

# ColoRail Passenger

January-February-March 2011

Issue #65

## Nationally-known rail leader:

**Gene Skoropowski to speak at  
ColoRail winter meeting --**

**March 5th - Englewood**

**Community Center/Library**

**at Englewood Station**

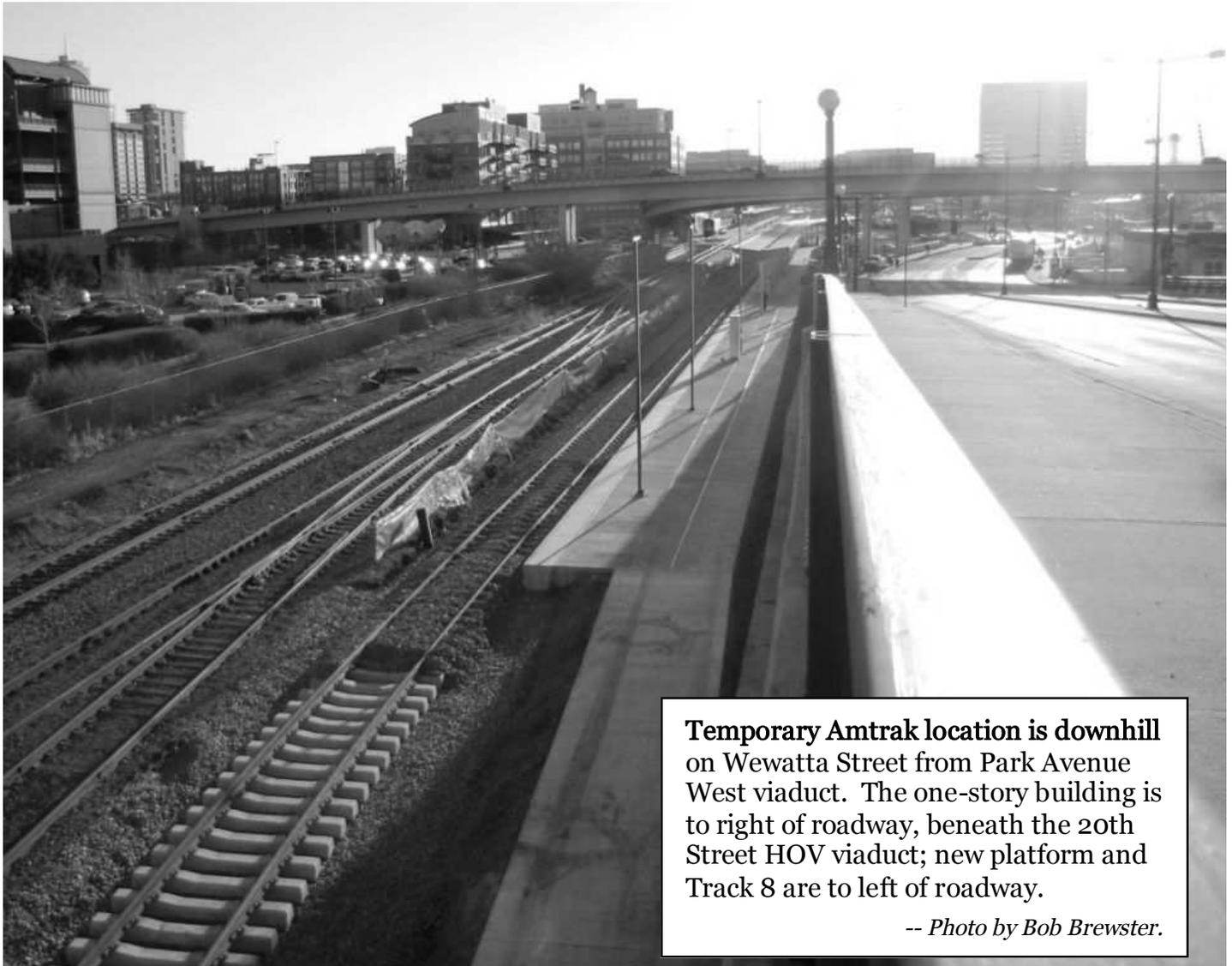
**Doors open 10:30 a.m.**

**Meeting starts 10:45 a.m.**

## Back track for Amtrak in Denver Union Station

At 8:02 p.m. on February 3rd, the last Amtrak train pulled out of Denver Union Station on Track 1 with conductor **Brad Swartzwelter** in charge. 22 hours later, Train 6 was parked on new Track 8 and passengers were making their way across Wewatta Street to the new

waiting room (formerly the Light Bulb Supply Co.). Train 5 of that morning had been canceled due to the aftermath of the Midwest blizzard. The well-appointed building is about half the size needed to handle peak loads during the next three to four years.



**Temporary Amtrak location is downhill** on Wewatta Street from Park Avenue West viaduct. The one-story building is to right of roadway, beneath the 20th Street HOV viaduct; new platform and Track 8 are to left of roadway.

-- Photo by Bob Brewster.

*"A Voice for Colorado's Rail Passengers"*

Will the new tunnel just be a big bore?

# Tunnel was "in the way"

*The ColoRail Passenger normally avoids nostalgia, but an objective look at the well-utilized pedestrian tunnel under Denver Union Station compels attention to this now lost part of our history.*

Tunnels are more noted for their utilitarian purposes rather than their decor. They're built to avoid something. Our former pedestrian tunnel at Denver Union Station served that purpose for almost 100 years: a conduit for travelers, coming and going by rail. It was a Spartan, all-business facility, passing beneath behemoth steel girders whose assignments were to support the weight of hissing iron monsters, later throbbing diesels, towing their cars of human cargo and precious mail and express to and from places near and far.

The walls of white glazed brick looked sanitary, the floor, well, it could have used some gussying-up, but it worked as designed. All but a few of the portals to long-gone platforms are bricked over. The west end got chopped back about a decade ago to accommodate new light rail services, almost exactly where juice-powered interurbans once called. But the tunnel did its job admirably, it kept people from crossing active station tracks to reach their trains. And it kept them dry as trains rumbled overhead.

Our tunnel will be stripped of its fix-

tures and demolished to make way for a new era of rail transportation. While we should be thankful for the new rail era, we are left with a number of questions about how our planners and "deciders" accomplish the coming era. Does it reflect poorly on us that a historically-designated symbol of Denver's past transportation achievements will exist only in photographs, books, and fading, fragile memories?

Decisions were made that deemed our tunnel "in the way of progress."

But must progress trample on the past if it is avoidable? Could our existing, functional tunnel have been modified once again to continue its public duty and serve as a reminder of things past - upon which the future is built? We shall never know, shall we?

Why do we so often fail to respect, acknowledge, and preserve the accomplishments of those who came before us as we address the same mobility challenges in the coming era?

Our tunnel's portals ushered people to wars and weddings, funerals and festivities - in much simpler times. No virtual strip searches, no garment and shoe removals.

Just dinner in the diner; after all, nothing could be finer. We shall miss that connection, that symbol of our origins as we peer into the future.

ColoRail board member **Edie Bryan** orchestrated a fitting farewell to our tunnel on Sunday, February 6. Channel 9 was in attendance to mark the occasion. We all owe Edie our heartfelt gratitude in celebrating the passing of a piece of Denver's "buried treasure." Thanks, Edie!

*Bob Brewster is a former Vice-President of ColoRail and participated in the Union Station planning process when permitted to do so.*

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ColoRail, the Colorado Rail Passenger Association, is in correspondence and coordinates with NARP, the National Association of Railroad Passengers. Membership in both organizations is encouraged.



Commuters already are complaining about closure of the tunnel, Amtrak customers are learning to find the temporary waiting room, but next to learn the hard way that the tunnel is gone will be Rockies fans.

The new underground bus concourse now under construction will replace this function, but drawings show that it has an institutional or airport look reminding of the 1960's.

# Californians will never ride trains?

Easy to get  
to Englewood

*It has a nice ring to it:* to Englewood by train! ColoRail will once again hold a general meeting in the (large) Community Room at the city's combined city hall, community center, gallery and library adjacent to Englewood Station.

Featured speaker for the Saturday,

## **Nominating committee at work**

The ColoRail Board would like to invite you to nominate yourself and/or others for the ColoRail board of directors. Directors serve for two years. Four board positions will be open for election in 2011. Nominees must be members of ColoRail in good standing. If you are nominating someone else, first please secure their permission. The Nominating Committee will be developing a slate of candidates for membership approval at the Annual Meeting in May 2011. (Specific mid-month date to be announced.)

The deadline for nominations is March 15, 2011. Nominations will also be permitted from the floor at the annual meeting, but again we ask that you secure the approval of the candidate to be nominated.

Nominations may be sent to the **Don Zielesch** of the Nominating Committee at [DWZ1@Juno.com](mailto:DWZ1@Juno.com) or by US Mail at Ste. 271, 1550 Larimer St., Denver, CO 80202.

## **Pueblo Hub Developing**

The week of February 14th saw the Greyhound station operation in Pueblo relocated to the city's Downtown transit center. The City will provide agency services.

Subject to the reopening of US50 after a rockslide, the Greyhound and Pueblo transit buses are to be joined by a Salida <-> Pueblo service using federal funds obtained by Colorado DOT.

March 5th meeting will be **Gene Skoropowski**. He is known throughout the transit and rail industries for his success at developing the weakest of the California state-sponsored Amtrak routes into a thriving service with many uses (San Jose - Oakland - Martinez - Sacramento - Sierras). And that was accomplished while dealing with the legacy of a railroad that seemed to take delight as the top company in the West for obstructing passenger service (Southern Pacific). All the while, critics were claiming that Californians will never ride trains.

Skoropowski is now working with the HNTB Corporation, and is the former Managing Director of the Capitol

Corridor Joint Powers Authority and a former NARP Director.

Doors will open at 10:30 a.m., with refreshments laid out. Business will begin at 10:45 a.m. The meeting is expected to continue after the speaker's presentation with updates on legislation and a discussion of ColoRail activities until 1:30 p.m.

Englewood's Community Center at 1000 Englewood Parkway may be accessed on weekends by the **D-Line** and bus **Rtes 0, 12, and 27**. Located at the site of former Cinderella City, the center and adjacent shopping and restaurants draw customers from neighboring cities to this Transit-Oriented Development. Nearby parking is also available.

## **Grand Junction group tackles landmark station and veterans' health issues in restoration project**

"We will bring the two together. Veterans will be employed to repair and restore the Grand Union Depot to its former glory and splendor. The unskilled laborers will be offered opportunities for training and the veterans skilled in construction, brickwork, electrical and other trades will work together under the non profit Operation Revamp, Inc to carry out the extensive restoration of the station. Healing will take place.

"During the second phase of the project an art studio, with wood and metal workshops will be established in the freight area of the building for use by veterans and military families suffering from PTSD, TBI and other emotional issues. Catharsis is a tremendous therapeutic tool and is easily accessed through art. The art studio will continue to develop as the renovations continue in the main depot culminating with a public art gallery and gift shop. Quiet space will be available for alternative therapy.

"The refurbishing and restoration will take from 5 to 10 years. Those working on this project will be invited to become part of a team who will provide free or low cost remodeling and renovation services to veterans and military families in the area. They will continue to be part of the Depot and will have an office in the building.

"Museums and permanent collections will be installed in the former women's lounge and men's smoking room. Meeting rooms will be available. Office space upstairs will be offered for counselors and art therapists.

"Once a refuge station for those fleeing the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 – where many were treated and healed -- the formidable building will again provide refuge and healing to a different group, the heroes and veterans who will heal the building's wounds."

From <http://www.operationrevamp.org/>

# INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES FOR COLORADO



There was nothing second-class about the second panel at the Intercity Passenger Rail conference held at the University of Denver last September 16th. **Michael J. Ogborn**, Managing Director, Government and

Policy Affairs, OmniTrax, moderated the panel. **John C. Bennett**, P.E., Assistant Vice-President, Policy Management, Amtrak started with an update on intercity and high speed rail from Amtrak's perspective.

cal Year 2009 revenue, including ancillary businesses. Understanding that helps to put the amount of Amtrak's FY2010 \$563 million operating subsidy into perspective. Amtrak covers the highest percentage of its operating costs from revenues of any U.S. and Canadian passenger railroad.

The September 16th program was introduced by Dr. Patrick Sherry, Director of the National Center for Intermodal Transportation. The center emphasizes the *inter-modal* in its name. Along with their partners at the University of Mississippi, the Center at DU works to bring modes of transportation together for greater benefits than might be gained in separate traditions.

In the late morning session, the issues of planning and financing high speed rail and improved corridor services were discussed. Other presentations were summarized in *ColoRail Passenger Issue #64*.

While Amtrak is often referred to in discussions of high-speed and other types of rail service, it is not uncommon for the people discussing it to only be referring to their own experiences with it. Bennett started out with a broad summary of the 21,100 mile Amtrak system covered by 310 daily trains through 528 stations. Nearly half of the trains run on some segments at speeds above 100 mph, but 70% of Amtrak train-miles run on track owned by other railroads.

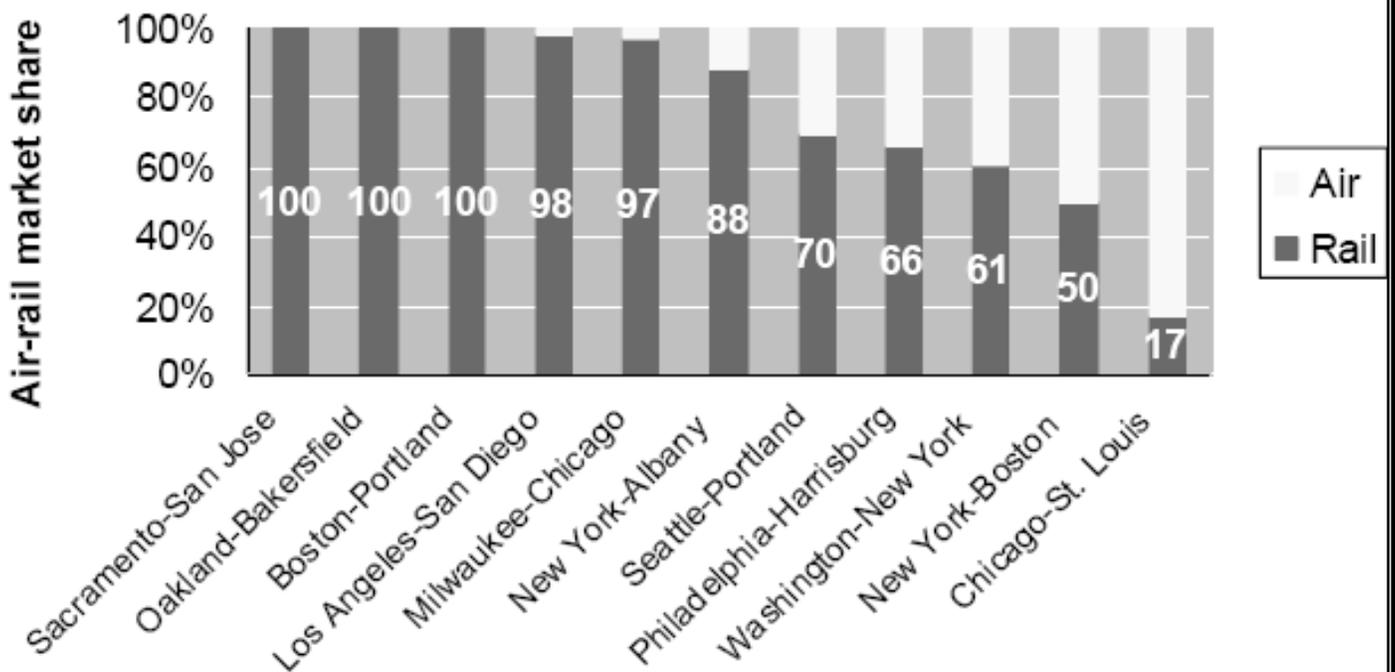
Amtrak generated \$2.3 billion in Fis-

Federal funding for Amtrak capital needs in FY 2010 is \$1 billion. Much of that is going to the capital project backlog that developed through two generations of neglect since World War II.

Bennett reviewed the ridership record of recent years at Amtrak. In spite of the economic downturn, Amtrak experienced its best first quarter and first half boarding counts in its history. The return of higher gas prices is a continuing incentive for ridership where train service is available. The company was enjoying

Graphics in this issue are as presented in the conference, without editing.

Top ten corridors – Air-rail share, FY 09



# New possibilities for Amtrak future

Planning was prohibited

(Continued from page 4)

strong administration and public support for passenger rail, with support also from Congress. It was in partnerships with 15 states.

This was all done with 3000 fewer employees than in 2000 and with a specific prohibition from 2002 through 2008 against planning High Speed Rail or other new services. And, as this time passed, customers could see that the equipment grew older than at any time in Amtrak's history.

Bennett reviewed the various subsidies to other passenger modes that readers of this newsletter are al-

ready familiar with, generously not mentioning how blind many op-ed columnists are to those facts.

As the excerpts from his presentation on these pages show, all that spending on other modes is not getting us very far. He then introduced the legislative blueprint from which Amtrak is developing its plans.

It basically would apply the same concepts to Amtrak as are used with other forms of transportation. The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) sets up matching grant programs for intercity/HSR capital investments. It encourages the Federal Railroad Ad-

ministration, the states and Amtrak to work in partnership to establish new or improved rail passenger services. States are expected to plan rail service and to provide operational and capital funding. The FRA is expected to provide capital funding and integrate state planning into a national system.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) passed in February 2009 also provided funding for rail projects, without requiring a state match. 79 applications from 31 states were selected.

Bennett took the audience through the many aspects of the PRIIA and ARRA. The announced grant programs would benefit at least 13 existing Amtrak routes. The funds were also expected to extend the existing *Hiawatha* service from Milwaukee to Madison and to begin service on the corridor from Cleveland to Cincinnati through Columbus. While those have since been scuttled, some other projects are moving ahead.

A variety of financing sources are under consideration with attempts to provide longer-term funding to end the turmoil which has blocked progress through annual funding fights. These include motor fuels taxes, the use of airport charges for air-rail stations, loans and credit assistance, tax-exempt and tax-credit bonds (used now for airports and highways), highway tolls or Vehicle Miles Traveled taxes, carbon taxes or emissions trading, petroleum-related fees on imports or elimination of the current tax breaks, and the exotic communications spectrum auction concept.

Bennett called for a level playing field between the modes, something that the railroad industry has been requesting since World War I.

*Additional reports from the conference are on the following page.*

- Competing modes are congested, and getting worse
  - Number of urban areas with more than 20 hours of annual rush hour traffic delay increased *sevenfold* between 1982 and 2007
  - Between 2000 and 2008, number of flight delays due to airport terminal volume increased by 42%
- Rail is most competitive in the sub-500 mile intercity market – and it's a big market
  - More than 79% of total trips USDOT classifies as 'long distance' (50+ miles) fall into this category
  - Number of Americans living in urban areas expected to double (150M to 300M) by 2050

# INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES FOR COLORADO



The intercity passenger rail financial panel at DU continued with **Alex Brown**, financial consultant. He provided an overview of the characteristics and demands of fixed income markets, often thought of as the bond market by the public.

The fixed income markets often supply the most intense scrutiny of public or private projects, if investors believe that their money is at risk. Proponents of high-speed rail are not exempt from this caution.

Brown summarized the primary concerns of these long-term investors as :

1. Security of principal.
2. Certainty of coupon payment.
3. Liquidity.

What these pension fund and wealth managers do not want, he summarized as:

1. To own physical assets.
2. A 'story' bond.
3. Innovation.
4. Burdensome surveillance.
5. Refinancing risk.

What struck some listeners in regard to items 2 through 4 is how aptly

they describe high-speed rail schemes that depend on unproven new technology and/or are not protected against future government intervention of the sort that ended privately-run rail transit and intercity passenger service.

He expertly surveyed the factors that reassure investors that they will receive their expected return, using the Denver Union Station Project Authority as an example. Important assurances come from its lease agreement by RTD and the City and County of Denver's "contingent commitment."

Recent practical experience with rail project financing was represented by **Brian Middleton** of the RTD's "Eagle P-3" project. This element of the FasTracks program uses a public-private partnership to deliver passenger commuter rail service, but Middleton suggested that the same approach might be used for high speed rail projects.

The Eagle project will deliver its service through a "DBFOM" package that has drawn in a consortium of firms to Design, Build, Finance, Operate and Maintain three initial commuter rail lines for RTD.

The contractors are responsible for operation and maintenance of all design/build elements, including replacements. Security of passengers, staff and assets will be a joint effort under RTD's direction.

The concession period will combine the 5-year Design/Build program with 29 years of Operation/Maintenance. RTD is to retain all assets at all times, with revenues generated by the project remaining with RTD. Fare policy and structure and the operating plan are to be established by the RTD Board. Fare enforcement will be a joint effort.

A Colorado High Speed Rail project would likely have similar objectives to the FasTracks projects, using adjustable payments based on project completion and performance. And, "the project must be capable of being sustained financially over the long-term."

The conference included a luncheon at which animated discussions took place. After the Luncheon Keynote talk by **Rod Diridon, Sr.** that was covered in Issue #64, a Q & A session offered an opportunity to clarify some of the issues raised.

## "Nowhere Man"

Reported in the *Denver Post* of January 26th:

"[Obama's] call for more 'investment' is nothing more than more government stimulus. We don't need to be spending more money on high-speed rail that goes from somewhere to nowhere. ... We've got to stop out-of-control spending and reduce government barriers to job creation." **Rep. Cory Gardner**, R-Yuma.

## "Taps" for the Union Station Tunnel" - as sung by the 25 people who gathered for the Sunday, February 6th farewell:

Now farewell / To the historic tunnel / To the trains / To the games / Ring the bell! / Now goodbye, / With a sigh, / We sing goodbye.  
*1st verse by Edie Bryan*

Deed is done, / Gone the fun, / A last run. / No more steps, no more schleps, the deed is done. / With a tear in the eye / We all say, / A final goodbye.  
*2nd verse by Ira Schreiber*

# Good news for California

A time when gas was cheap

*(Continued from page 8)*

percentage of the original federal funding grant. And let's not forget the fact that passenger rail equipment builder Talgo will move its manufacturing plant from Milwaukee to Illinois in 2012 after trains for Oregon are finished, because of the rail project cancellation. Jobs lost as a result of refusing federal funds should put a crimp in the Walker's inaugural address promise to bring 250,000 new jobs to Wisconsin in two years.

Both Walker and Kasich made much of returning the funds to the federal treasury to be applied to the national debt, however, before they made their offers, both asked that the money be kept by their states for highway and bridge maintenance projects. Both men had received generous campaign contributions from highway, auto, and petroleum industries. Apparently debt reduction is OK if it is done by depriving citizens of passenger trains but not highway travel.

Fortunately Transportation Secretary **Ray LaHood** would have none of it. LaHood spoke with both governors-elect to make sure they did not want to backtrack on their decision and then moved quickly to assign the funds to rail projects in other states that were only too happy to get it.

If there is to be a happy ending to this story, it may come as officials in California could scrap their initially politically unpopular "train to nowhere" project between two small towns in the San Joaquin Valley. With the new money, the first portion of their high-speed rail line will now connect the sizable cities of Fresno with Bakersfield. Then there are newly elected Governors **Pat Quinn** (IL) and **Andrew Cuomo** (NY) who practically tripped over each other announcing their interest in taking Wisconsin's and Ohio's money for their own state corridors.

Walker and Kasich have decided to reverse gears and move Wisconsin

and Ohio to a time when gas was cheap and environmental concerns were minimal. They see no problem in promoting the automobile as a solution to 21st Century problems. They have no worries about diminishing petroleum supplies, the fact that much of our oil comes from places that dislike us, or the growing climate changes are tied to increasing use of the automobile around the planet. They are unable to see that their states not only benefit from the jobs created by construction and operations in their respective rail corridors, but also how such a service will attract new jobs, industry, and residents to states which have been in the economic doldrums for some time.

I guess there is a reason why they are called "Rust Belt" states.

*Jon Esty is Past President of ColoRail. He resides in Ridgway, Colorado.*

Often missed by national media: the California project will benefit the existing *San Joaquins*, too. -- editor

## ColoRail Membership

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**\$15 PER YEAR**  
pays for 2011 mailings,  
printing, publicity

Ill-informed  
decisions

View from the Ridge:...*Rusty Thinking in the Rustbelt* by Jon Esty

"That train is dead. I said it during the campaign. It is dead. Passenger rail is not in Ohio's future." Ohio Governor-elect John Kasich, WDTN, Columbus, November 3, 2010.

"Only the communists distort the truth more." The late Paul Weyrich, noted conservative transit advocate and founder of the Moral Majority at a Transit Alliance sponsored meeting of transportation officials at the Oxford Hotel, Denver, June 2, 2000. Mr. Weyrich was referring to fellow conservatives who oppose passenger rail.

I wouldn't go as far as Paul Weyrich in almost labeling passenger rail opponents "communists." There is enough indiscriminate name calling already, although I do understand the emotional frustration of rail advocates when elected officials make ill-informed decisions.

We had no lack of these decisions in the last election what with newly elected Governors Scott Walker (WI) and John Kasich (OH) using passenger rail as political fodder to illustrate what they thought was pretentious and wasteful government spending in their campaigns. Because both men "felt" no one would ride trains in their states, they decided they could kick well-established plans for higher speed rail programs to the curb and gain political advantage from it. So much for potential ridership and economic development forecasting. One also has to

wonder if these officials actually get out of their own states into the country or abroad to see what is really going on.

In California, the Sacramento to the Bay Area Capitol Corridor has moved from three round trips a day to a phenomenal 16 daily well-patronized round trips under the leadership of Gene Skoropowski. Amtrak's new Washington-Lynchburg service is running an operating surplus and the NE Corridor and other state rail corridors are chalking up steady ridership gains. Walker only needs to take a trip on one of the seven daily round trips from Milwaukee to Chicago (Hiawatha Corridor) to gauge the popularity of passenger rail serving his state. True, we are not talking super fast trains for the most part, but what we are seeing is that people will ride trains when a minimum investment in track, stations, and trains along with some decent marketing has been made.

In their desire to make passenger trains a political football, Walker and Kasich have forgotten to consider job benefit, transportation efficiency, environment, and global competitiveness in their calculations. The \$800 million allocated by the Obama administration to the Milwaukee-Madison rail line would have paid completely for the project. The only state funding requirement was an estimated \$5 million annual operating subsidy, a tiny

*(Continued on page 7)*

# ColoRail Passenger

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