

The Michigan PASSENGER

YOUR SOURCE FOR PASSENGER RAIL NEWS • SINCE 1973



SPRING 2024
Volume 51, Number 2



1973-2024

Michigan Association of
Railroad Passengers
www.marp.org

What's inside...

A look at Colorado's Front
Range Passenger Rail -
Page 3

FRA announces proposed
long distance lines - Page 4

Record ridership spurring
growth - Page 6

SHORT LINES - Page 7

Brightline West begins
construction activities -
Page 8

Michigan Legislative Transit Caucus Formed



Inaugural meeting of new Michigan Legislative Public Transit Caucus. Caucus photo.

By Tom Fletcher

During the January 25th MARP meeting, Michigan State Representative Jason Morgan (D - Ann Arbor) spoke with excitement about a soon-to-be announced Legislative Transit Caucus that he was co-founding with fellow Representative Mike McFall (D-Madison Heights). He explained that the bipartisan caucus was established to drive transportation change in the state: "... we're well-positioned to drive meaningful change and expand access to safe, reliable public transit options for all Michiganders." Representative Morgan not only discussed the Transit Caucus but also answered many questions from MARP members during the

meeting as he demonstrated familiarity with the passenger rail situation in the state.

The Legislative Transit Caucus soon became a reality, with the first meeting held on February 28th. The caucus comprises of 30% of the Michigan State Legislature, including 46 Representatives and Senators, both Democrats and Republicans from across the state, including the Upper Peninsula. The caucus also includes all four chairs of the transportation policy and budget committees. The formation of this caucus was recently applauded by The Michigan Public Transit Association, the Detroit Regional Transit Authority, Transit Riders United and other organizations.

PRESORTED
STANDARD
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
BROOKLYN, MI
PERMIT #44



Caltrans announced that passengers traveling on the San Joaquin Route will be able to enjoy a more comfortable and modern ride with the new Venture Passenger Rail Car trains unveiled March 5th. The passenger cars provide wider aisles, accessible restrooms, and fully-automated doors. The trains will be used on the Amtrak San Joaquin line, which runs five daily roundtrips between Oakland and Bakersfield, and two daily roundtrips between Sacramento and Bakersfield. The first six-car set is in operation on the Oakland-Bakersfield route. All seven train-sets are expected to be in operation on the San Joaquin line by the end of 2025. (Caltrans photo)

The Michigan PASSENGER

YOUR SOURCE FOR PASSENGER RAIL NEWS • SINCE 1973

Published four times a year by the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.
 Copyright © 2024, Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.
 All rights reserved.

The Michigan Passenger welcomes your comments and submissions on passenger rail issues. Comments, articles, and other materials sent for publication should be sent by email to jhguidinger1@yahoo.com. Clippings from newspapers, magazines, and electronic sources must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent by email must be in .jpg format. We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

Contributors: Louis Vallance, Eric Schertzing, Hugh Gurney & Tom Fletcher

Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.

Executive Committee

Chair
Todd Schultz
 775-971-8374
todd@toddschultz.net

Vice Chair and Webmaster
Carolyn Ulstad
 231-941-6584 ext. 710
carolyn@groundworkcenter.com

Secretary - **Matt Thompson**
 989-233-8918
mthompson031@hotmail.com

Treasurer - **Jean Merckel**
 734-717-0326
jcmerckel@aol.com

John Guidinger
 Michigan Passenger Editor
 517-918-9955

Clark Charnetski
 734-761-3814
camcharnet@aol.com

Meetings & Station Reps Coordinator
Chuck Merckel
 734-330-0281
crmerckel@aol.com

Robert Patterson
 313-836-3736
ridethetrainmichigan@sbcglobal.net

Robert Lovell
 517-256-4552
boblovell@comcast.net

Ted Wojcik, Jr.
 231-590-2916
tjwojcik1@gmail.com

Tom L. Fletcher, P.E.
 269-998-5630
tlflet33@yahoo.com

Communications Coordinator
Kay M. Chase
 269-388-3777
chase@wmich.edu

Government Affairs Coordinator
Steve Vagnozzi
 517-349-4809
savagnozzi@comcas.net

Letters & emails to MARP

Diminished infrastructure appalling

Dear MARP,
 Good morning. We want to offer a quick note of appreciation for last Saturday's member meeting at the Dearborn Amtrak Station. It was the first member event we've attended and we learned much from the other members' insights and knowledge, as well as the good information presented by the guest speaker. It's appalling that our government and society so effectively diminished public transportation infrastructure in the U.S. We appreciate rail travel and are inspired by the efforts of MARP, the National Rail Passenger Association, and the high-speed rail

group based in Chicago. Funding and planning support are so meager, but hopefully some paradigm shift in thinking and funding is on the horizon.

Keep up the advocacy,

Greg Ptucha & Roberta Deering, Detroit

MICHIGAN SERVICES

Amtrak Train Schedules Effective April, 2024 Chicago-Kalamazoo-Ann Arbor-Detroit-Pontiac Chicago-Kalamazoo-East Lansing-Port Huron

Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service		Train Name	Wolverine Service	Blue Water	Wolverine Service	Wolverine Service		
350	352	364	354		Train Number	351	365	353	355		
Daily (SEE NOTE)	Daily	Daily	Daily	Mile	Days of Operation	Daily	Daily	Daily	Daily		
6:45a	2:15p	4:00p	5:50p	0	DP	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	10:32a	11:45a	2:02p	10:40p
7:11a	↓	↓	↓	16		Hammond-Whiting, IN (CT)	↑	↑	↑	1:15p	9:54p
9:04a	4:31p	6:10p	8:04p	62		New Buffalo, MI (ET)			11:24a	1:21p	10:02p
9:29a	4:52p	6:32p	8:24p	89		Niles, MI			11:04a	1:01p	9:42p
9:40a	↓	6:43p	↓	102		Dowagiac, MI			10:52a	↑	9:29p
10:14a	5:26p	7:11p	8:58p	138		Kalamazoo, MI		9:16a	10:26a	12:28p	9:00p
10:56a	6:03p	7:38p	9:35p	160		Battle Creek, MI		8:48a	10:00a	12:01p	8:33p
		9:00p		208		East Lansing, MI		↑	8:54a	↑	↑
		9:37p		238		Durand, MI			8:08a		
		10:08p		256		Flint, MI			7:35a		
		10:34p		274	↓	Lapeer, MI			7:08a		
		11:31p	↓	319	Ar	PORT HURON, MI	Dp		6:20a		
	↓		10:03p	184		Albion, MI	↑	8:15a			
11:51a	6:55p		10:28p	208		Jackson, MI		7:51a		10:58a	7:37p
12:28p	7:35p		11:08p	243		Ann Arbor, MI		7:14a		10:23a	7:00p
12:57p	8:11p		11:37p	271		Dearborn, MI		6:44a		9:53a	6:29p
1:25p	8:44p		12:10a	281		DETROIT, MI		6:26a		9:35a	6:11p
1:49p	9:05p		12:34a	292		Royal Oak, MI		6:03a		9:12a	5:48p
1:57p	9:12p		12:42a	296	↓	Troy, MI		5:56a		9:04a	5:41p
2:11p	9:29p		1:01a	304	Ar	PONTIAC, MI (ET)	Dp	5:43a		8:50a	5:28p

Amtrak Train Schedule Effective November 21, 2022 Chicago-Grand Rapids

Pere Marquette		Train Name	Pere Marquette		
370		Train Number	371		
Daily	Mile	Days of Operation	Daily		
6:30p	0	DP	CHICAGO, IL, Un Sta (CT)	Ar	9:08a
9:14p	89		St. Joe-Benton Harbor, MI (ET)	↑	8:10a
9:50p	116		Bangor, MI		7:32a
10:33p	151	↓	Holland, MI		6:49a
11:34p	176	Ar	GRAND RAPIDS, MI (ET)	Dp	6:00a

NOTE: Trains 350 and 353 will operate Friday, Saturday, and Sundays only for the period of May 6 through October 18, 2024, to allow for track work. Holiday exceptions during which these trains will operate normally are: Memorial Day, Monday, May 27; Juneteenth, Wednesday, June 16; Independence Day, Thursday, July 4; and Labor Day, Monday, September 2.

These schedules are provided for planning purposes only and may not show recent time changes. Consult with Amtrak at AMTRAK.COM or 1-800-USA-RAIL when making reservations.

Printed by the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. - April, 2024

If you want improved train service, join MARP on line at MARP.ORG

MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES

Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734-330-0281)

Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	Bus	Matthew Murawski
Ann Arbor	Amtrak	Clark Charnetski/Steve Sobel
Bangor	None	J. P. Descamp
Battle Creek	Amtrak	Shuler Harmon
Dearborn	Amtrak	Mary Jo Durivage
Detroit	Amtrak	Amy Hemmeter
Dowagiac	None	Dowagiac Chbr of Commerce
Durand	Museum	Mary Stone
East Lansing	Caretkr	Steve Vagnozzi
Flint	Bus	Barb Westcott
Grand Rapids	Caretkr	Mit Renroc
Holland	None	Nathan Nietering
Jackson	Caretkr	Tom Schindler
Kalamazoo	Caretkr	Warren Fritz
Lapeer	None	Jim Slater
New Buffalo	None	Rich Knoll
Niles	Caretkr	Jack Kessler
Pontiac	Bus	Robert Tischbein
Port Huron	None	T. J. Gaffney
Royal Oak	None	David Roberts
St Joseph	None	Todd Schultz
Toledo, OH	Amtrak	James Parsons
Traverse City	None	Carolyn Ulstad
Troy	None	Thomas VandeGrift

JOIN MARP TODAY!

It's easy. Just fill out and return this form today Or visit marp.org to join online.

MARP Membership Application

Name _____
 Address _____
 Apt/Unit# _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone (____) _____
 E-mail * _____

* We do not sell, rent, or trade e-mail addresses. We use e-mails to send meeting announcements, other time-sensitive information, and the monthly online bulletin.

Send check or money order payable to:

MICHIGAN ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS, Inc.
 c/o Jean Merckel, Treasurer
 33373 Hampshire Road
 Livonia, Michigan 48154-2952

MEMBERSHIP

- Student (under 21) \$20
- Seniors (65+) \$20
- Individual \$30
- Family \$40
- Advocate \$50
- First Class \$100
- Life \$500

Contact me - I want to be ACTIVE!

Please send me info on the National Association of RR Passengers

I want to be notified by phone or email not more than 4 times per year when critical issues arise

Additional Donation \$ _____

Amount Enclosed \$ _____

Colorado's Front Range Passenger Rail – A Development Model for Passenger Service

Recent press releases from the Colorado DOT indicated how the development of the emerging 173-mile passenger rail line linking Pueblo and Fort Collins to Denver is a model of how these corridors should be developed. The project would be the transportation "spine" along the Front Range, an underserved area that contains the majority of Colorado's growing population.

In 2017, the Colorado Southwest Chief Commission was legislatively repurposed to become the Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail (FRPR) Commission.

In 2018, the Colorado General Assembly made a \$2.5 million General Fund transfer to fund the FRPR Commission and the development of a rail passenger service plan for the Front Range corridor.

In 2021, the state legislature re-created the FRPR as a special taxing district and gave it the authority to ask residents to approve a new tax to fund train service. The Commission and CDOT are ready to work with USDOT to highlight key priorities, such as streamlining environmental review and reducing pressure on key freight corridors by

moving people off congested highways.

In 2023, along with 68 other projects, the FRPR corridor was accepted into the Corridor ID program. Advocates, planners, and policymakers have worked for years to bring service to the corridor.

In 2024, starting passenger service may happen via a ballot measure. But first, supporters are working to make sure the measure can win over a majority of voters. "We have to make sure we have a case to make to the public," the chair of the Front Range district's board of directors told Colorado Public Radio (CPR) recently. The expected development cost is between \$2 billion and \$6 billion, depending on the proposed route, speeds, frequencies, and other factors.

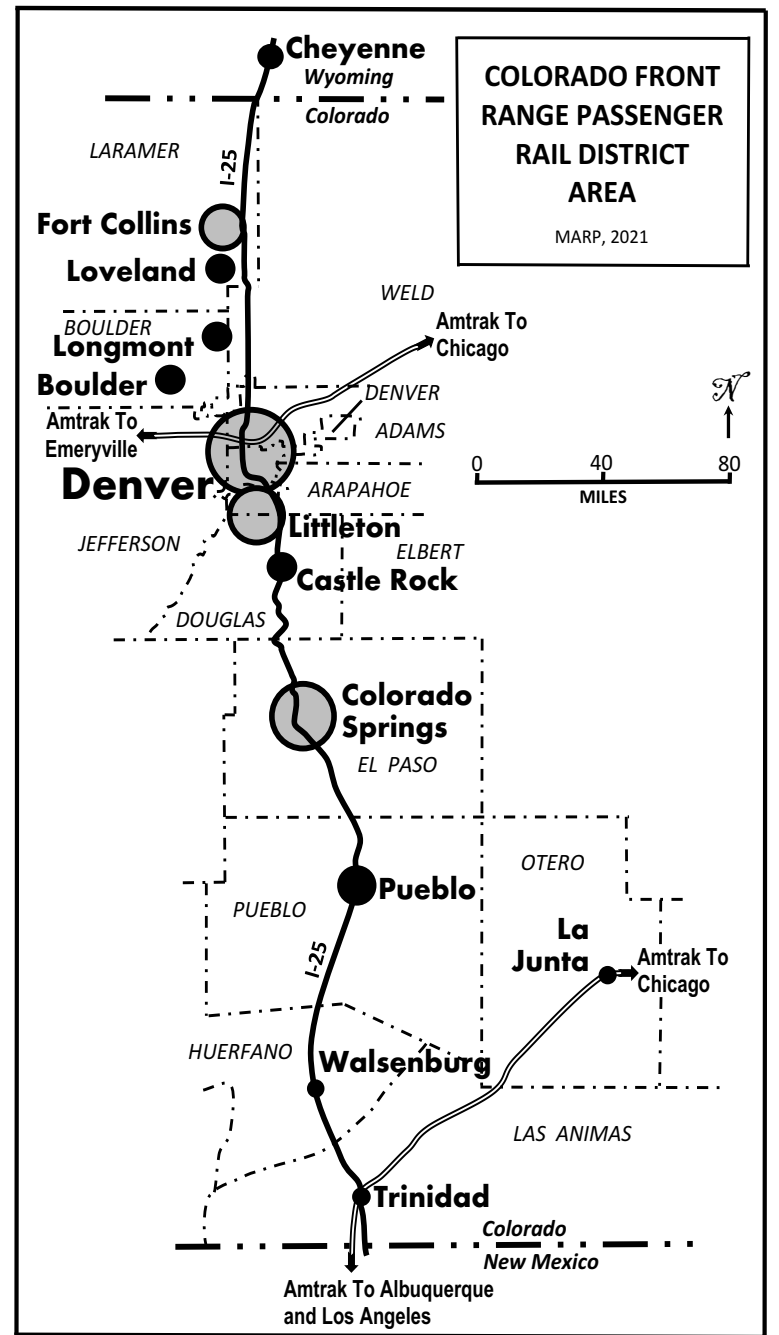
As always, grassroots advocates have played a crucial role in building energy and momentum for FRPR. But having an influential, all-in champion for high-quality trains makes a huge difference. So, it's an immense benefit that Colorado Governor Polis uses his megaphone to sell it to the public, tout its benefits, and keep it moving

forward.

In September, for example, Polis took a test run of a prototype, hydrogen-powered train—with two train cars full of elected local and state officials on board to build support for FRPR. "This has been planned for decades, and it's time to just get it done," he told a reporter on the trip. After a meeting with FRA Administrator Amit Bose, Polis emphasized that trains were key to addressing Colorado's affordable-housing and carbon-emissions challenges. "I would argue that we were ready five or 10 years ago, but we're certainly ready now," he said.

After the meeting, Bose said "what's happening in Colorado is just such a good model." The project has determined advocates, engaged state and local officials, and a governor with a passion for passenger rail. All of them are pulling together to bring high-quality trains to a region that's been neglected for more than half a century.

That's a good model indeed. Let's bring it to Michigan and nationwide.



Surface Transportation Board Names Passenger Rail Advisory Committee Members

Progressive Railroading and the US Surface Transportation Board (STB) announced the appointment of 21 members to the first STB Passenger Rail Advisory Committee (PRAC). "The members of this inaugural PRAC have a diverse range of experience and we look forward to them providing insightful perspectives as the board considers pressing passenger rail issues," STB Chair Martin Oberman said in a press release.

The committee will advise the STB on issues related to the development and operation of passenger-rail services, including improving efficiency on passenger-rail routes, reducing disputes between passenger-rail carriers and freight-rail hosts, and improving regulatory processes related to intercity passenger rail to the benefit of the public and the environment. Meetings will be open to the public and held at least twice a year.

Paul Nissenbaum, associate administrator for railroad development at the Federal Railroad

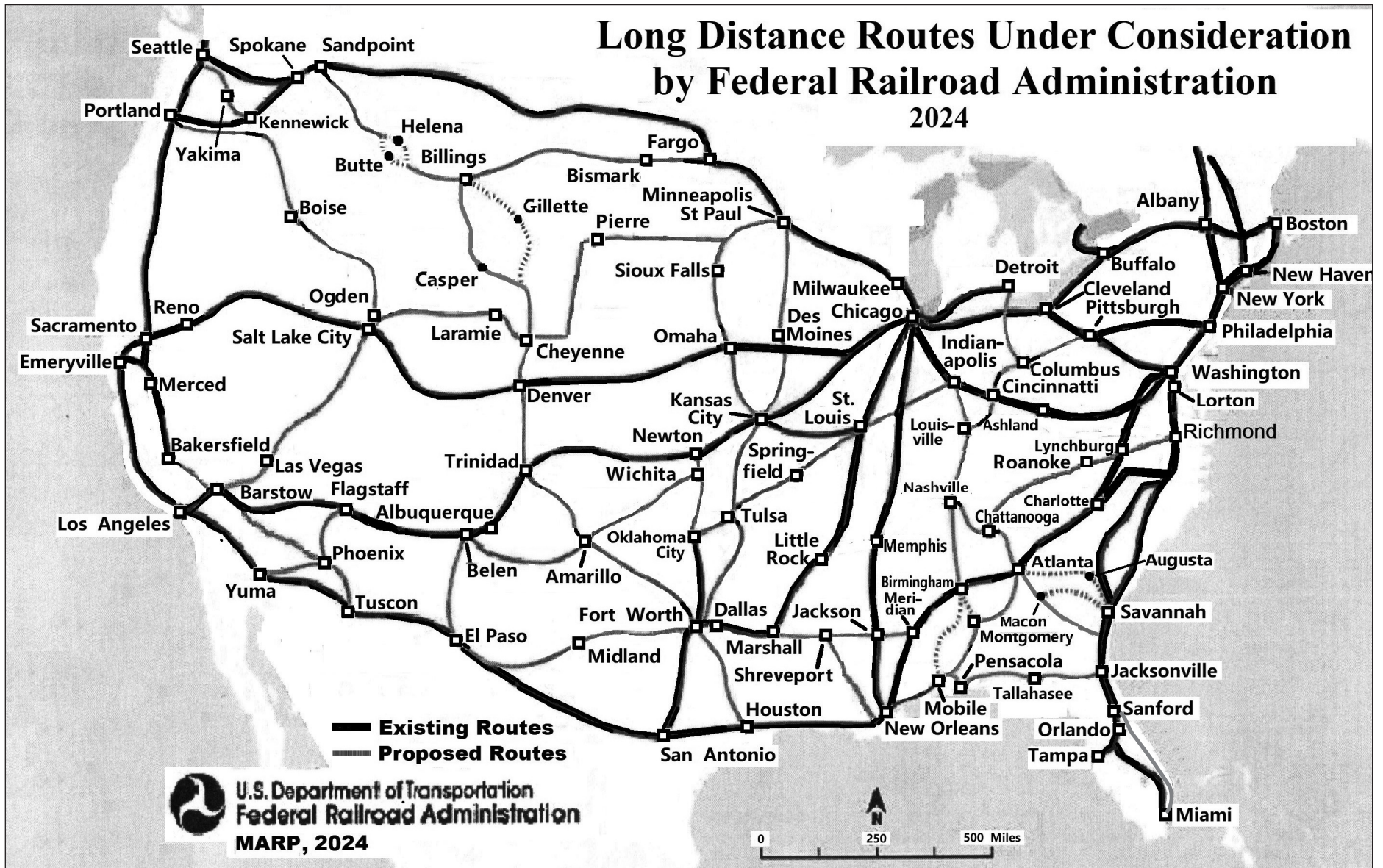
Administration, will participate as an ex-officio member of the committee to represent the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Progressive Railroading lists the following 21 committee members:

- **Amtrak:**
Christopher Perry, associate general counsel, 3-year term
James Blair, assistant vice president-host railroads, 2-year term
- **Commuter rail:**
James Derwinski, CEO and executive director of Chicago's Metra, 3-year term
Lori Winfree, general counsel, North County Transit District, San Diego
- **Non-Amtrak intercity passenger rail:**
Husein Cumber, chief strategy officer, Florida East Coast Industries, 3-year term
Gregg Baxter, director of government relations and strategic partnerships, Herzog Enterprises, 2-year term
- **State that funds intercity pas-**

- senger rail:**
Roger Millar, transportation secretary, Washington State Department of Transportation, 3-year term
- **State that hosts only long-distance service:**
Shoshana Lew, executive director, Colorado Department of Transportation, 2-year term
- **Class I Railroads:**
Michael McClellan, senior VP and chief strategy officer, Norfolk Southern Railway, 3-year term
Andy Daly, senior director of passenger operations, CSX, 2-year term
- **Short lines and regionals:**
Henry Posner III, chairman, Iowa Interstate Railroad, 2-year term
- **Labor:**
Greg Regan, president, AFL-CIO Transportation Trades Department, 3-year term
- **Rail-passenger advocacy organization:**
Jim Mathews, president and CEO, Rail Passengers Association, 3-year term
John Robert Smith, chairman,

- Transportation for America, 2-year term
- **Rail shipper or shipper organization:**
Jonathan Lamb, president, Lake Superior Warehousing Co. Inc., 2-year term
- **At-large Members:**
Joseph Black, SVP, rail operations and service planning, WSP, 2-year term
Aaron Edelman, attorney, Mooney, Green, Saindon, Murphy & Welch, 3-year term
Patricia Long, president, Railway Supply Institute, 2-year term
Robert Padgette, managing director, Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority, 3-year term
Liliana Pereira, director, Steer, 2-year term
Carl Warren, president and CEO, North Carolina Railroad Co., 3-year term



FRA Announces Proposed New Long Distance Routes

FRA Announces Proposed New Long Distance Routes

In February the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), announced fifteen new proposed long distance routes for consideration. Several of these routes operated during Amtrak's initial years, or were discontinued at the time Amtrak took over intercity passenger trains in 1971.

David Peter Alan, Contributing Editor with Railway Age provided much of the information for the following summary about these routes on February 21, 2024.

The study began with the "Baseline Network" (defined as a study parameter in the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021) as a starting point. The baseline was defined as the current Amtrak network with the following four additions:

- *Brightline* between Miami and Orlando
- The Gulf Coast route between New Orleans and Mobile (service should start soon)
- A second train on the Twin Cities-Chicago route (service should also start soon)
- The first segment of the California High-Speed line between Bakersfield and Merced

In December 2023 the first three proposed long distance routes selected by the Long Distance Corridor ID Program were announced by the FRA. They included daily operation of the tri-weekly *Cardinal* and the *Sunset Limited*, both of which have been operated by Amtrak as tri-weekly trains for decades. The other announced

route, advocated by the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority in Montana, is reinstatement of the former *North Coast Hiawatha*, which is described below.

The study identified the "Discontinued Network" (also defined as a study parameter in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) as five discontinued routes. These consisted of:

- *The North Coast Hiawatha* (Chicago-Seattle, via southern Montana)
- *The Desert Wind* (Los Angeles-Salt Lake City)
- *The Pioneer* (Denver-Seattle)
- *The National Limited* (Kansas City-New York)
- *The Floridian* (Chicago-Miami)

Ten other routes were identified by the study as proposed routes that would connect major growing cities in the US. Many of these new routes do not correlate closely to historical routes that the railroads operated in 1971. Growth has shifted to more southern, western cities. Also, Amtrak has the ability to use the tracks of several railroad companies to achieve the optimal route to serve populated centers instead of being limited to company-owned routes.

One exception evident in the ten proposed routes is the former "*Pan American*" operated by the Louisville and Nashville (L&N) Railroad (now part of CSX). The original route between Cincinnati and New Orleans can be seen in its

entirety in the Detroit-New Orleans proposed route. This train was operated up until the day Amtrak took over.

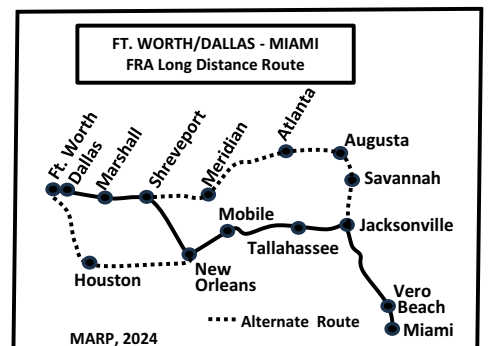
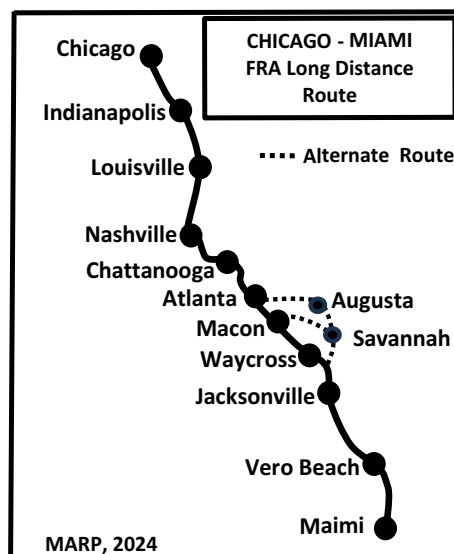
Combining the five "Discontinued Routes," the 10 new proposed routes, and the "Baseline Network" would yield an extensive network of intercity U.S. passenger rail routes, the likes of which have not been seen in the past 60 years (see national map above). Cities such as Kansas City, Columbus, Atlanta, Salt Lake City, and Fort Worth would become interconnecting passenger rail hubs. All trains would run daily, including the *Sunset Limited* and *Cardinal*. Whether any of these routes will see service over all or part of their length is unknown. It is anticipated that the study group will suggest "Recommended Actions" as the fourth and final phase of the study.

The five discontinued routes and the 10 proposed routes are described below.

Chicago – Miami: This is essentially the route of Amtrak's *Floridian*, which was discontinued in 1979. The proposed route identified by the FRA would extend south from

Chicago and serve Indianapolis, Nashville, and Chattanooga. However, unlike the *Floridian*, which did not serve Atlanta, the new route would serve this growing mega-city. From Atlanta, the proposed route would go to Jacksonville through Macon and Waycross, Georgia. South of Jacksonville the route would use the Florida East Coast main to Miami, where Brightline has operating rights, or the traditional route via Orlando. Alternative options between Atlanta and Jacksonville would include running from Atlanta via Macon and Savannah to Jacksonville, or via Augusta and Savannah to Jacksonville.

Fort Worth/Dallas – Miami: This route would extend to the east from Fort Worth to Dallas and to Shreveport. The route would then turn to the southeast and run

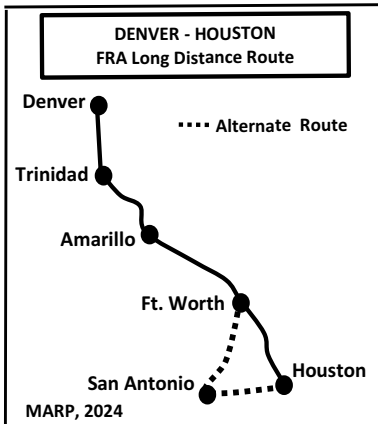


through Baton Rouge to New Orleans. Between New Orleans and Jacksonville, the proposed route would follow the former portion of Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* route via Tallahassee on CSX, which ran briefly east of New Orleans. South of Jacksonville, the current suggestion is to use the FEC/Brightline route. Various alternatives, between Dallas and

FRA Announces Proposed New Long Distance Routes

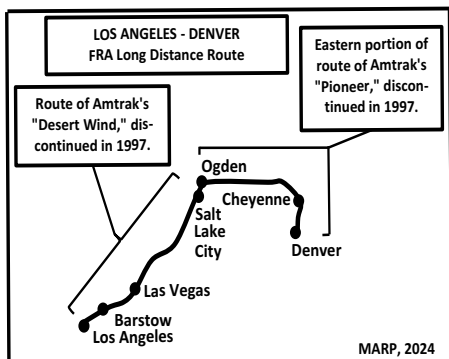
Jacksonville could be examined. One of these is Dallas-Houston-New Orleans-Jacksonville. Another alternative route would run Shreveport-Meridian-Atlanta-Augusta-Savannah-Jacksonville.

Denver – Houston: This route would serve a part of the country that now has no passenger trains despite a rapidly growing population. The route would run south of Denver to Trinidad and then south-



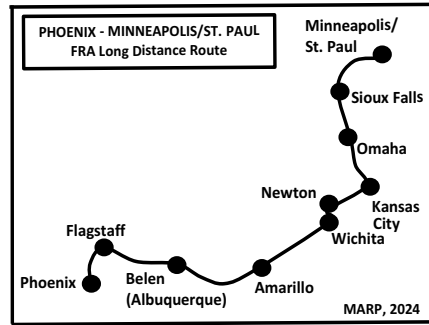
east through Amarillo to Fort Worth. From there it would continue south to Houston. An alternative segment that has been mentioned is Fort Worth-San Antonio-Houston.

Los Angeles – Denver: This route would restore Amtrak's *Desert Wind* and the eastern portion of the *Pioneer*, both of which were discontinued in 1997. The former ran from Los Angeles to Salt Lake City



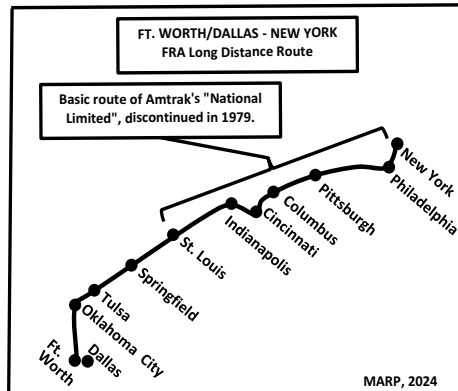
through Las Vegas. The original eastern portion of the *Pioneer* ran from Ogden to Denver, through Laramie and Cheyenne. The proposed route would duplicate these segments and fill in between Salt Lake City and Ogden. It appears that the backup-move to get to and from the downtown Cheyenne station would still be required. This route would restore Wyoming to the list of states with passenger trains. The route would also restore the Los Angeles-Cheyenne portion of the *City of Los Angeles*, which was discontinued when Amtrak took over in 1971.

Phoenix – Minneapolis/St. Paul: This route would run north from Phoenix to Flagstaff. East of Flagstaff the route would follow the route of Amtrak's *Southwest Chief* to Belen, New Mexico, where it would continue east shifting to the BNSF Southern Transcon through Amarillo, Wichita, and Newton to Kansas City, the route of the *San Francisco Chief* and *Grand Canyon* before Amtrak. Turning north at Kansas City, the proposed route would pass through Omaha and Sioux Falls to the Twin Cities, a segment that has not seen a passenger



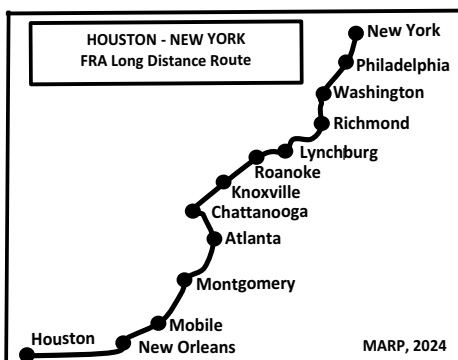
train since the 1960s. Stopping at Sioux Falls would bring a passenger train to South Dakota for the first time under Amtrak.

Dallas/Fort Worth – New York: This seems like an incongruous routing, since trains to East Coast cities historically originated from Chicago, St. Louis, or New Orleans, not from points west of those cities. The proposed route starts on the current *Heartland Flyer* segment running north from



Fort Worth to Oklahoma City, and where it turns to the northeast on the BNSF through Tulsa and Springfield to St. Louis. It would then follow the route of Amtrak's *National Limited* (discontinued in 1979) to Indianapolis, Dayton, Columbus, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and New York. Unlike the old *National Limited*, the new route would not originate in Kansas City and it would not stop at Richmond, Indiana, between Indianapolis and Dayton, but would make a slightly longer trip to include Cincinnati.

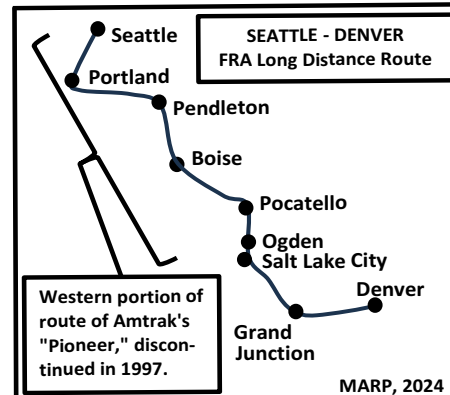
Houston – New York: Only the end segments of this route are served by Amtrak today. The route would start at Houston and extend east to New Orleans. Here the route would continue northeast on the old L&N



(now CSX) to Mobile and Montgomery and the former West Point route to Atlanta. North of Atlanta, the route would continue to Chattanooga on CSX where it would turn to the northeast on Norfolk Southern passing through Knoxville, Roanoke, and Lynchburg to Richmond. At Richmond, the route would follow CSX and the Northeast Corridor through Washington, Philadelphia, to New York. This route combines segments of many former passenger

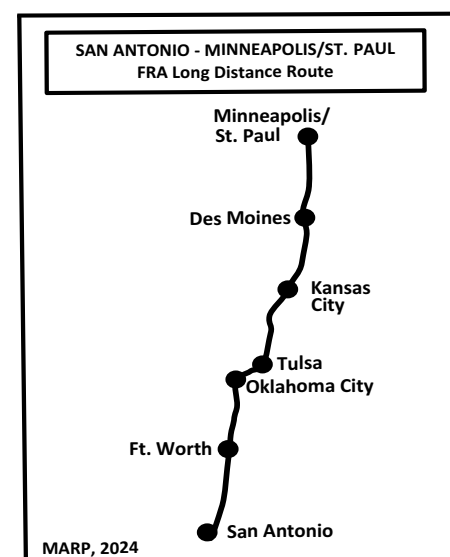
routes, some of which operated as parts of other routes before Amtrak took over.

Seattle – Denver: This is the western portion of the final route of Amtrak's *Pioneer*, which was discontinued in 1997. The proposed route would extend south from Seattle to Portland and then turn east on the Union Pacific. It would



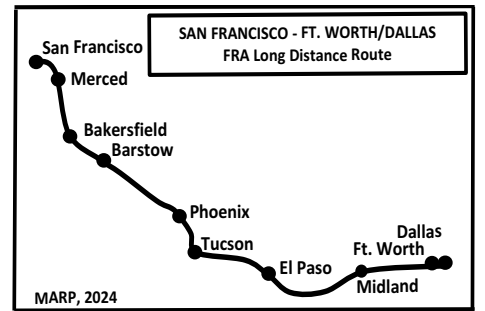
follow the south side of the Columbia River to Pendleton and then continue to the southeast to Boise. After Boise the route would continue to the southeast through Pocatello to Ogden. Unlike the original *Pioneer*, which used the Union Pacific east from Ogden through Wyoming to reach Denver, the new route would continue south to Salt Lake City and then follow the *California Zephyr* route through the Rockies to Denver.

San Antonio – Minneapolis/St. Paul: Except for the segment between San Antonio and Oklahoma City, which is on today's *Texas Eagle* and *Heartland Flier* routes, none of this route has



seen passenger service since the 1960s. The route would start by running north from San Antonio to Fort Worth and Oklahoma City. Here the route would turn to the northeast to Tulsa and then continue north to Kansas City. Passing through Kansas City, the route would continue north to Des Moines and on to Minneapolis/St. Paul.

San Francisco – Dallas/Fort Worth: This route seeks to serve the fast growing regions of central California, Tucson and Phoenix in Arizona, and Fort Worth and Dallas in central Texas. Starting in Emeryville, the westernmost segment of this route follows today's *San Joaquin* corridor to Bakersfield. Here it would continue to the southeast to Barstow, finally providing a rail passenger route out



of the San Joaquin Valley to the south. From Barstow the route would run to the southeast to Phoenix and Tucson. At Tucson it would join the *Sunset Route* as far as El Paso, where it would use the historic Texas & Pacific (now part of UP) the rest of the way east through Midland to Fort Worth and Dallas. (Note: This route is not clearly defined between Barstow and Phoenix/Tucson.)

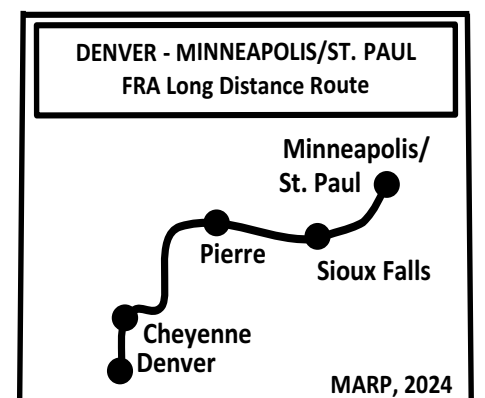
Detroit – New Orleans: None of this route has any Amtrak service today. This route would extend south from Detroit to Toledo, and then jog to the east to Columbus.



Jogging back to the west the route would reach Cincinnati and continue south on CSX passing through a series of significant southern cities including Louisville, Nashville, Birmingham, Montgomery, Mobile and terminating in New Orleans. The Detroit-Toledo segment once hosted Amtrak trains and Detroit-Toledo-Columbus-Cincinnati has been proposed as part of Amtrak's ConnectsUS plan and as part of the Ohio 3C+D route. From Cincinnati to New Orleans, the route was the route L&N's *Pan American*, which was discontinued in 1971, when Amtrak started. The long segment between Louisville and Montgomery continued to host the *Floridian* until that service ended in 1979.

Denver – Minneapolis/St. Paul: This appears to be the strangest route on the list. The route would leave Denver north to Cheyenne, presumably to get an

See next page



Record Ridership Driving Growth in Southeast

A record number of riders are using the trains supported by the states of Virginia and North Carolina. The top five stations in the Southeast in 2023 were the Staples Mill Road Station in Richmond, Va., Alexandria, Va., Charlotte, N.C., Norfolk, Va., and Raleigh, N.C. Virginia and North Carolina received federal grants to continue pursuing their vision to expand service in the region.

Amtrak Virginia, the Virginia state-supported passenger rail service, offers 12 daily trains at the Richmond station for service to Washington, D.C., Baltimore, New York, and Boston. Customers can also access south-bound Amtrak service for travel to Raleigh, Charlotte, Savannah, Ga., and other cities as far south as Miami. "Richmond is not just the capital of Virginia, it's the epicenter of the East, connecting the Southeast and the Northeast by rail," said DJ Stadtler, Executive Director of the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA).

In North Carolina, the *Piedmont* and *Carolinian* services offer daily roundtrips for travel between Raleigh, Charlotte, and points in between. The *Piedmont* and *Carolinian*, which travels daily from New York to Charlotte, and stops at the Staples Mill Road Station in Richmond, Va., and Alexandria, Va., are sponsored



Passenger waiting to board a northbound train at Norfolk. (Amtrak photo)

by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) and operated by Amtrak. "The growth we've seen in ridership in 2022 and 2023 is unprecedented," said Jason Orthner, NCDOT's Rail Division Director.

In 2023, the service set a ridership record of more than 1.3 million passengers, making the Virginia one of the most popular travel destinations on the Amtrak national network.

Plans are underway to expand

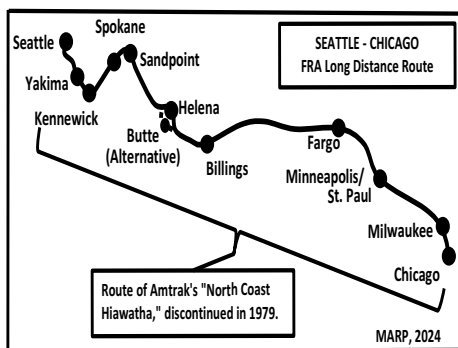
Amtrak Virginia service through VPRA's Transforming Rail in Virginia initiative, resulting in two additional roundtrips in 2026 and three in 2030.

FRA Announces Proposed Distance Routes (continued)

Amtrak train into Wyoming. However, the rest of the way through Wyoming, western Nebraska, and South Dakota to Minnesota is a mystery. Pierre, the capital of South Dakota, is ill served by railroads that are presently in poor condition. The railroad east from Pierre does not go to Sioux Falls. Other than local trains long since discontinued, passenger trains have not historically run on an east-west alignment through the state. A route between Denver and Minneapolis/St. Paul might be better served by running east from Cheyenne to Omaha on the UP and then north from that point.

Seattle – Chicago: This is a restoration of Amtrak's *North Coast Hiawatha*, which was discontinued in 1979. The route leaves Seattle to the south for a short distance and then turns east, following the railroad through the Cascade Mountains via Yakima and Kennewick to Spokane. This alignment is south of Amtrak's *Empire Builder* Seattle-Spokane route through the Cascades via Wenatchee, and north of the Portland-Spokane section of the

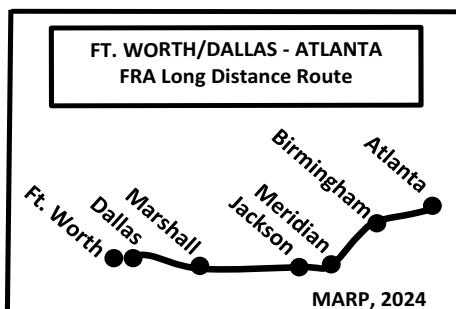
Empire Builder along the north side of the Columbia River. At Spokane this route follows the *Empire Builder*



route a short distance east to Sandpoint, where it turns to the southeast and passes through Helena (or Butte) and Billings in southern Montana and through Bismark to Fargo in North Dakota. At Fargo the route rejoins the route of the *Empire Builder* to Chicago via Minneapolis/St. Paul and Milwaukee

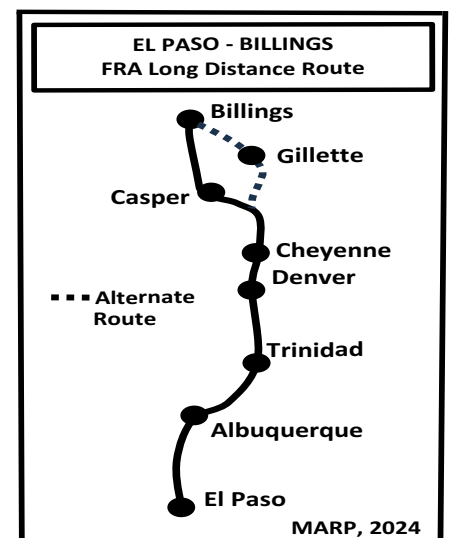
Fort Worth/Dallas – Atlanta: This is another train that might have a chance, now that CPKC appears willing to consider hosting it on their rail lines. The route runs east from Fort Worth to Marshall on Amtrak's *Texas Eagle* route. The route continues east to Meridian on a seg-

ment that has not hosted a passenger train since the 1960s. From Meridian to Atlanta the route follows Amtrak's *Southern Crescent* route to Atlanta. The Southern Rail Commission is pushing for restored service between Dallas and Meridian along the I-20 Corridor, a



route that was proposed by former Amtrak Board Chair John Robert Smith more than 20 years ago.

El Paso – Billings: This route would fill a large gap in north-south-service, between the *Texas Eagle* and the West Coast. The route would extend to the north from El Paso to Albuquerque and, via the *Southwest Chief* route, to Trinidad. From Trinidad the route runs north through Denver to



Cheyenne and then through Casper, terminating in Billings. the Burlington (now BNSF) ran a passenger train to Billings on part of this route until 1969. The proposed east-west *North Coast Limited* route would pass through Billings and provide connections to Seattle and the Twin Cities.

Through trains now running on South Shore

By Hugh Gurney

With construction of South Shore double tracking project near completion, the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District, operator of the line, announced through train service between Chicago, Michigan City and South Bend would resume on April 9, 2024. The bus bridge has been ended. It had been in effect between Gary and Michigan City since February, 2022, and was shortened in October, 2023, to between Gary and Dune Park Station. Following a yet to be scheduled Ribbon Cutting ceremony sometime in May, a new daily schedule will take effect which includes 14 additional trains each weekday.

As of March 25, final testing of all elements is underway. As summarized in the March 24, 2024, issue of *Double Track NWI*, the \$649 million South Shore Double Tracking project was both a major infrastructure accomplishment for Northwest Indiana and one of that state's top infrastructure priorities. It is certainly one of the most significant improvements to passenger rail in the Midwest in many years.

The major upgrade of the project was the addition of 26.6 miles of new second track between Gary and Michigan City, permitting trains to operate safely at higher speeds and allowing the addition of many new trains. The project also included the removal of approximately two miles of street running track in Michigan City, relocation of that track to its own dedicated right of way, platform improvements at five stations, two completely rebuilt station buildings, 1,475 new parking spaces, and reconstruction of 22 grade crossings and 22 drainage culverts.

Related to this project, Chicago Metra announced in an April 3, 2024 press release, that their 2024 Construction Program includes construction of a fourth main line track on a portion of the Metra Electric Line to accommodate expansion of NICTD service. NICTD has agreed to pay 85% of the estimated \$150 million for the additional track as well as for platform work at the Van Buren and Millennium stations. South Shore uses the Metra Electric Line to access these downtown Chicago stations.

Igor Studenkov reports in the April 3 issue of *Streetsblog Chicago*, that with this project nearing completion, NICTD is looking to possible improvements in South Bend, the eastern terminus of the railroad. According to NICTD CEO Michael Noland, relocation of the South Bend terminus from the east to the west side of the South Bend Airport would reduce trip time between South Bend and Chicago's Millennium Station by 13-15 minutes. Currently, there are five through eastbound and four through westbound trains between South Bend and Chicago. All other trains terminate in Michigan City.

The City of South Bend would like to see NICTD operating into South Bend's Union Station. This would require significant engineering and environmental studies to determine the alignment and could involve relocation of the current Amtrak station, the demolition of a soccer stadium and public housing, all major challenges.

A final change under consideration is the relocation of the Hudson Lake station, which has the lowest ridership in the system, to New Castle, where General Motors and Samsung plan to build an electric vehicle plant. An abandoned mobile home park, recently purchased by St. Joseph County, could be the location of the stop.

SHORT LINES

Amtrak announced on March 3 that between May 6 and October 18, 2024, Trains 350 and 353 will operate on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays only. Amtrak said that the cuts are due to summer track improvements being made by Amtrak and the Michigan Department of Transportation. There are holiday exceptions. Trains 350 and 353 will operate normally on the following holidays: Memorial Day, Monday, May 27; Juneteenth, Wednesday, June 19; Independence Day, Thursday, July 4; Labor Day, Monday, September 2. Trains 351, 352, 354 and 355 will operate normally. Blue Water Trains 364 and 365 will operate normally, and also serve the Wolverine stations in southwestern Michigan. **The U.S. Senate recently confirmed three new members to the Amtrak Board** according to a January issue of *Progressive Railroading*. The Senate confirmed attorney Anthony Coscia, Aviation Strategies President Joel Szabat, and Normal, Illinois, Mayor Christopher Koos as members of Amtrak's board. Coscia has been Amtrak's chairman since 2013. The Senate had not confirmed an Amtrak board nominee since 2015. President Joe Biden nominated Koos, Coscia and Szabat as board members in 2022. Several other positions on the ten-member board are either vacant or expired.....

Amtrak added four additional weekday and two new weekend roundtrip trains on the Northeast Corridor to meet demand. According to a report in the March 5th *Mass Transit Online*, the new service represents a 20 percent increase in weekday options and a 10 percent increase in Sunday service, which, according to Amtrak, collectively delivers more than 1 million more seats to the Northeast Regional service..... **The Washington State DOT released a Preliminary Service Development Plan (SDP) for the Amtrak Cascades route**, a step towards creating a blueprint for improving the route over the next twenty years. The Amtrak Cascades service, which connects Eugene, Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, currently operates at a max speed of 79 mph with two daily round trips between Eugene and Vancouver and six daily round trips between Portland and Seattle. The service saw over 800,000 riders annually prior to the pandemic. Improving the frequency and speed of the service, while also planning for high-speed rail, is critical to the entire region's economic vitality, sustainability, and livability. The preliminary SDP has identified five alternatives that merit further analysis as WSDOT prepares to develop the full SDP.....

Surface Transportation Board Chairman Martin Oberman is concerned about the proposed takeover of Norfolk Southern by activist investor Ancora Holdings Group LLC.

Progressive Railroading, interviewing Oberman in February, 2024, reported that he thought a takeover of NS could be a 'huge detriment' to the rail industry. (Oberman emphasized that he was speaking for himself and not the entire STB.) Ancora is proposing to replace Norfolk Southern's top leadership in favor of a short-term strategy of cost-cutting and workforce reductions to temporarily boost profits and stock value. The impact of similar actions in the spring 2020 when the pandemic hit, and the major railroads, which already had cut their workforces by 20% under the PSR model, reduced their headcounts by another 10% to adapt to the abrupt slowdown in business. Oberman indicated that in 2020, as the economy began to rebound, the railroads couldn't perform. "Railroads are a regulated monopoly, and they have a common carrier obligation to the public interest and to the nation's economy," said Oberman. "Railroad management and owners are not just free to manipulate the business for short-term gain to drain the resources out of the railroads in the form of enormous stock buybacks and dividends to the detriment of the railroads—".....

Poland's PKP Intercity awarded its largest-ever contract for 300 new locomotive-hauled coaches for 4.2bn Zlotys (\$US 1.1bn) according to the *International Railway Journal*. A contract option allows PKP Intercity to order a further 150 coaches from the Poznań-based manufacturer at a cost of 2.1bn Zlotys. The coaches will be built to a new design, with a maximum speed of 200km/h, and will be configured with both open and compartment passenger accommodation. Each coach will be equipped with Wi-Fi, individual seat lights, power and USB sockets, as well as air-conditioning, a fire

detection system, and CCTV. Some coaches will include a family section incorporating a safe play area for young children..... **New Jersey renewed their state Transportation Trust Fund (TTF) for five years to invest billions of dollars** to modernize and maintain New Jersey's statewide transportation infrastructure while providing additional capital funding for New Jersey Transit. According to a March 27, 2024, *Mass Transit Online* article, the TTF will establish a five-year program, beginning July 1, 2024, and ending June 30, 2029, to ensure a steady stream of revenue to support statewide transportation projects. Among other goals, it will bolster NJ Transit by providing an additional \$91.8 million during the last three years of the program to augment the \$767 million the agency currently receives annually from the TTF to fund new capital projects. By year five, NJ Transit will receive more than \$813 million annually for capital projects..... **The FRA announced in late March that a total of \$2.4 billion in is available for Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grants** during FY23 and FY24. The funding builds on the more than \$1.4 billion in CRISI grants previously announced in 2023. CRISI grants advance projects that target modernization of freight and intercity passenger rail infrastructure. "Today we're opening the biggest funding round in history for the program that modernizes freight and intercity passenger rail infrastructure," said U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg. Last year, FRA selected 70 projects in 35 states for CRISI Program funding. Those projects ranged from bridge, track, and grade crossing improvements to investments in restoring and expanding intercity passenger rail corridors. Applications for the new funding are due May 28..... **In England, passenger service will be restored from Newcastle north about 16 miles on the Northumberland line to Ashington 60 years after it was discontinued** as part of the infamous Beeching cuts. According to the *Guardian*, the line, which continued in existence for freight, recently saw a test run of a two-car Express Sprinter train. The local county council, which has promoted the project, said the benefits of having two passenger trains an hour will be huge. It will make commuting to Newcastle quick and easy compared with a reliance on buses and congested roads. It is costing an estimated £180m, which, campaigners say, in transport funding is peanuts. Dennis Fancett, the chair of the South East Northumberland Rail User Group, was accompanied on the test run by Ian Brown, a rail industry veteran. Returning passenger service to the Northumberland Line is a good case study for the power of persistent grassroots campaigning..... **Streetsblog reports that a new coalition of nearly 200 livable streets groups is calling for the end of the "Highway-Expansion Madness."** In a letter spearheaded by America Walks in early February, the coalition says that the endless highway expansions are pulling our country into an environmental, budgetary, and public health crisis. "It's time to end this destructive, unsustainable practice and set a responsible course toward a cleaner and more equitable future," says a letter signed by 194 community groups across the country that will be sent to state and federal transportation leaders.....

Amtrak will invest \$122 million in track improvements on the electrified Harrisburg Line. According to an online report by *Mass Transit* on March 21, 2024, the work will be between Lancaster and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The goal is to improve ride quality, increase reliability, and keep the tracks in a state of good repair. Amtrak will replace the existing wood crossties with concrete crossties, which have an expected lifespan of 60 years compared to 25 years for wood crossties.

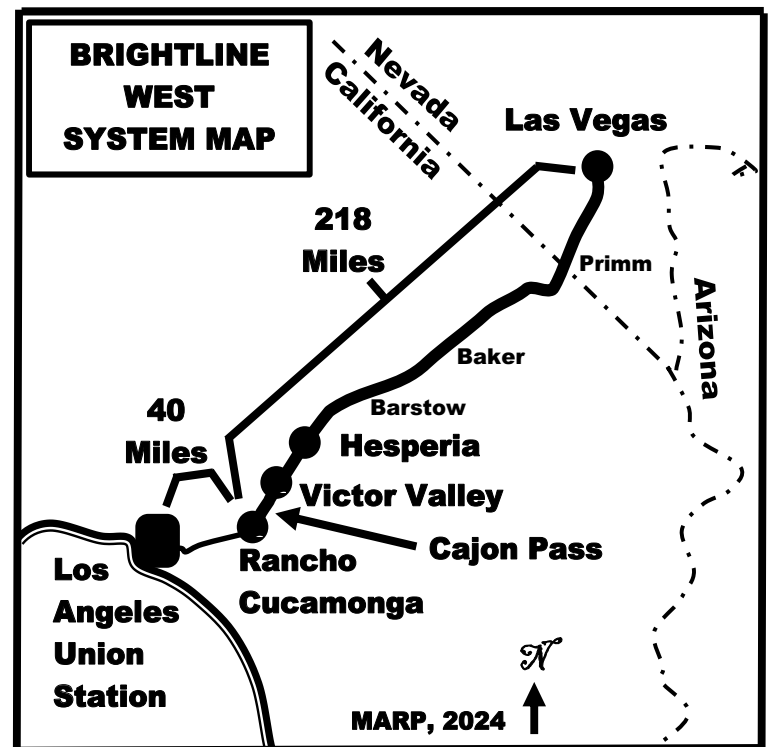
Locally sourced materials will be used. The concrete ties used will be manufactured in Bear, Del., and the ballast will be purchased from a quarry in Birdsboro, Pa. The project, which began on March 15, will require a series of significant track outages from April 8 through Nov. 21, 2024, with bus substitutions from approximately 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays and various schedule adjustments Friday through Sunday and weekday mornings and evenings..... **Michigan Central Station will reopen on June 6, 2024**, according to *Axios Detroit*. How much of the former station will be open to the public, future plans for the restored building, and other details are not being released.

Los Angeles to Las Vegas

Brightline West begins construction activities



Proposed Brightline West electric train running in center median of Interstate Highway 15 between Rancho Cucamonga, California, and Las Vegas, Nevada. (Brightline rendering)



Brightline West has begun work on building a 218-mile, all-electric high-speed passenger rail line from Rancho Cucamonga, California, to Las Vegas, Nevada. The first fieldwork consisting of geotechnical borings and land surveying was scheduled to start in February of

2024. The work will take place primarily within the right-of-way of Interstate Highway 15 in compliance with applicable environmental regulations and in coordination with Caltrans and the Nevada Department of Transportation.

At speeds up to 200 miles

per hour, trains will take Southern California passengers to Las Vegas in just 2 hours and 10 minutes, twice as fast as the normal drive time. Intermediate stations are planned for Hesperia and Apple Valley. The Rancho Cucamonga Station, which will be about

40 miles east of downtown LA, will connect to Southern California's regional Metrolink service, allowing for travel to Los Angeles and beyond.

In December 2023, the Brightline West project was awarded \$3 billion from the Federal Department of

Transportation toward its planned \$12 billion cost. Brightline has adopted an ambitious construction schedule with service scheduled to open in time for the Los Angeles Summer Olympic Games in 2028.

Comments on Michigan's Northern Thruway Bus Services

By Louis Vallance

I wish to comment on the difficult connections that we northern Michigan users of Amtrak must face. I take the Indian Trails Thruway bus from Cheboygan, Michigan, which is just 15 miles south of Mackinaw City. With the current schedules of Indian Trails and Amtrak, I must stay overnight in Flint to take the Amtrak train. If I were to take the bus to East Lansing or Grand Rapids, I still would have to overnight to catch the morning Amtrak train. If I took the bus to Kalamazoo and took the 10 PM train to connect to the National Network I would have to stay overnight in Chicago. Furthermore, I must do the same overnight routine if I return to Michigan on Amtrak from Chicago. This adds an extra 2 days to my travel time and a huge hotel bill in both directions, and it is just awful!

What needs to happen is for the feeder bus network to change its schedules to a 11 PM departure from St Ignace to all three Michigan Amtrak stations Flint, East Lansing, and Grand Rapids for a arrival in those three cities at 6 AM so one could catch the train. Indian Trails

and MDOT claim that there are no options to do this due to lack of buses downstate to make the connection. I think this argument seems wrong.

To use the Amtrak network I am forced to go via the Upper Peninsula bus to Escanaba to connect to the Wisconsin bus route of Indian Trails to the Milwaukee Intermodal Station to connect to Hiawatha train 332. The Wisconsin connection affords me same day connections in Chicago to the National Network.

However, the Wisconsin bus schedule needs to be adjusted to allow time to avoid the morning rush hours in Milwaukee and Glendale, a suburb of Milwaukee that has a high school right off Interstate 43 which causes backups and delays. Furthermore, extensive road maintenance in Milwaukee is also causing backups that Indian Trails and Amtrak have failed to account for.

Amtrak closes its gates 5 minutes before departure and so with Indian Trails bus 59 arriving in Milwaukee anything later than 7:35 AM that 30 minute connection becomes 25 or shorter. I



Louis Vallance connecting between buses.

have misconnected to Amtrak Train 332 at least 6 times over the past year, and that is unacceptable. Indian trails must leave 35 minutes earlier out of St Ignace to Escanaba. The bus needs to leave Escanaba 25 minutes earlier to make the connection in Milwaukee less stressful, and also easier on the Indian Trails drivers. It's a simple fix really.

According to Chad Cushman, in 2017 when Amtrak contracted with Indian Trails, the schedules were to be synchronized and to this date they are not. Furthermore, the State of Wisconsin's own documents state that Indian Trails bus 59 from Escanaba connects to Amtrak Train 332!

The Michigan Rail Passenger Association and

its counterpart in Wisconsin need to partner up and fix this horrible excuse of a transportation network for the betterment of the rural northern Michigan people that are paying subsidies to have this essential service. Amtrak is the choice mode of travel for many folks and we deserve better in Michigan.