

## *TRANSPORTATION TOMORROW: 2030*

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| <p>ELEMENT:<br/>INTERCITY PASSENGER TRAVEL</p> |
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While a metropolitan transportation plan typically addresses only surface transportation facilities and services within the metropolitan area, in the course of developing this plan, members of the BMTS Community Vision Team and the public expressed the sentiment that intercity passenger travel is important to accomplishing the recommended scenario of revitalizing the urban core. Therefore, this element is included in the Plan. There is the caveat that unlike the recommended actions of the Plan, BMTS cannot play a direct role in project selection, development, funding or implementation for intercity modes.

Just as an attractive vital region offers accessibility to many destinations by many modes within the region, our sense is that the same measure applies to travel beyond the region. Being able to travel to and from Greater Binghamton safely and conveniently contributes to positive decisions about personal and business location. Being limited to automobile and intercity bus is a perceived barrier for some people.

### *PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE*

While Binghamton has a rich history of railroads, and still has three freight railroads, passenger service was terminated more than thirty years ago. This was the consequence of a variety of factors including cost structures and inability to compete well with the convenience of automobile travel. In fact, intercity passenger rail service has greatly diminished across the nation, with Amtrak requiring continual Federal subsidies to operate.

Nonetheless, because of interest in restoring passenger rail service between Binghamton and New York City, the New York State DOT retained a consultant to perform a feasibility study. The Binghamton Passenger Rail Feasibility Study was completed in 200?. Based on market and cost analysis, examination of rail infrastructure and operating protocols, the study determined that scheduled service between Binghamton and New York City may prove feasible. The primary caveat is that the feasible route is via Scranton, and depends on the restoration of service between there and New York City. The alternative of using the Southern Tier Line to Port Jervis was determined not feasible because of the rail infrastructure. This line is now single track with periodic passing sidings, and is in use for regular freight service. Track conditions and schedule constraints, as well the necessity to transfer either in Port Jervis or Hoboken NJ would result in a travel time approaching five hours. This is far greater than travel by car or bus, making train service non-competitive.

The creation of scheduled service between Scranton and New York City is the subject of a Federal Transit Administration “New Starts” grant process. The driving force is the westward spread of the New York City commutershed, the congestion on Interstate routes across northern New Jersey, and concomitant air quality problems. The primary capital project need is the restoration of a thirty-three mile segment of track that was removed; and rolling stock. A bi-state coalition comprising representatives of New Jersey and Pennsylvania is working on the project, and has recently submitted documentation to the FTA for evaluation.

Representatives of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, who owns the track between Binghamton and Scranton, have indicated the rail infrastructure on that segment is in good condition, and may only need modest capital investment to accommodate passenger service.

The benefit of this situation for Greater Binghamton is that the market feasibility calculation need only account for the Binghamton-Scranton operation.

Unresolved issues:

- Who will operate the service? This may be influenced by the eventual operator of the Scranton-New York City service, but there is no reason that there could not be a separate operator for Binghamton-Scranton. It is fairly clear that Amtrak will not operate the service, since they are in financial difficulty and divesting much regional service.
- How will the service be financed? As demonstrated by Amtrak and other passenger operations, fare revenue is not sufficient to meet expenses. Subsidies will be required. The expectation is that these would be at the state or regional level.
- What other destinations might be served? There has been discussion of service to Syracuse (where the feasibility of occasional excursion service has been demonstrated), or to other in-state destinations. This ultimately depends on sustainability of the passenger rail service model.

What value does the availability of passenger rail service between Binghamton and New York City, or additional locations in New York or surrounding states, add to the achievement of the recommended scenario of urban core revitalization?

- It makes Greater Binghamton more attractive to the young professional/new college graduate demographic. This is particularly true for those living in New York City, where car ownership is atypical, and commuting by rail is the norm. Since the ‘creative class’ often have jobs that are not tied to a geographic location, they may choose to live in a place like Binghamton if it provides the lifestyle they want and convenient travel to desired destinations.
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