The Cincinnati Bell Connector will begin service to the public at noon Sept. 9 when the inaugural streetcar returns from its loop as part of the dedication ceremony. Service will operate until 1 am Friday; 8 am-1 am Saturday; and 9 am-11 pm Sunday.

Rides will be free the entire weekend thanks to the generous support of Believe in Cincinnati, CAF USA, Cincinnati Bell, Fred Craig, The Carol Ann and Ralph V. Halle Jr./US Bank Foundation, and the Joseph Automotive Group.

Riding the Cincinnati Bell Connector will be the highlight of the Sept. 9-11 grand opening weekend. There will be many things to do from the riverfront north to Over-The-Rhine.

The streetcar has a new design, name and logo as part of the naming rights sponsorship with Cincinnati Bell. Cincinnati Bell will pay $340,000 per year for 10 years under the contract agreement. Revenue from the naming rights will be used to help fund the streetcar operations.

For more information about the Cincinnati Bell Connector, visit the streetcar Web site and connect with the streetcar on social media on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Riders can board streetcars and Metro buses using the new EZRide app.

The 3.6-mile Cincinnati Bell Connector will stimulate development and enhance livability by connecting downtown, the riverfront and Over-the-Rhine. The streetcar system is owned and funded by the City of Cincinnati, managed by the Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority, and operated by Transdev.

Join AAO's campaign to save Ohio transit and result in service cuts, fare increases or both. Counties that levy sales taxes for transit are Cuyahoga, Franklin, Lake, Mahoning, Montgomery, Portage, Stark & Summit. All Aboard Ohio seeks to make whole the affected transit agencies, double state funding for transit and give ODOT Transit jurisdiction over all intercity passenger transportation.

In the coming months, as the biennial budget for the Ohio Department of Transportation is formed, All Aboard Ohio will be working hard to ensure there is sufficient funding for trains and transit.

The challenge is great yet the need is great. All Aboard Ohio requests your generous support today to help us in our fight for adequate state funding for trains and transit. Please make a donation today (or set up a recurring donation) to the Ohio Association of Railroad Passengers dba All Aboard Ohio HERE.

At issue is that sales taxes were applied to purchases from Medicaid Managed Care Organizations. That ends in 2017. Eight transit systems will lose up to 10 percent of their funding and result in service cuts, fare increases or both.
Wick Moorman starts work as Amtrak's new CEO

On Sept. 1, Amtrak's new CEO Charles Wickliffe "Wick" Moorman IV took the reins of the national passenger railroad. He will be paid $1 yearly but can earn up to $500,000 per year in performance bonuses. Mr. Moorman said he joined Amtrak because of his love of railroading.

Anthony Coscia, Amtrak board chairman said, "We are very pleased that someone with Wick's experience and vision will lead Amtrak during this critical period as the company charts a course for future growth and improvement. Under [former] CEO Joe Boardman and with the support of the [Obama] Administration and Congress, Amtrak has achieved record levels of performance and investment. The Board believes Wick can build upon this success in the coming year by launching initiatives to further enhance safety and customer service, modernize our operations, and guide our implementation of the FAST Act."

On his first day on the job he wrote this letter to Amtrak employees:

My name is Wick Moorman and it is a pleasure and a privilege for me to be joining you as your new CEO.

I want to start my time at Amtrak by saying how honored I am to follow Joe Boardman. I’ve known Joe for many years, and his work at Amtrak and FRA has left us a strong and useful legacy to build on. During his eight years in leading the company, Amtrak delivered record ridership and revenue levels, while making critical investments in our assets and our people to prepare for future growth. That success is a testament to the strength of the entire Amtrak team, and to Joe’s commitment to leaving Amtrak stronger than when he arrived. That’s what I hope to accomplish myself as your new CEO, as we work together to make Amtrak a safer, more efficient, and modern company, that’s growing our business and delivering increasing value to our customers and the nation.

Let me tell you a little bit about myself, and why I have chosen to come to Amtrak. The first thing you should know about me is that I am a life-long railroader, and from childhood I have been fascinated by the technology and romance of our business. After high school, I studied civil engineering at Georgia Tech and was fortunate enough to obtain an engineering coop position with the Southern Railway, one of Norfolk Southern’s (NS) predecessors. Upon graduation, I joined Southern full-time as a management trainee in the Maintenance of Way department where I was first put to work on a track gang to ensure that I knew the railroad from the ground up! It was a great way to start, and for the first 12 years of my career I worked in Southern and then NS’s Maintenance of Way department as a track supervisor and then as a division engineer.

Those years served as a wonderful foundation for my over four-decade career with NS. After a brief stint in business school, NS gave me the opportunity to work in transportation, human resources, labor relations, IT and strategic planning. These experiences helped me to understand what it truly takes to run a great railroad and prepared me to become NS’s CEO in 2005. Over the next 10 years, our company went through a period of significant change. Together, we continued to improve our safety culture. We introduced new technology and found new ways to become more efficient.

And we completed several rail corridor projects that would help us grow our service capabilities and revenue levels for a long time to come.

I retired quite happily last year, with no intentions of working full-time again, but then was approached about the possibility of leading Amtrak. I started my career in the summer of 1970, not long before Amtrak started to operate. It is not an exaggeration to say I have followed Amtrak since Day One – and while my background is in freight, I have a deep appreciation for passenger rail and have ridden passenger trains all my life. Amtrak provides a great and necessary public service. It keeps people moving and businesses strong in the Northeast Corridor, and it provides connectivity and mobility to 46 of 48 contiguous states throughout our National Network. Furthermore, as our country’s transportation needs continue to change and grow, there is more and more public interest in passenger rail service everywhere. Together, we can continue to transform Amtrak. We can expand and grow our company in ways that will help us meet these new demands, and make Amtrak the leading rail passenger carrier worldwide.

As I have talked to people over the years about my life and career, I have always stressed how extraordinarily fortunate and blessed I have been! The opportunity to become CEO of Amtrak is another chapter in that story of great good fortune, and I am excited to be starting today.

My immediate priority in the next 60 days as I transition into the new role is to spend time with the leadership team and to get out and see as many of you as I can, in order to get a better understanding of what we do, and how we do it. I also encourage all of you to let me know your thoughts on what we can do together to improve the company.

I will be communicating more with you as we close out fiscal year 2016 and kick-off fiscal year 2017. For now, thanks for everything you’re doing to keep Amtrak rolling, and I look forward to seeing you somewhere out on the railroad.

Sincerely,

Wick Moorman
The White House recently released a list of funding “anomalies” for the upcoming Continuing Resolution (CR) to keep the government running after the fiscal year ends Sept. 30. Included in the list is a full year of funding for Amtrak in FY2017 at $1.39 billion.

The anomaly that is causing the Obama Administration to request a full-year’s support for Amtrak is due to the rail corporation’s transition to a new accounting structure that is required by the FAST Act, the federal five-year surface surface transportation program passed in 2015.

While this would put Amtrak on firmer footing, it would postpone by another year funding from the FAST Act’s passenger rail grant programs that we in Ohio and other states need for expanding passenger rail services.

All Aboard Ohio is joining with the National Association of Railroad Passengers to ask Congress for funding levels for the new programs that were already agreed to by House and Senate appropriations committees. This will be difficult, but is critical to securing future investment in our nation’s passenger rail system.

Ask Congress to support the White House’s “Amtrak anomaly” that includes the following grant programs:

- Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Grants - $50 million
- Federal State Partnership For State Of Good Repair - $25 million
- Restoration & Enhancement Grants - $15 million

Given the short deadline before Sept. 30th, the intense election year and the desire to avoid a government shutdown, these negotiations will move fast. Contact Congress today!

Amtrak to invest $2.45B in Northeast high-speed trains

Amtrak is contracting with Alstom to produce 28 next-generation high-speed trainsets that will replace the equipment used to provide Amtrak’s premium Acela Express service. The contract is part of $2.45 billion that will be invested on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) as part of a multi-faceted modernization program to renew and expand the Acela Express service.

“Amtrak is taking the necessary actions to keep our customers, the Northeast region and the American economy moving forward,” said Amtrak’s then-President & CEO Joe Boardman. “These trainsets and the modernization and improvement of infrastructure will provide our customers with the mobility and experience of the future.”

The new trainsets will have one-third more passenger seats while preserving the spacious, high-end comfort of current Acela Express service. Each trainset will have modern amenities that can be upgraded as customer preferences evolve such as improved WiFi access, personal outlets, USB ports and adjustable reading lights at every seat, enhanced food service and a smoother, more reliable ride.

This procurement comes as demand for Acela Express service is as popular as ever, with many trains selling out during peak travel periods. The new trainsets will allow for increased service including half-hourly Acela Express service between Washington D.C. and New York City during peak hours, and hourly service between New York City and Boston.

The new trainsets will operate along the Washington-New York-Boston Northeast Corridor initially at speeds up to 160 mph and will be capable of speeds of 186 mph and thus will be able to take advantage of future NEC infrastructure improvements.

Amtrak is funding the trainsets and infrastructure improvements through the Federal Railroad Administration’s Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing program and repaid through growth in NEC revenues.

In addition to the trainsets, Amtrak is investing in significant station improvements at Washington Union Station, Moynihan (Penn) Station New York, as well as track capacity and ride quality improvements to the NEC that will benefit both Acela Express riders and other Amtrak and commuter passengers. Amtrak also will modify fleet maintenance facilities to accommodate the new trains.

The trainsets will be manufactured at Alstom’s Hornell and Rochester, N.Y., facilities, creating 400 local jobs. Parts for the new trainsets will come from more than 350 suppliers in more than 30 states, generating an additional 1,000 jobs across the country.

A prototype trainset will be ready in 2019 with the first train entering service in 2021. The existing Acela trains will be retired and scrapped rather than be moved into the Northeast Regional or Keystone services.
Infrastructure improvements like those made this summer at Toledo's MLK Jr. Plaza are brewing at more Amtrak stations across Ohio. The Toledo-Lucas County Port Authority retrofitted the Amtrak station/office complex for $500,000 to add Greyhound's two dozen daily departures plus a 24-hour Subway sandwich shop. Next, thanks to port authority, state and federal support, will be $1.2 million in accessibility improvements to the Amtrak station platforms. Other multi-modal investments are coming to stations in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Elyria, Oxford and Sandusky. All Aboard Ohio is helping officials in Mentor, Ravenna and Youngstown to consider multi-modal stations in those cities as well but more state funds are needed (photo appears courtesy of Toledo Blade).

Virginia Governor Terry McAuliffe recently announced that his state's proposed Atlantic Gateway Project has been selected for a federal FASTLANE grant of $165 million.

Combined resources for the project, including the federal grant, private investment and public funding, total $1.4 billion to address the worst bottlenecks on the I-95 corridor in Northern Virginia, transforming travel along the entire East Coast.

The project will enhance passenger and freight rail along the corridor, improving reliability and capacity on the East Coast's rail network, and increase bus service.

“Our administration worked with federal, state, local and private sector parties to submit a package of transportation improvements that will have far-reaching benefits for everyone who travels the Commonwealth, whether by car, bus or train,” said Gov. McAuliffe. “Transportation leaders came to the table with one clear goal: improve travel in the most heavily traveled corridor in the Southeast by investing in road and rail improvements to move people and commerce more efficiently, not only through Virginia, but also from Florida to New York.”

The $165 million FASTLANE grant will leverage $565 million in private investments and $710 million in other transportation funds to:

- Build 14 miles of new rail track to improve reliability and capacity for freight, commuter, and passenger rail service.
- Extend 95 Express Lanes 17 miles between Washington-Richmond.
- Provide dedicated on-going reinvestment in expanded bus service in the corridor to ensure that all populations have access to jobs, education and health care services.
- Add new commuter parking, technology upgrades and truck parking along the corridor.
- Build pavement for autonomous vehicle enhancement; this will provide the infrastructure to test and deploy driverless vehicles.
- Acquire the S-line, an abandoned rail corridor that runs from North Carolina to the Richmond area, from CSX to provide public ownership of a corridor key for future Southeast High Speed Rail.

The award, made under USDOT’s FASTLANE competitive grant program, is part of a $4.6 billion, 5-year program created by the 2015 FAST Act and makes large-scale national investments to improve freight and highway mobility across the United States. Every grant under the program will be subject to a 60-day congressional review before final grant awards are announced.