

# St. Louis gets a Station

*by Ron Goldfeder*

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This was then ...



From 1894 to 1978, a vast majority of passenger trains originating and terminating at St. Louis used the epic Union Station that fronted Market

Street (intercity trains of the Illinois Traction System/Illinois Terminal Railroad had their own terminal until 1956). Mike Shafer



Gulf, Mobile & Ohio's Chicago-bound Abraham Lincoln pulls away from Union Station on a grimy December morning shortly before Christmas 1968. Already, changes in the Mill Creek Valley are under way as the elevated U.S. 40 expressway begins to take shape. In less than a minute the train will be passing the site of two future Amtrak stations. Mike Shafer

**That was after then ...**



With the Edison Shoe Company warehouse building serving as a backdrop, the Chicago–Kansas City Ann Rutledge gets fueled at the “temporary” St. Louis station (to left beyond fuel truck) in July 1984. Essentially a double-wide, wags referred to this depot as “St. Louis Union Trailer.” Meanwhile, work was already beginning to change the exterior of the shoe warehouse-turned-hotel. Scott Muskopf

**This is (finally!) now...**



An Amtrak exhibition train stands at the new-in-2008 Gateway Station complex. The Edison Shoe warehouse is now an upscale Sheraton Hotel, and one can change between trains, buses, and light-rail vehicles at the new station. Ron Goldfeder



The west entrance to the new station as seen from the roadway/parking area. Ron Goldfeder

The Mill Creek Valley in St. Louis has been a focal point for railroads since construction of the Pacific Railroad of Missouri began there on July 4, 1851. On Dec. 9, 1852, this pioneer line west of the Mississippi River, known after 1872 as the Missouri Pacific, operated its first train from a depot in the valley at 14th Street. In the 156 years since, the area has been the route to the west of the MP, Frisco, Wabash, and Rock Island. It has also been the route to passenger stations by all the other users of the Terminal Railroad. Today it is still the main route through the city for Union Pacific, BNSF, and Amtrak.

History came full circle on Nov. 21, 2008, when the new Gateway Transportation Center for Amtrak trains, Greyhound buses, MetroLink, and

MetroBus was dedicated at just about the same 14th Street location used by the Pacific Railroad in 1852. Between these dates there were three other St. Louis stations nearby in the same Mill Creek Valley.

All the railroad lines in town had their own depots into the 1870s. The Pacific Railroad moved nearer to downtown at 7th and Poplar streets, still in the valley. The North Missouri, later part of the Wabash, had one at 2nd and North Market streets, about a mile north and just two streets inland from the riverfront. The St. Louis & Iron Mountain, later also part of the MP, had its station at Main (First) and Plum streets, about seven blocks east of the Pacific Railroad station and also just two streets inland from the riverfront.

The opening of the double-tracked Eads Bridge over the Mississippi River and the mile-long tunnel from its west end to the Mill Creek Valley in 1874 changed the situation, and the first St. Louis Union Depot opened on June 13, 1875. It was located in the valley between 11th and 12th streets, with a building fronting on Poplar Street to the north and the tracks to its south where the MetroLink runs today. This was just past where the tracks curving from the tunnel mouth at 8th and Clark streets straightened out to run east and west. Almost as soon as Union Depot opened, its limitations became obvious as it had trouble handling the combined traffic of the three older stations. When the various terminal lines in and around the city were consolidated into the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis in 1889, one of its goals was the building of a better station.

That better depot was the magnificent new St. Louis Union Station that opened on Sept. 1, 1894. Its headhouse faced Market Street, north of the east-west mainline alignment, and tracks leading to it went north to south between 16th and 20th streets. Designed by Theodore Link, it included three main areas: the headhouse, the covered midway leading to the tracks, and the 11.5-acre trainshed. The headhouse originally housed a hotel, a restaurant, passenger waiting rooms, ticket offices, and the TRRA headquarters.

It featured Romanesque arches and a gold-leafed Grand Hall with a 65-foot barrel-vaulted ceiling and stained-glass windows. The clock tower stood (and still stands) 280 feet high. In 1903, the station was expanded and its tracks altered to handle expected visitors to the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. There was also a 1928–29 expansion that added ten tracks to the west of the trainshed, for a total of 42. But as railroad passenger travel declined so did the station.

When Amtrak began on May 1, 1971, it started out using Union Station, which then only had a few tracks remaining under its vast trainshed. The building itself was sold for redevelopment in 1974, and the TRRA moved its offices out in 1975. In 1976 the building was designated a National Historic Landmark.

But just a short time later the station building seems to have been nearly abandoned as the developers ran into problems, part of which was the very presence of Amtrak and its use of the station. The Grand Hall was home to pigeons and dirt while it waited to be reborn, and Amtrak carried on under the leaky trainshed. Amtrak's use continued until Oct. 31, 1978, when it moved its station to a pair of modular buildings at the south of the station tracks and to the east at 16th Street. This location back in the Mill Creek Valley ended the need for trains to back into the station. The station move was seen as temporary until better arrangements for a St. Louis station could be made. Little did they know the wait would be 30 years.

During those 30 years much changed. A highway had already been built through the Mill Creek Valley. U.S. 40/I-64 was on an elevated structure over its north edge and across the approach tracks to Union Station. Its location and support pillars would be a factor in the new station's plans. Union Station itself was successfully redeveloped as a festival marketplace, which opened on Aug. 30, 1985. The MetroLink light-rail system opened July 31, 1993, using the lower level of the Eads Bridge and its tunnel.



The MetroLink line had no station at Jefferson Avenue, a major north-south street between the Union Station and Grand Avenue stops. There were thoughts of putting an intermodal train/bus/light-rail station at that point for some time, but nothing came of it. Then plans were proposed for the 14th Street location. It would take several attempts to get a plan that would work and was affordable.



The end is at hand for passenger train service in and out of Union Station as Amtrak's New York–Kansas City National Limited awaits departure in July 1978. Amtrak's Spirit of St. Louis/National Limited was the first train in modern times that traveled through St. Louis, pausing at Union Station; all others either originated or terminated here. In 1979, the National Limited was discontinued and the Chicago–St. Louis Ann Rutledge extended to Kansas City to fill the void; shortly after, the St. Louis Mule and the Kansas City Mule were added to the mix. Ed Hawkins

The site itself was full of problems and other challenges. The elevated highway runs right over the center of the site, with support columns and an eastbound exit ramp to 14th Street and a westbound entry ramp as well. Fourteenth Street itself is on a viaduct over the railroad and MetroLink tracks. The MetroLink line curves from an east-west route to nearly north-south here, with the Civic Center station just north of the highway and west of 14th Street. A MetroBus transfer point was recently built between the Civic Center station and 14th, and a massive Sheraton City Center Hotel is on the east side of the street. This former warehouse is painted in striking trompe l'oeil (French for "fool the eye") murals by the artist Richard Haas that were commissioned in 1983. These cover nearly three acres of surface on the north, west, and south sides, using a striking motif from the St. Louis World's Fair. Leaving here the MetroLink line turns east-west again and the next stop is at Union Station. Across Clark Street from this curve is the Scottrade Center, the St. Louis Blues hockey arena.



An Illinois-bound MetroLink train leaving Civic Center station passes the new Amtrak concourse and platforms in November 2008. Ron Goldfeder

Loading space had to be provided for Greyhound buses as well as Amtrak's tracks and platforms, with ticket and checked baggage counters, and waiting areas for both groups, Greyhound package service, restrooms, food service, and some office and crew space. It had to be open around the clock and have security for patrons. And don't forget road access for buses and patrons, parking space, passenger drop-off/pick-up, and the connections to the MetroLink and MetroBus areas. The result is a complicated building that runs north-south with the bus platforms on the west side of the north end, opposite the MetroLink platforms, a main waiting room in the center under the highway, with ticket and baggage counters and a food service area. All this is on one level. The Amtrak platforms are found farther to the south at a lower level in the Mill Creek Valley, with a connecting concourse.

The structure has five main components. The concourse for the bus bays is in the northmost component, with access only for ticketed passengers. Moving south, the second building component is the one you enter through using the walkway from Metrolink station on the east side. This lobby area has the entry to the bus concourse, restrooms, offices, and Greyhound's package express, with a separate outside entrance on its west side.

To the south is a third component, a zigzag-shaped section that houses the main waiting room and ticketing area for both Amtrak and Greyhound. There are 70 seats in the center for passengers, and the Amtrak ticket and baggage counters are on the south wall, while Greyhound's are on the north wall. To the east and around a bend is a glass-windowed lobe that houses the food court. The windows to the north end provide a nice view of the MetroLink station

outside. As the building bends at its west end, there is the main entrance from the road and parking area.

The enclosed fourth component hugs the southeast side of the waiting room and behind the Amtrak counter and houses offices.

The corridor at the south end of the waiting room leads to the fifth part of the building, the train concourse going up over the tracks, and it has its own restrooms and a first-class lounge. Only ticketed passengers are allowed to proceed past the end of this corridor, as with the buses. There are escalators, elevators, and steps up to the concourse and then down to reach the two platforms. The first is a short platform to serve trains of about four cars, having a stub track on the north side and a through one on the south. A demonstration train of a locomotive, one Horizon café, and three Superliner cars was parked there during the station dedication. The second platform is much longer with through tracks on each side.

This view taken on the same day looks southward from Clark Street (Brett Hull Way). At left is the west side of the Sheraton. The expressway ramp skirting the building is the westbound entrance ramp to U.S. 40/I-64, which runs east-west through the center of the photo. The new Gateway intermodal station is at center right; MetroLink's Civic Center station is at the center of the photo. The MetroBus station is next to the Sheraton and partially under the entrance ramp. Ron Goldfeder

Past the long platform, at the far west end of the site, is a second, separate building that serves as the Amtrak crew base and maintenance office. This 4,000-square-foot structure—estimated to cost \$600,000—was built before the new main station building and initially was used as Amtrak's depot building

while construction of the main building was going on, starting on Dec. 20, 2004. It has an employee parking area and access road to its north side.



This westward view from the upper floors of the Sheraton graphically illustrates how the new Gateway Station snakes beneath the expressway —and also how convenient the new Sheraton is to intercity rail and bus as well as local bus and rail transit, with MetroLink providing direct access to St. Louis airport. Ron Goldfeder

There were four phases to the new station's construction: first, the \$2 million Civic Center MetroBus center, which entered service in September 2005; second, the \$14.2 million, 35,000-square-foot terminal and concourse, with work on it starting in March 2006; third, the \$3.5 million road access improvements that were done by the Missouri Department of Transportation; and, last, \$4.5 million for station platforms, track improvements, public

parking, and service roads for Amtrak's needs. The new crew base, design and pre-construction expenses brought the total cost to \$28 million. Included was the demolition of Amtrak's "temporary" double-wide modular station dating from 1974.



Looking west-northwest from the 14th Street overpass one can spot three railroad stations in this scene. The new Gateway Station is obvious; Amtrak's second station location is denoted by the blue-roofed building at far left. In the distance beyond the large billboard at right, you can just see the top of the Union Station clock tower. Ron Goldfeder

So, St. Louis finally has a much nicer station, although there are still some concerns. One is that there is no long-term parking, although Amtrak is working to provide some a block away at 16th Street, which you have to use to drive to the station; all the short-term parking is paid parking. There are no free parking spaces for someone to use while going in and making an inquiry. Another is the size of the seating area, which only has 70 seats. Bus passengers can use the additional seats in the area by the bus loading bays, where they have televisions to watch while they wait, but there is no corresponding area for Amtrak patrons (except first class). And it is easy to see

more than 70 people waiting for a train departure. We were told more seats were on order, and double that number would be far more reasonable. But that aside St. Louis can be happy with the results. It has a new station, owned and managed by the city, open and secure 24 hours a day, and with excellent intermodal connections. Temporary facilities are a thing of the past in the Mill Creek Valley.

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