

## Tennesseans Contribute to Growing Amtrak Ridership!

Amtrak made national news at the end of the Year 2007 by carrying the largest number of passengers in the company's 36-year history – 25.8 million passengers to be exact!

The much-celebrated *City of New Orleans*, Amtrak's only train serving the Volunteer State, contributed to that number by carrying a record 180,500 passengers in fiscal year 2007 – a solid 3.0 % increase over the previous year!

We are elated to report that Tennesseans contributed plenty to that number because both of our stations – Memphis and Newbern (Dyersburg) – reported a combined passenger count increase of 11%!

The growth of the *City of New Orleans* is partly attributed to the rebuilding of New Orleans as more residents and tourists return to the train's namesake city; however, we must also attribute record high gas prices and ongoing problems in the airline industry as well!

It also happens that the *City of New Orleans* is one of six trains on Amtrak's Route Improvement Action Plan. Through this effort a group of managers is identifying better ways to market the train and structure the fare system to maximize ridership and revenue.

The effort is paying off, but we would like to see some other changes as well. Perhaps we could get another station in Tennessee, such as Covington. Or maybe get another Thruway Bus Connection, such as Memphis to Birmingham. Or, most important of all, the restoration of a connecting train from New Orleans to Florida.

Whatever happens, we hope that the progress can continue and that our beloved *City of New Orleans* will continue to grow and be a shining example for the entire passenger rail system!

## The *Music City Star* Makes Better Connections in Donelson

Nashville's *Music City Star* commuter rail service has broader appeal now that the Regional Transportation Authority has added a shuttle service from the Donelson station to three major commercial centers.

This service is comparable to the ever-popular bus connections at Nashville's Riverfront station that shuttle commuters to important employment centers including Vanderbilt Hospital.

As more and more residents in Wilson and Davidson counties discover the matrix of transportation options, we can expect to see increased patronage throughout the existing route.

Nashville's transportation infrastructure is still incomplete without commuter rail service to other cities, namely Murfreesboro and Franklin.

We can only hope that our elected leaders will notice the vast appeal that these services would provide if and only if they are put into effect.

Boardings & Alightings			
<u>Station</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2007</u>	<u>Unit Increase</u>
Memphis	44,502	50,049	+5,547
Newbern	2,598	2,826	+228

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# TARP News

Spring 2008

## **Ohio Takes the First Step**

The Buckeye State most recently made a faithful decision to move forward with a passenger rail study according to a March 6 press release from Amtrak.

The 3-C Corridor (Cleveland-Columbus-Cincinnati) has been a talking point for more than two decades as Ohioans try to find a solution that meets transportation, economic, and cultural needs. The health and well-being of this entire region is jeopardized by transportation gridlock that is hampering the ability to recruit new industry and retain jobs.

Rail advocates have tirelessly appealed to the elected leadership in Ohio to embrace the benefits of passenger rail. Besides meeting an obvious need for economical transportation, passenger rail would promote renewed economic growth in historic regions. It would also give cities along the rail route additional leverage to recruit new jobs and industry. For too long the idea of passenger trains connecting Ohio's largest cities fell on too many deaf ears until just recently.

It took a looming crisis to force the issue. With the decline of the automobile industry and other manufacturing industries, Ohio has one of the highest unemployment rates in the entire country. With gas prices already beyond \$3.00 a gallon and possibly headed to \$4.00 the situation gets even bleaker and talk of a national recession could not come at a worse time.

Evidently the elected leadership is finally seeing the light, and hopefully not too late. With productive planning and effective budgeting, Ohio can make this a reality.

The positive effects of a well-planned passenger rail corridor can materialize both short-term and long-term. Skilled labor jobs are created in the planning and construction phases. Additional trades are employed when the service begins helping to offset the decline of the job market. As patronage increases so will the presence of restaurants, hotels, and other service industries. Taxi ridership and bus transit ridership can also increase, especially if their services are convenient to rail travelers. And the list goes on and on.

Rail advocates in Tennessee will also benefit if indeed the 3-C Corridor comes to fruition. First of all, Ohio's success will bring even more light to the success of California, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin, which will hopefully inspire other states, including ours, to get serious about passenger rail. Secondly, we will be close to another rail service crying out for a southward extension. Last, but not least, we will have a shining example of how the rail industry can offset the decline of a troubled car industry, which should give Tennessee's elected leaders a clue about future economic development.

As of this writing, Amtrak and the Ohio Rail Development Commission have been directed by Ohio Governor Ted Strickland to begin a formal study that should lead to a number of proposals and options. This process may take up to a year to complete, and then it must go through the legislative and funding process long before any wheels can touch the rails.

At the very least we are encouraged by this critical first step that our friends in Ohio are making, and we wish them the very best!

## **More Nashvillians are Taking the Bus!**

The Metropolitan Transit Authority for Nashville-Davidson County reported a record 8.5 million riders in 2007 with an expected increase to 9.4 million by the end of the year 2008! According to numbers released by the American Public Transportation Association, these numbers coincide with ridership increases in other cities as well. In fact, nationwide bus and transit ridership is up 35 percent since the Year 1995! In the fall of 2008, Nashville will debut an all-new transit center at 400 Charlotte Avenue with restrooms, shops and services that, combined with bus patronage, may help spawn a more transit-friendly commerce in downtown Nashville.

## **The Cross-Country Café Accomplishes Multiple Objectives**

A few sessions ago, Congress mandated Amtrak to reduce the cost of meal services on the various trains it operates. Though this was not the first time this has happened, rail advocates automatically assumed “gloom and doom” and recalled gloomy images from an episode of horrible food service in the early 1980’s.

Fortunately, not all the news is bad as some of Amtrak’s most dynamic employees and managers used this potential crisis as a real catalyst to bring new ideas to the table – the dinner table, that is!

The Cross Country Café is on the *City of New Orleans* is the result of some of the most careful planning and analysis that we’ve seen in a long time at Amtrak. This new idea that was implemented late last year accomplishes a multitude of important objectives.

The first objective, quite obviously, is to reduce the cost of food service delivery. By combining the functions of a Lounge Car and a Dining Car into one single operation, Amtrak management can reduce food inventory expense, labor expense, and material expense while also reducing fuel and depreciation expenses.

The second objective is to provide a food service that meets the first objective, but does not compromise on the customer’s demand for quality service. To accomplish this, the Cross Country Café is custom-designed with attractive and handsome appointments for a pleasant and inviting atmosphere. The food selections represent a combination of better ingredients, thoughtful preparation, and attractive packaging. It should also be noted that the menu on the Cross Country Café includes regional specialties that represent the culture of the train’s namesake city, such as red beans and rice and bread pudding.

The third objective is to meet the needs of the traveling public. The *City of New Orleans* is unique in that caters to both a tourist market with discretionary dollars, and a local market that depends on the train for affordable transportation. The Cross Country Café serves both sectors by offering meal service a reasonable selection of lower-priced options with luxurious options such as a premium selection of wine, beer, cocktails, and souvenirs.

Revenue potential with the Cross Country Café is maximized thanks to a pre-inventoried food pantry so that meal service is available from the point of origin to the train’s final destination. This contrasts with earlier practices of opening the food service one hour past the point of origin and closing one hour ahead of the final destination.

According to Amtrak’s internal records, the Cross Country Café is already delivering impressive results. Revenues are up, costs are down, and customer feedback has been very encouraging. Our only concern is that Amtrak needs to provide one additional employee to facilitate a more efficient work flow during peak meal times. Doing so would still keep costs well below what they were before, and would ensure that the quality of service delivery can remain more consistent over the long haul.

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You can view a sample menu of the Cross Country Café on Amtrak’s website: [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com).

Go to the **Traveling With Amtrak** page and choose the **Meal and Dining Options** link.



## Passenger Rail News Briefs

Mudslides north of Chemult, OR resulted in suspension of Amtrak's *Coast Starlight* service between Seattle and Los Angeles. Amtrak eventually added a coach only train between Los Angeles and Sacramento with a bus connection from Sacramento to Portland. Full restoration of the route may not be possible until early April.....Amtrak, in partnership with the Illinois Department of Transportation, has submitted a survey and proposal to create regional train services from Chicago to Dubuque (IA) and from Chicago to the Quad Cities area (Bettendorf, Davenport, Moline, and Rock Island). This proposal comes in response to Amtrak's remarkable growth in Illinois following a service expansion along existing routes.....The Winter 08 Amtrak timetable includes a schedule tightening for the *California Zephyr* and revised northbound schedules for the *Silver Star* and *Silver Meteor*.....Oklahoma rail advocates and elected leaders are looking at ways to increase funding for the *Heartland Flyer* so that the route can expand to other cities, namely St. Louis or Kansas City. One proposal before the state legislature is a funding mechanism supported by automobile registration fees.....Speaking of the Heartland Flyer, effort is under way to add a stop in Denton County, immediately north of Ft. Worth.....Gov. Bill Richardson is encouraging a \$.08 tax to support the *Rail Runner* commuter train service that is out-growing all ridership predictions. Federal funding for the service will soon expire.

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