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For Immediate Release

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All Aboard Ohio and other passenger rail advocates seeking daily **Amtrak Cardinal service** have gained a major ally in the Boy Scouts of America.

In **a Dec. 15, 2016 letter** to Amtrak President Wick Moorman, BSA Chief Scout Executive Michael B. Surbaugh urged Amtrak to increase its *Cardinal* service from thrice-weekly to daily. He urged it on at least a temporary basis during July 2017 when the BSA will begin holding its annual National Jamboree at Summit Bechtel Reserve at Mount Hope, WV. An even larger event will occur in 2019 when the World Scout Jamboree is held at that location, near Amtrak *Cardinal* stations along the New River Gorge National River, a 70,000-acre recreation area.

BSA had been using the Philmont Scout Ranch near Raton, NM and large groups of scouts took Amtrak's daily *Southwest Chief* from Los Angeles, Chicago and points in between, to get there. The same large passenger loads will descend upon the *Cardinal*, but will be limited by its three-days-per-week operation.

BSA became aware of proposals and issues surrounding expanding the *Cardinal* to a daily schedule when BSA representatives attended the Sept. 23, 2016 **Cardinal Conference**. That event was organized by All Aboard Ohio and Amtrak, and hosted by the Cincinnati USA Chamber of Commerce in Cincinnati, OH, a station stop on the *Cardinal* route.

"More than 100 people attended the *Cardinal* Conference," () said All Aboard Ohio Vice Chair Derek Bauman. "While stakeholders learned of the challenges involved in getting the *Cardinal* to run daily, we were also energized by the level of interest by people in the room to press forward and tackle those challenges. We are thankful to the BSA for its letter which shows that interest in this enhanced rail service remains strong."

"I hope Amtrak will consider the opportunity to take advantage of the Jamboree window to operate daily service on the *Cardinal* and to work with local tourism representatives to maximize this unique opportunity," Surbaugh wrote in his letter to Amtrak. "I know I speak for all when I say that enhanced service would be a welcome addition offering the possibility of increased ridership and visitors to the New River Gorge."

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The West Virginia Governor's Conference on Tourism unanimously passed a motion in favor of daily *Cardinal* service in the Fall of 2016. In a 2010 Performance Improvement Plan, Amtrak projected that ridership on the *Cardinal* route would increase by 96 percent if the train operated daily. While Amtrak estimated the operating subsidy could increase by several million dollars per year, the subsidy per passenger was projected to decrease.

Amtrak cannot legally expand service that increases its operating losses without identifying funding to offset it. Congress provided that funding program in 2015 as part of its Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act by authorizing Restoration & Enhancement Grants with a total program ceiling of \$20 million per year. However Congress has yet to appropriate any funding to that program. States and other political jurisdictions may also sponsor passenger rail services under Sec. 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008.

Amtrak estimates it has enough locomotives and passenger cars to run the *Cardinal* as often as five days per week. A long-delayed order of 130 Viewliner II passenger cars from CAF USA in Elmira, NY is finally producing the promised baggage cars, diners, sleepers and baggage dorm cars. Enough cars may be on hand by July to offer daily *Cardinal* service for the BSA, if funding can be found to offset the added operating cost.

The last time Amtrak offered daily service on its *Cardinal* route was Sept. 30, 1981, when the train was discontinued due to federal budget cuts. Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) got some funding restored, bringing the *Cardinal* back on Jan. 8, 1982 as a thrice-weekly service. The train was rescheduled from serving Cincinnati in daytime so it could serve West Virginia at more convenient times. The train is named the *Cardinal* because that is the state bird in every state through which the train passes.

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