

# **Chugging along Strickland's request to Amtrak is baby step toward revival of 3-C passenger-train service**

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Now might be the time to shake the cobwebs off plans for a passenger-train line linking Columbus, Cleveland, Cincinnati and Dayton just might be now.

Gasoline prices keep climbing, while roadways and air corridors have become so congested that travel delays are the norm. Add to that mix the tightening of security at the nation's airports and the resulting hassles that passengers must endure.

Throughout his 13 months in office, Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland has demonstrated a grasp of Ohio's economic problems. In a Feb. 26 letter to Amtrak requesting a study of a Columbus-Cleveland passenger-train line and a separate estimate for an extension to Dayton and Cincinnati, he cited the potential economic benefits.

He sees a need for passenger and freight rail services on the 3-C route to ease congestion on the highways and serve businesses all along the corridor. Strickland apparently seeks to take advantage of Congress' offer of federal matching money for railroad improvements and expansions. Federal funding will pay for Amtrak's study of the 3-C line, expected to be completed within 18 months.

For at least 20 years, the state has been studying various proposals to move Ohioans out of their cars and onto trains. Plans to restore 3-C service have surfaced again and again, sometimes as a high-speed passenger-rail line.

Amtrak trains visit Cleveland daily and Cincinnati three times a week, but Columbus has not had passenger-rail service since 1979, when Amtrak's east-west National Limited ceased operations. The last year for 3-C service was 1971. Columbus and Phoenix are the largest metropolitan areas in the country without passenger-train service.

The attraction of conserving fuel and lowering transportation costs has proved to be an incentive for the renovation and expansion of freight-train lines, which began in 2000. Columbus is on Norfolk Southern's Heartland Corridor, being upgraded to improve freight service between Norfolk, Va., and Chicago. Railroads claim they can move the same load by rail with one-third less fuel than trucks, according to a Feb. 13 *Wall Street Journal* story on the resurgence of freight trains.

Similarly, an expansion of America's passenger-train network could reduce the use of fossil fuels, not only cutting travel expenses but also lowering pollution.

A 3-C passenger-rail corridor and improved freight service along it could spur development in and around the cities on the route while giving business and pleasure travelers an alternative for getting to and from Ohio's biggest cities.

Strickland's letter to Amtrak moves Columbus a little closer toward a reappearance on a passenger-train timetable.