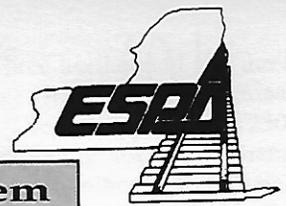


# THE ESPA EXPRESS

NEWS FROM THE EMPIRE STATE PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION



Summer 2017

Working for a More Balanced Transportation System

Vol. 42 No. 3



## Albany – Schenectady Second Track Opens

The second railroad track between Schenectady and Albany has been completed, eliminating a major bottleneck in upstate New York. The \$91.2 million track covering the 17 miles between the Capital Region's two largest cities went into service June 26 after 3 years of construction.

The long-planned track eliminates a single-track situation that had forced trains to wait up to 20 minutes either in Albany or Schenectady until the oncoming train cleared the tracks.

The work was arranged jointly by the state Department of Transportation and Amtrak, which has a long-term lease between Albany and Schenectady, which are owned by freight-hauler CSX Corp.

*Stephen Williams, Daily*

*Gazett*

## New York Wins \$33 Million PTC Grant

The New York State Department of Transportation won a \$33.7 million federal grant to help implement positive train control (PTC) on the Amtrak-controlled section of the Empire Corridor between Poughkeepsie and Hoffmans, just west of Schenectady. The award to New York was the largest single grant among the \$197 million package announced by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Federal Transit Administration. The federal dollars were awarded to 17 projects in 13 states. Twenty-seven eligible applications were received requesting \$455 million, more than double the funds authorized by Congress.

The grant may be used to install PTC technology, including back office systems, wayside communications and onboard hardware equipment associated with railroads' PTC systems. The funding was authorized by the federal Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST).

"This funding will get us closed to PTC implementation on some of the most significant railroads in the country that transport several million passengers every day," said FRA Executive Director Patrick Warren.

The Empire State Passengers Association had written a letter to the US Transportation Department in support of the New York State grant application for this project.

*Tony Rudmann*

## Schenectady's NEW Station is on Track!



As the Electric City continues to become an upstate destination, we have seen a transformation that has brought us an amazing downtown, the new Rivers Casino & Resort, the Mohawk Harbor, the Landing Hotel and more, all bringing good-paying local jobs and new economic development opportunities for the region.

But this work is just beginning. The on-going progress keeps building momentum in Schenectady, attracting more and more each day. Businesses like Slidin' Dirty, regional events like Summer Night, spectacular shows at Proctors, a new CDTA Trolley and the list goes on and on.

Schenectady's newest milestone, the announcement of an amazing new train station! With this project we have another significant investment that adds to the impact we have already seen on the local economy and the tourism landscape. The new station brings 21<sup>st</sup> Century engineering and technology to make travel safer and easier for residents and visitors from across the state to come and rediscover the Electric City.

We got a chance to see the new plans for the station that were unveiled this week in Schenectady, marking the beginning of this important construction project that will be a true reflection of the strength of this community.

As a civil engineer now serving in he State Assembly, I know transportation infrastructure is critical to the economic growth and vitality of upstate cities, and I look forward to when the new station is open and ready to welcome visitors to the great city of Schenectady.



*Assemblyman Angelo Santabarbara*



## NARP Honors Congresswoman Stefanik

New York Congresswoman Elise Stefanik received the NARP “Golden Spike” award during the national passenger group’s Washington Spring National Council meeting. The North Country Congresswoman was honored for her work in passing legislation aimed at improving rail connections between the United States and Canada.

The new law allows for the upgrade of US Customs and Boarder Protection pre-clearance facilities to ease the movement of people and goods between the two countries. An early beneficiary of the legislation will be Amtrak’s daily *Adirondack* from New York City to Montreal, half of whose route travels through Ms. Stefanik’s district. The new statute will advance the decade-long idea of building a pre-clearance facility at Montreal’s Central Station, eliminating the current two stop system which too often delays passengers for more than an hour.

Since Congresswoman Stefanik’s district stretches from the Vermont border to Lake Ontario & the St. Lawrence Seaway, freight service should benefit on the Canadian Pacific line from Albany to Montreal and on the CSX route from Syracuse to Montreal.

Also honored with “Golden Spike” awards were Vermont Senator Patrick Leahy and New Hampshire Congresswoman Ann McLane Kuster. The new law clears the way for expansion of Amtrak’s daily *Vermont* north from St. Albans to Montreal to better connect passengers to New England localities.

Jim Mathews, NARP president and chief executive officer, said: “This bipartisan effort is good, sensible policy making – but it is more than that. By facilitating the connections between people and economies, these leaders are helping build a better and more prosperous America.”  
*Tony Rudmann*



## Hudson Valley Congressman Wants Food Service

During the House Subcommittee on Railroads’ June 22<sup>nd</sup> congressional hearing, Mid-Hudson Valley Congressman John Faso (R-19<sup>th</sup> NY) specifically mentioned Amtrak’s food service (or lack thereof on many state supported ‘*Empire Service*’ trains that travel between New York City and Albany) when questioning Amtrak President Charles ‘Wick’ Moorman

Representative Faso stated that he had the occasion to frequent that service through the years and stated to Moorman, “*On customer experience, the fact that you can’t buy a cup of coffee on the Empire Service trains from Albany to New York City, I know that this is an issue between Amtrak and New York State as well, I would hope that you would go back to the drawing board on this, because I can tell you that this is a very frustrating experience for many people who utilize that service.*” Faso went on to say that this is a frustration further heightened when the trains are delayed.

He also asked about service disruptions during the summer track work at New York’s Pennsylvania Station, the Gateway Project, and the “Refresh Program” for the 450 *Amfleet I* corridor cars. Faso thought it was about time that the *Amfleet* coaches be rehabilitated. Moorman replied it had been over 20 years since the last refreshment, that it wasn’t extraordinarily expensive, and that it should be done to improve customer experience.  
*Benjamin Turon*

### Amtrak Fiscal Year 2017 Ridership Decreases in Upstate New York State, Up Nationally

Despite a 2% increase in Amtrak FY 2017 nationwide ridership-to-date (and with four months to go to complete the fiscal year ending September 30, 2017), upstate New York’s *Empire Service* Amtrak ridership on the Albany - Niagara Falls corridor is still in decline, despite the previous spring and summer’s train frequency reduction to accommodate CSX track work.

Ridership reductions continue on Amtrak’s *Adirondack*, albeit the *Ethan Allen* and *Empire Service* Albany-NYC routes had ridership gains. The *Lakeshore Limited* continues to experience increasing ridership.

#### October 2016 to May 2017 (FY 2017) Cumulative Amtrak Ridership

Service (Route)	FY17	FY16	% change
Acela (Boston – NYC – Washington)	2,302,322	2,337,379	-1.5
Regional (Boston – NYC – Washington)	5,705,171	5,542,519	+2.9
Ethan Allen (*Albany – Rutland)	31,700	31,271	+1.4
Empire (*Albany – Niagara Falls)	226,304	231,423	-2.2
Empire (NYC – Albany)	772,307	753,347	+2.5
Adirondack (*Albany – Plattsburgh – Montreal)	68,391	72,090	-5.1
Lakeshore Ltd. (Boston/NYC – Buffalo – Chicago)	236,244	232,932	+1.4
Amtrak System Total	20,677,472	20,259,752	+2.1

*\*to/from New York City (NYC)*

Source – Amtrak

Andrew J Cabal

## Cost of Hudson Tunnel Project Grows, While Support from Washington Shrink

The DEIS that was released a couple of days ago, estimates the cost of the Hudson Tunnel project at \$11.2 billion plus another \$1.7 billion for repairing the existing tunnels. This is 50% more than previously estimated. On the same day USDOT Secretary Elaine Chao (after spending the last eight years at the conservative Heritage Foundation) withdrew from the Gateway Development Corp. that was to advance this project. Certainly, the PRR tunnels under the Hudson, that were damaged after Hurricane Sandy, need some significant repairs. But these tunnels could be repaired by closing one tunnel at a time, and using the other tunnel for two-way traffic. This would work for Amtrak Corridor trains, but would require a major reduction in commuter rail service through the tunnels. Only about 6% of peak hour, peak direction ridership through these tunnels is on Amtrak NEC trains. All the scare-mongering is really about commuter travel.

NJ and NY officials that think they ought to get a pile of money from the Feds for this project need a reality check about who will be paying to fix this problem. NJ has the second highest per capita income in the U.S. Asking less prosperous states like West Virginia or South Carolina to foot the bill for wealthy suburban commuters to be able to travel comfortably to high-paying jobs in Manhattan, the bulk of the peak hour users, may not have been very realistic, even before the election. Now, NY and NJ must realize the ball is in their laps.

Once this sinks in, local officials need to take a closer look at the cost of building this project. For a 2.7 mile two-track tunnel (just tunnels, no stations etc.) to cost \$11.2 billion is out of sight! Once local officials and their consultants realize that an unlimited pot of gold would not be coming from Uncle Sam, they will roll up their sleeves and advance a more sensible plan.

### **Hudson Tunnel Project DEIS Information.**

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and NJ TRANSIT are jointly preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the Hudson Tunnel Project. The FRA and NJ TRANSIT invite you to learn about the Preferred Alternative and the environmental review process. The Draft EIS has been released and comments may be submitted through August 21, 2017. To view study and comment please visit...

[hudsontunnelproject.com](http://hudsontunnelproject.com)

*George Haikalis ESPA Manhattan Coordinator*

## Upstate Amtrak Trains to Grand Central

This summer six Albany-NYC 'Empire Service' trains are stopping at Grand Central Terminal instead of New York Penn Station from July 10 through September 1, 2017. This is part of the rescheduling of Amtrak, LIRR, and NJT service to accommodate the major track, interlocking, and signaling repairs at Penn Station after several derailments that cause major delays and brought the condemnation of Amtrak by the politicians, the press, and commuters.

Rather than ad hoc piecemeal repairs Amtrak President Wick Moorman opted for a major rebuild despite the huge but short-term inconvenience to rail travelers. According to Amtrak as part of the Infrastructure Renewal at New York Penn Station, Amtrak will perform a series of major track and switch renewal projects that will strengthen railroad infrastructure, operations and preparedness -- and ultimately improve reliability at America's busiest rail hub. The Infrastructure Renewal work accelerates several years of already planned improvements to track, switch and other infrastructure at Penn Station to improve track

conditions.

This major work required that three northbound and three southbound *Empire Service* trains use Grand Central Terminal instead of Penn Station from July 10 – Sept. 1, 2017. Trains 230, 233, 235, 236, 239 and 242 are stopping or starting at Grand Central Terminal. There have been other significant adjustments to scheduling and cancelation of other Amtrak services in the Northeast including the combining of the northbound *Maple Leave* (Train 63) and *Adirondack* (Train 69) from Penn Station to Rensselaer, both departing at 7:15am from Penn Station. For the most accurate and up-to-date information please consult [Amtrak.com](http://Amtrak.com).

The use of GCT required the switching of third rail shoes on the locomotives and the use of Metro-North engineers from Spuyten Duyvil at the north end of the Bronx to GCT. Intercity trains from Upstate NY historically ran into GCT until 1991 when an old freight line on the West Side of Manhattan was rebuilt and opened as the "Empire Connection" to Penn Station. This facilitated in-station connections to Amtrak's other services on the BosWas Northeast Corridor.



*View of station construction from temporary station*

## *Schenectady Station Construction*

The Amtrak station at Schenectady, New York (SDY) will be closed effective June 21, 2017 and demolished as part of a New York State Department of Transportation-funded project to construct a new station facility. This comprehensive project involves building demolition, track work, water remediation, platform reconstruction and the construction of a new station [new station expected to open in late 2018]

Limited station operations will begin at a temporary facility located next door to the existing station at the corner of Liberty Street and Erie Boulevard [across from Burger King]. Passengers are encouraged to be dropped off and picked up, as limited parking is available. Passengers should plan to arrive no more than 30 minutes before train departure. There is no waiting room [two bus shelters] at the temporary facility. Restrooms are available.

Ticketing and Amtrak Express services will not be available. Amtrak personnel will be available to assist customers checking baggage. Please note that overweight and excess baggage or any baggage requiring a service charge will not be available at the temporary Schenectady facility. Walk-on bicycle reservations must be prepaid before arriving at the station.

*Amtrak.com*

## Passenger Rail: Obama vs. Trump

A recent e-mail exchange I had with a noted railroad writer led me to think about how President Barack Obama's agenda for rail compared to that of President Donald Trump. During the online exchange, the author and columnist, who in a blog post stated that he voted for Trump, exclaimed, "**Obama failed Amtrak miserably, just as he failed high speed rail. What a waste of money to achieve so little!**" A widely shared sentiment perhaps, but is it fair?

I think when one examines the actual facts that while the Obama Administration's rhetoric on "High Speed Rail" was overheated, in actuality a lot of good was achieved. True, we didn't get the Shinkansen or TGV, but compare to the previous forty years a lot of money was allocated to various intercity rail projects across the country.

The Obama Administration's commitment to rail transportation was made symbolically when, in January 2009, the President-Elect and his future Vice-President-Elect, "Amtrak Joe" Biden, arrived before Inauguration Day at Washington's Union Station in a special train with private varnish Pullman car "Georgia 300" on the rear. Biden would return home after eight years in office to his home state of Delaware by Amtrak.

As part of the economic stimulus response to the "Great Recession," the Democratic Congress appropriated in 2009 and 2010 approximately \$10.5 billion for "High Speed Rail," and the TIGER grant program (\$5.1 billion to more than 400 projects) started by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (a.k.a. the "Stimulus") funded many rail projects, including some in New York State.



Beyond the California HSR project, state supported "Higher Speed Rail (HrSR)" corridors that got funded include the *Cascades* (Washington State & Oregon), *Lincoln Service* (Illinois), *Wolverine Service* (Michigan), *Piedmont Corridor* (North Carolina), *Vermont* (Vermont), *Empire Corridor* (NYS), and Amtrak's own *Northeast Corridor* (NEC). New York State in the end got \$451 million from the ARRA, but once one adds TIGER grants and state matching money the total investment in inter-city rail in the state during the Obama years rises to \$942 million.

Amtrak straight away got \$1.3 billion for capital investment from ARRA. ARRA stickers are still visible on the sides of rebuilt Amfleet coaches in use by the *Empire Service*. For corridor service in the Midwest and West Coast, thirty-two Siemens SC-44 'Charger' diesel-electric locomotives were ordered and now are entering service. For the NEC, seventy Siemens ACS-64 'City Sprinter' electric locomotives replaced the aging AME7 'toasters'. And last but not least, twenty-eight new 'Avelia Liberty' high speed train-sets have been ordered from Alstom in Hornell, NY, to replace the current Acela fleet. And lastly, Amtrak's long-distance network was not on the cutting block; instead, 130 new 'Viewliner II' long-distance cars was ordered, and these cars are now slowly coming into service

from CAF USA in Elmira Heights, NY. Over the last eight years clear missteps were made at the White House, at FRA, State DOTs, Amtrak, and rail manufacturers CAF and Nippon Sharyo. Most notably the \$353 million failure (ARRA money) by Nippon Sharyo and the FRA to design and deliver new bi-level corridor coaches due to the "100% Buy America" requirement for all components and materials and the then inability of the newly designed passenger cars to meet the FRA's stringent crash standards. Once redesign and testing is done, production could start again in 2018, but the funding expires on September 30, 2017.

Overall, a considerable amount of money was spent during Obama's eight years, and most of it was not wasted but went to worthwhile projects which in many cases are just now reaching completion. Criticism that Obama didn't do enough for passenger rail ignores the "elephant in the room" ... the Republican Party. President Obama only had two years of a Democratic Congress; after the 2010 mid-term election he had a Tea Party Congress which gave him a big "NO!" to proposals spend additional money on HSR, or establish a national for an "infrastructure bank" that could have funded rail projects.

As California Governor Jerry Brown recently said while actually riding on a high-speed train in China ... "**Many in the Republican Party have adopted anti-high-speed rail like anti-climate change and anti-birth control as key elements in their political philosophy**".

Now of course one can find plenty of Republicans who support rail at the local, state, and national level. Broad bi-partisan support is why Amtrak has survived for forty-six years. While several Republican governors elected in 2010 in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Florida, rejected their HSR grant money from the ARRA, in Michigan governor Rick Snyder and the Republican state legislature have moved forward in upgrading their Amtrak corridor service. On the Gulf Coast, deep in "Red State America," is strong support for the return of Amtrak service.

However, the reality is institutionally of the "Conservative Movement" at the national level that doesn't support rail, be it Amtrak, the TGV or the Toonerville Trolley. There is a whole overlapping opinion/think tank industry ginned up against rail: the Wall Street Journal, Fox News, and the Heritage, Cato, and Reason Foundations, all playing a game of 'whack-a-mole' with passenger rail proposals and proponents. Former Republican Florida Governor Charlie Crist was beaten in the primary by current Tea-Party governor Rick Scott after hugging President Obama at an Orlando HSR rally in 2010. Scott proceeded to axe the Orlando-Tampa project to the delight of Fox News and the Koch Brothers.

Now let us suppose the Democrats had maintained control of Congress during Obama's entire term. If they had continued to fund "High Speed Rail" at the same level that they did in 2010 (\$2.5 billion), funding for FY 2011-2017 would have been an additional \$15 billion for inter-city rail, for a total \$25.5 billion over eight years, including the ARRA HSR money from 2009-2010, but not including additional money from TIGER grants or the FRA Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing (RRIF) loans which included a \$2.45 billion loan made in 2016 to Amtrak for the Avelia Liberty train-sets and NEC infrastructure improvements.



## Obama made big promise

Obama made big promises about rail but never had the opportunity to fulfill them after the Tea-Party election wave; but still what his administration did achieve was not insignificant and left passenger rail better off than at the start of his administration.

So what about Trump? During the campaign and up to his inauguration, the rhetoric of the current president left many hopeful that he would quickly enact a bi-partisan drive for a big national investment in infrastructure including passenger rail. As a seemingly non-traditional, pragmatic, and opportunistic politician not tied to any political philosophy, many felt he could bridge the gap between the warring political parties in Congress.

During the campaign, Trump said to the British newspaper *The Guardian* that... **“China and these other countries, they have super-speed trains. We have nothing. This country has nothing. We are like the third world. But we will get it going and we will do it properly and, as I say, make America great again.”** He also said at a rally... **“The Chinese have trains that go 300 miles per hour. We have trains that go chug-chug-chug.”** And at the Republican Convention he promised, along with highways, airports, bridges, and tunnels, to build... **“the railways of tomorrow”**. “Railways” again made it into his inaugural speech and again during his speech to joint session of congress on February 28<sup>th</sup> 2017.

The prominent railroad writer mentioned at the beginning of this piece had blogged in the Fall that he hoped that concerning infrastructure Trump would be in the mould of his Republican predecessor Dwight Eisenhower. However, hope that actions would match words were soon dashed and one can only imagine that the events to date are not what many Trump supporters expected from a “Make America Great Again” agenda.

The new administration immediately set a worrying tone by needlessly delaying the start of construction of the Bay Area's Caltrain Electrification, a “shovel ready project” as there ever could be, by withholding final USDOT approval by several months beyond the plan start of construction date. And reportedly the Trump Administration has withdrawn funding promised during the Obama Administration for the Gateway Project's new Hudson River tunnels into Penn Station in order to create “leverage”.

Trump's much touted “Trillion Dollar” infrastructure plan. Only \$200 billion of that would be actual federal money that, spread out over a ten-year period, works out to only \$20 billion a year. And as pointed out in the media, this new \$200 billion in infrastructure spending is roughly about equal to what the Trump Budget cut in existing transportation infrastructure spending, including the popular TIGER grants, over the next decade, an estimated \$261.1 billion in cuts according to the *New York Times*. President Trump seems to have outsourced his infrastructure agenda to the Heritage Foundation, and it would mostly be reliant on private money attracted by tax cuts on private investment in infrastructure.

Yet there is strong doubt about how many roads, bridges, and railroads can be improved or built on a for-profit basis by the private sector. The record of private infrastructure investment is decidedly mixed in America with several private toll highways have met with financial failure in recent years. There is certainly room for privately led projects, like All Aboard Florida's *Brightline* or Texas Central Railways, but for the most part public money is what is need for rail construction projects like those of New York State's *Empire Corridor*.

Despite his campaign promises, President Trump is “all talk and not action” concerning investment in passenger rail. As it stands now, Obama legacy as president could actually far exceed that of the self-proclaimed master builder Donald Trump. It would be truly “sad” if, after eight years of significant investment in rail, these efforts would stall out instead of gathering speed.

If you were like the afore mentioned railroad writer who voted for Donald Trump, then I would strongly suggest that you write to the White House expressing your strong support for passenger rail and an infrastructure bill with real money. This is very easy to do: send an e-mail, write a letter, or make a phone call! Make a visit to “Get in Touch with The White House” at [www.whitehouse.gov/contact](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact). Be polite and to the point. Ask Mr. Trump to fulfill his campaign promise to build “the railways of tomorrow.”

*Ben Turon*



## Rally for Trains at the Albany-Rensselaer

A “Rally for Trains” was held on Friday, June 23 in the late afternoon at the Albany-Rensselaer station, part of NARP's efforts at the local level to show support for Amtrak's vital National Network trains which the Trump Budget proposes to eliminate. This would include the NYC-Boston-Chicago '*Lake Shore Limited*' which stops at Albany-Rensselaer, Amtrak's 9th busiest station. Rallies have been held across the nation in support of the long-distance trains.

## Rail Funding & Infrastructure in Limbo

As Congress went home to celebrate the Independence Day holiday, many wonder what important issues will be dealt with in the balance of calendar year 2017. When the nation's law makers return to Washington, the August recess/vacation looms and there are few scheduled legislative days before significant deadlines arrive.

One obvious deadline is passing a federal budget for fiscal year 2018 which actually begins on October 1, 2017. Some delay in starting the process was expected with the inauguration of a new administration, but details were slow in coming. For rail passengers, the details proved a disaster.

Amtrak was targeted for a \$630 million cut and elimination of all long-distance trains. That strips over two hundred communities without any access to public transportation since they are not served by bus or air options. Northeast Corridor funding was cut by \$93 million, more than \$328 million from the current fiscal year and \$280 million below the FAST act authorization level for 2018. FAST act proposed funding was pegged at \$ 51 million, \$375 million below the levels authorized for FFY 2018 and restricted to token support at large metropolitan areas. The popular TIGER competitive grant program used for rail, transit, bus and road projects was slashed by \$499 million leaving only \$1 million for use nationwide.

Public transit suffered as well with a presidential proposal to cut \$928 million from the Federal Transit Administration's "New Starts" Capital Investment Program. This transit program has been critical in launching new transit, commuter rail and light-rail projects throughout the nation.

Amtrak President and Chief Executive Officer "Wick" Moorman was among the first to push back on the new administration's budget ideas. In his annual budget submission to Congress, Moorman said: "Amtrak requests \$1.6 billion, the full sum authorized by the FAST act to support the Northeast Corridor and the National Network in FY 2018." If approved by Congress, that amount would provide \$515 million for the Northeast Corridor and \$1.085 billion for the National Network.

The Amtrak leader also pushed back on the idea that eliminating long distance trains would save money. "Enactment of such a proposal would drastically shrink the scope of our network, could cause major disruptions in existing services and increase costs for the remaining services across the Amtrak system," he said. "Amtrak initial projection is that eliminating long distance services would result in an additional cost of approximately \$423 million in FY 2018, requiring more funding from Congress and our partners rather than less."

Both House & Senate committees have held hearings and meetings on the new administrations budget ideas. The Transportation Secretary, the Budget Director and some of the usual anti-Amtrak groups have been supportive but they have faced pointed questions from legislators. By and large, many legislators have voiced their disagreement of the proposed cuts and state and local officials, passenger groups and business organizations think the cuts will hurt public mobility and the economy.

But it remains unclear that Congress can forge an agreement before the October 1<sup>st</sup> deadline. Without an adopted budget signed by the President, Congress may once again leave the nation in the Continuing Resolution "limbo" kicking a real budget into the Christmas Holidays or even until calendar 2018.

Another threat on lawmaker's plate is the need to increase the

nation's debt limit which must be raised by late August or mid-September according to Treasury Secretary Steven Capuchin. The national government borrows money because many Congresses and Presidents have authorized and appropriated money without increasing the revenue needed to pay for laws and projects. While families and businesses nationwide borrow money for major capital projects such as homes or automobiles, legislators and presidents have fallen into the trap of paying for recurring yearly expenses by borrowing. Since the country's debt limit is capped by law, failure to raise the debt ceiling means the government will not be able to pay its bills for past and current spending.

Most economists, bankers, and both lawmakers and the President, agree that defaulting on the borrowed debt would create an economic and financial disaster which would cripple our nation and may cause a world-wide depression. But there is no agreement on a path to solving the problem and the clock is ticking.

The new administration began with a three pronged agenda to solve problems of healthcare, tax reform and infrastructure, perhaps within its first hundred days. But as the nation enters the summer doldrums, these three priorities are not accomplished. Perhaps part of the problem is their inter-locking nature, with health care changes providing money for tax reform which allows infrastructure spending.

The Administration proposes a \$1 trillion plan with \$200 billion in federal money over the next decade. But that amount pales in comparison to the \$4 trillion backlog of infrastructure renewal and expansion needed now according to engineering experts. And the bulk of funding would come from private businesses and investors who would be motivated by tax changes and repatriation of almost \$3 trillion "stranded" abroad by high tax rates.

Congressional leaders are confronted with competing ideas for funding both tax reform and infrastructure and are beginning to suggest there may not be time to begin much-needed infrastructure renewal in calendar 2017. While individual legislators are suggesting cancellation of the usual August recess/vacation, that idea does not seem to have taken root.

Some Las Vegas odds-makers think infrastructure will slide into calendar 2018 when the congressional election will make a resolution even more difficult. So infrastructure remains in "limbo" but hopefully not drifting towards "hell."

*Tony Rudmann*

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*Amtrak fetching diners 'Boston' and 'Baton Rouge' from CAF-USA in Elmira Heights, NY, that are named after state capitals.*

## Rail News from Other States

**Florida's Brightline train is on track to move** towards phase two of its project as Martin County, Florida dropped the last of multiple legal suits against the company. All Aboard Florida will continue to receive \$1.75 billion of tax-free bonds, which was the legal suit in question, for the railroad. Despite the legal battles that they faced, Brightline officials look forward to working with the Treasure Coast.

"Brightline continues progress on its Phase 2 extension to Orlando. We look forward to continuing to work with the communities in the Treasure Coast, especially on partnerships with quiet zones, similar to our efforts in south Florida," the company said in an email. "These are important steps forward as we build a transportation system for Florida's future."

Brightline is expected to begin limited service between Miami and West Palm Beach later this fall, while the addition of the Orlando stop is still several years away.

"We are incredibly excited to see that Brightline is back on track and making continued progress," Jim Mathews, NARP President and CEO said. "Brightline will change the way Floridians think about travel and it will become a primary mode of transportation in the sunshine state.

*NARP*

**A bipartisan coalition of more than 50 Virginia state legislators** spoke out in favor of trains, urging the Commonwealth's congressional delegation to fund Amtrak. The White House's proposed budget cuts would eliminate 50 percent of Virginia's train service. The proposed budget would specifically cut 66 percent of Charlottesville's train service, 60 percent of Petersburg's service, 50 percent of Lynchburg's, and cities like Staunton, Clifton Forge, and Danville would lose service completely.

Virginians for High Speed Rail, a passenger rail advocacy group, says the budget cuts would add more than 714,000 additional trips on roadways which would have a dramatic effect on carbon emissions. The additional trips would burn four million gallons of fuel and release nearly 79 million pounds of carbon dioxide into the air annually.

*NARP*

## Chicago Union Station development

Amtrak has designated a team lead by Riverside Investment & Co. as the Master Developer for a \$1 billion development of Chicago Union Station and neighboring Amtrak owned properties. The conceptual design includes three phases projected to be completed in about six years.

Project priorities include improved street entrances and pedestrian traffic flow entering and leaving Union Station, as well as improved pedestrian friendly landscaping and open spaces. The proposed commercial development will total about 3.1 million square feet from all three phases.

Phase One – Union Station Head House & Concourse Improvements:

- 110,000 square feet of new/reconfigured retail with a new food hall
- Street-level retail to be added to enhance the pedestrian experience
- 100,000 square feet of office space and a new proposed hotel above the Great Hall.
- Two new 12-story residential towers above the head house.
- Phase Two – New Office Towers with Retail and Parking.
- Two new 750,000-square-foot office towers with ground-floor retail and about 800 parking spaces.
- Ample public-accessible green spaces including terraces and plazas, including above the current Union Station Transit Center.
- Phase Three – Plaza & Tower at the Southeast Corner of Jackson & Canal:
- Approximately 500,000 square foot retail and residential tower development over active rail lines with open space and plazas at street level.

The commercial aspects of the project do not require and Federal, state or local tax funding and are subject to further revision and consideration by the City of Chicago Plan Commission Landmark Commission, Zoning Committee and City Council.

*Ohio Passengers Association*



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### 2017 ESPA Working Group & Meeting

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.

October 14, 2017                      Schenectady – Backstage Pub  
November 18, 2017                  Schenectady – Backstage Pub  
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...

\*\*\* Stay in Touch with ESPA Via Facebook at [www.facebook.com/espa](http://www.facebook.com/espa)

### 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).

### 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)
- Family membership (\$30.00)
- Sustaining membership (\$50.00)\*
- Patron membership (\$75.00)\*
- Corporate membership (\$100.00)\*
- Lifetime membership (\$300.00)\*

Member  
Number \_\_\_\_\_

Yes send Pin

Please make checks/money orders payable to ESPA and mail to ESPA c/o Andrew Cabal, P.O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209. \*Premium membership can receive ESPA pin.

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**\*\*\* Stay in Touch with ESPA Via Facebook at [www.facebook.com/espa](http://www.facebook.com/espa)**

Send news items and "Letters to the Editor" to: Robert Lenz, Editor, 10531 Main Street, Clarence, NY 14031, Tel: 716-759-2315. Email: [www.rwlens4@gmail.com](mailto:www.rwlens4@gmail.com) Deadline for material for Summer Issue is October 1, 2017. Material may be reproduced if credit is given ESPA and to the writer.