Combining standardisation, modularity and customised styling, Citadis provides each city with an original, ecological and efficient transport system. Accessing a Citadis tram is made easier by its low floor. Large windows, spacious corridors, air conditioning, video surveillance and real time information provide passengers with comfort, safety and well-being.

Covering everything from rolling stock and maintenance to signaling and infrastructure, Alstom Transport develops and supplies the broadest range of solutions in the market, offering its customers greater comfort, increased safety and higher performance.

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A Value-Driven Passenger Rail Discussion

“An cynic is someone who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.”
– Oscar Wilde

The surging renaissance of passenger rail across the nation – whether it be streetcars, light rail or intercity rail – has, in some ways, run head-long into a halt signal in recent months as elected officials seek to mollify voters fatigued by federal and state debt while also investing in transportation infrastructure to support jobs and economic development. What has ensued in such places as New Jersey, Wisconsin and Ohio has been nothing short of debate about the price tag associated with major passenger rail investment.

Largely missing from these discussions, however, is a focus on the economic value that rail routinely generates – a story that’s always been central to our work at RAIL Magazine. Granted, the costs of constructing major passenger rail systems and infrastructure, be it tunneling under the Hudson River, reviving vital intercity connections across a state, launching a new streetcar line or acquiring the right-of-way for a light-rail extension, are not inconsequential. But neither are the direct costs associated with congestion-choked commuter arteries, airport overcrowding and delays, the environmental impact of over-dependence on the automobile or the building of additional roads, highways and airports. Let’s face it, there will be a price to pay to add the necessary capacity to our nation’s transportation infrastructure.

But to focus solely on the price of passenger rail is to only tell half of the story. The pages of RAIL Magazine have always emphasized the overwhelming positive economic impact of all facets of passenger rail. There’s a reason, in fact, why we use terms like investment rather than always fixating on costs, and why our magazine’s tagline is, Connecting Communities by Moving People.

Take, for example, the articles featured in this edition of RAIL. From the two Rail Yard op-ed stories right through our features on the Hiawatha line, Hampton Roads’ TIDE and the North American streetcar capsules, you’ll find a focus on passenger rail’s impact on land values, the local tax base, tourism and even retail success. You’ll learn about re-establishing the American rail industrial sector and about how well-designed multi-modal stations revitalize neighborhoods and inspire additional economic development.

We’re sure that our regular RAIL Magazine readers understand the real role that passenger rail plays in the future development of our nation. As you’ll see on page 5 of this edition, we have some plans to make sure that RAIL helps educate more people and is more accessible to elected officials from all levels of government than ever before.

Scott Bopen

From the Editor-in-Chief
FEATURES

Celtic Rail
Dublin’s initial two-route Luas network carries an average of 90,000 daily passengers across its 40 stations and 16 miles of tramway, and generates enough revenue to operate without public subsidy.
By Rich Sampson

The North American Streetcar
Overview
This rundown is by no means all-inclusive but is rather designed to highlight the growing importance of streetcars in the American passenger rail network as cities re-discover the economic development potential of streetcar services and integrate them with their public transportation systems and plans.
By Scott Bogren

Roll Tide
Upon its planned opening this May, the Tide will begin in downtown Norfolk, Va., before literally stopping at the city line at Newtown Road. The story of the Tide’s development is one that tracks the similar journey of Virginia’s Tide water region toward its own metropolitan vision.
By Rich Sampson

The Hiawatha Line: Impacts on Land Use and Residential Housing Value
This report excerpt summarizes a study of economic impacts resulting from the construction of the Hiawatha Line. Three major research questions are investigated: What are the impacts on property values of proximity to a Hiawatha Line station? How have land-uses changed around the Hiawatha transit stations? And what are the impacts of the transit stations on the level of housing investment within the corridor?

Are We There Yet? Travelling Across Europe by Rail
Europe is clearly in the 21st century and gradually advancing faster and forward for generations to come, and recently I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the European rail system first-hand. Over the course of 25 days, I took advantage of invitations from three leading passenger rail companies to tour their manufacturing facilities.
By W. Dennis Hodges
RAIL Magazine’s Priorities for Light-Rail and Streetcars

In many ways, the passenger rail renaissance experienced over the past 30 years has largely been driven by the light-rail and streetcar modes. While the commuter rail, heavy rail metros and – just recently – high-speed and intercity rail sectors have found increased emphasis over the same period, it is those rail services that act as bridges between high-capacity systems and localized circulator options that have seen the greatest number of openings and expansions. The following are a set of objectives to sustain and expand the role of light-rail and streetcar projects in North America.

Rail’s E-Pluribus Unum

Increasingly, the number of distinctive elements that previously separated light rail and streetcars as unique rail modes are becoming harder to define. As new systems open – such as the Washington, D.C. streetcar network, the Norfolk, Va. Pickering and the Central Corridor in Minneapolis-St. Paul – the lines of demarcation between streetcar and light rail are fading. Streetcars are reaching higher speeds, light-rail routes are winding through dense urban neighborhoods and both are fully integrated in economic development campaigns. With new technologies – such as the Kinkisharyo ameriTram profiled in our All Aboard section – railcars can be flexible enough to address growing capacity needs while also imposing less of a footprint on the districts and neighborhoods through which they pass. Community leaders and planners responsible for envisioning new routes and extensions should be mindful of, and receptive to, these exciting new technologies and operational concepts.

A Different Kind of Community Reinvestment

Few other arrows in the economic development quiver excite policymakers as much as rail-development projects. As one of the most successful public-private partnership concepts available, these approaches are proven generators of long and short-term economic activity. And while other modes of community and public transportation certainly can play important roles in development efforts, light-rail and streetcar projects often thread the needle most accurately through their combination of capacity, minimal construction impacts and cohesive integration of their operations within the fabric of a community. Our excerpt of a study documenting the rise in housing values associated with Minneapolis’ Hiawatha light-rail line demonstrates this notion. New and expanded streetcar and light-rail services must always be directed towards spurring development and revitalization in some segment or district along their route. Otherwise, some of the mode’s most important benefits are lost. Moreover, cost-effectiveness and project selection processes must be honed in order to give proper credit to projects where these important community benefits are included. Community reinvestment must be part of the equation used to determine the success of a system, not solely passenger counts.

The Corridor is the Future

While light-rail and streetcar operations have enormous potential to influence mobility and prosperity across an entire region, for communities first introducing these options, it’s never quite as simple as build it and they will come. Selecting the right corridor to deploy a starter streetcar or light-rail line is essential to the success of an entire system. Just because a former railroad corridor or highway median is available doesn’t mean that route skips to the front of the line. Important factors such as demographics, existing or potential economic activity centers and connectivity with other travel modes nearly always determine the order of these projects. Additionally, since investment opportunities at all levels of government will likely become more limited in coming years, it’s imperative that those projects chosen are the most likely to produce a positive return for the community’s investment.

Connectivity is Crucial

Although streetcar and light-rail systems are key drivers of economic development efforts, part of their muscle is derived from how well they link riders traveling to and from these rail-development projects to other nodes in the transportation network. These modes offer greater technical flexiblity than their commuter rail or heavy rail metro counterparts, it’s easier to fit them into important intermodal hubs, such as a intercity rail terminal or airport. Light-rail passengers arriving at the Portland International Airport find themselves literally at the airport’s front door, while the combination of the San Diego Trolley, Coaster commuter trains and Amtrak’s Pacific Surfliner at the city’s old Santa Fe Depot offer myriad options for Southern California commuters. As new projects are readied, their ability to connect with other modes and provide the crucial first and last mile of a trip only enhances their importance. 1

We’ve Changed History – Now History is Changing Us

If you pay close attention to detail, you might notice that every cover of RAIL Magazine includes the phrase: Connecting Communities by Moving People. We included this slogan from the very beginning to remind everyone that this magazine is totally dedicated to what we know as passenger rail, and that it is our vehicle to telling that story not just to those that already know about the benefits and innovation made possible by passenger rail systems, but to the wider world that needs more education about those important ideas.

Through the years, we’ve done some really great work in telling the stories of the passenger rail renaissance – featuring themed issues on various modes of rail (like this edition focused on light rail and streetcars), important topics (for instance economic development, intermodalism and community involvement) and breaking news. We’ve done this because telling the truth about passenger rail is the best way we know to educate not just policy makers and ourselves about our values, but the nation as a whole.

It’s time for us to increase RAIL Magazine’s influence and to begin a national campaign to even further spread the word about what you do. To do so, we’re planning some significant changes to your magazine. Increasingly, you — our valued readers — receive greater amounts of resources from electronic sources like websites, email and even social networking than ever before. So, in the spirit of innovation and responsiveness you’ve come to expect from RAIL Magazine — frankly, the spirit with which this magazine was first launched — we are exploring exciting new ways by which we can provide you with the same high-quality content in an electronic or digital format. It’s the best way we know to broadcast the positive stories about the work you do to the widest audience possible.

To be clear, we’re not considering simply posting a series of PDF documents on our website and hoping you navigate your way to and through them. After all, [www.railmagazine.org] already offers you those opportunities to explore the complete magazine catalogue. Nor does it mean we will eliminate printed material altogether — we are planning to continue printing several editions of RAIL Magazine. Rather, we’re looking at developing the most accessible and usable communication tools that will allow us to communicate with you in real-time, while also incorporating new amenities and tools to enhance the value you receive out of this publication. This new digital RAIL Magazine, literally, will shave weeks off the moment when a magazine edition is finished, and the time it arrives at your organization. It will allow us to link directly to source documents and resources within our articles and even give us the opportunity to share videos, audio and other interactive elements that are impossible in the print medium. At the end of the day, we’re sure that this digital publication will provide our loyal readers with a better product that reaches a far wider audience in a more timely fashion, as well as one that saves us environmentally.

The final design and appearance of this product is still very much under consideration, and I would greatly welcome your thoughts. Please send me your ideas right away by emailing raileditor@ctaa.org. RAIL Magazine will always be dedicated to telling the stories of how rail connects communities by moving people. This transition to a digital publication promises to both honor and augment our commitment to you and our mission.

PREVIEW DIGITAL RAIL

Additionally, visit www.ctaa.org/digital to explore our fully-designed digital editions of our other publications, Community Transportation Magazine for a look at where RAIL will be heading.
Why and How Florida’s High-Speed Rail Line Must Be Built

By Petra Todoravich

In January, America 2050 – a national initiative emphasizing infrastructure investment – released a report evaluating all potential high-speed rail corridors around the country on their ability to attract riders based on quantifiable regional characteristics, such as concentrations of jobs, population density and rail transit networks. Our report drew attention to the fact that Florida’s population and jobs are more decentralized and auto-dependent compared to other regions around the country, potentially challenging the state’s ability to attract riders based on quantifiable attributes that make it an excellent project. These include project readiness and public ownership of the right of way for the initial segment. Because of the difficulty in quantifying these important attributes, they were not accounted for in our report scoring system, but of all rail corridors in the nation currently being discussed, Florida’s first leg – Tampa to Orlando – leads the nation in feasibility. The importance of feasibility cannot be overstated. The promise of true high-speed rail has yet to be experienced anywhere in the United States, not even in the Northeast Corridor, where Amtrak’s Acela Express service falls short of international standards. The Tampa-Orlando segment of Florida’s high-speed rail corridor will be the first leg in a statewide and national system that can demonstrate the potential of high-speed rail to transform inter-city travel. This is similar to the role that the first segments in the Interstate Highway System played half a century ago in demonstrating the potential for these highways to transform late 20th century travel.

Central Florida also possesses a special attribute that distinguishes the region from almost every other: close to 50 million annual visitors to Central Florida destinations like Walt Disney World. Our study did not fully incorporate the impact of these visitors into the evaluation as that situation is unique to the Florida corridor. If only 5 percent of these visitors take the high-speed rail line to connect from the airport to Disney World, they would meet the passenger estimates of 2.4 million for the entire Tampa-Orlando line in the first year of operation. A growing share of Florida’s European and Asian visitors also use high-speed rail at home and can be expected to travel on Florida’s new system, giving the state’s vital tourism economy a boost.

But what of Florida’s spread-out cities and Floridians’ love of their cars, which contributed to the lower ranking? The Orlando region, with its projected 60 percent growth by 2040, has the opportunity to focus future jobs and development around the high-speed rail system’s stations, as European and Asian countries have done with their own high-speed rail lines. In so doing, these station areas have the potential to become magnets for new residents and businesses as the Florida economy recovers. These developments can also help subsidize high-speed rail capital and operating costs while boosting ridership on the rail network, further advancing its value to the state’s economy and transportation system.

For all these reasons we believe that building the Tampa-Orlando high-speed rail line is in Florida’s—and America’s—best interest.

About America 2050

America 2050 is a national initiative to develop an infrastructure plan for the United States that will position America for equitable, sustainable and prosperous economic growth. We are developing strategies that anticipate the challenges of rapid population growth, climate change, mobility, and ensuring national prosperity in a changing global economy. A major focus of America 2050 is the emergence of megaregions – large networks of metropolitan areas, where most of America’s growth by mid-century will take place – and how to organize infrastructure investments, environmental protection, and economic opportunities for all at this new scale. America 2050 includes a network of partners in megaregions across the country developing long-range strategies for sustainable growth and prosperity.

For more information, visit our website at www.America2050.org.

The Tampa high-speed rail terminal is planned as a key hub of economic activity downtown.
It’s hard to find a city in America that isn’t planning, proposing, studying or actually building a light-rail system. Cities as diverse as Dallas, Seattle and Washington, D.C., all see light rail as part of their future—a way to reshape their development.

There are 35 light-rail systems operating in the U.S. today. At least 13 metro areas are currently building others. Many more are being planned. Perhaps the most ambitious light-rail project in the country is being built in Denver. Downtown, behind Union Station, lies a cityscape that doesn’t quite exist yet. Much of the area is empty, fenced off. Construction crews are digging a huge hole in the ground in preparation for some new buildings. People are being moved out. Steps have been taken to assure that developers are getting the rights to buy much of the land. They own or have the rights to buy much of the land.

Los Angeles’ Eastside Gold Line has been pivotal in spurring development in East Los Angeles. The trains look more like streetcars than anything else. They’re only one or two cars long, and are electrically powered. The narrow footprint of light-rail cars allows them to be put in dense urban areas, on already crowded streets. "There are very few major metropolitan areas in the country that aren’t considering the installation of some sort of light-rail system," says Robert Puentes, a transportation expert at the Brookings Institution.

"They’re going to have to be able to attract young, qualified workers, and it’s going to take a robust transportation system to move these folks around. In case after case, we’re seeing that that is what these folks are looking for.”

Tom Clark, of the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation, says that what changed the business community’s view towards mass transit was simple economics.

“We had a worker housing problem. The roads were getting congested enough that workers from the north side could no longer commute by car to the south side. They needed an alternative.”

The current downturn has meant that there have been fewer sales tax revenues, which are paying for the system, and costs have spiraled upward. And in a new era of cutbacks, it’s not clear if more money from the federal government is coming either. But even so, cities with the same problems that Denver has had want to know how Denver officials convinced a car culture to turn to mass transit.

In Washington, D.C., streetcars are being installed in areas that don’t have any rail service at the moment, such as historically African-American neighborhoods. H Street was once one of the busiest commercial districts in the city, but struggled to revitalize itself over several decades. Now the city is hoping to change that.

“Right here next to us is going to be the new headquarters of DaVita,” says Frampton, pointing to a building around the corner, Gates Corp. Half of their 300 employees already take the light rail to work, he said.

"Trains make all that possible," Frampton says.

And it’s not just in Denver. In Salt Lake City, Phoenix, San Diego and other cities large and small, light rail is taking off. The trains look more like streetcars than anything else. They’re only one or two cars long, and are electrically powered. The narrow footprint of light-rail cars allows them to be put in dense urban areas, on already crowded streets.

Community and neighborhood reinvestment is at the core of Baltimore’s Red Line light-rail project.

"You’d get more people coming, and you’d get better businesses and... well, let me put it this way, it’d be easier to move around,” she said.

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"Light-rail stops create nodes and create opportunities for denser development,” says Robert Puentes. "They’re going to have to be able to attract young, qualified workers, and it’s going to take a robust transportation system to move these folks around. In case after case, we’re seeing that that is what these folks are looking for.”

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New Hybrid Streetcar Unveiled in Charlotte

On Jan. 20, Kinkisharyo International unveiled its hybrid-powered streetcar designed for North American markets. Having successfully completed testing on the LYNX Blue Line in Charlotte, N.C., the company showcased the first vehicle at a downtown Charlotte event. The streetcar – dubbed the ameriTRAM by the international railcar manufacturer – can operate both under the traditional catenary wire used by light-rail and streetcar systems, as well as under its own lithium-ion battery power for up to five miles, which is then recharged through a combination of catenary power and regenerative braking. By offering this dual-power supply, the ameriTRAM can serve route segments where installing overhead electric power is costly, technically difficult, unsightly or prohibited by local ordinances, such as crossing a substantial bridge or navigating a historic district.

“Municipalities across the country have greater expectations of their urban mobility solutions providers and the products and services they deliver,” says Rainer Hombach, vice president and general manager of Kinkisharyo International. “This new generation of streetcars must reduce capital investment and operational costs, improve environmental performance, offer greater aesthetics, enhance public safety and provide overall greater value.”

Beyond the innovative propulsion technology, the low-floor vehicle is also fully compliant with U.S. manufacturing and operating standards, including Buy America and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. Moreover, the ameriTRAM is expandable to reach speeds of up to 50 miles per hour and travel in both exclusive rights-of-way as well as street-running trackage.

“The ameriTRAM is an important technology, not just for Charlotte, but for all of North America,” said Councilman David L. Howard of the Charlotte City Council. “We’re looking for new technologies to help preserve the characteristics of our city but also drive economic development.”

With the opening of the complete Green Line route on Dec. 6, 2010, the light-rail network of Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) expanded from 48 to 72 miles, creating the nation’s largest light-rail system. As the combination of two corridor expansions – the Southeast Corridor from Buckner to downtown Dallas, and the Northwest Corridor from downtown to North Carrollton, the Green Line is also one the nation’s longest at more than 28 miles. Green Line trains serve four downtown Dallas stations with the system’s existing Red and Blue line trains, along with 20 additional, unique stations.

Meanwhile, beginning this June, the Green Line will connect with the A-train regional rail service at its Trinity Mills station, where passengers can transfer to trains reaching six stations in Denton County, including downtown Denton. (For full details on the A-train, see “Take the A-Train” in RAIL #23 – ed.) Additionally, DART operates weekday Orange Line trains over Green Line tracks between the Bachman and Pearl stations, which then continue north along the Red Line to reach the Parker Road terminal in Plano. Ultimately, the Orange Line will branch off at Bachman station to serve Irving, Las Colinas and DFW Airport along a 14-mile extension.

“The Green Line changes everything for our customers,” DART President/Executive Director Gary Thomas says. “Customers living in Pleasant Grove now have seamless access to jobs at Baylor, Downtown Dallas, the Market District, UT Southwestern/Parkland, Love Field and Farmers Branch and Carrollton. Business owners all along the corridor can connect with new customers and new pools of prospective employees.”

(For more information on DART’s ever-expanding light-rail network, see “Getting It Right” in RAIL #18 – ed.)

Detroit Receives Federal Investment for Woodward Avenue Light Rail

Through $25 million in investment through the Federal Transit Administration’s TIGER (Transit Investments Generating Economic Recovery) program, Detroit plans to move forward with its Woodward Avenue light-rail line, also known as the M-1 route, owing to the road’s state highway designation. Already supported by $125 million in funding from private investors in the region, the federal resources allow the project’s initial phase to move into design and engineering. The first phase will see light-rail trains extend 3.4 miles along Woodward Avenue through downtown Detroit, serving 12 stations to reach Grand Avenue, including a connection to the city’s Amtrak station.

The full 9.3-mile route would extend from Grand Avenue to I-94 near the state fairgrounds site, and would form the starting point for a network of rail and transit options, including commuter rail, bus rapid transit and additional light-rail routes. The initial project is expected to resemble the

VIDEO: Click the above image to watch a live video from the ameriTRAM unveiling in Charlotte, recorded by RAIL Editor Rich Sampson.

A rendering of the M-1 / Woodward Avenue light-rail line in Detroit.
Amtrak and FEC officials operated a special inspection train over the line in May 2010, and the project has received solid support from elected officials such as Senator Bill Nelson and Representative John Mica, Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. Passenger trains last served the FEC line in 1968, and contemporary trains could best the 79-miles per hour speed limit found throughout most of the nation due to the FEC’s use of positive train control across its entire infrastructure and maintenance programs.

“Restoring this service will give Floridians a quicker, more fuel-efficient way to travel between our state’s major east coast cities and it will create good jobs in engineering and construction,” says Senator Nelson.

**Honolulu Rail Transit Project Receives Green Light**

With the official Record of Decision from the Federal Transit Administration, design and engineering work on Honolulu’s planned rail transit system can begin. The 20-mile project will link downtown Honolulu with the Ala Moana Center and West Oahu – along with Honolulu International Airport – along an elevated right-of-way. The system will serve 21 stations and is expected to open in phases between 2012 and 2019, with the segment between West Loch and Pearl Highlands projected to begin service by the end of 2012.

“With the completion of the National Environmental Policy Act process, the city of Honolulu has met all of the laws and regulations of the environmental review, and we look forward to the day when Honolulu’s citizens can ride the rails in comfort, breathe cleaner air, and avoid getting stuck in time-wasting traffic jams,” says FTA Administrator Peter Rogoff.

**Phoenix Valley Metro Sets Ridership Record**

Serving more than 12.6 million riders in 2010, Valley Metro’s 20-mile light-rail line increased its ridership by more than 11 percent over its 2009 levels. Weekday ridership was nearly 40,000, with another 30,000 travelling on Saturdays and 20,000 on Sundays and holidays. Moreover, the number of col-
Valley Metro’s light rail’s ridership gains set the stage for future expansion in the region. Collisions with automobiles fell more than half when compared with 2009, and plans to extend the route into downtown Mesa are moving forward. Meanwhile, a 2.6-mile streetcar service has been approved for nearby Tempe.

It’s been another incredible year for Metro,” says Valley Metro CEO Steve Baanta. “Riders continue to use our service in record numbers despite the difficult economy and service reductions in July. The coming year is likely to bring similar financial challenges and they will be met by keeping a customer focus and an eye for where efficiencies can be gained.”

(For more information on Valley Metro’s light-rail service, see RAIL #17 – ed.)

Illinois, Amtrak, Union Pacific Reach Deal on 110-mph Service

The key parties crucial for implementing a higher-speed intercity rail service between Chicago and St. Louis reached an agreement in late December 2010 that clears the way for the project to move forward. The Cooperative Agreement between the state of Illinois, Amtrak and Union Pacific Railroad to begin construction on upgrades on the route between Lincoln and Dwight, Ill. The project will include advanced grade crossing protections, new rolling stock and improved communications on the corridor, which will allow for speeds up to 110 miles per hour and trip times between the two cities in just over four and ½ hours. The initiative will also provide for five daily roundtrips, including three at top speeds, while also achieving an 80 percent on-time performance standard. The project is expected to be completed by 2014.

“It’s a wonderful day for Illinoisans as we celebrate a milestone achievement towards becoming the first state in the nation to bring high-speed rail to fruition,” says Illinois Governor Pat Quinn. “We applaud the cooperation and hard work of all participating agencies to bring high-speed rail service, thousands of jobs, and economic growth to communities across the state.”

“Our priority in working out this agreement was to protect Union Pacific’s ability to provide the exceptional freight service our customers need and expect, while helping public agencies invest in improved passenger service,” says Jim Young, Union Pacific Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. “This agreement allows us to deliver on those customer commitments.”}

Recently, RAIL Magazine Editor Rich Sampson debuted his Potomac Express blog. This venue bridges the gaps between our quarterly editions of RAIL and our monthly electronic newsletter, Fast Mail for RAIL. Since this is a blog, the Potomac Express will be presented in a less formal style and include 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@cta.org if you’d like to spread the word on any interesting news, resources or events.
Envision a consistently-growing urban area. One that is facing steadily-rising congestion paired with neighborhoods and community districts seeking more efficient and responsive ways to link to each other. Moreover, consider that this region once boasted a substantial streetcar network that provided excellent service throughout the city.

Perhaps this account sounds similar to the story of many North American cities and towns that once operated vibrant rail transit systems, only to see them removed in the mid-20th Century, and then witness efforts undertaken to reinstate similar networks only a few decades later. And while this is indeed a plot that has unfolded numerous times in the United States and Canada, it played-out in a city a continent away from North America, but facing many of the same opportunities and challenges: Dublin, Ireland.

Tramways Help Build Dublin

At the confluence of the River Liffey and the Irish Sea, Dublin is Ireland’s largest, fastest-growing and capital city. Settlements here are believed to date from 140 A.D. and the city has since experienced a wealth of history and tradition, including the rapid growth and decline of its economy – once dubbed the Celtic Tiger – representing among the highest levels of development in Europe during the first part of this century. In many ways, Dublin’s transportation history marks a parallel path as the city’s larger evolution.

The bus network that succeeded the DUTC tramway system – operated by Coras Iompar Eireann (CIE), the Irish public transportation operator since 1945 – largely met the mobility needs of Dublin and its surroundings through the early 1990s. When the region began to experience significant population and economic growth through the end of the century, new mobility options were needed. Spurred forward by the city-sponsored Dublin Transportation Initiative study of 1994, CIE began to develop plans for a new, light-rail style tramway network to better circulate traffic to and within the city centre.

The agency returned with plans for two routes: one heading west and south-west, retracing a former DUTC streetcar line and another utilizing an abandoned railway right-of-way to the southeast of Dublin.

In 1996, the Irish Parliament passed the Transportation Act, which provided CIE the authority to construct the new light-rail system. Planning and engineering work refined the routes through the end of the decade. The CIE launched a subsidiary – Railway Procurement Agency (RPA) – in 2001 to build the dual projects. Construction began that March on the west-southwest line that would travel ten miles from Irish Rail’s Connolly station on the east end of the city centre along city streets before crossing the River Liffey to reach Heuston station and then along a mix of street-running trackage and private rights-of-way to neighborhoods like Goldenbridge and Walkinstown before reaching the more suburban communities of Ballymount and Tallaght.

Luas Green Line trams from Sandyford terminate in centre city Dublin at St. Stephen’s Green.

The tramway routes of William Martin Murphy’s Dublin United Tramways Company in red and railway lines in blue are shown in this 1890 map.
Red Line Luas trams from Tallaght terminate at Connolly Station, where passengers can connect to DART and Irish Rail trains. A new Red Line extension opened in late 2009 to the Docklands.

Meanwhile, work began at the same time on its southeastern counterpart that would originate at Dublin’s beloved St. Stephen’s Green park south of the river and occupy the right-of-way of the former Harcourt Street commuter railway that was abandoned in 1958. Utilizing the historic 1854 Nine Arches railway that was abandoned in 1958, the river and occupy the right-of-way of the former Harcourt Street commuter railway that was abandoned in 1958. The southeast line to Sandyford was designated as the Green Line and opened on June 30, 2004, while the west route to Tallaght became the Red Line when it debuted three months later. In every sense Luas is a transport system for the 21st century, combining a visually striking, state-of-the-art fleet of trams with a frequent, reliable and convenient commuter service,” said Séamus Brennan, who served as Irish Transport Minister at the time of Luas’ opening. “It will stir nostalgic memories of the days when trams were at the heart of transport in the city, while at the same time further enhancing Dublin’s reputation as a vibrant, progressive and modern European capital.”

The RPA stocked the service with the latest Citadis vehicles manufactured by Alstom for both routes. Reaching speeds of more than 50 mph, each Citadis tram is fully accessible and can accommodate more than 350 passengers. The vehicles can also be combined to form trainsets. To operate the system, the RPA contracted with Veolia Transport, because the CIE’s Irish Rail division had only operated the nation’s intercity and commuter trains, it had no experience operating light-rail service. “It was the Luas an unmitigated success for Dublin,” says Gerry Breen, Lord Mayor of Dublin. “I think that is largely because the operating contract was awarded to Veolia which is a single union employer. They are also very strict about safety.”

Meanwhile, plans are underway to address the most conspicuous gap in the current network – the lack of connection between the Red and Green lines. The River Liffey has represented a costly barrier to the linkage, requiring either upgraded bridges or expensive tunneling to link the Green Line from St. Stephen’s Green to the Red Line on the Northside. In June, 2010, the RPA filed plans to achieve this vital connection through the heart of Dublin on the south side of the River Liffey through Trinity College and cross over the O’Connell Street bridge before connecting with the Red Line at Lower Abbey Street. With a target completion date of 2012, the new line will continue north to reach the Irish Rail commuter station at Broombridge north of Dublin.

The momentum for passenger rail cultivation by Luas has set the stage for new local rail options throughout the region. The Dublin Metro North and West lines are envisioned as a heavy-rail metro system connecting the Luas

DARTing Along the Coast

A northbound DART train winds its way through Centre City Dublin near Pearse Station.

Traversing the rails of Ireland’s oldest trackage is the Dublin Area Rapid Transit (DART). Inaugurated in 1984, DART operates through three of Dublin’s downtown train stations — Connolly, Tara Street and Pearse — from the north and south along coastlines of the Irish Sea. Its initial route originated in Howth, a suburb to the northeast of Dublin, to Bray in County Wicklow to the southeast. In 1999, the line was extended south to Greystones and north along a new branch to Malahide.

Operated by Iarnród Éireann (Irish Rail) on behalf of the nation’s public transport entity, Córas Iompair Éireann (CIE), the 33-mile, 30-station electrified rail-road is the only of its kind in Ireland. Similar to Irish Rail’s intercity and commuter trains, DART’s 60-railcar electric multiple unit (EMU) fleet – built by a variety of manufacturers – utilize a track gauge of 5 feet 3 inches like railroads in Australia, Brazil and the Greek ishms of Crete, unlike the standard gauge of 4 feet, 8 ½ inches common most elsewhere in the world. From Pearse station to Dun Laoghaire, DART trains operate over the route first established by the Kingstown Railway in 1834, the nation’s first railroad.

Moving more than 80,000 daily passengers, DART complements Irish Rail’s larger Dublin Suburban Rail Network. Comprised of DART, the Northern route from Pearse station to Dundalk, the South Eastern line linking Connolly station with Gorey, the South Western service from Heuston station to Phoenix Park and Western route from Pearse to Longford, the system operates diesel multiple unit (DMU) trainsets to provide its hundreds of daily trips. Plans are under consideration to install a new DART tunnel on the south side of city centre Dublin to connect the Pearse and Heuston stations and offer through-service trains across the whole of the Suburban Rail Network.
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Limerick is a bigger city, it would stand especially viable in Galway, and seeing as would be physically possible and finan been proven that a light-rail system Galway’s Laus-patterned project. “It has benefits, it’s just common sense,” says

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cal governments, similar to funding legislation to provide investment programme going forward,” says current Irish Transport Minister Noel Dempsey. “The government is absolutely com-
ted to both of those programmes. There’s a couple of other Luas exten-
tions that will open over the next couple of years, and further ones that are in planning. We intend to ensure we can bring all of those through planning and design and then we will build when we have the money to build.”

Dublin’s current and future invest-
ment in passenger rail options have other Irish communities considering similar systems, especially Luas-style tram service. Cities along the west and south coats, including Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford, have all expressed interest in replicating the mode. The Irish Parliament is consider-
lizing legislation to provide investment that would match support from lo-
cal governments, similar to funding mechanisms in use in the United States and elsewhere.

“It’s not rocket science to see the benefits, it’s just common sense,” says Brendan Holland, Chairman of Gluas, Galway’s Luas-patterned project. “It has been proven that a light-rail system would be physically possible and finan-
cially viable in Galway, and seeing as Limerick is a bigger city, it would stand to reason that this would make equal sense to also have one there.”

“We need and deserve a first class transport system,” adds former Irish Transport Minister Martin Cullen, who served from 2004 to 2007. “We have the resources because of the hard work and enterprise of the Irish people and a government that works with them.

Passenger Rail: A Resource in Good Times and Bad

The severe economic conditions that have impacted Ireland in recent months have presented for nearly all sectors of the nation’s civic affairs, including its transportation policies. Elected officials and community leaders will examine how those fiscal challenges will effect rail expansion plans in Dublin and elsewhere in the coming months and years. However, the goal of continually upgrading the region’s passenger rail network has not been diminished.

“But while we have very serious bud-
getary issues to address, and not that I would minimise them in any way, we have to continue to invest in our people, invest in our infrastructure, provide the ways and means by which we can have an economy that operates more efficiently,” says Dempsey.

Led by Dublin and its mix of Luas light-rail trams, DART regional rail and the commuter rail services of Irish Rail, its capital and largest city has claimed some of its rail transit history through the new opportunities presented through its Luas routes. As new services emerge there over the coming years, and other cities across the Emerald Isle pattern themselves off Dublin’s lead, a new source of Irish pride is being cultivated.

“Luas broadens the scope of pub-
lic transport in Dublin. In addition to opening up new rail commuter services to rapidly growing suburbs, Luas is the foundation stone on which to construct in phases a city- and county-wide Metro system that would blend and knit together with other transport modes to deliver a seamless system to cater for the burgeoning population of the city,” says Séamus Brennan, the former Transport Minister. 

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The North American Streetcar Overview

By Scott Bogren

To make sense of the growing streetcar infrastructure around North America, we’ve divided this overview into three sections: Historic systems, Modern systems, and Future systems. In each section, we highlight five key streetcar systems and provide a capsule look along with a map. This rundown is by no means all-inclusive but is rather designed to highlight the growing importance of streetcars in the American passenger rail network as cities re-discover the economic development potential of such systems and integrate them with their public transportation systems and plans.

HISTORIC SYSTEMS — These are the cities where the streetcar network built in the latter part of the 19th century was never completely abandoned.

Boston

The System: The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority operates the Green Line streetcar as a part of its T subway service. It is the oldest operating subway line in the U.S. With both underground and above ground operations, the Green Line serves nearly a quarter million riders daily and is an iconic aspect of Boston as it trundles along Commonwealth Avenue past Fenway Park. In addition to the Green Line, the Ashmont-Mattapan High Speed Line, part of the system’s Red Line, operators PCC-era streetcars along a line that was inaugurated in 1929.

What’s New: An extension of the Green Line from its current terminus at Lechmere through to Somerville, Medford and the Mystic River valley is scheduled to be operational, according to the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, in 2015.

Philadelphia

The System: The Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority’s (SEPTA) operates six streetcar lines that are known as the Surface Subway Trolley Lines. Holdovers from the full-city streetcar service that first plied Philadelphia’s streets in the 1890s, the six lines — Routes 10, 11, 13, 15, 34 and 36 — utilize single-car consists very much like the classic PCC cars that made the service famous. Five of the six lines operate under the city’s Market Street for five stations.

What’s New: SEPTA’s Route 15 line, which saw restored streetcar service beginning in 2005 after a 15-year absence, now operates the system’s only PCC cars. Known as PCC Bs after their rehab, SEPTA opted for a romantic look for service along Girard Avenue.

Toronto

The System: Toronto’s streetcar system — often called the Red Rockets — is North America’s most extensive remaining streetcar operation in terms of mileage, ridership and cars in operation. Operating underground is some areas but at street level for the vast majority of its service, the Toronto Transit Commission’s (TTC) streetcars are responsible for the bulk of the city’s surface transit trips. In the mid-1960s, the TTC announced that it would eliminate all of the city’s streetcars by 1980. Opposition quickly built and the TTC led a second wave of streetcar construction that began in the late 1980s.

What’s New: In 2007, local elected officials proposed to build the Toronto Transit City which would bring together seven new light-rail lines with the city’s streetcar, bus and subway network. However, recently elected Toronto Mayor Rob Ford announced in early December his intention to stop funding for the massive transit investment plan.

New Orleans

The System: Nowhere else in the United States are streetcars as woven into the fabric of the community as they are in New Orleans. Each of the three lines still operating — the St. Charles, Riverfront and Canal Street — has its own history and impact on the city. The St. Charles is the oldest continually operating streetcar system in the world and has national landmark status; the Riverfront is a two-mile line between the massive convention center and the city’s French Quarter and largely serves tourists; the Canal Street line ran from the 1890s up until 1964, with service and much of the line’s infrastructure rebuilt for a 2004 rebirth. From the plays of Tennessee Williams to the inception of such phrases as the neutral ground, streetcars and New Orleans are virtually synonymous.

What’s New: A second vintage streetcar line will begin operating in San Francisco along the Embarcadero in 2012. Also deploying a collection of historic cars and the F-Market line, both operated by the San Francisco Municipal Railway, or Muni. The cable car system is the last in the world to be manually operated and run along three routes. They are largely used by tourists today. Though the current F-Market line dates back to 1995, rail service along the route goes back nearly 150 years. Plans to re-launch full-fledged streetcar service along Market began in 1983 with the onset of a Historic Trolley Festival. Today, the F-Market line operates a vintage fleet decked out in color schemes from cities across the world. At any given time, 20 cars from the collection are in service.

What’s New: Hurricane Katrina in September, 2005, wreaked havoc on New Orleans’ streetcars. The newer Red Cars were stored in a facility that flooded, and all had to be replaced. The older Green Cars survived the storm and flooding but had little track upon which to operate. All three lines are back up-and-running (with the Canal Street line being the first) and the last of the replacement Red Cars were put into service in 2010.

San Francisco

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What’s New: Given its tremendous success, Portland has played host to numerous city officials from around the country seeking to replicate its streetcar system’s impact. What’s more, the city is expanded the current streetcar network with its Eastside Alignment. Adding another 3.3 miles, Eastside track work is underway and service should begin in 2012.

Portland

The System: Portland’s streetcar system has, in many ways, been the inspiration for the modern streetcar revival currently underway across the U.S. Launched in 2001 and with 12,000 daily riders on its four-mile line, the Portland Streetcar was the first such system since World War II to operate modern vehicles — including one vehicle built in America. Operated by the city of Portland, the streetcars have had an immediate and lasting economic impact — since 1997 more than $3 billion has been invested within two blocks of the streetcar line.

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What’s New: A second vintage streetcar line will begin operating in San Francisco along the Embarcadero in 2012. Also deploying a collection of historic cars in a variety of livery schemes, the new line is testament to the success of the F-Market line.

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Little Rock

The System: The Central Arkansas Transit Authority operates a 1.4-mile long heritage streetcar line through North Little Rock and Little Rock. In addition to spanning the Arkansas Riverfront and Canal Street — has its own history and impact on the city.

New Orleans Streetcars

MODERN SYSTEMS — The re-emergence of streetcars as a viable transportation mode in the 21st century is due, in many respects, to the successes illustrated in these modern systems.
River, the River River Streetcar connects with the Clinton Library and the city's Alltel Arena. River Rail operates canary yellow Birney-style streetcars built by Gomaco. Since its inception in 2004, River rail has averaged annual ridership in the neighborhood of 200,000.

What's New: Several River Rail extensions have been discussed in the years since it opened, with the most ambitious being a 2.5-mile trek to the southeast of the current terminus to Little Rock National Airport.

Memphis

The System: Opened to the public in 1993 — more than a half-century since the last streetcars left Memphis — the Memphis Area Transit Authority's Trolley system has grown to three lines and serves more than 900,000 people annually. Two of the lines — Riverfront and Main Street — parallel each other and the Mississippi River while the newest line — Madison Ave., which was launched in 2004 — runs at an eastward right angle. The system's original six cars came from Porto, Portugal, while Gomaco subsequently supplied an additional 10.

What's New: The Madison Avenue line provides Memphis with a vital link between the city's central business district and the burgeoning Medical Center complex and operates along a densely populated corridor. The line also is designed to be the connector and catalyst for a regional light-rail network of both heritage and modern cars that has been planned, tentatively, for somewhere around 2020.

Seattle

The System: The South Lake Union Streetcar, connecting Seattle's South Lake Union neighborhood with downtown Seattle, is the first installment of a larger concept known as the Seattle Streetcar Network. The line, which was inaugurated in 2007, enjoyed significant political and business support throughout its development — and ridership, which tops 1,000 daily passengers, has exceeded expectations. The South Lake Union Streetcar operates three Inekon articulated cars — one red, one purple and one orange — and is operated by King County Metro under contract to the city of Seattle.

What's New: The next phase of the Seattle Streetcar Network set to open to the public is the First Hill line in 2013, which was approved by voters in 2008. Future lines are planned into the University of Washington district, to Fremont and Ballard, to the Seattle Center and to the central Seattle business district.

Charlotte

The System: Operating along a Norfolk Southern right-of-way and sharing track with the city's Lynn light-rail system, Charlotte's heritage streetcar line — the Charlotte Trolley — was opened to the public in 1996 with an initial trial period. The six-month trial along a 1.8 mile segment included the line running in the evenings Thursday-Saturday and on Sunday afternoon. Exceptional ridership convinced city officials to make the trolley a permanent fixture. The city's streetcar history is captured by currently operating car #85, which was one of the last cars operating in Charlotte when the city ceased streetcar service in 1938 — and then was found being used as a residence in 1987 and was refurbished and restored to service.

What's New: In July, Charlotte announced it had won $25 million in federal investment to construct a 1.5 mile streetcar line between Presbyterian Hospital and Time Warner Cable Arena. The line, which should be operational in 2014, is seen as the first piece of a nearly 10-mile streetcar network the city hopes to build over the next two decades.

FUTURE SYSTEMS — The newest wave of streetcar building is highlighted in this section, as cities around North America seek to capture the local vitality and economic development impact of streetcars.

Washington, D.C.

What's New: The last streetcars served the District of Columbia in 1962. In 2009, the DC Department of Transportation began laying track for two new streetcar lines — Anacostia and Benning. The Anacostia was originally viewed as the starter line for a vast streetcar network of more than 30 total miles, which would make the Washington system the nation's largest. Today, the Anacostia line remains mired in political infighting — much of which is centered around the overhead catenary necessary to power the streetcars — while the H Street/Benning Line sees tracks being laid. Local commitment seems to have coalesced around smaller versions of the two lines starting service in the Spring of 2012 and three Czech-built Inekon streetcars are currently being stored locally.

Cincinnati

What's New: Following on the heels of a feasibility study completed in 2007, the Cincinnati city council approved a plan to build a 3.9-mile streetcar line to create economic development in the city's Over-the-Rhine, uptown and downtown neighborhoods. The proposed line will serve the University of Cincinnati campus, a cluster of local medical facilities and the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens. In July, 2010, the federal government pledged $25 million for the service from its Downtown Circulator program. The Cincinnati City Council has pledged another $64 million in local funds for the project.

St. Louis

What's New: In a city that once enjoyed a more than 400-mile streetcar network and which the largest streetcar builder in the world — the St. Louis Car Company — called home, two new streetcar projects have emerged. The Delmar Loop Trolley is a proposed 2.2-mile heritage streetcar system in the University City area that will have nine stops, including two shared with the city's light-rail operation. The line received $25 million from the federal government in July, 2010. A second local streetcar proposal emanates from St. Charles where a seven-mile line connecting New Town St. Charles with the city's riverfront area and convention center is being considered.

Salt Lake City

What's New: Known locally as the Sugar House Streetcar, Salt Lake City's streetcar line connecting the Sugar House neighborhood with South Salt Lake City received a considerable boost in October when the federal government announced it had awarded the project a $26 million TIGER II grant. Current plans for the Sugar House...
Streetcar have it running on an abandoned rail line and the Parleys Trail and not, ironically, along the street. Estimates for launch of the service are late 2012 – early 2013.

Tempe

What’s New: In October, the Tempe City Council formally approved a $160 million plan to build a 2.5-mile streetcar line along Mill Avenue that it expects to spur considerable local economic development. Construction for the project is set to begin in 2013 with a 2016 service launch to the public. Local officials are hoping the streetcar will attract somewhere between 1,200 to 1,500 daily riders.

Tempe is in the process of receiving new streetcars for its extensive system, built by Bombardier below.

The first streetcars for Washington, D.C.’s initial two routes (above) have already arrived in the nation’s capital and were displayed at several downtown events. Meanwhile, the rendering below depicts Atlanta’s planned 2.6-mile route.

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY LENDER
By Rich Sampson

The Tide route stretches more than seven miles from downtown Norfolk to the city line at Newtown Road.

The Challenges of a Dispersed Metropolis
To suggest the Hampton Roads region is a typical metropolitan area with Norfolk as its core would be like believing that New York City is little more than a collection of suburbs surrounding Manhattan. For while it is true that Norfolk represents the region’s most well-recognized city center and its most well-defined business central district, the Hampton Roads metropolis is collection of nine cities in six Virginia counties – along with North Carolina’s Currituck County – with a population of more than two million, ranking it the 93rd largest in the nation and the largest in Virginia. And yet, despite its significant and growing population – one of the fastest-growing in the nation – it has no unifying governmental structure to focus decision-making and long-term planning efforts. Rather, the cities – Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Chesapeake, Newport News, Hampton, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Poquoson and Williamsburg (in descending order of population) – and counties operate as independent jurisdictions, unlike other large regions.

While each location is rightly proud of, and interested in, the specific workings of its own community, some policy questions and public services do not so neatly end at the boundary line between cities or counties. Mobility is one such jurisdiction-spanning concept, and Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) is one of the few entities that has forged a multi-jurisdictional approach.

From Hampton Roads to Rails
The metropolitan region today commonly known as Hampton Roads is one of the nation’s oldest communities, as English Captain Sir Walter Raleigh’s trio of ships – the flagship Susan Constant, along with the Godspeed and Discover – arrived on the shores of today’s Virginia Beach in 1607. Although the initial colonists did not stay – they instead founded Jamestown up on the James River – later permanent settlements were established where combined headwaters of the James, Elizabeth and Nansemond rivers meet to form the Hampton Roads harbor, which then empties first into the Chesapeake Bay and then the Atlantic Ocean. These communities that included Portsmouth and Elizabeth City – today’s Newport News – quickly became growing port communities, due to the naturally deep basin of the harbor and its resistance to freezing in winter.

Although the region would always primarily find its transportation identity in the water – it was a key center of naval activity even under British control, and was the setting for the legendary Civil War battle of the Monitor and the Merrimac – its railroading history is likewise important to its growth. Goods and supplies heading to-and-from seafaring craft needed to reach inland and by the mid-1800s, several railroads had constructed routes in various directions from Newport News, Portsmouth and Norfolk to move cargo and passengers throughout Virginia and to North Carolina. By the end of the century, the burgeoning oceanside destination of Virginia Beach necessitated a connection to the harbor area, and the Norfolk, Virginia Beach Railroad and Improvement Company established a route between its namesake cities in 1883. After transitioning through a variety of names and holding companies, the line was acquired by the Norfolk and Southern Railroad in 1900.

The railroad – one of the leading carriers in the South, along with the Southern, Seaboard Air Line and Atlantic Coast Line – electrified the route in 1904 to establish interurban style service between the two cities, while also offering intercity service beyond Norfolk, with Pullman sleeping car service extending as far as New York City. As the century wore on, the railroad – which became the Norfolk Southern Railway in 1942 – gradually pared its passenger business on the corridor, and service ended altogether in the 1950s.

On Aug. 8, 2009, Norfolk Southern filed its intention to abandon the 15-mile line. And in that petition, an opportunity arose.

“Instead of viewing the abandonment as a setback for the region, we viewed it as an opportunity,” says Norfolk Councilman W. Randy Wright. “Here was a ready-made transit corridor that could connect the region.”

The Tide light-rail vehicles are undergoing final testing in preparation for the initiation of service later this year.

For more than 12 miles from the sandy boardwalks of the Atlantic Ocean to Hampton Roads’ urban centers peppered with naval vessels and container ships, a narrow ribbon of land stretches from shore to city with laser-straight precision. More than a route of conveyance between two communities, the route of the forthcoming Tide light rail is an effort of a large and growing metropolis region to forge a new identity, although perhaps reluctantly.

Upon its planned opening this May, the Tide will begin in downtown Norfolk as its core would be like believing that New York City is little more than a collection of suburbs surrounding Manhattan. For while it is true that Norfolk represents the region’s most well-recognized city center and its most well-defined business central district, the Hampton Roads metropolis is collection of nine cities in six Virginia counties – along with North Carolina’s Currituck County – with a population of more than two million, ranking it the 93rd largest in the nation and the largest in Virginia. And yet, despite its significant and growing population – one of the fastest-growing in the nation – it has no unifying governmental structure to focus decision-making and long-term planning efforts. Rather, the cities – Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Chesapeake, Newport News, Hampton, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Poquoson and Williamsburg (in descending order of population) – and counties operate as independent jurisdictions, unlike other large regions.

While each location is rightly proud of, and interested in, the specific workings of its own community, some policy questions and public services do not so neatly end at the boundary line between cities or counties. Mobility is one such jurisdiction-spanning concept, and Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) is one of the few entities that has forged a multi-jurisdictional approach.

Although Virginia Beach voters had passed on utilizing the right-of-way for a light-rail line in a November 1999 referendum, transit leaders in Norfolk still eyed use of the corridor. Tasked with the development of plans for such a service, the transit agency worked with Norfolk’s public officials, community representatives and business leaders to determine how light rail could not only leverage the existing Norfolk Southern rail line, but also incorporate other economic development and land-use efforts, especially in downtown Norfolk. By 2006, HRT had formulated a proposal to install new, street-running light-rail tracks starting at the Eastern Virginia Medical School on the west end of downtown, through the heart of the Tide route.
of the city and the MacArthur Place retail center before linking up with the Norfolk Southern corridor near Harbor Park, home to the Norfolk Tides AAA baseball team. From there, the route parallels the increasingly-congested Interstate-64 between the cities. Given Virginia Beach’s hesitancy to become involved with the project, the line would end at the Norfolk city line at Newtown Road.

“We took the line as far as we could, literally to the city line,” says Wright. “It’s a good place to start, by connecting the medical facilities west of downtown with the downtown core and entertainment districts and then into more residential areas. It really fits with a lot of needs.”

On Oct. 1, 2007, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) signed a Full Funding Grant Agreement to provide $128 million in investment to build the 7.4-mile line, which would be matched by $33 million each from the city of Norfolk and the Commonwealth of Virginia, along with another $39 million from other federal sources. Construction on the project – named the Tide through a HRT-sponsored public contest – began in 2008 and will be completed in early 2011 to allow for a May service launch. HRT purchased nine S70 light-rail vehicles from Siemens, which were manufactured at their Sacramento, Calif., assembly plant.

“As The Tide carries Norfolk into the next decade of urban redevelopment, our light rail vehicles will help to preserve the environment, connect people and ensure the quality of life in Norfolk,” said Oliver Hauck, president and CEO of Siemens Transportation Systems Inc.

A Straight Line of Vision

From the end of the nearly-finished platform station at Newtown Road – the easternmost of the Tide’s 11 initial stops – the Norfolk Southern rail corridor continues towards the rising sun for as far as the eye can see, all the way to downtown Virginia Beach. Spanning more than 12 miles from Newtown Road to Pacific Ave. in Virginia Beach, the route is nearly ideal for a light-rail application: an established right-of-way that would produce relatively little construction impact on business or infrastructure with significant density on either side of the route. As Norfolk’s effort to introduce the Tide grew closer to reality, leaders in Virginia Beach began to reconsider their 1999 decision to eschew light-rail.

“I do see this as a historic moment for Virginia Beach,” says Mayor Will Sessoms. “This is something that should be done to make sure that we have the opportunity to make the proper evaluation if we want to move forward with light rail in the future.”

Last September, the city of Virginia Beach purchased the segment of the corridor in its jurisdiction from Norfolk Southern for $40 million, establishing a clear path for the Tide to ultimately continue east past the Norfolk city line. While the final investment for the extension has yet to be secured, and engineering and design work is needed, the city’s leaders are excited about launching Tide service on the entire corridor, not long after it begins service in Norfolk. Moreover, a set of rail-oriented development projects are envisioned along the route in the Pembroke, Lynnhaven and Hilltop neighborhoods, along with the downtown resort area to leverage the full value inherent in the light-rail mode.

“During this lull in the economy, it’s now probably the best time to put in the infrastructure for the type of development we’d like to see in the future,” says Warren Harris, Virginia Beach’s economic development director. “The decision has been for our future development to cluster in these strategic growth areas. For us it means moving into an urban development pattern, where we’ll see more vertical development, more structured parking.”

As the deployment of Tide light rail between Norfolk and Virginia Beach moves closer to reality, it is also viewed as a strategy to unite larger portions of the Hampton Roads metropolis. Norfolk is considering a westerly extension of the initial line to reach the Naval Station Norfolk, while Portsmouth and Chesapeake are considering potential corridors through their jurisdictions, although the geographic limitations posed by the region’s various waterways make connections such as Norfolk to Newport News or Portsmouth to Norfolk more challenging. Specific scenarios to achieve these linkages are very much conceptual at this stage.

Meanwhile, Norfolk is preparing for the eventual arrival of direct intercity and high-speed trains at a new station location near Harbor Park, which will connect with the Tide. Amtrak currently operates three daily Regional trains from Newport News to Richmond and the Northeast Corridor, but the Commonwealth of Virginia is currently studying options to extend daily service from Richmond to the new Harbor Park station by 2013. A 110 mph high-speed corridor is envisaged over the long-term.

A Cohesive Approach

The debut of the Tide light-rail service later this year not only represents a new and efficient means to move people through Norfolk, but also the first step in the forging of a broader identity for the Hampton Roads region. The prospect of the route’s expansion into Virginia Beach offers opportunities to focus economic development at and around rail stations and improve connectivity for a rapidly growing metropolitan area. In all, the Tide isn’t a single rail line, but rather an important element of a more focused strategy to enhance the region’s vitality.

“Rather than having a shotgun approach, a comprehensive approach seems to be in everybody’s interest,” said Councilman Harry Diezel of the Virginia Beach City Council. “From the standpoint of redevelopment, it’s probably the thing to do. The objective is to bring people to where they work and live and reduce the need for automobile transportation.”
The Hiawatha Line: Impacts on Land Use and Residential Housing Value

This report excerpt summarizes a study of economic impacts resulting from the construction of the Hiawatha Line. Three major research questions are investigated: What are the impacts on property values of proximity to a Hiawatha Line station? How have land-use changes around the Hiawatha transit stations? And what are the impacts of the transit stations on the level of housing investment within the corridor?

The first research question focuses on the impact of the line on the real estate market. Using tax assessor’s data, we examine trends in residential property sales before and after development of the Hiawatha Line. The assessor’s data provides data on most recent sales prices as well as detailed information on property attributes. The data allow us to control for a range of variables that determine sales value in order to isolate the impact of proximity to a transit station. We examine home sales from 1997 to 2007, both within station areas and in the larger southeast Minneapolis housing sub-market which we use as a control group. We use 2004, the year the Hiawatha Line completed construction, as the break point between pre- and post-light rail.

The second research question is an examination of how land-uses have changed around Hiawatha stations. We develop several measures of the land-use characteristics within station areas utilizing data from the Metropolitan Council – the Twin Cities’ lead planning organization – covering a period between 1984 and 2005. We focus our attention on an area defined by a quarter mile radius from the station. We examine home sales from 1997 to 2007, both within station areas and in the larger southeast Minneapolis housing sub-market which we use as a control group. We use 2004, the year the Hiawatha Line completed construction, as the break point between pre- and post-light rail.

The third research question focuses on the degree of investment in the housing stock that may have been induced by the Hiawatha Line. In this analysis we utilize data on construction permits issued within the city of Minneapolis from 2000 to 2007. We compare the rate and value of permits over the eight-year period, comparing station areas to comparison areas more distant from the Hiawatha Line stations.

The Hiawatha Line Project Narrative

Light-rail transit in Minnesota has been heavily debated and has received varying degrees of support over the last 25 years. In 1998 and 1999 support for light rail progressed to the stage that state and federal funds were granted to the Hiawatha Light Rail Line connecting the airport and Mall of America to downtown Minneapolis. From its inception, the Hiawatha Line has been characterized by significant cooperation between public agencies at all levels of government.

The Hiawatha Light Rail began construction in 2001 and started service in 2004. It consists of 17 stations along 12 miles of track (see map to right). The northern terminus of the line is at the intersection of Hennepin Avenue and 5th Street in downtown Minneapolis, and the southern end of the line is at the Mall of America in Bloomington. Two of the stations service terminals at the Minneapolis-St. Paul international airport where the line travels in a 1.4 mile tunnel. Thirteen of the station platforms are served by a total of 46 bus routes to provide timed transfers. Fares for bus and rail transportation are interchangeable. Ticketing is based on the honor system and fares can be purchased at train platforms. Compliance is ensured by random checks and the issuance of $180 fines for unticketed riders. During rush hours (6 a.m. - 9 a.m. and 3 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.) the trains run every 7.5 minutes with trains arriving on 10, 15 and 30 minute schedules for day time, evening and late night respectively.

One of the goals for light rail in the Twin Cities was to reduce or slow the growth of traffic congestion. In 1990 30 percent of the freeway lanes in the region were congested. By 2000 congestion of metro area freeway lanes had grown to 60 percent. A 2004 survey of metro residents listed traffic congestion as the number one problem in the area. Goals for the entire transit system are to increase ridership by 50 percent between 2005 and 2020 and to double ridership by 2030. The Metropolitan Council has moved to expand the regional bus system and to develop dedicated transitways for bus and light rail in order to meet future ridership goals.

Examining Hiawatha Line Station Zones

The 17 Hiawatha Line stations are located in a diverse set of neighborhoods. The downtown Minneapolis station areas from the northern terminals (Warehouse district station) to the Downtown East/Metromall station have little land-use diversity, being dominated by commercial land uses and having very few residential properties. The downtown stops are typically destinations for those travelling on the Hiawatha Line. The neighborhood corridor of the line stretches from the Cedar Riverside station on the north to the VA Medical Center station to the south. These station areas have a greater mix of land uses – especially the Franklin and Lake Street stations – that become more residential as one moves south along the line. The neighborhood corridor stations are primarily origin stations; most of the riders using these stations begin their LRT trips at these stations. There are significant differences in the demographic (and housing stock) profiles between the Cedar Riverside and Franklin Avenue stations in the northern section of the neighborhood corridor and the stations from 13th Street south to the VA. The northern stations have greater levels of racial diversity, lower incomes, and more multifamily housing compared to the southern stations in the neighborhood.
Housing locations closest to the Hiawatha line stations have yielded the highest values along the route. The Lake Street station occupies a middle ground both geographically and demographically. The third identifiable subset of station areas along the Hiawatha Line is made up of the Fort Snelling station and the two airport stations. These station areas are surrounded by institutional land uses with no residential properties. Finally, the southernmost stations of the line are in the city of Bloomington and are surrounded primarily by commercial properties, including the Mall of America. In general, the institutional and commercial station areas at the southern end of the line are destination stations (the 28th Street station is a notable exception, having park and ride facilities nearby).

Key Findings

- Single-family homes sold within a half-mile radius of the station areas along the neighborhood corridor are 16.4 percent lower in price before 2004 than homes sold in the larger area of Minneapolis sub-market. After 2004, single family homes within station areas sold for 4.2 percent more than homes in the comparison area.

- There is a significant accessibility effect for single-family residential properties located within station areas west of the Hiawatha Line. Location closer to the stations is associated with higher property values that extend beyond a half-mile. There is also a negative, nuisance effect for properties that are close to the tracks. This effect is of a smaller magnitude than the positive, accessibility effect.

- Properties on the east side of the Hiawatha Line do not benefit from proximity to the line. This is likely due to the intervening effect of the four-lane Hiawatha Avenue and the strip of industrial land use immediately adjacent to the highway on the east. The combination of these pushes the nearest residential property close to 200 meters away from the line and its stations. Furthermore, the large industrial structures create a visual barrier between the residential properties on the east and the Hiawatha Line.

- Development of the Hiawatha Light Rail Line has produced an average $5,229 price premium per single family home in the station areas. This translates to an aggregate increase in home value of $18.3 million for homes sold in the station areas since 2004. Applied to all single family homes in the station areas, the Hiawatha Line has produced an aggregate premium of $29.4 million.

- Properties with multifamily housing located within station areas have also benefitted from development of the Hiawatha Line. West of Hiawatha, proximity to stations is associated with an increase in value of roughly $350 per meter. As with single-family properties, there is also a smaller nuisance effect associated with proximity to the tracks. The positive accessibility effect, however, is of a greater magnitude than the nuisance effect, producing an overall price benefit for multifamily properties. As with single-family properties, these patterns are not repeated east of the Hiawatha Line.

- Development of the Hiawatha Light Rail Line has produced an average $15.75 price premium per multifamily property in the station areas. This translates to an aggregate increase in property value of $5.4 million for multifamily properties that have sold since 2004. Applied to all multifamily properties in the station areas, the Hiawatha Line has produced an aggregate premium of $17.7 million.

- All told, the development of the Hiawatha Line has resulted in a combined price premium of $25.2 million for residential properties sold after 2004 in the station areas from Cedar Riverside on the north to the V.A. Medical Center to the south. When applying the increase in value to all residential properties along Hiawatha’s neighborhood corridor, the LRT line has produced an increase of $47.1 million in residential property value between 2004 and 2007.

- There has been a significant amount of new housing construction immediately adjacent to the Hiawatha Line since 1997; 183 percent more than would be expected given rates of new construction throughout the southeast Minneapolis sub-market. Aerial photographs show fill-in construction of parcels adjacent to the line that had been kept vacant to accommodate potential widening of Hiawatha Avenue. In total, there were 67 residential properties constructed within 300 feet of the light rail tracks after funding for the Hiawatha project was announced in 1997.

- An analysis of building permits from 2000 through 2007 shows little difference between the number of building permits for station areas and for the larger sub-market comparison area. Three exceptions to this pattern exist: permit activity within a quarter mile of the Franklin Avenue station, the Lake Street station and the VA station were all well above the sub-market rate for the 2000-2007 period. It is notable that station-area planning and re-zoning efforts by the city of Minneapolis were completed first for the Franklin Avenue and Lake Street station areas. The greater rate of investment reflected in permit activity may be a result of completed planning processes in those station areas.

- When analyzed by value, permitting activity along the neighborhood corridor accounted for 6 percent of aggregate residential value at the quarter mile scale, compared to 4 percent for the larger sub-market comparison group. This suggests that station areas saw larger-scale building activity than the comparison area for the 2000-2007 period.

- There has been little systematic effect of the Hiawatha Line on the land-use patterns of station areas. Measures of vacancy and undeveloped land, land-use intensity, land-use type, and diversity show modest levels of change over an extended period of time from 1984 and 2006. The changes that have occurred since 2000, however, are indistinguishable in scale or pattern from those that occurred in previous years. Our data on land use extends only to 2005, just one year after opening of the Hiawatha Line. It is likely that greater land-use changes may occur in the future.

Overall Impact

This report presents the results of an examination of the economic and land-use impacts of the Hiawatha light-rail line. The findings indicate that construction of the Hiawatha Line has had a positive effect on property values within station areas. The effect is limited to the west side of the line; on the east side a four-lane highway and a strip of industrial land uses intervenes and eliminates any positive impact of the line. Results also show a high level of residential investment within station areas compared to the control area. No changes in land use patterns were detected since completion of the light rail line. This study demonstrates that completion of the Hiawatha Line has generated value and investment activity in the Minneapolis housing market.

Responding to the need to connect the Twin Cities via high rail, the 11-mile Central Corridor light-rail project is currently under construction. Upon its anticipated opening in 2014, the route between the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul will serve 18 new stations and is projected to carry more than 42,000 daily riders. The Central Corridor will share five stations with the existing Hiawatha Line in downtown Minneapolis to reach the Target Field Station. In St. Paul, the line will connect with the city’s Union Depot, which—beginning in 2012—will host Amtrak’s Daily Duluth-Bound between Chicago, Ill., and Seattle, Wash., as well as Portland, Ore., and has been awarded $35 million in investment through the U.S. Department of Transportation’s TIGER program. The project will transform the 1923 depot into a multimodal transportation facility and prepare it to ultimately serve high-speed rail routes throughout the region.
Excursions

By W. Dennis Hodges

Are We There Yet?

Travelling Across Europe By Rail

W. Dennis Hodges toured European high-speed rail systems, including Spain’s Renfe network.

Parents on a driving trip with their children will often get the question, “Are we there yet?” Depending on their mood or perspective, the question can either be annoying or humorous. When in comes to the development of 21st century infrastructure and transportation in America, the same question has relevance – “Are we there yet?” – and depending on the perspective of those who hear it, the question can annoy some and inspire others.

Europe appears to be there. Its landscape from Great Britain to France, Germany and Austria; from Scandinavian nations to Switzerland and Spain is saturated with passenger rail infrastructure of sound and contemporary design that carries a passenger rail system that rivals anything that we have in the United States. Europe is clearly in the 21st century and gradually advancing faster and forward for generations to come, and recently I had a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the European rail system first-hand. Over the course of 25 days, I took advantage of invitations from three leading passenger rail companies to tour their manufacturing facilities.

Those companies included Alstom of La Rochelle and Strasbourg, France; Talgo of Madrid, Spain and Siemens of Krefeld and Munich, Germany, and of Vienna and Graz, Austria. I was also invited by the SwissRail Association to experience a passenger rail system in Switzerland that operates as efficiently a Swiss watch.

I also met with representatives of the German Railway System and the Swiss Railway System and visited the SNCF French Railway System Command Center in Paris, and I toured the Siemens Test Center in Germany, where I was privileged to actually drive a powerful passenger train. For doing so, Test Center Director Robert-André Grottong gave me a Certificate of Completion, of which I proudly show off for generations to come, and I now believe I am now ready to engineer a high-speed train in America – or, maybe not. Throughout my tour, I rode on some 33 high- or higher-speed trains across Europe; seven of which with the engineers in the cab of those trains. And what a thrilling experience that was!

Traveling in the cab of a 200 mph Siemens Velaro or Talgo 350; or a brand new 125 mph Bombardier EMU gave me a completely new perspective on 21st century passenger rail travel. What power! What fantastic scenery! For the latter, the SwissRail Association provided for me an amazing tour, led by executive director Michaela Stoeckli, of central Switzerland that had me on four trains traveling going through the center of the Swiss Alps from Zurich to Interlocken to Bern and then on to Basel where I caught the TGV back to Paris.

As magnificent as the high speed trains of Europe are, I came to realize that for us in the American Midwest, we may be promoting the wrong images. Heretofore, my group, the Indiana High Speed Rail Association has been showing off – and proudly so – the Alstom TGV; the Siemens Velaro and the Talgo 350; but in reality, that is not the equipment at which the eight-state Midwest Regional Rail System (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin) is looking.

I know Illinois, for example, is excited over the potential of these faster trains and in fact, so am I. I love what these amazing trains are capable of. But the Midwest consortium is taking a more conservative approach and calling for trains that run on a diesel-electric power supply at 110 MPH. This approach would be well served by trains that could include the Alstom Inter City Explorer, the Talgo Series 8, Siemens Viaggio and the Bombardier EMU; all

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me to Steve Rohillard of Siemens Germany, who introduced me to Matthias Maier, who, in turn, provided for me a most memorable and outstanding six-day itinerary that included a stunning rail tour of the Rhine River Valley through the center of Germany, and who then introduced me to Hanns-Dietrich Adams, inventor of the Siemens Railjet and my tour guide in Vienna and for Siemens in Austria. And finally, I need to express my appreciation to Nora Friend of Talgo USA, who introduced me to Mario Oriol, Lucia Rouces and to my gracious host and tour guide Joan Gasol of Talgo in Spain.

Are we there yet? Much of Western Europe is already there, and America, given the right motivation and political will, could soon catch up and maintain pace. The tour convincingly proved to me that high-speed trains are not just an answer, but are among the more critical answers that this country can find for its many economic questions. This is a product and system that clearly can lead to the further creativity and innovation so needed in the United States. We are lagging behind in these areas and need to move forward once again.

It’s a system that definitely has economic and business development written all over it, and that means jobs! Jobs – for generations to come. It is a transportation product that also means quality of life amenities and high-tech education, that is environmentally-friendly and a system that will significantly bring this great nation deep into the heart of the 21st century.

Are we there yet? Europe is the model for what can be done when it comes to high-speed rail manufacturing. Let’s now bring it home to re-start the engines of our great American manufacturing plants, and get them producing this most amazing transportation equipment now. Future generations are waiting for us to do so.

W. Dennis Hodges is the vice president of business development for the Indiana High Speed Rail Association, which is a membership-based advocacy working for the funding and implementation of the Midwest Regional Rail System. For information, call 219.793.3370 or email dennis@indianahighspeedrail.org

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W. Dennis Hodges at the helm of a European high-speed train (above) and visiting a manufacturing facility.

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The Capitol Limited

News on federal passenger rail policy and developments from the Nation’s Capitol

- Passenger Rail & Transit Receive $17.7 Billion in American Recovery & Reinvestment Act: The new legislation provides the largest-ever single investment in rail transit and intercity rail.

- President Obama Voices Support for Passenger Rail Investment: At his recent Town Hall meeting in Fort Myers, Fla., the President enthused about the support for passenger rail projects as a key facet of his economic stimulus effort.


- Analysis: Obama Positions Passenger Rail as Signature Item: Not only in the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act, but also planned in his forthcoming policy agenda, President Obama is establishing passenger rail as an area of special attention and support.

Guess the Station

This edition’s puzzle is the perfect fit for winter, judging by the copious amounts of snow shown in these photos. The wintry scene belies this community’s name, indicating rows of fruit trees. This same town is also responsible for accumulating a number of bills, but not the kind you might think. As always, send your guesses to raileditor@ctaa.org.
As the Central Corridor light-rail line connecting the downtowns of the Twin Cities – Minneapolis and St. Paul – works its way towards completion, we look back at the region’s once-extensive streetcar network. Note the lavender line that cuts from east to west through the center of the map, largely via University Ave. Much of that same route will soon host Central Corridor trains.
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