Amtrak International Operations to Canada

Eastern Border Transportation Coalition
September 11, 2012
Overview – Five Current and Prospective Crossings

• Four of the Five in EBTC Arena
  – Vermont – Quebec
  – New York – Quebec
  – New York – Ontario
  – Michigan – Ontario

• In Service
  – New York – Montreal “Adirondack”
  – New York – Toronto “Maple Leaf”
  – Seattle – Vancouver “Amtrak Cascades”

• Potential Future
  – NEC – Montreal “Vermonter”
  – Chicago – Toronto – Montreal Higher Speed Rail
New York – Montreal “Adirondack” Initiatives

• Improvements Underway or in the Near Future
  – Amtrak’s new e-Ticketing system now provides far more accurate manifests
  – Amtrak, VIA and USCBP are working on a potential process to expedite on board inspections of passengers not requiring visas
  – On behalf of Amtrak, Agence Metropolitaine de Transport has issued a RFP for a Quebec firm of architects to review the concept of prescreening facilities at Central Station for feasibility and cost
  – Amtrak assuming operational control of the CSXT Hudson Line
  – MTQ will issue a RFP for a firm to evaluate the cost of raising speeds on CN and CP lines between Montreal and the border

• Mid-Term
  – Introduce preclearance facility in Montreal replacing customs and immigration inspections at the border
  – Relocating customs would reduce trip time and delays by over an hour
  – Right of way improvements in Quebec and New York could further reduce trip time
  – Preclearance requires a treaty being negotiated by the Beyond the Border Working Group although this does not expressly provide for Montreal
  – Amtrak is leading a ridership and revenue forecasting analysis
  – The partners are drafting a business case for the facility for the Department of Homeland Security
“Maple Leaf” Initiatives

• Whirlpool Rapids Bridge
  – Canadian National has obtained authorization on both sides of the border to abandon its operating rights and assets
  – CN has agreed to sell its assets to Amtrak and VIA Rail Canada
  – Amtrak and VIA have an agreement in principle with the Niagara Falls Bridge Commission to take over from CN
  – CN has agreements in principle with Amtrak and VIA to sell the rail assets for a nominal price
  – Amtrak is negotiating an asset purchase agreement with CSXT to take over their right of way assets adjoining CN

• Niagara Falls International Railway Station and Intermodal Transportation Center
  – Letters of intent sent to the City of Niagara Falls as required by the Federal Railroad Administration to release funds
  – Phase 1 for U.S. Customs House Restoration is complete
  – Phase 2 for replacement of CSXT Bridge over Main Street is underway and expected to be complete in the spring of 2013
  – Phase 3 for Station Construction – Ground breaking March 2013
Prospective NEC – Montreal “Vermont”

• Would connect NEC from Washington and Philadelphia plus much of New England directly with Montreal

• Improvements Underway
  – New England Central Railroad (NECR) right of way upgrade substantially complete between East Northfield, VT, and St. Albans, VT
  – State of Vermont has a $7.9 million federal grant to upgrade the NECR from St. Albans to the border for freight service but that would also make passenger service possible as far as the border
  – State of Massachusetts has a $72.8 million federal grant to restore operations over the “Knowledge Corridor” between Springfield and East Northfield eliminating the detour via Palmer and saving 30 minutes
  – State of Connecticut has a $190.9 million grant for improvements to the New Haven – Springfield Corridor to include partial double tracking, PTC, new interlockings, station and grade crossing improvements

• Additional Improvements Required
  – Right of way improvement and bridge restoration in Quebec
  – CBSA and USCBP preclearance facilities in Montreal Central Station
• An obvious missing rail passenger link between Canada and the U.S.

• State of Michigan and Amtrak progressively raising track speeds to 110 MPH in Michigan

• Current Detroit River Tunnel last handled passenger trains in 1979

• Current capacity limitations probably preclude passenger operation prior to the completion of the Continental Gateway rail tunnel which is not yet under construction

• Customs and immigration processes would need to be designed that avoid losing all the benefit of higher speeds and reduced trip time especially across Michigan

• Congressional Forum held in Detroit in June to review the possibilities

• Preliminary consideration given to one-time “Winter Classic” demonstration train
Questions and Discussion