

4.5 RAIL TRANSPORTATION

The North Carolina Railroad between Charlotte and Raleigh is an important transportation link. The communities along the corridor and their economies are growing. Improvements to the railroad are important for mobility, freight movement, and safety. Much of the corridor remains on the alignment laid out in the mid-1800s, which envisioned maximum train speeds of 45 mph. As part of the federally designated Southeast High-Speed Rail Corridor, this segment of railroad will need significant improvements for capacity and speed.

PASSENGER RAIL

In North Carolina, passenger rail services can be grouped into two categories. The first category is the state-supported Piedmont and Carolinian services connecting the state’s most heavily populated corridor between Raleigh and Charlotte. The second category are other interstate passenger rail services, consisting of the Amtrak operated Crescent, Silver Star, Silver Meteor, and Palmetto.

North Carolina has seen healthy growth in demand for passenger rail. Notable trends include:

- Ridership was up 38% on the Carolinian and 280% on the Piedmont from 2004 to 2015, including addition Piedmont frequencies.
- The largest ridership increases have been at new or renovated stations (High Point Station’s renovations were completed in 2003).
- From 2003 to 2015, North Carolina rail ridership increased 93% outpacing growth in population and vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

HIGH POINT DEPOT

The High Point Depot was originally built in 1907 by the Southern Railway Company in the heart of downtown High Point. In the 1930s, a trench was dug so rail would travel below-grade as to no longer impede automobile traffic. A walkway across the tracks and a staircase to an island platform at track level were also constructed. Amtrak took over passenger operations from Southern Railway in 1979. Between 2002 and 2003, a full restoration and renovation project was done on the historic depot to make the building ADA compliant.

Today in 2020, ten AMTRAK trains operate daily through the historic passenger rail terminal in High Point. Table 4.5-1 shows the trains, scheduled departure time, route and direction of the trains. To support passenger rail service, the Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation provides connector service from the AMTRAK station to Winston-Salem for trains 73, 74, 76, and 79. Time schedules and fare information are available at NC By Train’s [website](#).

Train		Departure Time	Route	Direction
Name	Number			
Crescent	19	12:39 AM	New York to New Orleans	SB
Piedmont	73	8:19 AM	Raleigh to Charlotte	SB
Piedmont	75	11:49 AM	Raleigh to Charlotte	SB
Piedmont	77	4:49 PM	Raleigh to Charlotte	SB
Carolinian	79	7:32 PM	New York to New Orleans	SB
Crescent	20	3:16 AM	New Orleans to New York	NB
Carolinian	80	8:02 AM	Charlotte to New York	NB
Piedmont	74	11:44 AM	Charlotte to Raleigh	NB
Piedmont	76	4:29 PM	Charlotte to Raleigh	NB
Piedmont	78	8:14 PM	Charlotte to Raleigh	NB

Table 4.5-1 Passenger Trains Using the Historic High Point Depot

LEXINGTON STATION

The Lexington Station currently operates out of a temporary platform near a former Southern Railway freight house. This station is a seasonal Amtrak station, located along a pair of spur tracks and only operates in October during the Lexington Barbecue Festival.

Plans are underway to re-establish rail service in the Depot District and ultimately create a Transportation Center that would feature year-round Amtrak passenger rail services as well as Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation (PART) regional bus services. A project has been funded in the TIP for grade-separation at Fifth Avenue; however, the passenger station and rail realignment are yet to receive funding. A full overview of Lexington's Depot District Redevelopment can be found on their [City website](#).

HIGH SPEED RAIL

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has designated the route connecting Washington, DC, Richmond, Raleigh, Greensboro, High Point, and Charlotte is part of the Federally designated Southeast High Speed Rail (SEHSR) Corridor. The SEHSR Corridor is designated as one of the five national high-speed rail corridors. The state of North Carolina has committed to a program of rail infrastructure improvements called IMPACT (Improvement Measures to Provide Alternate Corridor Transportation). The goal of this program is to increase the maximum train speed between Raleigh and Charlotte to 70 mph. This will reduce the travel time between Raleigh and Charlotte from just less than four hours to three hours and 15 minutes.

RAIL FREIGHT

General freight issues including freight carried by rail are addressed in Section 4.6 Freight Movement. The recently completed Statewide freight plan notes that the volume of rail freight carried in and through the Triangle is expected to decrease slightly through the 2045 horizon year of this MTP, due in part to declines in coal shipments as the region's energy mix changes.