

Passenger Trains between St. Louis and Kansas City

Today's Amtrak trains use tracks owned by Union Pacific Railroad, the successor to the Missouri Pacific, whose trains included the *Missouri River Eagle* (to Omaha), *Colorado Eagle* (to Denver) and *Missourian* (overnight). Other railroads ran trains on different routes between Missouri's two largest cities, including the *General Pershing Zephyr* and *Night Hawk* (overnight) on what are now the BNSF and the Kansas City Southern railways. The *City of St. Louis*, *City of Kansas City* and *Midnight Limited* (overnight) ran on what is now the Norfolk Southern Railway. Other trains were operated over the Rock Island Railroad, which is now largely abandoned.

When Congress created Amtrak to take over passenger train service on May 1, 1971, one St. Louis-Kansas City round-trip was offered, first as the *Spirit of St. Louis* and then known as the *National Limited*, both of which operated between Kansas City and New York, via St. Louis. However, federal budget cuts led to the decision to end that service in October 1979.

Rather than let the loss of an interstate rail route result in the loss of an intrastate route in Missouri, the state and Amtrak began a partnership that month, with Missouri and Amtrak sharing the cost of extending the *Ann Rutledge* train that previously operated only between St. Louis and Chicago.

Ann Rutledge was a friend of the young Abraham Lincoln. Born in Kentucky and raised in New Salem, Ill., she never lived in Missouri and likely never visited. Although Lincoln law partner and biographer William Herndon believed that Lincoln and Ann Rutledge were sweethearts until she died in 1835, many present-day Lincoln scholars are dubious. Nonetheless, the Chicago & Alton Railroad named a train for her in 1937. Amtrak and the Illinois Department of Transportation stopped using the *Ann Rutledge* name for St. Louis-Chicago trains in 2006 and Missouri followed suit this year.

In October 1980, the Missouri/Amtrak partnership was doubled and a second round-trip was added, with the state choosing to call the westbound train the *Kansas City Mule* and the eastbound train the *St. Louis Mule*. These names were advanced by State Rep. Frances Barnes of Kirkwood, and a mule was photographed there when the first of these trains came through on October 26 of that year.



The *Mules* names were replaced in 1984, when trains were renamed *River Cities*, connecting to the *City of New Orleans* train at Centralia,

Ill. The route went on to Carbondale, Ill., in 1987. However, a budget cut in 1994 led to the trains again operating only within Missouri and the return to the *Mules* names, which have continued until now.



The elimination of the *Ann Rutledge* name, the constant need to explain the *Mules* names and a new commitment by the Missouri Legislature to support the passenger rail program of the Missouri Department of Transportation have presented a chance to rename all the St. Louis-Kansas City passenger trains under a single name or brand.

-- includes information from "Amtrak in the Heartland" by Craig Sanders, Indiana University Press, 2006, and newspaper archives at the St. Louis Public Library. Photos by Mike Schafer.