

# ColoRail Passenger

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Issue #60

A letter from ColoRail's President on Litigation to Alter the Course of Denver Union Station Redevelopment

May 15, 2009

Dear ColoRail Members and Friends,

I'd like to share with you some background about the Colorado Rail Passenger Association and how the Board has come to the decision to take legal action against the proposed redevelopment plans for Denver Union Station. Some of you may recall that the history of ColoRail is rooted in the station, having grown out of the Save Our Station (SOS) organization founded during the Peña administration by, among others, then local brewer and current Denver Mayor **John Hickenlooper**. For those of you who are unfamiliar with SOS, the organization was successful in preventing the proposed removal of all track from the station.

ColoRail was established to provide continued support for Denver Union Station and to serve as an advocate for comprehensive commuter and passenger rail service. ColoRail is a volunteer, member organization with nearly 700 subscribers.

Members have a long history of service at the station as host volunteers, welcoming and assisting rail passengers. In addition, the board and general membership have volunteered countless hours to stay informed of the issues and to advocate far and wide for passenger

**ColoRail NARP Meeting**

**Cheyenne**

**May 30th - see insert.**

## *Decision to take legal action*

# Passengers pushed to edge

rail and other transportation services.

For the past seven years, ColoRail board members and others have duly participated in the public planning processes for redevelopment of Denver Union Station. We are not anti-development, as some may peg us, we, in fact, enthusiastically endorse and advocate for transit-oriented mixed use development.

Our members actively supported the successful implementation of FasTracks, having spent countless hours gathering thousands of signatures and campaigning for passage. The revitalization that has occurred in the communities served reinforces our belief that good transportation services promote successful sustainable development.

ColoRail concerns regarding the proposed redevelopment of Denver Union Station are solely related to missed transportation services opportunities, including a lack of focus on passenger service, limited capacity expansion for both rail and bus services, and what we believe are excessive construction and maintenance costs for a poorly planned project the details of which are available for at <http://www.colorail.org/dus.html>.

In brief, successful and effective multi-modal transit hubs are designed with the passenger in mind. Keeping the distance required for accessing different transit modes to an absolute minimum ensures maximum use.

The current plan, however, calls for relocating the light rail tracks nearly a quarter mile west of the station along the Consolidated Main Line, adding significant time and inconvenience for the commuter and long-distance traveler. In addition, rail companies generally oppose locating passenger service near freight tracks because of the known potential for accidents and unpleasantness of the surroundings.

The proposal also features buried bus bays at considerable cost, creating much neighborhood disturbance and forever limiting capacity. Planned to be located 36 feet below the 14 foot water table, these bays will require round-the-clock lighting and ventilation systems, along with pumps to keep water out and extra mitigation to contain pollutants. Also, the underground bus bays do not include enough space to host private bus services, leaving Greyhound, for example, nearly a mile away and

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

Deal turns public property over to developer

# 'No room for future...'

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requiring passengers to make up the difference.

Finally and most importantly, by selling the land purchased by tax payers for the purpose of ensuring the status of Denver Union Station as a multi-modal transit hub the present plan will leave no room for future planned commuter and passenger rail services along the Front Range and I70 corridors.

ColoRail has engaged expert legal counsel who have determined that there are grounds for successful legal action that should provide a new window of opportunity for project review and redesign. The Board has decided to file a law suit in Federal Court.

This decision was by no means made lightly and the costs to pursue it are not inconsequential in time or treasure. The proposed redevelopment plan, however, simply fails to satisfy the most significant aspect of the original vision statement, which recognized the primary project purpose to be to

improve existing, and provide for future, connections between all local, regional, statewide, and national transit modes and transportation systems.

We consider the transit components of the plan to be significantly flawed, and unlike Denver International Airport, so limited in expansion possibilities that such action is necessary.

The efficacy of the law suit is enhanced by your support and involvement. There are many ways to get involved. First, we ask that you share this information with your friends and family, particularly those who will be adversely affected by implementation of the proposed plan. Second, contact your local, state, and Federal representatives. We encourage you to write a letter to your local newspapers to let them know the adverse affects to your community and to let us know when it is published. To let us know of your volunteer interests, please write to [volunteer@colorail.org](mailto:volunteer@colorail.org) and someone will get back to you right

away.

Last, but not least, the cost of a Federal lawsuit is not insignificant, and we welcome your financial contribution today. Contributions can be mailed to ColoRail at 1550 Larimer St., Unit 271 Denver, CO 80202.

Of course, if I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to **c o n t a c t m e a t** [president@colorail.org](mailto:president@colorail.org).

On behalf of the ColoRail board, please know we look forward to your involvement and support.

Thank you.

*Ira Schreiber*, President

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Looking back...



### Terminal illness

With a few nice sentiments, Colorado leaders said their farewells to the Rio Grande *Ski Train* after it was announced that it had made its last run. The Denver tradition since 1940 was a classic rail service in that it benefited both ends and the middle of the line:

- Winter Park received a fresh-faced group of young skiers and tourists who otherwise would have skipped the drive.
- The environment between suffered little interference from the 700-800 travelers on each trip.
- Denver was a unique place for having this easy access.

Ironically, the Mile High City's desire for real estate development pushed the Ski Train to move aside. Buyer Algoma Central offered an easy way out of a "terminal illness."

What are your priorities?

# Funding is a tiny fraction of what is needed

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It appears the political establishment has come to the conclusion known by the public for years that passenger rail is a necessary component for a balanced national transportation system. Not since the formation of Amtrak some 38 years ago has there been such a strong commitment for passenger rail. There is no question the timing was perfect what with environmental quality and the need to put people to work being the central issues of the day. An uncertain energy supply and Amtrak's steady ridership increases over the past five years also underscored the importance of developing a high speed rail network.

Everyone from the president on down acknowledges funding for passenger rail is but a tiny fraction of what is needed. To emphasize this point, recent announcements have come from the United Kingdom and Spain that their governments intend on spending a much more generous \$46 billion and \$30 billion respectively over the next five years on passenger rail infrastructure and China may be spending over \$100 billion on high speed rail line in just the next two years.

**Howard Learner**, President of the Chicago-based Environmental Law and Policy Center said about \$2 billion of stimulus money should be used to upgrade Chicago - St. Louis, Chicago - Detroit, and Milwaukee - Madison corridors. **Mehd Morshed**, Executive Director of the California High Speed Rail Authority (a \$45 billion project) would like an initial \$4 billion from the federal government. And let's not forget the Northeast Corridor whose ancient infrastructure requires attention if there is to be any improvement in speeds there.

The president and his DOT chief insist that projects receiving stimulus funds must be ready to go by September and must support existing passenger rail efforts rather than starting entirely new corridors. It is also widely acknowledged that the limited stimulus funding available can only provide opportunities for "higher speed rail" in the 90-110mph range rather than vastly more expensive "high speed rail" which would be in excess of 150 mph.

Given these constraints, what rail projects are good candidates for funding? First of all, Colorado has nothing that is

"shovel ready" except Denver Union Station. Amtrak has indicated it may spend some of its own stimulus funding on bringing Colorado's rail stations served by the *California Zephyr* and *Southwest Chief* into compliance with ADA standards.

Here are my picks for funding from east to west in no particular order:

1.) Repair and rehabilitate all cars and locomotives that are not in service and plan for the manufacture of a new generation of equipment to be ready for the next round of funding. Amtrak President Joe Boardman has already indicated new electric locomotives are badly needed for the NE Corridor.

2.) Repair NE Corridor infrastructure any place where speed restrictions are in force. This would include bridges in Connecticut where a start has already been made. An update of ancient catenary along the former New Haven line is also necessary. Some serious work needs to be done on the tunnels in Baltimore where a 10 mph limit is effect.

3.) Add 20 miles of second track between Hartford, CT, and Springfield, MA to allow for more frequent service between these two cities.

4.) Construct a flyover at Stamford, CT for Penn Station bound trains to gain direct access to Hell Gate Bridge rather than move through crossovers through the busy Metro North line.

5.) Add 16 miles of second track between Albany and Schenectady, NY. This section of the Empire Corridor has been a serious bottleneck for passenger trains and must be remedied before additional service to western New York state can be considered.

6.) Initiate construction of the Cleveland, Columbus, and Cincinnati Corridor in Ohio. True, there is no existing service on this line but this corridor has been studied to death during the past two decades and the state finally has a governor, Ted Strickland, who is an enthusiastic rail supporter.

7.) Continue track and signal improvements to increase speeds on the Chicago - St. Louis and Chicago - Detroit corridors. Illinois has funded increased frequencies in the past but speeds need to improve to capture more ridership. Amtrak and the Michigan DOT have

already upgraded some Amtrak-owned track in southern Michigan but these efforts need to be extended toward Ann Arbor and Detroit.

8.) Improve rail line between Milwaukee and Madison, WI, and initiate passenger service as an extension of existing service between Chicago and Milwaukee. This project is ready to go and has been a priority for the Wisconsin DOT for the past couple of years. Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle is a devoted rail supporter who recently spent a couple of weeks riding trains in Europe.

9.) Improve rail infrastructure used by Amtrak in the Chicago area. Several years ago, ten freight railroads which serve Chicago plus Amtrak and Metra got together to develop a plan which would eliminate rail traffic congestion that plagues the area. The Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency program (CREATE) has about a dozen proposals for improvements including a couple of projects which would help speed Amtrak trains out of town to Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana.

10.) Add a second track to the busy Surfliner Corridor between Santa Ana and San Diego. This is the second busiest passenger rail corridor in the country yet much of it is single track. Even though California is planning to have a true high speed rail line, it won't be ready for decades. Double tracking in this corridor can help meet the growing demand relatively quickly.

Finally, I must mention a sentimental favorite. Upgrade track for passenger train speeds between Saratoga Springs, NY, and Burlington, VT. A couple of miles of slow order track into Rutland, VT, is already being proposed for improvement for the New York - Rutland *Ethan Allan Express*. Extend service to Burlington via Middlebury, Vergennes, and Shelburne.

I am sure you have your favorite project proposals so I invite you to e-mail them to me at <jonesty4@msn> and I will write them up for the next issue of the *ColoRail Passenger*.

*Jon Esty is the past president of ColoRail and resides in Ridgway.*

'Third rail' again in San Luis Valley?

# San Luis Valley rail upgrade proposal

**Amtrak not the only railroad with stimulus improvement plans:** ColoRail member **Don Thompson** reports from Alamosa that the San Luis & Rio Grande Railroad is preparing a grant proposal that would create a three-pronged project offering regional commutes, improved freight service and tourism appeal. The *Valley Courier* and *Pueblo Chieftain* both have carried stories about the effort to obtain approval of the request.

According to holding company President **Ed Ellis** as reported in the *Valley Courier* on May 7th, "we are looking at funds from that act to upgrade the track. This is 100 percent federal funding. We the railroad will provide the local match." Ellis was speaking to the Alamosa city council during an evening work session.

Track improvements would upgrade speeds to 60 miles per hour through the San Luis Valley. The three-way benefits, according to consultant **David Simpson**, as quoted in the *Chieftain* of May 8th, would meet the federal Department of Transporta-

tion's desire "...to see innovative projects -- projects that combine different categories of benefits..." Most startling may be restoration of the famed "third-rail" narrow gauge access between Alamosa and Antonito.

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

### Where Will The Stimulus Money Go?

*Editor's note: Even though little of the stimulus money will be spent on rail service improvements in Colorado, many of the projects listed below will provide indirect benefits to Colorado and Wyoming passengers.*

April 16, 2009, will be a day passenger rail devotees will long remember. Amtrak emerged from a long tunnel of despair and miserly funding to the bright light of enthusiastic national political support. It was on this day that President **Barack Obama**, flanked by VP **Joe Biden** and USDOT Secretary **Ray LaHood**, declared his forward looking vision for a

national high speed passenger rail system.

Passenger rail leaders in attendance could hardly believe their ears after decades of presidential and congressional indifference. National Association of Railroad Passengers President, **Ross Capon**, was typical of those leaders who could hardly contain their joy. In a burst of exuberance rarely seen by those who know him, the usually calm and serene Mr. Capon wrote a press release declaring that he would have been proud to have written the speech.

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