

June 2005

## The Southwest Rail Corridor

The Corridor is a vital link between the southwest's major population centers, Los Angeles, America's third largest city, and Phoenix, the fifth largest city in the USA. Passenger and freight traffic within this corridor is expected to continue to greatly increase over the next decade. The goal of the Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition is the creation and implementation of passenger rail service in the Yuma-Phoenix-Tucson-Nogales corridor. This will provide a viable transportation choice that will improve mobility, air quality, economic development and the overall quality of life for Arizonans.

## Background of The Corridor

In 1992, the Arizona Rail Passenger Association (ARPA) published a white paper entitled *Arizona Rail: A Regional Passenger System for Arizona* which outlined a vision for a regional rail system for southern Arizona, including a local commuter rail system for the Phoenix metropolitan area.

Subsequently there have been three State of Arizona sponsored studies:

- *Arizona Rail Passenger Feasibility Study* (1993);
- *Arizona Rail Passenger Feasibility Continuation Study* (1994); and
- *Arizona High Speed Rail Feasibility Study* (1997-1998).

In 2000, ARPA published the *Rail Passenger Service Goals for Arizona*, which reiterated many of the recommendations and ideas brought forth from these previous studies.

In the wake of these studies, the Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition (SWRCC) was formed to advocate passenger rail between Phoenix and Tucson, with extensions to Nogales and Yuma with interstate connections to El Paso, Palm Springs/Indio and Los Angeles. The Coalition has since received letters of support from numerous stakeholders and municipalities.

Now, many factors make both intercity and commuter rail passenger service in Arizona more attractive than ever:

#### Population and travel growth -

- Arizona is the 17<sup>th</sup> most populous state in the nation. Maricopa County's population has doubled since 1992 and Phoenix is now the fifth largest city in the country. Pima County and Tucson are experiencing similar growth.
- Pinal County, located between Maricopa and Pima Counties, has seen extensive growth. The populations of the unincorporated communities within Pinal County, in addition to Coolidge, Florence, Superior, Casa Grande and Eloy are all expected to double within the next decade.
- Expansion and widening of Interstate 10 between Phoenix and Tucson over the next decade will require a lengthy construction time. Regional rail services can effectively mitigate resulting traffic congestion during this period.

#### Availability of rail facilities -

- Tucson has restored its historic downtown Southern Pacific Railroad depot.
- The UPRR plans to reopen their line west of Phoenix connecting to Yuma in 2005. With additional track improvements, this could permit the re-establishment of daily passenger trains through Phoenix, providing direct service to Yuma and Southern California, and eastward to Tucson, El Paso and beyond.
- In Los Angeles, San Diego, Salt Lake City, Denver, Albuquerque and other western metropolitan areas, regional transit authorities recently have successfully negotiated with both BNSF and UPRR for joint use of railroad rights-of-way, and in some cases purchase of the right-of-way.

#### Expansion of connecting transit services -

- Valley Metro is beginning construction of light rail between Mesa, Tempe and Phoenix. The Regional Transportation Plan approved by voters in November 2004

calls for additional light rail lines and expanded bus transit.

- Burgeoning communities on the east and west of the Phoenix metro area in many cases ideally located for future commuter rail service. In Gilbert a new Bus Rapid Transit “park and ride” lot along the Union Pacific Railroad mainline is specifically designed to be used as a joint commuter rail/express bus transfer station.
- Tucson is expanding its heritage trolley and bus system and is studying the potential for a modern streetcar line.

Each successive transit project – whether light rail, expanded bus, commuter rail, or intercity rail –increases the effectiveness, attractiveness, and return on investment of the others. The Corridor is an integral trunk of the overall transit network.

## Previous Arizona Intercity Passenger Rail Studies

The following is a brief summary of previous rail studies and their primary recommendations and findings. The Arizona State Legislature and the Arizona Department of Transportation commissioned these studies from 1993-1998, which were carried out by a consulting firm.

- Arizona Rail Passenger Feasibility Study (1993 ~ by Kimley-Horn)
  1. Examined commuter rail in the metro Phoenix area (Glendale to Mesa), Phoenix-Tucson intercity rail, Tucson-Nogales intercity rail, and Phoenix-Grand Canyon tourist excursion service.
  2. Both Santa Fe Railway (now BNSF) and Southern Pacific Railroad (now UPRR) trackage could be utilized for passenger rail service in Arizona.
  3. Recommended six one-way trips per day between Phoenix-Tucson-Nogales, and six one-way trips per day between Glendale-Phoenix-Mesa.
- Arizona Rail Passenger Feasibility Continuation Study (1994 ~ by Kimley-Horn)
  1. Refined elements of the 1993 Arizona Rail Passenger Feasibility Study.
  2. Examined a 33-mile commuter rail in the metro Phoenix area from Peoria via Phoenix to Gilbert; and Phoenix-Tucson-Nogales intercity rail.
  3. Recommended ten one-way trips per day between Phoenix-Tucson-Nogales; 20 one-way trips per day between Peoria-Phoenix-Gilbert.
  4. Recommended the legislature create and fund an Arizona Rail Authority, an agency to plan and implement countywide and statewide rail projects.
- Arizona High Speed Rail Feasibility Study (1997-1998 ~ by Kimley-Horn.)

1. Examined Phoenix-Tucson regional rail service. Studied 80mph and 125mph conventional rail service as well as electric high speed rail and magnetic levitation systems (125mph-200+mph)
2. Analyzed an entirely new alignment parallel to I-10 from Chandler to Picacho-Tucson, as well as using the existing Union Pacific line.
3. Proposed four to seven stations along the line. Recommended an initial six one-way trips per day between Phoenix and Tucson.

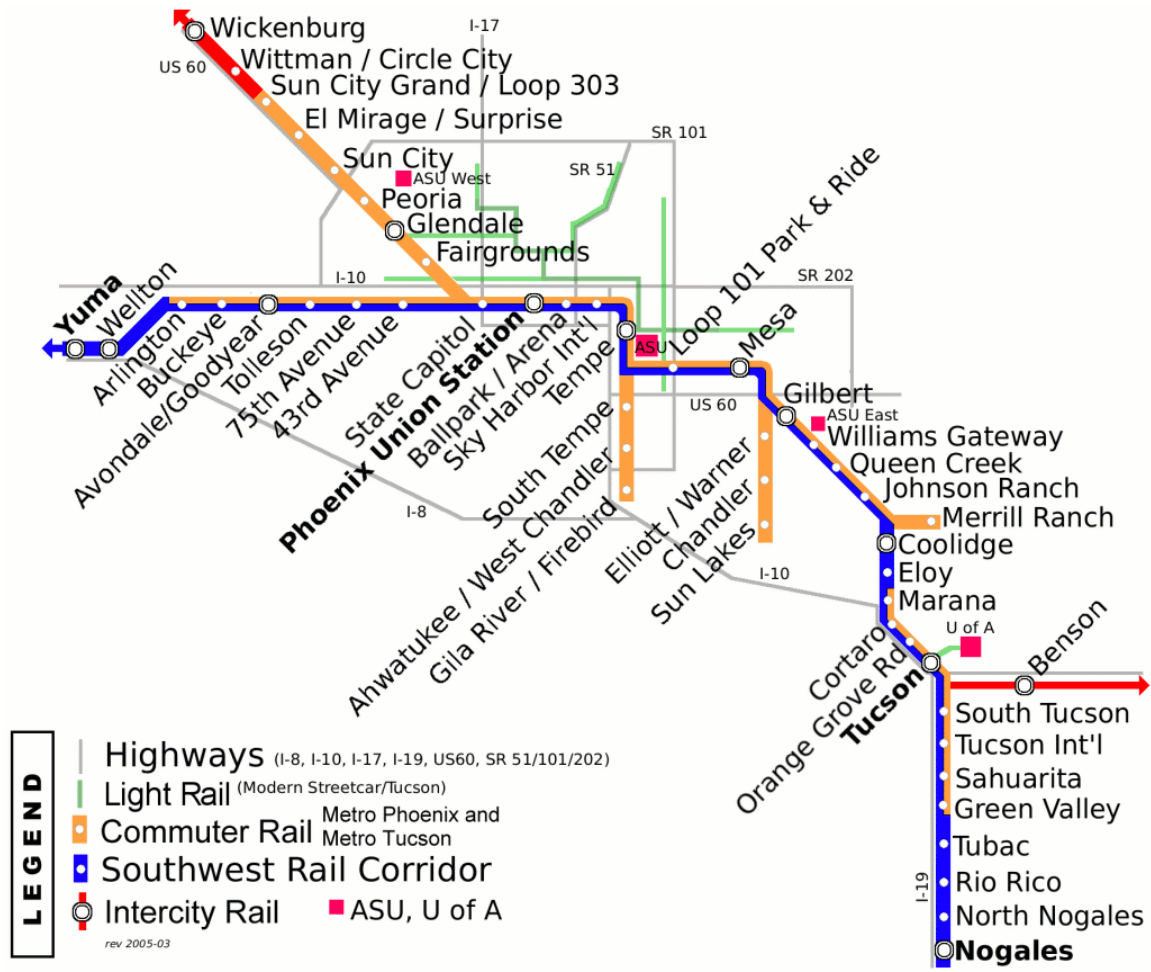
## The Phoenix-Tucson-Nogales Corridor.

Union Pacific currently operates a secondary mainline that connects Phoenix and the East Valley with the busy transcontinental UPRR Gila mainline at Picacho, AZ. (near Eloy). The Gila mainline continues southeast to Tucson, where other lines head east to El Paso and south to Nogales and Mexico.

Intercity trains could operate through downtown Phoenix and Tucson to serve surrounding communities. For example, an eastbound train originating near Buckeye or Goodyear/Avondale would serve Phoenix Union Station, Sky Harbor Airport, downtown Tempe, downtown Mesa, Gilbert, Queen Creek, Coolidge, Marana, downtown Tucson, Tucson International Airport, Green Valley, Tubac, North Nogales, and downtown Nogales. From Phoenix to Tucson is approximately 120 miles; from Tucson to Nogales is approximately 66 miles.

Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) is planning to widen and expand Interstate-10 between Phoenix and Tucson over the next decade. Adding passenger rail capacity to the existing, parallel Union Pacific rail line would allow ADOT to utilize passenger rail as traffic congestion mitigation. Essentially, ADOT will get more capacity out of the freeway during construction and post-construction, as some of the automobile passengers will have the ability to now choose the option of the new parallel passenger rail service.

One example of successful traffic congestion mitigation (relief) is metro Miami, Florida. In the 1980s, southeastern Florida was faced with extended construction congestion during the widening of I-95. As a short-term solution, the state, counties and cities implemented the Tri-Rail regional passenger train service on the existing CSX RR line between Miami and Ft. Lauderdale. Although this was initially an interim traffic mitigation measure, Tri-Rail became so popular and heavily used that it has been continually expanded and upgraded ever since due to public demand.



## The Phoenix-Yuma-Los Angeles Corridor

Amtrak provided service along the 294-mile segment connecting Tucson, Phoenix and Yuma until June 1996. Then-owner Southern Pacific decided to deactivate the little-used 80+ mile portion between Phoenix and Wellton (a junction near Yuma) after neither it nor Amtrak could afford the \$20 million rehabilitation costs. Amtrak was subsequently rerouted to the faster, more direct, 251-mile Gila Mainline between Yuma, Gila Bend, Casa Grande and Tucson. Subsequently, this left Phoenix as the nation's largest metropolitan area without intercity rail passenger service.

Union Pacific now expects to reopen the line between Phoenix and Yuma for freight traffic. This is an important first step towards re-establishing a continuous rail corridor between Phoenix and California.

California DOT plans to extend several regional passenger trains each day beyond their current terminus in San Bernardino, to Palm Springs/Indio. A partnership with California would enable through passenger train service between the Coast and Phoenix.

## Conclusion

The Southwest Rail Corridor is a worthy investment for Arizona's future. Many other states and communities have benefited greatly with the introduction of new passenger rail systems within congested corridors. The Corridor is a vital link between the southwest's largest cities. With growth predicted to rise exponentially within the next decade, passenger rail is a viable transportation choice that will improve mobility, air quality, economic development and the overall quality of life for Arizonans for years to come.

## Resources

Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) - [www.dot.state.az.us](http://www.dot.state.az.us)

Arizona Rail Passenger Association (ARPA) - [www.azrail.org](http://www.azrail.org)

Arizona Transit Association (AZTA) - [www.azta.org](http://www.azta.org)

Central Arizona Association of Governments (CAAG) – no dedicated website at this time

Citizens for a Sensible Transportation Solution (CFASTS) (Tucson area) - [www.savetucson.org](http://www.savetucson.org)

Friends of Transit (Phoenix area) - [www.friendsoftransit.org](http://www.friendsoftransit.org)

Maricopa County Association of Governments (MAG) - [www.mag.maricopa.gov](http://www.mag.maricopa.gov)

Maricopa County Dept. Of Transportation (MCDOT) - [www.mcdot.maricopa.gov](http://www.mcdot.maricopa.gov)

National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP) - [www.narprail.org](http://www.narprail.org)

Pima County Association of Governments (PAG) - [www.pagnet.org](http://www.pagnet.org)

Pima County Dept. Of Transportation (PDOT) - [www.dot.pima.gov](http://www.dot.pima.gov)

Regional Transit Authority (Pima County) (RTA) - [www.rtamobility.com](http://www.rtamobility.com)

Southwest Rail Corridor Coalition (SWRCC) - [www.southwestrail.org](http://www.southwestrail.org)

SunTran (City of Tucson Transit) - [www.suntran.com](http://www.suntran.com)

Valley Metro Rail (METRO) - [www.valleymetro.org/rail](http://www.valleymetro.org/rail)

Valley Metro/RPTA (Maricopa County) - [www.valleymetro.org](http://www.valleymetro.org)