

ALL ABOARD

INDIANA

The Official Newsletter of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance

Volume 2, Number 1 January 2015

Status of Amtrak's *Hoosier State*

By Doug Yerkeson

Daily passenger rail service between Indianapolis, Lafayette, and Chicago remains in jeopardy. State of Indiana funding of Amtrak's *Hoosier State* passenger train is scheduled to end on January 31, 2015.

Rumors are again circulating about the Indiana Department of Transportation's (INDOT) future plans for this important service. It is understood that INDOT is in negotiation with Iowa Pacific to provide rolling stock and food/beverage services, while Amtrak would continue as the operator of the *Hoosier State*. The Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) also understands that a connecting shuttle bus between the *Hoosier State* and Bloomington is being investigated to serve the Indiana University market.

Good news from INDOT: "INDOT's discussions are ongoing to obtain pricing from Amtrak. INDOT's negotiations with Iowa Pacific have advanced to the point where the discussions with Amtrak are now on the critical path. Should contract negotiations with Amtrak not conclude before Jan. 31, then INDOT would discuss a short extension of the existing service," said Will Wingfield, INDOT spokesperson.

This image was created by a sixth-grade train passenger enjoying his first Amtrak trip from Indianapolis to Chicago on December 21. Distressed at the news that the train was in danger of being discontinued, he immediately sat down and created several advertisements for the cause. We applaud this young advocate.



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Passenger Rail Celebration on *Hoosier State*

By David Drasin

On December 19, Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) members joined Amtrak passengers for a passenger appreciation day on the *Hoosier State*. Coaches were half full, with business class seats sold out. Lafayette station volunteer Joe Krause, IPRA board member Doug Yerkeson, and *All Aboard Indiana* correspondent David Drasin, along with his wife Jennie, took the Friday trek into Chicago.

Lafayette *Journal & Courier* reporter Chris Morisse Vizza interviewed passengers in Lafayette that Friday; her article and a picture appeared on page 3 of the newspaper the following day.

Lafayette residents Liz and Jim Solberg, West Lafayette's Pat Skifstad, along with Yerkeson, treated well wishers and passengers to an abundant selection of hot drinks and pastries. The passenger appreciation day goodies augmented the Sara Lee pastries, coffee and hot water available on the train. (Liz Solberg is also a member of IPRA's board of directors.)

Amtrak's Chicago office provided southbound passengers with complimentary Garrett gourmet popcorn—served in huge tins. Next time you visit Chicago, visit Garrett's very popular gourmet popcorn store located near the station.



Liz Solberg prepares treats for Amtrak passengers. (Photo courtesy David Drasin.)

IPRA volunteers distributed literature and leaflets on December 19, urging passengers to support the continuation (and improvement) of the *Hoosier State*.

By all accounts, passengers are appreciating the more comfortable train service

with new amenities. A frequent Amtrak traveler, I like the free Wi-Fi available on the *Hoosier State*. Passengers find the Wi-Fi reliable, fast, and more than adequate

for checking emails. Users must agree in advance not to download large files, however.

On the return trip, Jennie and I rode business class at an extra \$15 per ticket. Unlike normal train (or airline) seats, business class customers relax in seating that is something like a stuffed armchair. We/they also had access to the Metropolitan Lounge in Union Station. Unlike the regular, seriously overcrowded coach boarding area, the Metropolitan Lounge is not crowded, has comfortable seating, television, and courtesy internet plus the usual snacks. After a day of walking in Chicago, we were happy to rest there prior to boarding the train.

Pam Fogarty, a conductor on the *Hoosier State*, and other Amtrak crew members are familiar with the slowness and late overall performance that inflates the cost of the train service. The crew deals with the uncertainties of scheduling with total professionalism. Federal laws strictly limit the total number of hours a train crew can be on duty, and that number now is never enough to complete a round trip to Indianapolis. Thus, there has been a relief crew provided on the return trip (this time, in Rensselaer). This replacement crew times itself to arrive at the transfer location only when it is clear that the train will arrive before the first crew's allowable hours have expired.

Based in Indianapolis, the replacement crew is provided van transportation to, in this case, Rensselaer. Given that several large railroads operate from Chicago to the Southeast, there is a well-developed (*continued*)



Passengers relax and enjoy some holiday snacks aboard the Hoosier State. (Photo courtesy of Doug Yerkeson.)

(*"Passenger Rail Celebration"* continued from page 2) service which delivers replacement crews (for Norfolk Southern, Union Pacific, as well as Amtrak). The service is expensive—specifics not available—and inconveniences passengers waiting for the crew changes and clearances as they assume control.

(CREWS TO OVERNIGHT IN CHICAGO -- "After too long a time struggling with its own inadequate work schedule requiring every Chicago-Indianapolis train and engine crew to be relieved enroute when they run out of Hours of Service due to a short rest period, Amtrak has finally redone the work schedules to allow full rest in Chicago upon arrival from Indianapolis; this will allow the Indianapolis crew to work all the way from Chicago back to Indianapolis," reports *Trainorders.com*)

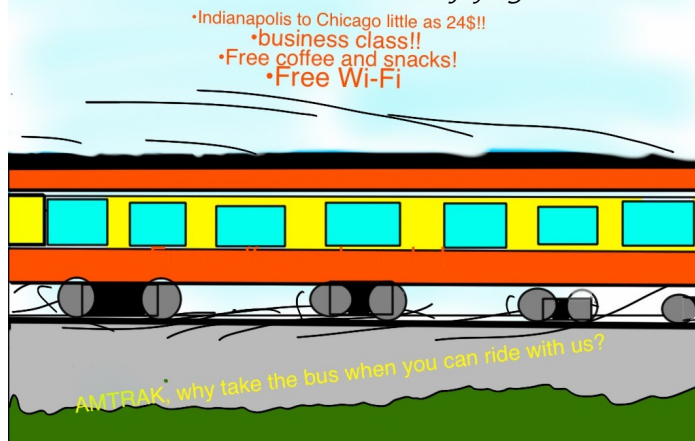
On December 19, this correspondent saw some encouraging signs during the southbound trip on Friday night. CSX is putting in some new sidings. As the train passes Reynolds, most visible is the huge Magnetation Inc. Pellet Plant on the east, which processes iron ore concentrate from high quality fluxed iron ore pellets coming by train from Minnesota. (See related story in this newsletter: "CSX Investments in Monon Subdivision.")

Passenger Appreciation Day Extended to Sunday, December 21

By Doug Yerkeson

As an encore to the successful IPRA passenger appreciation event on Friday, December 19th, Ed Ufkes and I travelled the *Hoosier State* from Crawfordsville to Chicago and back two days later. We had a large crowd (140 passengers) on the Sunday morning train 851 to Chicago. We talked with many passengers as they visited the café car for Amtrak-provided complimentary coffee and pastries, along with IPRA-supplied hot cocoa and holiday candies. Approximately 100 passengers returned from Chicago that evening on Train 850. Garrett's popcorn and bottled water (compliments of Amtrak) were available, along with the regular *Hoosier State* offerings of coffee and assorted snacks.

Doug Yerkeson's sixth-grade fellow passenger created this ad for the *Hoosier State* while enjoying his ride.



As always, the *Hoosier State* operating crew worked hard to provide excellent customer service, often under challenging circumstances.

Particularly rewarding was speaking with passengers about why the *Hoosier State* passenger train is important to them. Stories included a family making a week-end trip from Indy to Chicago for the Holidays, a Purdue foreign exchange student who rides Amtrak because he does not drive, and a woman who makes monthly trips for specialized medical appointments.

I spoke at some length with a 6th grade student and his mom who were travelling from Indy to Chicago. This was his first train ride, and he was genuinely concerned that the *Hoosier State* may not continue to run after January 2015. He took it upon himself to create several advertisements on his iPad while in the café car.

A good trip was had by all, and it's hoped that IPRA volunteers were able to help inform the public on passenger rail while spreading some joy over the holidays.

CSX Invests in Monon Subdivision

By Doug Yerkeson

CSX has invested approximately \$20 million in completed and in-progress improvements on the Monon Subdivision Line, which is used by Amtrak's *Cardinal* and *Hoosier State* trains. The investments (*continued*)

("CSX Invests in Monon Subdivision" continued from page 3) focus on projects to support additional freight rail business generated from the new Magnetation plant near Reynolds, Indiana. In November, CSX completed a \$10 million project to improve sidings in Shelby. Additionally, a project to improve a siding in South Raub is expected to be completed late in 2015. These Monon projects will improve efficiency on one of CSX's busiest routes and better serve customers on these routes and across the network.

This crossing at 205th Avenue is just one place where CSX is improving infrastructure. (Photo courtesy CSX.)



The Monon line is just one example of CSX's investments in fluidity across the Chicago region. In 2013, CSX acquired the Elsdon line to enhance both freight and passenger train fluidity and provide alternative routing options. New universal crossovers, new connections, and new routes are the end result. A new, improved Elsdon line is expected to reduce transit times through our Bedford Park intermodal terminal and open up additional capacity to reach the Belt Railway of Chicago, a critical system for effective interchange. Additionally, CSX is investing in the New Rock subdivision to accommodate volume growth. This project includes new yard tracks in Rockdale, new sidings at Minooka, track expansion in Utica, and double track and signal enhancements in Rockdale.

CSX is committed to increasing resources to support network-wide service improvements, which focuses on adding crews and locomotives, improving processes and enhancing infrastructure. Providing service excellence is CSX's top priority, company spokesmen say.

Greyhound, Amtrak Partner to Improve Network Connections

By Donald Yehle

An expanded Thruway Bus Service partnership with Greyhound Lines, Inc. now allows patrons of the *Hoo-sier State* and the *Cardinal* to book return trips—via buses—at hours those trains don't run, says Amtrak's Charlie Monte Verde.

"This can now be done directly and easily as part of a booking through Amtrak, and patrons will be able to utilize their same Amtrak stations of choice to catch the connecting buses, the government affairs spokesperson said.

Besides additional frequencies, the traveling public can now book additional travel to Cincinnati, Louisville, and Nashville though Amtrak, he continued.

Greyhound Lines has also opened up a ticket office at Chicago's Union Station, as it works with Amtrak to provide more connectivity for people from Indiana, Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee, Monte Verde said.

More information about this exciting development will be featured in the February issue of *All Aboard Indiana*.

Do You Want To Be a Passenger Rail Advocate?

By Phil Streby

Editor's Note: IPRA members have a wide range of experience in the passenger rail business and as advocates for passenger rail. In this column, Phil Streby – an Indiana representative to the National Association of Railroad Passengers – writes on how everyone can become better passenger train advocates.

Since you are reading this newsletter, it may be assumed you are a rail passenger advocate. That is good, but how much do you know about rail passenger service? Furthermore, how much do *(continued)*

("Do You Want To Be a Passenger Rail Advocate?" continued from page 4) you know about the railroad at all? Over the next several months, I will try to enlighten your general knowledge about railroading using a series of articles concerning the history of rail as well as what rail is and what it does (and doesn't do). Along the right-of-way, I'll introduce and explain railroad terms so that you'll have a better understanding, and, hopefully, better ability to argue for your advocacy.

If you wish for more technical knowledge than that I will be presenting, or if you have questions, e-mail me at pstreby@aol.com. I will take suggestions for topics in addition to, or maybe instead of, what I had planned. Improved passenger rail is our objective.

I urge everyone wanting improved passenger service to begin by reading (or reading more) at your local library. If they don't have what you want, let the librarian know, so he or she may plan your wish list into the library's budget.

An inexpensive start would be a subscription to one of many rail-focused magazines currently on the market. Some titles include: TRAINS and PASSENGER TRAIN JOURNAL. Many back issues may be found at train shows. They can provide much background information about the rise, fall, and rise again of rail. More importantly, they can provide some of that much needed information to help dispel the myths surrounding the modern passenger train "boondoggle". Knowledge is power. Use it wisely.

Future INDOT Surveys Must Mention Rail

By Donald Yehle

The Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (IPRA) compliments the state's Department of Transportation for conducting a 24-question survey on "the types of transportation programs you believe INDOT should focus its funding on and how you believe INDOT is performing in delivering various transportation services."

We only wish the state would have included passenger

rail initiatives as part of its "satisfaction with INDOT services." Fortunately, passenger rail advocates like me have been provided a toll free number to call with questions regarding the survey. That number is 888-801-5368.

Persons calling that number will be connected with the ETC Institute, a Kansas-based firm whose mission is to conduct surveys, focus groups, and stakeholder meetings "to help local governments gather data from residents to enhance community planning."

This editor was randomly selected to participate in the independent customer satisfaction survey. Randomly selected Indiana citizens have a choice to complete the survey online at www.INDOTsurvey.com or answer questions the old-fashioned way and return it in a postage-paid envelope.

One particularly disturbing question on the survey reads as follows:

"Four major categories of transportation funding are listed below along with the percentage of INDOT's budget that is currently allocated to each category. If you could set transportation spending priorities for INDOT, please indicate how you would allocate the funding by entering the percentage you would spend on each category in the space provided. Please be sure your total allocation adds up to 100."

Transportation funding categories are:

Projects that maintain road pavement conditions so that roads are smooth and have few potholes.
(44% now; what would you allocate?) *(continued)*

Passenger rail was notably ignored on INDOT's recent transportation survey.



("Future INDOT Surveys Must Mention Rail" continued from page 5)

Projects that ensure bridges are in good condition so that there are no restrictions on bridges.

(44% now; what would you allocate?)

Safety projects that target reduction in severe crashes. (6% now, what would you allocate?)

Construction of new road lanes and intersection improvements to reduce congestion. (6% now, what would you allocate?)

IPRA asks another funding category be added.

Projects that provide safe, reliable, frequent, and pleasant passenger rail throughout the State of Indiana. (0%; what would you allocate?)

Consider going to the survey website (www.INDOTsurvey.com) or contact 888-801-5368 to voice your concerns that future surveys need to include passenger rail initiatives, including funding requests.

News, Briefly Stated

- Thanks for "adopting" your railroad station – Dyer, Rensselaer, Lafayette, Crawfordsville, and Connersville are among cities along the *Cardinal* and *Hoosier State* routes lauded for voluntarily standing out as "keepers of the rail gateway to their communities." Local organizations in these communities are praised for doing "landscaping, painting, and general maintenance, and beautification."
- Krause's mission attracts TV-18, Lafayette – West Lafayette's Joe Krause and Lafayette's Julius Walker were recognized by the local television station for their efforts to "help people" connect with the *Hoosier State*. "I see him [them] every time I come [from Chicago]," said one passenger of the duo who aren't being paid for their daily services.

Salute to Bill Malcolm

The IPRA board of directors wants to salute outgoing *All Aboard Indiana* editor Bill Malcolm. You have been the backbone behind our publication. We want to

thank you for your efforts over a long period of time and wish you great success in your new full-time position. Thanks, Bill.

Coming in Our February Issue...

- *All Aboard Indiana* takes a look at public feedback received in December on the multi-state rail project regarding the Chicago-Detroit Tier 1 Environmental Impact Study.
- Breaking news on the *Hoosier State* will be covered, as a January 31 deadline looms for continuation of the train service.
- A Lafayette resident writes about the reluctance of America to spend money on passenger rail and offers ideas on how to market trains.
- We're looking for additional story ideas. Please forward those ideas to Donald Yehle, editor, at djyehle@gmail.com or 765-418-4097.

For More Information:

All Aboard Indiana is a monthly publication of the Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance (formerly Indiana High Speed Rail Association).

To learn more or to join IPRA go to www.indianahighspeedrail.org or contact us at Indiana Passenger Rail Alliance, 3951 North Meridian Street, Suite 100, Indianapolis, IN 46208

To follow rail news on Facebook go to Hoosiers for Passenger Rail and/or Hoosiers for the Hoosier State.

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Note: This group is not affiliated with Amtrak, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation.