



Recorder/Paul Franz

Gov. Deval Patrick arrives via train to announce the new passenger rail service at the Greenfield Energy Park on Wednesday.

# Gov. Patrick rolls into Greenfield on train to announce track buy

Service expected to begin Dec. 29

By **RICHIE DAVIS**  
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**GREENFIELD** — Gov. Deval Patrick rolled into Greenfield Wednesday aboard a passenger train to announce the state is spending \$17 million to advance the Amtrak Vermonter passenger service, scheduled to begin Dec. 29.

That money will buy 49 miles of track between the Connecticut and Vermont borders, once again carrying passenger trains through Greenfield, which was once a hub of freight and passenger train service.

“Every place a train has ever stopped, it’s been good for the local economy,” Patrick said.

“When we invest in ourselves and

in our future, we build a stronger and a more promising, more inclusive future,” he told a group of reporters and local and state officials at the Energy Park, built on the site of Greenfield’s last passenger rail station.

“It’s about how we shape and build our own future, rather than leaving it to chance.”

Using part of \$73 million in federal funding awarded to Massachusetts for acquisition and upgrading of

the line, the state is also in the process of building a rail platform onto the John W. Olver Regional Transit Center on Olive Street. It will serve the Vermonter service that would potentially shave 25 minutes off the detour through Palmer and Amherst that has been in place since 1989. Using \$30 million from a new state transportation bond bill, the state is also refurbishing MBTA rail cars and

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locomotives for passenger train service between Greenfield and Springfield that is expected to be up and running in the next couple of years, depending on a state appropriation for operating funds.

"For a long time now, there has been demand and interest in improving Amtrak service on the Vermonter line so that it included the burgeoning activities and the growing population of 'the Knowledge Corridor' along the Connecticut River," said the governor.

Use of the tracks will give flexibility to the state, which plans to contract with a rail operator to eventually begin north-south commuter service, to meet that demand.

"It's a big deal," said state Rep. Stephen Kulik, D-Worthington, who along with Reps. Paul Mark, D-Peru, and Peter Kocot, D-Northampton, were on hand at a press conference at the Energy Park. "It will give the state more control in how it's used, and it's set up nicely for the beginning of passenger rail service. I think a lot of people in Franklin County are looking forward to using it."

The agreement between the state and Pan Am Southern, a joint venture of Pan Am and Norfolk Southern, has largely been completed, according to Mass. Transportation Secretary Richard A. Davey.

The 49-mile stretch is now undergoing a major upgrade to allow for more efficient passenger service and better maintenance and enhancement of freight service, the administration said in a written press statement.

"Through this agreement, we are realizing the renewed value this infrastructure can have in creating economic opportunities throughout the region," added Patrick.

State crews have been upgrading rail crossings in Deerfield in recent days as part of this project.

The project will restore the original route of Amtrak's Vermonter traveling between St. Albans, Vt., and Washington, D.C., from its current route.

Starting in East Northfield, the restoration runs south to Springfield and includes the construction of three new station platforms in Greenfield, Northampton and Holyoke.

Begin in August 2012, the restoration consists of the replacement of about 95,000 rail ties, new continuously welded rail, new active warning signals and crossing gates at 23 public grade crossings, upgrades to six bridges and the first phase of a new



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**Greenfield's Mayor William Martin speaks at Energy Park on Wednesday with Rep. Paul Mark, D-Peru, Rep. Stephen Kulik, D-Worthington, and Gov. Deval Patrick.**

signal installation. The restoration is funded through a \$75 million grant awarded by the Federal Railroad Administration and approximately \$40 million dollars in state funds. The work is expected to be complete in 2016, after the start of passenger service. These changes will improve safety, increase operating speeds for existing freight train traffic and the Vermonter and enhance capacity on the rail line to accommodate future increased levels of train traffic.

"What's happening here, in terms of the expansion of the innovation economy, the energy in the collaborations around Greenfield and Northampton, Springfield and Holyoke, is enormously important," Patrick said.

## Local benefit

Greenfield Mayor William Martin, pointing to the town's historical role as a crossroads, said returning rail service here should have a "ripple effect" that will boost the local economy.

"It would have some impact on increased real estate values," he said. "In addition, it would increase pedestrian traffic, which would increase the need for different types of stores, and would add to the value and the need for a parking garage and to the need for downtown motel rooms. I think there are several benefits, all of them yet to be explored."

Having rail service to the town, said Greenfield Economic Development and

Marketing Director Robert Pyers, exposes the town to new groups of people to visit the community, and to invest in it.

"I think it's pretty significant," he said. "As with subway development, wherever there's a stop, there's a sphere of development that goes on around it."

The new Greenfield rail platform, which he said is due to be built in the next several months, should also make Greenfield eligible for state funding targeted at areas within walking distance of such transit centers.

Davey added, "The Knowledge Corridor is a rail asset that will play a key role in the region's transportation system, both by delivering improved customer service in the form of faster travel times, as well as by being built to a standard that can accommodate more freight. Purchasing the line will also allow us to preserve the line's viability for the long-term, and will position the commonwealth to use this line for increased passenger service that could provide commuters in the region a competitive alternative to driving on I-91."

Davey said the state has also begun study of extending passenger rail service westward along Route 2 from Fitchburg, and Kulik said that the state's development of commuter service along the Connecticut River even offers the potential for future rail service to the hilltowns.

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