

Local rail may reach Shreveport
Regional plan would add Longview, Marshall connection

By [Jamaal E. O'Neal](#)

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MARSHALL — Representatives as far as Arkansas and Louisiana gathered Thursday at downtown hotel The Marshall to announce plans to seek state and federal money that would provide Amtrak connections to Shreveport.

Amtrak has stops in Longview and Marshall. Travelers going to Shreveport are offered the option of a shuttle bus.

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Officials have been working to secure funding for higher-speed rail service from Dallas to Louisiana and Arkansas border connections for several years.

Passengers from this area who are traveling to destinations along the East Coast must first travel through Chicago. For instance, a traveler going to Jackson, Miss., which is about 280 miles from Longview, would have to travel first to Chicago and then to Jackson. That's a 1,625 mile trip - almost six times longer than the actual distance.

Service to Shreveport could change that.

Harrison County Judge Richard Anderson said Ark-La-Tex officials are lobbying to construct a rail line for passengers. There is a rail line between Marshall and Shreveport that is used for freight. Plans call for trains along the line to travel between 105 to 110 mph and would provide connections from Longview and Marshall to Shreveport, and allow passengers to connect in Shreveport to the Meridian Speedway in Meridian, Miss. The Meridian Speedway is a rail service that travels to the East Coast, with connections from New York to Miami.

Anderson said it could cost about \$250 million to upgrade the Texas Eagle rail line, on which Longview and Marshall are located, and take 10 to 15 years to complete if federal funding for the project is granted. The Texas Eagle goes from San Antonio to Austin to Fort Worth to Dallas to Longview to Texarkana to Little Rock.

"This is a regional effort," he said. "Approaching this from a regional basis, we can achieve passenger rail service in this area."

With gas prices approaching the \$4 mark, and increased traffic along Interstate 20, Anderson said it's time for local, state and federal officials to embrace the idea of passenger rail service.

"It's more economical," he said. "It's better for the environment and better travel for people in the region and country."

Shreveport City Council member Calvin B. Lester said the city stands behind the project, and looks forward to reaping



Jamaal O'Neal/News-Journal Photo
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Shreveport City Councilman Calvin B. Lester, left, Harrison County Judge Richard Anderson, center, and Arkansas state Rep. Steve Harrelson answer questions Thursday about the 30-mile stretch of passenger rail from Longview to Shreveport called the 'Louisiana Leg.' If federal funding is approved for the project, Amtrak passengers from Longview could potentially gain quicker access to the East Coast.

the economic benefits from the rail service.

"We've met with (Louisiana) Sens. (Mary) Landrieu and (David) Vitter about the project," he said. "This is going to be tremendous for Shreveport-Bossier."

Steve Harrelson, D-Texarkana, majority leader of the Arkansas House of Representatives, said solidifying passenger rail service in Arkansas is important to people in his district.

"We are very pleased to be part of this project, and want to make sure it happens," he said.

Richard Phelps, Amtrak national vice president of transportation, said the organization is seeing more support from Congress for passenger rail service throughout the country. .

Joy Smith, Amtrak assistant superintendent of Passenger Services, said with increased funding Amtrak could conduct studies that could provide better service to rural areas.

"In these towns that do not have an airport, rail can get them to the larger cities," she said. "It's a Renaissance in rail." Vote for this story!

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