



*Sources "Long-awaited Amtrak station opens in Rochester"  
Democrat and Chronicle, Oct. 6, 2017*

## New Rochester NY Amtrak Station Opens

The state of New York and Amtrak opened the new Rochester train station on October 6, just in time for college students and others leaving town for the long Columbus Day weekend. The airy new station replaces the 36 year-old dingy temporary station that was built by Amtrak in 1978, which replaced the third New York Central station designed by famed home town architect Claude Bragdon and opened in 1914.

The new station includes design features inspired by the Claude Bragdon designed station and is about 32% larger than the older Amtrak station it replaced. Most importantly, the new station features a central high-level platform serving two passenger tracks with additional outside freight tracks. Previously, trains in either direction had to be switched to the single low-level platform on the southern-most track. This new capacity was used immediately when the first train into the station the westbound Maple Leaf Amtrak #63 arrived just a minute before the on-time eastbound Maple Leaf Amtrak #64 pulled into the station.

At the opening ceremony, the featured speakers were Rochester Mayor Lovely Warren, Congresswoman Louise Slaughter and Governor Andrew Cuomo. Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, a long-time supporter of Amtrak funding, helped secure ARRA funding of 18-million dollars to pay part of the new station's cost. She had also (Cont'd on page 5)



## Hudson Valley Food Service Restoration Campaign

Why can't a passenger grab a cup of coffee or a quick snack while traveling during the over two-hour trip between Albany and New York City on most 'Empire Service' trains? We at ESPA have long wanted to change this long-lamented inconvenience and have now started a campaign to have food service restored on all trains on the Empire Corridor.

It wasn't always so. Amtrak ended food service in the summer of 2005 on trains starting or ending their runs in Rensselaer in order to save about \$ 1 million annually. This was a rough political and financial time for Amtrak, with the Bush Administration pushing to have the passenger railroad privatized despite the "glide path to operational self-sufficiency", and certain House members, like John Mica, mocking the cost of food service during congressional hearings.

Since those times, the situation has changed. With the passing of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) of 2008, the financial support of Amtrak's corridor trains was transferred from Amtrak to the states. With PRIIA Section 209, it is now New York State (NYSDOT) that covers the net costs of operating "Empire Service", so it is now New York State that decides the level and quality of intercity passenger rail service within Upstate NY and not Amtrak; which is now in the position of a service provider working under contract for NYSDOT. The citizens of this great state must make their voices heard to the NYS Legislature and to the Governor to effect this change. The decision of what amenities and service to fund is solely the discretion of the State of New York.

While there would be a startup cost to restoring food service to the trains that start and end in Albany, the café cars are already on every train, but simply not used. In addition, the Rensselaer station commissary space still exists, so it would need to be stocked with food, beverages, and supplies, and staff would be necessary to oversee its operation. The year-to-year operating costs should be very low, as most state corridors and the Northeast Corridor break-even or make a small profit on café car operations. A reopening of the commissary at Rensselaer would also allow for the restocking of trains to Niagara Falls, Toronto, and Montreal, as these trains often sell completely out of all food on weekends, as they are only stocked in Sunnyside Yard in Queens, NY.

Restoration of food service would also dovetail with Gov. Andrew Cuomo's "Taste NY" partnership with Amtrak to promote New York food and beverage products to passengers on Upstate trains. A worthy initiative, that unfortunately as far as fellow ESPA members can tell, has fallen flat with no discernible onboard promotion or other information in the café cars to inform passengers that such products are available for purchase. The restoration of Hudson Valley food service and the reopening of the Rensselaer commissary could be part of an overall revamping of food service on Upstate NY trains, including the clear offering and fully stocking of local and healthy food and beverages.

Across America, other state-supported Amtrak corridor services, including the Seattle-Portland *Cascades* and Boston-Portland *Downeaster*,  
(Cont'd on page 5)

## Successes and Challenges Ahead

Over the past year, the Empire Corridor has opened new stations in both Niagara Falls, NY and Rochester, NY, providing a huge improvement for rail passengers traveling to and from those two cities. A new station in Schenectady is under construction, the second track between Albany and Schenectady has been completed, as well as the fourth station track at the Albany-Rensselaer station.

To help ensure that ESPA's voice will be heard loud and clear, we are requesting that you consider a donation in support of our **"Stay On Track in 2018" Special Appeal**, to allow ESPA to continue through the financial and political challenges ahead that could impact passenger rail service across the state of New York. Send your checks, made payable to "ESPA", to P. O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209. Your contribution will help us to push for the following items in 2018:

- Food Service on ALL Empire Corridor trains,
- Return of Dining Cars to the Lake Shore Limited,
- Push back against the Administration's desire to eliminate long distance trains,
- Replacement of the current downtown Buffalo train station,
- More coach capacity on weekend Empire Corridor trains,
- Business class on the Adirondack, and
- Improvements to NYC subways, buses and commuter rail lines.

We look forward to seeing you at our Annual Meeting on March 10, 2018 in Schenectady, (more details will be in the next newsletter). And coming soon will be a new ESPA website, which will complement our Facebook page.

*Gary Prophet (ESPA President)*

## Schenectady Rail Station Bids Opened

The state Department of Transportation received two bids for construction of a new Schenectady Amtrak rail station, and both appear to fall within the \$15 million budget the state set for the long-delayed downtown project.

The new rail station, like the former station, will be a two-story building on Erie Boulevard just north of State Street, replacing a building that was deteriorating and widely seen as a liability for the city that has sought to rebuild and create a new image for the downtown area.

At a bid opening, Murnane Building Contractors, of Plattsburgh, submitted the apparent low construction bid at \$10,435,900. Also bidding was Jersen Construction, of Waterford, with a bid of \$11,383,000. They were the only two bids received under a design-build system in which a single contractor would be responsible for all aspects of construction.

Local officials said the bids were great news given that an *earlier station bid package* ended up far above budget and was rejected. The subsequent involvement of Gov. Andrew Cuomo in promoting the project has raised its profile.

"We're glad the bids are in and they're within budget," Schenectady Mayor Gary McCarthy said. "It's great that the project can move forward."

The project has \$10 million in federal funding, and Cuomo has pledged up to \$15 million in state funds to cover the cost of demolition of the old station, track repairs, and new station construction.

"The new Schenectady station is so important to our efforts to brand Schenectady County as a tourist destination and to be a catalyst for additional development in our revitalized downtown," said Anthony Jasenski, chairman of the Schenectady County Legislature, in a statement. "We are grateful to the governor for his personal involvement and commitment to making the new station happen and to the project team at NYSDOT." DOT now has time to review the bids.

"Generally, contracts are awarded within 45 days of bids being opened. We will review these bids in detail and submit the contract to the state Comptroller's Office and the attorney general for approval before it is awarded," DOT spokeswoman Jennifer Post said.

Both companies are well-established commercial contractors who have done work for the state in the past.

Construction of the new station would be the second phase of a two-phase project. *Demolition of the old station* took place over the summer under a separate \$5.4 million contract, which also included repairs to the elevated viaduct that carries the tracks above downtown Schenectady.



Cuomo has taken an interest in the project, listing it among his 2017 priorities in January, and coming to Proctors to *announce design changes* in July.

Plans call for demolition and track repairs to be complete this year, with the station construction to be completed by November 2018. For now, passengers coming to or leaving Schenectady are using a temporary platform Amtrak built on the north side of Liberty Street.

Schenectady officials have said for years that a new train station is important to downtown's redevelopment. The new station is to resemble the demolished Union station more than the utilitarian Amtrak station that opened in 1979.

The plans suffered a setback in March 2016, when a bid that included the demolition, track repair and construction in a single package came in at \$24.5 million — far above what was then a \$15 million project budget. State officials responded with a redesign of the station and by separating the demolition/repairs into a separate contract from construction.

About 60,000 passengers per year either board or detrain at Schenectady, but local officials believe the station would become busier with the opening of Rivers Casino & Resort, as well as Schenectady County's heightened tourism promotion efforts.

*Stephen Williams*



## Adirondack Railroad receives Favorable Court Decision

On September 27, 2017, Franklin County State Supreme Court Justice Robert Main Jr. issued a ruling in favor of retaining the rails over a competing proposal to remove the rails over a 34 mile segment of the railroad. Proponents of the idea of replacing the railroad with a multi-use trail convinced the NYS DEC to amend their "Unit Management Plan" for the corridor to favor a trail over the railroad.



The 2016 Amendment to the unit management plan and travel corridor calls for the conversion of the railroad between Tupper Lake and Lake Placid into a 34-mile, multiple-use recreational trail. DEC has released a Draft Conceptual Plan for the Adirondack Rail Trail which outlines the ideas, opportunities, potentials and possibilities for a high quality low grade trail that provides residents and visitors using the trail with a new way to experience the Adirondacks.

Many municipalities along the proposed trail favor the trail use over the rail use of the line. They argue that the trail use will bring in more visitors than an eventual seasonal passenger operation would. This quote from Elba town Supervisor Roby Politi sums up the reaction of those still in favor of the trail. "This just delays the inevitable, this is a lower-court decision that, regardless whether the decision was for or against, it was certain to be appealed anyway".

Adirondack Railroad is trying maintain the 119 mile corridor intact for rail use in the future. The railroad had been operating a short tourist train between Lake Placid and Saranac Lake up until last year when their continued use of the North end of the line was denied by the State in preparation for the trail. New York State owns the railroad granting the Adirondack Scenic Railroad operating rights to run its popular passenger trains from Utica and Thendara. It is uncertain how the Judge's decision will impact the unit management plan in the future.

*Ben Gottfried*

## Amtrak Reports Record Ridership, Revenue & Earnings

Amtrak reported record ridership, revenue and earnings for its 2017 fiscal year on in a November 16th press release.

Passenger trips increased by 1.5 percent to 31.7 million in the company's year ending September 30, 2017. All service lines grew ridership with the Northeast Corridor achieving its best year ever carrying 12 million passengers or 1 percent more. State supported services grew 2.1 percent to 15 million riders. Long-distance routes increased .9 percent to 4.6 million passengers.

However, the news for Upstate New York was not so grand, ridership was up NYC-Albany (Empire South) by +0.6% but down -1.4% west of Albany to Niagara Falls and Toronto. The 'Adirondack' was down -6.7% and the 'Ethan Allen' -1.5%. Total ridership for the Empire Service and other Upstate trains was 1,678,000; about two thirds of that Empire South. The 'Downeaster', 'Vermont', and *Northeast Regionals* saw gains, the 'Acela' a slight decline. The 'Lake Shore Limited' saw a +0.2% gain.

Amtrak total internal revenue grew 1.1 percent to a record \$3.2 billion shrinking the operating loss to a record low of \$194 million. The record low operating loss meant Amtrak covered a record 94.7 percent of its operating costs through ticket sales and other revenue. The operating revenue improved 15.7 percent over fiscal year 2016.

"We provided a vital transportation service to more customers and created strong value for the federal investment," said Amtrak Board Chairman Tony Coscia. "And we're going to do even better. Over the next several years, we're aiming to cover total operating costs from ticket and other revenues by strengthening our services and continuing too drive efficiency."

"More and more people are choosing rail travel and for good reason," said Amtrak Co-Chairman Wick Moorman. "Amtrak offers a more comfortable and convenient travel experience with great amenities such as free Wi-Fi on most trains, plenty of leg room, and no middle seat."

Other Amtrak highlights for 2017 include: completed more than \$420 million of state of good repair and renewal infrastructure work; deployed state-purchased Charge diesel locomotives on certain Amtrak routes; and cut total debt to \$1.2 billion.

The Amtrak announcement did not include revenue for each service route.

*Tony Rudmann*

### Help ESPA Go Green and Save \$\$

Members providing their e-mail address are entitled to the full-color, electronic version of the *ESPA Express* newsletter at the same time we forward the paper version to the printer. (ESPA will NOT share your information with anyone.) Receive the newsletter one to two weeks earlier than by mail!

Our postage and printing cost savings will give ESPA more resources to further its passenger rail advocacy mission.

Please send your e-mail address to:  
[www.rwlenz4@gmail.com](mailto:www.rwlenz4@gmail.com).

## Amtrak “Avelia Liberty” Production Begins in Hornell

Production of body shells and main components for Amtrak’s new Avelia Liberty trainsets has begun in Alstom’s Hornell factory, according to an October 11th article in the Railway Gazette. The 28 trainset fleet is expected to enter service on the Northeast Corridor in 2021-22.

Alstom displayed a model at the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) exposition in Atlanta. The model showcased the final exterior design of the trainset which will feature short wheelbase power cars and nine articulated trailer cars. There is an option to add up to three more cars if demand grows.

The trainsets will incorporate Alstom’s tilting technology and a crash energy management system which is said to meet the latest Federal Railroad Administration crash worthiness guidelines.



## Congress Puts Tax Cuts & Reform on Front Burner

On October 26th, Congress put tax cuts and tax reform as its top priority shifting resolution of the actual appropriations for Federal Fiscal Year 2018 and establishment of new debt limit ceiling into the future. The present temporary legislation on both issues expires on December 8th. Absent new legislation, the federal government would shut down and no money could be spent on intercity passenger or commuter rail. Amtrak and commuter systems could continue to run using their independent ticket and other revenue but capital projects would slow or stop. The promised first 100 day federal infrastructure renewal program now becomes an infrastructure dream of 2018 or later.

The vehicle for tax change priority was House Roll Call 589 adopted in a vote of 216 to 212 with all “Yes” votes cast by Republicans while “No” drew 192 Democratic and 20 Republican votes. Of the 9 New York Republican Congressmen, 7 voted “No” and 2 voted “Yes”. The “No” votes included Lee Zeldin (CD-1), Peter King (CD-2), Daniel Donovan (CD 11), John Faso (CD-19), Elise Stefanick (CD-21), Claudia Tenney (CD-22) and John Katko (CD-24). Congresswoman Stefanick was honored by the National Association of Railroad Passengers in April for her work to speed up the border crossing for Amtrak “Adirondack”. Congressman Faso has been publically calling for restoration of food service on the Albany – NYC Empire Corridor. Supporting the House Resolution were Congressmen Tom Reed (CD-23) and Congressman Chris Collins (CD-27).

The House Resolution is important because the Constitution says the House of Representatives must originate legislation on revenue and spending. The adopted resolution sets revenue and spending targets for FFY 2018 to FFY 2027. Additionally, it sets

budget outlays, debt and deficit limits and sets functional spending categories. Also, it gives specific instructions to the 11 authorizing & appropriating committees to achieve the desired targets.

A major procedure triggered by the resolution is that the Senate will need only 51 votes to pass the final tax and spending bill. This eliminates the ability of Democratic Senators to influence the taxation and spending legislation.

As this article is being written, no tax bill has been introduced in the House, but House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady said he would release a tax measure on November 1st and the Committee would have its final vote on November 6th. House Speaker Paul Ryan has said he would keep the House in session into the scheduled Christmas recess to get legislation done. If the tax and spending legislation is not signed into law by midnight December 23rd, it would require 60 votes to move through the Senate.

The future infrastructure renewal bill awaits next year’s calendar because it will require significant federal funding to make inroads into the estimated \$4 trillion infrastructure needs. Some suggested funding sources were also recommended to finance planned tax cuts. One new infrastructure funding source – a gas tax hike -- was mentioned by White House Economic Adviser Gary Cohn during the last full week of October. President Trump signaled some openness to the idea earlier this year, telling Bloomberg News that it was something he would “certainly consider.” An industry source told the press that the White House intends to back a 7 cent gas tax increase. A gas tax hike makes sense because it has not increased since 1993 while construction costs have skyrocketed in the interval. In recent years, Congress has transferred \$84 billion in general revenue to the Highway Trust Fund to keep funding road and bridge projects.

For those wishing to learn more about the House Resolution, the House of Representative website has the Resolution summary, complete text and official vote tally.

*Tony Rudmann*

## Funding Under Federal Review for New TIGER Grants

The federal Transportation Department is reviewing applications for \$500 million in Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) competitive grants authorized under the Consolidated Appropriations Act of May 5, 2017. Since the first TIGER program in 2009, \$5.1 billion has been awarded for capital improvements and applications have always far exceeded available funds.

“The TIGER grant program is highly competitive program whose winners will be awarded with the funding they need to rebuild the infrastructure of their communities,” said U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine L. Chao. “TIGER grants will continue to fund innovative projects that will improve the safety of America’s passengers and goods.”

The latest TIGER program was announced on September 7th with an application deadline of October 16th. Awards are not anticipated before the New Year. When an award is made, funds must be obligated by September 30, 2020, and fully spent by September 30, 2025.

Under the latest program, grants may not be less than \$5 million nor larger than \$25 million. Grants in rural areas may be as little as \$1 million. Federal funds will cover 80 percent of total project costs with the balance contributed by applicants or other entities. No more than \$50 million in grants may be awarded in a single state. Eligible capital projects include roads and bridges, public transportation projects, passenger and freight rail, port infrastructure and intermodal projects.

*(Cont'd on page 5)*



## Safety First: Respect First Responders on Rail Journeys

It has come to our attention that over the summer during a police action undertaken one evening to remove a suspicious and potentially dangerous individual from the train during the *Lake Shore Limited's* station stop at Schenectady, there was a secondary confrontation between law enforcement and another passenger apparently irate at the length of the delay, due to the actions of the police.

The initial incident started at Albany-Rensselaer when a passenger overheard another passenger engaged in a disturbing conversation on his cell phone about undertaking future criminal activities. Authorities were quickly alerted so that at Schenectady, the next station stop, the police boarded the train to question, detain and remove the suspicious man in question. However, needing to cross their t's and dot their i's, a lengthy search was conducted by the police of the train to ensure there were no other accomplices or illegal or dangerous items on board that could threaten public safety.

This delay apparently annoyed one person who was at the Schenectady station and he verbally confronted the police. Worse still, he claimed to be a member of this organization, the Empire State Passenger Association. What he did was foolish and potentially dangerous. While in our great democracy, there is a proper time and place for constructive criticism of law enforcement, during an ongoing police action is not the proper time nor place, as the safety of you, rail passengers, the train crew, and first responders, are most important at that point in time.

So as a friendly reminder: Don't make a nuisance of yourself, please control your emotions, and just grin and bear the inconvenience during such circumstances, and let the brave men and women of law enforcement do their job as they see necessary based on their professional training and experience.

*ESPA Officers & Coordinators*

## New Rochester Station (Cont'd from page 1)

helped obtain a TIGER grant for the recently opened Niagara Falls, NY station, a city which had been in her district until 2010. The new Rochester station opened more or less on schedule but considerably over budget.

The original cost estimate was budgeted to be around 29.8 million dollars but ended up costing 44 million. The total cost was split between the federal government, the state and the city of Rochester. Nevertheless, politicians at every level and the public who attended were thrilled to have a long overdue permanent station that provides a bright welcome to visitors and residents arriving home.

*Jacob Adams*

## Funding (Cont'd from page 4)

Eligible applicants are State, local and tribal governments, transit agencies, port authorities and metropolitan planning organizations. Multiple states or other eligible applicants may submit joint applications.

The federal Transportation Department does not identify the applications submitted in the current competitive program but has reported applications filed in the TIGER program for years 2009 thru 2015. New York applicants at all levels have sought TIGER funds and have been successful in past funding rounds. The past New York applications have covered a wide range of projects from the 2009 Maglev Demonstration and Certification Project of the Town of Riverhead to the 2015 Route 438 Safety Improvements Project of the Seneca Nation.

*Tony Rudmann*

## Hudson Valley (Cont'd from page 1)

offer good quality café car services. Northeast Corridor trains have café cars. And as part of a \$200 million sixty commuter car purchase, the State of Connecticut is including new "bar cars" for its Metro-North trains.

If commuters to New Haven can have food service then why not Amtrak passengers from Albany and the Hudson Valley who are paying much higher fares than what Metro-North charges passengers?

In the coming year, ESPA will move to build public support to bring this issue to the forefront of lawmakers in Albany. You can help by writing to your local state representatives and Gov. Andrew Cuomo on this issue and also by giving our new social media page "*Hudson Valley Food Service on Amtrak*" a "Like" on Facebook.

*ESPA Officers & Coordinators*



Dining car under construction, will be added to the *Lake Shore Limited* on May 2018. Kitchen has storage, grill, stove, and real oven. currently on the *Lake Shore Limited*, they have little storage and only a small convection microwave.



### New York By Rail

New York By Rail Magazine is the premiere Amtrak travel guide for destinations in New York, Vermont and Canada. Visit us at...

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ALL ESPA members (and other interested persons) are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact President Gary Prophet at [thegp@aol.com](mailto:thegp@aol.com) for more information or if you are planning on attending a meeting. Advance registration is required!

**All Meetings are 12:00n to 4:00pm**

**January 13, 2018 Schenectady - Backstage Pub**

**March 10, 2018: Annual Meeting – Schenectady,  
at Proctors**

Check [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org), for the most current information on meeting times and venues...ALL dates, locations and times are subject to change...

### ESPA/NARP Member

If you are a member of both ESPA and NARP you can save \$5 when renewing your ESPA membership.  
(Renew for \$19 instead of the regular \$24).



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## ESPA MEMBERSHIP NEW OR RENEWAL

The Empire State Passengers Association is a volunteer network of people working to improve intercity rail, mass transit and bus service in New York State.

- ☐ Introductory membership (\$10.00 for one year)
- ☐ Renewal membership (\$24.00 per year)
- ☐ Renewal - Student, Senior, Fixed-Income (\$12.50 per year)
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