

Amtrak offers excursion deals for Pittsburgh trains through Harrisburg

By Melissa Daniels
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The sun sets on the train station in Greensburg on Dec. 10, 2015. Amtrak is dropping the fares it charges passengers traveling from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg, Philadelphia and other points east.
Sean Stripp | Trib Total Media

Pittsburgh is now part of a cross-state network for discounted Amtrak trips.

PennDOT announced this week that it added Pittsburgh to the “PA Trips By Train” excursion deals between Harrisburg, Lancaster, Philadelphia and New York. Trips booked through the network's website allow travelers to buy one ticket and get one 40 percent off and give them access to other offers, including half off tickets for children younger than 12.

The idea is to encourage train travel as an alternative to cars and congestion, said Erin Waters-Trasatt, a PennDOT spokeswoman.

“It can be a more enjoyable experience for people or their families,” she said. “They may become more frequent riders, as well.”

Pittsburgh is the first destination west of Harrisburg to be included in the network, which is booking trips through December 2016. Some packages include added-on discounts for outings in the destination cities, while others, like the trip to Pittsburgh, are billed as an “On Your Own” trip with discounted fare and a free Uber ride.

Although Amtrak maintains the infrastructure on Pennsylvania's passenger rails, PennDOT is responsible for paying operating costs. During the last fiscal year ending in October, more than 6.1 million Amtrak passengers boarded and alighted through Pennsylvania, up 1.6 percent from the year before. The majority of the traffic — about 4.1 million passengers — traveled through Philadelphia's 30th Street Station, the third-busiest Amtrak station in the country.

Pittsburgh had about 149,000 passengers.

Mark Spada, a member of Western Pennsylvanians for Passenger Rail, said the initiative is a good way to drive up train travel. His group pushes for additional trains between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg to offer more convenient travel times, as the Pennsylvania route currently has only one departure and one arrival on the daily schedule.

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“This will indeed be good for passengers and hopefully, good for Pittsburgh,” he said. “What would be even better is more trains for those passengers to ride.”

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