

January 2009

Pittsburgh bus to help fill commuter service gap

Travelers to and from Pennsylvania were given a new transportation option for a route that had been mainly dominated by automobiles. In late November, the Steel City Flyer, a business-class bus service between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg, was launched.



Costing \$69 each way, the new Steel City Flyer service between Pittsburgh and Harrisburg launched successfully in November.

Henry Posner III, chairman of **Railroad Development Corp.** (RDC), which focuses on international rail investments, along with **Robert Pietrandrea**, president, founded the service with **George DeBolt** of bus travel company DeBolt Unlimited.

The Steel City Flyer will serve two separate markets: trips to Harrisburg as an actual destination and connections to **Amtrak** at the Harrisburg Transportation Center.

Amtrak has started running faster and more frequent service to destinations east of Harrisburg, and the Flyer will supplement the less-serviced route to and from Pittsburgh.

A frequent traveler himself, Posner has had to coordinate his own intermodal transportation routes due to flight cancellations. US Airways cut the only direct flights between the two cities in September, leaving travelers with the options of several Greyhound buses and a once-daily Amtrak train. Most travelers opt to drive between the cities through the Pennsylvania Turnpike. "A light

bulb finally went off that this might be worth doing in the Pittsburgh market," he said.

The first routes will run on two 50-passenger Daimler Buses North America Setra S417 buses, leased until permanent buses are custom-ordered. The service offers amenities similar to those in airplanes, such as attendant service, reading lights, reclining seats, pillows and movies. Marketed toward businesspeople with limited time, it also offers Wi-Fi and laptop desks, enabling travelers to work while on the bus.

The bus service's inaugural run in November was deemed a success. After "the start-up phase," the trio plans to expand the business, with hopes to integrate their service into the Amtrak Website. "The objective is...when you go to the Website, you will see us as one of the Amtrak options out of Pittsburgh," said Posner. "There would be coordinated schedules and true pricing, and we would become part of the Amtrak network."

Currently, tickets cost \$69 each way in comparison to a \$70 round-trip ticket with Greyhound and a \$36 one-way train ticket with Amtrak.

However, Posner figures the Flyer isn't competing with either of these — it's going after a different market. He estimates the competition to be air travel and the personal automobile, but since direct flights have been canceled between the two cities, travelers find themselves with fewer choices. The Flyer hopes to offer travelers another alternative.

"Most travelers are not interested or able to put the pieces [of intermodal transport] together. We're creating value by putting the pieces together for them. More importantly, we're coming up with the biggest missing piece, which is the scheduled bus service built around the Amtrak schedule," said Posner. "It should be an attractive alternative." — THI DAO

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