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What's inside...

Record ridership- Page 2

Proposed Detroit Commuter
System - See Page 3

Where Penn Station project
currently stands - Page 5

SHORT LINES - Page 6, 7

Mexico moving to restore
modern rail service - Page 8

FUTURE MARP MEETINGS

March (date TBD), Tour Detroit
Michigan Central Station
April 18, 10:00 AM
Dearborn Amtrak Station
See MARP.ORG for details

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Plans for Transit Hub at Michigan Central Station



Above: a futuristic image of Michigan Central Station serving modern high speed trains. Will we see this in coming years? (Oil on Canvas, by J. Craig Thorpe, c 2024, commissioned by the High Speed Rail Alliance, used with permission.)

Further news on the plans for a new transit hub on Ford's Michigan Central Station (MCS) Campus have been disclosed. The transit hub station would be along the north side of the CPKC tracks on the west side of Vernor Highway in approximately the same location identified by MARP several months ago. This is about 250 feet west of the MCS building. Although many variables are under still discussion, the present thinking is that a station at

MCS, would not replace the existing Amtrak Detroit Station on Woodward Avenue. The number of the existing trains stopping at MCS has not been determined, but the station would see at least the one planned international train to from Chicago to Toronto.

On October 15, 2025, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced her strong support for the development of an intermodal transit hub at MCS. She identified

\$40 million in initial funding, consisting of the unused \$10 million federal RAISE Grant intended to develop the Woodward Avenue Station into an intermodal facility and \$30 million in new funding from the State of Michigan.

Governor Whitmer says the transit hub will: "Serve as a new gateway, expanding access to the city and state with a direct connection

See Plans for Transit Hub on page 4

Union Station in Downtown South Bend, Indiana



Union Station in downtown South Bend, Indiana. Vacant since 1971, this station may see trains again as efforts continue to move Amtrak from the current station on the south edge of town back to this conveniently located downtown station. Jeff Parrott of *WVPE Radio* reported on December 18, 2025, that the city purchased the depot in July, 2024 and announced that Amtrak was interested in moving downtown. In November the city approved spending up to \$130,000 to hire a consultant to study two key questions. Can a platform be built between the existing tracks and can the tunnel under the tracks still structurally support passenger access? In the past, Norfolk Southern has rejected an Amtrak station there, fearing it would cause too much congestion for their freight railyard. The city seeks a federal grant for planning and design, and must apply by early February. (Derek Jensen photo, May 22, 2005, via Wikimedia Commons)

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“Amtrak’s operational success is not just about moving more people – it’s about moving them better,” said Amtrak President, Roger Harris. “These results show what’s possible when we lead with purpose. By prioritizing reliability and customer experience, we’re laying the foundation for the next generation of passenger rail in America.”

MARP STATION REPRESENTATIVES		
Chuck Merckel, Coordinator (734-330-0281)		
Station	Staff	MARP Volunteer
Albion	Bus	Matthew Murawski
Ann Arbor	Amtrak	Clark Charnetski
Bangor	None	J. P. Descamp
Battle Creek	Amtrak	Vacant
Chicago	Amtrak	Robert (Bob) Donahue
Dearborn	Amtrak	Mary Jo Durivage
Detroit	Amtrak	Greg Ptucha/Roberta Deering
Dowagiac	None	Matt Money
Durand	Museum	Mary Stone
East Lansing	Caretrk	John Boyse
Flint	Bus	Richmond Riggs
Grand Rapids	Caretrk	John Langdon
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Jackson	Caretrk	Tom Schindler
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Lapeer	None	Jim Slater
New Buffalo	None	Rich Knoll
Niles	Caretrk	Jack Kessler
Pontiac	Bus	Robert Tischbein
Port Huron	None	T. J. Gaffney
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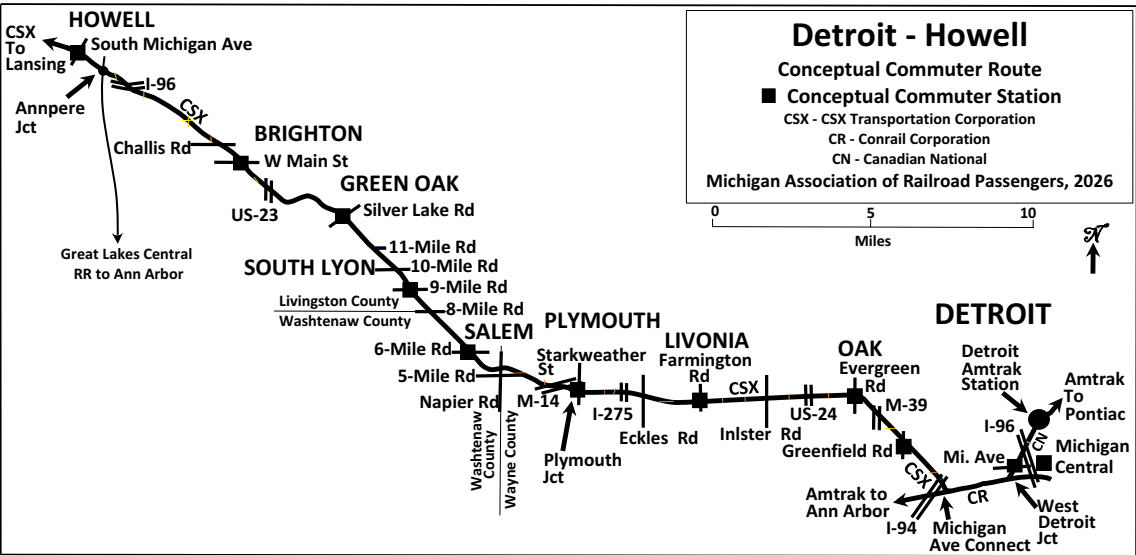
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A Detroit Area Commuter System

Possible Commuter Service Between Detroit and Howell



Introduction

This is the fifth article on a possible rail commuter system for the Detroit area. This article explores a 51.2-mile Detroit-Howell commuter route to the northwest of Detroit. (See map above.)

Two termination points in Detroit have been identified; Ford’s Michigan Central Station (MCS) and the present Amtrak Station on Woodward Avenue. (The determination of which of these two station sites should serve the proposed commuter trains will involve the study of many complex issues not addressed here.) Except for the first few miles in Detroit from MCS or the Woodward Avenue Amtrak Station, which are owned by Conrail (CR) or Canadian National (CN), the route described here is entirely owned by CSX.

Like most railroads in Michigan, this route was built during the decades after the Civil War when many short lines were constructed by various investors. In the following years these short lines were merged for efficiency to form larger railroads and to better serve shippers and passengers. Following the merger of several smaller railroads, the Detroit-Howell-Lansing line became part of the Pere Marquette (PM) Railroad in 1900. In 1929, the PM was acquired by the Chesapeake

and Ohio (C&O), which was in turn merged into today’s CSX Transportation, a major railroad in the eastern US. Under CSX the railroad between Detroit and Howell is today primarily a single-track railroad serving many large freight customers, primarily in the Detroit urban area.

Previous Passenger Service

MARP is unaware of any commuter service having existed on this route. However, a small number of intercity passenger trains of the PM and C&O once operated between Detroit, Howell, Lansing, and Grand Rapids. A PM schedule on page 534 of the January 1910 *Official Guide* shows one daily and two daily except Sunday round trip passenger trains on the route. C&O Table 2, on page 640 of the February 1941 *Official Guide* shows three passenger trains, two of which ran on an except Saturday or Sunday schedule and a third train as a daily mixed local. Stations served between Detroit and Howell included Plymouth, Salem, South Lyon, Brighton, Annpere, and Howell. The last C&O passenger train was discontinued on this route with the advent of Amtrak in 1971.

Few passenger facilities remain today. The wood PM depot in Plymouth, at the

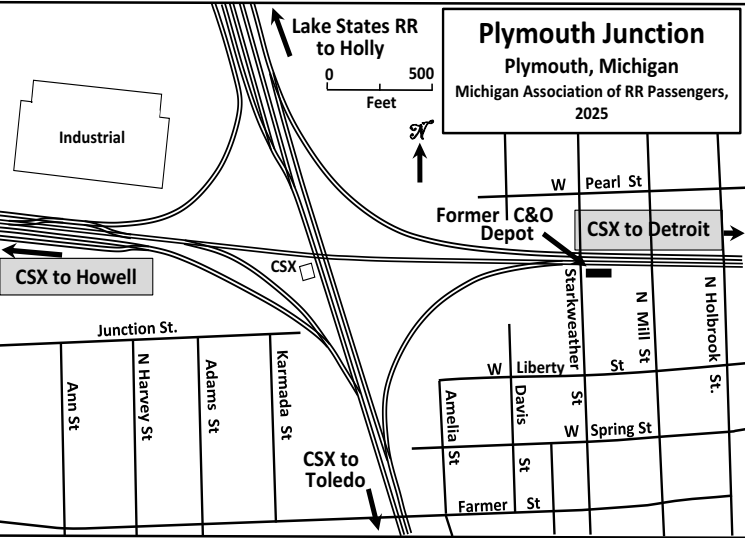
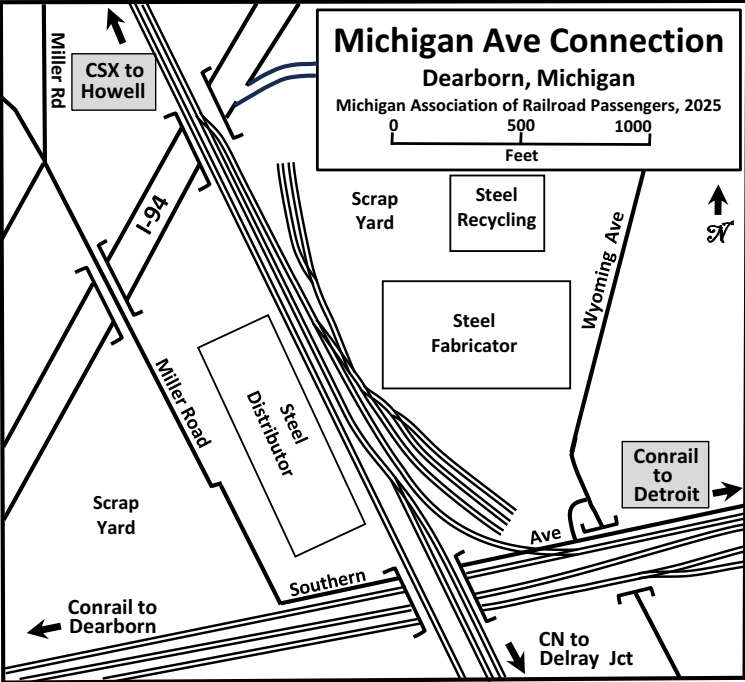
Starkweather Street crossing is still standing and serves as an ice cream store. The station building is pictured below in a photo from about 1910.

Description of Conceptual Commuter Route

Unlike C&O intercity passenger trains of the past, which originated at the Fort Street Station in Detroit (now demolished), the conceptual commuter trains would originate at either Ford’s Michigan Central Station (MCS) or the existing Amtrak Station on Woodward Avenue.

From MCS, the trains would follow Conrail to the west for 1.5 miles to West Detroit Junction, which is on Junction Avenue in Detroit. From the Amtrak Woodward Avenue Station, the route would follow a Canadian National (CN) line for 3.5 miles to West Detroit Junction. The remaining route to Howell is the same for either originating station. (The route from the Amtrak Woodward Station would be 2.0 miles longer.)

From West Detroit Junction the route would proceed west on Conrail 2.8 miles to a point on the railroad known as Michigan Avenue Crossing, a railroad junction just west of Wyoming Avenue. (See sketch of this junction to the right). This is the point where the original C&O



tracks crossed over the Conrail tracks for trains proceeding in and out of Detroit’s Fort Street Station.

At Michigan Avenue Crossing the commuter route would turn north and move from Conrail to the original C&O route (now CSX) for the remaining distance to Howell. The intense industrial development that

crowds up to the railroad at Michigan Avenue Crossing would probably necessitate some improvements to the existing connecting track and signals between Conrail and CSX at this junction.

Further west in Detroit, Dearborn, and Livonia the railroad passes through extremely dense industrial, residential,

See Detroit Commuter System on page 4



Photo from circa 1910 of the Pere Marquette station building in Plymouth on Starkweather Street. The building remains in place as an ice cream shop.

Features of Detroit - Howell Route			
Conrail & CSX Railroads			
Miles from MCS*	Feature	Municipality	Notes
0.0	Ford's Michigan Central	Detroit	Conrail, Wayne County
0.9	Bay City RR Junction	Detroit	
1.5	West Detroit RR Junction	Detroit	
3.6	Cross Boundary	Enter Dearborn	
4.3	Michigan Ave Cross. (Jct)	Dearborn	From Conrail to CSX
4.6	Cross I-94	Dearborn	
7.2	Cross Greenfield Road	Re-Enter Detroit	Conceptual Station Site
8.6	Cross Southf. Fwy (M-39)	Detroit	
10.0	Cross Evergreen Rd	Detroit (Oak)	Conceptual Station Site
12.0	Cross US-24 (Teleg. Rd)	Enter Redfield Twp	
14.0	Cross Inkster Road	Enter Livonia	
17.0	Cross Farmington Road	Livonia	Conceptual Station Site
20.0	Cross Eckles Road	Enter Plymouth Twp	
20.3	Cross I-275	Plymouth Township	
21.3	Cross Edward Hines Dr	Enter Plymouth City	
21.6	Cross Starkweather St	Plymouth (Hist. Station)	Conceptual Station Site
21.8	Plymouth RR Junction	Plymouth City	
22.9	Cross M-14	Re-Enter Plymouth Twp	
25.5	Cross 5-Mile Road	Enter Northville Twp	
26.3	Cross Napier Road	Enter Salem Township	Enter Washtenau County
28.0	Cross 6-Mile Rd	Salem Township	Conceptual Station Site
30.7	Cross 8-Mile Road	Enter Lyon Twp	Enter Livingston County
32.3	Cross Boundary	Enter South Lyon	
33.2	Cross 9-Mile Road	South Lyon	Conceptual Station Site
34.6	At 11-Mile Road	Enter Green Oak Twp	
36.5	Cross Silver Lake Rd	Green Oak Twp	Conceptual Station Site
40.3	Cross US 23	Green Oak Twp	
40.7	Cross Boundary	Enter Brighton	
42.2	Cross W. Mainstreet	Brighton	Conceptual Station Site
42.7	Cross Challis Road	Enter Genoa Twp	
48.3	Cross I-96	Genoa Twp	
49.8	Cross Annpere Junction	Enter Howell	GLC RR from Ann Arbor
51.3	Cross Michigan Avenue	Howell	Conceptual Station Site

* For miles from Detroit Amtrak add 2.0 miles.

Detroit Commuter System continued

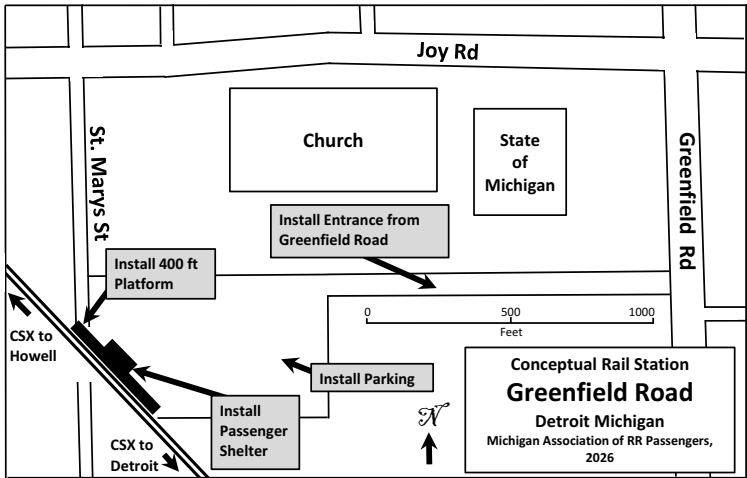
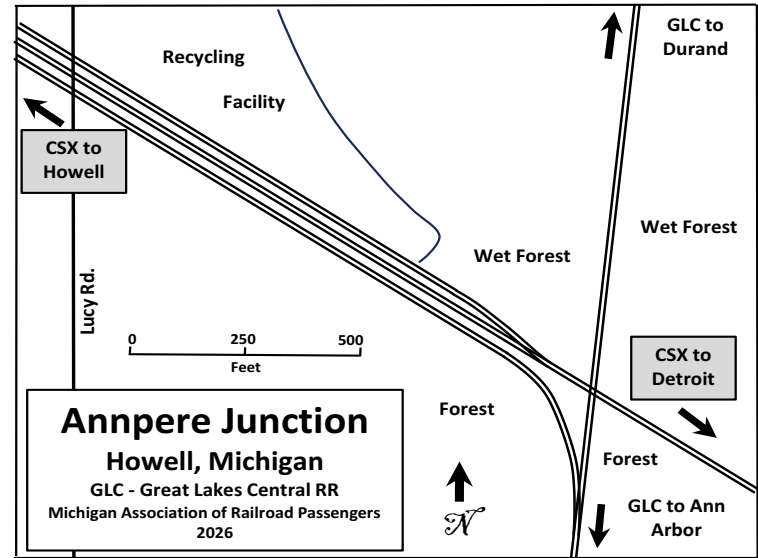
and commercial development. West of Plymouth, land use developments are less dense and are predominately residential, commercial, and agricultural. Sketches are provided for the Plymouth and Annpere railroad junctions shown on pages 3 and 4.

Conceptual Commuter Operations

It is envisioned that commuter trains would operate in and out of Detroit on a schedule to be developed once probable commuting patterns have been studied and identified. The goal would be to attract the greatest number of passengers to reduce road congestion while minimizing interference with rail freight operations. Track and signal facilities would be adjusted or built to allow the commuter trains to operate on the existing rail system. Servicing facilities would be built at each end of the line to service the commuter train equipment. The location of conceptual commuter stations shown in the table on page 3 would be adjusted as necessary to meet commuter patterns and the availability of property for station facilities.

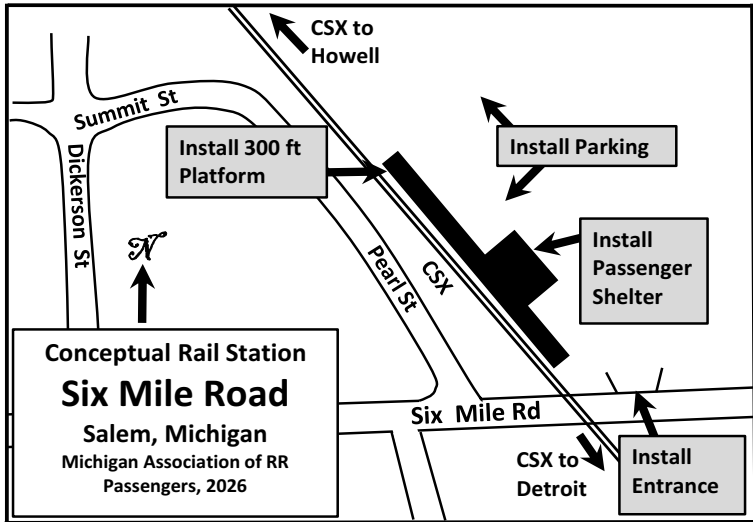
Conceptual Station for Greenfield Road in Detroit

The sketch at right shows a conceptual layout for a commuter station in Detroit on the west side of the crossing of Greenfield Road 7.2 miles west of MCS. The site appears to be undeveloped or previously developed with facilities which are now gone. The site is surrounded with dense residential and commercial developments. A covered passenger platform about 400 feet long and a passenger shelter would be built along the east side of the single track at this location. An access road about 1,200 feet long would be needed to access the site from Greenfield Road. A second means of access to the commuter station site could be provided from Joy Road by making improvements to about 1,000 feet of St. Mary's Street. Parking for the commuters would be developed on the east side of the railroad right-of-way. This site should have minimal effect on the surrounding land use.



Conceptual Station for Six-Mile Road in Salem

A sketch below shows a conceptual site layout for a station along the tracks on the north side Six Mile Road in Salem, 28.0 miles northeast of MCS. The site appears to be undeveloped and level. The area around the site is primarily residential as part of the village of Salem. A covered passenger platform about 300 feet long and a passenger shelter would be built along the east side of the mainline track. Access to the station and parking would be installed from Six Mile Road.



Conclusion

Although the southern part of the route has considerable freight activity, the route is straightforward and simple. It is owned primarily by one railroad company. It is a direct route to Detroit from a suburban area that is growing. Adequate right-of-way width seems to exist so that an additional track could be added where needed for commuter trains. Although preliminary studies would be necessary on a route never having had commuter service, it would seem that this route should be high on the list of potential commuter routes for the Detroit urban area.

A shortage of cars is highlighted in recently released Amtrak data

TRAIN CONSIST FULFILLMENT			
Percent of trains that operated with the planned consist			
REGION	2025		
	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL
Northeast Corridor Regional Trains	92%	96%	94%
Increased availability in March due to operational changes to improve reliability.			
State Supported Trains - East	86%	87%	89%
High on most routes, but poor reliability of Cab Cars on Downeaster requires use of a second locomotive.			
State Supported Trains - Central	41%	56%	62%
Poor availability due to substitution for Venture Cars. Fleet size and availability is insufficient.			
State Supported Trains - West	68%	80%	73%
Constrained fleet size requires substitution of various car types. The expansion of Pacific Surfliner service resulted in higher equipment use and increased substitutions in April.			
Long Distance Trains	80%	83%	81%
Variance in consists is due to substitution from a small fleet of Amfleet II lounges, feature cars, and Viewliner II combination sleepers.			
(Source: Amtrak)			

The table above shows Amtrak train consist fulfillment. This the percent of trains that operated with the number and types of coaches, café cars, diners, sleepers, baggage cars, cab cars, etc. that should be in the train “consist” to handle anticipated passenger needs. For example, as shown in the table, 94 percent of the NEC Regional Trains left their origin points in April 2025, operated with the number of cars need to handle anticipated passenger boardings. These trains normally have one Amfleet café car and 6 to 8 Amfleet coaches in their consists.

The table shows that the Central Region State Supported trains, which include the Michigan trains, have very low fulfillment percentages. This data seems to quantify what we have observed for so many years. There simply are not enough coaches and café cars to meet the anticipated passenger boardings in Michigan and other Midwest states. This is reflected in the low ridership growth in Michigan and trains that are often full west of Kalamazoo. Ridership cannot grow if there are not enough cars to carry increasing numbers of riders.

The solution is obvious. More cars need to be ordered to add to the existing trains and for new frequencies on the existing routes. With the coming retirement of the Amfleet cars, the best of these cars should be brought to the Midwest until new Venture cars can be delivered. To scrap these cars with the shortage of cars in the Midwest is unthinkable.

Plans for Transit Hub continued from page 1

between the Detroit-Ann Arbor Innovation Corridor and Detroit Metro Airport; support economic opportunities with a proposed extension of a Chicago-Detroit Amtrak Wolverine train to Windsor and Toronto; and position Detroit as a leader in the region's transit future, cementing Michigan as a desti-

nation for talent, investment, and innovation.” A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by stakeholders including MDOT, Ford, Amtrak, and the City of Detroit, and other stake holders in the project. Josh Sirefman, CEO of Michigan Central said “This is just another

step in positioning Michigan Central as the hub that not only connects people to possibility but drives regional growth.” Beth Kmetz-Amitage, Director of Community Development at Ford MC added some information during a webinar presented on January 11 by Rick Harnish of the High Speed Rail

Alliance. She indicated that Ford was strongly in favor of having a major transit hub adjacent to Michigan Central to further the mobility image of Michigan Central. She said preliminary design concepts for the transit hub have been discussed and that a consultant should be brought on

board within six months. She did not close the door on some day of having the station within the historic building as train frequency and passenger ridership grows.

A closer look

Where Does the Penn Station Transformation Stand?



Conceptual rendering of Amtrak’s improved 7th Avenue station entrance that reflects the types of improvements that will be part of the station’s transformation. (Amtrak Photo)

Pennsylvania Station is the main intercity and commuter railroad station in New York City. It is the busiest transportation facility in the Western Hemisphere. Originally opened in 1910 by the Pennsylvania Railroad, Penn Station has 21 underground tracks fed by seven tunnels. Intercity trains are operated by Amtrak, who owns the station, while commuter rail services are operated by the Long Island Railroad (LIRR) and New Jersey Transit (NJT).

Resurgence of train ridership in the 21st century has pushed the current Pennsylvania Station structure well beyond its intended capacity. This has led to several transformation proposals over the years to renovate or rebuild the station that for, various reasons, never really amounted to much more than cosmetic changes related to passenger service. Being 116 years old, Penn Station has long-needed updating since it’s last major overhaul almost 60 years ago.

Penn Station does not have a so-called unified floor plan design and is divided into separate Amtrak, LIRR and NJT concourse levels with each concourse maintained by its respective operator. The station’s jumbled layer cake of three levels has complicated all efforts to improve service.

Kathryn S. Wylde, chief executive of the Partnership for New York City, a business group, said in 2017 that “Penn Station is a symbol of the failure of America to keep up with the escalating demands on urban public transportation.” In September 2025 she reiterated that sentiment: “Nothing has changed.”

Amtrak is responsible for maintaining all station platforms, tracks, signals, fire-life safety systems, and tunnel monitoring. In addition to serving passengers, Penn Station houses important railroad operations and maintenance functions, commissary operations, crew management facilities, and other activities.

Complicating matters is that the magnificent classical structure built by the Pennsylvania Railroad, which allowed sunlight to stream into

the station concourse and boarding area, was removed in the 1960s and replaced by the present version of Madison Square Garden. This circular structure sits atop the station and required the installation of hundreds of obtrusive steel supporting columns on the boarding platforms. The powerful owners of Madison Square Garden have maneuvered to keep the Garden in place despite lease time limits. This thwarts the almost universal desire to reopen the station to sunlight and fresh air again.

But now but real change may finally be in the air. In April 2025, US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy announced the U.S. Department of Transportation would take over reconstruction from the Metropolitan Transit Authority. In May 2025 the White House announced that former New York City Transit Authority president Andy Byford had been chosen to lead the reconstruction effort under Amtrak management. Duffy announced that work would begin in 2027 and that the project would cost \$7 billion.

As one of the country’s biggest and most significant construction projects, USDOT and Amtrak are jointly committed to the following schedule, which was proposed last year:

- August 2025: Solicitation of interest by master developers
- Fall 2025: Engagement of contracting industry and stakeholders
- Oct. 2025: Release of master developer solicitation
- May 2026: Selection of master developer
- Summer 2026 to End of 2027: Completion of preliminary design and environmental permitting
- End of 2027: Start of construction

At this time no date for project completion has been officially announced, but Penn Station transformation plans finally appear to be on the move.

Congestion Pricing a Big Success in New York City

It has been a year since congestion pricing was instituted to reduce congested New York City streets and raise millions of dollars for badly needed transit upgrades. According to the *AM NY*, the *New York Times*, and the MTA, during the first year of charging drivers a toll of 9 dollars, resulted in 27 million fewer vehicles entering Manhattan below 60th Street during peak hours. This represents an average of 11%, fewer vehicles, or about 73,000 fewer vehicles a day.

Mass Transit reported on January 9th that the program brought in more than \$550 million during the first year to the MTA to help fund capital projects. It is hoped that congestion pricing revenue will eventually leverage \$15 billion in capital funding. So far the MTA board approved \$1.75 billion in contracts for several congestion pricing-funded projects during its December board meeting. Those include signal modernization on the busy A/C subway lines in Brooklyn and Queens and new elevator installations at five subway stations.

Gov. Kathy Hochul, who had once been hesitant to support congestion pricing, celebrated its success during a January 5th press conference alongside new mayor Zohran Mamdani and MTA Chair and CEO Janno Lieber. “The results are extraordinary, beyond what we could have expected,” Hochul said. “And to any naysayers out there, tell me who they are, and we’ll have a conversation. I’ll meet you at my local diner,” she added, referencing the difficulty getting to local restaurants that caused her to ultimately support her decision to turn on the cameras.

Other positive metrics include a 4% increase in car speeds on weekdays, a 2.3% increase in bus speeds, a 22% drop in air pollution, and 17% less noise complaints to the city’s 311 hotline within the CBD. The program also yielded a 23% faster vehicle speeds on crossings into Manhattan, a 6.3% increase in sales tax revenue, and two times more private sector job growth vs. the national average. As for the cars that still entered the congestion relief zone, they saw speed improvements of up to 51% on bridges and tunnels.

Subway ridership grew during congestion pricing’s first year; the MTA reported 1.3 billion trips in the system in 2025, up roughly 7% from 2024, representing about 85% of the pre-pandemic ridership high. The NYC Economic Development Corporation also reported in November that there were 16 million more visits to the CBD than in the previous year. Through last August, leisure trips into the zone increased by 2.8%, while work visits rose by 1.3%, compared to the previous year.

Despite these positive results, opposition to congestion pricing continues to be stubborn. U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy has ordered the state repeatedly to shut the program down. It also faced negative responses from the White House, local Republican lawmakers, and then-New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy. When Duffy initially sent a letter to the state last February demanding it end the program, the MTA sued in federal court to block the move. Federal District Judge Lewis Liman will hear oral arguments in the pending case later this month.

Opponents of congestion pricing long contended that the toll would discourage many from entering Manhattan’s Central Business District, devastating local businesses and Broadway shows, while adding another burden on working-class New Yorkers already financially strapped by soaring costs. However, state officials believe they have deflated those arguments with data showing that congestion pricing has helped, rather than hurt, the local economy.

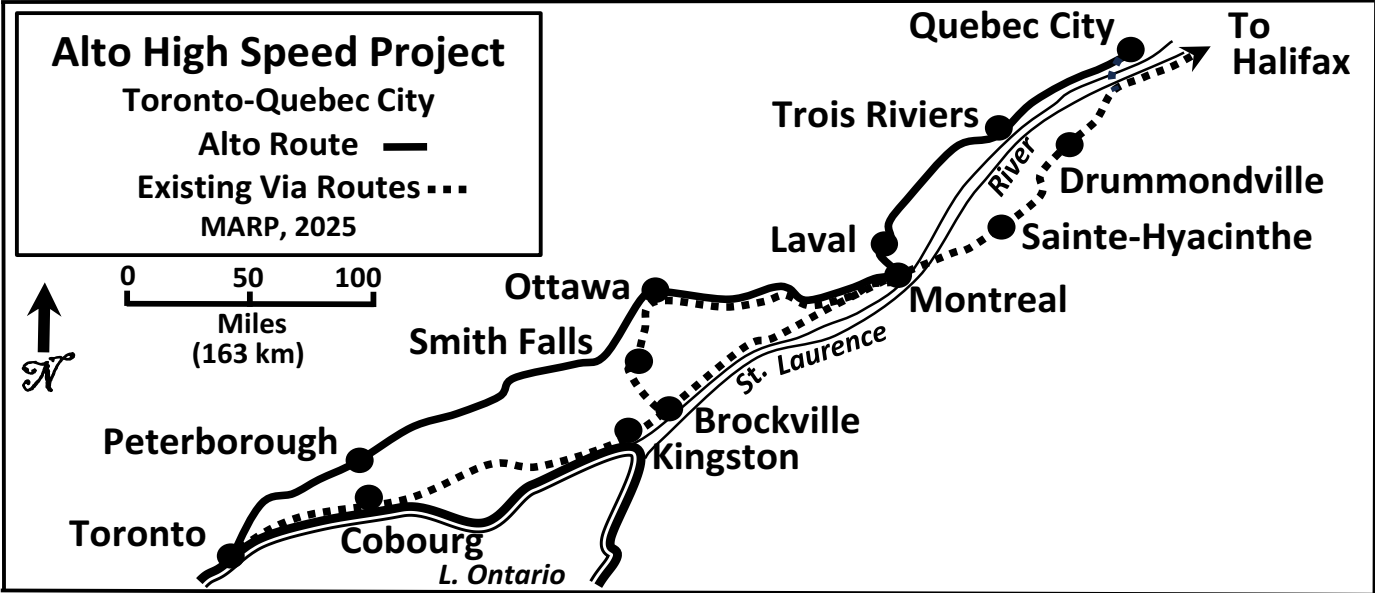
The transportation advocacy group, Transportation Alternatives, lauded the program’s success in a statement. “Today is a major milestone for New York City. One year ago, New York launched the first-in-the-nation congestion pricing program on Manhattan’s traffic-clogged streets,” said Ben Furnas, the group’s executive director. Many group members wore birthday hats to celebrate the first birthday of the program at the January 5th Press Conference.

SHORT LINES

The San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority renamed the California San Joaquin system the “Gold Runner” effective November 3, 2025. The announcement said that the Gold Runner name signals a bold new era for intercity passenger rail and bus service in California’s heartland and allows the Authority to steward the brand and reflects the Authority’s vision, values, and regional identity. In other news, a second Gold Runner has been restored between Bakersfield and Sacramento..... Amtrak’s Borealis, which began running in May of 2024, carried its 250,000th passenger over the July 4 Independence Day weekend. According to the Minneapolis Star Tribune on October 20, 2025, Borealis had 82 percent of its seats full over the summer, which was among the highest in the Amtrak system, per Greg Mathis of the Minnesota DOT. But during June and July, ridership dipped 15 percent attributed to the train having fewer seats available, 210 vs. 289 when Superliner cars were substituted for Horizon coaches.....Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as powerful technologies for addressing trespassing on railroad rights-of-way. According to an article in Mass Transit Online on Oct. 14, 2025, trespasser hotspot locations can be accurately determined from devices along the rail corridor. This must be separated from authorized behavior, such as walking across at a designated sidewalk railroad crossing. AI can be taught to distinguish patterns in human behaviors and identify areas where trespassing is likely to occur and report them as trespasser hotspot locations.....The Detroit People Mover was closed from November 10 through November 22 to complete essential track work for the winter season. According to the Detroit News, the Detroit Transportation Corporation, the agency that runs the People Mover, planned to restart the elevated train service in time for Thanksgiving week festivities..... The Government of Ontario (GO) has agreed to purchase land from CN to construct dedicated GO tracks on the Toronto-Kitchener commuter Line. As reported in Mass Transit Online on Oct. 20, 2025, the Agreement-in-Principle coincides with additional GO train service that will be added by GO to the Kitchener Line in November. The new service includes 18 new weekend trips between Bramalea (in Brampton, ON) and Toronto’s Union Station, as well as the first weekend service to Kitchener, which is about 70km further west of Bramalea. The project adds 40 kilometers of new, two-way track and includes track re-alignments, signal upgrades, bridge work, and platform expansion along the corridor for all day service. The line has been secondary to CN freight operations..... Railway Age author David Peter Allen took a Ride on MBTA’s new South Coast Rail. The route, in the shape of the letter “Y,” goes from Boston to two outer destinations of New Bedford and Fall River, Massachusetts. Historically part of the Old Colony Railroad, rail service from Boston’s South Station returned on March 24 of 2025 for the first time in 66 years, with 36 miles of rebuilt track. Allen rode from Boston to New Bedford on October 7 and back from Fall River the next day. He said that, while the line is not scenic and the stations are not placed conveniently, the two terminal towns are historic, scenic, and normally have plenty of things to see and do. But to the reach the cultural areas of these two towns require connecting from the stations via Uber or taxi. New Bedford’s water front with ferries and fishing boats is within 2 to 5 miles of the station. Newport, Rhode Island, is about 20 miles south of Fall River and the railroad tracks appear to reach that storied place.....Amtrak reports that ridership on the new Gulf Coast service will be about double the original estimates. According to a report in Axios New Orleans on Dec 8, 2025, more than 46,000 people have ridden the Mardi Gras trains since Aug. 18. On average, the route carried about 420 passengers daily and had the highest customer satisfaction scores across Amtrak’s network. Meanwhile, John Spain, vice chair

See Short Lines page 7

The Canadian Alto Project is gaining momentum



Canada has chosen the first section of high-speed rail line for the Alto project, a new high speed rail line which will eventually connect Toronto and Quebec City. (See map above.) The line would be 1,000km (620-miles) in length with high speed trains traveling up to 300km/h. According to reports in *Railway Supply* on December 14 and the *International Rail Journal*, on December 16, Alto expects to start work in 2029 on the central Ottawa - Montreal section, a 200km (125-mile) segment.

The choice of Ottawa - Montreal as the initial section was announced by Minister of Transport, Steven MacKinnon, and Alto president and CEO, Martin Imbleau. Alto is currently developing the project with the CDPQ Infra, AtkinsRéalis, Keolis, Systra Canada, Air Canada, and

SNCF Passenger under a public-private partnership. Via Rail Canada is apparently not part of the project.

The route for the new line would upgrade existing secondary lines of the Canadian National Railroad that are, for the most part, not part of the existing Via network. The project has been criticized as not serving the more populated areas of the region. However, VIA trains are expected to continue operating on their existing routes once the high-speed line is up and running.

The governing Liberal Party aims to accelerate planning, design, and engineering. At the center of it is a push to exempt the project from review by the Canadian Transportation Agency. A new Crown corporation would be created to build the line with the

ability to expropriate land and avoid the current requirement to hold extensive public hearings to respond to objections. Alto wants to avoid the problems that have stymied California’s high speed project and caused repeated delays, cost increases, and frustrations.

Alto held its first public meeting in August, after former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced the project’s launch in February. Officials initially estimate that the full Toronto–Quebec City line could be completed by the early 2040s and serve a region of about 18 million people, roughly 60 percent of Canada’s adult population.

The benefits could be substantial. A report released this year found that the new Toronto–Quebec City line

would boost Canada’s GDP by about C25 billion dollars annually, more than 1 percent of national GDP, and spur the building of more than 60,000 residential units near the stations. On the Toronto–Montreal route, the current passenger rail mode share is about 10 percent of the market. But it is projected to rise to 40 percent when Alto is operational, while the share of short-haul flights would decline from 32 to 19 percent. The Alto corridor should broaden access to work and education, allow finding a job in a different city without needing to relocate, and serve the 700,000 students at the 30 or more colleges and universities along the corridor.

Hydrogen-fueled trains run out of gas



The Coradia iLint has not run in trial service in France and other European countries as hoped. (Quintus Vosman photo)

According to an article in the *International Railway Journal* (November 26, 2025), the development of hydrogen-fueled trains in Europe has been suspended due to several contributing factors.

Alstom SA (Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine, France), the manufacturer of the hydrogen trains said that technical issues became apparent during more demanding and intensive commercial operations with problems experienced throughout the two years the trains have been in service. The com-

pany confirmed that further development of hydrogen-powered trains has been “put on hold” due to the withdrawal of funding from European country customers. Alstom’s CEO reinforced the decision to suspend development by saying the technology is “not yet mature.”

Hydrogen trains are powered by fuel cells, which convert hydrogen into electricity to drive the train’s motors, and emit only water during operation. As part of the global push for decarbonization, hydrogen trains are envi-

sioned to offer a clean alternative to diesel, especially on non-electrified lines. However, hydrogen-powered trains have faced significant reliability issues, with operators reporting high maintenance costs and operational challenges.

Alstom said that all current orders for hydrogen-powered trains will be completed and that the company will continue to provide maintenance support. However, some hydrogen train research staff have been assigned to other projects within the company.

On return track



The first Northlander trainset emerging from the Siemens Mobility shops in Sacramento, California. The train-sets have been seen passing on Canadian National through Michigan on the way to Toronto. (Siemens photo).

The Northlander slated to return to Ontario this year

CBC News reported on June 10, 2025 that “It’s happening. It’s real.” The Northlander passenger train is to return. The Northlander, discontinued in 2012 due to high costs and low ridership, is scheduled to resume with new equipment in 2026. The current Progressive Conservative government promised to bring it back and reported that the equipment is being manufactured.

Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne did indeed cite low ridership and high costs in 2012, when her government decided to scrap the Northlander and redirect that funding into Ontario Northland’s passenger bus service. In 2011, the Northlander had 39,000 riders, with an annual subsidy of C100 million dollars.

On January 9, 2026, *Railway Age* reported that the first of three Siemens Venture trainsets was officially unveiled on January 8, in Toronto. The service will operate on a route approximately 460 miles (740 kilometers) long with 16 stops. (See map at right.) The Ontario Northland website says it will operate four to seven days per week, based on seasonal travel demands.

The government in April, 2022, reported that it would invest C75 million dollars to reinstate the service and released an Updated Initial Business Case. Later that year, it awarded a C139.5 million dollar contract to Siemens Mobility for three trainsets, each comprising one locomotive and three passenger cars.

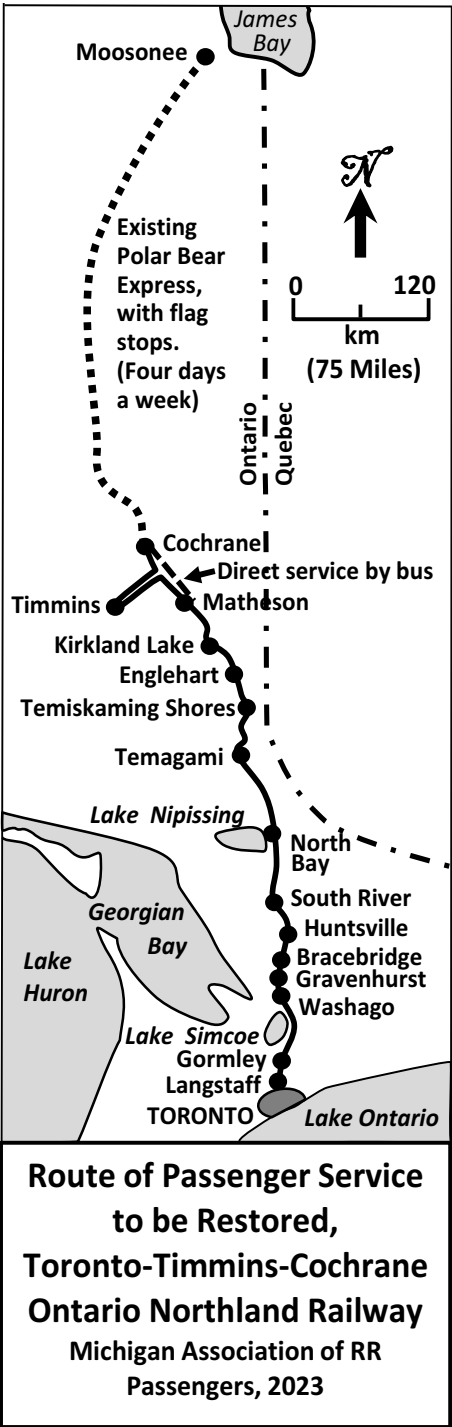
The first trainset is now undergoing testing and commissioning in Toronto before moving north, where Ontario Northland, the provincially owned operator, will begin testing

along the Northlander corridor. Testing will ensure all systems function correctly and meet safety, performance, and operating requirements.

Each trainset features 169 seats, including accessible seating and washrooms, wide aisles, charging ports, Wi-Fi, and LED lighting. There are two-seat arrangements, single-aisle seats “for extra privacy,” and “pod” setups featuring two bench seats and a table for groups of up to four riders. The cars also include seat numbers and call-for-aid buttons that are marked with Braille signage for riders with visual impairments.

The government awarded EllisDon a contract in 2024 to begin platform reconstruction at stops in North Bay, Temagami, Temiskaming Shores, Englehart, Kirkland Lake, Matheson, and Cochrane, and another contract in 2025 to reconstruct platforms and install pre-manufactured shelters at train stops from South River to Washago. Three separate contracts were awarded for the design and manufacture of nine new station shelters, for track improvements, and for complete warning system upgrades along the Northlander route.

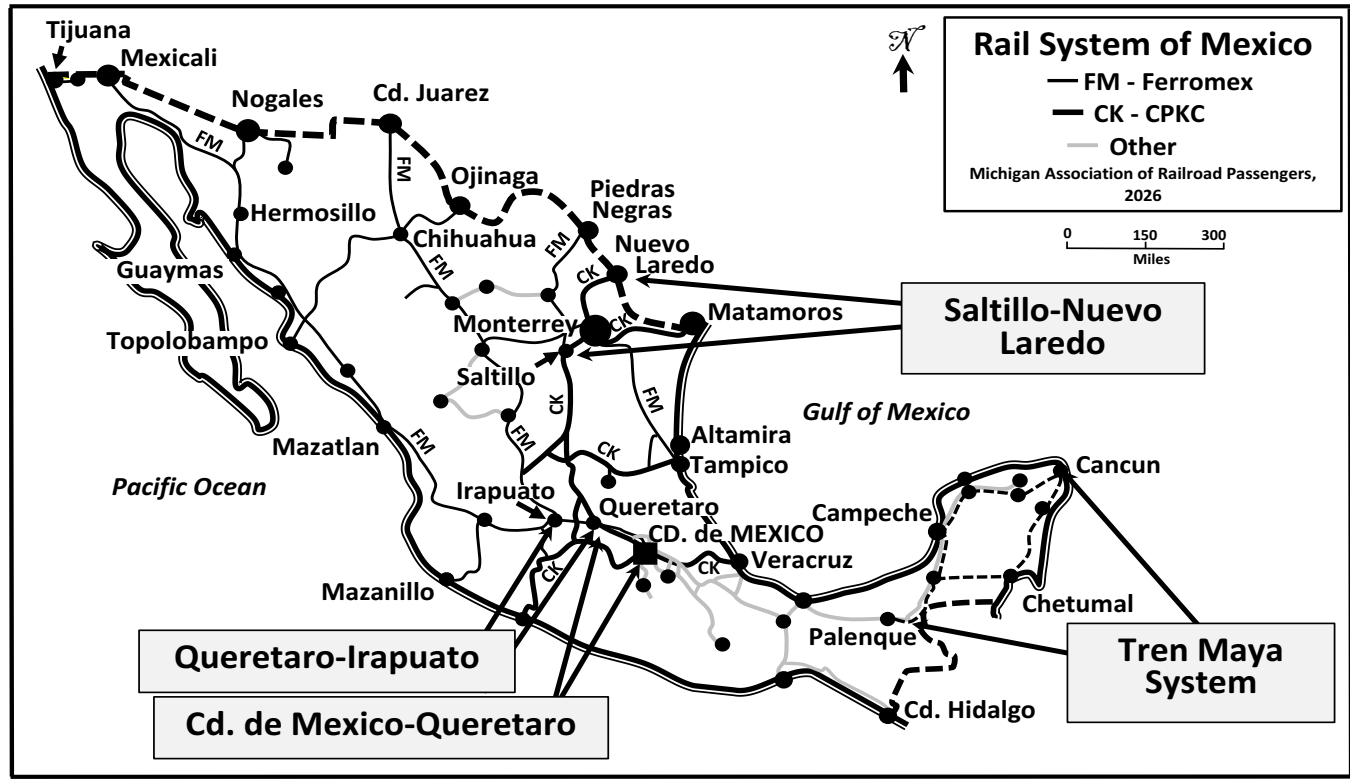
In 2025, the province began construction of Timmins-Porcupine Station for Northlander passenger rail, Ontario Northland Motor Coach, and bus parcel express services. It also completed the North Bay Rail Bypass, which connects the CN Newmarket subdivision to the Ontario Northland main line on the Temagami Subdivision, which is slated to cut travel times by 15 minutes.



SHORT LINES Continued

of the Southern Rail Commission, told *Axios* that a daily train connecting New Orleans and Baton Rouge is at least two to four years away.....In New York City, Citi Bike bikeshare ridership has surged, especially in areas of the city that are “transit deserts,” says advocacy group Transportation Alternatives. According to a report in *AMNewYork* on November 23, Citi Bike is gaining popularity, especially in neighborhoods with limited public transportation options. Ridership at existing bike stations grew 58% faster in these dry hubs; it also grew by an average of 4.1% within a quarter mile of a subway station and 6.5% outside of that area, according to research... German Rail (DB) long-distance train passenger services ran late, according to provisional monthly data. IRT reported on November 13, 2025, that on time performance figures for long-distance passenger services reached an all-time low of in October of 51.5%, following the previous low of 52.9% in June 2024. The performance of DB’s regional passenger services also dropped to 84.2% in October, marking a steady decrease over the spring and summer after maintaining an average of around 90% during the first quarter of this year. The monthly statistics cover 20,000 long-distance and approximately 780,000 regional services..... Brightline financial woes are suspected as suggested by the rising costs of building Brightline West and by cutting train frequency in Florida, according to an article by David Peter Alan, in *Railway Age*, on November 12, 2025. The *Palm Beach Post* reported on January 15 that Brightline has a debt of \$1.2 billion. *Planetizen* reported on the same day that Brightline’s bond rating has been lowered to ‘Junk’ Status as debt mounts despite high ridership. Brightline, the only private-sector passenger railroad in the US, hopes to revolutionize rail travel and provide an alternative to the now-dominant public-sector model...In its first full year operating all electrified train sets, Caltrain ridership soared 57 percent in 2025 on its San Francisco-south bay service, according to Caltrain reports. This astonishing success was widely reported and praised as proof that all day electric regional rail systems can be successful. According to *Bay Area News Group* via Ryan Macasero in *Mass Transit Magazine* (Dec. 29, 2025), this its strongest performance since the COVID-19 pandemic. According to its fiscal year 2025 report, which ended in June, Caltrain averaged 760,386 riders per month; 9.1 million total in 2025. However, without voter approval of a regional transit sales tax expected on the November 2026 ballot, Caltrain expects an average annual funding shortfall of \$75 million from 2027 through 2035, even as officials believe ridership will continue to grow with more Silicon Valley workers expected to return to offices next year..... The effort to get passenger service from Ann Arbor to Traverse City and Petosky made the national rail news. An article by Lindsay Moore in *Mass Transit Online* on Jan 9, 2025, and *MLive*, reported favorably on the efforts by the Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities, the Cadillac/Wexford Transit Authority, and engineering consultant WSP. Lindsay said that Michigander input will get it rolling..... A “Lofty” plan to start a new cross-country passenger train has been shelved for now according to the *Allentown Morning Call* and Evan Jones in *Mass Transit Online* (Jan 9, 2026). Last year, Delaware-based AmeriStarRail proposed a passenger and freight line dubbed the *Transcontinental Chief*. The goal was to have the service up and running by May. However, AmeriStarRail needs approval from Amtrak to act as a joint venture partner. The *Transcontinental Chief* needs to be operated, branded, ticketed and marketed as an Amtrak train in partnership with AmeriStarRail. However, Amtrak said that the proposal lacks a fundamental business case to support such a “lofty” proposal.

Mexico is moving to restore modern rail passenger service



BNamericas reported on November 29, 2025, that Mexican Government is making progress in the construction of four new passenger railway routes. This is a start on a new passenger rail system of more than 3,000 km (1,900 miles) of rail infrastructure to be operated by the Mexican Rail Transport Regulatory Agency. The system will include electric and diesel-electric trains capable of reaching speeds of 160 to 200km/h, according to the Mexican Ministry of Infrastructure, Communications and Transport.

The *International Rail Journal* reported on December 18, 2025, that Mexico awarded a US\$1bn contract to Alstom to supply and maintain 47 DMUs train sets for the government's passenger revival program. Alstom's local Ciudad Sahagún facility (near Mexico City) will manufacture 14 commuter and 33 inter-city trains. The commuter trains will accommodate 700 passengers, with seating for 315. The intercity variant will have 265 seats, with passenger amenities including power sockets and USB charging ports at each seat.

The contract also covers provision for support services, including a \$33.9 million package to design and supervise the construction of train inspection facilities, as well as to design and equip two maintenance depots for \$39.9 million each. Fleet maintenance will be undertaken over five years for \$139.3 million, including consumables, supply of qualified personnel, technical documentation and tools.

The four projects identified so far will produce 785km (487 miles) of new and rehabilitated tracks in the center and north of the country. (See map above) The total cost is estimated to be about



Alstom is supplying DMUs for the Tren Maya project in Mexico. (Alstom photo)

425 billion pesos (US\$23bn). According to *Proyecto México*, an initiative promoted by Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum, the four projects are:

The Ciudad de México–Pachuca corridor. This 57km (35.4 miles) commuter project is under the responsibility of the Secretariat of National Defense. Work began on March 22 with plans for electric trains carrying a projected 107,000 passengers per day. The investment estimated to cost 44bn pesos (US\$2.4bn).

The Ciudad de México–Querétaro route. This route is 226km (140 miles) long. Construction began in April by reusing existing right-of-way, and promises a two-hour journey between terminals. With diesel-electric trains for 450 passengers and speeds of up to 200km/h, the project seeks to improve interurban mobility for more than 30,000 users. The estimated investment amounts to 144bn pesos (US\$7.8bn) in its first stage.

The Querétaro-Irapuato Route. This 108.2km (67.2 miles) began construction in September. Its estimated

investment is 98.7bn pesos (US\$5.3bn) and it will create around 10,000 jobs. It includes nine vehicle overpasses, four bridges, 42 drainage works and stations in Querétaro, Apaseo el Grande, Celaya, Cortázar/Villagrán, Salamanca and Irapuato.

The Saltillo–Nuevo Laredo route. This route will cover 396km (245.9 miles), with an estimated demand of 7.5 million passengers per year and an investment of 138.1bn pesos (US\$7.5bn). Construction began on September 9 and is progressing by sections, including the El Sauz–Nuevo Laredo segment, 136.48km long, which started on November 7.

The Tren Maya System. In addition to these four projects, a 1,554km (965.6 miles) rail project in Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula is well along in construction. Although work was still underway on several sections, the *International Rail Journal* on December 10, 2025, reported that outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, on September 29th, marked the completion of the Mayan Train project. Obrador said

that completion of the project would provide modern transportation for residents and enable visitors to Cancún and other coastal resorts in the north of Yucatán to reach archaeological sites in the south of Quintana Roo state and Campeche.

President Sheinbaum, who took office October 1, said that she will inaugurate the section of Palenque to Chetumal of the Tren Maya system on December 15. *Almomento.mx* reports that this section is already operational and tickets are being sold to the public. *Riviera Maya News* reported that Sheinbaum in November announced the start of studies for the construction of cargo tracks to also use the Tren Maya system for the movement of freight as well as passengers.

A total of 42 "X'tropolis" trains are being built at Alstom's Ciudad Sahagún plant for the Tren Maya project. As well as three "P'atal" trains, they include 31 standard "Xiinbal" trains, and eight "Janal" trains with dining facilities enabling passengers to enjoy regional cuisine.

Transit-Oriented Development – Transit Funding Promise Shown in Many Locations



The proposed Transit Center in downtown Richmond, Virginia, is a TOD Project. (City of Richmond rendering)

The idea behind transit-oriented development (TOD) is that the mobility afforded by the transit system will attract human traffic that will increase the value of real estate near stations served by the transit system. This should increase real estate tax revenues, which can be used to offset the cost of providing the transit service. New buildings such as apartment buildings, shops, and restaurants, should be attracted to locations near the transit station due to the increased traffic around the station, pedestrian and otherwise. This may be especially attractive to modern young professionals who appear more likely to spurn the use of automobiles in favor of less stressful walkable communities.

Although Brightline holds its financial dealings privately, it is believed that rewards from TOD are a prime motivation behind the new privately operated Brightline passenger trains in Florida. Brightline's origin is with Florida East Coast Railroad, which historically owned extensive real estate property in Miami. Brightline apparently believes that TOD will increase income from the development of these holdings more than enough to cover losses on passenger rail operations. Whether this will work remains to be seen.

Mass Transit Online reviewed municipal TOD projects in an article on November 24, 2025. The City of Richmond, Virginia has advanced the process toward building a new downtown transfer hub for its transit services. The multi-story center will offer a centralized space integrated with mixed use development to support riders and encourage investment and strengthen the economic heart of the region. (See rendering above)

In Oceanside, California, the city council voted to further plans for the redevelopment of the Oceanside Transit Center pursuant to the TOD goals of the North County Transit – San Diego Railroad (NCTD). The redevelopment project is being managed by Toll Brothers Apartment Living, who will oversee building the transit center and associated developments consisting of 170 hotel rooms, nearly 30,000 square feet of ground floor retail space, and 547 residential units.

In West Falls Creek, Virginia, ground has been broken on a TOD project by the Washington Metropolitan Transportation Authority, along with development partners, on a mixed-use community centered around the West Falls Church Metrorail Station. The project will redevelop 24 acres of WMATA-owned parking lots into a neighborhood with up to 810 apartments and 82 town houses. The first phase is set to open in 2027.

The *Michigan Passenger* editor is reminded of reading that the New York Central Railroad owned many large apartment buildings along its tracks uptown along Park Avenue in New York City. These were built on land owned by the railroad that had become especially valuable after the opening of Grand Central Terminal in 1913. Perhaps this was an early use of TOD to help fund railroad expenses.