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Upgrades Planned for Antelope Valley Line, see page 19 • All photos by Charles Freericks.

Come to Fullerton September 28 for RailPAC annual meeting

Visit San Luis Obispo in October for the Railroad Festival
JOIN TODAY!

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 30 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!

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.

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  - Follow us on Twitter: www.twitter.com/RailPAC
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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

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 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.

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.
Greetings!

Once Again the National Network is at Risk

Last year it was the Southwest Chief, now it is the entire network. For those of us living in the mountain west and on the west coast these trains are key links to the rural heartland, the Midwest and east coast. They bring tourist dollars to our states. Finally, they provide a valuable travel option especially for older travelers, the disabled and for those with medical conditions that preclude flying or driving.

Long standing political philosophies that originated with the Heritage Foundation and the Reason Foundation have shaped the Administration’s FY2020 Budget and its threat to veto any budget with Amtrak long-distance train funding. The Administration is influencing Amtrak’s management and board and is driving the latest installment of a decade’s long policy campaign to discredit and ultimately discontinue all “long distance” routes. The strategy is to:

- Eliminate all Federal funding for intercity rail services;
- Have states take responsibility for a intercity rail services;
- Vaguely promise future funding to entice states to agree to this change.

At first glance, replacing long-distance trains with locally focused short-distance corridors sounds like a viable strategy. However, the large capital costs to develop a competitive short-distance service with reduced travel times, increased frequencies and dramatically improved on-time performance (compared to present), raises the possibility that the proposals for short distance corridors are nothing more than misdirection intended to distract attention from the real goal: the elimination of Federal funding for all intercity rail services. Also these proposed new passenger services can’t be implemented without addressing freight network bottlenecks.

RailPAC, RPA and other rail advocacy organizations are working to mobilize a grassroots effort of citizens, tourist and economic development agencies, civic and business leaders to convince Congress that it’s time for an Amtrak business plan that not only preserves the National Network but expands it. We face opponents with large budgets, but with citizen power we can win this battle.

Your help is needed NOW in two ways:

- Funding for travel, office supplies, outreach materials, internet management, etc.
- Communicating your concerns to your Congressional Representative and Senator - attend a town hall meeting, send an email, letter or phone call.
- Renew your membership at a higher level or send in a donation.

Let Congress hear from you! For Congress your letters/phone calls are like votes, they count! The future of the Amtrak National Network is presently on the proposed legislative agenda with the renewal of the Surface Transportation Act (FAST ACT II) and the Amtrak operating budget for the next five years. (Sample letters are on the RailPAC website.) Don’t let Congress only hear from advocates of the Northeast Corridor! Write, call or e-mail and effectively cast your vote.

Key requests to Congress are:

- Validation of the importance of the National Network of long-distance trains;
- Preserving the links to far-flung rural communities and the economic benefits it brings;
- Preserving a valuable travel option especially for older travelers, the disabled and for those with medical conditions that preclude flying or driving;
- Provision for specific stable funding to replace the aging long-distance equipment;
- Development of infrastructure programs to address the overall capacity bottlenecks on America’s freight railroad network which negatively impacts on-time performance.

Achieving these changes would significantly improve the performance and value of the National Network of long-distance trains, but you need to act now. Together we can do this. Thank you for your support.
Combined Effort to save Amtrak’s National Network

In his article Steve Roberts laid out the basics of forming the Western Interstate Trains Coalition, the reasons for it, and how readers can best participate. This article is about the nuts and bolts of startup. From a council of war in April, we started out with an action plan, a spreadsheet, a list of names and a video. Doesn’t sound like much, does it?

• I threw together an action plan based on a strategy designed by Chuck Mott, our president at All Aboard Arizona.
• Jim Souby and Peter LeCody provided a list of state rail activists to run our ground game.
• Steve Roberts wrote up arguments and letters to go to politicians.
• Peter LeCody provided full color displays from RPA to buttress our arguments.
• Mike Garey located a domain name for a new website dedicated to the project; now all we need is someone to design it.
• I used the “Our Train Stations” website, supported by Mike Garey and Doug Kerr, to build a spreadsheet of states, activists, train stations, local media, local politicians, and federal politicians with the accent on assignment to the important committees.
• Dr. Al Runte, leading author on the national parks and how the railroads created and nurtured them, wrote the script, and I handled on-camera and voice-over duties, for a video which was produced by our board member John James, who handles video engineering for the Phoenix sports teams. It was posted to You Tube.
• Rollout of the action plan occurred on June 24.

But even before that, we at All Aboard Arizona jumped on the case.

We traveled first to Yuma to meet with city and county politicians, and people from the county metropolitan planning organization, economic development council, tourist bureau and local newspaper. The room was packed! We discovered that the city had purchased an abandoned hotel across the street from the train station and was seeking a grant to turn it into a transit center. Everyone was supportive of our mission to get Arizona’s senators and congressmen on board with the preservation and expansion of Amtrak in the face of opposition to Amtrak’s national network from Amtrak’s president, Amtrak’s board, and even President Trump himself!

We were the topic of a highly complementary feature article in the Yuma Sun. The paper published a picture of me walking away from the camera – probably my best side!

We took our road show to Tucson for another packed audience. We had city and county people, economic development experts and the tourist bureau in attendance. Tucson has 29,000 boardings on the Sunset Limited every year, and a daily train would increase that to 70,000 boardings. Amtrak is an important player in Tucson despite its tri-weekly train, and the attendees were fully on board with getting the support of our congressmen and senators. From this meeting our local board members will be taking this show on the road to Benson. Tucson’s Channel 9 taped much of the meeting and gave me an on-camera interview for the evening news.

Our next goal is to meet with key people in the towns on the Southwest Chief’s route: Kingman, Flagstaff and Winslow.

Our biggest shock was President Trump’s decision to draw a line in the sand on this issue. It was enough to simply propose eliminating the national network as a “relic of the past,” but the president doubled down and stated he would veto any transportation bill that included money for Amtrak’s interstate trains. Considering the importance of the highly popular congressional pork dedicated to highways, bridges and airports in the bill, he may be able to make his threat stick. The people who will be hurt the worst are the people who voted for him in the American heartland, Trump Country. If he wins this one, the national network will shut down in October. Our job is to convince Congress to buck the president.

The good news is that our video is catching on: https://youtu.be/20hQAFiWk8Q.

This is crunch time, and there is no tomorrow if we lose.
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High-Speed Rail Update
Commentary by Steve Roberts, RailPAC President

On May 1st CHSRA released its 2019 Business Plan Update that validated the building block approach of the 2018 Business Plan. However unlike the 2018 Business Plan, which left investments Gilroy – San Jose, Merced – Madera and Wasco - Bakersfield “to-be-determined”, the 2019 update clearly stated and provide a plan to focus on the Merced to Bakersfield segment with investments Merced – Madera and Wasco – Bakersfield (Madera – Wasco is the segment currently under construction).

In addition to providing the overall goals and timelines for the project, the update confirmed that the most productive option, the option that would provide the greatest service given the funding currently available, is a full service rail line Merced to Bakersfield integrated at Merced with ACE and San Joaquin service. The Merced – Bakersfield integrated option was also found to substantially increase ridership (2.8 times compared to having no HSR) and improve the revenue/cost ratio of all rail services by approximately $20 million per year.

A high-level operating plan was produced to support a ridership and ticket revenue forecast to provide legislators guidance regarding the financial impact of the new goals of the project. Interestingly because the proposed Merced to Bakersfield segment will be so highly integrated with existing rail service, CHSRA used the Caltrans Rail Ridership model for its 2019 forecast. The State Rail Ridership model is a forecast model that has been in use for years in the planning of California state funded intercity rail service and yearly budgeting. It uses decades of Amtrak origin/destination ridership data, rail customer profiles and auto origin/destination studies. Its accuracy is tested yearly as part of the Caltrans/JPA budget process. The proposed integrated service sits on a firm foundation based on decades of actual rail data.

As was noted CHSRA developed a high-level operating plan for its analysis. This plan has high-speed rail trains from Bakersfield to Merced connecting to ACE and San Joaquin trains at a joint Merced station. As information, there is a point just north of Merced where the BNSF and UP are separated by about 4,000 feet. So bringing the San Joaquisns over to join ACE in Merced would appear feasible. Travel times from Merced to Bakersfield would be 90 minutes faster than at present (30 minutes faster to Fresno). While travel to San Jose would be circuitous, travel to Fremont, the Tri-Valley, Stockton, Sacramento and Contra Costa County would be direct and faster than present. However please note there is much detailed operational planning ahead, so there could very well be changes.

One critical challenge is the disengagement of the FRA in working with CHSRA for approvals of environmental planning documents. These documents are completed and are waiting Federal approval. CHSRA is trying to work around this challenge but it could become a major issue if not resolved within the next 12 to 18 months.

While the CHSRA staff is currently focused on completing a full service rail line Merced to Bakersfield, RailPAC will be joining with regional stakeholders in their efforts to develop concepts and strategies to complete the rail line to San Jose. CHSRA, Viaduct construction near Fresno - CHSRA

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while acknowledging that construction Chowchilla to San Jose is not funded at this time, has publically stated that it has a “building block” strategy and that reaching San Jose is their goal with environmental and engineering studies moving forward to completion. In addition CHSRA will create a Tunnel Delivery Advisory Panel, working with experienced engineering and tunneling firms, seeking to develop a strategies to reduce risk in the engineering design and construction of the Pacheco Pass tunnels. Also CHSRA continues to be involved in the planning and engineering effort reimagining Diridon Station in San Jose. The timeline for this project is critical given the upcoming construction of the new BART station at Diridon and increased passenger flow requirements with Caltrain electrification. No one wants to rebuild Diridon station twice, once for BART and Caltrain and a second time for HSR. So Diridon Station is an early HSR investment with near term deadlines. Finally, growth in downtown San Jose as it becomes a megacity offers the potential for expanded commuter rail service to Gilroy and Monterey County. This expansion in commuter rail and the rail line improvements it would require could also provide a foundation for high-speed rail to San Jose.

So while RailPAC monitors all of these longer term efforts, there are two critical near term benchmarks to track in the next 2-3 years. These are:

- CHSRA and contractors must regain credibility by making major progress (90%+ completion) in bringing the major civil works in CP 1 – CP 4 (Madera to Wasco) to near completion on schedule and on budget;
- The remaining Phase 1 Environmental Studies (LA – SF) must be completed and approved.

Achieving these goals will be “money in the bank” and could allow strategies for supplemental funding utilizing private activity bonds sold on the bond market (similar to how Virgin is funding its Orlando extension).

Michelle Boehm Moves On

By Paul Dyson

This past quarter saw the resignation of Michelle Boehm from the California High Speed Rail project. Appointed in 2012 by Governor Jerry Brown she served as Southern California Regional Director, High Speed Rail. In that role she took the heat from every critic of the project, and usually had to stand there alone as local politicians shuffled into the shadows or ran for cover. Suddenly, in spite of urban Southern California having voted heavily in 2008 for proposition 1A, there were no public figures in support, or if they were it was conditional on the route avoiding their district or jurisdiction. Pusillanimity, Governor Brown would have said.

Regardless of your opinion of the High Speed Rail project or its management, you have to admire Michelle’s professionalism, and her tireless commitment. During her tenure she faced angry crowds of mostly misinformed opponents, led on by the rhetoric of a handful of individuals looking for their day in the sun. I myself sat through a lot of this nonsense (they’re going to destroy your homes, your churches, the animals won’t be able to use their traditional trails because they will feel the vibrations of the trains in the tunnels underneath, I kid you not). Michelle took it on the chin time after time, kept her cool, and pointed out the need for and benefits of the project.

In her new role as Director of Transportation, Office of Mayor, City of Los Angeles, she will encompass all modes, land sea and air, both freight and passenger, and deal with a multitude of agencies, interest groups and agendas. She told Steel Wheels that her aim is to achieve “Seamless integration of the diverse transportation systems both built and under construction across Los Angeles City and County, as well as the region, to meet 21st century mobility needs and exceed current emissions reduction goals that we know we must achieve.”

RailPAC wished her well in her new role.
A recurring lament among passenger train advocates and the public is regret at the lack of a direct passenger rail link between Las Vegas and Los Angeles since Amtrak discontinued the Desert Wind in 1997.

One ambitious private project aspiring to address this first surfaced in 2006 under the name DesertXpress. Its key characteristics were the mode (high speed rail) and end points (Las Vegas and Victorville CA). The high cost of building through developed areas motivated the decision to end in Victorville (90 miles from Los Angeles). The notion someone would drive 90 miles from Los Angeles then hop off the freeway, park and go the last 190 on a train (however fast) struck many as fanciful. In time it was announced a phase II would extend further west to Palmdale and connect with Metrolink commuter rail service to Los Angeles and the eventual California bullet train project station there. Care has been taken in the project design to have it interoperable with the bullet train project.

Over the years the project was expanded to be part of a proposed network of lines serving Colorado, Arizona and New Mexico. The name was eventually changed to XpressWest, reflecting the wider scope. A partnership with a Chinese company raised hopes. But aspirations for federal funding were thwarted by Buy America provisions giving preference to domestic sourcing. The partnership eventually dissolved.

After a long period stalled the project recently has had a burst of renewed activity. On Sept. 20, 2018 Fortress Investment Group, owner of the recently opened Brightline passenger rail line in Florida, acquired XpressWest from longtime owner Marnell and announced plans to start construction in 2019 with initial service to start in 2022. An update dated Jan. 2019 to the Nevada High-Speed Rail Authority reiterated plans to begin construction this year. Brightline as part of a partnership with Virgin Group has rebranded itself Virgin Trains USA, which will be the name of the entity to operate the line upon opening.

Recently there have been startling developments. Mick Akers in a May 30, 2019 Las Vegas Review-Journal article “Start of high-speed rail construction likely delayed 2 years” disclosed lobbying of the Nevada legislature by Virgin Trains for a partial abatement of property and sales taxes (while still paying the portion related to schools) had failed. Similar abatements had been a key component of financing the Brightline project in Florida.

Bob O’Malley, Virgin Trains USA vice president of government affairs, stated in the article, “Not getting those abatements will likely push the start of planned construction back at least two years … If we had been able to do something this session, we were ready to start construction in 2020.” Without the abatements, O’Malley said, “we’ll have to go back and reevaluate the timeline. Abatements are a critical component of the financing package so without it I don’t think so.” They will try again for the abatements in 2021.

Michael Hicks, Director of Media Relations for Virgin Trains USA, in an e-mail amplified on the status of the project:

Elected officials and community leaders from both California/Nevada recognize the value and impact Virgin Trains will make and they are incredibly supportive.

We are moving forward aggressively with the pre-development aspects of environmental and engineering work and are committed to working with state and local leadership to keep our project timeline on track.

The website for the project is xpresswest.com

A version of this piece appeared in the Summer 2019 quarterly newsletter of the Rail Users’ Network.
Desert Xpress project - Maps courtesy of Virgin Trains USA

2019 RailPAC Annual Meeting and Steel Wheels Conference
Saturday, 28th September, 2019 • 11:30 am until approximately 3:00 pm
Location: The Old Spaghetti Factory (Former Union Pacific Depot)
110 East Santa Fe Avenue, Fullerton, CA 92832 (Adjacent to Amtrak Depot)
The meeting will hear reports from officers, elect a new Board of Directors, and conduct any other lawful business of the corporation.
The meeting will be followed by presentations from leading industry figures in Southern California from LOSSAN, San Bernardino County (Arrow Project) Los Angeles MTC (Metro projects) and Orange County Streetcar.

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or mail a check to:
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San Francisco CA 94122
FEE: $45.00 includes lunch

Lunch Choices:
please indicate your preference:
Pasta with Marinara Sauce
Pasta with rich meat sauce (beef)
Chicken Marsala
Four years ago, I lost my wife at a railroad crossing in the New York City suburbs. This catastrophe led to the loss of five other lives, and caused millions in damage. Needless to say, I had a lot of reasons to take a long, hard look at the railroad signage surrounding this incident.

I have a lot of experience in visual symbolism, having researched the topic at both the perceptual and unconscious level for several of my books and published articles.

It turns out the emperor does have clothes, but they are mostly out of date by about a century. Worse than being antiquated, in visual terms, railroad crossing signage speaks a different language than other highway signs.

I am well aware that few in the industry want to change anything. However, once you understand the difference—think of it as American English vs British English—small differences in meaning can have big consequences. But these can be fixed quite inexpensively. The payoff is a huge difference in safety and other long-term benefits. The safer the railway, the more it can do. Here are six ways to make crossings much safer at minimal costs.

**Use Bollards to Protect the Crossing**

If the no. 1 cause of crossing incidents is impatient drivers going around the gates, the solution is simple: Place bollards (rigid poles) at the median for several car lengths. It would take a very rare driver to drive that far on the wrong side of the street to beat a crossing. Bollards are cheap and can even be ordered online. The bollards described in this article are what the Federal Railroad Administration refers to as “Traffic Channelization Devices” in a 2012 report, which can be downloaded from the link at the conclusion of this article. The crossing pictured here is on the North Carolina Railroad “Sealed Corridor,” a project implemented by the North Carolina DOT beginning in the late 1990s.

**Use Pop-up Barriers Instead of Creaky Gates**

At $300,000 to install an electromechanical gate, a hydraulic pop-up would cost a fraction of the price. They can also tilt so stuck cars can easily back over them.

**Change the Flashing Lights to an LED Warning Strip**

The visual language becomes a real issue when the lights flash. Historically, this goes back to the early days when a wig-wag lamp signaled an oncoming train. Once upon a time, men walked in front of horseless carriages with a flashing light to warn the public of this newfangled device. But their meanings have diverged. At railroad crossings, flashing red lights represent rapidly approaching danger. On the highway, however, flashing red lights represent a lower-level hazard than a steady red light. Drivers tend to interpret them as a yield or a sign that the regular traffic lights aren’t working properly. That means some percentage of drivers will ignore the context and instinctively respond to these lights as they would on the highway. There are so many better, cheaper solutions today, from LED police-style lights to disco style strobes and fades, all of which would remove any hint of confusion.

**Put English in the “Lollipop” Warning Sign**

The main reason railroad signs are different is because they were not designed for motorists, mainly because there weren’t any at the time. They were designed for ranchers, since the greatest fear of a 19th Century rail baron was plowing into a herd of cattle. So the less of train enthusiast you are, the less likely you are to recognize the Circle X warning because it used the vocabulary of rural America: a branding iron intended to warn ranchers. A simple rectangular sign placed below stating Warning: Railroad Crossing could make all the difference to a generation that has never seen, let alone owned, a model train set.
Give the Crossbuck a Background—and Stop Talking in Angles and Tracks

Unlike the average rail enthusiast, the average driver cannot read at a 45-degree angle, even if the words do say "Rail Crossing." Often, the crossbuck, being white, gets lost behind white clouds. So, put a background board and add the warning at eye level, the way humans actually read—especially when driving. As the for the number of tracks at the crossing, it is highly unlikely that the average driver has a clue what is being communicated, so add "Wide Crossing" or "Extra Wide" crossing and maybe they'll understand.

Lower the Crossbuck and Light It

Since the crossbuck was intended to speak to ranchers, it had to be high enough that it could be seen by a man on a horse—around 13 feet. The typical roadside warning sign is set at around 7 feet. So not only is the crossbuck too high relative to other signs to be quickly recognized, it is also too high for its reflector material to pick up motor-vehicle headlights from closer than about 50 to 75 feet. That means, on a straight road, the sign will actually turn dark as you get closer. On a sharp turn less than 75 feet away, you may not see the sign at all. A fix would be to add a second crossbuck at headlight level, and if possible, illuminate the entire crossing. Strobe lights or powerful LEDs would be highly recommended.

While there are a lot of high-tech solutions that could be layered on top of these ideas, what I’ve described here is inexpensive and generally foolproof. The larger issue is not just saving lives, but that the safer railways are, they more they can be put to use.

Editor’s Note: On the evening of Feb. 3, 2015, in one of the worst highway/rail crossing accidents in recent years, a Metro-North EMU commuter train operating in third-rail-electrified territory struck a vehicle at a crossing in Valhalla, N.Y. The accident took the life of the vehicle’s driver, Ellen Brody—the author’s wife—and those of five passengers in the first railcar. The National Transportation Safety Board’s report on the accident, which can be researched at this Wikipedia entry, said that Ellen Brody “was unaware of the proximity of the approaching train.” This is mainly what prompted Alan Brody, whose first job as a teenager was as a railroad conductor in his native South Africa, to conduct his research and offer his views. It is our hope that some benefit will arise from publishing this article—at the very least, to raise public awareness of grade crossing safety, on top of what the Federal Railroad Administration and organizations like Operation Lifesaver have been doing for a long time.-William C. Vantuono

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TrainWeb.org is the home of over 1000 independently authored and managed rail related websites featuring information and photos on every aspect of railroading.
In the 39 years that I have been an advocate for passenger rail in Southern California I have seen various manifestations of the political train. These include adding station stops to intercity trains at the behest of elected representatives or other rail agencies, rewrites of the timetable to accommodate a particular market, or attempts to run “express” trains where the infrastructure does not exist to support it. They have invariably ended in failure and financial loss.

The most recent iteration of politics destroying value is train 759, 0409 (am) departure from Los Angeles to Goleta. The background is the 101 in Motion plan of Santa Barbara County, and the heroic efforts of RailPAC Board member Dennis Story to ensure that this was more than just another highway widening. After a failed attempt to pass a transportation sales tax in 2006 the voters overwhelmingly passed Measure A in 2008 for a package called “A Lane and a Train”. An extensive study in 2005 by Wilbur Smith Assocs. And Parsons Brinckerhoff indicated that a commuter rail service was feasible, although with a lot of caveats. Also, the original formula splitting the revenue from the tax was changed between ‘06 and ‘08. There was $126M for commuter rail in the ‘06 Measure but only $25M in the ‘08 Measure, while highway funding kept the same $140M from the ‘06 Measure in the ‘08 Measure.

Public agencies will always take the easy option and do what they are familiar with. In the case of transportation that option is highway building. Running a passenger railroad is so far outside the comfort zone of Santa Barbara local government that they quickly ducked and did their best to avoid the issue. Seeking the lowest hanging fruit (in big part due to lack of funding) SBCAG staff began discussions with LOSSAN and the State Division of Rail to see if a Surfliner train could be retimed to arrive in Santa Barbara at a suitable time for morning commuters. As you all know, retiming one train on a busy network has ramifications the length of the corridor, involving not just the Surfliner but also Metrolink and Coaster. Naturally these discussions dragged on with no good outcome. Finally, after considerable pressure from State Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson, the new timetable for April, 2018 was revised and 759 began its before dawn departure from Los Angeles.

This train was a disaster from the first week of operation. No amount of political pressure can alter the physical fact that if you run trains in opposite directions on a single track, one or other will be delayed. The dispatchers’ cardinal rule is that if you must delay one of two trains, you chose the one that does the least harm to the rest of the operation. Hence, in the first week, poor old 759, headed for a layover in Goleta, was held for a layover in the thick of the corridor service. It only had to be a minute or two late for this to happen. Delays of up to an hour became commonplace and early enthusiasm for the train soon evaporated. Adding insult to injury, this train has an additional ten minutes “recovery time” between Santa Barbara and Goleta to goose up the punctuality statistics. Who are they kidding?

Out of SBCAG’s $25M rail fund from Measure A, LOSSAN is paid to make up for the lost revenue of the old schedule, and it’s being squandered on this failed experiment, money that should be used for sidings to increase capacity and provide for more trains and better reliability in the future. In any rational business the experiment would have been stopped at the next timetable change, if not before. But here we have the July 20th, 2019 timetable with 759 still on the same schedule. Do we have to wait until the current office holders are termed out before common sense takes over?

Every politician wants the trains to stop at their station. Everyone wants a non-stop train from their station to their destination. We all want to get cars off the roads and backsides onto train seats. But if the railroad has not been modernized and capacity enhanced, no amount of foot stomping or legislative fiat will make the trains run on time. It’s a long, difficult row to hoe to get that second track laid. It’s not for the faint hearted, and certainly not for those with one eye on term limits and their next office.
There's so much to see Car Free in Santa Barbara!

SantaBarbaraCarFree.org

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.
Summer, Amtrak, Railfans, and Flyover Country
Commentary by Russ Jackson

The headline indicates that this article will tell many stories, and just as we have done for many years here is what is being observed by this writer at the middle of the year 2019. The summer heat is upon us; the middle of the country is having storms and flooding; Amtrak is having timekeeping problems. So, what else is new you ask? Let’s see.

Recently I found some sites on YouTube that I hadn’t seen before. There are hundreds of sites catering to rail, both freight and passenger of course, but the new ones for me are web cameras that show real-time activity at train stations. That’s nothing new, as TrainWeb was doing that at Fullerton, CA, and other locations years ago. The current cameras are run by Virtual Railfan, which has 17 locations operating 24 hours a day. Included are the stations at San Juan Capistrano and Barstow in California and Flagstaff, Arizona. The cameras are attached to the Amtrak train station buildings. If you miss the arrival of the train and you know what time it arrived there you can rewind the picture to that time and watch it. There is an operator who moves the picture to see arrivals, and the railfans (Yes, me too) watching can comment on what they are seeing. One group watching the arrival/departure of the Southwest Chief at Flagstaff plays a game guessing how many bags of trash are taken from the dining cars and placed on the platform. There is an operator who moves the picture to see arrivals, and the railfans (Yes, me too) watching can comment on what they are seeing. One group watching the arrival/departure of the Southwest Chief at Flagstaff plays a game guessing how many bags of trash are taken from the dining cars and placed on the platform. Now for my observations from sitting in my Texas home and “watching” trains this summer. The myth of “Nobody rides trains anymore” has been forever put to rest.

San Juan Capistrano: Every train that stops at this station, whether it is an Amtrak Pacific Surfliner or Metrolink has passengers get off and get on. It is a busy station for both providers. It is too bad that it is still only single track there, and probably will be for the foreseeable future. The right-of-way may be wide enough for a second track, but that location is historically not going to relinquish the space necessary to build another platform. The beauty there is caught by the color camera, and its proximity to the famous Mission certainly makes the station an attracting feature for tourists, but many of the folks boarding the trains, both northbound and southbound, are commuters. All Surfliner consists have at least one Superliner Coach car, leased by California from Amtrak. Yes, Amtrak could be using those cars to expand consists on long distance trains.

Barstow: This high desert community sees all of the freight trains moving on the BNSF Transcon route and the Union Pacific route that goes up through Las Vegas, and the camera shows all of them moving through the former Fred Harvey “Casa del Desierto” train station property. Sadly, there are only two passenger trains that stop at what at one time was a four track station, where all the classic Santa Fe and UP passenger trains stopped: Amtrak’s Southwest Chief stops there daily, and you can watch it arrive and depart and see the activity on the fully lit platform. The scheduled time the Chief arrives there eastbound, coming from Los Angeles, is at approximately 10 PM, and the westbound arrives at the scheduled time of approximately 4 AM PT. What has been interesting has been seeing that almost every arrival has a handful of passengers get on or off there, although there have been a few days nobody did. That’s an intriguing location, just like the station at Victorville west of Barstow, where it would be possible to travel into Orange or Los Angeles counties, spend the day, and return the same night. But, from seeing the timekeeping of the westbound train #3, the reliability is not something that a prospective passenger can count on.

Flagstaff: This is a fun station to watch. Needless to say, most of the passengers there have been visiting the Grand Canyon, and large numbers of families wait for both Southwest Chief trains 3 and 4. The historic Flagstaff station is staffed, unlike Barstow. Consists this summer for the Chief has been consistent, with three Sleeping Cars (one is the transition car) at the front behind the locomotive and baggage car, and three Coach cars at the rear. When it arrives, the folks waiting head out to board and inevitably some Coach passengers find that
their car is at the other end and must trek across the platform to board the correct car. Both Sleeping Car and Coach passengers board here; it is a cash cow for Amtrak. Again, though, the unreliability, particularly train 3 heading west, must be discouraging as some mornings before dawn they find themselves waiting for hours for the train to arrive.

**Ft. Morgan, Colorado:** Well, this is not a 24 hour camera. Every day a railfan treks down to the station, records the arrival of the westbound California Zephyr #5, and posts it on YouTube. I mention this here, because it proves the need for this train in a small town...about an hour east of Denver. Every day I’ve watched this video there has been passenger activity at this station. The passengers getting off here have come long distances, and are not just from Denver. Again, stopping the train here is a cash cow for Amtrak. The Zephyr consists this summer have been FOUR Sleeping cars (one is the transition car that sells room space) and three Coach cars. As a car attendant told this writer recently, the Zephyr is big because many foreign visitors want to ride it through the Rockies and Sierra Nevada, just as many do on the Empire Builder across the northern route through Glacier National Park. Amtrak has been advertising its vacation plans for years, and must keep it up...even do a better job of that. The success of the Rocky Mountaineer in Canada proves how popular trains can be. I’m sure the Sunset Limited, Texas Eagle, and Coast Starlight are doing well this summer, too, but there are no cameras to watch them. Yet.

**Comments:** And these comments are directed at the Amtrak administration and the national administration. So you are working together trying to break apart these long distance trains because you think they are losers and attract only railfans and senior citizens? Take a look at these cameras each day and see who is traveling on these trains. It is the whole range of ages and folks who CHOOSE to ride, or who have NO other alternative to travel by automobile. Losers? HA, if you were honest you would see how dishonest what you fed the Wall Street Journal to print recently was. Arizona’s Tony Trifiletti wrote an excellent rebuttal, “We have to protect these trains” ...the only problem is the WSJ won’t print it. Sometimes I worry that we are only preaching to the choir, but fortunately many members of the U.S. Congress support passenger rail transportation. That support will come crashing down if the long distance trains are removed, as most of these “Flyover country” legislators see the value to their communities in having these trains run and as you can see above how these small markets are responding; maybe not in huge numbers but in cash cow tickets that would disappear from Amtrak’s coffers with no replacement. Why is it so hard for Amtrak management and the national administration to see value where value exists in many forms? Why is it so hard to demand a GROWTH strategy within the current structure at Amtrak?

Then, of course the issue of on time performance at intermediate stations must be addressed. While most of the delays are not Amtrak’s direct fault, it must be a deterrent to repeat business. I think honest negotiations with the “partner” railroads could solve much of the problems; Gene Skoropowski and David Kutrosky did that for the Capitol Corridor. So, we say good bye to David on his retirement, too, but the legacy of both in this area of train management set the tone for the huge continuing success of this great service in California.

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Thank you for your continued support for RailPAC and passenger rail.
Legislature, Light Rail and Amtrak

The Arizona Legislature adjourned without raising the gas tax, which means that our rural roads are on life support. This tax increase was necessary because of a feature of our Arizona Constitution: Article 9/Section 14 states that all revenue drawn from sources related to transportation must go to highways.

State Rep. Noel Campbell (R-Prescott), chairman of the House Transportation Committee, gathered a group of businessmen together for advice to draw up a bill to raise taxes on different types of fuel. Unfortunately, Campbell publicly challenged Gov. Ducey to sign the bill. The net result was Campbell’s own caucus cutting him off in his own committee. The gas tax hike died, but the surviving bill permits county councils to send a sales tax hike to the voters, without having to obtain permission of the legislature, for highways—and light rail! The final law, however, explicitly exempts heavy rail, which limits the counties’ ability to fund commuter and intercity rail.

This law means that the state has abdicated its responsibility for transportation and has shifted it to the counties. If you want to know what that means, look at a road map of Florida, a state where the counties reign supreme. Look at the sheer number of toll roads as well as toll bridges on the Gulf and Atlantic coasts. This is Arizona’s future—unless there is a change of course.

Our biggest local challenge is Proposition 105. This is the anti-light rail initiative sponsored by out-of-state money that is set for a vote in late August. It would kill any future expansion of Valley Metro Rail in Phoenix by sending its money to highways, prevent renewal of rolling stock, send our federal transit dollars to Los Angeles and Seattle, put an end to the Maricopa Association of Governments’ plans for commuter rail, make future intercity rail impossible, and throw a monkey wrench into everything All Aboard Arizona has worked for in the past eighteen months. Passage of this initiative would be an unmitigated disaster.

We’ve teamed with the Transportation Choices Coalition to fight this. Our first success was to write an argument against Prop 105 for the voters’ pamphlet to be issued just before the election. It was received so well that other organizations in the coalition used it as a template for their own arguments. The good news is that a large coalition has formed, it has key business organizations and organized labor on board, initial polling is hopeful, and a campaign on social media, television and radio is being prepared by professionals.

Phoenix Union Station is on the block, thanks to Sprint leaving it for a larger facility. Could it be used again for rail? The biggest obstacle is that development in downtown Phoenix has bypassed that neighborhood for a location to the east near Chase Field. The area around Union Station today is the home of the homeless. But should the station become a development nexus it could change the entire area. One suggestion is to pick up the station and move it to a better spot, but the station is on the National Registry of Historic Buildings, which complicates matters.

As part of the Rail Passengers Association’s “Summer by Rail,” Chef Madison (“Madi”) Butler is coming to Phoenix and Tucson on her national tour via Amtrak. Her trip is aimed at meeting transit-oriented people, particularly young professionals, and combining it with food venues accessible by rail transit. Chef Madi was trained at the Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, and her experience should provide a wonderful alternative for those of us who find anything beyond Cracker Barrel an adventure.

Our goal for Madi is to connect her with the transportation movers and shakers in the two cities. We’ve got her booked for a soiree at the Four Peaks Brewery in Tempe on August 11. If you’re in town, drop in and meet us.

We’ve launched our Western Interstate Trains Coalition, but I’ll be providing coverage of that in a separate article. There is a lot going on.

Stay tuned.
Dear Passenger Rail Advocate:

RailNation: California - The largest nationwide gathering of passenger rail supporters is coming to Sacramento, Friday, October 18 - Monday, October 21, At The Sheraton Grand Hotel!

This is your opportunity to interact with & learn from industry experts; leading rail advocates from across the country and like-minded supporters.

Saturday, October 19th’s Advocacy Symposium will focus on three main ‘tracks’:

- **Inclusion & Equity** - ‘Rail needs to benefit everyone’
- **Making Change Happen** - ‘Enough with the studies; how do we get something done’
- **What Passengers Want** - ‘Enhancing the full passenger experience’

Confirmed Program Speakers Include:

- Chad Edison - Deputy Secretary for Transportation - California State Transportation Agency
- Jim Allison - Manager of Planning - Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority

Prominent Representatives from Amtrak; California Elected Officials & Industry Stakeholders will also be participating.

**Friday, October 18** will offer an optional ‘Hands-On’ Advocacy Workshop lead by Rail Passenger’s Sean Jeans-Gail, in addition to tours to ride the SMART Train; an opportunity to visit the Siemens USA Plant in Sacramento; a tour of the SacRT system and an evening Welcome Reception.

**Sunday Morning, October 20** the Association’s Council of Representatives will hold a Business Meeting, followed by plenty of free time Sunday afternoon to explore Sacramento (including the world famous California State Railroad Museum).

**Monday, October 21** will feature an optional all-day trip to view the construction underway for the California High Speed Rail Network.

Event Registration Is Now Open And Tour/Trip Tickets Are Available For Purchase While discounted group-rate hotel rooms at the Sheraton Grand are now sold out, there are many other attractively-priced nearby alternative hotels. Watch for more event information and details coming soon! Questions? - Please contact Bruce Becker

*We look Forward To Seeing You In Sacramento!*

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The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum will host the annual **Central Coast Railroad Festival**

October 4-6, 2019

Come celebrate the rich history and future of trains and tracks on the Central Coast. Model layout tour, depot to visit, history centers, museums, and more. Many of the venues are free.

See the detailed schedule here: CCRRF.com/schedule.html

Not all venues are open all days/times.
Electrification

By Paul Dyson – Director of Marketing – Rail Propulsion Systems, LLC, Fullerton, CA

Last month, the Los Angeles Times (June 5th) reported that California is now producing more solar generated electricity than it can consume. What do we propose to take advantage of it? Electrification! Given the imperatives of global warming and the continued problem of air pollution in both our urban and rural areas we have to stop burning fossil fuels for transportation as soon as alternatives allow. Indeed the LA Times in the same week reported that air pollution was rising again after years of decline.

For railroads, electrification has almost always meant fixed plant along the right of way. This most typically involves an energized rail alongside or between the running rails, or more commonly, catenary wires strung from gantries or poles. Overhead catenary is being installed on the Caltrain right of way between San Francisco and San Jose, and existing systems are being extended in Europe and Asia. While the capital cost is high, if there is a large volume of traffic there is a positive return on the investment if costs are controlled and the latest, most efficient systems are used.

In southern California, traffic density, the combination of Surfliner and Metrolink services, is approaching the level whereby electrification is viable. Should we then propose stringing up the wires, and replacing the rolling stock fleet with new locomotives or electric multiple units? (emus). I have been a proponent of electrification since I began my railroad career fifty years ago. Yet, given our unique circumstances here I believe that we need to look at an alternative that will give us most of the benefits, avoid some of the disadvantages, and be installed at a much lower cost.

What are the barriers to “conventional” wired electrification?

Here in the western United States our railroad forefathers built tunnels and other structures with extremely high clearance, much higher than just about any other railroad worldwide. And as containerized international trade has grown so the common carrier railroads have increased that vertical clearance even more to accommodate double stack container cars. While this improves the efficiency of freight haulage it makes electrification problematical. Even more clearance would be required to provide a safe gap between the top of the highest freight car and the high voltage wire, and then a further gap between the wire and bridges, tunnels etc.

In addition to physically accommodating electrification, you must add to that the capital cost of the fixed structures, and the significant intrusion into the environment of steel masts and associated supports which would be at least 50% higher than that required for light rail passenger. Realistically we have to plan on the basis that overhead catenary electrification is not going to be an option.

While Tier 4 diesels significantly reduce the pollution caused by conventional diesel locomotives, a diesel is still a diesel. It consumes fossil fuel and generates emissions. We have yet to see how well these new locomotives work in practice, but already Metrolink is reporting that their new fleet is using more fuel than anticipated. What are the alternatives? Let’s go forward to first principles. A modern locomotive is electric powered, and the diesel carries around its own electricity generating plant. So the puzzle is, how and where do you generate the electricity? An American regional passenger train, Surf line or Metrolink for example, is heavy. Six Bombardier cars weigh a total of three hundred and thirty tons, plus passengers and water, plus about one hundred and forty tons for the locomotive. That takes a lot of electricity to get it started from a station, and to lift it up gradients such as are found on the Antelope Valley, Altamont, and Coast lines. Overhead catenary gives access to almost unlimited power, especially for a short burst such as the first few minutes from zero mph to line speed. Can alternatives do the same?

While it has been available for many years, there has recently been something of a revolution in battery power. Led by innovators such as Elon Musk and the Tesla company the types of battery available and their performance is advancing rapidly. Some types charge more quickly, others hold their charge longer, or simply have a longer life. The question for railroaders is always, can these promises of performance match the reality of the harsh railroad environment? Railroad service has been known to crush the dreams of innovators (remember diesel hydraulic locomotives?). Extreme temperatures, dirt and dust, long periods away from maintenance bases, 24/7 operation will test the best engineering. Passengers demand reliability or it will be back to the private car, and don’t ask me to come back to a sweltering station platform to try again any time soon, thank you very much!

The answer, I think, is a gradual, cautious move into battery-electric locomotives coupled to a conventional, low emission diesel locomotive. What are the benefits of this hybrid approach?

- The diesel locomotive will get you home regardless of the state of the battery.
- The diesel generator will continue to charge the battery locomotive.
- The Battery locomotive will have battery modules for easy change out.
- Batteries could be leased and returned when better technology is available. Used batteries can be recycled and used for lineside storage and overnight charging.
- Most passenger rail storage yards already have plug in power for train maintenance, which can be used for locomotive charging.
- Uses existing fleet of cars and recycles locomotives to minimize capital expense.

This last point is critical. All of our passenger rail services need infrastructure improvements, including many miles of double track, to remove bottlenecks and improve reliability. Let’s focus available dollars on that.

As the technology evolves, lineside recharging batteries can capture excess solar power and recharge the batteries during turnaround stops, or overnight. Rail Propulsion Systems believes that we can grow this technology in California and create a new industry.
Finally – Metro Votes Unanimously for Antelope Valley Line Infrastructure

The Package of improvements permits 30 minute interval service between Los Angeles and Santa Clarita, and hourly to Lancaster
Still needs to be funded, but unanimous vote is a good omen

By Paul Dyson

25 years since the Northridge earthquake provoked a spate of station construction and new Metrolink service we are finally seeing the first moves towards substantial improvements to the Antelope Valley line. First to clear up misunderstandings about who does what:

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority aka Metro: Owns the line as far as Palmdale and is responsible for the infrastructure. Also, Metro is a member agency of Metrolink.

Southern California Regional Rail Authority aka Metrolink: The six county Joint Powers Authority (JPA) that runs the trains.

Since the Antelope Valley line between Los Angeles and Lancaster is entirely within Los Angeles County (the only Metrolink line that is within a single county) Metro is the agency that will primarily fund the improvements that the staff recommends. You can read the full report on line at the Metro.net website by searching for the program and planning committee meeting of July 17, 2019.

In broad strokes, Metro staff recommended, and the Board approved, a package of improvements (see map) that will provide capacity to allow Metrolink to operate a thirty-minute interval, all day service between Los Angeles and Santa Clarita, and hourly to Lancaster. The total estimated price tag is $175 million, which must make it the least expensive project for a half hourly service anywhere in the Metro territory.

There was a little bit of drama at Wednesday’s committee meeting. The chair, Supervisor Solis, had opted to combine this item with another on a part of the line and hear both at the end of the meeting. Given the large agenda the meeting went on and on, as stalwart proponent Mayor Marsha McClean, Transit Coalition’s Bart Reed and I shuffled impatiently in our seats. Close to One o’clock and three of the five committee members, including the Chair, left for other engagements and we thought we may have wasted a morning. Fortunately acting Chair Dupont-Walker ruled that without a quorum the item would be referred direct to the full Board (Thursday 25th) rather than held over, so we set our calendars for the following week.

At today’s Board meeting Board member and County Supervisor Barger, whose district encompasses most of the north end of the line as well as Burbank and Glendale, and Board member and Mayor of Glendale Ara Najarian spoke very positively about the benefits of increased train frequency. From the audience, support came from Mayor Marsha McClain of Santa Clarita and Mayor of Palmdale, Steve Hofbauer and Board Member of NCTC, Victor Lindenheim, representing the SCV Chamber of Commerce, and Board Member NCTC, and Michelle Kampbell, from Assemblywoman Christy Smith’s Office.

Arthur Sohikian, Executive Director of North County Transportation Coalition, our brother in arms Bart Read, Executive Director of the Transit Coalition, and David Kriske of the City of Burbank staff, as well as this writer.

Congratulations to all concerned, now for the fund raising.
The RailPAC Mission: Passenger Rail advocacy, Publications...both print and electronic, Representation at regional meetings, and Rail education.

Join us! More memberships increase our strength in presenting the case for rail to policymakers at all levels!

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