

The ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

<http://www.esparail.org>



WORKING FOR A MORE BALANCED TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Vol. 35 No. 6

November/December 2011

Amtrak to Lease 85 Miles of Empire Corridor from CSX

In an extremely welcomed announcement, it was confirmed on October 18 that Amtrak intends to enter into a long-term lease with CSX to gain full operational control of the 85 route miles of the Empire Corridor between Control Point 75 north of Poughkeepsie (the north end of Metro-North territory) and CP 160 at the Schenectady station. Amtrak already controls the 9 mile segment west of Schenectady to Hoffmans at CP 169 where the CSX freight line from Selkirk Yard joins the main line heading west. CSX will retain full freight rights on the leased line.

Reportedly, the negotiations for the lease of this segment were closely tied to the recent obligation of \$150 million in ARRA HSR funds, which will allow four significant improvement projects to now proceed. These include the new second main track between Albany and Schenectady and the fourth boarding track at the Rensselaer station. In addition, the future rehabilitation or replacement of the Livingston Avenue Bridge over the Hudson River should be better facilitated with Amtrak's lease.

The lease will give Amtrak full responsibility for the operation, dispatching and maintenance of the entire 85 route miles and it will be a major step forward in the decades-old efforts to significantly improve the infrastructure along this segment of the Corridor. Amtrak's Board of Directors is expected to consider and approve the lease agreement at their November meeting and the formal take-over from CSX is planned for early in 2012.

Many logistical questions have yet to be resolved, including where Amtrak's future dispatching center for the segment will be located. However, Amtrak's Rensselaer-based Engineering Department is reportedly already gearing up for its new maintenance responsibilities (which currently include the Amtrak-owned Post Road Branch connection used by the Boston section of the Lake Shore.)

Bruce B. Becker

Lake Shore Limited Route Improvement Plan Released

In late September, Amtrak released its Performance Improvement Plan for the *Lake Shore Limited*. This is part of the PRIIA Section 210 Reports for Fiscal Year 2011, which also included the *Silver Service* and *Crescent*. The report analyzed

possibly changing the *Lake Shore Limited* schedule by departing Chicago 3 hours earlier and also departing New York about an hour earlier. One improvement considered would extend the hours of the Diner to encourage more purchases, and to make the Diner cashless (Debit/Credit cards only), which would save time counting and tracking cash. Forty seven percent of the Diner guests are coach passengers, which is very high compared to other Amtrak routes. Upgrading the food in the lounge car also will be considered. Of interest in the report was that 62% of the *Lake Shore's* passengers are female and that 61% of passengers are traveling alone. The top three city pairs on the *Lake Shore Limited* are: New York-Chicago, Buffalo-Chicago, and Syracuse-Chicago. The report also looked at rerouting the train through Michigan, but determined that such a route would increase costs and decrease revenue.

Gary Prophet

Wi-Fi Debuts on the Empire Corridor



Starting on Monday, Oct 31, Amtrak began to offer Wifi service on all Empire Corridor trains, as well as regional trains on the Northeast Corridor.

Connecting is

free and easy and one simply selects, "Amtrak Connect" as the wireless connection on their computer or smartphone. Service works very well in the Hudson Valley, although reception is limited in Manhattan where the Empire trains are underground. Upstate service also works very well, although due to lack of cell towers in the Adirondack area, service is minimal north of Saratoga Springs. Wifi Service exists on all Amfleet I coaches (these are the coaches with 72 seats), but does not exist in the more spacious Amfleet II coaches, so the *Adirondack* (Trains 68-69) and Toronto *Maple Leaf* (Trains 63-64) have service only in the Amfleet I coaches. (Each of these trains typically has a couple Amfleet II coaches.) Wifi will not operate in Canada, nor areas near the Canadian border. Also, Wifi service does not exist at this time on the *Lake Shore Limited*, or other overnight trains.

Gary Prophet

The View from the Cab

More Good News...

The announcement that Amtrak is poised to lease 85 route miles of the Empire Corridor from CSX is very good news indeed! As has long been advocated by ESPA and many others, it only makes sense that Amtrak should control and operate this line segment since it is the predominate user of this vital **passenger** corridor.

While the terms of the lease have yet to be disclosed, I'm confident that CSX must have determined that it was in its best strategic interest to give Amtrak the ability to control the line, not to mention that it also allows CSX to avoid the expense of maintaining a high-speed passenger line which carries little overhead or local freight business.

And there is no doubt that the funded and obligated HSR improvement projects between Poughkeepsie and Schenectady will now be able to move forward as quickly as possible under Amtrak's leadership and operational control.

But, as good news as this all is, the fact still remains that CSX has yet to agree to allow any improvements to proceed west of Hoffmans! As I stated in the last issue, to have Hoffmans become the dividing line between fast, reliable service serving the eastern part of the state and status-quo, slow, unreliable and inconsistent service to the west is simply not acceptable.

It is now time for CSX, having been released from the expense of operating and maintaining the Hudson Valley line, to come to the table and allow advancement of those projects west of Hoffmans that will provide additional necessary capacity and higher performance benefiting both passenger and freight operations. A perfect example would be for CSX to agree to permit the funded (but not yet obligated) Syracuse Area Congestion Relief Project to now proceed forward. Other similar, relatively small, easily accomplishable, incremental improvements, which will directly benefit CSX too, are perhaps the best opportunities available in the near-term for reductions in trip times and improvements in reliability. When enough of these small projects do get done, they will all add up to significant positive momentum in the right direction!

As always, never hesitate to let me know how we're doing or to offer suggestions on what our organization could do better...

Bruce B. Becker, President

Amtrak Seeks ESPA's Input

Amtrak's new Empire District Customer Service Quality Supervisor Jay Green wants to hear of your New York State Amtrak travel experiences. Whether everything was great or if there was room for improvement, Jay welcomes our input, as the entire Empire Corridor team strives to provide the best service possible. Please send your written trip reports and comments, including specific dates, train numbers, stations and employee names as appropriate to Jay at: Jay Green, Customer Service Quality Supervisor, Amtrak 525 East Street, Rensselaer, NY 12144 jay.green@amtrak.com

Please also send a copy to Bruce Becker, so we can track trip experiences and follow up as necessary. Thanks for your help...

Empire Corridor Ends FY 2011 with Ridership and Revenue UP Despite Floods

Amtrak finished its FY 2011 year (October 1, 2010 – September 30, 2011) having carried over 30 million passengers for the first time in its 40 year history. Total passengers for the year were 30,186,733, up 5.1% from FY '10, with total passenger revenues coming in at \$1,891,679,877, up 8.5%. Amtrak noted that this new record was achieved in spite of numerous extended service disruptions throughout the country due to storms and rail infrastructural improvements.

Here in New York State, equally impressive increases were experienced on all trains. Overall ridership was 1,604,671, up 4.6% from the prior year, with total revenues of \$72,289,711, up 6.2%. When compared to two years ago, the FY '11 stats show a 13.3% ridership increase (these figures include the Hudson Valley trains, the west of Albany trains, the *Adirondack* and the *Ethan Allen Express*).

The *Adirondack* led the increases percentage-wise, with ridership up 5.5% (125,239 total passengers, a new record for this train); this was closely followed by the West of Albany trains which were up 5.1% (406,286 total passengers; the first time over 400,000). The Hudson Valley trains were up 4.3% (1,023,698 total passengers; first time over the million mark) and the *Ethan Allen Express* was up 3.0% (49,448 total passengers). The long-distance *Lake Shore Limited* (not included in the above overall NYS statistics) was up 6.2%, with a total of 387,043 passengers.

For a perspective on the strong gains that have occurred in recent years, the West of Albany ridership is up 49.0% and the *Adirondack's* ridership is up 44.4% over FY 2005. FY '11's YTD (through September) on time performance for New York State trains stood at 76.8% overall, down 4.4% from the prior year. By individual segment, during the year the Hudson Valley trains were 84.5% on time (down 1.5% from the prior year); west of Albany trains 77.7% on time (down 6.8%); the *Adirondack* was 61.2% on time (down 1.0%); the *Ethan Allen Express* was 60.6% on time (down 14.2%) and the *Maple Leaf* was 57.6% on time (down 11.4%). The *Lake Shore Limited* achieved a poor 55.5% OTP, down 20.3% from the prior year.

Bruce B. Becker

Border Inspections Stop on NYS Trains

The US Border Patrol's routine inspection of passengers traveling on trains running across Upstate New York (but not crossing any international border) came to an abrupt and unexpected end in mid-September. These inspections, which have focused primarily on the *Lake Shore Limited* at both the Buffalo-Depew and Rochester stations, have been ongoing for the past several years.

The inspections, which targeted undocumented travelers and illegal immigrants among others, have been the subject of repeated media reports, including an undercover story last year in the New York Times. These have led to extensive investigations into the constitutionality of the inspections by the American Civil Liberties Union. The inspections had been expanded to include intercity buses, but these also are now curtailed.

(Cont'd on page 7)

Governor Cuomo Names New Transportation Leaders

Governor Andrew Cuomo has named new transportation leaders for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and his own Executive Chamber. Patrick J. Foye was nominated as Executive Director of the Port Authority, Joseph J. Lhota was nominated to serve as Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of the MTA, and Karen Rae was named Deputy Secretary of Transportation in the Governor's Office.

The Port Authority, created in 1921, was the first interstate agency ever created by Congress. The Authority's mission is to facilitate commerce in the bi-state region within a 25 mile radius of the Statue of Liberty. Its facilities include airports, bridges, tunnels, bus stations and freight terminals, the World Trade Center site and the PATH rail transit system. It is governed by a 12 member Board of Commissioners, with the Governors of New York and New Jersey each appointing six members. The Board approved Mr. Foye's nomination on October 21st.

Mr. Foye previously served as the Governor's Deputy Secretary of Economic Development and oversaw the Empire State Development Corporation. Before that he served as Deputy County Executive of Nassau County and a board member of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. In addition, Mr. Foye saw service as a Vice Chairman of the Long Island Power Authority.

The Governor also nominated James Rubin and Rossana Rosado as members of the Port Authority Board. The Authority, which employs over 6,700 people, has a 2011 budget of \$7.2 billion and its capital spending is estimated at \$3.9 billion.

In addition to nominating Mr. Foye, Governor Cuomo called on the Port Authority to take full control of the long-awaited Moynihan Station rail project. The project would relieve the cramped and claustrophobic Penn Station which serves Amtrak, New Jersey Transit and the Long Island Railroad. The project, a decade in the making, is now managed by the Moynihan Station Development Corporation and the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation. Full-funding for the multi-billion dollar project has not been identified and actual funding so far has been limited to an \$83 million federal transit grant and just under \$200 million from the Port Authority.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is a public benefit corporation created to implement a unified mass transportation policy and provide transportation services in New York City, Long Island and five counties north of New York City. Major MTA operations include the Metro-North and Long Island commuter railroads, the New York City Subway and bus system and the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority.

Mr. Lhota, whose appointment as MTA Chairman requires State Senate confirmation, has previous experience as an MTA board member. He has also served as New York City Commissioner of Finance, Budget Director and Deputy Mayor for Operations. His private sector experience includes service as Executive Vice President for Administration at the Madison Square Garden Company and Director of Public Finance for First Boston.

Joining Mr. Lhota at the MTA is Nuria Fernandez who will serve as MTA Chief Operating Officer. Ms. Fernandez has extensive experience in transportation including service as Commissioner of the Chicago Airport Authority and executive positions at the U.S. Department of Transportation, the

(Cont'd on page 7)

News in Brief

- **Phase One of the Hudson Line Signal Improvement Project Obligated...**On October 18, the FRA obligated \$7.9 million in FY 2010 HSR Grant Funds allowing for the work to bury the currently pole-mounted signal code lines between CP 75 north of Poughkeepsie and CP 94 near Tivoli to now proceed (this project requires a \$2.0 million (20%) state match). Funds for Phase Two of this project, north from CP 94 to Rensselaer, were obligated by the FRA in September. When completed, this project will greatly increase the reliability of the signal system on this section of the Empire Corridor.
- **New Schedules Effective November 7th...**Amtrak's new Fall 2011/Winter 2012 timetables are now available on-line and at all staffed stations. There were only a few minor schedule adjustments made to the trains operating in New York State. Disappointingly, the majority of the extra time added in the spring to compensate for summer track work projects on CSX west of Hoffmans has NOT been removed from the new schedules.
- **Amtrak's Newly-Renovated Viewliner Diner #8400** entered service on the *Lake Shore Limited* October 2nd. This long-stored car was brought back to life by the craftsman of Amtrak's Beech Grove Shops. The dining room is spacious and bright, with energy-efficient LED lighting, simulated wood panels and blue window curtains. The all-new kitchen utilizes the same efficient roll on/off food storage and refrigeration cart system as does the Acela Express. The car's design and layout will be used in the construction of the 25 new single-level diners being built by CAF in Elmira Heights, NY
- **Repairs to Metro-North's Port Jervis Line** have progressed much faster than earlier predicted and full train service is now planned to be re-instated by the end of November, a full month earlier than originally thought possible. The line suffered massive flood damage from Hurricane Irene at the end of August.
- **Next Round of Empire Corridor Environmental Impact Statement Public Meetings Delayed...**The ongoing EIS process for the Empire Corridor is moving forward, with the Draft EIS statement expected to be released sometime over the winter. In advance of this release, a new round of public information meetings is now expected to be held across the state before the end of the year (these events were originally scheduled for the Fall). Watch the ESPA web site and your local media for the locations and times of these vital meetings being held in your area.
- **NYS High Speed Rail Planning Board Remains In Limbo...**To date, there has still been NO public information released concerning the High Speed Rail Planning Board, which was created by then Governor Paterson and the state legislature in mid-2010. Reportedly some appointments to the Board have been made, but no meetings have been held. ESPA continues to monitor this matter closely.
- **Reminder...NYS High Speed Rail Project and Progress Summaries** are now available on the ESPA web site, www.esparail.org. These lists, which will be updated regularly, contain full information on all of the statewide Passenger Rail improvement projects.

LIRR ‘Pledge to Customers’

U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer on October 10 called on the Long Island Rail Road to establish a commuters’ bill of rights, similar to a passenger bill of rights created by the airline industry. Schumer’s call came after thousands of riders were stuck on seven trains for more than three hours on September 29th when lightning knocked out signals and switches. It was the latest of more than a dozen major service disruptions since August 2010.

The policy would be modeled after the 2009 federal airline passenger bill of rights, except that LIRR compliance would be voluntary, not enforced by penalties, Schumer said. It would also call on the LIRR to better inform customers of delays and transit alternatives, and make stranded customers more comfortable, such as by providing bottled water.

After the Sept. 29 disruptions, LIRR president Helena Williams and senior vice president of operations Raymond Kenny defended the decision not to evacuate stranded riders. They said doing so would have been dangerous and further delayed repairs to the system because third-rail power would have had to be shut off to allow people to walk on tracks. The LIRR has emergency evacuation protocols but without specific time triggers.

David Rangel, deputy director of the Modoc Railroad Academy agreed it’s usually safer for riders to stay put on stranded trains. Even with the third rail shut off, he said, a railroad right of way is dangerous terrain, made up of rocks, cables, switches and other obstacles that frequently injure even trained railroaders. “Imagine an office worker in high heels trying to walk the tracks. That’s a broken leg for sure,” said Rangel, adding that evacuating trains could take several hours.

Schumer did not specify just how long a delay should trigger a requirement for the LIRR to get passengers off a train, but said “If people are on trains for a very long period of time, they have to consider evacuation.” Schumer argued that setting a time limit for how long passengers can be stranded would dissuade frustrated customers from illegally jumping off trains themselves. LIRR officials said at least two people did that near Jamaica on September 29th. *John Raha*

Congressional Super Committee Continues

As this issue goes to press, the Congressional Bi-Partisan Committee on Deficit Reduction continues work on crafting a \$1.2 trillion deficit reduction plan.

Created by August deficit reduction/debt ceiling legislation, the bi-partisan 12 member committee was charged with the task of recommending future spending cuts by November 23rd. The recommended reductions would be subject to an up or down vote by each house of Congress.

If the Committee fails to make recommendations or if either house of Congress fails to adopt the recommendations presented by December 23rd, automatic across-the-board budget cuts would begin to be made in federal fiscal year 2013 which begins on October 1, 2012. *Anthony Rudmann*

New Tappan Zee Bridge Excludes Transit

In October 2011, President Obama approved Governor Cuomo’s request for an expedited approval process for the Tappan Zee Bridge. Then the NYS DOT announced that the Federal Highway Administration and the NYS Thruway Authority will build a new Tappan Zee Bridge that will have no commuter rail, no light rail, and no Bus Rapid Transit service. Not only have the plans to have commuter rail across the bridge connect to the Hudson line been deleted from this project, but the plans to have Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) from Suffern to either White Plains or Port Chester have also now been deleted.

What was seen over the past 13 years as a plan to improve transportation along the 30 mile corridor between Suffern and Port Chester has now been reduced to simply a highway project which is now named, “Tappan Zee Hudson River Crossing Project”. In other words, as described at the meeting on October 25, all improvements to the corridor have been eliminated and the plan is now to just replace the Tappan Zee Bridge with a new Tappan Zee Bridge.

Actually, two new bridges will be constructed. The first will be a 96 foot wide bridge north of the present structure, which will allow 4 lanes of traffic in each direction while the existing bridge is removed. After that is built, the existing bridge will be demolished and a second span will be built, which will be 82 feet wide with four eastbound lanes for traffic, plus shoulders and a lane for emergency vehicles.

The first new span will then operate with four westbound lanes with shoulders, plus an emergency lane, and a 12 foot pedestrian and bike path that will be physically separated from auto traffic by a concrete barrier. The pedestrian/bike path will be on the north side of the northern span. The two spans will be 46 feet apart.

The only mention of transit in the plan was that the new bridge “will not preclude future transit”. After the formal presentation on Tuesday, Oct 25, public officials and members of the public spoke. Each of about 30 speakers mentioned the need to have transit, at least Express Bus service along the entire 287 corridor. Robert Astorino, county executive of Westchester County stated, “I am troubled by the absence of a mass transit component. We need to move people faster and better, not just move more cars and trucks.” The mayor of Nyack stated, “I am troubled by no mass transit. We must have BRT from Day One.”

Public comments are accepted through Nov 15. It was stated that the comments should be about the type of bridge, such as short or long span and whether the highway bridge should be an arch or cable design, as anything outside of the actual 4 mile long bridge is not part of the scope of this new project. So, a long-term plan to improve the Route 287 corridor has now been replaced with a plan to encourage more cars and more trucks, by constructing a new, wider highway bridge. *Gary Prophet*



No.7 Subway to Secaucus: A West-of-Hudson Viewpoint

I have been a member of both NARP and ESPA for 31 years, and I have served as a New Jersey Representative on the NARP Council since 2004. Following 14 years of commuting on the LIRR to Penn Station and Hunterspoint Avenue, I have lived in New Jersey and been a member of the New Jersey Association of Railroad Passengers (NJ-ARP) for 19 years. I am speaking for myself and several others.

I have seen the benefits of not forcing everyone into a single hub for rapid transit transfers, such as crowd dispersal, more direct routing, and positive redundancy for service failures. I think it is time *ESPA Express* got a fair hearing of the #7 Subway to Secaucus proposal. NJ-ARP has officially endorsed both Amtrak's "Gateway" plan and the #7 extension proposals so as not to throw all its eggs in one basket, and remain open-minded to rail expansion plans, which have some common goals, yet different strengths and weaknesses. Most rail advocates are open-minded to all forms of passenger rail options, whether it is rapid transit, heavy rail, or light rail, and do not restrict their solutions to just "regional rail" or "light rail".

The Facts

To put the North River tunnels in perspective, the numerical facts about weekday public transit Hudson River crossings between New Jersey and Manhattan are these:

- 315,000 (44%) weekday trips are made on 9,000 buses, mostly in the Lincoln Tunnel, and half of that occurs in the AM peak on 1,700 buses on the Express Bus Lane (XBL) to Port Authority Bus Terminal (PABT), which serves overwhelmingly NJT or NJT-subsidized carriers. Both are used beyond design capacity,
- 250,000 (35%) is PATH's approximate daily ridership, which has now achieved pre-9/11/2001 levels, albeit skewed more to the 33rd Street line instead of the World Trade Center line. Most riders go under the Hudson River, but some are also NJT Rail and Bus *intra*-state passengers,
- 150,000 (21%) is NJT's Rail's average weekday number of trips in and out of New York Penn Station (NYPS), which is 58% of total trips on its rail system,
- 6,000 (< 1%) is the number of daily trips to and from Orange and Rockland counties on the Port Jervis and Spring Valley lines to Hoboken on NJT-operated trains, no more than half of whom transfer at Secaucus for NYPS.

Obviously Penn Station (NYPS) is not the main hub for New Jersey public transit riders to Manhattan. It cannot be and should not be – it's crowded enough, and so are the north-south subways serving it. About 70% of NJT rail riders are headed to within a 10 minute walk of Grand Central Terminal (GCT) at 42nd Street. Manhattan has a cross-town subway along 53rd Street serving NYPS and PABT, the "E" line, and two cross-town subways along 42nd Street, which serve PABT at Times Square. One is the "S" Shuttle, the other is the #7 Flushing line, continuing onto Long Island City, Mets Stadium, and Flushing. No cross-town subways run under 34th Street, so the 7th Avenue subway (#1,2,3) is used between NYPS and Times Square. The navigability of Manhattan for riders from New Jersey, as well as municipal parking restrictions and capacity limitations in the New Jersey suburbs forces ridership to be much higher on bus than on rail. That problem is not easily solved, and all too many

people do not understand it, or the bus market.

Current Situation

Rail passengers heading to GCT now take two subway rides via Times Square. The far more numerous bus passengers take one subway. Others working further north squeeze themselves onto the crowded, narrow, 8th Avenue local platform and take the already crowded "E" train, along with LIRR passengers, which eventually heads across 53rd Street. If the #7 were extended to Secaucus, Newark Division passengers (100,000 out of 162,000 go to/from NYPS) could get off their NYPS-bound train at least 10 minutes sooner. Hoboken Division passengers (49,000 out of 102,000 go to/from NYPS) would not have to enter a crowded NJT Newark Division NYPS-bound train at Secaucus. GCT bound passengers would instead avail themselves of an 11-car #7 train, operating every 3 to 4 minutes, where it begins its run, empty, unlike in Manhattan where you first shoe-horn yourself onto an already crowded 7th Avenue subway train.

The Proposal

Given the ridership, market share, subway routes, and Manhattan destination facts, it makes sense for the #7 line to be extended to Secaucus Junction. It is now being extended to 34th Street and 11th Avenue (not convenient to NYPS) and will be running in several years, well before the 2nd Avenue Subway. While New York City and Parsons-Brinkerhoff study extending it from the end of its tail tracks at West 24th Street to Secaucus via Hoboken, but not stopping at Hoboken, some of us propose instead splitting the line at 40th Street on the far west side, sending a branch directly west to Secaucus Junction with a Lincoln Harbor intermediate stop, which is just north of the Lincoln Tunnel spiral, for Hudson-Bergen Light Rail (HBLRT) and bus transfers from Bergen County.

This is basically the same concept as PATH between Newark Penn and the WTC as a cost-saver, time-saver, and congestion avoidance of NYPS and subways from there to lower Manhattan. We then have:

- Additional Hudson River rail capacity at 18 trains per hour, assuming CBTC signaling, which has started construction on the Flushing line,
- Reroutes rail passengers between Secaucus and Times Square by direct routing on the #7, relieving passenger congestion at NYPS, the 7th Avenue subway station, and subway to Times Square,
- Turnpike buses can discharge/receive some passengers at Secaucus for the #7, or terminate there rather than run to/from PABT,
- Bergen County buses can do likewise at Lincoln Harbor,
- Almost continuous distribution of passengers to their destination along the #7's three stops in Manhattan between 7th and 3rd Avenues,
- Realistic alternative for bus passengers, who are far more numerous than NJT rail passengers, to reduce massive Lincoln Tunnel bus traffic, reduce Manhattan air pollution, and improve air quality,
- Operating advantages and economies to the NYCT by placing a small yard near the Secaucus station eliminating the need to run some trains to Corona for mid-day storage and then back again for the PM rush,

(Cont'd on page 7)

Saratoga & North Creek Railway: A Burgeoning Enterprise

America's newest intercity service is off to a fine start as the Saratoga and North Creek Railway's first Summer-Fall season comes to a close. The S&NC is operated by short line and tourist operator Iowa Pacific over tracks owned by the County of Warren and Town of Corinth, connecting Saratoga Springs with the alpine resort community of North Creek.

The potential significance of this new intercity rail service for the future of passenger rail has not been lost on some. *The Bridge Line Historical Society Bulletin* referred to the S&NC as "the first privately operated for-profit and regularly scheduled intercity passenger rail service in the United States in more than 40 years".

Quoting the Iowa Pacific, the *Bulletin* went on... "While there are numerous privately operated tourist railroads, the SNC is operated as a true passenger railway, meeting a stronger set of regulatory requirements for equipment and operations".

Indeed, in some ways the Iowa Pacific may be setting the S&NC up in the mode of the private railways in Japan which offer intercity service to many tourist communities via cross platform connections with the national network, including the high-speed Shinkansen.

With four trains daily from Thursday to Monday during its summer-fall season it was possible on several days to make a transfer to and from Amtrak trains at the Saratoga Springs Station.

For example a weekend trip could begin with a hypothetical traveler leaving Penn Station on Friday at 5:40pm on the *Ethan Allen*, arriving in Saratoga at 9:17pm. Here one can connect to the late evening train of the S&NC; boarding at 9:30pm to arrive at North Creek at 11:49pm.

For the return trip the traveler could board the southbound S&NC train in North Creek at 7:00am Monday morning arriving in Saratoga at 9:16am to board the southbound *Ethan Allen* at 9:43am, arriving Penn Station at 1:35pm.

Merchants in North Creek reported in interviews with the *Times Union* that there has been a noticeable uptick in visitors since the beginning of rail service. To facilitate an easier trip from the station to the village's business district, an electric cart was donated to give passengers a lift to the restaurants and shops along Main Street.

Today North Creek is already the site of an ongoing resort development, with the pending construction of the Ski Bowl Village which will tie into the Gore Mountain Ski Center while also offering year round activities including equestrian and golf.

At Hadley where there is a brand new train station, the Adirondack Park Agency has given regulatory approval for the Sacandaga Whitewater Park to create artificial waves and whirlpools by the select placement of boulders in the riverbed. The Sacandaga Outdoor Center already operates raft and tube trips down the river that float right under the railway's bridge.

Ridership has been good. In the first three days the S&NC transported 300 passengers according to the *Albany Times Union*, and into August was carrying about 80 to 100 people on each train, 125 to 150 passengers a day for all trains. At the end of August the president of the Iowa Pacific, Ed Ellis, told the *Glen Falls Post Star* that ridership had reached about 4000 in the first month of operation, a number he was very pleased with.

As reported in the *Post Star* in a September 4th article, the Iowa Pacific is negotiating to purchase the 28 miles of track from North Creek to Tahawus in Essex County, at the foot of

the High Peaks of the Adirondacks. The current owner is NL Industries (National Lead) which operated the titanium mine at the end of tracks from World War II until the late 1980's.

Iowa Pacific states that some industrial activity has continued with the removal of the tailings (waste material or cob rock) by truck, and that restoration of rail service could allow for more efficient removal. Further down the road there could be the reopening of the mine for its titanium and rare earths, both of which are now in high demand and short supply due to their vital importance in high tech industries.

Last, if this expansion does come to pass, it will provide a direct connection from Saratoga Springs to the High Peaks, allowing tourists to the historic urban resort to make a day trip deep into the mountain wilderness. At Tahawus there is the ghost town of "Adirondac" with several historic structures including a blast furnace from the early 19th century and breathtaking views of the mountains.

Iowa Pacific has also committed itself to making major upgrades to the permanent way it currently controls, including a half a million dollar investment this year, including replacement of rail and ties for a smoother ride and improvements at the station in Saratoga Springs.

The company has asked Warren County to rework part of the contract to withhold some revenue to help fund additional improvements through a temporary "cap" of the revenue the railroad operator would otherwise turn over to the county.

The railroad wants to upgrade tracks on parts of the line to allow trains to go faster. Currently the line is built and maintained to FRA Class II which allows passenger trains to travel up to 30-mph and freight to 25-mph. On the straighter sections they plan on an upgrade to Class III raising passenger speeds to 60-mph, and freight to 40-mph.

The Iowa Pacific has assembled quite a small fleet of equipment. The four original passenger cars (two ex-Holland American full-length dome cars and two LIRR double-decker commuter cars) have been supplemented with two additional streamlined coaches including a stainless steel Budd coach in Southern Pacific colors.

Further acquisitions could include former operator Upper Hudson River Railroad rolling stock that is still stored along the line. This includes three heavy-weight coaches with six wheel trucks, two light-weight streamlined coaches, two cabooses, and two gondola cars.

The S&NC Railway is moving briskly forward this year with preparations for its first winter season. They are running an advertising campaign in the local newspapers including full page ads in the *Saratogian* for fall colors and ski trains.

It has received favorable press, including a congratulatory editorial in the *Schenectady Daily Gazette* which highlighted that city's historic connection to North Creek; the first D&H ski train was for the Schenectady Ski Club in 1934.

A *Polar Express* train is scheduled for the holidays, with the permission from Warner Brothers, which owns commercial rights to the name. The railway has announced that ski trains once again will begin running to North Creek on December 30th, this year. This will be about 70 years after the last ski train was run by the old D&H in the shadow of World War II.

Ski trains will begin December 30 and run through to March on Friday, Saturday and Sunday with a 7am train up to North Creek and a 4:30pm return to Saratoga. A combined train and ski package will cost \$87 for dome and \$70 for coach. A round trip

(continued on next page)

Saratoga and North Creek (Cont'd from Page 6)

train ride alone costs \$55 for dome and \$30 for coach with breakfast and dinner available onboard.

I had the great privilege of riding the VIP-Press run on Wednesday July 20th as ESPA's representative, having been invited by a friendly official from the Warren County Planning and Community Development Office. This entity sponsors the First Wilderness Heritage Corridor Project which strives to bring economic development to the communities along the Upper Hudson River.

The run was not just to showcase the new service to the press, it was also a "victory lap" for the many politicians and local residents who help make this service possible on a formerly abandoned branch line. Now that the railway has concluded a successful first summer and fall season with more to come this winter, it looks like the beginning of a dream fulfilled.

Benjamin J. Turon

Border Patrol (Cont'd from page 2)

The uniformed Border Patrol agents would generally ask passengers to state their nationality and if they were satisfied with the response they would quickly move on. But for those passengers that raised the suspicions of the agent, formal identification was required. If their ID's were not supplied or found not to be in order, the passengers would be taken off the train for further questioning and possible detention. Passengers traveling in coach were far more likely to be questioned than those in sleepers or business class. Trains were often delayed as the agents did their inspections, though such delays had been greatly reduced in the past couple years, in part due to Amtrak's strong insistence that efficient train operations trumped the authority of the agents.

Increasingly however, knowledgeable passengers who objected to such domestic questioning recognized that they weren't under any legal requirement to answer the agent's questions and many would refuse to do so.

The Department of Homeland Security has made no clear statements regarding the reasons for the stoppage of the inspections, though they have indicated that Border Patrol agents retain the legal authority to make such inspections and that they may resume these activities at any time in the future.

From the passenger's perspective, the ceasing of these routine inspections will make for more enjoyable trips and should help improve on time performance, especially for the *Lake Shore*.

Bruce B. Becker

Governor Cuomo Appoints (Cont'd from page 3)

Chicago Transit Authority and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Karen Rae returns to New York as the Governor's Deputy Secretary of Transportation following service as Deputy Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration since March 2009. She brings three decades of transportation experience at the federal, state and local levels to the Executive Chamber.

Prior to her federal work, Ms. Rae served as Deputy Commissioner of Policy and Planning at the NYS Department of Transportation where she led the effort to develop the first New York State Rail Plan in a quarter of a century. Previous state-level transportation service included Deputy Secretary for

Local and Area Transportation at the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation and Director of the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation. Earlier in her career, she worked as director or general manager of transit systems in Austin, Texas as well as Glens Falls and Buffalo, New York.

Anthony Rudmann

No. 7 Subway to Secaucus (Cont'd from page 5)

which could entice MTA's interest in some financing.

- Better ability for New Yorkers to access jobs on the Jersey Gold Coast near Exchange Place, via the #7 to the HBLRT. The PATH 33rd Street line, which actually terminates at 32nd Street & 6th Avenue, simply does not penetrate Manhattan far enough, nor is its service integrated with the MTA's,
- Minimal disruption to Manhattan infrastructure.

It is not just for rush hours. This has utility 7/24/365, more than NJT operations. Hour-long traffic jams toward the Lincoln Tunnel can occur at any time of any day or night, even when NJT trains have empty seats. New rail traffic patterns and routings are called for, and rapid transit can be constructed and run more cheaply while having a greater impact on traffic for the money spent. Amtrak's Gateway plan is primarily an inter-city and New Jersey suburban rail expansion, with seven additional stub tracks up to 7th Avenue between 32nd and 31st Street.

The Realities

These are the only possibilities for trans-Hudson rail expansion. The NYPS - GCT link has been officially dead for eight years. It is, in a word, a fantasy, only in the minds of a decreasingly few advocates. In summary, it cannot be built, financed, equipped, nor operated. Metro North (MN), with growing ridership, now exceeding the LIRR's, will not allow intrusion in the lower level of GCT, the transitioning of 5 tracks to NJT, nor the compression of rush hour operations on 3 peak-direction Park Avenue tracks into 2 in each direction for "thru-running" since it would force an unacceptable compression of 28% of their peak-direction service. Other than the ability of NJT locomotives to cross the Hell Gate Bridge to the New Haven line, no NJT or MN locomotive or MU car is capable of operating on each other's system due to various power distribution and clearance issues, and most of them are new or are being delivered. There are seven NJT and three MN trunk lines. For any "thru-routing" operation, there are 21 permutations possible. You can recite such end-points all you like, but the odds of any such operation benefiting anyone's desire to travel between two specific locations on opposite sides of the Hudson on a single train range from infinitesimal to none. There is, for all practical purposes, no gain, but a lot of pain to engineer, finance, equip, and operate such an affair, to say nothing of the pedestrian conflicts and chaos that would occur in both Penn Station and Grand Central.

Amtrak paid money to get out of Park Avenue and GCT 20 years ago to consolidate their operations, avoid MN track charges, and reduce Boston-Washington running times – they are not going back, and they are not buying 3rd rail-equipped engines that would also risk gapping at interlockings without the back-up of going on diesel.

Rockland and Orange rail passengers are about 4% of the passengers headed to NYPS on NJT. While they are a consideration, they do not get to determine the optimal solution.

Joe Versaggi

2011 ESPA Working Group Meeting Dates

If you would like to become more active in ESPA, these 'working group' meetings are the perfect opportunity to learn more about the Association and how YOU can make a difference! ALL ESPA members (and other interested persons) are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Bruce Becker, 716-741-6384 or bbecker@esparail.org, for more information or if you are planning to attend a meeting. Advance registration is required!

Saturday, November 19, 2011 Schenectady – Backstage
Pub 12:00n - 4:00pm

Saturday, January 21, 2012 Schenectady – Backstage
Pub 12:00n - 4:00pm

Saturday, March 10, 2012 **2012 Annual Membership Meeting** - Schenectady

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

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 or Senior Citizen (\$12.50 per year)
- Family membership (\$30.00)
- Sustaining membership (\$50.00)
- Patron membership (\$75.00)
- Corporate membership (\$100.00)
- Lifetime membership (\$300.00)

Please make checks/money orders payable to ESPA and mail to ESPA c/o Andrew Cabal, P.O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209.

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 716-759-2315. e-mail: RWLenz@aol.com. Deadline for material for January/February issue is December 31, 2011. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.

THE ESPA EXPRESS
10531 Main Street
Clarence, NY 14031-1684

Forward & Address Correction Requested

Please take a moment to check your mailing label.
Your membership may be due for renewal.
We appreciate your support.

FIRST CLASS
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT #2
CLARENCE, NY