

ColoRail Passenger

January-February 2009

Issue #59

Planned progress:

Get well, CZ!

The next steps in the “get well plan” for Amtrak’s *California Zephyr* are slated to be inaugurated in the trains’ January 26th departures from Chicago and Emeryville, CA. Times in both directions between Denver and Chicago are to remain unchanged from the current schedule.

With the new times, westbound passengers should peer out of Train 5’s curtained windows at Elko, NV twenty minutes earlier than at present. From Winnemucca, NV through Martinez, CA, trains running

on time should be 29 minutes earlier than previously, and with another minute chopped off to round things out, arrive in Emeryville a half hour earlier than on the current schedule.

Eastbound Train 6 will be marked up to depart Emeryville and stations through Winnemucca, NV fifteen minutes later than at present. Times will remain unchanged at Elko and arriving Salt Lake City. Five minutes will be taken out of time spent in the ramshackle facility in the “Crossroads of the West” and then the train will proceed five minutes

earlier to Denver.

This is part of a continuing effort agreed to between the host Union Pacific Railroad and Amtrak. Previously, a steady decline in performance on U.P. tracks had led to concern among passengers that the *Zephyr* was being done in by the same sorts of situations that had finished off the *Pioneer* and the eastern end of the *Sunset*.

For 2008, final standings for on-time performance by the three transcontinentals linking Chicago with the West Coast:

1. *Empire Builder* - 68.3%
2. *Southwest Chief* - 65.3%
3. *California Zephyr* - 27.7%

ColoRail General Meeting
January 24th - see page 2.



Scene for Coloradans to dream about: Staff in Seattle preparing for another on-time departure of the *Empire Builder*.

“A Voice for Colorado’s Rail Passengers”

Video panorama
of American pas-
senger trains

Make tracks to E-wood

ColoRail is back on track -- er, tracks -- to convenient Englewood again for its winter General Meeting. Members will meet on Saturday, January 24th, in the Englewood Library. Doors open at 10 a.m., with refreshments courtesy of First Transit and coffee supplied by Jay Jones. The meeting will begin at 10:30 a.m.

Highlight of the meeting will be presentation of ColoRail member Richard W. Luckin's new video: *America and the Passenger Train*. A "fast-paced program" -- as *Railfan & Railroad* reviewer Tom Kelcec wrote in his positive critique -- the half-hour special is designed to give a well-balanced survey of the topic. ColoRail members will want to see this and decide whether it would make a good gift for friends or family members who are interested in getting beyond mass-media clichés about the development of rail passenger service.

Intercity train travel's place in this region's future will be featured in reports to members. Bob Briggs, John Bishop and Robert Rynerson are on the agenda. In addition, there will be an important update on the Denver Union Station project.

Bob Briggs is well-known to ColoRail members for his enthusiastic work on Front Range corridor service planning. He will bring news of his group's efforts and discuss how it will fit into the State of Colorado's struggles.

John Bishop is ColoRail's liaison with the *Heartland Flyer* project. A study for Kansas has increased the possibility that the Oklahoma and Texas - sponsored train could be extended to Newton, KS for a connection with the *Southwest Chief*.

Robert Rynerson will report on the status of potential *Pioneer* stations in Utah, including that state's new commuter rail line and light rail extended to the Salt Lake City intermodal terminal. Highlights of his previous presentation on the "why" of a "little train that could" are now

showing on YouTube (search field: enter "Amtrak Pioneer"). Oregon and Idaho stations will appear in a future YouTube addition.

Englewood Library -- at Englewood Station -- is served on Saturdays by light rail **D-Line** and by buses of **Rtes 0, 12, 27 and 51**.

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(with telephone numbers
and <e-mail addresses>

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Board elections coming Jan. 24th, too

ColoRail's nominating committee chair Don Zielesch reports that the following members of the Board have agreed to stand for re-election at the January 24th General Meeting: Mike Rowe, Dave Ruble, Sheila Sloan, David Terada, and Avery Grimes. As of the deadline for this newsletter, a nomination for the Western Slope position was being reviewed and the Northeastern Colorado position did

not yet have a candidate.

Other ColoRail members served the interests of rail passengers in a different way. Over the Thanksgiving weekend, the following members volunteered in assisting passengers at Denver Union Station: Tom Peyton, Ron Kaminen, Ron Vander Kooi, Rob Rynerson, and Don Zielesch.

Customers respond well to the special ColoRail brochure for new riders and kids' eyes light up when they see **Operation Lifesaver** coloring books



COLORADO RAIL PASSENGER ASSOCIATION

NARP ready for change in 2009

National Association of Railroad Passengers:
www.narprail.org

To President-Elect Barack Obama

December 31, 2008

“Now we need to remake our transportation system for the 21st Century.”

Dear President-Elect Obama:

Thank you for your clear statement recognizing the need for a change in the U.S. approach to transportation investment. Thank you also for selecting a transportation secretary supportive of Amtrak, and for noting at your December 17 news conference that Rep. La Hood, “throughout his career, has fought to improve mass transit.” We were equally pleased at his prominent reference to Amtrak at the same conference: “We have a task before us to rebuild America. As a nation, we need to continue to be the world leader in infrastructure development: Amtrak, mass transit, light rail, air travel...”

Your statements and your voting records encourage us to believe that you share the view that travel choices which are attractive, convenient, safe and affordable should be available to all Americans - be they of modest means or middle class, individuals or families, urban or rural, young or old, able bodied or with disabilities.

The National Association of Railroad passengers is the largest citizen based public interest organization representing the millions of Americans who use trains and transit today and the millions more who would use it tomorrow if they had the choice. Our work is carried out on a volunteer basis by our 24,000 individual members, supported by a small Washington-based staff of five.

Our vision – which will improve the lives of all Americans—is for a next generation transportation system that provides Americans those important travel choices. It is a vision for a multi-modal transportation system that will make travel easier for all Americans wherever they live; and make high quality mobility affordable and available. The system will place greater emphasis on rail for transporting passengers and freight, and on convenient linkages among all forms of transportation. The system will be energy efficient and environmentally benign and will drastically reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil and interests.

It is important that the stimulus package you are preparing begin to move our nation closer to this vision.

We urge you to allocate at least \$20 billion of total stimulus spending to projects that will improve and expand passenger train service throughout the country. The attached appendix lists some projects that should be undertaken with these funds.

Experience this year demonstrated how this choice helped many Americans adapt to high oil prices. Vehicle miles traveled dropped, highway and airport congestion eased and oil consumption fell as millions shifted from cars and planes to trains and transit. Millions more would have made the same shift, and the impact would have been far more positive, if they had had the choice. Even years before the recent peak in gasoline prices, polls showed that 70% of Americans want better train service. Overwhelming House and Senate votes for recent passage of the rail safety and Amtrak reauthorization bill shows that Congress agrees. The time to begin is now.

We understand that change will not be easy; entrenched interests—including many state highway departments—will fight to preserve the status quo. However, the current dip in oil prices does not weaken environmental arguments for a greater emphasis on energy-efficient transportation, nor does it eliminate the need to prepare America for the time when oil once again becomes scarce and expensive.

We stand ready to help you and your administration in any way we can to prepare America for a better future. We ask that you designate a person in your administration with whom we can work on transportation issues. We are in touch with the issues and can provide ideas and information that will be useful to you and your staff. We think that these issues are important to you - because they are important to the American people. We would appreciate an opportunity to meet personally with one of your staff.

Respectfully,

George L. Chilson
Chairman of the Board

Ross B. Capon
President and CEO

CC: Vice President-Elect **Joseph Biden**
Rep. **Ray LaHood**, DOT Secretary Designate
The Honorable **John D. Rockefeller**
The Honorable **Kay Bailey Hutchison**
The Honorable **Jim Oberstar**
The Honorable **John Mica**

Suggestions pour
from state and city
governments

Evaluating worthiness of projects

There is a broad consensus in the United States that Federal infrastructure spending is needed for either or both reasons: to boost the economy now or to build up the country for a better future. But how to do it?

President-elect **Barack Obama** has let it be known that immediately after he takes office, he wants to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on job producing infrastructure projects that are construction-ready as a way of attacking the nation's sluggish economy. Highway, bridge, transit, water, and energy projects are all mentioned as ways to reduce unemployment and provide the necessary funds for deserving projects to improve the infrastructure upon which the nation's prosperity depends.

As suggestions pour forth from state and city governments, the Obama administration will be faced with having to evaluate the worthiness of each project proposal. This is a situation not unlike what C-DOT faced two years ago when asked to assess priorities of projects made possible by Senate Bill 1 funds which were set aside for transit. It took a Transportation Commission appointed committee about a year to establish project criteria, determine a required dollar local match, and rank the three dozen or so projects submitted for funding. Approximately \$75 million was available for distribution.

Among the projects that were eventually funded were the Mason St. Bus Rapid Transit Corridor in Fort Collins, Denver Union Station property acquisition, buses for Roaring Fork Transit, a multi-modal transit facility in Durango, the Colorado Railroad Authority feasibility study, and around a dozen other projects across the state. The selection committee stipulated that a 20% local match had to accompany all proposals.

Though the selection process proceeded quite smoothly, state transportation officials in charge of the proceedings lamented the lack of state-wide coordination and connectivity of projects as a whole. Each city, county, and region put in their own proposals with little attention to how systems might be linked together. Officials were also concerned about their inability to do on site visits because of lack of time to better evaluate the value and efficacy of each proposal. It was left to each community to make their case without any proposal oversight by state officials.

In contrast to the relative few Senate Bill 1 requests, there are hundreds of funding proposals for money being made available by the new administration. The US

Conference of Mayors is just one of the organizations that has put together wish lists, one for passenger rail (Amtrak) and one for transit.

<http://www.usmayors.org/mainstreeteconomicrecovery/default.asp?Area=Amtrak>

<http://www.usmayors.org/mainstreeteconomicrecovery/default.asp?Area=Transit>

Widely divergent requests are named on both lists which total into the billions of dollars. The Amtrak list ranges from a request of \$60,000 for industrial rail spur improvements in the Haverhill, MA, area for the Downeaster line to a \$750 million rail yards tunnel and connector to old Sacramento on the Capitol Corridor. Transit has even more divergent proposals ranging from a \$1,620 request from Beloit, WI, for replacement of an existing copier, fax machine, and computer equipment to a proposal from St. Louis for \$900 million for north and south MetroLink light rail extensions.

There are also nearly identical project proposals in different cities which must be evaluated and ranked. For example, a request is being made by Akron, OH, officials for a new Amtrak station next to a bus terminal and Hialeah, FL, leaders are asking for upgrades to their Amtrak station including roadway access improvements. These projects are estimated to cost \$15 million each.

It will be a tall order for whomever has to review and prioritize these requests not only for transportation value, but also for their power to create jobs and be energy efficient and cost effective not to mention political considerations that might be in play. Decisions are going to have to be made about requiring a local match for the requested projects and deciding if capital expenditures may be used for rolling stock, studies, stations, bike and pedestrian trails, grade separations, parking, rail and highway improvements related to trains and transit, etc. In other words, even before any project is considered, considerable effort will have to be made to define the basis for rating the worthiness of each proposal.

Developing rating criteria and assessing proposals is going to take some time so stimulating employment increases quickly may be a difficult objective for the Obama administration to achieve. More importantly, spreading money around in a lot of different directions may not achieve any coherent transportation benefit among states and regions, just a lot of disconnected though probably necessary projects. A more unified approach encompassing the country as a whole may be worth examining when it comes to making decisions about how to invest in passenger rail related infrastructure.

going to be a tough assignment

Projects already
identified

About a decade ago, **Gil Carmichael**, the former director of the Federal Railroad Administration under President **George H.W. Bush**, proposed the development of Interstate II. Instead of more highways, however, Mr. Carmichael suggested that an interstate system of high speed passenger railways be constructed in the same manner and coordination as the original highway system. Following a similar concept now would facilitate the development of an energy efficient transportation system as well as provide jobs for thousands of workers across the country. Proposals would be prioritized on the basis of how well the project supports the development of an integrated national passenger rail system. Utilization of this sole criteria could dramatically speed up the selection process as well as moving the country into modern rail-based transportation.

Since many portions of a national passenger rail system are not project-ready, parts of it could be developed on an incremental basis to help increase passenger train speeds and schedule reliability. For example, a plan to double track the rail line between Hartford, CT, and Springfield, MA, is ready to go as are track upgrades for higher speed trains between Milwaukee and Madison, WS., Chicago and Detroit, and Chicago and St. Louis.

Station and maintenance facility improvements could be

evaluated on the basis to which they enhanced travel on the national system. The construction of through tracks at Los Angeles Union Station which is now a stub-end station would undoubtedly get a high rating because of the efficiencies which would result in trains not having to make reverse moves.

There is certainly no lack of suggestions for rail corridor development. The eleven high speed corridors defined during the **Bill Clinton** administration could serve as a national blueprint. The American Association of Highway State Transportation Officials 2002 Passenger Rail Report and the 2007 National Association of Railroad Passenger study also outline viable national passenger rail systems.

Train travel has had huge increases in ridership over the past year and the public and government officials are taking notice. Projects can be funded on a piecemeal individual basis as was done in Colorado or the Obama administration can go in another direction. Hopefully the President-elect will chose the development of a unified national passenger rail system as the best strategy to take. If he does, perhaps we will realize the dream of Gil Carmichael and many others who support fast, economical, safe, and energy efficient surface transportation for the 21st Century.

Short-term improvements in western states for rail passenger service as part of economic recovery plans -- putting people usefully to work.

1. Repair and rebuild damaged and obsolete cars to augment Amtrak fleet. Mountain states trains sell-out during peak travel seasons or space is sold at high rates to prevent sell-outs. Adding cars at peaks is a cost-effective public service. Applied skills and technology are important in a country that has lost much of its ability to manufacture.

2. Add agency stations at key locations. Top priority: year-round coverage at Raton, NM. Amtrak loses potential revenue and public loses potential convenience when transfer points are unstaffed. With Raton staffed, baggage and packages could be shipped between Denver and Southwestern points. Valuable long-haul revenue would be enhanced.

3. Add redcap service and Metropolitan Lounges at key locations. **Denver station is a priority for redcap service. Delays in handling baggage in Denver would be curtailed by addition of a Redcap position to assist passengers. This would permit other station staff to expedite baggage and train servicing. Determine potential for funding these positions separately from Amtrak as job training entry level opportunities.**

E-mail helps to clear up mystery

From: "Longsdorf, Jason" <Longsdorf@pbworld.com>
Date: Tue, 30 Dec 2008 18:53:35 -0500
To: <jonesty4@msn.com>

Jon,

As you have discussed with Gina McAfee, the ColoRail comments submitted during the public comment period did not appear in Appendix C of the ROD. I researched the issue and found that four comments had been submitted during the public comment period that were not fully included in the Appendix C of the ROD.

RTD and FTA have reviewed the attached memo provided to supplement the information already in Appendix C. It includes the inadvertently omitted comments and appropriate responses. We are transmitting this memo to each of the four commenting parties, posting it on the project website with the FEIS and ROD, and adding it to the administrative record.

Thank you for bringing this error to our attention. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact me or Gina.

Thanks

Jason Longsdorf, AICP
Supervising Planner

PB
555 17th St., Suite 500
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DUS plot thins

As the e-mail on the left hints at, ColoRail board members were shocked to find that comments submitted for the Union Station study were omitted from the Appendix to the "ROD" (Record of Decision) as though they had not been made.

Subsequently, the matter was corrected, but until then it was seen in the light of prior experiences with discussion having been closed off when a ColoRail member raised uncomfortable issues and the media report about City staff drumming up favorable comments to add to the document.

Study on mountain high-speed line underway

The Rocky Mountain Rail Authority has begun work on its CDOT-funded study of a "a feasible, high-speed rail system that provides reliable service at an affordable cost," according to Clear Creek County Commissioner Harry Dale, the authority's chairman. He was quoted in the *Denver Daily News* on December 26th. The story did not mention where the new route would stop in Downtown Denver or whether it might bypass soon-to-be congested Union Station.

Wyoming site for regional meet

Jay Jones, Colorado member of the National Association of Railroad Passengers board, is setting up a regional meeting in Cheyenne, WY for April 4th. More details to come!

In other news on the DUS issue, ColoRail member Bob Brewster met with Amtrak President Joseph Boardman and found him to be very familiar with the Denver situation.

In the meantime, without benefit of the glamorous plans, the station continues to grow as an intermodal focal point. The new GDX bus service for Gunnison-Salida is to call there starting January 14th.

View from the Ridge...

(it's clearer out there)

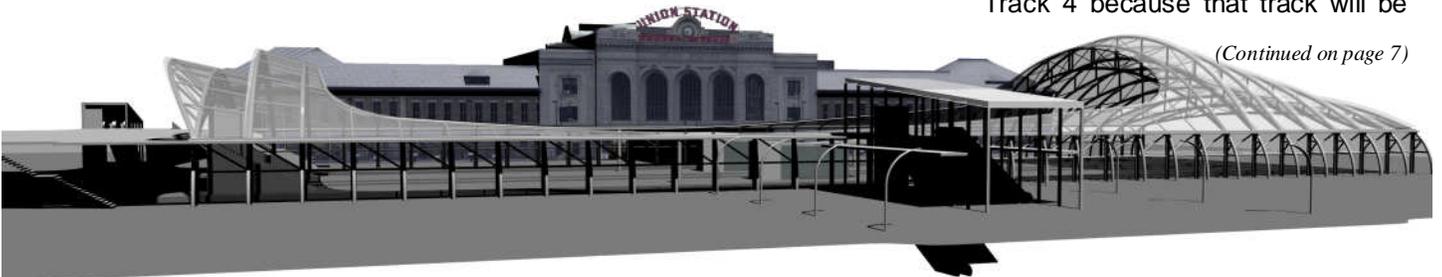
(Continued from page 8)

It is beyond comprehension just how DUS will bring together transportation modes when the light rail station is located two and a half blocks away and the intercity bus terminal is almost one mile distant. Planners have tried to use the concept "transit district" to cover these flaws and mislead the public yet the fact remains that transferring among transportation modalities will be more time consuming for the traveler and more expensive for RTD to build and maintain than keeping activities centralized at the historic station.

Particularly noteworthy is the long critique about station services for intercity rail by Amtrak's John Bennett. It appears from his comments that planners are trying to accommodate Amtrak but that much of the arrangements for Amtrak travelers and train location at the station are still very much up in the air.

Mr. Bennett would like Amtrak to remain at its current spot on Track 1 but planners want to move it to Track 4 because that track will be

(Continued on page 7)



Plan teeters on many assumptions

Separating
intercity trains?

(Continued from page 6)

the longest in the new station. He believes that centering intercity passenger trains in the middle of the commuter rail platforms isolates passengers by making baggage transfers more distant and station services more remote to the trains. He sees problems in passenger congestion during the morning rush hour when the westbound California Zephyr arrives at a time when commuter train and RTD regional bus activity are at their peak.

Mr. Bennett objects to the removal of the current station tail tracks west of 16th St. and reminds planners of a long standing contract Amtrak has with Denver that the rails can only be removed with consent of both parties. Planners have proposed Amtrak be compensated for the tail track removal with a couple of tracks just northeast of the station under the Park Avenue Viaduct. The only trouble with this idea is that the

property is not part of the DUS study area and is owned by the Union Pacific who may not wish to part with it or will charge Amtrak an arm and a leg for it.

Mr. Bennett expresses disagreement with the puny track-space allotment for future Front Range corridor trains at DUS which in all likelihood will be operated by Amtrak. Planners have magnanimously proposed that Front Range rail trains stop at a station adjoining the light rail downtown terminus along the Consolidated Mainline even though this proposal has not been a part of the DUS study. Mr. Bennett points out that planners assume there is enough room between the light rail station and the three CML freight rail tracks for a station which he suspects is not true. More importantly, he objects to Amtrak trains arriving and departing at two separate locations in downtown Denver. It makes no sense for the intercity passenger

waiting and services area located at the historic station to be so remote from where the passengers catch their trains not to mention the problem of handling passenger baggage over this distance.

After reading the numerous statements from those interested in the project, one thing should become obvious to the reader: Individuals from the real estate industry, many of whom will benefit from the station's commercial development, think the project is just swell. Knowledgeable transit advocates, who know from their travels what makes a successful intermodal transportation facility and do not stand to profit from the project, are almost unanimously against the ROD proposals. If for no other but this reason, those in charge of the DUS redevelopment should be very cautious in giving the go-ahead for this project.

Jon Esty is past president of ColoRail who resides in Ridgway, Colorado.

ColoRail Membership

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Telephone, with area code: _____

E-mail address, fax number or other contact information: _____

\$10 PER YEAR
pays for 2009 mailings,
printing, publicity

Woodland Park now on the transit internet

Colorado Springs roller coaster ride

Colorado Springs transit riders remained in a roller coaster in 2008, with big plans and new service starts hampered by budget shortfalls. A proposed transit center in the urban renewal area south of downtown fell

short on Colorado's state list of priority transit projects -- a list trimmed by declining tax revenues. Declining local tax revenues led to plans for service reductions in city and suburban service.

But in November, a new service, the Ute Pass Express, linked Colorado Springs with Woodland Park and intermediate US24 points. The new route offers free transfers into the city system.

View from the Ridge... *by Jon Esty*

I was all set to write an optimistic column about the president-elect and future federal rail transportation plans when someone sent me a copy of the Denver Union Station Record of Decision (ROD) report. Talk about a buzz kill. The 132 page report contains a review of the developer's proposed plans, some environmental data, and statements from stakeholders and interested parties accompanied by comments from study staff about those statements.

First off, a comprehensive critique of the plans from ColoRail President Ira

Schreiber representing the views of the ColoRail Board was missing from the report even though the comments were sent to study staff on the day of the September 29th deadline. Beyond that serious omission is the contradictory adherence to the Purpose and Need Statement which declares: Improving DUS will bring together the various modes of transportation into one place and provide efficient and convenient access to and from downtown Denver..."

(Continued on page 6)

Tipped off by an article in the Colorado Springs www.gazette.com, ColoRail punched in the ultimate Colorado itinerary into Google Transit's on-line travel planning service. Out came a schedule for a trip from Woodland Park to Lyons, Colorado, with a lunch stop in LoDo, Denver. That makes it easier for out-of-town visitors who are unfamiliar with the transit systems to organize their time in Front Range communities.

Interested in checking on Colorado Governor Bill Ritter's plans for transportation? Click:

www.colorado.gov/governor and follow links for Policy Priorities.

ColoRail Passenger

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