

**Local Transit****RRTC co-hosts 3rd transit forum**

On December 5th, RRTC co-hosted the third of a three-part transit forum series with the Common Good Planning Center and the Downtown Community Forum. The intent of the third forum was to start a local discussion on improving transit in the Rochester Region. The panel consisted of:

- Don Riley, R-GRTA CEO
- Jeffrey Carlson, Deputy Mayor of the City of Rochester
- Bob Cook, Staff for Assemblyman David Gantt
- Stephanie Aldersley, Monroe County Legislator.

The panel members were asked a series of questions, followed by questions from the audience. The first question was, "Inefficiency, inconvenience and expense in a transit system is both cause and effect of decreased ridership. And lower ridership often results in arguments against investments in transit. How can this vicious cycle be broken?" Stephanie Aldersley spoke of the need to provide and fund more than just adequate transit, and to limit sprawl. Bob Cook said that transit service has had to readjust to serve riders. Don Riley agreed, saying that transit service has not followed development outside of the city. R-GRTA's Access to Jobs program is developing new routes which are expected to become permanent. R-GRTA is currently focusing on its circulator study.

The second question was, "Is increasing ridership a practical goal?" Jeff Carlson said that the biggest challenge is that people want to park in front of where they are going. Bob Cook stated that reduced travel time can boost ridership. R-GRTA has been playing catch-up to past road patterns, but we need to go onto the next phase and influence future development, which could help increase ridership. Don Riley said that he believes that the number of riders is not the only measure-- that geographic coverage of service is also important. If a new service is introduced, it is important to keep the service going and market it. Stephanie Aldersley talked about how more people are willing to ride rail transit than bus transit. We need to look at rail, and start with a demonstration line.

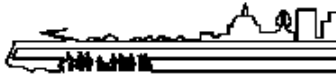
The third question was, "What role can transit play in making our communities more vibrant and viable." Bob Cook responded that transit can be a mechanism to guide growth, and that it can be a quality-of-life issue. Don Riley said that he is not opposed to rail, but thinks that it would be a tough sell. Stephanie Aldersley thinks that while stadiums and arts centers are nice public works projects, transit is a basic underpinning of our economy. If we are to have a fast ferry, we would be a connection to it. Jeff Carlson predicted that our investment in new roads will lead to the demise of Monroe County, as new development is encouraged outside of Monroe County.

The fourth question was "How can transit more effectively serve our spread-out population." Don Riley said that he did not believe that transit leads to sprawl. R-GRTA is willing to work with towns and employers to provide transit access. Stephanie Aldersley said that while transit cannot be a magic bullet, there needs to be greater linkage and synergy between various transportation modes, a thought echoed by Jeff Carlson. Bob Cook responded to Jeff Carlson's earlier comment about the decline of Monroe County by saying that this decline does not have to happen. But major changes in transit will not happen unless we change the way that the MPO (the Genesee Transportation Council-- our region's Metropolitan Planning Organizations).

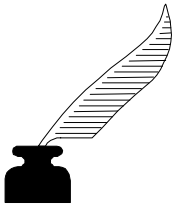
The fifth question raised a critical issue, "How can more money for transit be generated for this region?" Stephanie Aldersley pointed out that if we think big about transportation projects, we need to seek Federal TEA-21 funding. Major capital investments in transit could result in a reduction in transportation costs to businesses, which according to Aldersley could boost business in our area. Jeff Carlson spoke about how the "Livable Communities" concept in TEA-21 allows us to integrate transit with other community issues. Bob Cook believes that our region has been very aggressive with pursuing transit funding. In order to get a major project such as an LRT line, our community would have to get together to decide what it wants to do. Don Riley pointed out that it is more difficult to get funding for operating costs than it is to get capital funding. Riley believes that our region works well together, and we need a consensus on what transit projects we want to pursue.

**Continued on page 3**

*Rail Transition* is a publication of Rochester Rail Transit Committee Inc., P.O. Box 10696, Rochester, NY 14610-0696 Telephone: (716) 234-6096



DeWain Feller, Committee Chairman  
Susan Levinson, Secretary  
Mark Judd, Newsletter Editor/ Web Master  
Carlos Mercado, Treasurer  
Jeff Debes, Membership Chairman



## Chairman's Notes by DeWain Feller

---

### Looking for transit leadership

---

The December 5th transit forum (see article on page 1 of this newsletter) provided our area's leaders with an opportunity to demonstrate a common interest in promoting transit improvements in the Rochester area. While the positive tone of the forum was a welcome change from the acrimony of the debate over the downtown transit center, the forum revealed the lack of leadership in Rochester and Monroe County on transit issues.

We are blessed with innovative thinkers such as Monroe County Legislator Stephanie Aldersley of Irondequoit. However, our area's top leaders have yet to recognize the importance of increasing transit ridership and making transit a viable alternative for more than just those who are dependant on transit.

A major frustration with R-GRTA is the apparent failure to place an emphasis on attracting discretionary riders and significantly increasing ridership. Riley said that he did not believe that ridership "was the only measure" and that service coverage was also an important measure. Service coverage is indeed an important issue, and R-GRTA has made a valiant effort to market transit and make improvements within the current funding constraints. However, our region would be remiss to provide only token service to as many locations as possible.

This gets to the key issue with transit locally. Is transit just a social service for the transit dependent? Or is transit also needed to provide transportation choices for everyone?

Transit service in Rochester today is at minimalist levels, with long headways between buses (even during rush hours) and long travel times. If transit is to become a real choice, and a real influence on land use, we need transit service that is convenient, reliable and attractive. If our highway investments are driven by service standards (minutes of delay, levels of congestion), shouldn't transit investment also be driven by service standards? Our region needs to set minimum service standards for transit, and provide the funding needed to bring service up to those standards.

Who will provide the leadership to improve transit? Of course, R-GRTA ought to be, but the County has played a central role in ensuring that R-GRTA has a minimalist vision. Likewise, the Genesee Transportation Council ought to be setting our region's transportation priorities and policies, but Monroe County exerts influence within the GTC. The GTC's official line is that its purpose is to "educate, not advocate" despite the fact that Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in other metropolitan areas clearly believe that it is their role to advocate.

The City and State governments also need to play a leadership role on transit, however both have abdicated their roles. Our State government has failed to fulfill its obligations to reshape transportation policy. Albany views transit almost exclusively as a local issue, and our local delegation has often stated that they will only respond to requests from the local leadership.

The City of Rochester needs to play a part in establishing transportation policy. This is especially true given the County's unwillingness to promote transportation improvements that benefit the City. The City needs to aggressively promote transit, however, City leaders have yet to acknowledge that they can and should play a role.

This is Rochester's dilemma. Without anyone willing to lead on transit issues, and without recognition that transit needs to be more than transportation welfare, transit will continue to anguish. As long as transit languishes, we will continue to sprawl. And as long as our region continues to disintegrate, our local economy will lag the rest of the nation.

### Fast Fact

Approximately 70% of St. Louis light rail transit riders have been attracted from automobiles. With a typical average occupancy of 1.2 persons per car, that's about 93,000 automobile trips diverted from the city's freeways and streets. Assuming round trips, that's more than 46,000 parking spaces that were NOT needed that day.

## Transit Forum

### Continued from Page 1

The forum then shifted to questions from the audience. Unfortunately, the first portion of the forum went over schedule, reducing the amount of time available for questions and answers. The first person said that bus service here was much less convenient than it was for them in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Don Riley said that R-GRTA will be focusing on overhauling its city bus routes soon, and that the shuttles for the Buffalo Bills training camp is a model of what they would like to do more of.

Neil Jaschik of the Common Good Planning Center spoke from the audience to say that one reason why the GTC is not reallocating dollars for transit is that there is no regional vision for what we want. This sparked a discussion that expanded on earlier comments about the GTC. Jeff Carlson agreed that we need to start thinking about transportation. Carlson believes that since the City of Rochester does not have a transportation department, transportation decisions need to be done on a regional level. Stephanie Aldersley thinks that we need more communication between agencies and municipalities. Aldersley raised a critical question... if the MPO (GTC) is not setting the transportation agenda, then who is? Bob Cook replied that decision making needs to come from elected officials. Don Riley raised the issue that in NY State, local governments have control over land use Riley said that he fought regional land use planning while he was in town government in Greece, but he has a different perspective now that he is in charge of a regional agency.

An RIT student said that his attendance at the forum was his first time in downtown Rochester, due to the transportation choices available. Stephanie Aldersley responded that her son went to RIT, and it took him three hours by bus to get from Irondequoit to RIT. If we had LRT, that commute would be much shorter. Riley pointed out that R-GRTA is the provider for the RIT campus shuttle, which also provides access to Marketplace Mall. Riley believes that bus service patterns are determined by the location of businesses.

Gordon Webster of the Common Good Planning Center asked about the possibility of having the Council of Governments propose a regional transportation vision for Monroe County. Don Riley said that he thinks that the Council of Governments could take on this role. Jeff Carlson added that municipalities have cooperated on transportation issues recently. The City, Brighton the Town of Pittsford and the Village of Pittsford have cooperated together on the development of standards for Monroe Avenue.

## News Briefs

### Transit vote results mixed

The November 7th elections provided mixed results for transit referenda throughout the country. In Alameda County, CA (Oakland), voters approved Measure B, a 30-year extension of the half-cent transportation sales tax, by a whopping 81.2%. It includes funding for a link between BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) and the Oakland International Airport, and a BART extension from Fremont to Warm Springs.

In Austin, TX, a referendum to build a light rail line was narrowly defeated after an aggressive negative campaign by the highway lobby. The margin was little more than 2000 votes out of 250, 838 votes cast.

In Kansas City, MO, voters turned down a light rail plan promoted by a civic activist Clay Chastain. However, the city is currently developing its own LRT proposal. The Chastain proposal was criticized as being confusing and poorly defined. The city is expected to unveil its proposal later this year.

In New Jersey, voters approved a change in the state constitution dedicating a portion of sales and fuel taxes to the Transportation Trust Fund. The trust fund includes a balance of transit and highway funding.

In Salt Lake City, UT, voters approved a one-quarter percent sales tax to fund a regional commuter rail service from Ogden to Salt Lake City, the addition of Sunday and Holiday bus and LRT service, and possible extensions to the LRT system.

In San Jose, CA, a 30-year extension of the half-cent sales tax transportation was approved. The Measure A funds will pay the local share of two new LRT lines, the electrification of the San Jose-San Francisco Caltrain commuter railroad, and a possible extension of BART to San Jose.

In Washington State, an initiative that would have dedicated 90% of all state transportation funds to road building and maintenance was soundly defeated. The measure would have drastically reduced funding transit in the Seattle region.

## New Jersey LRT line grows

The new Hudson-Bergen line in New Jersey was extended from Exchange Place to Pavonia/ Newport Centre Mall on November 18th. Ridership has grown to 8000 per day. A three-station extension to Hoboken terminal will open later this year.

In related news, the NJ Transit board of directors has approved Phase 2 of the Hudson-Bergen line, which includes a western extension to 22nd Street in Bayonne, and a northern extension from Hoboken Terminal through Jersey City and Weehawken to an intermodal station in North Bergen. The extensions, which would be funded by the state Transportation Trust Fund and the Federal Transit Administration, are expected to be completed in 2005.



The new Hudson-Bergen LRT line includes a station at Liberty State Park

## New Newark line gets green light

The Federal Transit Administration has announced a "full funding" agreement with NJ Transit for the first of three segments of the Newark-Elizabeth Rail Link. The FTA's New Start program will pay 68% of the cost of the one-mile initial connection with the Newark City Subway. The remainder will come from a combination of federal Urbanized Area Formula Funds and the New Jersey's Transportation Trust Fund.

Construction on the first segment is expected to begin this Spring, and the first segment to begin operation by 2005. The project will extend from the Newark City Subway terminal at Penn Station to Broad Street Street Station, which is served by NJ Transit's Morris & Essex commuter rail line. It will include 5 stations, including one at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center. It will improve transit access from Newark's north side and suburbs to the office complexes and academic institutions around Penn Station.

The City of Newark's downtown master plan integrates the transit project with traffic calming and pedestrian corridors around the Penn Station, Broad Street, and Washington Park stops. The new branch is expected eventually to accommodate 13,300 weekday boardings and draw 6,400 new riders to the system.

The second segment, also one mile, would extend the light rail from Penn Station to Camp St. in downtown Newark. The third segment would continue the line 7 more miles to the south to downtown Newark. The final segment would include stops at Newark Airport, Elizabeth's waterfront and the Jersey Gardens Mall. NJ Transit estimates that daily ridership for the completed project could top 25,000 by 2015.

## Denver line ridership higher than expected

The recently-finished SW light rail extension in Denver was projected to carry 8,500 daily riders, but more than 13,000 are using the new service. Total ridership on the entire LRT line is about 28,000. Regional Transit District (RTD) officials say those ridership numbers are likely to climb even further a year from now when construction on Interstate 25 begins and motorists flock to light rail for relief from backups on the interstate.

The number of riders is more than six times the number who rode express buses on the same route before the line's opening in July.

The RTD is putting spare light-rail cars in service to ease the rush-hour crunch. The line's current two-car trains are often full after they leave the Mineral Avenue terminal, leaving little room for other passengers boarding at other stations. RTD will begin running as many three-car trains as possible to add capacity. The agency's 31-car fleet includes four spares that will be used during early morning and afternoon rush hours. The agency is also considering running three-car trains to service Colorado Rockies games when they coincide with afternoon rush hour.

RTD has six new light rail cars on order for the southwest line and the Central Platte Valley spur, which is slated to open fall 2001. The transit agency acknowledged it may have to purchase more cars to meet the demand. Construction on another project, the Southeast Corridor, is expected to start this year and last until 2008. The Southeast line will run along I-25 from the junction with the current LRT line at I-25/Broadway to Lincoln Avenue in Douglas County.

## **Albany studies commuter rail routes**

Albany transportation planners are studying whether to build another train station in downtown Albany to serve the proposed regional commuter rail service and act as a bus depot. The station would be on the north side of downtown, with the vacant Central Warehouse being the primary choice. The Central Warehouse, located on Broadway northeast of the Federal Building, is adjacent to both the CSX and Delaware and Hudson RR tracks.

The Capital District Transportation Committee, a regional planning agency, has given the city \$50,000 to study redeveloping the warehouse into a commuter rail station and new home for the downtown bus depot. The city is folding the funds into a larger, \$200,000 to \$300,000 redevelopment study of its entire north waterfront district. The Capital District Transportation Authority (CDTA- the area's transit authority) is tasked with studying the commuter rail project.

The commuter rail project is currently bogged down with a controversy over which route the initial demonstration project should take. Former Congressman Gerald Solomon had secured \$5 million in 1998 for a pilot project with the expectation that the pilot project would run north along the Delaware & Hudson to Mechanicville. Rail passenger advocates raised concern that the slow speed of the D&H route (which has a large number of grade crossings and track designed for slower speeds).

Schenectady County leaders balked, claiming the route through Schenectady was a quicker, safer one for passengers. Officials argued that Amtrak already uses that track going to-and-from the Rensselaer passenger station and the Schenectady, and that track improvement improvements for this line are already budgeted as part of the Albany-NYC high-speed rail program. Upgrading the Delaware and Hudson tracks to Mechanicville could cost \$30 million.

An additional \$10 million for the project was included in the rejected \$3.8 billion transportation bond act. It is not clear if the new state transportation funding initiatives will include funding for the project, although political support for the project is quite high.

The CDTA's report detailing what it will take to hold a two-year demonstration project is expected to be finished within several months. With issues including negotiations with host railroads and determining the route to be used, it

could be a couple of years before commuter rail service is launched.

## **Dallas accelerates light rail expansion**

Dallas area voters approved \$2.9 billion in long-term financing to accelerate light rail construction. The vote was 77 percent in favor to 23 percent opposed.

The bonding will be used by Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) to build rail lines to Carrollton, Farmers Branch, north Irving, south Dallas, Fair Park, Pleasant Grove, Rowlett and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport over a 15-year span. This accelerates the construction schedule about five years from earlier plans.

The measure does not raise tax rates above the current 1 percent transit sales tax, but rather allows for 30-year bonding instead of the current "pay as you go" financing. The proposal will help DART build about 49 more miles of light rail, along with buying new buses and constructing more than 100 new miles of high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes.

## **Dallas-Richland Hills commuter rail begins**

In addition to Dallas' growing light rail transit line, Dallas' commuter rail line is also expanding. The Trinity Railway Express ("The T") was extended westward from the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport to Richland Hills on September 18th. Parking lots quickly reached capacity in Richland Hills and near capacity at CentrePort.

The line originates at Dallas Union Station, where it interfaces with the DART LRT line, and operates along the former Rock Island railroad line. The line will be extended to downtown Fort Worth by October 2001, making the line 34-mile long. The current service level is seventeen trains per day.

Ridership during the line's first week of expansion reached about 6,000 per day, levels not expected for at least a year. Parking lots have overflowed, and the commuters rail cars are packed during peak hours. The popularity is forcing transit officials to expand parking lots at the Richland Hills station and CentrePort/DFW Airport stations.

The T is awaiting the overhaul of 13 commuter rail cars and locomotives that previously used by GO Transit in Toronto. The new trains will allow the T to expand service to meet the demand.

## **Dallas to study 2nd commuter rail route**

With the Dallas-Forth Worth Trinity Railway Express commuter train up and running, Dallas-area transportation officials are looking at creating a new second commuter rail line from the Fort Worth through Northeast Tarrant County to Addison.

A new commuter rail station in North Richland Hills would help advance the “new urbanism” projects such as North Richland Hills Town Center, which would emphasize rail access to 5,000 homes, 5,000 jobs and a bevy of recreational opportunities. “It just makes absolute sense in order to relieve congestion and better manage the ozone levels that you take people out of their cars and put them on non-polluting rail systems,” said Bill Gietema, principal for Arcadia Realty, the town center developer.

## **DART spurs development plans**

The Dallas vote has spurred plans for transit-oriented development along the new lines. “We've been pushing for this from day one,” Farmers Branch Mayor Bob Phelps said. “We've had a master plan for that area for years. Dallas Area Rapid Transit is part of it and will enhance it.”

More than 1,100 apartments and lofts have been built around two current DART rail stations at Mockingbird Lane and at the old Sears building south of downtown. Restaurants, retail, and theaters are also planned or under construction. This type of development will soon extend to Richardson, Plano, Irving and Farmers Branch along with the LRT extensions. In Richardson, the city is building a performing arts center near a major convention center and hotel. Residential units are also planned for the site, near the future Campbell Road light-rail station.

Farmers Branch plans to sell some parcels of city owned land to a developer to build 300 to 500 condominium units. Irving officials also plan similar developments. Michael Morris, the transportation director for the North Central Texas Council of Governments says that Smart Growth developments such as these are taking pressure off of outer suburban areas.

“We're focusing on the way we develop land to be able to take advantage of existing infrastructure,” said Roger Snoble, DART president and executive director. “Instead of a family having two or three cars, it might have one car and still be able to do everything.”

## **Orlando reexamines light rail**

Orlando Florida's Lynx transit authority has talking with cities to the north of Orlando in an effort to create a new light rail route that will get those cities' support. A previous plan for LRT north of Orlando was withdrawn in 1997 after a fight over the alignment. The southern half of the proposed line was stopped by Orange County, claiming that work should not continue if there was no consensus on the north side.

A separate proposal to run commuter trains from Volusia County to Osceola County has also been developed. The LRT study is examining an interface with this commuter rail line.

## **Vermont commuter rail line opens**

On December 4th, the Vermont Transportation Authority's Champlain Flyer commuter rail line began service on the 12.5-mile Burlington-Shelburne-Charlotte route. No fare will be charged until early April, when service will increase from 2 daily rounds to 10. Running time is 23 minutes. The \$18 million project was funded by federal and state sources.

The station in Charlotte currently consists of a temporary wooden platform and gravel parking lot, but permanent facilities should be completed over the winter. South Burlington currently does not have a station because an agreement could not be reached over a location.

## **DC completes original Metro plan**

Washington DC opened the final 6.5 mile segment of its Green Line on January 13th. The new segment includes 5 stations and extends southeast of DC to Branch Avenue in Prince George's County Maryland. This completes the original 103-mile MetroRail rapid transit plan, although two more extensions above and beyond the original plan are in advanced planning and several more are under consideration. The DC MetroRail system started with just one portion of the Red Line.

MetroRail now carries 630,000 passengers per weekday with a total of 1.1 Billion passenger-miles per year. With the new extension, ridership is expected to increase to 650,000 per weekday and passenger-miles are expected to increase to 1.2 Billion. On the 2nd day of operations, 19,500 riders flocked to the 5 new stations, where 18,000 had been predicted.

## Rochester transit figures lag nation

The Common Good Planning Center's Benchmarking Regional Rochester shows Rochester's transit system to be in the bottom third in key benchmarking statistics as compared to 28 other metro regions. The figures are Section 15 data reported to the USDOT for 1997.

The Common Good Planning Center (CGPC) report compares Rochester to the benchmark cities on 48 separate measures. The report was intended to gather, but not interpret, statistics. The CGPC, a non-profit group founded to promote livable communities and a thriving Rochester region, intends the report to spark discussion. In measures of creativity, productivity, wealth, and affordability, the Rochester region ranks well. In measures of population growth, job growth and business establishment, Rochester lags the benchmark cities.

The transit statistics measured are:

- Transit Service - measured by vehicle-route-miles per capita.  
Rochester ranked 20th out of 29 at 8.5 v-r-m of service per UA resident. First was Seattle at 20.8; last was Lexington (KY) at 4.2. Buffalo was 21st at 8.1; Syracuse was 14th at 10.4.
- Transit Ridership - measured by annual transit trips per capita.  
Rochester ranked 19th out of 29 with an annual use of 21.1 trips/capita. First was Atlanta at 61.6; last was Lexington at 2.5. Buffalo was 18th at 24.4; Syracuse was 15th at 25.5
- Fiscal Support - measured by transit operating expenses per capita.  
Rochester ranked 19th out of 29 spending \$54.29 per capita. First was Seattle at \$162.42; last was Lexington at \$20.55. Buffalo was 15th at \$59.03; Syracuse was 16th at \$58.69.
- Fiscal Effectiveness - measured by transit operating expenses per passenger (for bus systems only)  
Rochester ranked 20th out of the 30 bus systems (Cincinnati has two systems) at \$2.40 per unlinked passenger trip. First was Milwaukee at \$1.30; last was Lexington at \$6.40. Buffalo was 21st at \$2.50; Syracuse was 13th at \$2.10.

The 28 benchmark cities were Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Buffalo, Charlotte, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus,

Dallas, Dayton, Denver, Grand Rapids, Hartford, Indianapolis, Lexington (KY), Louisville, Madison, Milwaukee, Minn-St. Paul, Nashville, Pittsburgh, Portland (Ore), Providence, Richmond, St. Louis, Seattle, Syracuse, and Tampa.

## Transit ridership continues to climb

National transit ridership in the first quarter of 2000 increased 4.8 percent in ridership over the same period in 1999. The continuing increase in ridership builds on last year's year-end total of more than 9 billion trips, the highest peak in annual ridership since 1960. Total ridership in 1999 was 4.5 percent higher than in the previous year.

## Amtrak Sets All-Time Records for Ridership and Revenue

Amtrak announced that it set all-time ridership and ticket revenue records across its national network for fiscal year 2000. More than 22.5 million riders rode Amtrak during FY00 (Oct. 1, 1999 - Sept. 30, 2000), generating just over \$1.103 billion in ticket sales.

Ridership for the year topped last year's figures by one million passengers while ticket revenue climbed 10 percent, or more than \$100 million over the previous year's total of \$1.003 billion. This is the fourth consecutive year of increases in both ridership and ticket revenues.

Amtrak attributes some of the increase to its new Satisfaction Guarantee and commitment to service quality. "This is just the beginning of a fundamental change at Amtrak," said Amtrak Board Chairman Tommy Thompson. "This year's record-breaking performance is going to continue into next year as we redouble our commitment to put our guests at the center of everything we do and back that with our one-of-a-kind satisfaction guarantee."

In addition to the new Satisfaction Guarantee, Amtrak attributes the ridership increase to travelers' frustrations over higher gas prices, increased highway congestion, and airline delays and cancellations.

Ridership on the NYC-Buffalo Empire Corridor rose 4.6% in FY2000 to 1,320,537. Empire Corridor ridership has grown 50% since 1996.

## Amtrak initiates Acela Express HSR

After a year of mechanical problems and delays, Amtrak launched its Acela Express high-speed rail service on November 16th. Revenue service was initiated on December 11th. Acela Express operates in the Washington DC-NYC-Boston Northeast Corridor at speeds up to 150 MPH. The international standard for high-speed rail (HSR) is service that exceeds 125 MPH.

The current service is only one round trip per day. Amtrak hopes to add two more Acela Express round trips by the end of February. As more trainsets are delivered and complete acceptance testing, service is expected to increase to 19 weekday round trips per day. The North East Corridor is also served by slightly slower Acela Regional trains, which make additional station stops.

Acela express service has now attracted 11,000 riders, 12% more than expected, and accumulated \$1.25 million in ticket sales. Washington-NYC travel time is 2 hours and 43 minutes, and NYC-Boston travel time is 3 hours and 18 minutes.



The Acela Express high speed train during test runs (photo (c) Stan Feldman)

## Federal Transit Administration announces grants

The FY2001 Transportation Appropriations Act has provided Federal Transit Administration (FTA) with with a total of \$6.27 billion in funding for all transit programs, and \$6.27 billion in funding for new rail starts and modernization of existing rail transit facilities.

The appropriations includes funding for new projects in Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Alaska, New York City, Los Angeles, Hoboken, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Sacramento, Salt Lake City, San Diego, San Francisco, San Jose San Juan (Puerto Rico), Seattle, St. Louis, and Minneapolis.

## Pittsburgh to proceed with LRT overhaul, extensions

On January 8, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approved Pittsburgh's Port Authority's plan for two light rail extensions and the overhaul of mothballed trolley routes to light rail standards.

One extension will continue the "T" light rail line from the Gateway Center station via a new tunnel under the Allegheny River to the "North Shore" area. The extension will serve the new Steelers stadium, the Carnegie Science Center and a new parking garage. The second extension will branch from the Steel Plaza station to the convention center, with an underground station opposite the Greyhound bus terminal.

The Stage II light rail upgrade project will rebuild the mothballed Overbrook trolley line and improve the Library branch. A total of 12 miles of trolley line will be rebuilt to modern light rail standards, single track portions will be double-tracked, and 2,400 park-and-ride spaces will be added. The 55 light rail vehicles in Pittsburgh's current fleet will be overhauled, and 28 new vehicles will be purchased.

## Ground breaking for Minneapolis LRT

Minneapolis officials performed the ceremonial ground breaking for the Hiawatha Avenue light rail transit project on January 18th. Gov. Jesse Ventura and U.S. Representative Martin Sabo were among those giving speeches. The 11.6-mile line running between downtown Minneapolis and the Mall of America in Bloomington will open in 2004. The initial segment from downtown to Fort Snelling will open in 2003. The completed line will include a tunnel under the airport with a station at the airport terminal.

In a news release, Governor Ventura said: "This moment has been waiting to happen for more than 30 years. It is happening today because the public demanded more transportation choices and because so many have worked hard and kept their sights focused. Now the reality of the Hiawatha line will make the Twin Cities and Minnesota more competitive in the 21st century."

Sabo said: "Throughout the country light-rail transit has spurred development, played a key role in reducing congestion and helped peoples' quality of life. Today as we break ground on the Hiawatha Line, the Twin Cities joins a growing list of metropolitan areas that benefit from key smart-growth initiatives like light-rail transit."

## U.S. Conference of Mayors urges investment in rail transit

On January 17th, 300 mayors from across the country urged President Bush and the Congress to adopt a national policy on intercity rail and rail transit. The mayors called for the construction of more rapid transit, light rail and commuter rail in metropolitan areas. The mayors also urged the passage of the High Speed Rail Investment Act, which would sell \$10 billion in bonds to upgrade intercity rail corridors to high-speed service.

The U.S. Conference of Mayors also released a nationwide poll showing that a vast majority of residents (82%) support funding for rail as an option to driving. Eighty percent said that they supported building light rail and commuter rail systems. Sixty-eight percent reducing traffic congestion was a convincing reason for spending public funds on rail transit. Sixty-six percent said that they do not believe that building roads will relieve traffic congestion. Sixty-nine percent said that they favor creating high-speed intercity rail lines.

## California's Governor proposes major rail investment

In addition to \$700 million approved by the state legislature, California Governor Gray Davis has proposed additional state funding for major intercity rail improvements. California leads the nation in state funding for rail transit and intercity rail. Amtrak and California have released a 5-year plan that calls for \$3.9 billion in improvements to four corridors.

The new funds, above and beyond current commitments, are:

- \$48 million for additional double tracking on the Pacific Surfliner corridor
- \$29.4 million for additional double tracking on the San Joaquin corridor
- \$20.6 million for additional doubletracking on the Capitol corridor
- \$9.5 in additional operating funds to run additional intercity rail services.

## Pataki budget includes little for rail

In the wake of the defeat of the \$3.8 billion Transportation Bond Act, New York State Governor George Pataki has proposed \$250 million in "critical" transportation projects

in the 2001-2002 budget. The proposed increase would primarily go toward highway projects, including the conversion of the Southern Tier Expressway (Rt. 17) to I-86. The budget does include funding for the Saratoga-Albany commuter rail project (see article in this newsletter). Funding for some freight rail projects were also included: downstate freight clearance projects, and freight yard improvements in Buffalo.

No funding was included for intercity passenger rail, however, Governor Pataki has proposed a reduction in freight railroad property tax. The state's current high property tax levels on freight railroads is a major concern to CSX, the host railroad to Amtrak in New York State. CSX has stated that a reduction in property taxes is a prerequisite to cooperation on high speed passenger rail improvements.

The failed Transportation Bond Act was criticized by RRTC and other groups for its failure to include funding for high speed rail and upstate transit innovations (other than the Albany-Saratoga Springs commuter rail demonstration described on page 5 of this newsletter).

## Los Angeles starts Eastside LRT project.

The Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority approved a \$20.8-million contract to begin engineering work for a six-mile light rail line from downtown LA to the Eastside. The project was originally conceived as an eastern extension of the heavy rail Red Line subway, but budget shortfalls forced a conversion of the project to light rail. The new line will now be an end-on continuation of the Pasadena Rose Line, which is now under construction. The Eastside line will extend from Union Station across the Los Angeles River to Atlantic and Beverly boulevards. The line will include a 1.7 mile tunnel.



The new Kenosha, WI streetcar line demonstrates that vintage trolley lines can be wheelchair accessible.