

Wind-Powered Station Opens in Saco

The city of Saco, Maine has transformed what was once little more than a semi-enclosed bus stop into a modern energy-efficient transportation and business hub. Now, boasting 5,000 square feet of usable space, the new locally designed Saco Transportation Center reflects the city's commitment to green design and alternative energy.

"The new station in Saco represents cutting-edge green technology while also providing increased comfort and convenience for the more than 40,000 passengers who use the station annually," said President and CEO Joe Boardman.

With more than 178,000 passengers between October and February FY '09, ridership on the *Downeaster* was 4.4 percent better than the same period last year. Revenue during this period — \$2.4 million — was 7 percent better than last year.

The station gets nearly 80 percent of its electricity from a nearby 125-foot wind turbine. The transportation center areas are heated and cooled by a 1,200-foot-deep water well, which uses heat exchangers and pumps to connect the well to the station's interior and distribute heat through tubing in the floor tiles.

The office space areas of the station, occupied by the Biddeford-Saco Chamber of Commerce, which manages the building and provides staffing, are heated and cooled using high-efficiency fan-coil units.

South-facing windows and a central skylight provide additional heat and light. The central skylight and the eastern gable employ translucent panels to diffuse sunlight, block infrared and ultraviolet light, and limit heat gain and loss. The roofing material is a composite made of recycled soda bottles.

"The green aspect is something that has been quite prominent in Saco," said

Economic Development Director Peter Morelli who, along with former Mayor Mark Johnston, led the charge to bring Amtrak service to the city in 2001. "Among other things, we're located on a reclaimed Brownfields site in a historic mill district, we connect with local bus services, and we've even used a local company to construct the station's wooden furniture."

"This community has had a history of innovation, and the whole area is experiencing a renaissance," said Patricia Quinn, executive director, Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority, which contracts with Amtrak to run the *Downeaster* service. "This station is a testament to this culture of innovation."

Not only is the Saco station the first green station in the Amtrak system, Morelli added that the town

approached this endeavor as a very important economic project for downtown Saco. It was partially funded with \$500,000 from the sale of a city-owned parcel of land, and a tax increment deal between the city and local developers in which future tax gains will be used to finance the project.

The Saco station is currently featured on Amtrak's Great American Stations Web site as an example of station restoration and as a way to jump-start a local economy and improve service to *Downeaster* passengers. ■



Photo: Bill Lord

The new 5,000-square-foot Saco station, powered by a wind turbine and heated and cooled with a geothermal energy system, is equipped with a Quik-Trak self-service ticketing kiosk and houses the Biddeford-Saco Chamber of Commerce. In FY '08, the unstaffed station served more than 35,000 passengers.