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NORTH & SOUTH CAROLINA

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CAPT Begins Campaign to Grow Local Support for SC Service Expansion

URGES LOCAL GOVERNMENTS & CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE TO PASS RESOLUTION

At its January board meeting in Columbia, SC, the Carolinas Association for Passenger Trains formally began a campaign to present a draft resolution supporting state funding for increased passenger train service to local officials in cities and towns along proposed train routes. Members of the

Board of Directors will send the draft to City Councils, County Commissions, Chambers of Commerce, Councils of Governments (COGs) and other influential bodies. Those that pass the resolution will forward it to their local Representatives and Senators in the state legislature to build

support for an act to fund the new service. This campaign is modeled after a similar effort undertaken by CAPT in North Carolina in the early 1990s, which garnered the endorsement of many local governments and helped build support for funding what is now the *Piedmont*.

The draft resolution contains a list of reasons for legislators to support the plan, including as an engine of economic development, job creation and tourism, as a more fuel-efficient and environmentally preferable mode of travel, as well as to "strengthen social, historical, commercial and cultural bonds" between the cities on the proposed routes. It calls for the creation of a Rail Division in the South Carolina Department of Transportation (which currently has only a Mass Transit Division to oversee all non-highway operations) and asks that the state be an active partner in the development of the Southeast High-Speed Rail (SEHSR) corridor.

The complete text of the draft resolution is available at our Website, <http://www.capttrail.org/>

SOUTH CAROLINA NEWS BRIEFS

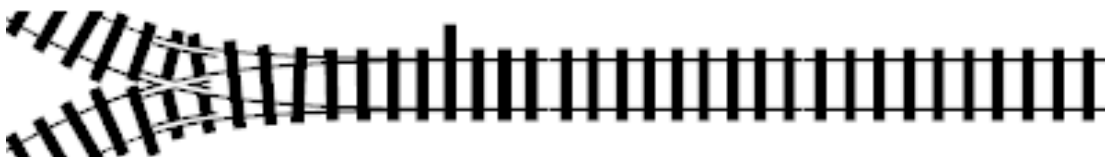
• The initial study for the Upstate High Speed Rail Corridor has been completed. This is the extension of the SEHSR corridor from Charlotte south to Macon, Georgia, via Spartanburg, Greenville and Atlanta. This route has very high ridership potential and would complete a HSR link for one of the nation's fastest-growing megaregions. The study considers the feasibility and cost of running trains at up to 150 miles per hour. The complete report can be found online at <http://www.sehsr.org/reports/MACCLTrept2004.pdf>.



• Further study has been conducted on a Charlotte to Columbia passenger rail link. The most favored proposal is to extend the existing *Carolinian* south to Columbia, maintaining its current schedule between Charlotte and New York. This would mean that train 80 would depart Columbia around 6:00 AM and train 79 would arrive there around 10:00 PM. The construction of a park-and-ride station north of Columbia off of Interstate 26 has also been discussed.

• South Carolina's Central Midlands Council of Governments (CMCOG), representing county and municipal governments in the Columbia area, has awarded a contract to four planning firms to perform the Columbia Alternatives Analysis Study. The study will analyze public transportation options for commuters in the region, including commuter rail and bus rapid transit. Three rail routes have been proposed radiating from downtown Columbia: one to Camden along the CSX trackage currently used by Amtrak's *Silver Meteor*; one to Batesburg and Leesville on Norfolk Southern (also serving the Columbia airport); and one to Sumter on CSX. More information available at <http://www.centralmidlands.org/>

• A feasibility study for commuter rail between Charleston and Summerville, along the existing Norfolk Southern corridor, has been completed. The project has the support of Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., as well as the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments. However, the state infrastructure bank currently lacks the necessary funds for any new service.



OPINION

It Takes Time

One of the most frustrating aspects of passenger rail advocacy is the amount of time it takes to get anything done. Projects to implement new rail services or improve existing ones require years of planning, study and assessment, and it takes additional years to secure the necessary funding to get them going. Even when the studies are complete and the funding is in place, we still find ourselves waiting for revamped stations to open and new trains to roll. Such is the fate of nearly all public infrastructure improvement projects, but in our case, it is exacerbated by the relatively low position such projects take on public agencies' priority lists. There is a tendency to blame this on Americans' culturally-engrained love affair with the automobile and desire to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible. However, we too often overlook the subtle power that lies in framing the issue differently, and in our case, a key part of the discussion is the matter of time.

One of the greatest challenges in promoting train travel is convincing the traveling public to value its time differently. Travelers are drawn to cars and airplanes by the convenience and the promise of a short travel time (a promise that is becoming harder to deliver thanks to the ever-increasing congestion of roads and airports). Part of drawing people onto trains lies in improving their trip-time competitiveness with other modes, but it is perhaps more important to convince people that time on board a train is time better spent. Trains allow riders to be productive while in transit and to enjoy the trip in a way that is impossible if you must keep your eyes on the road or remain belted into a tiny seat in a stuffy airplane cabin.



To truly enjoy a train trip, one must consider the time spent on board not as time wasted in getting to one's final destination, but as time taken back. Time on a train can be spent productively as well as leisurely. It

is useful to point out to business travelers that train travel is extremely conducive to being productive while in transit by using one's laptop or cell phone, and even bringing colleagues on board for a meeting in motion.

But perhaps more importantly, taking a leisurely train trip is a way to reclaim one's personal time from the rigors of modern life. The way trains enable riders to carry on conversations with fellow passengers, and even to make friends with strangers, is one of passenger rail's enduring contributions to society. Trains also help to reconnect people with the landscape they see through the window, which can be contemplated and enjoyed while reading or listening to music.

While seeing the advantages of rail travel in terms of time better spent may require a paradigm shift on the part of many

Americans, this is a shift that can be easily made the more other modes of travel become exhausting, expensive hassles. Much of the responsibility for pushing public opinion in our direction lies with us in the way we frame our arguments. It is important to discuss the benefits of trains in terms of promoting economic development, reducing energy consumption, and encouraging more sustainable forms of growth. But, given people's inherent selfishness, such rhetoric will not draw people to our cause as much as the promise of an all-around better travel experience. With that kind of rhetorical hook, we can increase the size and visibility of our movement, which will put pressure on public officials. Eventually, this will result in expedited processes for planning, designing and implementing new and improved passenger train services.

Better travel choices and a more efficient and diversified transportation system can, and should, become one of the leading goals of our time, and has the potential to engage broad public support. It just takes time.

- Malcolm Kenton



SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKS AT CAPT BOARD MEETING

The CAPT Board of Directors was honored to have Representative Walt McLeod, a member of the South Carolina State House of Representatives, as our guest at the January board meeting in Columbia. McLeod, a Democrat, represents Lexington and Newberry Counties in the central part of the state. He is also an attorney with a law degree from Yale University School of Law and a small business owner. He is a long-time advocate of public transportation and shared his perspective on the latest developments in the state.



He noted that SmartRide commuter bus service between Camden and Columbia has had consistent ridership despite falling gas prices and was saved by what he called a Herculean effort in the statehouse after losing federal funding. State funding, though, is only guaranteed through June 30, 2009. Most existing bus transit in South Carolina is provided by Regional Transit Authorities, which are supported by a small earmark from the state's gasoline tax.

McLeod was glad that some defunct rail corridors have been preserved as hiking and bicycling trails, but regrets that the state does not have a corridor preservation program like its northern neighbor. He closed by noting that not even President Reagan could stand up to the highway lobby, which mounted a successful effort in Congress to override his veto of a highway construction bill.

NORTH CAROLINA UPDATES

PRESENTED BY GENE KIRKLAND AND DON STEWART TO THE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Preparation for the inauguration of a third frequency train between Raleigh and Charlotte is on course. The NCDOT Rail Division is driving for an opening date of May 25th, which is when the *Piedmont* was inaugurated in 1995. One food service car is currently undergoing renovation. The new train's name has yet to be determined.

Changes to come in food service aboard the *Piedmont*, which will also apply to the new train.

The existing complimentary snack service will be replaced by vending machines, which will offer cold sandwiches, various snacks, and soft drinks. Bottled water and coffee will continue to be available free of charge.

Station improvement projects continue apace.

Platform work is being done in Salisbury and Durham, and work on the interior of the new Durham station, to be located in a former tobacco warehouse across the tracks from the current station, will begin soon.

Staffing changes will occur at Durham and Cary stations by May. Cary will gain an Amtrak agent and checked baggage service. Amtrak will occupy the entire station building following the recent departure of the Division of Motor Vehicles. A second agent will be added at Durham to accommodate increased ridership.

***Piedmont* ridership record broken.** The Sunday after Thanksgiving saw 300 passengers board train 74 in Charlotte. Sellout crowds rode both trains on Saturday, December 6th, when Santa Claus was aboard and the train consisted of nine cars hauled by two locomotives. Many first-time riders offered compliments to the crew and train hosts.

Other Briefs.

- NCDOT has roughly \$1 billion worth of shovel-ready public transportation projects, including rail, bicycle and aviation infrastructure, that would begin immediately upon receipt of federal funds as part of the proposed economic stimulus package. The list includes \$373.9 million for transit and \$256.2 million for rail projects, including SEHSR.

- The US Defense Department's Base Realignment & Closure (BRAC) plan will add an estimated 35-40,000 servicemembers and their families to Ft. Bragg by

2011, making Fayetteville the 4th-largest city in the state. A DOT-proposed highway bypass to an area of Harnett County likely to see many new residents faces much public opposition. The state owns a parallel ex-Yadkin Valley rail corridor. The option of developing commuter rail on the corridor was presented to the base's Department of Public Works. The right-of-way is clear almost to Sanford.



Train 80, the northbound *Carolinian*, pauses at Raleigh on December 3, 2008. Photo by Malcolm Kenton

RALEIGH AMTRAK STATION'S 57 PARKING SPACES INADEQUATE FOR NEEDS OF INCREASED RIDERSHIP

(AS REPORTED IN THE RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER)

Raleigh's downtown train station, built by Southern Railway in 1950, is Amtrak's second busiest station in the Southeast, but is also one of the smallest staffed stations in the region. More than 140,000 riders boarded and alighted at Raleigh in the fiscal year that ended in September, part of a 20-percent ridership increase in North Carolina, and as many as 900 riders a day flooded the station during last year's Thanksgiving travel season.

The facility is quickly becoming inadequate for the level of ridership it now accommodates, a problem made evident by the fact that the 57 parking spaces in the adjacent lot, which are available to passengers free of charge and are also used by Amtrak crew members, are often full. When there is no space at the station's lot, passengers may be forced to park several blocks away at a Salisbury Street parking deck. This situation is sure to be exacerbated once the third frequency of service between Raleigh and Charlotte begins this year.

Many passengers in the Raleigh area are using Cary and Durham stations to avoid the crowds. Amtrak management and the NCDOT Rail Division are aware of the problem, but there are no indications that funding will be available to expand the station or the parking lot anytime soon. The station's location leaves little room for expansion, which has prompted some discussion of the construction of a new station that would be able to accommodate the expected patronage of the SEHSR corridor.

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STAYING IN TOUCH

Please note our new Web address:

<http://www.captrail.org/>

This link will direct you to our site, still hosted by TrainWeb.org. Thanks to John Bobinyec for continuing to serve as Webmaster. Email him any documents, photos, or other information that you would like to see on the Website: jgb@dbd01.com

Reminder: You may now receive your newsletter electronically. This will save CAPT mailing costs and will also get the newsletter in your hands at least a week before you receive the printed version by mail. You will also be able to see the photos included in the newsletter in color. If you wish to receive your newsletter by e-mail please send an e-mail to Gene Kirkland at rkirkland1@nc.rr.com.

All Aboard In The Carolinas

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Baggage trucks at the Wilson, NC, station. Photo by Malcolm Kenton

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