



PASSENGERS Voice

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THE PASSENGER ADVOCATE'S GUIDE TO 2018

As Congress finishes last year's budget process and plans ahead for next year's spending, it's critical that train passengers play an active part in the process. That's why the Rail Passengers Association is launching our 2018 campaign to bring the voices of America's passengers to the halls of Congress. And, we need your help!

The bipartisan agreement passed by Congress on February 9 provides a real opportunity for transportation in the appropriations process.

The deal would increase budget caps for non-defense spending by \$63 billion for FY18, and by an additional \$68 billion for FY19. This should provide transportation appropriators with enough space to fully accommodate FAST Act funding levels, which will provide more funding for Amtrak and allow states to invest in better, more frequent train service.

	FAST Act FY19 Authorized Levels	FAST Act FY20 Authorized Levels
Amtrak - National Network	\$1,143.00	\$1,200.00
Amtrak - NEC	\$557.00	\$600.00
Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Grants	\$255.00	\$330.00
Federal State Partnership For State Of Good Repair	\$300.00	\$300.00
Restoration & Enhancement Grants	\$21.50	\$22.00
	\$2,276.50	\$2,452.00

But we have to be prepared for any eventuality. While the picture looks good now, just last year we saw efforts in both Congress and the White House to kill Amtrak's National Network. With a concerted campaign of station rallies, calls, and meetings passenger advocates were able to turn back these efforts, and secure additional funding for passenger rail in both the House and

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RPA OPPOSES PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS

The White House last month released a disappointing package of infrastructure initiatives and transportation budget cuts that included plans to once again eliminate Amtrak's long-distance services. This would be done by cutting Amtrak's annual grant from \$1.4 billion to \$738 million.

Trump campaigned on a message of bringing America's infrastructure into the 21st Century. He specifically cited passenger rail, saying it was embarrassing how far behind the



Amtrak train pulls into the train station at Emeryville, California
Photo Credit: Getty Images

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“These types of incidents are certainly significant and we want to avoid them as (much as) possible, but we do think train travel is something the American public is not only interested in, but craving more of.”

Randy Clarke, VP of operations and member services for APTA



RAIL PASSENGERS

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This issue has news through February 15, 2018.
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Senate. Now we need to move these bills across the finish line.

That's why RPA is asking you to take part in our 2018 campaign to build a safer, more reliable rail network. Just visit www.railpassengers.org/whitehousebudget to take part!

This year, RPA is advancing the following pro-train policies:

1.) Pass the popular, bipartisan FY2018 transportation budget cleared by both the Senate and the House, which includes additional funding for Amtrak and passenger rail grants.

These additional funds would allow Amtrak to improve its infrastructure and move ahead with equipment purchases,

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U.S. has fallen compared with China, and promised to close that gap. But now, the White House proposed that states fund the long-distance routes that they're served by.

"They know full well that asking states to absorb more costs is not feasible, and the default choice will be to drop service," said RPA President Jim Mathews. "This approach failed before, because the long-distance train network serves markets that overlap on state corridors."

Another proposed item on the "menu" involves phasing out first class sleeping cars. Sleeping car fares cross-subsidize coach services on long distance trains. The federal cost of moving one person one mile in a sleeping car is less than it is in coach. This change would actually worsen the financials of the national network.

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COLORADO PURSUES FRONT RANGE PAX RAIL FOR REAL THIS TIME?

By Jim Souby

The concept of a passenger rail line in the Interstate 25 corridor along the Rocky Mountain range has been repeatedly shelved by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and other organizations. While there was popular support there was not enough economic justification in the 1990's and early 2000's to win voter confidence for a ballot measure, which is required by Colorado's Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR) amendment for expenditures beyond an annually constrained state budget.

Even TABOR and its more

ideologic supporters may not be enough to derail this urgently needed, high capacity transportation service in the third decade of the 21st century, however. The footprint of I-25 is now reaching saturation north and south of Denver causing highway expansion costs to equal or even exceed estimated rail construction. Congestion often brings motorists to a virtual standstill while BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad freight trains and Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD) electric commuter trains pass by. This has awakened the public to the need



The Amtrak Southwest Chief travels through Apache Canyon.

for efficient, reliable alternatives to automobiles and buses.

Spurred on by far thinking political leaders and advocates at the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) and the Colorado Rail Passenger

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HUNDREDS GATHER FOR SOUTHWESTERN RAIL CONFERENCE

By Peter LeCody - RPA Chairman

A rail conference that started out 14 years ago in the rental car center meeting room at the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport has blossomed into the largest event in Texas and the Southwest, attracting the public and private sector to discuss important freight and passenger rail issues.

The Southwestern Rail Conference, held this past January at the Magnolia Hotel in Dallas, attracted over 250 attendees. Topics ranged from Positive Train Control and how Union Pacific Railroad serves ports across the Gulf coast, to the latest news from Texas Central Railway's Dallas-Houston bullet train project and the FRA's recently released Texas-Oklahoma Passenger Rail Study service level document.

The conference, hosted by Texas Rail

Advocates, embraces both passenger and freight interests because "we must maintain a fluid rail system and expand services in the future," said TRA Board Member John Radovich. "We work with the Class 1's and Short Lines because they are important to the economy while also promoting wise investment from the public and private sector for urban, suburban and intercity passenger rail services."

This year's rail conference featured a panel discussion titled, "Rail: The Rodney Dangerfield in State Transportation Plans." Compared to other modes, the panel discussed why passenger and freight rail get "no respect" in Texas. The panel explored how to make rail an integral part of a long-term transportation plan in the Texas legislature and with the Texas Transportation Commission/ Department of Transportation.

A presentation from BNSF Railway

centered on passenger service and commuter rail principles, another panel discussed how to move forward with advocacy for intercity rail development in the I-20 and I-35 corridors in the state, and Texas Transportation Commissioner Jeff Austin gave a candid talk on why rail needs to be an important component in future transportation planning and development.

"Advocates in other regions could start something similar to the Southwestern Rail Conference," said Radovich. "By bringing all rail interests together in the same room it shows that partnerships can happen and ideas and concepts previously shunned – and thought to be unattainable – can move forward."

Rail conference videos and slide presentations are available at <http://texasrailadvocates.org/2018-southwestern-rail-conference>.

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Association (ColoRail), a bipartisan majority created the Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Rail Commission (Commission) in 2017. The thirteen-member Commission is charged with sustaining the Amtrak Southwest Chief train in southeastern Colorado and facilitating north-south passenger rail up and down the front range to connect communities and link with Amtrak's Southwest Chief and California Zephyr.

Eventually, the service aims to provide more frequent service to New Mexico and return regular service to Wyoming. Except for the occasional California Zephyr "detour" to the Union Pacific overland route when the Moffat Tunnel route is closed for maintenance, Wyoming's

passenger service ended when the Amtrak Pioneer was eliminated in 1997, and New Mexico only connects with Southern Colorado once each way on the Chief.

The Commission includes representatives from: Amtrak, Union Pacific, BNSF, RTD, CDOT, a community leader from southeast Colorado and two rail advocates. It filed its first report to the Colorado Legislature December 1, 2017 as required by the statute. That report can be viewed at: <http://colorail.org/sw-chief-front-range-rail-report>.

While transportation funding is a controversial issue in Colorado, and passenger rail is opposed by some who mistakenly believe that highways are completely funded

by the state and federal gas tax (only half so, it turns out), the public mood is changing. A ColoRail poll in March 2017 found that over 61% of all Coloradans favor spending large amounts of any new transportation funds on front range passenger rail. They also strongly favor rail rather than bus service by the same margins. In the front range, over 63% in the Colorado Springs area, and 74% in the Denver and Boulder metro area voters agree.

Jim Souby is President of the Colorado Rail Passenger Association and serves on the Board of the Rail Passengers Association. He also serves on the Colorado Southwest Chief & Front Range Passenger Commission.

ON THE MOVE

Local, state and federal transit agencies have seen several new hires and appointments in October. A few of them include:

• **Ronald Batory** - With decades of experience in rail, Batory—an RPA member, was confirmed on Feb. 12 as the administrator for the Federal Railroad Administration.

• **Kevin Corbett** - On Feb. 19, Corbett took over the helm of NJ Transit as the agency's new executive director. He will oversee the rehabilitation of the country's third busiest transit system.

• **Joseph Gruters** - President Trump named Florida State Rep. Joseph Gruters to a five-year term on Amtrak's board of directors. Gruters is



Ronald Batory was confirmed as the new FRA administrator.

(Photo Credit: Railway Age)

a certified public accountant, and co-chaired Trump's 2016 presidential campaign in Florida.

DESTINATION OF THE MONTH: BIRMINGHAM, AL

Though named after Birmingham, England, Birmingham, AL is a city with deep southern roots and traditions. After it merged with smaller towns in 1878, its rapid growth led to the nickname "Magic City." It may not be considered a major destination for travelers, but the town has more to offer than people think. If you hop on the Amtrak Crescent, take a stop in Birmingham and remember these five facts:

- 1 - Beginning as an industrial and railroad hub, the city is the only place in the world where all three raw ingredients for steel (coal, limestone, and iron ore) can be found naturally within a ten-mile radius.
- 2 - In the Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his famous letter, started on the pages of a *Birmingham News* paper, in response to a letter of concern issued by eight white religious leaders of the South.
- 3 - If you're into motorcycles, right outside the Birmingham



A shot from a game at Rickwood Field.

(Photo Credit: Rickwood.com)

city limits, Barber Motorsports Park is the world's largest motorcycle museum.

- 4 - Birmingham is home to the oldest baseball stadium in the country, Rickwood Field. Many legends, such as Babe Ruth, Dizzy Dean, and Willie Mays have played there.
- 5 - The city is home to a booming craft beer and wine scene. Good People, Avondale, Cahaba and Trim Tab Brewing are just a few breweries in the city, while a short drive outside the city will bring you to the state's burgeoning wine trail.

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If funding for Amtrak's National Network is cut, more than 220 communities will lose service, and more than 140 million Americans will be left at the station. These are mostly smaller and rural towns, most of which don't have airports or long distance bus service.

"Just because these towns are small doesn't make them fly-over country," Mathews said. "They are the cities and towns that voted for [Trump] because they felt disconnected from the American dream. They deserve a government that invests in them and a train service that

connects them to critical services, jobs, and family."

Other cuts include the popular and effective grant program known as TIGER, or Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, which so far has injected a little more than \$5 billion into transportation investments nationwide.

The Rail Passengers Association continues to urge that Mr. Trump fulfill his promise to rebuild and modernize America's rail network, and just as they did last summer, RPA members will #Rally4Trains at stations nationwide to show their support for a true national rail service.

STATE NEWS

TEXAS CENTRAL PARTNERS revealed its preferred locations for high-speed rail stations in Dallas and Houston. The Dallas station will be multilevel and built between South Riverfront Boulevard and Austin Street. It will easily link with nearby roads and will provide connections to Dallas Area Rapid Transit light-rail and buses. The Houston station will be located at the Northwest Mall, near the interchange of Loop 610 and Highway 290. It will provide connectivity to METRO's Northwest Transit Center and will allow the railway to

follow existing rights of way.

CALIFORNIA LAWMAKERS are moving forward with an audit of the state's high-speed rail line. The audit, which will take between six and nine months to complete, is to determine if the California High-Speed Rail Authority will be able to complete the project on time and without any additional cost overruns. The audit will also look at the projected economic benefits of the rail line to the communities that surround it.

SAFE TRAINS SAVE LIVES

By Jim Mathews

The recent spate of fatal passenger rail accidents leaves the impression that we have a rail safety problem in America.

The truth is we do. Not only do we have too many accidents, but we also don't have enough trains. If our country prioritized rail and its infrastructure, we could build an awareness and a familiarity with train travel that would get people off the roads and onto safer, well-maintained, and well-run trains.

A U.S. Department of Transportation study in 2014, showed that if we moved just one percent of vehicle miles from auto to rail, we could save more than 200 lives per year.

That would reduce the overall risks for everyone. Still, there are myriad ways trains could be made safer. For instance, if automatic braking technology had been implemented nationally as Congress directed, we might not have lost two of our RPA

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RAIL STATION OF THE MONTH: BIRMINGHAM INTERMODAL FACILITY

In Alabama, the new Birmingham Intermodal Facility opened January 31 (with a grand opening celebration on February 23), and it provides the community with many new features as they take their public transit to and from the station. If you're making your way to Birmingham by Amtrak or by bus, here are five facts about the new station:

- 1** - Construction of the new facility began in 2014 and it cost \$32 million to build.
- 2** - The new facility is part of a larger effort by the city to revitalize downtown Birmingham, which focuses on increased tourism, and new businesses and jobs.
- 3** - The Amtrak Crescent will make a daily stop at the station as the train travels between New York City and New Orleans.



An outside view of the new Intermodal Facility in Birmingham.

- 4** - The facility not only includes an Amtrak station, but also provides services for the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority, Greyhound and Megabus.
- 5** - The facility is home to Olivia's Transit Cafe, which will serve southern food favorites, and is owned by chef Beverly Russell.

2018 'AT-LARGE' AND BOARD NOMINATIONS OPEN

RPA/NARP is inviting members in good-standing to consider running for one of the up-to 10 available 'At-Large' positions on the Council of Representatives. These positions are for a two-year term. Elections will be held at Council's Annual Business Meeting on Wednesday, April 18, 2018 in Alexandria, VA. For more information on the 'At-Large' positions, including the duties, responsibilities and required qualifications, and to submit a self-nomination, go to: <http://ow.ly/Yxzs30hxl4P>.

Self-nominations are also now being sought from qualified members interested in being elected by the

Council of Representatives to an Association officer position (Chair of the Board; one of four Vice-Chairs; Treasurer or Secretary) or to one of three available Board Director positions. Board officer positions are for a two-year term and the Board director positions are for a three-year term. For information on these Board Officer & Director positions, including the duties, responsibilities and required qualifications, and to submit a self-nomination, go to: <http://ow.ly/LGSj30hxlaf>.

The deadline to submit Candidate Information Statements is March 31, 2018.

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members in an accident in Dupont, Washington last December.

But, equipment is the smaller of the two major causes of passenger rail accidents. The leading cause, human factors, hasn't gotten as much attention lately.

Indeed, train crews deserve appropriate training, rest,

health screenings, and compensation, among other issues. If we don't set the regulations right in those areas, we are asking for more tragedy to happen. If railroads don't invest in their people, we passengers are sure to be the victims of repeat incidents.

That's why our organization needs to be among the loudest, strongest and most steadfast advocates for more and better trains in America.

PASSENGER VOICE: STRIVING TO DO MORE WITH LESS

We enjoy hearing from our members on why they enjoy taking the train to get where they need to go. To share your stories with us, please email them to narp@narprail.org.

Steve Meysing, North Platte, NE

My regional train is a long-distance train. That's life in western Nebraska, our regional centers are equidistant from Omaha and Denver. Thanks to the hub-and-spoke airline system, flying to Omaha requires first flying to Denver, adding substantial time and cost. But our Essential Air Service provider just announced Chapter 11 bankruptcy and will leave us without air service in as little as 30 days. Amtrak's California Zephyr enables me to save time and money by traveling directly (and overnight) to and from my head office in Omaha, or airport connections in

Denver thanks to their excellent public transport system.

While living in northwest Nebraska, a driving trip to my main office in Omaha for a daytime meeting meant two days on the road and two nights in a motel for a day-long meeting. But driving four hours to Fort Morgan, CO, meant that I could sleep on the California Zephyr in both directions and reduce a three-day trip to a day-and-a-half trip, allowing me to preserve productivity for my employer.

I work for a non-profit that serves one-quarter of all Nebraskans every year. We strive to do more with less, including time and money. Amtrak's California Zephyr makes it possible for our organization to do its part in helping people get the services they need. My region is bigger than most people's, but our one and only train is a critical part of it.

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while allowing states to upgrade short-distance corridors. The additional funds are also vital for the effort to install life-saving Positive Train Control technology and address maintenance and investment backlogs.

Based on already-approved bills, RPA is asking for:

- \$1.1 billion for Amtrak's National Network
- \$515 million for Amtrak's Northeast Corridor
- \$92.5 million for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure & Safety Grants
- \$500 million for Federal-State Partnership for Good Repair
- \$5 million for Restoration and Enhancement Grants

2.) Support full funding authorized by FAST Act rail grants in FY2019, and multi-year appropriations to provide predictability for Amtrak and states.

In the absence of dedicated funding, RPA is asking Congress to make a multi-year appropriation for Amtrak and passenger rail programs.

While this doesn't replace the need for a dedicated source of funding for rail, it does provide some certainty for states and Amtrak, allowing them to better plan projects and lower maintenance and capital costs.

3.) Advance a transformative infrastructure bill that closes the investment gap in passenger rail and transit, and oppose any attempts to eliminate Amtrak service.

Echoing last year's attack, the White House's infrastructure proposal targeted the elimination of Amtrak's National Network. Cutting half a billion dollars from Amtrak's budget would hurt the more than 220 communities that would lose service, and 140 million Americans will be left at the station.

RPA's members turned back this attempt last year, and we must be ready to do it again. We need passengers everywhere to demand that any infrastructure bill must include a plan for a modern, frequent, and NATIONAL passenger rail network.

Upcoming Rail Passengers Association Events

Sunday, April 15 - Wednesday, April 18

- **Make plans to attend RPA's Spring 2018 Advocacy Summit & Day on The Hill & Annual Council Business Meeting Washington, DC**

This is THE opportunity of the year for rail passenger advocates to have their voices heard directly by the decision makers on Capitol Hill. With drastic cuts being proposed for Amtrak and successful grant programs such TIGER being targeted for elimination, it is VITAL that rail advocates make this year's Summit and 'Day on The Hill' the largest event ever. Come be part; we need to flood 'The Hill' with our message that passenger rail matters!

- **Event Registration Is Now Available.** Visit the [Events Page](http://www.railpassengers.org) at www.railpassengers.org for Complete Information and to Register.
- **RPA's Annual Day on The Hill & Congressional Reception** - Tuesday, April 17
- **Host Hotel** - Hilton Old Town Alexandria (VA)

Upcoming Regional Rail Passengers Association and State Passengers Association Member Meetings & Events

- Saturday, March 10** - ESPA/RPA Joint New York State Meeting & Lunch - Schenectady, NY
- Saturday, March 24** - RPA New England Regional Meeting - Boston, MA
- Saturday, March 24** - Iowa Association of Railroad Passengers - Grinnell, IA
- Saturday, April 14** - RPA Delaware-New Jersey-Pennsylvania Regional Meeting - Philadelphia, PA

Please contact Bruce Becker (bbecker@narprail.org) to have a local, state or regional meeting added to the Rail Passengers calendar (print and on-line) of upcoming events!



\$10,000 SWEEPSTAKES FOR EDUCATION UNDERWAY

RPA kicked-off a new sweepstakes in February for college students who can use assistance paying for higher education. RPA understands that paying for college is not easy, and this is why the Association is offering one lucky student a chance to win \$10,000 for the 2018-2019 school year.

To be eligible to win the sweepstakes, students can nominate themselves, or a student can be

nominated by someone else - a friend or a parent for example. The only criteria is that the winning student must be enrolled in a U.S. accredited college or graduate program for the 2018-2019 school year.

For details on how to enter or nominate a student, as well as rules for the sweepstakes, please visit: www.crowdrise.com/rpascholarship. Nominations will close on April 26 at 11:59:59.



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