

Trains News Wire EXCLUSIVE: Indiana replaces Amtrak as 'Hoosier State' service provider

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Amtrak's 'Hoosier State'

Photo by Bob Johnston

INDIANAPOLIS — Although Amtrak conductors and engineers will continue to operate Indiana's *Hoosier State*, the Indiana Department of Transportation has selected Corridor Capital LLC of Chicago to provide the equipment and maintenance, effective Oct. 1, 2014, for its state-supported train. Before any contract is signed and agreement details are finalized, however, officials from on line communities which agreed to help keep the train operating through Sept. 30, 2014, must approve the new service plan and funding they will be required to pay beginning Oct. 1. The operation agreement would include the four weekly round-trips over the Chicago-Indianapolis when the Chicago-Washington-New York *Cardinal* does not run.

Indiana thus becomes the first state seeking to “unbundle” service currently provided by Amtrak under Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008. That legislation mandates that states assume financial responsibility for any Amtrak train operating less than 750 miles. The legislation requires Amtrak to itemize costs it is passing on to states or operating authorities so whatever it charges can be competitively bid on by other entities. The document released by INDOT this week reveals that Corridor Capital narrowly edged Iowa Pacific Holdings in judging criteria scored by the agency's Selection Review Committee. Herzog Transit Services and Travel Train Holdings Inc. also submitted proposals.

Department spokesman Will Wingfield tells Trains News Wire that Corridor Capital was essentially tapped as a consultant to help define the scope of alternatives for service that the state and Indiana communities will ultimately decide upon. “Leaders from the towns of Beech Grove, Indianapolis, Lafayette, West Lafayette, Tippecanoe County, and Rensselaer are being invited to help evaluate the options and costs that will determine how much support the train will need during the next fiscal year,” he says. Ticket pricing, possible café car service, and business class amenities are all on the table.

In an interview with Trains News Wire, Corridor Capital communications director F.K. Plous says his company will use up to five single-level cars that are certified for Amtrak operation, currently in charter service, and are similar to North Carolina's reconditioned Raleigh-Charlotte *Piedmont* equipment. However, Plous declines to name the source of either the cars or locomotives that will be used. Corridor Capital owns a fleet of stainless steel Hi-Level coaches built for the Santa Fe and once operated by Amtrak, but these cars have not been modified.

Railplan International, a Baltimore-based designer of modular interiors, is being hired as a subcontractor to retrofit luggage towers and modular bathrooms into the cars, “to make them fit for daily intercity operation and be responsible for maintenance,” Plous says. Railplan currently has maintenance contracts for commuter carriers Virginia Railway Express and MARC in the Washington, D.C., area, and recently took over maintenance of North Carolina's trains from Herzog.

“We were selected based on our reputation and our sub-contractor's reputation,” Plous says, “but costs are not settled yet.” Those specifics are being handled in discussions between Corridor Capital, INDOT, and the on line communities over the next several weeks. “The main thing is that on October 1 we will have a new train out there,” he adds. “Then we'll be able to gauge how many more people will come out and buy tickets if they are given the opportunity to ride better equipment.”

Of concern for both parties is the fact that as currently scheduled, the *Cardinal* arriving into Chicago Monday morning doesn't leave the Windy City until Tuesday evening. This means that unless the Corridor Capital's cars and locomotives operate in tandem with the *Cardinal* on those trips, they will be out of position to take the next run.