Resulting from the post-World War II decline of U.S. intercity passenger rail, many passenger train stations were demolished for redevelopment, kept and converted for other use, or abandoned entirely throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Bye 1973). Following the 1971 founding of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, known as Amtrak, continuing train service either served stations that still existed or, for the first time since 1950, operations were shifted to new stations. However, much had changed since the earlier generation of stations were built. Among other things, station financing now came from Amtrak’s limited allocation of federal funding rather than private railroad companies. As a result, the stations were markedly different from their predecessors in appearance, size and, more importantly, location.

My hypothesis is that intercity passenger train stations built after the 1971 founding of Amtrak were sited further from city centers than older ones due to a number of factors including decreased funding availability, dismantled infrastructure, urban decentralization, and the high costs of historic preservation. I believe station siting is important because a lack of proximity to central business districts strips stations of an important train benefit – being able to travel from the center of one city to the center of another – and limits the positive impacts stations can have on cities, such as maintaining or contributing to the re-establishing of a strong central business district.

This paper analyses the fate of old train stations, the characteristics of new ones, and whether the new stations are, in fact, further from city centers. Additionally this paper examines the intrinsic value of centralized train stations – both for cities and the future of U.S. passenger rail.