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ALONG FOR THE RIDE • Ken Leiser > ride@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8215

All aboard Amtrak: More travelers riding

Amtrak is racking up ridership records — including the St. Louis-to-Chicago service.

The national passenger railroad announced last week that its ridership reached 31.2 million passengers during the budget year that ended Sept. 30. Nationally, it marked 3.5 percent growth over the previous 12-month period.

"Ridership will continue to grow because of key investments made by Amtrak and our federal and state partners to improve on-time performance, reliability, capacity and train speeds," said Amtrak President Joe Boardman.

In the Midwest, the overall Chicago-to-St. Louis ridership on the Lincoln Service and Texas Eagle trains increased 11 percent to 675,000 passengers — a new record. The Missouri River Runner service between St. Louis and Kansas City saw ridership growth of 5.3 percent to about 196,000 passengers.

The Missouri Department of Transportation said the passenger totals on the River Runner reflected 74 percent growth since 2007.

"The number of passengers on the Missouri River Runner continues to grow because the service is consistently reliable," Michelle Teel, MoDOT's multimodal director, said this month.

The River Runner makes two round trips per day, including eight stops between St. Louis and Kansas City. MoDOT officials say any growth in riders bolsters ticket revenue and reduces the state's share of the service cost.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

With campaign season entering the final stretch to the Nov. 6 election, the St. Louis County Department of Highways and Traffic has warned that it will remove campaign signs pitched in the public right of way.

Department spokesman Dave Wrone said that the county policy targeted all signs but that the political signs posed a particular problem before elections.

"They become more of a problem," he said, "when they're placed in the right of way because they distract motorists and also obscure official road signs. This is strictly a public safety issue."

BIKE TRAIL TO OPEN

The St. Clair County Transit District this week will christen a new 2.2-mile bike and walking trail linking the Swansea and Memorial Hospital MetroLink stations in the Metro East.

Transit district officials say the new segment — which runs along the MetroLink right of way — will feature a bridge over Fullerton Road and drinking fountains.

The district has scheduled a ribbon-cutting at the Swansea MetroLink station.

Q. Why aren't stop lights put in at the two intersections of Babler Park Road (BA) and Highway 109? It is a poorly designed intersection that must be navigated by the school buses and parents driving students to and from Rockwood Valley Middle School. Traffic on 109 never slows to allow cars to enter from Babler Park Road.
— Patti Maeda, Wildwood

A. The reason there are no stop lights there is that the traffic levels don't warrant them, said Kara Price of the Missouri Department of Transportation. This means that drivers on Babler Park Road will have to make do with the standard stop signs, which require them to yield to cars on Highway 109. Price adds: "If there is a concern for people speeding on Route 109, we work with local law enforcement to enforce ... the speed limits in this area."

Q. Is there going to be a flyover ramp exiting westbound Interstate 44 onto Highway 141? If so, when? How do they plan to divert traffic?
— Marianne

A. The details are still being worked out, but MoDOT is looking to rebuild the ramp linking southbound Highway 141 to eastbound Interstate 44, MoDOT spokeswoman Kara Price said. The work also will apply to the ramp from northbound Highway 141 to westbound I-44. But the plan is programmed for 2014 or later, she added.

INTERSTATE LANE CLOSINGS

New project | Change in project | Continuing project

MISSOURI

1. Highway 40 (Interstate 64) from Jefferson Avenue to the Poplar Street Bridge
All eastbound lanes will be closed through 6 a.m. Sunday. A second eastbound lane will reopen at 2 p.m. Monday.

2. Interstate 70 reversible lanes in St. Louis
Closed daily for repairs.

3. Interstate 70 between St. Louis Avenue and Broadway
One eastbound lane closed.

4. Interstate 70 between Earth City Expressway and Missouri River
One lane closed each way around the clock.

5. Interstate 55 from Jefferson County line to city of St. Louis
One lane closed each way daily between 9 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

ILLINOIS

6. Interstate 55-70 at Illinois Route 162 near Troy
Expect intermittent lane closures on I-55-70 during construction of a new bridge and interchange.

7. Interstate 64 between Illinois Routes 111 and 157 in St. Clair County
Expect traffic to be reduced to one lane each way from Friday evening to Sunday night.

8. Interstate 55/70 between Illinois Route 203 and the I-55/70/64 split in East St. Louis
Expect westbound traffic to be reduced to one lane each night this week from 7 p.m. to 5 a.m. the next day.

SOURCES: Missouri Department of Transportation, Illinois Department of Transportation | Post-Dispatch

Q. I had the pleasure of having a friend visit the other week, and he arrived by Megabus. Much to my surprise, I was not picking him up at the transportation building for Amtrak and Greyhound buses built recently near Scottrade but on some side street by Union Station. Do you know why that is? Didn't we build that station for that exact purpose?
— Adrian

A. Megabus is different from the Greyhound buses that regularly pull up to the transportation hub beneath Highway 40 (Interstate 64) in downtown St. Louis. The Megabus service is billed as "curb to curb," meaning the majority of its stops are at curbside.

The service does not pay overhead on a building, which is one of the ways it keeps its costs down to passengers, a spokeswoman told Ride last week.