

conversations

# Indiana can't afford to let Amtrak derail

Indiana is facing a decision that must be made very soon, one that will impact our economic health and business climate for many years.

At stake is the fate of passenger rail service between Indianapolis and Chicago. Gov. Mike Pence soon will be deciding if Indiana will invest in continued regional connectivity and increased opportunity, or revert to an increased dependence on auto travel.

Congress is requiring that Amtrak discontinue its short-distance routes unless the affected states pay for them. All of the states with short-distance routes have agreed to do so, except Indiana.

Every aspect of commerce in Indiana is increasingly connected outside of our borders, with markets, trade, job creation, and financial activity linked in ways that affect consumers and the businesses that employ them. Research is clear that transportation improvements can improve economic growth by leveraging access to out-of-state markets.

Connectivity also lends itself to regional collaboration. Disconnected decisions and transactions made by individuals, business leaders, investors and policymakers can create unintended consequences that may be felt for generations. When we plan strategically and collaboratively we enjoy the benefits, such as our thriving Downtown.

The Indiana Chamber of Commerce has created a plan, Vision 2025, with a goal toward making Indiana a "global leader in innovation and economic opportunity." The plan calls for our state to excel in four key



**Christina Hale**  
MY VIEW

areas: outstanding talent, attractive business climate, superior infrastructure and dynamic and creative culture.

While we are making progress in these areas; and as Indiana is now widely acknowledged for our attractive business climate, per capita income is on the decline. We must better leverage our connection to the Midwest metropolis to the north and double down on our investment in a Central Indiana as a career and lifestyle destination that inspires CEOs and top talent to relocate here. This direct Indianapolis-to-Chicago connection, and the promise it holds for our future, is an important piece of this strategic vision.

As a member of the Indiana General Assembly representing Indianapolis, I believe that maintaining and improving passenger rail service between Indianapolis and Chicago is essential to our economic future, for the following reasons:

Daily passenger rail service provides a needed transportation option for our residents and those in nearby communities. For commuting to Chicago, it is a cost-effective alternative to driving and avoids the trouble and insufferably high charges of parking. Today, passenger rail is used by business travelers, students and families. It provides mobil-



Gov. Mike Pence soon will have to decide if Indiana will fund Amtrak's Hoosier State service linking Chicago and Indianapolis. All of the states with short-distance routes have agreed to do so, except Indiana. AP

ity for those who are unable to or can't afford to drive. And a great many of the young minds paying to pursue advanced degrees in Indiana can't afford to drive yet need access between their place of study, our capital city, and the rich research and cultural resource that is Chicago.

The student population served by Amtrak's Hoosier State route includes IUPUI, Butler University, Marian University, the University of Indianapolis, Wabash College, Purdue University, Saint Joseph's College and Ivy Tech. Indiana also stands to benefit from the intellectual capital that we import from Chicago as well as improved access to international flights offered at O'Hare and Midway airports.

This benefits more than just our students; census data indicate that 42 percent of Indiana's population lives within 25 miles of a train station served by the Hoosier State with service to Chicago.

Passenger rail service creates jobs and provides economic opportunities. In 2012 Amtrak spent more than \$21 million in Indiana for goods and services, supporting hundreds of jobs at Indiana companies. The Beech Grove shop, one of Amtrak's key repair and maintenance facilities, employs more than 500 people. Besides its role in servicing Amtrak's rolling stock, the shop also successfully competes for contracts with other rail providers. A recent report indicates that 99 Indiana companies are engaged in manufacturing or servicing rail equipment, the second-highest number among Midwestern states. It seems clear that to imperil the Hoosier State line is to risk the future of the Beech Grove shop and Hoosier jobs.

Robust passenger rail service provides opportunities for new development near train stations. Normal, Ill., served by five daily trains along the

Chicago-to-St. Louis corridor, invested in a new multimodal transportation center that has helped generate \$165 million in new downtown development.

The cost for Indiana to maintain Amtrak Hoosier State service is about \$3 million a year; a modest additional investment would support two trains each way per day. Hoosiers are clearly interested in passenger rail — even with limited service, the Hoosier State has seen its ridership grow 77 percent over the last 10 years.

With our eyes on the future — a future with a changing population, global competition for business growth, jobs and talent, as well as persistently high gas prices — now is the time for Indiana to modernize our transportation system, beginning with this most prudent investment in improved passenger rail service.

★ Hale is a member of the Indiana House of Representatives representing District 87.

## Income level, not race, breeds criminality

There has been a lot of murder in Indianapolis, and with it, an alarming number of reports on how many crimes in the city are committed by African-Americans and Hispanics.

Our viewpoint must be changed.

If we stop looking at crime as a problem of race, and more as a problem of income and education levels, it will be fixed. We know that race plays no role in a criminal's mind. So why do we approach crime as a race problem?

Exempli gratia: To say "96 percent of all crimes in Indianapolis are committed by African-Americans and Hispanics" solves nothing. It gives people a reason to forget about the record murder rates, and perpetuates racism, racial inequality and racial profiling.

However, to say "96 percent of all crimes in Indianapolis are committed by those who fall into the lowest income

brackets" solves everything. Income we can work with. Minimum wage laws can be strengthened. Social safety nets can be reinforced. Schools can be made more rigorous. Tax codes can be adjusted. Upward mobility, which is nearly non-existent for those born in the lower echelons of our communities despite the impressive persistence of the American Dream myth, can be significantly buttressed.

We have all the solutions to crime. They are sitting there, waiting for us, tools on the table the current state administration refuses to utilize, because it runs counter to traditional Republican ideals. But the only way to solve our problems is to see them for what they truly are and respond accordingly. Politics should not stand in the way of the lives of Indiana's citizens.

Stephen Cornelius  
Bargersville

## Heart Association wins funding to help women in Indiana

Heart disease is the leading cause of death among women in Indiana. Approximately 9,145 Hoosier women died in 2010 from major cardiovascular diseases.

Despite this public health crisis, for years Indiana has been one of eight states that did not receive any type of funding for heart disease and stroke prevention and treatment programs from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

After many years of American Heart Association volunteers traveling to Washington to advocate for increased funding for Indiana to address heart disease and stroke among women, the Indiana State Department of Health has finally received CDC funding from its WISEWoman Program.

The Well-Integrated Screening for Evaluation (WISE) for Women Across the Nation program provides low-income, underinsured and

uninsured women with standard cardiovascular disease screening services, including blood pressure, cholesterol and diabetes.

In order to be eligible for the WISEWoman Program, women must be enrolled in the existing Indiana Breast and Cervical Cancer Program. Women found to be at risk during the WISEWoman screening process are referred to lifestyle programs that target poor nutrition and physical inactivity such as healthy cooking classes, smoking cessation programs and walking and exercise clubs.

With this funding, Indiana can continue to educate, screen and address the risk factors associated with heart disease and stroke to reduce the number of Hoosier women affected by it. The Indiana Department of Health will pilot the WISEWoman Program to screen 1,000 women in Indiana over a two-year period.

This is a tremendous accomplishment for Indiana. Let's leverage this first big

step to work hard to reverse this tragic and costly public health crisis affecting women in Indiana.

Andrew B. Buroker  
past national chairman  
Tom Harris  
communications director  
American Heart Association  
Midwest Affiliate  
Indianapolis

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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