

PennDOT rail study examines upgrades, possible State College service

By LORI FALCE
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In some places, a train is a vital part of a daily commute. In others, it's a quaint relic of the past.

In recent years, Centre County has seen trains go from the daily presence of years ago to a rare sight in many areas. But could that change?

A PennDOT study is exploring railroad options that could mean a real shift in travel in the future.

It is called the Keystone Corridor, and it is all about travel between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia and all points in between.

Amtrak provides passenger service in Pennsylvania, but while some know that you can pick up a train in Harrisburg or Altoona, few know that same train stops in Tyrone, just 25 minutes or so outside the Centre Region.

Hop a train from Tyrone to Pittsburgh and you are paying as little as \$21 and spending just over three hours. Take a bus instead and you are paying as much as \$32 and spending almost five hours on the road. Go farther and save more. A trip to Chicago costs as much as \$63 less with 3.25 fewer hours on a train than a bus, according to ticketing information.

But Tyrone is still not State College, and that train stops just once a day, at 4:48 p.m. But what if the train came all the way to Centre County?

According to the executive summary of the feasibility and preliminary service development plan for the Keystone West High Speed Rail Study, all three alternatives for the project "would include either a rail connection from the Tyrone Amtrak station to State College, or bus connection(s) from one or more existing rail stations to State College."



Hannah, 6 and Elijah Corbin, 4, count the passenger cars as an Amtrak train passes through Petersburg on Thursday. ABBY DREY — CDT photo

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The Tyrone-State College spur is the only “new connection” listed on a summary of improvements and costs between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg. The eight other route segments listed would all look only at improving capacity, speed and existing facilities. Nonetheless, the State College portion would be on the lower half of costs at just \$71.8 million. The most expensive portion would be a \$573 million upgrade between Huntingdon and Lewistown.

Total projected cost of the Keystone West portion is projected at \$1.47 billion.

The study is available at www.planthekeystone.com/keystonewest.html. Public comment is being accepted on the project.

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