



Autumn 2021 | Intercity Bus E-News Update



Editor's Perspective

Intercity bus lines are on a roller coaster. Not an *actual* roller coaster, of course, but a harrowing ride with seemingly endless twists and turns. First, it's the outset of COVID-19. Then comes shortages of drivers, the Delta variant, worsening traffic congestion, and restricted inbound international leisure travel.

Overall, we should stay optimistic about 2022 and beyond. After talking to seasoned consultants, like Brian Antolin of FleetMotum, and Michael Weinman of PTSI Transportation, it is apparent the intercity bus industry has the advantage of catering heavily to **trips that involve personal business**. These trips range from visits to see family and friends, reaching leisure spots and college campuses, and supporting job hunting, health-care appointments, and more. The bounceback for intercity buses, when it finally kicks into a higher gear, will likely be stronger than for traditional commuters and for business travel services.



A Burlington Trailways bus from Iowa arrived in the Indianapolis Greyhound Station in July 2021

The Northeast Corridor (NEC) Intercity Travel study, published in 2015, found that 80% of intercity bus trips in the Northeast were for personal reasons and another 12% were combined personal and business trips. Only 8% are on purely business trips. Surveys by state governments in other parts of the country provide similar results.

That provides a reason for, well, “cautious optimism”—even as ridership stubbornly remains at around 40 - 50% of pre-pandemic levels in some regions. [A recent forecast](#) by **McKinsey & Company** for Amtrak, which serves a similar market segment to intercity buses throughout much of the country, anticipates that “non-business” traffic on the passenger railroad will strongly rebound. The scenario that it considers most likely predicts this traffic to be 78% of pre-pandemic levels in 2022 and then 90% and 105% in 2023 and 2024, respectively. The recovery for bus travel, of course, could indeed be slower, partially due to rising car ownership, and hinges on still-unknowable factors. Even so, there is hard evidence showing that **Americans of all stripes are eager to hit the road**

We eagerly await data about the hoped-for traffic recovery leading up to Thanksgiving. Below, you will find some of the latest intercity bus news and a special feature on a fact-finding trip I made to Texas this summer to learn more about surging traffic from the US-Mexico border region.

Joe Schwieterman
[DePaul University](#)

Flixbus Reaches Chicago & The Twin Cities; Rolls out Eco-Buses in Europe

Flixbus [launched service](#) to Indianapolis, Milwaukee, and our hometown Chicago—easily the largest U.S. city it did not serve—in July. It extended its Milwaukee route to **Minneapolis-St. Paul** last month. Service on both the Chicago –Twin Cities route, which generally runs Thursday through Monday, and Chicago – Columbus, OH route, which runs daily via Indianapolis and Dayton. Much of the carrier's earlier expansion focused on the East and West Coasts and the South and South Central regions. With this latest expansion, Flixbus now has a truly national presence.



A Flixbus coach unloads in Midtown Manhattan in June.

Also newsworthy is the move by [FlixBus, a parent of Flixbus, to roll out Crossway CNG](#) buses operating [on biogas](#). These eco-coaches support a twice-daily Amsterdam – Brussels service, making this reportedly the first international route to use buses powered by biogas. The carrier notes that biogas emits around **75% less CO2 on this route** than conventional diesel buses. Expect to see these types of buses here in the United States soon.

Long-Serving Bus Stations Hang in the Balance

The closing of long-serving intercity bus terminals across the country has attracted little attention from historians or preservationists. Many classic structures have been lost as real estate developers seek new sites for downtown development, sometimes due to indifference or negative perceptions about bus travel. Recently, there has been a flurry of news about Greyhound stations that were bustling not long ago. For instance, the still-used Greyhound station site in Louisville, KY is for sale and appears [poised for demolition](#) due to the land's real-estate potential. [In Baltimore](#), plans are afoot to preserve a classic Greyhound station at 601 N Howard Street that was designed by William Strudwick Arrasmith in the Streamline Moderne style. The station was replaced by a newer station south of downtown that opened in 2016. The best-known Arrasmith station still being used for bus travel is the Cleveland Greyhound Station, which remains a busy Greyhound hub.



*Former Greyhound station at 601 N. Howard St in Baltimore
(Photo from Wikipedia, click image for website)*

This summer, Greyhound Station at 11 E. Town Street in downtown Columbus was [sold for redevelopment](#) to the Central Ohio Transit Authority for \$9.4 million. The transit agency made clear that local buses (and presumably intercity coaches as well) will be part of the redeveloped site, although specifics are not yet known. Baron's Bus and Miller Transportation are among the other carriers using the station. This sale comes several months after security issues inside the aging station were addressed.

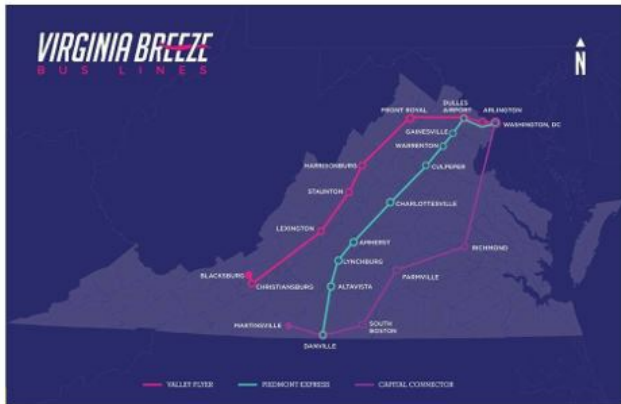
Virginia Awards American Rescue Plan Funds for Intercity Bus Service, *Virginia Breeze* set to expand

State governments across the country are providing much-needed American Rescue Plan Act funds for intercity bus services. This funding is provided to help sustain state-supported service to relatively low-density areas through the USDOT's 5311 (b) program. In early August, for

example, the Commonwealth of Virginia [announced](#) the availability of “one-time relief” for intercity bus providers through the CERTS programs. The state will not only support its popular *Virginia Breeze*, which operates three routes, linking Washington DC to Blacksburg, Danville, and Martinsville, VA. It will also support bus lines serving the state struggling during the pandemic. The allocation of funds for intercity bus service by Virginia as part of the Act can be found [here](#).



A photo of a brightly Virginia Breeze coach appearing on the carrier's website.



Virginia Breeze Bus Service map on map on megabus.com

We have expressed in our Outlook for the Intercity Bus Industry reports that the *Virginia Breeze's* Valley Flyer route to Blacksburg, launched in 2017, is among the highest-profile “success stories” among state-supported services to launch in recent years. The success of Breeze offerings has prompted the state to issue a request for proposals for a new route from the nation's capital to Bristol, VA.

Expanding the role of the Intercity Bus Atlas

An important effort is underway to expand participation on the USDOT's Intercity Bus Atlas (ICBA). The ICBA is an interactive online tool compiling, visually displaying, and archiving scheduled intercity bus service information. Many prominent carriers, including Burlington Trailways, Greyhound, Jefferson Lines and Indian Trails are already on the site; however; expanding participation in the ICBA will help local, state, and federal governments **identify gaps in intercity services** and potential opportunities for interlining and coordination. It will also expand awareness around the size and value of the intercity bus industry.



A Miller coach from Iowa, one of many carriers on the ICBA, has arrived in Indianapolis.



Intercity Bus Atlas screenshot from the USDOT website

If you work in the intercity bus industry or at a public agency involved with intercity bus service, we hope you will support the effort to expand participation in the ICBA. Joe Schwieterman will be hosting a **brief (30 minutes) Zoom session for state and local officials**, as well as industry professionals, on Friday, October 22, 2021, at 1 p.m. Central Time to share info on some of the conveniences we are offering carriers who participate. Joe will also share a few timely updates on the national intercity bus scene. To learn more, contact **Alex Levin** at BusAtlas@rsginc.com

Jefferson Lines named Minnesota's Best Transportation Service

Minneapolis-based Jefferson Lines has been named the North Star State's **Gold Best Transportation Company** by the Star Tribune's 2021 Minnesota's Best contest. President and CEO, [Steve Woelfel](#) noted: "Following a year of unprecedented challenges faced by our industry, we are incredibly heartened to have this response from our passengers and hometown state." Jefferson Lines is part of a national network of bus lines with interline agreements that connect places on its 14-state network to thousands of destinations across the country. **Congratulations Jefferson Lines team!**



A Jefferson Lines website photo appearing in conjunction with the announcement of its Gold Best Award.

Demand for Bus Travel from the U.S./Mexico Region Surges



A Tornado Bus coach prepares for departure at McAllen, TX bus station in summer 2021.

Check out our [seven-minute podcast](#) on a fact-finding trip made by [Intercity Bus E-News](#) editor Joe Schwieterman to Texas this summer. Schwieterman explored the role of intercity bus service for immigrants at the U.S./Mexico border. The summer season brought [nearly continuous reports](#) that buses were leaving the U.S./Mexico border area packed with immigrants. Reminiscent of 2019, Greyhound (partially through its Valley Transit affiliate) has added service on several routes, including the routes from Brownsville and McAllen, TX to both San Antonio and Houston routes. Nearly half the travelers were reportedly in family groups. Catholic Charities has been particularly active in buying tickets for travelers in McAllen.

The podcast describes the high-quality stations shared by bus lines, including **Greyhound, Tornado Bus, and El Expreso**, in Brownsville and McAllen, both of which have airport-style ticket counters and spacious high-ceiling waiting rooms. It also describes the rather spartan station in Harlingen, TX that is [slated to be replaced](#) with a much larger station.



Passengers buy tickets at Greyhound's ticket counter at McAllen Central Station. Many passengers in the waiting area (rear) will board a bus to Houston. The Tornado/El Expreso ticket counter is just out of view.

Listeners will learn why Greyhound requested federal aid to more effectively handle the traffic amid concerns over the spread of the coronavirus, which apparently fell on deaf ears. Despite this, Joe describes, Greyhound, Tornado Bus, and other lines "ramped up" their service to meet the urgent needs of those needing transportation. Recent reports suggest that traffic has diminished somewhat since a late-July peak,

but expect more fluctuation as the border situation evolves.



Coaches are at their assigned bay at Brownsville Intermodal Station. The Team Brownsville table supporting immigrant travelers is to the right, just out of view.

National Conference on Rural, Public, and Intercity Bus Transportation



We hope to see you, virtually, at the [24th National Conference on Rural Public and Intercity Bus Transportation](#), which will be held on October 25-27, 2021. The online conference offers a valuable experience for rural transit and human service transit providers, tribal transit managers, planners, state agency staff, intercity bus operators, consultants, researchers, and trainers. The 2021 conference will offer learning opportunities in planning, design, and research; policy, funding, and finance; special topics on rural mobility; rural and tribal transportation; and better mobility through technology. The Chaddick Institute has signed up as an event exhibitor.

Welcome others to join our Listserv. Check out our reports!

Invite your colleagues to join our Intercity Bus Listserv.

Send Abby an email at chaddick@depaul.edu to receive 8 – 10 emails per year. No spam. Free.

Also, check out our recent studies and briefs:

- [On the Brink: 2021 Outlook for the Intercity Bus Industry in the United States \(January 2021\)](#)
- [Spring Surprise: Air & Train Fares Surge while Bus Fares Fall for Trips <](#)

Masthead Caption:

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