

Ohio Passenger Rail News

Intercity Rail
Special Issue

Public Transit

Commuter Rail

Intermodal

A publication of All Aboard Ohio

2010

CVSR becoming serious transportation

By Ken Prendergast
All Aboard Ohio Executive Director

There are countless scenic and tourist railroads operating in the United States. But none compare with the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad in its size, sophistication, professionalism, volunteerism and popularity. Indeed, CVSR now carries more passengers than five of Amtrak's state-supported routes.

CVSR has come a long way from a full-size toy to a serious transportation service. Threatened with abandonment in the early 1980s, the railroad was saved so it could serve recreational visitors to the Cuyahoga River valley, now home to the nation's seventh-most visited national park. The Cuyahoga Valley National Park and its scenic railroad draw big crowds because it links three metropolitan areas - Cleveland, Akron and Canton, an area of 3.3 million people. That has helped CVSR become the busiest passenger railroad in the entire state, carrying more riders in 2009 than Amtrak (152,000 riders on CVSR vs. 128,000 to/from Ohio cities on Amtrak).

If anything, CVSR's success shows that when Ohioans have access to a well-supported and accessible passenger rail service linking population centers with convenient, multiple daily trains, they will ride them. They will even ride them when top speeds don't exceed 40 mph -- CVSR's maximum. Indeed, CVSR is already undertaking the kinds of commercial, financial,

— See **"CVSR"** on Page Two



Ken Prendergast photos

Ohio's most heavily used passenger railroad is the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad (CVSR) which carried more riders (152,000 in 2009 between Cleveland, Akron and Canton than Amtrak did statewide (128,000). CVSR has more weekly trains at more convenient times and more federal and private capital improvements too! CVSR also has Ohio's busiest station (Akron Northside) shown here on Aug. 7, 2010.



Station-area development in Akron by Testa Companies includes a high-rise luxury condo tower (at right), townhouses, restaurants and shops. More is coming including a 10-story Marriott Hotel to be built to the left of the condo tower. Private investment is attracted by busy rail stations worldwide and the Akron Northside CVSR station is no different.

Help us fight for more, better transportation choices in Ohio!

Join All Aboard Ohio today and support the cause for better rail and public transit services in and through Ohio! Your membership entitles you to a quarterly newsletter, action alerts, e-mail news, discounts to meetings and more:

- \$100+ Club Car (polo or sweatshirt with AAO logo.
Choose size: S M L XL XXL)
- \$50 First Class (includes AAO pen)
- \$35 On Board
- \$26 On Track (limited income, military, student)

Mail check payable to "All Aboard Ohio" to 309 South Fourth Street, Columbus, OH 43215-5428 www.allaboarohio.org

CVSR offers guidance for other Ohio rail projects

"CVSR" continued from Page One

infrastructural and intermodal partnerships desired by Amtrak and the Ohio Department of Transportation for faster, more extensive passenger rail services elsewhere in Ohio.

But for now, CVSR is Ohio's only passenger railroad service that has enjoyed significant federal, local government and private-sector funding support. That has resulted in CVSR:

- having access to 51 route miles of former Baltimore & Ohio Railroad track preserved by the National Park Service and the Akron Metro Regional Transit Authority;
- being the beneficiary of \$35 million in federal funds for infrastructure improvements including new or rebuilt bridges, tracks, road crossing safety devices, stations etc;
- having its operating costs financially backed by a stable transit authority (again, Akron Metro RTA) which also owns six of CVSR's passenger coaches;
- partnering with transit agencies in Akron and Canton to provide free downtown circulator bus services for CVSR passengers;
- employing innovative services such as Bike Aboard in which cyclists can bike one way on the busy Towpath Trail next to the old Ohio & Erie Canal and return on the train with their bikes for just \$2;
- enjoying the strong support of the corporate and philanthropic community in Cleveland, Akron and Canton including major sponsorships to pay for top-notch, in-house rebuilding of railroad cars and locomotives;
- enjoying the strong support of the civic community in Cleveland, Akron and Canton to provide CVSR passengers with discounted admissions to museums and other attractions;
- having on-board service partnerships with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park to provide in-person and electronic Voices in the Valley audio tour of sights along the route.



Ken Prendergast photos

"How do I get to my final destination?" CVSR has answered this often-asked question that has unfairly dogged other Ohio passenger rail projects. Arrangements with Akron Metro and the Stark Area regional transit authorities provide free circulator buses in Akron (above) and Canton (below) for CVSR passengers. In addition to serving each city's central business district, the buses provide curbside service to historic sites, halls of fame, museums and each transit system's hub so passengers can connect with routes to the entire region.



CVSR statistics

Ridership: 152,000 (FY 2009)

Bicycles handled: 21,000 (FY 2009)

Annual Revenue: \$4.7 million (FY 2008)

Paid employees: 22 full- and part-time (FY 2006)

Volunteers: Varies, but often several dozen.

Operations: Most extensive service is offered June-October (see timetable); weekend-only service north of Akron November-May.

Route miles: 51 (National Park Service-owned track north of Akron; Akron Metro RTA-owned track south of Akron).

Stations: Nine, each a standardized replica of an historic depot.

Locomotives: Nine plus two self-propelled rail diesel cars.

Passenger cars: 24 including baggage and head-end power cars.

Work train cars: Seven (five boxcars, two flatcars).

Equipment maintenance: Fitzwater Road Yard, Independence.

Headquarters/offices: P.O. Box 158, Peninsula, OH 44264

Sources: CVSR, NPS, faqs.org



Akron Northside station-area development is an attractive setting along Howard Street, at left.

CVSR's past, present and future

Ohio's busiest passenger railroad offers guidance to other passenger rail projects planned and proposed statewide. And it all starts with people and partnerships.

"Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad would not be what it is today without our partners, including the National Park Service, Akron Metro RTA, SARTA (Stark Area Regional Transit Authority) and many of our corporate and community partners," said Kelly Steele, CVSR's director of marketing.

"Steve Wait (CVSR president) is a real pro and doing a fantastic job, supported by a small but dedicated group of professionals and a large group of enthusiastic volunteers," said Arnie de la Porte, chairman of the CVSR Board of Directors.

The trains are run by professional locomotive engineers, train conductors, maintenance workers and others, some who retired from freight and passenger railroads or who simply want to work on a small, regularly scheduled railroad close to home. There are volunteers working the café cars, stations, special events and the Bike Aboard baggage car, which is like a rolling coat check room but for bicycles.

When CVSR passengers arrive or depart Akron at its Northside depot, they do so in a special setting. First, it is Ohio's busiest passenger railroad station in terms of passengers (nearly 100,000 per year compared to No. 2 ranking Toledo and its 54,000 Amtrak travelers) or in terms of train movements (at least 84 passenger trains per week compared to just 28 Amtrak trains weekly each at Toledo, Sandusky, Elyria and Cleveland). Those don't include rail rapid transit stations in the Cleveland area as those are transit operations, not railroad operations.

CVSR attracts new development to Akron station!

Akron's Northside depot is also the only Ohio railroad station busy enough to attract station-area real estate development. Testa Company's Northside development has moved forward despite the sour economy over the last several years, including a luxury loft condominium tower and a growing number of townhouses. There also is the VegeTerranean restaurant owned by native Akronite and rock-and-roll star Chrissie Hynde, plus art galleries and an old gasoline service station converted into a bicycle repair and rental shop.

More station-area development is coming, such as a 10-story Marriott hotel to be built next to CVSR's Akron Northside station. The development bug could soon bite in Canton, too, as historic but run-down buildings next to the Lincoln Highway Station are proposed for renovation.

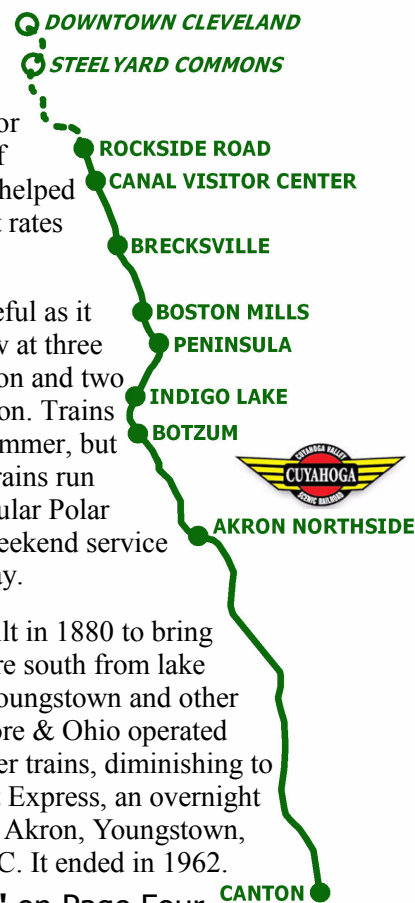
For the foreseeable future, the trains' primary purpose will be for recreation. But don't confuse that with simple joyriding. Riders are finding the train works well for tourism, shopping, visiting sporting events and other sites near the many attractive stations along the route. A few people even use CVSR for commuting to work and school - although as a national park's scenic railroad, CVSR isn't supposed to market itself as a commuter service. It doesn't have to in order to be successful.

CVSR's \$2 Bike Aboard program, \$15 all-day pass (\$10 for children) or the availability of buying tickets via Internet all helped boost ridership at double-digit rates in recent years.

More people find CVSR useful as it expands its service levels, now at three daily round trips north of Akron and two daily round trips south of Akron. Trains run Wednesday-Sunday all summer, but are less frequent in the fall. Trains run year-round, including the popular Polar Express at the holidays and weekend service north of Akron November-May.

The Valley Railway was built in 1880 to bring coal north to Cleveland and ore south from lake steamers to Akron, Canton, Youngstown and other cities. At its peak, the Baltimore & Ohio operated three daily round trip passenger trains, diminishing to just one - the Cleveland Night Express, an overnight Cleveland-Baltimore train via Akron, Youngstown, Pittsburgh and Washington DC. It ended in 1962.

— See "Future" on Page Four



CVSR trivia

CVSR ranks highly in Ohio and nationwide

Most heavily used passenger railroad in Ohio: 152,000 riders in 2009 (Amtrak had 128,000 riders in Ohio in 2009).

Ohio's most frequent passenger service: 84 regularly scheduled weekly trains June-October but 12 per weekend November-May (Amtrak has 34 weekly trains statewide).

Most heavily used railroad station in Ohio: Akron, with nearly 100,000 riders on/off (Toledo is second-busiest with 54,000 Amtrak riders).

Ohio's most active railroad station (trains): Akron, with 84 scheduled passenger trains weekly June-October, but just 12 per weekend November-May (Toledo, Sandusky, Elyria and Cleveland each have 28 weekly Amtrak passenger trains).

Most 6AM-Midnight passenger trains in Ohio: all CVSR trains are scheduled at convenient hours; only two Ohio cities (Toledo & Bryan) have a daily Amtrak departure between 6AM-Midnight.

Most federal capital improvement funding for a single Ohio route since 1990: \$35 million invested by the National Park Service in rail infrastructure that's used by CVSR. Less than \$10 million was invested by the federal government in all Ohio Amtrak infrastructure (mostly stations).

More heavily used than five state-supported Amtrak services: CVSR's 152,000 riders in 2009 were more than the ridership on Missouri River Runner (St. Louis-Kansas City: 151,000 riders), Pere Marquette (Grand Rapids-Chicago: 103,000), Heartland Flyer (Oklahoma City-Fort Worth: 82,000), Vermonter (St. Albans-Washington DC: 74,000), Ethan Allen Express (Rutland-New York City: 47,000).

Looking down the CVSR line shows bright future

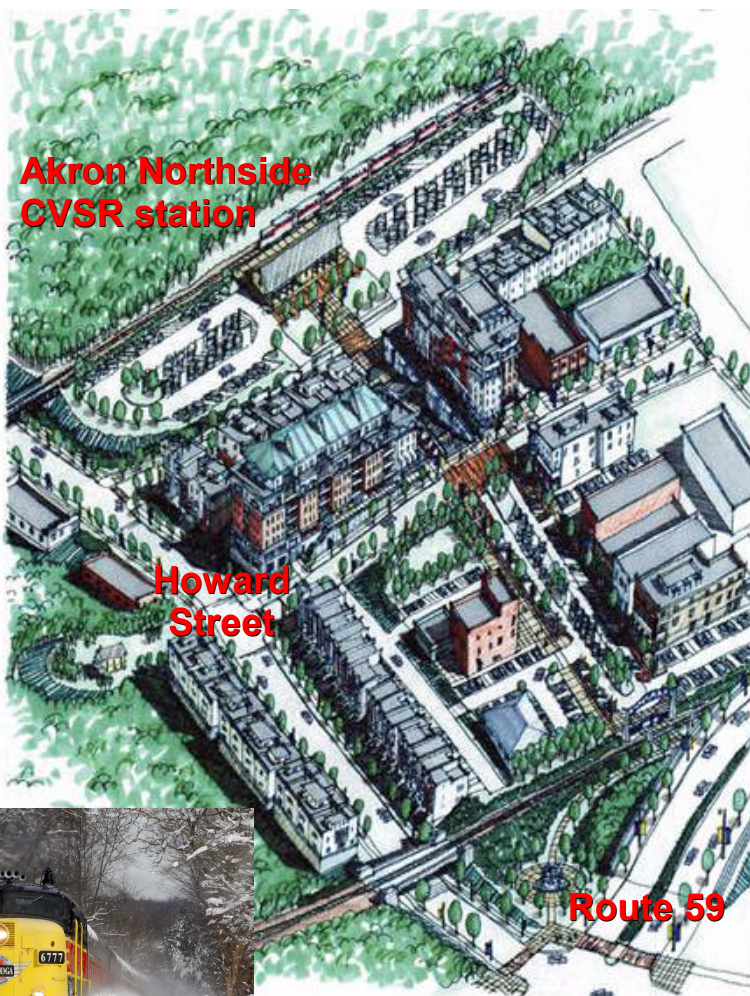
"Future" continued from Page Three

Just 10 years later, however, passenger service returned with regular excursion trains pulled by former Grand Trunk Western 2-8-2 steam locomotive 4070, owned by the Midwest Railway Historical Foundation for use by the then-Cuyahoga Valley Preservation & Scenic Railway Association operating under the name Cuyahoga Valley Line. Steam excursions from Cleveland to Akron ran until 1990 when maintenance problems sidetracked the 4070, so diesel-powered trains took over.

When B&O/Chessie System decided to end freight service on the valley line, things looked bleak. But the National Park Service acquired the rail line in 1985 and the trains kept rolling. Excursion operator Cuyahoga Valley Line later became CVSR and started using its round-end observation car Saint Lucie Sound for exclusive fundraising trips in the 1990s. That brought in significant new funding for expansion and momentum.

Today, the rail infrastructure is in its best shape in decades. More improvements are coming in the future, including paved parking areas and platforms at more stations, expanding the Akron station to handle growing crowds and train movements (now at 12 passenger trains per day), plus the grand-daddy improvement of them all - the Cleveland extension.

Extending CVSR train services north at least five miles to Steelyard Commons and eventually the full eight miles north to downtown Cleveland (Tower City Center or Settlers Landing) will require money CVSR doesn't yet have. The cost could easily exceed



Testa Companies graphic

Testa Cos' Akron Northside development (above), Polar Express (center) and downtown Cleveland (left).



Akron RR Club photo



Urban Ohio photo

the \$35 million in capital investments made thus far to the rest of the 51-mile system. But it could also raise CVSR ridership to an entirely new level, something that the railroad's board of directors is keenly aware of, as are many in Cleveland's business and political community.

The extension could result from efforts to develop the Ohio & Erie Canal National Heritage Corridor northward to Lake Erie. The corridor, led by the National Park Service, involves projects like extending the Towpath Trail to downtown Cleveland, construction of the Canal Basin Park, plus other industrial heritage sites.

If the National Park Service can acquire ownership of or access to CSX's right of way north of CVSR's Rockside Road station in Independence as part of the heritage corridor, as well as make any infrastructure improvements, then CVSR could extend its service to downtown Cleveland, CVSR officials said.

If you would like to be a part of Ohio's greatest passenger rail success story then take a ride on its trains, volunteer and/or join the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad by visiting www.cvsr.org or by calling 800-468-4070.



**309 South Fourth Street
Columbus, OH 43215-5428
(614) 228-6005 or
(216) 288-4883
e-mail: info@allaboardohio.org
www.allaboardohio.org**