



## **America's Auto Train**

America's Auto Train includes an 855-mile daily trip between Lorton, Virginia and Sanford, Florida.

The first auto train began in December 1971. This photo-program includes our Auto Train experiences over the past decade. Lorton, Virginia is approximately 25 miles from Washington, DC. Sanford, Florida is approximately 24 miles from Orlando, Florida.

There are many resources below that will provide the reader with more operational and historical information.

## **Founder of the Auto Train**

The origin of the auto train was by Eugene K. Garfield who formed the Auto-Train Corporation. (Eugene Garfield was born in 1936 and died in 2010.)

Garfield practiced law in Florida and Washington, DC. His interest in trains was lifelong. Eugene served in several state and federal government capacities including being an assistant to the White House Chief of Staff and to the Secretary of Transportation. During this period, he had the idea that families would like to take their own vehicles to save on the expense of a rental car. <themetrains.com> <en.wikipedia.org>

## **Government Study and a Sign of the Times**

"In the late 1960s, the US government sponsored a study to determine if there was a market for trains that could carry both passengers and their autos as had been done successfully in Europe.

The conclusion of the study was "yes". But the government also determined it could be run at a profit and so should be left to private industry. With almost all the major railroads turning their passenger equipment over to Amtrak in the early 1970s, there would be no takers from business interests." <themetrains.com>

## **Auto-Train Corporation**

With Garfield's leadership the Auto-Train Corporation began on December 6, 1971. It was a privately owned non-profit company. The Corporation bought and operated its own rolling stock and leased existing rail lines from major railroad companies between Virginia and Florida. The rail line systems used included Seaboard Coast Line and Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac. Passenger equipment purchased came from the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe, Western Pacific, and Union Pacific.

The Corporation began the Auto Train from Lorton, Virginia to Sanford, Florida along the Interstate 95 corridor. The train consisted of the engine, passenger cars, auto racks and a caboose in a distinctive red-white-blue color scheme. The initial service was very successful.

Garfield thought he might be able to expand this type of service. He began another auto train that ran between Louisville, Kentucky and Sanford, Florida. This venture became a costly venture and by early 1981, the corporation was forced into bankruptcy. <themetrains.com>

## **Amtrak Restarts the Auto-Train**

In 1983, Amtrak (National Railroad Passenger Corporation) reopened a daily service of the Auto Train between Lorton and Sanford. Southbound train No. 53; Northbound train 52 makes only one stop in Florence, South Carolina to take on fuel and unload trash.

## **Amtrak Auto Train**

Did you know that...

- Amtrak has provided this service since 1983.
- It is the longest passenger train in the world — over 3/4 of a mile in length with 18 passenger cars, 33 auto carriers and two engines.
- It transports over 130,000 automobiles and 250,000 passengers per year.
- It carries 650 passengers and 330 automobiles on a full train.

## **Station-Loading-Rules-Regulations**

The trip to and from both stations commences at 4 pm with an arrival the next day at approximately 9 am. The station opens at 11:30 am, passengers, vehicles (including motorcycles) must be registered by 2:30 pm. Each car is videoed, any scratches and/or dents are noted prior to loading the vehicles. Passenger boarding can begin after 2:30pm. During the trip, dinner and breakfast are served and there is a lounge car in the seating cars sections. Limited bags are allowed onboard the train. Due to health concerns, people must abide by any rules that may be in place at the time of using the station and the Auto Train itself during the 17-hour journey.

## **Personal comments about the Auto Train**

Our first ride on the Auto Train was sitting on bench seats made of Naugahyde leather vinyl upholstery that were able to recline. We did not use the traditional train individual seats. The bench seats proved to be very uncomfortable for us and other riders, in fact, many of the occupants of our compartment slept on the floor. Since that experience, we chose a sleeper car. There are several options for people to travel. Coach class, roomette compartments, and upgraded sleeper car accommodations. Those sleeper car accommodations can include bedrooms, family bedrooms, and accessible bedrooms. The food served is good and you can



choose various seating times to accommodate you, including having the meal delivered to your sleeper room. Amtrak employees and attendants are available and very accommodating.

Personally, we have found passenger trains and rail systems in Europe to be much smoother. Unfortunately, the Auto Train runs at the behest of freight trains and must yield to them during the run. During the run there were sections along the route that seemed as though we ran over a pothole or two. This is hard to believe given the weight and size of the cars, but it happens due to rails and their base. During our travels, we have only been late twice in arriving at the station. Fortunately, we have never experienced travel stoppages.

Once you arrive your vehicle is unloaded. Unless you really must be somewhere or want the privilege of earliest unloading of your vehicle, you can pay an extra fee to have your vehicle unloaded earlier than others.

Overall, the Auto Train is a very practical and safe way to and from Virginia/Florida. We will continue to use Amtrak's Auto Train.

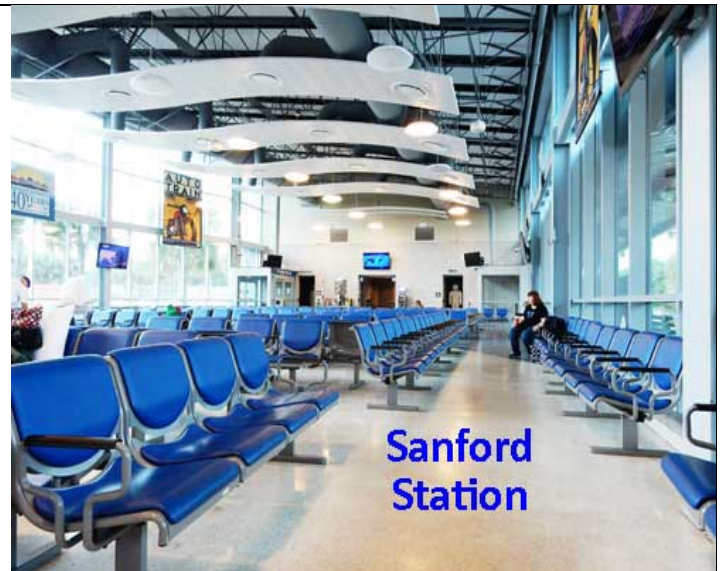
### Lorton Station



### Loading the vehicles









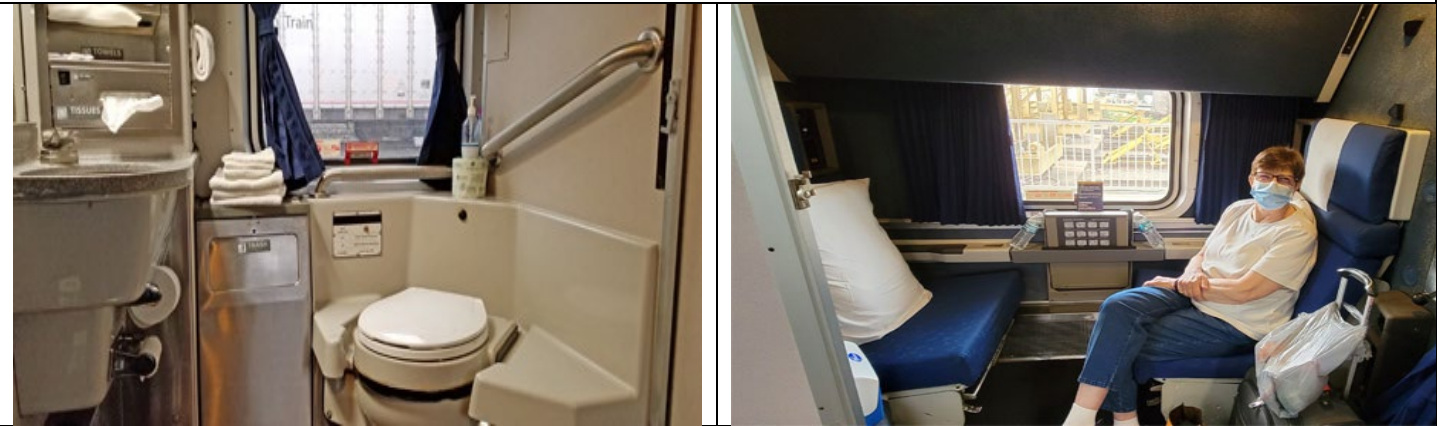


## Seating





## Roomette



## The Ride



Sources: <https://www.themetrains.com/auto-train-main.htm>, [c, https://billsrailroad.tripod.com/auto-train.html](https://billsrailroad.tripod.com/auto-train.html), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auto-Train\\_Corporation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auto-Train_Corporation), <https://www.metrojacksonville.com/article/2007-oct-amtraks-auto-train-a-daily-visitor>, <https://history.amtrak.com/archives/positioning-the-i-auto-train-i-at-sanford-fla.-2016>, <https://www.travelagentcentral.com/transportation/just-back-amtrak-s-autotrain-from-lorton-va-to-sanford-fl>, <https://history.amtrak.com/blogs/blog/digging-into-the-archives-a-look-at-the-auto-train>, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/travel/tips/amtrak-auto-train-florida-dc/>, <http://www.railway-technical.com/trains/train-maintenance/>, <https://www.aar.org/issue/freight-railroads-amtrak/>, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Railroad\\_tie](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Railroad_tie), and <https://asm.transitdocs.com/station/LOR>.

**acuri.net**

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