



## Last Stop

### Making the Case for Public Transit in Blair County

Eric Wolf, AMTRAN General Manager

When you work in the public sector, it's always part of your job to justify your agency's existence to elected officials and to taxpayers. That's okay because public transit can make a compelling case.

AMTRAN carries 1,100 people a day. (That's not including the students we carry for Altoona School District.) Of those 1,100 people, 25% use the bus to get to work.

#### Working Families

Many of our customers are working families. Mom and Dad both have jobs, but there's only one car. One of them drives the car to work. The other one takes the bus. These families will be hurt by the proposed service cuts.

#### Retail Employees

It is a fact that retail is a major component of the Blair County economy. Retail employees are AMTRAN customers. Check out the #1 Eldorado and #10 Night Owl buses as they leave Logan Valley Mall after it closes nightly filled with store employees on their way home.

All bus service after 6:00 p.m. will be eliminated if the proposed cuts go through.

#### Senior Citizens

When your parents or grandparents can no longer drive, do you want them to be completely dependent on you for grocery shopping and doctors' appointments? Or would

you like to see them retain their independence and ride the bus when and where they like?

Many of our seniors will become dependent and isolated if these service cuts are implemented.

#### In Conclusion

I like working in public transit because what we do matters. We're not some fancy Madison Avenue advertising firm using smoke and mirrors to sell junk that people don't need. We make a difference in people's lives every day, day after day.

So, do you want our region's working people to be able to get to their jobs? Do you want our area stores and restaurants to be able to hire good employees? Do you want our senior citizens to be self-reliant and independent? If you do, then public transit must be an integral and irreplaceable component of Blair County's transportation infrastructure.

## amtran THE TRIP SHEET

Altoona, PA

### AMTRAN to Cut Service and Increase Fares

On February 21, AMTRAN announced that, without a transportation funding solution from the state legislature, the bus company will raise fares and will make significant service cuts in June.

Following the recent lead of transit authorities in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, General Manager Eric Wolf outlined the issues.

"We have been talking for three years about a looming crisis in highway and public transportation funding in Pennsylvania," stated Wolf. "It is here, and it is real. There will be a \$900,000 gap in our \$4 million budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1."

The proposed changes would include the elimination of all bus service for evenings and weekends. In addition, Wolf predicted significant cuts to all daytime service Monday through Friday including the elimination of AMTRAN's downtown circulator, Route #9 the Flash. He also stated that the current adult fare of \$1.25 could increase to \$2.00.

AMTRAN staff are in the process of gathering rider-ship information to make specific recommendations to the Board of Directors at the April 18 board meeting. The proposals will then be advertised to the public.

After three public hearings (see below), staff will adjust their recommendations for approval at the May 16 board meeting. The changes take effect June 18.

Wolf encouraged customers to telephone their state representatives to tell them why the bus service is important to them.

"We have been talking with Senator John Eichelberger, Representative Rick Geist, and Representative Jerry Stern regarding the statewide funding crisis for highways and public transit," stated Wolf. "But they need to hear from their constituents. They need to know the local impact."

Action by the state legislature this spring could eliminate the need for the proposed service cuts and fare increase in June.

## In This Issue ... AMTRAN to Cut Service and Increase Fares



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#### Public Hearings on Proposed Fare Increase and Service Cuts

Saturday, April 28, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon  
Logan Valley Mall Community Room

Monday, April 30, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.  
Logan Valley Mall Community Room

Wednesday, May 2, 10:00 am. - 12:00 noon  
Green Avenue Tower, Altoona

#### Public Hearings

AMTRAN's Public Hearings are intended to give customers the opportunity to comment on the proposed fare increase and service cuts. There will be one morning, one evening, and one Saturday hearing to try to accommodate different work schedules.

AMTRAN encourages your attendance at the Public Hearings. If the only hearing you can attend is the evening one, AMTRAN will guarantee you a ride home.



# The Trip Sheet



## Dear Senator Eichelberger

### Customer Focus - 4th in a series

An actual letter from a young constituent to Senator John Eichelberger, Rep. Rick Geist, and Rep. Jerry Stern. Edited for length.

Dear Senator Eichelberger,

I am a 9th grade student at Roosevelt Junior High School. I usually spend time after school at my godmother's office. When she is out of town (which is quite frequently), I have to ride the 3:00 p.m. 3rd Avenue Amtran bus.

I may just live about a mile away, but I also live on a hill. I also have asthma. Having asthma is ok, but walking a mile, mostly uphill, can be quite bad. When I get home, I am usually breathing heavily, most often needing to use my rescue inhaler. Also most sidewalks have ice or ice-covered snow and make it very difficult to walk through and on.

Riding the bus helps me stay safe. I have become acquainted with many of the drivers and they have become acquainted with my grandmother. I know that when I ride the bus they will not let anything bad happen to me. They are very trustworthy people.

The price of the bus fare is very reasonable and not too much of a hardship on my family to purchase the bus pass for me. I feel much safer riding an Amtran bus than walking through ice and snow or through shady neighborhoods.

I have heard on the news where they may have to stop operating some of the buses, cut routes, or stop providing some bus service altogether. This concerns me quite a bit. Is there anything that can be done about the funding, so that the price of fare can remain reasonable? There is no price that you can put on a person's safety.

I do hope that you will consider assisting Amtran in getting the funding they need to keep their bus service as it is. If they raise the fare, it may be too expensive for some to continue riding the bus. This would mean myself and others would lose one way to travel safely.

Sincerely, Lindsey

### Amtran Winners

Sandy Stehley won a \$20 Kings Restaurant Gift Card.

Marie Moneglia won a free Super Rider Punch Card.

Cindy Johnston won a free Special Rider Punch Card.

You can win too. Just print your name and address on the back of your punch card, and drop it in the green box at the front of the bus when you are done with it.

Monthly Pass holders get an entry form every time they renew their pass. Just fill it out and drop it in the green box at the front of the bus.

## Bus Rodeo Winner



Dale Holland, Statewide Winner

Dale Holland, a veteran AMTRAN driver, took 1st Place in the statewide bus rodeo in Williamsport sponsored by the Pennsylvania Public Transportation Association.

He will compete in the International Bus Rodeo in Nashville, Tennessee in May.

The bus rodeo is a long-standing tradition in Pennsylvania, and AMTRAN drivers have a long and successful history of competing. The rodeo itself is a timed obstacle course consisting of 10 maneuvers that tests a driver's skill in operating a 35 foot bus.

AMTRAN drivers also took home the Team Award for highest average score among four transit providers at a regional bus rodeo in Altoona.

### Amtran Board of Directors

Scott Cessna, Chair

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## Customer Focus - Richard Mielnik 5th in a series



Richard Mielnik is a regular rider who claims that AMTRAN buses can get you anywhere you need to go in the area. Actually, he backs up his claim in the form of a complaint.

Due to a re-routing of the #3 Third Avenue route, Richard can no longer make a trip that he had made many times in the past. Richard lives in Frankstown and nearly every day walks or rides his bike about a mile to Hollidaysburg to catch the #8 Hollidaysburg bus. That bus takes him to the Logan Valley Mall where he can make connections to the rest of the service - including a downtown transfer to the #3. Formerly, that route took Rick to the Bellemeade shopping plaza where he would get off and walk to a cemetery near Bellwood - a total trip of well over 20 miles.

Even though Richard can no longer get as far as Bellemeade on the #3, he is still one of AMTRAN's most loyal customers. He says, "All the drivers have helped me figure out how to get to where I'm going at one time or another." He believes that the friendly drivers are one of the best things about riding the bus.

Though Richard's trip may be an extreme example, it proves what a lot of AMTRAN customers know - AMTRAN's bus routes cover a big area and really can get someone where they need to go. (By the way, AMTRAN hopes to re-institute service to Bellemeade soon.)