

Welcome to another addition to our on-line Ocracoke Newsletter!

This month we bring you exciting news from the island. For all of you who worry about the increased traffic both on your trip to the Outer Banks, and in the village of Ocracoke, we hope you will be pleased to know that Amtrak seems to be offering regular rail service to Ocracoke Island!

According to a recent brochure for Amtrak's "View liner" trains you can enjoy this familiar view from your first class, luxury car window:



The slick Amtrak brochure boasts a "spectacular view outside!"

Look carefully, and you will see the distinctive white Ocracoke lighthouse and Miss Helena Willis's home outside the train window. On another page of the brochure there is a panoramic Silver Lake view, showing the Castle Bed & Breakfast, the Whittler's House and other buildings with boats, docks and marsh grass in the foreground.

Mostly, as you could imagine, islanders might be excited about the prospect of this new service. It would mean relaxed, carefree off-island trips. No more two and a half hour ferry rides to Swan Quarter and then a three and a half hour drive to the Raleigh/Durham airport! If the picture is any indication, the train should run close by Wayne Teeter's Fish and Clam House. For most of us it will be a short walk or ride to the station and then we can sit back and enjoy the view.

The prospect of new, rewarding employment has also intrigued many locals. Job opportunities would present themselves as ticket agents, conductors, even engineers (ferry service might be curtailed as the View liner gains in popularity, but captains & deckhands could very likely transfer many of their skills to the railroad). Of course, arriving rail travelers would soon demand local mass transit. This would provide additional jobs for local

residents as taxi and bus drivers.

Some residents on the “Point” side of the island, however, have expressed a few initial reservations. Concern with noise pollution seems to be the number one issue. Islanders who are accustomed to the peace and quiet of island life are wondering if the regular clickety-clack of locomotives on steel rails will have a negative impact on their way of life. Young people who sleep late are concerned, as are many older residents who retire early. And what if the train traffic continues throughout the night? Wayne Teeter has also expressed concern for the future of his fishing industry, asking if the constant rumble of railroad cars might shorten the shelf life of fish and crabs unloaded at his docks, just a few feet away.

“Creekers” have even begun to worry that their side of the village might be neglected as rail travel fuels development on the other side of the harbor.

Safety is another major concern and there has even been talk about the need for gated railroad crossings at several streets. What to do about protecting youngsters from speeding trains has not even been addressed yet. We imagine that high metal fences topped with razor wire would probably suffice, but at what cost to aesthetics?

Environmental issues are also on many people’s minds. How, we wonder, has Amtrak obtained permission from the National Park Service to construct a railroad through the Cape Hatteras National Seashore?

Will it be built on the ocean side? If so, we have a number of questions, not the least of which is how will Amtrak protect its investment from erosion? Of course, it may be that Amtrak’s involvement with the NPS will be just what it takes for the powers that be to find a workable solution. The other question, of course, is what provision will be made for access to the surf from the parking areas? Tunnels under the tracks are certainly not practical on a barrier island. So we imagine overhead pedestrian bridges. An added benefit would be spectacular views from sound to sea.

On the other hand, if the track is laid on the sound side, how will that impact wildlife and ecotourism? Birds, fish, and crabs would certainly be affected, not to mention otters, mink and snakes (but then many visitors and locals alike are not particularly fond of snakes anyway). We suspect that the Banker Ponies might have to be moved, but since we no longer have a mounted Boy Scout troop, we guess that would be a small price to pay for progress. Kayak access to the sound would surely be affected and local outdoors enterprises are keeping a wary eye on these developments even while acknowledging the

overall positive benefits of major rail service to the island.

Locals have also been abuzz about the high cost of construction of a railroad bridge from Ocracoke to the mainland (the bridge across Hatteras Inlet would be a minor expense in comparison). But we reassure ourselves that the cost would not come out of our pockets, and that government and corporate America are wise beyond our ability to comprehend. So we go to bed at night secure in the thought that the good life is coming to our once isolated ribbon of sand, thanks in large part to Amtrak.

When planning your next vacation, Amtrak invites you to “Enjoy the Utmost Comfort, Service and Style” while taking in the spectacular view of Silver Lake outside your window. Call 1-800-USA-RAIL or your travel agent for information and reservations.

Until next time, all of us at Village Craftsmen join Amtrak in wishing you the “New Standard of Luxury in First Class Travel.”

Hope to see you soon,

Philip and crew at Village Craftsmen

PS: Just in case you didn't notice the date of this newsletter, now is the time to do so. Please don't send plaintive e-mails bemoaning this unwelcome news. However, the photograph on Amtrak's "Viewliner" brochure really does show a view of Silver Lake from the car's window. As Dave Barry might say, "I am not making this up!" Next time you are in an Amtrak terminal look for the Viewliner brochure. It's a hoot. As you can imagine, islanders have had many a good laugh about it. We hope you did too.

After writing this newsletter I found the spot where the Amtrak photo was taken, supposedly through the train window. I snapped a picture for myself and turned to walk home. For some reason, until I turned around, I hadn't noticed Arlene sitting a few steps away, mending her husband's nets. She was perched right next to where the tracks would be, but seemed decidedly unconcerned!

