



Passengers disembark an Amtrak train on Tuesday, May 24. The new platform was extended, raised to make disembarkment easier, canopied and with improved lighting.

# All aboard! Amtrak improvements mean easy access, new platform for travelers

## BY CHRONICLE STAFF

Photos Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle unless otherwise noted

On June 25, Amtrak and Village of Homewood officials will officially celebrate improvements to the Homewood train station.

After two years of work, a new and greatly improved Amtrak platform and a needed ramp will make traveling to and from Homewood a much better experience for visitors and commuters.

Homewood's station takes passengers under the tracks of passenger and freight lines by way of a tunnel that leads to the Amtrak train platform and the Metra commuter line platform. Passengers can enter the Homewood train station from the downtown side via Harwood Avenue, or from the Ravisloe side off Park Avenue.

The stucco train station buildings were meant to resemble the Spanish mission style exterior of Ravisloe Country Club's club house built in 1917.

While both lines have elevators for easy access to the train platforms, getting to those platforms required walking down about 20 stairs into the tunnel from the Park Avenue side, or entering from the



The lower portion of the ramp is finished in this April photo.

Harwood Avenue side and walking down steps or using an elevator to get to the tunnel.

Amtrak invested \$15 million in federal funding to make the station accessible and compliant with the Americans with

Disabilities Act for those with mobility issues. Amtrak also made improvements to its Park Avenue train station building, a primary waiting area for Amtrak inter-city passengers. In 2019, Amtrak spent \$146,000 replacing the clay tile roof and making additional interior ceiling repairs.

ADA compliance work included a new compliant walkway and ramp from Park Avenue to the main public entrance, new compliant doors at the main entrance and a second doorway to the train tunnel. Upgrades were made in the men's and women's restrooms.

Preparatory work for this project started in mid-2020. Commonwealth Edison had to move power lines and the Village of Homewood agreed to relocate the historic Illinois Central Railroad caboose displayed near the Amtrak station. By moving the caboose farther to the north, a new parking lot was built to replace the parking spaces that were eliminated when the ADA ramp was constructed on the south side of the station.

When local, state and federal officials gathered to celebrate the project in September 2020, the west side of the Homewood station was already a construction zone. Tall fencing shrouded in protective fabric blocked the public from any hazards.

The Amtrak boarding platform was demolished and replaced with a new one stretching 650 feet. It is eight inches above the rails to make boarding trains easier. It is covered and lighted and serves both the northbound and southbound trains.

Amtrak has resumed its Midwest service in Homewood that includes the Illini trains sponsored by the Illinois Department of Transportation between Chicago and Champaign, and the Amtrak City of New Orleans. An Amtrak spokesman said the Saluki line to southern Illinois is still not operational due to COVID-19 related staffing issues.

There's a second part to this project: Metra will be rebuilding its train station on Harwood Avenue. The stucco building will be replaced by a sleek glass station.

That portion of the project will be paid for with a combined \$14 million in local and federal funding, mostly from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Federal Transit Administration. Metra also will contribute \$4 million, Homewood \$585,000 and Cook County \$300,000.

The tunnel will be waterproofed and improvements will be made to lighting,