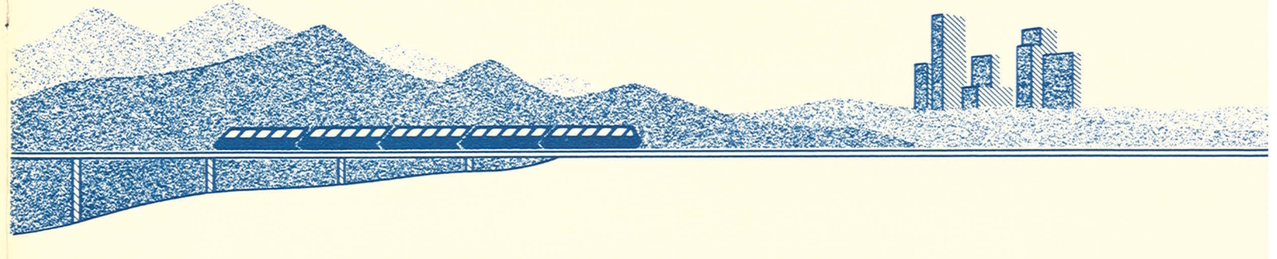
Interim Report of the Governor's Rail Passenger Task Force

To Governor James G. Martin

Based on Executive Order No. 71
March, 1989



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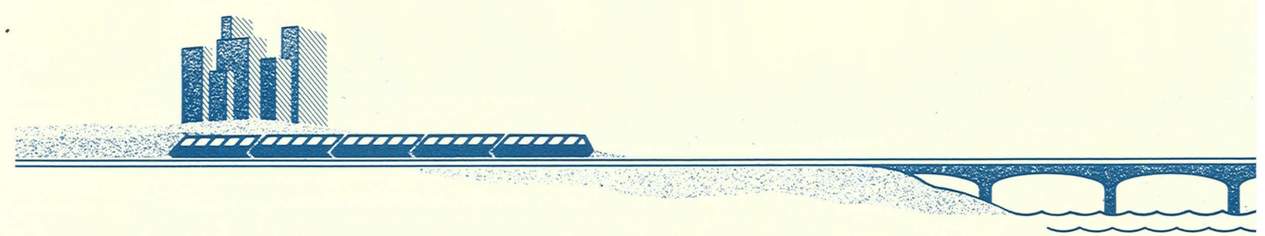
On March 11, 1988, Governor Martin issued Executive Order No. 71 establishing the Governor's Rail Passenger Task Force. The Task Force was charged with studying the "present, near term, and future needs for rail transit service connecting major cities of North Carolina."

After examining issues related to rail passenger service, it now offers this interim report. The recommendations in this report focus on short-term proposals.

Determining the appropriate state response to longer-term rail passenger opportunities will be the focus of the Task Force's work during 1989.



North Carolina's future economic vitality depends upon increased rail passenger service in the state. Local officials are looking to rail public transportation to provide future mobility options. Within the next 20 to 30 years, the state will rely more heavily on railroads to move people as well as goods.

The rapid growth of many North Carolina cities has produced traffic congestion and related problems. Congestion is growing worse both within and between our major cities. From Raleigh to Charlotte, traffic on segments of Interstate 40 and Interstate 85 frequently exceeds intended roadway capacity. In metropolitan areas across North Carolina, air space shortages are disrupting schedules at major airports, and it appears that long air flights soon will be scheduled in preference to medium or short commercial passenger flights.

Rail Corridors in North Carolina

Our rail system reached a peak of 5,522 miles in 1920; now we have 3,637 miles of track. All of these miles carry rail freight; some are also traveled by passenger trains. Because they share the same track, consideration of long-range rail passenger service must recognize its relationship to the rail freight industry.

Since the 1920s many miles of valuable rail corridors have been abandoned as railroads discontinued unprofitable routes. Over 700 miles of rail corridor have been lost since 1971 and another 127 miles are now in the abandonment process. The trend toward fewer rail miles continues in North Carolina, and the potential effect of these lost corridors on our future is severe.

The task force recommends that essential rail corridors be preserved for future rail passenger and freight transportation use.

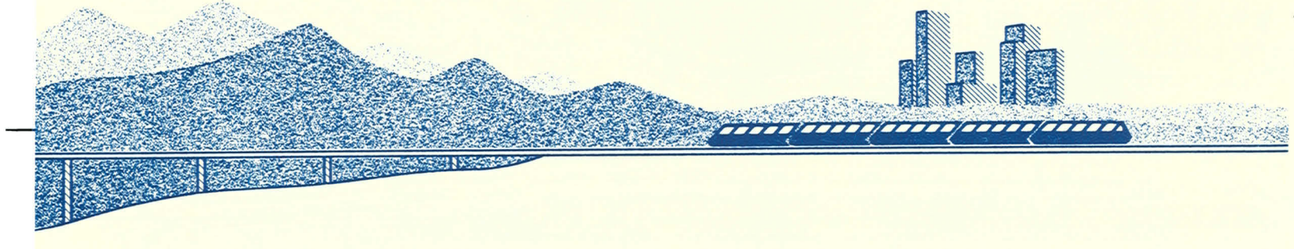
Saving these corridors will be a complex task. Currently no source exists to fund rail corridor protection. Potential solutions to this problem include direct appropriation of state funds, a bond issue or creation of a railroad trust fund.

There can be little possibility of future rail passenger travel unless rail lines can be preserved or can be built economically when they are needed. History has shown that a rail corridor lost is probably gone forever.

Rail Passenger Service in North Carolina

The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) operates the only regularly scheduled rail passenger service in the state. North Carolina's service is comparable to other Southeastern states and similar to the nationwide "one-train-a-day" pattern of a single northbound and a single southbound train daily. For the last 10 years, this service pattern has provided for one train through the central Piedmont and three trains through the eastern part of the state.

Most passenger trains are full in the summer and around major holidays. Greater interest in rail travel and incentive pricing by Amtrak have increased patronage at other times as well, so there are fewer periods when trains operate below capacity. Patronage of the trains running through North Carolina has traditionally been higher than other long-distance trains in the Amtrak system.

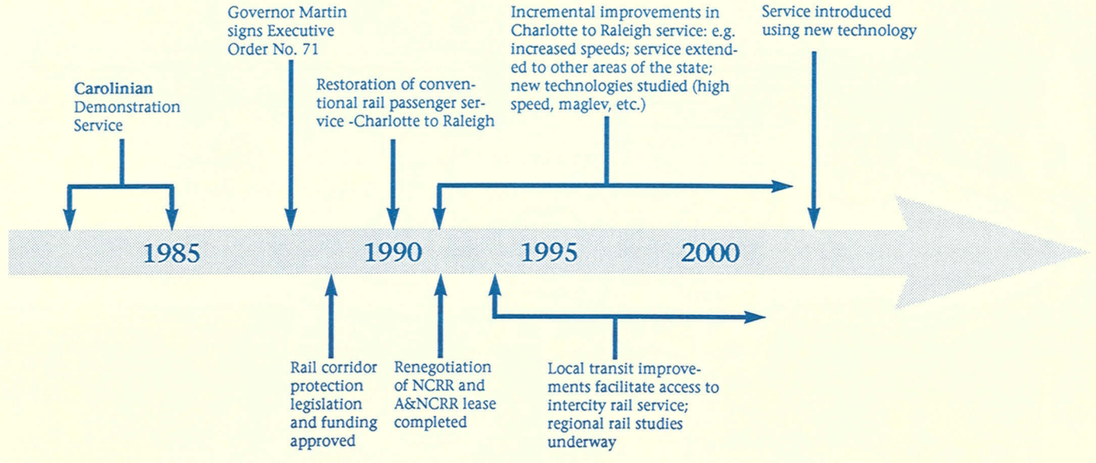


ative effect on the environment and should be most compatible with community and regional development plans.

As technology advances, and as new systems and new ways to pay for them become available, the state should assess these developments and take appropriate action. Improved conventional rail passenger service now will help us implement high-speed technologies later. State provision of conventional service will galvanize public support for new technologies as they become available and affordable. If the recommendations of the task force are supported, rail corridors will be preserved. The private sector will be more willing to work with a state that has a strong interest and a significant investment in passenger service.

In short, a clear, long-term direction, supported by adequate funding, is necessary for the State to use rail passenger service successfully to complement existing transportation options in congested corridors. Tentative and half-hearted efforts will surely fail.

Intercity Rail Passenger Service Time Line



Trends and Developments which influence the need for intercity rail passenger service

- New technologies developed & introduced-nationally and internationally
- North Carolina's population grows; congestion and travel demand increases, particularly in the Piedmont
- Local & regional mass transit services develop
- Major airports become more congested; delays increase
- Energy and environmental costs rise
- Cost of additional highway and airport capacity grows faster than inflation
- Better land use planning makes transit a more competitive alternative to the automobile

been able to furnish its estimates of the costs involved for the Raleigh to Charlotte service. In addition, Amtrak has indicated that it has limited ability to work with states for additional 403(b) service because of equipment shortages and budgetary constraints. Amtrak has responded by requiring states to help pay more for equipment when it participates with states in providing services. These increased state costs require a multi-year capital program and a long-term commitment.

Safety

Some modes of travel are more dangerous than others. For 1987, the rate of fatalities per 100,000,000 passenger-miles nationally was 0.13 for rail travel, 0.70 for air travel and 0.92 for automobile travel. Clearly the rail travel choice will result in improved safety since rail travel is seven times as safe as automobile travel. However, because the small number of travelers that would be diverted from the highway to trains, the statistics indicate that one life would be saved every five years in the Raleigh-Charlotte corridor at the current accident rates. This calculation assumes 400 seats (200 seats times two trains) filled each day for the entire trip between Raleigh and Charlotte. Highway deaths on I-85 between Durham and Charlotte currently average 11 per year.

Rail travel is also usually practical in bad weather. A snowstorm that would paralyze air and highway travel would have little effect on rail service and neither would heavy fog or rain.

Long-Term Commitment

One of the lessons learned from the **Carolinian** was that any future rail passenger service should be provided without the stigma of being regarded as demonstration service. Rail passenger service should be provided only with a long-term commitment.

There are several reasons for taking this position:

1. The public needs assurance that the service is permanent. At least a year is required to build awareness that such service exists. For train travel to be attractive, people must be confident it will be there when they need it. The **Carolinian** was billed as a one-year demonstration and the General Assembly forbade capital expenditures.

2. Travel times should be reduced. The Raleigh-to-Charlotte trip on the Carolinian took four hours and five minutes. Reducing the travel time requires changing local speed ordinances and railroad operating procedures, and improving grade crossing protection. Many other improvements also can help reduce the travel times. All of these measures require time, effort and money. Few of these improvements can be realized without the expectation of amortizing these investments over a long period of time. A multi-year capital improvement plan which lays out necessary improvements over time is required.

3. Train travel should meet customer expectations for service and comfort. Many of our passenger train stations are old and no longer efficient. Exciting opportunities exist in several cities (Durham, Greensboro, and Charlotte, for example) to plan and construct excellent multi-modal transportation centers. Such centers would permit passenger trains, local bus, intercity bus, taxi, airport limousine and other services to use the same building. This would reduce costs and make it easier to transfer from one carrier to another.

Conclusions

The only practical method for providing rail passenger service in the state in the near term is conventional Amtrak-type service. However, should the state decide to provide passenger service in a corridor, many improvements can be made through time. As these improvements are made, congestion on competing modes will increase, thus increasing the attraction of rail service. At the same time, improvements in supporting services, primarily local bus services, and station facilities, will enhance the appeal of rail.

The basic investment in railroads--the acquisition of land--has already been made, and rail is the only transportation mode operating far below capacity. In addition, rail passenger service, if expanded, will have the smallest negative impact on the environment.

However, there is no east-west rail passenger service to link the major cities across the state. While Amtrak trains through North Carolina are often full, the state's rail network could easily accommodate more trains.

The task force recommends that the state provide intercity rail passenger service in the Charlotte-Greensboro-Raleigh corridor.

Initially, service should consist of two round trips per day. One round trip should leave Charlotte in the morning and be coordinated with Amtrak's **Palmetto** to provide through service to and from Washington, D.C. and New York City, returning in the evening. The second round trip should begin in Raleigh in the morning and return to Raleigh in the evening.

Because Amtrak's ability to add passenger trains is limited by equipment and budget constraints, the task force will consider alternatives to Amtrak service as well as several options for working with Amtrak.

The Task Force makes this recommendation with the understanding that establishing intercity rail passenger service represents a long-term commitment. Tentative and half-hearted efforts will surely fail.

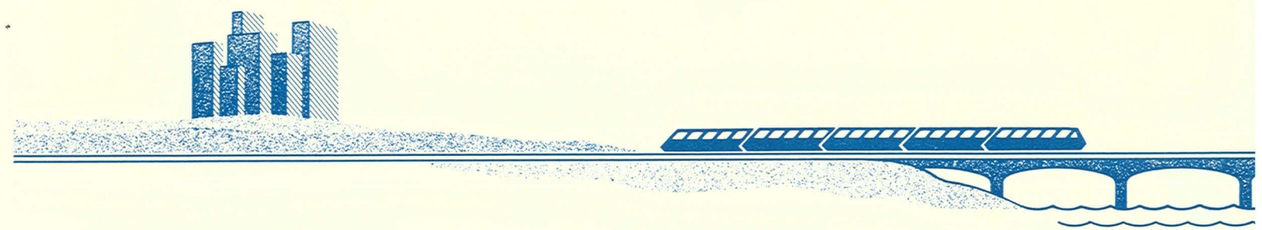
Future Directions

Growth in population and congestion, coupled with increasing highway costs mandate that we can no longer depend solely on highways to meet the future transportation needs of our citizens. Transportation must be viewed as a complete system that includes automobiles, aviation, and passenger rail service.

Determining the appropriate state response to longer-term rail passenger opportunities will be the focus of the Task Force's work during 1989. A long-term commitment to using intercity rail passenger service to supplement existing highway and air service in our most-congested, fastest-growing corridors requires careful consideration of funding and implementation strategies.

These strategies must take into account improvements in rapid transit passenger technology as well as local transit and transportation services. Such circulation services will provide easy access to intercity rail. The proper balancing of improvements to existing train services with implementation of new technologies must be analyzed. The state must also form partnerships with local governments, the University of North Carolina system, neighboring states, and the private sector to get the most from rail passenger services.

A recent poll revealed that North Carolinians, by a 2 to 1 margin, believe the state should "buy rail right of way to save it for future transportation uses" and should "provide money for railroad passenger service." Under Governor Martin's direction and drawing on this strong public support, the Task Force will focus on developing strategies to improve rail passenger service.



Raleigh in the afternoon.

In order to serve travelers desiring to make one-day round trips to Charlotte, a second Raleigh-Charlotte train is proposed, leaving Raleigh in the morning and Charlotte in the evening. There would be no connecting service to the Northeast available for this train. A possible schedule for these trains follows.

Eastbound	Train 1	Train 2
Leave Charlotte	8:30am	6:15pm
Arrive Raleigh	12:30pm	10:15pm
Arrive Rocky Mount	2:10pm	-------

Westbound	Train 1	Train 2
Leave Rocky Mount	3:50pm	-----
Leave Raleigh	5:30pm	7:45am
Arrive Charlotte	9:30pm	11:45am

Cost

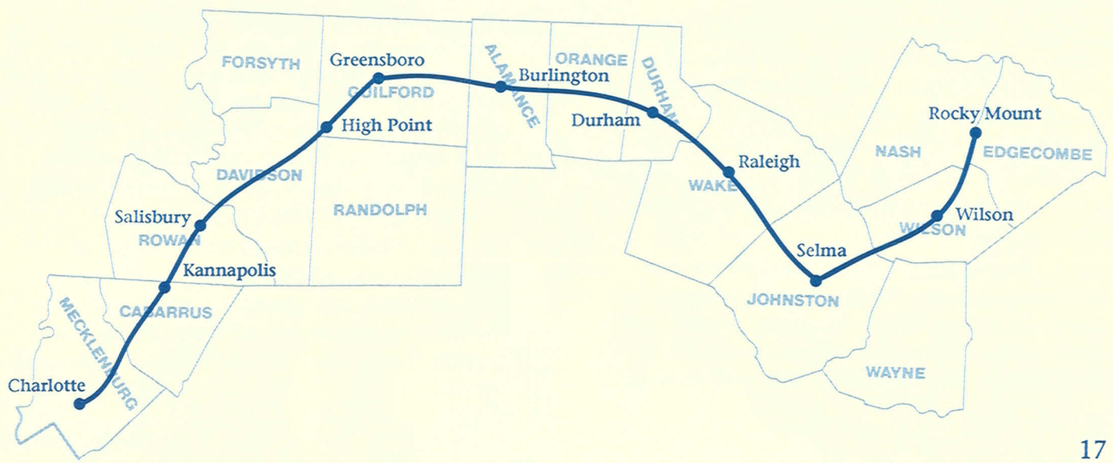
The costs of operating passenger train service vary with route and demand. In order to estimate the revenues that a train would generate, a specific route must be studied. Because of the high costs involved, mass transportation provided by passenger trains is most practical when the route serves major population centers or tourist attractions. In North Carolina, the Raleigh-Charlotte route along the Piedmont Crescent is the prime candidate for study.

The Task Force viewed several alternatives in considering how new service could be operated between Raleigh and Charlotte. If the issue of receiving permission and operating authority from the railroads involved is not considered, the alternatives range from exclusive state to exclusive Amtrak operation. Exclusive state operation was discarded because of the cost to the state of employing and training the necessary employees. Additional state costs would include providing an equipment maintenance facility to service the operation. The most practical alternative to exclusive Amtrak operation would be to have Southern Railway provide employees to operate state-owned equipment under contract. Locomotives could be provided by Southern Railway or leased privately by the state. For study purposes, the latter alternative was assumed and an annual cost for capital and operations of $3,029,025 was calculated.

The study found that even under the most favorable labor conditions, the costs to the state should be lower with exclusive Amtrak operation under section 403(b) of the Amtrak act. Under this act, deficits and equipment costs are shared by the state and Amtrak, as was the case with the **Carolinian**.

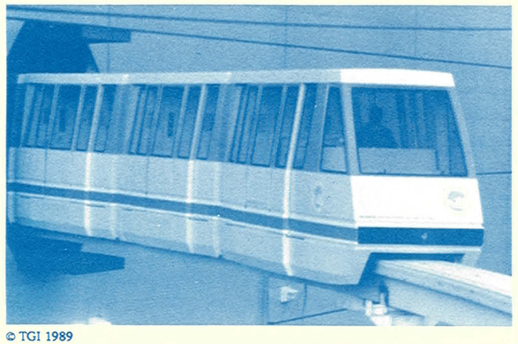
As of the date of this report, Amtrak has not

Proposed Service Area
Rocky Mount to Charlotte



well as to major regional airports. Also, several of these options could, in certain cases, use railroad rights of way. The ability of the rider to make convenient connections from one mode to the other would be an crucial factor in deciding what systems to develop.

Example: *Assume North Carolina State University invests in a people mover system (similar to the technology used at Disney World or Atlanta's Hartsfield Airport) to provide for circulation between its current campus and its new Centennial Campus. Further assume that this people mover would be elevated and would carry its riders in driverless vehicles at speeds of 20 - 25 mph and that the length of the system would not exceed 2.5 miles. This system would serve approximately 65,000 people who will be on campus each day. The route of the people mover would cross the North Carolina Railroad right of way. Given the possibility that both regional light rail and intercity service (such as Amtrak service to Raleigh-Greensboro-Charlotte) would use this right of way, the NCSU people mover could provide convenient access to either of these services at a station or transfer center.*



If people mover technology proves practical in the NCSU setting, it could also be used elsewhere. A partial list of possibilities would include the Research Triangle Park, Raleigh-Durham International Airport, Duke University and Duke Hospital, Piedmont Triad International Airport, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Charlotte-Douglas International Airport. In each case, a people mover system could provide convenient access to intercity and regional public transportation services for large numbers of people, boosting the potential patronage for each mode and increasing the likelihood that public transportation could play a meaningful role in the transportation system.

The Carolinian

From October 1984 to September 1985, the state and Amtrak jointly funded the operation of the **Carolinian**. The **Carolinian** traveled between New York and Charlotte with additional North Carolina stops in Kannapolis, Salisbury, High Point, Greensboro, Burlington, Raleigh, Durham, and Henderson. During the 1984 short session, the General Assembly appropriated $500,000 for a one-year trial of the **Carolinian**.

A total of 115,345 passengers rode the **Carolinian** during the 10 month trial period, with much higher ridership during holiday periods and the warmer months. Although ridership was 36% higher than projected, a revenue shortfall developed because the average trip length was much lower than expected. The service terminated when it became apparent that the total state share of the costs could exceed the appropriation made by the General Assembly for this purpose.

While the **Carolinian** did not meet revenue projections, the ridership demonstrated a high demand for rail passenger service along the Charlotte-Raleigh corridor.

Proposed New Service

The former **Carolinian** was combined with the **Palmetto** at Richmond to provide through-train service to the Northeast. Assuming the new service would operate on approximately the same schedule as the **Carolinian** between Raleigh and Charlotte, a convenient connection with the **Palmetto** could be made at Selma, Wilson or Rocky Mount. If a new train were operated, Amtrak has indicated it would agree to combine the train with its **Palmetto** to and from New York at Rocky Mount since the necessary tracks and support employees are available there. For these reasons, Rocky Mount-Charlotte is the route proposed for the first new passenger train service. This train would leave Charlotte in the morning and

North Carolina's Rail Network

Our rail system reached a peak of 5,522 miles in 1920; now we have 3,637 miles of track. All of these miles carry rail freight; some are also traveled by passenger trains. Because they share the same track, consideration of long-range rail passenger service must recognize its relationship to the rail freight industry.

Nowhere have the effects of growth been felt more acutely than in mounting congestion and delay at hub airports.

Future growth in air travel, which is closely tied to the state's economy, population increases and lifestyle changes, could overwhelm the capacity of the existing airport network by the year 2000. For the year 2010, target volume for air travel is on the order of three times today's traffic.

Partly because of the recent and planned expansions to the hub, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) projects that congestion at Raleigh-Durham International Airport will cause severe delays in operations by 1996. The congestion and delays at major hubs produce delays at airports outside of our state and also throughout the air transport network. Thus, as congestion occurs in Chicago, St. Louis or Atlanta, it will spur congestion and delays in North Carolina.

Expanding airport capacity is expensive--$25 million to $40 million for runways plus $2 million to $3 million per gate for terminal facilities. Enhancing the present system of airports is unlikely to provide adequate capacity for the long-term because of too few dollars and too little land.

It is probable that long-distance flights will receive preference for available air space. Airport expansion, already a sensitive issue in some areas, will not be undertaken merely to serve short-distance travelers. Of course, air travel is not a practical alternative for trips such as Charlotte-Burlington and Salisbury-Raleigh. While some very low air fares are now available with restrictions for a limited number of seats, recent trends have been toward higher fares and fewer carriers. As these trends continue, air travel will become less attractive for short trips.

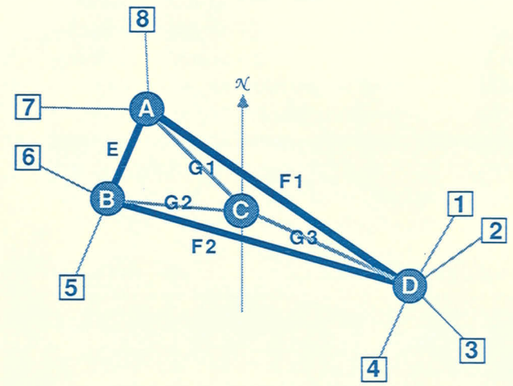
Rail service could be used instead of air travel for shorter trips or to provide rapid access to airports located far from urban centers.

Regional Public Transportation

In the three major regions of the Piedmont, serious thought is being given to providing increased public transportation. Within Wake, Durham, and Orange Counties for example, local officials are working together to form a Regional Public Transportation Authority.

Such an authority would plan for, provide and finance public transportation services. By creating an authority that encompasses a number of local government jurisdictions, the problems of multi-jurisdictional cooperation are greatly reduced and the effectiveness of planning for growth is enhanced.

Research Triangle System Model



Similar efforts are getting under way in the Triad (Greensboro, High Point and Winston-Salem) and Mecklenburg and surrounding counties.

Local officials expect rail-based public transportation options to provide future mobility. Through sound planning and intergovernmental cooperation, metropolitan areas in this state can avoid the severe congestion problems that plague cities such as Houston and Los Angeles.

Intermodal Connections

The range of public transit options that could directly affect intercity rail passenger service includes local and regional bus systems, regional light rail systems, commuter rail and people mover systems. Any of these modes could provide feeder service to intercity rail as

The Case for Rail Passenger Service

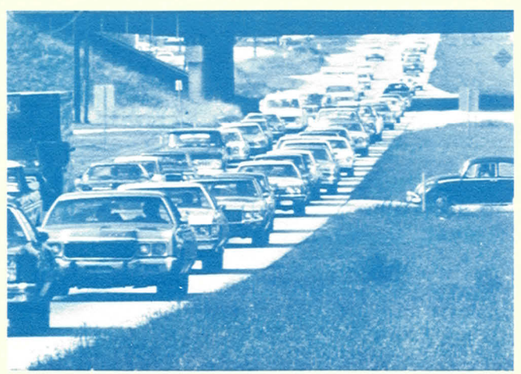
Consideration of adding passenger train service on a Rocky Mount-Raleigh-Charlotte route must include attention to the alternative travel modes now available. These modes include interstate highways, intercity buses and commercial air lines.

Highways

Traffic on stretches of I-40 and I-85 between Raleigh and Charlotte often exceeds design capacity. Construction and maintenance activities can add significantly to this congestion.

Construction projects to widen major portions of I-40 and I-85 from four to six or eight lanes are under way or are in the Transportation Improvement Program for the early 1990s. Project costs range from $4 million to 10 million per mile.

For example, to widen the 35.4 miles of I-85 from four to six lanes (beginning at SR 1134, east of Burlington, to US 29 in Greensboro) will cost an average of $4.22 million per mile. Work is under way on the design portion of the project. Construction will continue through 1996.



Not all highway expansions are designed to relieve congestion. The plan for a Strategic Highway Corridor Network seeks to improve routes that have high economic development potential. It should be recognized that highway construction projects will continue with these goals in mind.

Bus Service

Commercial bus service is available in the Rocky Mount to Charlotte corridor. Intercity bus ridership nationwide has declined steadily in recent years as auto ownership has risen. Increased car ownership is particularly significant in two of the intercity bus industry's two primary markets: students and military personnel.

The Bus Regulatory Reform Act of 1982 (BRRA) increased entry and exit flexibility for regular-route intercity bus firms and has led to the abandonment of routes and loss of service to rural areas. Before the act was adopted, the number of communities receiving bus service declined at an average annual rate of 3.3 percent. After passage of the act, the rate of decline increased sharply to a high of 11.6 percent from 1983 to 1984.

Recent changes in the intercity bus industry have increased ridership nationwide. It remains to be seen whether intercity bus operators will be effective in reclaiming market share.

Air Service

Air service is available between Raleigh and Charlotte, but as air service continues to grow, airports will soon reach capacity. The robust growth of air travel, especially in the past 10 years, has severely taxed our aviation facilities.

Freight Service

Our railroads are a vital element of the state's transportation system and are important to the state's continued economic health. In fact, the industries upon which the state's economy was founded rely most heavily on the railroads. Both large and small companies frequently require railroad service. New companies often will choose only communities with adequate rail service for new plants.

As a result of recent mergers, two major railroad companies -- Norfolk Southern Corporation and CSX Transportation -- are the most dominant carriers in North Carolina. In addition, there are 14 smaller, independent short line railroad companies. Four more lines owned by the trunk lines or a governmental unit operate as short lines or subsidiaries.

During the past two decades, railroads across the country have increasingly relied on the long-distance and bulk-commodity markets where they enjoy a competitive advantage. Railroads have lost market share in service-sensitive markets. As a result, the rail industry has undergone a significant restructuring. The

industry is trying to improve its competitiveness and profitability in all markets by reducing costs. These restructuring and cost-reduction efforts are centered on:

- abandoning unproductive lines
- selling or leasing marginally productive lines to more economical railroads
- using capital assets more effectively
- increasing labor productivity

Success in reducing costs should, if combined with better service to shippers, provide opportunities to increase rail traffic and preserve rail lines. The future of the U.S. rail system depends on the success of these efforts, as does the future of railroads in North Carolina. Much of the approximately 100 million tons of freight carried annually over rail lines in North Carolina and all Amtrak passenger trains move through the state on a national railroad system.

When the restructuring process is complete, the rail industry will likely include large, privately owned carriers operating main lines with dense traffic. Smaller rail carriers will operate the remaining system of branch lines and secondary main lines. These large carriers will continue to emphasize long-distance and single commodity service while the smaller carriers will gather traffic and interchange it with the long-distance railroads. Many of these smaller carriers, known as short lines (generally under 100 miles long) and regional railroads (commonly 100 to 2,600 miles long), already exist. More will be formed in the future with track acquired from the large trunk carriers, provided acquisition and equipment costs can be financed and operating costs are not inflated by expensive job-protection requirements.

Public funds may be required to help finance start-up of new short line operations. Such funds might pay for right of way acquisition, track rehabilitation, and initial equipment. Public investment should be justified based on economic development potential and contribution to the overall transportation system.

North Carolina and Atlantic & North Carolina Railroads

The North Carolina Railroad and the Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad are private corporations. The State of North Carolina owns approximately 75% of the stock of these companies. While the Governor appoints 8 of the 12 directors on each board of directors, these boards must be sensitive to the minority stockholders' rights and interests.

The North Carolina Railroad (NCRR) right of way runs from Charlotte to Goldsboro. The Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad (A&NCRR) right of way connects with it in Goldsboro and continues east to Morehead City. Both rights of way are leased for operation to the Norfolk Southern Corporation (NS), with the NCRR right of way operated by NS's Southern Railway subsidiary. The A&NCRR's right of way is operated by Norfolk Southern's Atlantic and East Carolina Railroad subsidiary.

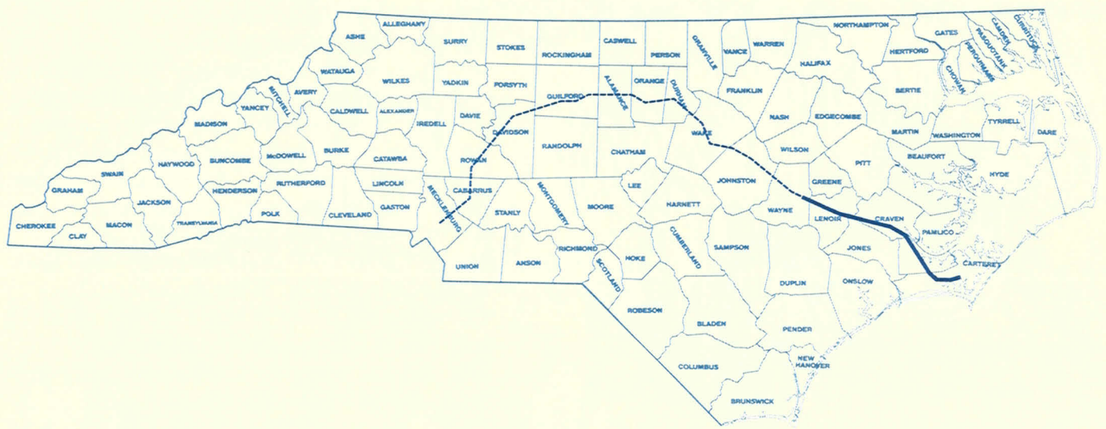
Norfolk Southern's right of way leases expire in December 1994. Work is reportedly under way on a proposal to merge the NCRR and the A&NCRR as a prelude to beginning the lease renegotiation process with NS.

The NCRR and A&NCRR, whether merged or not, apparently have several options. They could:

- continue to lease all the rights of way to NS or some other railroad for more money than NS's present lease payments now provide
- continue leasing only part of the right of way
- sell the rights of way to NS or some other railroad, and
- if only part or none of the rights of way are leased, resume operating as a railroad company or companies

Whatever the outcome of the negotiations, the right of way corridor held collectively by these two railroads is an irreplaceable transportation resource for the state. This corridor together with an aggressive entry into railroad operations would allow these companies to play a significant role in the state's transportation future. This could include passenger, freight, and other railroad activities.

The North Carolina Railroad and The Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad



Potential Funding Mechanisms

The following funding mechanisms for preserving rail corridors and for revitalizing railroads should be judged based on their adequacy, avoidance of long-term commitments of public funds, continuity, and political practicality.

The suggested mechanisms are:

1. *Finance a railroad trust fund through a railroad bond issue; support the fund with an increased continuing appropriation to the Rail Program.* General obligation bonds would be sold by the State Treasurer as needed and serviced by the General Fund. Any revenues from state railroad holdings would be deposited in the Railroad Trust Fund.
2. *Authorize a rail corridor bond issue.* General obligation bonds would be sold by the State Treasurer as needed, serviced by the General Fund, and revenues from any future state railroad holdings returned to the General Fund.
3. *Combine an increased continuing appropriation from the General Fund with a program for borrowing from and repayment to the highway fund.*
4. *Increase the level of the Rail Program's continuing appropriation from the general fund.*
5. *Establish a railroad trust fund with a one-time special appropriation.*
6. *Define railroads as a "highway purpose," fund railroad needs from the highway trust fund and include rail corridor acquisition in a transportation bond issue.*
7. *Approve a special one time appropriation.* This mechanism is the best way to make a rail bond issue workable (see mechanisms 1, 2, and 6.

The Case for Rail Corridor Protection

Since the 1920s, many miles of valuable rail corridors have been abandoned as railroads discontinued unprofitable routes. A select few have been saved through the formation of new short line railroad companies, most established since deregulation in 1981. However, the trend is continuing toward fewer rail miles in North Carolina, and the potential effect of these lost corridors on our future is severe.

Most abandonments during the past 20 years have occurred where the loss has been most damaging -- in areas of the state that were already struggling economically. This pattern of loss likely will continue and worsen due to curtailment of federal rail funding and the need for trunk railroads to consolidate, retaining only their most profitable lines.

Planning for the state's remaining rail lines and corridors should be based on their potential uses. Besides being detrimental to economic development, loss of rail corridors has an effect on the state's ability to meet its future transportation needs. Within the next 20 to 30 years, the state will begin to rely more heavily on railroads to move people as well as freight.

Already there are indications that there is too little money and too little land for the state to keep pace with its highway needs. Shortages of air space in metropolitan regions are disrupting schedules at the state's major airports. Long distance air flights soon will be scheduled in preference to medium or short distance commercial passenger flights.

There can be little hope for future rail passenger travel unless rail lines can be preserved, or can be built economically when they are needed. History has taught us that a rail corridor lost is gone forever.

There are several critical issues, some national in scope, which affect the future of rail transportation. These include:

- resolution of the labor-protection and short line financing issues, both of which will be critical to short line formation and survival
- the health of the national economy and the railroad industry, and
- the outcome of the North Carolina & Atlantic and North Carolina Railroads' negotiations with the Norfolk Southern Corporation for renewal of the rights of way leases that will expire in December 1994

Methods to Preserve Rail Corridors

Methods of preserving rail corridors should be judged based on the following criteria: cost, political feasibility, and involvement of both the private sector and local governments.

The single best means to preserve rail corridors is to keep them in operation. As economic conditions change, it will be necessary for state or local governments to consider support of continued railroad operation by participating in a portion of the capital or operating costs.

Methods to preserve rail corridors can be grouped into three categories.

1. *The major or trunk line railroad ceases active operations, but transfers its interest in the corridor by sale or lease to another railroad, perhaps a short line company.*
2. *The state acquires, or helps to acquire, the rail corridor for private railroad operation.*
3. *The state acquires and rail banks the corridor for future rail use.*

Passenger Service

The National Railroad Passenger Corporation (Amtrak) operates the only regularly scheduled rail passenger service in the state. North Carolina's service is comparable to that in other Southeastern states and similar to the nationwide "one train a day" pattern of a single northbound and a single southbound train daily. Only Rocky Mount and Fayetteville passengers have a choice of two or more departures in each direction each day. For the past 10 years, this service pattern has provided for one train through the central Piedmont and three trains through the eastern part of the state.

The **Crescent** travels over the Southern Railway line through Reidsville and Kings Mountain. Its termini are New York and New Orleans; it serves Greensboro, High Point, Salisbury, Charlotte and Gastonia in North Carolina. Its schedule brings it through North Carolina during the night in both directions with all cities served between midnight and 3:00 AM.

The CSX Transportation line through Weldon and Pembroke offers three passenger trains each way daily. One of these, the **Auto-Train**, makes no stops in North Carolina. The **Silver Meteor** serves Rocky Mount and Fayetteville between midnight and 3:00 AM on its run between New York and Florida. The **Palmetto** stops in Rocky Mount, Wilson, Selma and Fayetteville during the daylight hours on its run from New York to Jacksonville, Florida.

The **Silver Star** operates over the CSX line between Weldon and Selma, the Southern Railway between Selma and Raleigh and the CSX line between Raleigh and Hamlet. This train also runs between New York and Florida with North Carolina stops in Rocky Mount, Raleigh, Southern Pines and Hamlet, offering service northbound in the morning and southbound in the evening.

Approximate peak passenger capacities of these trains are as follows: the Crescent - 430, the Silver Meteor - 550, the Silver Star - 550 and the Palmetto - 300. Most passenger trains are full in the summer and around major holidays. Greater interest in rail travel and incentive pricing by Amtrak have increased patronage at other times as well, so there are fewer periods when trains operate below capacity. North Carolina riders must compete with other passengers for space during peak travel periods, and this situation is worsening. Amtrak is studying a system designed to increase revenue by limiting the seats available to riders making short trips.

Patronage of the trains now running through North Carolina has traditionally been above average compared to other long-distance trains in the Amtrak system. Ridership (total number of passengers getting on and off) at North Carolina's stations during past federal fis-

cal years (Oct. 1 through Sept. 30) is shown below. Cities are ranked according to 1988 ridership.

	1988	1987	1986	1985*	1984
Raleigh	39,088	37,562	40,624	90,619	27,018
Fayetteville	31,266	30,654	30,507	28,114	26,905
Rocky Mount	29,979	29,939	21,364	20,186	17,646
Charlotte	19,126	17,212	15,924	50,683	17,998
Greensboro	15,606	14,041	15,859	32,627	12,917
Wilson	14,785	13,505	12,389	13,761	15,160
Hamlet	8,711	8,280	8,913	8,548	8,411
Southern Pines	8,215	8,284	8,263	7,560	6,865
Salisbury	3,893	3,841	4,960	14,237	3,679
Gastonia	3,733	3,199	3,177	3,144	4,170
Selma	2,616	2,140	1,599	1,591	1,247
High Point	2,513	2,249	2,338	7,627	2,148
Henderson		402	5,977	6,970	4,952
Durham				13,367	
Burlington				12,973	
Kannapolis				8,525	
Total	179,611	171,272	171,894	320,536	149,116

*1985 figures include the Carolinian.

Recent ridership has mirrored Amtrak's nationwide pattern of sold-out trains, so growth can only occur during off-peak times. This same equipment limitation makes it unlikely that any new service will begin on the present routes. However, one recent expansion of service did take place when the **Palmetto's** southern terminus was extended from Savannah to Jacksonville in November 1988. This change did not require additional cars or an increase in crew costs.

Public Opinion and Demand

Several recent efforts to plan for transportation needs have helped to gauge the support among North Carolinians for rail passenger service.

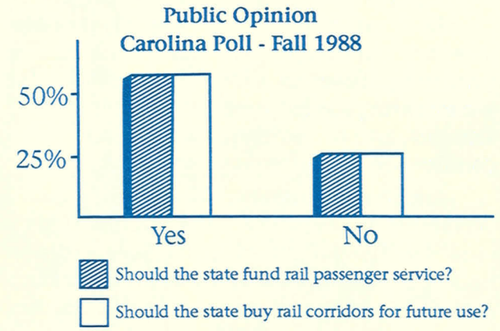
As part of the national "Transportation 2020" project, the League of Municipalities asked municipal officials for their opinions on transportation needs and how to address them. Respondents to the survey clearly believe that more highways alone will not solve the state's transportation problem. Of those responding, 71% said that highway improvements would not provide the complete solution, and 72% agreed that rail or light rail transit was a possible solution in some areas. A comparable survey of transportation professionals produced similar results.

The Task Force examined the degree of support for rail passenger service in two ways. Both an informal survey of visitors to the NC State Fair, and a statewide telephone poll were conducted.

Some 475 visitors to the NCDOT booth at the 1988 State Fair completed a survey. An overwhelming 89% favored state-supported rail service and 92% felt that the state should buy or protect rail rights of way.

The results of the above surveys are intriguing, although unscientific.

Two questions from the Task Force were added to the fall 1988 Carolina Poll, a telephone poll conducted semi-annually by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on political and other issues. The poll revealed that North Carolinians believe the state should "provide money for railroad passenger service" and should "buy rail right of way to save it for future transportation uses." These preferences were strongly stated by a 2 to 1 margin, with only 15 percent being against both measures.



To make the transition from public opinion to more sophistocated demand analysis, NCDOT has hired a consultant to develop an intercity rail passenger travel-demand model.

The project has two objectives. First, to develop a tool to predict the demand for intercity rail passenger service in the Raleigh-Greensboro-Charlotte corridor. Second, to predict the demand for intercity rail passenger service in any corridor in the state.

The consultant will review information about intercity rail passenger demand in North Carolina and data gained during the 10-month trial service provided by the **Carolinian**. The information will include ridership and revenue figures for that service, as well as the results of an on-board survey conducted by NCDOT. The consultant will obtain information about the service provided by other modes at the time of the **Carolinian** service. These include automobile operating costs and highway speeds, and the fares, travel times, and service frequency of intercity bus and airlines.