Rails, Inc



Bulletin

September/2016

Our position on three hot topics – Albuquerque Rapid Transit, Amtrak's Southwest Chief train, the Heartland Flyer Extension

ART, like any Bus Rapid Transit, is a poor and temporary substitute for Urban Rail in most corridors. However, "ART" might succeed if

1) it's convertible to Urban Rail in the future when money and vision become more available, and

2) It's put in where people will welcome it. We suggest the Central alignment as proposed, except for diverting to Lomas between Old Town and San Mateo, in part because central Central (so to speak) is not wide enough for everything that should be there, and a major transit line too. While most of Central cries out for redevelopment, the UNM / Nob Hill area should be kept somewhat like it is, much like Old Town Plaza.

We are not optimistic that either of our 2 "Ifs" will be implemented in the near future.

As to Bus "vs." Rail transit, our previous Mayor, Marty Chavez, declared that without Rail transit you can't be a great city in the West. Every major (including solidly conservative) city in the West has known this for at least 20 years. And many cities that have tried BRT have either converted them to Urban Rail or let them devolve into very expensive ordinary bus lines.

We say all this in the knowledge that a few local leaders (notably Isaac Benton) are trying to implement real civic improvements in a remarkably visionless city.

An interesting related issue is that a traffic flow improvement program has been designed for Silver SE in the Nob Hill area, for the purpose of smoothing out auto and bike traffic and generally making the street safer for people on foot or on two wheels. The ART line is very likely to divert considerable auto traffic and parking to Silver, negating these improvements.

Amtrak's Southwest Chief Train:

Concerning the struggle to save the Chief and keep it where it is, a proposal has been made to re-route the La Junta / Trinidad CO segment so as to pass through Pueblo and Walsenburg. Rails Inc supports this, for 2 reasons:

1) It adds almost 200,000 potential riders to the Chicago / LA route, and

2) It brings our dream of Albuquerque / Denver Rail service about 85 miles closer to reality, by bringing passenger Rail almost within reach of future Front Range commuter rail. If they ever build a Rail Runner-style service South from Denver, Pueblo is not all that much longer a reach than Colorado Springs.

Amtrak has offered to create a "stub-end" branch service between La Junta and Pueblo. This is an inferior alternative to the above-mentioned, but better than nothing if it can be extended later to Trinidad and Colorado Springs, as part of our fantasy "Rocky Mountain Flyer".

As of August 3, Amtrak Chair Joe Boardman has declared the Chief saved and that it will continue to run on its present route. This news seems almost too good to be true. Prospects are looking up, but some of the needed track rehab money has yet to be raised, in particular New Mexico's share. Also, Boardman has since retired, and nobody knows what his successor, a retired freight-rail CEO named "Wick" Moorman, will have to say about it.

The Heartland Flyer Extension:

The Heartland Flyer is an Amtrak train that operates between Fort Worth and Oklahoma City. Passenger Rail Oklahoma and others are promoting an extension of

the HF to Wichita and Newton KS, where it would connect to the SW Chief and thence to Kansas City. This train, the Pueblo / Walsenburg re-route, and a proposed new link between Tulsa and Kansas City, would be significant steps toward re-establishing something resembling a Rail network West of the Mississippi. Rails Inc supports this extension, and so should you.

OUR “RAIL INTERSTATE”:

This is another good time to remind everybody that we believe that our national passenger Rail model should be brought into line with that of all our other modes of transportation. That is to say, ”socialized” infrastructure and both private and public moving parts. The picture of one underfed quasi-government national railroad hobbling around on privately-owned tracks is upside down to that of our highways, streets, airports, and waterways.

Of course, socializing the tracks, not the trains, could mean turning Amtrak loose on the market to be the best carrier they can in the face of some healthy competition. When people talk about all our “free-market”, potentially profitable transportation services, they forget (or ignore or hide) the fact that all this stuff runs (or floats, or flies) around on taxpayer-supported infrastructure. Except passenger trains.

TWO GREAT TRAIN GROUPS THAT ARE NOT US:

1) RUN. Once again, we urge people to join the Rail Users Network, another good honest passenger train advocacy group. They’re bigger than Rails Inc, and better connected nationally. Our JW is a board member of RUN, however that may influence your decision. Their latest Newsletter is attached to our e-bulletin. Everybody else contact JW or:

rrudolph1022@gmail.com

2) OTS; OP. “Our Train Stations; Our Project” is the unusual name of a loose and yet honest organization whose mission is to visit local train stations, take both positive and negative notes, and get the word out to local authorities and our Web site. Don’t want to go to meetings? Don’t want to pay dues? Want to be an activist in the

fresh air (and on trains)? This is the outfit for you. Young people and retirees are especially welcome. Color and gender no barrier. Contact JW or

http://OurTrainStations.net

DMU’S (AND EMU’S):

Just to make you aware that many local and regional passenger Rail carriers are successfully and economically using “Diesel (or Electric) Motor Units”. These are self-contained rail cars, each with its own engine (or motor), that can carry about 150 passengers, and can be coupled into 3-car trains. Each loaded car is good for about 2 MPG or the equivalent wattage. Do the math. These things run cheap.

YOUR MONEY:

You have likely noticed that we are pretty casual about fund raising. This is because our expenses are very small. But they do exist. Hint hint. There are those of you who are loyal contributors. Thank you. Hopefully we’ll hear from some others this time. Send a check to:

Rails, Inc
PO Box 4268
Albuquerque, NM 87196

Or use Pay Pal.

As Usual: We’d like you to spread the word, or forward this bulletin, to your friends, neighbors, business associates, students, and political leaders. There’s still room in America for citizen activism. Modern passenger Rail is an issue that all political species can reasonably get behind. Or it should be.

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