

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

30 APRIL 2019

### Goals:

- Build support for Amtrak to include a Phoenix-Tucson link as part of its state-supported short-range corridor system.
- Build credibility among regional politicians, managers and organizations as the critical organization with expertise in rail.
- Support Valley Metro Rail in its hour of need.
- Recruit new members and raise funds.

### AZTA Convention in Mesa

I attended a series of sessions on various topics.

#### *Legislative Open Forum with Federal Transit Administration & American Public Transportation Association*

- The FTA spent \$15 billion on transit in 2018.
- \$194 million was spent on Positive Train Control.
- \$45 billion is available in 2019 for grants.
- There is a narrow window before the “silly season” begins when congressmen and senators position themselves for reelection.
- There is little room for bipartisan cooperation.
- FAST Reauthorization will give a historic amount to passenger rail, but there is a massive shortfall in the Highway trust Fund.

#### *Anti-Light Rail Initiative*

- Normally, economic activity congregates around freeways, but at present there is no way to capture that value for government in terms of funding transportation.
- There has been massive development around Valley Metro Rail because light rail gives people easy access.
- The issues enumerated in a previous Executive Director's Desk report are still extant, but there is a new wrinkle. The initiative will make it impossible to make capital improvements to the existing line. Not only will it make MAG's commuter rail projects impossible, but it will prevent Phoenix from applying any money for intercity rail and even Amtrak expansion, should it occur.
- There is a consensus that the key players are not prepared for the August vote.

#### *Public Transit in the Age of Autonomous Vehicles*

- \$40 billion has already been invested by Wall Street in this area.
- Actual rollout may be as far as 10 to 20 years in the future, which delays profits and return on investment.
- Planning needs to start now.
- Autonomous vehicles will not kill public transit but will require reinventing it.

- The primary use will be to service “the last mile” between public transit and destination.

#### *Freedom to be Age Friendly*

- Access to transportation is critical to freedom for seniors.
- Arizona’s elderly suicide rate is 70% over the national average.
- 28% of seniors live alone.
- The bulk of the presentation was how Wickenburg created a van service for seniors.

#### *Don’t Miss the Bus*

- This was a session about bikes, scooters and other pay-for-ride media that link to bus service.

#### *Arizona Transit on the Lookout for Child Trafficking*

- A victim of child trafficking, who was sold into sex slavery by her mother at age 6 and remained a slave until age 23, told her story. You could have heard a pin drop.
- Bus drivers are on the front line and have helped girls in trouble get in touch with the right people. Buses are used to move girls around, and intercity buses are the main means of travel.
- Police refer to an area of vice as a “blade” or “track.” The “blade” of Phoenix used to be Van Buren, but it has now moved to 27<sup>th</sup> Ave. Girls waiting for a bus who never take the bus are waiting for a customer. This is something a bus driver should note.
- Phoenix police have taken an aggressive stance against trafficking and have put people away for sentences in the hundreds of years.

#### *Let’s Talk Transportation*

- This was a group of panel discussions on how to engage different organizations and the challenges encountered.

### **Transportation Choices Coalition Meeting**

This meeting was dedicated to the anti-light rail initiative.

- There is tremendous weakness in community engagement with respect to Valley Metro. Until the anti-light rail initiative made the ballot, there was little interface between Valley Metro and South-Central Phoenix, particularly because Valley Metro made no attempt to communicate in Spanish and also talked down to people. As a result, there is a lack of trust between neighborhoods and Valley Metro.
- The people of South-Central Phoenix have large families, and bus fares can be a financial burden. Few own computers, and Internet access is primarily through cell phones. One solution has been to hold classes on how to use the advanced functions of cell phones.
- Friends of Transit will bring in money for the campaign, and Dave Martin’s Arizona General Contractors Association will handle the large dollar amounts by working with key business people.
- Initial polling is hopeful. Phoenix residents favor light rail, and users favor it strongly.

### **Meeting with Carlos Lopez of ADOT**

- Amtrak has a Phoenix-Tucson link on its list of corridors of less than 750 miles for state-supported services. Getting the state to support it is the weak link.
- Our old friend Rob Eaton is handling government relations for Amtrak and should be kept in the loop. I e-mailed him but no response as of yet.

### **Two Announcements**

- The state court will permit the anti-light rail initiative to remain on the August ballot. The Arizona General Contractors Association will appeal.
- The gas tax hike was killed in committee in the state legislature, perhaps because Rep. Noel Campbell, the Transportation Committee chairman, publicly challenged Gov. Ducey to sign it. The final bill is an abdication of the state's obligation to maintain its highways. This obligation has been transferred to the counties who can put a sales tax hike before their voters for the purposes of roads and light rail. Heavier rail has been explicitly excluded from the bill. If MAG goes to the voters for a sales tax hike to build commuter rail, it must get the permission of the legislature to hold the election.

### **Meeting with Maricopa County Councilman Jack Sellers & Chief of Staff Richard Bohan**

- Councilman Sellers is in favor of our mission in general. He asked me to send the Amtrak endorsement letters from Tucson and Sen. Sinema, which I immediately did.
- He suggested we approach Chairman Bill Gates of the county council because that's where the power lies.

### **Executives meeting to move our agenda**

Peter LeCody (RPA Chair), Steve Roberts (RailPAC President) and Jim Souby (ColoRail) met with Chuck Mott, Earl van Swearingen, Mike Garey, Roger Clark and myself to map out additional efforts to save the Amtrak western system.

- I will contact RPA representatives in the states to gauge their interest in working on this effort and whether they wish to work with us directly or take on the responsibility alone.
- I wrote a video script, had it polished by Al Runte, and John James will produce a video which he will post to You Tube.
- Steve Roberts and Peter LeCody will build informational literature and a "sales" letter that I will customize for each contact.
- Mike Garey will find a domain for our website, and we will ask Charlie Hamilton to build it.
- I used the "Our Train Stations" website to locate contacts for each station in smaller towns. I built a list of congressmen and senators tied to each station in the same spreadsheet.

### **Meeting the Goals**

- Contacting Rob Eaton regarding an Amtrak Phoenix-Tucson corridor.
- Reaching out to political figures for meetings.
- Sending notifications of Friends of Transit briefings on light rail to ou20 members in Phoenix.

### **Next Month**

- Tape video on Amtrak national network and post to You Tube.
- Send out initial e-mails to RPA state contacts to brief them on Western National Network Trains Coalition work plan. Follow up with adaptable support letter and video to share with their respective representatives and key contacts – leverage the message/drive support/build consensus
- Collect work plan deliverables from RPA and RailPAC.
- Meet with more Arizona mayors and key players to contact senators and congressmen about Amtrak support.
- Transportation Choices Coalition meeting.