles and Vang's World cater to readers and collectors, War Battle Games to gamers. Farther along Chapman Avenue, the Muckenthaler Cultural Center offers art classes, galleries,and outdoor performances and south on Harbor there is the living history of El Pachuco Zoot Suits.

That's not to mention the vintage clothing, like Stray Cat Vintage and Costumes (which has been around since the 1980s and is next door to the legendary Black Hole Records), tattoo parlors, barber shops and salons and two escape rooms.

Music has always had a home here, too. Even though downtown hasn't had a venue exclusively devoted to live music since Steamer's jazz café closed in 2015 (although the Continental Room night argue otherwise), live music still thrives in bars and cafés like The Night Owl, Back Alley Bar and Grill, Les Amis and the aforementioned Continental Room – where, on any given night, you might catch a local indie act or a surprise touring artist.

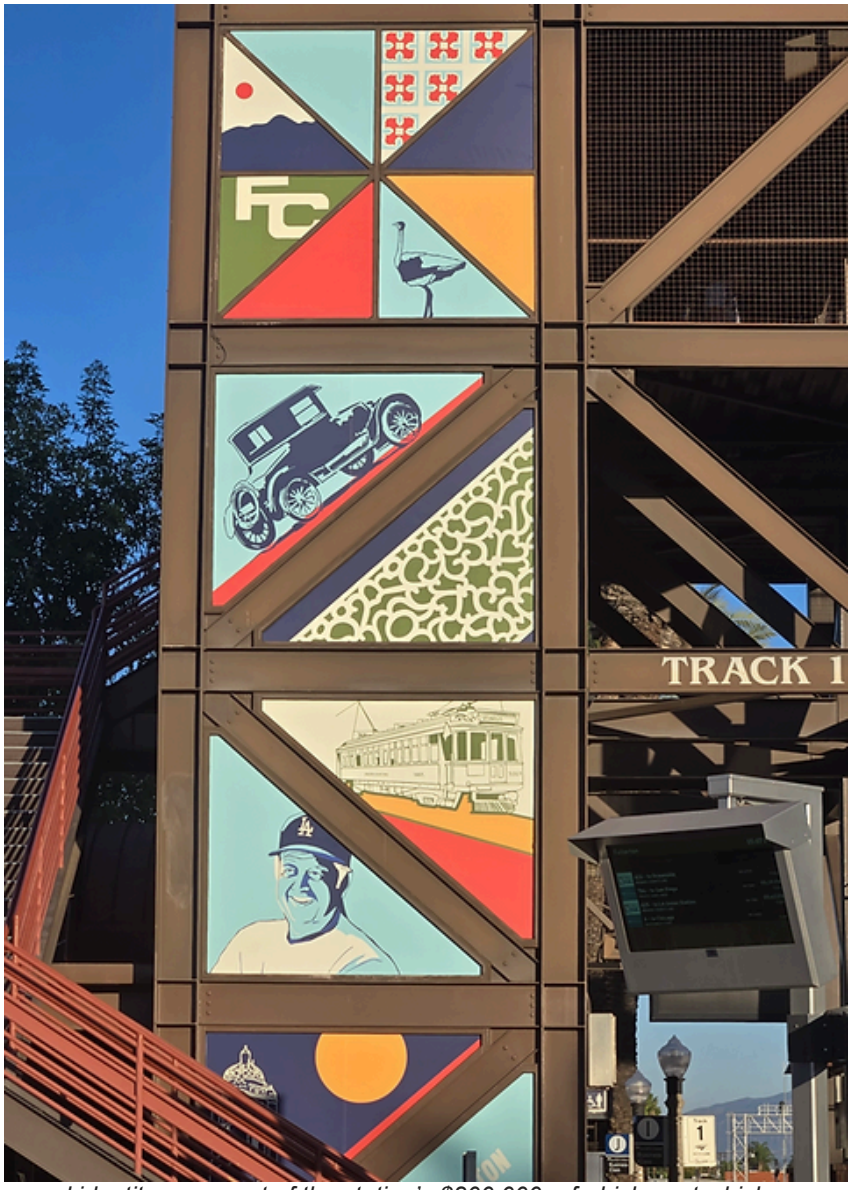
And, of course, there is a place to hurl an axe.

And if creating the next Great American Novel, play or AI program is your thing, you can rent a desk at Pro Desk Space for as low as $7 an hour or $40 a day.

A Hard Chapter

No story of the Fullerton Transportation Center is complete without acknowledging the 2011 killing of Kelly Thomas, a homeless man with schizophrenia, after a violent encounter with six Fullerton police officers.

The incident, which took place just a few steps from the station, drew national attention and sparked a wave of protests that changed the city's politics and police culture. For years, a makeshift memorial of flowers and photos surrounded a nearby light post. Today, it's gone – but the event remains an indelible part of Fullerton's modern history.



Images of Fullerton's history and identity are a part of the station's $800,000 refurbishment which was completed earlier this year. Among the 16 vinyl panels that were installed on the exterior of the train station's elevators are longtime Fullerton resident Tommy Lasorda and a Pacific Electric red car. Photo by Joel Beers, Culture OC

Historical remembrance with a few glaring omissions

No Metrolink station in the county commemorates its rail history like Fullerton. Volunteers at the Fullerton Train Museum keep that legacy alive, restoring vintage railcars and telling stories of how steel tracks gave birth to a city. The Old Spaghetti Factory now occupies the ornate Southern Pacific depot, while the old Union Pacific station endures as part of Hopscotch Tavern, still trembling with the echo of passing trains.

In 2025, the station received an $800,000 state grant for upgrades and beautification. The elevator panels gleamed – for about two weeks – before being carved, dented and defaced by those who seem determined to leave their own rough mark. But above the scuffed metal, 16 sleek art panels now stretch across the pedestrian bridge, celebrating Fullerton's icons: Leo Fender's guitars, Fullerton adopted son Tommy Lasorda's grin, the orange groves, the airfield, the sunlit optimism of a Southern California town that never stopped reinventing itself.

And yet – what's missing from those panels, and from every Metrolink station in the county, is the full story, that of the largely Chinese workers who swung the hammers and drove the spikes that stitched the county together; and the Indigenous, Mexican and Mexican American laborers who picked, packed and hauled the fruit that made Orange County wealthy.

Fullerton remembers its inventors, its dreamers, its doers – the engines and the entrepreneurs – but not those whose sweat built the foundation that others would polish into prosperity.

The city that grew around the tracks still hums to their rhythm. Trains may no longer define Fullerton's economy, but they remain its heartbeat – steady, enduring, unmistakably its own.

Still, there's a hole in that heart. A silence in the story. A glaring omission that is long overdue for correction.

FULLERTON Metrolink Station

Address: 120 E. Santa Fe Ave., Fullerton

Opened: First Fullerton station opened in 1888. Metrolink opened March 28, 1994.

Parking: 1,321 spaces/40 handicapped spaces. Parking is free for all Metrolink passengers; 72 hours maximum limit in parking structure; three-hour limit in other marked lots.

Amenities: Bike racks, Amtrak ticket office, restaurants, public phones

Route: Southbound: Fifth stop, and second in Orange County, on the OC Line, which runs from Los Angeles Union Station to Oceanside; also part of Perris/91 line, which runs from Perris to Los Angeles.

Metrolink Schedule*

Weekdays: Five southbound trains, departing between 9:18 a.m. to 10:18 p.m. 20 northbound trains, departing between 5:43 a.m. and 8:43 p.m.

Weekends: Four southbound trains, departing between 9:16 a.m. to 5:04 p.m. Six northbound trains, departing between 8:38 a.m. and 6:54 p.m.

**subject to change*

Amtrak Schedule*

Everyday: 12 southbound trains, departing between 6:41 a.m. and 10:41 p.m. 12 northbound trains, departing between 6:18 a.m. to 11:18 p.m.

**subject to change*

Bus Connections: OCTA routes 26, 43, 47, 123, 143, 543

Part Two – RESTRUCTURING PASSENGER RAIL IN THE UNITED STATES

(Part one of this article appeared in the Spring 2026 issue of Steel Wheels)

The country's highway and aviation systems have been successful because of a federal commitment to finance public infrastructure on which private operators are provided access. Each system has a trust fund that pays a substantial portion of its capital costs. Rather than being expected to turn a profit for the federal government, the net economic benefit and public utility each system provides have been, and remain, the goals of their creation and the definition of their success. The government-owned highways and airports operate at a loss, but the motor carriers, the airlines and the airport parking, and the restaurants and retail concessions that depend on them are flourishing businesses that contribute generously to the federal, state, and local tax bases.

A federally-funded, robust and well-designed network of passenger-rail infrastructure could make an equal or greater contribution to the economy, with a positive impact particularly on populations left neglected by the boom in highways and airways. Because most railroad stations are located in or near historic central business districts, a thriving passenger-rail business can serve as a driver of urban restoration and redevelopment for communities that have been depopulated and impoverished by federally subsidized development of highway-dependent suburbs. New stations along a modern passenger rail network will focus many billions of dollars in economic development along the routes.

A Big Role for the Private Sector

Federal sponsorship and planning does not exclude participation by private actors. Just as federally funded highways, airways and airports are used by private-sector carriers, and airports charge airlines access fees, host parking and retail concessionaires; a publicly-owned passenger-rail infrastructure can sell operating "slots" to private-sector operators of passenger trains, offer concessions at stations, and sell air rights over stations for further development.

The "Brightline Model"

The for-profit company Brightline is currently operating a passenger rail line in Florida between Miami and Orlando using both tracks it shares with the private Florida East Coast Railroad and

tracks it paid to construct. The same company is also in the process of constructing a Las Vegas-Southern California (SoCal) high-speed rail line which will use state-owned right-of-way on the alignment of Interstate 15.

Brightline is a public-private partnership model as the company has benefitted from public investment. Specifically, the Miami-Orlando route relied on public funding in the form of tax-exempt bonds (used in the funding mix for construction costs) and a publicly funded, publicly owned station at Orlando Airport. The company's Miami Central Station received some public funds for its construction as well. The Las Vegas-SoCal route (now under construction) has received $3 billion in federal funding from the 2021 IIJA. Furthermore, the line will eventually access downtown Los Angeles over planned public infrastructure to be built by the High Desert Corridor Authority and the California High Speed Rail Authority, the latter of which is currently under construction (**Figure 1**).



Brightline uses the trains as a catalyst for real estate development at and around stations, generating a substantial portion of its income stream.

The Brightline Model cannot replace the need for federal involvement to plan and fund the construction of a comprehensive, nationwide passenger rail network. This is because the Brightline Model will only work on the most financially lucrative routes, resulting in a system that is not fully inter-connected. Furthermore, Brightline has already demonstrated that even these routes will require a form of public support.

Using Government Infrastructure to Promote Private Competition

There are real-world examples that can help inform the United States as it decides how to chart a path forward. Perhaps the best example is from the European Union. Historically, the passenger-train business model in Europe was a sort of double monopoly: each national government owned

all of the railroad tracks in the country, and the track owner also operated all of the trains on its tracks.

Over the past 20 years; however, the EU has taken legislative steps to end state monopoly control of passenger rail operations by mandating open access to state-owned railway networks.[1] On the deregulated European rail network, privately owned train operating companies (TOCs) purchase operating "slots" from the nationalized track owner, paying the state track-occupancy charges based on the number, type, and speed of trains it operates. There are also provisions for "public service obligation" (PSO) contracts. PSO's are used to provide train service on routes that require operating subsidies.[2]

Deregulation/integration of the European rail network has been under way since 1991. The most significant change came in 2016 when a directive was issued that required member governments to open their railways to competition by 2020. As a result of these changes, the EU currently has, in addition to all the state-owned operators, over a dozen private ones. A few examples are listed below:

- The private operator Italo operates in competition with Italy's state-owned carrier TrenItalia on the country's high-speed network.
- Iryo, a public-private consortium jointly owned by state-carrier TrenItalia and the private companies Air Nostrum (a Spanish regional airline) and Globalvia, operates trains on the Spanish high-speed rail network
- The private operator FlixTrain operates a series of low-fare, bus-like trains on Germany's network.
- The Italian state carrier, TrenItalia, operates a high-speed route between Milan and Paris and will soon expand to Paris-Marseilles.
- The French state carrier SNCF operates trains on the Spanish high-speed rail network.
- The private company European Sleeper has begun offering trans-border night-train service connecting several European cities.

Opening up the EU's rail lines to competition has resulted in several improvements to passenger rail service, including[3]:

- Increasing ridership
- Lower fares
- Improvement in service quality with multiple options being offered: from no-frills service to high-end service with a range of options in-between.

Adapting the European Model to the American rail environment.

While we are not suggesting that privately-owned infrastructure currently used for freight rail be nationalized, it is possible for the United States to take lessons from the European model. There are options for constructing publicly-owned, passenger-only tracks.

The "Virginia Model"

On the 127-mile rail corridor between Richmond, Va. and Washington, D.C., the Commonwealth of Virginia is pioneering a novel form of passenger-rail development that multiplies the value of an existing right-of-way already used by Amtrak and a privately owned freight railroad. The alignment, now owned and operated by the CSX Transportation Co., is a typical 100-foot right-of-way, with double tracks occupying half of the footprint but no infrastructure on the other 50 feet.

The two existing tracks handle a dozen or more CSX freight trains daily, state-sponsored Amtrak trains, and Amtrak long distance trains.

To increase the number and speed of the state's passenger trains, Virginia purchased the empty half of the alignment from CSX and is using it to build its own track engineered for 110-mph passenger-train operation.[4] The sales agreement allows the Virginia trains to switch to the CSX tracks to accomplish meets and overtakes.

The "Virginia Model" is adaptable throughout the country. Most U.S. railroad rights of way are 100 feet wide, but tracks rarely occupy more than half of the footprint, leaving room for one or more passenger tracks. Additional trackage alone, however, will not be sufficient to leverage the U.S. into a modern passenger-rail network. Highway grade crossings will have to be either closed or replaced with viaducts so that motor vehicles cannot interfere with train operation. Rights-of-way must be fenced off to keep pedestrians and animals off the tracks, at least in populated areas and along high-speed lines. On frequent service lines, catenary must be erected so that clean, silent electric propulsion can replace noisy, polluting diesel locomotives. And, where routes intersect in city centers, modern stations must be built so that trains from different routes can meet on schedules that allow passengers to change trains on a cross-platform basis in as little as 5 minutes.

Existing Highway Alignments.

Where it is feasible, unused portions of highway alignments can be used to construct passenger-only tracks. Brightline is doing this for its planned Orlando-Tampa segment which will utilize the alignment of Interstate 4 for a portion of the route. In southern California and Nevada, Brightline West will use a 209-mile segment of Interstate 15 for its southern California-Las Vegas route.

Dedicated Alignments

Where it is not possible to follow the Virginia Model or use existing highway or rail alignments, construct brand-new, dedicated right-of-way.

REFORM EXISTING LAWS – Call for a New Passenger Rail Act

Legislative Barriers

Several legislative barriers in existing laws governing Amtrak and passenger rail are preventing prompt development of modern passenger rail infrastructure and services:

1. The lack of a clear direction and definition of what a true national system will look like and how it will perform. Congress defines the current system only with a map. There are no service or performance criteria.
2. The process is state-driven, which makes it cumbersome. States don't operate in a way that incorporates a national or interstate perspective and don't always work well together. Getting multiple states to cooperate on interstate endeavors such as passenger rail is difficult, as one state along a route can thwart an entire effort.

3. There is no growth strategy, timetable or budget. Current legislation establishes cost sharing formulas for state-initiated services and procedures to discontinue a service, but there is no defined vision of what an eventual national system will look like or a timetable for its development.
4. PRIIA and successor legislation assume Amtrak as an operator and states as the primary champion for rail infrastructure. Legislation that promotes public-private infrastructure investment and competition for operators can be expected to reduce public commitments necessary for both capital and operating expenses.
5. Certain provisions of NEPA are cumbersome. Passenger rail projects that would use existing railroad or highway rights-of-way are subject to similar requirements for construction of brand-new right-of-way. Conversion of rail trails and former railroad properties designated as greenways or recreational facilities back to passenger rail use is too difficult.
6. Lack of a dedicated federal funding mechanisms like those that fund highways and airway infrastructure is a major impediment to long-term planning. Again, federal funding is what drives state transportation investment decisions.
7. There are no performance standards such as segregation of freight and passenger tracks, mandating daytime service to all points along a route (this is important for long-distance routes), providing auto-competitive speeds, or providing multiple daily frequencies.
8. There is no provision for competition. Amtrak is essentially a monopoly. The company considers Congress, not the nation's travelers, to be its customer. Amtrak responds to Congress by cutting costs and reducing services rather than courting travelers with greater reliability, more frequencies, and higher performance standards. They are prohibited from launching new services on their own. The result is a company that consistently falls short in service quality.

Proposed Solutions

Congressional legislation must be rewritten to establish *growth* as a central criterion of national passenger-rail reform. Growth means:

- More routes
- More frequencies
- More communities enjoying passenger rail services
- More frequencies scheduled to connect with other routes at junctions
- Multimodal connections at stations.
- More access to capital funding
- More players, *e.,* more TOCs to compete for "slots" on each route and multiple TOCs competing on the busiest routes.
- Greater reliability and speed, and better amenities to attract riders.

Mechanisms to Drive Change

- Create a National Passenger Rail Authority (NPRA)
- Create a dedicated passenger rail trust fund to finance construction of a publicly owned network of high-performance railroad tracks to be used exclusively by privately operated passenger trains.
- Reform liability and insurance requirements

Unlike aviation and highway modes, passenger rail does not have a dedicated trust fund which would provide a predictable flow of revenue to allow planning for long-term needs and projects. Instead, passenger rail must rely on the vagaries of the Congressional appropriations process, which is subject to periodic uncertainty, partisan politics, and micro-managing.

Funding must be increased drastically if passenger rail is to attain its highest and best performance and make its full contribution to national mobility and economic growth. This commitment must include a balance of capital and operating funding towards a national vision for dedicated and grade-separated passenger railways. Highways and aviation get significant federal funding each year to expand their fixed facilities and promote growth in both the quantity and quality of services

while passenger rail is allocated barely enough to maintain current service levels. We spend as much annually on roads as we did for the first 40 years of Amtrak's existence. If America is to enjoy the same level of mobility as the advanced nations of Europe and Asia, the nation must support passenger rail at a level that permits full exploitation of its potential.

We suggest that Congress commission a study of the issue to devise a means to pay for a trust fund, which should be comparable to the Highway Trust Fund, including the additional Congressional appropriations it receives. Passenger rail must be accorded parity with highways and civil aviation in the contest for congressional funding and must be acknowledged as the technological equal of the other two modes in supporting the nation's mobility. It may be wise to consider converting the $35-billion Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing loan program to a grant system and use the funds to jump-start the process of building a national system.

Liability

The problem of liability and the cost of liability insurance is a barrier to private companies entering the passenger rail market as operators. Host railroads will not allow a passenger operator to use their infrastructure unless the passenger carrier fully absolves the host railroad of liability and pays for liability insurance. Under federal law, the liability limit for intercity passenger rail operators is $323 million. A solution to this problem is needed, such as instituting liability limits and/or creating a federal insurance pool, similar to the National Flood Insurance Program, for passenger rail operators.

Conversion of Rail Trails Back to Railroad Use

The National Trail Systems Act Revisions of 1983 allowed for the preservation of railroad rights-of-way for use as recreational trails. According to Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, rail trails are supposed to be convertible back to railroad use, should the need arise.[5] Congress should review federal laws and federal case law regarding the conversion of rail trails back to railroad use. Following this review, federal law should be amended, as necessary, to ensure the process of reclaiming rail-trails for passenger rail use is clear, concise, legally protected, and free of potential encumbrances.

Reform the National Environmental Policy Act

There are two areas where NEPA can create difficulties and raise the cost of passenger rail projects:

1. The use of existing, active or unused railroad right-of-way is subject to similar NEPA requirements as a rail line constructed on new right-of-way. If a rail line is already active with freight and/or passenger traffic or unused but intact, constructing additional track for passenger rail use should receive a categorical exemption under NEPA. The state of California provides such an exemption under state environmental laws for active right-of-way, so the idea is not without precedent.
2. When railroad properties are converted to parkland use, NEPA makes it very difficult to convert such properties back to railroad use unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative. Unreasonable impediments to the conversion of such properties back to railroad use should be eliminated, and such conversions should receive a categorical exemption under NEPA.

Reform Existing Legislation Governing Passenger Rail

Legislative reforms should include, but not be limited to, the following elements:

1. The concept that passenger rail infrastructure should be treated like highways and airports, whereby it is considered a public good and access to competing operators is accomplished via user fees such as access charges.
2. The segregation of passenger rail tracks from freight tracks. Exceptions may be made where an existing freight railroad is underutilized to a degree that passenger trains can be operated without interfering with freight operations.
3. Fair compensation to host railroads where access to their property is needed.
4. Creation of a national system that is on a par with the Interstate highway system, reaching the entire contiguous 48 states from coast to coast and border to border.
5. The requirement that all points on a given route be served by multiple frequencies (exact number determined by market/demand analysis and international best practices) at automobile-competitive trip times with options for marketable hours at all points. This implies multiple frequencies on all long-distance routes and hourly or better service between major metropolitan areas in densely-traveled corridors.
6. A “Fix it First” approach: Add service and make improvements on existing routes first (especially on the densely-populated Lake Shore and NY-Florida Corridors), with a goal of 90-mph top speeds in most instances and 110 mph where adequate separation from freight tracks can be achieved. Service goals should also include enough frequencies to offer the schedule flexibility needed to be competitive with other modes.
7. For the most densely-populated travel corridors between major cities, establish a goal of high-speed service on dedicated right-of-way.
8. Infrastructure goals that include:
    1. The segregation of passenger tracks from freight tracks.
    2. The construction of passenger-only right-of-way where it is necessary and where European-style high-speed service is warranted.
    3. Tunneling in mountainous regions to increase average speeds and shorten trip times as a means to make trains automobile-competitive.
9. Adjustment of routes and frequencies on a routine basis as market/demand analyses determine, but without compromising the schedule flexibility travelers need to choose train travel.
10. Designation of interstate routes as a federal funding responsibility, including both long-distance and shorter-distance corridor services.
11. For intrastate-only routes, designation of development responsibility to states with a 90-10 federal funding match for construction.
12. The establishment of a fair framework for negotiating cost sharing between states and a federal rail passenger authority (discussed in the next section) where services overlap on common routes.
13. The creation of a national equipment pool to be managed by a federal passenger rail authority.
14. The establishment of an Essential Rail Services program similar to the Essential Air Services Program that would pay for routes and services connecting rural areas to major population centers.
15. The streamlining of environmental reviews for new track, bridges and facilities that would be constructed within existing railroad or highway rights-of-way.
16. Expansion of the FRA’s grade crossing elimination program with an aggressive schedule and the funding necessary to eliminate as many grade crossings as possible.

National Passenger Rail Authority

Concept

Replace Amtrak with a National Passenger Rail Authority for service to areas outside of the Northeast Corridor (NEC), as defined by Congress. The NEC could also be governed by an authority specific to this area, which is unlike most other regions of the country in terms of population density, service levels, funding, and infrastructure ownership.

Rationale

The current legislative model for passenger rail is not meeting the needs of the traveling public. The primary intent when Railpax was passed was to relieve the railroads of their common carrier obligations to operate passenger service at a time when the industry was on the verge of financial collapse.[6] Subsequent revisions amount to a patchwork of laws which are attempts to address various issues but are not growth or modernization strategies aimed at creating a robust national system.[7] [8]

Endless cutback scenarios over the years led to a siege mentality at Amtrak and an insular management which is slow to adapt and tends to reward cost cutting over improving service quality. This is partly due to Congressional actions but is also caused by the actions of the Amtrak Board of Directors, who hired past managements that focused on cutting service. This approach is prejudicial to growth.

Even when Amtrak is a forward-looking organization (see the Texas high-speed rail initiative, for example), it lacks the tools to meet the goal of a national system and is subject to Congressional tinkering which does not address the larger need for growth. Too much of Amtrak's funding is allocated through a state driven process, which promotes a balkanized system that leaves too many communities unserved and ignores corridors of national, megaregion, and multi-state significance.

We believe the best solution is a national passenger rail authority, with the full powers of other federal authorities and a degree of independence not now possible. It should be modeled after other federal authorities to deliver a far-reaching, truly national system which will meet today's needs.

It's also important to note that in January 2025, the FRA issued the Amtrak Daily Long Distance Service Study. Without a well-defined federal program that includes a robust federal entity with predictable and ample funding, it will be difficult to implement any of these new routes[9].

Goals

1. Design, build and operate a Congressionally-approved national system on a par with the interstate highway system in size and scope. As with the interstate highway system, a national passenger rail system would be designed in cooperation with the states.
2. Establish service to the public on a par with national rail systems in other advanced countries, including:
    - Options for service to all points during marketable hours
    - Greater frequencies
    - Faster service
    - Better amenities
    - Seamless train connections at all junctions
    - Seamless intermodal connections at all stations
    - Convenient connections to strengthened local transit systems.
3. Address mobility, job creation, economic development, energy use, environmental, land use, restoration of urban cores, and other national concerns.

Structure

The Authority would:

1. Focus on the development of interstate passenger rail routes. Intrastate-only routes would be the responsibility of state governments, but would receive a 90% funding match through the Authority for capital projects.
2. Have the ability to fully fund interstate projects itself or through multi-state compacts that wish to carry out passenger rail development.
3. Have the ability to apply for funding from any federal, state, local, or private source.
4. Have the power to exercise the right of eminent domain for the purchase any real estate necessary to carry out the mission of the Authority.
5. Have the power to acquire real estate for the construction of tracks, signals, bridges, stations, intermodal facilities, maintenance facilities, and other incidental needs. Where real estate must be acquired from private railroads, arbitration provisions may be put in place.
6. Have the power to acquire rolling stock, and to operate a designated national rail passenger system and/or award franchises or leases for same. Additionally, the Authority should have the power to build, operate, or contract to other operators connecting services, regardless of mode.
7. Have access to a dedicated, federal infrastructure trust fund.
8. Have the power to levy and collect facility-access fees (track and stations) on contract operators.
9. Have the power to levy and collect passenger ticket taxes.
10. Oversee an Essential Rail Services program.
11. Have the ability to establish a national equipment pool for operators to access for peak use, emergencies, etc.
12. Be granted other powers as Congress may determine necessary or appropriate to carry out the mission of the Authority.

Conclusion

While the federal policy tools currently in place are inadequate for building a modern, robust intercity passenger rail system, the problem is fixable. The nation has successfully tackled important transportation issues in the past and can do so again. For example, Congress addressed the critical need for good roads in the early-20th Century and for interstate highways and airport infrastructure in the mid-20th Century. Today's need for a modern passenger rail system is equally critical to grow the economy, create jobs, improve the quality of life of American citizens, and help address climate concerns all while providing Americans with more freedom of choice in how they want to travel. There are multiple ways to accomplish this goal. The suggestions laid out in this document are intended as a place to start this important national conversation

The authors wish to thank: James Coston, Executive Chairman, Corridor Rail Development Corporation and one-time member of the former Amtrak Reform Council, Also a thank you to F.K.Pious

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Rail to the Rescue: How Public and Private Rail Uniquely Assist Firefighting

Geoff Mclennan

Railroads in California, both privately operated freight lines and publicly supported passenger rail cars and publicly funded infrastructure, have become partners in wildfire response. Because rail corridors often run through remote mountain canyons and forested terrain where access is nonexistent or limited, railroads developed specialized "fire trains" that are manned and equipped with water tanks, pumps, and high-pressure hoses to reach isolated terrain. These trains can move quickly on the track and spray water onto adjacent burning vegetation often in protected wildlife areas and federal and state parklands, while also protecting bridges, tunnels, and nearby communities while supporting firefighters working on the ground. A perfect partnership between rail and firefighters! *See Wildfire Prevention Is Union Pacific's Priority as Summer Heats Up | Union Pacific*

A good example of supportive rail partners was the 2021 Dixie Fire, one of the largest wildfires in recent California history. During the incident, crews from Union Pacific Railroad/UP deployed a huge asset called a firefighting train consisting of converted tank cars holding between 7,000 and 23,000 gallons of water each. Operating in the steep terrain of the Feather River Canyon in Northern California, the fire train sprayed water up to about seventy-five feet from the track to suppress flames and protect rail infrastructure ! Just imagine the effort to get comparable land-based water in those steep canyons. By controlling fires near bridges and tunnels, railroad crews helped prevent the diversion of CAL FIRE and other public resources away from other critical structures such as hospitals and schools.



Crew members spray water from a Union Pacific fire train at Keddie Wye. (Union Pacific)

Another recent example from the recent 2024 wildfire season was the Corral Fire, which burned more than 14,000 acres in San Joaquin County near Tracy. Although the fire was primarily fought by state and local agencies, railroads operating in the Central Valley coordinated closely with local fire departments and first responders. Planning for fire includes routine monitoring of tracks, vegetation prevention along the rails, and strategically locating water-trains for rapid response to nearby communities and rail corridors. Large fires like the Corral Fire and others illustrate why railroads maintain fire train capabilities along critical freight corridors crossing California's dry landscape.

Private freight railroads such as BNSF Railway also maintain dedicated firefighting trains that can carry thousands of gallons of water and fire retardant. These trains function as mobile firefighting platforms, sometimes transporting firefighters directly to remote stretches of track and spraying water along the right-of-way to halt advancing flames. Fire trains use demonstrates a growing partnership between government fire agencies and private rail operators, combining rail mobility with conventional fire crews, aircraft, and engines to slow wildfire spread in difficult terrain. When planning community emergency plans local public agencies can count on rail for the right help at the right time.

Finally, in 2025 in response to the devastating Los Angeles coastal fires, the Pacific Surfliner passenger train offered substantially reduced fares to fire victims in Southern and Central California. This was especially helpful to families who lost homes in these devastating fires who needed uninterrupted travel to temporary housing. Passenger rail to the rescue!

The Momentum Framework for Electrolink, Part 1

Adriana Rizzo and the Californians for Electric Rail

Adopted from the September 2025 white paper, "Electrolink: Modern Passenger Rail Service for Southern California", by Californians for Electric Rail.

What is the Momentum Framework?

> *" The Momentum framework consists of a series of infrastructure designs focused on making the most out of existing rights-of-way by boosting speed and efficiency wherever possible, as detailed below. These improvements are most likely to be installed on existing rights-of-way already owned by the public or on underutilized freight routes that are sold back to taxpayers for expansion of passenger service. High-level platforms that sit at the same height as the trains' doors allow riders to step on and off, saving time at every station stop. Those efficiencies grow when railroads optimize passenger car designs with wider doors. Swapping diesel for electric power improves acceleration, saving time by getting trains up to speed more quickly. Those gains are increased by using high-performance designs with subway-style propulsion instead of locomotives. The benefits compound at every stop and add up over the course of a route. Real-world trip time improvements of 13%-29% are obtainable for both commuter and intercity services. "*
>
> – Momentum, NYU Transit Costs Project

Each element of the Momentum Framework provides speed and connectivity benefits within the existing right-of-way that make regional and intercity rail more competitive with driving. In sprawling Southern California with many trips between 10-50 miles, it is imperative that rail service competes with the automobile. Simply running more service at the same speeds is insufficient to provide service benefits needed to grow ridership and induce modal shift.

In rail service planning, the best way to shorten trip times is not to raise top level speeds but to speed up the slowest parts of the route. This is because raising speeds at the top level requires

straighter ROWs and more dedicated infrastructure. By contrast, increasing speeds at the low end can be a more surgical and cost-effective approach.

Level Boarding

Using this rubric, where are trips slowest? The answer is where trains are fully stopped at stations waiting for passengers to board. This period, known as dwell time, is of course necessary to serve passengers. But dwell time is not fixed and is much faster for subways than for regional and intercity rail in Southern California. The reason is that the platform height for subways is level with the train itself. This allows passengers to get on and off trains quickly – even if they are in a wheelchair, pushing a stroller or carrying luggage. Regional rail stations in Southern California, by contrast, require passengers to step up from the platform to access the train. If a passenger requires assistance for a disability or other reason then lifts or manual assistance are required. This slows the boarding process considerably.

The solution is to raise platform heights so there is no barrier for passengers boarding and alighting. This solution not only makes traveling more comfortable for people of different abilities or burdens but it also generates time savings for all passengers. The Pacific Surfliner uses 3 minutes of dwell time at non-Union Station locations. Level boarding can reduce that dwell time to 2 minutes. Regional rail services like the Antelope Valley Line have a dwell time of 2 minutes; level boarding can reduce that to 1 minute. While 1 minute of time savings may not seem like a lot, it adds up when multiplied across lines with 10+ stations. Just this one upgrade would cut 11 minutes off the current Surfliner's run-time between LA and San Diego.

Furthermore, the unreliability of low platform boarding necessitates a risk adjustment by rail schedulers called "padding" to ensure that the service can recover if there is a large queue or fall or other challenge with boarding. This padding is expressed as a percentage applied to the dwell time, for example 20%. Since level boarding provides more certainty to the boarding process, rail schedulers can reduce padding significantly – to around 7%. The saved dwell time and reduced padding from level boarding results in both wins for riders in trip speeds and reliability.



Level boarding at an Arrow train at the San Bernardino Metrolink station. Notice the
platform height is level with the train floor.

Electrification

Californians for Electric Rail has consistently articulated the benefits of rail electrification. Briefly: rail electrification via catenary wire allows trains to be lighter, accelerate faster, and hit higher top speeds. The acceleration benefits appear every time a train is pulling out of curves, away from stations, and traveling up inclines. Electric trains are much quicker than diesel, hydrogen, or battery trains because they are much lighter.

Electrification is also a mature technology used throughout the world to deliver higher frequency service, which is not true for hydrogen or battery trains.This acceleration benefit – where electric trains known as Electric Multiple Units (EMUs) can attain top track speed faster – is particularly important in the case of regional rail where stations are closer together, usually 2-3 miles apart. The time accelerating out of each station is a penalty to trip times. By improving the efficiency of acceleration out of stations, EMUs can decrease trip times for people accessing jobs, education, and recreation. This allows rail to effectively compete with driving. This acceleration benefit also allows planners to add infill stations in gaps along routes, thereby creating more transit-served locations at a relatively low cost compared to building new fixed-rail routes. In addition to this benefit for riders, electrification brings benefits to surrounding communities by reducing pollution burden with zero-emissions technology. Coupled with clean energy sourcing and modal shift, electrification of Metrolink can yield significant environmental benefits across the Southern California region, especially with transportation being the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the state.

The new schedule after Caltrain’s electrification in 2024 shows this clearly. The local, 31 stop service schedule between San Francisco and San Jose in the diesel era was 100 minutes. After electrification, this schedule is now 75 minutes. With 25 minutes saved for riders, Caltrain has received a 41% increase in ridership from 2023 to 2024. The time savings and lower operating

cost of electric service has also allowed Caltrain to re-invest in running more off-peak service, including 2 TPH on the weekends.



Overhead catenary on the newly electrified Caltrain Corridor.

Through Running

The final element is through-running service at downtown stations. Many downtown stations in California are terminals – dead ends where trains stop service and then must maneuver to head back out for the next run. This turning process can take 20 minutes, which limits operational flexibility, increases complexity of service, and severely limits one seat ride service across regions. Terminal stations include Union Station Los Angeles, Santa Fe Depot San Diego, 4th and King San Francisco, and (to a lesser extent) Sacramento Valley Station.

By creating infrastructure and service patterns that run through these downtown stations, we can unlock more capacity as trains do not require complex turning movements and fewer platforms. That means more service can be added to meet demand. Through-running means faster trips as speeds approaching stations can be increased with simplified operations and there is less dwell time at stations. Suddenly, the 20 minutes it takes to turn *Pacific Surfliner* trains at Union Station is reduced to 3-4 minutes.

Finally, through-running can open up larger potential service patterns, as trains can

originate at one cardinal point and turn at another. This allows rail planners to create services that connect jobs, housing and other attractions to serve different travel demands and even create new travel demands. Through-running at Santa Fe Depot, the Coaster could not only connect Northern San Diego County to Downtown San Diego but also allow people in National City or Chula Vista to access jobs in Encinitas or Carlsbad.

Currently, LA Metro is developing a project to bring through-running to Union Station, called Link US. This project would construct a flyover above the 101 freeway that would link the south end of Union Station to points south like Fullerton, Anaheim, and San Diego. The project would

transform the region by making it easy for trains to pass from the north to the south, speeding travel and increasing capacity. Despite its potential, LA Metro and beneficiary services like Metrolink and *Pacific Surfliner* have done little to publicize its benefits. Additionally, the agencies have yet to incorporate California HSR's newly economized design criteria into the project, meaning its costs can likely be reduced upon review. In short, Link US provides an excellent example of opportunities to transform Southern California by strengthening and integrating passenger rail planning and management.

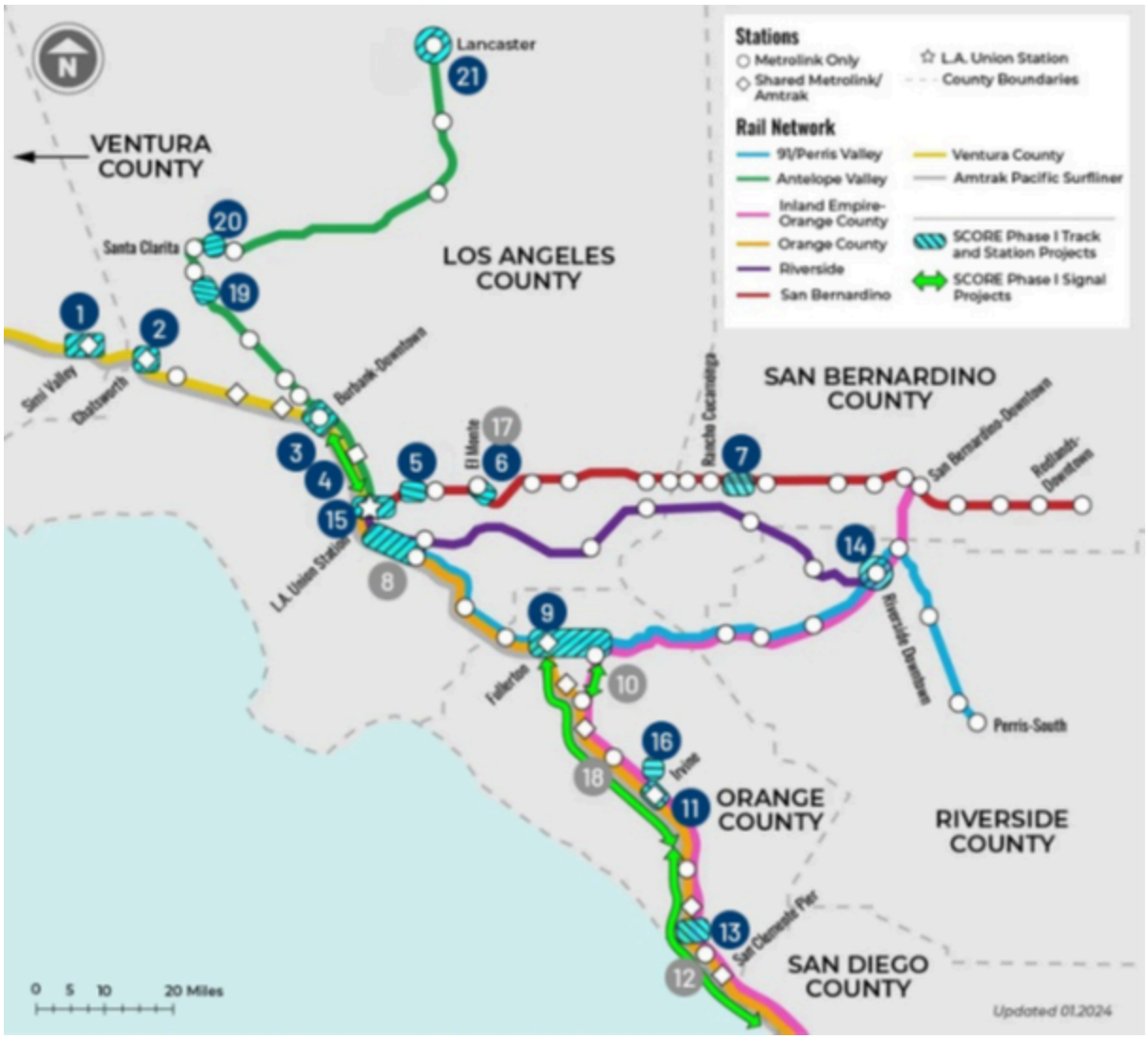
Today's Network and Capacity Plans

Currently, the Southern California rail network consists of regional services that are in the process of shifting from a commuter service with its focus on peak times and directions to a "regional rail" model that provides bidirectional, all-day schedules. Modern "regional rail" service is cheaper to operate due to predictable and consistent labor needs, more efficient use of equipment, and more rational maintenance schedules. Modern service patterns can also help rationalize fares by providing more flexible and lower cost fare products to meet non-commuter demand. This sets the stage for more frequency if capacity and demand allow. Generating that demand will require the improved trip-times delivered by the proposed modern infrastructure Electrolink framework — level boarding, electrification and through-running. A good example is Caltrain's shift to a modern service pattern with electrification in September 2024 that includes at least 2 TPH every day from early morning to late at night and on weekends. As a consequence, Caltrain's service has recovered and surpassed its weekend FY 2019 ridership numbers. There is even more time savings to

be found for Caltrain if it upgrades its stations to level boarding platforms, which research shows would induce even more ridership.

Metrolink's 2024 schedule change represents a shift towards this modern regional rail service pattern. Trains now leave and arrive on much more regular and predictable

schedules, although there are still gaps in weekend service on lines like Ventura County and Inland Empire – Orange County. Still this new schedule and its ability to provide transfers at key points like Union Station represents real progress for Southern California riders.



Improvements on Metrolink's SCORE program

Additionally, Southern California also has intercity services like the Surfliner (San Luis Obispo to San Diego) and Amtrak long distance routes. The Surfliner has often been the highest ridership line outside the Northeast Corridor but struggles with coastal erosion and sea level rise at key points along its ROW.

The *Surfliner* service is currently at ten (10) round trips per day, down from thirteen (13) round trips per day in 2019. While demand has returned for additional *Surfliner* service, the operating agency LOSSAN struggles to acquire equipment necessary for that service. Like Metrolink, the *Surfliner* has partially switched to consistent clock face departure times. South of Burbank all trains depart at consistent times; for example at Anaheim all Northbound trains depart at 10 minutes past the hour. North of Burbank the schedule is less precise, but departure times tend to group together within 15 minutes.

Electrolink's focus — based on NYU's Momentum research — is on unlocking more capacity and reducing trip times through raising average speeds. Currently, there are two plans for expanding capacity in Southern California: First is Metrolink's SCORE program, which was developed using service-led planning. Metrolink identified latent demand for additional service on its lines and

identified that certain bottlenecks in the system had to be addressed through scheduling, signaling, double tracking, sidings and other improvements. For example, the Antelope Valley Line (AVL) could be boosted to 2 TPH from Vista Canyon and 1 TPH from Lancaster through double tracking in two locations, adding a siding, and building a layover yard in Lancaster.

The AVL Capacity Improvement Program is exactly the kind of targeted, incremental improvement envisioned by the State Rail Plan. Unfortunately, it has been delayed and costs have increased substantially for familiar reasons: 1) extractive demands from 3rd parties like utilities and Union Pacific; 2) lack of design/engineering capacity in house; 3) disinterest from infrastructure owner LA Metro; and 4) lack of programmatic construction funding. As discussed below, California will need significant reforms in governance, project delivery and programmatic construction funding to implement the various programs within the SCORE Plan.

In order to deliver rail expansion and modernization, California needs to shift to a more rational

and effective capital funding program. Californians for Electric Rail's prior white paper "Against Patchwork Funding: How Multi-Year Investment Frameworks Can Deliver Rail Service Faster and Cheaper" discusses at length how the current slate of discretionary, competitive grant programs is ill-suited for rail program delivery.

With Cap and Trade renewal, the ten-year anniversary of SB 1 grant programs, and a potential road user charge all coming soon, now is the chance for California to adopt best practices for capital funding programs for regional and intercity rail.

Conclusion

Level boarding, through running and electrification of regional and intercity rail service in Southern California on the Metrolink and LOSSAN corridors have the potential to deliver massive gains for riders and bring the region closer economically. These benefits can only be realized, however, if the public and policymakers in Southern California 1) demand them; and 2) are willing to support necessary institutional reforms required to deliver them.

Utilizing Mode Shift as a Tool for Greenhouse Gas Reduction

Steve Roberts

While RailPAC strongly supports the goal of zero emission rail service (ZEV), RailPAC feels that the potential environmental benefits of mode shift from the highway mode to rail, especially for greenhouse gas reductions (GHG), has never been considered as an intermediate strategy by transportation planners and the California Air Resources Board (CARB). CARB appears to be solely focused on tailpipe emissions for the rail mode to the exclusion of a blended strategy. This is not surprising given CARB's legacy of focus on automobile ground level pollution (nitrogen dioxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, ozone, and lead). RailPAC recommends that in the case of Greenhouse Gas (CHG, CO2) CARB should broaden its strategy.

The foundation of this recommendation is the rail mode's dramatically higher fuel efficiency than the highway mode (by a factor of between 3 and 4 times more efficient). As a result, for any given passenger mile or ton-mile, the rail mode generates significantly less CO2 and criteria pollution than the highway mode. In the case of a Tier 4 diesel powered with renewable fuel, riders who shift from highway to rail show an 80% reduction in GHG gases. The impact is even greater if, as in the case of Amtrak's new locomotives which are paired with battery coach tenders – battery power is used on sensitive urban segments of rail lines.

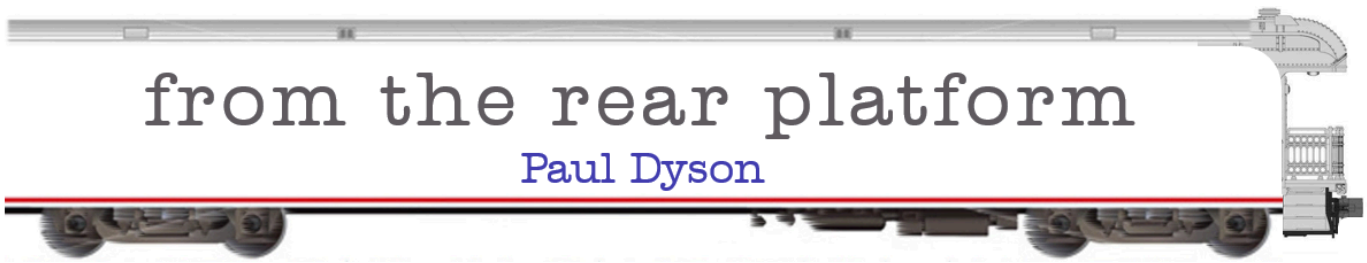
RailPAC recommends that CARB and Caltrans pivot to an alternative strategy, one that is more flexible, more incremental in nature but achievable, as pathway to reach the goal of zero emission rail operations. One key in this pivot is to recognize, incentivize and build upon the energy efficiency of the rail mode. With internal combustion automobiles and long-haul diesel trucks now likely to remain in service for decades, this is an even more relevant strategy. A carbon reduction strategy for mode shift can yield substantial near-term CO2 reduction at minimal risk.

Another factor underlying this recommendation is that California's high priority on hydrogen power as the solution to achieving zero emissions is faltering. Given the growing issues of hydrogen fuel cost, available fuel source (natural gas with venting of CO2 to the atmosphere), hydrogen leaks, a growing body of science on leaked hydrogen as a greenhouse gas and the life cycle costs of hydrogen fuel cells, this strategy is looking more problematic. In addition, changes in Federal requirements for fuel economy and ZEV adoption mean the regulatory push for zero emissions has stalled at the interstate commerce level.

Increasing rail frequencies is the key tool to leverage the shift from the highway to the rail mode to utilize mode shift to reduce CO2 emissions. The biggest barrier to increased rail frequencies is the lack of track capacity. All the California Corridors have track capacity expansion projects environmentally cleared and partially funded, waiting for the last funding increment. Additional track capacity is also key for more aggressive rail freight initiatives, especially lower shorter-distance bulk, and container shipments (compared to high-revenue transcontinental shipments).

As a result, the task of utilizing mode shift to generate GHG savings is achievable near-term, all that is needed is the recognition by decision makers of the importance of these capacity projects in reducing VMT and associated greenhouse gas emissions.

Finally, as was noted earlier, the mode shift strategy (highway to rail) provides a pathway to achieve GHG emissions savings sooner, has no technological challenges and provides an incremental pathway to Zero Emission Rail service. This incremental pathway generates GHG savings while allowing ZEV technology to fully mature before it reaches full service. It also allows the institutional issues that delay and increase costs that prevent the widespread adoption of the global standard for zero emissions rail service, overhead catenary electrification. In addition, all the investments made as part of this mode shift strategy and the larger ridership volume are fully usable by ZEV rail network as it comes into service.



I have often pondered how overseas visitors react to our passenger rail service in California. Those that do their research ahead of time most likely rent a car, especially if they want to do the loop of Coast and Parks (Yosemite, Kings Canyon etc.) This is especially true with Highway One being reopened at Big Sur. The limitation of a single daily train on the Coast Route makes trip planning difficult, not to mention limiting capacity and availability. In the urban areas there has been some improvement, especially on the San Jose – San Francisco Caltrain service which could almost be described as European. But southern California remains little more than a route map with mediocre service recently reduced even further.

This is particularly sad on the Los Angeles County owned portions of the Metrolink network. With public agency control over both the real estate and the operation the only excuse for the failure to provide frequent and competitive service is the lack of recognition of the potential of regional rail, coupled with the lack of political will to overcome localized opposition. For a very brief while my former "home station", Downtown Burbank, almost had 2 trains per hour all day to and from LAUS, provided by a combination of Antelope Valley and Ventura line trains. Sadly the intervals were 20/40 instead of 30/30, because of the lack of double track in the west San Fernando valley, the infamous Raymer/Bernson project. But it was a step in the right direction until recent cutbacks left holes in the middle of the day.

Speaking of those cutbacks, services throughout the State seem to be suffering from mechanical difficulties, most of which can be traced back to deferring scheduled maintenance. It's been a tribute to the older General Motors built locomotives that they kept California corridor and commuter services running in spite of missing overhauls at the recommended intervals. Deferred maintenance is borrowing from the future, usually without the foreseeable means to pay it back. Railroads have been doing it since the first day, usually leaving the next generation of railroaders to pay off the debt at much higher cost. "A stitch in time saves nine"!

SB 742 and the Thruway buses.

The original California legislation setting up the Thruway bus network was specifically designed to limit the use of these buses to be feeders to rail, and not for use between points on the buses' route. Opposition from lobbyists for the existing bus operators convinced the State that they should be protected from competition from this state-subsidized new operator. However, over the past four decades intercity bus service has diminished to a shadow of the operations of Greyhound and Trailways in the twentieth century. RailPAC's vision has consistently been not only in favor of making the Thruway routes available to intermediate points and non-rail passengers but also

encouraging other bus operators to participate in the program through some kind of code-sharing and joint promotion. The theory is that the more service there is on a given route and the more available connections it becomes more attractive to potential riders. In 2019 Senator Allen and RailPAC pushed for the passage of a bill to permit just that. SB742 was passed and became law, and yet there are still many routes where passengers cannot buy tickets. The worst offender seems to be LOSSAN which controls the route along the coast from Santa Barbara north in conjunction with the Pacific Surfliner.

It's difficult to find information about bus connections on the Pacific Surfliner website. Under destinations the map only shows the rail stations, not bus connection points. I tried booking a sample trip, from Santa Barbara to King City. Pacific Surfliner transferred me to the Amtrak booking site which identified a bus to King City, but would not let me buy a ticket! I tried to game the system by buying a ticket from Carpinteria instead and that didn't work either. I suppose the lesson here is not to be complacent. Just because a bill is passed and becomes law, it doesn't mean it has been put into effect. I for one confess to being asleep at the switch. Please contact me if you have similar difficulties booking a journey that you would like to make/..

San Joaquin Valley service.

Gold Runner? Hard seats, unsuitable for long journeys. Lack of refreshments, unsuitable for long journeys. Trains that break down. New rolling stock that is unsuitable for the type of service. Rolling stock that is overspecified for ADA requirements to the detriment of 99.8% of the traveling public. (How many airlines or bus lines provide wheelchair access to every seat?) resulting in ridiculously wide aisles and narrow seats. Numerous breakdowns oif locomotives and cars. And it's not just me. Respected transportation writers such as Roger Rudick of Streetsblog as well as RailPAC Board members and regular members have voiced similar comments in terms much stronger than mine. It's clear that the service is not designed with the long-distance traveler in mind, but rather to provide a "basic economy" experience at the lowest cost. One senses the hand of the State Treasurer here.



On a brighter note, overall patronage and revenue is up throughout the State thanks high gasoline prices. These prices may come down a little but I forecast that they w elevated while the "oil shock" works its way slowly through thousands of mile long su This is NOT the time for service cuts, or for service failures that drive away repeat business. *Comments? pdyson@railpac.org*