

North Carolina's Successful "Alternative"

by Kevin McKinney

PASSENGER TRAIN JOURNAL first featured North Carolina's state-supported trains in 2009. Much has changed since then, mostly for the better. Here is a new look at the state's program since its origin nearly 30 years ago.



F59PHI No. 1797, City of Asheville, pauses at the beautifully restored former Southern Railway Salisbury, N.C, station on May 30, 2014, with a

It may not be as well-known as rail programs in California, Washington, Illinois, or Michigan, but North Carolina's approach to rail is one of the most innovative and unique in the country. Perhaps it is because it started quietly and grew slowly and steadily, largely unnoticed even by many rail advocates elsewhere. What the Tar Heel State, now the nation's ninth most populous, has accomplished in nearly three decades of effort is, however, quite remarkable.

The rail passenger component of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) has long supported a semi-long-distance Amtrak train, the *Carolinian*, between Charlotte and New York City (704 miles), and has developed a growing 173-mile "Piedmont" corridor between Raleigh, the state capital and second-largest city (metro population 1.3 million), and Charlotte, the largest city (metro population 2.5 million), distinctly apart from Amtrak although operated by Amtrak train crews. North Carolina sets the *Piedmont* schedules, markets the service, owns the motive power and equipment—featuring its own distinctive paint scheme—and maintains it using outside contractors selected by the state at maintenance bases in Raleigh and Charlotte. The trains appear as Amtrak service on its website and were shown in Amtrak timetables before Washington decided that timetables were a thing of the past. North Carolina disagrees with that assessment and continues to publish its own timetables for the *Carolinian* and the *Piedmont* services. There's even a toll-free number to call for information (800-BY-TRAIN), and it is posted on numerous NC-BY-TRAIN signs along major highways in the state. When the number is called, Amtrak doesn't answer, North Carolinians do.

tangible result was the creation of the Charlotte–Raleigh–Richmond–Washington–New York *Carolinian* that year, giving Charlotte and Greensboro a daytime route to New York in addition to the nocturnal *Crescent*, and via a different route east of Greensboro, one that introduced Charlotte–Raleigh service for the first time in over 50 years, and added Richmond, Va., as an intermediate stop. Unfortunately, the train’s funding lasted only 10 months, and it was not until 1990 before it returned, under the administration of Gov. Jim Martin, a Republican. Meanwhile, in 1989, Gov. Martin’s Passenger Rail Task Force determined that the state should preserve essential rail corridors for future freight and passenger service and should establish additional passenger service between Raleigh and Charlotte.

In 1992, NCDOT formed a Rail Unit and in 1995 a stand-alone Rail Division was created. Plans for an upgraded, expanded Piedmont corridor between Charlotte and Raleigh were developed. At first, Amtrak’s reaction was “We don’t have equipment,” according to Allan Paul, deputy director of the Rail Division. So, North Carolina decided to get its own equipment and thus was born the independent direction of the state’s program. Joining the *Carolinian*, the first Piedmont Corridor round-trip started May 25, 1995, and 15 years later a second round-trip was added on June 5, 2010. A third was added this year on June 4, and a fourth *Piedmont* train will be added in 2021, making a total of five trains daily in each direction between Charlotte and Raleigh.

Slow, but steady

The success of the overall rail program, and the generally bipartisan support it enjoys, is due to its focus on improvements for both passenger and freight, says Paul. A program focusing solely on passenger services would not receive as wide of a support. Another reason it has been easier to make progress in the

Raleigh, Selma, Goldsboro, and the port of Morehead City. The state is the only shareholder and the line in turn is operated and maintained by Norfolk Southern under a long-term lease. Dividends from the lease are used to partially fund numerous freight-related projects throughout the state, such as new industrial sidings and transload facilities.

The 92-mile segment of the NCRR between Charlotte and Greensboro forms part of Norfolk Southern's busy Atlanta–Washington freight main line and is also traversed by Amtrak's New Orleans–New York *Crescent*. The three *Piedmont* round-trips and the *Carolinian* continue beyond Greensboro 80 miles to Raleigh, while the *Crescent* route heads north to Lynchburg and Charlottesville, Va., along with much of the NS freight traffic. The Miami–Tampa–New York *Silver Star* joins the corridor at Cary, eight miles west of Raleigh, coming from the ex-Seaboard Air Line/Seaboard Coast Line/CSX main line as it proceeds toward Raleigh. Between Raleigh and Selma, 29 miles, both the *Carolinian* and *Star* use the NS/NCRR line before shifting to the ex-Atlantic Coast Line/Seaboard Coast Line/CSX main between Florida and Richmond. Selma to Morehead City is freight service only. The Selma “shift” occurred in October 1986, when CSX severed a portion of the ex-Seaboard main line north of Raleigh at Norlina, N.C., to Petersburg, Va., adding time and 34 miles of circuitous routing for the passenger trains. However, improvements to the NCRR line have increased the Raleigh–Selma track speed to 79 mph, and the transition between NS and CSX at Selma is usually accomplished smoothly. Over the long term, the states of North Carolina and Virginia plan to revive the direct Raleigh–Petersburg segment and ultimately develop it as part of the higher-speed-rail Southeast Corridor. More on that later.

Carolina began a steady program of improvements that would not be completed until 2017.

Initially the focus was on eliminating grade crossings or “sealing” them with full gate protection or creating mid-lane barriers, making it impossible for vehicles to maneuver around the gates. Overpasses and underpasses replaced 23 grade crossings. In 2010, the state received a \$520 million Federal Railroad Administration American Recovery and Reinvestment grant, allowing work to proceed on completely double-tracking the NCRR between Charlotte and Greensboro by laying 26 miles of second track, and adding two new passing sidings between Greensboro and Raleigh, a two-mile siding east of Burlington, and a three-mile siding east of Durham. The Duke Curve near Linwood was realigned in 2014. As a result of all of this effort, Charlotte–Raleigh running time has been reduced from 4 hours 20 minutes in the 1990s to 3:10 today. Under three hours is the goal.




Raleigh's spacious new Union Station currently serves 12 daily arrivals and departures (the Silver Star was cancelled at this time in September due to Hurricane Florence), and has room for additional intercity and commuter trains in the future. The comfortable interior includes a mix of chairs and tables in the waiting area and a small beverage and snack stand. Plans call for a restaurant and several retail stores. kevin mckinney

	Origin	Destination	Arrival	Departure	Status
#75	Piedmont	Raleigh to Charlotte	n/a	10:00am	On Time
#80	Carolinian	Charlotte to New York	10:05am	10:13am	On Time
#74	Piedmont	Charlotte to Raleigh	1:41pm	n/a	On Time
#77	Piedmont	Raleigh to Charlotte	n/a	3:00pm	On Time
#79	Carolinian	New York to Charlotte	5:08pm	5:16pm	On Time
#76	Piedmont	Charlotte to Raleigh	6:26pm	n/a	On Time
#91	Silver Star	New York to Miami	Cancelled	Cancelled	Cancelled
#78	Piedmont	Charlotte to Raleigh	10:11pm	n/a	On Time
#73	Piedmont	Raleigh to Charlotte	n/a	6:30am	On Time
#92	Silver Star	Miami to New York	Cancelled	Cancelled	Cancelled

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Stations

Work began as early as 1992 on renewing historical passenger stations on all state passenger routes, not just the future Piedmont Corridor. In some cases, such as Raleigh and Charlotte, new stations replaced or will replace the old ones.



upgraded by NCDOT and now serves the Charlotte–New York, Durham and Savannah–New York Palmetto. The L-shaped station is at the junction of the North Carolina Railroad, operated by Norfolk Southern, and the ex-Atlantic Coast Line main line of CSX now known as the “A” line. alex mayes

On the CSX “S” line, served by the *Silver Star*, Southern Pines and Hamlet received major renovations. The Southern Pines depot, which also serves nearby Pinehurst and is across from another gem, the reactivated and restored Sunrise Theatre, once again became the centerpiece of the beautiful downtown area after being restored to its 1948 appearance at a cost of \$800,000. In Hamlet, traditionally a crew-change point, where several CSX lines converge and a major freight classification yard is located on the north side of town, the large station that was built in 1900 was not only renovated in 2004 but moved from the northwest quadrant of the diamond to the southwest quadrant and rotated 90 degrees, no small effort.

On the CSX “A” line, served by the *Silver Meteor* and *Palmetto*, the substantial Rocky Mount station, built in 1893 and expanded in 1912, was renovated at a cost of \$9 million, as were stations at Fayetteville and Wilson. The Union Depot (ACL, Southern) at Selma, in danger of being torn down, was instead renovated at a cost of \$3 million.



A westbound Piedmont stops at the Salisbury station on its way to Charlotte on May 30, 2014. The wye in the background is the line to Asheville, once the route of Southern Railway's Asheville Special, which ran well into the 1970s. This line may eventually receive passenger service. Several miles to the east is the North Carolina Museum of Transportation at Spencer and beyond that is Norfolk Southern's Linwood Yard.

passenger train journal/Mike Schafer

Along the Piedmont Corridor, served by the Piedmont Corridor trains, the *Carolinian* and, in part, by the *Crescent*, Salisbury's station was one of the earliest projects, restored in 1993 with additional improvements in 1999 and 2009. The High Point station was saved by local citizens in 1990 and by 2003 was reopened as a multi-modal passenger center. The Greensboro station, closed since 1979 with passengers using a small freight office west of downtown, was renovated and reopened in 2005. As part of that \$32-million

Burlington had its station established in 2003 in a former NCRN engine house. Durham's facility evolved from a small shelter in 1990 and a modular station in 1996, to a "new" station in 2009, located in the restored 1897 Walker Warehouse, part of the American Tobacco Co. complex.

To better serve the growing Raleigh metro area and nearby suburbs, a new stop was created in 1996 at Cary, nine miles west of the downtown Raleigh station. Located between the NCRN/NS main line from Charlotte and the CSX "S" line from Southern Pines, the new facility initially served only Piedmont Corridor trains and the *Carolinian* on the north side of the station, but in 2006 after construction of a platform on the south side, the *Silver Star* began calling at Cary. An expanded new station was opened in 2011. What once appeared to be an adequate, free parking lot at the outset is now unable to handle the demand, as Cary passenger boardings have increased to more than 80,000 annually.



In addition to having the only high-level platform (out of sight to the left) between Washington and West Palm Beach, Fla., Raleigh's impressive Union Station also features an outside train-watching deck, at the top of the steps on the left. kevin mckinney

At Raleigh, the capacity issue was even more acute. A small depot had been built by the Southern Railway in 1950 when it still served six daily trains including the *Carolina Special*. But with the rebirth of rail passenger service decades later, the facility could no longer cope with more than 500 passenger boardings on an average day. The parking lot, limited to a few dozen vehicles, was overwhelmed. But in 2018, a long-awaited new station opened. Located just north of the old station, in the center of a wye, it serves existing trains, but is also designed to serve a redirected *Silver Star* and, eventually, Southeast Corridor trains, once the "S" line is restored directly to Petersburg, Va. And, it is designed to also serve commuter trains, which are planned for the region at

Brightline's new operation in South Florida. Originally planned for a spring 2018 opening, the start-up was delayed by a problem with the cross-level slope of the high-level platform. Reworking the slope then required the two tracks to be raised two inches. On July 10 the spectacular new \$110-million facility began serving ten passenger trains a day.

In Charlotte, a new center-city, multi-modal (rail, streetcar, bus) station will replace the small, existing facility built by the Southern in 1962 near its freight yard less than two miles north of downtown, referred to in Charlotte as Uptown. Ground-breaking for the first phase of the \$91-million facility took place July 20.

Marketing and equipment

The Piedmont corridor is promoted by NCDOT through advertising in magazines such as *Our State*, which is also available in seat-back pockets on the trains along with Amtrak's magazine, *The National*. Every *Piedmont* and *Carolinian* is staffed with a volunteer who is available to answer questions or provide assistance. The Volunteer Train Host program, consisting primarily of retirees (a number of rail enthusiasts and retired railroaders among them), was expanded to include Station Hosts at many North Carolina stations. More than 130 Hosts now serve as "good will ambassadors" on all trains and at several stations.

Winston-Salem, located just 17 miles north of the Piedmont corridor, is served by a bus connection to and from High Point. Communities such as Greenville, New Bern, Morehead City, Goldsboro, Kinston, Jacksonville, and Wilmington in eastern North Carolina have been served since 2014 by Amtrak Thruway bus connections to and from Wilson on the "A" Line. A recent effort to

conductor will provide a transit pass good for one ride and one transfer at the destination location. Racks for unboxed bicycles are available on all Piedmont Corridor trains and the *Carolinian*. There is no charge for bikes, but reservations are required. NC multi-ride tickets for frequent travelers are available, providing 10 rides during a six-month period at a 15 percent discount and requiring no advance reservations. Service to special events is promoted. For example, during the State Fair, located between Raleigh and Cary, trains stop adjacent to the Fairgrounds. And when the new Charlotte station opens, it will be located within walking distance of the Carolina Panthers stadium.



NCDOT rail equipment roster

Locomotives

Number	Name	Units: 13	Type	Builder	Heritage
1755	<i>City of Salisbury</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	Amtrak
1797	<i>City of Asheville</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	Amtrak
1810	<i>City of Greensboro</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	GO Transit
1859	<i>City of High Point</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	GO Transit
1869	<i>City of Durham</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	GO Transit
1893	<i>City of Burlington</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	GO Transit
1871	<i>Town of Cary</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	GO Transit
1984	<i>City of Kannapolis</i>	F59PH	F59PH	EMD	GO Transit
101		F59PH Cab Control	F59PH Cab Control	EMD	GO Transit
102		F59PH Cab Control	F59PH Cab Control	EMD	GO Transit
103		F59PH Cab Control	F59PH Cab Control	EMD	GO Transit
104		F59PH Cab Control	F59PH Cab Control	EMD	GO Transit
105		F59PH Cab Control	F59PH Cab Control	EMD	GO Transit

Passenger Cars

Number	Name	Units: 31	Seats	Builder	Heritage
40001	<i>Cardinal</i>	Coach	66	Pullman-Standard	Kansas City Southern
40002	<i>Dogwood</i>	Coach	66	Pullman-Standard	Kansas City Southern
40003	<i>Honey Bee</i>	Coach	66	Pullman-Standard	Kansas City Southern
40004	<i>Long Leaf Pine</i>	Coach	66	Pullman-Standard	Kansas City Southern
40005	<i>Scotch Bonnet</i>	Coach	64	Pullman-Standard	Kansas City Southern
40006	<i>Plott Hound</i>	Coach	66	Pullman-Standard	Kansas City Southern
40007	<i>Channel Bass</i>	Coach	66	Pullman-Standard	Kansas City Southern
40008	<i>Gray Squirrel</i>	Coach	56	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40009	<i>Emerald</i>	Coach	56	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40010	<i>Box Turtle</i>	Coach	56	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40011	<i>Granite</i>	Coach	56	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40012	<i>Carolina Lily</i>	Coach	56	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40013	<i>Fraser Fir</i>	Coach	56	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40014	<i>Sweet Potato</i>	Coach	56	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40015	<i>Venus Flytrap</i>	Coach	64	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40016	<i>Strawberry</i>	Coach	64	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40017	<i>Wake County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40018	<i>Durham County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40019	<i>Orange County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40020	<i>Alamance County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40021	<i>Guilford County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40022	<i>Davidson County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40023	<i>Rowan County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
40024	<i>Cabarrus County</i>	Coach	62	St. Louis Car	Union Pacific
400201	<i>Pamlico Sound</i>	Bag-Lounge		St. Louis Car	US Army
400202	<i>Albemarle Sound</i>	Bag-Lounge		St. Louis Car	US Army
400203	<i>Cove Sound</i>	Bag-Lounge		St. Louis Car	US Army
400204	<i>Carrituck Sound</i>	Bag-Lounge		St. Louis Car	US Army
400205	<i>Bogue Sound</i>	Bag-Lounge		St. Louis Car	US Army
400206	<i>Yadkin River</i>	Bag-Lounge		St. Louis Car	US Army



In the early days, the Piedmont consist, shown at Charlotte in 2001, included an ex-Canadian National, nee Milwaukee Road, full-length dome and a less-attractive paint scheme. Expensive to maintain, the dome is no longer on the roster. Richard Baldwin

A typical *Piedmont* consist is three coaches and a baggage-lounge car, with a locomotive at each end to eliminate the turning requirement. The coaches are all pre-Amtrak from the 1960s, of Union Pacific and Kansas City Southern heritage. Totally refurbished by the state and maintained by a private contractor, they are extremely comfortable and smooth riding and present an image of being newer than Amtrak equipment dating from the 1970s and 1980s. A built-in trash/recycling/newspaper area at the end of each coach replaces the cardboard boxes used on Amtrak trains. Above that area is an information rack containing brochures for on-line destinations and timetables, which NCDOT continues to produce as passengers find them useful. The *Carolinian* is an Amtrak Amfleet consist with typically one locomotive, four coaches, a café car, a business class car, and a Viewliner baggage car.



The baggage-lounge cars are all former U.S Army cars built by St. Louis Car Company. The lounge cars are plain, featuring a few tables and seats, four vending machines for beverages, candy, and snacks, and an area

A recent ride on *Piedmont* trains 75 and 76, between Raleigh and Charlotte, provided evidence that the trains are well-used, with approximately half the passengers riding the full distance and the remainder on and off at the seven intermediate stations. The lounge car is spartan, providing tables, four vending machines for beverages, candy, and snacks, and an area where free coffee, tea, and bottles of cold North Carolina water are available. Arrival at Charlotte was two minutes ahead of schedule. However, the eastbound return almost immediately ran into an onslaught of westbound Norfolk Southern intermodal and merchandise freights, causing a minor delay outside Charlotte and a substantial delay near Linwood Yard east of Salisbury. One last delay was waiting for train 79, the *Carolinian*, on one of the remaining single-track stretches east of Greensboro, with a 48-minute late arrival in Raleigh. NCDOT is concerned about the NS congestion and delays, and Allan Paul cites that concern as the major reason the fourth *Piedmont* round-trip will not be introduced until it can be smoothly absorbed into the congestion.

Other expansion plans

In *PTJ*'s 2009 feature, hope was expressed that service would be restored to the scenic ex-Southern line between Salisbury and Asheville, a mountain city with a growing population and home to the famous Biltmore estate. At that time, station improvements had already been made in Statesville, Morganton, and Old Fort. However, due to funding issues and uncertainty regarding Norfolk Southern's future use of the line, Asheville service continues on hold.

Warsaw, the most direct route, the major problem being the removal of part of the line north of Wilmington by CSX. Service could also run down the “A” Line from Selma and serve Fayetteville along the way. South of Fayetteville, NCDOT has already built a new connecting track at Pembroke to allow for movement from the “A” Line to the CSX Wilmington line. *PTJ*'s 2009 article projected a possible 2015 start for the Wilmington service.

If both services are ever implemented, all of North Carolina's major cities will be served by passenger train, except for Winston-Salem, which is near High Point on the Piedmont corridor and linked by connecting bus service.

The only certainty for now is that China will have built at least several new high-speed lines before passenger trains return to Asheville and Wilmington.

North Carolina's Rail System

white river productions/tom hooper, based on ncdot state railroad map



North Carolina's comfortable coaches are a mix of ex-Union Pacific and Kansas City Southern cars, all built in the 1960s and completely renovated. Coach seats, 56 to 66 to a car, provide more space for passengers than most airline domestic first-class seats. kevin mckinney



Publicity for the Piedmont Corridor service included an equipment display at the North Carolina Museum of Transportation in Spencer, near Salisbury, in May 2014. The first coach is a former Kansas City Southern car built by Pullman-Standard; the second car is a former Union Pacific coach built by St. Louis Car Company. *passenger train journal*/Mike Schafer

Transit chases growth



A Gold Line trolley heads east from Uptown (downtown) Charlotte on January 30, 2016. The line is currently being extended to the east and west and conventional light rail cars will replace the trolleys when the expansion is complete. Kevin McKinney

Strategically located in the center of the eastern United States, with a relatively moderate climate and topography ranging from mountains in the west, the Piedmont and Sandhills in the center, and the coastal plain and the Atlantic Ocean in the east, North Carolina has become a popular place to live. The state's population grew nearly 40 percent between 1996 and 2017, from 7.5 million 10.3 million.

Charlotte

While good roads have always been a hallmark of the Tar Heel State, modern transit has been slow in coming, but at least it is coming. In 1996 rail transit in Charlotte consisted of a single historic trolley, No. 85, running from the edge of Uptown (the Queen City's name for downtown) to the burgeoning South End restaurant and residential district 1.8 miles to the south. More a delightful curiosity than a true people mover, the Charlotte Trolley nevertheless became part of the right-of-way for a future light-rail line. In November 2007, the Blue Line "Lynx" LRT began operation between the center of Uptown and a terminus 9.6 miles to the south in Pineville near I-485 and South Blvd. Instantly popular, the LRT was extended north 9.3 miles to the campus of the University of North Carolina-Charlotte (UNCC) on March 16, 2018.

Saturday from 5:30am to 1:30am, and Sundays from 6:15am until midnight. Car No. 85 continued to run on weekends until 2010 and is now preserved in a local museum.

Meanwhile, the first phase of the Gold Line streetcar was built east 1.5 miles from Uptown, opening in July 2015. The Gold Line is now being extended west two miles and east one-half mile. The vintage Birney replicas (Nos. 91, 92, and 93) built in 2003-04 by Gomaco Trolley Co., now equipping the line will be replaced by Siemens light-rail vehicles when the extensions open in 2020. On July 17, 2018, the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) announced plans for an ambitious expansion: a West Corridor light-rail line that would link Uptown with Charlotte-Douglas International Airport (the 11th busiest airport in the U.S.) and Belmont. Plans are already in the works for the Silver Line, which will extend to the east from Uptown along Independence Blvd., ending in the town of Matthews.

Commuter-rail service has been proposed since the 1990s to relieve the congested I-77 corridor north of the city to the Lake Norman area, utilizing Norfolk Southern right-of-way. However, NS has been opposed to the plan, and there is also some opposition from suburbanites. Alternative routings are currently being explored.

The Triangle

At the other end of North Carolina's Piedmont intercity rail corridor lies "the Triangle," a grouping that includes Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, and Wake, Durham and Orange counties, respectively. Raleigh has shown an off-and-on interest in light rail, but currently seems focused on its bus network. The only rail project currently moving forward is the Durham-Orange Light Rail, a 17.7-mile, 18-station line that will link Durham and Chapel Hill and serve major universities (Duke, University of North Carolina), major medical facilities, and three of the region's top 10 employers. Although there have been attempts to derail the project, it now appears to have the funding to proceed (See Rush Hour).

The concept of a 37-mile commuter-rail line has been developed, with the line to serve Durham, Research Triangle Park (RTP), Morrisville, Cary, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, and Garner, utilizing the state-owned (and NS maintained and operated) North Carolina Railroad. Provision has already been made to accommodate the commuter service at the new Raleigh Union Station.

The Triangle was recently in the running to become the location of Amazon's new second headquarters, but was not included in the final cut. One reason was the area's lack of adequate public transportation, something that hopefully will be corrected in the next decade. —Kevin McKinney

A new station for Charlotte

Charlotte, North Carolina's largest city (2015 population: 810,000), will have a new downtown railway station and intermodal center. Construction began in July, with tentative completion by 2022. The location is West Trade Street at South Graham Street, near Bank of America Stadium. The facility, designated the Gateway Station, will replace the existing, somewhat dingy Amtrak station on North Tryon Street. This building was constructed by the Southern in 1962, replacing a large, impressive station on West Trade Street, opened in 1905, that was subsequently demolished.

The current Amtrak facility is a small-town-style station in a light-industrial area about two miles north of center city. It presents a generally unappealing appearance for rail travelers. Its main virtue is free parking, and it is also on a city bus route. The station was built by the Southern at a time when the railroad was actively trying to reduce its passenger train deficits. The old downtown station was costly to maintain, had a significant tax bill, and the main line was at grade (it has since been elevated).

The Gateway Station site has been occupied by a Greyhound bus depot since 1973, which took the place of the old Southern station. The new station has had a lengthy history of implementation. The first feasibility study by the City of Charlotte and North Carolina DOT was tabled in 1991. Seven years later, NCDOT began acquiring land for the station and tracks. This totaled 27 acres by 2004, with a further 18 acres added in 2012.

It was originally planned that the terminal would have an underground station for local buses, while intercity buses would be handled within a massive street-level atrium. However, escalating cost estimates dictated that the project be scaled down. The lengthy delay was partly caused by federal, state, and local funding difficulties, changing governments, and the reluctance of developers to participate. However, Charlotte wants a new railway station and has managed to line up sufficient funding to begin work.

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) is coordinating the project. Construction has been divided into two phases.

Phase One will include construction of two new station tracks on Norfolk Southern's main line, including signals, retaining wall, embankment, platform and canopy, and a temporary intercity bus facility. This phase is fully funded with an anticipated construction period of 2018-2021 and a cost of \$91.3 million.

Phase Two will be the largest and most expensive part of the project, although it is intended that most of it will be funded by private developers. It will include

the Tryon Street facility.

Artists' renderings show a streetcar line along West Trade Street; this will be an extension of the existing Gold Line historic streetcar line, but using modern Siemens light-rail vehicles. Gateway station is about five blocks west of the existing Blue Line LRT route.

The City of Charlotte and the state government have been very supportive of Amtrak and rail passenger service. The Gateway Station will finally, after 60 years, provide the city with a first-rate railway station again.

—John D. Thompson

The Southeast Rail Corridor

Also on the wish list is the Southeast Rail Corridor (SEC), which will be a “higher speed” 110-mph corridor when completed. The concept was first established in 1992 by the U.S. Dept. of Transportation, envisioned as a series of corridors extending from Washington, D.C., to Charlotte, via Richmond and Raleigh, including a spur from Richmond to Norfolk. Ultimately, the SEC map was extended from Charlotte to Atlanta, Macon, and Jacksonville, and along the current “S” Line from Raleigh to Jacksonville via Columbia and Savannah. In 2010, it was projected that higher-speed service would reach Charlotte between 2018 and 2022, if funding was forthcoming, which has not yet been the case.

Nevertheless, the Southeast Corridor is slowly evolving, with most work to date occurring in Virginia. The 110-mile former Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac line between Washington and Richmond has received a third main track north of Fredericksburg, a single-track bridge choke point has been eliminated, and new signaling has been installed. Talk of a third track and possible electrification has already mobilized opposition in the town of

various improvements have not produced a significant increase in operating speeds or an improvement in on-time performance. However, ultimately, hourly service is envisioned with Washington–Richmond running times cut by 30 minutes.

The next segment to be addressed is Richmond–Petersburg–Raleigh. Although CSX removed track between a point south of Petersburg, Va., and Norlina, N.C., in 1987, the right-of-way has been largely preserved in the two states. A new 110-mph operation is envisioned for this direct route, which would reduce Raleigh–Richmond running times by 90 minutes to just over two hours due to higher speeds and elimination of the dogleg through Selma.

While the evolution of the state rail program is slow in the eyes of rail passenger advocates, it represents a plan of steady improvement, and today the result of more than two decades of good planning and execution is increasingly evident. The program depends on ongoing bipartisan political support, strong support and close oversight by the North Carolina Department of Transportation, and cooperation of the North Carolina Railroad, Norfolk Southern, CSX, and Amtrak. It is a template for other states to follow.

Kevin McKinney, who founded *PASSENGER TRAIN JOURNAL* in 1968, currently resides with his wife Nit in North Carolina. He remains involved with PTJ as well as other transportation-related endeavors.



NCDOT's Allan Paul



PTJ interviewed Allan Paul, NCDOT's Rail Division Deputy Director, at his Raleigh office in late June. Mr. Paul, a North Carolina native, received a degree in history at Wake Forest University, wrote the legislation creating the Historic Spencer Shops (now known as the North Carolina Transportation Museum), and was the first director of the Spencer Shops from 1977 to 1980. He then spent over a decade as a

⋮ two decades of station restoration and service development. ncdot rail division photo