



Throwing Amtrak under the bus

By D. Dowd Muska | 7.25.12

Joseph P. Schwieterman knows how to spot a trend. As director of DePaul University's Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development, the professor has spent the past few years documenting a phenomenon that no one predicted: The revival of intercity buses.

Megabus, BoltBus and other scrappy start-ups have changed the way millions of Americans move around. Last year, the Cato Institute's Randal O'Toole explained the companies' innovative strategy: "Under the old model, bus companies maintained stations on expensive downtown real estate, complete with ticket agents, waiting rooms, and baggage handlers. Under the new model, tickets are mostly sold over the Internet, buses pick up and drop off passengers at a curbside, and drivers handle the baggage."

Internet access is offered by the new carriers, which helps explain why 48 percent of their customers are between 18 and 25. Another advantage: Nonstop travel. Older bus lines (Greyhound, Trailways, Peter Pan) often make stops between destinations. "Curbside" providers prefer speed — they establish hubs and radiate routes outward. Megabus' Pittsburgh service, for example, offers direct passage to Columbus, Ann Arbor, Morgantown, Akron, Cleveland, New York City, Philadelphia, State College, Harrisburg, Frederick and Washington, D.C.