

STEEL WHEELS

PASSENGER RAIL IN CALIFORNIA AND THE WEST

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MAGAZINE OF THE WESTERN PASSENGER TRAIN COALITION

**RAILPAC • ALL ABOARD ARIZONA • PASSENGER RAIL KANSAS • NEW MEXICO RA • MINNARP
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Arizona News

1st QUARTER 2024

PUBLICATION OF THE



RAIL PASSENGER ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA & NEVADA

From the Editor's Desk

By Paul Dyson - RailPAC Editor



Dear reader, today you will notice a new format for Steel Wheels. 2023 saw both significant inflation in printing and distribution costs as well as difficulty in finding a reliable printer that stayed in business. We

believe we have solved the latter problem, and indeed we were very pleased how efficiently the last issue was handled. Now we are trying to tackle the paper cost (and thereby the shipping cost) by using a smaller type face and more columns to put more words on a page, and get the same information out in 12, and no more than 16 pages, instead of the 20 we have been doing. We expect that this will save us enough to be able to continue the quarterly distribution without a significant rise in membership dues. We have held the membership rate steady for many years now in the hope that we don't exclude anyone that wishes to support us. At the same time we are counting on most of you to pay more to keep our work going. Next time you renew, please consider adding \$10 or \$20 or more if you really care about passenger rail in California and Nevada.

On the cover is another fine image from our friend Georg Trub in Switzerland. The train is a NightJet NJ233 sleeper and coach service from Vienna to La Spezia, Italy's number two container port, via Milan and Genoa. The rail line runs through the beautiful and renowned Cinque Terra region and, while still an important route, has been somewhat superseded by the new, high-speed line which runs on a parallel alignment inland. The total trip length is about 550 miles and takes 14 hours and would be the equivalent of a trip from Sacramento to San Diego via Fresno, Bakersfield and Los Angeles, or via the Coast line. NightJet offers multiple types of accommodation including basic coach up to private sleeping compartments.

The other story told here is the well-maintained double track electrified line, elevated above the shoreline with engineered retaining walls and tunnels where needed to avoid the steepest cliffs. The line, known as the Ligurian railway, was opened in 1874, a little before the San Diego line. Landslides delayed construction, and the line was single track until 1971. Electrification was

completed in 1948. By way of contrast, the Los Angeles - San Diego line only began to be improved in the 1980s and double track is still not complete. And as you know, the line has been closed multiple times in the past year and remains closed as I write this. As I have written before, the line was cheaply built and has never received the investment that the two largest cities in California (Numbers 2 and 7 in the nation) deserve.

Perhaps change is coming:

In this issue you will find a paper produced by RailPAC and numerous allied organizations calling for a change to the governance structure of the corridor. The current administration has little power, no resources, scant expertise, and is duplicated in the core segment by Metrolink. It's not working and it needs to change. Hope has arrived in the form of Senator Catherine Blakespear, whose district encompasses southern Orange and northern San Diego counties. The Senator has met with us twice now, and we have explained to her our aims, and she is supported by a number of her colleagues in the Senate and Assembly.

February 7th a delegation from RailPAC (see photo) visit the Capitol offices, and met with Senator Blakespear and called on many officials and their staffs..

Left to right: Doug Kerr, Vice President North, Steve Roberts, President, Senator Blakespear, Brian Yanity, Vice President South, and Paul Dyson, Vice President, Government Affairs.



The Senator told us that legislation would be published later that week.

Here is a summary of the Blakespear Legislation.

SB 1098 has three main elements. It would:

- Direct the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) to create a clear list of prioritized capacity and resiliency projects along the corridor and recommend any changes to state policies.
- Direct the four metropolitan planning organizations in the corridor to create a locally driven plan that creates a clear path forward for management, governance and operations that results in improved services along the corridor. Those organizations are the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments, Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, Southern California Association of Governments and San Diego Association of Governments.
- Clarify the role of the state secretary of transportation to manage and lead stakeholders to support the LOSSAN corridor.
- The legislation is co-authored by Sens. Ben Allen, D-Santa Monica;

Monique Limón, D-Santa Barbara; Josh Newman, D-Fullerton; Tom Umberg, D-Santa Ana; and Assemblymembers Laurie Davies, R-Laguna Niguel; Diane Dixon, R-Newport Beach; and Gregg Hart, D-Santa Barbara.

Needless to say, we wanted to see something that spoke to the urgency of the situation. We also wanted to see mention of regional networks rather than just the LOSSAN corridor, but it will only move forward

with wide political support, and without upsetting existing fiefdoms. We will continue to carry this message to all the relevant Boards and officials.

Do you want to receive email news and updates? info@railpac.org will add you to our list.

We never share personal data.

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YOU can make a difference!

**Rail Passenger Association
of California and Nevada**

*A statewide membership organization
working for the improvement and
expansion of passenger rail service.*

Organized in 1977 by a group of passenger rail supporters, RailPAC has been working for over 45 years to establish a network of rail services that will provide service to and throughout California and Nevada.

**We need your support to improve and expand
passenger rail service in the west!**

Your Membership includes...

- **STEEL WHEELS:** Passenger Rail in California and the West
- Weekly newsletter and periodic email alerts
- Eligibility to attend our annual and regional meetings



Representation and Advocacy

RailPAC presents a strong case to federal, state and local governments for reliable rail services from long-distance trains to commuter operations. Your organization gains strength with a growing membership base and members are invited to review and reflect on proposed changes in budgets, routes and service frequencies.

Cooperative Alliances

RailPAC works closely with other rail organizations and transit advocacy groups.

Volunteer Efforts

Members work with local rail passenger groups including Station Hosts at several Amtrak stations, attend and report on meetings of regional and transit boards and write letters to editors of newspapers. Members also submit personal reports of on-board service levels for distribution in Steel Wheels and the weekly e newsletter.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

about RailPAC and how you can help expand and improve passenger rail, visit our website **RailPAC.org** or fill out and return the form on the back page of this newsletter.

RailPAC.org

Our website includes a complete listing of our current positions, as well as frequent articles and reports from around the state. Visit **RailPAC.org** to learn more about these and other regional passenger rail projects we support.

Social Media

To receive the latest rail news from around the state:

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RAILPAC'S WORK AT-A-GLANCE

RailPAC is working with Amtrak, Caltrans and all agencies involved in achieving the following goals for expanding and extending safe and reliable rail passenger service. We support adequate funding for these services and vigorously promote them.

High Speed Rail

Build the High Speed Rail system together with electrification Caltrain and Metrolink.

Coast Corridor

Reduce travel times. Continue to enhance onboard amenities. Restore connections to Long-Distance trains at Los Angeles Union Station. New stations at Gilroy, Watsonville, Soledad and King City.

Pacific Surfliner Corridor

Campaign for run through tracks at Los Angeles Union Station to improve punctuality and travel times for Amtrak and Metrolink. Extend service to the Coachella and Imperial valleys. Built bypass tunnels at San Clemente and Del Mar.

Sunset Corridor

Introduce daily service via Phoenix.

San Joaquin Corridor

Integrate service with High Speed segment. Extend service north of Sacramento. Add stations at Elk Grove, Marysville, Chico and Redding.

Capitol Corridor

Increase frequency to hourly service between Sacramento and Oakland. Increase frequency of service to San Jose. Extend service to Reno and San Luis Obispo.

Las Vegas

Reestablish service between Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Support the Brightline High Speed Rail Project linking Las Vegas with Southern California

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Organization
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President's Commentary

By Steve Roberts – RailPAC President

After a wait, the Federal/State Partnership and Corridor ID grants for FY22-23 have been awarded. In awarding the Federal/State Partnership

grants the FRA clearly favored projects that were under construction or super ready for construction (final design and pre-construction completed). It was also clear that there was a bias to favor projects that would deliver an operating railroad. Hence the size of the awards, \$3.1 Billion for California and \$3 Billion plus a \$2.5 Billion loan for Brightline West. California High-Speed Rail is focused on completing the Merced to Bakersfield segment and undertaking operations while Brightline West is planning operations by 2028. The other major award was to North Carolina to begin rebuilding the "S" Line (ex-Seaboard RR) shortcut between Petersburg, VA and Raleigh, NC. It follows the same pattern; North Carolina is ready to begin construction. The \$1 Billion award will rebuild eleven miles of rail line into a higher-speed railroad which will allow the extension of North Carolina's Piedmont Service from Raleigh to Wake Forest, NC.

Some impactful Midwest Corridor projects that would seem to have been in the same category did not make the cut for this round. Look for these projects - completion of the Springfield, IL bypass and sidings on the Detroit Line - to be included in future rounds.

Not surprisingly given the depth of staff expertise and prior planning work, all of California's existing and proposed corridors were included in the first round of the Corridor ID awards. The Corridor ID Program is a gateway process of planning requirements for a corridor to enter into the Infrastructure Bill's funding pipeline. Sixty-nine routes, including the Daily Sunset Ltd. were approved.

Two other grants are of note, \$14.9 million for a track, signal and bridge project to increase capacity in the Malta, MT area (where trains 7 and 8 meet and make a station stop) and \$28 million to construct crossovers and signals to address a design constraint at the existing Amtrak Elko station, and some Elko yard track extensions. Both of these projects address chokepoints on the routes where the existing rail capacity is adequate for the freight railroad until the passenger train shows up. What is of note is as far as I can remember

these projects are the first to address issues on the existing Amtrak network that did not involve a line downgrade (Raton Pass) or line abandonment (Devils Lake Subdivision) but are designed to improve the existing service's reliability. Could this be a new strategy from the FRA?

Another recent initiative is Amtrak's long-distance bi-level car order. The Request for Proposals is circulating with responses expected in late May. According to Jim Mathews, CEO & President of RPA, the order is for 700 cars and would replace all of Amtrak's long-distance fleet. Which raises the question how far north in the Northeast Corridor can bi-levels travel and what NE city will become the long-distance transfer hub? The new tunnel being built in Baltimore will clear bi-levels so will it be Philadelphia or even Newark, NJ? This could make for some interesting transcontinental routes – Los Angeles – Dallas – Washington, DC, Seattle – Miami, Emeryville – Boston, etc.

The additional positive news is that the FRA and stakeholders approved Amtrak's alternative accessibility proposal for an "accessible core" - a section of the train (including dining and lounge cars) that is fully accessible. This approval means the continuation of a separate dining and lounge cars instead of at-seat food and beverage service from a central commissary car which a strict interpretation of accessibility requirements would require.

In other equipment news the new Venture cars are entering service on the San Joaquins. While we have issues with the proposed food service bringing these cars into service will relieve some of the pressure on equipment availability and free up a set of California Cars for Surfliner Service to bring back the 13th frequency.

In February I represented RailPAC at the third Working Group meeting of FRA's Long-Distance Route Study. While the second Working Group meeting last summer identified travel segments, the third meeting presented these segments assembled into routes following existing rail lines. The proposed route map is quite comprehensive bringing rail service to virtually all regions of the US. (See FRA website for the map and presentation materials:

<https://fralongdistancerailstudy.org/>
Look under Meeting Materials at the top of the landing page for the presentation.)

Unlike the time constrained "connect the dots" process undertaken in the latter part of 1970 to develop the original Amtrak network, the current Long-Distance Study is quite comprehensive analyzing key markets at a level of detail impossible in 1970 (because of time constraints). The study's scope also includes factors unappreciated in 1970 that were incorporated into the study by the Infrastructure Bill that mandated it. This was clear in the presentation and the proposed route network which prioritizes not only the flow of travelers (all modes) but also looks at the importance of rail service to rural areas, small communities, tribal lands and disadvantaged residents (both as a result of health and income issues). The fourth Working Group presentation will present the estimated market potential by route for all of these factors plus an estimate of the operating and capital costs (passenger related only) for the proposed routes. Required rail line capacity investments by the railroads will not be estimated in this round. That will be done route by stakeholders in the Service Development phase.

When completed, the Long-Distance Study will represent a comprehensive, foundational document rail advocates can use to develop stakeholder support for the next steps; application for a Corridor ID award and the start of the Service Development Plan. What the Long-Distance Study will not be is a service plan that Amtrak will unilaterally undertake. For any of these routes to see service it will take a great deal of effort by all stakeholders along the route working with their Congressional legislators to provide funding for the service.

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It's Not Your Father's Railroad (or Climate)

By Steve Roberts, President RailPAC

Cancellations

Its winter and over the past three months there have been multiple cancellations of Amtrak trains. This has become a frequent pattern over the past few years. However, there is not a simple answer. It is a multi-faceted situation and the juxtaposition of two countervailing positions, one of which is rail advocates expectations.



Rail Advocates Expectations

On the one hand we have the performance goal - the trains should be run. However, this position is the combination of several influences. First, there is the foundational fact that for the rail mode there is an envelope of between 2 and 6 inches of snow, and modest winds, when the rail mode performs better than the air or highway mode. Pivoting from that fact is the 1950's railroad marketing tag lines that the railroads were the "all-weather" mode.

Next comes some "Rose Colored Glasses" the embellishment of this tag line to cover all weather events. I have read several articles covering the 40's and 50's chronicling difficulties the railroads had in operating in severe storms. The highest profile event was the marooning of the City of San Francisco at Donner Summit in 1952.



Southern Pacific from Classic Trains January 2002

Mix all of these together and we end up with high expectations of performance.

Rail Industry Today

Now take these high expectations and add the reality – efficiency focused railroading in 2024.

With system wide Maintenance of Way (MOW) track production units following the seasons instead of MOW teams every 15 to 20 miles, terminals every 500 miles instead of every 100 miles, CTC instead of train order/interlocking operators every 10 miles and a few mobile signal maintainers instead of signal maintainers at every staffed interlocking - the rail industry is simply not as resilient as in the 1950's. And the shift from mechanical systems to more temperature sensitive electronics may also be a factor. Over the last seventy years the focus has been on efficiency not resilience. As part of that efficiency the railroads strategy in dealing with severe storms is to shut down until the storm passes or fleet their trains' 12-hours one direction then 12-hours the other with no overtakes or meets. Neither operational scenario is compatible with a passenger rail operation.

In summary, the rail industry has met both the Wall Street and Congressional goal of staying a private profitable business; it is just not one that can operate in a snowstorm or tropical storm. Adding to the overall policy question is unresolved question being investigated by the Surface Transportation Board, what is the railroads common carrier/public service obligation post Staggers deregulation? Being more resilience should be considered as part of that equation.

Climate and Weather

A factor that has changed over the several decades is the quality of weather forecasting and the severity of storms. Weather forecasts, especially at the 72-hour mark, plus or minus 50-miles, are quite accurate. Operational decisions being made at railroad national control centers means the operational strategy in the face of an impending storm is no longer at the Division level, it is a system wide decision. The flip-side of this knowledge, forecast certainty and severity of storms is a risk-averse bias among decision makers.

Adding to the complexity of decision making is the impact of a warming planet. Storms, both winter and summer, are "heat engines". Warmer oceans and warmer air means more intense storms with higher winds and intense precipitation. Storms now rapidly intensify and become "Bomb Cyclones" with intense precipitation (rain or snow) with Category 1 hurricane force winds. Repeated "thousand-year storms" (storms with a 0.1% historical likelihood in a given year) are becoming

the new normal, just as the climate models have been predicting. The warming Arctic means that the polar vortex, the compact Jetstream encircling the Arctic, is becoming less stable. This instability results in severe frigid weather outbreaks in the continental US. Working and keeping a railroad operating in these intense storms and/or extreme cold outbreaks is challenging if not impossible. All of these factors complicate the operate/cancel decision process. Finally the climate challenge is more than just winter storms, it is also hurricanes, wildfires, floods, landslides and sea level rise; all causing cancellations and threatening the viability of rail service.

Highway Dependency

As was noted above, system wide production units have replaced most local MOW terms. The MOW teams that remain cover hundreds of miles and most importantly are totally highway based. Great for efficiency, but if the Interstate is closed these teams cannot address infrastructure issues. Also sprawl is not just an urban phenomenon; many small cities have spread out to interstate interchanges and beyond. With crew accommodations now located at chain hotels along the Interstates and many local passengers living beyond them, access to the rail station for train crews and passengers in a blizzard becomes problematic. Finally, there is an Achilles Heel, crossing gates. To prevent injuries to motorists and ease repairs these gates are designed to breakaway or rotate if struck. But this makes them susceptible to wind damage. Many railroads remove them as a precaution before hurricanes. But a train must stop and flag through a crossing if the gates are damaged. Needless to say if a storm damages crossing gates over a significant length of the route the railroad effectively is shut down until the gates are reset.

Emergency Declarations, No-Shows and Cancellations

With the accuracy of weather forecasts at the 72-hour mark, more severe storms and concerns about the safety of residents and first-responders, declarations of emergency and no travel advisories by Governors and Mayors are becoming more common. As a result of these declarations and access issues the rate of passenger no-shows and cancellations increases reducing train load factors.

One key consideration is that when a train is canceled, the result is the equipment and crews are all in the correct position to restart

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On the Horizon – Brightline Las Vegas – Southern California

By Brian Yanity VP South RailPAC

With service successfully underway from Miami to Orlando and the extension to Tampa in the planning stages, Brightline is turning its attention to the Las Vegas – Southern California route. Planning, design, regulatory approvals and pre-construction work is completed and the project is ready to begin. High speed rail service is truly on the horizon. With construction expected to begin in 2024, service is expected to start in 2027.

Brightline West is a subsidiary of Brightline Holdings, backed by Fortress Investment Group. The project is funded from a mix of public and private sources. It is the successor to several prior private sector attempts over the past few decades to start a high speed rail line between Las Vegas and Southern California. Thankfully this time, all indications are that Brightline West is finally the real thing.

With a total cost of more than \$12 billion, in December 2023 Brightline West was awarded a \$3 billion Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) grant that it applied for in partnership with the Nevada Department of Transportation. The additional \$9 billion required would be paid by private capital aided by tax-exempt private activity bond allocations from the state governments of Nevada and California. The U.S. DOT announced the approval of \$2.5 billion of private activity bond authority in January 2024, adding to a prior allocation of \$1 billion in 2020 for the project. The FRA also awarded a \$25 million RAISE grant to San Bernardino County Transportation Authority in June 2023 for construction of Brightline West stations in Victor Valley and Hesperia. Field investigation work along the I-15 right-of-way in Nevada began in January 2024. An anticipated 11,000 workers will need to be hired to build the project over the next three years.

Southern California to Las Vegas is an attractive travel market with huge potential



The soon-to-be right-of-way for Brightline West tracks: Interstate 15 median, looking south towards Victorville from Dale Evans Parkway overpass, January 24, 2024 (photo by author)

current and future growth. Clark County, Nevada now has a population of 2.2 million people. Las Vegas could even be considered the largest metro area in the U.S. without intercity passenger rail service (as the Phoenix metro area is technically served by the Maricopa Sunset Limited station). In addition to heavy inbound tourist traffic, there are thousands of Las Vegas Valley residents travelling each day to Southern California, for all kinds of reasons. There is much traffic between Las Vegas and LA County, but also the Inland Empire, Orange County, and San Diego. Between Greyhound and FlixBus, there are over 20 daily roundtrip buses between LA and Las Vegas. Numerous other scheduled and chartered bus and van services exist. Traffic volume on Interstate 15 on the California/Nevada border at Primm is typically over 50,000 vehicles per day. This number often skyrockets to well over 100,000 vehicles on Fridays, Sundays, holiday weekends and during large special events in Las Vegas. In all, over 50 million people travel between Las Vegas and Southern California annually, or an average of about 130,000 per day. At least 100,000 of these travelers are on Interstate 15 in private vehicles, buses or vans. High speed crashes

and traffic fatalities are all too common. On Sunday nights, I-15 southbound backs up for miles as Southern Californians head home after a weekend in Las Vegas, particularly around the state line and the California passes of Mountain Pass, Halloran Summit and Cajon. Most people's escape from Las Vegas down Interstate 15 into the vast desert expanse is less like the wide-open highway than rush hour on I-405 over Sepulveda Pass. The absurdity of being stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic in the middle of the Mojave Desert wilderness, many miles from the nearest town, has long been a 'Vegas weekend' cliché.

Southern California-Las Vegas is also one of the nation's busiest domestic air travel corridors. On average more than 10,000 people fly each day between Las Vegas and Southern California, as shown in the table below:

| Las Vegas Harry Reid International Airport (LAS) | | |
|---|------------------|---------------|
| Passengers travelling to/from Southern California | | |
| (November 2022-October 2023 FAA statistics): | | |
| | | ~ per day |
| Los Angeles International (LAX) | 1,322,000 | 3,620 |
| San Diego (SAN) | 783,000 | 2,150 |
| Orange County (SNA) | 568,000 | 1,560 |
| Burbank (BUR) | 427,000 | 1,170 |
| Ontario (ONT) | 271,000 | 740 |
| Long Beach (LGB) | 220,000 | 600 |
| Santa Barbara (SBA) | 86,000 | 240 |
| Palm Springs (PSP) | 76,000 | 210 |
| | | |
| Total Southern California | 3,753,000 | 10,280 |

Brightline West will be what many consider the first true high speed train in the Americas, electrified with 25 kV overhead wire. With an overall average speed of 100 miles per hour including two intermediate stops, top speeds will approach 200 mph. The planned trip time is 2 hours and 10 minutes to travel the 218 miles from Rancho Cucamonga to Las Vegas,

On the Horizon – Brightline West

with stops in Victor Valley (Apple Valley) and Hesperia. The driving time between these two locations is at minimum 3 hours and 15 minutes without traffic, but often takes much longer than this due to congestion on I-15. Brightline West expects to serve up to 11 million one-way passengers annually, or over 30,000 per day. Hourly frequency is planned. The Rancho Cucamonga station will be constructed adjacent to the existing Metrolink Station on the San Bernardino Line, enabling passengers to walk down the stairs/take the elevator from Brightline to Metrolink trains. Metrolink's busiest and most frequent line, it connects Los Angeles Union Station to San Bernardino-Downtown, with a planned direct through-service extension to Redlands. Brightline West has been working with Metrolink on schedule coordination and integrated ticketing.

The Brightline West Las Vegas station will be located on Las Vegas Boulevard at the south end of the Las Vegas Strip, a couple miles south of the airport. Also called the Brightline Ranch, the company plans commercial development on the property around the station. The station location and design has been criticized as being too-car centric, with no local transit connections in the plans

so far announced. It also does not appear that there will be any convenient pedestrian connections to anywhere off of the Brightline Ranch. Hopefully these transit and pedestrian deficiencies can be remedied in the future. The 2021 Nevada State Rail Plan proposed a five-mile extension of the Las Vegas Monorail from the MGM Grand to the Brightline Ranch.

The Brightline West track will be in the Interstate 15 right-of-way almost the whole way between Rancho Cucamonga and the south Las Vegas Strip. The corridor will be leased from Caltrans and Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT). Devore Heights is the northernmost part of the city of San Bernardino, about 15 miles on Brightline West's route from the planned terminus station next to Metrolink's existing Rancho Cucamonga station. The Devore area, at the base of the San Bernardino Mountains below Cajon Pass, is where the BNSF and UP mainlines, Brightline West/I-15 and I-215 intersect. Between Devore, California and the Brightline West station in Enterprise, Nevada on the southern reaches of the Las Vegas Strip, the I-15 route of Brightline West (205 miles) is about 15% shorter in length than the existing BNSF/UP rail route of 240 miles ¹

However, the Brightline West route has much steeper grades. Interstate 15 grades can be as steep as 6% at Cajon Summit, Halloran Summit and Mountain Pass, and are 4% to 5% at multiple places along the route. Brightline West track grades will not be much gentler than the freeway. These allegedly will be the steepest grades ever attempted by high speed trains anywhere in the world. For the track grades purported to be 5%-6%, Brightline West will use lightweight, fast electric multiple unit (EMU) trainsets with high power-to-weight ratio and special braking systems. By contrast, both the BNSF Cajon Subdivision (Cajon Pass) and the UP Cima Subdivision (Cima Hill) have comparatively gentle ruling grades of 2.2%.

This is a key development for Southern California and Nevada transportation, a clear demonstration of the potential of high-speed rail. Stay tuned!

¹ On the BNSF Cajon and Needles subdivisions between CP Keenbrook in Devore and Daggett Junction (Yermo) the track length is about 78 miles, and from there to south Las Vegas Strip on the UPRR Cima Subdivision is about 162 miles.

It's Not Your Father's Railroad (or Climate)

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service as soon as the storm abates. This is compared to operating through the storm which then results in a multi-day effort to stabilize and relaunch the service after a series of storm driven delays. So proactively cancelling a departure with a quick service relaunch actually disrupts the travels of fewer passengers.

So what is the strategy moving forward? First, there is also the value question. One of the key attributes of long-distance rail service is access for rural areas where public transportation is limited. But if the train does not operate when rural travelers need service (winter storms) what is its value?

As rail advocates discuss the attributes of rail service there also should be a discussion of resiliency. Some discussion points:

- What are the decision factors involving in cancellations and are there metrics (i.e. storm intensity levels) that lead to those decisions?
- What is the public service/common carrier obligation of the freight railroads to keep their operations underway, accommodate passenger trains, during various levels of winter weather?
- Is Amtrak's winter resiliency impacted by its maintenance strategies and by issues at its Chicago maintenance facility?
- Are there targeted investment and operational strategies (both for Amtrak and the freight railroads) that would improve the current resiliency and reduce the number of cancellations?
- Can a case be made to Congress (and Wall Street for the freight railroads) that investments in weather resiliency improvements can have a substantial public benefit and a positive revenue impact?

Don't forget to check your subscription expiration date on the mailing label and renew your membership if it is due.

Thank you for your continued support for RailPAC and passenger rail.

WANTED: Photographers for Steel Wheels

If you have a collection of hi-res jpeg photos, especially of passenger trains in California, or enjoy taking them, contact the Editor,

WE NEED YOU!

pdyson@railpac.org.



Joint Statement from Southern California Pro Rail Groups - The Need For Reform

LOSSAN, SCRRRA, NCTD, RailPAC, Streets For All, Californians for Electric Rail, NRDC, Surfrider Foundation, Circulate San Diego, Move LA, Strongtown Santa Barbara, The Transit Coalition, Ride SD, RISE

Southern California passenger rail is in trouble. Climate change threatens the Amtrak Surfliner, whose coastal tracks in Del Mar and San Clemente are nearly falling into the ocean, causing months-long service cancellations. Metrolink and Coaster commuter services are seeing low ridership recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic because their schedules do not accommodate convenient travel outside a 9-to-5 workday. Stations lack local transit connections, fares are not well integrated, and trains are often delayed due to equipment issues and freight train traffic; all this making service difficult to access, and unreliable.

However, there is an opportunity for Southern California to have one of the best passenger rail networks in the country if adequate investments are made to run trains frequently and reliably all day. The Los Angeles to San Diego corridor has some of the strongest market potential for intercity rail in the United States. Reducing travel times between those cities could make trains the premiere travel option (and reduce freeway traffic) and expanded service north of Los Angeles could improve connectivity with Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo.

To further realize this potential, existing commuter rail run by Metrolink and North County Transit District (NCTD) must become frequent "regional" rail and connect seamlessly to intercity services like the Surfliner, with trains coming at least every 15 minutes. Slow and polluting diesel locomotives should be replaced with electric trains powered by overhead catenary wires, a proven solution for achieving zero-emissions operation, unlike other proposed methods.

There are dozens of proposed projects in the works that could reduce travel times, save trackage from erosion, and improve reliability.



Regional Passenger Rail in Southern California

However, responsible agencies have been slow to deliver. Partially, this is due to a lack of an overarching regional vision but in many cases, it is because of fractured infrastructure ownership between several county agencies. In some cases, high-profile rapid transit projects or freeway expansion projects have been the main focus of these agencies, taking away resources from regional rail. The Link Union Station project, which would provide additional capacity and several minutes of time savings by constructing run-through tracks (think LA's Regional Connector but for regional rail), has been stalled for years as it is a highly complex project that LA Metro has not prioritized. In other cases, agencies have been hypersensitive to local opposition. Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) Serra Siding Extension project would allow more frequent trains through a bottleneck near San Clemente and Dana Point, but it has been stalled due to hyperlocal complaints about the project. The same happened to LA Metro's Rayermer to Bernson Double Track project, which would have increased Surfliner and Metrolink service north of Los Angeles by providing much-needed capacity between Chatsworth and Van Nuys. Clearly, the hyper-local focus of the current governance has been a failure. Counties take care of counties, with little regional focus. Money that flows into counties stays there, and they are reluctant to fund regional projects, especially if the physical infrastructure is in another county, regardless of the benefits. Going forward, there is little confidence that the current governance can deliver success, especially given the challenges related to the necessity of tunnels in San Clemente and Del Mar.

Recommendations – The Organization

Ideally, there would be one major agency for all intercity and regional rail in Southern California, with control over its own

infrastructure, ample funding for frequent operations, and permanent staff focused on improvement projects. The goals of the organization should be to provide the highest quality service and highest ridership regional rail service for the greater Southern California region.

Recommendations – The Board

The Board needs to be independent and operate at arm's length from the political bodies that appoint Board Members to assure a regional perspective and isolation from the hyper-local pressure that stalls projects of regional importance. It is equally important for the board to consist of a mix of those appointed for their history of public service and those with the necessary skills to oversee the activities of the new agency's staff. Board membership should be diverse with political appointees serving alongside those with professional expertise in management, finance, labor relations, transportation, etc. In addition, there should be Board Members representing customers and labor.

Recommendations – Funding

Existing funding sources (local, state, and federal) must continue to flow and ideally should be bolstered to the regional agency. To fulfill the long-term opportunity of the corridor, developing a dedicated region-wide funding stream for ongoing capital projects and operations funding should be a priority. Moreover, this agency should be able to levy taxes and issue bonds for the sake of capital and operational costs.

Recommendations – Structure

The new agency could be a new state agency led by a single county with other counties represented on the state agency's board. Alternatively, it could be a stand-alone Joint Powers Authority with all county assets owned collectively. Another option would be to organize the agency like a terminal railroad with each county owning shares in the railroad. Regardless of specific structure, we caution against marble layer cake governance with too many veto actors whose incentives are often hyper-local rather than regional and in the best interests of rail governance.

Recommendations – Management, Operations and Capital Projects

The new Southern California Regional Rail entity should be organized solely as a railroad, independent of member counties and large enough to support a robust management team responsible for a wide range of management and oversight. Importantly, the new entity needs to develop and invest in an extensive and permanent staff, giving it a high level of expertise for both operations and capital projects reflective of its long-term goals. The management and board would have direct control over its capital budget, project priorities, and construction. The entity could directly operate all or some of its trains or franchise out all or some of its



operations. Whatever the preference, it will have some operating agreements with other rail companies including Amtrak, BNSF, Union Pacific, CAHSRA, and freight shortlines.

Recommendations – Right-of-Way and Track

Because of the legal complexities, the reality is that some track and right-of-way is owned by counties and freight railroads. Operating agreements with the freight railroads will continue, however county-owned properties could be held collectively within the new entity. The only exception might be Los Angeles Union Station, which because of its acquisition history and development potential for LA Metro, is very complex. A lease of the assets required for the agency's operations may be an option. This would ensure that the Southern California Regional operator has rights to improve right of way with its capital projects, and increase service levels, without a county veto.

Electrification with overhead catenary, including on mainlines owned by Class I railroads, needs to be championed by regional governments or the new rail authority. Not only will it reduce the harmful effects of diesel pollution on citizens, electrification infrastructure can be shared by both passenger and freight trains. Passenger ridership has proven around the world to greatly increase following electrification, due to increased speed, frequency (in part due to lower operation and maintenance costs), reliability, and passenger comfort from less noise and no smoke.

Different models of ownership (such as publicly-owned electrification infrastructure over tracks that are privately-owned per the LA-Fullerton electrification proposed by California High Speed Rail on the BNSF-owned section of LOSSAN) and capital project financing need to be explored. Reducing the financial/operational risks and upfront costs for freight railroads with publicly-backed financing (grants, loans, bonds, etc.) will expedite much-needed regional rail electrification.

In addition to the benefits of electrification and increased passenger train frequency, new types of freight service (short & medium-haul, light “express” freight), which the Class Is have not pursued in favor of long-haul

business, should be advanced in the public interest of reduced less truck traffic on roads.

The substantial amount of public direct investment in freight rail track capacity already (on both public and privately owned track, such as port-area rail projects and adding a third track on the BNSF mainline through Hesperia) has provided substantial public benefits for Southern California.

Conclusion:

Governance that can fulfill the opportunity to build a world-class rail service throughout the Southern California region is essential. This high-capacity electrified rail network would offer travel times, frequencies, fares, and connections that would enable the rail service to be an attractive alternative to driving. It would be the greener and more cost-effective alternative to freeway expansions.

With capacity for higher frequencies, services could be offered to more varied market segments – frequent local trains for short-distance trips and economy travel, and limited stop trains for longer distance trips and premium travelers. These could still be

branded as separate services like Amtrak and Metrolink, but integrate seamlessly with clock face schedules that enable timed transfers at major hub stations.

By leveraging California's Integrated Ticketing Project, the agency would offer one-stop information, ticketing and payment portals. The new fare structure would create through fares over multiple connections with no tickets– just tap a credit card or use TAP/ PRONTO to board. Like other consumer loyalty programs, customers would be rewarded for the number of trips they take on the network. Travel loyalty discounts for travel between any city pair would replace the steep upfront cost of multiple-ride tickets.

In addition to providing expanded quality rail passenger service, the world class rail line would provide capacity for the expansion of traffic to/from the ports of San Diego and Hueneme as well as northern Mexico with its growing manufacturing activity.

Appendix

List of Critical Capital Projects

Regardless of governance structure, it is critical that key infrastructure projects are delivered to help improve service by adding capacity and reducing train travel times. The following is a list of critical projects for Southern California regional rail and their associated benefits:

| Project | Status | Benefit |
|--|--|---|
| Chatsworth (Bernson) to Van Nuys (Raymer) Double Track | Canceled | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows Metrolink service every 30 minutes between Los Angeles and Chatsworth |
| Serra Siding Extension | On Hold | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows service every 30 minutes (Amtrak and Metrolink combined) through the San Clemente bottleneck |
| Link Union Station | Awaiting pre-construction, funding not secured | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adds network capacity for additional frequency at LA Union Station, reduces Surfliner travel times Prepares the station for California High-Speed Rail |
| Del Mar Tunnel | Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protects tracks from coastal erosion Provides additional double track for improved service frequencies and reliability for Amtrak/Coaster |
| San Clemente Tunnel | Not started | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bypasses coastal tracks in San Clemente which are threatened by erosion Provides additional double track for improved service frequencies and reliability for Amtrak/Metrolink |
| Sun Valley (Brighton) to Sylmar (Roxford) Double-Track | Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows Metrolink service every 30 minutes between Los Angeles and Santa Clarita |
| Fullerton Junction | Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greatly increases overall train capacity and reliability on LOSSAN and BNSF San Bernardino Subdivision (including Metrolink 91 line to Riverside County), by adding 4th track through Fullerton and 3rd track east from existing Fullerton Junction, and improved crossover movements to minimize train interference. |

Amtrak and the Long Distance Trains

James Tilley, President of the Aurora Group, has written to Amtrak Board Chair Anthony Coscia, and his letter is reproduced here in full. It contains valuable data on the long distance car fleet and excellent ideas for action to alleviate the chronic shortage of cars and consequent cancellations.

RE: Long Distance Fleet Procurement

Dear Mr. Coscia:

I address this letter to you because, in your continuing role as a member of the Amtrak Board, you are best positioned to respond. I am the President of the Florida Coalition of Rail Passengers and Co-chair of TheAuroraGroup. Both organizations advocate on behalf of America's travelers and rail passengers. I am a professional railroader. I have held the inter-disciplinary positions of Vice President-Car Management at Genesee & Wyoming, Vice President-Sales & Marketing at Bombardier Capital Rail, and Assistant Treasurer at CSX Transportation responsible for the financing of much of the CSX fleet.

OUR QUESTION

How does Amtrak expect to maintain its long-distance services into the future? In the past six years, Amtrak has allowed its long-distance fleet to shrink even though it will be years before Amtrak can obtain new equipment. Does Amtrak have a plan to bridge the period between today and the time new equipment arrives? If one exists, we urge the Board to make that plan publicly available. All of your stakeholders – including Congress, taxpayers and your passengers – deserve to know what it is. If one does not exist, the Amtrak Board should require one. Quickly.

THE SITUATION

In October 2018, Amtrak had 713 active cars in its long-distance fleet. By October 2023 the number dropped to 658 cars, a 7.7% decrease. By contrast, during the same period, the inactive fleet grew from 33 to 107 cars, a 224% increase. This ongoing erosion of the long-distance fleet has already forced Amtrak to reduce capacity on its long-distance trains. Without immediate corrective action, the equipment shortage will only grow, likely forcing Amtrak, in the not-too-distant future, to eliminate daily service or to eliminate entire routes. Or both. The cosmetic “refresh” being done on this equipment is wholly inadequate to ensure its longevity.

LEAD TIMES PROBABLY LONGER THAN EXPECTED

The RFP for new long-distance equipment

that Amtrak issued in December 2023 is so complex that the rail car manufacturers have already requested an extension beyond the mid-May “close date.” It suggests that Amtrak's goal is to re-invent the entire concept of long-distance passenger trains without balancing the longer lead time required against the immediate need for new equipment at reasonable cost. It specifies not only a large number of different car types but also outlines, in great specificity, requirements for such details as window coverings and luggage racks. To illustrate, Appendix D, Mechanical Department Specification is 1,379 pages; Exhibit F-1, Product Feature Sheets, is 461 pages; Exhibit F, the Customer Experience Vision Part 2, exceeds 150 pages. Past experience – the Acela procurement from Alstom, the Mid-west Venture car procurement from Siemens and the Viewliner procurement from CAF – says Amtrak should anticipate this procurement also taking far longer than expected. Prudent management should have contingency plans that ensure continued operation of the long-distance network if such delays materialize. Does Amtrak have any?

CONTINGENCY OPTIONS

- The first and likely fastest and most economical option would be to remanufacture the existing fleet. Chief Executive Officer Stephen Gardner says the lack of replacement parts precludes this possibility. Recent history at our Canadian neighbor, however, suggests otherwise. VIA Rail Canada has remanufactured rail cars (some discarded by Amtrak) that were built in the 1950's and remain in service today. The privately operated Rocky Mountaineer is competing with Amtrak west of Denver utilizing Canadian railcars built in the 1960s and remanufactured to extend their service lives. With this experience in mind, Mr. Gardner must acknowledge that remanufacturing existing cars would update many, if not most, of their life expired components. This approach would even make car shells that have been stripped of parts to repair other cars eligible for remanufacture. By utilizing Beech Grove as a remanufacturing hub, Amtrak would satisfy Buy-America requirements. Amtrak's labor agreements also permit outsourcing, so some overhauls and brake tests could be performed at other Amtrak locations or by other shops. Alstom (which

is constructing the 28 Avelia Liberty trainsets for the Northeast Corridor), for example, has remanufactured bilevels at Mare Island, CA.

- A second option would be to utilize the Viewliner shell (for which Amtrak owns the rights) as a platform for updated designs of long-distance single-level sleepers, coaches, lounge and dining cars.
- A third option would be to repurpose for long-distance service some of the Airo cars that Siemens is currently building for short-distance routes.
- A fourth option would be to issue a supplemental – and less prescriptive – RFP that would incentivize suppliers to offer less customized, more off-the-shelf designs that they could deliver more quickly and at lower cost.
- A fifth option would be to procure equipment from overseas. VIA Rail Canada sourced long-distance equipment from Europe 20 years ago, modifying it to comply with North American railcar standards. Amtrak similarly purchased and deployed train sets from France. Amtrak also imported various high-speed trains from Europe for demonstration service in the northeast. If necessary, Amtrak could seek emergency waivers from specific provisions of the Buy-America or the Americans with Disabilities acts.

CONCLUSION

Amtrak first identified the need for new long-distance equipment in its 2010 Fleet Plan yet, 14 years later, the procurement still isn't off the drawing board. Time is no longer on our side. Corrective action today is necessary to prevent collapse of National Network service tomorrow.

We hope that the information and ideas we have offered will benefit America's Railroad as its leadership works to serve the mobility needs of the travelling public throughout all of America.

Thank you for considering our letter. We look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,
p.p. George L. Chilson
James M. Tilley

From the Rear Platform

By Paul Dyson, Editor



California and the landslips at San Clemente causing the annulment of Surfliner service we have neglected events in northern California. Caltrain will soon be going electric, the San Joaquins have a set of new rolling stock with more on the way, while SMART seems set to extend further north toward the eventual goal of Cloverdale. Meanwhile there is a robust debate about governance that reflects our thoughts about southern California on page 8. It seems to me that it is entirely logical for BART and Caltrain to merge (at least as it interfaces with the public) into a single system. The passenger doesn't care that the tracks are different gauge and the electric power supply is delivered in different ways. We already have a BART extension using

diesel multiple units, a third technology. No doubt there are funding issues, not to mention career prospects for some individuals and the desire of politicians to have their own Lionel set. We say, put the passenger first, unify and market the total service and rebuild patronage and put personalities and fiefdoms aside.

Reading through the agendas of the most recent LOSSAN and SCRRA (Metrolink) board meetings I was struck by an item about funding for repairs at San Clemente. LOSSAN had applied for **\$9.2 Million** STIP (State Transportation Improvement Program) to help pay for the emergency retaining wall. So far so good. At the Metrolink Board approval was sought to receive **\$8.9 million** from LOSSAN (administered by OCTA) to do the work. So, what happened to **\$300,000?** This is but one example of how local government operates. Every time grants are awarded and money distributed there is some "friction". One administrative body takes a cut before passing the funds along to the next organization. And the more levels of bureaucracy, the less money that actually finds its way to building double track or running trains. Food for thought.

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) continues its love affair with hydrogen propulsion by trying to pretend that it is equal in global application to Overhead Contact. This is of course deliberately misleading as OCS is clearly the global standard for rail propulsion, both passenger and freight. How anyone can seriously promote the conversion of fossil fuels, or even solar power, not to mention huge quantities of very clean water, into hydrogen, and then convert it back into electricity for energy efficiency of about 30%, is beyond my comprehension. Important decisions are being made by a CARB based on at best distorted data, if not outright falsehoods. SCRRA will soon be making a decision on whether to add more hydrogen units to their fleet, possibly for the Antelope Valley line. We continue to support Electrolink South, our proposal for OCS electrification from Chatsworth to San Bernardino and Santa Clarita to Laguna Niguel. Part of this route will be electrified for High-Speed Rail, and Brightline will bring electrification to Rancho Cucamonga, so it makes sense to build out a full network rather than piecemeal projects. The debate continues.

Arizona News –

Todd Liebman, President, All Aboard Arizona

We are close to having modern passenger rail in Arizona and powerful opponents are scared. They're terrified. That's why the man carrying water for them, Senator Jake Hoffman, has tacked on amendments to Arizona Senate Bill 1184, the reauthorization of the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) that would kill the progress we've made and set us back years. We must work to ensure the Hoffman Amendments to SB 1184 end up in the trash can where they belong.

It is sunrise for passenger rail in Arizona. Arizona has been selected for Phase One of the Corridor ID Program for the Sun Corridor between Tucson and Phoenix. This means we're ahead of all the corridors that did not get selected. The Sun Corridor is an affordable project that will mean tremendous mobility and economic development for the fastest growing region in the country.

The news for long distance service is extraordinary. In early February, I attended the FRA's Long Distance Passenger Rail Study Working Group for the Southwest in Sacramento. The proposed route improvements would link most of the state of Arizona by passenger rail. A new long-distance train would run from Dallas/Fort Worth-Midland-El Paso-Tucson-Phoenix-Barstow-Bakersfield and the Bay Area. This

new train would run west of Phoenix through Wickenburg. Another new long-distance train would originate in Phoenix and run north to the BNSF main serving Flagstaff-Amarillo-Wichita-Kansas City-Omaha-Sioux Falls and Minneapolis/St Paul. I asked about the Sunset Limited and was told it's a given that it will return to Phoenix. Under the proposed plan, Phoenix becomes the rail hub of the Southwest with corridor service and long-distance routes radiating in four directions.

But Hoffman would rather see Arizona taxpayer's federal tax money sent to other states. This would leave Arizona sucking on exhaust fumes while other states get modern passenger rail. That's why it's so important to defeat "Tailpipe Hoffman's" amendments and keep Arizona on track.

The good news is that passenger rail has strong bipartisan support. Representative David Cook (R-Globe) wrote a glowing opinion piece advocating for passenger rail. Likewise, Mayor James Giles of Mesa, a Republican, is also a strong supporter of passenger rail. Governor Hobbs, Mayor Gallego of Phoenix and Mayor Romero of Tucson are likewise strong supporters. We have far more friends than enemies. Write your legislators and tell them you want passenger rail and ask them to defeat the Hoffman amendments to SB 1184. Please

also don't forget to thank our friends in both parties.

Mark your calendar for National Train Day, May 11, 2024 in Tucson. We're planning a big event. Check the All Aboard Arizona website for updates as plans unfold. Thank you always for your help and support.



Sunset Limited departs Benson, AZ - Todd Liebman

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