



FROM THE CAB -- AUGUST 2024

By Martin Wheeler, President; David Robinson, and Don Yehle

RED LINE, SILVER LINE AND POTENTIAL TRANSPORTATION SALES TAX NOW IN FLUX IN CHARLOTTE!

Recent developments in Charlotte concerning a number of rail and transit issues are coming fast and furious these days. Here is a look at what is going on with each, and perhaps another issue that ought to see the light of day in all the discussion.

Charlotte is proceeding to purchase the Norfolk Southern "O" line from center-city Charlotte to downtown Mooresville. 25 miles of the line between Charlotte and Mt. Mourne would be the first segment of the Red Line commuter rail service. Charlotte City Council is to vote on the purchase by September 3rd. Norfolk Southern would like to close on the deal on September 9th. The line could be conveyed to a future regional transit authority if one is created. Norfolk Southern would have first option on repurchase of the property if Charlotte would attempt the sell the right of way.

A regional transit authority plan has been presented to Charlotte which would be comprised of 27 members representing city, county, and state jurisdictions. The plan has had no public vetting and was produced by Charlotte City staff under the direction of the City Manager. The funding would be provided by local sales tax of one percent in Mecklenburg County. The plan would allow for buy in by adjoining counties in the Charlotte region.

The sales tax plan has been rejected by Matthews in eastern Mecklenburg County due to indications the Silver Line light rail transit line would be dropped and substituted by bus service due to the 5.1 billion dollars cost for the light rail extension. The Red Line commuter rail, Airport light rail line, and Blue Line light rail extension to Ballantyne would survive. The plan has had a major change over the past few years as State legislative interests have demanded that any sales tax should have 40 percent diverted to highway projects. This would make building all earlier proposed rail projects problematic.

It should be noted NO county in North Carolina now pays any sales tax for road projects. Historically all road funding on the state level has been supported by the state gas tax. With the advent of more efficient, and electric vehicles gas tax revenues are continuing to take a hit. The State to date has done nothing to increase money for roads including concepts like VMT where all vehicles are taxed on miles driven not consumption of fuels.

A sales tax referendum to support the Transit plan would not be expected until November of 2025. As it would be a countywide tax it could be potentially approved even if one or more town councils in the county officially reject it. Matthews, other east Charlotte interests and non-profit Sustain Charlotte continue to express strong support for building light rail to Matthews even if the sales tax needs to be increased to 1.4 percent. Sentiment is that buses are a poorer transportation option and will do little to spur economic development along the corridor.

One idea that hasn't seen the light of day since early analysis of the Charlotte-Matthews corridor is concept of commuter rail to Matthews and Monroe which would be similar to the Red Line commuter rail to Mooresville. A commuter rail line would cost less than light rail, or probably true bus rapid transit. With the Red Line coming in a cost of \$750 million to 1 billion dollars, through extrapolation one would think the Monroe Line could be done for a similar cost. Mileage is about the same, track conditions are much better, and like Norfolk Southern the freight operator CSX Transportation might be willing to consider a purchase or usage agreement. CSX also owns rail segments between Charlotte and Mount Holly that would be useful in forwarding commuter rail between Charlotte and Gastonia.

The proposed commuter line would service the Charlotte-Monroe corridor and could be extended to Wingate. Stops could include Monroe, Wesley Chapel-Stouts, Indian Trail, downtown Matthews, Sardis Road North, Sharon Amity, and the Charlotte Gateway multi-modal transportation center. While not spurring as intensive development as spurred by light rail it probably would be more intensive than bus alternatives especially in Monroe and Matthews. The idea was dropped initially for bus rapid transit which was later changed to light rail due to apparent resistance of owner of the freight rail line, and other issues. Perhaps it's time for a revisit?

<https://www.wsocvtv.com/news/local/matthews-vote-opposition-sales-tax-increase-transit-plan/C4OSQPN65BEY7AOAWH7D4IY25U/>

https://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/news/2024/08/15/mecklenburg-transit-transportation-tax.html?utm_source=st&utm_medium=en&utm_campaign=me&utm_content=CH&ana=e_CH_me&j=36429965&senddate=2024-08-16&empos=p8

<https://www.southeasternpri.com/post/u-s-74-corridor-project-overview>

MAKE SALUDA GRADE JOINT RAIL WITH TRAIL OPERATION – “CAPT (Carolinas Association for Passenger Trains) is never happy when a future transportation option goes away. The (Saluda Grade) corridor has so much potential for a joint rail with trail operation similar to the Western Maryland Scenic Railway. Also, CAPT feels it still has potential future value for inter-city passenger rail service,” said Martin Wheeler, CAPT president.

“CAPT would not oppose the trail as long as future rail is factored into the development plans. The vast majority of the line is 200 feet wide which would allow both rail and trail to coexist if not now, at some point in the future. The 5 mile grade south of Saluda is rather narrow and would perhaps require innovative solutions for both trail and rail to exist,” Wheeler said talking to Blue Ridge Public Radio’s news staff.

“This corridor is being saved through the Rails to Trails program adopted by the federal government in the early 1980's. The paramount purpose of the law is

preserving rail corridors for future reactivation, not a giveaway for a permanent trail. Trail is an 'interim' use whether that turns out to be a couple of years or 50 years, etc.," he continued.

Another passenger rail advocate, Dr. David Robinson, added to Wheeler's comments. "The huge economic benefit to the proposal is meager to what rail plus trail could do for the region." Robinson is CAPT vice president – North Carolina.

The passenger rail advocates were responding to news that the Saluda Grade Trade Conservancy inked a contract with Norfolk Southern on August 5 to buy the right of way for what was once the steepest rail main line in the United States.

"Terms of the sale are confidential at the request of Norfolk Southern, but the coalition of organizations making up the conservancy has 12 months to exercise due diligence and raise the remaining funding needed for the trail in North and South Carolina," the ***Greenville (SC) Journal*** reported earlier this month.

Due diligence allowing for the purchase of the right of way has four elements: Surveying the property. Conducting title searches. Doing an environmental impact assessment. Developing a regional marketing plan, the newspaper reported.

Three organizations comprise the Conservancy. They are PAL: Play, Advocate, Live Well; Upstate Forever, and Conserving Carolina, the latter group which recently received a \$450,000 federal grant in July toward trail development.

<https://www.progressiverailroading.com/resources/editorial/2024/308376.pdf>

<https://www.saludagraderail.org/saluda-grade-news/view-the-saluda-grade-trail-feasibility-study-presentation>

Please refer to the following link for feedback on the trail project. It would be appropriate to submit comments strongly supporting a rail component to the multi-use trail.



SALUDA GRADE T R A I L

SCAN THE QR CODE TO
GIVE US YOUR FEEDBACK!



FEEDBACK FORM

THE PROPOSED SALUDA GRADE TRAIL WOULD RUN FOR APPROXIMATELY 31 MILES, FROM INMAN, SC TO ZIRCONIA, NC. THE TRAIL WOULD WELCOME FOLKS OUT FOR A STROLL, AS WELL AS BIKERS, HIKERS, JOGGERS, WHEELCHAIRS, STROLLERS, AND OTHER FORMS OF EXERCISE AND PLAY. THERE IS ALSO POTENTIAL FOR AN EQUESTRIAN PATH. HOWEVER YOU LIKE TO GET AROUND, THE TRAIL WOULD INVITE YOU TO ENJOY THE BEAUTIFUL COUNTRYSIDE OF UPSTATE SOUTH CAROLINA AND WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA.

PROJECT LEADERS

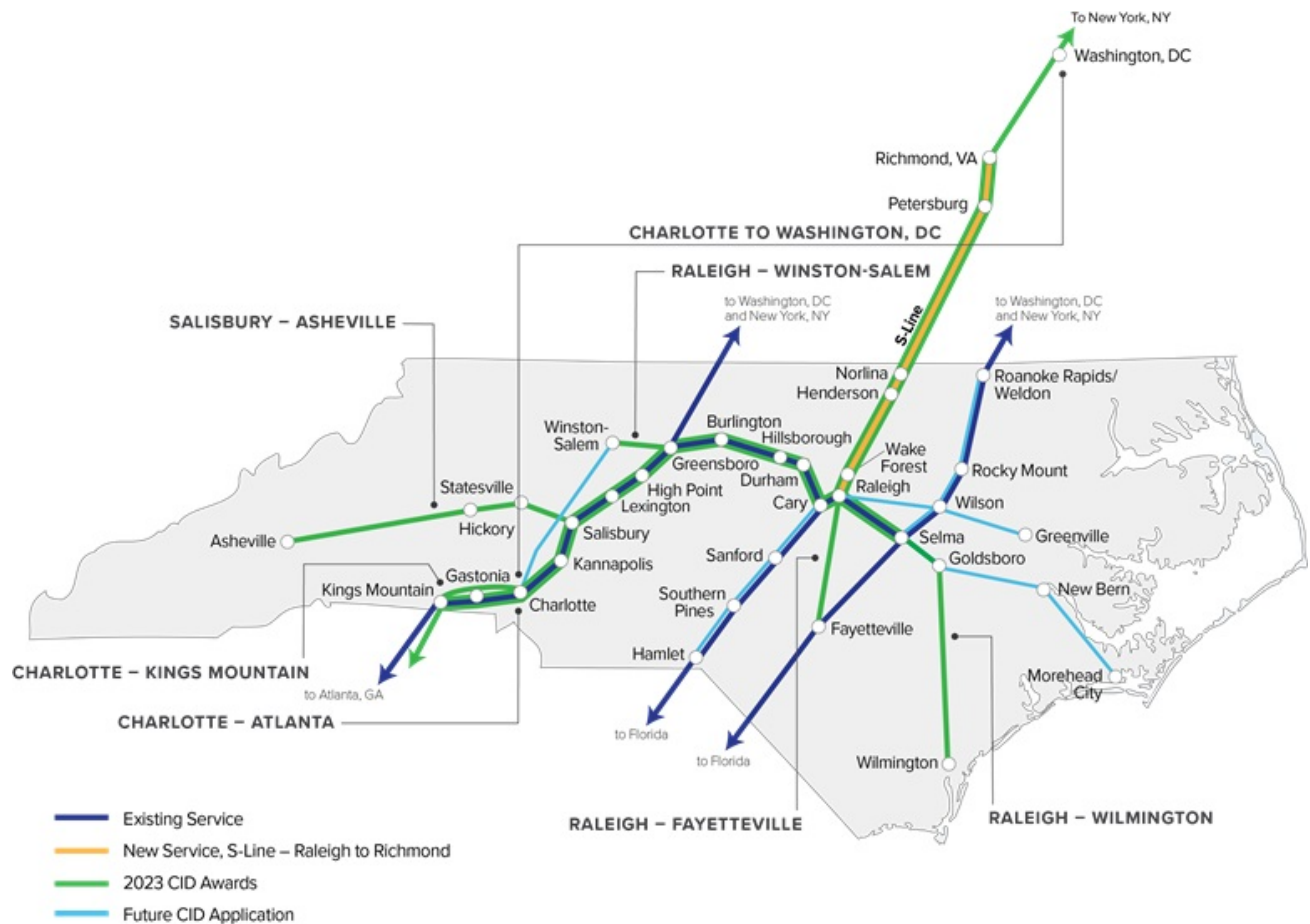


SIGN UP FOR EMAIL UPDATES AT:
SALUDAGRADETRAIL.ORG

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

The most important thing for the success of the Saluda Grade Trail is active support from our community. Many local governments, civic organizations, and community members have proudly voiced their support for the trail. Please add your voice!

Visit saludagraderail.org



PREPARE COMMENTS NOW FOR CORRIDOR ID PLANS -- With

engineering contractors hired for the seven approved passenger rail corridors in North Carolina, CAPT members are urged to participate in developing ideas and suggestions for the organization to submit to the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NC DOT). "It's critical to convey our thoughts and concerns to NC DOT before the study process gets in full swing next month (September)," says Martin Wheeler, CAPT president.

"For instance, I will be submitting info on Charlotte - Atlanta study in connection with airport stations in Charlotte and Greer (Greenville-Spartanburg). I am sure everyone knows a little piece of info that might be under the radar screen for the planners.

"The firms doing the corridor studies will be starting September 1st. NCDOT has suggested we get those to them before September. Please separate by corridor to

more easily distribute to each corridor team. I would like these in no later than August 28th.

Any passenger rail advocate, CAPT member, or board member is asked to submit ideas on any of the approved corridors to President Wheeler at mwheeler3@att.net

“NCDOT plans to issue a periodic newsletter updating developments on the corridors but would prefer that CAPT members have no direct contact with staff of study contractors listed below unless in a public setting during the conduct of the studies,” NCDOT added.

The seven corridors and contractors are:

Atlanta to Charlotte -- WSP USA, Charlotte.

Charlotte to Kings Mountain -- Moffatt & Nichol, Raleigh

Charlotte to Washington D.C. -- Mott McDonald, Raleigh

Asheville to Salisbury -- Pinecone Transportation Professionals,

Fuquay-Varina, NC (Edward McFalls)

Wilmington to Raleigh -- Stantec, Raleigh

Fayetteville to Raleigh -- Jacobs, Cary

Winston-Salem to Raleigh -- AECOM, Raleigh

In 2023, seven of 12 applications were accepted to the Federal Railroad Administration’s FRA Corridor Identification and Development (CID) program. “The CID program is specifically for developing new or improved intercity passenger service on those corridors,” NCDOT emphasized.

LET’S LEARN FROM ALL ABOARD OHIO -- Passenger rail advocacy groups are active nationally, including in Ohio. *All Aboard Ohio* zoomed a statewide meeting on Saturday, August 10, and will be zooming at least three other sub-region meetings in coming weeks. “Might be good to take a look at one or more to see how they run things, and what we might be able to take from their approach,” says CAPT President Martin Wheeler.

SOUTHWEST CHAPTER: Wednesday, August 28 at 6:00 p.m. at the Walnut Hills Library (2533 Kemper Ln, Cincinnati, OH) AND via Zoom. Please [click here](#) to RSVP.

NORTHWEST CHAPTER: Friday, September 13 at 3:00 p.m. at the Toledo Amtrak Station (3rd Floor, 415 Emerald Ave, Toledo, OH) *No RSVP is necessary.*

To see future meeting dates and other events, please visit allaboardohio.org/meetings-events.



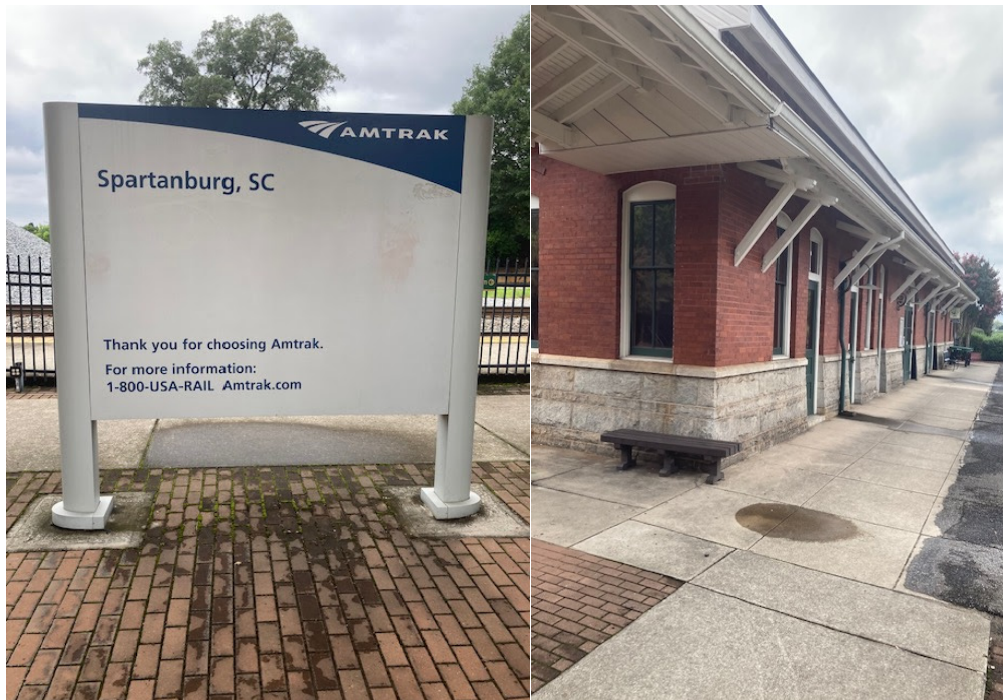
Seaboard Station Restaurant, Hamlet, NC

RARE FRIDAY CAPT BOARD MEETING THIS SEPTEMBER IN HAMLET –

In a break from tradition, if not exactly history-making, the next CAPT board of directors meeting will be held in Hamlet, NC, on a Friday, instead of a Saturday.

The meeting date is Friday, September 20, 2024. While the precise meeting location isn't known yet, all attendees are invited to meet beforehand at 11:30 a.m. at the Seaboard Station Restaurant, 18 Front St., Hamlet, NC, for lunch. (The restaurant is closed on Saturdays, which is why the meeting day was changed to a Friday.)

Following lunch, the board meeting will run from 1:00p.m. to 4:00 p.m.



SPARTANBURG SITE OF JULY 2024 BOARD MEETING – The CAPT board held its July 2024 meeting in Spartanburg, SC, in the offices of One Spartanburg, the area's hybrid Chamber/Tourism organization. The meeting room was about the best the board has ever experienced, and a member of the local staff was there to make sure we had everything we needed, said David Robinson, CAPT VP – North Carolina.

The following persons were in attendance: Martin Wheeler, David Robinson, Ed Locklin, Thomas Darling, John Bochman, Charles Hiatt, Bob Bischoff, Philip Sophocleous, Ralph Messera, Don Yehle, and Jim Frierson.

While the complete minutes of this meeting will be provided to the board at the Hamlet meeting, one major development was approval to contract with WonderDesign to design a new organization logo to go with the proposed rebranding of CAPT to “All Aboard Carolinas” and a redesigned website. The Carolinas Association for Passenger Trains, Inc., will still exist as a private non-profit organization; All Aboard Carolinas will be our “d.b.a. (doing business as) name. The changeover has not been scheduled yet, but is expected to occur before the end of 2024, so the launch year will be 2025.



CAPT members Charles Hiatt and John Bachman attended the Spartanburg board meeting.

NO ONE LOVED TRAINS AND RAILROADS MORE THAN PHIL -- Capt. Phillip Brooks Bush II “lifelong hobby took him all over the continent collecting thousands of miles on Amtrak rail lines and enjoying hundreds of excursions on steam trains, diesel engines, and electric-powered locomotives,” according to an obituary written earlier this year on the North Carolinian who died on January 13, 2024, and is interred at Arlington National Cemetery.

The Lenoir, N.C., native and long-time CAPT member “made many friends and associates on adventures all over the continental U.S. It was a glorious site to see them all racing around to get the best picture angles when the special trains would stop to let everyone off, back track and then race by for closeups.

“He took his brother and nephew with him in 1994 for the 125th anniversary of the driving of the Golden Spike at Promontory Point in Utah.

“His very last train adventure included a trip on a Sugar Cane plantation rail line in Florida as well as a ride on the auto car trains,” read his obituary, which also encouraged donations in his memory to the N.C. Transportation Museum, “anything that keeps the history of trains alive.”

“Mr. Bush served honorably in the U.S. Navy and retired as a Captain in the U.S. Naval Reserve. In civilian life, he served as chief budget officer for the Navy at the Pentagon, retiring at 55 in 1986, but not before his final budget was complete,” it was said of Phil (as known in his Washington, D.C., circles) and as Brooks among family and friends in Lenoir.

MY AMTRAK TRAVELS -- A college friend of Board Member and *From the Cab* editor Don Yehle also has logged many miles on Amtrak over the last 35 years. “My interest in rail travel began about 35 years ago when I would occasionally travel the four-hour drive to Chicago from East Lansing, MI, for business meetings, wrote Jeff Arbour of Okemos, MI.

“I discovered right away that the four-hour Amtrak trip was much less stressful and a lot more interesting than driving. And, if needed, you could get a little work done,” he said.

“After a few trips into Chicago Union Station I became fascinated by the double decker overnight cars that I saw. I bought the book on the *(California) Zephyr* and got even more interested in the possibility of overnight travel by train,” Arbour wrote, at the request of Yehle, who encourages CAPT members to regular submit passenger train articles “in an effort to build ridership.”

“This interest was coupled with the realization that I was flying to most of the airports in the country but was not really seeing the country. I decided to try overnight travel when a corporate meeting was scheduled in New Orleans,” he said.

“I booked a trip from East Lansing to Chicago and connected with the **City of New Orleans**. Everything about that trip was exciting starting with waking up in my sleeper at Memphis and seeing the riverboats being prepared for breakfast on the Mississippi River.

“I was in the last car as we crossed Lake Pontchartrain and loved the view out of the back of the train. That trip got me hooked. Since then, I have traveled on at least fifteen (15) different routes, sometimes multiple times.

“When my wife and I visit our daughters and family in the Denver area we almost always take the train from East Lansing to Chicago and jump on the **Zephyr**.

“I have taken the **Zephyr** all the way to California twice and always loved the beauty of the sun shining down on the Colorado River along with the beautiful ride from Reno, Nevada, through the mountains into California,” Arbour continued.

“Instead of flying over much of our country I have now enjoyed sensing the history of Harper’s Ferry traveling on the **Capitol Limited** and seen the fall colors of New York State and Vermont in October on the **Adirondack** ride between New York City and Montreal.

“When my wife and I planned a visit to our daughter and son in law in Tampa we decided to see more of the east coast by taking the **Capitol Limited** (from Toledo, Ohio) to Washington D.C. and connect on the **Silver Star** to Orlando.

“The one route that I hope to make happen is the **Empire Builder** which has so many interesting stops along the way such as Glacier National Park. I have family in some of the Wisconsin stops such as Portage and Wisconsin Dells and would love to visit places like Spokane on the way out,” Arbour concluded.

CAROLINAS AMTRAK ROUTES

THE CRESCENT 19/20

(New York-New Orleans)

This is the first of several articles that will feature Amtrak routes that originate in or pass through North and South Carolina.

As shown in the timetable below, the Crescent stops at 5 stations in NC (GAS, CLT, SAV, HPT, and GRO) and 3 stations in SC (Clemson, Greenville, and Spartanburg.) Southbound, #19 makes middle-of-night stops in NC, and very early morning stops in SC, arriving in Atlanta at 8:43am.

Northbound, #20, makes middle-of-night stops in SC, and early morning stops in NC, arriving in Washington DC early afternoon at 1:47pm.

Crescent 19	Scheduled
New York, NY (NYP)	Dp 215P
Newark, NJ (NWK)	Dp 237P
Trenton, NJ (TRE)	Dp 318P
Philadelphia, PA (PHL)	Dp 355P
Wilmington, DE (WIL)	Dp 419P
Baltimore, MD (BAL)	Dp 515P
Washington, DC (WAS)	Ar 603P
	Dp 630P
Alexandria, VA (ALX)	Dp 649P
Manassas, VA (MSS)	Dp 722P
Culpeper, VA (CLP)	Dp 755P
Charlottesville, VA (CVS)	Dp 852P
Lynchburg, VA (LYH)	Ar 1000P
	Dp 1016P
Danville, VA (DAN)	Dp 1124P
Greensboro, NC (GRO)	Ar 1225A
	Dp 1232A
High Point, NC (HPT)	Dp 1249A
Salisbury, NC (SAL)	Dp 127A
Charlotte, NC (CLT)	Ar 230A
	Dp 255A
Gastonia, NC (GAS)	Dp 322A
Spartanburg, SC (SPB)	Dp 424A
Greenville, SC (GRV)	Ar 524A
	Dp 531A
Clemson, SC (CSN)	Dp 609A
Toccoa, GA (TCA)	Dp 645A
Gainesville, GA (GNS)	Dp 728A
Atlanta, GA (ATL)	Ar 843A
	Dp 908A
Anniston, AL (ATN)	Dp 1030A
Birmingham, AL (BHM)	Ar 1245P
	Dp 103P
Tuscaloosa, AL (TCL)	Dp 202P
Meridian, MS (MEI)	Ar 413P
	Dp 419P
Laurel, MS (LAU)	Dp 516P
Hattiesburg, MS (HBG)	Dp 553P
Picayune, MS (PIC)	Dp 657P
Slidell, LA (SDL)	Dp 722P
New Orleans, LA (NOL)	Ar 902P

Crescent 20	Scheduled
New Orleans, LA (NOL)	Dp 915A
Slidell, LA (SDL)	Dp 1012A
Picayune, MS (PIC)	Dp 1037A
Hattiesburg, MS (HBG)	Dp 1145A
Laurel, MS (LAU)	Dp 1220P
Meridian, MS (MEI)	Ar 132P
	Dp 137P
Tuscaloosa, AL (TCL)	Dp 314P
Birmingham, AL (BHM)	Ar 515P
	Dp 524P
Anniston, AL (ATN)	Dp 659P
Atlanta, GA (ATL)	Ar 1100P
	Dp 1129P
Gainesville, GA (GNS)	Dp 1224A
Toccoa, GA (TCA)	Dp 105A
Clemson, SC (CSN)	Dp 141A
Greenville, SC (GRV)	Ar 218A
	Dp 223A
Spartanburg, SC (SPB)	Dp 304A
Gastonia, NC (GAS)	Dp 404A
Charlotte, NC (CLT)	Ar 506A
	Dp 531A
Salisbury, NC (SAL)	Dp 617A
High Point, NC (HPT)	Dp 701A
Greensboro, NC (GRO)	Ar 722A
	Dp 729A
Danville, VA (DAN)	Dp 828A
Lynchburg, VA (LYH)	Ar 937A
	Dp 941A
Charlottesville, VA (CVS)	Dp 1059A
Culpeper, VA (CLP)	Dp 1151A
Manassas, VA (MSS)	Dp 1225P
Alexandria, VA (ALX)	Dp 119P
Washington, DC (WAS)	Ar 147P
	Dp 212P
BWI Airport, MD (BWI)	Dp 239P
Baltimore, MD (BAL)	Dp 256P
Wilmington, DE (WIL)	Dp 345P
Philadelphia, PA (PHL)	Dp 414P
Trenton, NJ (TRE)	Dp 444P
Metropark, NJ (MET)	Dp 510P
Newark, NJ (NWK)	Dp 523P
New York, NY (NYP)	Ar 548P

One feature of the trains, in either direction, is the ability to make shorter trips between select station cities. Southbound from NC and SC, Atlanta and Birmingham are reasonably convenient trips, as are northbound trips to Charlottesville and Washington, DC.

During 2022, the Top Ten Station City Pairs were as shown in the chart.

Top city pairs by ridership, 2022

1. Birmingham, AL - New Orleans, LA	354 mi
2. New York, NY - Washington, DC	225 mi
3. Atlanta, GA - New York, NY	859 mi
4. Atlanta, GA - Washington, DC	634 mi
5. Atlanta, GA - New Orleans, LA	518 mi
6. New York, NY - Philadelphia, PA	91 mi
7. Charlottesville, VA - Washington, DC	112 mi
8. Charlottesville, VA - New York, NY	337 mi
9. Atlanta, GA - Greensboro, NC	347 mi
10. Atlanta, GA - Charlotte, NC	258 mi

Is this giving you any train travel ideas?