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

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 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.

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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 for Caltrain and Metrolink.

Coast Corridor
Reduce travel times. Continue to enhance onboard amenities. Restore connections to Long-Distance trains at Los Angeles Union Station. Reestablish the Coast Daylight between Los Angeles and San Francisco. New stations at Glendora, 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.

Sunset Corridor
Introduce daily service and reestablish service to Florida.

San Joaquin Corridor
Increase service to and from Sacramento as well as a new station in Elk Grove. Extend daytime and overnight service to Los Angeles.

Capitol Corridor
Increase frequency to hourly service between Sacramento and Oakland. Increase frequency of service to San Jose. Extend service to Reno and Redding and Salinas.

Las Vegas
Reestablish service between Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

RailPAC is a 501c3 Organization therefore all donations are tax deductible.
President’s Commentary

The Altamont Route – Obsolete railroad needs to be replaced.

The cover story concerns my visit to Stockton in early January. After attending the Caltrain Board meeting in San Carlos I took Caltrain to San Jose and Altamont Commuter Express to Stockton. I’ll leave my comments on San Jose’s Diridon station for another day. Suffice it to say that while Caltrain is the largest user, there is no excuse for the lack of information and signs about the other trains, most particularly the ACE. By the time I had ascertained which track it used I was beginning to assume that it must be a CIA offshoot, so secretive are its operations.

The ride from San Jose to Stockton is way too long for the seating of a Bombardier commuter car. It was informative to see that the real market for the train is from the Great America stop, much less so from San Jose and Santa Clara. Upon leaving the suburbs we start the climb through Niles Canyon, and seemingly go back in time almost a hundred years. Like the Antelope Valley line in the south, the Altamont route is from a bygone age. We crawl up and over two ranges of hills through pleasant scenery enhanced by wind turbines and occasional views of the near stationary freeway traffic. The sole reason the train is patronized is that the freeway alternative is as bad or worse, not that the train represents a modern, speedy alternative that allows the commuters more time with their families. If you cannot afford to live in Silicon Valley, and especially if your employer helps with the train fare, then ACE is the least bad alternative for those that choose to live in Tracy, Pleasanton, and surrounding districts.

The next morning I went to the meeting of the Board of the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission (“SJRRC”), the overseer of the ACE service. That was a disheartening experience. Consider first of all that the ACE service was mooted in 1989, and finally delivered in 1998, with two trains each way per day. Here we are almost twenty years later with four trains each way per day. That’s breathtaking progress. At the meeting one of the representatives from Alameda County proclaimed that he had gotten funds for two, yes two, new locomotives from the California Air Resources Board! “Free” money from another government agency, a great accomplishment. Much of the meeting was taken up by arguments about voting rules and by the appointment of a representative to a newly formed rail board with overlapping objectives and no funds to implement them.

Given the size of the market, the tens of thousands who now or soon will be traveling in this corridor, the SJRRC should be working on how to run four trains per hour, not four trains per day. Yet there is not, and never will be, the energy or initiative coming from this Board to deliver what is really needed, a new electrified railroad that will cut journey times by a third or more and provide the kind of capacity that the region needs. Indeed, I don’t see any of the Joint Powers Authorities that have been formed over the past two decades doing anything more than inch the ball forward. We were promised that local control would be more effective than the State Division of Rail. Yet what have they delivered? We have seen only marginal additions to service on the Capitol Corridor, San Joaquins and Surfliner, but at the same time stops have been added that increase journey time, worsen on time performance, and generally make the journey less competitive for the longer distance traveler. We are beginning to see the erosion of the common fare structure, giving way to individual branding exercises by the individual agencies. Whatever the State Rail Plan might say, the trend is against an integrated State network, thanks to local control.

I’m pleased to note that the Train Riders Association of California (“TRAC”) has similar views to RailPAC on this issue and I hope that we’ll be able to collaborate on this, and other issues, in the coming year.

Coast Route Mudslides at Montecito

The other cover story is of course the devastating mudslides at Montecito on January 9. Both the 101 freeway and the adjacent Union Pacific Coast line were closed, covered in mud and debris. However, Union Pacific mobilized and the tracks were open by Thursday 11th and the Surfliner and Coast Starlight resumed service. I spent much of Thursday trying to “encourage” members of the Metrolink Board and other local officials to attempt to use the three 5-car trains that are parked over the weekend at East Ventura. Even though there are route knowledge issues it seemed to me that there ought to be a way for Metrolink to help. Did anyone ask Union Pacific to provide engineers? UP diverted its through freights to the Valley line so there may have been UP crews available. About 20,000 people a day commute between Oxnard and Santa Barbara.

Meanwhile David Kutrosky and the folks on the state intercity corridors did what they could with the limited resources available. Our cover picture shows the Coast Starlight bringing eight cars and three locomotives to supplement the Surfliner consists, at the expense of their own patrons. Kudos to Kutrosky and crew, and to Jennifer Bergener and the Surfliner. As for Metrolink? Well I don’t have all the facts, but I have to wonder whether a real effort was made. Here was a unique opportunity for public agencies to respond to an emergency, and gain some much needed positive publicity.

Their efforts were not helped by the failure of Santa Barbara County to improve the rail infrastructure by adding at least one siding. That can has been kicked down the road in spite of the “Lane and a Train” measure passed in 2008. So even if more trains were available, capacity is limited. Roads are built, trains are studied. Overall an A grade to Union Pacific and the corridor agencies, but an F for those responsible for the sad, single track, under capacity train service we have in so many places in California in 2018.
Bruce Jenkins
One of the reasons for my northern California trip was to have a lunch and presentation for Bruce Jenkins. Bruce has just retired from the RailPAC Board after nearly two decades of service. A Silicon Valley resident and retired aerospace engineer, Bruce has been our eyes and ears on the peninsula. Together with the late Art Lloyd, Bruce worked tirelessly to bring about the electrification of Caltrain and promoted the High Speed Rail project. We presented Bruce with a plaque with a picture of one of the Stadler emu trains. Thank you, Bruce, for all you have done for passenger rail.

High Speed Rail - CHSRA appoints Brian Kelly CEO
Mr. Kelly was previously Secretary of CALSTA, the State transportation agency. He is grabbing a falling knife at the California High Speed Rail Authority. The costs of land acquisition and utility relocation are way above budget, and falling behind in buying right of way has triggered delay penalty payments to contractors. As I have written here before, the absolute priority should be to get a train service started. Given the start on Caltrain electrification, and construction in the San Joaquin Valley, the logical target is Fresno-San Jose-San Francisco. Yes, it’s much diminished from where we hoped to be in 2018. Southern California may squawk about lack of expenditure (although they have done little to support the project). But it will demonstrate the technology, relieve Silicon Valley’s housing problems and transform Fresno into what could be a second center for our technology industries. We wish Mr. Kelly success in his new role.

New Passenger Cars for the State Intercity Corridors
This fiasco continues. By some sleight of hand Nippon Sharyo is somehow subcontracting the building of new cars for the State Rail programs to Siemens. Unfortunately, Siemens does not, and will not build American bi-level passenger cars. They have recently built single level passenger cars for the new “Brightline” service in Florida, but these are designed for high level platforms. Some of you will remember the controversy about the “Comet” cars assigned to California which were also designed for high level platforms. These cars cause delays in boarding from low level platforms. You may also remember the solution I promulgated at the time, viz. to run mixed consists with Bombardier commuter cars with low level boarding. Apparently my idea was scotched by the lack of interagency cooperation. Well, for what it’s worth I’ll float the idea again. Even if some new bi-level “commuter” cars have to be ordered it’s still a good solution.

Los Angeles Union Station
We were so close…. Back in 2005 Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (“Metro”) had an EIR cleared project to build a straightforward operationally oriented set of through tracks at Los Angeles Union Station (“LAUS”). Lacking in vision and imagination, unable to comprehend the significance of the idea for regional mobility, Metro let the project die for want of money and political support. Now, Metro has revived the idea, except that the new concept is to completely rebuild the operational end of the station, raise the tracks 16 feet, and turn the place into a retail and restaurant “mall”. The price tag has grown at least fourfold, none of which is funded. Worst of all the conceptual designs portray a facility in which rail and transit passengers are secondary, and in some cases are deliberately inconvenienced in order to push them past retail shops, for obvious reasons. Another issue that has arisen is the possibility that shortened platforms may push the Amtrak network (long distance) trains out of LAUS altogether! Anaheim has been mentioned as an alternative. You can’t make up this kind of nonsense without being laughed at. Apparently this is to accommodate the desires of CHSRA to have their trains on the same level as the rest of the tracks. The hub of the Southern California regional, intercity, and transit rail networks must be first and foremost about efficient operation and the convenience of passengers. You’ll be hearing a lot more about this.

Locomotives
The Metrolink locomotive program continues to flounder. The well-publicized failure of the F125 at Newhall watched by the press and politicians was not an isolated incident. The $250 million acquisition of 40 new locomotives from EMD-Progress Rail, a division of Caterpillar, is now more than two...
years late with no sign of Metrolink accepting and more than the two machines currently in service. I hope that Metrolink is looking for alternatives.

Pacific Parlour Car

Just before we went to press Amtrak announced the permanent withdrawal of the Pacific Parlour Car from the Coast Starlight. RailPAC’s response to Mr. Anderson, Amtrak CEO, is reproduced below. Amtrak had previously announced that the cars were to be out of service for maintenance until March as in previous years. So as well as purposely downgrading the premium network train, Amtrak scored a spectacular public relations shot in the foot. The RailPAC Board considered the situation. We realize that a political campaign would be difficult, given that this would appear to be asking for special treatment for the minority that can afford first class travel. It is, however, a really bad business decision to stop providing this type of accommodation when Amtrak should be continuing to improve their product wherever possible.

Randy Scholtthauer

I regret to record that long time RailPAC supporter and promoter of passenger rail, Randy Scholtthauer, has passed away recently. Randy operated Slottsy Tours in Fullerton, and owned the former UP Columbia River railcar back in the 80s. Despite a lot of indifference from corporate Amtrak he persevered in operating rail tours and excursions as well as a regular travel agency business. He will be missed by many friends in the advocacy community.

With all the brouhaha about the Pacific Parlor Car, we have not forgotten our objective of a daily Sunset Limited. The issues are closely related. First Class Amenities on the Sleeper trains are good for business. A daily Sunset Limited is good for business, for equipment utilization, and for adding revenue to connecting services as well as the train itself. Either Amtrak embraces this philosophy, and starts to think of the network as a winner rather than a loser, or else all of the western long distance trains are in peril.

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Paul Dyson, pdyson@railpac.org

Dr. Adrian Herzog and Randy Schlotthauer aboard the X2000 train, 1993. Photo by Russ Jackson.
Let’s begin with the well-earned acknowledgment that Amtrak’s new CEO, Richard Anderson, the lawyer from Texas, and former CEO of both Delta and Northwest Airlines, is a very smart, capable and accomplished guy. Let’s also stipulate that he is quite capable of learning the differences between airlines and railroads, and the differences between real profit-making businesses accountable to Boards of Directors and shareholders, and social welfare organizations like the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, seemingly accountable more to its labor organizations and their political representatives than to customers or taxpayers.

Those differences are real and important. But they don’t determine outcomes. Management vision, wisdom and investment strategy determine outcomes.

Mr. Anderson has a challenge and an opportunity, to take Amtrak from the running joke it has become, and turn it into a financially sound, socially significant contributor to American intercity passenger mobility. The status quo isn’t really tenable, even if Congress appears to be willing to lavish endless billions of dollars of subsidy into an organization that has accomplished decades of declining market share and declining financial performance. Item: Nationally, Amtrak generates fewer annual passenger miles of transportation output than do motorcycles. Its market share of intercity passenger transport has declined steadily for decades. Businesses that do not grow are in fact slowly wasting away and will die.

Financially, Amtrak has burned through well over a hundred billion dollars (in constant 2018 dollars) in free federal subsidy since 1975, yet is in worse financial condition today than it has ever been. That amounts to “earning” a negative rate of return on invested public capital, provided free of charge by taxpayers. Try that at your bank the next time you ask for a business loan and see what the answer is.

Mr. Anderson began his tenure with some small, obvious, and beneficial steps. He launched an overdue early retirement buyout of non-union employees in November. Hundreds accepted the offer and will not be replaced. The minimum buyout was $15,000. The offer announcement said, “We must deliver more results with fewer people.” Thinning out a bloated HQ staff continues the work of undoing many of the bad management practices of Joe Boardman. Wick Moorman’s drastic simplification of the executive reporting structure last year was only the first step in this process. But that leaves the challenge of re-building a management team that understands railroading, intercity passenger transport, the imperative of growth, sound investing that maximizes return on investment, and its own business performance. It remains to be seen whether Mr. Anderson will do that.

But some other early steps are more troubling, suggesting that Mr. Anderson may be too accepting of the received wisdom at headquarters from the people, and policies, that dug Amtrak into the hole it is in.

Mr. Anderson identified three key threats to Amtrak in an October speech to a railfan group. The first (always Amtrak’s core interest) is possible reduction of its federal subsidy. The second is the persistent undercapitalization of Amtrak’s services, and the third is extensive delays to Amtrak trains. About a quarter of Amtrak’s delay-minutes is its own doing, three-quarters attributable to host railroad and other factors. These are all issues, to be sure, but are they the big ones? The top priorities?

Significantly omitted from Mr. Anderson’s list are other factors that pose a far greater strategic threat, and opportunity. These include: private sector competition; Amtrak’s decreasing national market share for intercity passenger transport; the decades-long absence of growth; and, Amtrak’s deeply flawed management information system (MIS) and the route accounting and operations planning processes that are crippled by it. If I were Richard Anderson, these are the issues about which I would be most concerned.

There is latent demand in the United States for intercity rail passenger transport that Amtrak leaves unanswered. That is reflected in the load factors of its long distance trains, which consistently approach the theoretical maximum load for such trains, which is around 65%, and the thousands of potential customers denied accommodation every year for want of space on the long distance network. Conversely, the consistently low load factors in the shorter corridor services (30-50%) demonstrate that these trains are already somewhat over-developed, simply because they create far more inventory than Amtrak has ever been able to sell. (If these available seat miles could be sold, then, after 40 years, they would be sold; that they are not demonstrates that they likely cannot be sold.) This exacerbates the absence for decades of organic growth in the enterprise: capital has been heavily over-allocated to segments where growth is almost unattainable, while the one segment that is the most under-developed and under-capitalized is starved of investment.

Increasing transaction volume in extremely short, quasi-commuter, market segments masks the stagnant output nationally in passenger miles, the only valid measure of the production output of the enterprise. And that stagnant output in a steadily growing national market for intercity transport, not commuter, transport means that Amtrak’s share of the market and its social utility (the value that taxpayers get for their contribution of subsidy) is declining steadily. This is especially acute in the NEC, where Amtrak’s market share of true intercity transport has fallen to perhaps 1 ½%.

Against this record of stagnation and growing financial losses (masked in part by tens of billions in deferred maintenance in the NEC), private competition can cripple Amtrak, both commercially, by taking growth opportunities away from it and even by eating into its core markets, and politically, by eroding the sense that Amtrak’s subsidies are a good or necessary use of public resources. Brightline opens this challenge with an overlay regional route in Florida, where Amtrak badly under-serves the regional market. This will become especially
acute when competing private operators bid for selected long
distance route franchises later this year. And it will cause
heads to burst when some private operator decides to offer a
competing service in the NEC, or Southern California. State
competition could also become quite harmful to Amtrak if a
large state, like California, ever figures out that Amtrak needs
it far more than it needs Amtrak. Competition would be good
for Amtrak and its customers, because it would force Amtrak to
improve and to grow, but if I were Richard Anderson, I would
be deeply concerned at the prospect.

Finally, if I were Mr. Anderson, I would be most concerned of
all about a profoundly defective MIS, that produces deeply
misleading information concerning the results of my different
lines of business. No enterprise can invest wisely, or do much
of anything useful, when its MIS produces false impressions.
(It would be useful for Mr. Anderson to ponder the idea that
if Delta Airlines published financial performance information
along the lines of what Amtrak puts out from its notorious
“Amtrak Performance Tracking” (APT) system, the SEC
could have prosecuted it for securities fraud.) APT—Amtrak’s
only route accounting system—is an arbitrary and artificial
accounting construct that allocates costs to different activities,
based not on documented causation but on management
algorithms and assumptions. It does not produce financial
statements like those used in private businesses, it is not
compliant with generally accepted accounting principles
(GAAP), it is not audited, and it is not necessarily consistent
from one period to another. It does not, therefore, report the
“financial results of operation” of any activity in a given period,
as a private sector business’s income statements do.

Two simple examples demonstrate the problem. All or nearly all
of the regional corridor trains (outside the NEC, where states
get a free ride on the federal dole) operate under contracts that
oblige the state to pay Amtrak the difference between a train’s
revenues and Amtrak’s APT-derived fully-allocated costs. By
definition, there can be no unreimbursed costs under this
arrangement, hence no “operating loss.” These trains have to
be cash-positive to Amtrak. Yet, the APT system reports a $100
million “loss” on these services. That is simply not possible. It is
internally contradictory.

An even more telling example can be found in the APT reports
on the long distance segment, where APT reports a cumulative
segment “loss” of about $500 million last year. If this were
really true, then it necessarily follows that ceasing that activity
would eliminate the “loss” and thereby reduce Amtrak’s
corporate loss and subsidy need by that amount. But when the
administration proposed just that—eliminating federal “subsidy”
for long distance trains’ “losses”—Amtrak immediately reported
to Congress that ditching these trains would not reduce
the loss and subsidy, rather it would increase the loss and
subsidy (in FY’18) by $423 million. Those numbers are directly
contradictory and cannot be reconciled. A group of trains
cannot simultaneously “lose” $500 million AND reduce the
subsidy need by $423 million. IF Amtrak was telling Congress
the truth regarding the actual financial results of operations of
the long distance segment, it put the lie to the APT statement
that these trains “lose” anything.

No business can manage its affairs, or make sound business
and investment decisions, using a management information
system that misrepresents the results of one line of business
by $923 million a year.

So, if I were Richard Anderson, the first thing I would do is
install a reliable and GAAP-compliant management information
system. I would then use it to begin directing my available
capital resources into segments of the business that were the
most undercapitalized, the most susceptible to meaningful
growth in the annual generation of revenue passenger miles,
the most commercially successful (the long distance segment
is by far Amtrak’s largest, measured by output; most under-
developed, measured by load factor; and most profitable,
according to Amtrak’s statement to Congress), and which
promised—evidently for the first time since Graham Claytor
left the building—an actual and objectively positive rate of
return on invested capital. Once I did that, I would be able to
report that Amtrak, under my leadership, was growing in real
terms, and achieving improved financial results for the first time
in 30 years. And, in the process, finally providing a growing
contribution to American mobility and a good return to the
taxpayer.
What is Missing from the California State Rail Plan

By Steve Roberts, RailPAC Vice President of Policy and Research

While the California State Rail Plan, Vision 2040, outlines a broad interconnected network with high service levels that will rebalance the state’s transportation system, it leaves many critical questions unanswered.

The State Rail Plan is presented as a straightforward stepping stone process from the near-term to the achievement of the vision in 2040. Except for some oblique references there was no discussion regarding the significant institutional barriers and challenges to achieving this goal. The only discussion that started to come close was the listing of transportation funding programs in Chapter 6 and the noting of the shortfall in Federal funding. No mention is made of the institutional failures over the last decade that failed to deliver vital capacity improvements on California’s corridors undermining the Rail Plan. This leaves stakeholders unaware of the rigorous efforts needed to achieve the plan’s visionary goals. There is no action item to work toward a consensus among stakeholders to support the projects outlined in the vision. Of critical importance is the goal of Vision 2040 to play major role in meeting California’s climate change goals. But to achieve that goal a radical change in the process of achieving of capacity improvements needs to be considered.

In addition to funding two of the most impactful institutional barriers and challenges are:

• The near veto power exercised by lineside stakeholders, despite the fact that the majority of rail line improvements will be constructed within existing rail right-of-ways that have been in service for over a century. In all cases the proposed projects have significant public benefits. Also opposition to operating any additional rail frequencies should not be an acceptable position. Despite the risk to the plan’s goal this is not discussed nor are strategies and mitigation efforts designed to balance lineside stakeholders’ issues vs. the benefits of the proposed investment. One particular negative impact of this veto power is the loss in the state’s credibility with the freight railroads. With the state unable to deliver capacity additions a disincentive is created for the freight railroads to work with the state.

• Moving forward, equal weight in the decision process also needs to be given to quality-of-life issues for harried commuters stuck in gridlock. Key actions listed in the rail plan – enhanced rail safety, quiet crossings, highway/rail grade separations, additional right-of-way fencing and electrification - all provide mitigation for lineside stakeholders. Perhaps some legislative clarification/relief may be warranted.

• Another factor is the freight railroads focus on yield. With yield maximization railroads prioritized their highest yielding traffic flows pricing away lower yielding traffic, even though it is profitable, to reach a lower operating ratio (costs divided by revenue). This lower yielding traffic is pushed to the highway. Price is used to manage traffic flows to match capacity, thereby avoiding capital expenditures for additional capacity or to allow the removal of capacity and its maintenance expense.

• Market share growth (vs. truck) is considered to be a negative since it would require aggressive pricing or service improvements. In addition, using price increases and service reductions shipments that remain are forced to large regional load centers/intermodal terminals with the final distribution by highway. The railroad retains the majority of the movement and revenue. However, these regional centers are generally located in exurban areas with highway distribution on congested urban freeways.

• The result of both of these strategies is more truck movements, shrinking rail mode share and less rail capacity investment. This is the opposite of the goals as outlined in the rail plan. Yet readers of the rail plan know nothing of this conundrum or strategies for state investments to improve the profitably of lower yielding traffic and to bring short-line entrepreneurial energy to the freight railroads. Only by increasing profitability of lower yielding traffic through state initiatives (as is done in Midwest agricultural states) can the public benefits of increasing the rail mode’s share of freight traffic be achieved.

• A key example of the manifestation of both of these challenges (almost a case study) is Union Pacific’s Coast Route. As was outlined in the Rail Plan (Exhibit 1.5), 2040 the travel volume between the Central Coast and Northern and Southern California is significant – exceeding the travel volume between the Bay Area and LA Basin. The parallel highway, US 101, has segments that even today are severely congested. Yet the Coast Line lies underutilized. Anchored at both ends by publically owned line segments, the Coast Line is clearly a secondary “overflow” route for the Union Pacific. The combination of UP’s maximum yield focus and its use of centralized load centers located on its core lines, means that local origin/destination traffic has shrunk to a very low level. (The oil train still operates because of the yield it generates.) Lineside stakeholder opposition to passenger related capacity expansion has meant that UP will not agree to any additional passenger trains. So the Coast Line sits almost fallow carrying a fraction of its passenger or freight potential. That situation has existed for almost two decades. Is the Coast Route stagnation the real 2040 Vision for the state rail network? What institutional or legislative changes are going to be undertaken to allow the 2040 Vision for the state to be fulfilled?
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Siemens locomotives are reinventing intercity travel in America.
A recent trip to New York afforded an opportunity to revisit a train I hadn’t experienced in 20 years: the Lakeshore Limited, Amtrak #49, spiritual heir to the New York Central’s Twentieth Century Limited. The comparison is not favorable: even Al Perlman is spinning in his grave.

We embarked on a Friday in early November, plainly not a peak period. Penn Station was its usual crowded mess. Construction outside blocked the usual taxi access under Madison Square Garden (which is round not square – it houses a basketball arena above the station), leaving a barely-marked and bumpy path from 31st St. I head down the escalators to the concourse, where ample signs direct commuters bound for the Long Island Rail Road and NJT trains that dominate the station (Amtrak owns and occasionally maintains it, but is by far the minority user), but nothing for Club Acela, the hangout for the privileged riders of Amtrak’s semi-fast NEC trains, and the handful of sleeping car passengers who board here. I find the Amtrak general waiting area, walled in and gated to insulate Amtrak passengers from the homeless and the shifty who also hang out in the semi-public spaces of the station, and get directions to the Club. It has modest signage at the entry, but you have to know where to look to find it.

Unlike the increasingly palatial and lavishly-stocked fee-based airline private clubrooms at the airports, Club Acela is small, crowded, and lacking amenities beyond a coffee pot, a basket of bags of Cheetos, and, mercifully, a private restroom. Like the tracks below, it also shows the effects of deferred maintenance. The departure screens work, and announcements are made for imminent departures. It also runs a small-scale racket: guests can ask at the front desk to be put on a “Redcap list” for a given train. Before the boarding announcement, names are called “for your Redcap,” and an Amtrak-employed Redcap appears, to take the ultra-privileged to the platform ahead of the crowd, for a tip, for private pre-boarding and first choice of the mostly unassigned seats.

At 3:22, train 49 is announced in the Club for its 3:40 departure. An usher leads us to the escalator and down to the platform, where #49 has just arrived from Sunnyside Yard. It consists of P32-DM (Dual Mode) #711, four Amcoaches, an Amdinette (all table Amfleet food service car), two Viewliner sleepers, and a trailing CAF baggage car. The train is clean, and my sleeper, line #4911, is properly set-up. A walk later of half the train shows the two NY sleepers are nearly full, the coaches much less so.

Lake Shore Limited passing through upper New York State
Photo by Chris Gore

We roll out OT at 3:40 and soon are rolling briskly north on Manhattan’s west side line, across the East River and north to Croton-Harmon, end of third rail territory, where the NYC always changed engines, from electric boxcabs to steam or diesel road power. In our case, the P32 at some point simply retracts its third-rail shoe and imperceptibly goes to diesel-electric mode. Just past 4:00, the Dinette LSA comes by for dinner reservations. There is no lounge car yet (it comes on #449 from Boston) but the diner sells snacks and beverages until dinner starts. But there is no lounge car seating, either, so no social dimension or good visibility for the train trip. One longs for the NYC’s round-end parlor observation car. We’d settle for an Amcafe.

We enjoy sunset over the Hudson valley as Metro-North commuter stations but surprisingly few M-N trains flash by. We run at 45-60 MPH to Poughkeepsie, then reach 90 and even 95 at times to Albany. Three times, a PA announcement warns that the train will lose electric power, and therefore working toilets, imminently and before we reach Albany. It is wrong – the HEP is pulled immediately after arrival at Albany-Rensselaer.

We arrive ALB at 6:13, a few minutes early. #449 is already there waiting for us across the platform. It has two P42 locos, a CAF baggage car, one Viewliner sleeper, the Amcafe, and two Amcoaches. Our P32 goes away, and 449 pulls forward then backs down on us. The combined train now has 13 cars; this will be a long walk at Chicago, since my sleeper is now the next to last passenger car on the very long train. There is no chance I will use the café lounge car – it is the eighth car forward and not worth the walk.

Dinner in the Amdinette is quite basic. The two servers are terrific, pleasant, patient and helpful, but the menu is slim and everything is plastic. The food would be charitably described as barely adequate. I’ll bet my ticket home that neither Wick Moorman nor Richard Anderson has “enjoyed” dinner on #49.

Is 449 that late often enough to warrant that long a dwell? Moorman nor Richard Anderson has "enjoyed" dinner on #49. We leave ALB at 7:05. What is the point of racing up the Hudson at 95 MPH just to sit around in Albany for 50 minutes? For a switching move that takes maybe 10 minutes? Is 449 that late often enough to warrant that long a dwell? Overnight and into Chicago, Norfolk Southern’s track is as smooth as any I’ve ridden over this year.

The next morning, as I head to the dinette at 6:45 for an even more rudimentary “breakfast” (akin to what you might get on a camping trip), the train, already 100 minutes late, stops west of...
Sandusky. And sits there for 55 minutes. A fleet of four Norfolk Southern eastbounds passes, followed by – we are shocked – a six-hour late #48. Oh oh. Eventually our Conductor announces that we are stopped because a rotary bridge ahead at Toledo was stuck open for five hours overnight, and NS is clearing out the traffic back-up before we can move again. We will be following #29, the Capitol Limited, to Chicago – our own little two-train mini-fleet. We leave Toledo at 9:40, about 3½ hours late. But the good news is that, contrary to widespread opinion about NS dispatching, NS goes out of its way to expedite us. Several times we cross over and back, running around stopped westbound freights, including double-stacks, and dodging eastbounds. We stop occasionally doing this, but also have long runs at 70-75, even 79, MPH.

Around 8:00, right after breakfast, the toilets in the sleeper fail (the car’s vacuum pump system dies), so the rest of the way into Chicago, the nearest toilets are in the virtually empty coach, two cars forward.

Out of Bryan, OH, a Conductor walks the train, checking individually on all connections. The bus to Detroit was held for us at Toledo. Along the way I muse about the Viewliner roomette. It is good for a solo passenger, with the bathroom facilities in the room, but less so for double-occupancy. Also, the room is way too complicated. Light switches are scattered around the room in five different places, with three different types of switch; one thermostat (it works, surprisingly) and four different vent controls manage temperature and airflow. The overhead baggage shelf is very difficult to see and reach.

At Hammond-Whiting, I look up #29 – it is expected at Chicago 6 minutes before us, so we really are running on its markers. Our train is due in at 9:45, but I don’t see the Willis Tower until 1:22, and we finally stop at Chicago, nose in, at 1:38, 7 minutes less than 4 hours late. The good news here is that the Empire Builder won’t leave for 37 minutes, and I, along with perhaps 15 other passengers, will make the connection, at the cost of a brisk and very long walk up the platform, straight through the station, and out Boarding Door B on the north side, where a gateman greets us with a cheerful, “Come on down! We’ve already boarded!” I am sitting in my room in one of the Seattle sleepers at the far, front, end of #7 with 12 minutes to spare.

The trip on #7 was an anti-climax. The Builder runs fast and effortlessly, and on time, all the way to St. Paul. At 2:53, 37 minutes out of Chicago, we meet the eastbound Empire Builder, running perhaps 10 minutes early. Coming out of Milwaukee, CP has three westbounds lined up and stopped waiting for us to pass. Night falls as we stop at the recently-unstaffed Columbus station. The two Seattle sleepers are essentially full, but the one Seattle coach is maybe half full. Yes – the off-peak Seattle Section has but three revenue cars.

Both the sleeping car attendant and the dining car LSA recognize me (and greet me warmly) from other trips earlier this fall. The lounge car (#38038, the one with the extremely annoying solid bulkheads blocking the sightlines in the car) is lightly used; the snack-bar guy has very little traffic. But even though the dining car has one LSA and only one server (!), dinner is delightful and a welcome change and huge improvement from the Lakeshore Limited. I am shocked to see how much CP’s track quality has deteriorated between Wisconsin Dells and LaCrosse, after CP tie gangs and surfacing crews have spent two years working on that segment.

We arrive at St. Paul exactly on time at 10:03 (and would have been 10 minutes early, but for train traffic conflicts at the Division Street wye, immediately east of SPUD). Conclusions? The Lakeshore is an embarrassment with its crummy food service and lack of a usable lounge car. But the Empire Builder still scores as Amtrak’s best train. And, any connection that works is a good connection.
Even public transit advocates can be critical of the way government approaches some projects. The New York Times’ startling article, “How excessive staffing, little competition, generous contracts and archaic rules dramatically inflate capital costs for transit in New York,” demonstrates why New York’s partially completed Second Avenue subway costs six times more than Paris’ similarly situated Line 14 extension.

The Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit District faces similar out-of-control costs, frustrating those who want the most bang from scarce bucks. Everywhere the process is dominated by a consultantocracy conditioned to build the perfect over the adequate but affordable.

The proposed $55 million, 3.1-mile extension of SMART’s commuter rail line from Santa Rosa Airport Station to Windsor is an example. In 2008, when North Bay voters approved a quarter-cent sales tax funding SMART, trains going north from Santa Rosa to Cloverdale were promised.

When the quarter-cent levy proved inadequate, the line’s “first phase” instead terminated at Windsor, the next town north of Santa Rosa.

Windsor is a booming community that needs and wants the promised trains.

SMART estimates it will cost $55 million to put the three-mile line into service. With no significant bridges involved, flat topography, existing Federal Railroad Administration Class 2 freight track in district ownership and Windsor’s already-built new depot, $18.3 million a mile seems high.

I ran the numbers by veteran Santa Rosa railroad civil engineer Mike Strider. With one caveat, Strider estimates the job can be done for about $7 million.

One big difference between Strider’s and SMART’s approach relates to maximum speed. SMART built its line to FRA Class 4 standard, allowing speeds up to 80 mph.

The three-mile Windsor segment is so short, given acceleration and de-acceleration times, rail cars can travel at maximum speed for only a mile. To control costs while expediting construction, Strider suggests upgrading the three miles of existing track to FRA Class 3 standards, allowing 60 mph. That change consumes two minutes of extra travel time and save tens of millions.

As an old railroad-hand friend says, “The problems is the tendency of most government agencies to build expensive high-maintenance solutions when simple solutions are at hand because those complex solutions automatically enrich the vendors and justify the employment of those who write the specifications.”

Engineer Strider’s estimate for making the 3.1-mile airport-to-Windsor segment ready for passenger service is in the range of $6.85 million. That’s including installation of Positive Train Control safety technology.

He cut tens of millions from SMART’s best guess by starting with the track. SMART’s plan is to remove and replace the existing three miles of track. Don’t do it, he says. The current freight-only track is FRA Class 2. Doing a few relatively minor upgrades costing $800,000 a mile - totaling $2.4 million - will bring the three-mile segment up to FRA Class 3 standard which allows passenger train speeds of up to 59 mph.

The balance of his estimate is for two control points, approach signals at Windsor, existing track switch upgrades, improving four grade crossings and a temporary passenger platform at Windsor.

He discards the idea of building a frills-loaded Windsor station platform until service is extended north to Cloverdale. That won’t happen before 2027.

To be conservative, let’s add $3 million for contingencies and soft engineering. Call it $10 million.

Even if Strider’s estimate is low and we triple it to $20 million, it is still a $35 million savings over SMART’s $55 million projection. That’s not chump change.

At a minimum, SMART’s board and General Manager Farhad Mansourian need to summon value engineers and seek alternatives that get the rail cars to Windsor sooner at a lower cost.

Columnist Dick Spotswood of Mill Valley writes on local issues on Wednesdays and Sundays. Email him at spotswood@comcast.net
There’s so much to see Car Free in Santa Barbara!

SantaBarbaraCarFree.org  @SBCarFree

Santa Barbara Car Free is a cooperative project founded and led by Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District for cleaner air and a healthier planet. See OurAir.org.
The recent commentary by this writer published on the internet and in Steel Wheels was highly complimentary of Amtrak’s long distance trains and its crews following my recent trips. RailPAC VP Long Distance Services James Smith agrees that the atmosphere and morale “out there” is very high, after his recent trip on the Sunset Limited, City of New Orleans, and Southwest Chief. To Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson I say “keep it up!” Good customer service is the most important area to generate word of mouth promotion! Mr. Anderson, you have a nucleus of talented employees and junior executives who are doing top jobs. Don’t mess it up. Keep listening to them, and to rail advocates! Get out among ‘em! Your presentation to NARP in Chicago was particularly impressive when you said that upgrading Superliner equipment is a priority. Unfortunately, that will only keep total capacity at what we have now, making growth difficult. Come west, young man, see what we have out here…and build on it!

A new calendar year is upon us. Amtrak has been around since 1971, yet there are some projects dating back to that date that need finishing, and many have emerged since then that still need to be addressed, solved, and implemented. Maybe rail advocates haven’t been loud enough, so in this writing (one of many from this author for over 30 years) I will show my frustration at the lack of finality for some things that should have been accomplished YEARS AGO. Notice the ALL CAPS? Well, as you read the following and see something in ALL CAPS, think of the writer SHOUTING those words. Maybe we can finally have ACTION, AND SEE GROWTH!

1. **HEY AMTRAK: WHY isn’t the Sunset Limited DAILY?** It certainly looks like that is still on the back burner, but now the new “Unlimited Sunset” committee has been formed maybe they can DO SOMETHING. That group met in of all places, San Diego, which if I read the map correctly, ISN’T ON THE SUNSET ROUTE, but was a wonderful (REALLY wonderful) place for a meeting. They are supported by NARP? HEY, why isn’t Amtrak doing this themselves? Is it easier to ignore an outside group? I am very happy that RailPAC is involved in this new group, and includes Paul Dyson, Bob Manning, and Noel Braymer, as well as retired Amtrak official Richard Phelps, all of whom bring years of level headed advocacy to the table. If the two biggest hurdles to daily service are the UP and a lack of equipment, GO CAMP IN OMAHA!...THINK LEASING! LET’S GO! Amtrak revenue GROWTH and higher passenger mile counts are IMPORTANT. Would it work to add one new day each timetable change until it’s DAILY?

2. **HEY AMTRAK: WHY isn’t restoring the route along the Gulf Coast from New Orleans to Florida DONE?** For several years a Southern group has held numerous meetings, run a test train, and worked hard to get this service going. It’s been, what, twelve years since Hurricane Katrina wiped out the railroad and ten years since that railroad was rebuilt. We still wait for restoration of service either by extending the Sunset Limited or the City of New Orleans to Orlando. WHAT’S THE HOLDUP? If the two biggest hurdles are the CSX and a lack of equipment, GO CAMP ON HUNTER HARRISON’S CSX DOOR!...THINK LEASING! LET’S GO!

3. **HEY AMTRAK: WHY** does the Palmetto STILL end its run in Savannah, GA? Isn’t the logical end point for this train in Orlando? Orlando is only the biggest tourist attraction in the East, ISN’T IT? **WHY** does the “Silver Starvation” (Silver Star train) not have first class dining? Looks like removing it is in concrete and shall return “nevermore.” Think revenue enhancement, think Passenger Miles! WHY isn’t the Southwest Chief connection to Pueblo, CO, a DONE DEAL? ColoRail has done a GREAT job working on this project, and certainly are to be congratulated on getting the Winter Park Express ski train back. Small things? Each one is a revenue enhancer!

4. **HEY AMTRAK: WHY** isn’t there more momentum on adding the new train, the connection from the Crescent at Meridian, MS, through northern Louisiana to Dallas/Ft. Worth? **HOW LOGICAL** it is to get something accomplished that locals have been asking for and are willing to support? Is it the railroads holding it up? **GO FOR IT!** And, while you’re at it how about extending that train west of Ft. Worth through Abilene and Midland, to El Paso and on to Los Angeles as the second frequency which also would bring it through Palm Springs in **DAYLIGHT**. Sure, this train would have low-level equipment. **WHO CARES?** Amtrak, you’ve got lots of low level cars and California is going to be stuck with some from the new car order.

5. **HEY AMTRAK:** What do you think of this idea: “A rolling hotel overnight between Los Angeles and the Bay Area.” Can you think of a new marketing idea with A GREATER CHANCE OF SUCCESS? We floated this idea many years ago and almost had it approved. The Coast Daylight plan appears to be dead, so this plan provides second service on the flip schedule of the Coast Starlight. By extending the California Zephyr trainset from Oakland to Los Angeles with departures from each end at 8 PM, and arriving by 8 AM next morning using the Coast Line. It would be a national system train not needing state support. Superliner west coast maintenance could then be consolidated in the LA 8th Street shop. Railfans would want the train named the Lark, but whatever the name it’s a potential gold mine **IF IT IS MARKETED.**

6. **HEY NARP...or RPA...or whatever you call yourselves now.** Amtrak pays you to run THEIR Customer
Advisory Committee, and you know what? I’ve NEVER seen anything that it recommended. IS IT TRUE that the work of that group is ignored? If so, WHY does it exist and WHY do you go along with it? It SHOULD BE the most important committee Amtrak has. I’ve attended far too many rail “meetings,” where Amtrak big shots come, speak, take a couple of questions, and then nothing happens. The most productive meeting I attended was the RailPAC dinner with Brian Rosenwald in Sacramento where we were able to talk customer service. WHY aren’t you yelling as loud as I am? You should CONCENTRATE on PASSENGER issues! WHY are you only proud of things like taking the railroads to the Supreme Court?

7. HEY NEC! (Notice that I singled out the NEC from Amtrak?) WHY is the load factor for travel on the Corridor huge between Philadelphia and New York, yet so small on either side? Do all Regional trains have to run to DC? Why not save some precious bucks and run some trains only between Philly and NYC, freeing up more space for high revenue generating through passengers! And while you’re at it, if you need more money for the NEC, ASK for it and STOP DUMPING NEC COSTS onto the state supported and long distance trains!

8. HEY BNSF, UP, NS, CSX: STOP being so antagonistic to passenger rail. If you are being underfunded by Amtrak or other rail agencies, get your acts together and march on Washington together to get fair compensation for carrying passenger trains. And I mean FAIR, don’t try to squeeze as much as you can. It should be obvious now that Amtrak and passenger trains are here to stay, with general support from a big majority in the Congress. WORK WITH US!!!

And so the end of my rant is here. Am I calm? Yes. Am I tired of writing about these things over and over? Yes. Am I at an age when I’d like to see some of these things HAPPEN? YES! When people ask why I do these writings the answer is I’ve tried to save Amtrak from itself, and in some ways there HAS been success. The key LOUD word to Amtrak from rail advocates and me is GROWTH...think it, work for it!

editrail@aol.com
“Railways are dangerous places, made safe by operating discipline and the strict adherence to rules and regulations.”

Happy New Year to all RailPAC Members, and passenger rail supporters in general. And a Happy and SAFE new year to all our friends who operate, maintain and manage our railroad system. Safety is very much on my mind after the derailment of the Cascades train in Washington in December. Such events are heartbreaking for those of us who encourage people to travel by rail. It is especially galling when we know that ingenious devices exist that could well have prevented this and other accidents, and saved lives and avoided the destruction of property.

Back in '72 an American, William Robinson, devised a system whereby the location of trains could be determined using low voltage electric currents. It was true then, and still is today, that railroads benefit from that happy confluence of physics and invention, that railroad wheels, axles and rails are made of steel, and that steel conducts electricity. By the 80s and 90s Robinson’s invention, the track circuit, had spread through much of the railroad world on both sides of the Atlantic, and signal engineers had devised many ways to use this technology to safeguard trains and to more efficiently control traffic.

Many of you will have realized by now that the above references are to the 1880s and 90s, i.e. well over 100 years ago. By the first half of the twentieth century many miles of the busiest sections of railroad were protected by a degree of automation, such as preventing switches being moved into a position that would cause a collision, the returning of signals to the “stop” position behind moving trains until they had reached a safe distance to allow the next train to proceed, and so on. It seems to surprise many politicians and members of rail boards that these means to operate a safe railroad have existed, in many cases for over one hundred years. In particular there are two devices that, if deployed, would have prevented the Chatsworth disaster in 2008 and that at Dupont WA December 18th, 2017.

Going all the way back to 1907 systems have been devised to warn train drivers that they are approaching signals with a restrictive aspect, i.e. that they must stop at the next or subsequent signal. These were, and are, electro-mechanical devices that linked the signal to a ramp on the track which interacted with a shoe on the locomotive to sound a warning signal in the cab, and if appropriate to apply the brakes. This system is generally known here as Automatic Train Stop (“ATS”) and was widely deployed by the Santa Fe Railway. It is required by the Federal Railway Administration on passenger lines where speeds greater than 90mph are permitted. It would have prevented the Chatsworth collision had it been installed. It was installed after the wreck, you can see the ramps by the rails in many locations on Metrolink.

1968 picture of an ATS shoe on a Santa Fe locomotive. (Wikipedia).

The other system, which would have aided the engineer of Cascades 501, is known as approach control. This can take various forms but primarily consists of using the time travelled between signals to measure speed. Heading towards a curve the first signal stays at yellow as a warning. The second signal stays red until the train speed is reduced to that of the speed restriction at the curve. If the train does not slow sufficiently the signal stays red, and if the red signal is passed the brakes are applied. Tragically, even large, brightly colored warning boards which might have helped prevent DuPont were not deployed.
In the UK a wreck with multiple fatalities occurred at Morpeth in the north of England in 1969. An Anglo Scottish sleeper train took the 40mph curve without slowing from line speed of 80mph with disastrous results. (Sound familiar?). As a result, new regulations required warning boards and approach control where the reduction from line speed to restricted speed was greater than 30%.

All of this costs money of course, and if I can make a general observation, we are too ready to attempt to implement passenger rail on the cheap. Unfortunately, cheap has turned out to be very expensive. The Chatsworth wreck caused the panic reaction mandating Positive Train Control (“PTC”) which, at least in the USA, was more a concept still under development rather than a product that was ready to be installed off the shelf. Certainly, there were no national standards in place. The mandating of PTC in turn put the investment in any “old fashioned” devices on hold while everyone waited for this high-tech panacea to solve all of our safety problems. In my view this led inevitably to the Dupont wreck where PTC was almost ready but had not been fully installed.

Where do we go from here? The industry is (involuntarily) betting the farm on PTC. In the early days some experts were opining that PTC will pay for itself with increased operating efficiencies, although they have gone rather quiet lately. In southern California, Metrolink’s experience is mixed. Numerous delays are attributed to “PTC”, presumably from data acquisition or from fail-safe events stopping the train. Furthermore, PTC has been blamed for extending the turn around time at Los Angeles Union Station (“LAUS”) to accommodate data acquisition for the next route segment. It’s hard to believe that this cannot be fixed by better data transfer and indeed a few years ago an Amtrak representative told the LOSSAN Board that they would boost the data transmission at LAUS. The Surfliner trains still dwell for 30 minutes!

My own opinion has always been that the money spent on PTC would have been better spent on grade crossing improvements, and traditional ATS. The reality is of course that the money would never have been allocated to grade crossings, and that PTC is here to stay. We can only hope that it can be made to work efficiently. Railroad signaling practice is based on fail safe, i.e. if it goes wrong then train movement stops. That’s fine, but a busy, scheduled railroad aiming to get people to work and meetings is of no value if it “fails safe” too often.

The cost of PTC means that it is highly unlikely that any long distance train routes not already fitted with PTC will ever see passenger service. On the plus side, once it is installed, there is no limit to the number of trains that might be run, up to line capacity. We can but hope that PTC lives up to its billing, and that we will see no more Duponts, and no more Chatsworths.

Paul Dyson
As the new Executive Director of All Aboard Arizona, I received an introduction to the Arizona Department of Transportation’s highest priority, rural roads, on my drive from Las Vegas to Kingman. US 93 was like driving on a washboard. “Whose brother-in-law got the contract to pave this?” I thought, until I realized I was witnessing the destruction of a highway by heavy trucks.

Our job at All Aboard Arizona is to enlarge the role of passenger rail in the state. Starting fresh at a new job meant meeting with the one man that ADOT assigned to handle rail issues. Carlos Lopez served as project manager on the Tucson-Phoenix Passenger Rail Study and is a source of historic information of passenger rail needs and opportunities.

Although ADOT spent $6 million for a study of a $6 billion high speed Phoenix-Tucson rail line with a 20-year buildout, ADOT also displayed a menu of cheaper options, to include an alternative labeled the “Amtrak Connection.” This simply uses the existing UP line between the two cities with $1.1 billion in improvements to the tracks and stations, and new intermediate stations along the line. ADOT’s numbers agreed closely with our own numbers that we developed independently.

The Maricopa Association of Governments is planning to go to the voters no earlier than 2022 with a new transportation package. Four potential commuter rail corridors may be considered as part of the package that could include freeways, arterial roadway improvements, expanded light rail, bus rapid transit, local bus and commuter rail.

A tip from Mike Garey led to the Sonoran Institute, a think tank working on land use. Laurel Arndt and Ian Dowdy had key information on the proposed I-11 project and Bill Gates’ new “smart city” of Belmont, which is to be located on I-11 between Buckeye and Wickenburg. The key piece of intelligence was that I-11 is supposed to be a Cooper Corridor, containing not only a freeway, but a rail line, power lines and pipelines.

A little history here. Dr. Hal Cooper came up with this multimodal corridor concept nearly half a century ago when he was a professor of engineering at Texas A&M. When Gov. Perry of Texas proposed the Trans-Texas Corridors 15 years ago, he was building on Dr. Cooper’s pioneering work. Chuck Mott, Dr. Cooper and I got the Washington state legislature to fund the study of a Cooper Corridor in the Cascade Foothills of Washington in 2003. Now Arizona and Nevada are considering a Cooper Corridor of their own.

By a stroke of luck, Dr. Cooper was in town for the fall meeting of All Aboard Arizona in Tucson, and we arranged a gettogether with the folks at the Sonoran Institute, to include their cartographer, Angela Melendez. The plan is for high speed rail in the I-11 corridor, although no one is sure at this point how to surmount the grades.

There was even talk of a hyperloop! On October 24, All Aboard Arizona met with representatives of the Rail Passenger Association of California (RailPAC) and our national Rail Passengers Association (formerly NARP) in San Diego for the purpose of turning Amtrak’s Sunset Limited into a daily train. This had almost come about years ago until the Union Pacific named an exorbitant price tag for a daily train. Our meeting identified a possible “Sunset Unlimited” campaign should it be necessary, but the solution could be as simple as getting Amtrak to reopen negotiations with the UP. The railroad has over 500 locomotives in storage in two states, and with its business down substantially, there should be room on the rails for a daily Sunset train for a reasonable price.

The All Aboard Arizona fall meeting in Tucson on December 9 was a success. Mayor Rothschild of Tucson is a full supporter of intercity rail, and he would love to have that $6 billion 125 mph train as the preferred alternative! But it’s going to require a whole lot of money that isn’t there right now.

Dr. Hal Cooper’s presentation laid out the work he’s done with China on the proposed Silk Road Railroad project, with Russia on the proposed Bering Strait rail tunnel, and with New York on its future rail connections.

I did a short presentation mixing my biography with the development of rail cultures in urban areas, and how Phoenix is the latest addition to the list of cities with thriving rail cultures. You know a city has a rail culture when people demand, “When are you going to build a rail line that serves my neighborhood?”

State Sen. Steve Farley (D-9) of Tucson is running for governor, and he indicated he wants to be America’s most pro-rail governor. He spoke of working across the aisle in a bipartisan manner and bringing real estate developers, who are the largest beneficiaries of rail projects, into public-private partnerships to build the lines.

Peter LeCody of the Rail Passengers Association spoke about how bipartisan support kept Amtrak from losing its long-distance network, the challenges facing Amtrak in Congress in 2018, and the campaign to make the Cardinal a daily train. The meeting concluded with a panel discussion on making the Sunset Limited a daily train. Peter was joined by George Chilson, Chuck Mott, Dr. Hal Cooper and Bruce Ashton of Texas.

Our activities next quarter will feature work with the state legislature, which comes into session in the new year, and with organizations such as the Arizona Transit Association, Friends of Transit, the Sonoran Institute and other regional players. We have a lot of work ahead of us.
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