

RAILCET INTELLIGENCE REPORT

To: RAILCET
From: Ray Chambers- Senior Policy Advisor to RAILCET
Date: October 25, 2023

Subject: Special Meeting of the APTA Intercity Passenger Rail Steering Committee

Meeting Highlights

Chris Brady, Chair of the APTA Passenger Rail Committee, convened a special session of the Executive Committee to follow up on the Orlando meeting and the upcoming announcements of Corridor ID Projects.

Orlando Transform Conference Review

Chris and Art Guzzetti, APTA Policy VP, declared the Orlando meeting earlier this month a giant success. Over 12,000 people participated, making it the largest transportation event in the western world according to Art.

- *FRA* was there with some 70 staff. Paul Nissenbaum, FRA Associate Administrator for Railroad Development announced he is in the process of hiring 70 additional staff for the Corridor ID program.
- *Amtrak* President Stephen Gardner brought a large contingent which were embedded in several panels.
- *Stadler Hydrogen* – California Deputy Transport Secretary Chad Edison described the ongoing California program and announced after extensive testing the hydrogen trains are being introduced into service. This is a part of California's \$10 billion multiyear zero-emission package. The first train sets are operating on the San Bernardino Redlands commuter line which is operated by Herzog.
- *Brightline* launched its new service to Orlando during the conference. Art had an awkward moment in terms of its central role in the Orlando conference, as Brightline has dropped out of APTA. Brightline continues to get major publicity. Secretary Pete Buttigieg rode the train on October 18. My “insider channels” tell me Buttigieg is prepared to commit as much as \$ 4 billion in grant funding into the project and that Biden has bought in. The reason is this is the only major project that can be announced prior to the election. The labor deals are all agreed to.

Corridor Identification and Development Program - CID

- *FRA Leadership* - There was a small APTA meeting with Administrator Bose Deputy Mitchell to scope the implementation of the CID program prior to Orlando. It was decided at Orlando there will be regular meetings going forward. I requested that the rail operating and construction contractors be represented at future meetings. The next meeting will likely be in January after the Step #1 CID projects are released.
- *CID Projects Announcement* – FRA now believes it will be just before Thanksgiving or early December. Over 100 projects were submitted. Each project selected will receive a half million dollar planning grant. It is estimated that there will probably be less than 50 projects finally selected. This will begin the CID funding pipeline that will lead to an intercity network. The next stage will be Project Development. This grants will then require a 10% match.
- *Approved CID Projects* – Not discussed in the APTA meeting, but Important to rail construction and operations contractors is that a state applying for federal CID project grants may either exclusively partner with Amtrak through the Traditional Amtrak Model or select alternative partners through the Competitive Direct Access Model. We must analyze these projects quickly and in detail as soon as they are released to determine which are pen to contractor contracting.
- *CID Follow up* -- There is an enormous amount unknown about how the CID program will unfold. This needs continuing intense review. The next opportunity for face-to-face discussion will be the December 6 APTA intercity passenger seminary in Washington, D.C. Presumably the Step 1 projects will have been selected by that point.

Surface Transportation Board – Art and Chris are in discussion with STB Members on their new Intercity Passenger Rail Office and whether they should expand their role in the oversight and promotion of intercity passenger service. This is putting together a Select Committee to progress the issue and I requested to be on it.

Consolidation of Conferences –There are too many conferences. A special committee will be convened to review all APTA-AASHTO, etc. conferences and strive for consolidation for several years.

Speak with a Single Voice - Congressman Seth Moulton, a passenger rail advocate, expressed to Chris his concern that the rail community message on the future of high speed and intercity passenger rail is fractured. There needs to be an effort to achieve a single voice. I agree with Moulton. Amtrak is now that voice in the mainstream media. We need a new voice that reflects the broader interests of construction and operations contractors and other stakeholders.

APTA INTERCITY Passenger Rail Steering Committee Agenda

Special Meeting

October 20, 2023

1. Notes and news
2. from AASHTO Rail Council meeting in San Diego
3. Preparation for meeting with Amit Bose and Jennifer Mitchell on FRA grants procedures
4. Preparation for meeting with STB Commissioners on passenger rail evolution and growth
5. APTA HS&IPR program focus:
 - December 6, 2023: HS&IPR Program in DC / December 7 Leg Committee and Capitol Hill Reception
 - Thursday, April 11, 2024: Half-day Passenger Rail Forum the week of APTA Legislative Conference
 - June 2 – 5, 2024, APTA 2024 Rail Conference in Cleveland, OH
 - September 29 – October 2, 2024: Strong HS&IPR track / presence at the APTA TRANSform Conference in Anaheim / California HSR events
 - June 2025: Strong HS&IPR track at APTA Rail Conference in San Francisco