

# Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future

## Overview

The successful long distance train of the future will look very different from today's Amtrak long distance train. The train of the future will look more like the successful trains of the past which made money for their owners for very specific reasons.

In the future, the overall structure of the long distance passenger train operation will be different, too. No longer

**J. Bruce Richardson**  
September 2005  
Updated August 2008

**United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc.**  
1526 University Boulevard, West  
PMB 203  
Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006  
904-636-6760  
[www.unitedrail.org](http://www.unitedrail.org)  
[brucerichardson@juno.com](mailto:brucerichardson@juno.com)

will one company be responsible for ownership, operation, and marketing of

trains. Instead, the future model will be based on successful franchising operations of such major corporate powers as Marriott and Hilton. While there will be an umbrella company, such as Amtrak, to market the national network of trains and provide uniform reservations and ticketing,



## Seize the Moment – Now is the Time for Amtrak to Become a Full and Robust Partner in America's Domestic Transportation Network

Since its beginning on May 1, 1971, never have so many opportunities aligned "just right" for Amtrak to become a resounding financial and social success as part of America's domestic transportation network.

The shock of stratospheric gasoline and diesel prices have forced consumers and government planners to look at alternatives to highway building. Coupled with the lost glamour of jet airliner travel, Amtrak's time has come.

Will Amtrak meet the challenge?

Now is not the time for "business as usual" at Amtrak; now is not the time for Amtrak to revel in mediocrity. Now is the time for Amtrak to seize the moment and bring back to America one of the greatest resources it never lost, just forgot about: Passenger rail travel.

URPA President J. Bruce Richardson first presented this white paper in September 2005. It has been updated and is offered today as a blueprint for successful long distance passenger trains of the future, which are no longer reliant on annual government subsidies or constant experiments in bad corporate policies.

and set service standards, other companies, as owners, will provide the capital for equipment, and operations under the preset service standards. The concept has been a strong performer for decades in the hospitality and travel business; there is no reason for it not to work in the passenger rail business, too. It will help get the federal and state governments out of the business of financing what has historically been a successful private business (until the unique circumstances of post World War II America in the 1950s and 1960s). The drive and rewards of capitalism are always stronger than the drive and rewards of government control.

## Today's Passenger

Today's average long distance train passenger is not of the demographics that most people think. A passenger survey on the Sunset Limited in the late 1990s showed on one



departure there were four Ph.D.s, and a high number of



educated, and willing to spend money on accommodations and amenities. Coach passengers tended to skew younger, travel a shorter distance, and travel for purposes other than leisure travel.

The success of the American Orient Express/GrandLuxe Rail Journeys, Canada's Rocky Mountaineer Vacations, and VIA Rail Canada's trains such as the Canadian continue to prove the point Americans are willing to embrace long distance rail travel at what many consider to be a premium price when offered comfortable accommodations, good food, and interesting amenities.

American Express Gold Card holders. The average passengers were traveling for pleasure, well



Within given logistics, these passenger trains offer many of the same options as found on popular upscale cruise ships.

## Amtrak's Company Identity Crisis

Amtrak has often found itself in an identity crisis. On the one hand, there has been a corporate sentiment Amtrak is an agency of government, subsidized by government, and therefore

should serve the lowest common denominator of passenger. At times, on the other hand, Amtrak's managers have realized high revenue first class passengers, particularly on long distance trains, bring

in enough profits that help pay for other low revenue services the railroad operates. Amtrak has never been able to come to grips with these two profiles, and, as a result, has never really offered a consistent product that attracts repeat, high revenue passengers.

Amtrak has also, out of

---

### Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future

J. Bruce Richardson, September 2005, Updated August 2008  
 United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc. • 1526 University Boulevard, West, PMB 203  
 Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006 • Telephone 904-636-7739 • www.unitedrail.org  
 brucerichardson@juno.com • Copyright 2005, all rights reserved

necessity because of a lack of equipment, limited itself to very few types of equipment, focusing on uniformity and the presumption that “one size fits all” for both sleeping car and coach passengers. As a result of this, many profitable revenue opportunities have been lost through the lack of ability to adapt and change to meet passenger demand.

## **First Class Passengers are Where the Money Is, and Will Support Coach Passengers**

The long distance passenger train of the future will concentrate on first class passengers, which generate the most revenue. While these passengers also require the highest level of passenger service, the cost of those services will be built into the fare structure. Coach passengers will be divided into three categories: Premium long distance coach service, standard long distance coach service, and

short distance coach service. All classes and levels of service will be “family friendly.” Much attention will



also be paid to senior citizens traveling for leisure, a growing population

which has time, disposable income, and who seek a high level of comfort and service.

As in the pre-Amtrak past, first class passenger revenues will provide enough income to support less financially viable coach services.

## **Train Consists and Amenities**

A typical single level long distance passenger train will have a baggage car, three to 10 sleeping cars, two dining cars, one lounge car, one recreation car for children and adults which also has an onboard gift and sundries shop, and three to five coaches. Today, Amtrak often operates nine car trains. The long distance passenger train of the future will probably run 15 to 20 cars. The costs of operating a train do not double when the length of

the train doubles. The costs only increase incrementally because fixed costs such as management, stations, dispatching, and host railroad train miles costs do not change because of train length.

Bi-level Superliner trains will most likely have the same amount of cars in a consist, but each car will have a larger carrying capacity. Any train today which warrants bi-level Superliners has the potential to warrant 15 to 20 car consists with proper marketing.

## **Sleeping Cars**

Amongst the sleeping cars will be exclusive bedroom cars that today sell out first (including drawing rooms for three passengers), combination bedroom and



roomette cars, and combination bedroom, drawing room and lounge cars. The lounge areas will provide

revenue alcohol service, a continental breakfast for those passengers seeking a

---

### **Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future**

J. Bruce Richardson, September 2005, Updated August 2008  
United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc. • 1526 University Boulevard, West, PMB 203  
Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006 • Telephone 904-636-7739 • [www.unitedrail.org](http://www.unitedrail.org)  
[brucerichardson@juno.com](mailto:brucerichardson@juno.com) • Copyright 2005, all rights reserved

light morning meal, a cold lunch service, and an evening dessert service. At least one smaller lounge area will be available as a quiet reading area, without food or beverage services. All sleeping car passengers will have available 24 hour room service for meals and beverage service. The lounge areas will provide sleeping car passengers with onboard destinations away from their accommodations.



Amtrak currently offers four types of sleeping car accommodations: The bedroom, for two adults or two adults and one small child; the roomette, designed for two very small adults or one normal sized adult; the special access bedroom designed for a special needs passenger and a companion; and in bi-level Superliner equipment, there is a family bedroom, with beds for two adults and two children. On all current equipment, two bedrooms can be arranged en suite, allowing for two adults to each have a lower level bed, or four passengers

to travel in a common accommodation.

By improving on these accommodations choices, passenger satisfaction can improve and revenues can improve, too. Add to the mix the venerable drawing

rooms, with two lower beds and one upper berth, allowing three passengers to travel together, or two adult passengers to both have lower berths without having to purchase two full bedrooms.

Reconfigure roomettes to be sold for one adult or one adult and one child. There is no need for an economy sleeping car accommodation if a premium long distance coach service is to be offered in tandem with sleeping cars.

Today's sleeping cars are virtually amenity free, other than a morning newspaper and wake up orange juice or coffee offering. By offering, among other amenities, full 24 hour room service which includes alcohol service and an afternoon and evening snack or dessert service, and

audio and video entertainment in each accommodation, passengers will see an enhanced experience.

## Premium Coach

The top class of coach passenger, in premium long distance coach service, will travel in a coach unlike any one today. There will be fewer seats, broken into small areas to reduce the ambient noise level. The seats will be larger (three across seating instead of four across seating). A small lounge will be at one point in the car adjacent to a serve-yourself food service area offering continuous coffee, tea, and soft drinks. Other standard amenities such as newspapers and snacks will



be provided. Perhaps the two best amenities will be a shower service in the car, and all meals will be included in the price of the accommodations ticket. These cars will be placed in the train's consist directly adjacent to the sleeping cars,

---

### Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future

J. Bruce Richardson, September 2005, Updated August 2008  
 United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc. • 1526 University Boulevard, West, PMB 203  
 Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006 • Telephone 904-636-7739 • [www.unitedrail.org](http://www.unitedrail.org)  
[brucerichardson@juno.com](mailto:brucerichardson@juno.com) • Copyright 2005, all rights reserved

adding to the exclusive experience of the premium long distance coach service.

## Standard Long Distance Coach

Standard long distance coach service will be much as it is today, but with reconfigured cars which offer different grouping of seating to accommodate families traveling with children or groups of more than two.

Short distance coach service, designed to carry passengers distances of less than three hours travel, will be a standard coach as found today, but split into two sections to reduce noise levels.

## Food Service

Of the two dining cars, one will be a traditional diner with white linen service, open continuously from 6:30 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. This car will primarily serve the sleeping



car and premium coach passengers, but also be available to other coach passengers who are willing to pay upscale restaurant prices for a meal.

## Why will these concepts work?

**Because they are either in service now, or have been successful in the past.**

**Never in recent history have all of these concepts been used on a single train**

Amtrak currently operates all-bedroom sleeping cars on Auto Train, and has a sleeping car passengers-only lounge/limited diner on the Coast Starlight, the Pacific Parlour Car

The 24-hour dining car was successfully tried on Amtrak's Sunset Limited, and today's City of New Orleans has the Cross Country Cafe, which has continuous meal and beverage service from early morning to midnight

Auto Train provides full dining car meals for all passengers in coach and sleeping cars included in the cost of the rail tickets

The Coast Starlight currently provides an onboard arcade room, and

enhanced coach service Amtrak's Palmetto between New York and Savannah, Georgia offers two levels of coach service, but does not offer the same two levels on the parallel routes of the Silver Meteor and Silver Star

GrandLuxe provides its passengers fine dining for all meals in a white tablecloth dining car

VIA Rail Canada's Canadian often operates with 10 sleeping cars or more in the summer season, including lounge cars just for sleeping car passengers. Sleeping car accommodations range from Pullman-style open berths to single roomettes, double bedrooms, en suite bedrooms, and traditional drawing rooms for three passengers

VIA Rail Canada offers different levels of food service, from coffee shop to a full dining car

VIA Rail Canada coaches have attractive, noise-reduction partitions in the center of many cars, and many coaches has three-across seating instead of the standard four-across seating

## Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future

J. Bruce Richardson, September 2005, Updated August 2008  
United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc. • 1526 University Boulevard, West, PMB 203  
Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006 • Telephone 904-636-7739 • [www.unitedrail.org](http://www.unitedrail.org)  
[brucerichardson@juno.com](mailto:brucerichardson@juno.com) • Copyright 2005, all rights reserved

The second dining car will be open 24 hours a day, and offer a menu similar to what may be found in the popular Denny's restaurant chain, with placemats replacing tablecloths, and a part of the car devoted to both counter and takeout service.



Dining car service meals must be included in the cost of accommodations for all sleeping car and premium long distance coach service passengers. This guarantees income to the dining car service, and it is irrelevant whether or not the passengers consume the food they have prepaid for in their accommodations fare. By combining the accommodations and food service costs into one fare (as is done on cruise ships) along with a given set of amenities, a higher fare can reasonably be charged without protest from passengers. The more services are prepaid, the happier the passenger will be and the company will have higher income at

predetermined levels.

Amtrak today does not make a strong effort to have its passengers open their wallets while onboard long distance trains. Much of this is due to there being little

choice for passengers having destinations onboard the train other than the lounge car with its limited offerings and the diner, which is open less

than half of the number of hours in a day, and only for specified meal service. There are a number of ways, which are essentially self-financing with high revenue potential which will help cover other costs, to help passengers part with their discretionary travel dollars while enroute.

One offering is the implementation of the 24 hour dining car. The concept went through live test runs on the Sunset Limited in 1999 and 2000 to resounding success and high marks from both passengers and crew members. Because of the necessity of long distance train travel to pass through some major markets during overnight hours, a

train of passengers and crew is never completely asleep. An open dining car every hour of the day provides opportunities for passengers to have both nocturnal snacks and odd hour daytime snacks and meals at the discretion of the passenger, not the discretion of the long distance train operating company.



## Lounge, Recreation, and Beverage Service

The lounge car, aimed primarily at coach passengers, will offer snack and beverage services, but will not offer take out meals such as sandwiches which are offered today, because these services will be available in the 24 hour dining car.

The recreation car for children and adults will have three primary components. A gift and sundries shop, such as found on cruise ships, a small video arcade, and a

---

### Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future

J. Bruce Richardson, September 2005, Updated August 2008  
United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc. • 1526 University Boulevard, West, PMB 203  
Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006 • Telephone 904-636-7739 • [www.unitedrail.org](http://www.unitedrail.org)  
[brucerichardson@juno.com](mailto:brucerichardson@juno.com) • Copyright 2005, all rights reserved

glass enclosed children's play area which can be monitored by parents, will become a centerpiece of the long distance train.

A gift and sundries shop offers high markup goods and provides a diversion, as well as an offering of reading materials and necessities for passengers who have forgotten items or urgently need something unexpected in their plans.

A small video arcade offers long lasting opportunities for passengers to feed money into machines for their entertainment, with little capital cost to create the service.

A children's recreation area provides relief for passengers from children running up and down aisles to expend energy and relieve boredom, as well as a safe haven where parents can watch their children have fun.



Separate, exclusive lounges for sleeping car passengers offer opportunities for the high profit sale of alcoholic beverages as well as selected

profitable snacks not offered as part of the food service in the price of accommodations. A separate reading lounge area also provides an additional onboard destination, providing a quiet place for passengers who either wish to be alone or to have a positive reading environment.



Sleepers, coaches, diners and lounge cars can all have configurations appropriate for dome cars for routes that do not have height restrictions.

## From the Past to the Future

Why will this type of train succeed where today's long distance passenger train is not considered successful?

First, today's long distance trains currently are successful from a basis of actual costs of operating the trains. It is the enormous corporate overhead and cost of maintaining the Northeast Corridor which is incorrectly

shoveled into the costs of the long distance trains which cause them to wrongly appear to be money losers.

By restructuring the long distance trains (and the accompanying marketing programs) to provide a combination of accommodations and services the public seeks and expects, the long distance trains can become successful.

On a cruise ship, transportation is part of the vacation experience. On an airplane, transportation is often an agonizing beginning and end to a vacation that is best forgotten. On a long distance train, the train itself, such as the cruise ship, can be a memorable and desirable part of the vacation experience.

For passengers riding a long distance train, excessive speed is not a consideration. Well run trains, with a pleasant travel experience is the prime consideration. Passengers are willing to pay to see first



---

### Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future

J. Bruce Richardson, September 2005, Updated August 2008  
United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc. • 1526 University Boulevard, West, PMB 203  
Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006 • Telephone 904-636-7739 • [www.unitedrail.org](http://www.unitedrail.org)  
[brucerichardson@juno.com](mailto:brucerichardson@juno.com) • Copyright 2005, all rights reserved

hand scenery, passing Americana, and new sights.

The long distance passenger train of the future has higher operating costs than today's trains, but it also has higher revenue potential, which exceeds the costs of operation.

Longer trains with more opportunities for onboard sales to passengers based on food and beverage service, gifts and sundries, arcade entertainment, and a better selection of accommodations which are sold with many costs already built into the fare, offer predictable, high revenue opportunities when properly supported by marketing and promotional campaigns.

The successful long distance train of the future is passenger friendly, offers a wide choice of profitable accommodations and amenities, good food service, and is itself a part of a desirable vacation experience.



---

## Concepts of the Successful Long Distance Passenger Train of the Future

J. Bruce Richardson, September 2005, Updated August 2008  
United Rail Passenger Alliance, Inc. • 1526 University Boulevard, West, PMB 203  
Jacksonville, Florida 32217-2006 • Telephone 904-636-7739 • [www.unitedrail.org](http://www.unitedrail.org)  
[brucerichardson@juno.com](mailto:brucerichardson@juno.com) • Copyright 2005, all rights reserved