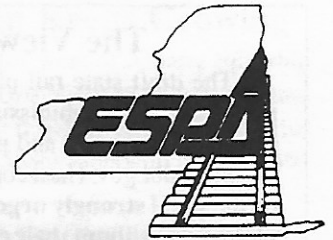


The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 32, No. 4

July/August 2008

House Passes Amtrak Re-Authorization

By a veto-proof margin of 311-104, the House of Representatives on June 11 passed HR 6003, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (i.e. Amtrak's re-authorization). The bill now goes to a conference committee to reconcile differences with the Senate counterpart, S. 294, which was passed earlier in the session, also with a veto-proof majority. President Bush has issued veto threats against both versions.

Both versions of the re-authorization bill set a new federal precedent by endorsing an 80/20 federal/local match requirement for future intercity rail improvements. If ultimately enacted, this will be the first time in Amtrak's 37-year history that rail will be treated equally with the other major transportation modes.

All of New York's Congressional delegation voted in favor of the final bill (with the exception of Kirsten Gillibrand, R-20th District, who did not vote). ESPA applauds this unanimous pro-Amtrak voting record and thanks the House members from both sides of the aisle for their ongoing support of Amtrak.

The first step in the Fiscal 2009 Amtrak appropriations process has also now taken place. The House Appropriations Committee's Subcommittee on Transportation and Housing and Urban Development approved \$1.439 billion for Amtrak on June 20th. This is a slight increase over current funding, but \$346 million (19%) lower than Amtrak's request of \$1.785 billion. The legislation does propose \$475 million for operational support, and \$850 million for capital grants and debt service. Importantly, it does include \$114 million to meet the back pay recommendations of the Presidential Emergency Board and subsequent labor contract agreements. The full committee is now scheduled to take up the legislation after the July 4 recess. Consideration by the full House and any Senate action has not yet been scheduled.

Bruce B. Becker

Amtrak to Study I-81 Rail Corridor

The New York-Pennsylvania I-81 Rail Corridor Committee had a very productive meeting on May 22, 2008. The committee was joined by Amtrak and NYSDOT officials to discuss the scoping of the Amtrak involvement in intercity rail service through the Binghamton gateway. Press coverage of the event included television reports on WBNG and WIVT which highlighted the significance of the event and the involvement of Amtrak with the corridor. Committee members Larry Malski of the Northeast Pennsylvania Regional Rail authority and Steven Gayle of the Binghamton Metropolitan Transportation study were interviewed for the on air segments.

Attending were Karen Rae along with Charles Poltenson via conference call while Ron Thaniel, Director, Amtrak Government Affairs, drove up to attend in person. In all, 17 people attended the meeting with our usual representation of political leaders, economic development, planning and

(Cont'd on page 6)



NYS State Fair Service - see page 5

Draft State Rail Released

On June 13, NYSDOT released the draft state rail plan, which has been in development since December 2007. The over 160 page document can be viewed and downloaded at the NYSDOT web site; www.nysdot.gov. Printed copies can be ordered on the web site also.

The release has started a required 30-day public comment period, which has been highlighted by NYSDOT's holding of three public workshop forums across the state. The first, held in Buffalo, was attended by over 50 interested persons (both industry connected and the general public). ESPA was represented there by Bruce Becker, Bob Lenz and Dave Skoney. The following week a similar workshop session was held in Binghamton, where ESPA's Ben Gottfried and Frank Barry represented the Association's interests. The final public meeting was held in NYC on July 10.

The public comment period runs through July 18 and individual comments may be submitted in writing to NYSDOT or via their web site.

While the draft plan is rather short on specifics, Assistant Commissioner Karen Rae has been quick to highlight that the Department is most interested in public input and that the final plan will be a very comprehensive blueprint for future improvements and enhancements, both for passenger and freight. NYSDOT's current objective to have a final plan completed and approved by the end of the year.

Reportedly, Governor Paterson has taken a significant interest in the development of the rail plan and he has focused increased attention in the plan on the positive impact rail can play in reducing the state's level of energy consumption and the environmental benefits of rail.

Broad passenger related goals outlined in the draft, to be accomplished in the next 12 years (i.e. by 2020), include:

- Doubling intercity rail ridership.
- 2 hour service New York to Albany; 4 hour service Albany to Buffalo; 6 ½ hour service Albany to Montreal.
- Achieving 90% on time performance.
- Expanding service where there is market demand, including service New York to Binghamton and commuter service Saratoga to Albany and Niagara Falls to Buffalo.

(Cont'd on page 5)

The View from the Cab

The draft state rail plan is now out and the period for public comment submission runs through July 18. The draft plan can be viewed and printed at the NYSDOT web site; www.nysdot.gov. Hard copies of the plan can also be ordered on the site. **I strongly urge all ESPA members to review the plan and to submit their comments.**

I remain hopeful that, when completed, the final plan will provide the foundation for a passenger rail renaissance in New York State. Certainly the recent overwhelming passage in the House of the Amtrak re-authorization bill should help provide the Federal policy and funding that will be necessary in the years to come if this is to occur.

The recent decision by State Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno to retire is disappointing news for rail advocates. Senator Bruno carried the torch of high speed rail for the state for many years by championing and funding the State Senate Task Force on High Speed Rail. The Task Force's report of January 2006 remains as the clearest current vision of where we should be headed. I thank Senator Bruno for his leadership and I hope he will stay interested and influential in passenger improvements in the coming years.

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

Rail Related Photo Exhibits Scheduled

Two exhibits of rail related photos are scheduled in Upstate New York over the next several months.

At the Cornell Art Museum in Ithaca, NY, an exhibit '**Remembering Steam Locomotives: Photographs by Frank Barry**' (a former ESPA President) is on display now through August 17. For over forty years, Frank has traveled all over the world photographing the demise of the steam locomotive, a conveyance that Barry clearly appreciates. This exhibition highlights approximately twenty-five works from his personal archive. Frank is also currently working on the publishing of a book containing many of his photos of Mexican steam operations in the '60's. For more information visit www.museum.cornell.edu

At the world-renowned George Eastman House in Rochester, NY, the original steam photos of **O. Winston Link** will be the centerpiece of a major exhibition and series of rail-related events, all starting in mid-October and running through January 2009. ESPA is on the Advisory Committee for this significant show, which will be a great opportunity for ESPA to promote passenger rail in the 'Flower City' and Genesee Valley region. Amtrak and CSX are both major sponsors of the show and Amtrak will be offering special travel discounts for those coming to Rochester by rail. Program and event information will be available soon.

National Train Day at Penn Station - NY

ESPA and NARP members from New York and New Jersey joined forces to promote the virtues of trains at Amtrak's first annual National Train Day on May 10th. Volunteers from both groups staffed a table with membership information, newsletters, rail magazines and fact sheets on why trains matter. NARP Region 2 Board members Lou Hoppe and George Haikalis each spent over 4 hours at the table with assistance from NARP Region 3 Board

member Joe Versaggi of New Jersey.

Amtrak scheduled over five hours of events at Penn Station-NY to call attention to the importance of trains in providing mobility for millions of Americans every year. ESPA gave away information to over 300 people and signed up several new members. We answered questions about train service in New York and urged people to write or call their Congressional representatives in support of adequate Amtrak funding.

ESPA members Steve Strauss, Chris Nadelbach and Stan Kozaczka also helped out at the table. NARP supported similar tables at Amtrak stations across the country. *Steve Strauss*

On-Time Rates Now Available by Train No.

Amtrak has added an interesting feature to its www.amtrak.com website. Near the bottom center of the home page, one can click on "Historical On-Time Performance". Then, on the next webpage, one can drill down and view the on-time performance of any particular train in the Amtrak System. Data is provided for the past month and also for the past 12 months. One must consider the information carefully, as some trains operate just 1 or 2 days a week, so a month of data may only be 4 or 8 rail trips. For example, Train 288, the Sunday only train from Niagara Falls to NY had a 25% on-time rate for May, but that means it was late 3 of 4 trips during that month. Its 68% on-time figure for the past 12 months provides a better picture of this train's one day a week operation. The westbound *Lake Shore* (Train 49) had a 45% on-time rate for May and 43% for the past 12 months while the eastbound (Train 48) had a 68% on-time rate for May and 66% for the past 12 months. The northbound *Adirondack* (Train 69) was on-time 61% in May and 52% for the past 12 months while the southbound *Adirondack* (Train 68) ran on-time 81% in May and 62% for the past months. (The recent increase is likely due to the extra 45 minutes added to this train's schedule from Schenectady to New York). The westbound Toronto *Maple Leaf* (Train 63) was on-time 32% of the time for May and 42% for the past 12 months while its eastbound counterpart (Train 64) was on-time 65% in May and 57% for the past 12 months.

The Empire Corridor trains that start and end in Niagara Falls, ran between 42% and 59% on-time for the past year, except for Train 284 (67%) and Train 288 (68%). The average on-time rate for west of Albany service was about 50% for the past year.

For the Empire Corridor trains that start and end in Albany (Empire south), a much better on-time rate exists. In fact, the worst train was No. 237 (4:40pm from NYP to Albany) with a 68% on time rate for the past year. The top four trains on the Empire Corridor are No. 261 (Weekends only, 11:45pm from NYP to Albany) with an on-time rate of 97% and Train 259 (Weekends only 9:20pm from NYP to Albany) at 96% and Train 232 (Weekday 6:20am from Albany to NYP) with a 95% on-time rate over the past year. In fact, of trains that operate most days, Train 232 is the only train on the Empire Corridor to be on-time 100% of the time during May 2008. Of trains that start and end in Albany, the overall on-time rate was a respectable 85% for the past year. The worst on-time figure for the Empire Corridor was the Friday-only Train 293, with just a 32% on-time arrival in Rutland over the past year. Overall, the *Ethan Allen* was on-time just 42% of the time during the past year, but 52% on-time for May 2008

A breakdown of cause of delays is shown for each train and each corridor. On-time is defined as within 10 minutes on routes less than 250 miles (Albany to NY), but up to 30 minutes is considered on time for long distance routes of more than 550 miles.

Gary Prophet

Binghamton Rail Plan Meeting Report

The NYSDOT held a meeting on June 24, 2008 in Binghamton regarding the new State rail plan. The meeting proved to be an interesting event where new ideas and input were being sought for the plan in a non traditional fashion. The process involved small group discussions on narrowly focused points in the plan. This forced attendees to think about topics and aspects in the plan which might be outside their respective interest area and personal agendas. The invited guests included representatives from a wide array of interest groups including but not limited to economic development officials, planners, railroads and ESPA.

The event was hosted by NYSDOT Deputy Commissioner Karen Rae, who is spearheading the process to develop a new and much needed rail plan for the State. Ms Rae took the time to thank representatives Dan Lamb from Maurice Hinchey's office, and Bob Messinger of Mike Arcuri's office, for attending the meeting. At several points in the meeting Ms. Rae also thanked ESPA for its leadership and guidance in preparing the draft version of the plan. Jack Williams, NYSDOT regional 9 Director and numerous other speakers noted the enthusiasm and need for passenger rail service to Binghamton as a top priority. The facilitator also noted the "buzz" in the room for a Binghamton passenger service which connects with Albany, Syracuse and New York City.

The biggest problem noted by all concerned was money. Karen Rae and all those in attendance are well aware of the fact that the best laid plans are nothing without project dollars to actually get something done. To that end the new State rail plan is required by Federal entities for rail projects to be eligible for federal funding resources, so creation of the new plan is an essential first step in the highly competitive process. The I-81 corridor is not identified in the plan as an emerging rail corridor, but some mention is made of returning passenger rail service as far as Binghamton, though not in a comprehensive way.

The Department expects many changes to be made to this draft version of the plan. Hopefully with some guidance from the New York-Pennsylvania I-81 Rail Corridor Committee it can be assured that the I-81 travel and trade corridor receives adequate attention and scope in the new plan to put the corridor in line for future funding opportunities.

Ben Gottfried

Hudson Valley Track Work Starts In July

CSX will be starting a major tie renewal and surfacing program in the mid-Hudson Valley in early July. Ties are slated to be replaced on both main tracks from just north of Poughkeepsie to south of Rhinecliff. The work plan calls for the customary northbound track to be taken out of service first, with the southbound track to be completed after this. Alternating single-track operation will be required during this project and Amtrak passengers should expect delays of up to 30 minutes during this multi-week improvement effort.

Following the completion of the CSX project, Metro-North will be rehabilitating the CP 75 interlocking, located north of the Poughkeepsie station. This project will limit operational flexibility at this location and some additional delays may occur to both Metro-North and Amtrak trains.

West of Albany Ridership Keeps Growing

May was another banner month for west of Albany ridership and revenue, with increases on the two Niagara Falls trains and the *Maple Leaf* of 30.5% and 35.4% respectively, over the prior year. FY 2008 year-to-date west of Albany ridership is up 21.3%, with revenue up 32.0%

The other New York State services also all enjoyed gains, with the *Adirondack's* ridership up 4.7% and revenue up 2.3%; the *Lake Shore* was up 8.9% and 16.1% respectively and the *Ethan Allen* was up 12.7% and 22.1%. The Hudson Valley trains had modest increases of 4.2% and 6.9%.

Amtrak's fixed five-car consists on the Empire Corridor are likely to constrain these record increases over the coming summer months. With many trains now selling out days in advance, seats will just not be available to handle the expected continued increase in demand, in spite of poor on-time performance and high fares.

And in a bid to capture some of the Toronto – Buffalo – New York City travel market, two new express bus services have been started. Megabus currently offers two trips per day from Toronto to New York, with stops in Buffalo and limited service to Binghamton. Meanwhile, Greyhound and Trailways have started NEON, offering two direct Toronto – New York runs per day. Both services advertise fares as low as \$1 each way, but in reality most actual fares are much higher. While both services are faster than Amtrak, they do not offer on-board food and beverage or ability to move around offered by Amtrak.

Bruce B. Becker

2008 New York By Rail Guide Now Available

The 2008 edition of Amtrak's *New York By Rail* Travel Guide is now available! Featuring a beautiful stylized cover photo of Amtrak in the Hudson Valley, the guide's over 120 pages are 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 30-page Hudson Valley route guide, providing detailed information on the many historical sights which can be seen from the trains. Also featured this year is a 24-page 'Pride of New York' insert section, highlighting the rich diversity of New York State's bountiful farm and orchard products.

Amtrak's new partnership with Enterprise Rent-A-Car is prominently featured. Enterprise now provides rent-a-car services at all New York State Amtrak destinations, including free pick-up and drop-off between the station and their local rental office. Special 'New York by Rail' rental discounts are also available by referencing account # 'NYRAIL1' and pin # 'AMT' when making car reservations.

In addition, Amtrak's 20% off 'I Love New York' travel discount (as highlighted in this year's issue) is also being prominently displayed on the state's tourism web site this summer. In conjunction with the Enterprise partnership, Amtrak is listed as 'THE' way to get to vacation destinations across the state.

Get your printed 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. The guide can also be downloaded at www.escapemaker.com.

Bruce B. Becker

Governor Paterson Appoints 13-Member Commission on MTA Financing

On June 10, 2008 Governor Paterson announced the names of the 12 prominent New Yorkers who will join Richard Ravitch on a special advisory commission to deal with MTA's growing financial crisis. The commission will propose new funding measures such as additional tax sources, toll and fare "adjustments", congestion pricing and initiatives to make MTA more efficient.

This commission will have an important impact on guiding transport policy in the NYC Metropolitan area, which encompasses two thirds of the states population and the lion's share of its transit ridership.

George Haikalis

Regional Rail advocates ask Support for a Better Hudson River Rail Tunnel Plan

NARP President George Chilson, NARP Executive Director Ross Capon and ESPA Manhattan Coordinator George Haikalis made their case for connecting NJ Transit's rail tunnel directly into Penn Station, rather than into a separate Deep Cavern station under 34th Street in Manhattan. In back-to-back meetings with Federal Railroad Administrator Joseph Boardman and Federal Transit Administrator James Simpson in their Washington offices on April 28, 2008 rail advocates received a warm welcome as they made their case for regional and interstate cooperation in advancing the tunnel project. On June 16, 2008, at Simpson's request, Haikalis returned to Washington to make the case before the entire FTA senior staff. Amtrak apparently is also anxious to see this direct track connection, which would give it access to the two new rail tubes as well as the two existing ones.

During the earlier planning phase of the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) tunnel project MTA was a full partner, along with the Port Authority and NJ Transit. The ARC studies found that bringing the new tunnel directly into existing tracks and platforms at Penn Station and then continuing on to Grand Central Terminal would cost less to build and operate and would attract more passengers and divert more motorists than the Deep Cavern, dead-end plan. The direct track connection into Penn Station, proposed last year by NJ Transit, and then scuttled this year, would be the first step in the Penn Station-Grand Central connection — the mother of all train station connections. Direct regional rail train service through the existing Penn Station tunnels would be an important precursor to the full plan. MTA Executive Director Elliot Sander has called for "interoperability" as a worthwhile near term measure, starting with football specials from Connecticut to New Jersey. Rail advocates asked Simpson to fund a demonstration project with full weekday and weekend service, as a measure to reduce congestion and save gas.

In 2003, Governor George Pataki withdrew from the ARC effort, forcing NJ Transit to go it alone. Rail advocates reminded Boardman and Simpson that the Federal government has a constitutional obligation to foster "interstate commerce", and that NJ Transit's request for three billion dollars of Federal "new starts" transport funding should come with a "string attached" — that the two states must come up with a mutually beneficial plan. While Boardman and Simpson listened sympathetically, the ball is still in New York Governor David Paterson's court. Without his enthusiastic support a sensible interstate rail plan cannot be advanced.

George Haikalis

MTA Board Members Pushed to Give Up Free Riding and Driving

NYS Attorney General Andrew Cuomo energized a controversy on May 27 when he issued a letter that said MTA should "immediately terminate and rescind all free E-ZPass tags" and other free passes to board members, calling them "illegal compensation". NYS law says that people who serve on public boards shouldn't be compensated. MTA board Vice Chairman David S. Mack reacted by saying "Why should I ride (the train) and inconvenience myself when I can ride in my car?" Newsday reacted with the following in an editorial on June 23.

"If you're in the mood for a little class warfare, this story has it all. On this side, the board: Well-heeled, mostly white members, some of whom want freebies to be induced to ride the public transit system they govern. And over here, the riders: Working-class people dependent on the trains and buses, feeling pinched when the board votes to raise fares rather than cut an arguably bloated bureaucracy. Such are the divides at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

"The MTA board needs to descend from its privileged heights. Board Vice Chairman David Mack gave voice to the class divide last week, questioning why he should pay to take the trains and subways when he could just as well ride in a car. Mack apologized, but other board members support his original sentiment.

"It's a status symbol to serve on this board, and with that cachet comes a duty to ride the system - if for no other reason than as a sort of homework assignment. How else can members be informed enough to vote on budgets and capital plans?"

On June 25, reacting to public pressure, the MTA Board voted 12-0 to replace the existing policy of a free ride for life on trains, roads and all MTA facilities with passes for active board members on board business only. After the meeting, the board insisted that it had done nothing wrong or illegal.

John Raha

More Riders Taking LIRR from New York to Resorts on the East End

LIRR between New York City and the Hamptons had increased boardings this Memorial Day weekend compared to 2007. This year, 44,618 passengers left Penn Station or Jamaica on eastbound trains on Friday, May 23, up 12 percent from the 39,849 who took the train in 2007. LIRR reported that ridership between New York City and the Hamptons in April was up 10 percent from the same month in 2007. "There is no question that the increase in gas prices has contributed to an increase in ridership," an LIRR spokesman said.

From The NY Observer - John Raha

Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

Amtrak's Empire District Superintendent Tom Connolly wants to hear of your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Tom 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: Thomas Connolly, District Superintendent, Amtrak 525 East Street Rensselaer, NY 12144 Please also send a copy to Bruce Becker, so we can track trip experiences and follow up as necessary. Thanks for your help...

New Station Platform Standards Announced

In mid-May, Amtrak announced guidelines for the construction of new station platforms, which may positively affect station development efforts in New York State.

For the past three years, most new station starts have been in limbo based upon proposed USDOT rule making procedures, which would have required full train length, high-level platforms at all new or significantly rebuilt stations. USDOT never officially initiated this ruling, but in the absence of an official USDOT position, both Amtrak and local communities were unwilling to proceed with station projects.

The newly announced guidelines now make clear that high-level platforms are not required for most locations outside the Northeast Corridor. Low level platforms (i.e. with the platform at least 8 inches above the top of the rail) are acceptable in most non-NE Corridor situations.

Two new and long-sought New York State stops, Lyons and Dunkirk, may potentially benefit from this new guideline, as the cost of platform construction should be significantly reduced. However, other costly CSX requirements at both locations would still have to be addressed.

In addition, currently proposed station projects in Niagara Falls and Schenectady should be able to proceed sooner, as the full funding gaps for these projects will be narrowed.

Bruce B. Becker

Saratoga Race Season Service

Amtrak will again be offering special Saratoga Race Track Packages this race season, with direct service provided from New York City and all other Hudson Valley points every Saturday and Sunday, starting July 26 through Labor Day, September 1.

Northbound service will be provided directly to Saratoga Springs on # 69, leaving New York's Penn Station at 8:20am and arriving at Saratoga Springs at 11:57am. Southbound service will be provided from Saratoga Springs on #296 departing at 6:57pm, on both Saturdays and Sundays, with a 10:35pm 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 more complete. *Bruce B. Becker*

NYS State Fair Service

Amtrak will again be making special stops at the New York State Fairgrounds in Syracuse during this year's Fair, scheduled for August 21 through September 1, Labor Day. Most Empire Corridor trains (excluding the *Lake Shore Limited* and eastbound train #280) 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 are expected to be announced soon. For complete information, contact Amtrak or visit our website, www.esparail.org,

Late News Flash

Empire Corridor schedules are being revised for the period July 7 through August 29, to accommodate both CSX and Metro-North track work being performed across the state. Up to 30 minutes has been added to trains running west of Albany and 5-10 minutes has been added to most Hudson Valley trains. Contact Amtrak for more information.

Vermont Initiates Overdue Track Work for

Ethan Allen Route (Exclusive to the ESPA Express)

ESPA has obtained a copy of a letter written by Vermont's Deputy Secretary of Transportation, David Dill, to an Amtrak rider in Vermont outlining several much needed repairs to the rail infrastructure used by Amtrak's *Ethan Allen* train. Currently underway is a \$525,000 tie and rail replacement project on two miles of track in Center Rutland on the Vermont Railway. This work is scheduled for completion in August.

A scope of work has been prepared for crossing repairs and rail replacement in West Rutland and Castleton along with the replacement of the deck on the Castleton River bridge. This work will begin after July 1st. The Vermont Railway West Street crossing rehabilitation is presently under design and that construction work will be done in early 2009. Additionally, the VR has stabilized a section of track in NY State which it owns and has a grant to fund the removal of additional slow orders in New York. Funding for these projects has come from both Federal Railroad Administration grants and the State of Vermont.

Deputy Secretary Dill predicts that these improvements will result in some decrease in the seven hour travel time from Rutland to New York and hopes to fund more repairs in Vermont's FY10 budget.

Steve Strauss

Draft State Rail Released (Cont'd from page 1)

The draft plan does specifically reference the start of a new, state-funded, Albany to New York express train in the fall of 2008. The availability of equipment for such a new train is not addressed however.

ESPA's Officers and Coordinators met in Schenectady on June 21 to review the draft plan and to develop our official response (which is now in the process of being finalized) that will be submitted by the July 18 deadline.

Among the significant topics to be included in our response:

- **New York State must become an active partner with Amtrak in the operation of the entire Empire Corridor, with New York State contributing a reasonable share towards the Corridor's current operating costs.**

The draft plan specifically states that New York's policy is NOT to enter into such a partnership/support arrangement for Amtrak's currently operated trains.

- **A new state entity should be created to facilitate and fund (through bonding) the completion of the improvements and service enhancements to be recommended in the final plan.**

The draft plan does not address how or who would implement the plan's recommendations.

- **Obtaining new equipment for the Corridor must be an immediate priority, not only to meet current demand, but to allow for future growth.**

The draft plan does recognize the need for new equipment, but as of yet does not provide specifics.

While we are still some time away from seeing any actual improvements being made (with perhaps a new Hudson Valley Express Train this Fall being the first tangible evidence of meaningful progress), the final state rail plan should define a vision of where we will be heading. ESPA, as a principal stakeholder in the plan, will continue to push for more specifics and clear commitments to insure that the state actually takes action on the plan's recommendations and initiatives.

Bruce B. Becker

2008- 2009 ESPA Meeting Dates

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 on attending a meeting. Advance registration is required!

Saturday, August 2, 2008	Utica, NY - Trackside Tavern
Saturday, September 27, 2008	Rensselaer, NY
Saturday, November 15, 2008	Schenectady, NY
Saturday, January 24, 2009	Schenectady, NY
Saturday, March 7, 2009	Annual Membership Meeting - Schenectady

ALL dates and locations are subject to change... Please refer to the ESPA Web Site, www.esparail.org, for the most current information on meeting times and venues...

Amtrak to Study I-81 (Cont'd from page 1)

transportation professionals. Drew Galloway- Amtrak AVP Strategic Partnerships-East, also presented via conference call his Power Point overview of the steps necessary to get the planning and study phase underway.

Karen Rae offered to devote some of her staff to assist with Amtrak's analysis process. Ms. Rae noted the leadership of Senator Schumer for this project and thanked our Darcy Fauci (Broome County Director of Economic Development) and Amanda Spellicy

from the Schumer Binghamton office for all of their efforts to date.

Mr. Galloway noted that the entire route segment between Syracuse and Scranton could support passenger train operations at relatively high speed. We know the grade separated Scranton-Binghamton segment is capable of true high speed running with only one grade crossing and the high speed alignment which includes the Tunkhannock viaduct engineering marvel centerpiece. It was nice to hear that Amtrak also views the Syracuse-Binghamton segment as a potential passenger resource. NYS&W and CP have both pledged their support to the passenger concept and have done so from the outset.

Ben Gottfried

Work on Poughkeepsie Bridge Begins

The "Walkway Over the Hudson" group broke ground on a \$30 million project to overhaul the long-dormant ex-New Haven Railroad bridge over the Hudson River. The bridge will serve as an elevated hiking trail and a state park. State, federal, and private money is funding the rebuilding effort.

The Poughkeepsie Journal reported the walkway group wants to get the work done and open the bridge to the public by September 2009.

The Poughkeepsie Bridge is a steel cantilever single-track bridge spanning the Hudson between Poughkeepsie and Highland, N.Y. It was completed in 1889; New Haven successor Penn Central closed it after a 1974 fire.

(Trains News Wire)

Travel Tip: Visit www.amtrak.com and select 'Hot Deals' for the latest discount program information.

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.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Introductory membership (\$10.00 for one year) | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining membership (\$50.00) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal membership (\$24.00 per year) | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron membership (\$75.00) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal - Student or Senior Citizen (\$12.50 per year) | <input type="checkbox"/> Corporate membership (\$100.00) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family membership (\$30.00) | <input type="checkbox"/> 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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