

Test Run Under Way for Amtrak's 'Beef Train'

May 1 2010, by Miranda Marquit



Test Run Under Way for Amtrak's 'Beef Train'. Image source: Wikipedia.org

(PhysOrg.com) -- In an effort to create a greener train, Amtrak has unveiled the Heartland Flyer, which is designed to run on a special biodiesel blend that includes beef byproducts. The idea is to reduce hydrocarbon and carbon monoxide emissions by 10% each and reduce sulfates by 20%. Amtrak also claims that particulates will be reduced by 15% with the help of this new fuel mix.

However, the train won't be running solely on cow power. [Discover](#) reports on how Amtrak will use the fuel:

The Heartland Flyer uses about 100,000 gallons of [diesel fuel](#) each year to move 84,000 people. For this one-year test run, Amtrak will replace 20 percent of that fuel with [biodiesel](#), produced from tallow from Texas

cows. The fat from the cattle, which is normally used to make [animal feed](#) and soap, will now instead help power a train.

While the new biofuel can be used on standard train engines, the Heartland Flyer has been given new parts so that it is possible to determine how much damage the biofuel is inflicting on the train over the course of a year. The Flyer is only expected to run for a year, between Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and Forth Worth, Texas, and then the engine and the train's performance will be evaluated.

At first glance, it seems as though this might be a great idea for biofuel. Use cow byproducts to fuel a train. But those products are often used anyway, in soap and other products. Besides, [PopSci](#) reports, these cows are often grain-finished with corn, and there are questions about the how environmentally friendly the process is:

Sure, it may benefit certain regions around Oklahoma and Texas where a cattle industry produces beef byproducts as waste regardless. But it's hard to imagine corn-fed cattle as an environmentally friendly stock for widespread biofuel usage, especially when some scientists already fret over the economic and environmental impact of making biofuel directly from corn.

It will be necessary to carefully consider the true environmental impacts of this [biofuel](#), as well as the way the fuel affects the train's engine and performance.

More information: Smriti Rao, "All Aboard the Beef Train -- Amtrak Debuts a Train Running on Beef Biofuel," Discover (April 27, 2010). Available online: blogs.discovermagazine.com/di...ing-on-beef-biofuel/

Jeremy Hsu, "Get on the Beef Train: Amtrak Unveils First Biodiesel

Commuter Train, Powered By Animal By-Products," PopSci (April 26, 2010). Available online: [www.popsci.com/technology/arti ... el-commuter-train-us](http://www.popsci.com/technology/arti...el-commuter-train-us)

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