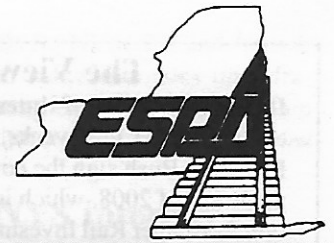


The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 32, No. 6

November/December 2008

New York State Ridership Surges in 2008

Amtrak's 2008 fiscal year, which ended September 30, 2008, was one of banner increases for both New York State ridership and revenues. Overall ridership was up 8.4% on the Empire Corridor trains, the *Maple Leaf*, the *Adirondack* and the *Ethan Allen Express* over the previous year. Overall revenues were up 13.0% from FY 2007.

By route segment, the service west of Albany showed the greatest increase with ridership up 22.9% and revenues up 29.1%. These percentages represent a total of 66,127 more riders taking to the rails across upstate NY and generating \$4.9 million in new revenue. This ridership growth was the fifth largest (by percentage) of all of Amtrak's corridor operations.

The *Adirondack* came in with 10.8% ridership increase and 10.2% revenue growth; the *Ethan Allen Express* enjoyed a 6.7% ridership boost and 9.9% more revenue while Hudson Valley trains contributed a 3.8% ridership and 6.5% revenue gain.

Statewide, there were 116,726 more passengers and \$8.2 million in new revenues in FY 2008 as compared to FY 2007.

The *Lake Shore Limited* also enjoyed gains for the year, with ridership up 10.6% and revenues up 13.1%.

System-wide, Amtrak experienced an 11.1% surge in ridership (to a new record total of 28,716,407 passengers) and 14.2% in revenues (to also a new record of \$1.734 billion).

Bruce B. Becker

Route Process Improvement

Amtrak has selected the *Lake Shore Limited* and Empire Corridor, as well as the *Adirondack*, as trains they wish to improve through their Route Process Improvement (RPI) over the coming year. This process has led to improvements and the recent rebranding of the Northeast Corridor, as well as the recent refurbishment of the Pacific Parlour cars on the *Coast Starlight*. Jim Brezinski is leading the *Lake Shore* RPI and Hank Koppleman is heading up the Empire Corridor RPI. They will be collecting ideas for improvements to the on-board service from the customer experience point of view (with the goal also of improving the CSI scores on passenger surveys). An initial conversation indicated that they are looking at improving food service and that they realize the Diner-Lite dining service is not working well on the *Lake Shore Limited*. Minor changes in on-board service, as well as when/where trains are cleaned, will be reviewed and may be improved. Items that can be implemented fairly quickly and inexpensively will be analyzed and improvements that may result in more revenue than their incurred costs will be a high priority.

(Cont'd on page 6)

New York Wins Federal Passenger Grant

New York State won \$1.25 million to improve intercity passenger rail service under a new federal grant program. Neighboring Vermont won a \$581,000 grant which will impact Amtrak service in New York.

The New York grant will be used to perform full engineering of a multiphase reconfiguration of the interlocking in and around Albany-Rensselaer Station. The total project cost of \$2.5 million requires a State match of \$1.25 million. The engineering work will lead to installing a station track on a currently unused east face of the east high island platform, the addition of pocket tracks, and the reconfiguration of the Post Road connection used by the Boston section of the *Lake Shore Limited*. *(Cont'd on page 5)*

Region II Federal Transit Officials Hear Regional Rail Advocates Concerns

Last month FTA Regional Administrator Brigid Hynes-Cherin and her entire staff sat down with regional rail advocates representing ESPA and its counterpart west of the Hudson -- the NJ Association of Railroad Passengers, together with representatives of NARP, the MTA Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee (PCAC) and the Lackawanna Coalition to discuss NJ Transit's Hudson River rail passenger tunnel project. Transit advocates are uniformly opposed to the current plan, which would connect to a deep cavern dead-end terminal station some 175 feet below 34th Street, two blocks north of the existing Penn Station. NJ Transit's plan costs more to build and to operate, attracts fewer passengers and diverts fewer motorists than the plan favored by rail advocates -- a plan that would connect the new tunnels directly into Penn Station and then would continue on to Grand Central Terminal. NY's Governor David Paterson has already strongly expressed his support for through trains at Penn Station linking New Jersey and Long Island. He is in an excellent position to advocate for similar through trains between New Jersey and Westchester using the proposed Penn Station-Grand Central connection. The Governor can veto the current misguided NJ Transit plan, since it would be funded by Port Authority and Federal agencies, both requiring the NY Governor's approval.

New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine is adamant on advancing the seriously flawed NJ Transit plan, under pressure from construction unions and the transit agency itself which wants its own separate (and extraordinarily inconvenient) terminal. Transit advocates have called on Governor Paterson to "do the right thing" and veto this failed plan -- akin to Alaska's famed, "bridge to nowhere". *(Cont'd on page 5)*

California Votes YES on High Speed Rail

California Proposition 1A, which authorizes the sale of \$10 billion in bonds for a statewide high-speed rail network, passed on November 4th with a 52% of the vote.

The View from the Cab

It's both the best of times and the worst of times...

In the past few weeks, we have seen Congress pass and President Bush sign the comprehensive Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008, which included the Amtrak Re-Authorization Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008. What many Washington insiders thought was impossible this Fall turned out not to be, and now Amtrak is poised to receive a significant multi-year stream of investment for the first time in its rocky history. Indeed, if the federal appropriations process can fully fund the levels authorized for Amtrak and state partnership investment, over \$13 billion will flow into improvements and expansions during the next five years!

And as I write this we are looking to a new administration in Washington which by all indications will be strongly pro-rail...

But closer to home, also within these same few short weeks, we have seen the world-wide financial crisis take target on Wall Street and New York State. Governor Paterson and the state legislature have a very daunting task ahead of them in trying to cope with the huge tax revenue shortfalls expected in the coming months and years. The hard state budget choices certainly could not have come at a worse time in light of the potential increases in federal funds for rail, which the State will have to match some portion of. Hopefully, the state crisis will be less severe and shorter than expected, which would allow the State to move forward on the many necessary passenger rail initiatives already identified in the impending State Rail Plan.

On a positive note, Amtrak has again this Fall run its lone Great Dome Car on the *Adirondack*, taking full advantage of the Fall colors along the train's beautiful route north of Albany. Amtrak is to be applauded for taking the initiative to bring the Dome Car cross-country from its California base and showcasing it here in New York State. Hopefully this is now a yearly tradition that passengers will be able to look forward to in future 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

Proposed Hudson Valley Express Train Victim of State Budget Crisis

The proposed new weekday Express Train service between Albany and New York City has fallen victim to the state's worsening budget and financial crisis. The new service, originally slated to start this fall, was not included in the recently issued Fall 2008/Winter 2009 schedules and its prospects appear bleak at best for the near future. Funding had been available in the current year state budget and NYSDOT had also referenced the potential start of service in its draft State Rail Plan.

This is very disappointing news, as the new trains would have been the first tangible service enhancement for the Empire Corridor in many years. With Amtrak, CSX and Metro North all having given preliminarily approval for the new 2 hour, 15 minute run, it is very unfortunate that the need to cut state expenditures came at this time.

Bruce B. Becker

Capital Region Station Developments

The Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA) is moving two Capital Region station projects forward:

- CDTA has awarded a contract for the demolition of the two former station buildings located north of the current Rensselaer station. This work will allow for construction of the fourth boarding track and additional parking. The demolition contract calls for the removal of the buildings to be completed by the end of February 2009.
- CDTA and the Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority have jointly filed an application to NYSDOT, seeking funding from the 2005 State Transportation Bond Act Rail and Port Program, to allow for the Schenectady Intermodal Station Project to proceed. The total cost of the project is slated to be \$8.9 million, with \$4.5 million in federal funding already secured. ESPA has sent a letter to NYSDOT Commissioner Astrid Glynn in support of the funding request and overall project.

Bruce B. Becker

Amtrak Appoints New Marketing Manager for New York State

Amtrak has appointed Deborah Sanderson as the new Marketing Manager for New York State effective October 1, 2008. Ms. Sanderson is filling the vacancy created when William Hollister was recently named as Amtrak's Principle Officer - Strategic Partnerships and Business Development for New York.

Ms. Sanderson has twenty-years of Amtrak experience, most recently as the District Manager of Stations for the eastern portion of the Empire Corridor. She has previously had responsibilities in both customer service and operations.

Ms. Sanderson's new duties will include the general marketing and promotion of Amtrak's services across the state, working with Amtrak's numerous travel partners including the 'I Love New York' tourism initiative and assisting with the 'New York By Rail' magazine.

ESPA congratulates Ms. Sanderson on her new position and we look forward to working with her in the future.

Bruce B. Becker

Lake Shore Limited Adds Through Boston Cars...

With the Fall 2008/Winter 2009 schedule, Amtrak has restored through cars on the Lake Shore Limited between Boston and Chicago. This positive development comes after requiring all passengers from/to Massachusetts locations to transfer trains at Albany-Rensselaer for more than two years. As of press time, only coaches are operating through, with the trains sleeping cars continuing to all run to/from New York. The plan is to have one of the three sleepers run Boston-Chicago as it used to, however there is no state date as of press time.

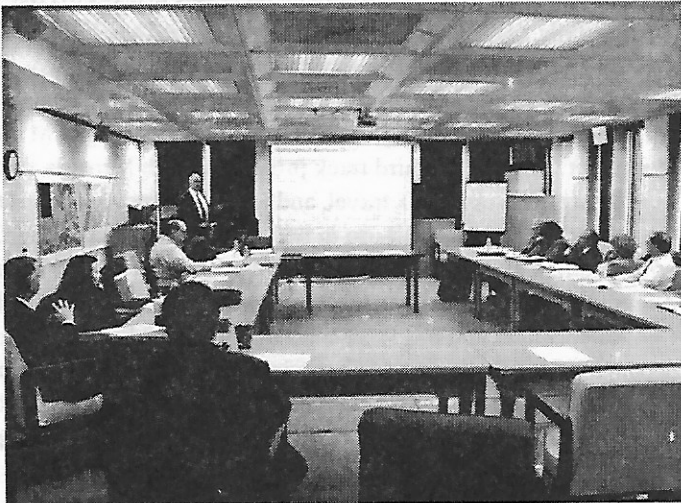
ESPA applauds this service enhancement, which hopefully will only be the first of many improvements for the long-neglected Lake Shore Limited in the coming year (see accompanying article on the impending Route Process Improvement program).

Bruce B. Becker

Binghamton Amtrak/NYS DOT Rail Passenger Study Underway

On October 22, 2008 NYSDOT Region 9 hosted the “kick off” meeting for the Amtrak study of rail passenger service through the Binghamton gateway, looking at Binghamton to Scranton/NYC and/or Binghamton to Syracuse. Region 9 Regional Director Jack Williams opened the meeting with some general comments regarding the history of passenger rail operations through Binghamton and the significance renewed rail service would have for the region in the future.

NYSDOT Deputy Commissioner Karen Rae then went on to address the group and introduced Matt Paul, NYSDOT Project Coordinator, Lawrence Malski, CEO, Pennsylvania Northeast Regional Rail Authority, Drew Galloway, Amtrak AVP for Strategic Partnerships & Business Development East, and William Hollister, Associate, Sales & Marketing for Amtrak.



Birth of a new rail corridor- Drew Galloway introduces an Amtrak perspective to the meeting assembled in Binghamton to discuss scoping for the Amtrak/NYS DOT study.

Mr. Paul provided the group with some of the previous study efforts made regarding passenger rail service through the Binghamton gateway and the Syracuse rail link concept introduced by the Senate High Speed Rail Task Force in 2006.

Mr. Malski provided the group with an update on the Pennsylvania-New Jersey Lackawanna Cut-Off Passenger Rail Service Restoration Project. The Scranton to Hoboken transit oriented proposal has recently received a big boost with the announcement and funding agreement to replace the rail on the first section of the Cut-Off rail to Andover, NJ. The project beyond Andover is in the process of review before the Federal Transit Administration and final approval of the environment significance statement is still anticipated in the near term.

Mr. Galloway’s presentation was the centerpiece of the meeting in which he outlined the importance of the “corridor” business segment with respect to Amtrak operations. Mr. Galloway pointed out that corridor services make up 49% of Amtrak ridership and 21% of total ticket revenue. Several areas of special interest to the new corridor study to be undertaken here in partnership with NYSDOT were addressed at the meeting. The conceptual service illustrations assumed an average running speed of 55 mph for the new Syracuse to Scranton route section. The outstanding engineering standards of the former Lackawanna Railroad south of Binghamton yields the potential for relatively high speed running in the near term.

The ambitious study phase calls for NYSDOT and Amtrak to cooperatively work together to make estimates on infrastructure needs, schedules, operating expenses and ridership between now and the spring of 2009. *Ben Gottfried*

MegaBus – New NYS Intercity Bus Service

Starting December 4, 2008, MegaBus will greatly expand its service in New York State, with two separate routes planned. On that day, it will start 4 roundtrips per day from Albany to New York, with a stop at a park and ride lot in Ridgewood, NJ. In fact, the service will operate from the Rensselaer to New York with the following text stated on the MegaBus website: “Albany, New York, Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak Station - Arrivals and departures are located near the Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak Station on the west side of East Street, just south of Herrick Street.” In New York, MegaBus will take passengers to the front of Penn Station (31st St and 8th Ave), with a Rensselaer-Penn Station scheduled travel time of 2 hours 45 minutes. They plan bucket fares with yield pricing, so the price rises as the bus fills, with the fares for each way between Albany and New York as follows: \$1, \$11, \$19, and \$28. Typically, only the first two seats reserved are available for one dollar and there is an additional 50 cent booking fee for each reservation. Reservations are required for each bus.

Also, on December 4, 2008 the current 3-4 daily buses from New York to Toronto with stops of some buses in Buffalo and/or Binghamton (but no other upstate cities), will be reconfigured with five roundtrips every day. Station stops for most of the five roundtrips between New York and Toronto will include: Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, and Niagara Falls, Ontario, with Binghamton completely removed from the MegaBus schedules. The Niagara Falls (Ontario) station will be in front of the VIA Rail Station, Buffalo stops will be at both the downtown bus terminal and at the Buffalo airport, the Rochester stop will be at Eastview Mall, and Syracuse will be at the Syracuse Amtrak/bus station.

The travel time from downtown Buffalo to Niagara Falls, Ontario is exactly one hour for each trip, so they plan to pass through customs more quickly than Amtrak. The New York to Toronto travel time ranges from 10 hours (overnight trip) to 11 hour 15 minutes for most trips. New York - Toronto fares will typically be \$25 or \$45 each way, with \$60 as the highest fare and one dollar for a couple seats per bus. New York to/from Buffalo will generally be \$21 or \$32 each way, with a high of \$40. New York to/from Syracuse will be \$19 or \$30, with a high of \$38. The last couple of seats on each bus may be sold from \$50 - \$70 each. Fares between Syracuse and Buffalo range from \$14 to \$33. Like Amtrak and the airlines, MegaBus fares are subject to change without notice. Double deck buses, holding up to 81 passengers offering panoramic views, will be used on selected departures across New York State, with the single level buses carrying 55 passengers on other departures. Each MegaBus offers free WiFi, reading lamps, and reclining seats, as well as bathroom facilities.

Reservations are non-refundable and can be changed more than 24 hours in advance for a one dollar fee. All reservations should be made at www.megabus.com, and if made by phone an additional \$3 fee is added. No refund if you miss your bus or wish to cancel or change within 24 hours of scheduled departure. *Gary Prophet*

State DOT Targeted for \$60.5 Million Cut

The New York State Transportation Department is targeted for current year savings of \$60.5 million according to documents posted on the Budget Division website on October 28th. Of that sum, cuts totaling \$40 million have been identified and the balance will be taken from unused snow and ice control activities during the upcoming winter. Among the major cutbacks are:

- \$ 11.2 million from implementing a hiring freeze;
- \$ 8.3 million from various non-personal service actions and reductions in overtime;
- \$ 3.0 million from reduced utilization of existing consultant contracts, primarily for project design and materials inspection;
- \$ 3.0 million from cancellation of operational funding for a new Amtrak express service between Albany and New York;
- \$ 1.7 million from savings in a contract with the Thruway Authority for operation and maintenance of Interstate Route 84 in the lower Hudson Valley; and
- \$ 1.3 million from cuts in Multi-modal program funding.

While the Budget Division has not posted a new workforce by agency chart, earlier charts show the number of workers at DOT will be cut by 286 below the actual number of employees on March 31, 2008. Since the original approved budget for 2008-2008 added 322 new FTE positions, the gross job cut for DOT from the original budget is 618 positions. The DOT cutback is the second largest cut in regular state agencies and a stark contrast to ten agencies slated for 100+ employee increases.

The Budget Division data does not include additional cuts which may be enacted at the November 18th Special Session of the State Legislature. That session has been called by the Governor David A. Paterson to pass an additional \$2 billion in current fiscal year savings.

The Governor contends that New York State faces a record \$47 billion budget deficit over the next four fiscal years. That deficit is based on a projection that the State will lose \$19.2 billion in revenue over the next four years as a result of recent Wall Street turmoil and its long term effects on the economy.

In October 29th Washington testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, Governor Paterson called for a federal economic program "to reignite the engine of our economy" by sending federal dollars to cash strapped states. Governor Paterson asked Congress to consider helping states by:

- * Boosting spending and eligibility for food aid for the poor;
- * Increasing federal spending for states in the form of emergency grants; and
- * Spending federal dollars to rebuild the nation's crumbling infrastructure, including constructing roads and repairing water treatment plants.

The Governor told Congressmen that in New York there are 40 "shovel ready programs for improving highways and bridges" and another 50 water projects "ready to go. No mention was made of any projects to improve intercity passenger rail.

Anthony Rudmann

Warning to Snowmobile operators and cross-country skiers... stay off the tracks. It can take a train up to two miles to stop and trains can't swerve to avoid collisions.

Commission Holds Hearings on MTA Funding Crisis – Business Leaders Question Need for LIRR East Side Access

Governor David Paterson's Commission on Financing the MTA, headed by former MTA Chairman Richard Ravitch, held hearings in October, inviting testimony from a number of civic, environmental and business leaders.

ESPA's Manhattan Coordinator George Haikalis was one of about sixty persons invited to speak. At the hearings, Kathryn Wylde, President of Partnership for NYC -- the city's largest business organization -- and Matthew Crosson, President of the Long Island Association -- representing businesses on the Island, both questioned the wisdom of proceeding to complete the \$7.3 billion LIRR East Side Access project, given the substantial shortfalls expected in MTA's capital and operating budget.

Both business organizations oppose increases in taxes to cover the shortfalls. Crosson was particularly emphatic in pointing out that few of the three million people living on Long Island would benefit from a project that brings some 50,000 LIRR commuters closer to their workplaces in East Midtown. He urged MTA to redirect funds to the third track project through Mineola that would permit reverse peak travel, and to the Nassau Hub project that would facilitate transit use in this evolving business center.Haikalis called for a less costly plan for LIRR East Side Access that would use existing tracks and platforms at Grand Central Terminal and might save as much as \$2.5 billion while producing a much more passenger-friendly facility. Haikalis also urged the Ravitch Commission to consider using existing LIRR tracks that link Penn Station with the West Side Yard, redirecting some \$2.1 billion now earmarked for the #7 subway extension, to fund much needed improvements at Penn Station, and also to build a double-track connection from Amtrak's West Side Line into Penn Station, avoiding this capacity constraint.

Ravitch has the unenviable task of finding new revenue sources as the meltdown of the state's economy spreads. The Commission will report on its findings in early December.

George Haikalis

LIRR Queens Interlocking Project

In September, the LIRR restored normal operations on the Main Line after the \$60M reconfiguration of Queens Interlocking west of the Bellerose station. The project replaced the 1960's era track configuration and signal systems to allow operation on the through tracks at 80 mph, with 70 mph through the crossovers. The passenger-jarring track layout formerly mandated 60 mph on the through tracks. Higher speeds are facilitated by replacing number 15 and 20 switches with number 32.7 crossovers, track realignments and a microprocessor-based signal system. Additional high-speed crossovers will be installed in the future to complete this project. Trains cancelled since June to provide construction windows were reinstated. The September timetable also added a new morning reverse peak train through this area on the Hempstead branch. This was requested by Adelphi and Hofstra Universities to serve their passengers coming from New York City.

John E. Raha

Amtrak Rock Cut Project Inches Forward

Amtrak's plans to stabilize the rock cut on the Empire Corridor just south of the George Washington Bridge and eliminate a slow-speed order continue to move forward. Amtrak awarded a construction management contract to HNTB, a large engineering firm, at the end of September. The work has been advertised to the contracting community and interested firms have submitted bids. Amtrak hopes to award a contract shortly and projects construction commencing in November.

The slow-speed order was first brought to Amtrak management's attention after a question was raised about it at an ESPA annual meeting. Further investigation led to the realization that the zone affected every Amtrak train traveling between NYC and upstate New York. Fixing the problem could shave a couple of minutes off the schedule of every train and eliminate a potential safety hazard. ESPA looks forward to a ribbon cutting in 2009.

Steve Strauss

FRA Seeks Maglev Project Applications

The Federal Railroad Administration is seeking applications for a \$45 million grant program available to Maglev Projects east of the Mississippi River. The competition for the money is limited to three projects named in legislation passed in June 2008.

The three competitors are a 54 mile project through Pittsburgh, PA, a 39 mile project between Baltimore, MD and Washington, DC, and a 110 mile route between Atlanta, GA and Chattanooga, TN. Extensive environmental and preliminary engineering work has been completed for Pittsburgh and the Baltimore-Washington corridor according to a Federal Register notice.

Applications must be received by February 13, 2009 and the grant money may be given to a single project or split among competitors. Funds may "be used for preconstruction planning activities and capital costs of the fixed guideway infrastructure of a maglev project."

A 40 mile maglev project between Las Vegas and Primm, NV has been designated as the western program and allocated \$45 million.

Anthony Rudmann

New York Wins (Cont'd from page 1)

According to the September 30th federal grant announcement: "The full implementation of the reconfiguration will allow for improved speeds approaching and departing the station resulting from the improvement of signal aspects through installation of track circuits and the realignment of tracks to allow for non-diverging moves to and from the inboard island platform faces. The project represents the first comprehensive reconfigurations of one of the busier station interlocking in the U.S. since the time it was first cobbled together in the late 1960's."

The Vermont grant will support "a state-of-good-repair project to rebuild 2 miles of slow-order laden track on the Clarendon and Pittsford Railroad near Rutland, VT on the route of the State-supported *Ethan Allen Express*. The project involves the installation of continuous welded rail, 2000 new ties, and renewal of the roadbed." The total project cost is just over \$1.1 million with Vermont sources supplying the balance.

The federal grants were made from a new \$30 million program enacted as part of the 2008 federal transportation appropriation and officially announced in February 2008. Pending federal appropriations for Fiscal Year 2009 which began October 1st would include \$100 million for intercity passenger rail service grants.

Anthony Rudmann

Tappan Zee Bridge Update

I attended the Tappan Zee Bridge presentation in White Plains on October 29, 2008. It began with an hour plus presentation showing the various alternatives for bridge replacement, background information of alternatives as well as the problems with the current bridge and the fact that to rehabilitate the current bridge would require 80-85% of the cost of a new bridge. The preferred alternative is a new bridge with Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) from Suffern to Post Chester, which is the full length of the Route 287 Corridor through Rockland and Westchester Counties. It would also include commuter rail from Suffern across Rockland and the Tappan Zee Bridge, then heading south and connecting with the Hudson line of Metro-North, which would result in a one-seat ride from Rockland County to Grand Central Terminal.

The Bus Rapid Transit would have some exclusive roadway, some shared roadway and would serve the existing Tarrytown Metro-North station (Hudson line) and downtown White Plains (Harlem line), as well as the Port Chester rail station (New Haven line). The BRT will have a dedicated lane from the east end of the new Tappan Zee Bridge to the Tarrytown rail station. The new Tappan Zee Bridge would have 4 lanes of traffic in each direction for general use. There will be an additional lane in each direction for the BRT, which could also be shared for either high occupancy vehicles and/or at a higher fare for vehicles, if they so choose. The bridge may physically be two separate bridges with the two track commuter rail on a lower level of one of the bridges or the commuter rail may be a third bridge itself. It is unlikely that the entire bridge will be one structure. The new Tappan Zee Bridge will have an area, likely on the northern side of the bridge, to accommodate both bicycles and pedestrians.

The total cost of this option, in 2012 dollars, is \$16 billion. Almost half of this is for the commuter rail and BRT. Full commuter rail from Suffern to Port Chester would have added six additional billion dollars to the cost. It was stated that the highway bridge will be completed first, with the BRT not far behind, but that the commuter rail from Suffern connecting with the Hudson line would be built after the new highway bridge is opened

Gary Prophet

Region II (Cont'd from page 1)

Moving forward on the deep cavern plan would signal the complete failure of regional cooperation, making it very difficult for motorists to ever be attracted to transit for trips passing through the core of the NY-NJ-CT region.

Governor Paterson could call a halt to both NJ Transit's Hudson River tunnel deep cavern plan and MTA's deep cavern LIRR East Side Access plan. Both plans are not only costly and inconvenient but they are inviting terrorist targets. Some 14,000 commuters, waiting in delayed trains, would be at great risk in these deep terminals. The Governor has an obligation to protect its citizens from this kind of risk. Transit advocates have called for an independent assessment of costs, operational feasibility and security risk before the worrisome plans are allowed to advance. The only assessment has been done by the transit agencies themselves -- acting as judge and jury -- in what are poor uses of scarce public resources. Governor Paterson has called for "everything to be on the table" as the State faces its most serious financial times since the great depression. These sacred cows must not be immune from the careful scrutiny expected of all state-funded programs. *George Haikalis*

Amtrak Introduces New USA Rail Passes

Amtrak has revised its USA Rail Pass program, which is available to both International Travelers and US citizens. Designed for those travelers interested in seeing many parts of the country all on one trip, the pass enables you to visit any destination in Amtrak's system and to choose how long you want to travel.

With current pass pricing starting at \$389 for the 15 day/8 segment duration and going up to \$749 for the longest length, the passes (valid for coach accommodations; upgrades to business class and sleepers are allowed at full regular rates) are a great bargain if you wish to travel on multiple long-distance trains, particularly from their end-to end points. Children's (2-15) passes are half-priced, when traveling with adults.

Various restrictions apply and the passes are NOT valid on the Acela Express, Auto Train and some other Amtrak services. Contact Amtrak for complete information.

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...

Route Process *(Cont'd from page 1)*

The focus is on items that can be accomplished within months (less than a year) for costs of nothing to a small amount, so long term views of new equipment is not part of this, nor are train fares, nor adding trains, but slightly changing schedules would be considered. ESPA's Board will develop a list of items and communicate with Amtrak on the RPI for the *Lake Shore Limited*, *Adirondack*, and Empire Corridor service south and west of Albany.

Gary Prophet

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, 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...

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)
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- 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.

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