

Amtrak ridership up at Lancaster stations

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Despite ongoing renovations at Lancaster's Amtrak station, train ridership increased last year and along the length of the Keystone Corridor between Philadelphia and Harrisburg.

Passengers boarding and exiting Amtrak trains at the McGovern Avenue station increased 5.7 percent in the fiscal year that ended June 30, state transportation officials reported Monday.

Ridership at the newly renovated Elizabethtown station increased 3.7 percent and there was a 2.3 percent increase at Mount Joy, state Department of Transportation spokeswoman Erin Waters said.

Overall, ridership on the state-supported Keystone line set a new record with 1.33 million boardings during the fiscal year. That represented a 5 percent increase over the 1.27 million set a year before.

David Royer, Lancaster County's Transportation Planning director, said more people are expected to take the train with the completion of ongoing and planned improvements.

The first of those is the \$14.2 million renovation of the Lancaster station. When work there is done by the end of the year, there will be additional parking available and a more attractive and functional station, he said.

There are no definitive plans to add further parking, Royer said, but "things are in the works."

"Officials are looking at long-term parking needs," he said, without providing details.

The other improvement in the works is the replacement of three at-grade road crossings in Lancaster County with overpass bridges that will take automotive traffic over the tracks.

The crossings are the only remaining at-grade crossings on the 104-mile Keystone Corridor. Completion of the overpasses will allow Amtrak trains to increase their speed from 110 mph to 125 mph.



A woman prepares to board an Amtrak train at the Lancaster station in this file photo. (Justin David Graybill/Staff)

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Royer said construction is due to begin early next year on bridges on Eby Chiques, Newcomer and Irishtown roads. Irishtown Road is expected to be completed first, opening to traffic in October 2012. The other two are more complicated projects and are scheduled to open about a year later, Royer said.

Funding for the bridges will take nearly all of the \$24.3 million allocated to the state this spring by the Federal Railroad Administration.

The improvements follow the \$145 million Amtrak and the Federal Transit Administration spent on the Keystone corridor in 2006. That effort replaced wooden railroad ties with concrete. Workers also welded together rails to make the ride smoother and faster.

Lancaster remains the third busiest station on the Keystone line. Philadelphia's 30th Street Station, where the Keystone line connects to trains along the Eastern Coast, remains the busiest, with 3.7 million passengers boarding and exiting trains there.

Lancaster, with 528,658, saw 28,376 more passengers than the year before. It remains slightly behind Harrisburg in station usage, despite ridership in the state capital city station falling by nearly 1 percent last year, from 540,104 to 535,838, said Waters.

Elizabethtown, at which a \$9.3 million stimulus-funded station renovation was completed in May, saw ridership increase from 94,296 to 97,803.

Mount Joy, where a station platform is being planned, had ridership increase from 59,718 to 61,107.

source: LancasterOnline.com