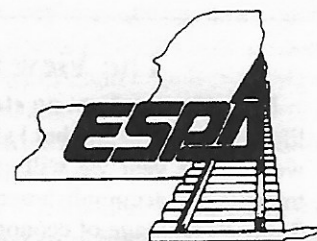


# The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



## WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 31, No. 1

January/February 2007

### State Needs to Get on Track with Amtrak

New York's plans for an effective passenger rail system remain in the planning phase, while other states have added the passenger train to their approaches to transportation. These states have worked with Amtrak during the past several years to develop improved rail service as part of their respective economic development agendas. While New York championed similar efforts 30 years ago, we now have the dubious distinction of being the only state to be at odds and, in fact, in court with Amtrak, over the failed joint high-speed rail development deal of 1998.

Perhaps we need to talk about the wider significance of improved rail service in New York and its effect on traffic and trade in the Northeast.

Rail travel across upstate New York consists of Amtrak's "Empire Corridor" trains playing cat and mouse with a daily parade of CSX freight trains. CSX's Chicago-bound route is among the nation's busiest freight corridors, funneling valuable freight traffic to metropolitan New York City, New Jersey and New England. The status of the CSX route as a major component of the transportation network for the Northeast means that it is a national transportation asset for freight traffic now and potentially passenger rail traffic in the future.

*(Continued on p. 6)*

### Ridership Surge Continues

Ridership and revenues on trains serving New York State were up significantly at the end of Amtrak's 2006 Fiscal Year on September 30, 2006.

Trains running west of Albany posted impressive gains, with overall ridership up 9.3% over 2005 and revenues up 13.6%. Hudson Valley trains experienced a modest 1.1% ridership decrease from the prior year, but still recorded a 6.3% revenue increase.

Other New York State routes with growth included the state-sponsored *Adirondack* to Montreal, with ridership up 8.4% and revenues up 12.2% over FY 2005. The *Ethan Allen Express* to Rutland, VT, enjoyed a 14.4% ridership increase with revenues up an impressive 19.5%. The New York to Chicago *Lake Shore Ltd.* had a 3.4% ridership increase, with revenue jumping 8.9%.

Even with gas prices moderating, New York State ridership has remained strong. For October 2006, all routes posted ridership and revenue increases over the prior October. The *Adirondack* had a substantial 19.9% ridership increase, the *Ethan Allan Express* followed with a 15.0% increase, Hudson Valley trains gained 8.6%, West of Albany services moved ahead 3.8% and the *Lake Shore Limited* was up 1.0%. Revenue gains were topped by the *Ethan Allen's* 17.9% gain, followed by Hudson Valley up 15.7%, the *Adirondack* up 13.3%, West of Albany up 6.6% and the *Lake Shore* up 9.8%

*Bruce B. Becker*

### New Hudson Valley Express Train Stalled

The planned introduction of a weekday Albany to New York roundtrip express train, (included in the fall Empire Corridor schedules with the footnote "service is to begin on a date to be announced") now appears to be on permanent hold. The new service, geared towards travelers with mid-day business in New York, is scheduled to shave 15 minutes off the current best running time for the route and is also slated to offer food and beverage service.

An apparent victim of the ongoing lawsuit between New York State and Amtrak, the service is to be the first tangible improvement initiated by the State Senate High Speed Rail Task Force and will be funded with a portion of the \$22 million obtained by State Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno in the current year's state budget.

Reportedly, negotiations between Task Force officials, NYSDOT and Amtrak regarding the new service have been continuing, but no service contract has yet been agreed upon or approved by the parties.

On a related initiative, the planned start of a commuter train demonstration project between Saratoga Springs and Albany (timed to make a direct connection at Rensselaer for Amtrak service to/from New York) also appears to be stalled at the moment. The availability of the planned equipment for the demonstration service (Colorado Rail Car DMUs and/or rebuilt VIA Budd RDC cars) is in question and the necessary operating agreements with Amtrak and CP Rail have yet to be fully addressed.

*Bruce B. Becker*

### Acela First Class Food Service Returns

In early December 2006, Amtrak upgraded its food service on Acela Express, in first class. The change offers hot, prepared meals (breakfast, lunch, and dinner), and a rotating selection of wines, all served on china and with glassware. Amtrak had downgraded food service since the Acela Express had first operated. Amtrak's Food and Beverage Director Pete Humphreys stated, "Our passengers and employees told us clearly that they wanted to see the Acela First Class meal service returned to its previous levels that distinguished the service in the early days of Acela's introduction. Amtrak is pleased to once again offer an enhanced dining experience." Breakfast options include omelets, French toast or waffles. Dinner options include pesto chicken and seared salmon, with vegetables and a salad.

*Gary Prophet*

**ESPA Annual Meeting March 10 Details page 7**

## The View from the Cab

**My wife says I am an eternal optimist!** Not only am I a lifelong Red Sox fan, but I also firmly believe that 2007 may well be the year we will start to see meaningful progress towards the accomplishment of our many goals. Governor Spitzer's message of economic revitalization for "One New York", with an emphasis on increased spending for critical infrastructure and transportation projects is certainly welcome news. While the Governor has yet to specifically address intercity passenger rail, it is only logical that he will include investment in our state's railroads, both for passengers and for freight, as part of his initiatives. Particularly upstate, such an investment would help jump start the faltering economies which he has so correctly highlighted as needing immediate attention. I especially hope that Governor Spitzer and Senator Bruno can unite behind the Senator's initiatives for higher-efficiency passenger rail service across the state and make this a non-partisan effort to benefit the citizens and traveling public of New York.

And in Washington, with both Houses of Congress now under Democratic leadership, there is a real possibility that meaningful legislation will be *finally* passed that puts funding for passenger rail investment on an even par with other transportation modes. And perhaps, just perhaps, work can progress on crafting a true, long-term national transportation policy, which will recognize the importance of all forms of public transportation as real alternatives to the private car.

I can assure you that we will be actively working to advance our agenda with Governor Spitzer, the new State Commissioner of Transportation and with our Washington delegation, especially those newly elected to Congress.

I strongly encourage you to make plans to attend our 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Membership Meeting in Schenectady on March 10, 2007. Rick Harnish, Executive Director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association and Ross Capon, Executive Director of NARP are both confirmed to speak and other guests from Amtrak, the State and the rail industry have been invited. Full details and registration information are enclosed. As the saying goes, there is strength in numbers and a record turnout will send a clear message that the members of ESPA demand positive action now.

I'll look forward to seeing many of you on March 10<sup>th</sup> in Schenectady. As always, I welcome your comments, critiques and suggestions, on how ESPA can better attain our goals of improved passenger rail service in New York State. Don't hesitate to contact me at anytime. **Bruce B. Becker, President**

impressed with his extensive knowledge and hired him to provide a multi-modal perspective for the SMTC staff. Charlie has been working in transportation ever since.

His current assignment involves work with the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council, the downstate MPO, which covers New York City, Long Island and the Lower Hudson Valley, as well as mid-Hudson Valley Metropolitan Planning Organizations.

*Frank Barry*

## Point of View

### LIRR East Side Access - A Better Way

While New Yorker's can celebrate the Bush Administration's decision to provide some \$2.6 billion of Federal funding to help pay for LIRR East Side Access, the current plan is seriously flawed. MTA would bring trains into a Deep Cavern Station some 150 feet below Park Avenue. A better option would be to use five existing platform tracks that lead to the Upper Level Loop at Grand Central Terminal. Loss of five platform tracks, out of a total of 46 platform tracks available to Metro North at Grand Central - the world's largest railway station, would have only a limited impact on that carrier's operations. When compared with the MTA plan, ULLA would save at least \$1.2 billion in construction cost and speed its completion by three years, while meeting LIRR requirements for future growth. It would save LIRR commuters three to four minutes per trip each way, and avoid the increased security risk of a deep cavern station. These findings are detailed in a report prepared by Delcan, a well-regarded Canadian engineering firm (posted on [www.irum.org](http://www.irum.org)).

Even though a tunnel boring machine contract has been awarded, it is still not too late for New York's new governor to move forward on the Upper Level plan. The contract could be modified or cancelled and the alternative could be quickly advanced. This would speed, not delay completion of the project. Governor Spitzer did call for change on Day One in his inaugural address. To his credit, recently-named MTA CEO Lee Sander has promised to meet with transit advocates and carefully review their concerns about this project. Stay tuned!

*George Haikalis*

*President, Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc.*

*One Washington Square Village, Suite #5D*

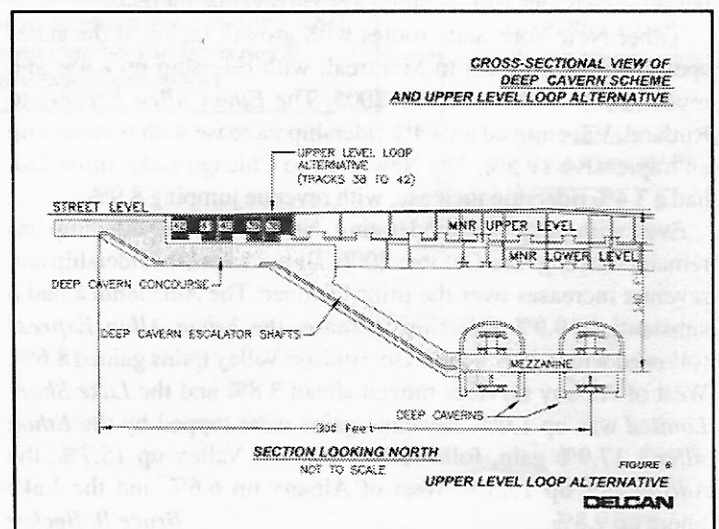
*New York, NY 10012 212-475-3394 [geo@irum.org](mailto:geo@irum.org)*

*[www.irum.org](http://www.irum.org)*

## Former ESPA President Moves to NYSDOT

Charles Poltenson, who served as ESPA's second president from 1982-84, recently took a position as Transportation Analyst in the Policy and Strategy Division of the New York State Department of Transportation. "I moved to a broader stage to have the opportunity to do more things," Poltenson told ESPA. He had formerly served as Senior Intermodal Planner at the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), the official Syracuse Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Poltenson's long interest in railroads and his experience with ESPA led to a career change in 1993. Prior to that he had worked in medical sales and marketing, but in that year, as ESPA's Syracuse coordinator he offered advice to the SMTC on the new Syracuse intermodal station then being planned. The Director of SMTC was



## Spitzer States Transportation Priorities

Governor Eliot Spitzer's first State-of-the-State message, delivered to a joint session of the State Assembly and Senate of January 3<sup>rd</sup>, established two objectives: "to reform our government" and "to revitalize our economy." The Governor said that "In order to revitalize our economy, we must get back to our roots and stake out a bold vision for infrastructure investment". Four infrastructure investment categories were identified: housing; transportation, broadband, and energy and environment.

Upstate transportation projects receiving the Governor's support were: —replacement of the Peace Bridge in Buffalo; and —construction of I-86 along the Southern Tier.

Downstate transportation projects identified by the new State Chief Executive included:

- construction of the first segment of the Second Avenue Subway and planning for its full extension to Lower Manhattan;
- completion of the planning process to replace the Tappan Zee Bridge;
- moving forward on the East Side Access project to connect Long Island and Queens commuters to Grand Central Terminal;
- expansion of Stewart Airport to become the forth major airport in the Downstate region.

No mention of intercity passenger rail appeared in either the Governor's Inaugural Speech or the State of the State Address. By the end of his first week in office, Governor Spitzer had not named a State Transportation Commissioner but had designated Elliot G. Sander executive director and chief executive of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Mr. Sander, a former New York City Transportation Commissioner, co-chaired Governor Spitzer's Transition Transportation Committee.

*Anthony Rudmann*

## Niagara Falls Gets Funds for Customs House but Bridge Potentially Threatened

Niagara Falls, NY has been awarded \$2 million in federal transportation enhancement funds to help make much-needed repairs to the historic 1863 U.S. Customs House, located near the current Whirlpool Bridge used by the *Maple Leaf* enroute to/from Toronto. The Customs House has for many years been planned as the site of a new Amtrak station for the Falls, to replace the current, poorly-located, station on Lockport Road. The funds, which require a \$500,000 local match will be used to help stabilize the building and prepare it for future uses, including as the station. Full funding for the proposed new station, which would require a new track layout are not yet available. In addition, while Amtrak supports the new station project, it faces higher operating costs at the new location, as the two daily trains which originate and end at the Falls would have to shuttle back and forth to the current layover facilities at the Lockport Road site for overnight maintenance and storage.

In a related matter, the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission, the owner/operator of the Whirlpool Bridge is reportedly considering the abandonment of the top, rail deck of the bridge, unless the rail users (currently ONLY Amtrak) agree to fund necessary repairs. The Canadian National now uses the International Rail Bridge connecting Fort Erie, Ont, with Buffalo for its cross border freight trains. This option would not be available for Amtrak's Maple Leaf however, as there is currently no feasible rail route to get the train from Buffalo to the Niagara Falls, Ont. ViaRail station using the

International Rail Bridge. Thus, the abandonment of the Whirlpool Bridge would cause the elimination of through Maple Leaf service to Canada. The adjacent former Michigan Central Railroad bridge was abandoned a number of years ago after its remaining user, the Canadian Pacific rerouted rail traffic from the bridge's route, which ran through Niagara Falls, Ont.'s tourist area.

ESPA will be immediately working to learn more of this potential threat to the *Maple Leaf* service and to publicize the negative impact that a Whirlpool Bridge closure would have for both rail and national security interests.

*Bruce B. Becker*

## Schenectady Station Improvements Unveiled

Schenectady Amtrak station improvements took a step closer to reality as three design concepts were unveiled at a November 14<sup>th</sup> public community workshop. About 40 members of the public heard engineering and architectural firm Kise Straw & Kolodner present preliminary concepts and options and allowed the attendees to register their likes and dislikes. The offered options were:

A modernistic glass-clad rehabilitation of the existing station connected by glass-roofed open air walkway to a bus stop on State Street.

A rebuilt brick station at the current location with a footprint 150 % of the current station size. Included in this two-story design is an enclosed connector to State Street and retail space. This design was favored by the vast majority of citizens attending the meeting

A relocation of the present station to front on State Street. This single story design concept includes retail space and is reminiscent of a railroad freight house.

Other improvements discussed included upgrading the existing Liberty Street underpass adjacent to the station and the potential for a pedestrian passageway under the existing railroad viaduct to North Broadway by opening up existing empty space. The potential for integration with intercity bus service was also discussed.

The consultant firm said it will present a single final design to the public in February or March public workshop.

The station improvement project is funded by part of a \$1.1 million federal grant secured by local congressman Michael McNulty. The grant is being managed by the Capital District Transportation Authority which built and owns the Rensselaer train station and managed the overhaul of the Saratoga Springs station. The regional transportation improvement plan calls for up to \$6.8 million, including state and federal funding, to be spent on Schenectady station improvements in 2008 and 2009.

*Anthony Rudman*

## Kummant Installs new Management Team

Alexander Kummant, who became Amtrak's 8th President last September, announced installation of a new management team last month. The Law Department, criticized last Fall for poor management in a joint report of Amtrak's Inspector General and the Department of Transportation, will get a new director, Eleanor Acheson. Acheson has 30 years of legal experience including serving as Assistant Attorney General in the Clinton Administration. More recently she has served as director of Public Policy and Government Affairs for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force. She is a granddaughter of Dean Acheson, Secretary of State under President Truman.

Barbara Richardson, who joined Amtrak as an assistant to former President George Warrington and (Cont'd on page 5)

## West of Albany Running Times

The consistent delivery of reliable service is one of ESPA's primary goals for Empire Corridor operations. Needless to say, particularly west of Albany, there is much room for improvement towards accomplishing this goal.

The most widely used measure of service reliability is overall on-time performance. For October 2006, the Empire Corridor experienced a very disappointing 57.4% overall on time performance and for the 12-month period ending September 30, 2006, the Corridor results were 69.8%, also below expectations and acceptable levels.

Another relevant and perhaps more telling measure of performance however is the calculation of how much time (either more, less or equal to) it takes trains to actually cover a particular route as compared to their scheduled running times. With this in mind and with the reliability of the four daily round trips running west of Albany continuing to be extremely inconsistent, I recently gathered and analyzed the running time data for the Albany-Rensselaer to Buffalo-Depew segment of the Corridor. The information I examined was obtained from the Amtrak website and was for a 28-day period.

Train	Schedule Running Time	Average (Per Day) Additional Running Time	Best Running Time During Period (Train Used...)	Worst Running Time During Period (Train Used...)
<b>Eastbound</b>				
280/282/288	4' 55" - 5':10"	11 Minutes	8 Minutes Less Than Schedule	68 Minutes More Than Schedule
48	4' 50"	23 Minutes	25 Minutes Less Than Schedule	90 Minutes More Than Schedule
286	5' 15"	11 Minutes	33 Minutes Less Than Schedule	83 Minutes More Than Schedule
64	5' 35"	n/a*	49 Minutes Less Than Schedule	92 Minutes More Than Schedule
*Note #64, on average, beat its scheduled run time by 5 minutes.				
<b>Westbound</b>				
63	4' 56"	24 Minutes	20 Minutes Less Than Schedule	115 Minutes More Than Schedule
281/283	4':55" - 5' 0"	12 Minutes	17 Minutes Less Than Schedule	85 Minutes More Than Schedule
285	5' 0"	21 Minutes	9 Minutes Less Than Schedule	153 Minutes More Than Schedule
49	4' 50"	29 Minutes	6 Minutes Less Than Schedule	78 Minutes More Than Schedule

The summary of the results for the period are...

Average (Per Day) Total Additional Time Required for all Eastbound Trains: 40 minutes

Average (Per Day) Total Additional Time Required for all Westbound Trains: 86 minutes

Combined Average (Per Day) Total Additional Time Required for all Trains: 126 minutes

Best Eastbound Day For All Four Trains: 74 Minutes Less than Scheduled Times

Best Westbound Day For All Four Trains: 38 Minutes Less than the Scheduled Times

Combined Best Day for all Eight Trains: 112 Minutes Less than the Scheduled Times

Worst Eastbound Day for all Four Trains: 176 Minutes More

than Scheduled Times

Worst Westbound Day for all Four Trains: 256 Minutes More than Scheduled Times

Combined Worst Day for all Eight Trains: 390 Minutes More than Scheduled Times

### What can be extrapolated from the data?

- The fastest train for the period was #48, which on one particular day made the Buffalo to Albany run in *only* 4 hours, 25 minutes! This rivals the best times of the New York Central 40 years ago and is an average speed of 66mph.
- The slowest train for the period was #285, which on one particular day took a total of 7 hours, 33 minutes between Albany and Buffalo. This case was due to a significant delay caused by a CSX freight train grade crossing accident.
- The trains with the fastest scheduled running times (#48 & 49 at 4 hours, 50 minutes) consistently used the most additional time.
- The best-combined day was December 25, when CSX

was running very few trains and 112 minutes were saved.

- The worst combined day (requiring 6 hours of additional running time) was December 26, the day after the three-day Christmas weekend when CSX was back in full operation.

- On 8 days out of the 28, more than 4 hours of combined additional running time was required! On only 6 out of the 28 days were the combined overall running times better than the scheduled times and this average savings was only 36 minutes for all eight trips.

While heavy CSX volumes, track repairs and freight train interference have a very significant impact on Amtrak's operations, other factors also play a role. The Albany-Schenectady single track adversely affects trains which otherwise would be on-time; the ongoing Border Patrol inspections at Rochester routinely delay the Lake Shore Limited (it's average dwell time there is now 14 minutes, with many occasions exceeding 20 minutes); all along with other uncontrollable circumstances.

While there are **NO** quick or easy solutions, these statistics do readily point out the need for significant long-term investment for improvements and capacity enhancements to CSX's mainline. However, in the near-term Amtrak, CSX and the State need to jointly commit to making reliable passenger train operations a top priority.

Bruce B. Becker

## Amtrak Rewards Business Travel

Businesses whose employees travel on Empire or Northeast Corridor trains can now receive Amtrak Guest Rewards travel points for their company in addition to the points received by the travelers themselves. Companies must sign up for the program, tickets must be purchased either through Amtrak's website or from its automatic ticketing machines and the traveling employees must already participate in Amtrak's Guest Rewards program for individuals. Business travel points are initially awarded at 25% of the rate for individuals but the percentage increases according to the amount of travel. For companies spending over \$75,000 per year on Amtrak travel, the rate reaches 40%. For more information go to [www.amtrakguestrewards.com/forbusiness](http://www.amtrakguestrewards.com/forbusiness)

## Amtrak Flat Funding Possible

Early in December the outgoing Congress passed a Continuing Resolution extending funding for Amtrak and all other unfunded federal programs at current levels through February 15th. This effectively passed responsibility for funding the current year over to the new Congress. Indications are that Congressional negotiators are working out budgets program by program. Cuts seem unlikely but increases may be difficult in view of Congressional pledges of fiscal responsibility. Amtrak got \$1.294 billion last year and requested \$1.598 billion for 2007 (the Bush Administration had proposed only \$900 mil.) At least \$1.4 billion will be needed to avoid backsliding on maintenance according a USDOT Inspector General's Report issued last year. Fortunately it appears that the destructive language proposed in the former Congress requiring food and beverage service to be "revenue neutral" may be dropped.

Prospects are looking up for passage of the Lautenberg-Lott Amtrak Authorization bill in the Senate. And if you have a new Representative in the House it is especially important to contact them to urge increased funding for Amtrak and authorizing legislation that provides funding for improvements with a federal share similar to that for highways.

*Frank Barry (From NARP hotline and website)*

## Long Island East Side Access Funding

Transportation Secretary Mary E. Peters said final approval has been granted for \$2.6 billion in federal funds for construction of the Long Island Rail Road East Side Access (ESA), which will give LIRR commuters a direct ride to Grand Central Terminal (GCT). She said it was the most money the federal government had ever committed to a mass transit project. The ESA has a total budget of \$6.3 billion; a majority of the \$3.7 billion not supplied by the federal government will be raised through the sale of MTA and state bonds.

Peter S. Kalikow, MTA chairman, called it "an event that started in 1968," a reference to the early days of planning for the Long Island Rail Road connection.

The two additional tunnel tracks and an east side terminal will increase LIRR capacity into Manhattan by over 40% and reduce commuting trips by as much as 40 minutes while at the same time reducing auto trips and demand on subway lines. Metro-North service at Penn Station will be enabled by released track capacity there, establishing connectivity with NJT and the Amtrak corridor. Taken together with LIRR connectivity with Metro-North at GCT, regional mobility will be greatly enhanced.

The project involves constructing new approaches in Manhattan and Queens to connect to the existing but unused lower level of

the 63rd Street East River tunnel. In Queens the tunnels will link with LIRR tracks at Harold interlocking. Beneath Manhattan, the tunnels will head west from the end of the existing tunnel, turn south under Park Avenue and end under Grand Central with a concourse near the GCT lower level, and platform areas carved from the rock about 150 ft below the existing station. A controversy remains concerning security and cost issues for this "deep cavern" design as compared with the alternative of bringing LIRR trains directly into existing GCT tracks. (*See East Side Access-A Better Way, P. 2*)

Work on the ESA project has already begun with completion scheduled in 2013. Projects ancillary to the ESA underway or already completed include: **Highbridge Yard** in the Bronx (*December 2003*) provides six tracks for Metro-North train storage and maintenance previously located at GCT, making room for the new ESA concourse. **Arch Street Yard and Shop** in Queens (*June 2005*) will provide mid-day support for LIRR trains in GCT service. **Woodside Interlocking** (*Underway*) includes high-speed switches and signal reconfiguration to provide operational flexibility at Wood interlocking during ESA construction. *John Raha*

## Visionary Transit Exhibit to Open Soon

A vision of what transit could look like will be on display in the Conde Nast Building Lobby, 4 Times Square, New York City Monday, January 29 - Friday, March 2, 2007. Reception: Thursday, February 8, 2007 6-8pm - Special Guest Theodore Kheel, President, Nurture Nature Foundation.

With four railway systems serving three states and two Manhattan terminals, the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan region still lacks one comprehensive, interconnected rail network — a network that could simultaneously alleviate congestion on overcrowded roadways, stimulate the economy and foster more sensible development.

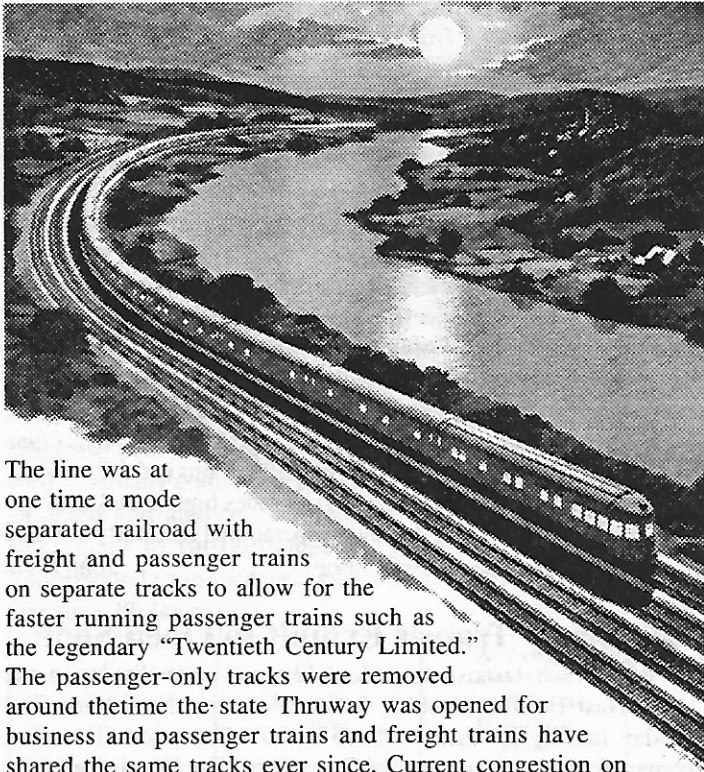
This exhibit of pictures, maps and renderings, prepared by transit advocates and professionals, proposes connecting Grand Central Terminal with Penn Station and transforming commuter rail lines into a Regional Rail System that provides frequent service, integrated fares and thru-running of trains at the terminals.

*George Haikalis*

**Kummant Installs new Management** (Cont'd from page 3) later became Director of Marketing and Sales, will be leaving. Her Department will be incorporated into a new Marketing and Product Management Department, headed by Vice President Emmett Fremaux. The Corporate Communications Department (news bureau), formerly under Richardson, has been moved to Government Affairs, which continues to be headed by Vice President Joe McHugh.

In a December 18th letter to employees announcing the changes, President Kummant wrote that "While change can be difficult, this reorganization is the result of a great deal of consideration....We've made a lot of progress in the last few years—from rebuilding the railroad to paying down the debt—but we still face tremendous challenges ahead. One of my chief responsibilities as President...is to build the team that can tackle the challenges, and I believe these changes will accomplish that." *Frank Barry*

Warning to Snowmobile operators and cross-country skiers..... stay off the tracks. It can take a train up to two miles to stop and do not have the ability to swerve to avoid collisions.



The line was at one time a mode separated railroad with freight and passenger trains on separate tracks to allow for the faster running passenger trains such as the legendary "Twentieth Century Limited." The passenger-only tracks were removed around the time the state Thruway was opened for business and passenger trains and freight trains have shared the same tracks ever since. Current congestion on this busy railroad means that in order for the route to serve as an effective passenger line, the dedicated passenger tracks will have to be put back. Fortunately, the right of way remains available for this option.

Pennsylvania has just completed a \$150 million corridor development project to connect its capital (Harrisburg) to its major metropolitan area, Philadelphia. Maximum train speeds were notched ahead to 110 mph, knocking off 15 minutes for new express trains on the 104-mile line. Pennsylvania has an economic advantage over New York as their new railroad represents an environmentally responsible transportation asset to foster smart growth and attract business and jobs.

The Pennsylvania deal was conceived of after our own 1998 high speed plan for connecting Albany and New York City. Amtrak has contracts with 14 states, worth an estimated \$147 million, for similar projects in other parts of the country.

Unfortunately, since 1998, New Yorkers have experienced stagnation, punctuated by increasing fares and declining reliability on the Empire Corridor. One so-called "improvement" for New York thus far has been the discontinuation of food service on the Albany-New York City trains in 2005. This has forced passengers to grab their morning coffee before they board their trains, though some of that coffee reportedly is better than the Amtrak brew.

To further our efforts to actually achieve something along the lines of the Pennsylvania example, Senator Joseph Bruno formed a High Speed Rail Task Force last year to tell us what will be required to get some snappy new trains to connect our cities. The Task Force, headed up by transportation expert John Egan, correctly advises the need for far greater public investment in rail, utilizing state-federal cost-sharing formulas to address both deferred maintenance (20 percent state, 80 percent federal) and future improvements (50/50). As a comparison, federal highway projects today enjoy a much more favorable "match point" of only 10 percent state funds and 90 percent federal funds. The environmentally friendly and fuel efficient mode — rail — is being penalized.

Similarly, the state Department of Transportation has just released its corridor based vision for transportation for the year 2030. That

report also cites the need to create a seamless system in which travelers can conveniently shift between modes and operators to complete trips that meet their individual and business needs. The report also notes that the transportation system is essential to economic competitiveness and that we risk falling behind other states with more dynamic transportation plans.

Political players in Washington and Albany often talk of the need to develop energy and environmental policies that are sensitive to our wounded planet. Strategic rail projects, like the Empire Corridor, offer the opportunity to address these desires and further economic development in New York and the Northeast. Let's hope the new team in Albany can articulate the need to develop the rail system in New York and explain the importance of its role as a transportation asset for the entire Northeast. They will need to work with the realigned Congress to press for rail project parity with federal highway projects.

This is probably our best shot in years for bringing responsible projects forward that address our collective desire for sustainable transportation policies. While we seem to have the plans and desire to develop a rail service option for New York, it will ultimately be the match point that wins the game.

*Ben Gottfried*

*First published: Monday, December 18, 2006 Albany Times Union*

*Night Flight- Image above left- New York Central artists rendering of the "Twentieth Century Limited" on the four track water level mainline in the timetable of October 1961.*

## Empire Corridor Travel Tips/Discounts

- All Empire Corridor trains **NOW** require reservations. While advance reservations are encouraged, last minute passengers will always be accommodated if space is available on a particular train. Booking as early as possible will provide the best possible fare. Amtrak accepts reservations up to 11 months in advance of your travel date! Travel during off-peak periods (mid-week, early morning or late evening) will generally be the least expensive.
- In conjunction with the **2006 'New York By Rail' Travel Guide**, Amtrak is offering a **'50% Off Companion Fare'** discount between all New York State destinations on Empire Service trains; on the Maple Leaf as far as Niagara Falls, NY; on the Adirondack to Montreal and on the Ethan Allen Express to Rutland. Travelers can save 50% off a second adult fare when traveling in pairs. The discount is valid through April 2007, using discount code V707.
- AAA and NARP members receive 10% off most regular fares, with a three day advance purchase requirement. Senior citizens, veterans and many students can receive a 15% discount off most fares.
- Visit [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com) and select 'Hot Deals' for the latest discount program information.
- Join the Amtrak Guest Rewards program and earn points towards free travel and more.

## Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

Amtrak's Empire District Superintendent, James Turngren, wants to hear of your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Jim welcomes our input, as he strives to provide the best possible service on the Empire Corridor. Please send your written trip reports and comments, including specific dates, train numbers and employee names as appropriate to: James Turngren District Superintendent, Empire District Amtrak 525 East Street Rensselaer, NY 12144.

## Metro-North Looking Northward

Metro-North President Peter Cannito said his railroad is open to studying extending service north of Poughkeepsie if northern communities support the idea. In a Jan 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting with the editorial board of the Poughkeepsie Journal, Cannito said: "We think there is a demand for that service. But we're not going to take the service north unless there is an interest"

A \$3 million Metro-North study of the issue seven year ago was halted after opposition from residents and leaders in northern Dutchess County.

According to the Poughkeepsie newspaper, a Rhinebeck Supervisor acknowledged there is a "crying need" for commuter rail service in the northern part of the county. Hyde Park Supervisor Pompey Delafield said: "I think it's worth exploring." Both officials expressed concern about increased automobile traffic in their community.

Ridership on the Hudson River line has increased steadily in recent years. Station and parking improvements have been made in Poughkeepsie.

Metro-North is looking to add a connecting bus service to allow Ulster County residents to leave their cars on the western side of the Hudson River before heading to Poughkeepsie to catch the train. The proposed shuttle buses would start in Rosendale, make stops in New Paltz, and a stop in Highland. The plan is to have six bus runs to Poughkeepsie in the morning and six in the afternoon and evening from Poughkeepsie, to serve peak commuting hours.

*Anthony Rudmann, Gary Prophet*

## NJ Transit

### Double-Deck Equipment Arrives

In December, New Jersey Transit (NJT) began operating their new double-deck cars, also referred to as multi-level passenger coaches. Each coach has seats for between 127-142 passengers, depending on whether it also has a cab control area or a restroom or neither. Seating is four across (more spacious than Metro-North's or LIRR's typical five across seating) and the ride is reported to be very smooth, with increased legroom and wider aisles. Each coach has an upper and lower seating level, as well as an open, intermediate mezzanine level at each end of the car, which provides an area for wheelchairs, strollers or standees. Fully accessible ADA restrooms are found in this area on more than half the coaches.

These new coaches will be used on the Northeast Corridor line (Trenton to New York Penn), as well as the Morris & Essex line and North Jersey Coast line. All 234 cars are to be delivered by December 2008. The typical five car consist will have a total of 685 seats. The coaches, manufactured by Bombardier, are smaller than typical double-deck coaches elsewhere in the United States, as they are built to fit through the tunnels into Penn Station.

Some critics contend that trains will be slowed by the time passengers take to board the coaches, as passengers must either go up 5 steps or down 5 steps after they enter the coach. But the comfort and space have nevertheless resulted in rave reviews.

*Gary Prophet*

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**27<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Empire State Passengers Association and  
National Association of Railroad Passengers – Region II  
Saturday, March 10, 2007                      12:00noon – 5:00pm  
Holiday Inn Downtown • 100 Nott Terrace • Schenectady, NY  
Four Blocks from the Amtrak Station - Free Parking  
A Complete Hot Lunch Buffet will be served at 12:30pm**

**Confirmed Speakers:  
Rick Harnish, Executive Director – Midwest High Speed Rail Association  
Ross Capon, Executive Director - NARP  
Other Guests From Amtrak, the State and the Rail Industry Have Been Invited.**

**Please complete and return this stub with a check for \$32.00 per person for the complete program (lunch and meeting) or \$15.00 if you will ONLY be attending the meeting, by February 28, 2007. (NO cancellations after this date). *Please Note:* Written confirmation of your meeting registration having been received is *NOT* provided unless specifically requested. Meeting registration begins at 11:00am.**

**Make checks payable to 'ESPA' and mail to: Bruce B. Becker • 8175 Old Post Road East • East Amherst, NY 14051**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I will be arriving in Schenectady on: \_\_\_\_\_  ⇒ Tr. # 282     ⇒ Tr. #71

(Transportation and Walking Maps will be provided)

## Rail Infrastructure Funding Update

New York State rail infrastructure funding initiatives were outlined last month in a December 15, 2006 press release by Governor Pataki's office. The spending measure primarily addresses freight programs and calls for the need to improve our rail freight network to adapt to the coming realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno noted in the release that "improved rail service is critically important for New York to remain a transportation leader and innovator in the 21<sup>st</sup> century..." Numerous legislative leaders throughout the state also noted the essential role of rail transportation in developing tourism and economic development objectives in New York.

Adirondack Scenic Railroad, in particular, received accolades as a key project to advance the economy and environmental objectives for the Adirondack Park. The plan calls for \$5 million in State spending to upgrade the tourist railway's tracks between Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake in Franklin County. Saratoga counties' North Creek Branch operated by Upper Hudson River Railroad, was also awarded \$3 million for passenger projects.

The program allocates key infrastructure investments for short line freight railroads in addition to the States's Class One carriers. This funding includes an impressive \$20.7 million in State spending for improvements to Class One's CSX, Norfolk Southern and Canadian Pacific as follows:

- CSX- \$10.2 million for siding and capacity related improvements to the west shore "River Line" in Greene and Ulster counties.
- Norfolk Southern- \$2 million for bridge replacement on the Southern Tier bridge near Portageville in Wyoming County.
- Canadian Pacific- \$7 million for intermodal facilities located in the Capital district.
- Binghamton gateway- \$1.5 million to Canadian Pacific, New York Susquehanna and Western and Norfolk Southern for improvements to the Binghamton yards in support of the terminal district as a gateway point for northeast traffic and trade flows.

The program does not call for any spending through the year 2010 for infrastructure in support of routes used by Amtrak trains. Lawmakers did however tap the fund in the coming three years as a funding mechanism to "subsidize" Amtrak's operation of the *Adirondack* between New York City and Montreal for a three year total of \$15 million.

The lack of funding for passenger rail in this announcement underscores the need for groups such as ESPA to work with state and Federal leaders to develop a funding resource for intercity passenger rail development in the Empire State. *Ben Gottfried*

## 2007- 08 ESPA Meeting Dates

Saturday, March 10, 2007	Annual Membership Meeting Schenectady Rensselaer, NY
Saturday, April 21, 2007	Schenectady, NY
Saturday, June 16, 2007	Utica, NY
Saturday, August 4, 2007	Rensselaer, NY
Saturday, September 29, 2007	Schenectady, NY
Saturday, November 17, 2007	Schenectady, NY
Saturday, January 26, 2008	Annual Membership Meeting Schenectady
Saturday, March 15, 2008	Annual Membership Meeting Schenectady

ALL dates and locations are subject to change...Please refer to the ESPA Web Site, [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org), for the most current information!

If you would like to become more active in ESPA, these meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how YOU can make a difference! ALL ESPA members (and other interested persons) are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Bruce Becker, 716-741-6384 or [bbecker@esparail.org](mailto:bbecker@esparail.org), for more information or if you are planning on attending a meeting.

### ESPA MEMBERSHIP - NEW OR RENEWAL

The Empire State Passengers Association is a volunteer network of people working to improve intercity rail, mass transit and bus service in New York State.

- Introductory membership (\$10.00 for one year)
- Renewal membership (\$24.00 per year)
- Renewal - Student or Senior Citizen (\$12.50 per year)
- Family membership (\$30.00)
- Sustaining membership (\$50.00)
- Patron membership (\$75.00)
- Corporate membership (\$100.00)
- Lifetime membership (\$300.00)

Please make checks/money orders payable to ESPA and mail to ESPA c/o Andrew Cabal, P.O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209.

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 716-759-2315. e-mail: [RWLenz@aol.com](mailto:RWLenz@aol.com). Deadline for material for March/April issue is February 28, 2007. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.

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