

ALL ABOARD INDIANA

The Newsletter of Indiana Passenger Rail Advocates

March 2014 Edition

New Chicago Crew Scheduling Policy Causes Major Delays

Imagine if United Airlines stopped in Gary to get a crew while en route from Chicago to Indianapolis. Passengers would be furious. "Why didn't you get a new crew in Chicago?" they would ask.

This, however, is exactly the new policy eastbound out of Chicago on the Hoosier State and Cardinal. Not surprisingly, it has caused the already slow 5 hour and 5 minute run to face major delays. Indeed, the Hoosier State and Cardinal trains going east out of Chicago have been on time just 32% of the time this winter (compared to 80% last fall).

While CSX rail issues and the cold weather were partly to blame, the delays were exacerbated by Amtrak Chicago's new policy of using the same crews in and out of Chicago. (cont.)



Both the Cardinal and the Hoosier State in Indy's Union Station at 5:50 a.m. on Friday, February 21, 2014.

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Newsletter content by volunteer Bill Malcolm (billmalcolm@gmail.com)

Instead of putting a new crew on the eastbound Cardinal and Hoosier trains leaving Chicago, staff from the inbound train is used. Any delay means the crews aren't swapped in Lafayette as planned but wherever the crew "times out".

The trip from Chicago to Indianapolis on February 21 took 11 hours. This included a 1 hour 40 minute delay while a new crew was driven to a spot just 40 miles north of Lafayette. This delay then was followed by a 3 hour delay in Crawfordsville when a tree fell onto the track, plus a delay when a 40 mph reduced speed limit was called for by CSX due to a flood alert. Passengers arrived in Indianapolis at 5:45 a.m. instead of 11:50 the previous evening.

Crew switching also delayed the train February 6. The February 6 eastbound Cardinal arrived in Washington, D.C. 8 hours late (on February 8 at 2 a.m. instead of on February 7 at 6 p.m.) due to a locomotive shortage; Amtrak apparently pulled the locomotive off the Cardinal right before the scheduled departure and gave it to another train. This initial delay caused a crew swap issue.

A story by Chris Morisse Vizza in the March 1 *Lafayette Courier Journal* reported on a meeting between Amtrak and the Lafayette Chamber in Washington, D.C. on the matter.

Amtrak's president committed to minimizing delays caused when the train is stopped mid-route so that a new crew can board and replace employees who have reached a maximum of 12 continuous work hours. Also dis-

cussed was finding a more direct route between Chicago and Dyer, possibly using CN tracks.

Readers may want to contact Amtrak Chicago Operations, encouraging a return to the former policy of using a new crew out of Chicago. The person responsible for this policy is Mr. Ben Sheets, Assistant Superintendent East, who can be contacted at Benjaman.Sheets@amtrak.com.

Union Station Repair Study to Be Released Shortly



Scaffolding holds up the ceiling at Indy's Union Station

A consultant study of Indianapolis' Union Station is pending and will be released any day now, according to the City of Indianapolis, which owns the beleaguered facility and commissioned the study.

The current Indianapolis Union Station has had scaffolding holding up the ceiling since November 2013. The station is an eyesore to arriving bus and train passengers. The buzz of the 1980s era fluorescent light is omnipresent, the bathrooms are poorly maintained, and passengers frequently sleep on the floor—including some patrons who appear to be homeless. In short, the facility is an (*cont.*)



Indy's historic Union Station

embarrassment to arriving passengers if not the City's image.

Not only is the station used by Amtrak, but is also used by Greyhound as well as

the following other bus companies:

- Baron's Bus (to Ohio and Detroit)
- Miller Bus (to South Bend and Muncie)
- Trailways (to central Illinois and Iowa)

Amtrak Skips Indiana in Midwest Wi-Fi Rollout

Amtrak has added Wi-Fi to all Midwest trains except for those in Indiana via a rollout of AmtrakConnect.

Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Missouri now have Wi-Fi on all their trains, according to a recent Amtrak press release and flyer.

Lincoln Service/Illini-Saluki, Illinois Zephyr/Carl Sanburg, Wolverine Service, Blue Water, Pere Marquette, Missouri River Runner and Hiawatha Trains now all feature free Wi-Fi.

Indiana was apparently not included on the list because negotiations began a while back with the other Midwest states.

Unfortunately, Amtrak's competition between Indianapolis and Chicago, Greyhound Express and MegaBus, both offer free Wi-Fi.

INDOT RFP Scheduled for this Month

INDOT has retained rail consulting firm R.L. Banksto, issuing a request for proposal for an alternative operator for the Hoosier State. The goal is to improve service on the Hoosier State.

Non-Amtrak passenger rail operators are not unheard of.

A private rail operator, Iowa Pacific, may be a bidder for the Hoosier State service. The company is bidding to run a train from Oklahoma City to Tulsa. It also operates other passenger services.

In Florida, another private operator wants to run the train from Orlando to Miami.

Virginia's commuter rail system also uses a non-Amtrak operator for its services.

Crowne Plaza Hotel Union Station Renovates Interior

The Crowne Plaza Union Station in Indianapolis has recently undergone renovation. You can even stay in an old train car if you like.

Other nearby hotels include the Omni, the Hyatt, and the Westin.

Spring Break in D.C? Cardinal Route a Scenery Stunner

Why not take Amtrak to D.C. for spring break?

The Cardinal out of Washington, D.C. westbound is a well-kept secret.

From D.C. westbound, the train travels south through Virginia through the college town of Charlottesville, then over the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Alleghenies and through the New River Gorge in West Virginia. Even the middle of the night trip along the Ohio River is scenic.



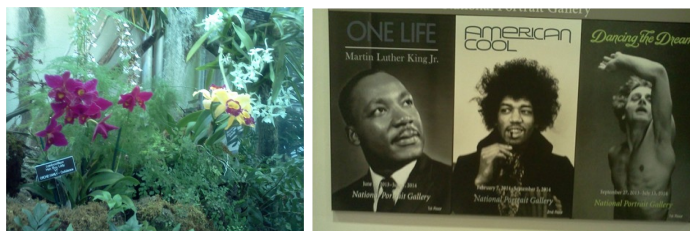
Smithsonian National Botanical Gardens in D.C.

A trip to D.C. is the perfect spring break get away. All the museums managed by the Smithsonian are free. While in D.C., don't miss the Smithsonian's Na-

tional Portrait Gallery and the National Botanical Garden.

The Washington Plaza in D.C. (weekend rates from \$99) and the Beacon House Hotel are the author's favorites, although the Courtyard and Holiday Inn on Rhode Island are also nice. (Metro Faragut North)

On a side note, the D.C. Union Station is undergoing rehabilitation due to damage from the earthquake a few years ago. The main hall ceiling seems most affected.



Flowers at National Botanical Garden; American Cool Exhibit and Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery

New Indy Transit Center Skips Amtrak Connection

Connections with Amtrak are apparently being ignored as Indianapolis moves forward with a new \$200 million transit center (primarily for IndyGo buses) across from the City County Building on Washington Street. The *Indianapolis Star* mentioned the plan in a February 28 story on legislation that would allow regional residents to vote to raise taxes to fund increased transit service.

IndyGo does not currently serve the Amtrak/Greyhound Bus Station (as the current "station" consists of a covered shelter just east of the State House); however, transit advocates feel Indianapolis would be wise to do what Milwaukee and St. Louis recently did: construct an inter-modal bus/rail/regional bus transit station.

NARP President Transitions Out

The National Association of Railroad Passengers announced this week that Ross Capon will be transitioning from his 39-year career with the organization. Dr. Larry Scott will take over as Acting President.