

Hawkeye Express

Ever been to Iowa City on a sunny fall Saturday when the Hawkeyes are in town? If your answer is yes, you've probably avoided the area around Kinnick Stadium like the plague, or gone in with the patience of Job to wait hours in snarled traffic to reach the event.

This year a new transportation option can carry up to 1,200 people on each trip to and from the stadium with no traffic or parking hassles. The Hawkeye Express, a two-engine, 11-car diesel-powered train supplied by the Colorado Ski Train and operated by the Iowa Interstate Railroad, made its maiden trek at the first Iowa home game of the season Sept. 4.

Dan Sabin, president of Iowa Northern Railway, has been a volunteer consultant to the University of Iowa Athletic Department, and said the initial run had "a few glitches," but everything was in great working order for the big game Sept. 11 versus Iowa State.

It's an eight-minute trek from the loading point at Iowa Interstate Railroad at 25th Avenue and Iowa 6 in Coralville. With time for loading and unloading, officials worked out an approximately 30-minute, round-trip schedule with trains running about two and one-half hours before and 90 minutes after each home game.

"We started early and made six round trips before kickoff for the Iowa State game," said Sabin. "We transported about 2,000 people to the Iowa State game." Sabin added that with capacity of 1,100 per run, the train would be able to handle more than 5,000 fans per game day.

"The University of Iowa Athletic Department has been trying to come up with ways to alleviate the parking and traffic congestion for Iowa football games for years, and we think we have scored a big touchdown with the Hawkeye Express shuttle train," said Associate Athletic Director Mark Jennings. "The fans that have ridden the train have really enjoyed the experience and appreciated the ease of getting to the game."

The train was leased from a firm in Colorado and typically transports travelers from Denver to the Winter Park Ski Resort. Much of the décor on the train still reflects its mountain travels. So far a one-year contract is the extent of the university's commitment to the route, but a multi-year contract may be in the works depending on the success of the train. The shuttle is costing the university between \$150,000 and \$175,000 for this season. Burlington Northern Santa Fe donated the "deadhead" move of the equipment between Denver and Council Bluffs to dramatically reduce the cost of the project.

Tickets for the Hawkeye Express can be purchased at a kiosk at the boarding site, at the UI athletic ticket office in Carver Hawkeye Arena or at the Iowa City/Coralville Convention and Visitor's Bureau Information center at Coral Ridge Mall. A shuttle bus from in front of the Iowa Children's Museum at the Iowa Interstate boarding site. Parking is also available near the train's boarding area.



Erik Rasmussen, 2004



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