

RAILGRAM

NJT Rail Celebrates 40th Anniversary With a Special Train Ride and a One-Day Exhibit in Hoboken

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

Although NJ Transit Rail was founded at the beginning of 1983 and started operating at that time, the “official” celebration of its 40th anniversary was held in September and at the beginning of October, as reported elsewhere in this issue of the *Railgram*. Twenty-eight of the railroad’s original employees were honored at the agency’s Board meeting on September 14. The rest of the celebration took place 2½ weeks later, on the weekend of September 30 and October 1.

The Saturday event was a commemorative train ride, named the *40th Anniversary Express* and run in cooperation with the United Railway Historical Society (URHS). The trip ran on the North Jersey Coast Line with no rare mileage, except for the turnaround loop at the end of the line at Bay Head. The train’s consist was the main attraction. It was pulled by two ALP-46A motor units: #4636, wrapped in the historic Pennsylvania Railroad livery of Tuscan Red with gold stripes, and #4640. The latter featured a design with the original “disco stripe Retro Scheme” of orange, magenta, and blue chevrons that the agency used in its early days, along with a new design commemorating the anniversary.

The trip also recreated a ritual that took place in regular operation on the line until 1988: an engine change at South Amboy, where the electric motor units were removed and replaced with diesel locomotives to take the trains to the Shore. For the occasion, NJT used the last two F40PH-2CAT units on its roster: #4119 and #4120.

There were also five Comet-V cars that are used in regular service, along with two historic cars each from the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central, which merged to form Penn Central in 1968. It cost either \$317 or \$425 to ride in the historic cars, and the fare in the Comet cars was \$90; compared to the “regular” round-trip base fare of \$29.25. Despite the high fare for the trip, it sold out 8 minutes after online sales were first offered, according to NJT CEO Kevin S. Corbett.

On Sunday, those units, along with other historic equipment, were on display at Hoboken Terminal. Two GH40PH-2 units from 1968, which might have pulled trains south of South Amboy, were on view: #4109 in its original dark-blue Jersey Central livery with gold lettering and the railroad’s Statue of Liberty logo, and #4101 in the “Bluebird” paint scheme originated in the 1970s by the New Jersey Department of Transportation. The other diesel locomotive on display was #3372, a U34CH “U-boat” built for the Erie-Lackawanna in 1971 and restored by the URHS. It is the only one of its class still in existence.

Numerous rail fans showed up for the occasion, some wearing Conrail-blue T-shirts. Along with ordinary riders and curiosity-seekers, including some families with young children, they walked on the platforms and photographed the historic units, and boarded some of the 1940s-vintage cars from the “Pennsy” and the

“Central” that formed part of the previous day’s consist. The occasion gave them a chance to take a closer look at equipment that only a lucky or wealthy few could ride.

In a statement delivered at a meeting of the NJ Transit Board on October 11, Coalition Chairperson Sally Jane Gellert said: “The day certainly brought to life local rail history and provided additional motivation for protecting and expanding current passenger rail.”

For more-detailed coverage of the weekend events, including photos of the special train by Editor-in-Chief William C. Vantuono, see “NJT 40th Anniversary Express: South Amboy Power Swap Redux” posted on October 19 at www.railwayage.com.

NJ Transit Honors Its Original Rail Employees

By **DAVID PETER ALAN**

New Jersey Transit Rail Operations (NJTRO) was founded as 1982 ended and 1983 began: the deadline that Congress had imposed for Consolidated Rail Corporation (Conrail) to give up the local passenger trains that it had been running along the Northeast Corridor (NEC) that Amtrak had owned since 1976. NJ Transit’s rail component was founded at the same time as Metro-North was formed to serve New York City’s northern suburbs and part of Connecticut, and SEPTA Regional Rail was established to serve the same purpose in the Philadelphia area.

As part of its commemoration of NJT Rail’s 40th anniversary, the agency honored 28 railroad employees who were transferred to NJT after having worked for Conrail, some of whom had also worked for its predecessor roads: Penn Central, Erie-Lackawanna, and Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ).

The ceremony took place at the agency’s Board meeting on September 14. The proclamation honoring the “Forty-year Club” was presented by NJDOT Commissioner and NJT Board Chair Diane Gutierrez-Scaccetti, NJT CEO Kevin S. Corbett, and Senior Vice-President and General Manager of Rail Operations James A. Sincaglia. “Today, we recognize employees who have been instrumental to the success of NJ Transit’s rail operations over the past 40 years,” Corbett said. “Their long-term commitment and dedication has been a cornerstone of our work to provide safe and reliable rail service to our customers.”

The honorees represented a number of different crafts on the railroad. The most-senior was John Boyington, who started in 1967 as a block operator. The highest-ranking was Andrew Mercogliano, who began his career with Penn Central in 1973, became a superintendent, and supervised the River Line, the diesel light-rail line between Trenton and Camden.

After the ceremony, the “Forty-year Club” members left the room to attend a reunion, amidst the sounds of applause and well-wishes from the audience.

For additional coverage of this event, see NJTRO honors ‘40-year Club, reported on September 15 at www.railwayage.com. A report on the history of the founding in 1983 of NJT Rail and the other railroads that were established at the same time can be found in the April 2023 issue of Railway Age magazine and on the Railway Age website.

(Newsletter continues on reverse)

HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE! Come to a Lackawanna Coalition meeting!

Fourth Monday of the month (except holidays), 6:45 p.m., always by phone, now again in person in Millburn. Next meetings: November 27 and December 18. info@lackawannacoalition.org

Report from the Chair

By **SALLY JANE GELLERT**, Chairperson

October started with a morning in Hoboken, enjoying the good weather and historic trains, in celebration of NJ Transit Rail's 40th anniversary year. We arrived as NJ Transit staff was setting out information tables and tote bags, and enjoyed photographing the equipment, reading the URHS information boards, and boarding 2 of the historic cars.

The Coalition had a couple of member excursions planned; one rained out for the second time, the other lightly attended on a better-weather day. We are considering a shorter, afternoon event in Montclair on a Friday afternoon, and a marathon or overnight field trip to western Pennsylvania to visit Henry Posner III's Railroad in the Spring.

Meanwhile, we prepare for our officer elections in December (when we meet 1 week early, on December 18th—as December 25th is a Monday this year). Our December meeting is generally festive, as a kickoff to the holiday season; we invite you to join us.

Officer Elections at December Meeting

Each December, the Lackawanna Coalition elects officers for the upcoming year; this year, we look to have a full slate and, as always, will take nominations from the floor.

Current officers are willing to retain their positions:

Sally Jane Gellert, Chairperson

Bob Hingel, Vice Chairperson

Bray Payeur, Treasurer

Daniel Chazin, Secretary

Vito Havrilla, Legislative Director

David Anderson, Technical Director

Running to fill vacancies are the following:

Rachel Herman, Communications Director

George Kaufer, Membership Director

All members who have joined before 1 July 2023 are eligible to vote; we will have a list of voting members at our November meeting. The Executive Committee will provide a means of voting by absentee ballot for those who indicate that they will require such accommodation; details will be finalized by the November Executive Committee and confirmed and explained at the November membership meeting.

ONE, A&C Buses Now Run by NJ Transit

By **GEORGE KAUFER**

With remote work still being fairly common (whether fully remote or hybrid) it is crucial to plan for a system that offers frequent service during both peak and off-peak hours. This allows for both leisure riders and riders heading to jobs with odd hours to be able to have a usable system that meets their needs.

The ONE Bus takeover does a decent job of meeting this goal. Rush hour service was slightly reduced, but off-peak spans and frequency were maintained. With A & C, service was reduced during the early days of the pandemic and the service span was not restored (buses still don't run past approximately 8:00 p.m.)

The DeCamp takeover was the most poorly handled of the three, with no off-peak (including weekends) or reverse-peak service despite rush hour service increasing fairly rapidly upon takeover. The excuse is a "driver shortage," but off-peak service usually doesn't require much in the way of extra drivers, just some better coordination of shifts.

Pre-pandemic, most of DeCamp's service area had a bus every 10 minutes during rush hour and every 30 minutes off-peak. This was reduced to a fraction of that during the pandemic, and yet it is considered a big surprise when riders gravitate to more frequent bus and rail service from such areas as Willowbrook Mall and Allwood Park & Ride.

Likewise, ONE Bus kept its span but reduced its frequency during the pandemic. Back in the 1970s, a few years after the 1967 riots caused population loss in much of Newark, those routes were still running every 6-8

minutes for most of the day. Now, it is every 20-30 minutes, with even less frequent service along the #44 and outer branches of the #24. There is much potential to bring back ridership if NJ Transit puts in some effort. (Hopefully an increase in frequency is planned as part of the NewBus Newark bus redesign, now that these routes are integrated into the NJT network. Similar improvements could happen as bus routes in other areas [such as Camden] are considered).

RUN Fall 2023: Virtual Conference

By **VITO HAVRILLA**, Legislative Director
On Saturday, October 21st, the Rail Users' Network (RUN) held a virtual conference, "Passenger Rail & the Environment – Natural Allies: Environmental benefits of passenger rail / rail transit in North America," with 7 speakers:

- Katherine J. Garcia (Sierra Club's Campaign Director, "Clean Transportation for All"): replacing fossil fuels with clean energy—electrification, addressing inequities, and supporting good jobs.
- Darrell Clarke (Sierra Club, Los Angeles Chapter, Transportation Committee Chair): history of Santa Monica's Expo Line—overcoming local opposition, funding through a half-cent sales tax, and the climate rationale for passenger rail.
- Barry Scott (Board Member, Coastal Rail Santa Cruz), "Santa Cruz Friends of the Rail and Trail"—lessons learned: local elections matter; alliances with unions, businesses, and service organizations are important; losing a freight easement loses a railroad.
- Tom White (Co-Chair, Climate Rail Alliance): problems of U.S. rail—recommendation: separate companies to provide open access.
- Brian Yanity (Vice President-South, RailPac, and RUN Board Member): need and benefits of electrification of rail lines—history in this country, tied to coal extraction; electric freight and passenger rail through the Rocky Mountains and Cascades.
- Peter Cole (TrainRiders NorthEast and Maine Rail Group Representative): efforts to save the hundreds of state-owned miles of track from being torn up and converted to trails; the Maine fight centers on passenger expansion and corridor preservation.
- Michael Wojnar (Senior Advisor, Innovation & Policy at NYC's MTA): planned New York City Congestion Pricing, with positive effects on transportation & air quality.

After the speakers' presentations, there was a public forum during which RUN chairperson Richard Rudolph noted that Montana Senator Jon Tester recently blocked an Amtrak board nominee. Currently almost all Amtrak board members live on NEC; none are from the western U.S.

Then Lackawanna Coalition Chairperson Emeritus David Peter Alan gave the closing remarks, noting that this was a single-issue-based conference (environmental aspects of passenger rail), not the usual RUN Conference on a specific region. One looming problem for transit around the country is that COVID-19 relief money will run out in the next couple of years. Agencies must start planning to attract riders back with frequent and reliable service.

Coming Attractions for Meeting Presentations

We have a great line-up of presentations for you at our upcoming meetings! Last month, Lackawanna Coalition Chairperson Emeritus David Peter Alan took us on a trip through Canada on VIA Rail. In November, joining us by Zoom from New Orleans is Alan Drake to give us an international perspective on rail, and for December we have invited Coalition Treasurer Brad Payeur to describe some of his international rail travel.

Lackawanna Coalition

Sally Jane Gellert
Chairperson

David Peter Alan, Esq.
Chair Emeritus

Bob Hingel
Vice Chairman

Brad Payeur
Treasurer

Daniel D. Chazin, Esq.
Secretary

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