

# CENTRAL PENN BUSINESS JOURNAL

## Keystone Corridor continues improvements to rail system

By Holly White, Contributing Writer  
June 01, 2012 10:00AM - Last modified: June 01, 2012 10:19AM

After consideration to shut down the Keystone Corridor a dozen years ago, the rail system is rising from its near ashes with updates happening throughout the midstate.

After a \$145 million infrastructure improvement project finished in late 2006, the state Department of Transportation and Amtrak turned their gazes to the stations along the rails stretching from Philadelphia to Harrisburg that have been neglected, many for decades.

"People were saying the stations didn't reflect the same level of care (as the improved rail lines)," said Marilyn Jamison, senior director of major project partnerships for Amtrak.

The midstate has five stations on the line: Elizabethtown, Harrisburg, Lancaster, Middletown and Mount Joy. Updates began in 2009 to the Elizabethtown and Lancaster station buildings and surrounding area. Mount Joy will soon be entering phase II of the project launched in 2011. Middletown will eventually be moved to a new site, while Harrisburg will receive some updates and a major change to its train entry system.

The stations along the corridor are considered the entranceway to the line, a welcome to the service Amtrak and the state are providing, said Toby Fauver, PennDOT's deputy secretary for local and area transportation.

"Most of them are not accessible (under Americans with Disabilities Act requirements), but they're also largely limited accessibility for senior citizens and someone with temporary disabilities," he said.

More parking, updated utility systems and historic restoration are a part of the corridor stations' updates, along with ADA compliance, he said.

Sources of funding for each station vary and can include Federal Transit Administration formula funding, dedicated state funding, municipal or county money, or grants, he said.

Each community along the line has worked with Amtrak and the state to identify station improvements and provide support for the rail system, Fauver said.

In Mount Joy, the planning process identified a concern that riders parked, rode the train and left the borough without taking advantage of the communities' assets or visiting any of the businesses, he said.

The borough, the Main Street Mount Joy downtown revitalization organization, PennDOT and Amtrak partnered to design a streetscape improvement plan near the station and better signage and access around the borough as phase I of the station improvements. Phase II of the \$12 million project includes improvements to the station's platforms, shelters and parking, with the bidding process starting in the fall.

## **Keystone Corridor continues improvements**

Central Penn Business Journal, June 1, 2012

*page 2*

"We need these projects to fit into the fabric of the community and be a part of the community identity," Fauver said.

In Lancaster, the Red Rose Transit Authority is building a parking garage in its downtown transit center and will provide free transportation from there to the train station, said Terry Kauffman, chairman of the Lancaster County Transportation Authority.

The Lancaster station improvements are nearing completion after about a \$14 million investment in it over the past three years. Updates included becoming ADA compliant, replacing ventilation systems and roofs, restoring the interior and improving access.

"It really is talking about looking at the investment and how it's leveraged in communities," Kauffman said.

Improving rail travel can be a tool for economic development, he said. As the state and local areas invest in rail transit, there will be ripple effects with transit-oriented developments flourishing throughout the corridor, he said.

PennDOT also has been active in linking the stations to other ways of travel, including biking and walking, Kauffman said.

"Any time we can really get people moving and connecting their resources with activities, be it via work or for fun, it creates an environment where it adds to economic development for the entire area," Jamison said.

Close to 70 percent of train riders on the Keystone line are traveling for commuter or other business purposes, according to PennDOT.

Ridership on the corridor has been steadily increasing and might hit 1.5 million riders this fiscal year, said Bob Garrett, executive assistant to Fauver at PennDOT.

In Mount Joy, numbers have increased by 130 percent during the past four years, Amtrak said. In Lancaster, ridership is up 50 percent in the same period, making it the third-busiest station in the state, behind Philadelphia and Harrisburg.

People like being able to work or relax on the train, which is a shorter ride than driving the same distance would be, PennDOT and Amtrak officials said.

From Harrisburg to Philadelphia, the trip is about an hour and 45 minutes, Jamison said. Taking the high-speed, or direct, trip narrows the time to about 90 minutes, she said.

In the future, Amtrak and PennDOT will continue to make improvements.

The partners are working on incentives and creative ways to use the mid-day trains, Garrett said. They're also looking at possible changes to the schedule to have more trains in the mornings, perhaps operating on an hourly timeframe instead of the existing 90-minute wait, he said.

Amtrak also has ordered 70 new locomotives to be put into use between 2013 and 2016, Jamison said. They'll be installed on both the Keystone and the Northeast corridors.

The cost used for infrastructure improvements has not been passed on to riders through fares, she said. Federal and state money used for the updates are not reimbursable through fare revenues, she said.

## **Keystone Corridor continues improvements**

Central Penn Business Journal, June 1, 2012

page 3

### **Midstate station improvements**

**Elizabethtown:** The \$9.38 million that the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided was spent to renovate the historic train station; add high-level platforms; improve signage, lighting and landscaping; and expand parking. Construction began in 2009 and was completed in January 2011. Overflow parking is the last part of the project in the works.

**Harrisburg:** Updates slated for the future are a 500-foot-long, high-level platform and improving the ticket office, telephones and restrooms to meet ADA requirements. PennDOT was granted \$66.8 million under the ARRA to make high-speed rail improvements, including reconfiguring and rebuilding the rail interlocking system outside the Harrisburg station. Improving the interlocking will allow trains to arrive in Harrisburg at 20 miles per hour faster, PennDOT said.

**Lancaster:** Construction on the \$14 million project began at the Lancaster station in 2009 and is ongoing, with a planned start of the last phase in 2013. A new heating, ventilation and air conditioning system, new taxi and bus areas, improved landscaping and sidewalks, replacement of platform canopy roofs and updated areas for ADA compliance are included in the project.

**Middletown:** The existing station and platform require relocation to meet Amtrak and ADA standards, and they will be moved to Ann and West Main streets from Union and Mill streets, about a half-mile away. PennDOT is pursuing federal environmental clearance and property acquisition for the site. A preliminary concept is designed, and work is slated to begin after the completion of the Mount Joy project, likely in 2014.

**Mount Joy:** Phase I of the \$12 million project is wrapping up improvements to streetscapes and access. The total outline includes walkway access to the station and business district, canopied platforms, elevators and expanded parking. The project is slated for completion in 2013.

### **Ridership in the midstate**

Ridership has been increasing steadily on the Keystone Corridor, PennDOT and Amtrak representatives said. Amenities such as Wi-Fi, time and stress saved by taking the train and more accessibility are reasons why more people are using rail travel, they said.

source: [www.cpbj.com](http://www.cpbj.com)