



## Study Suggests No Harrisburg to Pittsburgh Rail Improvements Any Time Soon

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By Kaye Burnet

PennDOT is seeking public input on the results of a four-year study that analyzed possible improvements to passenger train service between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg.

Amtrak operates only one daily round-trip on its Keystone West line between the two cities. The journey takes five and a half hours, compared to three and a half hours by car. PennDOT spokeswoman Erin

Waters-Trasatt says there is “a lot of interest out in the Pittsburgh area” in making improvements to the rail service,

but an in-depth analysis of possible enhancements was not possible until 2011 when PennDOT received a \$750,000 grant from the Federal Railroad Administration.

The study looked at three tiers of potential infrastructure improvements for the rail line, starting with improving track design at curves so trains could travel more quickly. The next level involved straightening curves and the third called for the construction of a completely new set of tracks.

Waters-Trasatt said the new tracks would reduce traffic problems between the passenger train and freight trains that share the existing lines. That option would be the most expensive, according to the study, with an estimated \$13.1 billion in construction costs.

The study found that time savings after improvements could be as little as five minutes or as much as a half hour depending on how much money PennDOT invests.

“It is a lot of money with some savings of time, but is that ultimately what’s going to be the most efficient for the region? We’ll see that in our future planning,” Waters-Trasatt said.

Waters-Trasatt said the increased cost of running additional daily trains makes it impossible right now.



PennDOT recently concluded a study on possible improvements to the Keystone West passenger rail service.  
Credit Flickr user Jarrett Stewart

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“Our transportation plan that was passed in 2013 gives us the funding to maintain our current services but if we were to expand the services, Amtrak would need to identify the equipment and we’d be looking at additional operating and capital costs,” Waters-Trasatt said.

There are no immediate plans to change the rail service, according to Waters-Trasatt.

“This will be more of a long-term planning type of initiative,” Waters-trasatt said. PennDOT is accepting questions, comments, and concerns about the Keystone Westrail service through March 31st.

*source: wesa.fm*