

WHEEL CLICKS

Pacific Railroad Society Inc.

AUGUST 2008

RIDING THE COAST STARLIGHT TO BAKERSFIELD

by KEN RUBEN

Amtrak rerouted the *Coast Starlight* via the San Joaquin Valley route on June 22, 2008, using the Metrolink and Union Pacific routes through Lancaster and Tehachapi to Bakersfield and then the regular Amtrak Santa Fe route to Sacramento with no intermediate station stops.

I was one of many who rode that day (northbound on Tr. No. 14 and Amtrak *Thruway* bus back). PRS members aboard included Ed Von Nordeck, Charles Varnes, Thomas Grose, Jed Hughes, Rolland Graham and myself.

I arrived at the back of Union Station around 9:41 a.m. and saw James Smith, Vice-President, South of RailPAC (Rail Passenger Association of California and Nevada) in the tunnel and he advised me to get my ticket (I had a ticket but in this case, he was referring to a boarding pass which I eventually got up at the gate area). I went aboard and found Art Tomlin, Jed Hughes and other friends and saw Charles Varnes, and John Ulloth and Larry Boerio outside the *Coast Starlight*. I didn't see Charles during the rest of the trip as he was in the sleeper section while I was in the coach section.

Everyone was excited about doing this route for the first time in some 30-35 years (except for the time two years ago that David Gunn with his Amtrak business car, *Beech Grove*, on the rear), had the *Coast Starlight* rerouted). Many were taking pictures, comparing notes, etc. There were many motorcadars, including my friends John Ulloth and Larry Boerio, who were keeping in touch with me via cell phone as to our location.

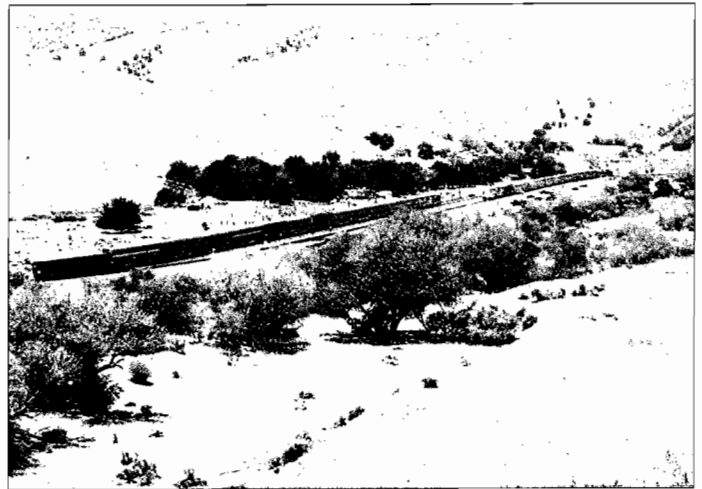
There were members of many organizations represented unofficially, including NARP (National Association of Railroad Passengers), RailPAC (Rail Passenger Association of California), Trainweb.com, Southern California Transit Advocates, and of course, Pacific Railroad Society.

The consist north consisted of: Amtrak Genesis engines 113 and 119, Baggage 1734, sleepers 39005, 32094, 32086, 32118, 37007, Cross Country Café, 38055 diner, 33014 Sightseer Lounge, coaches 34028, 34510 (Arcade Coach where I was assigned), 34064, 34061 and 80033, *Silver Solarium*, the privately owned *ex-California Zephyr* dome observation-lounge car.

I had conversations with many on the train including Bruce Heard, Ed Von Nordeck, Rolland Graham, Art Tomlin, Jed Hughes, Matt Melzer and Dennis Lytton of NARP and many others. Art Tomlin, Thomas Grose and I had lunch in the diner and as we were eating, met Tr. No. 11 at Caliente which had the private car, *Scottish Thistle*, on the rear.

We arrived at Bakersfield about 3:30 p.m. but didn't unload until about 4:10 p.m. or so due to *San Joaquins* arriving and departing.

My friend, Eugene, and I boarded one of the Amtrak buses



The northbound *Coast Starlight* (right) approaches its stopped southbound counterpart at Caliente on June 22, 2008, while detouring between Los Angeles and Sacramento.

Photo by John Ulloth

and we departed about 4:35 p.m., arriving LA Union Station 6:27 p.m., the same time that Tr. No. 11 arrived. Eugene and I went up to view Tr. No. 11. I stayed around the station awaiting John Ulloth and Larry Boerio.

In the meantime, I ran into Robin Bowers, one of the members of the Trainweb-train travel group and we then ran into members of the OCRHS (Orange County Historical Society), who were making one of their regular treks to LA and Olvera Street.

I had a light dinner with at Philippe's nearby later with John and Larry. After Philippe's, Larry Boerio drove John Ulloth and me to his car and then John drove me home.

CALIFORNIA INJURIES AND FATALITIES

California again leads the nation in trespassing injuries and fatalities. According to Federal Railroad Administration statistics, 127 incidents were recorded in the state in 2007. During a recent directed enforcement activity in Orange County, more than 20 persons were observed and cited for trespassing along the right-of-way by law-enforcement officers.

As a reminder it is only permissible to cross tracks at designated crossings. When crossing tracks, even where there is an active warning device such as a crossing gate that lowers to stop traffic with lights and bells, use caution and always look both ways. Active warning devices are only located at crossings. When you are trespassing, there is nothing to indicate the advancement of the oncoming train.



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PRS NEWS — ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

August 1 Board meeting, 7:30 p.m., Valencia Room at Joslyn Fri. Center, 210 N. Chapel Ave., Alhambra.
 Aug. 2, 9, Pacific Railroad Museum work party, 10 a.m. to 4 16, 23, 30 p.m., Bonita & Monte Vista Aves., San Dimas.
 Sats. Committee meeting: August 23.
 Aug. 2, 9, Rolling Stock repair day, 8:30 a.m. to ?, Saunders 16, 23, 30 Yard, Noakes & Herbert Sts., Commerce. Regular Sats. Day: 2, 16; Extra day: 9, 23, 30; Com. Meeting: 16.
 August 8 Membership meeting, 7:30 p.m., Alhambra Room at Joslyn Center, 210 N. Chapel Ave., Alhambra.
 August 15 Slide Night at Saunders Yard, 7:30 p.m., Noakes & Fri. Herbert Sts., Commerce. Everyone welcome.
 Sep. 5 Board meeting, 7:30 p.m., Valencia Room at Joslyn Fri. Center, 210 N. Chapel Ave., Alhambra.
 Sep. 6, 13, Pacific Railroad Museum work party, 10 a.m. to 4 20, 27 p.m., Bonita & Monte Vista Aves., San Dimas.
 Sats. Committee meeting: September 27.
 Sep. 6, 13, Rolling Stock repair day, 8:30 a.m. to ?, Saunders

20, 27 Yard, Noakes & Herbert Sts., Commerce. Regular Sats. day: 6, 20; Extra day: 13, 27. Committee Mtg.: 20.

MEETING PROGRAMS

by **RUSS DAVIES**

August 8: **Traction Night, Switzerland!** See interurbans entering major cities on streetcar tracks, old 1920s **box cabs** still in service, electric railroading in depots with giant train sheds, and major streetcar systems (called trams) still in service, and growing! **Switzerland is the world's biggest electric train set!** Slides from my visits in the early 90s. **Be there, and bring slide briefs! (For digital briefs, please contact Russ Davies, 310-454-0046, at least two weeks prior to meeting date, so we can accommodate you.)**

September 12: **Bill Farmer** was an outstanding and well-traveled railroad photographer, and a **slide collector as well!** He had numerous slide "trading partners" in the ranks of well-known photographers. This night we'll see a sampler of the work of those partners, many of them known by PRS members. **We'll see outstanding slides from all over the USA. Be there, and bring slide briefs!**

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

by **VIRGINIA GRUPP**

Late renewals were assigned Membership Numbers 417-458. New members voted into PRS on July 3, 2008, were Frederick Lilly, #414; David Markstrom, #415; William Martinez, #416; and Barry Herliny, #459.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY RIDERS

During the month of May 2008, the average number of week-day riders traveling on trains going to, from, or within Los Angeles County, other than on Amtrak, was 323,737. This was an increase of 8,721 riders per day from April or about 3 percent.

CALTRAIN NEWS

by **MIKE GONDON**

On July 4, Caltrain ran a total of six extra trains to accommodate the multitudes attending the Giants-Dodgers baseball game at AT&T Park and the fireworks display later that evening at Pier 39 in San Francisco. .

Only one of the extras ran northbound. It left San Jose at 10:20 a.m. and arrived in San Francisco at Noon, making all local stops. Two extras were run following the baseball game, and three extras were run following the fireworks, leaving San Francisco at 11:00 p.m., 11:15, and 12 Midnight.

On June 12 as part of its 100th anniversary, the city of Burlingame celebrated the grand opening of its newly remodeled train station. Begun last summer at a cost of \$20.5 million, the new station offers a range of improvements including a pedestrian plaza, enhanced landscaping, and wider sidewalks.

Perhaps most importantly, the new station now features outside boarding platforms with protected pedestrian crossings and fencing, which permits two trains to occupy the station at the same time, eliminating the hold out rule. With the new platforms, Burlingame also became a wheelchair accessible station for passengers with disabilities.

Caltrain's car shortage and daily mechanical problems continue. Three more cracked bolsters were discovered, but some of the cars have been returned to service, their trucks

replaced with trucks from other cars, which were out of service for different reasons. In addition, an extra Bombardier train set was created by using four four-car trains with one spare car instead of three five-car trains with two spare cars. No information was available on any temporary replacement cars.

To make matters worse, Caltrain is still experiencing a high number of fatalities. The most recent occurred June 30 at the San Bruno station when a young woman decided to lie down in front of Train No. 147. The fatality was Caltrain's ninth of the year, putting it on a pace equal to 2007.

ENVISIONING A VENICE HISTORY MUSEUM

The Venice Heritage Foundation is a newly formed public non-profit corporation, whose mission statement – “Envisioning a Venice History Museum” – encompasses the wish to establish the community's first heritage museum. Envisioned is a museum campus that will include as its “centerpiece” a restored original Pacific Electric Interurban Red Car from the early 1900s, which will be located in Centennial Park by the Venice – Abbot Kinney Memorial Public Library.

The Foundation's plan incorporates an additional adjunct building replicating the old pagoda-style PE substation that used to stand nearby along Venice Blvd., named “The Tokio Station,” that served Venice residents until 1950.

The Foundation is asking for your help. Please contact one of our volunteers to see how you can make this heritage museum a reality, or email us at VeniceHeritageMuseum@gmail.com. [Info. from Ralph Cantos]

INCREASE IN MASS TRANSIT

In May 2008, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Metrolink and Amtrak, the three major transit agencies serving greater Los Angeles, all reported increased rail ridership. For the MTA, which runs the city's subways and largest bus network, rail ridership jumped 6 percent in May compared to the same month last year, reflecting a growth from about 7.1 million monthly passengers to about 7.6 million, MTA spokesman Marc Littman said. Littman noted that a Metro day pass costs \$5, about the same as a gallon of gas, but that there are no limits on how far someone can travel on the agency's system for that price.

MTA's 6 percent overall increase in rail passengers was driven by a 21 percent increase in average weekday ridership on the Gold Line linking Pasadena to Downtown Los Angeles, which measured passengers from Monday through Friday between morning and evening rush hours. Last month, an average of 23,141 riders were climbing aboard that line each day, a record.

The Red Line, which connects Downtown with Hollywood and North Hollywood, saw a 10 percent increase in average weekday ridership, from 128,087 to 141,659 passengers, and the Blue Line, which connects Downtown with Long Beach, jumped 5 percent, to 79,291 daily passengers.

Metrolink commuter trains, which connect the Central City with areas as far away as San Bernardino, experienced a 5 percent gain in passengers in May, but an agency representative said that jump could pale in comparison to June ridership. Since the start of June, daily ridership has increased compared to the

same day last year by up to 15.6 percent, Metrolink spokeswoman Denise Tyrrell said. On June 17, 50,232 passengers boarded Metrolink trains – up from 43,443 on the same day last year – marking the first time in the agency's history that it crossed the 50,000-passenger threshold, Tyrrell said. We have no other explanation for this except the price of gas,” she said. “We're calling it ‘sticker shock and awe.’”

While transportation agencies welcome increased ridership, more passengers mean fewer seats, and some of Los Angeles' once relatively empty subway and rail cars are getting increasingly crowded. While Metrolink riders report crowded trains, the MTA subways and light rail lines are not pushing capacity, Littman acknowledged.

For Metrolink, meeting the new demand could prove challenging this summer since the agency currently has all of its rail cars in operation, Tyrrell said. The agency has ordered 107 more cars, but the first of those, which are manufactured in South Korea and assembled in Philadelphia, are not slated to arrive until June 2009, Tyrrell said.

In the meantime, Metrolink is in negotiations to lease cars from other public transit entities across the nation to meet demand, she said. But since increased rail ridership is a national trend, the market for leased cars is extremely competitive right now, she said.

“We do have reason to believe we will be able to lease rail cars,” said Tyrrell, adding that the agency's goal is to make sure every rider has a seat. “But we still maintain that standing on a Metrolink train is better than sitting in traffic.”

[Info. from *Los Angeles Downtown News*]

S. CALIF. COMMUTER RAIL RIDERSHIP by DICK FINLEY

Metrolink weekday, systemwide, average trips during May 2008 was 45,443. This was an increase from the previous month of 651 or about 1 percent. Metrolink weekday, systemwide, schedule adherence (within 5 minutes of scheduled time) was 95 percent, which was 1 percent worse than last month.

METROLINK FARES RISE

Metrolink fares will increase an average of 5.5 percent beginning June 24 to help pay for rising fuel costs. The fare increase is expected to generate about \$3 million in additional revenue. Diesel fuel costs are almost \$4.8 million more than the agency allocated for the current fiscal year.

“We did not anticipate diesel fuel doing what it did this year,” said Denise Tyrrell, a Metrolink spokeswoman. “We budgeted for \$2.50 per gallon, and now it's over \$4.50 a gallon. And we buy 6 million gallons a year.” Because Metrolink's fares are based on mileage, the new fares will vary, though none of the regular fares will increase by more than 10 percent.

Tyrrell said Metrolink's five county transit agency partners, which provide 45 percent of the commuter service's operating costs, are also paying more to combat rising costs. In April, Metrolink's board approved a 2 percent system-wide fare increase that builds on a previously approved 3.5 percent rate hike, both of which took effect in early July. Fares will go up an additional 3.5 percent in July 2009 as the final stage of Metrolink's three-year rollout of fare increases, Tyrrell said.

VERDICT IN TRAIN WRECK

A jury on June 26 convicted Juan Manuel Alvarez of 11 counts of first-degree murder for triggering the deadliest Metrolink train crash in history, when he parked his vehicle on railroad tracks three years ago and fled.

On Jan. 26, 2005, he parked his Jeep Cherokee on railroad tracks near Glendale. A southbound Metrolink train struck Alvarez's SUV, pushing it a quarter of a mile down the track. The southbound train derailed to the west, striking an unoccupied Union Pacific train parked on the adjacent track. The southbound train then jackknifed, ripping into the third car of a northbound Metrolink train passing on the east adjacent track.

The jury took little more than a day to convict Alvarez and also found him guilty of arson and a special circumstance allegation that makes him eligible for the death penalty. Jurors are expected to hear more testimony next month to determine whether he should be executed.

Metrolink spokeswoman Denise Tyrrell said her company shared in the family members' grief. "No matter what happens, we cannot look at this situation with anything but sadness," she said. "Nothing is going to bring these 11 people back."

Some crash survivors and victims' families have sued Metrolink, contending that the agency could have minimized the damage by placing an engine at the front of the train rather than the back. Tyrrell said such a practice could have made the losses worse had diesel in the engine caught fire.

[Two last sections from *Los Angeles Times*]

BOARD MEETING

At the Board of Directors meeting on June 27, 2008, and consistent with the adoption of the Fiscal Year 2008-09 Operating and Capital budgets by the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA) board, contracts were passed for ongoing work, including:

- Track and Structures Maintenance with Herzog Contracting Corporation for \$5,994,018.
- Maintenance of Equipment Services with Bombardier Transit Corporation for \$25,009,082.
- Metrolink Operator Services with Connex Railroad LLC for \$24,406,828.
- Maintenance of Fare Collection System with Affiliated Computer Services, Inc. for a new total contract authorization not-to-exceed amount of \$15,338,561.
- Signal and Communications Maintenance with Mass Electric Construction Company for \$8,539,933.
- Remanufactured Locomotives Increase Contract Funding Authorization with MotivePower, Inc. for contract funding authorization not-to-exceed \$44,379,733.45.
- Ticket Vending Machine Cash Collection and Counting Services with Los Angeles Federal Armored Services, Inc. for a total not-to-exceed amount of \$2,051,921.
- Law Enforcement Services with Los Angeles County Sheriff Department for \$6,315,581 and to support Metro collectable work for \$2,048,466.
- Seven other contracts for lesser amounts were approved.

SCRRA has identified rolling stock potentially available to lease from other transit agencies to replace currently leased equipment scheduled to be returned to Sound Transit during the next six to eight months.

BURBANK INTERSTATE -5 PROJECT

Caltrans proposes to construct two High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on Interstate 5 (I-5), one in each direction from Burbank Blvd. to Buena Vista St. The overall Caltrans' project includes the (a) widening of I-5 affecting the rail right-of-way; (b) extension of Empire Ave. and grade separation with Victory Pl. within the rail right-of-way; (c) closure of San Fernando Blvd. within the rail right-of-way; and grade separation of Buena Vista Ave. Los Angeles Metro is a significant funding partner in this project.

SCRRA will design and construct the relocated railroad facilities necessary for the freeway widening and new interchanges. The general scope of SCRRA's railroad work included in the Construction and Maintenance Agreement includes (a) two new railroad bridges to accommodate two new underpasses at Empire Ave. and Buena Vista St.; (b) all temporary and permanent railroad track and signal work and associated grading, drainage facilities and access driveways; (c) a raised embankment supported by retaining structures, which will elevate the existing two tracks to permanent locations and which will be wide enough to accommodate one additional future track; (d) ancillary support services including furnishing railroad inspectors, watchmen and flagmen to provide for the safe operation of trains during the construction, and (e) coordination support services related to the protection and relocation of longitudinal utilities within the rail right-of-way including telephone, fiber optic, oil, gas and electrical lines and appurtenances.

Caltrans will fully reimburse SCRRA the actual project costs and expenses incurred by SCRRA and its contractors and consultants for all services and work performed in connection with the railroad work under the C&M agreement. The total cost of SCRRA's railroad work is presently estimated to be \$100 million and the estimated design and construction duration is 24 months.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY

The Union Pacific Railroad began their ongoing Tie Replacement Project on the Riverside Line on June 2, 2008. Metrolink was to operate Bus Bridge services for affected passengers on July 1, 2, 3, 7, 8.

All Metrolink Stations in Riverside County now have designated and secure facilities for bicycles. You can choose to store your bicycle in a bicycle locker, rack, or BikeLid, depending on the station. Riverside Downtown and North Main Corona Stations provide BikeLids on a first served basis. Both bicycle lockers and BikeLids offer optimal security and protection from the elements. Bicycle lockers are installed at Pedley, West Corona, and La Sierra Stations. Bicycle lockers are assigned and require an initial \$25 deposit and annual renewal fee.

Construction of the new six-story parking structure at the North Main Corona Station is continuing as anticipated. The project is on schedule for completion in Fall 2009. Since Jan. 4, the affected portion of the parking has been closed. To compensate for this decrease of 239 spaces, Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) has leased 300 spaces as an auxiliary parking lot at the former Edwards Movie theater. Shuttle services are transporting morning and evening Metrolink commuters to and from the station and auxiliary lot.

[RCTC info. from *Station Update* via Ed Von Nordeck]

GAS PRICES CAUSE TRANSIT CRUSH

Rail systems from Boston to Los Angeles are begging passengers to shift their travel to non-peak hours, and some seats have been removed from San Francisco's subway cars to allow more people to cram in. High gas prices around the country are pushing more people to leave their cars at home and crowd on to trains, buses and subways.

In the first three months of 2008, 2.6 billion trips were taken on public transportation in the U.S., a 3 percent increase over the first quarter of 2007, according to the American Public Transportation Association. Among the cities registering big increases in the first quarter were Baltimore, where light rail ridership was up 17 percent from the same period a year ago; Seattle, which saw a 28 percent jump in commuter rail passengers; Boston, where subway ridership rose 9 percent, and San Antonio, where ridership climbed 11 percent.

Meanwhile, the number of miles driven on American roads fell slightly last year – 3.014 trillion to 3.003 trillion, according to the Federal Highway Administration. It was the first time since 1980 that the figure had not increased. The drop has continued this year.

Many big transit systems already had expansion plans long before the run-up in gas prices. In New York City, for example, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority is in the middle of a \$21.2 billion capital program that includes the biggest subway expansion since the system was completed in the early 1940s.

The Washington, D.C., transit agency is working on contingency plans prompted by high gas prices. Among the ideas: having certain lanes declared "bus only" on an emergency basis, and encouraging employers to stagger workers' schedules to ease rush-hour crowding. Similarly, Boston's transit agency and the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink) are urging people to spread out their commutes.

Metrolink plans to add 107 rail cars to its fleet of 155, but it will take at least a year for the order to arrive, spokeswoman Denise Tyrrell said. The agency has been leasing cars from Sound Transit in Seattle and Altamont Commuter Express in Stockton, but now these agencies want their cars back.

[Info. from *Pasadena Star-News*.]

IT SMOKES LIKE AN ALCO by JOHN PETROS

Because of the fact that diesel locomotives manufactured by ALCO (American Locomotive Company) had the characteristic of often smoking profusely while underway. When other makes of diesels might be seen smoking, some railfans would remark, "Wow, it smokes like an ALCO."

On one occasion several years ago when I and several friends were watching color slides of a PRS excursion, which had steamer UP 8444 (now 844), a 4-8-4 "Northern" for motive power, a scene came up on the projection screen, showing a photo runby with heavy smoke coming from the engine's exhaust stack. One of the fellows in the audience, who had been an instructor with Electro Motive Division (EMD) but was now a teacher in the training department at the company where I was employed, cried out: "Wow, it smokes like an ALCO!"

Hearing this, I responded to his remark very simply by saying: "But, it is an ALCO," which got a few laughs from the others present. Fond recollections_____.

RAIL RUNNER EXPANSION ON TRACK

The section of Interstate-25 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, that was re-routed for Rail Runner construction is about to re-open. A check on the construction on June 24 showed the raised track bed was nearly finished, along with tunnels and culverts under the interstate. "They're almost done. In fact I would expect to see us put back I-25 on both ends of the corridor probably by the middle of July," said Lawrence Rael of the Mid-Region Council of Governments.

Next, crews will install concrete railroad ties, and then the rail. They will also put upgraded crossing gates and lights at several street-intersections. Officials say construction is on track to wrap up in early December.

[Info. from KOB.com]

TRANSIT NEWS

The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) announced on June 2, 2008, that Americans took 2.6 billion trips on public transportation in the first three months of 2008. This is almost 85 million more trips than last year for the same time period. "There's no doubt that the high gas prices are motivating people to change their travel behavior," said APTA president William W. Millar. "More and more people have decided that taking public transportation is the quickest way to beat the high gas prices."

Last year 10.3 billion trips were taken on U.S. public transportation – the highest number of trips taken in 50 years. In the first quarter of 2008, public transportation continued to climb and rose by 3.3 percent. In contrast, the Federal Highway Administration has reported that the vehicle miles traveled on our nation's roads declined by 2.3 percent in the first quarter.

Light rail (modern streetcars, trolleys, and heritage trolleys) had the highest percentage of ridership increase among all modes, with a double digit 10.3 percent increase for the first quarter. Light rail systems showed double digit increases in the following areas: Baltimore, 16.8%; Minneapolis, 16.4%; St. Louis, 15.6%; and San Francisco, 12.2%. New Orleans' light rail system is recovering from Hurricane Katrina with a 476% increase in ridership.

Commuter rail posted the second largest ridership increase at 5.7 per cent. Commuter rail systems showed double digit increases in the first three months of 2008 in the following areas: Seattle, 27.9%; Harrisburg, PA, 17%; Oakland, CA, 15.8%; Stockton, CA, 13.9%; Pompano Beach, FL, 12.9%; and Philadelphia, 10.4%.

Heavy rail (subways and elevated trains) ridership increased by 4.4 percent. Heavy rail systems with the highest increases in ridership for the 2008 first quarter were in the following cities: Staten Island, NY, 12.3%; Boston, 8.8%; Jersey City, NJ, 6.5%; Los Angeles, 5.4%; New York City, 5%; Baltimore, 4.9%; and San Francisco, 4.5%.

Bus ridership saw an increase of 2 percent nationwide. Bus travel in all size communities saw ridership increases, communities with a population of less than 100,000 had a 7.8% increase. The highest increases at the largest bus agencies occurred in the following cities: San Antonio, 10.6%; Denver, 9.4%; San Diego, 6.8%; Minneapolis, 6.7%; Seattle, 6.2%; and Phoenix, 5.4%.

[Info. from APTA via Charles Varnes]

PASSENGER TRAIN UPDATES by CHARLES VARNES

On June 22, 2008, the southbound and northbound *Coast Starlights* detoured from their usual route between Sacramento and Los Angeles. The trains detoured via the *San Joaquin* route from Sacramento to Bakersfield, and then over the Union Pacific and Metrolink from Bakersfield to Los Angeles. The detour occurred because the *Starlight's* usual route was closed at Santa Barbara to permit the replacement of bridge.

Originally, the *Starlights* were to operate non-stop (except for crew changes) between Sacramento and Los Angeles. About ten days before the detour Amtrak placed coach seats and sleeping car accommodations on sale on its web site. The opportunity to ride over the famous Tehachapi Loop attracted many passengers, some of whom chose to ride the entire detour rather than detraining at Bakersfield and returning to Los Angeles on a Thruway bus.

Two private cars, one on each train, operated that day. The *Scottish Thistle* on the southbound *Starlight*, and the *Silver Solarium* on the northbound.

There were two previous *Starlight* detours over the Tehachapis. The first was on Aug. 26, 1974. Both the southbound and northbound trains were detoured when a Southern Pacific freight train derailment at San Ardo, California, closed the Coast Line. The second detour was on Oct. 23, 2005. The Amtrak business car, *Beech Grove*, with then-Amtrak president David Gunn aboard, was on the train's rear that day.

AMTRAK

Two bills reauthorizing Amtrak are currently in Congress.

S.294, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2007 was introduced by Sen. Frank Lautenberg on Nov. 16, 2007. It authorizes appropriations for FY2007-FY2012 for Amtrak capital and operating grants, including capital grants to states, and other purposes. The bill passed the Senate on Oct. 31, 2007. It was received in the House the following day and was referred to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. On Nov. 1 it was referred to the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials.

On May 8, 2008, Rep James Oberstar introduced H.R. 6003, the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008. It authorizes appropriations for FY2009-FY2013 for Amtrak capital and operating grants, including capital grants to states, and other purposes. The bill passed the House on June 11, and was received in the Senate the following day where it was read twice and placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders. Calendar No. 779.

The official title of both bills, as introduced in their respective houses, was A Bill to Reauthorize Amtrak, and for Other Purposes. The bills authorize the appropriation of funds. Another Congressional action is required to expend the funds.

On July 10, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved FY 2009 legislation that included \$1.55 billion for Amtrak; \$1 billion for capital investment and \$550 million for operating assistance. The bill also includes \$100 million for capital assistance to states to help establish state-supported passenger rail service.

LOS ANGELES-LAS VEGAS INSPECTION TRAIN

On June 23, 2008, Amtrak operated an inspection train from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. The train, operating as Amtrak Tr.

No. 962, operated from Los Angeles Union Station via the Metrolink San Gabriel Subdivision to San Bernardino, and then via the BNSF and Union Pacific railroads to Las Vegas. The next day the train, operating as Tr. No. 963 returned to Los Angeles running via the BNSF San Bernardino Subdivision between San Bernardino and Los Angeles.

The consist was AMTK 79 (P42)/83 (P42)/54500 (Coach)/58106 (Club-Dinette)/10031 (Amtrak *Great Dome*)/BNSF *Glacier View* (Dome/Business Car). Reports indicated that Amtrak President, Alex Kummant, and high-level host railroad officials were aboard the train.

INTERCITY TRAINS

Major storms in June caused severe flooding in the Midwest and caused the temporary suspension of Amtrak's *Empire Builder*, *California Zephyr*, and *Southwest Chief* trains on the eastern portions of their routes.

The *Empire Builder* was suspended on its usual route between St. Paul and Chicago on June 10. The train then operated on a BNSF Ry. detour route until flooding closed it on June 15. During the suspension alternate transportation was provided to stations between St. Paul and Chicago. Service was resumed on June 27 and through June 30 used a Canadian Pacific and Union Pacific detour route. The route was Chicago Union Station to A5, A5 to B17, B17 to Bryn Marr, and Bryn Marr to Tunnel City. At Tunnel City the train returned to its usual route. On July 1 the *Builder* resumed service on its usual route.

The *California Zephyr* was temporarily suspended between Chicago and Denver on June 13 due to flooding on its BNSF route in Iowa. Service between the cities resumed on July 5. During the suspension, alternate transportation by chartered motorcoaches was provided between Denver and points in Nebraska, including Omaha. No alternate transportation was available to or from points in Iowa. Alternate transportation between Chicago and other points in Illinois was provided by other Amtrak trains.

The *Southwest Chief* was temporarily suspended between Kansas City and Chicago on June 17 due to flooding on its BNSF route in Iowa. On June 24 service was restored with the exception of the Fort Madison, Iowa, station. On June 27 the train was suspended again due to flooding in Missouri. On July 1 service between Kansas City and Chicago was resumed. During the trains' suspensions some alternate transportation was provided to stations between Kansas City and Chicago.

California Zephyr

Beginning August 11 the *California Zephyr* will operate faster between Winnemucca and Emeryville. The westbound *Zephyr* will operate 30 minutes faster, arriving at Emeryville at 5:40 p.m. Its schedule between Chicago and Elko will remain unchanged. The eastbound *Zephyr* will depart Emeryville 45 minutes later at 8:55 a.m. Its schedule between Salt Lake City and Chicago will remain unchanged.

MIDWEST CORRIDORS**St. Louis-Kansas City**

The Missouri state legislature has provided \$5 million to increase track capacity on the Union Pacific line between St. Louis and Kansas City, the route of the *Kansas City Mule* (Tr. No. 311), *Ann Rutledge* (Tr. Nos. 313/314), and *St. Louis Mule*

(Tr. No. 316). The funds will be used for the construction of sidings between Kansas City and Jefferson City in west central Missouri. In addition to the state appropriation, the Missouri Dept. of Transportation is seeking an additional \$5 million in federal matching funds.

NORTH AMERICAN RAIL PASS TO BE DISCONTINUED

The North American Rail Pass will be discontinued on September 30, 2008. Passes can be purchased up to that date, and travel must commence by September 30, 2009.

The pass permits travelers to take an unlimited number of trips during a 30-day period on any VIA train in Canada and Amtrak trains in the United States except the *Acela Express*, *Auto Train*, and 7000 series *Thruway* motorcoach connections. It entitles travelers to Coach Class travel, but can be upgraded to Business Class or Sleeping Car accommodations for an additional charge.

The North American Rail Pass is offered at peak and off-peak fares. The peak fare is \$999.00 through October 15, 2008. From October 16, 2008 through May 21, 2009 the off-peak fare is \$709.00. There is a 10 percent discount for seniors, students and children. In mid-July the discontinuance was posted on the VIA Rail Canada web site, but not on Amtrak's.

During June and July 2003, your columnist and his wife used the North American Rail Pass for travel during a month-long trip through Canada. On the first portion of our trip, we traveled from Los Angeles to Seattle aboard the *Coast Starlight*. Following an overnight stay at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Seattle, we rode the Amtrak *Cascades* Talgo to Vancouver, British Columbia. At Vancouver we boarded VIA Rail Canada's *Canadian* for our travel to Toronto. At Toronto we stayed at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. We had an excellent view of the east throat of the Toronto Union Station from our hotel room. From Toronto we traveled to Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City, returning to Los Angeles via the same routes. All of our Amtrak travel was either in sleeping cars or Business Classes. With the exception of one train in Canada, all of our travel was either in *Silver & Blue* class aboard the *Canadian*, or *VIA 1* class for our travel east of Toronto. *VIA 1* class was not offered on Sundays, the day we traveled from Ottawa to Montreal, so that day we traveled in Comfort Class. The service aboard the VIA Rail Canada trains we rode was outstanding. In the Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City stations, pleasant Panorama Lounges for *VIA 1* class passengers made waits for trains very enjoyable. The lounges have comfortable furniture, and newspapers, bottled water, juices and soft drinks are available.

VIA RAIL CANADA CANADIAN SCHEDULE CHANGE

Effective December 2, 2008, VIA Rail Canada will change the schedule of its flagship *Canadian* from a three-day, three night trip to a three-day, four-night schedule. On the new schedule the westbound *Canadian* will depart Toronto at 8:00 p.m. on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday; and arrive in Vancouver at 9:42 a.m. on Saturday, Monday, and Wednesday. The eastbound *Canadian* will depart Vancouver at 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Friday and Sunday; and arrive in Toronto at 9:30 a.m. on Saturday, Tuesday, and Thursday.

Dinner will not be served on the departure evening. Breakfast will be served on the arrival morning.

[Info. from Ken Ruben, Ed Von Nordeck]

EASTWARD CARGO HAS L.A. AT A CRAWL

Municipal officials say freight trains have delayed more than 500 ambulances, police cars and fire trucks in Riverside during the last five years – some for as long as 15 minutes. Whether the delay comes at a rail crossing or behind a line of big rigs on a clogged interstate, hundreds of thousands of Southern Californians routinely live with the side effects of the region's huge and growing role in international trade.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach make up the nation's largest harbor complex, handling 44 percent of all goods imported by cargo container into the United States. Last year, the equivalent of 7.85 million 40-foot shipping containers poured through the ports, with most of them moving along the region's highways to massive rail yards and warehouses before heading to the nation's interior.

According to the Federal Highway Administration, highways used for commerce in the Los Angeles area rank among the worst in the nation in terms of delay. That unfortunate distinction is not expected to change soon. The cost to deal with congestion related to goods movement – or simply to keep it at current levels – is enormous, \$18 billion statewide, mostly in Southern California, according to a recent report for the state Legislature.

A transportation bond measure passed by California voters in Nov. 2006 set aside about \$3 billion for such projects statewide. The ballot initiative is only a start, according to transportation experts who urgently tout a list of high-priced projects, which include:

- Eliminating 131 street-level rail crossings in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties – cost \$4.5 billion.
- Rebuilding an 18-mile stretch of the 710 Freeway from the harbor to the 5 Freeway, adding four new lanes exclusively for trucks – cost at least \$6 billion.
- A magnetically levitated train to haul cargo from the ports to warehouses in San Bernardino County – cost \$6 billion to \$8 billion.

The steady flow of big rigs on the northbound 710 deposits much of its cargo at Union Pacific Railroad's East Yard in Commerce or at the Hobart Yard operated by Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Co.

Hobart, which spreads across 245 clamorous acres roughly five miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles, is the busiest rail yard in the country for transferring cargo containers between trucks and trains. In the yard, trains up to 1½-miles long are assembled or broken down with the help of global positioning technology, which locates cargo in the facility. The yard handles about 11 incoming trains a day and 11 departures for destinations including Houston, Chicago, and Memphis.

Those transcontinental trains must pass through either Los Angeles County or Orange County before heading for the Inland Empire and points east. Along the way, they regularly clog traffic on surface streets.

Eliminating freight isn't an option. "Goods movement is vital to the California economy," said Danny Wu, who managed goods movement planning for the Southern California Assn. of Governments. "There will be more congestion, delay, noise and

health-threatening emissions unless we can come up with more efficient ways of moving freight.”

The problems are most apparent in Riverside, which has 26 railroad crossings. Individual delays of 28 minutes per train have been recorded. After the city threatened the railroads with fines and criminal prosecution last summer, railroad executives and Riverside officials agreed to work together to reduce delays for motorists.

Railroad officials acknowledge the problems, but they blame roads and rail networks built years before the surge in trade, and a shortage of government funds to build overpasses and underpasses that separate streets from busy rail lines.

“Delay in one part of the rail system can trickle down into other parts of the system,” said Zoey Richmond, a spokeswoman for Union Pacific. “We are working with the city on short-term solutions, but we need to take care of rail bottlenecks and old railroad crossings.” Some of this work is underway.

In 2002, the Alameda Corridor opened from the port to the rail yards near downtown Los Angeles. At a cost of \$2.4 billion, the project overhauled a 20-mile freight route and eliminated scores of grade-level crossings by lowering the track into a concrete trench. It now carries 50 trains each day. Transportation officials are planning to extend the corridor east.

Earlier this year, the California Transportation Commission earmarked \$366 million for projects in the Los Angeles area and the Inland Empire to eliminate at-grade railroad crossings. Port officials and the railroads also want to build and expand rail yards close to the harbor or on the docks to reduce truck traffic.

“There is increasing concern in the region about moving goods,” said Joseph Magadino, chairman of the economics department and the global logistical program at Cal State Long Beach. “It does no good to off-load cargo in port, if you can’t move it quickly.”

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times* via Michael Palmer]

RAILCAR MANUFACTURER GREENBRIER COS.

Greenbrier Cos. said April 7 that it purchased Roller Bearing Industries Inc. from SKF USA Inc. Greenbrier Rail Services President Tim Stuckey said the acquisition will enhance the company’s replacement parts business and boost its presence in the wheel services market.

Greenbrier said it will immediately assume the operations of Roller Bearings’ Elizabethtown, Ky., plant with about 50 workers. Greenbrier is based in Lake Oswego and builds railroad freight cars in three plants as well as marine barges. It also repairs and refurbishes freight cars and provides wheels and railcar parts.

Shares of Greenbrier Cos. Inc. fell 6 percent on April 9 after the nation’s largest maker of railroad freight cars reported second-quarter sales and profit that trailed analysts’ estimates. “The slowing economy, declining railcar loadings and turbulent financial markets are contributing to a cyclical downturn in the new-railcar market in North America,” said Chief Executive Officer William Furman.

[Info. from *The Oregonian* via Caroline Hobson]

URBAN RAIL TRANSIT

by **DICK FINLEY**

LOS ANGELES METRO RAIL

RIDERSHIP

| | | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| May 2008 | Red Line | Blue Line | Green Line | Gold Line |
| Weekday Ave. | 141,659 | 79,291 | 39,173 | 23,141 |
| Saturday Ave. | 93,963 | 51,846 | 23,622 | 15,931 |
| Sunday Ave. | 76,241 | 43,244 | 17,984 | 12,568 |
| Monthly Total | 3,825,866 | 2,140,559 | 1,030,664 | 628,451 |

BOARD OF DIRECTORS — JUNE 26, 2008

In Sept. 2007 a Siemens P2000 Metro Gold Line rail car #243 was struck by an SUV at a grade crossing in Highland Park. Upon impact fire resulted in the SUV, severely damaging the rail car back to the first passenger door, including all under car equipment. The Board authorized the award of a single source firm fixed-price contract to Siemens Transportation Systems, Inc. to repair Car #243 for an amount not to exceed \$250,000, as determined by insurance.

The Siemens P2000 Light Rail Vehicle (LRV) fleet is in its seventh year of operation. Wear and tear of these units in normal service requires both ongoing maintenance, which is performed by Metro personnel, and periodic overhaul, which is beyond the level of in-house maintenance capability. The Board authorized the award of a firm fixed-price unit rate contract under Bid No. 08-0011 with Wabtec Passenger Transit, the single responsive and responsible bidder, for the overhaul of the Siemens P2000 LRV brake system for an amount not-to-exceed \$1,808,560.

Currently, the P2550 contract with AnsaldoBreda for 50 LRVs is over two years behind schedule; however, the first two vehicles were recently conditionally accepted. Much work remains to be done in order to complete delivery and acceptance of the 50 vehicles. AnsaldoBreda is working to finalize and submit an updated completion schedule which is estimated to run through Dec. 2010. LTK Engineering Services was originally issued a contract for a five-year period to provide technical support to staff in managing the P2550 contract with AnsaldoBreda for the manufacturing and delivery of 50 LRVs as necessary to meet the fleet requirements for the Pasadena Gold Line, Eastside Extension, and Exposition Line. The Board authorized a modification to the contract to extend the period of performance by 30 months and increase the not-to-exceed contract amount by \$3,919,571 from \$8,588,537 to \$12,508,108.

TAX HIKE ON BALLOT

With gas prices soaring and mass transit ridership on the upswing, the board of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority voted 9 to 2 on June 26 to draft a sales tax proposal toward asking voters in Nov. to approve a half-cent sales tax increase to fund at least \$30 billion in road and mass transit projects. It votes on the final ordinance in July.

The board also voted on June 26 not to put \$80 million for the extension of the Gold Line from Pasadena into its long-range plan. Proponents say they need that money now to seek federal funds to build the Foothill Extension.

The state bill on the sales tax outlines several projects that would get some money, including the Expo Line, a rail or busway along Crenshaw Blvd., funding for the Gold Line extension and a subway extension, as well as improvements to the 5 Freeway. All that totals about \$4 billion. That means it’s

up to the MTA to spell out how to spend the rest, leaving board members leery of which projects will get money and when – assuming that the sales tax musters two-thirds support among voters. Board members said the proposed tax was the county's best hope of getting transportation funding now.

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times*]

ONE MORE TIME — METRO RAIL IS #1

The Los Angeles Metro Rail championship team competed at the 16th Annual American Public Transportation Association International Rail Rodeo, held in conjunction with the 2008 APTA Rail Conference in San Francisco May 31 through June 2. The Los Angeles Metro team, racking up the highest rail operator and maintainer team combined score, walked away with the Rail Transit Team Achievement Award. Eighty-one contestants from 20 rail systems competed for top honors.

The Maintainers Competition judges the ability to troubleshoot maintenance problems. The Metro maintainers earned first place in this competition for the second year in a row. It was a triumph for the returning champion maintainers and their instructor Russell Homan [PRS member], who won first place at the APTA International competition in Toronto, June 2, 2007.

"I couldn't be any prouder of those guys," said Homan. "They are the best, by far." The top-scoring team scored a perfect 100 points in the "defective component," "HVAC" and "tools and fasteners" events. Homan attributes the rail maintenance team's achievement to hard work and a great deal of experience.

[Info. from *Metropeople*]

GOLD LINE FOOTHILL EXTENSION

By about 8 a.m. on June 24, the Sierra Madre Villa Station at Foothill Blvd. and Halstead Ave. was already bursting with traffic, with multiple cars driving out of the parking structure, unable to park. Habib Balian, chief executive officer for the Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority said the full garage is a mixed blessing. "It's great that people are using the rail," said Balian. "But it means that as it fills up, people will start to turn away from using it."

For Balian, the answer is simple – extend the rail line east and people will stop driving to the end station. He said a three-year-old study his organization commissioned indicated that about 60 per cent of commuters parking at the station come from outside Pasadena. "A lot of people are coming from the east, from as far as San Bernardino County," said Balian. "I think it will disappear if the line is extended."

Politicians in the San Gabriel Valley have long said the region has been passed over for transit projects because of the votes of MTA board members who represent Los Angeles

[Info. from *Pasadena Star-News*]

METRO SUBWAY CARS SWITCH TO AUTOMATIC

The smooth subway ride along the 17.4 miles of red line and purple line traversing the City of Los Angeles is running on a new system called Automatic Train Operations (ATO). "Putting ATO in service is a major milestone and one that is improving vehicle reliability, maintenance, ride comfort, and on-time performance," said Rail GM Mike Cannell of the subway trains.

After five months of studies, tests and evaluations, Rail Operations began to use the new ATO system in March, putting the 104 heavy rail cars in automatic mode for the first time since

the debut of the A650 Breda cars in 1993. It was a seamless transition from the more taxing, manual mode to ATO.

The propulsion and brake systems were designed to be controlled electronically, enabling the trains to run more accurately and efficiently in automatic, Cannell said. That efficiency translates to a significant reduction in trouble calls, fewer manpower hours spent to respond to problems on the main line, and fewer costs to attend to propulsion and brake failures, which were occurring as often as three times a day. On-time performance has noticeably increased. "Those stubborn propulsion and brake failures have now been reduced by approximately 80 percent and that is huge," Cannell said.

Undetectable to passengers but important to operators is the ATO equipment – a massive, intricate computerized system that is fronted by a simple mode selector knob on the operator's control board. The mode selector knob allows the operator to switch between automatic and manual modes.

In ATO mode, the operator monitors the automatic operation, keeps a safety eye peeled, makes announcements and opens and closes the doors. In manual mode, the operator controls the acceleration and aligns the train when it berths at the platform. Operators are required to complete one round trip in manual mode during each shift. The practice ensures the operators remain proficient in all modes of operation.

[Info. from *Metropeople*]

ORANGE COUNTY

Consultant to Boost Rail Service

The region's transportation agencies have hired a consultant to help coordinate and improve rail service. For years, rail advocates have pushed for more service between Los Angeles and San Diego, but coordinating Amtrak, Coaster and Metrolink in addition to the freight carriers has been complex.

An assessment by San Francisco-based Wilbur Smith Associates will cost about \$349,300 and be completed in 10 months. The assessment is a joint project with the Orange County Transportation Authority acting as project manager. OCTA, Metrolink, Caltrans, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, North County Transit District and the San Diego Association of Governments will share costs.

Transit Budget at \$1.06 billion

The OCTA approved a \$1.06-billion budget on June 9, earmarking funds for improvements to Metrolink and bus service, road repairs and freeway construction, officials said. Roughly \$266 million will go for bus service, including a new Bus Rapid Transit system in which buses stop every mile.

OCTA budgeted nearly \$170 million to pay for Metrolink upgrades that include more parking at stations, station construction, more trains, and adding transit options to and from Metrolink stations.

[Info. from *Los Angeles Times* via Michael Palmer]

LUMBER TRAIN GOES ON LAST RIDE

Weyerhaeuser closed the Green Mountain sawmill in Toutle, Washington (west of Mount St. Helens Nat. Volcanic Mon.), the first week of May. The train's last trip pulled six cars of wood chips and 13 cars of lumber to Longview on the Columbia River where the company is building a new sawmill to consolidate lumber operations with its Longview planer mill.

Thirty-two years ago, Pete Weekley was the engineer and Gary Sweet was the brakeman on the first Weyerhaeuser train to haul freshly sawn lumber out of the new Green Mountain sawmill. Now Sweet was the engineer and Weekley, now retired, was a passenger. The two men, best of friends for 41 years, reunited for the train's last trip. Sweet and Weekley had ridden together for 19 years, making nearly 6,000 trips on the rail line through the Cowlitz County countryside.

Sweet was surprised at the number of "paparazzi" he saw along the rails taking pictures, he said, but he snapped away himself. "It's the first time in 41 years that I've ever taken a camera and taken pictures out there."

[Info. from *The Oregonian* via Caroline Hobson]



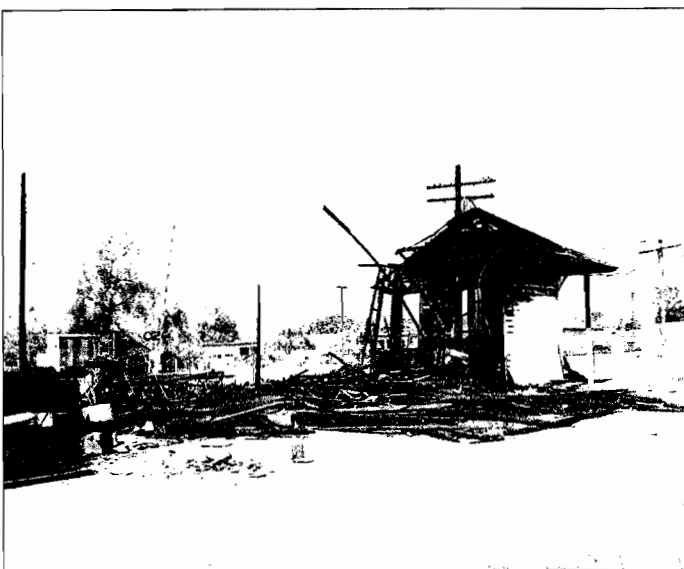
PRS National Forum, in a Pacific Surfliner consist, lays over at LAUS between morning and afternoon round trips to San Diego on May 10, 2008.
Photos by Dennis Gilkey



The south end of the 104-year-old Southern Pacific depot is all that remains following a June 3, 2008, early morning arson-caused fire.
Photo by John Ulloth



Amtrak 79 and 83 pull special Tr. No. 962 past CP Cambridge on July 24, 2008. CP Cambridge, located west of Cambridge Avenue in Claremont, is where the Metrolink Pasadena Subdivision diverges from its San Gabriel Subdivision.



The burned remains of the historic Southern Pacific Tehachapi depot are seen in this view looking towards the south end of the structure. The fire's intense heat scorched the paint on the signal cabinet (left rear) across the tracks from the depot.

Photo by Charles Varnes



Photo by Charles Varnes