

ColoRail Passenger

February-March 2014

Issue #74

Thanks owed to many:

Support for *SW Chief* reaches across boundaries

Boundaries of all kinds have not been barriers to cooperation to save Amtrak's *Southwest Chief*. Leaders from three states, elected officials from both major political parties, residents of big cities, small towns and ranches have joined together to find constructive solutions to the jigsaw puzzle created by practical engineering issues and conflicting Federal policies.

At right is Las Vegas, NM Mayor **Alfonso Ortiz, Jr.**, one of several leaders speaking on this subject in the ColoRail organized meeting in Pueblo. *More on this issue inside.*

Photo in Pueblo meeting by Gary Sprung.



***Rail issues are rolling!* All aboard for ColoRail meeting March 8th**

Whew! If you have not been keeping up with fast-moving rail developments in Colorado, the Saturday, March 8th ColoRail general meeting will be essential. If you have participated, there is still more coming down the track.

The meeting will be held in the new Colorado History Museum at 12th

Avenue & Broadway in Denver, from 9 a.m. till noon. Legislators and other community leaders will attend, subject to their schedules with the legislature in session. Topics will include this year's specific legislation to maintain the *Southwest Chief* line through Colorado, future Front Range rail plans and a report on

Denver Union Station's multiple openings.

Pastries and coffee will be served. The History Museum is easily reached via a short walk from the Civic Center area, or directly on RTD **Rtes 0, 6, 9, 10, 52 and 83Ltd.** Indoor paid parking and on-street parking is also available.

"A Voice for Colorado's Rail Passengers"

Don't take
wrong roads

At the State and Local level:

Station volunteers show the way for holiday travel

Jay Jones and I would like to thank the following volunteers who helped out at the Amtrak station over the Thanksgiving and Christmas-New Year holiday weekends. We appreciate the effort you all made to help out. There was a fair turn out and reports of heavy loads, especially during the Christmas-New Year's period.

The following volunteers helped over Thanksgiving:

Edie Bryan
Ron Kaminen (3x)
Tom Peyton
Vince Szafranko (2)
Betty Vander Koi
Ron Vander Koi
Don Ziesch

The following volunteers worked over the Christmas-New Year's period 2013-14:

John Bishop (2)
Ron Kaminen (4)
Tom Peyton (3)
Don Ziesch

If anyone's name has been left off, please let me know so I can correct the records.

See you at Easter. From what we understand Amtrak will be back at DUS on or about February 28, 2014. We don't know what arrangements will be made to accommodate us and our material. Keep tuned!

DwZ

TRANSPORTATION BALLOT MEASURE – NO THANKS

Last year, county and local government officials proposed a statewide transportation ballot measure MPACT 64, for the 2014 election. It would have imposed a 7 tenths of a cent sales tax and raised over 600 million dollars for roads and transit. 120 million dollars would go to Denver RTD, 80 million to statewide transit agencies including 5 million for CDOT to spend on administration and studies.

As it turns out, poll results indicate Colorado voters are not interested in any tax hikes right now, as over half have not yet recovered from the Great Recession.

As far as ColoRail is concerned, the ballot measure was flawed from the start. It had no funding for passenger rail, at all, save whatever CDOT might have allocated to more studies. In response to the early proposal, I began to seek support for adding .05 percent to the measure for passenger rail.

The objective would be to finance the early, but crucial building blocks for passenger rail statewide. This might include acquiring important segments of right of way, expanding current bridges to accommodate more tracks over or under, adding or improving stops for the *Southwest Chief* and *California Zephyr*, for example.

This amendment would have raised about 42 million dollars a year for these building blocks to passenger rail along the Front Range. For example, the 30 to 40 million dollars neces-

sary to reroute the Southwest Chief to Pueblo. Anyway, the question is moot for now but ColoRail needs to be ready to respond to the inevitable need for infrastructure funding in Colorado, and, next time, make sure passenger rail is a key component.

Jim Souby

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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.

"Thanks and no thanks!"

IN APPRECIATION FOR LIFETIMES OF SERVICE

Two ColoRail members who both reached out beyond their Boulder jobs to serve the larger world have passed away. Both had made important presentations to ColoRail general meetings.

Michael Rowe, active in numerous transportation projects, died at age 68 in his Boulder home on September 13th. Not only willing to speak up on behalf of railroad alternatives, but also willing to put in many hours of hard work, he will be missed. His extensive interests led to a ColoRail speech on the way that lopsided Federal spending on barge navigation in turn damaged rail transportation into Lewiston, Idaho.

University of Colorado physics professor emeritus Dr. **Al Bartlett** died on September 7th at the age of 90. In his retirement, he addressed many groups on the problem of rapid growth vs. natural resources. His membership in ColoRail and his speech to the group were reminders that efficient rail transportation can help to deal with the issue.



COLORADO RAIL
PASSENGER
ASSOCIATION

Selected photographs in this issue are in color for readers who request e-mail PDF delivery of the *ColoRail Passenger*. Drop a note to join the e-mail list to

rw.rynerson@att.net.

Thanks for showing the way to new possibilities for Colorado travelers

ColoRail wants to thank the following people who were at the legislative hearing on the Southwest Chief bill in Denver on February 12th:

Rep **Leroy Garcia** and Sen **Larry Crowder**,
House and Senate Prime Sponsors

Sal Pace, Pueblo County Commissioner

Joe Reorda, Mayor, Trinidad

Carol Bolton, Mayor Pro Tem, Trinidad

Tom Acre, Trinidad City Manager

Skip Ruedeman, Lamar City Council member

Julie Hoerner Colorado Attorney

ColoRail Members

Ira Schreiber

Edie Bryan

Bob Brewster

John Bishop

Hugh Fowler

Jim Souby

Railroad Reps

Matthew Abbey, GM, San Luis and Rio Grande RR

Ray Lang, Chief, State Government Affairs, Amtrak

Mark Murphy, GM, Long Distance Trains, Amtrak

Labor reps

SMART Union **Carl Smith**

BLE rep **Bill Wilmesher**, BLET

CDOT reps

Kurtis Morrison and colleagues

Sal Pace urges
Pueblo reroute

Chief reason for meeting in Pueblo

by Richard Luckin

On September 14th about a hundred people attended the "Hail to the *Chief*" meeting held by ColoRail in Pueblo. These hundred represented cities and towns in Colorado, Kansas and New Mexico along the route. Twenty-eight Denver and Front Range ColoRail members and friends traveled to the event on a chartered motor coach from the RTD parking lot at the I-25 & Broadway Station.

As readers of the *ColoRail Passenger* know, the *Southwest Chief* is threatened with relocation to Texas, or possible termination, after 2016. The packed meeting started at 1:10 p.m. in the Pueblo Heritage Center, across from the beautifully restored Pueblo Union Depot.

ColoRail President **Jim Souby** introduced the various presenters on "How Do We Save the Chief?" Among the speakers were **Ross Capon**, President and CEO of the National Association of Railroad Passengers. **Sal Pace**, Pueblo County Commissioner, gave the keynote address.

The fundamental issue is that Burlington Northern - Santa Fe does not wish to maintain the track used by the Chief at passenger train standards on the Raton Pass line, since little freight traffic moves over it. Amtrak has gone on record stating it wishes to maintain the train on the current route and has presented cost-sharing ideas for track maintenance to the various states, as well as the railroad. So far, no plan has been accepted, but all of the cities along the line have come out in favor of maintaining the train's route.

The major goal of the meeting was to get general public support for maintaining the train on its present route, but also urging people to contact their state governments, Departments of Transportation in each state, as well as elected officials outlining the need for continued rail pas-

senger service in southern Colorado. It is important to note that while the Southwest Chief travels between Chicago and Los Angeles, most people do not travel the whole route. That they only ride a portion of it in an area with few alternatives makes this train more important than ever as it plays its role in maintaining mobility for citizens along the line.

Several dollar figures were batted around regarding cost-sharing and the amount it would take to accomplish the goal over a multi-year timetable. Discussions at the meeting also included "Front Range service" but it was evident that "saving the Chief" is the primary short-term goal of ColoRail.

Fund-raising will be important, as well as a coordinated communication plan to save a train worth saving. One attendee said after the meeting, "when I came down here, I thought it was a 10 to 90 chance, now I think it's more 60-40 in our favor."



Keynote speaker Sal Pace advanced the idea of linking the train to Front Range population via a stop in Pueblo. *Photos this page by Richard Luckin.*



Left -- Part of the crowd that paid close attention to the speakers. Right -- Mayor of Las Vegas, NM, Alfonso Ortiz, Jr., in the center of the photo, listens intently as participants exchange ideas.

bringing diverse interests together

Leaders from *SW Chief* region



Speakers included left -- Ross Capon, President and CEO of NARP and right - Rick Klein, City Manager of La Junta.

Photos this page by Gary Sprung.

NATIONAL OUTLOOK BRINGS NEW FACTORS

Excerpts from Ross Capon's address

It is common for speakers to pull out their smart phone and pronounce this as one of the key reasons why young people are less interested in driving. There's another factor going that supports Amtrak's long-distance trains. A recent TV news report reports on young people returning to small-town America as entrepreneurs. Young business folks from Montana – Fort Benton and White Sulphur Springs – were interviewed. One of them said, "It used to be location, location, location. Now it's who has the best web site."

There is a good chance that we either save the *Chief* on its current route or we lose it, as I think Ray Lang just said in a more subtle way. In a sense, that strengthens our case be-

cause it shows that Gallup and Albuquerque and Newton, Topeka and Lawrence should be equally concerned and fighting just as hard.

This train is tremendously important. It is the fastest train between Chicago and the West Coast, and the only direct train between Chicago and the biggest West Coast metropolis – Los Angeles – and the importance is magnified by including San Diego, for which Los Angeles is the Amtrak gateway. And the long-distance network as a whole is vital to the existence of Amtrak. No LD trains means 23 states lose all service – really, 25, if you include TX and OK because you'll agree that the *Heartland Flyer* could not survive in isolation.

So thank you the great turn-out today, and for all that you are doing!

Contradictions lead
to conundrums

by Bob Brewster

We rail advocates know the drill: espouse all the attributes of the rail mode and wait for our "leaders" to likewise recognize them - wake up and smell the creosote - and everything will be perfect with the world. So how's that working so far?

We know the answer. Mixed bag. And it's more empty than full. There are some bright spots, for sure, though many came to fruition through torturously long campaigns, some riddled with compromises that will likely affect the efficiencies and functions of the final products.

Locally, our own remake of Denver Union Station is a telling example: a limited number of short tracks means opening at full capacity, discounting future rail opportunities.

But there are many dull spots, too. There are states that just say no (to most anything). There is Congress. Then there is Amtrak, caught in the middle. Rail advocates know that "America's Railroad" was born (almost stillborn) in the shadows (5 o'clock?) of the Nixon administration. That's probably a sufficient enough curse for anything to fail, which some argue was the whole point in establishing Amtrak - an orderly shutdown of an anachronistic, archaic, useless, broken, nostalgic.....you get the idea.

But the silver stake (spike?) missed the heart and the condemned corpse kept popping up out of the box. There are some real rail heroes that kept the spark of life in the poor thing and gave it some new clothing: Amfleet cars, head-end power, then Superliners. Even some new track to roll on. Rail's value was rediscovered and the creature started to breathe on its own.

And then, there are those that continually insist that the Amtrak beast is still a bloodsucker that must be killed, or at least become a private bloodsucker, with "blood" and "taxes" being interchangeable nouns. Never mind all the billions in taxes that developed the airway/highway competition that almost killed the rail option. Not that there is

Conundrum: A paradoxical,

anything wrong with spending billions - just don't play favorites, which is what we deal with today in our quest for equality, kneeling before the transportation alter. Although there is a complication. While infrastructure for the anointed modes (air, road and waterways) fall in the public realm, much of the earth under the rail mode remains in the private realm. The same realm that deposited its emaciated passenger trains on the fledgling Amtrak's doorstep. Some trains were nurtured, others euthanized. Two subsequent sacrificial slaughters left us a skeleton rail system that needs meat on its bones to flourish and fill the glaring gaps that would benefit countless communities and their populations. So that is where rail advocates sit today, in a swirling morass of politics, blood/taxes, and would-be rail corpses. A conundrum. Let's look at some other Amtrak conundrums and questions, as the nation's most fuel-efficient people mover continues to overcome its disadvantaged childhood.

Follow this peculiar logic: (1) Congress demands Amtrak operate like a "real" business, and presumably earn a profit. (2) "Real" businesses estimate revenues and expenses years into the future. (3) "Real" businesses pursue growth (volume), expansion (diversity), and economy of scale (cheaper by the dozen). (4) "Real" businesses use marketing tools to attract and please customers to encourage repeat patronage. (5) "Real" businesses plan for the future and control their own destiny. (6) Congress denies all these attributes to Amtrak by way of threats, intimidation, financial cuts, and uncertainty. What are Amtrak's latest sacrificial offerings to please the Congressional Gods at the funnel of the steaming volcano? Toss in the pillow chocolates, cranberry juice, and the cheese cubes. It's a shame, and an embarrassment to America, that Amtrak must cower to this handful of high school bullies. Shades of Richard M. Nixon? Conundrum?

By the way, a "real" business would fire such Congressional micromanagers in a heartbeat for incompetence. The big question: why do the aforementioned solid business principles not apply to Amtrak? Particularly economy of scale? Why won't Congress permit it? What is wrong with this picture? Note to Congress: you are beholden to the Ameri-

can people first. Invest our cash *here*, not under some Afghan warlord's pillow.

Of course, this begs the larger question: where does it say that Amtrak must break even or earn a profit in its duty to provide this often essential mobility to the American people? And further, mobility choices for ALL citizens and visitors to this vast nation? Congress must be reminded that many Americans have few mobility options and Amtrak fills that void for some, but could fill the void for exponentially more, if allowed the freedom to explore expansion opportunities. And do members of Congress understand that the freedom of mobility is one of the most cherished? Not to mention the related economic impact. Conundrum, as bus and air service retreat from the heartland?

Amtrak's portion of the federal budget is microscopic compared to the many more questionable expenditures of federal largesse. Congress can dissipate more cash with an errant sneeze than Amtrak can consume in a year. Yet Amtrak, especially its long distance trains, remains a favored lightning rod for some legislators, neglecting the fact the Amtrak national network is open for the benefit of every American citizen, as opposed to so many federal distributions that cater to very narrow, parochial interests. Hypocrisy? Conundrum?

The availability and cost of fuel has dominated the national energy discussion since the early '70's, not long after Amtrak's miraculous inauguration in 1971. National security, national speed limits, national mobility, national fear.....all part of the dialogue. Rail gets an honorable mention as part of the solution, where it remains today. Where are the shouters from the rooftops: "Hey, steel wheels on steel rails and roller bearings! ?" It doesn't get much better than that..... Amtrak, commuter rail, light rail, streetcars? Hello? Anyone home? The silence is deafening. Conundrum?

Is "drill, baby, drill" really the answer we want? Rail should be a highly valued part of our energy paradigm because of its fuel efficiency.

Amtrak and its host railroads, the freight forwarders, have a tenuous relationship. Talk about conundrums! It's no secret

(Continued on page 7)

Reference
TheFreeDictionary.com

insoluble, or difficult problem; a dilemma.

that the freight carriers would prefer that Amtrak disappear from their rails. The mere mention of more passenger trains causes severe managerial apoplexy. Could it be that political influences might dampen further passenger rail expansion on freight rails? Perhaps just a cynic's speculation. But "freight railroads" must propel trains along their tracks to earn income. An increasing number of those trains will be intermodal, whose speeds are comparable to standard passenger train speeds. Will there ever be hope that the freight carriers will view Amtrak as another valued customer sharing their rails? If the argument rests on increased rail maintenance issues for passenger trains, shouldn't the rails also be in perfect condition for all of the hazmat and unit oil trains they carry?

A difficult relationship for sure, but what can be done to improve it? Public investment to mutually benefit product and people mobility? With a safety emphasis?

Moving into the dining car with its al-

leged financial losses: How can these "losses" be accurately measured when the revenue from sleeping car room sales is co-mingled with dining car revenue? Fungible funds? Some in Congress appear obsessed with this essential feature of trains and the human condition requiring food for vital sustenance. Is this a tempest in a teapot? Will we hear "How would you like your corndog prepared, sir?" on our next Amtrak trip?

Is the sudden infatuation with high speed rail sucking the life out of more practical and affordable rail initiatives, that would serve a broader cross-section of the nation and with much faster implementation? Do such ordinary projects lack the pizzazz of HSR, condemning both to the scrap heap when the HSR estimates appear? A conundrum? Guilt by association - all intercity rail endeavors tarnished by the HSR quagmire?

Perhaps the most serious conundrum facing Amtrak and its passengers is the transfer of funding responsibility from the federal level to the state level, as we know firsthand with ColoRail's efforts to

retain the famous *Southwest Chief* in our state. Shouldn't any train that crosses a state boundary be considered "interstate commerce," a phrase mentioned in the Constitution? Should that not be a federal responsibility? Amtrak's reliance on multiple states to cooperate, with differing governance, financial resources, and political ideologies, is not a formula for success. And Amtrak may not be free of complicity in this scheme, considering its cash-starved situation.

Hope? Amtrak ridership climbs every year. So do the ticket prices. Capacity is limited. No new Superliner cars are ordered. No new route discussions.

Suspended and terminated train routes are still dead as a doornail. Long distance trains are still blamed for everything wrong with the world: famine, flood, pestilence. One political party dominates the anti-Amtrak fervor while the other occupied the White House during Amtrak's two biggest service cuts. Who said bipartisanship is dead?

(Continued on page 8)



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They keep the trains
rolling

Thanks to those who share bigger vision

(Continued from page 7)

Mention must be made on behalf of all the Amtrak employees and leaders who have kept the trains rolling in spite of an often adverse and hostile environment. There have been some visionaries that moved Amtrak along to the next level. Corridor development has been extremely successful with more on the horizon.

We hear "essential service" more and more, and rightly so. A big thanks to those who share the bigger vision!

But after 43 years, is this all Amtrak can be? Is it wrong for federal spending to include a sliver for the rail mode that the public favors in poll after poll? Why are those voices being ignored? What about the good jobs and infrastructure spending that rail expansion would create? Rail investment gets paid right back into the communities served and the pockets of America's citizens, as

they gain a safe, reliable, and comfortable mobility alternative. Americans deserve this choice!

Yes, there will be some new rolling stock hitting the rails and some new locomotives, mostly benefitting eastern trains and corridor services. Will there be more to follow for the rest of the unserved and underserved? We hope so, because this is an incredible business model with more and more demand for the rail alternative. Sadly, many are turned away due to either full trains or unaffordable or unjustifiable roomette rates (financial crowd control). And that's the worst conundrum of all: rail advocates who can no longer afford to ride the trains for which they advocate.

So what's a rail advocate to do? That, boys and girls, is our challenge at ColoRail, along with our partners! Stay tuned.....

More March 8 Meeting Notes:

First, we will have a complete legislative briefing (Rep Garcia, Sen Crowder and Commissioner Pace) for ColoRail members on *Chief* matters and a call to action to see that this bill passes.

Second, a forum for a discussion among legislators and Front Range Economic Development leaders emphasizing the importance of rail to moving people around and the long-range challenges to making this vision succeed.

Plan to attend. Plan to renew. Plan for rails in Colorado's future.

If you have not already done so, it's time to renew! Clip the handy form on the reverse side of this page, or pay on-line through PayPal at www.colorail.org . Specify if you prefer e-mail delivery of this newsletter.

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