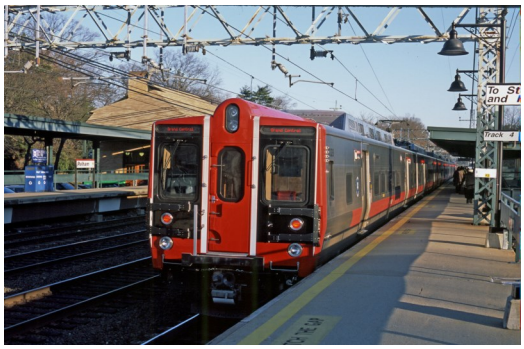
The Bulletin



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The Bulletin

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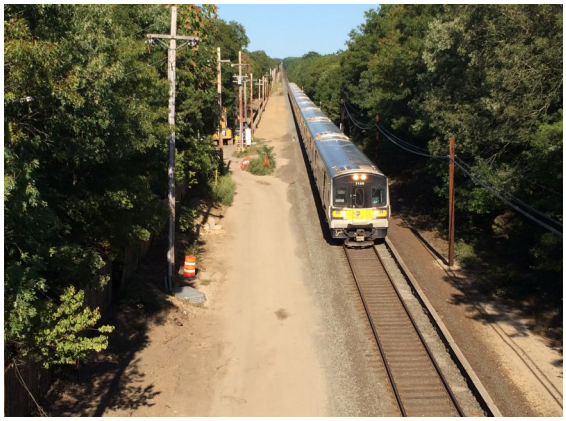
LONG ISLAND RAIL ROAD DOUBLE-TRACK PROJECT
by Jeffrey Erlitz
(Photographs by the author)

The Long Island Rail Road Double-Track Project is now well underway and is, in fact, scheduled to be completed this year. This project is being done in three phases. The first phase, for the preparation of the right-of-way from west of the Central Islip station to Ronkonkoma, was awarded in December, 2013 to Skanska-Posillico/PB Joint Venture for $34,160,000. On August 27, 2015 the first ceremonial piece of second track was laid at the Pond Road grade crossing in Ronkonkoma. The second phase, also for the preparation of the right-of-way, is from east of the Farmingdale station to west of Central Islip. The contract for this segment was awarded in May, 2016 and went to Skanska-Posillico II JV for $59,675,000. That work was completed in November, 2017. In June, 2017 L.K. Comstock and Company, Incorporated, a division of RailWorks Corporation, was awarded the $66.5 million contract for the third and final phase, installation of the second main track between Farmingdale and Ronkonkoma. Railworks Transit, another subsidiary, is performing the track installation work. If the actual track installation work was being done in the third phase, I am not sure why that piece of second track was ceremonially installed back in August of 2015. Perhaps it was just that, for the purposes of having a "ribbon-cutting" ceremony.

From east of the Central Islip station to west of the Ronkonkoma station the new second track is to the north of the existing single main track. From east of the Farmingdale station to west of the Central Islip station the new second track is to the south of the existing track. The following images show the progress of this major project over the past three years.



In the above view taken on September 5, 2015, M-7 7159 (Bombardier Transportation, December, 2003) leads Train #8059 west through Islandia and Ronkonkoma (the tracks are actually the border between the two with Islandia to the left). The existing main track will become Track 2 here. This view is from the Veterans Memorial Highway (Route 454) overpass and is a little over one mile east of the Central Islip station. You can see that the right-of-way has been prepared on the north side (to the left) for the second main track. This is in the first segment and was the more difficult section to build. For a long stretch, the single main track is on an embankment that needed to be widened and it also traverses through Lakeland County Park and over the Connetquot Brook, so

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Part 2 of Subutay Musluoglu's article on the Grand Central subway station has been postponed to May.

THE GENESIS OF DASHING DAN — ENTER THE NORTH SIDE DIVISION
by George Chiasson
(Continued from March, 2018 issue)

While the dirt most definitely flew in Flushing, earnest electrification work began on the Whitestone Branch in May, 1912. The line was outfitted with third rail almost entirely as it was originally constructed, but with high wooden platforms installed through the summer at Elmhurst, Corona, Bridge Street, College Point, Whitestone, and Whitestone Landing to expedite dwell times. By this time it was clear that the established traffic levels between Manhattan and the North Side Division not only justified its insertion at Penn Station as soon as possible but almost demanded it. Of course, one overarching aspect of this urgency which had not applied to the earlier electrified lines was a lack of destination alternatives at the New York end for passengers from the two branches, who inherently only had access to Manhattan but not Downtown Brooklyn. As a result their fast-growing passenger load was continuing to put an incredible strain on the Woodside station, which was still a humble setting that was being used for transfers between North Side trains and the various electric lines already serving Penn Station, a function far in excess of its original purpose. In addition, until their electrification could be implemented, the ever-increasing volume of passengers from the (frequent) trains of the Port Washington and Whitestone Branches, along with the company's continuing plethora of steam-powered routes, would keep the terminal at Long Island City and its attendant ferries almost as busy as Penn Station, while also continuing to require a full range of staffing and passenger services at both locations. On the other hand, it was equally obvious that terminal capacity at Penn Station itself, though it was still less than two years old, was already being strained and there would not be room to simply relocate all then-scheduled service from both Whitestone and Port Washington into Manhattan.

Then, as always, there was the question of available equipment. The unceasing ridership needs of the Long Island Rail Road's burgeoning suburban electric empire to date had eagerly consumed each and every one of its 335 passenger-carrying MUs as soon as they could be added to the fleet. Nonetheless the company was not in a financial position (nor truly expected to be anytime soon) that it would just as readily be able to procure additional large quantities of rolling stock for an indefinite period. For its part, the parent Pennsylvania was still willing and able to assist in this regard, but its future commitment to the suburban side of the mature New York Terminal project was understandably limited—the Pennsy, after all, was on the cusp of its own similar struggles in the Philadelphia area. As much as anything else this challenge was a key factor going forward which retarded the LIRR's ability to develop a (profitable) "commuter" network that could stay ahead of Long Island's virtually inexhaustible suburban growth, as opposed to one that was perpetually trying to catch up with itself and the communities it served. There were other mitigating circumstances, of course: the (First) World War, financial inflation by the 1920s, and the growth (or absence) of government's role in setting the conventions for commercial and residential development in such a vast, prosperous urban region before the deflationary effects of the Great Depression intervened. All in all, the railroad's power to control its own destiny in this regard during that first, crucial decade after Penn Station's opening was very definitely compromised by issues beyond its immediate control.

In any case, the LIRR did receive 20 more MP-54A motors in 1912 (1602-21) which would enable it to "open the (new) line at a moment's notice, were that necessary," or so its spokesman stated in the newspaper. Employee training was finally able to commence on the newly-electrified corridor from Penn Station to Whitestone by the beginning of September, about a month after the customary media alert of the start-up and literally as the last construction crews were getting out of the way and the necessary facilities certified for use. To support the new electrification, a substation was established in the Flushing "meadow" at Whitestone (aka Great Neck) Junction, another at Whitestone Landing, and the requisite power lines partly buried in wayside troughs and partly strung alongside the oft-sodden earth around its right-of-way. Meanwhile, electrical facilities had already been established at the stations before third rail was laid with the exception of Malba, where it was built-in at its rather late opening date. Completely electrified revenue service commenced when the "Winter" schedule went into effect on October 22, 1912, at which time all Whitestone trains were routed into Pennsylvania Station while traditional, steam-powered consists from Port Washington continued to journey to Long Island City only during the rush hours. To reduce the continuing crush of interchange activity at Woodside, at all other times Port Washington Branch trains were terminated at the Corona station then deadheaded to the Long Island City servicing complex and back, with passengers transferring to and from Whitestone electrics at the former location for the balance of their trip.

Otherwise, the Whitestone Branch was operated as always, with meets on its single main track based on timetable superiority and executed at passing sidings at Myrtle (32nd) Avenue in Flushing and College Point or entering the terminal at Whitestone Landing, each overseen by a nearby signal tower. This traditional working routine was the only one of its type on the Long Island

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The Genesis of Dashing Dan

(Continued from page 2)

Rail Road's electric lines (though not on its system) and was long a point of concern but not uncertainty with the railroad. In fact, the installation of an automatic block signal system (using semaphore heads) was initially planned and approved once upgrading and electrification of the neighboring branch to Port Washington was completed by 1914, but such work on the Whitestone Branch was actually being advanced by LIRR management at substantial additional cost. Each of these dynamics came into play on the morning of Monday, September 22, 1913 when two trains — #311, the scheduled 6:16 from Whitestone Landing to Penn Station (which was 23 minutes late), and #308, the scheduled 6:15 from Penn Station to Whitestone Landing (which had passed by "JC" Tower at Whitestone Junction three minutes behind schedule) — collided head-on at approximately 6:45 AM. The accident occurred just past the (blind) 90º curve at Third (now 14th) Avenue between the College Point and Malba stations, killing both Motormen and critically injuring the Conductors on each train (which at that hour were mostly empty of passengers). The lead MP-54A motor car of each train was heavily, but not fatally, damaged while the rest of the equipment involved evidently sustained no serious harm. For the record, the consist of westbound train #311 was MP-54A unit 1526 along with a "combination car" (probably an MPB-54), while 308 had four MUs led by the brand new 1371, with (likely) another MPB-54 trailing.

After a number of investigations and testimonies were conducted both within and outside the LIRR (most notably by the Interstate Commerce Commission), it was determined that the wreck was indeed caused by a combination of many factors, including the lengthy tardiness of the Manhattan-bound train (which had timetable superiority for the time of day), as well as poor procedural (rulebook) judgment and miscommunication, inattention to detail (both on behalf of the line's Dispatcher and the Towerman at "JC") and to some degree signal and sightline limitations presented by the line's now-aged (44-year-old) operating environment. In response to this predicament, and continuing until the Whitestone Branch was ultimately closed almost 20 years later, a "staff" block authentication system was implemented (otherwise and more recently known as operation by "baton") which required any train entering a single-track segment to be in possession of an exclusive, designated identifying marker (often in the form of a flag, lamp or lantern) before it could proceed, such that any train lacking this indicator in addition to standard permissions was forbidden from proceeding through the single-track area, regardless of timetable status or any otherwise countermanding order. While this incident and its aftermath may have scarred the railroad and accentuated the intrinsic shortcomings of the Whitestone Branch, the line nevertheless remained an important and intensely-served traffic generator for the rest of its service life.

In the meantime, the Port Washington Branch was still deep in the pangs of construction intended to support its ultimate electrification with a wired, two-track elevation being added through the summer of 1913 to replace the original grade-level right-of-way from a point east of the Murray Hill station (corresponding with the present 155th Street) to the grade crossing at Broadway (now Northern Boulevard). This was in addition to the final effort to complete the previous (1912) elevation of trackage through the central area of Flushing, where the permanent, high-platform station was constructed at Main Street along with a substantial yet aesthetically-crafted and concrete-sheathed overpass which carried the new main tracks over the roadway in place of the temporary trestle work. In between these two sections, the Murray Hill open cut was extended along the northerly perimeter of the railroad's property from a new underpass at Percy (147th) Street to a point past Murray Street (roughly at the present 154th Street) which enabled trackage through the densely-populated Murray Hill station area to be depressed by some 25 to 30 feet below the original grade level. This cut was to be occupied by a single, temporary, and electrified track and include a new (and also temporary) station while the construction of more permanent facilities progressed, with both placed in service along with the relatively short elevated segment to a new (permanent) high-platform station at Broadway on September 24, 1913. The new Main Street station and its associated concrete-encased bridge across Main Street were also opened on October 4, which completed the two-year jigsaw puzzle of electrification-ready track through Flushing, and testing of the new facilities was at last able to begin. Employee qualification followed a week after that, and within two weeks the Port Washington Branch was deemed ready for its long-awaited diversion to Manhattan. Ultimately, construction work on the extended open cut through Murray Hill, which continued to exhibit the rapid transit-like "concrete canyon" characteristics of the portion opened in 1912, was ongoing through the following winter and spring. Its permanent, electrified double-track and an entirely depressed, cement-encased station at Murray Hill, which included a replacement, albeit unconventional "depot" at ground level (more accurately described as an enclosure) were finally completed by the end of July, 1914.

As was the case the previous year, new "Winter" schedules were put into effect on Tuesday, October 21, 1913 which featured through service from Port Washington to Pennsylvania Station at all times, but with some capacity- and equipment-conserving strings attached. In the peak commuting hours (at least after October of 1914 if not from the beginning), Port Washington service consisted of numerous express trains that skipped most stations in the dominant direction of travel (stopping only at Main Street and Bayside west of Great Neck), and may not have stopped at all between Great Neck and Woodside going the opposite way. Meanwhile, Penn Station MUs in "local" service (that is, mak-

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Tech Talk

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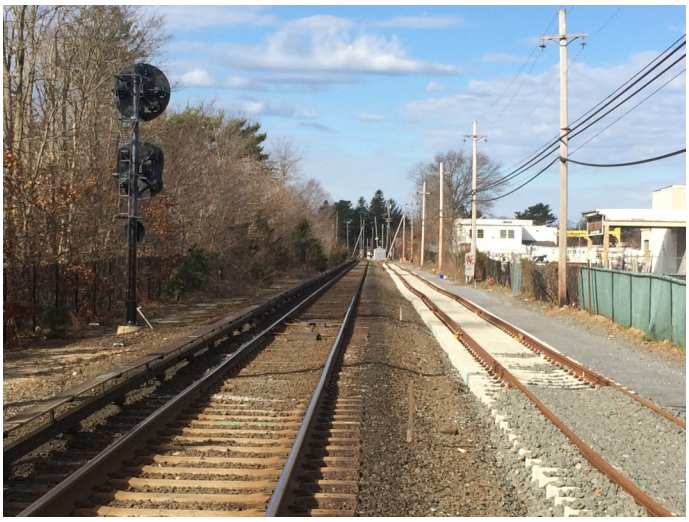
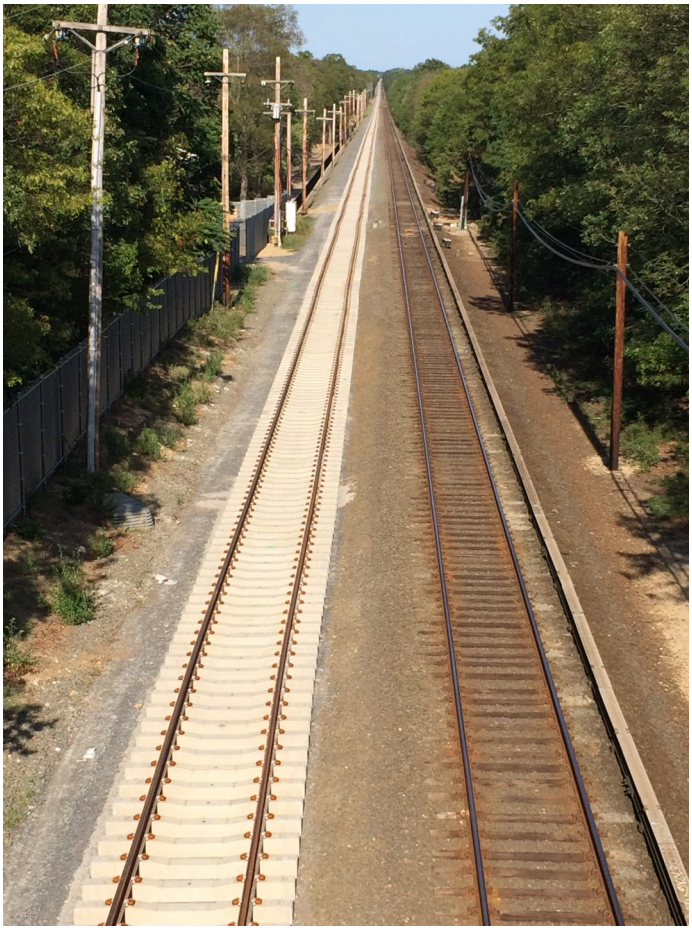
there were some environmental issues here. This is the longest section of the Main Line west of Ronkonkoma without any grade crossings, a distance of over three miles.

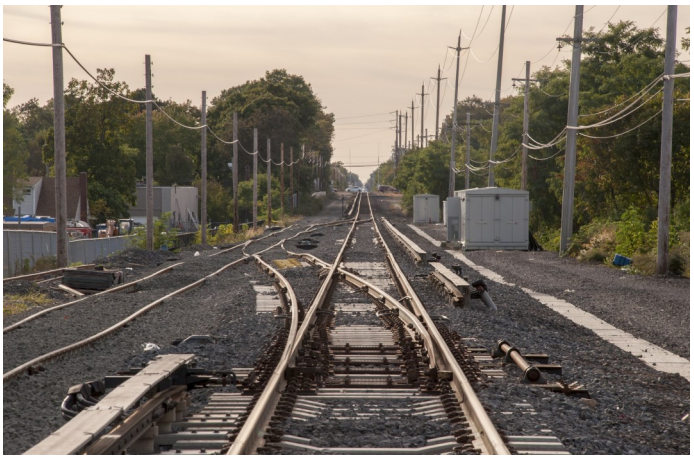


The above view is looking west on March 20, 2016 with the section of second main track that had been laid

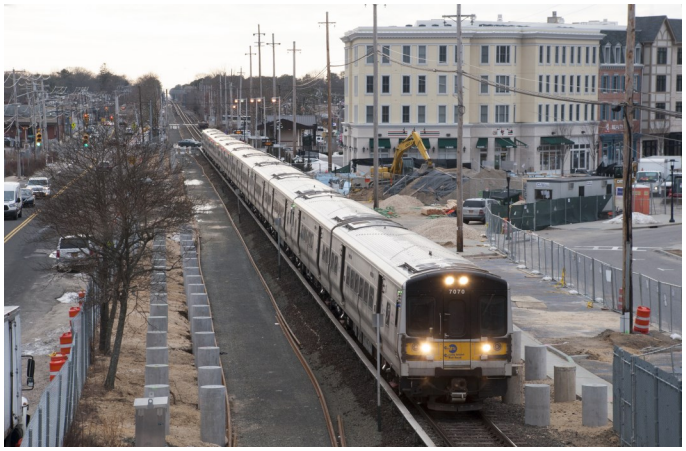


the previous summer in the ribbon-cutting ceremony. I am standing on the Pond Road grade crossing and that signal to the left is the eastward home signal (1E) protecting the facing point switches at KO-1 Interlocking, about a quarter-mile west of Ronkonkoma station.

Returning to Veterans Memorial Highway in Islandia/ Ronkonkoma on August 27, 2016 (bottom left) we see that the new second track has been laid and is awaiting ballast, tamping, and lining.



It is now October 21, 2017 and this is looking west from just west of the Peters Boulevard grade crossing. This is about one mile west of the Central Islip station. In the current scenario, the Main Line is single-track from Brentwood to Ronkonkoma with a passing siding at the Central Islip station. The interlockings (CI-1 and CI-2) on either side of Central Islip station will be removed from service and this single universal interlocking (just named CI) will replace it. The segment from here east to Ronkonkoma is scheduled to be the first piece of double-track placed in service and is supposed to be this summer.



On January 15, 2018 we see M-7 7070 (Bombardier Transportation, May, 2003) leading Train #8054 out of the Wyandanch station. Note that the column supports for the new platform along the as yet unbuilt Track 2 are already in place. In addition, the platform along Track 1

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Tech Talk

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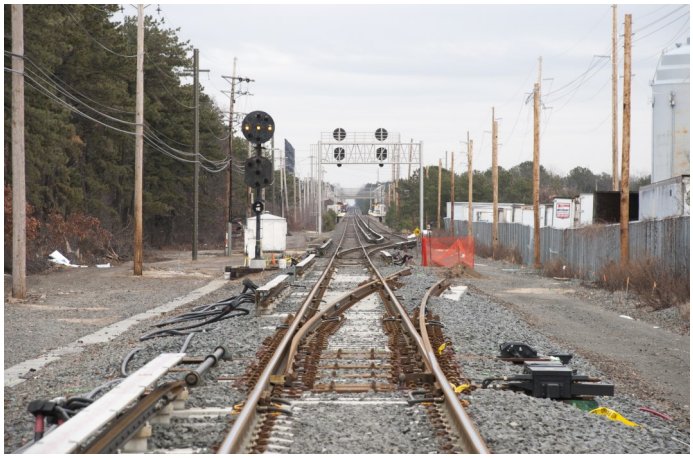
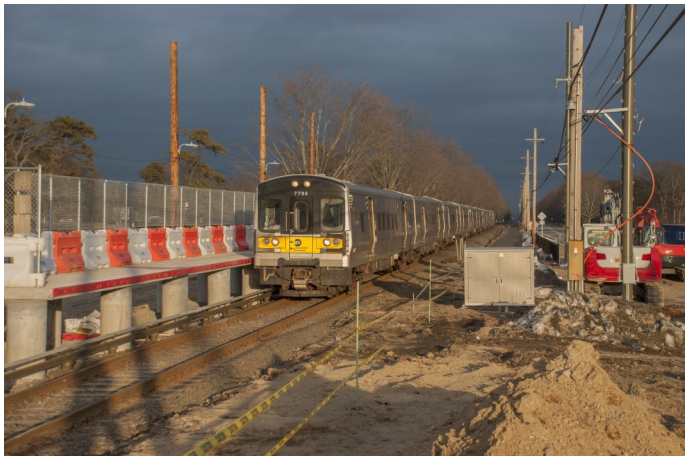
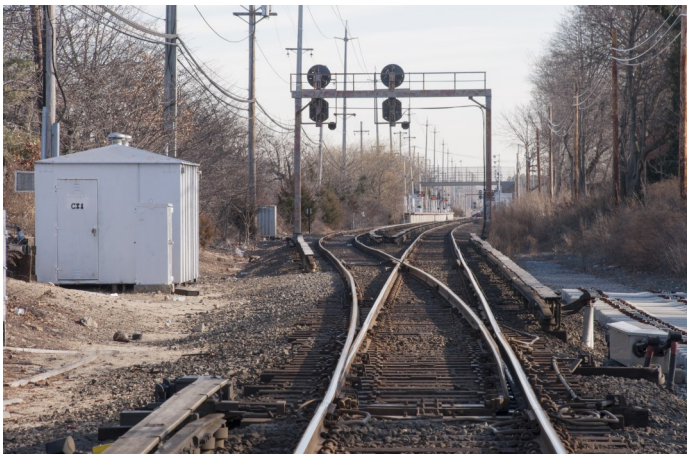
is being extended, hence the new columns on the right. In the right background are the new apartment buildings and stores in Wyandanch Village, a transit-oriented development. Out of sight to the right is a new parking garage for the station that is already open and in use.



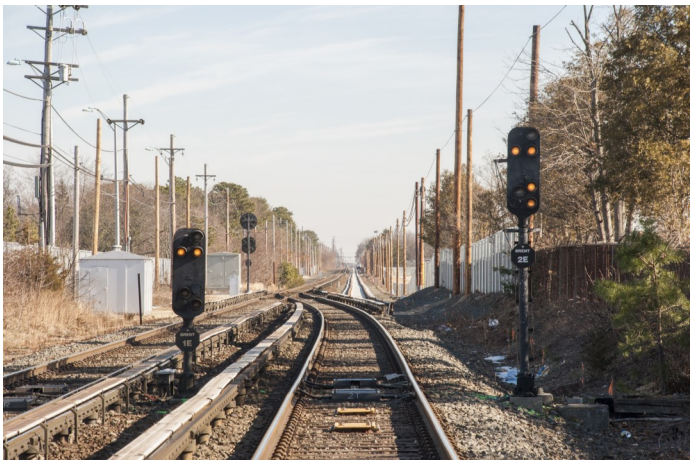
Also on January 15, 2018, this is looking east at JS Interlocking, west of the Deer Park station, which you can see in the distance. Though mostly single-track, the Main Line *is* double-track from this point, west of the Deer Park station, to just east of the Brentwood station. The new, second main track will be to the right. I had originally assumed that the existing single switch (the second one seen here) would simply be rebuilt into a crossover switch as the new second main track got built here. As you can see, such is not the case. They installed a brand-new switch for the future crossover. You will notice that the home signal here (1E) is to the left of the main track. This was just done a few months ago to free up the space for the new second main track.



Later in the afternoon of January 15, 2018, M-7 7795 (Bombardier Transportation, December, 2006) brings Train #8057 to a stop at the Pinelawn station, which is actually in the village of Wyandanch. This was the first day of service for this platform, which was previously to the right of the single main track, but that was in the way of the new second track.



This view, on January 20, 2018, shows the west end of the current siding at Central Islip. You can see the new second main track to the right. As mentioned above, this interlocking will be removed and replaced with a new one about a mile to the west. Both main tracks here will need to take a slight jog to the left, one track space, to align with the existing two tracks in the station, just off in the distance.



Back at Brentwood, the current end of double-track from Deer Park. Looking east on January 20, 2018, you can see the new second track off in the distance.

As I mentioned in the January issue, the placing in service of the new interlocking at Kew Gardens-Union Turnpike was in fact completed over the weekend of February 17-20. It took a total of nine weekends to do the whole job, beginning to end. With the completion of this signal work, the whole Queens Boulevard Line is now "CBTC-ready" from 50th Street-Elghth Avenue and 50th Street-Sixth Avenue to Briarwood (formerly Van Wyck Boulevard). Parsons Boulevard-Hillside Avenue will be the last original interlocking left on the Queens Boulevard Line mainline since Northern Boulevard will

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A BRIGHTLINE FOR AMERICAN PASSENGER RAIL
by Alexander Ivanoff
(Photographs by the author)

Since its inception as a solution for Florida's failed high-speed rail plans, Brightline (originally known as All Aboard Florida) was started in 2012 with lofty ambitions as a "skunkworks" project (to borrow the Lockheed Martin term) of the parent company of Florida East Coast Industries/Florida East Coast Railway (FECI/FEC). This is the FEC's first passenger rail since 1968, when a court-ordered train between Jacksonville and Miami was discontinued. Despite a series of minor legal and larger technical setbacks (construction and testing delays), Brightline opened its first stretch of rail on January 8 between West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale.

I took this trip with ERA Treasurer Michael Glikin. We arrived at Brightline's West Palm Beach terminal about 3 in the afternoon for the 3:30 PM departure to Fort Lauderdale. The station in West Palm Beach is well appointed, with appropriate colors and very modern design. Brightline bills itself as the first 100% ADA-compliant rail system in the United States, and that accessibility is present in all parts of the operation. Outside the stations, bike and ride-sharing facilities are available, as is parking.

Much like NJ Transit's Secaucus Junction, everything is done via QR code, allowing for in almost all cases a paperless ride. Brightline also bills itself as cashless, which for some might be an issue. Security was also straightforward, offering Brightline a bit of peace of mind in a world that is very conscious of terrorism and mass shootings. Bathrooms are aesthetically interesting with hand dryers built into the faucets (like wings). Doors at the stations are almost all motion sensor-operated, including gate barriers for lounge access! The Select Lounge is well-appointed and allows passengers some pre-boarding snacks (no alcoholic beverages) along with TV broadcasting the latest news. The lounges have lots of seating, with numerous power outlets. When our train was called, an escalator brought us to platform. Our trainset was the BrightPink one, with car numbers on the vestibule ends.

The Siemens-built trainsets are quiet and comfortable, with spacious windows, bright interiors, and, just like the station lounges, ergonomic leather seats with plenty of power outlets and dual armrests. The ceiling-mounted banners, which show train status information and ads, also inform customers as to if the restroom is occupied. Pull-down shades, like those found on intercity motor coaches, are a nice touch. Smart is two-by-two seating while Select is one-by-two seating. While on the train I ordered a ginger ale. I wanted a popcorn snack, but the car attendant mentioned they were out of stock. I was more than content with just the ginger ale as I was busy trying to take everything in. Our train passed a FEC mixed-freight heading north. Another ERA member had made the same trip in January and remarked how smooth the ride was. The FEC is known for their top-notch right-of-way, and Brightline is no exception.

The only disappointment with my trip is how fast it ended. We arrived into Fort Lauderdale a few minutes ahead of schedule. The Fort Lauderdale station is nearly identical to the one in West Palm Beach, and the Broward Central Terminal for Broward County Transit is located right across the tracks, further making intermodal connectivity a possibility. From there Mike and I took two buses to Miami Beach, where we enjoyed dinner.

While it was my first ride on Brightline, it is far from my last. The service was very welcoming and a refreshing change from what I am used to on Amtrak. My only question is, how will Brightline manage to avoid people booking from one city and riding further than they are ticketed? In recent months, Amtrak has come under fire for poor service and a string of accidents. Brightline is truly a bright spot in a nation that in the last sixty years has had little advancement in passenger rail. Hopefully we'll see more Brightline-like routes across the country. With Texas Central Railway close to starting work on the line from Dallas to Houston, high-speed rail in the United States is finding new homes outside of traditional passenger rail corridors. *(Continued on page 7)*

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(Continued from page 3)

ing all stops) were generally turned back at Great Neck so as to avoid the remaining single-track railroad into Port Washington. In addition to this operational mix, a connecting, supplementary electric shuttle was instituted from Woodside to Long Island City which, like the neophyte Rockaway operation of 1910, was drayed into and out of the non-electrified Borden Avenue terminal by steam-powered switching locomotives. This aspect of the railroad's impressive new array of services was intended to direct as many of the North Side lines' East Side (i.e. Manhattan) passengers onto its existing East River ferries as possible, thereby to further reduce the incredible load of humanity travelling through Penn Station. Outside of rush hours, the electric trains from Port Washington and Whitestone Landing were cut or combined by "JC" Tower at Whitestone Junction, being operated as a single consist between that point and Pennsylvania Station, Manhattan. *(Continued next issue)*

A Brightline for American Passenger Rail

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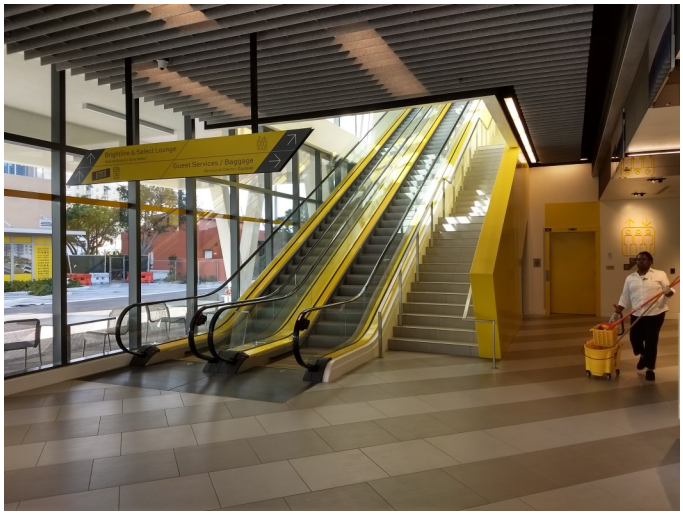
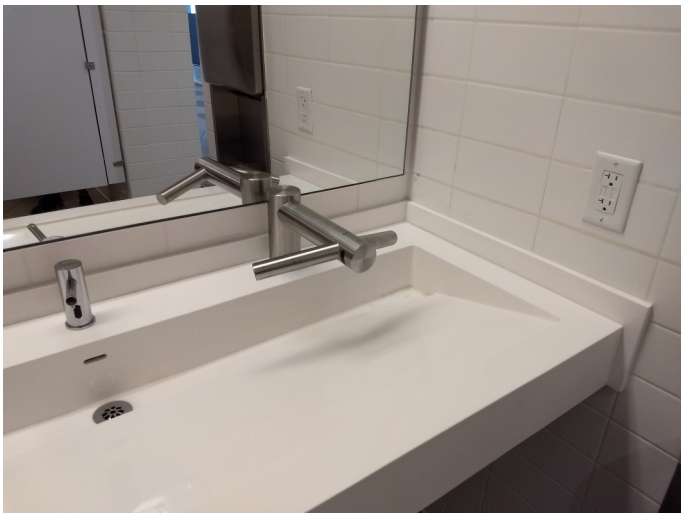
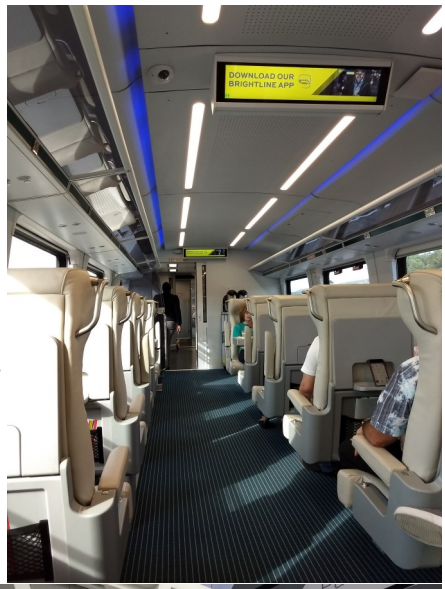


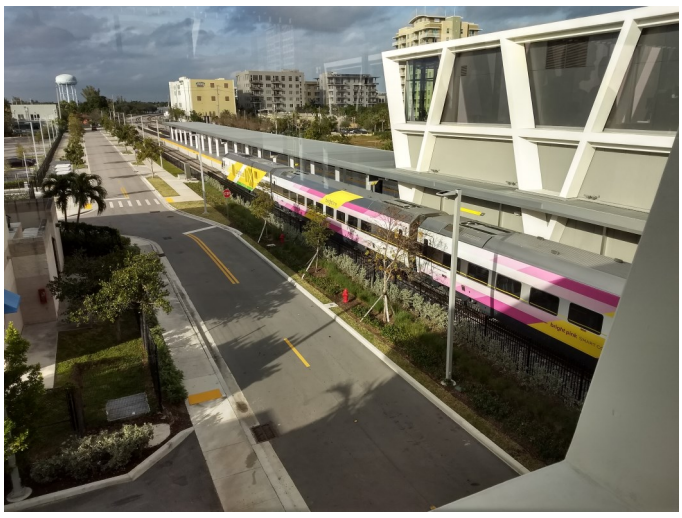
The interior of the Brightline station in West Palm Beach. Regardless of the accent colors, yellow truly helps to make the "Bright" in Brightline come out.



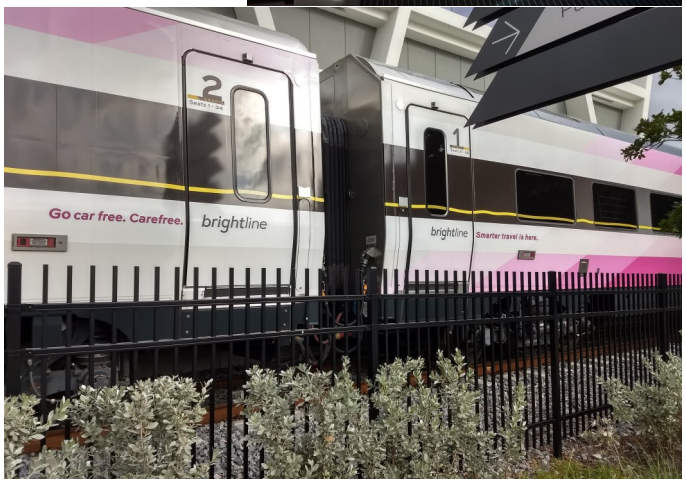
The combination water faucet/hand dryer in a Brightline station. restroom



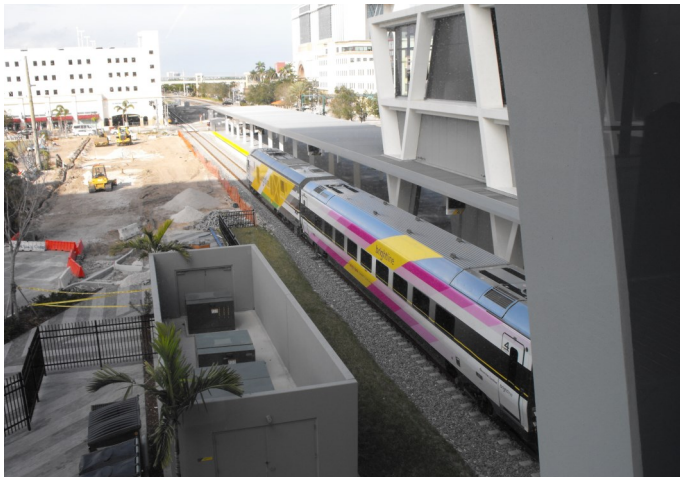
The interior of a Brightline Select coach. The Siemens cars currently on order for CalTrans (California DOT) and Illinois DOT on behalf of the Midwest corridor services will be nearly identical.



The BrightPink consist at the Fort Lauderdale station.



Brightline Select car 202. For some reason, Brightline does not make car numbers prominent like Amtrak and other rail operators do.



The BrightPink consist at the West Palm Beach station.

Commuter and Transit Notes

No. 351

by Ronald Yee, James Giovan, and Alexander Ivanoff

MTA Metro-North Railroad

Metro-North closed its ticket windows on the west side of the upper level of Grand Central Terminal on March 5 until further notice for renovations. The ticket selling and customer service functions were shifted to the ticket windows on the east side of the terminal. *(Editor's Note by Ronald Yee: These windows have remained unused since the departure of Off Track Betting (OTB) in the late 1980s and have only served as a single tourist information window and for special events. Going farther back in Grand Central's history, these windows were originally the ticket windows for the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad, separate from the New York Central Railroad.)* (Metro-North Railroad press release, March 4)

Metro-North reduced its evening services after 10 PM to hourly on all three lines on Friday, March 2 in response to the severe winter storm with high winds and snow that had battered the region all afternoon. Regular service resumed Saturday, March 3. (Metro-North Railroad press release, March 2)

Five days later, another winter storm, packing less intense winds but dropping around two feet of heavy wet snow north of White Plains, forced Metro-North to reduce service on Wednesday, March 7 by combining select AM and PM peak period trains and reducing its service to hourly after 8 PM. However, the weight of the heavy snow caused numerous trees to fall across the tracks on all three lines, forcing the railroad to suspend all service at 7:45 PM, stranding hundreds of commuters in Grand Central Terminal overnight. A reduced schedule was operated on Thursday, March 8 on the Hudson, Harlem, and New Haven mainline while service remained suspended on the New Canaan, Danbury, and Waterbury Branches. On Friday, March 9, service on the Harlem Line between Goldens Bridge and Southeast had to be suspended due to power line poles weakened by the storm that fell across the tracks and damaged the third rail. Repairs took three days with a "bus bridge" providing service between Southeast and Goldens Bridge. Normal train service resumed in time for the morning peak period Monday, March 12. (Metro-North Railroad press releases, March 7-9)

The March 18 schedules make major changes to the traditional service patterns that had been in effect for the entire history of the railroad since 1983. To accommodate the addition of a new platform at the White Plains station and the preparation work needed for platform reconstruction and renewal at the Hartsdale and Scarsdale stations, all weekday off-peak and weekend North White Plains locals that do not make connections with upper Harlem Line trains to and from Southeast will terminate at Crestwood, leaving the Scarsdale and Hartsdale stations with hourly service. This loss of service will be mitigated during time periods where ridership is heavier by having select Southeast trains stop at Hartsdale, Scarsdale, and Crestwood before operating express to/from Manhattan. The once per day weekend through service express trains between Wassaic and Grand Central Terminal will be replaced with Wassaic to Southeast shuttle trains. There are no changes to peak period schedules and patterns. *(Editor's Note by Ronald Yee: This schedule revamping will provide a longer uninterrupted time "window" during which workers can focus on getting the construction work done instead of constantly clearing up to allow the passage of trains every half-hour in each direction. It will also reschedule the train movements through construction areas to permit the single-tracking of the line between North White Plains and Scarsdale as well as Goldens Bridge to Southeast to support a switch replacement project and allow workers continuous track time to perform their work. However, this Editor does have some concerns regarding the irregularity of the stopping patterns of the revised service. It is not a "mnemonic" schedule, in other words, a schedule that customers will easily remember as the stopping patterns of all the trains in the Crestwood-Scarsdale-Hartsdale zone are not uniform and have variances throughout the day, ostensibly designed to better serve the public during certain portions of the off-peak periods which have somewhat higher levels of demand based upon ridership data. There a possibility that this varied and inconsistent schedule pattern change could result in a great deal of confusion amongst the passengers getting carried past their stops thinking the train they are on is making Hartsdale, Scarsdale, or Crestwood when in fact it is not. Adding to that scenario the prospect of only hourly service at Scarsdale and Hartsdale should someone need to ride back to a station they missed is a recipe for customer dissatisfaction and potential ridership loss. Clear and concise public address announcements at boarding stations and aboard the trains by the crews will be the only means to prevent confusion.)* (Metro-North press release, March 13)

NJ Transit

March 7's winter storm caused NJ Transit to implement its Severe Weather Schedule Level 1 on its rail system, resulting in a limited weekday schedule on all lines. After the storm stampeded through the region, dropping up to 30 inches of snow on some portions of the NJ Transit commuter rail network, the railroad announced that limited rail service would operate on Thursday, March 8. Limited service was offered on the Pascack Valley and Main Line only between Hoboken and Suffern, service to Port Jervis remained suspended due to downed trees across the tracks, Raritan Valley Line service was restored only between Newark and Raritan, and service west to High Bridge remained suspended because of fallen trees. The Northeast Corridor and North Jersey Coast Lines and *RiverLine* resumed full service and the Princeton Shuttle and Atlantic City services remained suspended due to mechanical and signal issues respectively. The Morris & Essex Lines

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remained suspended due to snow and fallen tree issues affecting the catenary. (NJ Transit press releases, March 6-8)

Amtrak

Amtrak unexpectedly announced the end of its Pacific Parlour Car service on the *Coast Starlight,* train numbers 11 and 14; the final run northbound was February 2 departing from Los Angeles and February 4 departing from Seattle. Amtrak officials cited the advancing age of the 1956-vintage former *El Capitan* high-level cars used for that service and the need for an extensive (expensive) inspection and rehabilitation work on a 60-year-old car body and trucks. (Amtrak press release, February 1)

Amtrak is shortening the route of the Cardinal and cancelling two Northeast Regional trains to minimize congestion during track work at New York's Penn Station.

Beginning March 29, train #50, the eastbound *Cardinal*, will operate from Chicago to Washington, D.C. instead of continuing to Penn Station as is currently the case. Beginning April 1, the westbound *Cardinal*, train #51, will operate from Washington to Chicago. These changes are until further notice.

Existing trains will provide connecting service to and from New York, but the change ends, at least temporarily, the one-seat service between New York and Virginia and West Virginia communities that generates a significant amount of the train's traffic.

The *Cardinal* ran between Washington and Chicago from 1995 to 2002 to facilitate use of Superliner equipment, which cannot operate on the Northeast Corridor because of clearance issues. The Superliner equipment was replaced by single-level cars in October, 2002 and full service to New York returned in 2004.

Cancelled as part of the schedule change are Saturday and Sunday Northeast Regional trains #152 (leave Washington at 8 AM) and 153 (depart New York at 8:05 AM). Those cancellations are effective March 25 until further notice, although both trains will run as part of the July 4 holiday schedule. (***Trains Magazine*** via Orrin Getz, March 13)

Amtrak CEO Richard Anderson stated that he does not intend to operate passenger trains over tracks not in compliance with Positive Train Control (PTC) regulations slated to take effect December 31. This would include host railroads that have not made enough progress toward implementation of PTC to be granted a waiver. Sections of track granted a waiver while the work is being completed will be considered on a case-by-case basis for continued operations. (***Trains Magazine***, February 15)

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) has recommended that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issue an Emergency Order (EO) that would require railroads to change the methods of operation whenever trains must operate over tracks that have had their signal systems suspended for any reason. This is in direct response to the wreck of Amtrak #91 on February 4 where a train operating on manual block authority encountered a switch that had been left misaligned and was directed onto a siding where it struck the lead two locomotives of a parked freight train, killing the two Amtrak crewmembers. The NTSB recommends that the first train to enter a block that contains a switch that has been reported re-aligned for the mainline operate at restricted speed until the train reaches the switch, visually confirms that it is aligned properly with the Dispatcher, and only then would be permitted to increase its speed up to 59 mph, the federal maximum speed for tracks governed by manual block. While improving safety, this degree of caution will wreak further havoc on Amtrak's timekeeping wherever this EO will be in effect. (***Trains Magazine***, February 15)

A winter storm severely impacted Amtrak operations from Virginia to Maine from Friday, March 2 until Sunday, March 4. The extremely high winds created a constant risk from falling trees, downed catenary and power feeder cables, and general region-wide power outages, any and all of which made continued train operations too risky to continue. Initially, train services on the Northeast Corridor were subject to delays due to reduced-speed operations but as the winds increased and power outages became more widespread, a decision on Friday afternoon was made to suspend all operations on the Northeast Corridor until the hazardous weather eased off, track blockages were cleared away, and continuous catenary power could be assured throughout the route. This suspension expanded to cover the long-distance services into and out of Penn Station New York such as the *Silver Meteor* departure of March 2, which was cancelled. Service was partially restored around midday Saturday with most trains resuming their normal scheduled runs for Sunday, March 4. Power failures in northern Virginia also caused a cascade of worsening delays to the *Auto Train*. The Thursday, March 1 departure of *Auto Train* #52 from Sanford, Florida had ERA member Sid Keyles aboard, who reported the train suffered a parted air hose soon after departing Sanford, delaying the train significantly while repairs were made. The delays cascaded through the night from the effects of the delay as well as the increasing winds from the storm, resulting in a very late arrival into Lorton, Virginia at 7:33 PM, 10 hours 34 minutes past its 8:59 AM scheduled arrival. Member Bob Vogel, waiting to ride *Auto Train* #53 to Sanford, reported that the high winds caused a regional power blackout across northern Virginia plunging the *Auto Train* station and facility into darkness. Battery-powered lighting was initially used to light the station waiting room and its toilets lit by emergency chemical light sticks until a portable generator was delivered to provide minimal power for the complex and enable the offloading of the automobiles on the car carriers from 9:13 PM until 11:27 PM. The departing passengers had to wait in their cars as the sole waiting room at the station was full of arriving passengers still

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waiting for their cars. Southbound passengers were finally allowed to board the train at midnight as automobiles were still being loaded onto the car carriers. The southbound *Auto Train* pulled away from the platform at 2 AM but required two additional hours to switch and add-on the automobile carriers to the rear of the train. Train #53 finally departed Lorton at 4 AM, 12 hours late, and arrived at Sanford at 9:43 PM, almost 13 hours late. Because there are only two sets of equipment serving the *Auto Train*, Amtrak cancelled the Saturday runs in both directions to allow a "reset" of the equipment turns for on-time 4 PM departures from Sanford and Lorton on Sunday, March 4. (Amtrak and Sid Keyles and Bob Vogel, March 2-4)

Four days later, another winter storm struck the Northeast on Wednesday, March 7, 2018. While it was a faster-moving storm with lower wind speeds of "only" 40-60 mph, the system contained a lot more moisture and dumped upwards of 24 to 30 inches of heavy wet snow, causing additional power outages and downed trees. Amtrak modified its services along the Northeast Corridor for March 7, reducing the number of trains operated by cancelling 27 *Acela Express* runs, nine *Northeast Regional* trains, eight *Empire Service* trains, and eight *Keystone* trains (New York City-Philadelphia-Harrisburg). By that evening Amtrak was forced to suspend all services between New York City and Boston until 11 AM Thursday, March 8.

A third winter storm struck the same region on Tuesday, March 13 with high winds and dumping an additional 1-2 feet of snow on New England, creating blizzard conditions and forcing Amtrak to suspend all train services on the Northeast Corridor between New York and Boston as well as the *Downeaster*, *Vermonter* (New York City-St. Albans, Vermont), and Boston-Albany section of the *Lake Shore Limited* in both directions that day. Service was slowly restored the following day as maintenance crews cleared the lines for service. (Amtrak press release, March 12)

Miscellaneous

The Pikes Peak cog railway, also known as the Manitou & Pikes Peak Railroad, which first opened in 1891, may end up closing permanently following an engineering assessment this past winter season that the track and much of the equipment has reached the end of its useful life. Jack Damoli, President and Chief Executive Officer of The Broadmoor Hotel, which owns the line, stated that the line ceased all operations on March 15 for the remainder of the year and could remain closed for up to three more years while an economic assessment is performed to see if the corporation could justify spending tens of millions of dollars to restore the 8.9-mile line rising to an altitude of just over 14,000 feet. *(Editor's Note by Ronald Yee: The 2013 ERA Convention covered that line with a chartered car added to a regularly scheduled run.)* (***Colorado Springs Gazette***, March 13)

Other Transit Systems

Boston, Massachusetts

Following the March 7 winter storm that whipped up blizzard conditions throughout New England, the MBTA was able to operate its trains on Thursday, March 8, albeit with delays up to 100 minutes. (Al Holtz, March 8)

Buffalo, New York

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) Board voted on February 22 to authorize the awarding of a $4.8 million contract to WSP USA for environmental review and engineering design services on the first phase of the 6.8-mile extension of the Buffalo light rail network to Amherst.

Following the completion of an analysis of transit options for the Amherst corridor last year, a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) was selected for an extension of the existing seven-mile Buffalo Metro Rail Line from its current northern terminus at University South Campus.

The extension would follow an underground alignment from University station to a portal near Eggert Road, continuing at-grade along Niagara Falls Boulevard to Maple Road and Sweet Home Road before reaching University North Campus.

The extension will reduce the journey time between the north and south campuses of the University to around 17 minutes. A phase 2 would extend the line to a terminus near Interstate Highway 990 at Audubon Parkway.

In January, 2017 Governor Andrew Cuomo approved the allocation of $5 million in state funding through the Buffalo Billion II program to complete the environmental review for the Amherst extension, which is expected to boost Buffalo Metro Rail ridership from 20,000 passengers per day to more than 40,000 per day by 2035.

However, criticism of the project has surfaced from former supporters. Buffalo-area U.S. Representative Brian Higgins claims that the existing system should be brought up to a state of good repair first before an extension is given a go-ahead. *(Editor's Note by Alexander Ivanoff: While I understand the Representative's concerns, Metro Rail has been stuck in the 1980s for three decades. Rehabilitating the existing line is just as important as attracting new customers.)* (***International Railway Journal***, February 23; ***Buffalo News***, March 12)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

A St. Louis, Missouri developer that specializes in scrapping and upgrading heavy industry locations that were once the source of American industrial might, has bought 138 acres of the former Budd Company railcar plant location on Red Lion Road in far Northeast Philadelphia. Commercial paid drug maker Teva Pharmaceutical $18 million for the site.

Commercial plans three large warehouse buildings, totaling more than 1.6 million square feet of office space, an area larger than each of the Comcast and Liberty Place office towers that dominate the Center City skyline.

The Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation

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and city officials have been trying to lure new users to the site since Budd successor Transit America shut down in 1987, followed by years of environmental remediation work.

Teva had proposed building a $300 million drug warehouse complex on the property with state assistance, but canceled the plan amid cost-cutting moves in 2012. The site was also home to the partly completed Island Green golf course, after Transit America sold neighboring land for housing development. The site is also suited for "big box" warehousing and distribution.

Warehousing has replaced heavy industry as a blue-collar employer across much of Pennsylvania and New Jersey's highway corridor. But Philadelphia has up until now missed out on the modern warehouse construction that has followed the growth in digital logistics and online "direct" sales, as most of these distribution centers are in the Lehigh Valley.

Budd's plants at Red Lion Road and its earlier works on Hunting Park Avenue ranked among Philadelphia's largest industrial employers in the mid-1900s, when the city was still a center of specialty metals, electrical, rail equipment, and textile manufacturing. (***Philadelphia Enquirer*** via Bill Vigrass, March 8)

Baltimore, Maryland

In response to inspections on an above-ground section of track which revealed serious deficiencies that compromised safety, the Maryland Department of Transportation's Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) abruptly closed the entire 15.5-mile, 14-station subway system down starting Friday night, February 9. The system remained closed 24/7 for four weeks until Monday, March 11 while emergency repairs were performed to the tracks. In the interim, emergency funds financed a $2.2 million "bus bridge" that replaced the subway service offering free rides and all-stops local service from 5 AM to midnight on weekdays and 6 AM to midnight on weekends to the line's 40,000 weekday riders. There was also an "express bus bridge" during weekday peak periods from 6-11 AM and from 3-8 PM stopping only at Owings Mills, Milford Mill, Mondawmin, State Center, Charles Center, and Johns Hopkins. (Baltimore CBS News, February 11)

Charlotte, North Carolina

Charlotte opened the second piece of the Lynx Blue Line, a 9.3-mile segment from uptown to UNC Charlotte, on March 16. It is the most expensive public works project in the city's history and will double the amount of light rail in the city.

The extension debuts a little more than a decade after the original light-rail segment opened in November, 2007, and it will give the city a total of 20 miles of rail, and a 59-minute trip from the outerbelt in south Charlotte to the university. While the city has other rail ambitions, there is currently no money to fund them.

The Lynx extension begins in Uptown, where the Blue Line tracks end at the Seventh Street station. It travels 9.3 miles through Uptown, NoDa, and then to UNC Charlotte.

The original plan was for the train to stop at Interstate 485 with a large park-and-ride station, but that final two miles was removed to keep the project within a $1.1 billion budget. The extension has 11 new stations.

CATS said it plans to operate trains every 8 minutes during rush hour in the morning and evening. On weekdays during non-peak times, the Lynx will arrive every 15 minutes. After 7:20 PM, the trains will come every 20 minutes. (***Charlotte Observer***, March 14)

Miami, Florida

After 15 years of proposals for light rail transit (LRT) linking downtown Miami with Miami Beach, Miami Mayor Carlos Jimenez has endorsed Metro-Dade's Commissioners' plans to select Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) over LRT. They cited far lower construction costs ($100 million for Metrorail rapid transit vs $10 million per mile for PRT) and a much less intrusive "footprint" on the landscape in terms of elevated guideways or street trackage with impacts on pedestrian and traffic flows as well as shorter point-to-point travel times. Instead of light rail vehicles with capacities in excess of 100 passengers that stop at every intermediate station stop enroute, PRT vehicles carrying 4 to 6 passengers each would offer faster point-to-point travel with no intermediate station stops. For groups of people larger than 6, more than one car can be coupled together to form a train bound for the same destination, even if the points of origin or boarding stations are different. PRT vehicles are expected to travel at an average speed of 28 mph in comparison with 16 mph for automobile traffic. An additional feature offered by the proposed PRT would be the ability of a PRT car to be of a dual-mode nature with the ability to leave the rail right-of-way at designated locations along the line and navigate city streets to receive or discharge riders and rejoin the rail line afterward. The initial concept proposal has the PRT line leave downtown from two branches, one from the Omni Center and the other from the Brightline terminal, then travel along the MacArthur Causeway with the first stop at Watson Island, then at Fifth Street and Alton Road in Miami Beach. Florida Department of Transportation's District Six expects a competitive bidding process similar to an ongoing process in South Carolina for PRT. (***Miami Today***, February 28)

Despite some expected teething issues, Brightline is demonstrating to be a success with passengers and investors. The Select coaches, which include complimentary food and beverages, wider seats, and lounge access, have been regularly selling out on certain trains.

In response, the company has started charging $5 more for tickets. The price increase is only on weekend days, at least for now. According to the Brightline website, prices for a Select Cabin ticket have increased from $15 to $20 at peak times on Saturdays and Sundays. On some trains, the fare class has been sold out entirely. The reason is cited as overwhelming demand.

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Fares for the coach service (Smart) are still at $10.

At a press conference introducing the service on January 10, Brightline executives revealed new details about their plans for the speedy train service. The MiamiCentral station is expected to be ready for passengers in the spring, other markets are being considered, and bond sales have been better than expected.

Brightline CEO Patrick Goddard announced in early March at a lunch with the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce that service to MiamiCentral is expected to launch sometime in April.

Miami-Dade County is now in discussions with Brightline to operate the Northeast Corridor route (from Miami to Aventura, NOT the more famed one), which would follow the plan for the Coastal Link commuter rail plan that has been in the works for years. *(Editor's Note by Alexander Ivanoff: From my ride back in February, I could see that Brightline knows its market and in five years could very easily expand to Jacksonville and Tampa, both natural markets. As to the Costal Link/Northeast Corridor (Florida) Line, it would be natural for Brightline to operate that and I would guess that Brightline would operate that using Tri-Rail equipment.)* (***The Next Miami***, January 15, February 12, and February 27; ***Curbed Miami***, March 13)

Poinciana, Florida

Wabtec Corporation signed a $62 million contract to design, install, test, and commission a positive train control (PTC) system for the Central Florida Rail Corridor between Poinciana and Deland, Florida which carries the SunRail commuter rail line serving Orlando. It has ongoing PTC installation contracts for the Chicago area's Metra commuter rail lines and the South Shore Line operated by the Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District (NICTD). Wabtec will equip SunRail's 24 locomotives and cab cars with its Interoperable Electronic Train Management System (I-ETMS®), a back-office server, wayside communications and signals, a dispatching system, training and system integration. Wabtec expects the PTC installation to be completed in time to meet the federal deadline for operational PTC of December 31 and be fully compatible with the PTC systems of the Class I carriers. (***Progressive Railroading***, February 13)

Chicago, Illinois

Metra F40PHM-2 205 was severely damaged in a CSX wreck near Sherwood, Tennessee as it was being transported with unit 204 to Georgia for rebuilding. Built in 1991-2 as the last locomotives produced at EMD's LaGrange Illinois plant, these locomotives are being rebuilt to enable them to serve on Metra for several more years. (Al Holtz, March 13)

Los Angeles, California

Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) Board of Airport Commissioners approved plans to award a $4.5 billion design, build, finance, operate, and maintain (DBFOM) contract to build a 2.5-mile-long Automated People Mover (APM) transportation system for Los Angeles International Airport. The contractor, LAX Integrated Express Solutions (LINXS), is expected to deliver by 2023 a functioning APM system capable of transporting 10,000 persons per hour on a two-minute headway linking a central transportation hub housing a consolidated rental car facility, a pick-up and drop off area, and an intermodal transport station in the airport with the nearby LAMTA Green Line light rail. The DBFOM contract will be for a 30-year period. Bombardier, LINXS' selected builder of the APM vehicles, has supplied similar equipment to APM systems at 8 of the 10 busiest airports in the United States. The APM is expected to reduce traffic congestion at LAX and improve travel times overall. (Los Angeles World Airports press release, February 15)

LAMTA is considering a temporary shutdown of its Blue Line to allow for an eight-month-long, $300 million rebuild of the 22-mile light rail line linking Downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach. The project was announced at the Metro Board's System Safety, Security, and Operations Committee and is planned for two phases, first a four-month closure of the line's southern half between Long Beach and 103rd Street in Compton, followed by a four-month closure of the northern half of the line from 103rd Street to 7th Street/Metro Center in downtown Los Angeles. The Rosa Parks/Willowbrook interchange station with the Green Line will be closed for the entire eight month period as it undergoes a $66 million renovation and upgrade. Plans call for shuttle buses to replace the portion of the light rail line closed during each stage, likely resulting in a 50-100% increase in travel times for its riders. During peak periods, there will be express and limited-stop rapid services, most likely using the Silver Line alignment but for the same $1.75 Blue Line fare, not the premium fare on the Silver Line. The line closures could begin in January, 2019 and fully reopen just before the LAX/Crenshaw Line opens in October, 2019. Combined with an ongoing $1.2 billion line upgrade involving traffic flow adjustments and the installation of crossing gate arms to deter vehicles from making illegal left turns in front of LRVs along Flower Street near downtown as well as signal prioritization for LRVs and signal synchronization on the streets of Long Beach, the ultimate goal of reducing the end-to-end travel times on the Blue Line from the current 58 minutes to 48 minutes can be realized. Delays along the line can also be reduced by the grade separation of the line between the junction of the Blue Line and the Expo Line at Washington Boulevard and Flower Street and the Pico station. While not in the scope of this series of line upgrades, this future project is one of 28 objectives Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti hopes to have the city completed in time for the 2028 Summer Olympics. (URBANIZE LA, February 15)

Quebec, Canada

The Canadian government's 2018 budget released in print on February 27 apparently includes a line item that will provide funding for the purchase of new trains for the Quebec-Windsor Corridor to replace an aging fleet

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SWITZERLAND IN THE LATE SUMMER
by Jack May
(Photographs by the author)
(Continued from March, 2018 issue)

A storm with heavy rain, loud thunder, and bright lightning ravaged the sky overnight, and our getaway day from Bern dawned beneath a steady drizzle. After an early breakfast we paid our bill and departed. We just missed the 7:47 trolleybus, but fortunately service is reasonably good on Sundays, and we rode the 8:02. "The climate was still right for trains" (rainy) and the 8:34 Inter-City Express (German ICE equipment) took us to Interlaken Ost (East), where I stowed our luggage in a locker upon our 9:28 arrival. We then boarded the Zentralbahn's meter-gauge 10:04 Interlaken-to-Luzern express and rode it for a short distance to Brienz, arriving at 10:25. Everything was running on time, but it was raining off and on. Upon our arrival we saw some blue sky in the distance and began to feel hopeful.

We crossed the street to the terminal of the Brienz-Rothorn Bahn (the lake — Brienzersee — is on the other side of the railway station), and saw the 10:38 from the summit coming in early. No chance for a photo though, as we had to buy our tickets for the 10:45 trip up the mountain. The BRB is one of the few non-electrified railways in Switzerland. The 800 mm-gauge dual Abt rack line climbs from the foot of the Brienzersee at 1,850 feet to the kulm (summit) of the Rothorn mountain at 7,362 feet, traversing about 5 miles of track. It passes through 5 tunnels and climbs grades as steep as 25 percent. Almost all trains are powered by 0-4-2 steam locomotives, although a few runs in the early morning are diesel-propelled (exactly the opposite of the Mt. Washington Cog Railway in New Hampshire). Each train consists of two passenger cars pushed up the mountain at a speed no greater than 5.5 mph. They run in platoons, the number based on demand, on a schedule that calls for headways that range from every 40 minutes to hourly. The line is equipped with one intermediate station and has three passing sidings. It operates only from the beginning of June to the end of October, and apparently exists exclusively for tourists, hikers, and campers.

We boarded the rear unit of our 2-car train, the second of the platoon of two. Quite a few tour groups, equipped with umbrellas, occupied the first car. As we pulled away from the station it stopped raining, but the mountains were still pretty much socked in. Soon we were traveling through clouds and a few gaps in the cover allowed us to see the Brienzersee below. Climbing further, we passed the early morning diesel train at the halfway mark, where a number of hikers alighted from our car. The views became even better as we climbed further, the lake getting smaller and smaller. By the time we approached the summit we were above the tree line and there were some large patches of clear sky. The trip took a little under an hour.

A restaurant with toilet facilities graces the summit, and the tour group members went in immediately. Clare and I walked up to a viewing area at the beginning of a series of hiking trails and took some photos, both of the scenery and the station from above. It was rather cold and windy up there, and we were glad we brought jackets.

The 10:45 AM scheduled trip up the Rothorn was operated in two 2-car sections as shown in this view taken at the Brienz station at 10:43.

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Switzerland in the Late Summer

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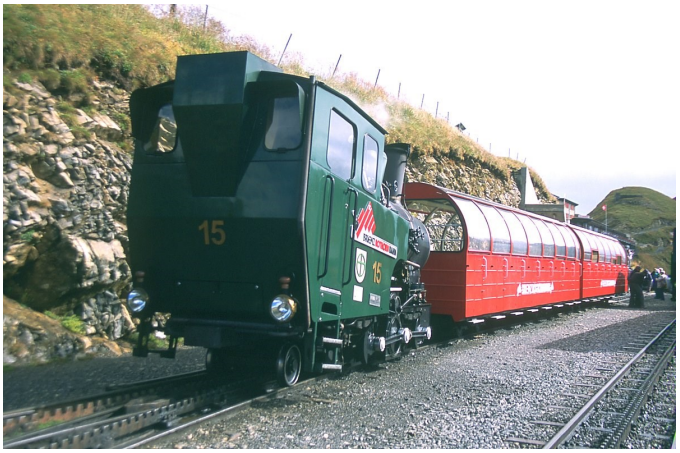
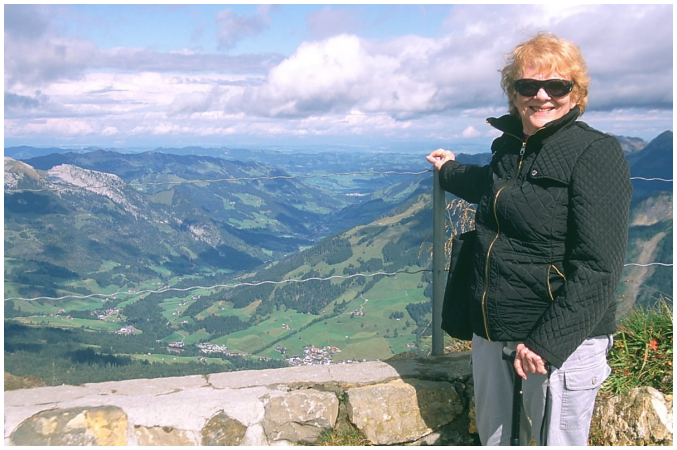
Two views of the Brienzersee during the train's ascent of the Rothorn from below and above the first level of clouds.



After alighting from our train at Rothorn Kulm I had a chance to photograph the 0-4-2 locomotive from both its front and rear.



Rothorn Kulm is 7,362 feet above sea level, but it is possible to climb higher on foot. Two views of Clare admiring the scenery from a hiking trail, while her high anxiety makes her hold on for dear life. "Step to your right just a little bit further, please?" Interlaken is shown at the far end of the Brienzersee in the photo at right.

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Switzerland in the Late Summer

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The station at Rothorn Kulm from a perch higher up the mountain.

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of coaches composed of three distinct classes, classic Budd built stainless steel coaches, LRC coaches, and European-built Renaissance coaches, all of which have been requiring ever-increasing levels of maintenance coupled with difficulties in acquiring replacement parts. VIA now plans to issue a Request for Proposals for 32 push-pull trains providing 9,100 seats for delivery starting in 2022. The total funding levels have not been clarified at the time this goes to press. (Railjournal.com, March 1)

Liverpool, England

The first of 13 five-car rakes of Mark 5A coaches, which CAF is building for British franchisee Trans-Pennine Express (TPE), is on its way from Spain to the Velim test track in the Czech Republic.

The push-pull coaches be will powered by Class 68 locomotives leased to TPE by Direct Rail Services. Both the locomotives and coaches will be owned by Beacon Rail Leasing. Two of the locomotives will also be sent from Britain to Velim to power the trains on the test track.

The new trains will enter service on the Liverpool-Manchester-Leeds-Newcastle route, where they will replace three-car Class 185 DMUs. However, Hitachi is building 19 five-car Class 802 bi-mode trains for this route, so the CAF trains will be redeployed on Liverpool-Scarborough and Manchester Airport-Middlesbrough services, when the Hitachi trains enter service in 2019.

The Mk 5A coaches will have an electronic reservation system, Wi-Fi, power sockets, a real-time passenger information system, and an onboard server to enable passengers to stream programs.

CAF is also building 12 five-car Class 397 Civity UK EMUs for TPE for operation on the Manchester-Liverpool-Glasgow-Edinburgh route. (***International Railway Journal***, March 12

Paris, France

RATP has exercised an option for 20 five-car rubber-tired metro trains from Alstom, the supplier announced on February 19. The €157 million order is funded half by RATP and half by regional transport authority Ile-de-France Mobilités.

The MP14 sets with open gangways would go into service on Line 11, where they would replace the existing MP59 fleet. Alstom is to undertake assembly at its Valenciennes site, with components coming from Le Creusot, Ornans, Villeurbanne, Tarbes, Saint-Ouen, and Aix-en-Provence.

In March, 2015 Alstom signed a framework contract for the supply of up to 217 metro trainsets to Paris, with 35 eight-car sets included in the base order. These would be put into service on Line 14. An option for 20 six-car sets allocated to Line 4 was exercised in December, 2016. (***Metro Report International***, February 20)

SNCF has placed a firm order for a further nine Bombardier Transportation Regio 2N double-deck electric multiple units, acting on behalf of greater Paris public transport authority Ile-de-France Mobilités.

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Around New York's Transit System

Next Phase of Station Rehabilitations

NYCT announced that the next phase of its planned total station overhauls will require the closure of three stations along Central Park West, 72nd, 86th, and 110th Street stations on the Ⓑ Ⓒ and the 163rd Street station on the Ⓒ in Washington Heights. 163rd Street is scheduled for a six-month closure from March 12 until sometime in September. The 110th Street station would be next, closing on April 9 and reopening in September. The 72nd Street station will close on May 7 and the 86th Street station closes on June 4, with both of these stations expected to reopen sometime in October. The $110 million full rehabilitation will include waterproofing the underground station structures, repairs to the floors and walls, installation of permanent countdown clocks, illuminated handrails, energy-efficient LED lighting, and upgraded informational and assistance kiosks (help stations). Local business interests and transit advocates expressed their dismay at the station closures for what is mostly cosmetic and upgrade work, leaving these stations still inaccessible to the handicapped with no elevators and local businesses without most of their customer base during these periods. In addition, no alternative bus services are planned; customers will be advised to utilize the next station up or down the line or use the Broadway Line (❶❷❸).

Tech Talk

(Continued from page 5)

be eliminated with the Queens Line West CBTC signal project in the next couple of years.

Over on the IND Sixth Avenue Line, the new interlocking at 34th Street-Herald Square is scheduled to begin being placed into service during April. I am not sure how many weekends that will involve but it could be as little as four, one for each track. After this, the new interlocking at W. 4th Street-Washington Square will be done, possibly in June.

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Commuter and Transit Notes

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The order announced on February 19 is worth €96 million, including "price escalations based on best faith assessment of assumptions."

The order has been placed as an option within a framework contract covering up to 860 trainsets which SNCF agreed to with Bombardier in 2010 on behalf of the French regions. A total of 134 Regio 2N EMUs have now been ordered for SNCF Transilien routes R, N, and D, with the first having entered service on Line R in December, 2017. In addition, 10 regions have now ordered a total of 382 units. (***Metro Report International***, February 20)

Tangier, Morocco

Moroccan National Railways (ONCF) says it is on course to open Africa's first high-speed line in the third quarter of this year.

According to ONCF's Luciano Borges, work on the 114-mile Tangier-Kenitra high-speed line is now 99% complete and good progress is being made on the delivery of rolling stock (97% complete), infrastructure works (95% complete), and operational preparation (78% complete).

Tracklaying was completed in October, 2017 and the final section of catenary was installed in November. The 25kV 50Hz a.c. electrification system was energized at the beginning of January and the Integrated Command Centre was commissioned in February. Stations will be completed by June, when the new line is due to be handed over to ONCF by the contractors for the start of trial running.

ONCF has hired 479 new staff as part of the project and more than 10,000 hours of training will be carried out before the start of revenue service.

A fleet of 12 Alstom Euroduplex trains will operate at up to abut 200 mph on the new line, reducing the Tangier-Kenitra journey time from 3 hours 15 minutes to 50 minutes and Tangier-Casablanca from 4 hours 45 minutes to 2hours 10 minutes.

A brand name for the high-speed service will be unveiled when the line opens.

Morocco is planning to build 1,500 kilometers of high-speed lines as part of its Rail 2040 master plan, which aims to achieve journey times of less than two hours between the country's key cities. (***International Railway Journal***, March 12)

Lusail, Qatar

Alstom has shipped the first tram for Lusail from its La Rochelle factory in France. It will travel by ship from the port of Barcelona in Spain to Doha, and is expected to arrive next month.

In 2014 Qatar Rail awarded a contract to a consortium led by Alstom and the QDVC joint venture of Qatari Diar and Vinci Construction Grands Projects to build the four-line network. As part of this contract, Alstom is supplying 28 five-section trams that will use the APS ground-level power supply system.

The 100% low-floor trams are 33 meters long with capacity for 207 passengers in two classes: standard and family.

The first phase of the network is scheduled to open in January, 2019, and will be operated by the RKH Qitarat joint venture between a consortium of RATP Dev and Keolis (49%) and local construction, property, and trading business Hamad Group (51%). (***Metro Report International***, February 21)