



Pennsylvania State Rail Plan - Questions/Comments & Responses

Virtual Public Meeting #2

November 17, 2020 / 6-7PM

QUESTION/COMMENT

Don't see the poll, but I'm general public :-)

As a comment, I strongly support adding additional daily trips on the Pennsylvanian. Any additional perspective on what might affect the likelihood of that happening would be appreciated.

RESPONSE

Comment acknowledged.

The 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan assumes that a second roundtrip of the Pennsylvanian will be added by 2024. PennDOT and Amtrak coordinated to develop potential timetables and cost information, which was provided to Norfolk Southern. In turn, Norfolk Southern is doing their due diligence to determine what opportunities exist for additional service while minimizing impacts to their operations since they own the rail from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh. PennDOT anticipates receiving this information from NS in early Summer 2021. Please note that Amtrak projected the additional roundtrip in 2024 without consideration of any capital improvements that may need to be completed as a result of additional study and analysis.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Amtrak could do a better job coordinating with public transit in Pittsburgh. For example, by adding a connect card machine to the station, and adding way-finding signage.

Why weren't any station improvements, such as raised platforms, considered for stations West of Harrisburg? These would be a worthwhile investment.

Has any consideration been given to daytime rail service to Cleveland from Pittsburgh?

RESPONSE

Comment acknowledged.

From Pittsburgh to Harrisburg, the line is owned by Norfolk Southern and Amtrak operates on it. Some stations are privately owned, while others are owned by a variety of historical societies. Thus, the platforms may or may not be owned by Amtrak. This makes it a challenge and significantly limits available funding as compared to the eastern side of the state from Harrisburg to Philadelphia, which is owned by Amtrak. Those stations are either owned by Amtrak, SEPTA, or PennDOT. Additionally, funding streams differ from Harrisburg to Philadelphia compared to Harrisburg to Pittsburgh.

PennDOT has not proposed daytime service; however, Amtrak would be willing to partner with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and/or the State of Ohio should either (or both) entities wish to investigate and ultimately sponsor a new state-supported passenger rail service under PRIIA Section 209.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

How does Amtrak's statutory access rights to freight rail lines come into play with increasing service west of Harrisburg?

It is our interpretation that freight line owners can require improvements or limitations, in order for Amtrak to exercise its rights.

Freight line owner can definitely impose required improvements, typically capacity related, before Amtrak can exercise its rights. Hope that's helpful.

Comment acknowledged.

When you list projects, are they actual infrastructure or are some service - as in expanding passenger rail?

Some projects are service oriented. For example, project number 37 in *Appendix C: Proposed Passenger Rail Projects* involves the Elwyn to Middletown/US Route 1 rail service restoration. Please refer to the appendices for specific project information.

Is Phila to Reading envisioned to be SEPTA service?

The 2020 PennDOT study evaluated SEPTA as a potential operator and acknowledges other service providers could be considered. Recent studies conducted by others evaluated service that could operate by SEPTA and/or Amtrak but is not specific to a particular operator.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Will there be ways to add new projects as they emerge once the plan is adopted? For example, on the Pennsylvanian corridor once we know what Norfolk Southern's review says.

If PennDOT should assume ownership of the Keystone Line as is being discussed, how does that change affect its relationship to managing the Pennsylvanian Corridor?

Is there any chance Pennsylvania might look to what the state of Virginia has done and set up a separate Dept of Rail and Public Transportation and a separate rail authority under state control?

Is there any consideration for converting some SEPTA regional rail line (e.g. Chestnut Hill East/West, Manayunk lines) into the intracity high-frequency transit system?

RESPONSE

Although the Pennsylvania State Rail Plan is required to be updated every four years by the FRA, new projects may be added at any time.

Federal legislation would be required to transfer ownership and no actions have been advanced at this time. The Commonwealth continues to be committed to passenger rail service to Pittsburgh and western Pennsylvania.

Although this particular scenario has not been part of discussions to date, PennDOT continually considers viable options for increased funding and sustainable operations.

No.

QUESTION/COMMENT

I am from Delaware Water Gap, PA. I have seen i-80 clogging. Can't Lackawanna-Cutoff line at least be brought up to Delaware Water Gap, welcome center?

Lackawanna-Cutoff line should be brought at least up to the PA-NJ border at Delaware Water Gap, PA

I think joining President-elect Joe Biden home town Scranton to NYC would be the biggest gift for him and Pennsylvanians. And vice versa.

Would it be possible to review the projects already included in the new plan, and second, to offer any suggestions on this?

RESPONSE

The Lackawanna Cut-off Project is noted as a visionary project in Appendix C: Proposed Passenger Rail Projects. Currently, the New Jersey and Pennsylvania portions are unfunded and there are no implementation timelines. You may find some additional information in Section 2.1.1.4.1. This project is not led by PennDOT.

Comment acknowledged. See comment response above.

Comment acknowledged. See comment response above.

Appendix C lists all of proposed passenger rail projects and *Appendix E* lists all the proposed freight rail projects, which are organized by region. If you have any suggestions, please [email](mailto:RA-PDPASRP@pa.gov) us at RA-PDPASRP@pa.gov.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Could you briefly summarize how the plan focuses on improving rail safety in a cooperative manner between the Commonwealth and the railroads in Pennsylvania?

I rely on passenger rail for transportation. A restoration of the Broadway Limited Route would be of great help. A major problem is the price-gouging by Amtrak on travel to New York City and roomettes for overnight travel. The Pennsylvanian is not adequate.

I don't foresee construction of new rail lines in the state, but adding trackage is vital to moving freight quickly and competing with other transportation.

Amtrak should take over commuter train management from Septa. I would like to see service from Philadelphia to Reading and Allentown, but I don't know if there is the ridership.

RESPONSE

The Rail Service and Investment Program (RSIP) was developed in conjunction with the railroads in Pennsylvania. Implementation of the RSIP will improve safety. Please refer to the project listings in the appendices for specific projects that will have safety benefits.

Comment acknowledged.

Comment acknowledged.

Comment acknowledged.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

We have many from the NYC area purchasing properties in the Scranton & Pocono area. They are finding, in the Covid era, they can work remotely & don't need to be in NYC as often.

Comment acknowledged.

Shouldn't rail service from Scranton to NYC via the Lackawanna cut-off become a priority now, to transport the transplanted New Yorkers to the city? It certainly would help in reducing congested highway travel.

The Lackawanna Cut-off Project is noted as a visionary project in Appendix C: Proposed Passenger Rail Projects. Currently, the New Jersey and Pennsylvania portions are unfunded and there are no implementation timelines. You may find additional information in Section 2.1.1.4.1. This project is not led by PennDOT.

The rail service to the city could also attract business & commerce to PA as an attractive alternative to the NYC metropolitan area.

Comment acknowledged.

Why don't tons originated plus tons terminated equal tons total?

Total tons carried also includes through freight tonnage. Through freight is freight that does not have an origin or a termination location in Pennsylvania but rather travels across the state (Section 1.2.1).

QUESTION/COMMENT

Appendix C includes proposed service between Philadelphia and Reading, which appears to partially overlap the SEPTA map that you presented. Is the proposed Reading service anticipated to be operated by SEPTA (as previously) or by Amtrak?

Has potential restoration of Phila-Allentown passenger rail been studied by PennDOT, and if yes, why hasn't it been included in the list of projects alongside PHL-Reading? The Saucon Rail Trail does not preclude its restoration as it is a lease under SEPTA

RESPONSE

The SEPTA map illustrates existing conditions. The 2020 PennDOT study evaluated SEPTA as a potential operator and acknowledges other service providers could be considered. Recent studies conducted by others evaluated service that could operate by SEPTA and/or Amtrak but is not specific to a particular operator.

No, the restoration of passenger service between Philadelphia and Allentown has not been studied by PennDOT. Please refer to Section 5.7 for descriptions of rail studies and reports that have been completed within the last four years and studies that are anticipated to be initiated in the next four years.

QUESTION/COMMENT

The majority of the 127 Passenger Rail projects are located in the eastern part of the state. Why such little investment west of Harrisburg?

Do you have any plans for additional passenger rail service to Scranton?

There should be ways to allow expanded passenger rail to improve, particularly in western PA, without needing Norfolk Southern to approve it.

RESPONSE

From Pittsburgh to Harrisburg, the line is owned by Norfolk Southern and Amtrak operates on it. Some stations are privately owned, while others are owned by a variety of historical societies. Thus, the platforms may or may not be owned by Amtrak. This makes it a challenge and significantly limits available funding as compared to the eastern side of the state from Harrisburg to Philadelphia, which is owned by Amtrak. The stations are either owned by Amtrak, SEPTA, or PennDOT. Funding streams also differ from Harrisburg to Philadelphia compared to Harrisburg to Pittsburgh.

Additional passenger rail service to Scranton is not under consideration by PennDOT at this time.

Track is shared between Amtrak as the passenger service provider and Norfolk Southern, the owner. The studies that are currently in progress by Norfolk Southern will indicate what capital improvements need to be accomplished in order to minimize impacts to both passenger and freight rail for service.

QUESTION/COMMENT

Much of the right of way on the Pittsburgh Line has room for 4 tracks, yet most of it only has 2 tracks. Additional track should be built to allow expanded passenger traffic without being at the mercy of Norfolk Southern.

Could investment be put into better connecting rail lines to help alleviate traffic on the Pittsburgh line, e.g. trackage rights on other lines/improved capacity? This would allow NS freight to still move while also allowing for better passenger service.

Are there any proposals to move forward with studies to introduce commuter service from Pittsburgh to Arnold via the Allegheny Valley Railroad?

RESPONSE

Norfolk Southern owns the railroad right of way, and as a result, has approval authority for any and all capital improvements within their property.

Norfolk Southern (NS) has the sole discretion how to operate. In addition, any lines that NS would run on would require Positive Train Control (PTC).

We were not made aware of any proposals during the development of the 2020 state rail plan.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

More information about "Monessen Mid-Mon Valley Commuter Rail" would be helpful. Monessen Mid-Mon Valley Commuter Rail, appendix C, project #127.

The City of Monessen identified interest in reestablishing passenger rail service on an existing freight line. This is a long-term vision project without initial evaluation or funding identified as this time.

What role beyond the short-term expansion of Keystone/Pennsylvanian service will Amtrak play? Could we see more routes? More Sleeper routers (like to NYC)?

Please refer to Chapter 3 and Appendix C for information on Amtrak's proposed passenger rail improvements and investments.

Agree with approach to forecast "normal" conditions...but did effects of COVID cause any change in the way freight flow characteristics were considered?

The anticipated short- and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic were taken into account, where possible, during the preparation of the 2020 Pennsylvania State Rail Plan.

Are station improvements between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg included?

The draft state rail plan does not currently include station improvements between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg; however, required capital improvements associated with additional Pennsylvanian service will be added, as required, after the plan is finalized.

QUESTION/COMMENT

One of the major struggles for SEPTA is its unreliable source of funding. Was there anything in the draft plan that identifies how to change the source of funding to a more reliable, stable, and democratic structure?

Hi! I found the Draft State Plan, but it doesn't seem to include the appendices. Where can I find those/the list of proposed projects? Also, is it possible to recommend a project through the public comment form?

How do we get our rail service on par with Japan, Canada and Europe?

RESPONSE

Please refer to Section 5.5.4.2 for information on SEPTA's capital financing plan and Section 5.5.6.2 for information on SEPTA's operating financing plan.

The appendices are available on the PA State Rail Plan page of the Plan the Keystone website (<http://www.planthekeystone.com/Pages/PA-State-Rail-Plan.aspx>). If you would like to recommend a project, please email us at RA-PDPASRP@pa.gov.

The Pennsylvania State Rail Plan provides the vision, goals, and objectives to address the trends, forecasts, needs, and opportunities that are specific to the commonwealth's freight and passenger rail system with consideration to short- and long-term fiscal constraints. Best practices and technological advances that have been developed in other countries are incorporated into the Pennsylvania State Rail Plan, where applicable.

QUESTION/COMMENT

RESPONSE

How can the general public influence NS to establish a second Pennsylvanian?

The general public can support this initiative by continuing to stay involved and provide feedback during the public comment period.

How does the state of PA support short line railroads in Economic Development? Are there grant programs specifically pointed at rail economic development in PA?

There are grant programs in Pennsylvania specifically aimed at promoting economic development; please refer to Sections 1.3.2.3, 2.1.5.4, and 5.6.2.4. In addition, please refer to Section 6.3.8 for how economic development interests were incorporated into this State Rail Plan.

Has technology improved the State Rail Plan data collection process when compared to previous years paper mailings allowing the Plan to Grow for the needs of the Commonwealth through increased Public Comments?

Yes, advancements in technology have enabled improved data collection workflows. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic created the unique environment to leverage available technology for public and stakeholder engagement. Please refer to Chapter 6 for how stakeholder, agency, and public involvement was accomplished virtually as well as a summary of the comments received.