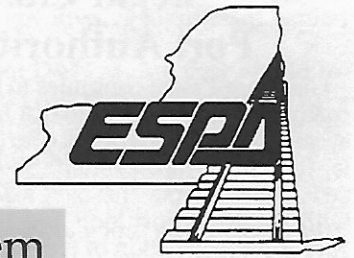


THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.trainweb.com/espa>



Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

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Saratoga Commuter Service Sparks Political Tug of War

Shortly before retiring in 1998, former Congressman Jerry Solomon inserted \$6 million into the federal TEA-21 transportation funding law for a demonstration of rail commuter service between Saratoga Springs and Albany. But his beneficence has touched off an unexpected tug of war between politicians over which route the new trains should take.

To most ESPA officers the choice seems obvious—Amtrak trains cover the 37 miles through Schenectady in as little as 49 minutes, making one stop and running on 110MPH track over part of the route. But to Eugene Corsale of the Saratoga West Side Neighborhood Association, (and a prime mover of a Delaware & Hudson historical group), the preferred route is what's left of the original D&H mainline from downtown Albany to Saratoga Springs. At one time this route too was only 37 miles long, and trains covered it in as little as 48 minutes in 1964.

But by then the D&H commuter train had made its last run and the railroad ripped up 10 miles of its direct mainline between Mechanicville and Ballston Spa. This forced the two remaining passenger trains onto a permanent detour that added 6 miles to their run, and running times stretched to an hour or more.

All passenger service through Saratoga ended with Amtrak's creation in 1971, but Amtrak started the present Adirondack train to Montreal when the state provided funding three years later. Then, in 1978 the train was shifted to its present route through Schenectady and its running time dropped to 46 minutes in 1980. Without passenger trains the Mechanicville route was allowed to deteriorate.

Congressman John Sweeney, (R), who replaced Jerry Solomon, is widely viewed as promoting the Mechanicville route, although John Boling of his office told ESPA he has not yet made up his mind. (His district includes Saratoga and Rensselaer counties but not Albany or Schenectady). Assemblyman Robert Prentiss (R., Saratoga, Albany Counties) also supports the Mechanicville route, according to the Schenectady Gazette.

This has caused a predictable reaction among Schenectady politicians. Hugh Farley, (R), one of the strongest rail advocates in the Senate, is very concerned and has held extensive discussions with Sweeney and Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, according to David Smingler of Farley's office. Congressman Michael McNulty (D), who represents all the counties involved, has also reportedly expressed concern.

Schenectady has a lot at stake. The city is planning a \$33 million investment centered around a new railroad station, and the new complex will include a major office building and retail center designed to bring jobs downtown. It will be a major blow if commuter trains by-pass the city.

The Schenectady route runs close to other major job centers near the Fuller Road underpass including Wolf Road, the State Campus office complex and the State University Campus. None of these are

(Cont'd on page 5)



Photo: Bob Lenz

Two new Acela train sets in Philadelphia undergoing testing and debugging. Acela Express service between Boston and Washington DC expected to begin in August.

State Bond Issue to Include Rail Funds

When New York State's budget finally emerged from the legislature on May 5th, it contained up to \$180 million for rail projects—more than twice the \$80 million initially proposed by Governor Pataki for the next five years. But there are major caveats. First, the additional \$100 million will be part of a \$3.8 billion bond issue to be submitted to voters in November. It may or may not pass. Secondly, this amount is designated for Rail and Port Projects, which means not all will go for rail. And thirdly, the rail portion will include freight projects, some of which will provide little or no benefit for passenger service.

Specific projects have not yet been specified for the bond issue; legislative leaders and the governor hope to accomplish that by mid June, and ESPA has been invited to suggest projects. In addition to the \$180 million, there will be a \$350 million fund for "multi-modal" projects. Of this, \$100 million will be allocated by Governor Pataki; individual members of the legislature will allocate the remainder in small amounts. Rail projects will be eligible.

The legislature's May 5th action capped weeks of activity by ESPA and more formidable forces in the transportation arena. For ESPA, the process began in earnest on March 14th when Senate head Joseph Bruno proposed a \$2.5 billion highway bond issue. This reportedly resulted from pressure from highway lobbyists when it appeared more funding would go to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) than for highways. (In fact the amounts were about even when Thruway spending was included).

At that point ESPA spoke out. We saw no excuse for a highway-only bond issue, especially given growing public frustration with air and highway travel. We reminded legislators that 82% of the state's voters believe upgrading intercity rail passenger service is at least as important as upgrading highways and airports, according to a 1998

(cont'd on page 6)

Legal Challenges to Port Authority's Air Train

Governor Pataki continues to hold firm in his support for the costly and disruptive Jamaica leg of the Kennedy Airport rail system despite a vigorous court challenge led by the Committee for Better Transit and the Southeast Queens Concerned Citizens. Project opponents have asked the Governor to move ahead with the on-airport loop and the Howard Beach spur but to suspend construction of the Van Wyck "el" for 120 days. This would allow time for the Empire State Development Corp. to evaluate proposals received from a number of prominent engineering firms for a "one-seat ride" rail service from Kennedy Airport to Penn Station in Manhattan. In a surprise move several months ago ESDC Chairman Charles Gargano issued a "Request for Expressions of Interest" for firms to design, build, operate and maintain this service. None of the proposals have been made public thus far. This delay would also allow MTA to complete and circulate to the public the results of its "one-seat ride" study, originally due to be released in July 1999, but now hidden from public eyes. The delay would also allow the court to reach a decision on CBT's appeal of the FAA record of decision-making \$598 million in Passenger Facility Charge (PFC) funds, generated by the \$3 tax on departing air passengers, available for the Van Wyck "el". If the construction continues, and the Port Authority loses, its funding plans could be greatly disrupted. This would further up the ante in the battle between Governors Pataki and Whitman over PA resources.

CBT is confident that it will win its appeal, which is based on the lack of "adequate justification" for the expenditure of PFC funds in the Port Authority's application given the limited use expected from this ill-conceived proposal. CBT favors restoration of the disused Rockaway cut-off in Central Queens. CBT and Southeast Queens residents - a community of color - have formally asked the Governor to hold up construction until these issues are resolved.

George Haikalis, ESPA Manhattan Coordinator

Rail Tax Relief Coming

Discussions are underway on legislation to be proposed by Governor Pataki to avert a major crisis for freight railroads this fall when a ceiling on local rail property tax expires. The agreement to institute a ceiling ended a Conrail lawsuit initiated in 1992 when a five-year tax law generated by Governor Cuomo's Railroad Taxation and Service Advisory Council expired.

Without new legislation or extension of the agreement, property taxes for CSX and Norfolk-Southern could nearly double in 2001. And the \$7160 per mile property tax paid by Conrail in New York was already more than double the \$2660/mile average tax in the state with the next highest rate (Illinois) served by Conrail, according to Conrail figures presented at ESPA's annual meeting in February.

The proposed legislation is expected to reduce rail property taxes by 45% on average when fully implemented. It is designed to ease the burden more on weaker railroads and to provide incentives to all railroads to upgrade their plant and improve service—both freight and passenger. Improvements and new facilities would get a ten-year exemption from tax increases based on their value when approved by the State Department of Transportation. And the 611 counties, cities, towns and school districts that now collect property taxes from railroads would get state funds to compensate for any reduction in rail taxes for five years.

Property tax legislation is critical for rail passengers because CSX has made it clear that it will not allow passenger improvements unless the property tax situation is resolved. CSX does not want to end up paying higher taxes just because passenger service improvements are made on its property, especially when the improvements do little to help move freight.

Frank Barry

Washington Update

Congress returned from its Spring Recess May 1, with a light legislative agenda ahead, and a strong desire to get re-elected. For passenger rail supporters, the key question is this: What bills have the best prospect of passing when Congress' main focus is on getting re-elected?

The re-election drive goes hand-in-hand with the legislative agenda, and ESPA members can take advantage of this re-election year to push for important passenger rail legislation. Fortunately, more members of Congress are seeing the connection between growing highway congestion and airline delays, and the need for improved passenger service. This is the year to take advantage of this growing awareness in Congress of the increased need for better passenger rail service.

Where should ESPA members concentrate their efforts? First and foremost is Amtrak's capital grant for FY 2001. Amtrak and the White House have asked for \$989 million, with an understanding that \$521 million is the minimum amount Amtrak needs to continue its current national system. It's important to aim for the high number. At \$521 million, Amtrak will continue to creep along, with little margin for error.

The bill with the most promise for expanding passenger rail service is S. 1900/H.R. 3700, and that bill continues to pick up sponsors in both the Senate and House. The champion of the bill, which will provide bonding for high-speed rail improvements, is Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), a loyal supporter of passenger rail service, who regrettably is retiring.

Also known as the High Speed Rail Investment Act, S. 1900/H.R. 3700 authorizes Amtrak to sell \$10 billion in high-speed rail bonds between FY 2001-2010. Amtrak is authorized to invest this money in designated high-speed rail corridors to upgrade existing routes to high-speed rail; construct new dedicated tracks and purchase high-speed rail equipment.

Up to 10 percent of the funds would be available to improve non-high-speed rail service nationwide. States are required to match at least 20 percent of Amtrak's share. The cost to the federal government of providing tax credits to bondholders in lieu of interest payments is \$404 million over 5 years and \$2.3 billion over 10 years—which will leverage \$10 billion in private sector investment.

This bill should be a very attractive one for even the most conservative members of Congress, because it relies on bonding rather than direct federal appropriations. In addition, it is consistent with the trend toward state participation in passenger rail improvements.

The future of new high-speed rail corridors in the Midwest and South are dependent on this bill's passage. More importantly, the overall strength of America's passenger rail network in all parts of the country - including New York State - hinges on the passage of this bill. The major railroad industry suppliers, who will benefit from it in the years to come, support the High Speed Rail Investment Act. But for it to pass, members of Congress must also hear early and often from rail supporters.

In an election year, you can be sure staff members in Congressional offices are keeping track of every phone call which comes in, by issue.

It's vitally important to make members of Congress know that passenger rail advocates are watching how they vote on these passenger rail bills.

A brief phone call is all that is needed. Just call the switchboard in Washington and ask for your Senate or House member. Start with these numbers:

Senate Switch Board: (202) 224-3121

House Switch Board: (202) 225-3121

You can be sure your call will be counted.

-John Boffa, ESPA Washington Representative

Anyone interested in contributing transit related articles from the New York City area, please contact the ESPA Express at rwlenz@aol.com or write ESPA, 10531 Main St., Clarence, NY 14031.

Rochester Forum

The Rochester Rail Transit Committee, the Common Good Planning Center and the Rochester Downtown Community Forum will be hosting a series of forums on "Transit Innovations in Upstate New York." The free forums will be from 5-7PM at the Dugan Center at 15 St. Mary's Place in downtown Rochester. The forums will give participants a chance to see what is going on throughout the state, and what the opportunities are for Rochester.

The series will begin on Wednesday, June 7th with "High Speed Rail: How Does the Rochester Region Make the Most of It." The featured speakers will be John Reed of the New York State Department of Transportation high speed rail group and Bill Sanford, Chairman of the Onondaga County Legislature. John Reed will explain the State's program to upgrade Amtrak's Niagara Falls to NYC Empire Corridor to high-speed service. Bill Sanford, who also chairs the Empire Rail Task Force, has been active in promoting high-speed rail in the state.

The second forum, "Transit Innovations in Upstate Cities, Large and Small" will be held on Wednesday, June 21st, and will feature speakers from Buffalo and Ithaca. Deborah Finn of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority will discuss the NFTA's "Hub Link" program, the Metro Rail light rail line, and other innovations. The Hub Link program is a new effort to transform Buffalo's bus system from a downtown-centered system to a multi-hub system that includes suburban and neighborhood transit centers. Dwight Mangel of Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit (the Ithaca-area transit agency) and Fernando de Aragon, Director of the Ithaca-Tompkins Area Transportation Council will talk about Ithaca's transit system. Ithaca's system is regarded as one of the best small systems in the state. Their recent efforts include an extensive public participation process, bus route restructuring, and a new intercity bus terminal.

One to two additional forums are tentatively planned for the fall. The forums will likely feature speakers from the transit authorities in Rochester, Syracuse and Albany. Look for more information on these forums in the future.

The forums are open to the public, and no registration or fee is required. The Dugan Center is located one block south of the Bausch and Lomb Building. Limited on-street parking is available on St. Mary's Place, and additional parking is available in the Court Street parking garage. For more information, call DeWain Feller at (716) 527-9619.

Finally, Amtrak Scranton to Binghamton (Almost)

On Saturday, April 29 and Sunday, April 30, the Steamtown National Historical Site in Scranton, PA, in partnership with Amtrak and through the cooperation of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Delaware Lackawanna Railroad, operated a special series of excursions eastbound to Mount Pocono, Pa. and westbound to Binghamton. This was part of the site's Year 2000 National Park Week Celebration.

This was the first official Amtrak operation over the former Delaware, Lackawanna & Western line between Scranton and the Binghamton area, excluding the recent private car ventures. Regrettably, congestion in Canadian Pacific's East Binghamton yard resulted in the excursion stopping six miles shy of downtown Binghamton. Thus, a good photo opportunity to show the local press the sight of Amtrak arriving at the Binghamton depot for the first time was unfortunately lost.

Due to inaccessibility of the Binghamton yards, and use of the wye, the excursion trains operated with an F40PH locomotive at each end. The train consisted of six Amfleet coaches, an Amtrak cafe-lounge car and Lehigh Valley private car #353, which is stored in Scranton and hosted local press and political leaders during the excursions. The trains operated both days, and were well received by the public despite the setbacks. Saturday's trip was nearly full and had only a few unsold seats left.

Still the passengers on Saturday's trip clearly had a good time

and would likely agree that any trip over the former DL&W is time well spent - thanks Wes!

Rob Piecuch

Amtrak: Passenger vs. Freight

On April 15th Amtrak inaugurated the first new train resulting from its Network Growth Strategy announced on February 28th. The new *Lake Country Limited* runs between Janesville, Wis. and Chicago, taking about 3 hours for the 100 mile run, about half of which is on 30MPH track. It leaves Janesville, (pop. 50,000) at 6AM, stopping only at suburban Glenview.

The train has been running with several empty freight cars and two Horizon coaches, but during its first two weeks it carried no more than 16 passengers on any trip and on some days carried no passengers at all. It may have trouble filling those coaches, as the distance via I-90 is only slightly longer, and presumably can be driven in two hours. Janesville has not seen fit to build a station, according to the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP).

"It was important just to get it going," Amtrak President George Warrington told NARP's Board of Directors at their meeting in Washington on April 28th. "There's no express on it yet, but we have to demonstrate it's there to get the business."

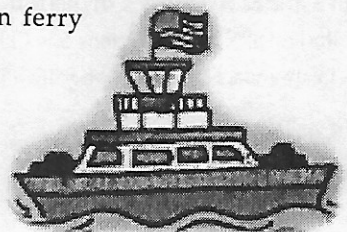
On April 20th, as the *Lake Country Limited* pulled two virtually empty coaches through northern Illinois, no seats at all were available on any westbound train across New York State. Other corridors were busy too, but no others had to turn all passengers away. In fact it is not uncommon for the New York route—Amtrak's third busiest corridor—to be the only one completely sold out during busy periods, according to ESPA Vice President Gary Prophet, who monitors capacity on various routes. Prophet feels at least one of those Lake Country cars should be allocated in New York State. In past years Chicago area Horizon cars were often loaned to the Empire Corridor during Christmas and Thanksgiving periods, but this has not occurred since Amtrak was divided into separate business units.

The *Lake Country Limited* is the most recent example of an incipient trend to schedule trains mainly to take advantage of freight hauling opportunities in response to federal pressure for Amtrak to cover its operating costs. (The new train to Jeffersonville, Indiana, and the current *Pennsylvanian* schedule from Philadelphia to Chicago are other examples). Amtrak apparently hopes to get business from the General Motors plant in Janesville. But since there are no plans to buy new coaches, cars for these new runs are coming from more established trains, some of which are frequently sold out.

This trend sharpens a question already being raised by NARP: how much inconvenience should Amtrak passengers endure so the corporation can haul freight? Already schedules have been lengthened on the *Lake Shore Limited* so freight cars can be added in Albany, and other long distance trains have been slowed for similar reasons. But to what extent is it appropriate for Amtrak to actually turn passengers away from well established routes so equipment can be used to start trains with questionable passenger prospects? This would not be a serious question if there were an abundant supply of cars. But the frequently sold out *Lake Shore Limited* has already been shortened, reportedly to free cars for new freight hauling trains.

Frank Barry

The 2000 Lake Champlain ferry schedule linking Amtrak's Port Kent, NY station and Burlington, VT can be found on the web at www.ferries.com or by calling 802-864-9804.



Amtrak's President Receives Salzberg Medallion

Syracuse University's School of Management awarded its Salzberg Medallion to George Warrington, Amtrak's president and chief executive officer.

Given annually, the Salzberg Medallion is bestowed upon outstanding practitioners, advocates, academics or researchers in the field of transportation, distribution or logistics management, and to companies for pioneering ideas and policies that have reshaped the industry.

Warrington, a graduate of Syracuse University, said, "I am thrilled, delighted, humbled and deeply honored to receive the Salzberg Medallion. And that the award is being presented to me by my alma mater makes it all the more meaningful to me."

Reorganization to improve service –

Amtrak Intercity, one of three Amtrak strategic business units, announced a new organizational structure that will make it easier for the corporation to deliver quality service to its customers.

Amtrak Intercity President Edward V. Walker said Eastern and Western regions, each headed by a Vice President (Al Edelston and Don Saunders respectively) have been established within the business unit to provide support and leadership for all aspects of service delivery in their areas.

Website Named one of Top 100 –

The Amtrak website – a comprehensive, online information and reservation-making service – has been named one of the 100 most popular bookmarked sites on the internet. www.amtrak.com was the only direct provider of passenger transportation service included in the Top 100 list, compiled by HotLinks.

According to HotLinks, the Amtrak website was also one of the top 10 special interest sites regularly bookmarked by its members. The increasingly popular Amtrak website provides users with access to fares, schedules, and promotional information.

Rental Car option available at 13 additional locations

Amtrak and Hertz have added 13 new locations bringing the total to 31. Added are: Albany, NY, Ann Arbor, Mich., Dearborn and Detroit, Mich., Boston and Boston Back Bay, Mass., Cleveland, Ohio, Dallas and El Paso, Texas, Denver, Colo., New Orleans, La., and Stamford, Conn.

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Patchogue, NY	Accent on Travel	(516) 654-3325
 FAX(516) 654-3379	
Rochester, NY	Automobile Club of Rochester	(716) 461-5000
Tonawanda, NY	Courtesy Travel	(716) 695-3550
	(800) 695-3750

Authorized Amtrak travel agents who wish to join ESPA, maintain current membership status, and be listed in this DIRECTORY, should send a \$50 check, made payable to ESPA, and mail to: Robert Lenz, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031.

ESPA NEEDS YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS

As part of our program of keeping members informed, the e-mail list is used from time to time to send out alerts and notices to members about upcoming meetings and events of interest.

If you're not on the list or you can't be sure, send your e-mail address to: rwlenz@aol.com and you will be added.

California Announces Big Plans

In January the California High Speed Rail Authority released a draft business plan for a 700 mile \$25 billion high-speed ground transportation system that could be operable by 2016 and would yield annual operating surpluses in excess of \$300 million. It would link San Francisco, Sacramento, Los Angeles and San Diego, and should capture 35% of trips over 150 miles from airlines and highways. The system would share rights of way (but not tracks) with railroads and/or highways, and would operate at 200MPH or more in some sections. The fastest runs would link San Francisco and Los Angeles in 2-1/2 hours, downtown to downtown. A total of 86 trains would operate each way each day. Funding would most likely require a dedicated tax as well as a serious reallocation of transportation priorities at the federal level.

On April 5th, California Governor Gray Davis proposed a shorter term \$5.3 billion funding campaign to ease transportation congestion. Nearly half the money would go to intercity rail and rail transit projects, including double and triple tracking, new cars and locomotives, as well as extension of both heavy and light rail systems. The proposal requires legislative approval.

In 1989 the ESPA Express featured two lead articles comparing New York and California approaches toward rail passenger service. New York came out very poorly in the comparison. Although New York was the undisputed leader in the 1970's, there had been no major funding for rail passenger projects for a decade and there was a certain smugness in the Department of Transportation. As one staffer put it, "They'd be thrilled if they could have the 110MPH service we have now."

But since then California has started a multi-billion effort to upgrade its rail passenger service incrementally. It has extended its San Diego Corridor northward to San Luis Obispo and added three trains to the San Diego line for a total of eleven trips daily. The San Joaquin line now has five daily trains instead of two and the State has started a completely new corridor between San Jose, Oakland and Sacramento with six daily runs each way. To make this possible, the State has purchased new equipment and subsidized low fares to attract riders.

During the same period, frequency on the Empire Corridor has increased from approximately 9 to 13 trains daily south of Albany and from 3-1/2 to 4 west of Albany. A new corridor of sorts seems to be beginning to Saratoga Springs. This expansion has so far occurred without major state funding for equipment or track improvement, although the state has funded major station projects.

Both New York and California now have decidedly pro-rail administrations, which was not the case in New York during most of the 1980's under Cuomo's transportation commissioner Franklin White. However, a big difference has occurred regarding planning: In 1993 California established a High Speed Rail Commission chaired by the Secretary of Business to undertake a feasibility study of high speed rail. Three years later the High Speed Authority was created to develop a plan for construction, operation and financing of a statewide high-speed rail system.

After the 1970's New York made no major financial commitment until 1998 when Governor Pataki announced his \$185 million agreement with Amtrak. Earlier that year, Buffalo Assemblyman Sam Hoyt had offered legislation to create a Cali-formia-style High Speed Rail Commission for New York. Although Pataki rejected the idea, Hoyt's efforts were given some credit for inspiring creation of the Rail Passenger Council last year. A five-year plan for modest incremental improvements in New York has since been put together by the Department of Transportation staffers with input from the Council. While New York is now moving in the right direction, its financial commitment still falls far short of California levels.

Frank Barry

Letter to the Editor

In comparison to the long list of national tragedies that Americans experienced during the nineteen sixties, the decline of our railroads seemed to be just an inevitable fact of life. But one incident will always be remembered as a senseless act of corporate greed by a mis-guided company administration ... the demolition of New York City's Pennsylvania Station by the Pennsylvania Railroad. This event galvanized the historic preservation movement and led to the creation of the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. Since 1965, New Yorkers have been using an underground maze of tunnels and storefronts in place of a railroad station. The idea of a new station has long been overdue.

Last spring the plans for a new Penn Station were unveiled. Proposed by New York State Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the plan calls for the adaptive re-use of the existing Farley Post Office building. The Farley building is a federally owned landmark on the National Register of Historic Places. It was designed by McKim, Mead, and White, to be a compliment to their masterpiece, Penn Station, which was located just across the street. All of the hype surrounding this project has been deliberately honed to make the project sound like a preservationist's dream come true. It is not. A press release from Moynihan's office stated that the new station "will attempt to recreate the majesty of the original." It will not. Nothing even vaguely reminiscent of either the main waiting room or the main concourse of the original station is planned. Nothing reflecting a neo-classical motif is planned.

What is planned is the demolition of the middle section of the building (approximately 60ft by 300ft). In this space, is to be installed a 150-foot high steel and glass structure towering twice the height of its host and spilling out onto the adjacent sidewalks. Judging by the graphics presented to the public, it seems to most closely resemble a mammoth drive-in theatre screen armature, sheathed in glass. This may be an intriguing concept for a piece of modern sculpture, but it is not at all what its planners had claimed it would be. It is an insult to the preservation ethic, and makes a mockery of sympathetic design.

This type of shock-oriented renovation is being hailed by some critics as the kind of freedom of expression that architects have been yearning for for decades. They believe that appropriations is old fashioned and has no place in contemporary design. This notion is nothing new. It is simply a regurgitation of the same foolish dogma that brought about the demolition of the original Penn Station thirty-five years ago.

Unfortunately, it seems that New Yorkers are so used to being treated like rats that they don't seem to care what the new building will look like, as long as they will be above ground. As long as the people don't complain, those in power will do whatever suits their own personal agenda.

If you are a railfan, a preservationist, or just a person who cares about democracy, I urge you to send your thoughts to your United States representatives. The Farley Post Office building is owned by the federal government and federal funds are to be used for this project. Your opinion matters.

*Peter H. Tassone
Highland, New York*

Saratoga Commuter (cont'd from page 1)

accessible to the Mechanicville route. But Corsale points out that this line does run close to the Hudson River towns of Waterford, Cohoes, Troy and Watervliet, where many commuters reside—a total area with more than 90,000 inhabitants. Boling says it passes within more population than the Schenectady route. But Cohoes and Troy, the largest towns, are less than 10 miles from Albany and it is questionable how many commuters would leave their cars for such a short train ride given the need for connecting transportation at each end.

According to Kristine Younger, of the Capital District Transportation Authority, the lead agency for the project, "There is really no choice unless someone comes up with more money."

The money Solomon found can only be used for a demonstration, Younger said, which cannot involve significant capital investment.

"Initially we had a letter from D&H saying they would require a second track, which would cost about \$30 million. That's simply not an option," Younger said. But Congressman Sweeney has pushed D&H for a more detailed estimate, and the railroad now appears to be backing off the second track requirement. Still, the line has 45 grade crossings, vs. 5 on the Schenectady route, and some upgrading of even the single track would be needed.

Use of the Schenectady route may also have to wait for installation of the second track, which probably won't be operational before next year. But money is already available for this and it is doubtful that the Mechanicville route could be readied much sooner.

In the end it comes down to who benefits. One of the major reasons for the project was to relieve congestion on the Northway. But a train which takes an hour and a half (CDTA estimate for Mechanicville route) to replace a 37 mile drive is unlikely to get many Saratoga commuters out of their cars. If the purpose is to serve the Hudson Valley towns represented by Sweeney and Bruno, the Mechanicville route is clearly preferable, but perhaps such a train need not run all the way to Saratoga.

Frank Barry



New Rails Along the Hudson

On April 15, 2000 a brand new light rail transit system, the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail, started operating on the completed segments of its proposed initial routes.

Parts of the system are within sight of the New York skyline, with its Exchange Place stop in Jersey City, a short walk from PATH, with next stop the World Trade Center in New York City.

The initial segment included several park and ride facilities with one very large park and ride facility at Liberty Park.

Several non-government officials were recognized as being responsible for this new light transit system, such as Doug Bowen, President of NJARP, Arthur Adams and the late Gordon Thompson. New mass transportation systems will eventually happen when public officials recognize the visionary ideas of ordinary local citizens.

*—Richard P. Duffy
ESPA Westchester Coordinator*

The Adirondack Scenic Railroad's 2000 Operating Schedule lists many interesting specials: Train Robberies, Eco Tours, Bike & Rail Ride, Canoe & Rail Ride, Executive Luxury Coach, Fall Foliage, Parties/Weddings/Meetings among others.

Information can be obtained by calling 315-724-0700, toll free 877-508-6728, or on the web at www.adirondack.com

State Bond Issue (Cont'd from page 1)

Marist Institute poll. (The poll was commissioned by ESPA and the Empire Corridor Rail Task Force, comprised of county legislatures along the corridor). We pointed to the clear implication that including rail money would make the bond issue more likely to pass. And we protested that intercity rail was being completely overlooked in the tug of war between highways and downstate transit.

On April 4th, Assemblyman (and ESPA member) Sam Hoyt (D) teamed up with Senator George Maziarz (R—both from Buffalo), to urge that 1% of all state transportation spending be allocated to upgrading intercity rail passenger service. The 1% figure was based on the proportion of trips along the Empire Corridor taken by train according to a 1989 study for the Department of Transportation, which also found that 93% of corridor travel was by auto. If the 1% ratio were applied to the current budget, \$380 million would be spent on intercity rail passenger service—at least twice what is planned. The Marist poll found strong potential for people to leave their cars behind if rail service improves: 23% of the state's voters said they would "definitely consider" taking the train on their next trip and 50% said they would "possibly consider" it. It was late in the game by then, but Hoyt's logic seemed unassailable and may be used in the future.

For almost the first time in New York, the rail manufacturing industry joined the effort, as the President of Alstom in Hornell wrote to Governor Pataki and key legislators urging inclusion of more funds for rail. This was a major step because in the past the rail industry has not even tried to match the highway industry's effectiveness in lobbying. Reluctance of railroads and their suppliers to compete aggressively for public funds is certainly a major reason highway interests have gotten so much more attention – and dollars.

In the end, both highway and MTA dollars were increased: each will get \$19 billion over the five-year period. Ten percent of this will come from what the New York Times labeled the largest bond issue in history. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D, Manhattan), who had pushed for funding for a long promised 2nd Avenue subway line running the full length of Manhattan, will see studies begin if the bond issue passes. However \$300 million will be carved out of the MTA portion for airports (\$75 mil.), rail and ports (\$100 mil.) and non-MTA transit (\$125 mil.). This represents a virtual doubling of the Governor's original proposal.

According to a source close to the action, "everybody wanted to do something for rail." The Governor's initiative helped, he said, "and so did the magnificent new Rensselaer station, which is now changing the view of the skyline from the Capitol."

Round one is over, but much work is still ahead. ESPA will promote both intercity and transit rail projects, especially those west and north of Schenectady since the federal TEA-21 funds allocated under Gov. Pataki's 1998 agreement with Amtrak are concentrated on the Hudson Division.

Currently the governor has yet to approve his own Department of Transportation's Five Year Plan, which proposes spend-

ing \$130 million to modernize signaling west of Schenectady. The goal is to increase train frequency and cut over an hour from New York- Buffalo travel time through 90MPH operation and various other improvements. But the Department has yet to determine the precise mix of specific projects required to achieve this goal most efficiently. A plan is needed that would rank order projects in terms of their cost, contribution to the goal and ease of completion. Unfortunately the haste with which projects must be selected will make careful selection difficult. DOT is working to identify obvious projects for starters.

ESPA members with project suggestions should immediately contact ESPA President Robert Lenz at rwlenz@aol.com or 716-759-2315.

Frank Barry

97,000 Pound Trucks?

H.R. 1667, a proposal that would allow states to raise the federal weight limit of trucks from 80,000 to 97,000 pounds on Interstate highways has been introduced. The Coalition Against Bigger Trucks opposes truck weight increases because heavier trucks are more dangerous, more difficult to drive and control, and do additional damage to our highway infrastructure. Additional information can be obtained by calling:

888-CABT-123 or on the web at www.cabt.org

ESPA Meetings

Downstate – For time and location, please call 212-475-3394. Officers & Coordinators meeting – Schenectady, June 24. Contact rwlenz@aol.com or 716-759-2315.

ESPA Membership

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. Keep informed with The ESPA Express. Keep the pressure on for safe, efficient, environmentally sound transportation. Dues and contributions support ESPA's publications and advocacy on the passengers' behalf.

- Introductory membership (\$10.00 for one year)
- Renewal membership (\$20.00 per year)
- Renewal - Student or Senior Citizen (\$12.50 per year)
- Family membership (\$25.00)
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- Lifetime membership (\$300.00)

Individuals that join or renew at the sustaining membership or higher will receive the new ESPA lapel pin as a gift.

Please make checks and money orders payable to ESPA, c/o John Ross, 4 Maplewood Court, Greenwich, NY 12834.

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel. 716-759-2315, Fax: 716-759-2791, e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. **Deadline for material for the July-August issue is June 30.**

6

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