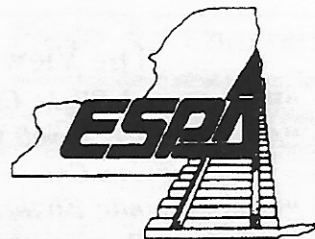


The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

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July/August 2007

West of Albany Schedules Change Abruptly

With little advance notice from CSX, scheduled trackwork on their mainline across Upstate New York has forced Amtrak to revise Empire Corridor schedules effective July 2nd. As much as 45 minutes of extra time was added to most trains (excluding the perennially poor-performing Lake Shore Limited), with eastbound departures at stations from Niagara Falls to Schenectady being earlier than previously published and westbound times being later. Currently it is not known if the previous already heavily-padded schedules will be returned to before the fall general schedule changes. Times from Albany south are not changed from the published June 11 revisions.

With this added time, the slowest New York to Niagara Falls trains now require 10 hours and 5 minutes to cover the route's 460 miles; a dismal average speed of only 46 mph! By contrast according to Mapquest, the same trip could take as little as 7 hours by car.

The new schedules are in the Amtrak computer system and all newly ticketed passengers will be advised of the changes. Previously ticketed passengers will be contacted by Amtrak to ensure they are aware of the earlier departure times.

Bruce B. Becker

New Bills to Affect Rail Passenger Service

The House Transportation and Infrastructure's Railroad Subcommittee has "marked up" two bills that should improve rail service if they become law. HR-2095, the *Federal Railroad Safety Improvement Act*, would rename the Federal Railroad Administration the Federal Railroad Safety Administration and require it to develop a long-term strategy to reduce rail accidents, injuries and fatalities. It would expand staffing and provide agency track inspection vehicles for each federal region.

Perhaps most importantly this bill would require all Class I freight railroads to develop and implement plans to institute positive train control systems by 2015. These would counteract train crew errors such as failure to react to restrictive signals, speed restrictions or a misaligned switch. Priority would be given to routes with passenger service and those transporting hazardous materials. Plans would be subject to federal approval and monitoring.

(Cont'd on page 7)



Schenectady Station Design Presented

Engineering and architectural firm Kise Straw & Kolodner presented a design for Schenectady Amtrak station improvements at a May 17th public community workshop. The design unveiling was the second step in a process, which began last November when Schenectadians were asked to give their opinion on three design options.

(Cont'd on page 7)

Amtrak to Serve Both State and Dutchess County Fairs this Summer

Amtrak will again be making special stops at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse during this year's Fair, scheduled for August 23 through September 3, Labor Day. Most Empire Corridor trains (excluding the Lake Shore Limited and eastbound trains #280/282) will provide service directly to the trackside Fair Entrance Gate. This service is especially convenient for Western New Yorkers, as current schedules provide excellent same day trips to the Fair. Special State Fair Service Discounts will be announced soon. For complete information, contact Amtrak or visit our website, www.esparail.org, for the latest details.

And for the first time, Amtrak is partnering with the Dutchess County Fair, being held in Rhinebeck August 21 – 26, to provide coordinated bus shuttle bus service directly from the Rhinecliff station to the fair grounds. The bus service will be operated by Dutchess County Transit system. This will be an excellent opportunity for New York City residents to enjoy Amtrak's frequent and convenient Hudson Valley Service and visit this extremely popular fair. Special Dutchess Fair Service Discounts are also expected. Information will be available from Amtrak or also on our website.

Bruce B. Becker

The View from the Cab

“Wide Spread Flight Cancellations Reported...”

“Air Passengers Revolt While Trapped On Plane Only Yards From Gate...”

“Trans-Atlantic Flight Operates With No Working Toilets...”

It should come as no surprise that all of these headlines have been actually seen in the news in recent weeks. And while thankfully, Amtrak was not the topic of the related articles for once, they point up the utter failure of our elected government representatives, at all levels, to address the needs of our ever increasingly mobile society.

While Amtrak is carrying record numbers of passengers nationally, outside of the Northeast Corridor, in California and on a few other select routes, this increase in ridership is happening in spite of embarrassingly poor on-time performance, aging equipment and a general lack of resources and capacity to properly run a national rail system.

And with China announcing the construction of new multi-billion dollar high-speed rail lines every few months it seems, we have to ask the question “Where have we gone wrong?”

Clearly the lack of any coherent, unified and adequately funded National Transportation Policy for the US is the root cause. Coupled with an administration seemingly unaware that we have a true transportation crisis looming, we face a potentially very scary future for our country.

As the 2008 Presidential election nears (it appears that by early February we will know who the two major party candidates will be), we as transportation advocates must work hard to make this looming crisis a topic of widespread interest, concern and discussion among the general public. And we must push for the candidate’s commitment to make meaningful investments in rail, their most viable, cost effective and environmentally friendly answer to our relentless and pointed questions on the topic.

So, if there is more negative news from the ‘unfriendly skies’ over the coming summer travel season (which now seems quite likely), it can only help but make our case that we need a long-range and adequately funded National Transportation Policy, with rail as a key component.

As always, I welcome your comments, critiques and suggestions. Don’t hesitate to contact me at anytime.

Bruce B. Becker President

Saratoga Race Season Service

Amtrak will again be offering special Saratoga Race Track Packages this season, with direct service provided from New York City and all other Hudson Valley points every Saturday and Sunday, starting July 28 and running through Labor Day, September 3.

Northbound service will be provided directly to Saratoga Springs on # 71, leaving New York at 7:45am and arriving at Saratoga at 11:15am. Southbound service will be provided from Saratoga Springs on #296 departing at 7:07pm, on both Saturdays and Sundays, with a 10:46pm arrival back in New York. Normally scheduled Train #292 will NOT run on Saturdays during this period.

Race Packages will include round trip Rail, Bus Transfer from the Saratoga Station to the Racetrack, Clubhouse Admission and a Program. Contact Amtrak for reservations, fares and more information...

Bruce B. Becker

Letters to the Editor

Yesterday I took Amtrak from Albany-Rensselaer to NYP to see a Broadway matinee. Trip was okay except for annoying cell phones constantly going off and people chatting about nothing important. Why can’t there be “quiet” cars on Empire Service? Acela has them.

I expect Amtrak will say “quiet cars” are unenforceable, but the no-smoking ban was successful.

As you know, there is no food service on trains below Albany, but Amtrak continues to haul club cars back and forth, now called “business class.” If food is unprofitable, why not put the club cars in storage, or use them on other routes, and have single class (coach) service?

I truly like rail travel and wish it could be better. I continue to be exasperated about service improvements that I think should be obvious, but Amtrak is blind to. Please bring these concerns up with management. Thank you for your efforts in our behalf.

James A. Bailey, ESPA Member

Greetings! Would it be possible, perhaps on an each-issue basis, to include a box with a report on the status of **the double tracking** of the Albany-Schenectady bottleneck. The reason for it dropping from sight is supposedly because of the Amtrak/NYS suit. Is Amtrak actually involved in it? I would think the double tracking would be between NYS and CSX. I cannot imagine anything more important for ESPA to lend itself to if there is to be workable rail travel beyond Albany. Perhaps a regular report on where the hangup is, might attract enough attention to get it done.

Paul Evans

Credit/Debit Cards Now Accepted for ALL On-Board Food and Beverage Purchases

After a success trial program on Acela Express trains, Amtrak has recently introduced new wireless technology terminals on board **ALL** food service cars nationwide and thus is now accepting credit and debit cards for all food and beverage purchases, with instant, real time approvals and receipts. Previously, Amtrak had accepted credit cards only on full service dining cars through the use of a tedious manual imprint system.

With the availability of this improved service technology, Amtrak has however discontinued the acceptance of personal checks on board food service cars. Travelers checks will continue to be accepted on all cars.

From first hand experience on Empire Corridor trains in the past month, the new credit card technology is quick, user friendly and very similar to most restaurants. Purchasers have the opportunity to add a gratuity for their server and they then receive an instantly approved receipt for their records. Amtrak reports that per passenger sales increased during the Acela trial period and indeed my purchases were higher than they might have been if I had been paying cash.

As we heard from Emmett Fremaux at our Annual Meeting, this and other new technology will eventually lead to paperless ticketing systems and improved customer service opportunities for passengers boarding with only reservation numbers at Amtrak’s many unstaffed stations.

Bruce B. Becker

Operation Lifesaver ...Be aware trains Do NOT follow schedules! Any time is train time!

House Sub-Committee Allocates \$1.4 Billion for Amtrak

On June 11th the House Appropriations subcommittee on transportation recommended \$1.4 billion for Amtrak for next year. This would be a \$106 million increase over the current figure, but \$130 million less than Amtrak requested for FY-2008. The subcommittee did recommend \$50 million additional to match state funded passenger rail improvement projects—just a third of what Amtrak suggested, but this does at least respond to the need for federal participation. The match would be 50-50 rather than the 80-20 ratio common for highway projects—but it's still better than the current 0-100.

However the Bush administration has said the President will veto any appropriation greater than his request. Since he offered only \$800 million for Amtrak, the Amtrak recommendation would become one of many expected challenges, as numerous non-military programs will likely get bigger appropriations than the President requested.

While the House has yet to develop authorizing legislation for Amtrak, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's railroad subcommittee has held two hearings on the subject on June 12 and 26. So far they have taken testimony from Amtrak President Alex Kummant, Board Chairman David Laney, National Association of Railroad Passengers Executive Director Ross Capon and New York State Transportation Commissioner Astrid Glynn (see shaded area). Other key witnesses included Wisconsin Transportation Commissioner Frank Busalacci who also chairs the States for Passenger Rail Coalition, and Montana Lieutenant Governor John Bohlinger.

The hearings were kicked off with strong pro passenger rail statements by T&I Chairman James Oberstar (D., Minn.) and Rail Sub-Committee Chair Corrine Brown (D., Fla.). They noted rail's superior energy efficiency, potential to reduce congestion and Amtrak's growing ridership. In her opening statement on June 26th Brown lamented that "We were once the premier country in the world in passenger rail service and now we are dead last behind every other industrialized country. " It was gratifying to finally hear from Committee leadership what ESPA and NARP have been saying for years, instead of obsession about long distance trains and Amtrak's failure to cover its costs.

Oberstar ended his otherwise positive statement with concern about Amtrak's labor negotiations, which have been proceeding slowly, held up mainly by difficulties over back pay. Over 10,000 Amtrak employees have been working under contract extensions since 1999—a point emphasized by a massive demonstration by workers on May 17th.

Additional Amtrak hearings are scheduled for July 11 (on capital needs) and July 26 (labor issues).
Frank Barry

'New York By Rail' 07 Travel Guide Available

The 2007 edition of Amtrak's 'New York By Rail' Travel Guide is now available! Featuring a beautiful fall cover photo of the Hudson Valley, the guide is loaded with information on Amtrak's services and destinations across New York State and is the perfect planning tool for both experienced and first-time rail travelers. New this year is a 16 page 'Pride of New York' insert section, which highlights the rich diversity of New York State's bountiful farm and orchard products.

Get your copy by stopping by your local staffed Amtrak ticket office, on board Empire Corridor trains or by contacting Amtrak by phone or ordering through their web site.

Bruce B. Becker

Commissioner Glynn's Points for Congress

New York State Transportation Commissioner Astrid Glynn testified on June 26 before the Rail Subcommittee of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee regarding legislation to authorize Amtrak funding. Here are some of her points:

*Public policy should steer passenger trips in the 200-500 mile range to intercity rail with connections to other public transportation services. Airlines themselves are beginning to recognize the value of rail connections.

*Rail access is an important part of revitalizing New York's upstate cities. She cited particularly the development planned and underway around the new Rensselaer station.

*Only 2% of federal transportation funding goes to rail—vs. 56% for highways, 24% for air.

*States should have a major role in planning for rail service as they do for highways and transit. "And from New York's perspective we should at least be able to consider alternatives that would allow us the benefits of competition."

*"Any proposed federal income tax credit for Class I freight railroads should be linked to a demonstrated public benefit such as improved on time performance for intercity passenger service."

*The federal government must provide dedicated, sustainable funding for Amtrak "from sources outside the Highway Trust Fund."

Two Freight Railroads Request Public Corridor Funding

Both CSX and Norfolk Southern have recently proposed upgrading their tracks to serve major corridors in the Southeast in response to a federal request last Fall for proposals for "Corridors of the Future". The most dramatic proposal came from CSX, which proposes to triple track its mainline from Washington to Florida and provide for 70MPH freight service and 110MPH passenger service. All grade crossings would be eliminated. CSX would contribute, but public funding would be required.

Norfolk Southern has proposed to upgrade its Crescent Corridor from Washington to New Orleans with a mixture of double track, longer sidings and improved signaling. But there is one key difference. "Improving passenger service is not the point," NS Information Officer Robin Chapman told ESPA. Faster train speeds aren't contemplated either. "We just want to be able to move more freight at current speeds."

Like CSX, NS would invest some of its own funds but would need public funds as well. Will government fund the upgrading of a profitable private freight railroad? "We think they will," Chapman said. He referred to the Heartland Corridor, which he said received \$95 million in federal funds to raise the ceilings of 28 tunnels between Norfolk and Ohio to accommodate double stack trains: "We think getting freight off the highways provides a real public benefit."

US DOT's aim is to select three to five multi-state corridors for federal assistance, and proposals were requested last Fall, to be submitted in April. It remains to be seen how DOT will evaluate competing claims of public benefit, especially when comparing rail proposals with likely highway proposals.
Frank Barry

European Food Technology Benefits Amtrak Passengers

Much has been said in the past year of Amtrak's efforts to improve its dining car food services; both financially and quality wise. And with now over a year of the 'Simplified Dining' program behind us, success is seemingly being made on both fronts.

As a food service professional, I can assure you that every restaurant's goal is to provide consistent meal experiences to their guests; simply stated your meal today should be the same as your meal yesterday and tomorrow. While there are obviously vast differences between restaurant styles, costs and menu prices (we will never compare Amtrak to fine dining), the consistent delivery of meals is the key to success.

With this goal in mind, Amtrak has become one of the foremost transportation based users in the United States of a food technology trend first started in France over 30 years ago. Called 'Sous Vide' (or French for 'under vacuum'), this cooking method is intended to maintain the integrity of ingredients by heating them for an extended period of time at relatively low temperatures. Food is cooked for a long time, sometimes well over 24 hours. But unlike using a slow cooker, sous-vide cooking uses airtight plastic bags placed in hot water well below the boiling point (Usually around 140°F).

The beauty of the system for Amtrak is that the items prepared using the Sous Vide method have a relatively long and stable safe refrigerated or frozen 'shelf' live and require only simple reheating to prepare them for service. As no actual on board cooking is involved in the final preparation, every dish served is consistent. Vegetables and starches also benefit from the process, which allows Amtrak to offer a variety of selections with each entrée. In addition to the elimination of labor intensive on-board raw food preparation and cooking, which has allowed Amtrak to reduce staffing costs, there is less waste as only the necessary amounts of each need to be prepared and fewer food items are 'condemned' (i.e. thrown away) at the end of each run.

Admittedly, the Sous Vide process is not good for items needing crispy coatings or with grilled foods (i.e. steaks), but for braised items it's great. Among my favorites from the current dining car menus are the lamb shank and seared salmon, both excellent examples of sous vide products.

Amtrak's future plans are to expand to 'all-day' dining selections on long distance trains, including offering new appetizer-style casual items. Unfortunately, Amtrak's current fleet of café cars used on short distance routes lack the necessary equipment and space to utilize sous vide products, so microwavable foods will continue to be the core offerings available to passengers on most day trains.

Bruce B. Becker

Data Confirms Amtrak Energy Efficiency

The Oak Ridge National Laboratory, which calculates energy usage under contract with the U.S. Department of Energy, has issued a new report showing that Amtrak's efficiency has improved relative to other modes. Results are shown in British Thermal Units per passenger mile:

	<u>2005</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2001</u>
Amtrak	2709	2800	3257
Domestic Air Flights	3264	3587	3968
Automobiles	3445	3525	3583
Commuter Rail	2743	2545	2515
Rail Transit	2784	2837	2737

As of 2005, Amtrak was more energy efficient than all other modes shown (intercity bus figures, which would have been lower, were not included). Amtrak was 20% more efficient than air and 27% more efficient than cars, its two main competitors. The figures understate Amtrak's advantage since they include energy used to provide food and lodging on board, which of course automobile figures do not.

All three modes have improved since 2001—Amtrak by 16%, air by 17% and cars by 3%. The pressure to improve is likely to grow, and airlines are already working aggressively to do so. Two factors will be especially important to Amtrak: working with freight railroads and the Surface Transportation Board to improve on time performance, and buying new technology. General Electric has just introduced its first hybrid road locomotive. By using batteries to store the energy produced by dynamic braking, this may eventually do for passenger trains what hybrid cars are beginning to do for automobile travel.

Frank Barry

NARP Presents 40 Year Vision

On June 25th the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) celebrated its 40th anniversary by presenting its goal for the next 40 years—a national rail passenger system that makes rail available and viable throughout the U.S. The vision is based on a "Grid and Gateway" network that would serve all 48 contiguous states (Wyoming and South Dakota are not presently served). It would double the current system mileage from 22,000 to 45,000 miles—approximately equal to the present 47,000 mile Interstate Highway System. The NARP plan would add 103 Metropolitan Statistical Areas, Consolidated Metropolitan Statistical Areas and State Capitals to the total of 134 currently served by Amtrak. The Census Bureau has designated 292 such places, including Phoenix, Las Vegas, Nashville and Columbus, Ohio, which now lack rail passenger service but would get it under NARP's plan.

NARP aims to shift the discussion of rail service from having to justify Amtrak's mere existence every year to the urgency of developing rail service to cope with future needs.

"In the near future, road and air congestion, worldwide competition for oil, and growing environmental concerns will make \$4 a gallon gas seem cheap, today's traffic jams modest, and affordable flights a distant memory," said George Chilson, president of NARP. "Modernizing our rail network through a public-private partnership in which the federal government takes the lead is one of the most effective things we can do today to ensure our quality of life tomorrow. The U.S. is falling further behind the rest of the world in building a modern rail system. We know what is coming. We have an obligation to act now before it is too late."

For New York State, the vision would restore service to the Southern Tier—from Buffalo through Elmira and Binghamton to Scranton and New York—and from Scranton to Allentown and Philadelphia.

It will be up to us in New York to do our part to make this happen. (See map at www.narprail.org).

Frank Barry

Bus and Train Service thrive in Maine

4 ½ years after the *Downeaster Amtrak* train began service, demand for both the train and Concord Trailways buses is surging. Ridership on Concord Trailways in Maine is up 54% since 2003. Train ridership increased from 248,000 in 2004 to 293,000 in 2006.

ESPA Takes Action On Utica Mainline

ESPA directors and coordinators met in Schenectady on June 17, 2006 to discuss, among other things, the potential removal of track structure from approximately 60 miles of the Utica mainline, which connects Utica with Binghamton. New York Susquehanna and Western (NYS&W) is advancing plans to salvage the line and has advised stakeholders in Chenango County and elsewhere of the potential loss. Senator Charles Schumer jumped into the advocacy to preserve the rail line with a June 20, 2007 written request to the Railroad to allow public officials the necessary time to prepare a plan to purchase the property from NYS&W.

An ESPA resolution was the result of a discussion of the potential for the Utica Mainline to provide a passenger rail option to connect Binghamton and Utica and its value as a through connecting route for both freight and passenger service. The resolution: "ESPA supports the restoration of through service and repair of the Utica Mainline. Furthermore, ESPA urges stakeholders in the Utica Mainline to come to a long term solution to preserving rail service on this important rail route". ESPA will follow up the resolution with a letter to NYSDOT Commissioner Astrid Glynn stating our position that abandonment of this section of track is both unacceptable and avoidable. NYSDOT and NYS&W have worked cooperatively to improve the infrastructure on the line as a part of the economic development strategy to offer a railroad option for central New York. We see no reason to terminate that effort.

Senator Schumer and Chenango County Chamber of Commerce president Maureen Carpenter are asking for time to review the proposal to remove the rails and develop an alternative to the loss of the line. Ms Carpenter is moving forward with plans to preserve the route as affected communities along the line have expressed support to preserve the railway option. Plans to convert the railroad into a rail trail have already been discussed. An article published in the *Oneonta Daily Star* reported that both State Senators Jim Seward and Tom Libous were working to secure funding to convert Chenango County's tracks to hiking trails under the rails-to-trails program.

Mr. Schumer has gone on record to oppose the removal of the rails. The *Norwich Evening Sun* of June 20, 2007 quotes the Senator. "This railway could be a boon to both tourism and economic development across Chenango County, and local leaders will be missing a golden opportunity if they aren't given the necessary time to properly formulate a plan to acquire it," said Senator Schumer. "Today I'm calling on the railway's current owner to hit the brakes when it comes to terminating the railway, giving local residents a fair chance to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse."

ESPA will continue to move forward on this important issue and support the continuation of a rail service option on this important piece of our transportation network. *Ben Gottfried*

"This railway could be a boon to both tourism and economic development across Chenango County, and local leaders will be missing a golden opportunity if they aren't given the necessary time to properly formulate a plan to acquire it," said Senator Schumer. "Today I'm calling on the railway's current owner to hit the brakes when it comes to terminating the railway, giving local residents a fair chance to turn a sow's ear into a silk purse."



Cortland Passenger Study

Cortland New York is the focus of a new passenger rail study proposal to use the New York Susquehanna and Western railroad in tourism development for train service to Binghamton. SUNY Cortland's Recreation and Leisure Studies Department will launch the \$50,000 study in September to explore whether reviving passenger service along a 44-mile stretch of NYS&W rail corridor in Central New York would be economically viable. The passenger rail study was funded by a grant from State Senator Thomas W. Libous, a Republican from Binghamton who chairs the Senate Transportation Committee.

The rail line is used for the annual Marathon Maple Festival in March and this study is an effort to examine if expanded use of the line for special trips is feasible. The study will explore passenger service options to three other special events each year: the Cortland Pumpkin Festival, the Spiedie Fest in Binghamton and a Binghamton Mets Baseball game. The study will also look at recreational use of the railroad to access the Tioughnioga River for fishing or boating.

"A lot of people canoe and kayak in the Tioughnioga River," according to Sharon L. Todd, associate professor of recreation and leisure studies, who will work on the study. "That might be a possibility to explore other ways that the train could tie into recreation and tourism."

This study is another example of renewed interest in the I-81/NYS&W corridor in New York. Hopefully the study will lead to larger questions regarding the passenger potential of this emerging rail corridor. Read more on the study at the SUNY Cortland website at: www.cortland.edu. 6-25-07 SUNY press release, Ben Gottfried

Point of View

Road Pricing — Essential to Fund Rail Transit in NYC and Throughout NY State

ESPA members are urged to pay particularly close attention to the continuing debate about Manhattan Central Business District (CBD) cordon tolls being advanced by NYC's Mayor Michael Bloomberg. This dense business center, the nation's largest, owes its very existence to the intense network of subway and commuter rail lines that bring hundreds of thousands of workers to the core in the peak hour. Even with this rail system, roads leading to the core are catastrophically congested. Modeled after the successful cordon road pricing plan that imposes a \$16 fee for each private car entering Central London, NYC's plan would not only reduce car use and speed traffic flow, but would provide a much needed funding source to improve the region's rail system.

Though some fine-tuning of details are needed, the overall plan provides an important blueprint for transportation reform in NYC and NY State. It has gained widespread support from most of the state's leading environmental advocates. These same interests can be expected to support a similar initiative for improvement of statewide intercity rail passenger services, but it is important for ESPA and its members to cultivate a partnership to gain this support. The Mayor's cordon pricing plan may be brought up in a special session of the State Legislature later this month and it would be important for ESPA to show its backing of this plan. Also ESPA could articulate a parallel initiative for using tolls generated by the NY State Thruway Authority to fund investments in the Empire Corridor, which provides a high capacity rail freight and passenger relief corridor for the ever-growing numbers of cars and trucks that are clogging up this vital facility.

George Haikalis

Advocates Join Forces to Advance Thru-Running at Penn Station, NY

Regional Rail advocates from Connecticut joined their New York and New Jersey counterparts to call for a cooperative approach to advance rail projects that enhance mobility in the three state metropolitan area. The centerpiece of this effort was the Regional Rail exhibit, funded in part by ESPA, which outlines a plan for remaking the commuter rail lines serving the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area into a Regional Rail system with frequent service, integrated fares and thru-running. The exhibit was on display in the lobby of the Stamford Government Center from late May through June and was featured at a reception/presentation on June 20, 2007. By coincidence a few days before the reception, Connecticut Governor Rell asked ConnDOT to explore rail equipment options that would be capable of thru-running to New Jersey by way of Penn Station, NY.

The plan and exhibit were developed by the Regional Rail Working Group (RRWG), an informal collaboration of rail advocates from the three states. RRWG meets monthly in Manhattan. All ESPA members interested in advancing this concept are urged to participate, either by attending monthly meetings or in some other manner. With Connecticut activists interested in participating, a new location and time will be considered. If you are interested please call or e-mail RRWG Chair and ESPA Manhattan Coordinator for Regional Rail George Haikalis at 212-475-3394 or geo@irum.org or visit the group's website at www.rrwg.org. To see the exhibit online go to www.irum.org. *George Haikalis President, Institute for Rational Urban Mobility, Inc. One Washington Square Village, Suite 5D, New York, NY 10012* geo@irum www.irum.org

Metro-North Looking West

Metro-North Railroad is continuing with its efforts to better serve its customers west of the Hudson River with new Intermodal connects by land, sea (or river) and air. Expansion of service for commuters and discretionary travelers from Ulster County is becoming a reality with a new deal to provide dedicated bus connections to Metro-North trains at Poughkeepsie. Additionally progress is being made on plans to introduce a new rail connection with Stewart Airport while the Newburgh-Beacon ferry service continues to be a popular travel choice.

On June 20, 2007 the Poughkeepsie-Dutchess Municipal Planning Organization approved a Metro-North request for \$1 million in Federal CMAQ money to operate an Ulster feeder bus service to connect with trains on the Hudson line. The money will become available in October of 2007. Metro-North Spokesperson Marjorie Anders points out to ESPA "we also have support from The Dutchess-Orange-Ulster Transportation Management Association, which has approved the expenditure of \$700,000 in federal capital money to purchase buses". The commuter rail authority had begun the process of outreach with a questionnaire survey last year to Ulster County residents asking for their input on a proposed plan to offer the service using the Intermodal bus connection outlined here.

On the nautical side of the equation Ms. Anders goes on to point out that the Newburgh Beacon ferry service instituted in October of 2005 continues to be a success with patrons on the west side of the Hudson. About 400 daily riders use the ferry to begin and end their daily commute. In a new ferry service deal the City of Newburgh has contracted with a ferry operator for week-end tourist service, from the city dock to another dock in Beacon.

New York's Stewart Airport is also on the list of upcoming transportation priorities for Metro-North. The Feasibility Study of improving transit access to Stewart Airport was completed in December of 2003. MNR will begin an alternatives analysis and Environmental Impact Statement later this year pending identification of funding resources for the study. Stewart Airport is growing in popularity as a Downstate airport with available capacity for needed expansion of air service for the metropolitan region. A rail connection to the airport via the New Jersey Transit/Metro-North Port Jervis line would be a major accomplishment in intermodal planning and attraction for expanded air service.

Metro-North continues to be a leader in looking for ways to expand their customer base as Metro-North carries an impressive 85 percent of all people from the northern suburbs who are going to jobs in Manhattan via their rail network. *Ben Gottfried*

Empire Corridor Travel Tips & Discounts

- All Empire Corridor trains require reservations. While advance reservations are encouraged, last minute passengers will always be accommodated if space is available. Book early for the best possible fare.
- AAA and NARP members receive 10% off most regular fares, with a three-day advance purchase requirement.
- Visit www.amtrak.com and select 'Hot Deals' for the latest discount program information.
- Join the Amtrak Guest Rewards program.

NJT Looks for Dual Mode Power

NJTransit has teamed up with the Montreal transit system to issue a request for proposals to design and build a dual power locomotive that can run with diesel fuel or high voltage alternating current from overhead catenary. Dual power locomotives were introduced on the New Haven Railroad in the 1950's and are used by Metro-North, Long Island and Amtrak today, but all take low voltage direct current from the third rail. No one has attempted to combine in one locomotive a full-scale diesel engine and generator with the transformer and other electrical equipment required for a high voltage AC locomotive. Proposals are due by July 20.

Both NJ Transit and Montreal's transit agency are contemplating new routes that will have non-electrified sections but require electric operation to get through lengthy tunnels. NJ Transit now requires passengers from the non-electrified portion of the North Jersey Coast line to change to electric trains to Penn Station at Long Branch (formerly engines were changed at South Amboy). And passengers from the Boonton Line to Penn Station must change to electric trains in Montclair or Newark. The new tunnels planned to be built under the Hudson will increase capacity for trains to Manhattan, and through trains will be desired for other non-electrified lines now being proposed.

The availability of this type of dual power could enable through service from Scranton and Binghamton to Penn Station instead of Hoboken if and when this service is restored.

Frank Barry, from Railway Age, courtesy Orin Getz

New Bills (Cont'd from page 1)

Other provisions aim to improve grade crossing safety, address employee fatigue and improve response to accidents that do occur. In the first major revision of hours of work in more than thirty years, the legislation would require ten hours of rest between 12-hour shifts (rather than 8 under some circumstances) and would, for the first time, guarantee one 24-hour day off every week.

HR-2701, the *Transportation Energy Security and Climate Change Mitigation Act*, would target transportation and building design. It would authorize \$850 million annually for both FY2008 and 2009 to allow transit agencies to reduce fares or expand services, which would presumably draw more riders from cars. It would also allow for arbitration by the Surface Transportation Board when a commuter operator and freight railroad cannot agree on terms for operation of commuter trains on freight railroad tracks.

HR-2701 would also authorize \$50 million annually for grants to railroads to buy green locomotives that exceed Environmental Protection Agency standards or rebuild existing locomotives to meet these standards. Finally, HR-2701 would authorize grants to regional and shortline freight railroads to upgrade tracks for 286,000 lb cars that have become standard for Class I freight railroads. This could improve Amtrak service on the *Ethan Allen* if the Vermont Railway receives a grant for its track between Whitehall and Rutland. It might even improve the ride on Adirondack Railroad trains between Utica and Remsen on tracks used by the Mohawk, Adirondack and Northern if a grant is awarded for that stretch.

Frank Barry

Schenectady Station (Cont'd from page 1)

The design offered is 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. At State Street, a new bus stop connects travelers to

the Capital District Transportation Authority's four-county service. This design was favored by the vast majority of citizens attending last November's meeting.

The current Amtrak station is built on a portion of the former 1906 Schenectady Union Station site owned by the New York Central Railroad and also used by the Delaware & Hudson Railroad. That station was torn down in 1972. The current station host's twelve trains daily.

Architectural elements of the new station reflect many of the design characteristics of the demolished station including arched glass windows and street side canopy.

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 train 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.

The project enjoys wide public support through a project advisory committee, which includes the NYS Transportation Department, Amtrak, the Schenectady County Chamber of Commerce, the City of Schenectady and Metroplex – a County level economic development agency.

The consultant firm said it would proceed to the final design stage and work on required environmental and permit procedures. It is expected that the first step in the project will be improvements to the railroad viaduct, which carries trains past the station.

Tony Rudmann

Amtrak - Lionel Essay Contest

Children ages 12 and under have an opportunity until August 31st to win one of 15 model train sets in an essay contest co-sponsored by Amtrak and Lionel, one of the world's leading model train makers.

The contest asks kids to describe what they like best about riding Amtrak. Winners will be judged on content and originality by a panel of Amtrak judges.

Fourteen lucky first-prize winners will receive a "New York Central Flyer" train set which includes a steam engine with puffing-smoke, operating headlight, steam whistle and bell. In addition, the set includes three freight cars, a caboose, twelve track sections and power transformer.

One grand prize winner will receive a "Santa Fe El Capitan" train set which includes a diesel engine with operating head light and cab interior as well as diesel horn and bell. In addition, the set includes two illuminated coach cars, a lighted observation car, twelve track sections and power transformer.

Contest entry forms will be available onboard 43 Amtrak routes throughout the country including the *Adirondack*, *Ethan Allen Express*, *Maple Leaf*, *Lake Shore Limited* and other Empire Service trains.

This is the 8th summer Amtrak and Lionel have partnered in the "Kid's Essay Contest".

Construction of nine miles of second track

The North Carolina DOT launched construction of nine miles of second track between Greensboro, NC and High Point NC. Work was expected to cost approximately \$20 million and be completed in approximately 18 months. (Ed. – if only we could do this on the Albany to Schenectady single track section.)

'TRAILS & RAILS' PROGRAM EXPANDS WEST

For the first time ever, Amtrak's is partnering with the National Park Service to offer its popular 'Trails & Rails' educational programs on trains running west of Albany.

On most weekend days over the coming months, Park Service volunteers will be riding the *Maple Leaf*, train #63, between Albany and Syracuse, providing commentary and information on the rich cultural history of the Mohawk Valley and Central New York. With Amtrak's route closely following the original route of the Erie Canal, the guides will also be focusing on noting the importance of this pioneering transportation system in the development of the country.

The 'Trails & Rails' program also is offered on the Adirondack on weekends, with guides focusing on the Hudson Valley and Champlain regions of the route.

The 'Trails & Rail' program is now also on available on week-days for pre-arranged groups on both routes. Inquiries about this service should be directed to Amtrak's New York State Marketing Director Bill Hollister at 518-462-5760. *Bruce B. Becker*

2007-08 ESPA Meeting Dates

Saturday, August 4, 2007	Utica, NY - Trakside Tavern
Saturday, Sept. 29, 2007	Rensselaer, NY - Rudy's Italian Restaurant
Saturday, Nov. 17, 2007	Schenectady, NY - The Parker Inn
Saturday, January 26, 2008	Schenectady, NY - The Parker Inn
Saturday, March 15, 2008	Annual Membership Meeting – Schenectady Holiday Inn

ALL dates and locations are subject to change...Please refer to the ESPA Web Site, 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, for more information or if you are planning to attend a meeting.

New York State Ridership Still Down West of Albany, Up Elsewhere

Service disruptions due primarily to poor on time performance from CSX continue to cause ridership reductions along the western *Empire Corridor* (down 8% from April '06; down 7% from Oct.-Apr. '06), and *Lake Shore Limited* route (down 5% from April '06; down 10% from Oct.-Apr. '06). This goes against the continued nationwide trend for Amtrak that shows a 5% Oct.-Apr. '07 system ridership gain, and gains in all three types of services offered.

North of Albany, ridership rose in April on the *Adirondack* to Montreal by 11% and on the *Ethan Allen* to Rutland by 5%. Also for that month, gains of 3% were reported on the *Empire Corridor* south of Albany to New York City. *Andy Cabal*

The Depot Theatre

The 2007 Season at the Depot Theatre in Westport N.Y. features: *Moonlight and Magnolias*, *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, *Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks* and *The Memory of Water*, highlight the 2007 season.

The Depot Theatre is located in the Westport N.Y. Amtrak station and is easily reached by Amtrak's *Adirondack*. www.depottheatre.org 518-962-4449

Adirondack Scenic Railroad

The 2007 summer schedule including special events on the Adirondack RR is available at 1-800-819-2291 or at www.AdirondackRail.com Volunteers are welcome to answer the phone, car host, gift shop sales, and operating personal such as engineer, conductors and trainperson

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.
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