



June 14, 2011

Mr. Matt Van Hattem, Senior Editor
Trains Magazine
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Dear Mr. Van Hattem:

I recently read the article entitled "Amtrak's Critical Turns" in the July 2011 issue of "Trains" Magazine summarizing Amtrak's 40 year history. It provided an interesting historical perspective on the birth of Amtrak, the challenges it has faced, as well as its response to those challenges. I also appreciated the recognition of the roles various states, including California, played in helping foster Amtrak's growth.

The article contained references to the efforts of the Next Generation Corridor Equipment Committee (NGEC) established in the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) of 2008. As the Chair of the Executive Board of the NGEC, I would like to respond to a couple of points in the article.

The NGEC first met in January 2010. Since then, it has been actively working to develop specifications for new intercity passenger rail equipment designed to operate throughout the country at speeds up to 125 mph. The NGEC is also developing approaches to financing, acquiring, and supporting that equipment in service. The first PRIIA specification, for bi-level corridor cars, was adopted by the Executive Board of the NGEC in August 2010. A specification for standalone single level cars was adopted in February 2011 and the diesel-electric locomotive specification was approved in March 2011. We feel each is a significant accomplishment by itself. The accomplishment is even more significant when you consider they were developed concurrently in less than 18 months.

While PRIIA calls for the development of standardized specifications and equipment, we believe manufacturers still have significant opportunity for innovation. In fact, in February 2011, the Executive Board approved the establishment of a "Standardization Working Group" under the direction of the NGEC Technical Subcommittee. This Working Group, comprised of Amtrak and the FRA, will work with the equipment and supply industry to develop and foster opportunities for innovation.

Mr. Matt Van Hattem, Senior Editor
June 14, 2011
Page 2

Consequently, I do not think that the description of the committee's progress as "lethargic" is appropriate, particularly given how multiple interested parties have been brought together and consensus achieved in a very short period of time--a credit to the focus and commitment of all involved. Moreover, the specific comments about the lack of agreement on the specifications, as discussed above, are clearly incorrect.

It should be noted that the rail equipment and supply industry has volunteered significant time and effort towards the work of the NGEC and played a major role in the development of all of these PRIIA specifications. They are to be commended for the commitment that they have shown to the process, particularly in light of an uncertain financial return for those efforts.

The next specification in process at the moment is for a multi-car trainset. The technical content of this is on schedule for Technical Subcommittee approval at the end of June 2011 and for Executive Board adoption by August 2, 2011. Again, these specifications have been developed with the broad industry involvement and the same process that created the previous three PRIIA specifications. All specifications will be in place to support any equipment acquisitions when required. Extensive details and records of all NGEC committee activities can be viewed on the website <http://www.highspeed-rail.org>. I encourage all interested parties to take a look.

Thank you for the opportunity to correct these issues with your readers. I appreciate "Trains Magazines" coverage of the passenger rail industry in North America and highlighting the benefits of passenger and freight rail across the country.

Sincerely,



WILLIAM D. BRONTE

Chief, Division of Rail

California Department of Transportation

Chair, Section 305, Next Generation Corridor Equipment Committee