

Lancaster train station repairs speed up

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An employee of Lobar Inc. of Dillsburg works on renovating trim around the front windows at the Lancaster train station interior. (Dan Marschka)

Lancaster's Amtrak station is finally getting a much-needed facelift.

Scaffolding reaches the ceiling in the main hall, and workers from Lobar, Inc., are repairing and patching the ornate plaster to prepare for the final paint job.

Meanwhile, members of the Lancaster Train Station Advisory Committee were told Wednesday, Amtrak workers are in the process of finishing plaster work on the west side of the concourse leading to the train platforms and putting the final coat of paint on the eastern concourse walls.

Work on the ceiling is being postponed until after a new heating/ventilating/air conditioning system is installed on the concourse roof.

"They're going to have to cut through the ceiling as part of the installation," said Marilyn Jamison, a senior director in Amtrak's department of major project partnerships, policy and development who is overseeing the entire station project. "We thought it would be best to wait to repair the ceiling after that work is done."

Fluidics, Inc., of Philadelphia, was awarded the HVAC installation contract. The firm has surveyed the site, ordered the necessary equipment and is mobilizing its workforce in time for the equipment's arrival.

According to the contract, the work is to be completed within 120 days.

The work is part of Amtrak's \$3.5 million capstone project to repair the station's deteriorating interior. When completed, it will mark the final phase of a \$14.2-million project to refurbish the 84-year-old landmark.

The original work on the infrastructure of the station took 13 years to complete. As it neared the finish line, local business and government leaders and Amtrak passengers were frustrated that the original contract did not include any work to patch the decaying interior.

In response, Amtrak answered with the capstone project, which proceeded fitfully for a year before

Lancaster train station repairs speed up

LancasterOnline.com, June 19, 2013

page 2

Amtrak reacted to local pressure and, at the end of 2012, stepped up its pace.

"Everything's coming together now," Jamison said.

Work in the main hall is scheduled for completion in late September, and all scaffolding and equipment will be removed by early October.

Work in the concourse interior has been pushed back a few weeks because of a problem Amtrak experienced at the Harrisburg station, forcing workers to be taken away from the Lancaster station to complete emergency repairs.

"The baggage bridge in Harrisburg was deemed structurally deficient, and we had to close it," Jamison said. "That meant we also had to close the elevators which carried people to the platform, so we had to quickly build and install ramps to get people to the trains."

The Amtrak crew working in Lancaster was temporarily shifted to Harrisburg to expedite the emergency work.

Amtrak is also rerouting its trains to stop at a freight elevator so passengers' luggage can be lifted to the station there.

The workers, however, are now back in Lancaster.

Other discussion at the meeting focused on new traffic patterns on the station grounds implemented as a result of the Lititz Pike bridge construction project and the closure of McGovern Avenue from Lititz Pike to Queen Street.

The new pattern restricts traffic at the front of the building to only buses and taxis. Commuters must park either in the long-term lot or be picked up and dropped off in the short-term lot just off Queen Street. The Queen Street entrance now serves as both entrance and exit.

This situation has caused confusion for drivers who continue to try and reach the front of the station, and drivers who get backed up on Queen Street waiting for others to negotiate the short-term lot.

"We are considering some modifications there to alleviate the backup on Queen Street," Jamison said.

The problem initially was caused when McGovern Avenue's closing eliminated the main exit from the station. Buses and taxis were still able to travel through the employee parking lot to reach the front of the station, but passenger car access was restricted for safety reasons, since what had previously been a two-lane, one-way loop road now carries two lanes of traffic in opposing directions.

The problem will get worse in three weeks, when PennDOT places a crane in the employee parking lot to work on the new bridge, closing the lot to bus and taxi traffic.

That means those vehicles will be forced to make a U-turn in the eastern section of the lot to reach the

Lancaster train station repairs speed up

LancasterOnline.com, June 19, 2013

page 3

Queen Street exit.

David Haverstock, of Michael Baker LLC, the engineering consulting firm working with PennDOT on both the bridge and Amtrak station projects, said the timing of the green light for northbound traffic on Queen Street at McGovern Avenue has already been lengthened. He said PennDOT also would look into the possibility of removing the no-turn-on-red signs for traffic leaving the station, since no traffic is approaching the station westbound on McGovern Avenue.

Amtrak officials said they would erect larger directional signs in the parking lot to show drivers the traffic pattern they should follow.

But even with the signs, said Terry Kauffman, chairman of the Lancaster County Transportation Committee, enforcement remains the crucial component to making the parking pattern work.

"When Amtrak officers have a presence there, traffic moves," he said.

The problem, Amtrak officials said, is the number of available officers. Four are assigned to the station and are scheduled to direct traffic, but if something happens along the Amtrak line that requires police response, they must leave the station.

Haverstock said he would talk with PennDOT officials to see if the department could provide additional traffic control workers to supplement the Amtrak force.

In a final piece of business, Jamison read a statement from Amtrak's real estate division. It said the passenger rail provider has signed a letter of understanding with Strategic Equity Investments of Lancaster, to provide leasing and development services to "maximize the potential of the retail real estate" at the station.

SEI plans to conduct a feasibility study to determine if there are potential retail tenants who might be interested in leasing a portion of the station for retail development.

Bob Shoemaker, president of the Lancaster Alliance, said the Alliance would be available to help get the spaces filled.

Noting the development that has occurred around the Mount Joy station, Shoemaker said Lancaster, the second-busiest station on Amtrak's Keystone Corridor, provides opportunities for retailers.

"We think we can probably get something going here," he said. "Shame on us if we can't."

source: LancasterOnline.com