



Empire State Passengers Association

**Working For A Balanced  
Public Transportation  
Network For New Yorkers**

[www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org)

# ESPA EXPRESS

*News From The  
Empire State Passengers Association*

## New York State Ridership Stats

Route	Since Start Of COVID-19 Crisis					
	February	March	April	May	June	July
Empire Service	89,700	40,200	3,200	6,700	14,800	23,500
Maple Leaf	25,300	15,200	2,400	5,300	8,900	12,600
Adirondack	4,100	3,200	0	0	0	0
Ethan Allen Express	3,700	1,900	0	0	0	0
Lake Shore Limited	19,800	14,800	2,900	5,900	10,800	14,800

Date Source - Amtrak Monthly Performance Reports

## NYS Ridership Slowly Coming Back

Gary Prophet

Empire Service ridership, which is the ridership that travels solely Albany and south, has decreased 74% comparing February 2020 to July 2020, but that has improved from the 96% decrease in ridership from February to April. The ridership on the Empire Corridor west of Albany, which was down 90% February to April, is now down only 50% from February to July. The Lake Shore Limited, which was down 85% in April, is now down only 25% when February is compared to July.

For Amtrak nationwide, comparing February to July, the Long Distance trains are down 62%, the state corridors down 83%, and the Northeast Corridor (Boston-NY-WashDC) is down 87%. So, New York State ridership, when compared to the NEC, is doing well and the long distance trains, especially the Lake Shore Limited, are performing much better than the Northeast Corridor and state corridors.

## Lake Shore Limited Going Tri-Weekly

Gary Prophet

Despite the relative good performance of the long distance trains, Amtrak announced that most long distance trains, would be reduced to 3 times a week in October. The Auto-Train will remain daily and the Silver Meteor has already been reduced to 4 days a week, and the Silver Star has already been reduced to 3 days a week.

Starting on October 12, 2020, the Lake Shore Limited will only depart New York (Train 49) and Boston (Train 449) on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and will only depart Chicago (Train 48, 448) on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. With the Capital Limited and Cardinal also departing Washington DC and New York City respectively on those same 3 days, the result is no trains from the east coast to Chicago on the other 4 days of the week.

This is a horrible decision, which is not supported by the relative steady ridership of the Lake Shore Limited, and as Amtrak has noted in the past, tri-weekly trains often reduce revenue faster than they save costs, when compared to daily operation, so this action by Amtrak would seem to be part of their continual attempt to hurt the long distance trains.

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## Metro North & LIRR Face Draconian Cutbacks

Gary Prophet

Metro-North has stated that they may reduce the number of trains by about 50% on the Hudson, Harlem and New Haven lines, resulting in service every two hours during the off-peak hours at most stations and may eliminate all service on the Port Jervis line and the Pascack lines, if the federal government does not provide additional financial assistance because of Covid-19. The LIRR also has stated that they may substantially reduce service by about 50% and could eliminate service on one or more lines, with one rumored to be the West Hempstead branch. Covid-19 has temporarily disseminated ridership on the commuter lines into New York City, with initial 95-98% decreases in ridership in April, which is now down about 70-75% on the commuter railroads in July and August.

The MTA's revenue is about \$200 million per week less than it was a year ago. The LIRR South Fork Commuter Connection, Metro-North Haverstraw-Ossining ferry, and Newburgh-Beacon ferry, all services advocated for by ESPA, have been discontinued for the foreseeable future, due to Covid-19. On a positive note, parking at Metro-North's Beacon station is now free 7 days a week.

## Portal Bridge Advances

Benjamin Turon

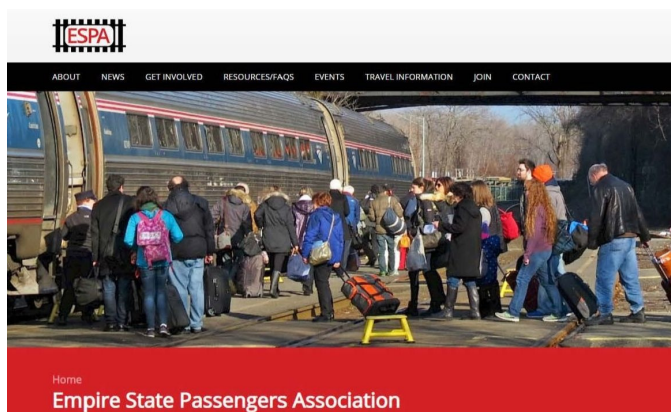
The long-delayed Gateway Program got some good news in July: the Federal Transit Agency (FTA) approved \$767 million in funding for the project as it entered the engineering phase. The \$767 million is in addition to the \$55 million Amtrak received in May from the FTA. NJ Transit and Amtrak will have to finance the remainder of the \$1.81 billion project, with New Jersey agreeing to fund \$600 million through state Economic Development Authority bonds for its state share. Construction on the new span to replace the existing Portal Bridge is expected to begin in spring of 2021. The existing Portal Bridge is a twin-track swing-span over the navigable waters of the Hackensack River, just west of Secaucus Junction and the twin tunnel entrance of the two bores under the Hudson River into Penn Station.



Gateway Program Development Corporation

The movable bridge opened in 1910 and is today a vital part of Amtrak's Boston - Washington Northeast Corridor, hosting approximately 450 daily Amtrak and NJ Transit trains carrying nearly 200,000 passengers, making it the busiest railroad bridge in Western Hemisphere. In recent years, several failures of the aging bridge as it opened and closed for river traffic have led to massive commuter nightmares, leading to calls to repair or replace it.

As part of the Gateway Program (which includes building two new trans-Hudson tubes into Penn Station) a new high-level double-track bridge will be built to replace the existing span, eliminating the need for a movable bridge to facilitate the passage of tugs and barges. The old span will be demolished, making way for in the future a second new double-track high-level bridge to be built.



Welcome to the Association's new website!

## Introducing New ESPA Website

Gary Prophet

ESPA has launched a new full service website, [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org), which contains a wealth of historical information about Amtrak's Empire Corridor and various forms of public transit in New York State. In addition, the website has information on every Amtrak station in New York State, as well as travel information and links to local public transit providers within New York State.

Continued on Page 4 - ESPA Website

## Understanding the MTA's Confused Finances

Tony Rudmann

Few dispute the fact that the arrival of COVID-19 created new challenges to the operations of New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority, the nation's largest operator of buses, subways and commuter railroads. In more normal times, the MTA's revenue is a diverse mix of rider fares, money from dedicated taxes, state and city contributions and federal grants and loans. The pandemic destroyed normal funding streams leaving the Agency with operating expenses far above the money collected.

Fortunately, few think a total shut down of the buses, subways and commuter rail operation is a smart way forward. Some suggestions may be helpful such as eliminating nonessential consultants but other ideas such as using planned future funds to pay current operating expenses are unrealistic. More state and city funds – with their own revenue shortfall of \$16 billion and \$3 billion, respectively – are not likely to magically appear. Federal officials have delayed implementation of “congestion pricing”, a new local revenue source.



The notion that Federal funds for capital projects can be used for operating expense is flawed because those grants are earmarked for specific projects and cannot usually be used for normal operating expenses. The Federal CARES legislation has provide \$3.9 billion to keep MTA operating but that money will be gone by Labor Day. Added federal money requested has not yet been granted. Even a recent \$1.4 federal grant to the MTA was restricted to COVID-19 mitigation expenses.

One should remember MTA 5 Year Plans are not documents carved on stone tablets handed down by some deity. They are not and their “adoption” does not automatically generate billions of dollars sitting in a vault which can be freely spent. Five year plans are an expression of hope in what may be accomplished in the future and reflect improvements which may or may not be built. And to use a variation of an old military saying: “No Five Year Plan survives contact with implementation”. They will change over a five year period as will their funding. In fact, \$8.8 billion in projects envisioned in the 2010-2014 and 2015-2019 capital plans remain undone alongside the new \$51 billion 2020-24 Five Year Plan.

Hopefully, sufficient cash will be cobbled together from diverse sources to insure the subway, buses and commuter trains will continue running. But taking cash for operations from non-existent planned capital projects is not the “Silver Bullet”.

## Connecticut DOT Prepares Railcar Order

Steve Strauss

The Connecticut Department of Transportation has issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a base order of 60 new railcars to serve the Hartford Line (CT Rail), Shoreline East and New Haven lines in the State of Connecticut.

The base order of 60 single-level cars includes 41 push-pull trailer cars and 19 cab cars capable of operating at speeds up to 125 mph. According to the RFP, the specifications call for interior “amenities somewhere between a traditional commuter rail car and an intercity car, leaning toward intercity”. Car interiors will include a minimum of 80 non-reclining seats in the trailer cars and 72 non-reclining seats in the cab cars arranged in standard 2x2 alignment. Each car will have a fully accessible toilet and one wheelchair location, overhead luggage racks, racks to hold 4 bicycles and an end car luggage tower similar to those on Northeast Regional trains. Cars will be operationally compatible with existing non-electric equipment operating in Connecticut and contain one or more workstation tables in each car.



The RFP allows ConnDOT to exercise any combination of four different option orders ranging from 8 to 26 additional trailer cars and 2 to 4 additional cab cars. The first production car (not test car) is due for delivery 973 days after the Notice to Proceed (NTP) date or in about 35 months. The manufacturer will deliver 4 cars per month. Proposals are due to ConnDOT in mid-October.

The car specification are based on the common specifications called for in Section 305 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 which established the Next Generation Car Equipment Committee to approve common specifications for passenger rail car orders among Amtrak and the states. Connecticut will fund the purchase with no federal assistance and bidders receive extra consideration for their level of Connecticut and United States content. More information on the Next Generation Car Equipment Committee may be found at [www.highspeed-rail.org](http://www.highspeed-rail.org).



## New ESPA Website (Continued from Page 2)

Our new website also contains a detailed list of our priorities and how you can contact your elected state officials, to promote our priorities to improve both rail and public transit within New York State and connecting to other states.

In addition, ESPA's Facebook Page, [www.facebook.com/espa](http://www.facebook.com/espa), also remains active and is your best source for breaking passenger rail news, commentary and information

One feature of particular interest to ESPA members is the new ability to renew your membership or donate to ESPA (with a credit card) & update your membership information (address, e-mail, phone number, etc.) at anytime on-line.

To access your ESPA membership account please follow these steps:

- Go to [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org)
- Select "Join" & Then "Renew/Donate"
- Click on "Contact Us" For Assistance With Your ESPA User Name & Password
- Complete The Contact Form With Your Name, E-Mail Address And Enter 'Yes - I Need Help' & Click "Send"
- The ESPA Membership Help Desk Will Respond (As Quickly As Possible) Via E-Mail With Your Membership Account User Name & A Temporary Password
- You Can Then Log-Into Your ESPA Membership Account By Selecting "Join" - "Renew/Donate" & "Access My Account - For Security Purposes Please Change Your Password To One Of Your Own Selection
- If You Forget Your Password You Will Be Able To Re-Set It Using Your E-Mail.

If You Have Questions Or Need Assistance With Your Account, Simply Complete & Submit The "Contact Us" Form!

## Amtrak Expands NYS Service

Bruce Becker

Effective September 8th, Amtrak has expanded New York State Services to include 10 weekday round trips between New York & Albany and 9 round trips on weekends. Most importantly, an early morning northbound train (#63 departing New York daily at 7:15am; arriving Albany at 9:50am) has been added, allowing for productive same-day trips from the City to the State Capitol. A complete summary of the revised schedules can be printed from our website, [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org).

Pre-Covid service levels provided 13 weekday Hudson Valley round trips, which were reduced to only 6 round trips during the height of the crisis.

West of Albany service to Schenectady, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester & Buffalo remains unchanged with 2 daily round trip Empire Corridor trains to/from Niagara Falls and the daily Lake Shore Limited. Service north of Albany to Montreal, QC & Rutland, VT currently remains suspended, as does service to Toronto, ON.

### ESPA Meetings

**All ESPA members and other interested persons are welcome and encouraged to participate in ESPA Meetings! Please contact President Gary Prophet at [thegp@aol.com](mailto:thegp@aol.com) for more information or if you would like to participate. Advance registration is required!**

**Working Group Meeting** - Saturday, October 10  
12:00n - 3:00pm via Zoom Conference

**Working Group Meeting** - Saturday, November 21  
12:00n - 3:00pm via Zoom Conference

#### **2021 Annual Meeting & Lunch**

Saturday, March 6, 2021 11:00am - 4:00pm  
Key Hall At Proctors - Downtown Schenectady, NY

All dates, times & locations are subject to change!

Check 'Events' at [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org)  
for the most current information

### ESPA Membership

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

- ☐ Introductory Membership (\$10.00 for first year)
- ☐ Renewal Regular Membership (\$24.00 per year)
- ☐ Renewal - Student, Senior, Fixed-Income Membership (\$12.50 per year)
- ☐ Family Membership (\$30.00 per year)
- ☐ Sustaining Membership (\$50.00 per year) \*
- ☐ Patron Membership (\$75.00 per year) \*
- ☐ Corporate Membership (\$100.00 per year) \*
- ☐ Lifetime Membership (\$300.00 One Time) \*

Join or Renew On-Line At [www.esparail.org](http://www.esparail.org)  
or

Send A Check Made Payable To 'ESPA' To  
'ESPA', P.O. Box 434, Syracuse, NY 13209

## Amtrak Inspector General to Probe PRIIA 209

Tony Rudmann

Amtrak's Inspector General has announced an audit "to address longstanding concerns with the PRIIA 209 cost-sharing methodology and the company's billing process with its State partners." The PRIIA legislation shifting costs from the national railroad to states was enacted as part of an effort to reduce federal expenses in response to the 2007-2008 recession.

The cross-sharing methodology has been controversial because it was said to have been offered to the states on a take it or leave it basis. In addition, both government and private reports have pointed out deficiencies in the Amtrak accounting system which underlies the methodology. Bills to states are less than transparent as the sole-source Amtrak-state contracts are not public record and in some states not audited.

Currently, 26 states are required contribute to Amtrak for train service on routes of less than 750 miles. For the past several Amtrak fiscal years, the state-supported routes have carried more passengers than the Northeast Corridor between Washington and Boston. New York, which carried about a million passengers last year, pays about \$40 million to Amtrak annually.

Some of the complaints voiced about the current system include charging a Deep South state for snow removal, restricting the number of coaches available for state service, mismanagement of food service and restricting advertising and promotions for state service trains.



The Amtrak Inspector General website is at [www.amtrakoig.gov](http://www.amtrakoig.gov) and a Fraud Hotline phone number of 800-468-5469. The audit is Project Code 015-2020.

## Airline Replacing Short Flight with Trains

Tony Rudmann

National flagship Austrian Airlines will replace one of its daily flight routes with a more frequent train service according to a CNN report. Starting July 20, the company will no longer fly the 184 miles between capital Vienna and Salzburg, operating a rail service instead.

The new "ALRail" service, operated in partnership with Austria's national rail operator OOB, will boost the number of direct rail connections between the two cities from three connections per day to as many as 31 direct trains. While a flight between the cities took 45 minutes, total travelling time, including time spent at each end point was often longer than the 2 hour 49 minute train journey. "This is why our ALRail offer is a good and more environmentally friendly alternative to flying", said airline CEO Alexis von Hoensbroech.

The change in service was triggered to meet the environmental criteria of the recent government \$680 million airline bailout. The airline was required to cut domestic emissions by 50 percent by the year 2050 where direct train connections are less than three hours.

## Lake Shore Limited (Continued from Page 1)



ESPA is continuing to argue for the DAILY operation of the Lake Shore Limited and will continue to work with Congress and the Senate throughout September to reverse Amtrak's decision to reduce passenger rail service on the overnight trains, especially the Lake Shore Limited, which is used both by passengers traveling within New York State and those traveling to Ohio and Chicago and connecting to other trains in Chicago.

Ironically, as of August 27, Train 49 was SOLD OUT on August 28, 29, 30, and September 4 and Train 48 was SOLD OUT on August 28, 30, 31, and September 7. Amtrak does not recognize the passenger demand for the Lake Shore Limited and many other long distance trains and continues to operate too few coaches and too few sleepers on many of their overnight trains.

## “Keep Digging and Get it Done.”

Benjamin Turon

“Two centuries ago, our ancestors could have been content with breeding faster horses. Instead, they invented the railways. They created the transport network on which the United Kingdom rose to economic pre-eminence. They looked to the future of transport and they made it happen and today it is our duty to do the same.” – Prime Minister Boris Johnson to the British Parliament on his approval of HS2.

As of this writing the 2020 US Presidential and Congressional Elections are less than 90-days away, the result of which could have a dramatic impact on infrastructure investment and passenger rail in the United States. Faced with an economic downturn not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s, will either a Trump Administration or a new Biden Administration embark on a massive infrastructure program?

Perhaps the United Kingdom can offer an example: hit with double economic whammy of Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, the British Government under Prime Minister Boris Johnson is pushing ahead with [High Speed 2 \(HS2\)](https://www.hs2.org.uk/), an estimated £100 billion project to build a new ultra-fast high-speed railway from London's Euston Station to the north of England. With his wavy blond hair, the nationalistic populous leader of the Conservative Party is often compared to President Donald Trump. However, the British Prime Minister is closer to former VP Joe Biden and the Democratic Party on environmental and economic policy . (<https://www.hs2.org.uk/>)

A former Mayor of London – who has a whole line of red double-decker London Transport “Boris Buses” nicked-named after him – Mr. Johnson has long been enamored by big infrastructure projects, recently proposing building a tunnel/bridge between Scotland and Northern Ireland.



Mr. Johnson at historic Curzon Street Station in Birmingham, future HS2 stop.

With fears that the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union on January 31st 2020 could lead to economic decline, Mr. Johnson, in a General Election last December, boldly broke with the Conservative Party orthodoxy of the Margaret Thatcher era by pledging big spending on both social programs and infrastructure.

After the Conservative Party's big win in the December election there still remained a big question mark over the future of HS2. Like its American cousin in California, the project has been a decade's long debacle of ever-increasing sky-high cost estimates and construction delays. It has been roundly opposed by suburban NIMBYs, fiscal conservatives, and rail advocates who want the money spent on upgrading the existing railways.

Given the opposition of Conservative members of parliament from constituencies in the path of the new railway and several of his own cabinet members, there was serious thought that Mr. Johnson might axe the mega-project, despite his pledge for big infrastructure spending.

However, the mega-project also has the strong support of many elected officials in Midland cities – including Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool – who feel left behind by the population and economic growth of the Greater London region. Proponents point out that in addition to increasing frequency and reducing travel times of north-south inter-city services, the new railway will free up capacity for more freight and regional passenger trains.

Supporters of HS2 see it dovetailing with the variously “Northern Powerhouse/HS3/High Speed North” plan to interconnect northern cities with fast inter-city and regional services over upgraded and newly built electrified tracks. Mr. Johnson, during the December 2019 general election, pledged to rebuild the national infrastructure outside London, embracing the broadly popular grand project of High Speed North.

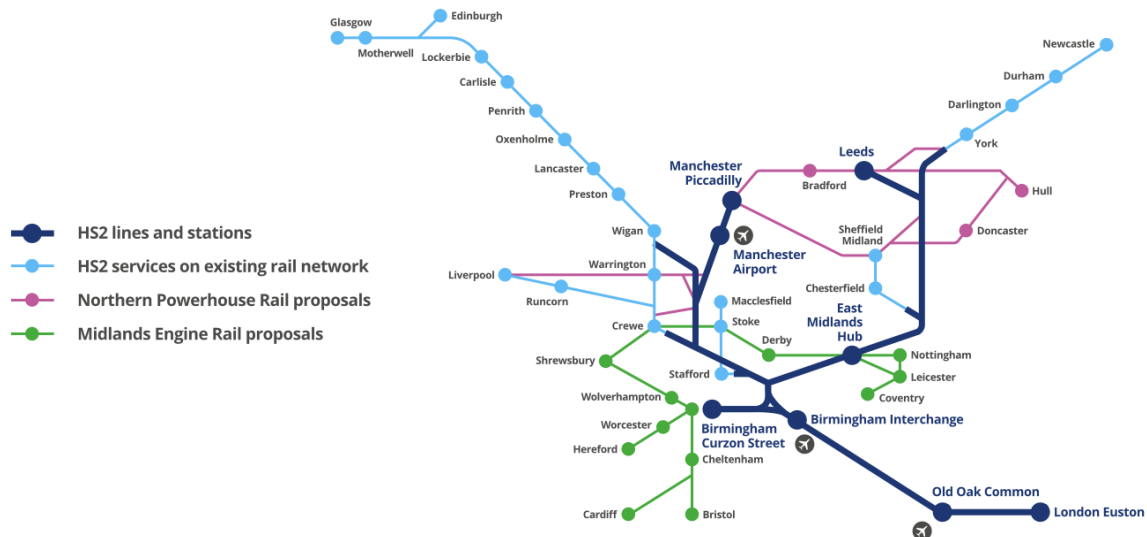
However, on HS2 the Prime Minister stayed mum till the ongoing “Oakervee Review” for the Department of Transport released its report of findings and recommendations. The review panel broadly recommended in its final report released in January that the project be continued, while making recommendations on better management and several cost reductions in its construction.

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## “Keep Digging...” (Continued from Page 6)

In late January before the official decision, the Prime Minister tipped his hand on his eventual decision, when during a Q&A session on a children's news show he told a ten-year old questioner about the mega-project: “In a hole the size of HS2, the only thing to do is keep digging”.

Mr. Johnson later announced officially his decision in allowing the first phase from London to Birmingham to start construction – he did quantify his support by calling for reforming of the management of the company overseeing the project and finding ways to cut building costs.



“I cannot say that HS2 Limited has distinguished itself in the handling of local communities. The cost forecasts have exploded, but poor management to date has not detracted from the fundamental value of the project.” The Prime Minister pledged to “restore discipline to the program,” including creating a new cabinet level position to oversee the project.

Visiting on the afternoon of February 11th the Birmingham terminus for the first phase of the project – the historic Curzon Street Station was built in 1838 as part of a Robert Stevenson engineered London & Birmingham Railway – the Prime Minister posed with hard hatted and orange jacketed workers, posting on Twitter that: “HS2 will deliver better, faster and more reliable transport connections across the country.”

So, what about the future of High-Speed Rail in America? Mr. Trump's rhetorical support for infrastructure during the 2016 Campaign – including calling for “building the railways of the future” – has largely ended policy wise in a big goose egg. A visit to the [Trump 2020 campaign page](https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/infrastructure-and-technology/#) found little specifics on infrastructure beyond rural roads and the deregulation of federal planning and permitting. (<https://www.promiseskept.com/achievement/overview/infrastructure-and-technology/#>).

The Trump Administration over the past four years has actually been outright hostile to passenger rail – including the California HSR Project and the Gateway Project of building new tunnels under the Hudson into Penn Station. On the flipside, several privately lead high-speed rail projects have move forward: in Florida with Virgin Trains Brightline; Las Vegas-California with Virgin Trains XpressWest; and the Houston-Dallas with the Texas Central Railway.

In contrast, the 2020 campaign website of Mr. Biden includes many specific proposals. This includes providing every American city with 100,000 or more residents with high-quality, zero-emissions public transportation options – including commuter trains, school and transit buses, ferries, and passenger vehicles.

The [Biden website](https://joebiden.com/clean-energy/#) sets forth “sparking the second great railroad revolution” by ensuring that America has the cleanest, safest, and fastest rail system in the world — for both passengers and freight. The new administration would work with Amtrak and private freight rail companies to further electrify the rail system, reducing diesel fuel emissions. (<https://joebiden.com/clean-energy/#>)

Despite the pandemic, Britain is pushing forward with the biggest construction project in its history – with construction starting on HS2 in June – putting Britons back to work now building the infrastructure that will support a better future. There is no doubt that COVID-19 has brought the United States to a low, including creating the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mr. Johnson is showing both Messrs. Trump and Biden how to get big building done in the face of great adversity in troubling times.



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Art Peterson for IDOT

The first cars being manufactured in Sacramento, CA by Siemens Mobility for the Illinois Department of Transportation have arrived in Chicago and will begin testing in October. The 88-car order will be used on Midwest state-sponsored routes out of Chicago. Included in the order are coach, coach-business and coach-cafe interior configurations. Initial revenue service is expected in 2021 and deliveries will continue through 2023.

CalTrans has also ordered 47 similar cars for use on California intrastate routes

Work continues at a rapid pace on the new Buffalo Exchange Street Station (BFX) in downtown Buffalo.

The impressive new station building, along with the new high-level platform, passenger siding and reconfigured main track are nearing completion.

The new station's convenient location is only steps away from the popular Canalside area, two full service hotels, Buffalo's light rail line and the reborn Seneca One Tower, which will soon become a major employment & residential hub.

The new facility is slated to open later this fall.



WKBW