



Heartland Flyer trailblazer signs presented at Norman event

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Officials from cities along Oklahoma's *Heartland Flyer* route were presented with ceremonial signs of newly installed trailblazer signs during festivities in Norman Friday, Sept. 19. The signs are designed to direct people to the state's five Amtrak *Heartland Flyer* train stations.

Nearly 50 signs were installed in all Oklahoma cities with *Heartland Flyer* stops – Oklahoma City, Norman, Purcell, Pauls Valley and Ardmore. Officials from each city were present at the event, which was hosted by the City of Norman and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation at the Norman depot.

“We are delighted to see the growth of the Amtrak service,” Oklahoma Department of Transportation Director Gary Ridley said. “We want to encourage people to use the train to travel through Oklahoma and on to Texas.”

The signs are one of many ways officials are working to continue improving the service, he said. The number of people riding the *Flyer* has increased substantially in recent months with a nearly 12 percent year-to-date increase in ridership.

The sign installation came after rail promoters in Norman suggested state and local officials consider the signs to help people easily locate the station. Ridley noted, as the program was discussed, it became clear signs should be installed in all the cities along the route.

Ridley said while these signs are intended to help riders locate train stations, he believes the signs will have other positive impacts for the communities by raising public awareness about the train.

Noting the *Heartland Flyer* has been named one of the best-rated trains in the nation as gauged by passenger surveys, Joy Smith, Ft. Worth-based Amtrak Assistant Superintendent, said the idea also fits into a long-term evolution of the service.

“If you don't think the country is falling in love with trains, just look at what is happening with the *Heartland Flyer*,” Smith said. “This is the only train in our system that has all recently refurbished stations on every stop.”

In all, 47 signs are being placed in the five communities.

In service since 1999, the *Heartland Flyer* travels daily between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth with stops in Norman, Purcell, Pauls Valley, Ardmore and Gainesville, Texas. In recent negotiations with the Oklahoma Transportation Secretary Phil Tomlinson and the Texas Department of Transportation, the two states agreed to equally share in the \$4 million annual operations costs. Since the train's inception, the *Flyer* has carried 580,000 passengers.

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INFORMATION RELEASE

OKLAHOMA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, MEDIA & PUBLIC RELATIONS DIVISION
200 N.E. 21ST ST. OKLAHOMA CITY, OK 73105-3204 PHONE 405-521-6000



Gathering for an official *Heartland Flyer* trailblazer sign presentation Friday morning at the Norman Amtrak station were, left to right, Sen. John Sparks; Rep. Wallace Collins; Paul Rachel, division engineer, Oklahoma Department of Transportation; Rep. Bill Nations; Gary Ridley, director, ODOT; Fire Chief J.D. Spohn, Ardmore; Evan Stair, Oklahoma director, Northern Flyer Alliance; David Holt, assistant to Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett; Mayor Betty Gerhard, Purcell; Bob Kemper, legislative director, NFA; James Frizzell, city manager, Pauls Valley; Mayor Cindy Rosenthal, Norman; Joe Kyle, manager, Rail Programs Division, ODOT; Sen. Jonathan Nichols; Rep. Scott Martin; Joy Smith, Amtrak; and John Dougherty, Rail Programs Division, ODOT.



Evan Stair, Oklahoma director for Northern Flyer Alliance, positions one of the new directional signs that will assist the public more easily locate Amtrak train stations along the *Heartland Flyer* route. Gathered around Stair are, from left, Tommy Hendon, Traffic Control, City of Norman; Rep. Bill Nations; Sen. John Sparks; and Norman Mayor Cindy Rosenthal. The group, along with dignitaries from the five cities along the Oklahoma route between Oklahoma City and Ardmore, were on hand Friday for the official sign presentation at the Norman Amtrak station.