

# New Lynchburg Service

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One week ago yesterday, Amtrak launched new service between Lynchburg and Northeast Corridor points; an additional round trip passenger train made possible through financial support provided by the Commonwealth of Virginia. But for the vision and commitment of Governor Tim Kaine, this would not have happened. Now Lynchburg must use or lose this groundbreaking investment in transportation service by the taxpayers of Virginia. Although commonplace in many other states, this is the very first Amtrak train sponsored by the Commonwealth. As an experiment in multimodal transportation policy, the new train must not fail. Too much depends upon its success.

Lynchburg's selection as the starting point of the new train was probably made for the wrong reasons; however, Lynchburg now has the prize, and it must see that it is not lost. We predict the new train will be a success. With a regional population nearing 250,000 (the city and four abutting counties), Lynchburg has the potential ridership to insure success of the new venture. In fact, there is a remarkable comparable with the Maine *Downeaster* train service, inaugurated about a decade ago, between Portland and Boston. In that instance, rail passenger service had not existed for years, yet the new trains were an immediate hit, and now they make at least five round-trips daily between Portland, ME and Boston. Interestingly, if one were to draw a 60-mile circle around Lynchburg, the potential passenger "catchment" area would resemble a similar circle around Portland, with approximately the same population -- something in excess of a half-million people.

The City of Lynchburg has had a checkered rail history, especially in its dealing with the Commonwealth. Early leaders of Lynchburg were visionaries when it came to transportation. They wanted a railroad, and worked hard to get one. Instead, State politicians wanted Lynchburg to have the James River & Kanawha Canal. We know how that turned out. Despite commendably-successful local efforts to raise capital for the proposed Lynchburg & Tennessee Railroad, one of the conditions of General Assembly approval and financial support of the new line was to have it renamed the Virginia & Tennessee. This, of course, was the forerunner of the present-day Norfolk Southern rail route through Roanoke, and on to Bristol. Then, to make matters worse, the politicians later sold Lynchburg's railroad to former Confederate General William Mahone, who promptly lost it in bankruptcy. Philadelphia capitalists bought the line on the courthouse steps in Richmond, named it the Norfolk & Western, and moved everything to Roanoke!

We also salute Wick Moorman, CEO of Norfolk Southern, for accommodating the new Amtrak service. Moorman has brought fresh thinking to NS. No, don't expect him to give away the store, but do look for a more enlightened and progressive business philosophy to emerge. Rail-Highway "intermodal" trains are somewhat more compatible with passenger trains than coal trains. Looking down the track, there will be more of the

former than the latter. One day “truck trains” may run 75 m.p.h., and passenger trains 90.  
That would be good for Lynchburg, and for Virginia. #####