

# News Release



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## NEW AMTRAK *AUTO TRAIN* STATION IS OPEN IN SANFORD Florida's busiest Amtrak station is now the nation's newest

SANFORD, Fla. – A new Amtrak station is open near Orlando for the more than 244,000 annual Amtrak *Auto Train* passengers. At about 10,000 square feet, the station in Sanford seats 600 passengers and is about four times larger than its predecessor. Thomas Carper, chairman of the Amtrak Board of Directors, today joined local, state and federal officials for the celebration.

The original depot, constructed in 1971 and renovated in 1995, was not large enough to accommodate growing demand for the *Auto Train*, which just reported a year-to-year ridership increase of nearly five percent – despite the economic recession.

Under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), Amtrak received \$10.5 million to reconstruct the Sanford station, as the original facility sustained extensive damage during the 2004 hurricane season and part of the waiting room had since been sheltered in a tent. Station platforms are receiving \$161,000 in Amtrak ARRA funds for accessibility improvements of a wheelchair lift and tactile edges under the railroad's Mobility First initiative.

“The *Auto Train* is an example of how good stations, modern equipment and competent operation make good service – we've made the investments, and passengers are reaping the benefits,” said Carper, the former mayor of Macomb, Ill.

Chairman Carper was joined at the ribbon-cutting ceremony by Cong. Corrine Brown (D-Fla.) and Cong. John Mica (R-Fla.), who represent the area and both serve on the U.S. House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Cong. Brown as the Chair and Cong. Mica as Ranking Member. State and local officials also attended the brief ceremony.

“This project would not have been possible without the hard work of our elected representatives, who helped us get the money to put people to work through the ARRA,” said Carper. “Amtrak thanks Congresswoman Brown for her tireless work, her vision, and her profound understanding of the railroad industry and Congressman Mica for his leadership, his

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belief in the relevance of rail, his interest in linking communities, and his support of this particular project.”

Anticipating increased traffic around the complex, Cong. Brown and Cong. Mica helped direct \$750,000 to the project for the design and construction of improved access roads and new signage in the station area.

In addition to the larger passenger lounge, the modern structure contains a ticket counter, café, restrooms, and a gift shop. The transition between the new station and the remainder of the depot is accomplished by a pavilion whose roof slopes upward toward the trackside façade in opposition to the roofline of the adjoining waiting room. The pavilion is centered upon a deep porte-cochere that shelters passengers while they enter the station and register their vehicles for loading and storage.

A portion of the former station abutting the new structure will be reconfigured into administrative offices and will open in early 2011. The original platform canopy remains in place to protect passengers from inclement weather as they board or exit the *Auto Train*.

The Amtrak *Auto Train* holds the distinction as the longest passenger train in the world, with two locomotives and 40-plus passenger rail cars and vehicle carriers operating daily to Lorton, Va., in the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

### **Amtrak *Auto Train* Background**

The 855-mile *Auto Train* route is the only Amtrak service to simultaneously transport passengers and their motor vehicles, including cars, SUVs, vans, trucks and motorcycles. Each year the *Auto Train* draws more than 100,000 vehicles off of a highly congested highway corridor, with resulting energy, environmental and safety benefits.

These vehicles are primarily diverted from Interstate highway 95, which is why the special toll-free 877-754-7495 phone number for *Auto Train* reservations spells 877-SKIP-I-95.

A look at the license plates on vehicles being driven to and from the *Auto Train* shows it draws users from the Eastern Seaboard of the United States and several Canadian provinces, all choosing to ride overnight in sleeping compartments or reclining coach seats for the scheduled 17 ½ hour trip rather than drive the distance.

The *Auto Train* originated in a three-year, \$3 million Congressional study in 1965, to determine if auto-ferry service could be as successful in the U.S. as it had been in Europe. Eugene K. Garfield, formerly of the U.S. Department of Transportation, used the results of this study as the

blueprint for the privately-owned Auto-Train Corporation that he founded in early 1969. It took some time for money to be raised and track usage agreements to be signed, but on July 15, 1971, the Auto-Train Corporation went public by offering 700,000 shares at \$10 each. Seven million dollars were raised to purchase equipment for this privately-owned common carrier—the first such established in 50 years.

The Auto-Train began running on December 6, 1971 with daily service in both directions. Lorton was chosen as the northern terminus because it is the most northerly spot that the auto rack cars can go as they are too tall to fit through tunnels further north. Additionally, the train was scheduled to leave in the late afternoon so that travelers leaving from Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York could arrive after a day's drive and take the overnight train to Florida.

The service began two months after the opening of the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World near Orlando and in time for the severe shortages and steep gasoline price increases of 1973-1974.

The Auto-Train service became so popular that on May 24, 1974, weekend service between Louisville, Ky. and Sanford was set up. In 1975, the Lorton–Sanford train ran in two sections, five minutes apart during peak periods. However, the combination of two major operational incidents and the lack of success on the Louisville–Sanford run marked the beginning of the end for the corporation. The Louisville–Sanford service ceased in September 1977 and in early 1978, another incident took its toll on the cash-strapped company. In late April 1981, the Auto-Train Company ended the service.

Twenty-two months later, Amtrak revived the operation with a tri-weekly service, now called the *Auto Train* (no hyphen). This service became popular enough to return to daily service before long, with former customers returning for the Virginia-to-Florida run.

Since then, Amtrak has upgraded the service with its famous bi-level Superliner rail cars and in 2000 replaced the northern terminus in Lorton with a 450-seat facility. In 2005, Amtrak retired the auto carriers from the original Auto-Train Corporation with the purchase of 80 higher capacity carriers.

### **About Amtrak**

As the nation's intercity passenger rail operator, Amtrak connects America in safer, greener and healthier ways. Last fiscal year (FY 2010), the railroad carried over 28.7 million passengers, making it the best year in the company's history. With 21,000 route miles in 46 states, the District of Columbia and three Canadian provinces, Amtrak operates more than 300 trains each day—at speeds up to 150 mph (241 kph)—to more than 500 destinations. Amtrak also is the partner of choice for state-supported corridor services in 15 states and for several commuter rail agencies. Visit [Amtrak.com](http://Amtrak.com) or call 800-USA-RAIL for schedules, fares and more information.