

**Working for a More Balanced Transportation System**

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### Second Track Project Nears Completion

While some work remains, the long-awaited Albany-Schenectady Second Track project is nearing completion. A 5-mile segment, from the Livingston Avenue Bridge over the Hudson River, up the West Albany Hill, past CSX West Albany Yard, over Central Ave and Fuller Rd, and under the I-87 to a new interlocking at the Lincoln Road grade crossing in Colonie, is now in service.

The \$90 million, 17-miles project will be completed once final interlocking and signalling work now currently underway is completed this year. Once fully in place, a major bottleneck of Upstate's Amtrak Corridor will be just a memory; in its place: a more reliable rail service. Late trains will no longer delay other trains due to need to wait in Schenectady or Albany because of a single track line.

On Wednesday March 22<sup>nd</sup>, the above photo, taken from an eastbound Amtrak train, shows a westbound train passing it using the new track. NARP's Bruce Becker recorded a video from the rear of a westbound train of the entire segment; the 10-minute video was uploaded to YouTube under the title, "Amtrak in NY's Capitol District - LAB to CP 149." The image below from Bruce's video shows just east of Lincoln Road in Colonie looking towards the I-87 Northway overpasses.

*Benjamin Turon*



### Buffalo Selects Downtown as Station Site

The Buffalo Station Selection Advisory Board has selected, downtown as their preferred site. The vote was 11 for, 3 against with 1 abstention. Now the question is where? A station in downtown on or near Main Street, near the light rail and the ongoing Canalside redevelopment is favored. Stay in touch with the unfolding story Via Facebook [www.facebook.com/esparail](http://www.facebook.com/esparail).

### White House Begins War on Transportation

Despite growing public support for improvements in intercity passenger rail, commuter rail and public transit, the new Trump Administration announced plans for drastic cuts in transportation in the proposed federal budget for Fiscal Year 2018 which begins October 1, 2017. Also attacked was current Fiscal Year spending which was funded until April 28, 2017 under a Continuing Resolution when Congress could not agree on full year funding under the normal appropriation process.

In a March 15<sup>th</sup> briefing, Office of Management & Budget Director Mick Mulvaney unveiled a "skinny budget" plan slashing \$2.4 billion, or 13 percent, of Transportation Department appropriations. The plan eliminates funding for Amtrak long distance trains, any new grants for public transit by the Federal Transit Administration, and the widely popular Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grants.

Eliminating the 15 Long Distance routes affects 40 states, and kills the only Amtrak service in 23 of the 46 states Amtrak serves, and all intercity rail service to almost 200 stations. Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer Wick Moorman said, "These trains connect our major regions, provide vital transportation to residents in rural communities and generate connecting passenger and revenue for our Northeast Corridor and state-supported services." New York State intercity rail passengers would lose the *Lake Shore Limited*, thereby severing travel to Chicago, all service to the West Coast, three trains to Florida, and service to Atlanta and New Orleans.

Elimination of new Federal Transit Administration grants would impact Amtrak, New York & New Jersey by halting Hudson Tunnel work, impact Caltrain electrification, and stop long-planned transit projects in states which supported President Trump just last November, including Florida, Texas, Michigan, Indiana, and North Carolina. Ironically, as a candidate, Mr. Trump said, "We have to spend money on mass transit—we have to spend a lot of money." The new President also spoke of building new subways and high speed rail while on the campaign trail.

The end of the TIGER program surprised many transportation professionals since new Transportation Secretary Elaine Chou praised the program as a success during her

(Cont'd on page 5)

## Interstate Cooperation is Key to Advancing a “Rational” Gateway Tunnel Project

Fewer than five percent of the inbound morning peak hour passengers using Amtrak's Hudson River tunnels are actually Amtrak passengers, even though this agency was given the responsibility for operating and maintaining the tunnels after the financial collapse of the Penn Central merger some fifty years ago. The real problem is handling peak period New Jersey commuters who now dominate tunnel use.

Though damaged by Hurricane Sandy, Amtrak claims that these tunnels can safely remain operational for the time being, while each tunnel is taken out of service, one at a time, while doing a major overhaul on the other; a process that will take two to three years. While Amtrak's Northeast Corridor Regional and Acela trains can be accommodated, though with some inconvenience by this single-tracking, the real burden falls on NJ Transit.

USDOT and NJ Transit have proposed a “fast-action” environmental review, “segmenting” the building of replacement tunnels, restricting public input, and ignoring the overall consequences of a much more complex Gateway project that is projected to cost over \$25 billion. In doing so, they have foreclosed far more useful and cost-effective strategies that could actually get the job done sooner as well.

Building two new tunnels while the existing tunnels are taken out of service for repairs will do little to ease overcrowding at the existing Penn Station. The full Gateway project calls for the expansion of Penn Station to the south, constructing a new seven track stub terminal. This plan calls for the removal of dozens of buildings and the displacement of thousands of workers. The new station would be even further from existing subway stations, used by about half of Penn Station's passengers whose destinations are too far to walk.

In 2006, ESPA and NJ-ARP, called for a much better plan, routing the new Hudson River tunnels by way of the Jersey City-Hoboken waterfront business district, the state's largest in terms of Class A office space. This routing would take advantage of underutilized existing rail facilities, like NJ Transit's Morristown Line and its three-track vertical lift draw bridge over the Hackensack River. Existing NJ Transit-owned property could serve as the launching site for tunnel boring machines, avoiding the need for costly and time consuming property taking. An on-line station adjacent to the Hoboken Terminal would not only serve this district, it would allow a convenient transfer to the Hudson-Bergen light rail line and would also enhance the value of adjacent NJ Transit-owned waterfront properties. On the New York side, this plan calls for linking tracks 1 thru 6 at Penn Station with a new pair of tunnels under 31<sup>st</sup> Street and Park Avenue, and connecting to existing tracks in the Lower Level of Grand Central Terminal. A description of the plan can be viewed at: <http://www.rrwg.org/connectr.pdf>

The Manhattan business district is an important economic engine for New Jersey and New York, and both states need to advance a repair strategy for fixing the tunnels while maintaining interstate mobility. New Jersey residents make up more than half of the suburban work force in the NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area, and significantly contribute to the economic well-being of the region's core. New Jersey has the second highest per capita income of any state in the U.S. Understandably, MTA has been reluctant to actively participate in tunnel repair and expansion plans, fearing that they might have to share in their substantial cost. Instead, a new subsidiary

of the Port Authority has been created to advance the effort - Gateway Development Corporation.

Governors Cuomo and Christie, who control the Port Authority, must call for a sensible, cost-effective plan to expand passenger rail capacity across the Hudson. Some reality is needed in counting on President Trump's trillion dollar infrastructure plan to justify the currently over-scaled \$25 billion Amtrak, NJ Transit and Port Authority plan. With Congress keeping a tight lid on budgets, new Federal funding to pay for transportation infrastructure is likely to be in the form of “loans” that must be paid back, or controversial “tax credits”.

The two Governors must make sure that plans for much needed repairs and expansion are carefully thought out, with adequate participation by affected parties, including rail advocacy groups like ESPA. The recent derailments at Penn Station were the result of management errors that were quickly and professionally acknowledged by Amtrak's new leadership. In the near term, the rail operators who share Penn Station must find ways to make better use of this important, publically-owned resource, since new tunnel capacity may be many years away. Improved access to existing platforms can be achieved by adding more stairways from platforms to Level A, the first level above the tracks at Penn Station. Broader concourses on this level can be gained by relocating back-of-office functions and removing concessions, easing pedestrian circulation. Plans for “through operation” can increase peak hour train capacity by 20% or more by avoiding conflicts with inbound and outbound trains, while improving reliability. Common equipment purchases can reduce capital costs and improve operating efficiency. Coordinated information and ticketing should make it easier for travelers to use this important hub. This near-term plan is described at: <http://www.rrwg.org/penn10.pdf>

Needed is better public outreach in developing improvement plans, particularly involving rail advocates.

*George Haikalis, ESPA Manhattan Co-ordinator*

## Positive Train Control Advances

**For the fourth quarter of 2016, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) found that the passenger rail industry made a slight increase on Positive Train Control (PTC) installation, largely due to progress by Amtrak. This life-saving technology, which can remotely monitor and slow or stop trains, has been activated in 24 percent of all rail lines, up from 23 percent in the previous quarter. In a press release, the FRA noted that the one percent increase was associated with Amtrak's efforts to install PTC on 41 percent of its locomotives, up 12 percent from third quarter 2016. The FRA report includes railroad-by-railroad quarterly data on track segments completed, locomotives equipped, employees trained, radio towers installed, route miles in PTC operation, and other key implementation data. For several years, NARP has been calling for passenger rail lines to implement the technology, which is subject to an unfunded mandate as well as deadlines set by Congress.**

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## Rensselaer Forth Platform Work nears Completion

The \$50 million project at the Albany-Rensselaer Rail Station continues, albeit most construction is done and major delays reduced that resulted from the work. Once in place, the new 4<sup>th</sup> platform track, lengthen platforms, and additional track and signalling work will eliminate the former bottleneck of having just three tracks for the two island platforms.

The remaining work, including major repairs of the platform escalators, will be completed this summer. As with the other \$163 million of passenger rail infrastructure funding in the Capital District, including the Albany-Schenectady 2<sup>nd</sup> track and the new buried signalling between Poughkeepsie to Rensselaer, the funding came in large part from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, a.k.a. "The Stimulus." Rensselaer is Amtrak's 9<sup>th</sup> busiest station and sees over 825,000 passengers annually.

*Benjamin Turon*



### How much do federal modes cover their costs from customers?

|                            |                                      |                                      |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Amtrak</b> <sup>1</sup> | <b>Federal Aviation</b> <sup>2</sup> | <b>Federal Highways</b> <sup>3</sup> |
| <b>94%</b>                 | <b>88%</b>                           | <b>78%</b>                           |

1. National Railroad Passenger Corp. Amtrak Delivers Strong FY 2016. Financial Results, Nov.17, 2016
2. Airport and Airway Trust Fund (AATF) Fact Sheet, Federal Aviation Administration, 2016
3. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Highway Fund Highway Account Receipts and Outlays, Fiscal Years 2000-2014, 2015

*All Aboard Ohio*

## Schenectady Station Rebuild Back on Track

The long planned replacement of the Schenectady train station came closer to reality at the end of March when the State Transportation Department opened three bids for the first phase of a two-step rebuilding process. Bette & Cring, LLC of Latham was the low bidder at \$5.4 million.

Also submitting bids were Harrison & Burrows of Glenmont at \$5.9 million, and W.M. Schultz of Ballston Spa at \$5.97 million. All three bidders are said to be heavy construction companies widely known in the Capital District. The Transportation Department had anticipated the cost of this first contract at \$6 million. It is expected the work will start this spring and be completed by the end of 2017.

Work included in the contract will be demolition of the current Amtrak station, together with structural and concrete work around the existing boarding platform. Because the tracks run on an elevated viaduct next to the street level station, several culverts will be built beneath the tracks for drainage. The contract is said to require the contractor to provide temporary restrooms for passengers. Amtrak has almost completed a stairway and ADA compatible access ramp from street level to the track level to allow use of trains at Schenectady.

The State Transportation Department will put out a second contract for bid in the fall to build the new station with construction to commence in 2018 and be completed by the end of that year. The estimated cost of the second bid work is \$9 million. The new station building is said to resemble the classic NYC station demolished before construction of the deteriorating current Amtrak facility.

The drive to build a new Schenectady train station has been going on for a decade with an early design unveiled in 2007. A significant early delay was difficulty in assembling funds to translate the concept into reality. The project hit a roadblock in early 2016 when the sole bid for the new station came in at just under \$25 million about 65 percent above the \$15 million cost estimated by state planners. It was decided to review the original design elements and split the project into two parts in hope of drawing more bidders. The strategy appears to have been successful for the first contract letting.

Schenectady officials are pleased with the bid opening. Ray Gillen, chairman of the Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority, is quoted by the Schenectady Daily Gazette as saying, "We are very grateful for the Governor's strong support for the Schenectady station and we are pleased to be working closely with DOT to get the new station built." Governor Andrew Cuomo visited the current station in early 2017, expressed support for a new station, and said he would like to see it open by the end of 2018.

Still unanswered at this point in the process is the level of Amtrak staffing and service available between demolition start and new station opening.

Gary Prophet, president of the Empire State Passengers Association, stated, "NYSDOT and Amtrak are still in ongoing planning discussions on how to serve the Schenectady station during construction. There is an understanding by both DOT and Amtrak that there needs to be a presence at the Schenectady station, which needs to include providing safe, secure access to multiple tracks from one side platform entrance, and may or may not include a small building or shelter for passengers, for ticketing and/or for baggage."

*Tony Rudmann*

## Does Infrastructure Improvement Stand a Chance?

Repairing and replacing America's decaying infrastructure was a major theme of the 2016 presidential campaign and both major political candidates agreed that it was past time to deal with long delayed essential projects.

Newly elected President Trump and congressional majorities of his party said their three major priorities for 2017 were health care, tax reform and infrastructure, in that order. With health care changes on hold, the conversation has shifted to tax reform. It is unclear how long the tax reform discussion will continue. The new administration is debating its tax priorities and has not submitted firm proposals to Congress. The House majority – which must begin the tax reform legislation – has a plan, but those ideas are being debated by Congressmen, state governments, charitable groups, lobbyists, and anyone with a stake in the current tax code. Should legislation emerge from the House, the Senate will have a chance to amend and Senators often have different ideas on taxes.

We are even seeing some debate on what infrastructure improvements are. Most define infrastructure as roads, bridges, public mass transport, airports, the electric and communications grid, public water, and sewer facilities. A late March comment by Transportation Secretary Elaine Chou indicated the administration considers veterans hospital as infrastructure. It remains unclear what other items may be considered “infrastructure”.

As usual, a major problem with any infrastructure program is how to pay for all the needed improvements. An obvious fund contributor would be an increase in the 19 cent a gallon gasoline tax which has been unchanged since 1993. But neither major political party has embraced the idea fearing electoral vengeance by tax adverse drivers. Some states and localities have increased the gas tax to permit improved highways and transit either by legislation or by voter approved boosts. But the federal government has just shifted general tax revenue intended for other expenses to support highways and transit spending.

One new idea under consideration is linked to tax reform. A popular tax reform suggestion is to create a lower tax rate to encourage companies holding profits in foreign countries to bring those dollars back to America. Estimates of the “stranded” overseas profit run as high as \$2 trillion. The bi-partisan suggestion is to establish a \$50 billion infrastructure bank funded through the sale of \$50 billion in bonds to companies “repatriating” overseas profits. There would be no federal tax liability for every foreign dollar invested. As the debate on new infrastructure spending continues, other funding ideas will probably emerge.

Adding more confusion to the debate is the new Administration's attack on transportation in the proposed federal 2018 budget which begins on October 1, 2017. The proposed budget plan outlined by the President's Office of Management and Budget cuts \$2.4 billion from the Transportation Department. Slated for the budget axe are all Amtrak Long Distance trains, any new grants for public transit by the Federal Transit Administration, and the widely popular Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grants. It is difficult to understand how cutting transportation spending contributes to infrastructure improvements.

Civil engineering associations have long reported on the continuing decay of American infrastructure. Virtually every association of transportation professionals, state and local officials, volunteer groups such as the National Association of

Railroad Passengers, and business groups, have submitted lists of much needed infrastructure projects.

But Congress is divided with many only interested in budget and debt reduction and others wanting more spending in the defense and homeland security areas. The new Administration displays some confusion in firm plans.

Adding the coming deadlines for important regular items such as finishing the 2017 budget (April 28<sup>th</sup>), increasing the debt ceiling (mid-August), and enacting a 2018 budget (September 30, 2017), makes it appear unlikely any infrastructure improvement legislation will see the light of day.

*Tony Rudmann*

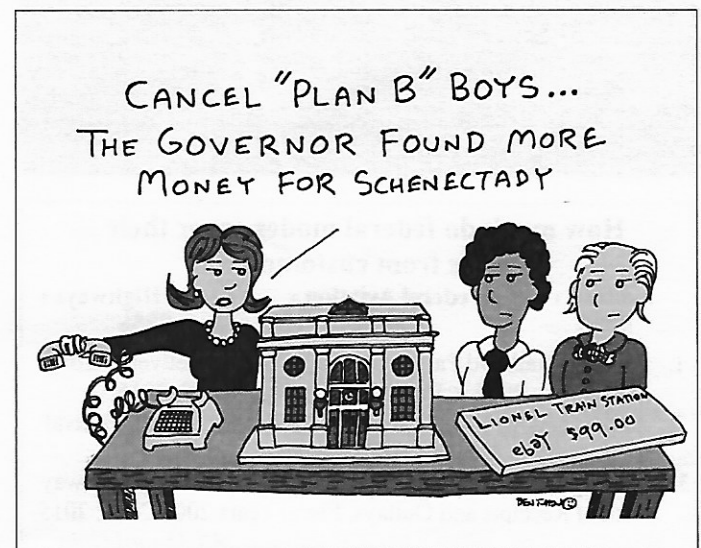
## Southern Tier Service

A satirical April fools story led to renewed interest in restoring passenger rail service to the Southern Tier. The article written by Dave Rochelle of Corning and published on the web page Urban Corning stated that passenger service would soon be returning to Corning. Though satirical, the article generated extensive interest in the idea and ESPA's Southern Tier representation immediately reached out to Rochelle with the idea of getting the idea moving.

The new effort has been named Southern Tier On Track and the committee has met several times and held two public meetings to introduce and update the project. NARP VP of Operations Bruce Becker attended the second meeting and offered support for the project. The committee is undertaking a fundraising campaign for a new grassroots feasibility study as the first major objective. A launch party for the campaign is planned for early spring. Urban Corning is handling the initial startup, and all contributions can be sent via their web page [www.urbancorning.com/southern-tier-on-track/](http://www.urbancorning.com/southern-tier-on-track/) and through the Community Foundation of Elmira-Corning and the Finger Lakes at [www.communityfund.org/](http://www.communityfund.org/). A full web page, additional ways to donate and a promotional video are in the development.

The project would likely tie in with the NYC-Scranton effort, which has also regained momentum. Restoration of service over the first seven miles of the Lackawanna Cut-off in New Jersey was started in 2011, then halted. Environmental issues have delayed the restart of construction in 2017. Service is to begin in 2019. Later phases would rebuild the tracks across the remainder of the Cut-off and extend service into Pennsylvania, which could then continue to Binghamton and beyond.

*Rob Picuch*



## Amtrak's Dual-Mode Locomotives Need Replacing

Recent years has seen a number of important intercity passenger rail projects undertaken in Upstate NY, including the long awaited but now ongoing Albany-Schenectady 2<sup>nd</sup> Track Project which eliminates a major bottleneck that has long led to numerous delays of Amtrak trains. However, like an express train hurtling down the track, there is a major crisis awaiting rail travellers if prompt action is not soon taken by New York State.

I write about the urgent need to replace the aging fleet of GE P32AC-DM "dual-mode" diesel-electric locomotives currently employed by Amtrak as motive power for the state supported Empire Corridor trains. "Dual-Mode" refers to their ability to run off the third rail in pure electric mode as required to enter New York's Grand Central Terminal and Penn Station, where diesel operation in the tunnels and subterranean stations is banned. Dual-modes replaced the need for Amtrak and Metro North to change between electric and diesel locomotives at Croton-Harmon where third rail electrified territory ends.

Currently Amtrak has 18 dual-modes built between 1995-1998 hauling trains between New York City, Albany, Rutland, and Niagara Falls; one by one they are exceeding their 20-year service life. They have been run hard, have never been rebuilt, and are now increasingly beginning to clunk out like a taxicab with 300,000 miles on the odometer.

Amtrak's P32s operate about 125,000 miles per year, far more than the 80,000 miles of Metro North's P32s, and that wear and tear has now led to a "Mean Distance between Failures" (MDBF) of only 6000 miles, the equivalent to 6½ round-trips New York to Niagara Falls. Metro-North's younger fleet is also showing its age too with its MDBF dropping to 21,000 miles from the previous 40,000 miles.

For this reason of declining reliability, Metro-North is now moving to begin to replace its existing dual-modes with a new fleet. It plans to issue a request-for-proposal by the end of 2016 to procure six dual-modes that will be in service by 2020. The new dual-mode locomotives will be built to specification layouts by the multi-agency "Next Generation Equipment Committee" established by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) of 2008 that will meet the needs of Amtrak, Metro North, LIRR, and NJ Transit.

Locomotive builders Siemens, Caterpillar EMD, and Bombardier, have passenger locomotive designs that can be adapted to meet these specifications and are the likely bidders. Siemens, based in Sacramento, California, has just built the last of Amtrak's new Cities Sprinter ACS-64 electric locomotives and is now building 125-mph SC-44 Charger diesel locomotives for All Aboard Florida's "Brightline" Miami-Orlando HSR service, and several state-sponsored Amtrak corridor services, with state DOTs retaining ownership of the engines instead of Amtrak. LA's commuter railroad Metrolink is receiving its first new EMD F125 locomotives, and NJ Transit has operated Bombardier's ALP-45DP locomotives for several years. The reliability of Amtrak's P32AC-DM units now in service in Upstate NY will continue to decrease as the fleet ages and with an increasing number of the 18 dual-modes out-of-service. Amtrak will soon fall below the bare minimum of units required to operate the existing service. Also, any increases in train frequency, for example, will also require more motive power.

The time to act is now, and it's up to New York State, not cash strapped Amtrak, to acquire a new locomotive fleet. It should be noted that now because of PRIIA Section 209 the planning, management, and financing of corridor services is now a state responsibility, with Amtrak acting as a contractor; so in the end

the state would get the bill anyways.

What should be done is for NYSDOT enter in a joint-procurement with Metro-North that will deliver enough new dual-mode locomotives to replace the existing P32 fleet. Ideally more than the current 18 locomotives should be acquired in order to expand train frequency and provide enough spare locomotives so that more routine maintenance can be undertaken in the future.

If the state legislature and the governor fail to act, then sooner or later many downstate lawmakers, lobbyists, lawyers, consultants, and state workers may be forced to seek alternative means of transport to and from the Capital District so as to avoid becoming stranded behind a dead locomotive out on the high iron in the heat of August or the cold of December. Let's not let that come to pass; solve the problem as soon as possible!

*Benjamin Turon*

## White House Begins (Cont'd from page 1)

Senate confirmation hearing. During its life, the competitive grant process drew more than 7,300 applications seeking more than \$143 billion for transportation projects across the country. Also, the program brought private sector money to the transportation building process. Tiger grants in New York supported Moynihan Station (now Empire Station) as well as rail station projects in Niagara Falls and Rochester.

The OMB Director said full details of the proposed budget would be available in May.

A second budget shoe dropped on March 16<sup>th</sup> with a Fiscal Year 17 supplemental budget request to add \$30 million to the Defense Department and \$3 million for the Department of Homeland Security. The Homeland Security money would be for "urgent boarder protection" which would include money for the much discussed Mexican border wall. The President recommended "the Congress enact non-defense discretionary reductions of \$18 billion in FY 2017 which would fully offset the amounts proposed for DHS and would offset half of the amounts proposed for DOD."

As this article is being written at the end of March, there are roughly a ten days of Congressional sessions scheduled before the April 28<sup>th</sup> expiration of the FY 2017 Continuing Resolution shuts down the federal government. Since negotiations on the appropriations needed to close out the current fiscal year have been ongoing for months, some House Majority members indicate it would be difficult to deal with the new requested changes. There appears to be a consensus that both leaders and most members of the Congressional majorities do not favor another government shutdown and will present a negotiated agreement which will not include contentious issues such as funding a border wall or defunding Planned Parenthood. Instead, the hot button issues will be addressed with separate legislation at a future date. But since no FY 2017 final legislation has been made public, there is no guarantee that intercity passenger rail or public mass transit funding will not be cut seven months into the fiscal year.

*Tony Rudmann*



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ALL ESPA members (and other interested persons) are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Gary Prophet at [thegp@aol.com](mailto:thegp@aol.com) for more information or if you are planning on attending a meeting. Advance registration is required! All Meetings are 12:00n to 4:00pm.

June 3, 2017 Schenectady – Backstage Pub  
August 12, 2017 Utica - Trackside Restaurant  
Check [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org), for the most current information on meeting times and venues...ALL dates, locations and times are subject to change...

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