



**Station Host**  
Association of California

# Platform

## Boy Scout Merit Badge in Railroading

Ushering In a New Generation of Rail Enthusiasts

Story by David Weisman, *San Luis Obispo (SLO)*

For the third time since 2016, I have had the great opportunity to work with the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum (SLORRM) as a participant in their program to fulfill the Boy Scout merit badge in railroading. Dozens of young men from troops along the central coast and inland valleys have now achieved this requirement, working with the SLORRM as the principal sponsor. The museum has scout-certified trainers who school (and quiz) them on railroad operations, history, model railroading, and most importantly, railroad safety.

Here's where I came into the picture: Part of the merit badge involves passenger railroading, and includes activities like planning and reserving a hypothetical trip on Amtrak, as well as knowing the different passenger cars on the train, their functions, station operations, and the key personnel. The SLORRM (where I also volunteer on the events committee) was familiar with my work as a station host, and asked me if I would conduct the actual tour and demonstration of the passenger train and station. Since the southbound

Starlight is often early into SLO, this would allow ample time to tour the train. The SLORRM also contacted their Amtrak liaison, who alerted the crew that a group of Boy Scouts might be coming on board so that they were not taken by surprise.

We've done this three times and have been lucky to have the early Starlight arrival work in our favor. I begin the presentation inside the SLORRM, after the scouts have been given a lecture from "Operation Lifesaver." Since today's generation is all "tech-savvy" I use an overhead video projector and a laptop computer, and with scout volunteers, we visit the Amtrak website and plan a "hypothetical" trip (often to Anaheim/Disneyland) for their families. By a show of hands, many of the boys have traveled on Amtrak before—but often when they were much younger and so their memories are faint.

Then it is time to walk the ¼ mile to the Amtrak station. Along the path, I give a history of Amtrak. Once we reach the station, I explain the protocol for travel by train, and the unaccom-



panied minor policy (since many scouts are between 11-15). There are often adult chaperons along, so this is helpful information for them as well. As the Starlight is usually approaching, we walk to the baggage area and they can see the cart being prepared with outgoing luggage. The agent is always friendly and explains to the boys the facets of his or her job.

Making sure that everyone is safely behind the yellow line, we watch train 11 come roaring into the station. Starting with the locomotives, I explain all the cars and functions from the head end to the tail markers. Dividing them into two smaller groups, we then board a sleeping car for a tour of the different rooms, and proceed through to the dining car (lunch service has usually ended and the crew are setting the tables for dinner). Following this we march through the Sightseer lounge and then enter the

business class or coach, and the boys spread out to sample the spacious seating. We exit through a coach and back onto the platform.

All the crews have been welcoming and helpful. At each "stop" I'd ask the employee to tell the Scouts how they had entered the profession and what they liked best about it. The conductors also drilled home the safety lessons about the distance it takes the train to stop, and the need to be vigilant and not trespass on railroad property. Interestingly enough, many of the employees said that railroading had been in their families and they were carrying on a tradition. Others came from the military, and some simply answered that they liked the pay and the benefits. One conductor asked, "What is the fastest speed this train is allowed to travel on this route?" and as a prize, the winning boy (who answered correctly 80 MPH) then got to step into



## Safety Reminder

Familiarize yourself with the station layout and know the location of emergency exits and assembly areas.

### Law Enforcement Phone Numbers

911

Amtrak Police  
1-800-331-0008

BNSF Railway Police  
1-800-832-5452

Caltrain Transit Police  
1-877-723-7245

Sacramento Transit Police Services  
1-916-556-0275

Union Pacific Police  
1-888-877-7267

VTA Police (Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority)  
1-408-321-7149



the vestibule and make the scripted announcement for the SLO station stop over the intercom!

As to the other question: How many Boy Scouts can you fit in a deluxe bedroom? Well, 11 to be exact, without much spare room. But they all got to see a deluxe bedroom. Their key take-away comment: “Wow this is like the Hogwarts Express, only better.”

(I have never seen a Harry Potter movie or read the book, but I got the reference). For sure, they would all soon be begging their parents to take them on an overnight train trip.

These events have been so successful, that other local Boy Scout chapters are asking if the SLO Rail Museum can do it again and take it as a traveling road show, so to speak, up and down the coast and even inland to Bakersfield or Fresno.

These are all great opportunities for the Station Host

Association to broaden its outreach and mission. Other hosts might

look to partner with local rail enthusiast organizations or the Boy Scouts of America and inquire what similar programs might exist in their cities. This has been one of my most rewarding experiences as a volunteer Station Host.

*“Wow this is like the Hogwarts Express, only better.”*

## Bach Birthday Performance



The group “Music of Bakersfield,” featuring young musicians, played Sunday March 18th at the Bakersfield Amtrak station. The local performance was part of a global event to bring awareness to classical music and to celebrate the 333rd birthday of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Caption by Armando Soliz, *Bakersfield (BFD)*



## Customer Care Person With a Visual Impairment

### Approaching and Greeting

If you believe someone might have a visual impairment, signal your approach by verbally identifying yourself. Then ask the person, “Will you need any assistance while at the station?” Do not assume someone will need help. If they need assistance that you can not provide, notify Amtrak staff.

### When Leading

1. Ask the passenger if they want arm assistance. If so, determine which side (right or left) they want you to position them. If the person has a guide animal, go to the side opposite the animal.

- Offer your arm.
- Do not take the passenger’s arm and push them along, and never grab the arm with which the person is holding a cane or guide animal’s harness.
- Never grab a guide animal’s harness or interact with it.

2. Inform the person about obstacles such as stairs or revolving doors.

3. To help the person sit down, place the person’s hand on the back of the seat/chair and state which direction it is facing.

4. Lastly, signal to the person when you’re leaving and make sure their aware of their location.



## Meetings & Events

**Friday November 19th**  
Nominations Due—Board Election  
Email to Membership Secretary

**Monday, December 10th**  
Board Meeting  
11:30 a.m.  
Oakland, CA

**Saturday, January 19th**  
Annual Meeting  
11:30 a.m.  
Sacramento, CA