

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK

31 MARCH 2019

Goals:

- Build support for Virgin Trains and Fortress Investment Group to establish service in the Sun Corridor.
- 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.

RailPAC Board Meeting in Oakland

Chuck Mott, Alan Mott and I journeyed to Oakland (CA) to attend the RailPAC board meeting to present a proposal whereby RailPAC would team with other passenger rail activist groups in the West and the Rail Passengers Association (DC) to send me out as ambassador of our movement to areas of the West that lack necessary passenger rail activism and support. With the reauthorization of the 2015 Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act 2) coming up in Congress and the Superliner equipment on its last legs, it would be only one small step for Amtrak to kill the national network altogether as the Trump Administration has proposed. It has become necessary to put together a grassroots effort to keep Congress from going along with Amtrak's effort to eliminate the national network.

Chuck presented a comprehensive plan to harness my efforts in this project along with a realistic estimate of the costs involved. RailPAC voted to make a monthly financial support commitment for 12 months with a review at the 6-month point. Several members were asked to contact other state organizations to determine the possibility of further financial commitments.

It became apparent that RPA's involvement is critical in that its DC office has both the money and the Rolodex to make this project feasible. Chuck talked with George Chilson to set up a meeting in DC with Peter LeCody and Jim Mathews to determine RPA's involvement with funding, administrative support and access to their all-important Rolodex. Chuck and I produced a work plan that will be discussed after RPA's DC events of the first week in April.

The key takeaway is that with the Trump Administration asking for a 22% cut in the new transportation budget, we have a very steep hill to climb to save Amtrak's national network and a very short time in which to climb it. We need support from congressmen and senators from the West to stand up for the interstate trains, and that means lighting a fire under the grassroots. This effort would supplement RPA's usual congressional activities. I would be our key grassroots coordinator to launch the Western Passenger Trains Coalition.

Valley Partnership Breakfast

This month's breakfast was dedicated to tourism and the hospitality industry. The panelists were:

- Maria Baier, VP Public Affairs, Phoenix Suns;
- Aaron Studebaker, VP Development, Salt River/Talking Stick Community;
- Brett Hopper, VP Real Estate Development, Opus Group;
- Kim Sabow, VP, Arizona Lodging and Tourism Association;
- Bridget Binsbacher, VP Public Affairs, Arizona Cactus League.

Tourism generates \$22.7 billion per year in revenue, sends \$3.4 billion per year in taxes to government coffers, and provides 320,000 jobs.

The Cactus League provides a massive influx to the region. There are 1.7 million attendees per year at spring training baseball games with 1.1 million attendees coming from out of state. Revenue impact is \$644 million per year from 6400 jobs with \$31.9 million in taxes diverted to government coffers.

Opus Group spends its time with high-rise buildings and industrial sites. Town Lake changed the face of Tempe. Most of Opus' work is now concentrated by there.

I exchanged business cards with the following people:

- Craig Trbovich, VP Sales & Leasing, Commercial Properties Inc.;
- Dave Lindquist, Architect & Hospitality Market Leader, Dekker Perich Sabatini;
- Alan Laulainen, Associate Advisor, Net Lease Advisory Group;
- Randall Parmele, SVP Business Development, Landmark Title Assurance Agency;
- Alex Shaffer, Regional President, MeadowsBank;
- Bob McFall, SVP Commercial Real Estate Arizona, Johnson Financial Group.

Randall, Alex and Bob were excited by the possibility of intercity rail, and building and operating it with private investment. I discussed the idea of having local real estate developers form a consortium to start our own Sunline project in the mold of Florida's Brightline project. I sent them our Arizona Legislature presentation, asked them to join and mentioned that we're interested in corporate memberships. Randall responded that she loved our presentation.

Transportation Choices Coalition (conference call)

Most of the meeting was dedicated to the Phoenix City Council light rail vote.

- The northwest extension on Camelback Road between 19th and 43rd Avenues was killed by the city council on a 5-3 vote due to a citizens' initiative submitted for that purpose.
- This removes the incentive to vote to retain light rail in August.
- Each proposed extension could be killed on a one-by-one basis via citizens' initiative.
- As pro-rail people retire from the Phoenix City Council, the new mayor, Kate Gallego, who is strongly pro-rail, could be standing alone.
- The city council vote was a major blow.
- Most of the pro-rail people are waiting to see what happens in court on April 10-11 when Dave Martin's contractor organization's lawsuit is heard.

- The pro-rail people are looking for a new generation of business leaders to emerge in support of light rail who can generate large amounts of money; the earlier generation of leaders in Phoenix has mostly retired.
- They are waiting to hear from the rather quiet South-Central neighborhood.
- They are looking for partners to create a pro-rail campaign, build a social media presence and start opposition research.
- They are planning to canvass small businesses along the line and ordinary residents.

Friends of Transit Briefings on Light Rail

We were tasked to get our 20 members who live in Phoenix to attend briefings, paid for by Friends of Transit, on the light rail crisis. Only 5 showed interest in attending. I suspect the other 15 were more interested in the Amtrak situation than any local issue. I sent each invitation to our 20 members just in case they wanted to attend. So far, it appears that our attendance is light.

Meeting the Goals

- Virgin Trains USA has kept the door open to coming out to Phoenix in the spring.
- We're reaching out to new political figures for meetings.

Next Month

- AZTA convention in Mesa.
- Transportation Choices Coalition monthly meeting in Mesa.
- All Aboard Arizona Rail Summit in Mesa.
- Meeting with the Mayor of Yuma.
- Meeting with the new Mayor of Phoenix.
- Meeting with Maricopa County Councilman Jack Sellers.
- Meeting to introduce Peter LeCody to key political and business people in Flagstaff.