



A Vision for Passenger Rail and Public Transportation in New York State 2004 - 2008

Introduction

The ***Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA)***, a 1,400 member rail user advocacy group, introduced its first **Five Year Plan for Passenger Rail Improvements in New York State** in 1996 with a subsequent update in 2000.

In February 2000, Transportation Commissioner Joseph Boardman released a comprehensive “Intercity Passenger Rail Plan”, which provided details for the implementation of the 1998 joint New York State/Amtrak ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ for intercity rail improvements across the state. ***ESPA*** applauded this plan for providing the framework for the development of a world-class high speed rail system for the state.

However, much has changed in the State’s transportation landscape in the four years since 2000. The events of September 11, 2001 and the overall economic slow down have altered both the needs of the traveling public in New York State and the level of available resources to positively address these needs. Unfortunately, to date, relatively few of the outlined improvements have been accomplished, resulting in little overall enhancement in the intercity public transportation travel experience.

In this context, the ***Empire State Passengers Association*** introduces “**A Vision for Passenger Rail and Public Transportation in New York State – 2004-2008**” as its next contribution to the ongoing mission of improving passenger rail service and public transportation for travel in our state. We hope that our three “vision points” outlined here will inspire and provide direction to our elected officials, the Department of Transportation, Amtrak and the state’s other public transportation providers.

Passenger Rail and Public Transportation

“Vision Points”

1. Development of a Comprehensive State-Wide Public Transportation System Plan

To serve the needs of the traveling public in the years to come, we see an absolute need for a comprehensive intercity public transportation system plan for the state, focusing on the advantages of a modern high-speed passenger rail network as its core. We feel that this plan must go well beyond the scope of the state's 2000 “Intercity Passenger Rail Plan”, by incorporating all modes of public transportation into an overall unified system.

This comprehensive plan should recognize the benefits and advantages of all modes of transportation and should embrace a unified, intermodal approach to providing transportation throughout the state. Ironically, despite large investments in intermodal centers in Rensselaer, Utica and Syracuse, there has been little attempt to coordinate rail, bus and car rental services there, and consequently, few passengers transfer between modes. Instead, our various transport modes still focus primarily on competing with each other rather than cooperating to provide a viable alternative to driving. Yet, viable alternatives to auto travel are essential to address the congestion and air quality issues that confront our State.

New York State has a rich history of pioneering in transportation, from the early days of the Erie Canal to the present. Now, as then, the state's transportation system serves as a catalyst for economic growth and prosperity in all regions of the state. Each major improvement in travel technology has spurred economic growth and development. We believe the next stage in this evolution should be two fold: upgrading of our rail system to high speed levels; and integration with other modes to provide access to locations that the rail spine line cannot serve.



Passenger rail service in New York State started in 1831, when the Mohawk and Hudson Railroad launched service between Albany and Schenectady, using the pioneer locomotive ‘Dewitt Clinton’

We strongly recommend that California's highly successful efforts in providing a unified rail and bus network be studied and emulated, where applicable, here in New York.

It is important to note that as important as we believe this intermodal plan is, its preparation should not delay completion of the many long sought rail improvements that have already been designated in the State's 2000 rail plan.

2. Commitment to Plan Vision and Identifying Resources

To make a modern integrated transportation system a reality, New York State citizens must ask their elected representatives to embrace the need for a unified public transportation network and provide the necessary funding. **ESPA** believes that elected officials must make improving state-wide public transportation a top multi-year priority.

In addition to necessary public funds, appropriate Private/Public partnerships should be investigated and encouraged wherever possible, particularly when local economic growth would be a direct benefit.

We feel that the citizens of New York recognize the need for such a rail based public transportation plan and are willing to support it. In a 1998 Marist Institute for Public Opinion survey, 87% of the polled registered voters favored increasing state spending to improve passenger rail service. Eighty-two percent said having modernized intercity passenger trains was at least as important as having good highways and airports.

3. Creation of a New York State Public Transportation Authority

We believe the ultimate success of the proposed statewide public transportation network requires creation of a state-authorized entity charged with implementation of the comprehensive statewide intercity public transportation plan. Just as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has been the vehicle for vast improvements in the public transportation network of the New York City metropolitan area, we envision the newly created authority as the facilitator for improvements in the public transportation network throughout the rest of the state, especially the core high-speed passenger rail network. This "special authority" approach has been used in California and Maine to greatly improve their public transportation networks.

We envision the newly created organization providing the direction and capital funding, including the sales of bonds, to accomplish the necessary improvements and enhancements across the state. Given the extreme current pressures on the

state budget, it will be essential to provide a source of financing that does not overly increase the demand on tax revenues. In the 1998 Marist public opinion survey, a majority of voters (57%) voiced support for a bond issue to generate funding for improving rail passenger service. Specific recommendations and suggestions for improvements that we, as travelers, feel are necessary are included in this plan.

In order to reduce costly duplication of efforts and administration, we would encourage investigating the advantages of making the new authority a subsidiary of one of currently established entities in the state. Operation of the canal system by the Thruway Authority could serve as an example of the manner in which this might work.

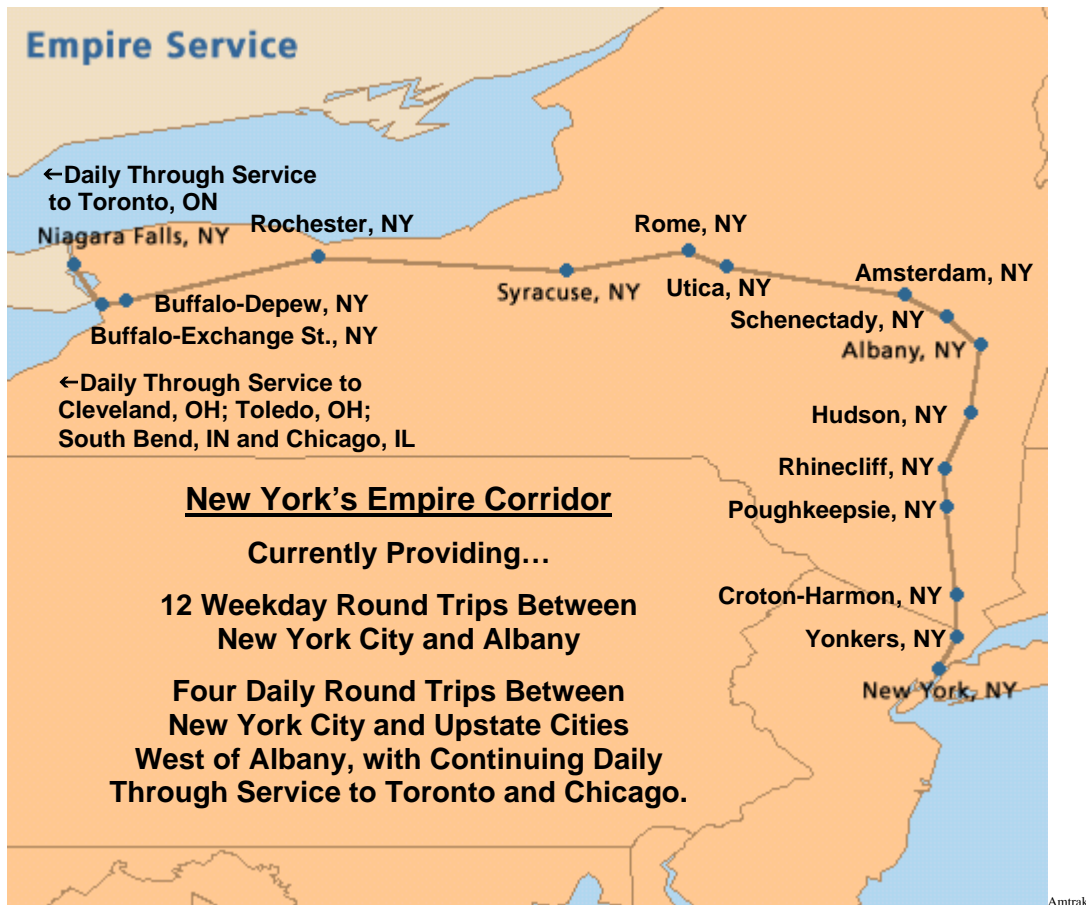
The proposed Public Transportation Authority would be responsible for setting service levels, frequencies, fares, selecting service operators and coordinating the public awareness and marketing of the system. Among the Authority's principal duties would be the creation and development of the proposed intermodal network of linked and coordinated train, bus and ferry services.

Summary

ESPA believes that if these three vision points are embraced, adopted and implemented in the coming five year period, New Yorkers across the state would benefit from a truly world-class public transportation system. The economic, social and environmental benefits from such a system would provide a catalyst to communities of all sizes, both on the main rail system spine and those served by coordinated feeder routes. Overall public transportation ridership would increase significantly as travelers are provided with a reliable, efficient and cost effective alternative to private vehicle use.

Highlights of 1998 Marist Public Opinion Survey On Intercity Passenger Train Service

- 97% of voters throughout the state thought that trains used for long distance travel should be improved and modernized...
- 82% of voters throughout the state believed that having improved and modernized intercity passenger train service is at least as important as having good highways and airports...
- 87% of voters throughout the state favored an increase in resources for intercity passenger train service in New York State...
- 57% of voters throughout the state supported borrowing through issuing bonds to improve the state's intercity rail passenger service...
- 73% of voters would definitely or possibly consider taking their next trip of 75 miles or more away from home by train. Of these voters, better scheduling and reliable performance are the most sought improvements...



ESPA's 2004 New York State Passenger Rail Plan Infrastructure Improvement and Service Enhancement Recommendations

Increase Travel Reliability/On Time Performance:

ESPA believes that consistent reliability is one of the most critical factors in selecting a public transportation travel mode and that quantifiable on-time performance goals must be established, measured and adhered to. There is little point in developing higher speed service if it is not reliable. It must be remembered that travelers who care most about saving time care even more about arriving at their destinations on time.

As the consistent on-time operation of the core passenger rail system will be key to the reliability of the overall coordinated public transportation network, all parties involved in rail operations be held to the highest possible accountability for meeting the established goals. Incentives should be offered to the rail operators for meeting

or exceeding performance goals, with appropriate penalties for operators that consistently fail to meet expectations.

ESPA's recommended year-round on time performance goals:

- New York - Albany: 95%
- New York - Buffalo: 90%
- New York - Montreal: 90%
- New York - Boston - Chicago: 85%



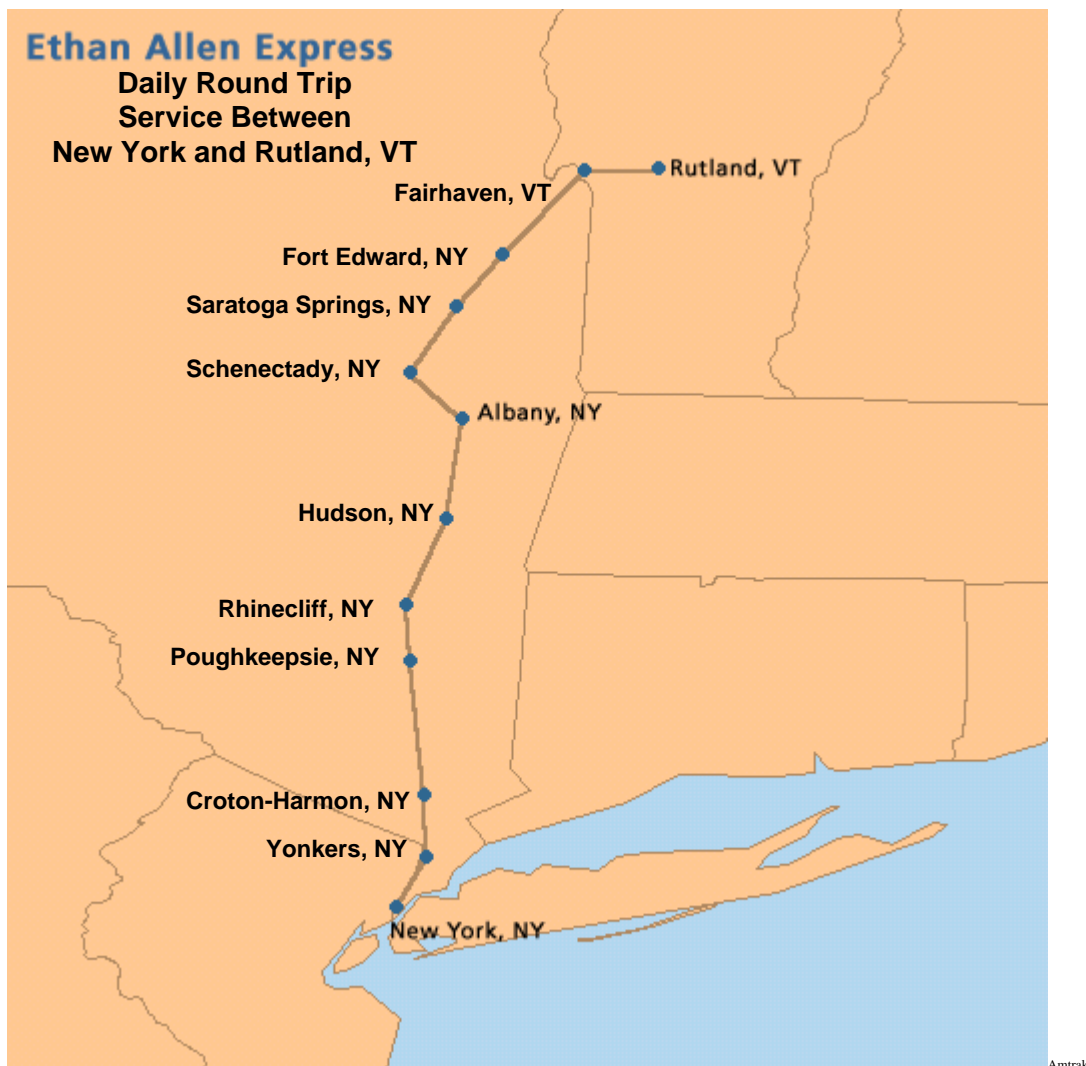
Refurbished RTL III Turboliner For Use In
New York State High Speed Service

Specific infrastructure improvements necessary for consistent on-time reliability include:

- Construction of the planned fourth platform track at Albany
- Construction of second track between Albany and Schenectady
- Construction of segments of third track between Poughkeepsie and Croton/Harmon to allow necessary added capacity for Amtrak and Metro North trains.
- Construction of new platforms at Hudson allowing for the boarding of two trains simultaneously.
- Addition of new switches/interlockings between the two main tracks at known 'choke points' between Hoffmans (west of Schenectady) and Buffalo, allowing for greatly improved traffic flow and flexibility.
- Construction of third track segments between Hoffmans and Buffalo, in incremental portions, allowing for increased passenger and freight capacity.
- Expansion of capacity at New York's Penn Station. Re-construction of the adjacent Farley Post Office building into a new Penn Station and initiating run-through commuter rail services could provide such needed capacity.

*Historic James A. Farley Post Office
Building in midtown Manhattan,
adjacent to Amtrak's current
Penn Station facility.*





Reduce Travel Times:

ESPA believes that second only to the requirement for consistent on-time reliability is the need for overall reduced travel times between all points on the core passenger rail system.

ESPA's recommended rail travel time reductions:

- **New York to Albany:** Reduce trip from current 2 hours 25 minutes to 2 hours.
- **Albany to Buffalo:** Reduce trip time from current 4 hours 45 minutes to 4 hours 30 minutes in the immediate future. Decreasing travel time is particularly important here; although more people travel between New York and Albany than from Albany west, the train is already the fastest mode to New York. However west of Albany the train is significantly slower than the

current best approximate 4 hour driving time to Buffalo. Therefore rail would have a greatly improved opportunity of increasing its market share if it could reliably match or beat the driving time from Albany to the west. This 4 hour trip goal should be used in planning significant longer-term infrastructure improvements on this segment.

- **New York to Buffalo:** Reduce trip from current 7 hours 20 minutes to 6 hours 40 minutes, with the ultimate goal being a trip time of 6 hours 10 minutes.



Amtrak's 'Adirondack' Along Lake Champlain

- **New York to Montreal...**
Reduce trip from current 10 hours 15 minutes to under 9 hours.

Amtrak's Adirondack has been recognized by National Geographic Traveler as "one of the 10 best rail trips in the world"...

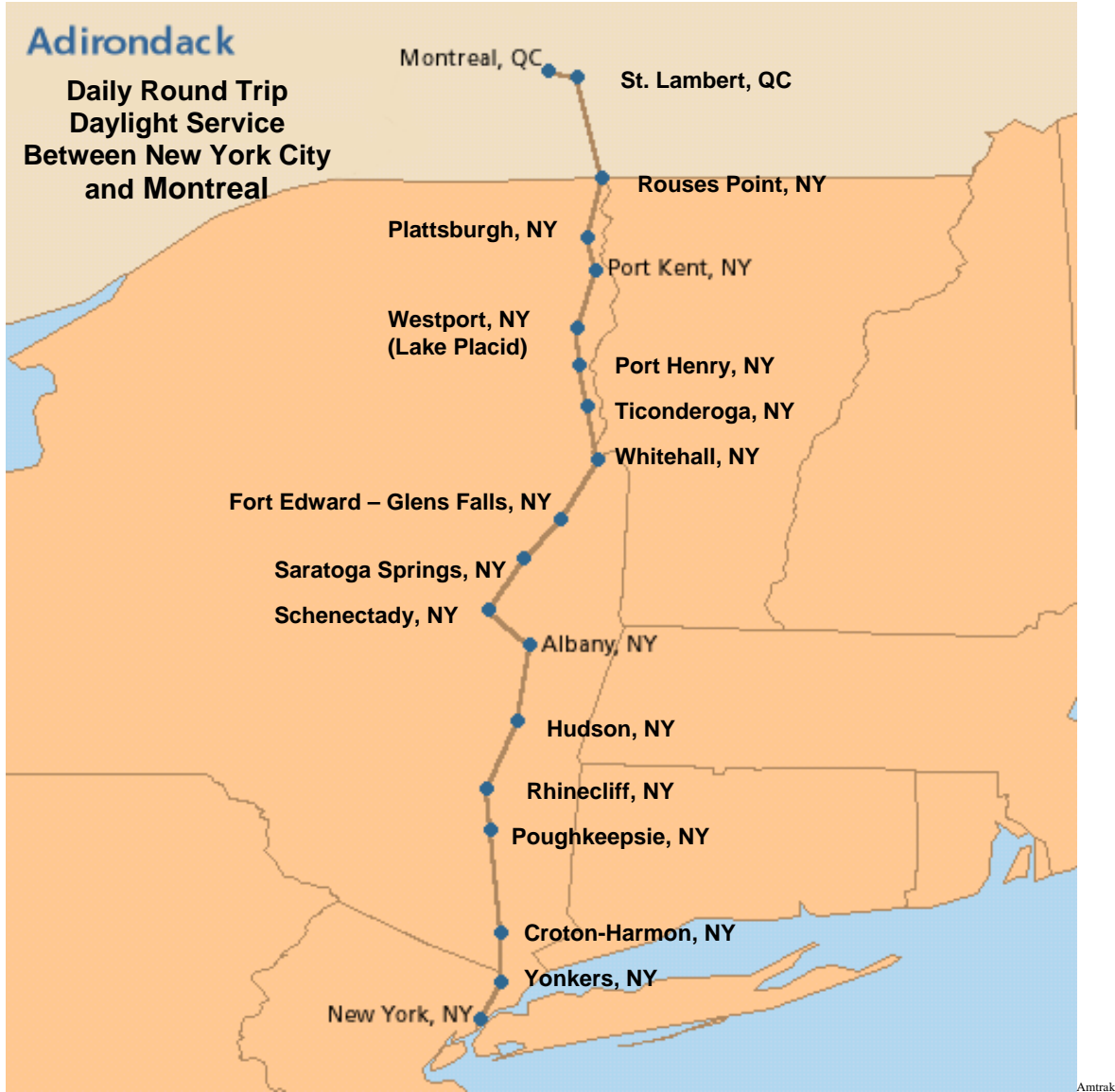
ESPA believes these running times can be achieved with incremental infrastructure improvements and are obtainable within five years. Specific necessary infrastructure improvements include:

- Construction of high-level platforms at stations, where appropriate, to speed passenger loading/unloading.
- Reconstruction of specific, extreme curves, allowing for higher sustained speeds.
- Reconstruction of bridges, permitting higher sustained speeds.
- Installation of new train control technology and signals, permitting speeds above 80 mph on the existing tracks west of Hoffmans.
- Reconstruction of track and addition of passing tracks on the Adirondack route to Montreal, especially north of Rouses Point.
- Improve safety and increase speeds through highway grade crossings with the installation of modern warning devices and systems.

Service enhancements which can reduce travel times include:

- Operating selected New York – Niagara Falls trains non-stop between New York's Penn Station and Albany.
- Expediting boarding procedures at stations, with the maximum possible number of doors always used and tickets always collected after departure from the station.

- Modernizing Cross Border Inspection procedures, with facilities for processing passengers constructed at Montreal's Central Station.



Rationalize Rail Fares:

ESPA believes that an immediate rationalization of the current passenger rail fare structure is necessary to boost current rail ridership and to create a base for the future public transportation network. Specific recommendations include:

- Reduction in all fares for travel west of Albany
- Elimination of “peak” fares for all rail travel west of Albany.
- Introduction of promotional fares for selected trains with excess capacity.
- Introduction of ‘Family Fares’ to spur recreational/discretionary use of rail.

Increase Frequencies:

ESPA believes that increased rail service frequencies will spur significant ridership increases, as potential passengers are provided with additional travel options. Specific recommendations include:

- Hourly service between New York and Albany on weekdays, utilizing a combination of express and local stop trains. Additional trains should be operated during traditional rush hour periods.
- Additional services west of Albany, including an early morning westbound trip to Buffalo, a late afternoon eastbound trip from Buffalo and a daily round trip to New York originating in Syracuse early each morning.
- As Western New York trip times are reduced, an additional daily round trip to New York originating in Buffalo early each morning should be implemented.
- Extension of one daily daylight round trip to Cleveland from Buffalo.
- Extension of 'rush hour' trains to Saratoga Springs from Albany.

Improve Stations and Ticketing:



New Albany-Rensselaer Station Opened In 2002

ESPA believes that modern, safe and attractive station facilities are key for public acceptance and use of a public transportation network. While notable station improvements have been accomplished across the state, additional enhancements are necessary, including:

- Construction of new stations for Niagara Falls and Downtown Buffalo at Exchange Street.
- New stops and stations at Lyons and Dunkirk.
- Renovation of existing stations at Buffalo-Depew, Rochester, Schenectady and along the Adirondack route.
- Installation of communications systems at all un-staffed stations, capable of providing service and delay announcements.
- Overall improvements in cleanliness, parking, lighting, security and location signage.
- Installation of Self-Service ticket machines in all unstaffed stations, at other appropriate business locations and on nearby college/university campuses.
- Development of joint ticketing and marketing agreements between all service providers. Specific rail examples include through ticketing arrangements

between Amtrak and the Metro North and Long Island Railroads.

- Engaging local groups in beautification efforts at stations; such has been long done by **ESPA** at Buffalo-Depew, where flowers are planted and tended, through cooperation between **ESPA** and a local florist. Also, encourage historical and art displays of local interest inside stations along the routes.

Enhance On Board Service:

ESPA believes that passengers expect and should enjoy a consistent high-level of service during all travel experiences. Examples of minimum expectations include:



Enhanced Longer Distance Seating

- Clean, comfortable and modern equipment. Temperature control, lighting, seat comfort, cleanliness and restroom sanitation should be among the highest priorities.
- Enhanced coach seating and lounge car facilities on trains to Toronto and Montreal.

- Maximum use of a train's available seating capacity to avoid overcrowding and uncomfortable conditions.
- Clear and informative on board announcements must be made on a consistent basis, especially when delays occur.
- Appropriate food services should be available immediately upon initial departure through final destination. Staff breaks and re-stocking should not occur at normal meal times.
- Crew members should actively aid passengers requiring assistance (seniors, families, etc.).

Development of Feeder Network:

The State currently finances a network of buses that serves most of its counties. However there is virtually no coordination between this system and the rail system, part of which also receives state support. Bus schedules are rarely published in train schedules and train schedules are rarely published in bus schedules. There are virtually no arrangements for through ticketing. Rental cars are available at very few rail stations.

ESPA believes this should be changed. An effort should be made not only to serve rural areas with buses but to link these buses with the trunk rail line and to inform travelers of the connection. Through ticketing should be possible where there is a significant travel market (ie: at college campuses or attractions such as the Turning

Stone casino). In addition, arrangements should be made for easy access to rental cars at all major rail stations.



Utica's historic Union Station serves Amtrak and Adirondack Scenic Railroad trains, Greyhound and Trailways buses and local transit services.

Coordination of schedules and through-ticketing is not currently available.

Increase Public Awareness, Marketing and Information:

ESPA believes that significant efforts are necessary to increase the public awareness and marketing of the current and future public transportation network. Access to information on available services must be vastly improved. Recommended initiatives include:

- Development of a state-wide, intercity public transportation web site, including links to schedules for all trains, buses, ferries and local transit.
- Publication of a state-wide, intercity public transportation guide.
- Inclusion of the public transportation network in all state-produced and authorized maps.
- Readily available and accurate information on local transit services, car rental agencies, and local accommodation availability, must be at all stations.
- State-wide marketing campaigns are necessary.

Longer-Term Public Transportation Goals and Recommendations:

ESPA believes a number of longer-term rail system expansions should be given high priority, including:

- Restoring rail service from New York through Scranton, PA to the Southern Tier cities of Binghamton, Elmira and Corning.
- Extending rail service to Lake Placid and North Creek from Amtrak connections in Utica and Saratoga Springs, respectively.
- Beginning rail commuter services between Saratoga Springs and Albany and between Niagara Falls and Buffalo.
- Extending tracks to Rich Stadium in Orchard Park (south of Buffalo) to allow trains to bring football fans directly to stadium.

In addition, there are many necessary and desirable public transportation improvement projects for the metropolitan New York area which **ESPA** will address in a future plan.

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The **Empire State Passengers Association (ESPA)** works with government, business, railroad management, unions and consumer and other civic groups to bring fast, modern trains to New York State. Our goal is a comfortable, convenient transportation system with seamless connections between trains and rental cars, busses, ferries, airports and local transit.

**Please visit our web site, www.trainweb.org/espa,
to learn more about ESPA's goals, how you can help
and for complete membership information.**

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