



Grand New Station at Niagara Falls Is Open

Amtrak's newest station, the "Niagara Falls Station and Custom House Interpretive Center," opened for its first passengers on December 6, 2016. The \$43 million station not only serves Amtrak but includes U.S. Customs and Border Protection, local bus service, and a soon to be opened museum on the Underground Railroad. Its location is adjacent to the international Whirlpool Rapids Bridge which carries Amtrak into Canada.



Bruce Becker

The complex includes the restored c.1863 stone custom house which is connected to a new station head house by a two-story glass atrium. Passengers access a new high-level platform from the second floor.

Construction on the project began in August 2010; the City was awarded a USDOT \$16.5 million TIGER grant that October. The facility replaces the former station located in a 1959 Lehigh Valley freight house at a rail yard two miles to the east which Amtrak began using October 1978 after the extension of *Empire Service* from Buffalo to Niagara Falls.

Most of the travellers off the first train using the facility (including a large contingent from the United Kingdom) were a bit confused as they were greeted by applause, cameras and curious onlookers. While some called the new station 'beautiful', they were also confused by its current lack of amenities. "Is there anything to do here?" said Angela Honey, of South Wales, during a two-hour layover before the train headed to New York City. "We'll just sit, get back on the train and that's it."

That should change in future, as the facility will house a complete welcome center, and have 4500 square feet of retail space, in addition to the museum. The station was completed in July after a decade of effort, but negotiations between Amtrak and the City of Niagara Falls (which owns the facility) over a 20-year lease of the station delayed the first day of service for a few months more.

The *Buffalo News* reported that Amtrak will lease 29,360 square feet of the station (63 percent of the entire building) and will pay 63 percent of the operating costs, (Cont'd. on page 7)

Pre-clearance at Montreal Central Station a Step Closer

The US Congress in December passed the "Promoting Travel, Commerce and National Security Act of 2016" which allows for U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents to operate in Canada in order to conduct "pre-clearance" at several sites for both passengers and cargo. Canada's Parliament must pass similar enacting legislation, and then the two countries would have to strike diplomatic agreements to finalize the deal.

"My bottom line is: Canada, we've done our part, now do yours," stated U.S. Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY), who introduced the measure in the Senate with fellow senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). Republican U.S. Representative Elise Stefanik of the North Country introduced the measure in the US House and stated, "Increasing commerce with our Canadian neighbors is a top economic priority for our region, which is why I was proud to lead this initiative in the House."

For Amtrak passengers in New York State, the bill meets the goal of eliminating border stops for the New York City – Montreal *Adirondack* (and cuts over an hour from the current schedule), and would enable the Washington – St. Albans *Vermont* to be extended to Montreal.

The current *Adirondack* border stops at Rouses Point, N.Y., and Cantic, Quebec, and the station stop at St. Lambert, would be eliminated; American and Canadian border inspections would be conducted at a dedicated facility within Central Station in Montreal, just as is now done at Vancouver, B.C.'s Pacific Central Station for Amtrak's *Cascades* international service to Seattle and Portland. The trains would operate from a secured and enclosed platform and track at Central Station and then run sealed and non-stop across the international border.

This agreement would not affect the Toronto – New York City *Maple Leaf* across the international border at Niagara Falls; that train is operated in Canada by VIA Rail which has several intermediate stations between the border and Toronto.

Benjamin Turon

Rensselaer Rail Station to gain Vermont Intercity Bus Connection (vtidigger.org)

The Bennington-Manchester, Vermont area will get a long-sought link to the Albany-Rensselaer Amtrak Station via a new state-supported motor coach service slated to start this year. Bennington County Regional Commission planner Mark Anders made the announcement during a public information session.

Visit vttranslines.com or the Vermont Agency of Transportation website connectingcommuters.org for more information.

“A View from the Cab”

Gary Prophet (ESPA Interim President)

Customs at the Niagara Falls Station: Just before the Christmas holidays, I entered the United States at Niagara Falls on the Toronto – New York *Maple Leaf*, which was my first time at the new Niagara Falls station. Upon arrival at 10:40am, we were told by the crew to gather our belongings and exit the train onto the platform. This was very easy with the high level platform, and as we exited, border patrol officers directed us into the building where we walked down ramps to the inspection area. First, our bags were x-rayed, then we encountered 3 officers at a counter to ask questions of the passengers. With only about 30 passengers on-board, all of us were finished in about 30 minutes. It was unclear if anyone was taken to a back area where more intense interviews or search of bags would occur. After each person spoke with an officer, each exited by a ramp and, a few steps later, were in the Amtrak waiting area. At 11:10am, the train itself was cleared by Customs and we were allowed to board.

Several people complained of no food available on-board, no food available in the station nor was there any food within viewing distance out the windows of the station. The train is scheduled to depart Niagara Falls at 12:30pm, so we had over an hour to wait. The customs process is much improved with the new station; hopefully some of the nearly 2 hours scheduled for customs can be removed due to more efficient processing of passengers.

Sold out Trains: Over the last 2 weeks of December, 71 Empire Corridor trains were sold out, which does not include the near universal sellouts of the *Lake Shore Limited* during these weeks. The 4 trains most frequently sold out were: Trains 63 & 64 (Toronto *Maple Leaf*), Train 284 (eastbound *Empire*), and Train 68 (southbound *Adirondack*). The *Maple Leaf* seems to have operated with just 5 cars; in past years it would have 6 cars during these 2 weeks. However, the *Lake Shore* did operate with 7 coaches (instead of its usual 5) but coach seating was still sold out most days. The Empire Corridor needs more coaches, especially on weekends, and needs to properly stock its café car, which often runs out of food.

FY'17&'18 Passenger Rail Funding Timetable

With Congress back in session and a new President inaugurated, passenger rail advocates face a busy four months to insure that the drive for improved intercity passenger rail continues.

While the last Congress approved, and the outgoing President signed, a new transportation authorization known as the FAST act, the appropriation process shortchanged the authorization amount for the federal fiscal year which began on October 1, 2016. Indeed, Congress was not able to settle the appropriation amounts needed to fund all government operation for the entire fiscal year. Instead, a Continuing Resolution was adopted to fund the federal government until April 28, 2017. That leaves a five month gap until September 30, 2017, with no money to operate federal programs. While the staff members of Congressional committees and individual Congressmen have continued to discuss resolution of the problem, no clear path has emerged to a solution.

An early decision for new President Donald Trump is what to do about the federal budget for the fiscal year which begins on October 1, 2017. Under the Congressional Budget Act which went into effect in the mid-1970s, the President is required to

submit the fiscal 2017-18 budget to Congress between January 2 and February 8, 2017. There is no penalty for not sending a budget to Congress and in many years budgets or amendments to the outgoing President's final budget were submitted months after the official time frame. While Mr. Trump has designated a budget director, a clear path has yet to emerge. Usually, Amtrak submits a formal budget request to the Senate and House four to six weeks after a federal budget is submitted.

Complicating life in Washington is the need to raise the federal debt ceiling. Current projections indicate that it will be hit on March 16, 2017. While the Treasury Department has mechanisms to extend the projected default date, raising the ceiling has been a contentious issue in Congress. It can be expected that the deficit hawks and spending advocates will have their usual war before developing some mechanism to avoid a debt default.

During his campaign, Mr. Trump suggested a \$1.5 trillion improvement program to fix the nation's crumbling infrastructure. While few in Washington or elsewhere say such a program is not needed, many in Congress seem to believe such spending is not affordable. This appears to be a major conflict between a President who wants to make America great, and a Congress dedicated to tax cuts and deficit reduction. When the President fleshes out his infrastructure ideas, passenger rail advocates may have to work overtime to insure rail is not neglected.

Tony Rudmann

TIGER Grants Top \$5 Billion Mark

The Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grant program topped the \$5B (billion) mark with the announcement of the 2016 award winners, according to the US Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx.

The \$500M (million) 2016 TIGER awards leveraged applicant support from sources in 32 states, 2 territories, and 40 communities. Demand for the program continued to exceed the 585 eligible applications which collectively sought over \$9.3B in funding. During the previous funding rounds, more than 7,300 applications requested more than \$143B for transportation projects across the country.

New York's single 2016 grant will provide \$17.6M of a \$49.6M improvement package at the Albany Port District Commission. Included in the project to enhance cargo handling capabilities are reconstruction of a wharf with roll on/roll off capacity, replacement of a warehouse, reconstruction of a cargo storage area, and rebuilding of a port roadway. Previous grants to New York included support for the Moynihan station as well as rail station projects in Niagara Falls and Rochester.

Tony Rudmann

NEC FUTURE: Tier 1 EIS Released

The Tier 1 Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Amtrak's Boston – Washington Northeast Corridor has been completed and released from the Federal Railroad Administration. The study lays out a plan to rebuild and expand the current rail infrastructure for high speed rail service as well as enhanced commuter and freight service. On the NEC Future website, the entire document can be accessed as a pdf file; there also are a highlights flip book and short video. For more please visit necfuture.com

Gov. Cuomo Announces “Taste NY” Partnership with Amtrak

Governor Andrew Cuomo, in an October 3, 2016, press release, announced a “Taste NY” partnership with Amtrak to promote New York food and beverage products to passengers on trains travelling to or through New York City, Toronto, Montreal, Niagara Falls, and Rutland. Through the Taste NY pilot program, Amtrak passengers can now enjoy locally-produced snacks and craft beverages on select Amtrak trains.

The governor stated that... “New York companies produce some of the best food and beverages anywhere, and through the Taste NY program, these great products are getting more and more exposure across the state and around the globe. This exciting new partnership means that the approximately 1 million people traveling on these Amtrak lines will be able to experience for themselves some of the best products New York has to offer.”

Taste NY is an initiative launched by Governor Cuomo in 2013 to promote New York's food and beverage industries. It is overseen by the Department of Agriculture and Markets and has created opportunities for local producers to showcase their goods at nearly five dozen locations throughout the state and at more than three dozen large public events, such as the Great New York State Fair. The program has also opened at locations, such as stores, cafés, and bars, at Thruway rest stops along the state's highways, at state parks, and at other major tourist destinations and sports and entertainment venues, enabling customers to buy New York State's homegrown and homemade products.

Amtrak Vice President of Customer Service Tom Hall stated that... “Amtrak is pleased to work with Governor Cuomo and the State of New York to provide locally-sourced food and beverage items for café service on Empire Service trains. This program will help improve the customer experience for our passengers by providing new and enhanced food choices while also highlighting some of the great New York-based businesses helping to grow the State's economy.”

The initial launch of the program includes KIND bars (Manhattan, NYC), Always Bagels (Bohemia, Long Island), Chobani yogurt (New Berlin, Southern Tier), Sweet Sam's coffee cakes (Bronx, NYC) Brooklyn Defender IPA (Brooklyn, NYC), Ommegang Witte Wheat Ale (Cooperstown, Mohawk Valley) and Nine Pin Cider (Albany, Capital Region).

More information about Taste NY, at www.taste.ny.gov

Excerpts from Press Release of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo

Amtrak Introduces Business Class Service on the Lake Shore Limited

Amtrak began Business Class service aboard the *Lake Shore Limited* between Chicago, Albany-Rensselaer and Boston. Customers can enjoy the following amenities: Reserved seating in a car for Business Class customers only; Complimentary coffee, tea and other non-alcoholic beverages; Access to digital newspapers on Amtrak Connect; Amtrak Guest Rewards Business Class bonus points; Access to Chicago Union Station's Metropolitan Lounge. Tickets are fully refundable if cancelled prior to departure. At this time, Business Class is not available between New York and Albany-Rensselaer.

For more information please visit amtrak.com

Amtrak Ridership, Revenue Hit Record High

Amtrak reported exceptionally strong financial results for its 2016 fiscal year, ending Sept. 30. This included an all-time ridership record of 31.3 million boardings, and a ticket revenue record of \$2.14 billion. Ridership was up by nearly 400,000 over Fiscal Year 2015. Revenue saw a \$12 million increase over FY2015. This is the sixth consecutive year Amtrak has carried more than 30 million customers. It carries more passengers than all but five domestic airlines. Amtrak covered 94 percent of its operating costs with ticket sales and other revenues, up from 92 percent the year before – a world-class performance for a passenger-carrying railroad. Total revenue was a record \$3.2 billion for FY 2016. In addition, Amtrak reported an unaudited operating loss of \$227 million, a reduction of \$78 million over last year, and the lowest operating loss since 1973. Amtrak also made a net reduction in long-term debt of \$71.4 million. “The results demonstrate the value we deliver to our customers and the vital role Amtrak plays in our nation's transportation system,” said Amtrak Chairman Anthony Coscia. “We are off to another strong start for the new fiscal year and will provide a great travel experience for customers who choose Amtrak in the upcoming holiday season.”

Few passenger railroads in the world make a profit. So while Amtrak continues to cut its operating deficit, it can't “economize” to a point of hurting product quality, said new Amtrak President and CEO Wick Moorman. “One of the things we're going to pay a lot of attention to going forward is the customer experience,” he said. Capital investment is emphasized in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act adopted by Congress in 2015. It requires Amtrak to divvy up its five-year, \$8 billion in funding among the Northeast Corridor and National Network. But it doesn't say how much should go to operating or capital. A record number of riders rode America's rails in fiscal year 2016. *Amtrak*

New Viewliner II Dining Cars

In November, the first of 25 new Viewliner II dining cars left the CAF USA assembly plant in Elmira Heights, NY for testing on regular Amtrak trains, according to the blog “Amtrak in the Heartland” by Craig Sanders. Diner No. 68001 *Annapolis* was moved to Amtrak's Hialeah, Florida yard near Miami on Amtrak's *Silver Meteor*. It will undergo testing and inspections to ensure that there are no problems with the rest of the Viewliner II diners that will be coming out of the factory at the rate of about two or three per month until mid-2017. The National Association of Railroad Passengers said Amtrak is confident the problems that hindered production of the Viewliner II were resolved. Amtrak ordered 130 Viewliner II cars for \$298 million in 2010; but so far only the 55 baggage cars were delivered. Another 25 baggage-dorms and 25 sleepers are still due. Amtrak removed heritage diners from the *Lake Shore Limited* and *Silver Star* due to structural issues. Diners will be restored when the Viewliner II cars arrive. The *Cardinal* is also slated to get Viewliner II cars. CAF USA workers are making slow progress on the 130-car Viewliner II order for Amtrak.

Schenectady Station Project in Limbo

Senator Charles E. Schumer held a news conference on October 18, 2016, on the platform at Schenectady Station in part to state that he will very much support additional federal funding for replacement of the current 1970-era decaying, leaking Amtrak station.

The replacement project has been long in planning with already \$14 million in federal funding secured, but it has stalled when bids for construction put out last winter resulted in only one bid for \$25 million. NYSDOT, which is overseeing the project, then decided to break it into two parts and put it up for rebidding, but that rebidding was then cancelled last September. Currently the whole project is in limbo with a significant portion of the federal funding set to be lost by the summer of 2017 due to a sunset clause in the stimulus American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009.

The U.S. Senator, at his press conference in the Electric City, also voiced his support for a state grant application for \$33.7 million in federal money to install a Positive Train Control PTC system in the 97-mile section of the Empire Corridor from Poughkeepsie to Amsterdam. This section of track in the Capital District and Hudson Valley is owned by CSX (a freight railroad), but passenger service is the primary user of the line which is leased long-term by Amtrak for the state funded *Empire Service*, *Maple Leaf*, *Adirondack*, *Ethan Allen*. The Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015 provided \$199 million in funding to install the PTC on passenger rail lines.

PTC, according to the Union Pacific Railroad, is defined as an advanced signalling and train control system designed to automatically stop a train before certain accidents occur including: train-to-train collisions; derailments caused by excessive train speed; train movements through misaligned track switches. A deadly commuter train crash in California in 2008 prompted the federal mandate, and since then deadly crashes involving Metro North, Amtrak, and New Jersey Transit have strengthened the call by the media and politicians for swift installation of this technology by the railroads.

The Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008 requires the systems be installed on all major passenger and freight railroads, but for the most part they haven't been installed yet due to technological challenges and lack funding, particularly for public commuter railroads. The original 2015 deadline has been pushed back to 2020 for full installation and operation. Metro-North is notably well behind schedule but is expected to get PTC up and running from New York City to Poughkeepsie eventually and CSX is required to do the same west of Amsterdam to Buffalo.

Some construction work is being undertaken at the Schenectady Station as part of the Albany – Schenectady 2nd Track Project which should be completed by the first part of 2017.

Benjamin Turon



Gondola Ride to Empire State Plaza from Rensselaer Rail Station?

A new privately funded study completed by the McLaren Engineering Group and its partners proves that a mile-long aerial gondola over Hudson River could work to connect the Albany-Rensselaer Rail Station with the Empire State Plaza in Downtown Albany.

Gondolas are transported by means of aerial lifts which are supported and propelled by cables from above. A loop of steel cable is strung between two stations, sometimes over intermediate supporting towers. The cable is driven by a bull wheel in a terminal, which is typically connected to an engine or electric motor. Gondolas can be found at many ski resorts in North America and are in use for public urban transport in Europe and South America.

The study estimates 825,000 people arriving and departing Amtrak's ninth busiest station each year could benefit from the gondola. The first phase of construction is estimated to cost between \$17 million and \$20 million, with annual operating costs at about \$2.4 million. The second phase could cost an additional \$10 million. Expenses would be offset by a mix of private funds, passenger ticket revenue, advertising and public funds. Peter Melewski, the McLaren Engineering Group's national director of strategic planning, told to the *Albany Times Union* that the next step would be securing funding.

The proposal has received mixed reviews but Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan told the *Times Union* that it could be an economic engine for the city as a possible attraction in and of itself, while also improving transportation in the Capital Region. "I hope this is a more environmentally friendly way to get people across the river, and also is more affordable," she stated.

Benjamin Turon

Process Begins for a New Buffalo Station... but Where?

Great excitement has been generated as the process for a new intercity rail station in Buffalo was jumped started after Amtrak's current downtown Exchange Street Station sprung a leak with the false ceiling giving way during a heavy rain. It had to be briefly closed until Buffalo's Department of Public Works made repairs to the city-owned station. The building has since reopened, but not before the public, including Senator Charles Schumer, weighed-in to demand a new station for the Queen City.

(Cont'd. on page 5)



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(Cont'd. from page 4)

Governor Andrew Cuomo provided the City with \$1 million for a preliminary station study, and Buffalo Mayor Byron W. Brown selected Robert G. Shibley, the dean of the University at Buffalo school of architecture to facilitate discussions on where a new Amtrak train station should be located within the Buffalo city limits. Cuomo stated that \$25 million had already been set aside by NYSDOT for a new Buffalo train station. A preferred site has been schooled to be selected by April 2017.

Where to build a new station? That is the question. The necessary new station tracks, interlocking and signalling work on the CSX mainline could cost several tens of millions. The massive Art Deco Central Terminal, built by the New York Central on the eve of the Great Depression, is currently undergoing stabilization by the non-profit Central Terminal Restoration Corporation; a Canadian developer is lined up to help redevelop the complex.

The big plus of the Central Terminal location, and another proposed station site in the Larkin District, is that it would allow passengers on the NYC-Chicago Lake Shore Limited to board and detrain much closer to downtown (2 miles away for the Central Terminal) compared to Buffalo-Depew which is eight miles from the city center. However, this would move every Amtrak passenger using the current Empire Service further from downtown if Exchange Street were closed. Also, passengers would be unable to make the unattractive but short walk to the NFTA's Metro Rail on Main Street, which connects downtown to the South Campus of the University of Buffalo.

A station in downtown on or near Main Street and the ongoing Canalside redevelopment is championed by others. Various opinions have been voiced in local media including the *Buffalo News*. Brown administration officials, and former New York State Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, a board member of Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp, have expressed support in the past for putting a train station at the old "Aud Site," a large undeveloped downtown parcel of land next to the railroad. An environmental impact study was completed over a decade ago for a rail station on this site.

Bruce B. Becker, former ESPA President and current vice-president of operations for the National Association of Railroad Passengers, stated to local TV news WKBT that... "We need a new facility that will serve everybody, together, connecting NFTA services with Amtrak services and inter-city bus services. So, where should a new station go? It's way too early to say. We're not saying there is any one best solution, yet. We need to have a study by examining all the alternatives and what goes into that, which would be ridership studies and, obviously, costs involved with building a new facility."

The Citizens for Regional Transit held a forum on October 19th on the issue of a new station, and public meeting was scheduled in December by the city, but it had to be cancelled due to inclement weather. Interim ESPA President Gary Prophet travelled to the city to attend the event and was able to scope out the situation.

Benjamin Turon

Release of the Empire Corridor HSR Study Delayed to Fall 2017

More than six years after it was started, the completion and release of the Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the High-Speed Rail Empire Corridor Program has been delayed until Fall 2017. The planning process was started in April 2010 with a \$1 million grant awarded by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and an additional \$1.8 million from the Federal Highway Administration, to the New York Department of Transportation (NYSDOT); the state matched with a further \$3.5 million.

The *Albany Times Union* reported in an October 9th article by business reporter Eric Anderson that the FRA, at the NYSDOT's request, has extended the deadline to Sept. 30, 2017. Agency spokeswoman Jennifer Post was quoted in the newspaper stating that NYSDOT hopes to have the final document completed by the end of March, with a final alternative selected. The draft environmental impact statement was released on January 31, 2014, with several open house meetings occurring across the state in March, and public comment period lasting until April 30, 2014.

Primarily focused on the Albany-Buffalo segment of the Empire Corridor, several alternatives were presented in the DEIS, including a "do-nothing" Base Alternative; an upgrade of the current double-track CSX line to 90-mph (Alt. 90A); the building of a dedicated passenger track on the CSX right-of-way at 90-mph (Alt. 90B), and 110-mph (Alt. 110). The last alternative called for building a new electrified double-track high-speed railway between Albany-Buffalo with a top speed of 125-mph (Alt. 125). TGV style high speed rail service of with speeds of 160 to 220-mph was rejected for being too expensive and having too little benefit in terms of ridership and revenues.

Alternatives 90A, 90B, and 110, included infrastructure upgrades (some ongoing today to tracks and signalling Penn Station-Schenectady), and an increase in train frequency to hourly south of Albany, and doubling to eight the number of round-trips west of Albany to Niagara Falls. Travel time NYC-Albany was to be cut to 2hrs 05mins, from the current 2½ hours; and Albany-Buffalo from the current 5½ hours to as little as 4hrs 15mins in Alt. 110. An overview of all the alternatives can be found in a video entitled... "High Speed Rail Empire Corridor Public Outreach Video" and posted to YouTube by NYSDOT.

FRA spokeswoman Desiree French stated in the *Times Union* that more than 900 individuals and groups submitted more than 1,600 unique comments for the Empire Corridor environmental review, and many comments were highly technical. "New York's Department of Transportation requested more time to catalogue and review the comments and to also generate well-researched responses." It is known that CSX submitted a very length comment letter to NYSDOT.

The infrastructure consulting firm hired by the state to help complete the report, HNTB of Kansas City refused comment to

(Cont'd. on page 7)

Feds propose regulations that would greatly improve transportation planning in the New York metro region

Downstate rail advocates commend U.S. Secretary Anthony Foxx for proposing new regulations that would advance reforms for the metropolitan transportation planning process in large urbanized areas. And no metropolitan area is in more need of these reforms than the 22 million-person NY-NJ-CT metropolitan area, the nation's largest.

Since the dissolution of the Tri-State Regional Planning Commission in 1982, and its replacement with ten metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs), the region has suffered ever growing levels of traffic congestion and pollution. No mechanism exists to advance plans and programs that would coordinate the region's three commuter rail systems, and other rail and bus systems, leaving travellers to fend for themselves, in a hopelessly complex, and disconnected transit network that practically demands that they travel on the region's congested roadways.

Secretary Foxx's proposed reforms would require the New York Metropolitan Transportation Council – the metropolitan planning organization (MPO) for New York City, Long Island, and Lower Hudson Valley counties – to work closely with the other MPOs that cover the New Jersey and Connecticut portions of the region, to prepare a single common long range regional transportation plan and a short term program of investments and operating strategies for the entire region. These regulations are especially important for metropolitan areas that extend across state lines, where the Federal government has long failed to exercise its Constitutional authority to “regulate interstate commerce.”

However, preparing and reaching agreement on a unified NY-NJ-CT long range plan and a short-range program will not be easy. This cannot be accomplished by simply “cutting and pasting” the documents of multiple existing MPOs into a single document. It will require thoughtful preparation and considerable public discussion and review. Tragically, the governors of New York State, and its neighbors, have systematically decimated planning staffs, and refuse to convene a rudimentary public involvement process that might challenge their autonomy.

One approach to gaining broader support for reforming the planning process would be for rail advocates to outline an ambitious agenda to bring about needed multimodal transportation enhancements in the NY region. This could be include:

1. The development of near term operational strategies for managing demand and dealing with roadway congestion, which are at legendary levels, through a coherent plan for road pricing that would reduce excess demand and use of some of these generated revenues to greatly increase the frequency, and reduce the price, of regional rail service.
2. By throttling excess demand for auto travel on a roadway system that cannot accommodate it, through road pricing, improved regional freight movement by truck would result in the interim, before major much-needed new rail freight investments can be placed in service.
3. Planning for longer term investments in regional rail service for passengers should complement planning for new investments in rail freight facilities. For example, by constructing long planned new Hudson River passenger rail tunnels to Penn Station and then continuing on to connect with Grand Central, the existing passenger rail tunnels through Penn Station could be used, off-peak and weekends for low profile

container trains, while plans for more ambitious rail freight tunnels are advanced.

4. Efforts to move forward with sustainable, transit-oriented communities, particularly in the suburbs, would benefit greatly from enhanced, affordable regional rail service – particularly for reverse-peak, off-peak and weekend service.

5. Planning at the regional level could lead to a co-ordinated strategy for enhanced aviation facilities at outlying airports that would be made more accessible with rail access improvements, while repurposing close-in airports for affordable housing.

The NY-NJ-CT region must plan more comprehensively for transportation and economic development if it is to meet the challenge of its growing competitors abroad.

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LIRR Third Track Draft Environmental Study Released

The LIRR Third Track Draft Environmental Study has been released with, according to the state, findings that demonstrate how the project will improve service reliability, safety and quality of life. The LIRR Expansion Project will add a third track to 9.8 miles along the congested Main Line of the LIRR between Floral Park and Hicksville, and eliminate all seven street-level train crossings within the project corridor. With up to 40 percent of the LIRR's 308,000 daily passengers going through the Main Line, which serves as the main corridor through which many branches of the LIRR travel, the proposed project will improve service for more than half a million passengers per week.

Governor Cuomo stated that... “Expanding the Main Line is crucial to the future of Long Island and its residents. By increasing capacity on one of the LIRR's busiest corridors and eliminating all street-level grade crossings, this project will result in less traffic, less congestion and a transportation network that meets the needs of current and future generations of Long Islanders. Today's action marks an important milestone in this project's completion and is another major step forward in our efforts to build a brighter future for Long Island”.

The proposed project is completely different from prior proposals to expand track capacity on the LIRR's Main Line. This project will include: no residential property acquisitions; eliminating all grade crossings within the 9.8-mile project corridor; building sound walls to reduce noise; station upgrades and additional parking.

All project benefits, as well as other detailed information like track and grade crossing changes, proposed service changes, current land use patterns and proposed construction staging, are outlined in the project's Draft EIS available for download at the project's website at www.aModernLI.com.

Benjamin Turon

New York By Rail

New York By Rail Magazine is the premiere Amtrak travel guide for destinations in New York, Vermont and Canada. Visit us at...

www.newyorkbyrail.com or on...



FRA 30-Year Investment Plan

The Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) issued a NEC Future report, which outlines a 30-year investment plan to build a better and stronger Northeast Corridor (NEC). The report is the result of four years of intensive outreach to the public, local governments, and stakeholder groups. The FRA found broad agreement among all groups that the NEC's current capacity is grossly inadequate, and a dramatic expansion in investment and capacity is urgently needed. The plan prioritized bringing the existing NEC infrastructure to a state of good repair, then adding capacity and frequencies sequentially.

The FRA outlined the following steps to increase reliability and provide more options for NEC passengers:

- Adding new tracks to increase the Northeast Corridor to four tracks in most locations, which would allow for more frequent and faster service. Additional tracks would be added to areas with greater demand.
- Providing intercity access to Philadelphia Airport so that passengers do not have to change trains at 30th Street.
- Adding direct and frequent service to Hartford, Conn., and Springfield, Mass. Increasing, and in some cases doubling, the number of regional trains and providing up to five times more intercity trains

Alstom's High-Speed Rail Contract a Win for Upstate New York

Amtrak announced a \$2.0 billion "Next-Generation of High-Speed Rail" deal with Alstom for 28 new "Avelia Liberty" high speed trainsets to replace current Acela Expresses on the Northeast Corridor fleet last August.

United States Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY) had been a big champion of the deal, twice heralding Alstom's win of the contract before the award was officially announced by Amtrak. As part of his re-election campaign last fall the senator ran a TV ad featuring the new high speed trainsets that Alstom will be building at its facility in the Southern Tier.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo also got into the action by visiting Alstom's plant on December 4th to deliver a \$30 million check from the state for facility expansion; officials say the state's financial support for the project was an important factor in Alstom's efforts to secure the agreement with Amtrak for the contract.

The manufacturing of the trainsets will be performed upstate at Alstom's 150-year-old former Erie Railroad shops in Hornell, New York, where the company will invest in and expand its production and testing facilities. Overall the contract will result in the creation of more than 1,000 jobs nationwide, including 750 in New York with 400 of those at Alstom facilities in Hornell and Rochester.

Benjamin Turon

New Station at Niagara Falls *(Cont'd. from page 1)* including personnel and maintenance, with payments made on a quarterly basis. Amtrak also agreed to pay a one-time upfront fee of \$50,000, which the city would hold to begin paying for their share of costs. The annual cost to Amtrak has been estimated at \$172,000.

Benjamin Turon

Amtrak Announces Streamlined Structure

To increase organizational effectiveness, improve service to its 31 million customers and position itself for an even more competitive future, Amtrak today announced several management and organizational changes.

Effective immediately, Amtrak President and CEO Wick Moorman reduced by half the senior management team into six direct reports:

- Operations – Scot Naparstek, *Chief Operating Officer*
- Marketing and Business Development – Jason Molfetas, *Executive Vice President*
- Finance – Jerry Sokol, *Chief Financial Officer*
- Law – Eldie Acheson, *General Counsel and Corporate Secretary*
- Administration – DJ Stadtler, *Chief Administrative Officer*
- Planning, Technology and Public Affairs – Stephen Gardner, *Executive Vice President*

The changes will also allow Amtrak more organization flexibility to fully comply with new account structure created in the Fixing America Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), and will provide greater transparency.

Congress included Amtrak reauthorization for the first time ever in the 2015 surface transportation bill, affirming the importance of Amtrak's network of service that connects more than 500 rural and urban communities in 46 states.

Release of Empire Corridor Study *(Cont'd. from page 5)* the *Times Union*, as well as freight railroad CSX. The article stated that off the record some officials think that CSX now prefers the status quo and opposes a previously agreed on 90-mph top speed on its right-of-way. Trains today operate up to 79-mph Amsterdam to Buffalo on CSX's former New York Central mainline. Politicians had openly pushed for a speed of 110-mph during the draft EIS process. CSX contacted Upstate shippers to oppose the EIS and even created an anti-HSR video.

ESPA officially supported Alt.110 in Spring 2014 but had earlier voiced support for three tracks at 90-mph (Ninety Now!) that would be shared by both CSX freight and Amtrak passenger trains. In the October 9th *Times Union* article Bruce Becker, former ESPA President and now Vice-President of Operations for the National Association of Railroad Passengers, stated that... "A third track interoperable with the other two tracks benefits both" with added capacity and higher average speeds. A third track in a sense creates a passing lane for faster trains to overtake slower trains without requiring trains travelling in the same or opposite directions to stop, essentially creating more green lights for Amtrak and less waiting in a siding.

The good news is a lot of important work from stations to new mainline tracks funded by a mix of state and federal funds (ARRA and TIGER grants) has or is now being carried out even in the absence of an official EIS study for the Empire Corridor. This includes the long-awaited completed fourth platform track at the Albany-Rensselaer Rail Station which will reduce delays.

Benjamin Turon

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Amtrak adding expansion to Roanoke from Charlottesville VA

Amtrak has announced it is expanding in Virginia by adding train service from Charlottesville to Roanoke. Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation spokesman Chris Smith confirmed Wednesday that a project to extend train service from Charlottesville to Roanoke is on track to be completed in the fall. The train line currently ends in Lynchburg. Smith says officials are exploring the idea of adding an extra train between Lynchburg and Charlottesville. He says the department has allocated funds for the project, but that it won't be ready by the end of the year. Amtrak's service expansion is expected to begin once construction on the new platform in Roanoke is complete. *AP*

ESPA/NARP Member

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

ESPA MEMBERSHIP NEW OR RENEWAL

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)
- Renewal membership (\$24.00 per year)
- Renewal - Student, Senior, Fixed-Income (\$12.50 per year)
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Check www.esparail.org, for the most current information on meeting times and venues...
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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.rwlenz4@gmail.com Deadline for material for Spring Issue is March 31, 2017. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.



37th Annual Meeting
of the
Empire State Passengers Association
and
National Association of Railroad Passengers

Saturday, March 4, 2017 11:00am – 4:00pm

Key Hall At Proctors State Street Schenectady, NY

*The Entrance To Key Hall Is From Inside The Proctors Theater Arcade (Opposite The Box Office)
Two Blocks From The Amtrak Station – Free Parking Available In Lots Behind Proctors*

Confirmed Speaker:

Bruce Becker – Vice-President – National Association of Railroad Passengers

Invited Speakers:

From Amtrak and from the Long Island Railroad and more ...

Full Program Registration Includes The Meeting And A Three Course Luncheon

**Full Early Bird Discount Registration - \$36.00 per Person
(Registrations Must Be Post Marked By February 22nd)**

**Full Late Registration - \$40.00 per Person
(ALL Registrations Post Marked After February 22nd)**

Meeting ONLY (No Lunch) Registration - \$25.00 pr Person

Please complete and return this form with your check for the appropriate registration fee, to be received NO later than February 25, 2017. (NO cancellations after this date).

Please Note:* Written confirmation of your meeting registration and payment having been received is NOT provided unless specifically requested (i.e. tickets are not mailed to you in advance of the meeting). **Meeting registration begins in the Key Hall foyer at 10:00am.*

Please make checks payable to 'ESPA' and mail to:

**Gary Prophet
Empire State Passengers Association
86 Cedar Lane
Ossining, NY 10562**

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