



Trains – Sold Out

The Empire Corridor has experienced increased numbers of sold out trains, as Amtrak no longer switches coaches on and off from trains at Albany.

On Fridays all summer, the Empire Corridor trains had every train sold out in the mornings and afternoons from New York Penn Station, a situation that severely limits ridership. In addition, an extra coach that often were added on weekends on the Empire Corridor trains to Niagara Falls and on the Ethan Allen Express on Fridays, did not operate this summer.

Reducing capacity of trains simply caps the ridership on the busiest travel days, when the highways simply cannot handle the traffic.

In the case of Labor Day weekend, every train to Niagara Falls and Toronto was sold out on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday and on Labor Day, only the 6:20am Albany departure to New York City had any seats, the other 11 trains to New York City from Albany were sold out.

Even on the day after Labor Day, all trains departing Albany between 6am and 10am to New York City were sold out a couple days in advance.

Can you imagine if such conditions occurred on the LIRR or Metro-North? Of course, by requiring reservations on all trains, Amtrak limits passenger demand and operates trains with just 4 coaches, with the exception of the Adirondack that operates with just 5 coaches.

After Labor Day, passenger demand is much less and only a few trains sell out each week on the Empire Corridor during September and October.

New York State Fair

On the first day of the New York State Fair, Governor Cuomo arrived on a train from Albany, at the New York State Fair station, to much fanfare and media coverage.

As a result, some reports indicate that Amtrak's ridership to the State Fair boomed, with Train 284 on Aug 30 and 31 arriving at the Fair, from Buffalo and Rochester, with over 150 passengers getting off of the train to enjoy a day at the Fair.

With both a mid-afternoon and early evening departure back to Rochester and Buffalo, a day stop is very convenient from Western New York.

New Potential Operator of D&H on the Adirondack Branch

Warren County – the owner of the former D&H Adirondack Branch along with the Town of Corinth – is negotiating with Las Vegas-based United Rail Incorporated to take over operations of the publicly owned line from Saratoga Springs to North Creek.

United Rail was the last four initial contenders bidding take over from Iowa Pacific's Saratoga & North Creek Railway, which pulled out last year leaving unpaid bills and bad feelings. The county's negotiating team will make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and the Corinth Town Board as they consider a formal agreement.

Jon "Jack" Kelley – a Saratoga County economic leader who helped bring Global Foundries to the Luther Forest Technology Campus – is on United Rail's negotiating team as the local point man. United Rail operates one short line freight railroad in Indiana and is making proposals to run a passenger excursion trains (Las Vegas Xpress) between Las Vegas and Southern California.

United Rail is also negotiating with Iowa Pacific Holdings to buy the Sanford Lake Branch to the ex-National Lead titanium mine at Tahawus at the foot of the Adirondack High Peaks. Freight line operator OmniTRAX had been interested in the line, but has pulled out of negotiations with Iowa Pacific and Warren County.

Removal of the decades of mine tailings for use in construction is seen as a key to operating the roughly 90 miles of track along the Upper Hudson River from Saratoga Springs to Tahawus at a profit. Other potential freight customers include a garnet mine at North River and the former papermill site in Corinth where there are hopes for finding a new industrial tenant.

United Rail also plans on running tourist excursions and had hoped to wrap up a contract in time for running fall foliage and holiday season trains.

United Rail has proposed a lease-to-own arrangement, but the county is not sure if it wants to lose control over the rail line which had been bought and repaired in the 1990s with federal money. Lastly, there are still calls to convert the rail line to a recreational bike trail.

Ben Turon



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Empire Corridor Final EIS Delayed Again

The long-delayed release of the Empire Corridor Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been delayed again until May 8, 2020, according to an article published in the Albany Times Union on August 14th. The federal – state Empire Corridor Environmental Impact Study (EIS) began in September 2009 and is on track to be the longest uncompleted EIS study in the nation.

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the NYS Transportation Department (NYSDOT) now have a target date of May 8, 2020, to complete & release the final study according to Times Union business editor Eric Anderson. The NYSDOT Draft EIS was completed and released for public comment in the Spring of 2014. The state submitted its final draft to the FRA in the summer of 2018. Until the FRA acts, New York is not eligible to receive federal funds for rail improvements for the line stretching from Albany to Buffalo.

The cause of the delay is not clear. NYSDOT spokesman Glenn Blain said: “Questions about the timing of the completion of the Environmental Impact Statement should be directed to the Federal Railroad Administration as they are the lead agency in this process.” No statement from the FRA seems to be on public record. The Empire Corridor study reviewed five alternatives for future rail improvements including a “no build” alternative; two alternatives which would raise the maximum authorized speed (MAS) from the current 79 miles per hour (mph) west of Hoffmans to 90 mph; and two alternatives to boost MAS to 110 mph and to 125 mph.

Amtrak controls the track between Poughkeepsie to Hoffmans (9 miles west of Schenectady), with CSX owning and controlling the line west of Hoffmans to Niagara Falls. The Amtrak-controlled section has two 110 mph segments: one between Schenectady and Albany, and a second from Rensselaer and Castleton. CSX has favored the current 79 mph speed limit on its controlled track, but had signed (and then withdrawn from) an agreement to permit a 90-mph MAS in some areas.

It is believed that New York State supports the 110 mph EIS alternative, largely because of the high cost of a 125-mph program. The FRA has authorized a 110-mph maximum speed in Michigan. The Empire State Passengers Association has supported alternatives 90B and 110, with MAS of 90 mph and 110 mph, respectively.

Tony Rudmann

Gateway Development Commission Created

New York & New Jersey have approved legislation establishing a Gateway Development Commission (GDC) to oversee the planning, funding and construction of new Hudson River train tunnels, repair existing tunnels, build a new Penn Station South for New Jersey Transit, and create North and South Portal rail bridges.

The new Gateway Commission -- a partnership of New York, New Jersey and Amtrak --- will work to add two more tracks on the Northeast Corridor between Newark and Secaucus and add rails to permit a one-seat ride on all NJ Transit trains to Manhattan.

The bi-state legislation creates a seven-member commission, requires each state to pay 50 percent of the

combined New York-New Jersey share of the projects, and provides standards of transparency and accountability. There will be gubernatorial veto over commission actions. When fully implemented, the legislation will replace current sponsors of the Gateway project, including the Gateway Program Development Corporation, the Port Authority of NY & NJ, and New Jersey Transit.

Importantly, the GDC will be an eligible recipient for Federal, State and local grants. With estimates of the total cost of Gateway projects ranging from \$14 billion to \$24 billion, federal assistance will be needed to prevent the shutdown of the Northeast Corridor which would cause trillion of dollars in economic damages. The federal government had agreed to supply funding, but the new Trump Administration voided the agreement. Congress seems more agreeable to help rebuild and improve infrastructure, but serious future work will need additional federal support.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said, “The Gateway program is the most urgent infrastructure project in the country --- a comprehensive rail investment program that will improve commuter and inter-city services, add needed resiliency and create new capacity for the busiest section of the Northeast Corridor.”

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy said, “The efforts of the New Jersey and New York Legislatures to fully stand up a bi-state commission to oversee the Gateway Program are just the first step towards ensuring its timely and efficient delivery.” “New Jersey's commitment to Gateway is clear”, the Governor added.

Tony Rudmann

East-West Passenger Rail Study

The planning for a potential future Boston-Springfield-Pittsfield passenger rail service continues with the second meeting of Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Transportation's (MassDOT) Advisory Committee for the East-West Passenger Rail Study.

At a July 23rd meeting, MassDOT presented to the committee members composed of state lawmakers, local elected officials, and regional business community leaders, six alternatives. A final alternative is scheduled to be chosen and released early next in 2020.

One alternative sets forth running a new rail shuttle service between Worcester and Springfield connecting with to existing MBTA commuter rail service to Boston. Several other alternatives involve a one-seat ride service from Boston (at either 80, 90, and 110 mph) to Springfield with either a bus shuttle to Pittsfield or with rail service fully extended to Pittsfield.

One last alternative involves building a new 150-mph high-speed railway on new rights-of-way from Boston to Pittsfield along the I-90 corridor, utilizing existing rail infrastructure to serve downtown Worcester and Springfield. (Maglev was rejected as being too expensive, while Hyperloop was deemed as “completely unproven”.)

Committee members from the Berkshire area of Western Massachusetts were outspoken in rejecting any alternative that involved buses. Speaking for a number of members who wrote a letter to MassDOT, State Senator Adam Hinds stated. “There's certainly a simplicity in marketing and

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grabbing people to come the other way, to say, just hop on the train and you can come to our region as a tourist or as a homeowner or a remote worker... We feel that it starts to undermine some of the objectives of having the rail and why it could be successful.”

The letter which called on MassDOT to “think big” stated that: “With so much investment based in the city of Boston, the rest of the state and particularly the four western counties are often left behind... Pittsfield should not be viewed as the ‘end of the line’ for East West Rail, but as a bustling link to Albany, Boston, New York City, Springfield, Worcester and other major economic centers of the North East.” The letter was signed by state Rep. William “Smitty” Pignatelli, D-Lenox; Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, DPittsfield; Rep. John Barrett II, D-North Adams; Sen. Adam G. Hinds, D-Pittsfield; and state Rep. Paul W. Mark, D-Peru. All East-West Rail study documents – including the latest committee meeting presentation and notes – are available in PDF form on the MassDOT website at: www.mass.gov/east-west-passenger-rail-study.

Ben Turon

The Senate Appropriations Committee passed an \$86.6 billion Fiscal Year 2020 transportation funding bill

This is an increase of \$167 million over this year's levels--\$58 million of which went to increased funding for Amtrak.

The bill was approved by a vote of 31-0, a strong show of bipartisan support infrastructure investment has in Congress, and a rejection of the Trump Administration's proposal to eliminate funding for the National Network. “Thanks to bipartisan cooperation on this Subcommittee, Senator Reed and I have drafted a bill that accommodates the priorities of many Members. We received input from 75 Senators with more than 950 requests, all of which we carefully evaluated,” said Senator Susan Collins (R-Maine), chair of the Senate Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations Subcommittee. “This legislation will support job creation and economic development [and] allow us to make critical improvements to our infrastructure.”

Downtown Buffalo Train Station

During the 3rd week of August, the c.1952 Buffalo Exchange Street station, built by the New York Central System, was demolished.

Construction of a new downtown Buffalo station will start soon at the same location with scheduled completion by either late 2020 or early 2021. A temporary station building will be used during the construction of a larger, new station.

Niagara River Bridge Maintenance

From Sept 9 through Nov 1, the Whirlpool Bridge, which carries Amtrak on its upper level over the Niagara River connecting Niagara Falls, US with its Canadian counterpart, will be closed for rebuilding.

Until completion of work, Amtrak's New York – Toronto Maple Leaf train will start and end at the Niagara Falls,

New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) released a historic 5.5 billion Five Year Capital Spending Plan

for the 2020 – 2024 period. The proposal is 70% higher than the current four-year improvement plan.

All told, the plan calls for an investment of \$40 billion in New York City Transit with major funding allocated for new subway signal systems; over 1,900 new cars; phase 2 of the Second Avenue subway line; station improvements and new buses.

The long-delayed East Side Access project allowing for direct rail service from Long Island to Grand Central Terminal is funded for completion and opening in 2022, along with the installation of over 9-miles of new third track on the LIRR's busy Mainline between Floral Park to Hicksville.

The plan earmarks \$4.7 billion for the Metro North Railroad and will advance the New Haven line access project to Penn Station via Amtrak's Hell Gate Bridge line with four new Metro North stations in the Bronx.

Revenues for the ambitious funding plan include \$15 billion from the new mid-town Manhattan congestion pricing program; \$10 billion from bonds backed by new revenue streams; \$10.68 billion from federal funding programs; Another \$10 billion will come from bonds backed by newly established revenue sources dedicated to public transportation: a progressive tax on high-end real estate sales and the elimination of the internet tax advantage. The state has pledged \$3 billion, subject to approval by the legislature, and the city has been asked to pledge an equal amount. The remaining \$9.8 billion will come from the MTA in the form of pay-as-you-go capital contributions and bonds backed by long-standing dedicated taxes, fares and existing toll revenue.

“This proposed 2020-2024 Capital Program – the most ambitious capital plan in the agency's history – builds on the success of the Subway Action Plan, and with new tools such as Design-Build and the reorganization that is underway we're certain we can deliver for our customers,” Patrick Foye, MTA chairman and CEO, said in a statement. “This plan expands service, increases reliability, speeds up the system, and delivers the world's largest ever investment in accessibility, for both NYC Transit and the MTA's commuter railroads, and at the end of this five-year period, New Yorkers will see a revitalized and modern system for the 21st century and beyond.”

Challenge of Going Net-Carbo Neutral

New York State has become a leader in confronting the challenge of climate change from global warming caused by the emission of greenhouse gases – primarily CO₂ – from the burning of fossil fuels by passing the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act during the Spring Legislative Session. The Climate Act's mandate to go net-carbon neutral is both an alluring opportunity and a daunting challenge for the rail industry within the Empire State.

The bill mandates that the state all but eliminate its greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 through the elimination of the burning of fossil fuels in power generation and transportation. The goal by 2050 is to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 85% of the 1990 levels, with the remaining 15% offset by reforestation, wetland creation, or carbon capturing through technological means.

The state's climate bill is nearly identical to legislation passed in the United Kingdom. The Climate Change Act of 2008 calls for net UK greenhouse gas emissions for the year 2050 to be at least 80% lower than the 1990 baseline.

Concerning transportation, the current policy of the British government is for all new passenger cars and vans sold in the UK to be zero emissions vehicles – either battery electric, plug-in hybrid electric or hydrogen fuel cells. For the rail sector, transport minister Jo Johnson in 2018 called for all diesel trains to be phased out by 2040.

There is debate in the British rail industry if the phase out of diesel traction is technologically and economically possible. In the March & April issues of *Modern Railways* (the British equivalent of *Trains Magazine* and *Railway Age*), columnists Ian Walmsley and Roger Ford contend that it is not for rail freight and passenger service utilizing rail lines with too little traffic to be economical to electrify. They also pointed out that only 29% of the rail vehicle fleet runs solely on diesel traction, making overall rail emissions today minuscule compared to the rest of the UK's transport sector. Given that diesel trucks were not included in zero-emissions mandate for motor vehicles, the two men recommended that a modal-shift to rail of both road freight and passengers would lead to overall reduced emissions for the transport sector. They stated that the design and operation of diesel engines can be made more efficient by minimizing idling. They also called for finding ways to reduce the cost of railway electrification, and then for enacting a rolling program of electrifying the remaining non-electrified mainlines.

Messrs. Walmsley and Ford were very skeptical of the prospects of electric batteries or hydrogen fuel cells being able to play any major role in replacing diesel traction. While pragmatic for light-weight passenger cars, current state-of-the-art batteries lack the range and power-density required for either long-haul road freight or railway traction.

They dismissed hydrogen fuel cells because, while a fuel cell can equal the power of a diesel engine of the same weight and size, the efficiency of the production of hydrogen fuel from electrolysis is currently very poor.

Also, the low-density of the gaseous hydrogen requires considerably greater storage volume than that of liquid diesel fuel.

Yet it is possible that Walmsley and Ford's skepticism towards hydrogen powered trains may be unfounded. In a letter-to-the-editor in the April issue of *Modern Railways*, Mr. David Shirres pointed out that the falling cost of renewable energy – including off-shore wind power – made the production of hydrogen through electrolysis for transportation competitive with fossil fuels. This is particularly true, he wrote, when hydrogen production occurs at night when electrical demand falls, but the wind continues to blow generating surplus energy.

Indeed, hydrogen passenger trains are already in commercial service in Lower Saxony, the windiest state in Germany in terms of power generation. Alstom's Coradia iLint is a hydrogen fuel cell multiple-unit trainset derived from an existing regional train design that entered commercial service in September 2018 in Lower Saxony.

The SNCF – France's national railway – is also moving to replace diesel traction for its regional passenger services on non-electrified lines with hydrogen fuel-cell trainsets. Alstom plans to offer SNCF a 100-mph (160km/h) bi-mode train equipped for overhead electric and fuel cell operation. The 236-foot-long four-car train will accommodate 230 seated passengers. With capacity for up to 200kg of hydrogen, the train set will have a range of 250-375 miles (400-600km) on non-electrified lines between fueling cycles.

Thus, hydrogen might play a significant role after all in replacing diesel traction, especially in North America where only a tiny fraction of the rail network is electrified compared to Europe or Asia. Ongoing research into hydrogen production is also seeking to boost the efficiency of electrolysis to bring the overall costs of hydrogen closer to that of diesel and gasoline.

The other major issue with hydrogen trains, however, is the required space to store hydrogen fuel onboard trains. A long-distance freight or passenger train would require a tender car along the lines of tank car tenders used today by the Florida East Coast Railway for their CNG fueled freight locomotives. While not likely an issue for freight railroads, many people might not be thrilled with the idea of tank cars of compressed hydrogen being brought in and out of major passenger rail stations in dense urban centers.

So, where does this leave rail transport in New York State? Fortunately, large parts of the Metro-North and the Long Island Railroad are already electrified, and it would seem a straightforward matter to extend the current third rail territory to the rest of the system within the next few decades, fully electrifying commuter rail service into New York City. The real challenge is what to do about Upstate inter-city rail.

Interestingly, the climate act passed this Spring by the NYS legislature might have rendered irrelevant the long-delayed Empire Corridor EIS study. It is thought that the EIS's final alternative will involve running diesel trains on

an upgraded CSX mainline from Albany to Buffalo – as laid out in alternatives 90A, 90B, and 110. ESPA as an organization officially supported, with caveats, alternative 110, which involves building a third dedicated passenger track with a top speed of 110 mph.

Yet, when taking in account the spirit of the climate bill it would now seem that alternative 125 is the best option since it called for building a new electrified passenger railway across Upstate New York. The high service level of alternative 125 in terms of train speed, frequency, and reliability would lead to a considerable modal-shift of passenger travel from air and road to low-polluting rail.

Alternative 125 had some major flaws, including: new electrified tracks bypassing Schenectady, Amsterdam, Utica, and Rome; the failure to make use of 28 miles of existing Amtrak track west of Albany through Schenectady to Hoffmans; and the failure to electrify the Hudson Line south to Croton-Harmon, eliminating the need for dual-mode trains. Yet the overall idea of a high-speed electric railway along the Empire Corridor fits right in with the world vision by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act.

A good comparison from overseas of a railway project similar in scope and conception to Alt. 125 can be found in Southeast Asia. Starting in 2006 the Malaysian government began electrifying, double-tracking, and grade-separating, incrementally, its 715-mile West Coast Line in large project sections northward from the capital Kuala Lumpur to the Thai Border. In total, Malaysia has spent about \$6.3 billion over 15 years to completely rebuild its British colonial era meter-gauge mainline. The introduction of the new fast and frequent ETS (Electric Train Service) utilizing 100-mph EMU trainsets has resulted in double-digit growth of inter-city passenger rail ridership – up to 7.2 million annual passengers in 2018 – for its national railway KTM

Unfortunately, it is difficult to imagine New York State – let alone the rest of the United States – matching the large investment in rail infrastructure seen overseas. While there are a few bright spots including Virgin Brightline in Florida and CalTrains Electrification in the Bay Area, overall investment in passenger rail in America is marked by embarrassing disappointments including: the California High Speed Rail Project; the Gateway Program; and LIRR East Side Access. These are rail projects have gone way over budget, while never seeming to reach completion.

For all the talk about a “Green New Deal,” America in 2019 –celebrating both the 50 anniversary of the Moon Landing and 150 anniversary of the completion of the Transcontinental Railroad – has a lack of both the willpower and competence today, than the previous generations that built the Interstate Highway System and the Panama Canal. The United States will never be able to successfully overcome the twin challenges of climate change and a growing national population if we do not find a way to think and build big again.

Railroad electric traction was pioneered in New York with the electrification of trains into Grand Central and Pennsylvania Stations, and later with the full electrification of the Pennsylvania Railroad's New York-Washington line in the 1930s. In Schenectady, both General Electric and ALCO pioneered diesel-electric traction that rapidly replaced steam after WWII. Today, New York State is still home to a large rail manufacturing industry, including Alstom which is building

Amtrak's next-generation Acela trainsets. New York should leverage its in-state rail manufacturing capability and expertise to become a leader in zero-emission rail motive power.

The next step for the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act is the creation of a 22-person “climate action council” comprising of top state officials who will be advised by smaller working groups with expertise in specific areas from forestry to economic development. With one-third of the state's emissions being from transportation, both freight and passenger rail will have to be addressed.

How can the long-term and broadly benefiting investment of railroad electrification be made by an industry largely in private hands whose decision processes are driven by the narrow, short-term interests of the financial markets? Could hydrogen fuel-cells offer a cheaper incremental solution by in the coming decades, replacing today's diesels as effectively as diesels replaced steam? And can rail transit overall be expanded economically or are we doomed to the astronomical costs seen in recent projects?

Passenger rail has an environmental advantage over road and air by being both energy and land-use efficient; yet, that advantage could significantly narrow with the mass electrification of passenger motor vehicles. What will the public perception of passenger rail be in 2040 if Amtrak trains are still hauled by belching diesels, while electric automobiles are charged from wind farms on Long Island, hydroelectric plants at Niagara Falls, and solar panels installed over parking lots?

The world is seeing the effects of climate change on its railways: from steel rails warping out-of-shape during intense heatwaves to tracks washed out by unprecedented torrential rains. Rising seas could swamp the Hudson Line – completed in 1851 – midway into its third century of service. Business as usual is no longer tenable.

While little discussion has occurred so far within ESPA on the effects of the state's climate act on passenger rail, this may change if we are to ensure as advocates that the right public and private investments are made so that rail does its part in creating a more sustainable world.

Benjamin Turon

GO GREEN

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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 for more information or if you are planning on attending a meeting. Advance registration is required!

Meetings:

Sat, November 23, 2019: Schenectady, location Katie O'Byrnes Restaurant at 12:21pm

Sat, Jan 11 or Jan 18, 2020: TBA

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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