

Ohio's Transportation Options

OHIO TRANSPORT REPORT CARD

Addressing Ohio's mobility crisis



November 2009



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Traveling over the river and through the woods to Grandmother's house this holiday season is more difficult than ever for many Ohioans. Like Ohio's intracity, urban public transit systems, the state's intercity public transportation modes – bus carriers, Amtrak and airlines – that link cities, towns, suburbs, and rural hamlets are getting less accessible, less convenient and less attractive. Carriers are eliminating routes, cutting arrivals and departures, as well as reducing the number of cities and towns where travelers can get on/off buses, trains and planes.

That's the summary of this analysis by All Aboard Ohio, a nonprofit organization which promotes improvements to passenger rail and public transportation. All Aboard Ohio reviewed whether there are more or less intercity public transportation options in Ohio to arrive at an even more basic summary. Thus there are only two grades Ohio can earn as the nation approaches the busiest travel time of the year: a candy cane or a lump of coal.

All Aboard Ohio's report card for intercity public transportation in Ohio is:

A Lump of Coal!

Before Ohioans can work together on improving their state's transportation services, we have to understand where the shortcomings are. Unfortunately, one does not have to look far to find the problem areas in Ohio's intercity public transportation system.

As Ohioans and visitors to Ohio partake of the busiest travel time of the year, All Aboard Ohio has found that travelers lost access to significant intercity public transportation assets in Ohio over the past 30 years. Here are the lowlights:

- Bus companies like Greyhound and Continental Trailways eliminated more than two-thirds of their Ohio departures and dozens of routes between 1979 and 2004;
- In the past five years bus services have stabilized but with some losses (Sandusky and downtown Dayton stops eliminated) and gains (Megabus adds Chicago service to Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus and Toledo);
- Ohio has lost 1,000 route miles of Amtrak train service from 1979-2005 and saw service levels decline by 60 percent from 84 trains per week to 34;
- Amtrak in Ohio has also stabilized since 2005 yet offers inconvenient middle-of-the-night services on just three routes;
- Airlines have been in retreat after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, with Ohio airports losing seat-mile capacity ranging from 10-100 percent, mostly due to cuts in short-distance flights;

- Losses accelerated since 2007 due to high fuel prices and the recession. Since 2007, airports in Ohio and within 100 miles of Ohio have seen their scheduled domestic departures decrease 7-39 percent.

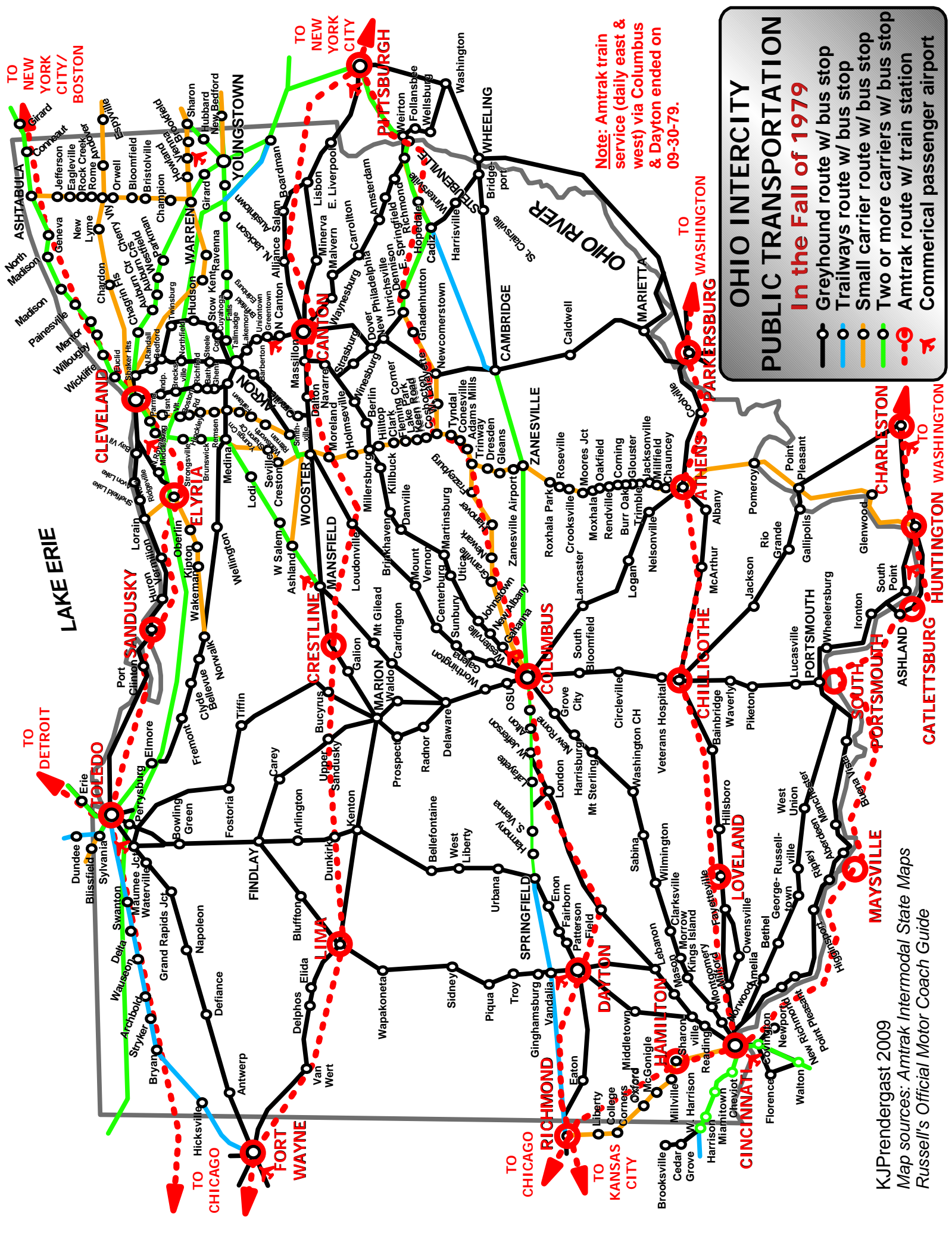
Cuts in bus, rail and airline services are especially painful for Ohio's growing elderly population, its disabled citizens (many of whom are veterans), plus lower-income and working-class families who cannot afford to own a car or reliably maintain one to safely drive it over longer distances.

There is a significant market for intercity public transportation in Ohio that is not being served:

- Ohio is the seventh-most populous state and the ninth-most densely populated.
- Ohioans older than 65 years comprise 16 percent of the state's population but will be 20 percent of the population by 2030, the U.S. Census predicts.
- In Ohio's largest urban areas like Cleveland, Cincinnati and Dayton, 20-25 percent of households have no car, with 8½ percent of all Ohio households lacking a car, the Census says.
- Ohio's public and private colleges and universities have a total enrollment of 637,000 students, according to the Ohio Board of Regents.
- And Ohio's young adults are getting their drivers licenses later than their parents did, and getting their first cars much later than their parents.

All Aboard Ohio notes that reuniting with family is one of the greatest quality of life assets any state can offer in competition with other states and nations. But for too many Ohioans, this basic need is not being satisfied. If we are still fortunate enough to have bus or train service to our own town, it is often sold out or travels on inconvenient schedules. And if we are still fortunate to have a commercial passenger airport nearby, our travel choices from that airport are becoming less attractive.

All Aboard Ohio believes Ohio's public officials and the executives at all transportation carriers must do better at addressing Ohio's worsening mobility crisis. This report, at this time of the year, is an opportune time to publicize this crisis and start to address it.



INTRODUCTION

All Aboard Ohio is issuing this report to provide an inventory of recent changes to available common carrier passenger transportation resources – ie: transportation other than the private car. These modes include intercity bus transportation (ie: Greyhound, Megabus, Lakefront Lines, etc.), intercity passenger rail (ie: Amtrak), and commercial passenger aviation (ie: Continental Airlines, Delta Airlines, Southwest Airlines, etc.).

As often happens when trying to classify something, there is a blurring of lines between various classifications. That is typical when trying to differentiate between what is considered intercity (between cities) and intracity (within a city).

In some cases, intercity bus services are provided by urban public transit systems whose mission is traditionally to offer intracity transportation. However, given Ohio's sprawling urbanized land uses of our metropolitan areas, there is a widening physical disconnect between residents, jobs, education, health care and shopping. All of these were once concentrated in our urban cores, but have since relocated among surrounding towns and cities.

In some cases, that has required transit agencies to extend their routes into adjacent counties and provide services that were traditionally provided by intercity bus carriers. When that carrier eliminated routes and services, the urban transit agencies sometimes restored them. This is particularly true in Northeast Ohio, such as between Cleveland and Akron, Akron and Canton, Cleveland and Kent, Akron and Kent, as well as between Massillon, Canton and Alliance.

All Aboard Ohio used available data from several sources, including the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Russell's Official National Motor Coach Guide, Amtrak Intermodal State Maps, plus the latest bus and rail route/schedules published at each carrier's Web site. Additional data was provided by DePaul University, Southwest Airlines, the American Express Business Travel Monitor, the Air Transport Association, and Reconnecting America.

COMMERCIAL PASSENGER AVIATION

Through decades of deep cuts in rail and bus routes and services in Ohio, the airlines seemed to be immune. But in recent years the airlines are in retreat and at a monumental scale, evocative of the rapid decline of passenger trains and intercity buses. The airlines' retreat began in earnest after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 when security screenings eliminated the airlines' speed advantage over short-distances, providing small increases in ridership at bus carriers and at Amtrak.

In its "Missed Connections" report from 2002, Reconnecting America noted that airlines slashed flights to all airports within the state of Ohio by 10-100 percent. The only exception was at the **Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky** International Airport where average seat-miles actually increased 8 percent. As we will see, **Cincinnati** wouldn't escape losing airline service for long.

The complete elimination of commercial passenger airline service after Sept. 11, 2001 occurred at the **Youngstown-Warren** Regional Airport, which serves a metropolitan area of more than 500,000 people.

But the **Youngstown-Warren** region is served by other commercial passenger airports within an hour's drive at **Pittsburgh, Cleveland** and **Akron-Canton**. But there is no direct bus or rail service from **Youngstown** or **Warren** to those airports, which is significant because the Census reports that 18 percent of households in **Youngstown** have no car. Similar data for Warren wasn't readily available. Since the 2002 Reconnecting America report, **Youngstown-Warren** has regained commercial passenger service when Allegiant Air began offering a single daily scheduled flight to/from Orlando/Sanford, Florida. There are also gambling junkets to casino towns in other states.

Youngstown-Warren wasn't the first Ohio metropolitan area to lose all commercial passenger airline service, however. That distinction belongs to **Mansfield**, where Lahm Airport lost its last airline schedule in the 1990s and hasn't regained it. It is unlikely that **Mansfield** will be served by passenger air service ever again.

But the cutbacks in travel capacity by air have accelerated since 2007 with skyrocketing high fuel prices followed by one of the worst recessions in decades.

In the 3rd quarter of 2008, available seat-miles (a common measure of flying capacity available to the traveling public) among all domestic flights declined 5.5 percent compared to the same quarter in 2007. Although the economy appears to be stabilizing, someone forgot to tell the airline industry. In the 3rd quarter of

2009, available seat-miles were down 12.1 percent compared to 2007, according to the Air Transport Association, an airline industry trade organization.

That means fewer flights, smaller planes, fewer seats and fewer routes available to the traveling public for the coming holiday travel season – and beyond.

Although available seat-miles data for individual airports was not obtainable for this report, data for changes in scheduled domestic departures was available. It shows a grim picture, spurred by 12 consecutively monthly declines in passenger revenues as of October 2009. The ATA blamed worsening unemployment nationally, which exceeded 10 percent last month.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's Bureau of Transportation Statistics, domestic flights decreased in the first four months of 2009 by 8.9 percent compared to the previous year. Every major airport serving Ohio except **Detroit's** saw capacity reductions greater than the national average:

Change in scheduled domestic departures

At major Ohio airports & those within 100 miles of Ohio
First quarter 2009 vs. First quarter 2007

Pittsburgh International (PIT): **-39.1%**

Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International (CVG): **-29.9%**

Port Columbus International (CMH): **-16.7%**

Cleveland Hopkins International (CLE): **-15.3%**

Indianapolis International (IND): **-10.0%**

Detroit-Wayne County International (DTW): **-6.7%**

Source: U.S. Department of Transportation

These come on top of the post-9/11 losses in the airlines' travel capacity offered to Ohioans and those seeking to visit Ohio. This is resulting in an Ohio that's less accessible to the outside world, and making it harder for Ohioans to do business on the opposite side of the state or outside of the state. And, of course, for travelers seeking to reunite with family and friends during the holidays, their choices of routes, flights and services is significantly lower, too.

INTERCITY BUS

It wasn't that long ago that Ohio was criss-crossed by an extensive web of intercity bus routes that linked big cities to rural crossroads, suburbs to universities, and small towns to major airports. And on many routes, typically along the Interstates between the largest cities, buses traveled very frequently.

Ohio's busiest routes were those offered by Greyhound and Continental Trailways across the I-80/90 corridor between Cleveland and Toledo and Chicago, the I-71 corridor between Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati, and the I-70 corridor between Pittsburgh, Wheeling, Columbus, Dayton and Indianapolis. As recently as the 1980s, more than a dozen daily buses in each direction were scheduled over each of these routes. But other routes were not ignored either.

That is no longer the case today.

Nowadays, many people consider intercity bus travel as a travel option of the last resort, noted "The Return of the Intercity Bus," a report by the School of Public Service Policy Study at DePaul University.

"In many cities, the local bus station was the only business open around-the-clock," the report noted. "Even communities with populations of less than 100,000 once boasted bus stations with dozens of arrivals and departures daily. But the intercity bus sector slumped in the 1960s in response to the decline of central cities, improvement to other modes of transportation and rising household incomes. By the mid-1970s, the number of passengers using scheduled bus services was falling precipitously, and the industry's image was fast deteriorating."

Greyhound also endured labor strikes and bad management. The company acquired rival Continental Trailways in 1987 to eliminate redundancies in services and routes. That didn't stop Greyhound's slide into bankruptcy in 1990. Greyhound successfully reorganized but failed to gain new ridership during the ridership boom of the 1990s that benefited the airlines and Amtrak.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, airline passengers went looking for alternatives to airport security screenings. They found them in new-start bus companies like the no-frills "Chinatown" buses based on the East Coast or the low-fare Megabus service in the Midwest. But those failed to compensate for the continuing retreat of Greyhound, which in 2004 slashed hundreds of daily buses and eliminated 1,000 communities from its route map, the DePaul University report said.

Further, the report noted that among Midwest cities, Greyhound eliminated a large number of scheduled daily bus arrivals and departures since 1980. Here is a sampling:

**Greyhound arrivals/departures eliminated
since 1980 at select Midwest cities**

Chicago – 50 percent eliminated
Cleveland – 64 percent eliminated
Columbus – 71 percent eliminated

Source: DePaul University

But since 2006, the growth of Megabus has caused the number of daily buses to increase slightly, including a 4 percent rise at **Chicago** and **Cleveland**, the report showed.

Today, however, All Aboard Ohio notes that many Ohio cities that lost service since Greyhound's major cutbacks in 2004 have not regained service by Greyhound or other operators. Those include the college towns of **Bowling Green, Ashland** and **Kent** or the small/medium-sized cities of **Portsmouth, Steubenville** and **Warren**. And while Greyhound no longer serves the city of **Canton** or the college town of **Athens**, Lakefront Lines does - but with just one bus in each direction per day.

Other reductions are occurring. For example, **Sandusky** – Ohio's largest tourist destination – lost its Greyhound stop in 2009. But the stop was located near the Ohio Turnpike, far south of the city's working-class and lower-income neighborhoods or the region's lakeside tourist destinations. The only remaining public transportation link to the outside world at Sandusky are middle-of-the-night Amtrak train services.

Another 2009 bus service reduction was the relocation of downtown **Dayton's** Greyhound station to the far northwest side of the city in suburban **Trotwood**. That puts Greyhound at an inconvenient distance for many people in the city of **Dayton** where 20 percent of households have no car. To reach the Greyhound station from central **Dayton** requires a 40- to 55-minute ride each way on a Miami Valley Regional Transit Authority bus. Airline service is not accessible to many, as MVRTA offers no bus service to the **Dayton** International Airport, located far north of the city in **Vandalia**. There is no other intercity public

transportation service – be it long-distance bus or rail within the city of **Dayton**, the center of a metropolitan area having nearly 1 million people.

A bright spot in the intercity bus market is the introduction and expansion of Megabus, a low-fare carrier offering limited-stop bus services from its Midwest hub in **Chicago** (outside Union Station downtown) to numerous cities including four in Ohio: **Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus** and **Toledo**. Megabus' busiest Midwest route links Chicago to Minneapolis via Milwaukee and Madison. But ranking second in ridership is its route from **Chicago** to **Toledo** (at the since-demolished Southwyck Mall) and **Cleveland** (at Tower City Center).

Megabus' popularity shows that Ohio is an untapped travel market which requires some vision and patience to reap the rewards of ridership growth. On the downside, Greyhound is attempting to copy Megabus by offering limited capacity, express services along the interstates, ignoring small- and medium-sized cities throughout Ohio. Having two carriers offering the same type of service means many Ohio travelers will not have access to basic transportation. Although Lakefront Lines provides services to small towns on its routes, Lakefront is far too small at this time to make up for the tremendous losses in bus service, routes and stops Ohio has endured for the past 30 years.

Never has the State of Ohio or any regions in Ohio provided an operating subsidy to support expanded bus services to its smaller cities and towns, as other states and regions outside Ohio have done. All Aboard Ohio encourages that this be pursued by ODOT in partnership with Metropolitan Planning Organizations, municipalities, counties and bus carriers, especially as the state's population ages over the next 20 years.

INTERCITY RAIL

Unfortunately, there is only one intercity passenger rail carrier in the U.S. – Amtrak. Unlike its bus and airline competitors which use open-access, government-owned and financed highways and airports, Amtrak must use the rights of way of privately owned and financed railroad companies who primarily haul freight.

The freight railroads can deny access to their tracks without cause, except in Amtrak's case. Amtrak was created in 1971 by Congress which stipulated in its enabling legislation that freight railroads must grant Amtrak access to their rights of way. But Amtrak must adequately compensate the freight railroads for that access. No other passenger rail carrier has this federally granted benefit that Amtrak enjoys.

Amtrak has never offered intrastate passenger rail services in Ohio, meaning that no regularly scheduled Amtrak train ever began AND ended its route entirely within Ohio. Amtrak has offered to do so on several occasions, assuming that the State of Ohio provides an operating subsidy as other states have done. Ohio has studied the possibility, but never gone any further.

So, for the entire history of Amtrak, all passenger trains serving Ohio have passed through Ohio. And since Amtrak trains are traveling between Chicago and cities on the East Coast on overnight schedules, typically this has meant middle-of-the-night arrival and departure times at Ohio cities.

Ohio's peak of Amtrak services was exactly 30 years ago, in 1979. Ohio had six Amtrak routes, all with daily trains and traveling east-west between the Midwest cities of Chicago, Kansas City and St. Louis and the East Coast cities of Boston, New York City, and Washington D.C. However, two of those routes actually began and ended in Ohio, although they were scheduled to connect with the east-west trains. These two routes were the **Toledo-Detroit-Ann Arbor-Chicago** "Lake Cities" and the **Cincinnati-Parkersburg-Washington D.C.** "Shenandoah".

Amtrak in Ohio		
1979 vs. 2009		
	<u>1979</u>	<u>2009</u>
Route miles:	1,300	563
Train miles:	950,000	559,000
Trains/week:	84	34
Stations:	14	7

In 1979, Ohio had 1,300 route miles of Amtrak services over which 84 passenger trains per week traveled. That amounted to 950,000 train-miles that Amtrak operated in Ohio over the entire year. The trains served 14 stations in Ohio cities and another eight that were in cities within 30 miles of Ohio. Five metropolitan areas in Ohio with more than 500,000 people – **Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton** and **Toledo** had Amtrak service. Only two didn't – **Akron** and **Youngstown**.

Thirty years later, the Amtrak experience in Ohio is much different. In 2009, Amtrak had just three routes with only two providing daily service. Amtrak has just 563 route miles in Ohio total, offering only 34 trains per week. That amounted to 559,000 train-miles in 2009. The few remaining trains served a mere seven stations in Ohio cities and another seven that are in cities within 30 miles of Ohio. Only three Ohio metropolitan areas with populations greater than 500,000 have Amtrak service – **Cincinnati, Cleveland and Toledo** (and all are served in the overnight hours between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m.). The metro areas of **Akron, Columbus, Dayton and Youngstown** have no Amtrak service. This has remained the situation in Ohio

In the near future, Ohio could have much more attractive passenger rail services linking its largest cities – starting with those in the 3C Corridor (**Downtown Cleveland, SW Cleveland, Downtown Columbus, Downtown Dayton, Sharonville and Cincinnati**). Additional station stops are planned in **Hamilton or Middletown, East Dayton, Springfield, North Columbus and Galion or Shelby**. The Ohio Department of Transportation and its Ohio Rail Development Commission submitted a \$564 million application for federal stimulus funds for the first phase (dubbed 3C “Quick Start”) of developing a 79 mph passenger rail service in this corridor. ODOT/ORDC’s funding application will be decided by the end of January.

Also early next year, ODOT/ORDC will begin Programmatic Environmental Impact Studies of proposed passenger rail services with train speeds of between 79-110 mph on these routes/segments:

Cleveland – Columbus
Columbus – Cincinnati
Toledo – Cleveland
Cleveland – Pittsburgh
Columbus – Toledo

The PEIS planning phase is a required first step toward securing federal funds for the development of passenger rail services with train speeds above 79 mph. The phase of planning will take 12-18 months at the conclusion of which the Federal Railroad Administration will determine if the proposed improvements to these corridors will result in no significant negative impacts to natural and built environments along each corridor.

CONCLUSION

There is simply too much to be lost by permitting this low level of intercity public transportation services to remain unchallenged in Ohio. It is too horrible to contemplate a further worsening of the mobility crisis, especially when we already have too much of Ohio's 2 million and growing elderly population homebound.

And, there are the state's 500,000 low-income and working class-citizens who lack cars being denied physical access to jobs, education, health-care and other opportunities.

And, there are many among the 500,000 students in Ohio's colleges and universities who are denied freedom of movement, including to collaborative educational programs, sporting events, weekend tourism on the other side of the state, or just to do laundry at their parent's house.

And, there are businesspersons who want to save money or be more travel-productive by not having to drive everywhere, or take over-priced flights which save little time on short-distance trips.

All Aboard Ohio believes Ohio's public officials and the executives at all transportation carriers must do better to address Ohio's worsening mobility crisis. This report, at this busiest travel time of the year, is an opportune time to publicize this crisis and start to address it.

SOURCES FOR THIS REPORT

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