

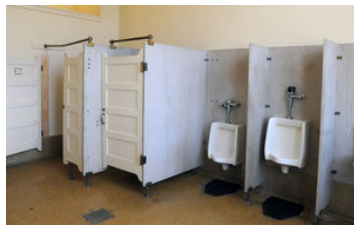
# LancasterOnline

## Lancaster's costly, bumpy ride with Amtrak

Posted: Monday, December 29, 2014 9:00am

Updated: 9:06 am, Mon Dec 29, 2014

The LNP Editorial Board



The men's restroom at the Lancaster Amtrak station was not part of recent upgrades.

Richard Hertzler/Staff

**The Issue:** The Lancaster Amtrak station was built in 1929 and renovated in 2009-14 — work done in two stages. Infrastructure repairs cost \$14.2 million and were completed in the fall of 2011. The \$3.5 million Capstone project completed this year added internal improvements, including restored and refinished benches, new plaster and fresh paint on the walls and ceiling of the main waiting room, and heat and air conditioning in the concourse to the tracks.

After years of neglected maintenance, the Lancaster Amtrak station saw \$17.7 million in renovations. That work did not include new restrooms or new elevators, as anyone who traveled home for the holidays, via the station, undoubtedly noticed.

You could run the entire City of Lancaster for better than four months with the money spent on renovating the Lancaster Amtrak station. But you wouldn't know it in some parts of the station — if, for instance, you have to take the elevators, use the restrooms, look for out-of-town newspapers or magazines or books, seek upgraded eating facilities, or find appropriate parking during busy travel times like this holiday season.

In fact, based on the basic experiences of most travelers, the station is a mess. It may be beautiful, but it is totally lacking when it comes to the very basic amenities of travel.

And our station is not some side stop in the Amtrak system. It is the second busiest — second only to Philadelphia's 30th Street Station — in the state.

The everyday or holiday traveler was clearly not a priority when funding decisions were being made. Lancaster and the people who use the station deserve better. Much better.

While the renovated station overall has a modern look that honors its past, the restrooms look just plain old. And the elevator from the lobby is shabby looking, doesn't smell quite right and takes a long time to travel a single floor.

As recently as two years ago, it was believed the restrooms were not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Funding would have to be found to upgrade them.

Amtrak had \$200 million to bring its stations up to ADA standards.

## **Lancaster's costly, bumpy ride with Amtrak**

LancasterOnline.com, December 29, 2014

*page 2*

Lancaster was on the list — until Congress reduced Amtrak's ADA money to \$50 million. Gary Talbot, the director of Amtrak's ADA program, who uses a wheelchair himself, then visited and found he had no trouble negotiating the restrooms.

Lancaster was off the list.

Members of the Lancaster Train Station Advisory Committee — a group of local leaders organized to keep an eye on Amtrak's work after learning that the original project did not include internal improvements — learned this at their final meeting in June.

At least two people at the meeting expressed a sentiment no doubt shared by anyone who visits the restrooms at the station: They don't fit with the rest of the renovated station.

An aide to Sen. Bob Casey said at the June meeting that he was confident money could be found to renovate the restrooms.

Other hopes for the station's future include expanded parking and — as depicted in an artist's rendering in 2009 — adding restaurants and retailers inside the station. Its single cafe is inadequate for such a busy place.

Local leaders should keep the pressure on Amtrak, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation — which is operating the station — and our federal lawmakers to give the Lancaster train station its due.

Its passenger traffic alone makes it worth the effort to get it up to full speed as a commuter-friendly destination. And Lancaster County's established reputation as a top tourist attraction only adds to the case.

If the Lancaster Amtrak station was worth 15 years and \$17.7 million in renovations and repairs — and it was — it is worth a bit more time, effort and investment to make it the showplace envisioned in 2009.

*source: LancasterOnline.com*