Ohio’s only passenger rail corridor development project just got a big boost. The City of Columbus will provide $250,000 to help fund planning for passenger rail that will link it to the Midwest’s economic capital. Another $100,000 may soon be coming from other Central Ohio entities. This will add to $350,000 already committed by cities, businesses and others for the portion between Lima, Fort Wayne and Chicago. Planning has already begun for improving the Lima-Gary, IN rail infrastructure, led by the Federal Railroad Administration and conducted by engineering firm HNTB.

Stakeholders along the route met May 24 in Fort Wayne to get an update of the planning work, described as “pre-NEPA” referring to the National Environmental Policy Act that guides the process for all transportation development projects.

This will add to $350,000 already committed by cities, businesses and others for the portion between Lima, Fort Wayne and Chicago. Planning has already begun for improving the Lima-Gary, IN rail infrastructure, led by the Federal Railroad Administration and conducted by engineering firm HNTB.

This will add to $350,000 already committed by cities, businesses and others for the portion between Lima, Fort Wayne and Chicago. Planning has already begun for improving the Lima-Gary, IN rail infrastructure, led by the Federal Railroad Administration and conducted by engineering firm HNTB.

Stakeholders along the route met May 24 in Fort Wayne to get an update of the planning work, described as “pre-NEPA” referring to the National Environmental Policy Act that guides the process for all transportation development projects.

Once the pre-NEPA plan is done early next year, the planning may be able to quickly move into engineering. The reason is that there are few rail corridor alternatives for linking the stakeholder cities. CSX’s Chicago, Ft. Wayne & Eastern (Gary-Dunkirk, OH) will be recommended. CSX’s Toledo Terminal and Scottslawn subdivisions (Dunkirk-Columbus) are favored by planners for passenger rail. They have the lightest freight traffic and link populations centers. En route stations and schedules will be identified in the operating plan.

Columbus funds plan for passenger rail to Chicago via Fort Wayne, Lima

Fast trains may link the Midwest's first- and third-largest cities (Chicago & Columbus) via Indiana's second-largest city (Fort Wayne) as Richmond, VA is linked to the Northeast by 8 daily round trips, including Amtrak train #86 slicing through the fog in Ruther Glen, VA on May 31 (Joe Garnett photo).

Ohio's only passenger rail corridor development project just got a big boost. The City of Columbus will provide $250,000 to help fund planning for passenger rail that will link it to the Midwest's economic capital. Another $100,000 may soon be coming from other Central Ohio entities. This will add to $350,000 already committed by cities, businesses and others for the portion between Lima, Fort Wayne and Chicago. Planning has already begun for improving the Lima-Gary, IN rail infrastructure, led by the Federal Railroad Administration and conducted by engineering firm HNTB.

Stakeholders along the route met May 24 in Fort Wayne to get an update of the planning work, described as “pre-NEPA” referring to the National Environmental Policy Act that guides the process for all transportation development projects.

Once the pre-NEPA plan is done early next year, the planning may be able to quickly move into engineering. The reason is that there are few rail corridor alternatives for linking the stakeholder cities. CSX’s Chicago, Ft. Wayne & Eastern (Gary-Dunkirk, OH) will be recommended. CSX’s Toledo Terminal and Scottslawn subdivisions (Dunkirk-Columbus) are favored by planners for passenger rail. They have the lightest freight traffic and link populations centers. En route stations and schedules will be identified in the operating plan.

Midwest rail plan sets new blueprint

The Federal Railroad Administration’s Midwest Regional Rail Planning Study is well underway. It will create a 40-year vision for passenger rail in the Midwest and build off the network envisioned in the Midwest Regional Rail Initiative a decade ago.

That initiative since served as a blueprint for $2.5 billion in federal grant applications for new locomotives, passenger cars, upgraded tracks, modernized stations, increased frequencies and faster travel times.

The new vision could have a similar impact on the future of passenger rail in the Midwest, including Ohio. The Ohio Rail Development Commission is participating in the plan.

That plan will help determine the priorities, studies and investments needed to advance projects for decades to come. This is why it’s critical the plan include faster trip times, more frequent departures and focus on broad networks rather than individual routes.

The most recent Stakeholder Planning Group workshop was held June 7 in St. Paul, MN (DETAILS). See the project Web site HERE and the latest newsletters and documents HERE.
Windsor-Toronto HSR is finally progressing

Just across Lake Erie, Ontario is getting serious about building high-speed rail (HSR). The province, already investing billions in Metro Toronto transit, will start environmental planning and preliminary engineering this fall.

To expand rail investment to more of Ontario, the province announced on May 19 it has allocated C$15 million (US $11 million) for design work on the line from Toronto to Windsor. It will serve intermediate stations at Pearson Airport, Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, London and Chatham.

A business-case analysis by Ontario outlines two options for the project. Scenario A is an electrified line operating at 200 mph on dedicated rights-of-way. Scenario B is an electrified line using a mix of existing infrastructure and dedicated new alignments to achieve speeds of up to 155 mph.

The assessment found that Scenario A offered a Benefit-Cost Ratio (BCR) of 0.36 for Phase 1 (Toronto-London) and 0.17 for Phase 2 (London-Windsor), rendering this option not viable. The low BCR is due to the need for extensive tunneling, which resulted in a base cost of C$19 billion, excluding contingencies for the full corridor.

Scenario B has a BCR of 1.02 for Phase 1 and 0.24 for Phase 2, reflecting higher forecast demand on the Toronto-London section. The base cost for this option is C$7.5 billion, excluding contingencies.

From Toronto Union Station, HSR trains would use GO Transit’s Kitchener corridor. HSR trains would share the line with the Union-Pearson Express and planned, electrified GO Regional Express Rail (RER) services on the corridor to Kitchener. This mixed operation involves infrastructure improvements that can be shared with the RER project. Peak HSR service of three trains per hour each way is proposed on this section with two trains per hour off-peak.

From Kitchener-Waterloo’s planned multi-modal hub, HSR trains would head west to London on a new dedicated double-track line. Toronto-London may be traveled in 78 minutes vs. two hours by train now. Driving is often slower due to worsening traffic on Highway 401 and other roads.

From London to Windsor, trains would run hourly on a new electrified single-track along existing freight tracks. Windsor-Chatham is already operated by VIA passenger trains at 100 mph. More than 12 million people live along the Toronto-Windsor route. Construction could start by 2022 with service starting in 2025. The project will be overseen by a new governing body, High Speed Rail Corp.

Chicago Union Station development announced

Amtrak has designated a team lead by Riverside Investment & Development Co. as the Master Developer for a $1 billion development of Chicago Union Station and neighboring Amtrak-owned properties. All Ohio Amtrak trains have their western terminus at Chicago Union Station.

The conceptual design by Riverside, in conjunction with co-developer and co-venture partner Convexity Properties, includes three phases projected to be completed in about six years.

Project priorities include improved street entrances and pedestrian traffic flow entering and leaving Union Station, as well as improved pedestrian-friendly landscaping and open spaces. The proposed commercial development will total about 3.1 million square feet from all three phases.

From Kitchener-Waterloo’s planned multi-modal hub, HSR trains would head west to London on a new dedicated double-track line. Toronto-London may be traveled in 78 minutes vs. two hours by train now. Driving is often slower due to worsening traffic on Highway 401 and other roads.

From London to Windsor, trains would run hourly on a new electrified single-track along existing freight tracks. Windsor-Chatham is already operated by VIA passenger trains at 100 mph. More than 12 million people live along the Toronto-Windsor route. Construction could start by 2022 with service starting in 2025. The project will be overseen by a new governing body, High Speed Rail Corp.

Chicago Union Station development announced

Amtrak has designated a team lead by Riverside Investment & Development Co. as the Master Developer for a $1 billion development of Chicago Union Station and neighboring Amtrak-owned properties. All Ohio Amtrak trains have their western terminus at Chicago Union Station.

The conceptual design by Riverside, in conjunction with co-developer and co-venture partner Convexity Properties, includes three phases projected to be completed in about six years.

Project priorities include improved street entrances and pedestrian traffic flow entering and leaving Union Station, as well as improved pedestrian-friendly landscaping and open spaces. The proposed commercial development will total about 3.1 million square feet from all three phases.
National “Rally For Trains” events this summer

Amtrak passenger trains will still be running this summer, but rail advocates will be raising awareness nationwide that hundreds of cities will be without trains if Congress OK’s the Trump Administration’s proposed $525 million Amtrak budget cut. The National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) is organizing the nationwide rallies starting June 23, with more events due this summer in communities throughout the USA, including in Ohio.

"We’re planning a comprehensive campaign that will be the broadest and loudest NARP has ever mounted," said NARP President Jim Mathews. "This summer we’ll create billboards, radio ads, newspaper op-eds, and social-media content to support this nationwide effort to save our long-distance trains."

All Aboard Ohio is participating. Keep checking our Web site for the latest details on cities, dates/times, and more for the rallies in communities with Amtrak stations.

Congress reached an omnibus spending agreement in early May that would have increased investment in passenger rail in 2017. However Congressional leaders are unwilling to move that bill and instead rely on continuing resolutions until it can pass the 2018 budget. Trump wants the same cuts to Amtrak in 2018 that he proposed for 2017, which means a $524 million cut for 2018 and a $1 billion cut in each of the following years.

That would eliminate all long-distance trains in 2018, including all passenger rail service in Ohio. All train service is threatened, including state-supported short-distance trains and the Northeast Corridor. All trains share revenues from connecting passengers as well as the costs of fixed facilities (stations, rights of way, maintenance facilities, etc.). Removing the long-distance trains makes operating the rest of the network less cost-effective and more vulnerable to dissolution.

For more, see NARP’s new Towns Without Trains Web site HERE.

RTA breaks ground on $7.5 million Campus station

Community leaders and officials of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) on May 31 broke ground for a new station on the site of the current station at 2820 E. 34th St.

It is called the Campus Station because it is near the Tri-C Metro Campus. The station serves three rail lines – the Red (heavy rail), Green and Blue lines (light rail), as well as bus routes 15, 19 and 76.

The total project budget is $7.5 million, with $6.0 million going to construction by the Panzica Construction Co. of Mayfield Village. Federal funds will cover about 80 percent of the construction cost.

When completed in late 2018, the Campus Station will be ADA-compliant. RTA expects it to be a major boost to the Campus District and the Opportunity Corridor. Instead of escalators and elevators, it will use an extended ramp design.

Red Line service began in 1971 after high-level platforms were added to the station. That was 16 years after the heavy-rail trains began operation.

Several years of planning went into the project. In November 2014, RTA gathered input on the future of the East 34th station and two stations on East 79th. All have low ridership.

In 2015, RTA assessed options to best serve this area. All Aboard Ohio urged relocating the East 34th station to the extended East 9th Street, near activity centers and development sites.

RTA chose to replace the existing station and work with the city and local development agencies to boost density and transit-oriented development around the station. This would help ensure that investment in a new station would yield positive results. All Aboard Ohio is advocating for a route extension of the E-Line Downtown Trolley to the Campus Station.
All Aboard Ohio

OHIO ASSOC. OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

230 West Huron Road #85.53
Cleveland, Ohio 44113

844-464-7245 (toll-free)
info@allaboardohio.org (click it!)

Illustration of the month

All Aboard Ohio Executive Director Ken Prendergast points out the great work by our Toledo Coordinator Bill Gill at the opening ceremonies of the 10th Annual Toledo National Train Day at MLK Plaza station. Mr. Gill, seen at the left of Mr. Prendergast, has organized every year’s installment of the Toledo Train Day, drawing thousands of visitors each time. The events feature full-size locomotives and rail cars on display, model trains, vendors of railroadiana, kids rides and activities, and information about new and proposed railroad developments. Also pictured (at far left) is Peter LeCody, chairman of the National Association of Railroad Passengers and (at far right) District 3 City Councilman Peter Ujvagi. Toledo Mayor Paula Hicks-Hudson (not pictured) opened the ceremonies (Beth Gill photo).

Campaign starts for better Cincinnati transit

Long after the jobs sprawled beyond the city of Cincinnati, the transit system was still being funded by a 0.3% earnings tax on Cincinnati jobs. That has proved to be an obsolete way of funding transit in two ways.

First, the existing tax is failing to meet the existing needs of the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA). The transit system, operating as Cincinnati Metro, is unable to replace aging buses and maintain the existing network which extends beyond the city but gets no tax support from those areas.

Second, the existing tax doesn’t allow Metro to offer transit service to reach the growing number of jobs that are locating outside of the city of Cincinnati. One out of five adults in Cincinnati doesn’t have a car and many more share cars with others. Only 4% of the region’s jobs are accessible within a 1-hour transit commute.

To address this difficult situation, the Better Bus Coalition is urging a 1-cent, countywide sales tax be put on the November ballot in Hamilton County. All Aboard Ohio’s board in May voted to support the coalition.

SORTA’s board will vote on whether to seek a sales tax at its next meeting at 9 a.m., Tuesday, June 20, at 602 Main St., Suite 1100, Cincinnati.

The sales tax would pay for new, more efficient buses that use cleaner fuels or even electricity and expand the system with dozens of new countywide routes to access more job sites and riders.

While rail likely won’t be part of this plan, it could be in the future once the agency is financially stabilized. A more detailed investment and expansion plan will be issued soon to show specifically what the levy would pay for.

“Our elected officials have kicked the can down the road for decades,” said coalition President Cam Hardy. “Either we step up and properly fund our transit system locally or it will collapse in a few years.”