RAILS

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...is a non-profit, volunteer, community-based action group whose mission is to bring passenger railroad service back to New Mexico.

SUCCESS AT THE ROUNDHOUSE

At the conclusion of the recent legislative session, several transportation reform bills passed in the New Mexico Legislature and have been signed by Governor Richardson. They include:

SB 34, Enabling Regional Transit Districts. The bill provides a framework for local governments to cooperate on regional transit projects. The funding appropriation of $1.9 million was not approved.

Senate Bill 561, Transit Cap Removal. The bill removes the $50,000 expenditure cap on funds used by NMSHTD for "Public Mass Transportation."

SB 648, New Mexico Passenger Rail Study. The bill provides funding for a feasibility study regarding the potential for passenger rail service linking El Paso-Juarez through New Mexico to Denver.

HB 561, NMSHTD Name Change. The bill changes the name of the New Mexico State Highway and Transportation Department to the New Mexico Department of Transportation.

We urge you to communicate with your leaders concerning these issues. There are some legislators who would like to see rail transportation choices in New Mexico, but they need to know there is public support behind their efforts.

Source: New Mexico Transportation letter, Walker Exchange, April 2, 2003, Vol. 2, Issue 4, STPP

RAIL AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

The C-Train, the highly successful light rail system in the Calgary, Alberta area, is powered 100% by wind generated electricity. About the only petroleum product they use is axle grease.

This points up the perfect fit between Rail service and renewable energy: wind turbines to power the trains themselves and solar panels for supplementary power aboard the cars. This is not science-fiction.

In connection with this, RAILS has written a proposal called, "An Energy/Transportation Fantasy for New Mexico." It can be read on our web site (www.nmrails.org) or we can mail it to you.

IMPORTANCE OF AMTRAK IN NEW MEXICO

The Amtrak service running through New Mexico is much more important to our economy and our transportation needs than many people realize. Our sources include the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP), www.narpnet.org, The Great American Station Foundation, www.tatationfoundation.org, and our own conversations with appropriate officials.

Page 1

TRAINS AND BUSES

Anti-rail proponents, as well as some transportation progressives, point to increased bus service and carpooling to solve our transportation problems. They are right, up to a point.

We need buses, carpools and all other modes as part of a truly "intermodal" system. But these are not enough. Without getting into arguments between modes, we offer the following about trains — Light, Heavy or Trolley:

- Trains are smooth riding, quiet and reliable.
- Trains almost never get stuck in traffic since they run on their own tracks.
- Most new Rail systems for New Mexico can be set up on existing tracks. Where new track is needed, it can be installed very quickly and much cheaper than a new road.
- Death and injury are extremely rare compared to other modes. When they happen, the fault is often on the automotive side: a driver ignoring signals or trying to beat the train.
- After a natural or man-made disaster, a rail line can be restored to service within days as opposed to weeks or months for highways.
- People will ride trains who won't ride buses.
- Trains do not contribute to the rubber tire disposal problem which has become a worldwide environmental nightmare.

For much of New Mexico, especially the Socorro-Albuquerque-Santa Fe corridor, there can be no effective multi-modal transportation without rail.

TRANSIT UPDATES

Dallas-Fort Worth. Making the largest additions to the light-rail system since its inception, DART opened eight new stations from May to July, 2002. Dart completed its expansion wave in November and December, 2002, when light rail arrived in Plano and Garland, to cap off a doubling of the system to 44 miles and 34 stations.

Keeping up with neighboring Dallas, the Fort Worth City Council approved a 7.6-mile starter light-rail line. The city plans to have streetcars operating on city streets through downtown and linking with the Dallas-Fort Worth Trinity Railway Express commuter rail which also serves DFW Airport.

Denver. Becoming the first city in the nation to connect all its major sports facilities along one line, Denver's RTA launched its Platte Valley extension just in time for the Colorado Rockies first home ball game of 2002 and hosted some 2,300 rides. The two-mile spur from the Central light-rail line serves sports and entertainment venues for hockey, basketball, football, baseball and an amusement park. It also features Denver's Union Station at its terminus, where light-rail passengers can transfer to Amtrak intercity and eventual commuter trains.

Source: RAIL Magazine, 5th Edition, 2002

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

RAILS (NL) - www.nmrails.org
Denver Transit Alliance - www.66-denver.com
DART (Dallas) - www.dart.org
The T (Ft. Worth) - www.the-t.com
Santa Fe Southern Railway - www.sfsr.com
NARP - www.narpnet.org
Surface Transportation Policy Project (STTP) - www.stp21.org

Page 2

ALBUQUERQUE RAPID TRANSIT PROJECT

On February 26, 2003, Mayor Martin Chávez announced the creation of the Albuquerque Rapid Transit Project (RTP). The City of Albuquerque Transit Department in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration is conducting the Project. Financing for the project will be shared locally and federally. The objective of the RTP is to identify a preferred alignment for implementation of Albuquerque's first rapid transit route. The basis for the RTP is the Long-Range High Capacity Transit System Plan adopted by the Mid-Region Council of Government's Metropolitan Transportation Board and specifies the corridors with the highest potential for rapid transit service.

One proposed first phase will implement Rapid Transit on Central Ave. between Coors Blvd. and Louisiana Blvd. and will connect the Westside, Bio Park, Old Town, Downtown, UNM, TVI, Nob Hill, Hiland Dialcal, NM Fairgrounds and Uptown. (See map below.)

The second phase of the project, the "String of Pearls," is intended to provide efficient access to major tourist destinations within and near the downtown including the Alvarado Transportation Center, the Convention Center, Old Town including its museums, the Biological Park/Zoo, National Hispanic Cultural Center and the Wheels Museum. The Downtown to Airport route of this project will connect the Airport, Alvarado Transportation Center and downtown area in general.

Four public information meetings were held in late February and early March in various locations. The presentations were informative and comprehensive in outlining the steps that are necessary to qualify for Federal New Start Funds and the long range plans that are being considered. RAILS, Inc. is encouraged and gratified that a real vision for the future is being implemented. We strongly urge our fellow citizens to become involved in the process by attending future public information meetings as they occur.

More information can be obtained from Mike Tomoz, Public Involvement Coordinator, Albuquerque Transit Department, 724-3178, or David Pennington of Parsons Brinckerhoff, 883-0055.

Potential Station Locations
Alignment Option

Central Avenue/
Louisiana Blvd
Alignment

Page 3

THE FREIGHT RAILROADS

Anti-passenger Rail forces have often used the track-sharing issue as a reason we can't have commuter Rail in New Mexico. In other words, the freight RRs won't allow passenger and commuter trains on their tracks. Our investigation of these charges has unearthed the following information.

The Southern Pacific, which "hosts" the Amtrak Sunset Limited through southern New Mexico and the El Paso area, haven't really wanted Amtrak or other passenger trains on their tracks and don't make it easy for them (although there are reports this may be changing). The Sunset Limited can be seriously late as a result. On the other hand, the BNSF has made a cooperative decision to cultivate Amtrak "incentive" payments which means allowing ample room on the track for the Southwest Chief. In addition, the BNSF is not opposed to regional and commuter lines on their right-of-way but needs to be included in all negotiations.

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WHAT AN "ORDINARY" CITIZEN CAN DO

1) Let our state, local and federal leaders know where you stand, especially state and local. Be polite but unmistakable, and be persistent. Some of our representatives will stand with us, but they have to know they are speaking for the public. And they have to know that there are a lot of us. The only answer to lots of money is lots of concerned citizens.

2) Spread the word among your friends, neighbors and whatever groups you may belong to. We can help you with our Traveling Show and our printed material which covers the entire political spectrum.

3) Join an independent citizens' group (RAILS, Inc. comes to mind). Though a small, all-volunteer group with a very low budget and no overhead, we have developed a reputation for non-partisan, straight-shooting & organizational integrity.

What RAILS, Inc. needs from you:
— Arranging appearances for our traveling show, as well as becoming part of the show if you desire.
— Distributing our brochures.
— Your financial support.

Page 4

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