The state of North Carolina partners with Amtrak to provide rail service on two routes. Amtrak operates the *Piedmont* service (Charlotte-Raleigh) under contract with the state; all *Piedmont* equipment is newly refurbished and state-owned. North Carolina also contracts with Amtrak to operate the *Carolinian* (Charlotte-New York), which operates with Amtrak-owned equipment.

**CREATING A STATEWIDE PROGRAM**

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) promotes state-supported rail service through a variety of initiatives, including the North Carolina Train Host Association. Volunteer Train Hosts assist passengers onboard *Piedmont* trains and the *Carolinian* on the segment of its route within state boundaries. The association also includes Station Hosts who offer similar assistance at stations.

“Station Hosts were a natural progression from the Train Host program,” says Alison Boswell of the NCDOT. “If a Train Host could not, for whatever reason, physically work the trains, they remained active in the association by volunteering at the stations.”

Since 1990, members of the North Carolina Train Host Association have primarily volunteered at the state's three busiest stations - Raleigh, Charlotte and Greensboro - but can also be found at other locations. Station Hosts answer travelers’ questions, describe points of interest, provide local transportation options, promote rail safety and serve in general as “goodwill ambassadors” for the state and Amtrak. They also assist...
the Amtrak station agents or NCDOT Station Attendants as requested.

As of early 2016, there were 120 North Carolina Train Hosts. Approximately 15 of those volunteers worked primarily in stations. Paul Worley, CPM, Director of the NCDOT Rail Division, notes, “In 2015, association members contributed more than 13,100 hours aboard the trains and in the stations throughout North Carolina.”

HOST TRAINING
New Train Hosts fill out an application and must pass a background check. Once they are approved to move forward, they attend a day of training in Raleigh sponsored by the NCDOT. Classes are held two or three times a year depending on the number of applications received.

Hosts board actual Piedmont equipment to get a feel for the train; review schedules and rail safety standards; and discuss rules for working with Amtrak personnel and interacting with passengers.

Once they have completed an in-station training period, Station Hosts must commit to two hosting days every 30 days. They are generally in the station for about an hour before and after a train’s departure. In addition to the duties mentioned above, Station Hosts may assist passengers with disabilities as requested by NCDOT or Amtrak personnel, but they do not handle baggage.

Hosts are asked to present a neat and uniformed appearance while on duty. Men wear a suit or sport coat and slacks, shirt of any color, a vest and a necktie, while women may wear a skirt or pants, a blouse of any color, a vest and a scarf. Volunteers must also wear an ID badge so that they are easily identified by passengers and station staff. The NCDOT and Train Host Association provide the vests, neckties, scarves, hats, visors and ID badges.

STATION HOST COORDINATORS
There is a Station Host Coordinator each for the Raleigh, Charlotte and Greensboro stations. They arrange for Station Hosts to be present during especially busy days, whether to assist a large tour group coming through the station, facilitate holiday travel, or help during high ridership events such as a Carolina Panthers game.

Bill Cole, the Station Host Coordinator based in Charlotte, has volunteered with the program for 25 years. In that time, he has developed his own Host philosophy that he shares with new volunteers: “I focus on four components of every trip: 1. The ticket purchase - was it problem-free? 2. In the station - was it a welcoming, helpful and comfortable environment? 3. The “on-board” experience - were you pleased? Would you ride again? (The Host’s job is to help this happen). 4. Assist in smooth and efficient de-training and baggage pickup, directions to taxis, buses, etc.”

The Station Host Coordinators work with new volunteers to discuss their areas of interest, introduce them to the NCDOT Station Attendants or Amtrak agents, provide contact information for local transportation providers and highlight restaurants, shopping areas and other attractions in the community.

Thanks to Alison Boswell of the NCDOT for her assistance with this profile. Photos by Katy Warner, NCDOT Staff Photographer.