

AMTRAK 2024 ANNUAL PUBLIC BOARD MEETING

Wednesday, Dec. 4, 2024

Seattle, Washington – Embassy Suites

Updated: Jan. 13, 2025

Public Q&A – Post-Event Answers

Due to time limitations, Amtrak executives were unable to answer every question submitted by the public during the Board meeting on Dec. 4. As follow-up, Amtrak is providing written answers to these questions, from company leaders.

STATIONS & FACILITIES

Since the restoration of King Street Station in 2013, why is there still no Metropolitan Lounge as found in Amtrak’s other large-city locations for use by First-Class passengers? What needs to happen for a Metropolitan Lounge and some type of food service, as is found in Portland Union Station in Portland, Ore., to be constructed within King Street Station?

Gery Williams, EVP, Service Delivery & Operations: Amtrak and our state partners are always looking for new ways to improve the customer experience at all our stations. The City of Seattle owns King Street Station, not Amtrak. We are in ongoing discussions with Seattle on what new services and amenities could potentially be added to King Street, given passenger needs, available space and business opportunities. Currently, significant additional investment is needed to add a Metropolitan Lounge at King Street, as well as new retail and food space. We will continue to have discussions with Seattle and our state partners to determine how to best move forward with station improvements, including identification of possible funding.

There doesn’t seem to be a standard policy for handling passengers when there is a Service Disruption along a route. Sometimes, passengers are accommodated on buses to their final destinations. Other times, passengers are left holding their bags at whatever station their train was stopped. If alternate transportation to destinations is unavailable, then at least assist passengers with local accommodations until they can continue their train trip.

Gery Williams, EVP, Service Delivery & Operations: We always aim to have a consistent approach across all services – but we believe it is more important to do what is best for our customers, given the circumstances and available resources. Amtrak does have [specific policies](#) that outline what we do in Service Recovery situations – both in our stations and onboard our trains. However, circumstances often dictate our approach depending on the conditions, geography and the type of disruption. When significant disruptions do occur to active passenger trains, Amtrak’s National Operations Center determines how to best take care of our customers, with the goal of fulfilling a traveler’s trip safely and expeditiously. However, in cases where this is not possible, and depending on the type of service and route, we may provide alternative transportation, accommodations, or as a last resort, returning service back to point of origin.

It seems to take a long time to reconstruct station platforms and station entrances to meet ADA requirements. Are contractors and subcontractors going to be able to accomplish this work within their contracted timeframe? Or are they having problems with having enough employees to do this work in a timely manner?

Dave Handera, VP Accessibility, Stations and Facilities: While these projects take time to construct, we work to ensure the contractors are staffed adequately and do accomplish the work within their contractual timeframes. There are a number of factors that contribute to the duration of construction schedules. In particular, much of the required work is along active rail lines owned by other railroads. Gaining access to these rights of way and achieving the necessary “outage” time to accomplish the work amidst often busy freight train operations is something we work closely to achieve with our host partners. Weather also plays a part with construction at stations in colder climates being forced to shut down for the winter. Factoring in weather and railroad access, and the amount of work needed at a station, we are seeing our contractors performing the work safely and as contracted. We appreciate everyone’s support as we safely advance these projects to completion.

BUS SERVICE

What is the future of Amtrak’s Thruway Bus services? Coach USA (Van Galder and Megabus) have filed for bankruptcy. Greyhound, owned by Flix Bus (2021), has been selling off many of their bus stations across the country. With these bus companies having financial problems, will Amtrak be adversely affected – and might Amtrak also have to become a bus company?

Jason Maga, AVP, Service Planning: We are seeing a lot of consolidation within the intercity bus and motor coach industries. This has led to a smaller number of operators – and challenging conditions for bus passengers. We are working closely with our vendors, to ensure that our Amtrak Thruway Bus operations have defined standard procedures and service quality standards. We will continue to look for ways to ensure that the Amtrak passenger experience for connecting rail passengers remains as unaffected as possible by these developments.

Should Amtrak stations serve as bus stations in communities where there is no longer a dedicated bus station for passengers to get out of the elements?

Gery Williams, EVP, Service Delivery & Operations: We do consider opportunities for other transportation providers to use our facilities – especially as we design our future stations or look to improve current ones. We know that accommodating bus service may, in some cases, be a plus for the communities we serve – and in general, we believe that creating multimodal connectivity with our services is good for Amtrak. However, we must recognize that many of our existing stations were created long before interstate highways and simply weren’t built with bus service in mind. Given this, we consider accommodating bus service at our existing stations on a case-by-case basis. We take several factors into account when making these decisions – including our overall station capacity, any necessary physical accommodations or alternations, sufficient staffing to support safe and consistent operations for both Amtrak and bus passengers, and adequate capital and operating funding from partner entities.

TRAINS

On washing the exterior of trains: If the wash racks are out of service and Amtrak is waiting on replacement parts, consideration should be given to using portable power washers as a temporary washing method until repairs are made to the automated wash racks.

George Hull, VP, Chief Mechanical Officer: We are doing this. However, it is not as easy as it sounds. Current environmental regulations require that wastewater from washing the train must be collected and processed appropriately by local water treatment requirements. This makes it a very time-consuming and expensive process – and in some locations, it is not able to be safely done. However, we have recently put new wash racks into service in New Orleans, and we expect to have new wash racks soon in Seattle, Boston and Chicago.

COMMERICAL

Can Amtrak return to printing and posting a National Timetable on the Amtrak website? It would be good to have all train information found within a single publication, instead of having to navigate several windows on the Amtrak website to locate the same information.

Jessica Davidson, VP, Digital and Brand Marketing: We know how important it is to our customers to have the most accurate and up-to-date information to plan their trips. A few years ago, Amtrak made the decision to stop printing consolidated timetables, just as most European railways have done. We believe this continues to be the right decision. With printed schedules, the production costs are high, usage rates are low, and the information becomes quickly outdated, given frequent schedule changes. Our current digital experience, where a customer can enter station and date information and receive a timetable result for a specific route, is much more helpful. It ensures that customers are always receiving the most current information, which means they can plan their trips with confidence. We know there is opportunity to improve this experience given ongoing interest in viewing more information at once in an easy-to-navigate way. We are exploring new and improved ways to present this information.

Amtrak needs to advertise their long-distance trains to reach more people across the country. I live in Glendive, Mont., and drive 100 miles to Wolf Point, Mont., to go west – or 100 miles to Williston, N.D., to go east. Many people are excited about these efforts to return passenger rail service through southern Montana – but many of these same people don't realize that Amtrak currently operates daily across northern Montana. What about an ad campaign?

Jessica Davidson, VP, Digital and Brand Marketing: On Oct. 1, we debuted the “Retrain Travel” national advertising campaign which encourages customers to reimagine their approach to travel and avoid the stress of flying and driving. The campaign highlights the spacious, comfortable seats, and other unique amenities which can make train travel enjoyable. This campaign is supported through digital video advertisements, display advertising and keyword search campaigns and more. We also advertise nationally on various websites including Expedia, Kayak, Facebook and Instagram. The Retrain Travel campaign also covers Montana and other states across the national network. Additionally, because Montana is served by the daily *Empire Builder* train service as noted, it (especially Glacier National Park) receives special promotional coverage across Amtrak.com and Amtrak's social media channels.

ROUTES

How do you calculate where and when you create stops?

Nicole Bucich, VP, Network Development: Traditionally, station locations on new routes are driven by land use, population and employment levels, distance from existing stations, and the availability of connecting transit services. On existing routes, Amtrak considers several criteria to determine potential candidate infill stations, including distance from existing stations, area demographics and tourism, site feasibility, projected ridership, costs, and passenger convenience. We also consider funding sources (local, state, and federal) as well as host railroad cooperation. For new routes being developed through the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor ID program, routes will be determined by state project sponsors using many of the same factors listed above.

Might Amtrak consider additional stops within the city of Newark, Delaware, for workers commuting to DC and Baltimore?

Jason Maga, AVP, Service Planning: Due to the station infrastructure currently in place, Newark is a challenging stop for us. It has short length, low-level platforms and at-grade crosswalks that require trains to enter the station slowly for precise spotting, potentially stop movements on adjacent tracks, open only a few doors, and have passengers board via steps. Stopping at Newark would add significant schedule time and risk of delay to trains calling at the station or through trains that could be impacted. Given this situation, ridership at Newark does not justify additional stops at this time. Once future platform improvements are in place, we will be in a position to consider additional stops at this location.

Might Amtrak consider new stations along the *Cascades* corridor in Oregon – Woodburn and Canby?

Nicole Bucich, VP, Network Development: The *Cascades* route is a State-Supported Service sponsored by the states of Oregon and Washington, with Amtrak as their partner and operator. Decisions about additional stations are the responsibility of the states and can be vetted as part of their upcoming Corridor ID Service Development Plans.

Is there a plan to build a connection from Salt Lake City to Boise?

Nicole Bucich, VP, Network Development: The Salt Lake City to Boise route was not part of the first round of the FRA's Corridor ID program, which is the federal program for developing new intercity passenger rail corridors. However, it is anticipated that the City of Boise will submit an application for this corridor in the next round of FRA's Corridor ID Program.

Does the daily *Sunset Limited* study include restoring service through Phoenix? Is Amtrak working with United Pacific Rail and Arizona on a plan to repair and rehabilitate the UP?

Nicole Bucich, VP, Network Development: The Daily *Sunset Limited* Corridor would bring the current tri-weekly service to daily service and will also consider a return to Phoenix. Phoenix is a critical yet underserved market and is the largest city in the country with no passenger rail service.

The Daily *Sunset Limited* Service Development Plan will evaluate capital improvements to the UP line required for passenger service.

FREQUENCIES

Is Amtrak working with the state of Oklahoma to increase frequency on the *Heartland Flyer*?

Nicole Bucich, VP, Network Development: Amtrak is working with Kansas DOT as they advance their *Heartland Flyer* Extension project to extend service from Oklahoma City, OK to Wichita, KS and Newton, KS through FRA's Corridor ID Program. To date, this initiative has not considered additional frequencies.

The current schedule requires an overnight layover north into Oklahoma. I would appreciate a morning train to Oklahoma and an evening return back to Texas.

Jason Maga, AVP, Service Planning: The proposed schedule under evaluation is based on the current schedule and would provide connections to/from the *Southwest Chief* in Newton.