



Hudson Valley Food Service

As part of the Summer 2018 detour to Grand Central by Amtrak Empire Corridor trains, the formerly closed Albany-Rensselaer food service commissary has been temporarily reopened so that the café cars of Upstate NY trains can be stocked. Normally *Empire Service*, *Maple Leaf*, *Adirondack*, and *Ethan Allen* trains are stocked only at Amtrak's Sunnyside Yard in Queens.

ESPA calls for the commissary at the Albany-Rensselaer Rail Station to be permanently reopened; its operating costs to be included in the annual payment made by NYSDOT to Amtrak as part of the PRIIA Section 209 contracting for the state supported services of the Empire Corridor. Overall, we believe that this will add very little to the annual appropriations made by New



York State towards intercity passenger rail, because, system wide, Amtrak's café food services break even financially.

Having a commissary at Rensselaer will enable two things:

- **First:** the restocking of trains traveling beyond Albany to Montreal, Vermont, and Western NY. Often these trains run out of food on their return journeys to New York City, which is not only inconvenient for passengers, but is financially wasteful having a café attendant serve nothing all the way back to Penn Station.
- **Second:** it will allow the reintroduction of café service to all Upstate trains including those which travel only through the Hudson Valley. Why can't a passenger grab a cup of coffee or a quick snack during the over two-hour trip between Albany and New York City on many *Empire Service* trains? Many other Amtrak corridor trains that make journeys of similar time and distance have food service; so why not the NYC-Albany trains? ESPA has worked to promote this issue with lawmakers in Albany. You can help by writing to your local state

representatives, and Gov. Andrew Cuomo on this issue.

Send a Message to the Governor:
The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Schenectady Station Construction



Photos of ongoing construction of new Schenectady Station, taken in July, as bricks are being laid and new parking lot takes shape. The new downtown station is set to open in November of this year.



Schuster Releases Draft Infrastructure Plan

House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Schuster released a draft infrastructure plan on July 23 that would be funded in part by an increase in fuel taxes. While new infrastructure funding was called a priority for the first hundred days of the new federal administration, rebuilding public facilities has fallen behind health care, tax cuts, increased military spending, immigration and trade.

Chairman Schuster indicated his draft was developed with “input” from Republican and Democratic Congressmen and from “stakeholders”. A major focus of the plan is bolstering the Highway Trust Fund (HTF), which is the main funding source for roads, bridges and public transit preservation and improvement. In recent years, over fifty billion dollars has been diverted from general tax revenue to maintain HTF spending. Construction inflation, declining gas tax collections, introduction of hybrid & electric vehicles, and increased public use of bike and transit have contributed to the shortfall since the gas/diesel tax rate has not been increased in more than two decades.

The Schuster draft would increase the gas tax to 15 cents a gallon and the diesel fuel to 20 cents per gallon, phased in over 3 years and indexed for inflation until 2028 when both taxes would be eliminated.

A new 10 percent tax user fee on the wholesale price of motor vehicle electric batteries and a 10 percent user fee on the wholesale price of adult bicycle tires would be created. Current reduced fees on fuel used by intercity and local public transportation buses, and reinstatement of the 4.3 cent per gallon fee on diesel used by passenger trains, would be indexed. If enacted, the draft bill would establish a national, volunteer based pilot program to demonstrate whether a per-mile user fee can replace the existing user tax on gasoline and diesel. There is no information on the amount of money the suggested changes would raise.

Chairman Schuster said the draft was, “meant to reignite discussions amongst my colleagues. Over the coming weeks and months, I look forward to additional input from my Republican and Democratic colleagues in order to prepare a bill for congressional consideration.” *Tony Rudmann*

Better Boston-Albany Passenger Rail Service within Reach

Imagine being able to take an Amtrak train to Boston as conveniently as you can now go to New York City. A Boston-Albany intercity passenger rail service that is reasonably fast, with a decent frequency of scheduled departures and arrivals spread evenly across the day, so that day trips could be made readily.

Well, it could happen if New York State were to partner with Massachusetts in its ongoing efforts to connect the western half of the Bay State by rail to Boston and New York City.

Governor Charlie Baker on June 12th announced at Springfield's newly renovated \$90 million Union Station, that MassDOT would hire a consultant to complete a study on “East-West” rail service from Boston to Springfield and Pittsfield. The detailed study, to be completed in 18 months,

will examine the feasibility, costs, and benefits of corridor service — and engage with stakeholders.

The East-West rail proposal has broad political support. It follows the successful start of a new Springfield-Hartford-New Haven “North-South” commuter rail service — that in 2019 will be extended to Holyoke, Northampton and Greenfield. Planning is also ongoing for a pilot season of the “Berkshire Flyer”, a proposed new seasonal Amtrak service to Pittsfield from New York City via Albany-Rensselaer.

Albany is the logical terminal for a future East-West rail service to the Berkshires. Albany-Rensselaer is Amtrak's ninth-busiest station, serving a metro region over a million people. Including it would considerably boost ridership and revenue, compared to a train terminating at Pittsfield. At Rensselaer there is also an existing Amtrak crew base, maintenance facility, and currently an operating food service commissary.

New York State needs to get on board by having NYSDOT partner with MassDOT on the East-West Corridor Study.

There is precedent for New York cooperating with a neighboring state on passenger rail. New York and Vermont jointly fund the New York-Saratoga-Rutland Ethan Allen Express as a PIIA Section 209 Amtrak service. A few years ago, NYSDOT and VTrans also commissioned a bi-state study on the expansion of Amtrak service to Southern Vermont via Mechanicville.

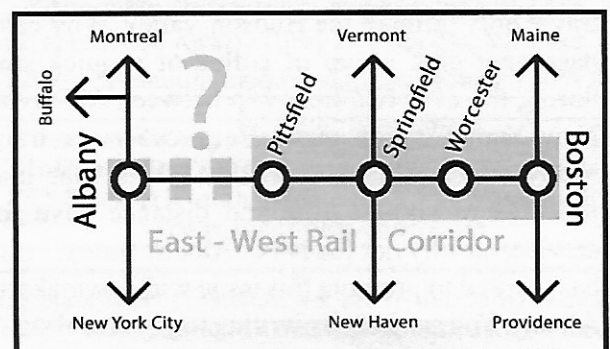
A passenger rail corridor service to Boston would be of great benefit to the Capital District. It would connect the businesses, colleges, and tourist attractions of our region with a world class city of great universities, research, financial and cultural institutions. Boston is the tenth-largest metro region in the USA, with a population of 4.8 million and a \$363 billion economy.

Yet there are a few issues that will need to be examined about the feasibility of using the existing CSX Berkshire Subdivision (former Boston & Albany Railroad) for passenger service. The railway was completed in 1841 and has steep grades and many curves that limit speeds to 50, 40, and even 35-mph in some sections. At 200 miles its 30 miles longer than I-90. Today's sole Amtrak train, the Boston-Albany-Chicago long-distance Lake Shore Limited, takes 5-hr 10-min to make the run.

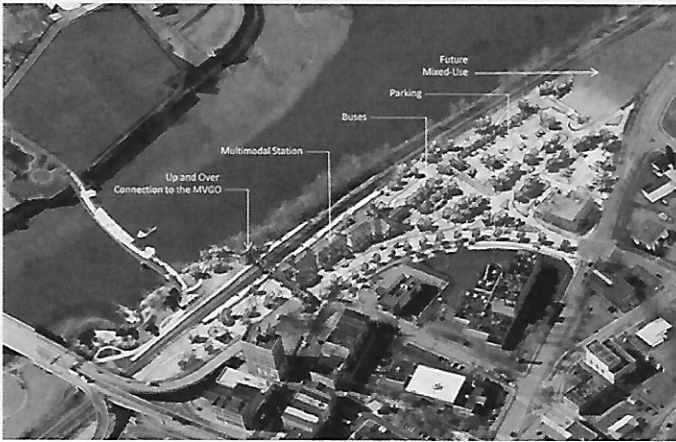
However, in the 1950s the New York Central Railroad's “Beeliner” passenger service ran it in 4-hr 15-min. The first Beeliner from Boston left South Station at 7:15am and arrived Albany at 11:30am — average speed 47-mph. Furthermore, modern technology, including the utilization of tilting train-sets (like the Acela), could cut travel times further to below 4 hours by raising speeds on the sinuous track.

A modern Boston-Albany passenger rail service is a sound proposition and the Empire State should cooperate with Massachusetts to create a new bi-state intercity rail service.

Benjamin Turon



Amsterdam Studies New Rail Station



The last few years has seen new rail stations built or planned across Upstate NY, including Rochester, Niagara Falls, Schenectady, and Buffalo — Now Amsterdam joins the list.

The city government was presented in late May with the results of a feasibility study it funded of consolidating the various highway bypasses and onramps downtown to free up land that could be used to build railroad passenger platforms and a mixed-use multimodal station building — which would include retail space, coffee shop, a newsstand, and a Taste of New York location. The station would be adjacent to the recently opened Mohawk Valley Gateway Overlook Pedestrian Bridge that connects downtown with the southside of the city across the Mohawk River.

The plan would undo the widely held opinion of the damage done to the city by “urban renewal” projects; of the 1950’s, ‘60s, and ‘70s, by restoring the original street grid of downtown. As part of the proposed project: restoring Main Street as a through east-west street by the demolition of Riverfront Center “Amsterdam Mall.”

Costs associated with the estimated \$34 million project include: \$1 million for property acquisition; \$5 million for the removal of the eastbound section of Route 5 and road improvements; \$20 million for multimodal center and platforms; and \$8 million for design and contingency expenses. Cost estimates do not include demolition of the Riverfront Center.

The process towards a new station and downtown rebuilding started in April 2017 when Amsterdam officials contracted with Mott MacDonald to perform a feasibility study for approximately \$207,790. The New York Department of State had awarded a \$115,000 grant in late-2015 to conduct the study.

Mott MacDonald's role in the study was transportation planning and design, assisted by Saratoga Associates for conceptual design, architecture and environmental review for sites, The Chazen Companies did the Transit Oriented Development component and public outreach; E.M. Pemrick & Company did the economic and market analysis; and M.J. Engineering and Land Surveying did the survey and mapping.

The next step is to finalize plans for the multimodal center

and apply for state and federal grants to fund the project. To this end, the Common Council in May 2018 hired The Chazen Companies for \$7,500 to help assist the city with the \$450,000 application grant from New York state to help pay for a \$517,000 study, (the local share of the study would be \$67,500).

Benjamin Turon

Hudson Station ADA Improvements Underway

Amtrak has begun a project to make its Hudson station more accessible to handicapped travelers under the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The improvements include coordination with the City of Hudson, which owns parking lots serving the twenty six daily train visits. The work will be funded by Amtrak and completed by November 2018.

Exterior improvements include ADA compliant pathways from the public right of way and parking lots, the platform, and new ADA approved parking spots. In addition, platform signage will be upgraded. Inside the building, improvements will include ADA accessibility modification to the washrooms, waiting room and ticket counter.

Built by the New York Central Railroad in 1874, the Hudson station use has grown to be the fourth busiest station in New York, serving over 215,000 passengers in 2017. Station revenue eclipsed \$9.2 million in 2017. The depot is within walking distance of the city's downtown which has preserved its diverse architecture. The downtown area hosts a variety of shops, art galleries and restaurants.

Accessible stations are valued by the disabled community because they offer a usable public transportation option to many who have no other option. As a governmental agency, ADA stations benefit Amtrak's role as a national network and gains revenue to support its services. Providing ADA stations has been slower than desirable because of several challenges. In addition to the common funding shortage, the complex ownership of train depot sites slows disability access improvements. In some locations ownership of the track, building and parking lot/street is not Amtrak's. In such cases, all three owners must approve upgrades. At Hudson, Amtrak and the City of Hudson cooperated to make enhancements.

Tony Rudmann

Go Green and Save \$\$

Members providing their e-mail address are entitled to the full-color, electronic version of the *ESPA Express* newsletter at the same time we forward the paper version to the printer. (ESPA will NOT share your information with anyone.) Receive the newsletter one to two weeks earlier.

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

Please send your e-mail address to:
www.rwlenz4@gmail.com.

Big Lift: Amtrak repairs Empire Connector to Penn Station



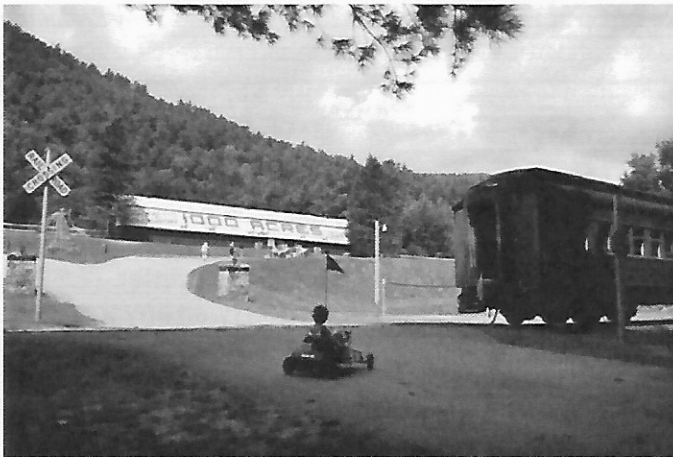
As part of Amtrak's summer work on Empire Connection westside rail line and in Penn Station, the Spuyten Duyvil rail bridge was repaired, which included lifting the center swing span off its pier and barging it to New Jersey for rebuilding. The bridge was moved by the "Left Coast Lifter," a massive crane that was used in construction of the new Tappan Zee Bridge.

The movable rail bridge was built in 1900 (replacing a wooden span) and rehabilitated in the 1980s to switch (from Grand Central Terminal to Penn Station) Amtrak's Empire Service terminal. The bridge suffered damage to its mechanical and electrical systems during Hurricane Sandy.

Over the summer, all Amtrak trains from Upstate New York were detoured to Grand Central, except the *Lake Shore Limited* whose New York section was terminated. Overall, about \$50 million was spent on the Empire Connection this summer. The Grand Central detour ends the day after Labor Day (September 4th) with termination of construction.

Benjamin Turon

D&H Adirondack Branch Update: SNCR Out of Service – What Next?



The Saratoga & North Creek Railway is out of service - parent company Iowa Pacific is having difficulty moving its rolling stock and equipment off the railroad, which is the property of Warren County.

According to a series of articles in the Glen Falls *Post-Star*, at issue is lack of employees, equipment being in disrepair, and Ed Ellis (CEO of Iowa Pacific being apparently incommunicado) along with the rest of the company. Also, there is equipment left over from the pre-SNCR operator, the Upper Hudson River Railroad, that the county also wants moved out.

The good news is that while there is debate over whether to turn the former Adirondack Branch of the Delaware & Hudson Railway into a recreational rail trail for cyclists — there is also interest being expressed by several parties in taking up where Iowa Pacific left off: to continue with tourist train operations.

As reported in the *Post-Star*, the owners of the Stony Creek Ranch Resort (former 1000 Acre Ranch), Scott McLean and his mother Carol McLean-Wright, are seeking the county's approval to use the county owned railroad for excursion trains that would include the return of the Polar Express and other themed trains between Corinth and Thurman, the middle section of the sixty-mile Saratoga Springs and North Creek rail line.

The ranch had partnered with SNCR last winter on a Christmas-themed train that they said drew 10,000 people to the ranch last November and December. They have offered to pick up the cost of maintenance from the county for the section of line that they seek to use.

McLean said that losing the railway would be a "deal breaker" for his business, and the tracks were the reason investors were interested in partnering with his family. The railroad passes through the riverside ranch, with a rail platform to load passengers. To run a holiday train, the ranch would need permission by early September from the county, Mr. McLean stated.

Rome Station Recovering from Tunnel Damage

The historic Rome passenger station is recovering with a \$250,000 grant from New York State. Amtrak train service was suspended on Independence Day when the city-owned train station suffered a partial ceiling collapse as the outside air temperature approached nearly 100°F. A six-foot long section of concrete fell to the floor, exposing the reinforcement bars of the concrete ceiling slab of the subway passage connecting the main building to the train platform, leading police to close the facility. One person was in the station during the incident and was not injured. The station sees six trains a day: round-trips of the New York – Toronto *Maple Leaf* and two Niagara Falls – New York *Empire Service* trains. In 2017, the station accommodated over 8,500 passengers.

At the end of July, State Senator Joseph Griffo announced the state funding for repairs and Amtrak said passenger service would resume August 4th. (However, as of mid-August, the station has yet to reopen.) Initially, a temporary structure will be built within the subway tunnel to protect passengers so they can get from the station to the tracks. "We don't want to lose this station," said Rome Mayor Jacqueline Izzo. "We've been working for some time and we did have an assessment done earlier this summer." The money will address "advanced structural problems," according to the Mayor. This will require negotiations with CSX, she said, as trains on the track pass over the damaged subway tunnel, causing vibrations. (Cont. Pg. 5)

Track owner CSX sent personnel to the station on July 4th and confirmed that the tracks were not damaged. Freight and passenger traffic have continued over the subway tunnel.

The Rome station was built between 1912 and 1914 for the New York Central Railroad as part of a larger grade-separation project that re-routed the mainline south of downtown and the Erie Canal. It was owned by Conrail and Amtrak at the time of its sale to the City of Rome in 1988. The Neoclassical style station was renovated between 2002 and 2004, and includes a restored waiting hall and benches, new restrooms, a restored tile roof, a new canopy with a heated passenger platform, and the reopening of a connection in the passenger subway from the east parking area to trackside. The station is handicap-accessible from the city-owned parking lot to the train platform by elevator accessed from the subway; a handicap lift providing access between the platform and trains is also provided.

Former Amtrak President and CEO Joe Boardman was a frequent user of the station to reach his home near Rome. The Empire State Passengers Association held one of its bi-monthly officers and co-ordinators meeting in the station several years ago.

Tony Rudmann

Service links customers to Amtrak trains in Upstate

Amtrak now provides a Thruway bus service, in partnership with Trailways of New York, for customers to connect to the Empire Service, Lake Shore Limited, and Maple Leaf trains across New York State. Convenient and affordable bus connections are available at Amtrak stations in Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, and Saratoga Springs, New York and will be taking customers to new locations, including Cooperstown, Cortland, Ithaca, Glens Falls, Lake George and Oneonta.

“As Northern New York continues to grow as a popular place to visit and live, partnering with Trailways of New York helps Amtrak customers travel where they want to go, even after they step off a train,” said Adam Krom, Director of Transportation Connectivity at Amtrak.

Amtrak Thruway services make coordinated connections with trains and enable passengers to use other carriers to connect with the Amtrak national network from cities without rail stations.

“Trailways of New York is pleased to be partnering with Amtrak,” said Anne Noonan, Vice President of Traffic and Marketing. “Travel to more cities and towns is now available to our customers and, with one ticket, they can now move seamlessly between Trailways and Amtrak.”

Tickets may now be purchased online on the [Amtrak app](#), through [Amtrak.com](#), by calling 1-800-USA-RAIL, or at any Amtrak station.

Amtrak News

Federal court ruled in favor of passenger rail service

by allowing Amtrak and the Federal Rail-road Administration (FRA) to set their own standards for measuring passenger rail service on time performance.

The 2-1 ruling in DOT's favor revives the ability of Amtrak and FRA to co-write metrics and standards to measure the service quality of intercity passenger rail operations.

“Today's appellate decision vindicates the position our Association has taken in numerous court filings, briefs and letters to regulators over the years,” said Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers Association President. “This sets the stage for Amtrak and the FRA to work together to restore on time performance standards that were vacated by previous rulings.

With on time performance today at record lows, American passengers have been waiting for years for the courts to step in and protect the rights of the traveling public. The Rail Passengers Association could not be happier with this decision.”

Attempts to set standards has been tied up in the court system for nearly a decade after the federal government's and Amtrak's efforts were challenged by the freight rail group at the Supreme Court, which found in 2015 that Amtrak was a governmental entity for purposes of co-authoring the rules, but threw other constitutional questions back to the lower courts, who ruled again that the section of the law was unconstitutional by giving a self-interested entity like Amtrak power to regulate its competitors, which the court said violated due process. DOT argued in March that removing the arbitration provision from the law would cure the constitutional issues judges had previously found and the court agreed.

RPA has played an active role in this long-running battle, including filing an amicus curiae brief, along with the Environmental Law & Policy Center in a case that was ultimately decided in Amtrak's favor.

New York State 2017 Ridership

City	Boardings + Alightings
Albany-Rensselaer (a)	803,348
Amsterdam	10,475
Buffalo-Depew	106,815
Buffalo-Exchange Street	35,528
Croton-Harmon	46,057
Fort Edward	9,917
Fort Ticonderoga	1,770
Hudson	217,970
New Rochelle	91,058
New York City (Grand Central) (b)	23,838
New York City (Penn Station) (c)	10,397,729
Niagara Falls	31,169
Plattsburgh	13,711
Port Henry	2,488
Port Kent	657
Poughkeepsie	102,070
Rhinecliff	201,667
Rochester	127,203
Rome	8,580
Rouses Point	1,253
Saratoga Springs	36,835
Schenectady	54,388
Syracuse	131,881
Utica	59,868
Westport	5,699
Whitehall	1,638
Yonkers	27,009
Total New York Station Usage:	12,550,621

(a) Albany-Rensselaer is the 9th busiest station in the Amtrak system.

(b) Some Empire trains diverted to Grand Central during summer track work program at Penn.

© New York Penn Station is the busiest station in the Amtrak system. Amtrak also serves Jamestown, Fredonia, and Dunkirk via a bus connection at Buffalo-Exchange Street.

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2018 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

Sept. 29 12:00n to 4:00pm, Schenectady - Backstage Pub
Nov. 17 12:00n to 4:00pm, Schenectady - Backstage Pub

Check www.esparail.org, for the most current information on meeting times and venues...ALL dates, locations and times are subject to change...

ESPA/RPA Members

If you are a member of both ESPA and RPA, you can save \$5 when renewing your ESPA membership.
(Renew for \$19 instead of the regular \$24).



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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)
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- Renewal - Student, Senior, Fixed-Income (\$12.50 per year)
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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.
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