

City should get back on track

How many readers know that central Ohio is a desert island in the middle of an important transportation network? For nearly 40 years, central Ohio has not had regularly scheduled rail passenger service. Our rail connection to the rest of the country ended with the demise of the National Limited back in the autumn of 1979. Since that time, if anyone wanted to take a passenger train to Chicago or to the eastern seaboard, it required a late night/early morning trip to Cleveland, Toledo, Cincinnati, or Pittsburgh to catch a train in the wee hours. This is an inconvenience to say the least.

However, hope is on the horizon. A group in north-eastern Indiana is working to implement passenger-rail service between Chicago and Fort Wayne. This service would offer a potential link to Columbus and central Ohio. Such service would at least get this area connected to Amtrak's Chicago hub and would be a practical alternative to get us reconnected to the national rail passenger network. Other communities, such as like Marysville, Kenton and Lima, would benefit from this connection. Nationally, Amtrak carried 31.3 million passengers last year, a record. Wouldn't it make sense for the many central Ohio residents who are either unable or unwilling to drive long distances to have access to this system that connects over 500 stations across the country?

A recent study indicated that there are nearly 896,000

students attending 141 institutions of higher education along the Columbus-Chicago corridor who could take advantage of this service. Many of these students are interested in energy-efficient, environmentally friendly modes of transportation that allow them to work at their seats as they travel. Factor in business people who are interested in being able to work as they travel to maximize their productivity, and it shows that this transportation corridor has tremendous upside potential.

Right now, local governments and planning agencies, including the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning

Commission, are looking at ways to obtain funding to undertake environmental impact studies. As Columbus would probably be the main beneficiary of this service, we have much to gain. Columbus was recently ranked as the only Midwestern city in the Top 10 list of best places to hold a conference. The other cities ranked above Columbus were all in the Sunbelt. Having additional transportation alternatives simply raises the quality of life in this area, making our region even more attractive to visitors and conventioners.

We urge local governments, chambers of commerce and tourist and

convention bureaus to get on board with us as we advocate to reconnect our region to the national Amtrak network. Although it is a small step, it is a necessary first step to bring us into the age of providing real transportation choices to the residents of central Ohio and to attract visitors to our region. We need to correct the present situation in which central Ohio is the largest region in the United States without regularly scheduled rail passenger service.

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