



From the Cab -- September 2024

Martin Wheeler-President, David Robinson-NC Vice-President, and Don Yehle

Effective November 10, 2024

"THE FLORIDIAN" IS BACK, BUT NOT THE SAME ONE FROM 1979

September 21, 2024 -- Amtrak has finally put all the rumors to rest and announced that the portion of the "**Silver Star**" between Miami and Washington DC is to be combined with the "**Capitol Limited**" between Washington DC and Chicago starting November 10, 2024, and named the "**Floridian**." The trains currently known as "**Silver Star**" and "**Capitol Limited**" will therefore no longer exist (except in our memories.)

What still is (but soon won't be) a two-train journey from the Carolinas to Chicago will thus be possible on one train. The timetable is in an abbreviated form, listing all eight Carolinas' stations, but only major stations north and south of the Carolinas. Those stations are: In North Carolina (Rocky Mount, Raleigh, Cary, Southern Pines, Hamlet) and in South Carolina (Camden, Columbia, and Denmark). Additionally, the **Floridian** will make a stop in Savannah, very convenient for Low Country residents.

The distance traveled by the "**Silver Star**" between Miami to Washington DC is 1,164 miles (and to New York City was 1,389 miles.) The distance traveled by the "**Capitol Limited**" between Washington DC and Chicago is 780 miles, so the total one-way trip distance for the "Floridian" is 1,944 miles. Let's hope that the "**Floridian**" can make the trip reasonably close to being on-time all along the route, which the **Silver Star** has struggled with in the past.

Editors are seeking at least one CAPT member who will be on the inaugural November 10 trek and furnish **From the Cab** with photographs and a detailed trip report.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 23, 2024

Amtrak Launching the *Floridian*, with Daily Service Between Chicago and Miami. Two iconic routes combine to create a new travel experience.

WASHINGTON – Amtrak customers can now purchase tickets on the [*Floridian*](#), a new temporary route offering a direct round-trip between Chicago and Miami with intermediate stops in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., Jacksonville,

Orlando, and Tampa that will take customers to these cities in comfort and style. This train combines the routes of the *Capitol Limited* and *Silver Star* for a limited time and makes its inaugural trip on Sunday, Nov. 10.

“The *Floridian* offers customers an exceptional and sustainable journey to great destinations between Chicago and Miami, providing the amenities and delicious food our guests enjoy when traveling with us,” Amtrak Executive Vice President and Chief Commercial Officer [Eliot Hamlisch](#) said.

Customers traveling in [Coach Class](#) enjoy wide, reclining seats with ample legroom, no middle seat, and windows to enjoy the scenery. For extra comfort and additional privacy, customers can upgrade to a First Class private room. For an additional fee, a limited number of dining car meals are also available for Coach Class customers.

First Class private room options include a [Roomette](#)—featuring two reclining seats that transform into upper and lower beds by night and shower access—or a [Bedroom](#) offering twice the space of a Roomette and an in-room restroom and shower. The private rooms have large bi-level windows, a sink and a dedicated attendant who provides turndown service, assists with meals, helps with luggage and shares great stories of life on the rails.

All customers in private rooms receive complimentary [lounge access](#) at major stations and priority boarding.

The *Floridian* will offer [Traditional Dining](#) service in the Dining Car, a complimentary amenity for customers traveling in First Class private rooms. This popular service, experienced in a dining car with bi-level windows, will feature several enhancements, including chef-prepared meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner; table service with glassware, cutlery and linen tablecloths; vegetarian and vegan menu options; selections for children and a complimentary alcoholic drink with dinner. The menu offers several customer favorites, including:

- Amtrak Signature Railroad French Toast, Three Egg Omelet for breakfast;
- Artisan Grilled Cheese Sandwich, Natural Angus Burger, Vegan Chili Bowl for lunch;
- Amtrak Signature Flat Iron Steak, Atlantic Salmon, Rigatoni Bolognese for dinner.

[Café service](#), also featuring a newly updated menu, will be available onboard for all customers, offering a variety of meals, snacks and beverages for sale.

Amtrak is temporarily combining the [Capitol Limited](#) and [Silver Star](#) trains to create the *Floridian* due to the upcoming [East River Tunnel Rehabilitation Project](#) in New York. During this project, one tunnel tube will be closed at a time, minimizing service impacts, maximizing construction access and modernizing the tunnel infrastructure to serve customers for another 100 years.

"Our members have had a long-standing dream of restoring a one-seat ride from the Midwest to Florida, and we're thrilled that a new generation of American passengers will be able to experience this service for themselves," said [Jim Mathews](#), President & CEO of the Rail Passengers Association. "This move will free up badly needed equipment while taking pressure off Northeast Corridor infrastructure during the renovation of the ERT Project. Rail Passengers applauds Amtrak for this innovative solution to keeping passengers moving during critical state of good repair work. We believe riders will flock to this new service."

The *Floridian* (Trains 40 & 41) will operate on a similar schedule and make the current stops of the *Capitol Limited* (Trains 29 & 30) between Chicago and Washington, D.C., and the *Silver Star* (Trains 91 & 92) between Miami and Washington, D.C. The [Silver Meteor](#) (Trains 97 & 98) continues to operate daily between New York and Miami.

About Amtrak®

For 50 years, Amtrak has connected America and transformed transportation by modernizing train travel and building for the future. Amtrak will continue to play an important role in the national transportation network for the next 50 years and beyond by operating a safe, environmentally efficient and fiscally responsible business by providing travelers with an experience that sets a new standard. Book travel, check train status, access your eTicket and more through the [Amtrak app](#). Learn more at [Amtrak.com](#) and connect with us on [X](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#).

Courtesy of Amtrak.

CATS RED LINE PUBLIC MEETINGS -- FALL 2024



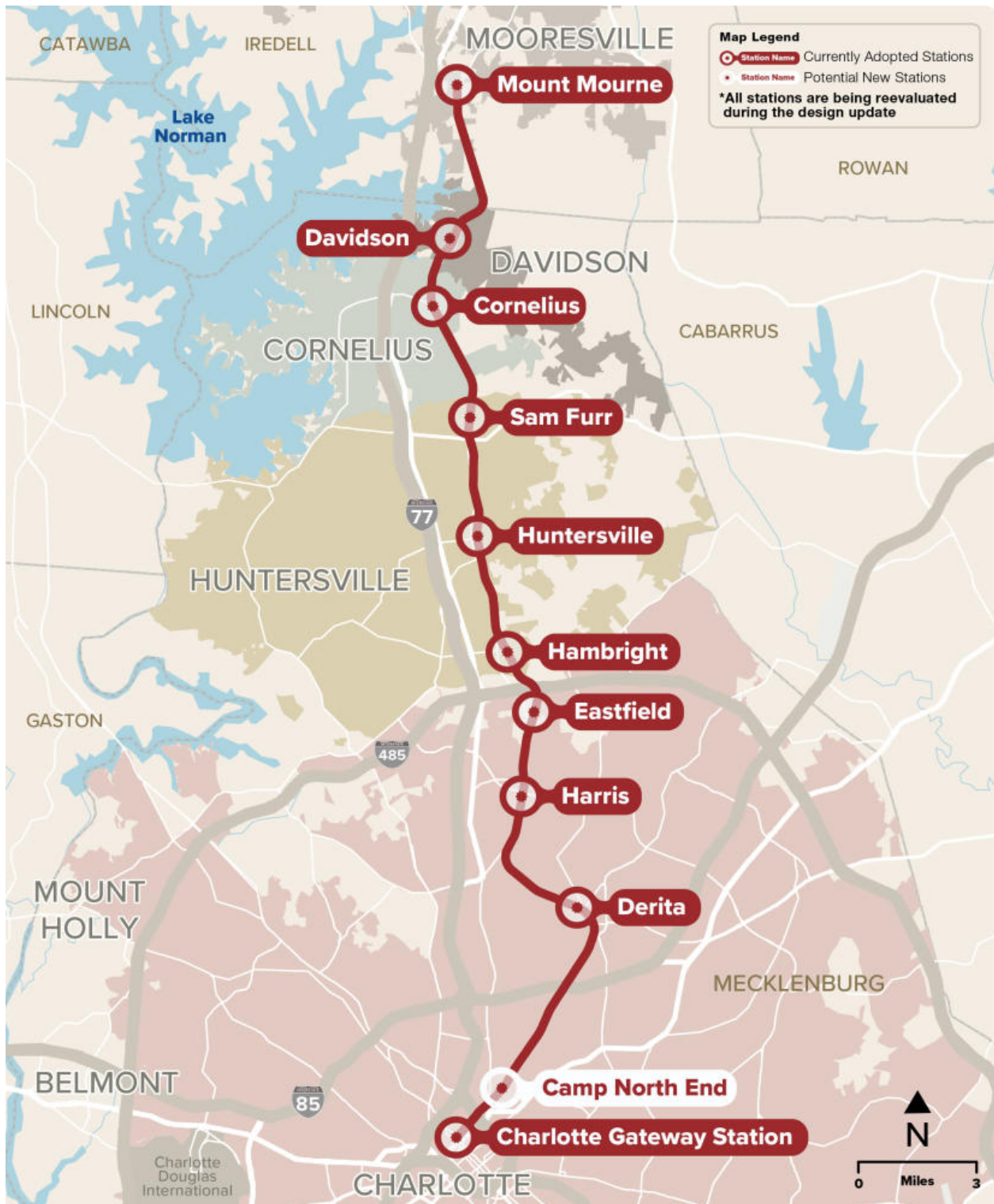
Greetings,

Thank you for your interest in the CATS Red Line Commuter Rail project. We are reaching out to inform you that CATS will be hosting another round of public meetings about the project, both virtual and in-person.

Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) invites you to attend public meetings to learn more about the Red Line Commuter Rail project and to help establish a shared vision for the North Corridor.

The project aims to enhance mobility in the region by establishing a rapid transit corridor connecting Uptown Charlotte to northern Mecklenburg County and southern Iredell County.

It will also create connections to the Charlotte Gateway Station with its additional transit options and the surrounding entertainment district on one end, while providing the opportunity for future expansion on the other end.



Residents are welcome to attend and contribute at all meetings. At the meeting, attendees will have the opportunity to review information about the project, speak with members of the project team, and provide comments. There will be a brief presentation at the beginning of the in-person open houses followed by the

opportunity to talk one-on-one with project staff. Doors open at 5:30 p.m. and the presentation starts at 6 p.m.

Virtual Public Meeting:

Tuesday, Oct. 8 starting at 5:30 p.m. Watch on [CATS YouTube](#)

In-Person Meetings:

Monday, Sept. 30 from 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. at Junior Achievement of Central Carolinas at Camp North End. Address: 1701 N. Graham St. #100, Charlotte, NC 28206

Thursday, Oct. 3 from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. at Cornelius Town Hall. Address: 21445 Catawba Ave., Cornelius, NC 28031

Thursday, Oct. 10 from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. at David B. Waymer Recreation Center. Address: 14008 Holbrooks Rd., Huntersville, NC 28078

Your input is important to the planning and success of this venture. To RSVP visit www.PublicInput.com/RedLine. This is not required but is appreciated as we plan for each public meeting.

Courtesy of CATS.

Mecklenburg County passes transit sales tax, measure heads to state legislature

Mecklenburg County leaders voted in favor of a proposal to increase the county's sales tax to fund future transit projects. The money would fund the future Red Line commuter rail line, which the city of Charlotte purchased from Norfolk Southern this month. The future train line is intended to [link Uptown Charlotte with the suburban commuters in northern Mecklenburg County, including Huntersville, Cornelius and Davidson.](#)

County commissioners voted 6-3 in favor of the measure on Tuesday. With Mecklenburg County's approval, the proposal heads to the North Carolina legislature. If approved by the legislature, the sales tax would then be voted on by the public in 2025.

[Full Story](#)



[READ IN APP](#) ↗



You're reading Transit Time, a weekly newsletter for Charlotte people who leave the house. Cars, buses, light rail, bikes, scooters ... if you use it to get around the city, we write about it. Transit Time is produced in partnership between [The Charlotte Ledger](#) and [WFAE](#).

Matthews Mayor John Higdon is arranging a 'transit summit' to discuss changes to plans; Commissioner Leigh Altman calls it a 'political stunt'

by
WFAE

Steve Harrison

With legislation that would enable a sales tax referendum moving forward, Matthews Mayor John Higdon is trying to tap the brakes and organize a meeting of elected officials for late October to discuss revamping Charlotte's multi-billion dollar transportation plan.

The proposed legislation now has the support of Mecklenburg County and every municipality in the county except Matthews — which has been told by Charlotte officials it won't get the Silver Line light rail. The city has promised bus rapid transit instead.

One of Higdon's goals: tweaking the proposed funding formula, which is now 40% of new sales tax money for roads, 40% for rail transit and 20% for buses.

He said he wants slightly more money for trains, and in exchange, the plan could send more money to roads. That might keep it palatable to Republican lawmakers in Raleigh while still allowing more miles of the Silver Line to be built.

What if the money were divided with 45% for roads, 45% for rail transit and 10% for buses?

Higdon said a split like that "makes sense." The town of Matthews says the "transit summit" is scheduled for Oct. 19 at the Valerie C. Woodard Center on Freedom Drive, where elected officials and managers will "discuss alternatives to the currently proposed transit/transportation tax funding model."

But he's facing opposition.

Mecklenburg commissioner Leigh Altman, who chairs the Metropolitan Transit Commission, said in a meeting Tuesday that Higdon's meeting is a "political stunt."

John Higdon

Leigh Altman

Matthews Mayor John Higdon (left) is advocating for changes to the transit plan. County commissioner Leigh Altman says the plan is in its early phases and many of the key details will be ironed out later.

She then said the meeting is unnecessary because no concrete decisions have been made.

If Raleigh allows Mecklenburg to place the sales tax increase on the ballot, Altman said at that point “we will engage in a thorough and searching revamp of the transit plan, and that will be the opportunity for the kind of input I think the mayor of Matthews is envisioning.”

In response, Higdon said: “Throughout the process, we haven’t had an open and honest discussion among elected officials concerning the transit plan. I fail to see how one having now could be considered a ‘political stunt.’”

A change in role

A year ago, Altman was playing a more adversarial role as a commissioner. After it was revealed a Lynx Blue Line train had derailed with no public acknowledgment, Altman asked pointed questions of the Charlotte Area Transit System. Her relentless questioning drew the ire of some city officials, including Charlotte Mayor Vi Lyles and City Council member Ed Driggs, who believed she was overstepping her authority and grandstanding.

Now, Altman is playing a different role.

She is trying to bring the transportation plan across the finish line, and her messaging is now in sync with Lyles and Driggs.

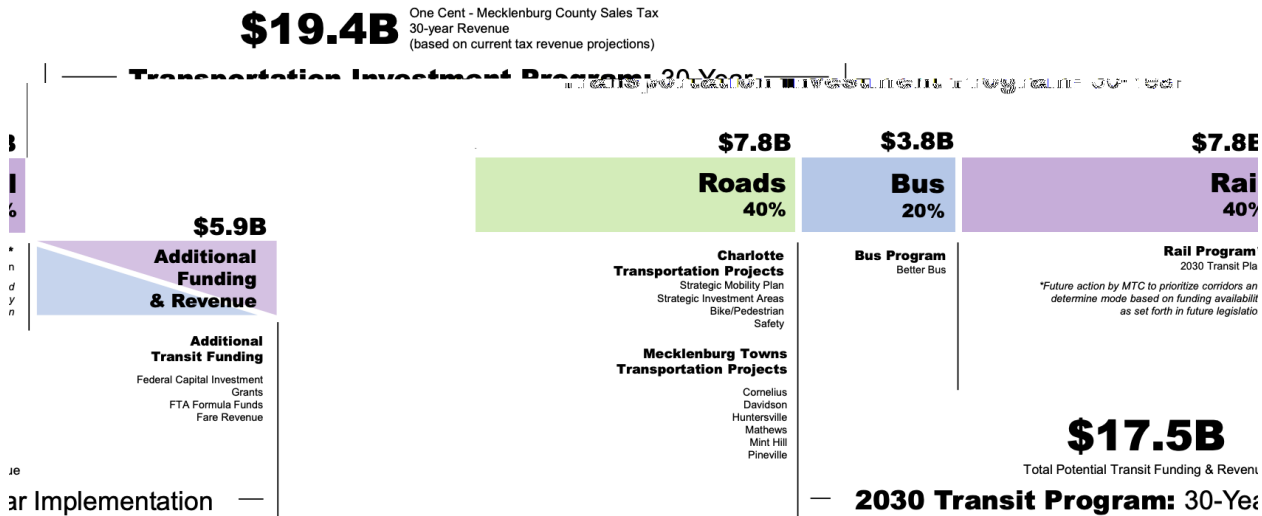
Their message: No final, real decisions have been made, and all the details can be worked out after getting Raleigh on board.

The problem is that the draft legislation spells out the funding split of 40-40-20. The city may bring that draft bill to state lawmakers in November — and it would be very hard to go back and change the split after it’s passed.

And a 40-40-20 split dictates what kind of plan Mecklenburg County will have.

Draft Legislation: Transportation Revenue

Opportunity for a generational investment in our community



Raising the sales tax in Mecklenburg by 1 percentage point, to 8.25%, would raise an estimated \$19.4 billion over 30 years, backers say. A plan agreed upon by the city, county and five of six Mecklenburg towns would direct the money toward rail (40%), roads (40%) and buses (20%). (Slide from city of Charlotte presentation)

A roads compromise

Sending 40% of new sales tax money to roads is not what Charlotte originally wanted. In fact, original versions of the plan called for between 80% and 90% of new money to be dedicated to trains.

But after being told by Republican House Speaker Tim Moore and Republican Senate Leader Phil Berger that Charlotte needed a “roads first” plan, the city relented.

Some are still unhappy about sending 40% to roads, but many are making peace with the split. The group Sustain Charlotte, for instance, has said the new plan “isn’t perfect.” But it’s supporting it out of the belief that a good plan is better than no plan.

Mecklenburg Commissioner Susan Rodriguez-McDowell doesn’t like dedicating so much money to roads.

She asked Mecklenburg Manager Dena Diorio on Tuesday whether the funding split could be changed.

Diorio responded that she had been told by business leaders that it could not.

But Rodriguez-McDowell needed to ask a more succinct question: Could the city and county ask for *more* money for rail transit (45%) while also setting aside *more* money for roads (45%)?

Why would Republican lawmakers object to that?

She later voted against the resolution supporting the proposed legislation, along with Laura Meier and Pat Cotham.

Said Cotham: “I certainly want to slow this down because there is a lot to talk about. And we have not been included. And I resent that.”

The resolution passed 6-3.

Matthews is OK with less for buses

Going from 40% to 45% funding for rail transit would not provide enough money to build the \$6 billion Silver Line from uptown to Matthews.

But it could help the city build a shorter Silver Line, from uptown to, say, Idlewild Road.

Matthews might get the Silver Line to its town in the next round of transit expansion, whenever that is.

But putting more money into roads and trains would mean there would be less money for buses.

Higdon said he’s OK with that. He doesn’t believe there’s enough money anyway to build what the city has called a “gold standard” bus rapid transit line to Matthews.

“Our buses will still be stuck in traffic,” he said.

Charlotte’s response: It’s too early to say. We will work out those details in the future — after getting approval from Raleigh.

[Steve Harrison](#) is a reporter with [WFAE](#), Charlotte’s NPR news source. Reach him at sharrison@wfae.com.

—

Related Transit Time articles:

- [“The plan for buses to Matthews faces doubts”](#) (Aug. 15)
- [“The basics of Charlotte’s new transit plan”](#) (Aug. 22)
- [“Charlotte scrambles to contain Silver Line blowback”](#) (Aug. 29)

- [“Transit plan could be a windfall for Mecklenburg’s towns”](#) (Sept. 5)
 - [“Answering your questions on the transit plan”](#) (Sept. 12)
-

Transit Time is a production of [The Charlotte Ledger](#) and [WFAE](#). You can adjust your newsletter preferences on the [‘My Account’ page](#).

HAMLET, NC, TRAIN DEPOT SITE OF SEPTEMBER BOARD MEETING -- Officers, directors, members, and interested guests of the Carolinas Association of Passenger Trains met Friday, September 20, at the historic Hamlet, NC, Train Depot for a bi-monthly board meeting.

A number of CAPT members attended the meeting virtually.

CAPT’S annual membership meeting is planned for mid-November in Charlotte. Details to follow. Officers for 2025 will be elected, including president (incumbent Martin L. Wheeler); vice president - North Carolina (incumbent David Robinson); vice president - South Carolina (incumbent Jim Frierson); treasurer (incumbent Ralph Messera), and secretary (incumbent interim secretary David Robinson).

Five board members will be up for re-election for two-year terms from 11/24 to 11/26. CAPT members interested in serving on the board or interested in holding an office are urged to contact President Wheeler at mwheeler3@att.net

TWO NORTH CAROLINIANS WILL SPEAK ABOUT FRA CORRIDOR GRANTS on November 15 at the Rail Users’ Network, Inc., 2024 Fall Virtual Conference. Ray Rapp, Co-Chair, Western North Carolina Rail Committee, is to address proposed passenger rail service to Asheville. Gene Merritt, Co-Chair of Eastern Carolina Rail, follows Mr. Rapp regarding proposed service to connect Willington and Raleigh.

Passenger rail advocates are seeking to boost economic activity the rail way! This event, which is taking place virtually on Zoom (tm), will highlight a representative sample of I.D Corridors awards granted this past year. Each speaker will have up to 25 minutes to talk about their state's projects, which includes five minutes for Q/A.

The conference is designed not only for rail advocates, but also for civic and business leaders, environmentalists, planners, real estate developers and members of the general public who are interested in knowing more about passenger rail and rail transit in America. **Please note this is a free event for RUN members, but registration is required. A registration fee for nonmembers is \$25, which includes RUN membership through 2025.**

Be sure to register by November 1 so that we can send along the info needed to attend RUN's Virtual Fall Conference. To register, please go to our web site to register at <https://www.railusers.net/fall-virtual-conference/>

Rail Users' Network (RUN) is a national train organization that represents rail passengers' interests on the national level. It networks passengers, advocacy organizations, and their advisory councils with concern for intercity and regional rail passengers. "RUN is working to help secure an interconnected system of rail services that passengers will use with pride," according to its website.

CAROLINAS FALL FESTIVALS....BY TRAIN!

(+ CAROLINA PANTHERS' HOME GAMES)

===== OCTOBER 2024 =====

4-6 (3 days, but Saturday 5 is fullest day)

49TH ANNUAL SELMA RAILROAD DAYS, SELMA NC

<https://selma-nc.com/special-events/48th-annual-selma-railroad-days/>

The northbound Carolinian 80 from Charlotte (and stations in between) arrives Selma

(Amtrak Code = SSM) at 10:48am, and the southbound Carolinian 79 to Charlotte (and stations in between) departs Selma at 4:38pm, giving you almost six hours of enjoyment.

4-13 (10 days)

CAROLINA CLASSIC FAIR, WINSTON-SALEM, NC

<https://carolinaclassicfair.com/>

Held at the Winston-Salem Fairgrounds, 414 Deacon Blvd, Winston-Salem, NC

To get to the Winston-Salem “Clark Campbell” Transportation Center, you can use either the High Point (HPT) or Greensboro (GRO) Amtrak stations. From GRO, use PART Route 2 – Greensboro Express, or from HPT, use PART Route 3 – High Point Express to transfer at the Coble Transportation Center to PART Route 1 – Winston-Salem Express. From the downtown transportation center, city bus routes 89 or 106 will get you to the fairgrounds with only a 7-minute walk.

5 (Saturday)

3RD ANNUAL BELL TOWER BREWFEST, SALISBURY NC

<https://www.facebook.com/events/bell-tower-green/bell-tower-brewfest-2024/360207466720078/>

12 noon – 7pm, Held at Bell Tower Green, attendees will enjoy a variety of local and regional breweries, live music, food trucks, and more. It is only an 11-minute walk from the Amtrak station (Amtrak Code = SAL). Conveniently timed trains are Piedmont 72 from Charlotte and Kannapolis which arrives at 11:06am, and Piedmont 73 from Raleigh, Cary, Durham, Burlington, Greensboro, and High Point arriving at 12:25pm. Return trains in the Charlotte direction are Piedmont 77 (5:41pm) and Carolinian 79 (8:06pm), and in the Raleigh direction Piedmont 78 (8:22pm.)

9-20 (12 days)

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE FAIR, COLUMBIA SC

<https://www.scstatefair.org/>

Owing to the times of day that Columbia’s only Amtrak train – the Silver Star – stops in Columbia, this is not a same day out-and-back train trip like can be done for the North Carolina State Fair. The northbound Silver Star 92 arrives Columbia (Amtrak Code = CLB) early in the morning at 4:15 am from Florida and Georgia by way of Savannah, GA and Denmark, SC. The southbound Silver Star 91 arrives in Columbia from five NC stations (including Raleigh) during the night at 1:49am. The State Fairground is only about 2 miles from the Amtrak Station, so if you’re determined to attend, it can be done if you know you’ll need to stay for a couple of days to accommodate the train’s schedule.

12 (Saturday)

CAR, TRUCK, AND BIKE SHOW, FLORENCE SC

<https://www.palmettocruisers.org/event/sports-fanatics-car-truck-and-bike-show-2/>

The northbound Palmetto 90 from Savannah, Yemassee, Charleston, and Kingstree arrives Florence (Amtrak Code = FLO) at 10:49am, and the southbound Palmetto 89 departs at 5:57pm, giving you over seven hours to see the show and other Florence sights.

13 (Sunday)

CAROLINA PANTHERS vs ATLANTA FALCONS, CHARLOTTE NC

Bank of America Stadium

17-27 (11 days)

NORTH CAROLINA STATE FAIR, RALEIGH NC

<https://www.ncbytrain.org>

Some trains between Charlotte and Raleigh will stop at the temporary NC Fairgrounds station (Amtrak Code = NSF); go to above website for more details closer to the date.

Northbound train: 80 Carolinian is the earliest train of the day (arrives about 10am)

Southbound train; 79 Carolinian is the latest in the day (departs about 5:30pm)

26 (Saturday)

Charleston Beerfest 2024

<https://www.chsbeerfest.org/>

Riverfront Park, 1061 Everglades Ave, North Charleston, SC 29405

3 miles from Amtrak station. The northbound Palmetto 90 from Savannah and Yemassee arrives Charleston (Amtrak Code = CHS) at 9:21am, and the southbound Palmetto 89 departs at 7:37pm, giving you over ten hours to enjoy the festival and see other Charleston sights.

26 (Saturday)

40TH ANNUAL BARBECUE FESTIVAL, LEXINGTON NC

<https://www.thebarbecuefestival.com>

Most trains between Raleigh and Charlotte (Piedmonts and Carolinians) will stop at the special one-day temporary Lexington station (Amtrak Code = LEX). The Barbecue Festival, set in historic Uptown Lexington, will be located on Main Street and adjoining side streets between 4th Street and 5th Avenue. Go to www.ncbytrain.org for more details.

CHARLOTTE'S REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION MORASS is discussed “pretty much all factual and correctly,” says CAPT President Martin Wheeler. Listen to:

[Charlotte Talks with Mike Collins](#)

Charlotte City Council OKs buying the tracks for the Red Line and takes the next steps in the Eastland Yards project -- **September 6, 2024, rebroadcast.**

IN GOOSE CREEK, SOUTH CAROLINA (near Charleston), a CSX train hit a mobile howitzer artillery piece, that was being carried on a “lowboy” truck, at a railroad crossing. Thousands have viewed the accident in the You Tube video below.

The mid-September incident was reported on national news. Nobody was injured, but once again, safety around rail tracks gained much needed attention.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-rcLVyJAHml>

COMING IN OCTOBER'S FROM THE CAB

CAROLINAS' AMTRAK ROUTES -- THE *PALMETTO* 89/90 (New York-Savannah) -

This is the second of several articles that will feature Amtrak routes that originate in or pass through North and South Carolina. Unlike three other Carolinas trains – the *Crescent* (featured in last month's **From the Cab**), the *Silver Star*, and the *Silver Meteor* – the *Palmetto* has no overnight portions, starting from Savannah northbound in the morning, and from New York southbound in the afternoon.

A DAY TRIP TO WINSTON-SALEM BY TRAIN AND BUS

-- Would you like to leave home in the morning, spend the day in Winston-Salem, and visit Old Salem, or the Reynolda House Museum of American Art, or the Wake Forest University campus, or just enjoy downtown, and return home late afternoon or in the evening? It can be done, as North Carolina Vice President David Robinson will explain in the October issue of your monthly newsletter.



OFFICIAL VIRGINIA STATE RAIL MAP -- A wonderfully prepared map which is just bursting with information that even North Carolina and South Carolina passenger and freight rail advocates will enjoy; a full-color paper copy can be obtained by emailing: Andrew Wright, Chief of External Affairs & Strategic Initiatives, Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation: andrew.wright@drpt.virginia.gov