

RAIL

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES BY MOVING PEOPLE™



Publisher

Dale J. Marsico, CCTM

Editor-in-Chief

Scott Bogren

Editor

Rich Sampson

Contributors

Rachel Dovey
Anthony Frederick
Hannah Kebede
Maria Saporta

Circulation

Please direct all circulation questions to
fastmailrail@ctaa.org

Finance

Don Browner

Editorial Offices & Advertising

1341 G Street, NW - 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
Email: cteditor@ctaa.org
Web: www.railmagazine.org

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FROM THE EDITORS



Click [here](#) to watch Editor-in-Chief Scott Bogren and Editor Rich Sampson offer an overview of the feature articles and department pieces in this edition of RAIL.

ALL ABOARD

Northern Virginia Prepares for Silver Line Opening

Source: [Washington Post](#)

Saturday, July 26 will see the launch of one of the nation's largest public transportation projects as the first phase of Northern Virginia's [Silver Line](#) is added to the Washington Metropolitan Area Transportation Authority's ([WMATA](#)) Metrorail network. The 11.6-mile extension of service from the existing East Falls Church in Arlington County station to

the new Wiehle-Reston East station in Fairfax County will add five new stations to the current 86-station, 106-mile system, currently the second-busiest transit operation in the nation after the New York City Subway.

Opening ceremonies for the new Silver Line route will begin at the Wiehle-Reston East

station and continue as the first Silver Line train heads east through the four new stations serving Fairfax County's Tysons Corner suburban downtown district, the nation's 12th largest area of economic activity and the largest in Virginia. The residential population of Tysons Corner is expected to skyrocket from 20,000 to 100,000 over the coming decades with the Silver Line's arrival, with an additional 60 to 70 million square feet of new development fueled by the line. The new rail service is expected to generate 30,000 new daily Metrorail trips by 2030, adding to the existing network's average daily ridership of more than 750,000.

"The Silver Line is going to be a major driver, a game changer, because it opens up the Tysons market for easy access from the entire D.C. metro region," said Michael Caplin, Director of the Tysons Partnership, a consortium of developers, planners and other groups with a stake in the future of Tysons.

A second phase of the project will extend Silver Line service another 11.5 miles west in 2018 to reach the Fairfax County communities of Reston and Herndon as well as Washington Dulles International Airport and two additional stations at Routes 606 and 772 – Metrorail's first stations in Loudon County. Six new stations will be included with the Silver Line's second phase.

(For more information on the Metrorail network, see [RAIL #19](#). Additionally, stay tuned for a full-length feature profile of the Silver

Line – as well as passenger rail across Virginia – in the next edition of RAIL, #36 – ed)



Source: Rural Missouri

Ridership Booming on Amtrak's Illinois, Missouri Trains

Due to a number of capital investment projects in both [Illinois and Missouri](#), ridership on Amtrak trains travelling between Chicago, St. Louis and Kansas City is reaching new highs. Over the past year, ridership has doubled on the Chicago – St. Louis corridor, while *Missouri River Runner* between St. Louis and Chicago has also seen significant ridership growth.

Leaders in both states point to upgraded tracks, new passing sidings and improved signaling that has allowed for increased speeds and enhanced reliability for the entire corridor. On-time performance for the *Missouri River Runner* has improved from 64 percent to 90 percent following the installation of new passing sidings between St. Louis and Kansas City, while 110-mph service is now offered on a 15-mile stretch near Dwight, Ill. Over the

next five years, the majority of the Chicago – St. Louis route will be capable of 110-mph speeds.

“Ridership has more than doubled because there are more opportunities for people to arrive, more opportunities for people to go back and forth the same day,” says Amtrak Spokesman Marc Magliari. “In the next five years, we’re going to have two 110-mph routes from Chicago: one to St. Louis and one to Detroit.”

(For more information on Amtrak’s state-supported service in the midwest, see [RAIL #18](#) – ed)

Ontario Premier Proposes Toronto-Kitchener-London High-Speed Rail Within A Decade

Kathleen Wynne – the Premier of Ontario – recently argued that establishing Canada’s first high-speed rail line between Toronto and London could be possible within a decade. Wynne, who assumed Ontario’s top elected office in 2013, believes a combination of federal, provincial and local funding sources could make high-speed service through one of Canada’s most densely-populated corridors a reality by 2024. An in-depth report studying the roughly 190-

mile corridor is expected to be released later this summer, with a future expansion to reach Windsor to be included in the study.

“Yes it is, that’s what the engineers and experts have said is possible and that’s why the minister of transportation has talked about that time frame, that decade,” Wynne said in a recent interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. “We’re in the process right now of doing the environmental assessment” for the high speed rail, which includes the corridor to Windsor. That report is with the minister of transportation and we’ll make sure that the information is available.”

A high-speed rail line between Toronto, London and Windsor could compliment existing [VIA Rail intercity service](#) and [GO Train commuter rail](#) operations within the corridor. Currently, [Metrolinx](#) – the Ontario agency charged with transportation improvements



Source: AM980

in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area – is currently constructing the [Union-Pearson Express](#) (UP Express) rail service, which will connect Toronto’s historic [Union Station](#) with Canada’s busiest airport, Toronto Pearson with service every 15 minutes. UP Express is expected to begin operations in 2015 and its 14.5 miles of upgraded rail infrastructure could serve as the initial stage for Ontario’s high-speed rail line. Ontario is also working on increasing service frequency on its 63.8-mile Toronto – Kitchener GO Train route.

“As you know we added more trains, and we’ll be adding more trains immediately to the Kitchener-Waterloo line, but the full two-way, 15-minute GO service, that will take a couple of years,” said Wynne. “And we’ve committed to electrifying the whole system.”

Layton, Utah Opens Rail-Oriented Development Project

A mixed-use development project combining 2,000 square feet of retail space and 156 apartments opened in July adjacent to a [FrontRunner commuter rail](#) station in Layton, Utah. The [Kay’s Crossing development](#) is the first rail-oriented development project in Utah with the [Utah Transit Authority’s](#) (UTA) participation. The project utilized a compilation of public and private land near the FrontRunner’s Layton station north of Salt Lake City and is the precursor to future developments at the line’s Clearfield and Pleasant View stations. About 116 of the 156 residential units have been rented, with rents ranging from

Source: [Standard-Examiner](#)



The Kay’s Crossing rail-oriented development at the FrontRunner Layton station includes a swimming pool for residents.

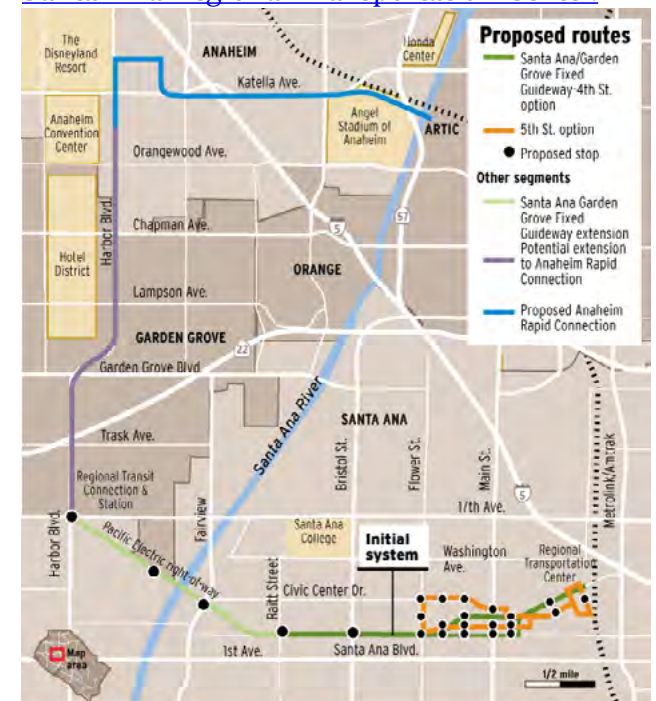
\$835 to \$1,350 per month. A property across the street from Kay’s Crossing is also under development by the project’s backers to open a new restaurant and additional retail.

More than 20 percent of Kay’s Crossing residents are expected to utilize FrontRunner trains on a regular basis. The \$17 million project incorporated a mix of public and private investment, including tax increment financing options. FrontRunner opened its first line serving Layton between Salt Lake City and Ogden in 2008, with a southern extension to Provo opening in 2012. More than 14,500 daily riders travel on the 88-mile FrontRunner system each weekday.

“UTA is confident that by facilitating the adjacent development, additional riders will be generated due to both the proximity and convenience of the residential development to the rail line and the increase in associated amenities at this development that will now be available to all transit patrons,” said UTA General Manager Michael Allegra.

Substantial Streetcar System Eyed for Orange County

A C-shaped streetcar network may ultimately connect many of Orange County, California’s key urban areas and improve connectivity throughout southern California. Three of the county’s cities – [Anaheim](#), Garden Grove and [Santa Ana](#) – are collaborating on their previously disparate plans to initiate streetcar service within and between their downtowns. The proposed system would incorporate a mix of street-running sections as well as right-of-way of the former Pacific Electric network to cover 7.5 miles between the [Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center](#) – currently under construction – and the existing [Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center](#).



Source: City of Santa Ana

Molly Zisk / The Register

The former will replace Anaheim's existing rail station and serve California's planned high-speed rail network, as well as Amtrak *Surfliner* and [Metrolink commuter rail](#) trains along with local and regional bus service, while the latter already serves both [Amtrak Surfliner](#) and Metrolink trains. When the replica mission-style Santa Ana station opened in 1985, it was the largest new passenger rail terminal constructed since 1955.

In addition to connecting two key regional transportation nodes, the streetcar would also link important retail, commercial and residential zones, as well as large entertainment destinations including the Disneyland Resort, the Anaheim Convention Center and sports facilities for the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim and the Anaheim Ducks baseball and hockey clubs, respectively. An initial \$180 million operating segment in Santa Ana may be the project's first stage, likely to be supported by a mix of federal, state and local investment. The [Orange County Transportation Authority \(OCTA\)](#) could serve as the entity to operate the service, with construction beginning as early as 2015 and operations underway by 2017.

“What we're talking about is a circle that would connect Central County,” Santa Ana Mayor Miguel Pulido told the Orange County Register. “If you travel around the world and look at transit systems, these circles are very important because that's the way, often, that transit works. People are able to get on at different points and go in diverse directions and connect.”

Sound Transit Launches Northgate Extension Tunnel Boring

After completing tunnel boring work last year on the 3.5-mile [University Link](#) extension of Seattle's [Link light-rail](#) line, the same boring machines have begun work on an additional 3.5-mile tunnel to support the system's [Northgate extension](#). Combined, the projects will add more than 7.6 miles and five new stations of light-rail infrastructure to the Link network, along with 60,000 additional daily riders. The University Link expansion is scheduled to open in 2016, followed by the Northgate extension in 2021.

Seattle's Central Link route opened in 2009 and carries more than 30,000 daily riders on a 15.6-mile line through 13 stations between downtown Seattle and Seattle-Tacoma (SeaTac) International Airport. In addition to the under-construction University and Northgate extensions, [Sound Transit](#) is planning three additional expansions to the network: an 8.5-mile route continuing from [Northgate to Lynnwood](#) by 2023; the 22-mile [East Link](#) line stretching from downtown to Redmond, also in 2023; and the 23-mile [South Link](#) to connect both of Sound Transit's light-rail lines, the existing Central Link southern terminus at SeaTac with the Tacoma Link in Tacoma, although the completion date for that project is yet unknown. By 2030, Sound Transit's Link network is expected to carry more than 280,000 riders and create more than 100,000 direct and indirect jobs.

“It's great to see these machines going underground,” said Sound Transit Board Chair and King County Executive Dow Constantine. “It will be even better when their job is finished and millions of light rail riders will sail past one of the biggest traffic bottlenecks in the state.”



Source: Sound Transit



THE RAIL YARD

TRACK I

Why Light Rail Appeals to Non-Traditional Transit Communities

By Rachel Dovey

Ambitious light rail projects in Los Angeles, Salt Lake City and Phoenix underscore a paradox of auto-centric cities: As traffic worsens, even taxpayers who love their cars look favorably on public transit.

As in Denver, voters in these highway-dependant cities have approved massive rail arterials largely as inoculants against congestion. Whether their lines will actually unsnarl roadways is still a matter of debate; research has suggested that even with infrastructure alternatives in place, growing populations tend to fill freeways. But some ridership patterns, especially among students, present good news for lovers of both public transit and wide-open roads.

Los Angeles regularly tops national “worst traffic” lists, but a [recent report](#) assembled by George Washington University and Smart Growth America gave it a new spot of honor



Photo by Rich Sampson



this year: One of the future's most walkable cities.

That's partly because of rail, according to Marc Littman with [L.A. Metro](#). In the last two decades, Los Angeles workers have constructed four light rail and two subway lines covering 87 miles, and multiple expansions are in the works.

Before Measure R was proposed in L.A. County to implement a half-cent sales tax increase to fund transportation projects (voters approved the measure in 2008), L.A. Metro polling found that traffic congestion, safety and highway accidents were top concerns (*for more information on Measure R and other*

innovative finance options for passenger rail, see [RAIL #27](#) – ed.

“We can’t build more roads,” Littman says. “There’s no land. We can’t build double-decker freeways.”

Environmental factors swayed Southern California voters as well. The [L.A. Times endorsement](#) declared that if Measure R failed “pollution will only worsen,” mirroring arguments for California’s high-speed rail that focus on climate change. But not all voters share these priorities. In Salt Lake City, congestion alleviation carries more weight.

“We have a very conservative population,” says Hal Johnson with [Utah Transit Authority](#). “We’re a red state, and more of our voters tend to like transit based on business rather than environmental concerns.”

The transit authority tried to fund its TRAX project with tax revenue in the early '90s, but voters rejected the initiative. According to one report, protestors at the project’s groundbreaking several years later held signs reading “Light Rail Kills Children.” By 2006, however, voters did approve a measure directing tax funds to rail expansion.

Johnson says partnerships with the local business community have been key, along with outreach that emphasizes how rail actually benefits drivers.

“We don’t look at them as competing,” he

says.

As CityLab reported in June, Denver has relied on similar strategies. After freeway-widening projects did little to ease congestion, voters turned to trains.

“Denver is a car town,” Phil Washington of the [Regional Transportation District](#) told the story’s writer. Later in the article he said: “From the start, we made it clear we weren’t competing with the car.”

But some research questions whether rail lines actually do thin roadway congestion. A much-cited study published by the Journal of Transport Geography examined data from light rail in four British cities over 10 years, concluding that train ridership comes mainly from buses instead of cars. The study also pointed out that as some cars left the road for public transit, others took their place.

In Seattle, Geoff Patrick with [Sound Transit](#) outlines the nuances of marketing rail. Voters passed a tax increase to expand the region’s rails in 2008 but, because of factors like those listed in the study, the agency has tried not to make promises it can’t deliver.

“People who ride a train or bus are not competing for clear roadway space – that’s clear and irrefutable,” he says. “Where I think you need to be careful is in creating a promise that traffic will recede from its current levels.”

Congestion can be tied to so many things:



driver patterns, bus service and development density, to name only a few. It's difficult to prove overall that one factor reduces it. But regional reports on the subject do show some interesting trends.

For example, researchers from the University of Utah and the National Institute for Transportation and Communities released a [joint report](#) in June examining Salt Lake City's rail.

"Our calculations show that without the University TRAX line, there would be at least 7,300 more cars per day on 400/500 South, and possibly as many as 21,700 additional cars," a press release for the study states.

And Phoenix's new light rail shows similar trends.


Albert Santana, a Phoenix light rail project administrator, says the region's new system has been more successful than even the agency hoped. Their goal was to serve 26,000 riders a day, but so far they've drawn nearly 45,000 riders a day – a figure they'd hoped to have by 2020.

Santana believes the reasons echo Utah. Around 35 percent of Metro's ridership comes from students, he says.

These figures may not demonstrate a universal fix for congestion right now, but carless culture skews young. Over time, light rail's thinning effect on nearby roadways will likely be magnified.

Echoing many a trend piece on millennials, Santana sums up Phoenix [Valley Metro's](#) increasing popularity.

"The youth these days are not rushing out to buy cars," he says.

Rachel Dovey is a contributing writer for Next City, where this piece [first appeared](#) on July 15, 2014. It is republished here with permission. 



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Members of the Community Transportation Association of America's Small Urban Network are advancing key issues of policy and legislation important to the mobility needs of the nation's small urban communities. For more information on the SUN, contact RAIL Editor Scott Bogren at bogren@ctaa.org

THE RAIL YARD

TRACK II

Commuter Rail from Atlanta to Lovejoy is the Little Engine That Could

By Maria Saporta

A commuter rail line between Atlanta and Lovejoy should adopt the tagline: “I think we can; I think we can; I think we can.”

And yes, we really can.

Forget all the panic from the Federal Transit Administration’s letter to the Georgia Department of Transportation on July 7 saying it was “deobligating” about \$45 million in federal funds that had been earmarked for the commuter rail project by the U.S. Congress for more than a decade.

Forget all the angst that came from a [Norfolk Southern](#) letter that made it sound as though the railroad opposed commuter rail running on its tracks from Atlanta to Lovejoy. Its letter said that having commuter rail within six years was “simply is not realistic,” and that the costs in a consultant’s study were likely to have been “dramatically understated.”

That letter almost caused the Clayton Commission to halt its Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) journey.

But in the world according to a commuter rail believer, my chant continues to be: “I

think we can; I think we can; I think we can.”

This is not just wishful thinking. It is based on sound information and strategic thought.

Let’s start with the deobligating of funds from the FTA.

Dana Lemon, who represents Clayton County on the board of the Georgia Department of Transportation, said the whole “deobligation” news has been misstated and blown out of proportion.

“There was a misunderstanding because of the wording of the FTA letter,” said Lemon, who has had her facts checked out with all the powers that be. “The deobligating of those funds basically said to Georgia DOT, because you haven’t done anything in a long, long while, we are going to take your name off those funds. When you get ready to use these funds for construction of the commuter rail line, then you simply apply to the FTA to reauthorize those funds.”

Lemon went on to say that it would take an act of Congress to take those funds away from the [Atlanta-Lovejoy commuter rail](#) project.

“It’s in the law that those funds can not be reobligated to another project or agency or



state,” Lemon said. “The only way that can happen is for Congress to change the law. That money is still dedicated to commuter rail from Atlanta to Macon.”

The timing of the FTA letter seemed bitterly ironic. The letter was dated exactly two days after the Clayton County Commission had voted 3-to-1 to let Clayton residents vote on a referendum for a full penny MARTA sales tax on Nov. 4 that would set aside half of a penny to develop commuter rail from MARTA’s existing south line down to Lovejoy.

The letter stated that the reason for de-obligating the funds was because over the years, GDOT “was unable to secure the local financial share” of the cost of the project. The Clayton tax would qualify for that local share.

Keith Parker, MARTA’s general manager and CEO, agreed with Lemon.

“It is our understanding, after having discussions with GDOT and the regional administrator of the FTA, that the funds for commuter rail in the corridor remain available,” Parker said. “It is our intention to develop a plan to fully utilize those funds.”

Ok, I think we can work through the FTA \$45 million funding issue.

So what about Norfolk-Southern? Norfolk-Southern may not yet be smart enough or strategic enough to realize it, but welcoming commuter rail on its tracks could be the best thing that could ever happen to the railroad.

Our nation badly needs to improve our railroad infrastructure. By partnering with local and state governments to improve its tracks for passenger rail, it will be able to improve the movement of freight.

It is in our nation’s interest to move more freight and people by rail than by trucks, cars and air primarily for environmental reasons.

Other railroads throughout the country have been able to leverage the benefits of providing commuter and passenger rail along their tracks along corridors with far more traffic than what exists between Atlanta and Macon.

If Norfolk-Southern wants to take a problem-solving, constructive approach that is in its own best interests, it would welcome entering into negotiations with MARTA, Clayton County, GDOT and the federal government on how to improve its rail corridor.

Imagine if we all could come up with a shared vision whereby the rail-line is upgraded with some double-tracking (allowing for both freight trains and passenger trains to share the same corridors by letting each other pass).

Imagine fewer at-grade crossings where the trains can travel at faster speeds.

Imagine straightening out some of the more dangerous curves so both freight and passenger trains can travel at faster speeds.

Under such a scenario, everyone benefits. the railroads can provide higher quality service to their customers and actually improve the capacity of the rail corridors. And people would be able to travel on one of the most fuel-efficient, least polluting modes of transportation available.

Norfolk-Southern, and the same applies to CSX and all the other railroads in this country, would find another serendipitous benefit. By letting people enjoy the pleasure of riding on rails, they actually could leverage it


as a marketing opportunity for their freight business. It would be a great way to sell the movement of goods on rail rather than on trucks.

Because I love trains as much as I do – that includes both passenger and freight trains, it makes me really angry to read letters like the one from John V. Edwards, Norfolk-Southern’s general director of passenger policy in the strategic planning area, to Rich Krisak, MARTA’s chief operating officer.

It is anything but constructive, strategic or in Norfolk-Southern best interests.

But because I have interviewed Norfolk-Southern’s CEO Wick Moorman more than once – and because I know the intelligence of Norfolk Southern’s director Tom Bell – I believe the railroad will recalibrate its position so that it can contribute to a constructive future of Clayton County, MARTA, the Atlanta region, the state of Georgia and, most importantly, of Norfolk-Southern.

As I said before: “I think we can; I think we can; I think we can.”

Maria Saporta is the Editor of the Saporta Report and is a longtime Atlanta business, civic and urban affairs journalist with a deep knowledge of our city, our region and state. Since 2008, she has written a weekly column and news stories for the Atlanta Business Chronicle. Prior to that, she spent 27 years with The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, becoming its business columnist in 1991. This piece [originally appeared in the Saporta Report](#) on July 14, 2014 and is republished here with permission. 

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RAIL Magazine Editor Rich Sampson continues his **Potomac Express** blog. This venue bridges the gaps between our quarterly editions of *RAIL* and our electronic newsletter, *Fast Mail for RAIL*. Since this is a blog, the **Potomac Express** is presented in a less formal style and includes postings as news and developments occur in the passenger rail industry, or simply when there's an idea to share or concept to discuss. This means sometimes there may be several posts in a week, and in other weeks, none. Some will be more substantive, and others more brief. Visit the **Potomac Express** at potomacexpress.blogspot.com.

In all, the **Potomac Express** represents another means to get you the latest happenings, trends and ideas in passenger rail, while also offering a new interactive medium for you to share your reactions and connect with other passenger rail leaders, experts, advocates and observers. As always, feel free to contact Rich at sampson@ctaa.org if you'd like to spread the word on any interesting news, resources or events.

The Twin Cities' Transit Awakening: Momentum Surging for New Mobility Options

By Rich Sampson

There is a moment in the lifespan of some American metropolises when transit becomes not just something the city has – a service or infrastructure like any other – but instead transforms into something they are known for, a part of their identity. Think of New York City and Boston in the early 20th century. How about the opening of the Washington Metro or Bay Area Rapid Transit in the 1970s? Or Portland in the mid-1990s or Los Angeles under recently mayor Antonio Villaragosa. For the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, that moment of transit awakening is now.

Few other cities find themselves at that exciting yet challenging point where momentum and resources come together to fundamentally reshape mobility trends and habits. A score of new transit projects – from commuter and light rail to bus rapid transit, exclusive bus-only shoulder lanes and park-and-ride locations – are all either recently-completed or moving rapidly through planning and construction. In all, it amounts to nothing short of a new beginning for public transit options in Minnesota's most-populated region.



Photo by Scott Bogren

A New Twist on an Old Tale

The plot summary of the history of transit in the Twin Cities is a familiar read to most observers of urban development during the past century: the first horse-drawn streetcars emerged in the late 1800s operated by

private entities, followed by conversion to electric traction not long after and ultimately replaced by diesel buses between 1940 and 1970 before finally shifting to public authorities. Such was the case in Minneapolis and St. Paul, whose streetcar networks once rivaled the fabled [Pacific Electric Red Car](#)

network in Southern California. Of course, the area's public bus routes provided crucial service to those who needed it most, bringing people to and from work, medical appointments, community services and more.

The moment when the storyline shifts, though, came in 1967, when the Minnesota Legislature created the [Metropolitan Council](#), whose initial *raison d'être* was to end contamination of the area's water network – a job too large for a single jurisdiction. Indeed, at the time of the Council's creation, more than 200 municipal agencies and departments existed in the seven-county metropolitan area. One such trans-jurisdictional service that became the domain of the Council was the region's transit network. In just its first five years of operation, the Council's transit division – today known as Metro Transit – replaced a total of 465 buses to provide reliable service.

After ensuring dependable bus routes would continue, the agency began to consider higher-capacity, transformational transit projects to reflect the changing demographics of the Twin Cities region, an inherently methodical process. Plans for a rail transit system first emerged as early as 1972, but it wasn't until the opening of the Hiawatha light-rail line in 2004 that a full-fledged transit vision for the region evolved in earnest. The 12.3-mile Hiawatha line – connecting downtown Minneapolis to [Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport](#) (MSP) and the [Mall of America](#) in Bloomington – represented an attitudinal shift in how the Twin Cities viewed transit's role in

the area's future.

"After decades of discussion, our opportunity came with the Hiawatha Line," Metro Transit General Manager Brian Lamb told RAIL Magazine in a phone interview last year. "Like many regions, there was so much angst and apprehension before the first rail line, but now it's become 'why isn't it here yet?' in communities waiting for the next line."

"The success of the Hiawatha line started to bring the region together on transit," adds John Siqveland, Public Relations Manager for Metro Transit, noting the route – recently re-branded as the [METRO Blue Line](#) – draws more than 31,000 daily riders, the busiest transit line in Minnesota. "Now the transit system is increasingly viewed as a solution to development, land use and affordable travel."

Service First, Regardless of Mode

Even though the Blue Line light rail marked a new level of awareness of transit's potential in the Twin Cities, rail lines were never envisioned as the only means of leveraging a greater presence of public transportation in the region. Alongside the [METRO Green Line](#) light-rail route – of which *RAIL Magazine* witnessed its green opening firsthand on June 14, along with a who's who of Minnesota's federal, state and local elected officials, is now operating between the existing Blue Line in downtown Minneapolis and downtown St. Paul – and a handful of other light-rail and commuter rail lines in various stages of planning, Metro Transit fields an aggressive

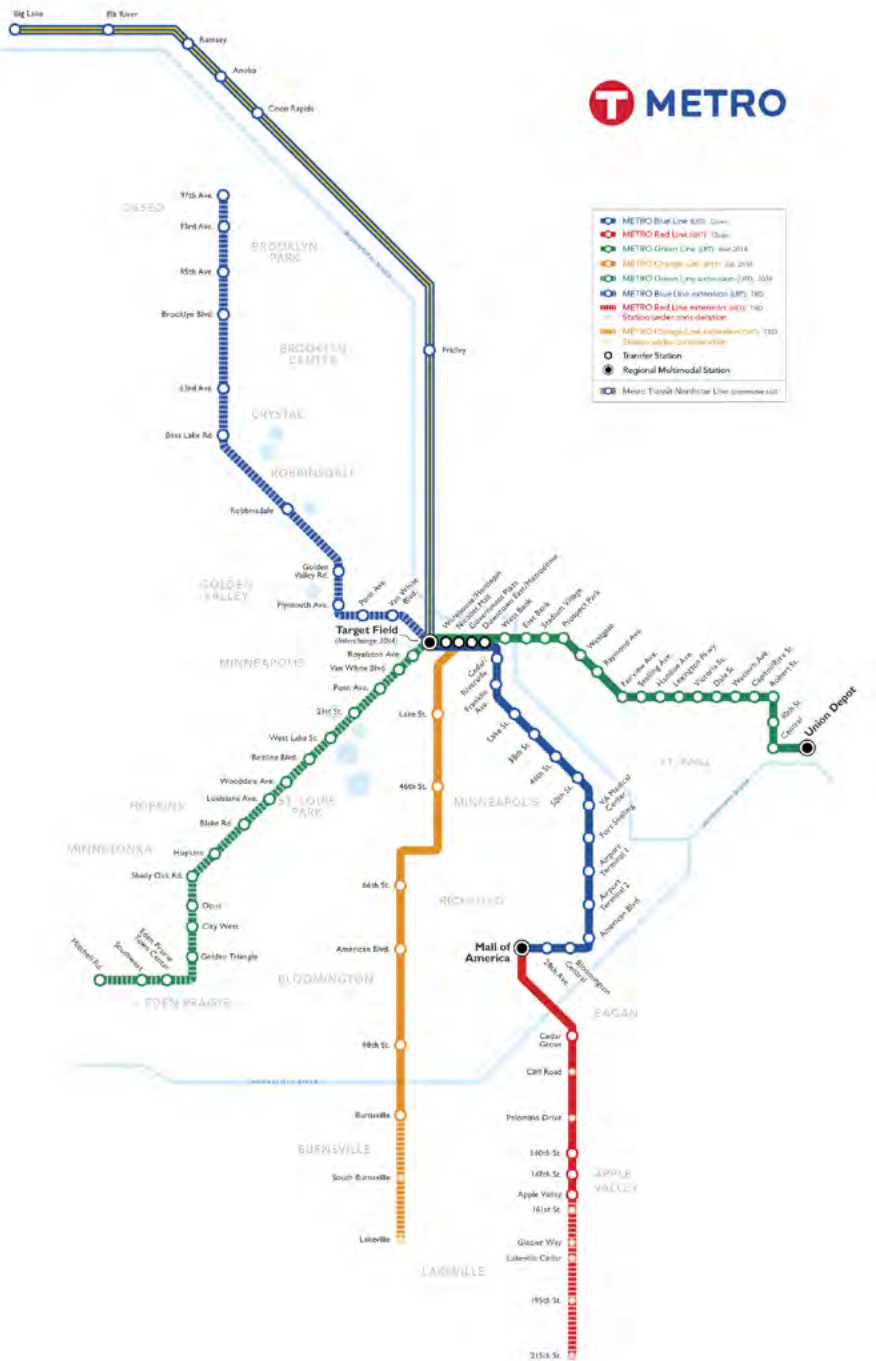
approach to local and regional bus routes.

The Green Line represents one of the nation's most ambitious transportation projects. The 11-mile line not only connects two dynamic downtown cores, but more than a dozen neighborhoods served by its 18 new stations, as well as service through the heart of the University of Minnesota main campus, which spans both banks of the Mississippi River. The project was the first to take advantage of new criteria established by the Federal Transit Administration in 2009 under the Obama Administration that evaluate other criteria beyond cost-effectiveness and travel time savings. That allowed Metro Transit planners to re-instate three stations – at Hamline, Victoria and Western – that had previously been eliminated because they would have slowed down travel times through the corridor, stops that were demanded by citizen groups and community leaders along the route. The additional stations have been well-

Green Line: On Location



RAIL Editor Rich Sampson shot this footage of a Green Line train testing at the Central station in downtown St. Paul



Maps courtesy of Metro Transit

Metro Transit's ever-expanding network of light-rail, bus rapid transit and commuter rail lines includes seven routes either in service, under construction or in advanced planning (left). A longer-term vision for the region includes additional routes focused around The Interchange in Minneapolis and St. Paul's Union Depot as the focal points of transit in the Twin Cities region.



Metro Transit's bus-only shoulder lanes program is the most extensive in the nation while also utilizing a number of dedicated bus thoroughfares.



received in the line's opening days: although Metro Transit estimated the Green Line will host more than 42,000 daily riders by 2030, its trains are already carrying more than 27,000 daily passengers in its initial weeks of service, despite the University of Minnesota's summer break.

The system's [123 bus routes](#) serve more than 100 [park-and-ride facilities](#) through its service area and have access to more than 300 miles of bus-only shoulder lanes on highways and thoroughfares, the largest such program of its kind in the nation. The bus-only shoulder



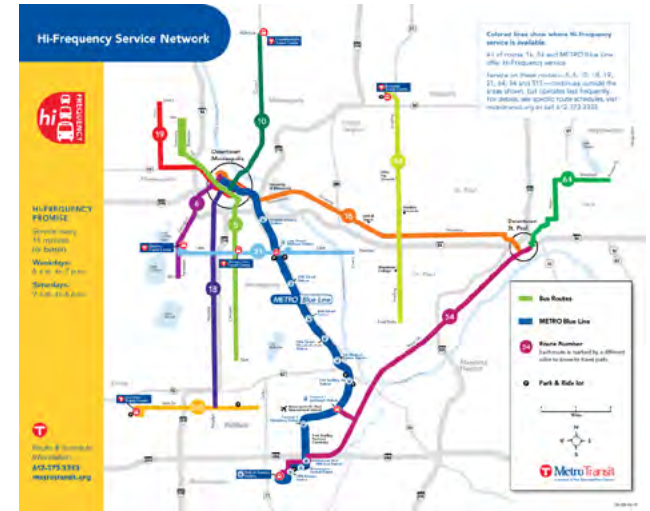
In Their Own Words



Watch Metro Transit's John Siqueland describes the system's focus on outstanding customer service.

lanes program began in 1991 and includes extensive awareness training for drivers to avoid incursions with distressed vehicles and navigating the narrow shoulder lanes, all while reducing travel times and boosting reliability of numerous bus routes by avoiding traffic congestion. Metro Transit also stresses its [Hi-Frequency Network](#), a collection of 12 routes that operate at least every 15 minutes from 6:00 a.m., to 7:00 p.m., on weekdays and from 9:00 a.m., to 6:00 p.m., on Saturdays.

Elsewhere, the network's innovative "Marq2" corridor on Marquette and 2nd avenues accommodates 80 percent of Metro Transit's express buses with vehicles alternating stops every other block to move transit traffic through the dedicated lanes during rush hours. The Marq2 corridor – not quite Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) which was completed in 2009 – included rebuilt streets to accommodate the greater volume of buses, new heated and lit bus shelters, real-time passen-



ger information, wider sidewalks, bike racks, trees and public art. Both streets are located within a block of Blue Line light-rail stations.

The [METRO Red Line](#) – the region's first true BRT route – opened for service on June 22, 2013. The 16-mile corridor connects passengers from Blue Line trains at the Mall of America station with Lakeville through five total stations. Using dedicated lanes on Minnesota State Highway 77, the line includes signal priority, permanent platform stations and all-doors boarding, among other amenities. Also in development is the [METRO Orange Line](#) BRT along Interstate 35W, which will connect downtown Minneapolis with Bloomington and Burnsville. For Metro Transit, the route's color designates its high-capacity transit status alongside the Blue and Green light-rail lines, further proof of the system's commitment to innovative bus transit.

Metro Transit also offers an advanced, unified payment mechanism called the [Go-To](#)



Metro Transit's Blue Line light rail and Northstar commuter rail deliver Twins fans to Target Field

Card, which allows riders to use a single card to access the entire network, ranging from **Northstar commuter rail** to neighborhood bus routes. Northstar riders, in particular, benefit from easy-to-use payment lanes at Target Field station in downtown Minneapolis designated by their ultimate destination, an approach unique among commuter rail systems. Since its introduction in 2007, use of Go-To Card has risen to more than 50 percent of



Saint Paul's Union Depot has been immaculately restored as a multi-modal transportation center, which now includes Metro Transit's Green Line trains.

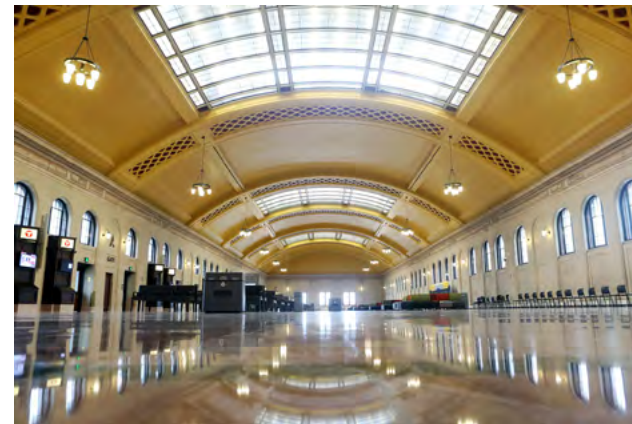
Metro Transit passengers and includes special configurations for both older and younger riders, as well as targeted platforms for employers, schools and non-profits. Go-To Card users can also enroll in an auto-refill program that refreshes the card's balance when it gets too low.

"We find that new ways of incorporating both bus and rail modes are the best way to serve our customers," explains Siqveland. "We look for long-term approaches that respond to community needs while providing the highest level of service possible."

"Its not just for the build-out of projects that we have a good reputation, but our focus on customers, technology and environmental improvement is what has earned us trust in the region," says Lamb.

Union Depot & The Interchange: The Twin Beacons of Transit

It seems fitting that for a region known as



the Twin Cities, there should be two complementary landmarks for mobility. In downtown St. Paul, the historic 1917 **Union Depot** recently completed an extensive restoration, paving way for renewed transportation activity at a facility that once hosted more than 280 daily trains on 18 tracks and 9 platforms. Today, five Metro Transit bus routes serve the Depot, with another three operated by the **Minnesota Valley Transit Authority** and intercity bus service provided by **Jefferson Lines**. As of May 7, 2014, Amtrak has returned its **Empire Builder** trains between Chicago and Seattle or Portland after passenger rail service was shifted to the less-accessible Midway Station in 1978.

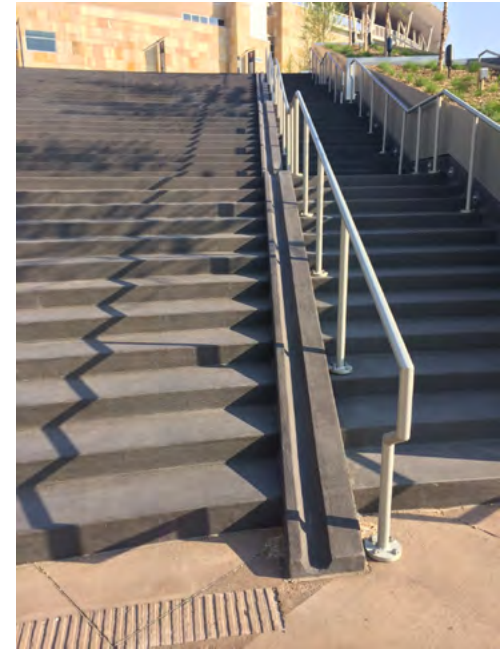
Additionally, the METRO Green Line light rail route now calls the Depot its eastern terminus, while additional light-rail or commuter rail lines on the **Red Rock** and **Gateway** corridors could also serve the station in the future. Plans for potential intercity and high-speed rail lines reaching as far as Duluth,



Rochester and Chicago also include service to the Union Depot.

While the revitalized historic nature of Union Depot corresponds well with the industrial past of St. Paul, its counterpart in downtown Minneapolis – Target Field Station, formerly known as [The Interchange](#) – strikes a modern tone. The facility adjacent to the Minnesota Twins’ Target Field serves as the current terminus for both the Blue and Green lines and Northstar commuter rail to Big Lake and not only helps channel passengers to rail and bus transit routes more conveniently – especially on Twins game days and other special events downtown – but also serves as a community gathering place for downtown

Minneapolis and fuel development in the nearby North Loop and Warehouse District neighborhoods. Among the project’s innovative design elements are The Great Lawn green space, The Cascade outdoor amphitheatre and recreation plaza and other open public areas. The Cascade amphitheatre even includes an innovative trench among its rows of seating for bicyclists to easily roll their tires down the steps, one of many features that wouldn’t be out of place in community spaces in European and Asian cities. Target Field Station also fosters future extensions of the Blue Line on the [Bottineau corridor](#) to Osseo and the Green Line through the [Southwest corridor](#) to Eden Prairie, as well as potential



Among the innovative elements at Target Field Station (left) is a bicycle trough (above) built into The Cascade amphitheatre.

intercity rail service to Duluth via the proposed Northern Lights Express.

“The combination of the Union Depot in St. Paul and The Interchange in Minneapolis represent very strong, tangible presences for transit,” says Siqveland. “They offer fantastic regional connectivity and set the stage for future high-capacity routes going forward.”

An Epic Expansion Effort

The Twin Cities’ aggressive expansion of transit options is not in end in of itself for the region, but rather a clear path to respond to the area’s shifting identity. The region’s population bottomed out in the early 1980s at just



played no small role in shaping the region’s direction. “The metro area’s popularity is no accident and residents are privileged to live in a region with an ongoing commitment to planning, calculated and wise investment, and civic engagement.”

In this environment, decisions impacting the future of transit in the region receive strong interest. Any observers who paid only cursory attention to local media in the Twin Cities region over the past several years would assume that the Southwest Corridor project is mired in turmoil. And, to wit, there has been no shortage of coverage on Metro

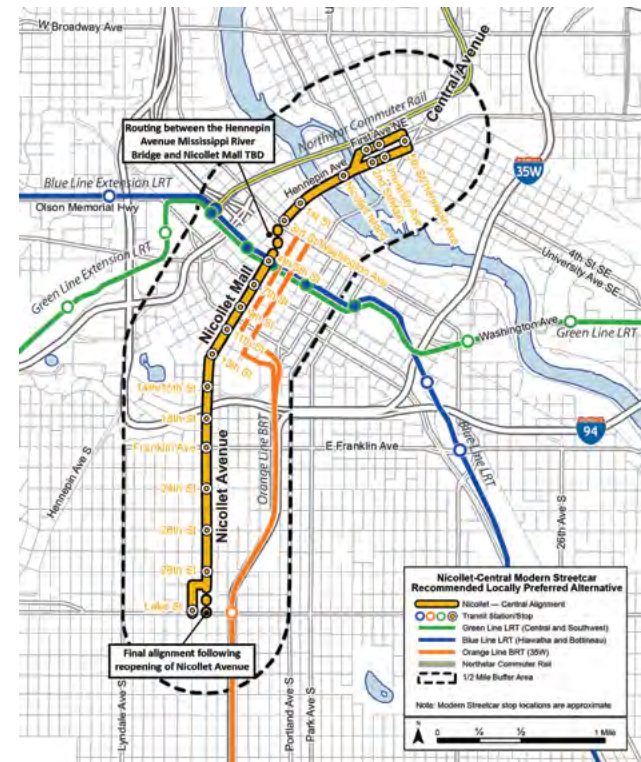
over two million and has added more than 700,000 new residence since then to reach more than 2.8 million people – a trend that is only expected to continue in coming years. By 2040, the population will grow by **another 890,000 residents**, according to the Metropolitan Council. That growth is fueled by paralleling interest by both millennials and baby boomers in living in livable communities and neighborhoods. The Twin Cities’ collection of historic residential areas and emerging, revitalized districts perhaps represents an ideal intersection of supply and demand, one enhanced by a vital, expanding transit network.

“The economists who do this forecasting are looking at demographic trends; they’re looking at market forces; they’re looking at real estate behavior, consumer choices,” said Metropolitan Council Chairwoman Sue Haigh, the current leader of the entity whose creation

Transit’s plans to extend the Green Line south and west to neighborhoods and communities from downtown Minneapolis to Eden Prairie, using a combination of former and current railroad rights-of-way and new infrastructure. But rather than a contentious process debating whether the line should be built at all, the discussion instead revolves around exactly where and how it should travel. The planning process for the Southwest Corridor has studied intricate trenches and underpasses beneath active freight rail lines and pedestrian/bicycle paths, around numerous lakes and ponds and to important concentrations of housing, jobs and commercial activity to assemble a route that links many of the region’s most rapidly-growing communities. Currently, the regional Metropolitan Council has approved the basic alignment of the corridor and five local jurisd-



The Metropolitan Council – through its Metro Transit operating agency – is cultivating an extensive set of regional, high-capacity transit projects (left), while the cities of Saint Paul (above) and Minneapolis (below) are working on local streetcar routes.



Green Line: On Location



RAIL Editor-in-Chief Scott Bogren captured this video of a Green Line train leaving the West Bank station.

dictions to be served by the line – Minneapolis, St. Louis Park, Hopkins, Minnetonka, and Eden Prairie – are in the process of providing their consent to the final alignment. Should those entities consent to the project, the Metropolitan Council – via Metro Transit – will seek out federal, state and local funding to support the \$1.7 billion effort, which would begin service in 2019 and carry more than 29,000 daily riders by 2030 to 16 new stations on 15.8 miles of new rail.

“The beginning of the municipal consent process signifies the conclusion of two and half years of close work between the Council, Hennepin County and the five cities along the line,” said Haigh. “The next 75 days will give local policymakers a chance to discuss and debate this regional investment and what it will mean to their community. In the last year, we have come far to find solutions to numerous technical challenges. I know we can do this together for the good of the region. We

must. The Southwest Corridor is projected to add 30,000 additional households and 60,000 additional jobs by 2030.”

Although the path towards agreement for the Southwest Corridor has been a circuitous one, it indicates how much the narrative regarding rail transit projects has shifted since the Hiawatha Blue Line unfolded slowly and contentiously over more than three decades. Less turbulent has been the process to extend the Blue Line along the Bottineau Boulevard corridor, stretching north and west from downtown Minneapolis, serving the communities of Golden Valley, Robbinsdale, Crystal and Brooklyn Park. The line – which will utilize a diverse mix of track alignments on and alongside Olson Memorial Highway, BNSF’s existing freight rail corridor and West Broadway Avenue – is expected to carry more than 27,000 daily riders by 2030. Service could begin as early as 2019, although further steps in the environmental assessment and engineering processes might push that schedule back into the early 2020s.

“Bottineau is key to the region’s future development and continued economic success,” adds Haigh.

While the Southwest and Bottineau extensions to the Green and Blue lines, respectively, are the Twin Cities potential rail transit lines have advanced most thoroughly through the planning process, another half dozen light-rail, commuter rail and streetcar projects could also begin construction over the next decade. The Rush Line corridor would broaden the Northstar commuter rail network to connect Union Depot with Hinkley, 80 miles to

In Their Own Words



The University of Minnesota’s Center for Transportation Studies prepared this video describing the Green Line’s benefits to the campus community.

the northeast while the Red Rock Corridor would employ the same mode starting at Target Field Station, traveling through Union Depot and then 30 miles to the southeast to reach Hastings. Meanwhile, the Gateway Corridor Commission is currently studying a new light-rail route stretching 11 miles east from Union Depot parallel to the increasingly-congested Interstate 94 to Woodbury, a corridor expected to add more than 60,000 new jobs and increase in population by 40 percent by 2030. Light-rail lines are also under consideration for the Central Avenue, I-35W and TH 36/NE corridors, emerging from Target Field Station to communities and neighborhoods to the north and east, as is Bus Rapid Transit for those same routes. At the same time, the city of Minneapolis is undertaking environmental studies for the region’s first modern streetcar operation, a 3.4-mile line along Nicolet and Hennepin Avenues, intersecting the Blue and Green lines in downtown Minneapolis much

like the Portland Streetcar interacts with that city's MAX light-rail network. The service is expected to attract more than 9,200 daily riders by 2030 and would set the stage for additional streetcar routes on the city's Midtown and West Broadway corridors. St. Paul is also examining its own return of streetcars, having identified a number of potential corridors in its recent Streetcar Feasibility Study. When combined, the Twin Cities planned high-capacity transit projects are as ambitious as long-range plans in the nation's largest metropolitan regions such as New York City, Baltimore-Washington, Chicago and Southern California.

Hallmarks of a New Transit Era

Interacting in-person with the various elements of transit in the Twin Cities – whether they be existing or in development – there's no avoiding the perceptible momentum growing for mobility in the region. More than 81 million passengers ride the system each year, and ridership grew by more than 300,000 additional riders in 2013 alone. New bus and rail services and infrastructure projects seem to move quicker now, and riders transferring between complementary modes deliver energy befitting a region eagerly embracing its future.

“We have a very robust vision for transit improvements, but need a reliable, dedicated funding source,” says Lamb. “We have made great progress with Governor Dayton and the current Legislature. Individual projects are



Photo courtesy of Metro Transit

good, but we aim to implement a larger vision for the next 10 to 15 years.”

This sense of transit was best exemplified when *RAIL Magazine's* editorial staff rode on a Metro Transit bus from the St. Paul Union Depot on a typical weekday rush hour. Our driver – courteous and engaging with us as a couple of out-of-town visitors asking about fares and the most convenient stop to disembark – knew most of her riders personally, pointing out the various connections and transfers available to the rest of the region, places she enjoyed going herself.

“There's a lot happening here now with transit,” she said. “It's exciting to be a part of and I can't wait to see what's coming next.”

Metro Transit's extensive portfolio of high-capacity transit lines – including Blue and Green light rail (above) and Northstar commuter rail (below) has the region poised to be a trendsetter for the coming decades.



Photo courtesy of Minnesota DOT

The Empire Builder Strikes Back: The Historic Legacy of James Hill

By Hannah Kebede

The year was 1889. James Jerome Hill rode his horse up an unbeaten path of the Rocky Mountains. He dismounted on the edge of a cliff and took a deep breath. Hill and his horse were almost as high as the clouds sailing through the blue sky, but he would not let the light-headedness and the popping in his ears stop him.

Despite his unsighted right eye—blinded in a childhood bow-and-arrow accident—Hill gazed down at the rocks and foliage of the yet uncharted Marias Pass in Montana, a vast and flat valley hidden between two peaks of the mountain range.

Hill's principal engineer, John Frank Stevens—led by a Blackfoot Native American guide—had discovered this place; the only ground even enough to accommodate railroad tracks through the otherwise impenetrable mountains and finally link the cities of Seattle, Washington and Saint Paul, Minnesota by rail.

This would be the path of the Great Northern Railway – the route of the *Empire Builder*.

Even to this day, train whistles can still be heard echoing off the hills of the Marias Pass.

A Man & His Railway

James Hill's story did not start in the Ma-

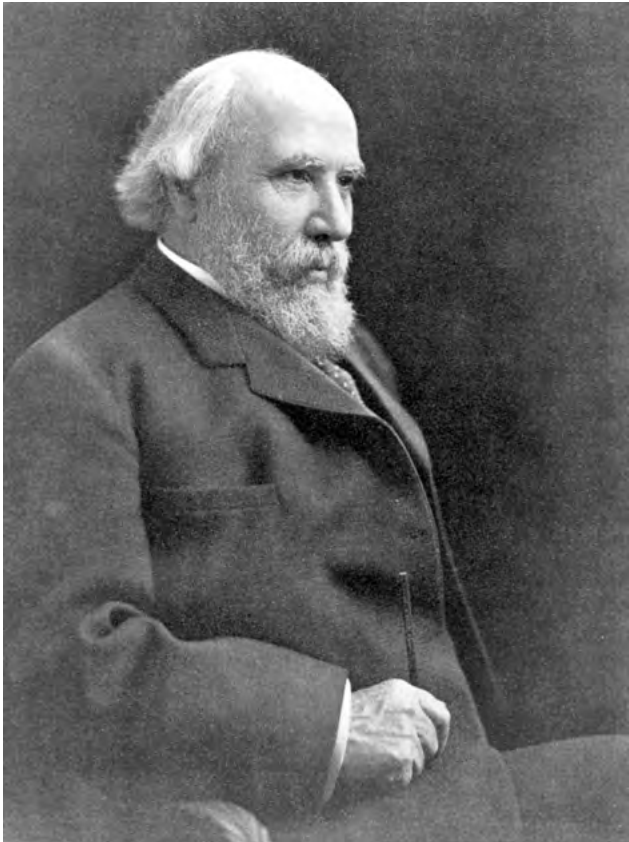


Photo courtesy of [Vacations By Rail](#)

rias Pass of the Rocky Mountains, though. It began when Hill left home for the first time at 17. He set out from a tiny and impoverished township in Ontario, Canada where he was born in 1838. He went to Saint Paul make a

new life for himself. There, he began work as a low-paid shop clerk with big dreams of becoming a self-made businessman.

And he succeeded at the outset of an era of empires and emperors, the Gilded Age of



James J. Hill's influence extended beyond the rail network he built to the commercial activity and settlement patterns for much of the northern swath of the nation.

Industrialization.

Hill made that dream reality by becoming a coal purchaser and salesman as the steamboat industry switched from burning wood to the round black rocks, and by winning many contracts for moving goods up and down the Mississippi River by steamboat. He then multiplied those earnings by buying bankrupt steamboat, coal and rail companies and building them back up. Sometimes he sold them for profit; other times he added them to his coal,



steamboat and railway empire that spanned the United States of America.

Two of the bankrupt companies Hill purchased were the St. Paul and Pacific Railroad Company, and the Minnesota and Pacific Railroad Company. He and his mentor—Canadian baron George Stephen—reorganized these assets into the St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway. Most importantly, these railroad companies had been chartered to build a transcontinental railroad, and so when Hill took over, he continued its construction, naming the route the Great Northern Railway.

The Great Northern Railway would connect Wisconsin with Washington State and beyond into British Columbia, running through Montana, North Dakota and of course, Minnesota, home to the railroad's headquarters in Saint Paul.

By 1889, Hill was wealthy man. He could have hired the most skilled of surveyors to make this journey and stand on this cliff for

him, but he knew that only he could correctly choose the place based on his years of experience as railroad tycoon.

Those years of experience had turned his hair and beard white at only 51, and he was proud of them. After all, when he was [asked by a reporter](#) the secret to his success he would answer: “work, hard work, intelligent work, and then more work.”

This work, hard work, intelligent work and then more work earned Hill millions of dollars in cash and assets, acres of land, and, most memorably, the title Empire Builder.

Now, the *Empire Builder* is a [passenger train](#), named after the legendary James J. Hill.

13 years after Hill died at age 77, the first Empire Builder train was introduced in 1929, after the railway system of around 1,700 miles from the Great Lakes to the Pacific coast was finally complete. Its first operator was Hill's Great Northern Railway; its second, Burlington Northern. Today, the *Empire Builder* trains

are run by Amtrak, which took over in 1971.

While private railroads became public, rail companies merged or disappeared, and rail tycoons faded into history over the last century, James J. Hill's legacy has endured. The cross-country empire he built still exists in the form of small towns and big cities around the tracks he laid down. Neither his name, nor his moniker, Empire Builder, have been forgotten.

Empirical Evidence of Hill's Vision

This year, 2014, the *Empire Builder* celebrates its 85th anniversary of cross-country transportation service.

These double-decker, long-distance trains proudly baring the name *Empire Builder* still speed along Hill's route from the Midwest to the Northwest, running from Chicago to Seattle – over 2,000 miles. The *Empire Builder*, the train crosses the same Marias Pass that the Empire Builder, the man, once crossed himself.

The *Empire Builder* carries an average of 1,285 passengers daily; 469,167 yearly. The route serves 46 train stations in eight states—Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois—and, coincidentally, is also a 46 hour trip in full (without delays). That journey lasts three days, but they are three days spent enjoying some of the most awe-inspiring landscapes in North America.

Not only tourist and long-distance based, the *Empire Builder* also carries passengers from small town to city, or from small town to small town. Point-to-point service is im-

portant to customers in rural areas, who take often it to visit family, doctors or shopping centers, along with the sight-seeing travelers on vacations.

“The *Empire Builder* traveling through Minnesota is one of the most used routes in the national system,” stated the passenger rail advocacy organization All Aboard Minnesota in its article, [The Case for Intercity Passenger Trains](#), “They account for 43 percent of passenger-miles on the nation's entire intercity passenger train system...They would carry even more passengers if Amtrak had more equipment, greater frequencies and more routes. Lack of service—not lack of demand—is what limits usage.”

Inside each two-story train, in addition to the standard coach cars, there are scenic lounge cars, dining cars and sleeping cars for overnight travel. The main dining car serves three meals a day. The main dining car's tables are draped with white cloths and hold vases of tiny flowers. There is another, more casual, cafe car, as well. Both types of dining cars are towards the middle of the train, for easy access to passengers from both ends, and all the tables are four-person booths next to the windows.

“The restaurant car was serving breakfast, but I opted for the small café down the stairs from the observation car,” Gary Gray wrote in his 2014 blog post [Aboard The Empire Builder](#), “A cup of coffee, a muffin and a banana and I was ready to watch the plains of North Dakota roll past the windows. Later I would try the restaurant car for lunch and dinner. It offered a small but certainly adequate selec-



Photo Courtesy of Amtrak

tion, a calorie count on the menu items, and a wide assortment of beverages including wine and beer. It was good enough food and reasonably priced.”

The bedrooms, located in the sleeping cars on the ends of the trains, are fully furnished, including a two-bunk bed, chairs, a fold-away table, sink, toilet and even a shower. They are small and cozy, with pillows, blankets, bottled water, tissues, soap and toilet paper provided.

“It's really pleasant in the cabin. There's very little traffic in the hallway, and there's a curtain that Velcros shut for privacy,” recorded Dave Howell in his 2006 essay [Rail, Aboard the Empire Builder from Seattle to Chicago](#), “It's not especially noisy, and quieter when the door is slid shut. The seats are wider than first-class airline seating, and are far enough apart, though they face each other. There's a closet (about six inches wide, but still, a closet), and a lot of storage room beneath the seats. We can also lower the upper berth half-way and store things overhead. Fully lowered, I can still sit upright in the seats below. There's also a fold-out table,



Keith Bear, a member of the [Mandan Tribe](#), makes a Trails and Rails presentation aboard the *Empire Builder*.

should we want to dine in-cabin.”

Aboard the *Empire Builder*, passengers can enjoy solitude and scenery, alone in their sleeping room with a book, or make new friends in the communal passenger cars with people of diverse backgrounds, reasons for travelling, and stories to tell.

The *Empire Builder* is a city and a small town in itself; a meeting point to share laughter and ideas for people from all over the nation and the world.

“Traveling by train, I’ve spent time with people I would never have met otherwise,” recalled Dan Savage in his 2002 New York Times piece [Across the Great Divide](#), “Once in Havre [Montana], I played poker at 8:00 a.m. with an elderly rancher I’d had dinner with on the train the night before. The *Empire Builder* makes an hour long morning stop in Havre, and when I got out to stretch my legs, the rancher hurried over, grabbed my hand and asked if I would be so kind as to escort her to a small casino a few blocks from the

station. She didn’t want to go by herself, she explained, because it isn’t ladylike to gamble alone so early in the morning.”

For riders who want to learn about the history and nature surrounding the *Empire Builder’s* route, volunteers from the National Parks Service travel on board from May to September, as part of the Trails and Rails program, to teach about the construction of the railroad, the famous exploration of the land by Lewis and Clark, as well as their guide Sacagawea, and plants, animals and minerals of the American West.

“Fire is actually a friend to the forest. And fire is a major part of the ecological cycle of the forest,” volunteer Leigh Wilson, a retired Seattle principal taught the young daughters of Chicago Sun Times reporter Dave Newbart in his article, [The Empire Builder – Amtrak’s train with a view](#), “Fire that sweeps through the Rockies periodically burns the brush under the trees. It’s also required by some species of pine cones, the heat is required to release the seeds out of the cones so that new forest can regenerate.”

From windows of the superliner traincars, especially from the Sightseer Lounge—made possible by floor-to-ceiling windows—riders can look out at the scenic visage of north-western and midwestern America. Farm animals, such as horses and cattle, are a mainstay. And at rare, lucky moments, much wilder beasts such as bears, wolves and coyotes have been spotted, as well.

Passengers heading northwest will encounter golden cornfields, green forests and nostalgic old farmhouses, red barns, and metal

silos, as they pass through Illinois and Wisconsin, into Minnesota. Meanwhile, southeast travelers will see clear night skies with bright stars, unobscured by manmade lights. They will also cross the picturesque valley hand-picked by James J. Hill himself, the Marias Pass, on their way from Oregon and Washington, through Montana. The highlight of the western half of the train route is Glacier National Park, a secluded expanse of cold blue lakes, snowcapped mountains and endless evergreens. The *Empire Builder* glides through tunnels and over bridges, across this gorgeous landscape, towards Minnesota.

There are also many stops along the route, in cities and small towns, all over the Midwest and Northwest, where riders can disembark and explore both natural and man-made attractions. The *Empire Builder* is unique from start to finish, as it allows riders to experience the beauty of the American landscape in one comfortable, coherent sitting.

Although the *Empire Builder* draws many tourists travelling long distance, for some passengers from isolated, rural areas, the *Empire Builder* is a commuter train. It is their main link to the major urban centers of their region far away, that they would otherwise not have access to, except via long drives.

“Trains like the *Empire Builder* provide a real, tangible link between small towns like Havre and big cities like Chicago.” New York Times’ Dan Savage [wrote](#) after his 2002 voyage on the train.

“This train isn’t just a land cruise for retirees but a vital transportation link for dozens of small towns long abandoned by even Grey-



hound,” explained Jim Cameron in his blog [Talking Transportation](#) in 2009.

The *Empire Builder* is an essential service to the area surrounding its route due to shrinking bus service and rental car availability, expensive and limited air service, and lack of access to interstate highways that can be over a hundred miles away. For many along the route, the *Empire Builder* is the truly only mode of long-distance transportation.

Amtrak understands how much Midwesterners need its services and so to reaffirm its commitment to rural areas of the Midwest and Northwest, Amtrak CEO Joseph Boardman re-

cently rode the *Empire Builder’s* route in full.

As RL Banks & Associates Inc., noted in their [report](#) prepared for Montana’s departments of Agriculture, Commerce and Transportation in 2003, “Amtrak’s *Empire Builder* is an essential transportation service for which there is, by and large in most of the Montana communities served, no reasonable alternative” and “as an institution is no small part of everyday life to many Montanans who live in rural isolation along the line and who depend upon it”.

It saves the state and its residents money and time, improving their quality of life

with connections to employment and leisure, among a myriad of other possibilities.

For Montana’s Native American population in particular, RL Banks & Associates noted that “the availability of *Empire Builder* service – one train a day in each direction – constitutes a convenient and economical method of transportation and is utilized by people on these reservations for transportation to medical appointments, colleges, shopping and for other purposes.”

Henri Headdress, Transportation Planner for the Fort Peck Sioux Tribe in Montana, told RL Banks & Associates, “The *Empire Builder* travels through the entire length of our reservation and stops in Wolf Point. We use this service extensively for travel. It is convenient for our people to use this service and is an affordable means of transportation. With unemployment hovering about 65 percent on the Reservation, many folks have no vehicles to get to their respective destinations.”

And the train is just as useful and crucial to Montana’s seniors, as well. RL Banks & Associates reported that the Mayors of Glasgow, Harve, Browning, Malta, and Cut Bank agreed that the *Empire Builder* is needed by the elderly, many of whom do not drive and have no other means of transportation, to get to medical appointments and family visits. The Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota is a popular destination for medical needs.

“It is imperative that Havre have Amtrak’s *Empire Builder*,” declared Bob Rice, former mayor of Harve, “Havre is isolated; it is only 49 miles from the Canadian border. Amtrak is a basic mode of transportation for Havre resi-



COURTESY BRIAN SCHOTT

Whitefish's tudor revival-style depot is the *Empire Builder's* busiest stop in Montana, boarding more than 66,000 annual passengers.

dents. The train is, in fact, the only mode of transportation available to many residents, including the elderly, Indians and other groups.”

Citizens of small towns all over Montana sent in their opinions via mail and fax about the *Empire Builder* to a state newspaper, as well, the majority of them in support of its continued service to their communities. These too were published in the study.

“I cannot tell you how much it means to me and my family to have Amtrak available in Montana,” said one resident in a letter, “Each year we ride back to Minneapolis to visit my children’s grandmother. We all enjoy the trip which is more economical than flying and more fun for our family.”

“We are an elderly, semi-handicapped couple who have traveled on the *Empire Builder* for medical treatment and to visit children. It has been a lifesaver,” two other residents added. “Because of physical problems we are unable to fly and age makes driving long distances not a viable option.”

“As a college student in Minnesota and a native of Montana, I’m a passenger on Amtrak at least twice a year, travelling during breaks,” a third respondent said. “It is not only an efficient and economic means of travel for me, it is the safest...When I travel on Amtrak, I see the diverse group of people who are benefited by this mode of transportation... Some of these people would not otherwise be

able to travel to Montana without the convenience of the system—taking valuable tourist dollars away from Montana’s economy. Not only is Amtrak beneficial for Montana’s tourist economy, it also helps support many small town economies on the Hi-Line.”

The term *Hi-Line* refers to the northern portion of the United States, along the border with Canada, including northern Montana, Washington and Minnesota. The area is defined by the railway – once the Great Northern and now BNSF – that stretches across the agrarian expanse.

“The *Empire Builder* line has been used by my family for many trips to Washington [state], and North Dakota,” another resident recounted, in a letter to the newspaper. “I do not like to be on mountain passes by myself when the weather is below zero, and snow is coming down. Instead I have traveled in warmth and comfort aboard Amtrak and felt safe and secure. I have arthritis and have used the disabled seating on the *Empire Builder*, and the comfort and ease of travel has been wonderful.”

“The *Empire Builder* is very important to Montana’s tourism, transportation and economic development, particularly along the Hi-Line, and most particularly for residents of that area who are unable to drive long distances for various personal and financial reasons,” a fifth writer agreed. “The Hi-Line has no other form of transportation and the *Empire Builder* should continue its service from the West Coast and from the Midwest through northern Montana to serve the people who live in this remote area. It is also benefi-

cial to many businesses in the area.”

Whether travelling from small town to big city or from one end of the railway to the other, and whether travelling for business or for pleasure, riders of the *Empire Builder* will be impressed by the incredible view from the train. They will be surrounded by silhouettes of city skylines, shining big sky country and the rolling Great Plains as they make their journey, long or short.

Saint Paul Returns to Hill's Transportation Nexus

In both directions, Minnesota's capitol Saint Paul is the center of the Empire Builder route. It is where the train makes a 45 minute servicing stop. Now, thanks to Amtrak's *Empire Builder*, trains once again stop at downtown Saint Paul's historic Union Depot. 43 years after being shut down, the Union Depot re-

opened in 2014 – its first (and only) long-distance train to arrive and depart is the Empire Builder.

“Our beautifully restored building is achieving our vision as a multimodal transit facility and a unique gathering place for people,” Ramsey County Commissioner Rafael Ortega announced to the [TwinCities Pioneer Press](#), and the cheering crowd, during the opening ceremony this past May 7th.

Union Depot is one of two historic stations to reopen in the Midwest recently, the second being Union Station in Denver.

Amtrak's *Empire Builder* shares both multimodal stations with Jefferson Lines, an intercity bus company in the Midwest. Jefferson Intercity is a significant partner of Amtrak, sharing customers and even tickets with Amtrak, as both methods of transportation help passengers along different sections of their journeys.

Saint Paul was the city where James Hill first made his fortune and a name for himself. It was the most important hub along the Mississippi River, which connected the nation's north and south with the still largely unexplored and wild west. On the bank of its water of life, the Mississippi River, Saint Paul is still the transit and trading hub it was in James Hill's time, and has grown even larger and more metropolitan in the centuries since.

“A great city does not arise by accident.” Hill once said, [in reference to the city](#). And he was right, the development and progress of Saint Paul was no accident. It was a direct result of its past and present leaders and residents, including James J. Hill.

The Empire Builder returned to Saint Paul's historic Union Depot on May 7, 2014.



Photo by [Greg S. Brown, URS Corp.](#)

Hill's personal residence in Saint Paul – the home he had built for himself in 1891 and in which he died – still stands three stories high on Summit Avenue. A registered US National Landmark, managed by the Minnesota Historical Society, the James J. Hill House is a popular tourist attraction. Mansion-sized, a pipe organ and an art gallery inside warrant visitors, in addition to the home and its owner's fascinating history.

James Hill's biggest contribution to Saint Paul was the railway system that connects it to the northeastern reaches of the United States – from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Ocean. Both directions of Amtrak's *Empire Builder* stop daily in Saint Paul, paying tribute to the city where Hill built his business and established his legacy.

Challenges and Triumphs

Unfortunately, the train has been experiencing delays lately, especially through North Dakota, causing Amtrak to cancel five of its *Empire Builder* trips in 2013. "Delays during May and June averaged between three and five hours," cautioned Amtrak in the Heartland's June 2014 blog post, [Track Work Delays Expected This Month](#).

These delays are caused by track-sharing with other trains from another company, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF). It is a wholly-owned subsidiary of today's incarnation of an *Empire Builder*, Berkshire Hathaway's Warren Buffet.

BNSF was created by a merger between Burlington North and Atchison, Topeka and



Santa Fe Railway in 1996. While, Burlington North was itself created in a merger in 1970 between Northern Pacific Railway, Spokane Portland and Seattle Railway, Burlington and Quincy Railroad, and Great Northern Railway – James Hill's railroad.

Combining different companies into one big company was how Hill assembled his empire during the late 1800s and early 1900's. BNSF—a direct decedent of Hill's Great Northern Railway, is a result of that tradition. Nonetheless, Hill never would have predicted that a descendent of his railroad company and a train named in his honor would ever compete for track space.

"The primary reason the *Empire Builder* has been running behind schedule is problems on the host railroad, BNSF Railway," Amtrak Communications Director Marc Magliari [told Minnesota Public Radio](#) this year, "It's a great concern to us."

One reason for the congestion is an influx of trains hauling crude oil across the Northern Plains. BNSF trains ship oil across the country by rail –similar to Hill's shipments of coal via

steamboat—and they have increased traffic in the region due to the North Dakota oil boom. Because of recent freight train derailments—as well as extreme hot and cold weather—BNSF began large construction projects along the tracks to prevent future accidents. They also introduced new policies that instruct their engineers to go slow and even stall for an hour or more in certain places. The construction, slow operating and stalling prevent other trains – especially the *Empire Builder* – from moving quickly across the line.

As a temporary measure that began in April 2014, Amtrak adjusted its *Empire Builder* schedule, making the travel time from Portland and Seattle to Saint Paul three hours longer, to reflect the existing delays. The Saint Paul to Chicago segment of the journey has been left unchanged.

"We are working closely with BNSF Railway Co., which owns the tracks and controls the dispatching of the *Empire Builder* trains between St. Paul and the West Coast, in order to publish a schedule that accounts for the freight train congestion and the condition of

the BNSF-owned infrastructure,” was *Empire Builder’s* Route Director Jim Brzezinski’s public statement, reported by the Minneapolis [Star Tribune](#).

BNSF spokesperson Amy McBeth [added that](#) the railway’s construction project, a capacity increase in the northern corridor, “will benefit all of our freight customers and Amtrak’s *Empire Builder*.”

While according to US law, Amtrak passenger trains are supposed to have dispatching priority over freight trains, that priority is not currently being enforced.

And so, Route Director Jim Brzezinski, along with other customer service representatives, is always on board the *Empire Builder* to support both the passengers and the crew. The crew works incredibly hard to accommodate customers, make their stay on board the train comfortable, and even help them change plans if needed because of delays. This support is what maintains the *Empire Builder’s* stellar customer satisfaction rate.

In addition, these track-sharing delays are not a necessarily problem for everyone, especially for travelers riding the train just to see the sights.

“Consider the train trip a journey, not a means of transportation,” Dave Newbart of the Sun Times [advised](#), “And keep your plans loose.”

Fellow-passenger of Newbart’s Gail Anderson, from Maryland, agreed, “Don’t expect to get anywhere at any certain time or even any certain day.”

Despite the delays, the *Empire Builder’s* ridership and revenue is not slowing down—in

fact, quite the opposite is true.

“Ridership growth is also driving plans for a second daily train on the *Empire Builder* route, which grew by 16 percent from 2011 to 2012, that links Chicago, Milwaukee, the Twin Cities and stops to the west, including Seattle,” Amtrak’s Magliari informed [The Milwaukee Wisconsin Journal Sentinel](#), “A second round-trip is a significant improvement for passengers by providing more same-day trips without overnight stays and by making it more likely our scheduled arrivals and departure times meet their travel needs.”

But no plans have been finalized, as of yet. Currently, a study is being conducted, set to be concluded in 2015, to analyze the environmental impact of a second train.

After that, the cost would have to be determined and a concrete plan would have to be created. Also, the governments of Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota would all have to approve of the addition.

“If a second *Empire Builder* train is feasible, there will be a more detailed analysis, and representatives from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois would have to come to a cost-sharing agreement for capital and operation costs before the project could proceed,” Praveena Pidaparathi, Minnesota DOT’s Passenger Rail Planning Director, commented. “States are responsible for portions of costs on routes less than 500 miles.”

“All Aboard Wisconsin, a group that advocates for transit, is drafting a bill officials hope is offered in the state legislature this fall that would establish a rail plan asking for state financial support for expanding the Hi-

awatha and *Empire Builder*,” said All Aboard Wisconsin Spokesperson Gary Goyke, a former state senator. “Rail expansion would help the economy and tourism as well.”

Destination: The Empire Builder’s Continuing Legacy

The story of James Jerome Hill is the quintessential rags to riches story of achieving the American Dream through intelligence, hard work and determination. It teaches us that someone born with almost nothing can, one day, have everything. It teaches us that sometimes, blood, sweat and tears do solidify into gold – or in Hill’s case, steel. And most importantly, it teaches us that like Abraham Lincoln, children born in log cabins during the 1800s grow up to leave a lasting impression – even if they’re born in Canada instead of Kentucky.



Photo courtesy of [Vacations By Rail](#)

Previous


But, a product of his ruthless times, Hill was not without faults. His empire was three monopolies that consolidated all the wealth and success in the fields of steamboats, coal and rail into his bank account. Shrewd shortselling of stocks, tax evasion and vertical integration were among his tricks to make and keep his money – often at the expense of others. Still, Hill was far gentler than the other monopolists of the era, like the more famous Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller.

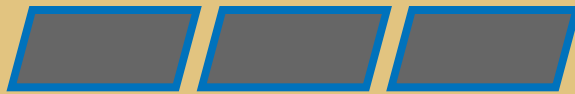
James Hill attained the Empire Builder title by gathering up smaller, failing companies and then restoring and combining them into

a sprawling transportation empire. He forged independent railroads in separate and unconnected Midwest and Northwest locations, into a beautiful and cohesive mosaic that became the Great Northern Railway.

The train Amtrak today calls the *Empire Builder* continues that tradition.

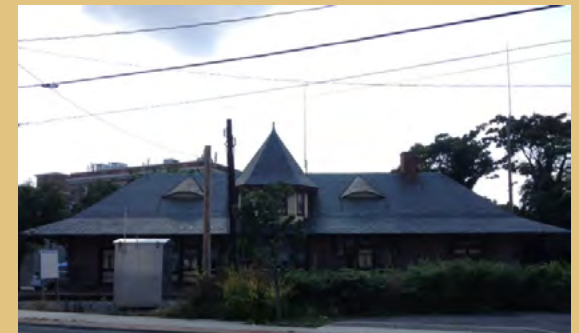
Taking scattered and distant cities and small towns, and turning them into a convenient and direct single network, that ties together distinct and secluded urban, rural and suburban communities, the train builds them into a great, integrated empire.

“The *Empire Builder* has a great legacy and a name that resonates,” said Marc Magliari Amtrak in a brief interview with *RAIL*. “It serves the transportation needs in a huge section of the country where both locals and visitors want to travel. It has Glacier National Park, the Cascade and Rocky Mountains, Puget Sound, and other unique destinations. The *Empire Builder* provides a basic mobility function in an area that is expansive, mountainous and stunning – the most scenic route that is only seeable by rail, it’s no wonder why the highest ridership of all of Amtrak’s long distance trains is the *Empire Builder*.” 



GUESS THE STATION

Many places around the world share a name with the community where this station stands. Those who’ve seen the movie *Shawn of the Dead* should know a similarly-named place as a spot of refuge. To submit your guess, email raileditor@ctaa.org.



Duluth's Past, Present and Future Converge at its Union Depot

By Scott Bogren

As is the case in many major American cities, it is impossible to tell the history of the Duluth, Minnesota [Union Depot](#) without telling the history of the city itself – so intertwined are the two. In fact, it is altogether fair to say that two forms of transportation – rail and steamship – along with nearby rich iron ore veins and timber gave rise to an inevitable city on the western shores of Lake Superior: Duluth.

Duluth: Built by Transportation and Trade

In the second half of the 19th century, Duluth appeared almost overnight. The local population was 71 in 1860. By 1900, the city was home to more than 55,000 people. In many ways, it was the opening of the Sault Ste. Marie Canal Locks in Michigan, in 1855, that prompted Duluth's meteoric growth. The locks opened Lake Superior shipping to not only the lower Great Lakes, but to eastern U.S. and even to the Atlantic Ocean. As was often the case, 19th century railroads and their entrepreneurial leaders seized upon these new-found trade options and a city was born.

The first railroads into Duluth were the [Northern Pacific](#) and [St. Paul & Duluth](#), which jointly commissioned a rail depot at Michigan



Photo by Rich Sampson

Street and 5th Avenue with a commanding view of Lake Superior. They built a wood-frame structure that was quickly in need of expansion, for at about the same time, miners and speculators seeking gold and copper had instead struck iron ore and hematite in abundance in a series of ranges throughout

Northeastern Minnesota. This so-called iron range would fuel the U.S. industrialization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries as shipments of ore made their way to steel mills across the Midwest and East. It also built Duluth.

A Train Depot Befitting a Great City

Duluth rapidly outgrew the first iteration of its Union Depot. And with this rapid growth came municipal aspirations to have a new train station befitting a city that some thought would soon surpass Chicago in population. Enter the Boston firm of [Peabody & Stearns](#) and one of its founders, Robert Swain Peabody. Using locally quarried granite, brownstone and limestone as well as yellow

brick, Peabody fashioned bookend-like towers with a triple-arch entry building in a French Norman design topped with a Pennsylvania green slate roof.

Construction took two years at a cost of more than \$600,000 (around \$16 million today). Throughout the construction of the new Depot, the old one continued in use at the center of the new facility's train shed. When the new Duluth Union Depot opened, the old facility was disassembled.

March, 1892 marked the first train to service Duluth's new depot, and soon five more railroads (bringing the total to seven – The Great Northern, Northern Pacific, St. Paul & Duluth, [Duluth & Iron Range](#), [Duluth Missabe & Northern](#), Duluth Superior & Western, and [Duluth South Shore & Atlantic](#)) served the station, making for more than 50 trains daily at its peak in the early 20th century. The station housed a barber shop, railroad offices, ticketing facilities, a newsstand and lunch room. A cast-iron portico was added to the structure in the early 1900s, while the long-span train shed behind the station was removed in 1924.

The Ore Gives Out, the City Declines and the Union Depot is... Saved!

With a thriving economy built on the iron-ore trade, Duluth became a haven for Scandinavian immigrants, and was home to the largest population of Finnish people outside Finland. Fueled by international trade, the city boomed throughout the first half of the 20th century. In the early part of the 1900s, Duluth outstripped both the ports of Chicago and New York City in terms of gross tonnage handled, making it – for a short while – the busiest port in the U.S. It wasn't until mid-century when the high-grade iron ore of the Iron Range finally gave out, that Duluth began to experience economic decline. Population in the city peaked at 160,000 in the 1960s, followed by a slow decline to today's 90,000.

Fewer trains began calling at Duluth Union



Photo by Rich Sampson

Union Depot: On Location



RAIL Editor Rich Sampson reports on location from Duluth's Union Depot.

Depot as the city experienced the same transportation priority shift to the automobile as the rest of the nation in the 1950s. In 1969, passenger trains ceased serving the Station. A lone Budd Diesel car was the last to leave Duluth Union Depot with a handful of passengers determined only to say they were the last to leave the station. Later, in 1970, the railroad merger that created the Burlington Northern (today's Burlington Northern Santa Fe, or, [BNSF](#)) left the Duluth Union Depot slated as surplus property and squarely on the list to be demolished. However, something unusual had occurred that would prove the station's salvation.

Four local Duluth residents stepped forward with a plan to convert the Union Depot into a home for local cultural, arts and history organizations. Don Shank and Frank King of the Duluth Missabe & Iron Range Railroad along with local railroad enthusiast Wayne Olson and local attorney Leo McDonnell began their efforts to save the Depot a full two years prior to the last train, in 1967. Fortunately, the

structure itself was in relatively good shape, making its saving a more reasonable outcome.

As they worked to build support with local politicians and residents, the Duluth Union Depot was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971. Three years later, Amtrak launched daily passenger rail service between Duluth and St. Paul – the [North Star](#), a service that would run for more than a decade.

New Life and Hope for Rail's Return

One of the saved Duluth Union Depot's original tenants was the Lake Superior Museum of Transportation – now known as the [Lake Superior Railroad Museum](#). The museum was – and is – housed in the Depot's train shed, which was rebuilt specifically for this purpose. The Museum features seven steam, 14 diesel and two electric locomotives in addition to 40 various cars and rolling stock – as well as the first train to operate in the state of Minnesota in 1861.

In addition to the train shed being rebuilt, a 1945-era false ceiling was removed from the nearly 90-foot great hall, providing a central lobby area for the building. Currently, the Duluth Union Depot is home to four museums, a community playhouse, the [Minnesota Ballet](#), the [Duluth Art Institute](#) and the [St. Louis County Historical Society](#), among others. More than a quarter million people visit the revitalized station each year.

Looking past its re-birth as a cultural incubator and museum host, the Duluth Union Depot remains, first and foremost, a transpor-

tation center. And that original purpose may soon, too, be reborn as the Northern Lights Express rail proposal gains momentum.

Proposed to serve the 155-mile corridor between Minneapolis and Duluth, the Northern Lights Express entered the environmental impact assessment phase in 2010 and would return intercity rail to Duluth for the first time since Amtrak left in 1986. Plans calls for stops in Superior, Wisc., Sandstone, Minn., Hinckley, Minn., Cambridge, Minn., Coon Rapids, Minn., and Minneapolis' Target Field Station. It's far from a done deal, but the proposed Northern Lights Express would bring the Duluth Union Depot full circle.




Amtrak's *North Star* (above) served Union Depot until the mid-1980s. Today, the Lake Superior Railroad Museum (below) hosts excursions with well-maintained rolling stock.



Photos courtesy of Twin Ports Rail

A Return to Glory

The Duluth Union Depot is once again a community gathering place that speaks to both the past and future of this great American city. Construction is underway nearby that will add to its transportation future.

A new downtown transit center operated by the Duluth Transit Authority will soon be finalized a block away from the Union Depot that will not only increase pedestrian traffic in the station, but that will – one day – offer local mobility options to intercity travelers once trains return to Duluth. 



Rendering courtesy of Duluth Transit Authority

The Duluth Transit Authority's new downtown transit center will be a fitting modern counterpoint to Union Depot, much in the same manner as Minneapolis' Target Field Station compliment's Saint Paul's corresponding Union Depot.

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TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES & MULTI-MODAL CENTERS

Intercity Passenger Rail in Minnesota: Two Projects Could Connect State's Population Centers

By Rich Sampson

While passenger trains in the context of light rail and commuter rail in the Twin Cities region indeed appears to be on solid footing, intercity rail in the larger state is less a sure thing. Currently, Amtrak's daily – and often-delayed – [Empire Builder](#) between Chicago and Seattle or Portland is the only scheduled intercity rail service in Minnesota. Although the Empire Builder has some of the highest customer service ratings in the entire Amtrak network, it arrives at Midway Station – appropriately named for its location in-between Saint Paul and Minneapolis, but hardly convenient for most of the region's population – on its westbound trek late at night, not particularly ideal for regular, reliable travel. Moreover, the train pauses for about 45 minutes in each direction to refuel and change crews, adding to travel times.

And yet, there are several encouraging projects that could transform Minnesota's ability to connect communities via passenger trains. In particular, the Zip Rail corridor – between the Twin Cities and Rochester – and the Northern Lights Express, which would link Minneapolis-St Paul with Duluth are about at similar stages of development and could connect the bulk of the state's population via frequent and reliable passenger rail service.



Rendering courtesy of Zip Rail

Zip Rail

Despite its status as the largest metropolitan area in Minnesota outside the Twin Cities region with more than 200,000 residents, the Rochester, Minn., area's economic future depends on improved transportation connections along the roughly 90-mile route to Minneapolis-St Paul. Currently, no direct rail lines connect the two regions and although the state's Highway 52 doesn't yet experience great congestion, it is not built to Interstate Highway levels, such limited-access, grade-separated, etc. The populations of both regions are expected to grow over coming

decades, requiring improved mobility connections between them, especially as Rochester's nationally-known medical services industry continues to expand and new employment opportunities enhance both areas.

Accordingly, [Zip Rail](#) – a coordinated effort of the [Olmstead County Regional Rail Authority](#), the [Minnesota Department of Transportation](#) and the [Federal Railroad Administration](#) – is studying how best to institute high-capacity rail service within the corridor. The state has identified the route as a Priority 1 corridor, placing it at the front of the list for state support and investment.

Current studies have focused on high-speed rail service – at speeds between 150 and 220 miles per hour – utilizing dedicated infrastructure and vehicles as the best fit for the corridor to compete with auto and air travel, while also potentially serving as the first phase of a [larger high-speed rail network](#) connecting other Midwestern destinations such as Chicago, Milwaukee, Madison and Des Moines. State transportation officials have long identified a high-speed rail link to Chicago as one of their top long-term goals, but leaders in neighboring Iowa and Wisconsin have been hesitant – at best, and reticent at worst – to expand intercity passenger rail options in their states.

In the meantime, Minnesota could initiate high-speed rail service between the Twin Cities and Rochester – serving intrastate traffic initially – while waiting for Iowa and Wisconsin to become more comfortable with similar projects, or alternatively work with Illinois – one of the most passenger-rail friendly states in the nation – to advance the Twin Cities – Chicago corridor without the involvement of Iowa and Wisconsin, even though such a service would have to travel through at least one of those states.

As it stands today, Minnesota recently conducted [a series of public meetings](#) along the Zip Rail route in advance of the Tier I Environmental Impact Study (EIS) – a prerequisite for any large infrastructure project to move forward. A service development plan is also expected to be completed in conjunction with

the EIS by the end of 2014.

Northern Lights Express


Seeking to link the Twin Cities with Minnesota's third-largest metropolitan area is the 155-mile [Northern Lights Express](#) service. While the project would likely use conventional rail equipment rather than high-speed rail infrastructure as proposed for Zip Rail, the operation will still focus on frequent trips and 110-mph service to spur \$2 billion in development and encourage more than 13,000 jobs along the corridor.

The project – a Joint Powers Board with participation from six counties, numerous cities and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe – began in 2007 and is currently undertaking engineering and design work supported by federal and state investment that is expected to be completed in 2015. Trains on the corridor would utilize existing BNSF Railway tracks between Duluth and The Interchange intermodal facility currently under construction in downtown Minneapolis, along with three additional on-line stations in Hinckley, Cambridge and Coon Rapids.

Moving Minnesota...By Rail

With two intercity rail projects progressing through the planning and engineering process, Minnesota is moving towards a more robust network of intra-state passenger rail corridors to compliment the growing rail transit options in the Twin Cities. When matched



with signature intermodal facilities in Duluth, Minneapolis and St. Paul, Zip Rail and the Northern Lights Express could produce one of the nation's most dynamic passenger rail environments in coming years. 

historic ties



The current iteration of the *Empire Builder* operated by Amtrak owes its identity and legacy to the train of the same name inaugurated by James J. Hill's Great Northern Railway. Its iconic green-and-orange trainsets were almost as picturesque as the panoramic views they offered across the Hi-Line through North Dakota, Montana, Idaho and Washington.