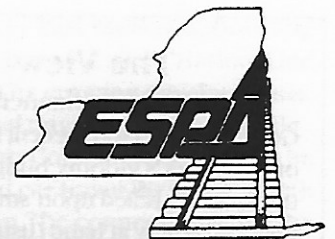


The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 32, No. 5

September/October 2008

Empire Corridor West Study Set To Proceed

The long-awaited, comprehensive study of the Empire Corridor west of Albany is finally set to proceed.

Similar in scope to the 'Hudson Line Railroad Corridor Transportation Plan' completed in November 2005, the 'Empire Corridor West' study will examine all aspects of the current operation of CSX's main line across upstate New York and will include traffic simulation modeling for future increased passenger and freight train volumes on the line. As in the Hudson Line Plan, the study will identify specific improvement projects and associated costs that will in the future be necessary in order to increase both capacity and reliability on this very busy segment of railroad. In addition, the study will examine the feasibility and costs of the addition of significant segments of a third, higher-speed, passenger track.

Systra Engineering has been selected as the contractor for the study, which is being coordinated and administered by NYSDOT and which will involve all the current users of the Corridor. Funding for the study is coming from money originally obtained by former Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, as part of the Senate High Speed Task Force initiative. Current plans call for the study to be completed in 2009.

Bruce B. Becker



Amtrak Appoints William Hollister to Strategic Partnership Position

Long-time Empire Corridor employee Bill Hollister has been appointed to the position of Principle Officer in Amtrak's Strategic Partnerships and Business Development Department. In his new responsibility, Bill will be working with Amtrak's state government partners in New York, Vermont, Maine and Pennsylvania, with his primary office being at Rensselaer.

Bill has worked for Amtrak for 24 years, first in a number of corridor operations positions and then most recently as the New York State Marketing Manager. In this position Bill worked to promote Amtrak's services to the travel and tourism industry, both here in New York and across the country. Bill also had a big part in the development of the 'New York By Rail' magazine, which is now its fifth year. Bill has always supported ESPA's efforts and was a guest speaker at our 2008 Annual Meeting.

ESPA is very pleased by this appointment as Bill brings a wealth of knowledge to the position, both from an operations and marketing perspective. With New York State poised to significantly increase its commitment to passenger rail in the coming years, Bill's customer service orientation and positive 'can-do' attitude will certainly be put to good use.

Bruce Becker

State DOT Impacted by Budget Cuts

The New York State Transportation Department will suffer significant budget reductions under two waves of cuts ordered by Governor David A. Paterson.

As his first act in office, the new Governor proposed a \$500 million reduction in 2008-09 agency spending (-3.35 percent). On July 30, an additional \$630 reduction (-7 percent) in 2008-09 executive agency spending and a "hard" hiring freeze were ordered by the Governor.

The initial 3.35 percent cut translates into recurring savings of \$721,000 according to the Financial Management Plan submitted by DOT Commissioner Astrid C. Glynn and posted on the Budget Division website. This cut reflects the fact that only \$21.5 million of the \$3.5 billion of the Department's budget was subject to the mandatory 3.35% savings required. The second wave of cuts increased the DOT spending reduction target to \$1,303,000 according to a Budget Division website chart. As of this writing, the Budget Division has not posted a new Financial Management plan from Commissioner Glynn.

More significant may be the changes in workforce demanded under the Governor's plans. The initial January Budget submission

(Cont'd on page 5)

West of Albany Ridership Continues Upward Spiral

June was another banner month for west of Albany ridership and revenue, with increases on the two New York - Niagara Falls trains and the *Maple Leaf* of 31.9% and 31.2% respectively, over the prior year. FY 2008 year-to-date west of Albany ridership is up 22.6%, with revenue up 31.9%

Other New York State services also all enjoyed gains, with the *Adirondack's* ridership up 22.1% and revenue up 24.8%; the

(Cont'd on page 5)

The View from the Cab

I'm quite a financial conservative and I applaud Governor Patterson's recent frank and honest public disclosure of New York's gloomy budget situation. For too many years the state has relied upon 'smoke and mirrors' to gloss over the financial reality at hand (usually for political expediency) and it's high time we face-up to the truth... we can't keep spending money we don't have on things we don't need! Tough choices will have to be made...

That being said however, I think that we can all agree that state investment in our passenger rail system is the right choice; is something we do need now (more than ever) and is very sound government policy for both today and the future. On behalf of ESPA I will be writing Governor Patterson, urging him to immediately approve the funding of the proposed Albany-New York Express Train described elsewhere in this issue. The demand for fast and reliable service to the City is clearly there and this new train would be the first tangible evidence of the state's commitment to providing energy efficient transportation alternatives in the increasingly congested Hudson Valley region.

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

Rensselaer Station Platform Project Advances

The previously announced project to add a fourth platform track and to extend the current high-level platforms at the Rensselaer Station is moving forward towards a hoped for fall 2009 completion.

Current project developments reportedly include:

- Agreements for Amtrak to transfer the ownership of the two former passenger buildings north of the current station to the Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA). This impending property transfer will open the door for the demolition of the two unused buildings, which may occur as early as this winter. No track work can start until these buildings are removed.
- CDTA awarding a contract for the design and engineering of the extended platforms and canopies to Clough Harbour & Associates.
- Completion of the design and cost estimates of the reconfigured track, switch and signal systems by CSX. This aspect of the project is being managed by NYSDOT and involves close coordination and cooperation between CSX, Amtrak and CDTA. Once all of the necessary approvals are obtained, CSX will be administering the actual construction of the fourth track, new interlockings and upgraded signals.

Once completed, the project will allow for far greater operational efficiency at Rensselaer and should significantly reduce delays due to train congestion, a problem which has plagued the station since opening in 2002. Funding for the project is coming from state money originally obtained by former Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno, as part of the Senate High Speed Task Force initiative.

Bruce B. Becker

Congressman Nadler Visits Upstate

Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY's 8th District) held public 'Transportation Priority' meetings in Utica at the end of July and in Buffalo in mid-August. The Utica meeting was hosted by Congressman Michael Arcuri and the Buffalo event was hosted by Congressman Brian Higgins. NYSDOT Commissioner Astrid Glynn also attended in Buffalo. A meeting hosted by Congresswomen Louise Slaughter had been previously held in Rochester last April.

Congressman Nadler, the senior Democrat from the Northeast on the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, was seeking local input to help guide his efforts and focus during the upcoming reauthorization of federal transportation funding, slated to be undertaken in 2009.

Rail passenger interests were represented at the Buffalo session by ESPA President Bruce Becker, who participated as one of the meeting panelists. Bruce stressed the need for the development of a rational, comprehensive national transportation policy, to include intercity passenger rail, as a guide for the upcoming reauthorization discussions and deliberations. Congressman Nadler alluded that such a national transportation policy is long overdue, but that it would likely be hard to achieve consensus on such a broad topic. Bruce thanked Congressman Nadler and Higgins (along with the remainder of the New York congressional delegation) for voting in favor of the recent Amtrak reauthorization legislation, which passed by a veto-proof majority. Bruce also addressed the vital need for federal funding for the next generation of intercity passenger equipment, in addition to asking for immediate help in securing more cars for the Empire Corridor.

Other speakers at the event spoke of the need for increased federal spending on basic 'state of good repair' issues, with particular focus on the huge backlog of needed highway bridge repairs. And Niagara region public transportation officials stressed the need for new buses, in light of significant ridership increases across their systems.

Bruce B. Becker

No Decision on Proposed New Express Train

As of press time, there is reportedly still NO firm commitment by the state to enter into an operating agreement with Amtrak for the proposed new weekday Albany to New York Express Train, which had been targeted to start service late this fall.

While funding for the new train is included in the current state budget, the looming budget crisis which has been the focus of Governor Patterson in recent weeks, has apparently complicated the decision and approval process for the new service.

Amtrak, *CSX* and *Metro North* have preliminarily agreed to the new service, which calls for a 7:35am weekday departure from Rensselaer, arriving at New York's Penn Station at 9:50am. The return trip would leave New York at 3:50pm, with arrival back at Rensselaer at 6:05pm. The 2 hour, 15 minute run would be the fastest currently operated and is intended to provide a consistently high on-time performance. The best ever scheduled Albany - New York running time was 2 hours, 10 minutes for a similar non-stop service operated many years ago.

We strongly urge Governor Patterson to approve the initiation of the new express train service as a demonstration of his stated commitment to support better and more energy efficient public transportation options for travelers between Albany and New York City.

Bruce B. Becker

Elected Officials, Transit Advocates And Amtrak Raise Concerns About Hudson River Tunnel Project

In an August 6, 2008 letter to New York Governor David A. Paterson, New Jersey State Senator Jennifer Beck together with 16 other Senators and 15 New Jersey Assembly members, asked New York State to pay a "fair" portion of the \$7.5 billion cost of the new Hudson River tunnel being planned by NJ Transit.

In 2003, New York State forced New Jersey to go it alone on the tunnel project when then-governor George Pataki withdrew MTA as a partner in the Access to the Region's Core (ARC) study. Pataki feared that New York's cooperation would come at a price, and the state would be expected to pay a share of this project. The late George Warrington, then NJ Transit's Executive Director was only too happy to have a project that was fully under his control. New York officials boast about their "cooperation", but thus far about all they have offered is permission for NJ Transit to burrow through Manhattan's very tough schist, which has no petroleum or mineral deposits.

The result has been a plan that has very negative impacts for transit riders. Bringing passengers into an isolated, deep cavern terminal station some 175 feet below 34th Street and 460 feet north of Penn Station instead of connecting the new tunnel into existing tracks and platforms at Penn Station, will add four to five minutes of travel time in each direction. Furthermore, in this age of concern about security, placing this facility so far below the surface is worrisome. Regional transit advocates, together with NARP Executive Director Ross Capon, discussed these concerns with NJ DOT Commissioner Kris Kolluri and NJ Transit head Rich Sarles on July 9, 2008. A follow-on meeting is scheduled in early September.

Transit advocates strongly support the expansion of rail capacity across the Hudson River to Midtown Manhattan. However, they have called for a more rider-friendly plan — connecting the new tunnels into existing Tracks 1-6 in Penn Station, and not building a new six-track deep cavern station. Advocates also call for resuming the ARC planning study of connecting Penn Station with Grand Central Terminal, including full participation with MTA, Amtrak and the general public. Advocates have requested that the 1,600 page Draft Report of the ARC Major Investment Study, which includes a detailed description of the station connection plan, be released for public review. Finally, advocates have called for NJ Transit and MTA to work quickly to put into place a NY-NJ-CT regional rail "demonstration project" that takes advantage of the existing thru-running capability at Penn Station.

Amtrak President Alex Kummant continues to call for a direct track connection to Penn Station as part of the ARC tunnel plan, most recently in an interview in the August 18-25, 2008 issue of the Observer, New York's prickly peach weekly.

With gas prices rising and congestion growing, it is hard to understand why the very capable governors of New York and New Jersey cannot ask the transit agencies that report to them to come up with a sensible plan that would make public transit easier to use for travel between the two states. In particular, New York Governor David Paterson should ask his key transportation advisors to take a careful look at the benefits to New York State that would result from a direct track connection between Penn Station and Grand Central. In the ARC study, this alternative would cost less to build and operate, and would attract more riders and divert more motorists than the current deep cavern plan. It would make it easier for West of Hudson commuters to reach the massive

concentration of office buildings in East Midtown, boosting property values and tax revenues. It would allow Harlem Line riders to reach West Midtown with its growing developments. Many new opportunities for regional travel would be possible. And Northeast Corridor and Empire Corridor trains would be better able to compete with air and car travel, by serving both business concentrations in Midtown. The connection would be truly a project of national significance, and would be a real feather in Governor Paterson cap, if it could be advanced under his watch.

George Haikalis, ESPA Manhattan Coordinator and NARP Region 2 Director

Metro-North Adds Weekend Train To Pascack Valley Line

MTA Metro-North is now operating an additional weekend train on the Pascack Valley Line between Spring Valley, NY and Penn Station.

Last fall, Metro-North added weekend service on the line after a four-decade hiatus. The agency now will operate a total of 24 daily weekend trains on the line.

During 2008's first half, ridership on Metro-North's West-of-Hudson trains has jumped 17 percent compared with the same 2007 period. Metro-North officials attribute the increase primarily to weekend and off-peak Pascack Valley Line service.

Orrin Getz

NJ Transit Purchases Dual-Power Locomotives For NYC-Scranton-Binghamton Service

NJ Transit approved a \$325 million contract to purchase 26 dual-power locomotives at its July 9, 2008 Board Meeting. The locomotives are capable of operating under electric power thru the Penn Station tunnels as well as using diesel power on non-electrified lines. The locomotives will be adapted from the ALP-46 electric locomotives that NJ transit is purchasing from Bombardier. Horsepower will be 6,700 in the electric mode and 4,200 in the diesel mode. NJ Transit plans to use these locomotives on the Raritan Valley, North Jersey Coast and Boonton Lines, and, when connections are completed to the new Hudson River tunnels, on its lines serving Bergen, Passaic, Rockland and Orange Counties.

With these locomotives, a one-seat ride would be possible on the Lackawanna Cut-off from Manhattan to Stroudsburg and Scranton, PA and Binghamton, NY.

George Haikalis

Upcoming Rail Related Events

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. Complete program and event information are available at the Eastman House web site: www.eastmanhouse.org

States Compete for Federal Passenger Grants

Twenty-two states submitted 25 proposals to improve intercity passenger rail service in a competition for \$30 million under a new federal grant program. An early August press release from the Federal Railroad Administration said the grant awards will be announced in September.

According to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary E. Peters: "Our goal is to achieve long-term achievements in intercity passenger rail service by supporting state investments that get real results."

Secretary Peters explained that the state proposals received were designed to improve the reliability of intercity passenger service, relieve highway congestion and increase rail capacity. Some examples of submitted project proposals included installing advanced signaling systems to increase track speeds, reconfiguring track junctions to enhance operational efficiency and construction additional mainline track to keep trains moving.

Most submitted applications proposed improvements to existing passenger routes while a few involved planning activities for the creation of an entirely new service according to Secretary Peters. Each federal grant awarded will require a 50-50 funding match she said.

The new \$30 million grant program was enacted as part of the 2008 federal transportation appropriation and officially announced in February 2008. Pending federal appropriations for Federal Fiscal Year 2009 which begins October 1, 2008 would include a \$100 million grant program.

The federal August announcement did not indicate which states had submitted grant applications or identify what projects are competing for grants. A search of federal web-sites found no information beyond what was provided in the press release. There has been no New York State government announcement that a grant application had been submitted. *Tony Rudmann*

Tourist Survey Underway for Utica Mainline

In an effort to identify new uses for the Utica Mainline of the New York Susquehanna and Western Railroad (NYS&W) a passenger oriented study is underway. The Utica Mainline connects Binghamton and Utica, the line was severely damaged by flooding in 2006. NYS&W has not rebuilt the flood damaged section between Chenango Forks and Sherburne as no freight customers exist on that portion of the line.

In support of the study of the line for recreational uses the Chenango County Area Corporation is requesting that interested parties complete an online survey to help gauge public response to the concept of using the route as a scenic railroad. The survey asks respondents about events in the area served by the line that might be of interest in addition to proposed ticket prices and on board service options riders would prefer.

The study is funded in part by the Chenango County Planning and Economic Development Committee; TranSystems-Stone Consulting has been selected to prepare the study. To add input to the study visit the survey website at the Commerce Chenango website, <http://www.chenangony.org>. *Ben Gottfried*

Amtrak Seeks ES&PA'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...

There's Always a Reason to Ride Amtrak

Niagara Falls	www.niagara-usa.com
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Rochester	www.visitrochester.com
Syracuse	www.visitSyracuse.org
Utica	www.oneidacountycvb.com
Albany	www.Albany.org
New York City	www.nycvisit.com
Montreal	www.tourisme-montreal.org

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If you see a problem at a Crossing or trespassing:

Report any problem – stalled vehicle on the tracks, damaged sign, obstructed view, signal malfunction, or trespassing – to the railroad immediately. Call the emergency notification number posted on or near the crossing, or notify local law enforcement.

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CSX	800-232-0144
Canadian Pacific	800-716-9132
Norfolk Southern	800-848-8715
MTA- Metro North	212-878-1001

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Always expect a train, Trains can run on any track, at any time, in either direction. After a train passes, look both ways before proceeding.

Since 1990, more than **5,500** people have been killed while trespassing on railroad rights-of-way and property.

Empire Corridor Travel Tips and Discounts

- o Last Chance...In partnership with the 'I Love New York' tourism program, Amtrak is offering a 20% fare discount program for NYS rail travel now through the end of September 2008. With a 20% discount off the regular adult fares, the program is only available by making reservations directly through Amtrak's 800 number, 1-800-USA-RAIL and specifically mentioning discount code V464 to the agent (it is NOT available via the Amtrak's web site!). Valid on all trains running in New York State and on the Adirondack to Montreal (but not on Northeast Corridor trains or on the Maple Leaf in Ontario), reservations must be made at least three days in advance of travel and early reservations will help insure the best availability of the discount. For more information and other discount restrictions, contact Amtrak directly.
- o All Empire Corridor trains require reservations. While advance reservations are encouraged, last minute passengers will always be accommodated if space is available on a particular train. Booking as early as possible will provide the best possible fare. Amtrak accepts reservations up to 11 months in advance of your travel date! Travel during off-peak periods (mid-week, early morning or late evening) will generally be the least expensive.
- o AAA and NARP members receive 10% off most regular fares, with a three day advance purchase requirement. Senior citizens, veterans and many students can receive a 15% discount off most fares.
- o Visit www.amtrak.com and select 'Hot Deals' for the latest discount program information.
- o Join the Amtrak Guest Rewards program and earn points towards free travel and more.

State DOT (Cont'd from page 1)

were requested for 322 new FTE jobs, 292 in design and construction and 30 in preventive maintenance.

A far different current picture is shown on the July Workforce Chart displayed on the Budget Division website. That chart shows the actual 10,245 FTEs on March 31 will be cut by 286 to 9,959 by March 31, 2009. Since the website does not show cuts by DOT program, we have no way of telling what departmental programs will be downsized. The DOT cutback is the second largest cut in regular state agencies and a stark contrast to ten agencies slated to enjoy 100+ employee increases.

At this writing it is unclear how the proposed budget reductions would impact the \$3.5 capital construction program the Transportation Department was supposed to deliver in the current fiscal year.

Tony Rudmann

West of Albany Ridership (Cont'd from page 1)

The *Lake Shore Ltd.* was up 12.0% and 11.9% respectively and the *Ethan Allen* was up 14.7% and 20.7%. The Hudson Valley trains had modest increases of 6.7% and 8.7%. Empire Corridor on-time performance for June was 70.1%, a 14.1% improvement over the previous year's poor 56.0% showing. The *Lake Shore Limited* tallied a 50.0% OTP rate, up 17.2% from June 2007.

Bruce B. Becker

Amtrak Ridership Sets New Records

Amtrak ridership in July 2008 increased to 2,750,278, nearly a 14 percent increase, marking the most passengers carried in any single month in Amtrak's 37 year history. Total ridership for the Fiscal Year to date — October 1, 2007 - July 31, 2008 — reached 23.7 million, topping the 21.3 million from the same period last year. Total ticket revenue for the fiscal year to date reached \$1.4 billion, a 14.1 percent increase over the same period in FY07. For the month of July, ticket revenue increased by 18.6 percent to \$168 million.

"Increasing fuel prices, highway congestion, airline issues and environmental awareness continue to make intercity passenger rail extremely relevant and popular," said Alex Kummant, President and CEO of Amtrak. "In addition, we continue to work on service improvements and better on-time performance, which draws more ridership and revenue each month.

"Our record-setting ridership and ticket revenue in the month of July alone indicate we will end the year with approximately three million new passenger trips in FY09," he added.

Eastern Highlights

The popularity of the *Acela Express* service continued in the month of July with a 5.5 percent increase over July 2007. Ticket revenue in the Northeast Corridor reached more than \$79 million, a 16.2 percent increase. Ridership on the recently relaunched *Northeast Regional* trains continued to rise with an 8.8 percent increase in the month of July and revenue topping \$41 million.

The *Downeaster*, which operates between Portland, Maine and Boston, carried 48,438 passengers in July, a 33.6 percent increase over July last year. Ticket revenues on this route increased by 34.1 percent to \$722,676.

The *Keystone Service*, which operates between Harrisburg, Philadelphia, and New York City experienced significant growth with a 26 percent increase in ridership, reaching 109,317 in July, and a 19.9 percent increase from October - July with more 975,184 passengers.

The *Piedmont*, which runs between Raleigh and Charlotte NC, increased ridership by 43 percent in July, and ticket revenue by 48 percent.

Central Highlights

The Midwest trains continued to see significant gains in both ridership and revenue in July. The *Heartland Flyer* increased ridership by 40.2 percent and revenue by 70.2 percent last month. The *Hiawatha Service*, with seven daily round-trips sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Illinois DOT, reached 78,662 passengers - a 37.7 percent increase over July 07.

West Highlights

California's *Capitol Corridor* service which operates between Auburn and San Jose, carried 161,731 passengers in July FY08, a 32.6 percent increase over the same month last year. The *San Joaquins* continue to increase in ridership with a 32.1 percent increase over July last year and a 47.5 percent increase in revenue.

National Highlights

Among the trains on the Amtrak national network, the *Coast Starlight* - which operates between Seattle and Los Angeles - was the most popular overnight train in the month of July with more than 47,000 passengers, a 27.7 percent increase. The *Auto Train*, which runs non-stop between the Washington, DC and Orlando areas, carried more than 24,000 passengers in July and the New York-Miami *Silver Service* trains (*Silver Meteor-Silver Star*) achieved ridership gains of 14.7 and 17.8 percent respectively.

Amtrak

ESPA's Fun "One-Day Trip" Flyer

One-Day Trip Flyers to Utica, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo list the many attractions that are easily available within a short walk or bus ride from the station. Flyers are available on the ESPA web site: www.trainweb.com/espa.

The flyers also include a map and Amtrak schedule. For a copy of the four flyers, contact Bob Lenz 10531 Main St. Clarence, NY 14031 e-mail: rwlenz@aol.com

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, September 27, 2008	Rensselaer, NY
Saturday, November 15, 2008	Schenectady, NY
Saturday, January 24, 2009	Schenectady, NY
Saturday, March 7, 2009	NARP Region 2 ESPA 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...

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Send e-mail address to www.rwlenz@aol.com

Thank You! Robert Lenz, Editor

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



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- Corporate membership (\$100.00)
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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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