

Amtrak Marks the 20th Anniversary of ADA

As the nation observes the 20th anniversary of the enactment of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Amtrak officials recognize the significant progress the company has made toward serving the community with disabilities while acknowledging that work remains to be done.

"The Amtrak experience, from stations and equipment to planning and booking tickets, includes accommodations for passengers with disabilities," said Chief Operating Officer William Crosbie.

Among its directives, ADA mandates that all stations be made accessible to persons with disabilities by July 26.

Amtrak serves 529 stations, but only owns 63 of the 483 stations that need to become compliant. Currently, 352 of the 483 Amtrak stations, or 74 percent, required to be ADA compliant provide barrier-free pathways — between streets, parking areas, other ground transportation and trackside locations for boarding the trains — for passengers requiring the use of wheelchairs. Moreover, 94 percent of Amtrak passengers begin or end their trip at stations accessible by wheelchairs.

Yet, the lack of dedicated funding and complex access and other agreements have in large part prevented Amtrak from meeting the statutory deadline to make the stations it serves fully ADA compliant.

"Completing a comprehensive ADA stations program is still a considerable challenge," said John Bennett, assistant vice president, Policy and Development. "Defining the scope of the needed changes, the funding requirements and timing for improvements requires coordination between host railroads and station owners."

Bennett added that efforts to further develop and implement the program are underway, involving key personnel in a number of departments, all dedicated to improving ADA compliance and better customer service.

Despite the challenge, Amtrak is

engaged in a \$1.6 billion capital improvement program to bring all stations up to the required standards. In FY '10, the company allocated \$144 million for station accessibility improvements.

The Great American Stations program, which partners Amtrak with local communities to rebuild and revitalize stations, also plays a key role. The Web site offers Station Design Guidelines and is supplemented by an ongoing series of "Civic Conversations" between Amtrak, station owners and community leaders that serve as a resource for redevelopment and ADA compliance. The next Civic Conversation is scheduled for July 21 in Chicago.

From a passenger equipment viewpoint, all of Amtrak's trains meet or exceed ADA requirements for accessible seating, offering such amenities as reserved spaces for wheelchairs, seating that enables passengers to transfer to/from a wheelchair and accessible bedrooms and restrooms. In addition, cars are being modified to allow on-board storage of Segway personal transport vehicles for the mobility impaired, a project that will be completed sometime next year.

Amtrak has advanced an across-the-board initiative to increase the number of stations that are accessible to persons requiring wheelchairs. This program, called Mobility First, is being funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

"As of last month, we had more than 300 wheelchair lifts at 231 stations," said Program Manager, Stations, Gail Secan. "And, as part of the Mobility First initiative, we're placing an additional 176 lifts in 162 stations."

By the project's conclusion on Feb. 17, 2011, Amtrak will have 479 lifts available at 393 stations.



President and CEO Joe Boardman joins Disabled and Senior Task Force member and Capitol Corridor passenger Cecilia von Beroldingen and her guide dog, Neoki, at the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee spring meeting at which he discussed the company's efforts to improve accessibility.

Additionally, plans are underway to modernize the Passenger Information Display System, or PIDS, to meet ADA requirements for disseminating train status information to passengers with hearing or visual limitations.

"PIDS offers visual paging systems for deaf passengers, with information provided in audio and visual formats simultaneously," said Sanjean Williams, PIDS project director.

Following the launch of a pilot program in Aberdeen, Baltimore and New

Thanks for a Job Well Done

For nearly 18 years, the Amtrak men and women assigned to operate the Virginia Railway Express commuter service have delivered safe and customer-friendly service to VRE's 17,000 daily passengers.

The Train and Engine crews continued to operate the service through July 9, per a two-week extension of the original agreement. VRE requested the extension because of Keolis Rail Services' inability to assume operations as scheduled on June 28.

"I want our crews to know that I'm proud of the work they've done and look forward to having them continue to be part of the Amtrak family," said Amtrak President and CEO Joe Boardman.



(L-R on the platform level): Engineers Floyd Turner and Gordon Vincent, Assistant Conductor Michael Thompson, Conductors Carlos Cruz, Melvin Johnson and William Boggs, Assistant Conductors Brenda Alexander, Michael Johnson, Charles Pitts, Bonnie Olliff, Blair Catts and Alfonso Calwise; (Bottom to Top on ladder): Engineers Steven Geter, Michael Chadwell, Mark Singer and Diana Lynch; (In the locomotive): Engineer Chris Dort; (L-R alongside locomotive): Conductors Steve Watson, Thomas Franta, Odis Bledsoe, Corbett Price Jr. and Robert Dameron, Assistant Conductor Brion Reed and Conductor Justin Waldron.

Carrollton, Md., the PIDS system will be deployed in a phased approach, with additional installations in Hudson, Rhinecliff and Albany, N.Y.; Route 128 in Massachusetts; Harrisburg, Pa.; and Providence, R.I. The new system is

designed to connect to a number of train monitoring systems to provide detailed and accurate train information.

Station and equipment improvements are combined with Block Training for on-board and station employees to better assist passengers with disabilities. The training offers clear explanations of how to provide assistance if requested.

The Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee's Disabled and Senior Task Force has also played a role in improving staff sensitivity for passengers with disabilities. Over the past year, the task force has developed video and audio recordings for

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new hire and Block Training, worked with disability groups to gather input for improving customer service, and attended new hire training.

"My

approach has always been to put the passengers first and offer assistance with a warm "How may I help you?" said Levi Methvin, a conductor from the Pontiac, Mich., crew base. "I offer a friendly arm when assistance is requested. Passengers with disabilities don't need your help to eat or use the bathroom, but they may need you to bring them their food or assistance to visit the restrooms."

On the trip planning and ticket booking front, Amtrak.com features a text size feature to enlarge the type used on the site and provide more color contrast to help sight-impaired or color-blind customers.

At the Reservation Contact Centers, specially trained teams further assist passengers with disabilities with their travel planning needs.

"When an agent is made aware that a customer has special needs, he or she offers whatever service makes that passenger most comfortable from point A to point B," said Les Lord, a customer service agent at the Western Reservation Sales Contact Center.

Lord added that TTY capability is also available for deaf callers still using the technology or customers can also call 1-800-USA-RAIL to talk to an agent via a relay service.

A "briefing blitz" took place last month to provide information on assisting passengers with disabilities to reservation and ticket agents, all train and on-board service crews, station personnel and Amtrak Police. Additional information and an online refresher training course is available on the Amtrak Intranet at "Employees" → "Education and Training" → "Customer Service." ■