



Release of Final Empire Corridor EIS in July?

The Albany Times Union in a March 14th article reported that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has posted a July 1, 2019 date for the release of the Empire Corridor High Speed Rail Program Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which began in September 2009.

The article by TU business reporter Eric Anderson quoted Michael Wojnar, the deputy secretary for transportation in the Cuomo administration, informing the Empire State Passenger Association at their March 9th annual meeting that the holdup was the FRA, which had not contacted the state since being given the completed study last summer in 2018.

Ron Epstein, the state transportation executive deputy commissioner at NYSDOT told the TU that the final environmental review needs to be in place so that the state could seek any federal funding that becomes available for such passenger rail infrastructure projects.

In spring of 2014 the Draft EIS was release for public review with public meetings being held across the state with wide press coverage and a healthy attendance of interested citizens. Public comments were taken at the event, electronically, and by mail.

The study review five alternatives for "High Speed Rail" service including an obligatory "no build" that included

(Cont'd on page 2)



Schenectady Mayor Greets ESPA Members at New Station

On Saturday March 9th, 2019, Schenectady Mayor Gary McCarthy was on hand to welcome attendees to the 2019 ESPA/RPA Regional Annual Meeting & Lunch at the new Schenectady Rail Station. Amtrak's Matt Kelley and Bill Hollister were also there and joined the mayor, along with ESPA President Gary Prophet and Rail Passengers Association Rhode Island State Representative Steve Musen.

The \$23 million station open last fall with official fanfare from state and local officials after almost two decades of planning, funding, and then construction. The new station front building replaced a decaying 1970s-era Amtrak station while the island platform and supporting c.1900 viaduct was repaired and reconstructed.

The new station is expected to help boost ridership including attracting out-of-town visitors to the new Rivers Casino and the Proctor's Theater complex of stage, screen & performance spaces, and new business incubator spaces. Around the station in downtown and on the Mohawk River the city is seeing ongoing construction of new housing and hotels.

Mayor McCarthy later spoke at the annual rail advocacy meeting held once more in Key Hall at Proctors Theatre along with: Michael Wojnar the Deputy Secretary for Transportation for the Office of Gov. Andrew Cuomo; Congressman Paul Tonko (NY-20); Larry Roth of Solutionary Rail and the Delaware & Ulster Railroad; Donald Corkery the retired Director of Training for the Long Island Railroad; and Bruce Becker, VP of Operations for the Rail Passengers Association.

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Construction Starting on New Downtown Buffalo Station

The start of construction for the new \$20 million Buffalo Exchange Street Rail Station will soon be underway as trailers.

The new station will be 4,800 square feet, over twice as large as the existing building, and raised 9 feet to bring it level with Exchange Street. The building will also be closer to Exchange Street to bring it out of the shadows of the elevated I-190 Niagara Thruway.

There will be a new ADA-compliant, 540-foot long high-level platform connected by stairs and a ramp to the station. An attractive, broad, pedestrian walkway will replace the existing car parking under the elevated expressway to connect the new station with the Canalside Metro Rail station on Main Street, a 5-minute walk.

Still, more work needs to be completed before Amtrak services will move over from the old station. The new station is expected to open in the summer of 2020.



Rochester Station Dedicated to Congresswoman Louise Slaughter

The new Rochester Amtrak Station was dedicated to honor Congresswoman Louise McIntosh Slaughter (1929-2018), who was a champion of its construction. Representative Slaughter served Rochester from 1987 to until her death in 2018, and was, according to Wikipedia, the oldest sitting member of Congress and the last sitting member to have been born in the 1920s.

Bruce Becker, former ESPA president and current vice-president of operations for the Rail Passenger Association, was on hand for the March 29th ceremony, writing that, “It was a great celebration of her life and well-deserved recognition of all she did for the City, for passenger rail and for her country.”

Bruce Becker

Release of Final Empire EIS (Cont'd from page 1) ongoing projects funded including the now completed Albany-Schenectady 2nd track; several upgrades to the existing double-track CSX freight line used by Amtrak Schenectady-Buffalo including a new third dedicated passenger track with a top speed of 110-mph; and a green-field alternative to build a new 125-mph, double-track, grade-separated, and electrified dedicated passenger line across Upstate NY from Albany to Buffalo.

. It is unknown which of the five alternatives that has been chosen or modified into a final alternative. When the public might get to see the final Empire Corridor EIS is also unknown. You can view the official “High Speed Rail Empire Corridor Public Outreach Video” from the 2014 DEIS on YouTube.

Benjamin Turon

GO GREEN

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Our postage and printing cost savings will give ESPA more resources to further its passenger rail advocacy mission.

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Food Service Expansion not Funded

The Albany Times Union reported on April 3rd, 2019, that New York State would not find an expanded café food service for the state supported trains of the Empire Corridor. ESPA has been advocating for the expansion and improvements of the Amtrak food service on our corridor trains for some time.

The article by Eric Anderson quoted state Division of Budget spokesman Freeman Klopott who stated, “The FY 2020 Enacted Budget does not include funding to restore food service in the Empire Corridor and we continue to look to the Federal government to restore its role in fully supporting train service.

The first part of the statement was a disappointment while the second part was illogical since federal law (PRIIA Section 209) requires that states pay Amtrak for the operation of their corridor services while Amtrak would continue to fund the long-distance national network and the Northeast Corridor.

According to NYSDOT, the state annually pays Amtrak just under \$45 million for the Empire Corridor. And as federal funding for rail has lapsed the state continues to move forward – funding the \$20 million construction of the new downtown station in Buffalo entirely with state money. The “it’s not our job” attitude of the Division of Budget seems at odds with what the state has been doing over the past decade.

Restoring full food service to the Empire Corridor is low-hanging fruit of potential improvements to our passenger service. It’s understandable with such big transportation issues as congestion pricing on the table that the legislature and administration could overlook the Amtrak café service of our state-supported trains. It may seem like a small thing – but unlike “High Speed Rail” it’s an entirely doable improvement that can be quickly undertaken at a very small cost.

Other states including California, Washington, and Maine, have long taken an active role in shaping the food service of their state-supported corridor trains, including managing procurement and menus. New York State under the Cuomo Administration has taken a step in this direction by introducing a program of stocking “Taste NY” food and beverages onto Empire Corridor trains.

Amtrak, in 2005, scaled back food service as a cost cutting measure while under siege from the Bush Administration over its federal support. This cutback included closing the Rensselaer commissary and eliminating onboard food service from the Albany-NYC *Empire Service* trains. Yet, since then the railroad has reformed its café service so that they largely break even, even turning a profit on the Northeast Corridor. The remaining food losses are from the full-service dining cars of the long-distance trains like the *Lake Shore Limited*.

This was detailed in the October 2013 report “Food and Beverage Service: Potential Opportunities to Reduce Losses” by Amtrak’s inspector general. Last summer in 2018, Amtrak briefly reopened the Rensselaer commissary for several months during the Grand Central detour when Upstate trains couldn’t be restocked at Sunnyside due to construction.

Reopening the commissary at the Rensselaer Station is the key to restoring food service on the Hudson Valley trains. This action would also benefit the entire service by allowing the restocking of trains headed for west and north

of Albany. Currently café cars sometime run low or out of food on return trips to Penn Station (restocking occurs at Amtrak’s Sunnyside Yard in Queens) resulting in the state paying Amtrak for café attendants selling nothing. How does that make financial sense?

The start-up costs should be minimum since the commissary and café cars already exist – it’s mostly a matter of labor and procurement, and how much the state would be charged by Amtrak. Once up and running the annual increase to the overall operating costs of the Empire Corridor should be minimal – if not revenue neutral or slightly profitable. In the end, it’s a pretty low risk move in terms of budgeting.

ESPA will continue to push for better food service. You can help by contacting your local state representatives and the governor’s office on this issue of reopening the Albany-Rensselaer commissary and restoring café service to all Empire service trains. By making your voices heard, you will push this issue up in priorities of our state government.

You can do this by writing or sending a simple e-mail. For help in finding and contacting your state lawmakers and the governor’s office please visit our “Hudson Valley Food Service” page on Facebook: @hvfoodservice
Benjamin Turon, ESPA VP & Social Media Co-ordinator



Buffalo Metro Rail Gets State Funding

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) is getting a \$100 million state aid boost for the Buffalo Metro Rail over the next five years, thanks to an agreement between Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo and the State Legislature. The money will fund major infrastructure improvements on its deteriorating Metro Rail system.

An additional \$6 million for an engineering study to expand the 6.4-mile rail line to the University at Buffalo’s North Campus was included as part of the deal. The Metro Rail is a semi-rapid transit system running from the Erie Canal Harbor in downtown to the South Campus of the University at Buffalo. It is the only rail transit system in Upstate NY.

State Rail Plan Overdue for Revision

New York State's Rail Plan celebrated its 10th birthday in February reaching its "past due" age under federal law. The 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) required states to develop a State Rail Plan (SRP) to be eligible to receive federal funding for rail improvements. Originally, states were to submit plans to the Federal Railroad Administration every 5 years. In 2015, the federal Fast Act shortened the frequency of state rail plan submissions to every 4 years.

New York was an early leader in developing a rail plan but the previous rail plan had been issued in 1987 and was clearly out dated. Fortunately, the state had begun to update its prior plan and the data collected enabled NY to claim funds leading to several hundred million in improvements along the empire corridor from NYC to Buffalo. With most improvements completed, the current updated 2009 State Rail Plan may become a barrier to receipt of federal funds in the near future.

Neighboring states have submitted FRA accepted rail plans – New Jersey and Vermont in 2015; Pennsylvania in 2016 and Massachusetts in 2018. Updating a state rail plan is not a simple task and the 2009 New York plan was the product of almost two years of gathering data, meetings with stakeholders and state government policy decisions. The Empire State Passengers Association was among the stakeholders.

Hopefully, with the delivery of the long-delayed Empire Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement scheduled for this summer, the State Transportation Department will begin work on an updated State Rail Plan.

Tony Rudmann

Congestion Pricing Coming to NY City

After decades of discussion, the State Legislature approved implementation of "congestion pricing" charging vehicles to enter the busiest parts of lower Manhattan. Effective after December 31, 2020, cars and trucks entering the business district below 61st Street will be charged a yet-to-be-determined fee.

The new fee is designed to reduce the vehicular congestion threatening to gridlock downtown Manhattan and to raise funds to repair and update public transportation facilities in New York City and on the Long Island and Metro North commuter railroads. Of the estimated \$15 billion revenue collected, 80 percent will be allocated to New York City infrastructure and 20 percent split by the two commuter railroads. In addition, it is anticipated the new fee will reduce vehicle air pollution.

According to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, congestion pricing fees will go to city transit improvements including new signals on subway lines, and at least 150 miles of track work and thousands of new subway cars and electric buses. The new fee is expected to pay for a significant expansion of the Long Island Rail Road, four new Metro North stations, hundreds of new electric and diesel rail cars and scores of new locomotives.

The fee will be charged electronically through the system such as the EZPass system now used for cashless tolling at tunnels, bridges and highways such as the NYS Thruway. For vehicles not connected to an electronic system, cameras will

take photos of license plates for mail billing.

Passenger cars will be charged only once a day, no matter how often they go in and out of the zone; handicapped and emergency vehicles will not be charged. The West Side Highway and the FDR Drive will be outside the congestion zone allowing drivers free passage around the fee area. Other exemptions or discounts may be established.

While actual zone charges will not be set until the end of 2020, there has been speculation that the entry charge will range from \$11 to \$14 for cars and about \$25 for trucks during prime business hours (and less at night and on weekends).

New York City will be the first American city to implement congestion pricing, but the practice has been used in London and other cities for a number of years. *Tony Rudmann*

Adirondack Scenic Railroad Update

The [Adirondack Daily Enterprise](#) reported that 2019 will be the third year without trains operating on the northern segment of the historic former New York Central Railroad Adirondack Division between Lake Placid and Saranac Lake. New York State, which owns the 118-mile rail corridor, continues to move forward with plans to remove the rail structure between Tupper Lake and Lake Placid, to be replaced with a trail built on the right of way (though the start of any such construction is not expected during 2019). In 2017 the State lost a lawsuit which prevented the trail plan from moving forward, but the State has now changed the wording of the applicable land use regulations to apparently allow the rail removal plan to proceed. The potential of additional lawsuits aimed at blocking the trail plan is currently unclear.

The State has pledged that the currently out-of-service 45-mile segment between Big Moose and Tupper Lake (which traverses some of the most remote sections of the Adirondacks) will be rehabilitated allowing for through train service from Utica to Tupper Lake.

First East-West Rail Public Meeting Held

On the evening of March 12th in Springfield, the Massachusetts state department of transportation (MassDOT) held the first public meeting for the East-West Rail Study – a plan to bring inter-city passenger rail service to the Boston-Springfield-Pittsfield corridor now travelled only west of Worcester by Amtrak's Boston section of the long-distance *Lake Shore Limited* train to Chicago. The meeting in downtown Springfield, a few blocks from the newly rebuilt Union Station, was well attended and covered in the press – having broad political support. Some rail supporters hope that such a future East-West Rail corridor service would also serve Albany-Rensselaer Station. *For more please visit: www.mass.gov/east-west-passenger-rail-study*

Massachusetts is also moving forward with its planning for the seasonal weekend "Berkshire Flyer" from New York City to Pittsfield, Mass. It is hoped that a pilot program will start Memorial Day 2020 by paying Amtrak to extend one of its Empire Corridor trains now terminating at Rensselaer to Pittsfield.

For more information, please visit: www.mass.gov/berkshire-flyer-study



Joseph H. Boardman, Jr. (1948–2019) was honored at our annual event with a moment of silence honoring Joe and reflecting on his past work for rail advocacy. Many attendees and speakers shared memories of the former Amtrak president. Boardman was the longest-serving Commissioner of the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT), in office from July 1997 until resigning to head the Federal Railroad Administration in April 2005. Boardman then became the second-longest serving head of Amtrak, after W. Graham Claytor, Jr., in the 1980s. In its January 9, 2014 issue the trade publication 'Railway Age' magazine named Boardman as its 51st "Railroader of the Year". Born on a farm in Taberg, in Upstate New York, and also attending Cornell University, Mr. Boardman was a US Air Force Vietnam Veteran and, along with his wife Joanne, had three children. After his Amtrak presidency, Mr. Boardman remained active in passenger rail affairs while keeping busy on his farm in Oneida County near Rome, New York. Mr. Boardman suffered a stroke while on vacation in Florida on March 5th, 2019 – and died two days later.

Joe Boardman will long be remembered; we at ESPA are thankful for his many decades of public service – may his soul rest in peace.



Benjamin Turon

Amtrak Plan States Dual-Mode Locomotives Need Replacing

This spring, Amtrak released a series of 5-year plans including: Equipment, Infrastructure, Stations, Transportation Assets, and Service Lines. On page 30 of Amtrak's "Five Year Equipment Asset Line Plan" – available

as a PDF online – was an interesting part detailing plans for replacing the existing fleet of dual-mode locomotives used by Empire Corridor trains

Amtrak also works with the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) on a dual-mode solution to replace 18 aging P32ACDM units on *Empire Service*, *Ethan Allen Express*, *Maple Leaf*, *Adirondack* and *Lake Shore Limited* trains that operate to Upstate New York and use electric power around New York Penn Station and diesel power everywhere else.

Options to be considered include: (1) Acquisition of self-propelled, dual-power integrated trainsets; (2) Acquisition of additional dual power locomotive units of the same type Amtrak may procure for NEC through services, with consideration of whether they can be modified for third-rail electric operation into Grand Central Terminal during any potential Penn Station New York outage periods; (3) Acquisition of the new third rail/diesel dual mode locomotives that Metro-North Railroad is procuring, which will be largely compliant with PRIIA 305 specifications applicable to equipment purchases that receive FRA funding, through an option to the Metro-North order.

Should Amtrak and NYSDOT elect to procure dual-powered locomotives, approximately 20 units would be needed for to replace existing dual modes, eliminate the current need for time-consuming engine changes between dual mode and diesel locomotives on the *Adirondack* and *Maple Leaf* at Albany-Rensselaer, accommodate the planned extension of the Ethan Allen Express from Rutland to Burlington, VT, and provide a sufficient spare ratio.

The aging fleet of GE P32AC-DM diesel-electric locomotives currently employed by Amtrak as motive power for the state supported Empire Corridor trains are called "dual-mode" for 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.

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 may someday soon fall below the bare minimum of units in required to operate the existing service. Furthermore, any increases in train frequency, for example, will also require more motive power. Because of federal law (PRIIA Section 209), New York State will likely have to financially contribute if not out-right purchase, the new dual-mode locomotives. This is because except for the overnight long-distance *Lake Shore Limited*, the trains of the Empire Corridor (including the *Empire Service*, *Maple Leaf*, *Adirondack*, and *Ethan Allen*) are state supported passenger rail services. New York State pays Amtrak about \$40 million annually for the Empire Corridor

To avoid stranded travelers by curtailing of service, and to allow an increase in service frequency, we at ESPA hope that New York State DOT will work with Amtrak to complete plan to finance and order new locomotives.

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ESPA Working Group & Meeting

ALL ESPA members (and other interested persons) are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Gary Prophet at thegp@aol.com for more information or if you are planning on attending a meeting. Advance registration is required!

Meetings:

- Sat, June 1, 2019:** Noon-4pm Schenectady at Katie O'Byrnes, located in parking lot of Amtrak station (meeting confirmed)
- Sat, August 10, 2019:** Noon-4pm Utica, in the Utica Train Station
- Sat, October 5, 2019:** Schenectady, location TBD.
- Sat, November 23, 2019:** Schenectady, location TBD.
- Sat, Jan 11 or Jan 18, 2020:** TBD.
- Sat, March 7, 2020:** ESPA Annual Meeting at Proctor's Hall in Schenectady from 11am-4pm (meeting confirmed)

Check 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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Please make checks/money orders payable to ESPA and mail to ESPA c/o Andrew Cabal, P.O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209. *Premium membership can receive ESPA pin.

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Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 716-759-2315.

Email: www.rwlentz4@gmail.com Deadline for material for Summer Issue is June 30th, 2019.

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